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# Illiteracy as Immanent: The (Re)Writing of Rhetoric's Nature

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ILLITERACY AS IMMANENT: THE (RE)WRITING OF RHETORIC'S NATURE

by

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors  
(English & Philosophy)

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University of Maine

May 2017

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## ABSTRACT

Literacy is often thought of as a skill-set, that is, an ability to read and write in the dominant language of one's socio-historical milieu. Illiteracy, on the other hand, is often thought of as a lack – an absence of a necessary skill-set that influences how well one can work and communicate (via reading and writing) within their dominant language and their society. In other words, illiteracy seems to have been defined by its relationship to the definition of literacy, that is, as a “negative-literacy” or a “not-literacy” that creates a lacuna of meaning when attempting to define illiteracy as something more than just the negative side of a bifurcation. In this thesis, I am interested in shifting the definition of literacy and illiteracy – and more generally our experience of language – from a practical to an aesthetic frame of reference. In this shift of discourse about literacy, it will be my hope that I may come to a deeper understanding of literacy and illiteracy as immanent to each other rather than opposed, and that I'll be able to translate this new understanding of literacy and illiteracy into potential future suggestions for a practical pedagogical methodology.

## DEDICATION

My late grandmother, Patricia Kachmar, graduated with her bachelor's in education from the University of Southern Maine in 1967, and her master's in education two years later. She was 32 years old, raising five children with my grandfather. After her master's, she became a reading consultant. In her role, she focused on improving adult literacy in and around her community of Scarborough, Maine, all while raising a young family. I grew up in Scarborough with my mother, and Grammie would often read me stories in her living room. I was three and a half years old when she passed away from lung cancer. For years after Grammie had passed I would walk by a photo portrait of her in the Scarborough Public Library. At the bottom of the portrait was a small plaque, outlining the many years of service my grandmother had given to the community – both on the school board and as a reading specialist for those who were functionally illiterate. Even though I've spent the better part of my life growing up without her presence, it's because of her and her work that I'm sitting here today, ready to start graduate school. This thesis is dedicated to her.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is with the warmest appreciation that I acknowledge this work's partners, and my own circle of friends, colleagues, and teachers. Without the many kind, intelligent, generous people I've had the pleasure of meeting and befriending at the University of Maine, this text would never have come to fruition. To every teacher I've had the privilege of learning under throughout my college experience, and every teacher who pushed me to attend college: thank you. I'll always be grateful.

I would like to thank those who advised me during the nascent stages of this work, beginning with Dr. Pat Burnes, whose introduction to advanced composition class inspired me to think more deeply about literacy as a concept, and to Dr. Kirsten Jacobson, whose phenomenology class succeeded in blowing my mind and helped me establish my "philosophy legs." Thanks, also, to Dr. Kirsten Jacobson for her guidance and friendship – I am deeply indebted to her for her unwavering patience, her wisdom in academics and life, and for encouraging me to never give up; Dr. Melissa Ladenheim for helping me improve my writing as a first year in the honors sequence; Dr. Michael Howard for encouraging me to always search for ways to improve the world; Dr. Bridie McGreavy for asking difficult questions and helping put my work into perspective, especially the ecological arguments; and Dr. Nathan Stormer for keeping me laughing and being the best mentor and advisor I could have ever wished for.

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And finally, I would like to thank my twin sister, Vanessa, for her love, her belief in me, her friendship, and for quite literally being there since day one. More than anyone

else, she's always encouraged me to pursue my dreams. I wouldn't be where I am today without her.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: A PROBLEM OF DICHOTOMIES – LITERACY VS. ILLITERACY

There's a certain acceptance that comes with learning how to read and write in a language. It's large, isn't it - English?<sup>1</sup> And there's a way in which we come into being in and through language and communication. As a child, I remember learning how to write my name, slowly, iteratively, until I got it right. That was me – my name. I could spell it out and leave a trace of myself, then. Writing seemed – and continues to feel to me, now – so much bigger than myself: something that allows me to emerge, to become, and to connect with others and their stories. Entering into that way of being – becoming able to read and write – much like the classroom in which I was taught, seemed *right*. By that I mean, because of how large it seemed, how ancient it felt and correct it was – this letter combined with these four other letters creates this word that refers to and names this *thing* in the world – to my five year old mind, because the adults were using it, because it seemed to be “working,” and because I was being taught how to also be literate, it, alphabetic literacy, convinced me that in order *to be a person correctly*, I must have to participate.

My grandmother reading to me as a child helped galvanize my interest in acquiring an adeptness with language, too. It wouldn't be until much later in my life that I

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, here I mean any language – that goes without saying – but I'm specifying English so as not to reiterate language, and because, obviously, English is the dominant language I was raised with and within.

would learn that my grandmother was a literacy coach<sup>2</sup> in Scarborough, Maine – where I grew up and spent the first 13 years of my life – but the stories she’d tell in her living room were enough to inspire in me an interest as to what she was doing, and how I could do it too. Of course, illiteracy was never a concept I heard about or was talked to about as a child. Being literate was the norm – it was the *expectation*. As a young boy, it never crossed my mind to deeply and thoughtfully consider how I was experiencing my being-in-the-world during this process of *crossing over* into a literate-way-of-being. And, of course, I’m not disappointed in my younger self for not critiquing the socio-intellectual milieu in which I was raised; that kind of level of awareness wouldn’t present itself until college. No, the fact that I was raised in this way – taking literacy for granted – is a lived-reality that I’m now grateful for: that diffuse desire for literacy is exactly what I’m now interested in calling into question.

Eva Maria Simms, for example – a phenomenologist who’s inspired a lot of my work, including this thesis – begins her essay, “Questioning the Value of Literacy” by writing that “Reading and writing seem to be harmless, innocuous skills . . . but how does the acquisition of literacy affect the child’s consciousness?”<sup>3</sup> Her next sentence calls attention to the surprising silence surrounding this topic, and I can corroborate that observation: there *is* a profound silence about illiteracy, especially in the field of rhetorical theory. While there’s plenty of research studying the history of literacy<sup>4</sup> – the “rise of consciousness” as Ong calls it – and the ways in which this specific vein in

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<sup>2</sup> A fact that seems remarkably prescient to my own career goals now, and most assuredly on some level has influenced them.

<sup>3</sup> Simms, *Questioning the Value of Literacy*, 20.

<sup>4</sup> See Ong, Goody, Illich, Havelock et. al.

history spins out into fractals that influence many different intellectual and material developments, there aren't many bodies of work that call literacy into question and critique the way in which it influences our experience of the world. Literacy is a good, full stop.<sup>5</sup> Simms writes that this "kind of cultural belief in the desirability of literacy is what the phenomenological tradition calls a 'natural attitude'"<sup>6</sup> via Husserl. By isolating and then actively suspending this desirability, we may begin to explore how we take for granted being able to read and write and engage with written text in the dominant language of our social milieu, and how that ability influences the way we communicate and engage with the world, others, and ourselves.

Historians and rhetoricians alike would agree, for example, that literacy is an acquired skill and has aided in the construction and sustainability of societies throughout history. The accumulation and distribution of knowledge over time has increased, bolstered by written communication and the ability to read such communication, especially since the inception of Gutenberg's press in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Literacy is valuable, and the purpose of this thesis is not to argue against the *value* of literacy as such; to do so would be absurd and would put into tension the material nature and the theoretical nature of this project. Instead, I'm interested in reevaluating the study of literacy from a rhetorical perspective, specifically to challenge the understanding of literacy and illiteracy as a binary.

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<sup>5</sup> Even now, for example, as I'm writing this I'm relying on my being-literate: both with reading and writing, and with the conceptual knowledge and language I'm engaging in. Both allow me the space to move my argument, but this kind of ability *does* have consequences with regard to my perception. What are those?

<sup>6</sup> Simms, *Questioning the Value of Literacy*, 21.

This kind of isolation of literacy within binary logic, of course, necessarily means that there's some way of being that must be uncovered underneath, or beside/behind being-literate: after all, we aren't *born* literate. And, of course, there is an exterior to literacy which is called illiteracy. But again, here, analogous to how there's a surprising silence surrounding any sort of sustained critique of literacy, including within rhetoric, there's a similar lacuna in the exporation of illiteracy from an academically and conceptually rigorous point of view. To clarify, I am not conflating orality with illiteracy. By definition, orality, or what Ong calls *primary orality* refers to those "persons totally unfamiliar with writing."<sup>7</sup> Illiteracy, on the other hand, seems to always already have been defined in the negative as the dark, vestigial aspect of literacy that necessarily needs to be overcome. In other words, orality does not depend on there being writing, while illiteracy seems to only have emerged as the after-image of the excess of literacy; it is what remains when the proliferation of literacy fails to fill certain spots, and peoples lived experiences are influenced by the existence of literacy, but not the way-of-being it catalyzes.

That is to say that the space in between orality and illiteracy isn't as simple as it seems. It isn't a simple intellectual or societal progression that's naturally accommodating to the individuals caught up in these ways of being. Literacy, for example, "begins with writings" as Ong reminds us, while orality fundamentally doesn't. Orality doesn't need writing: illiteracy does. It at least needs it to exist. But what does that mean for illiteracy, then? Consider this description of literacy proffered by David Olsen: "we may think of literacy as both a cognitive and a social condition, the ability to

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<sup>7</sup> Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 6.

participate actively in a community of readers who have agreed on some principle of reading, a hermeneutics if you will, a set of texts to be treated as significant and a working agreement on the appropriate or valid interpretation(s) of those texts.”<sup>8</sup> Such a definition, while comprehensive for the literate-body, calls for a negative extrapolation when inverted in an attempt to define the *illiterate*-body. By following Olsen’s definition, it would have to be assumed that the illiterate-body is one that would be “unable to participate actively” in a community of readers – a definition that would sequester the illiterate as the “negative other” as compared to the “positive” or “valuable” literate-body. This thesis enters and will move within this lacuna of meaning for the illiterate-body, for it is exactly this “lack of meaning” that acts as evidence for the inherent problem of putting epistemology underneath ontology.

This thesis hopes to critique the fundamental problem of a powerful dichotomy in a productive, rhetorical way. Literacy and illiteracy can no longer be understood as strictly a part of the realm of epistemology; rather, I want to open up our understanding of illiteracy, arguing that it is always an influential factor in our ontological status, which includes even being able to talk about the epistemic as such. In order to organize this move, it’s necessary to begin breaking down the myth surrounding the individual in thought – that is, it’s necessary to begin breaking down the boundary between the I-Self, and the Self-as-always-Other. With a more porous boundary between Self and Other, I am better equipped to dismantle the dichotomous understanding of illiteracy and literacy. Additionally, in exploring illiteracy as a way-of-being that is not opposed to literacy but

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<sup>8</sup> Olsen, *The World on Paper*, 274.

constitutive of it, it is important to consider literacy and illiteracy as historical concepts that are more complex than our current interpretations admit to.

My argument generally is that literacy and illiteracy need to be folded back into each other, recognizing the mutual, ontological immanence between them, while concurrently positing a different conception of symbolism that is fundamentally aesthetic and rhetorical rather than epistemological. In chapter two, I will explore the historical emergence of literacy, noting important developments in the history of written symbolism that established an intellectual ‘turning away’ from the sensuous world of our lived experience. I will also explore the concepts that emerged from developments in reading and writing that created the space for Cartesian schisms between mind/body, subject/object, inside/outside, and other dualisms. Finally, I will finish the chapter by submitting a different diagrammatic conception of literacy and illiteracy that doesn’t rely on binaries, but rather posits an indefinite number of different literacies, all of which are predicated on a symbolism that is affectively aesthetic. The concept of affective symbolism allows for literacy and illiteracy to be understood as immanent to each other, essentially flattened horizontally, rather than layered vertically with literacy above illiteracy.

Following this exploration of the history of literacy and my reconceptualization of literacy and illiteracy, I define two ways of being in chapter three: being-scriptural, and being-ascriptural. I hope to substitute these concepts for conventional definitions of literacy and illiteracy. In this chapter, I work to offer a new way of thinking and talking about the dominant form of literacy (the one I’m engaged in as I write this), which I call scripturality. I argue that it is a specific kind of literacy that has evolved as one form of

symbolism on a wide spectrum of potential symbolisms, and that even within scripturality there are an indefinite number of degrees of intensity and competency which correlate with aesthetic experiences that transversely cross human society and the more-than-human-world. Specifically, I reference the work done by Michel de Certeau to discuss being-scriptural and bring in voices of people who were once unable to read or write to discuss being-ascriptural. The anecdotes provided by these once functionally ascriptural (or less competently scriptural) people will expose similarities and continuities (and important differences) between being-scriptural and being-ascriptural, situated as both are within a specific historic context of literacy.

Chapter four offers a more in-depth exploration of the symbolic implications of re-situating literacy and illiteracy onto a horizontal axis that is fundamentally aesthetic. In this chapter, I introduce the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead as integral to my understanding of symbolism, specifically that rather than symbolism being a marker of thought, it is a co-traveler with ontology. I also argue for the metaphysics behind my diagrammatic reconceptualization of literacy and illiteracy: that all things are affected by the larger world, meaning that ontology is inherently aesthetic, and so all things therefore engage in symbolism that is based in feeling regardless of sentient complexity. This premise has consequences for how we currently think about our own bounded-ness as a body, how we think about rhetoric, and how we think about symbolisms in general. My main thesis in this chapter is that we must establish the symbolic as always, at minimum, a symbolic of affect.

After describing the metaphysics of symbolism and affect behind my reconceptualization of literacy and illiteracy, in chapter five I will consider the ethical

implications such a re-orientation introduces. I will explore the consequences a symbolic of affect has on the way in which we talk about, interact with, and relate to nature, ourselves as bodies, others as bodies, and communities. Specifically, I argue that these relations are not binaries, but continuities and sites of exposure that directly implicate an ethic of responsiveness and being response-able. Further, I argue that an ethical orientation to response-ability, to being accepting and open to otherness, calls for a paradigm shift in the way we teach reading and writing. At the conclusion of the chapter, I argue for the need to utilize existing modes of writing to create lines of exposure in which binaries and boundaries are exceeded and new forms of connectivity can be felt.

Lastly, in the final chapter, I will take a turn towards a new type of pedagogy. I argue that the classroom needs to be reconceptualized and reorganized to explore all instantiations of the symbolic – but especially reading and writing – as experiences that expose the inherent aesthetic connectivity between all things. Premised on the theoretical work preceding it, I suggest some potential moves that could begin the work of shifting discussion and teaching of literacy from literacy as a skill-set, to literacy as a way of being.

Having laid out the steps I make in this thesis, it must be stated that I won't be offering any clearly organized models for a new pedagogy of literacy. I simply don't have the time or the knowledge of existing models of literacy pedagogy to offer a new, improved model for literacy pedagogy that could be implemented at the level of educational policy. This thesis is, I hope, the beginning of my trying to connect literacy and rhetorical theory so as to improve both fields of study – ultimately leading to my being able to suggest pragmatic, pedagogical methodologies that could, someday,



improve composition studies and the way in which we rhetorically discuss and think about literacy and illiteracy. In the following pages, I attempt to establish a landscape of concepts and relationships that I hope to bring with me into future work as I continue to explore the connections between rhetoric, literacy studies, materialism, pedagogy, and the symbolic.

## CHAPTER II

### DIAGNOSIS: FEELING THE BOUNDARY & THE DICHOTOMY

On page one of his work, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, Goody writes that “the trouble with the categories is that they are rooted in a we/they division which is both binary and ethnocentric, each of these features being limiting in their own way.”<sup>9</sup> And indeed, this thesis is dedicated to plumbing the depth of that division between the concepts of literacy and illiteracy: I attempt to excavate the negative, conceptual darkness of what it means to be illiterate by bringing it out into the light so as to inform how we talk about – and teach – literacy. This is to say that literacy is often thought of as a skill-set – an ability to read and write in the dominant language of one’s socio-historical milieu. Illiteracy, on the other hand, is often thought of as a lack – an absence of a necessary skill-set that influences how well one can work and communicate (via reading and writing) within their dominant language and their society. Illiteracy seems to have been defined through its relationship to the definition of literacy, that is, as a “negative-literacy” or a “not-literacy” that erects, as Goody reminds us, a division between the “literate-body” and the “illiterate-body.” To echo Eva-Maria Simms, “I have always wondered what other abilities of our children’s perception, imagination, feeling, and cognition we have sacrificed when we taught them how to read.”<sup>10</sup> I ask, in tracing the fault-lines between literacy and illiteracy through time: “what is lost?” In what ways do

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<sup>9</sup> Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Simms, *Questioning the Value of Literacy*, 21.

we see a change in the way humanity thought about itself as it adopted iterations of literacy through time? Where are there paradigm shifts that change the concepts such as embodiment, or community, or inside vs. outside? These types of questions will be kept in mind as I work through the history of writing and literacy – noting spots that seem to contradict what arguably today is the popularized definition of literacy: “both a cognitive and a social condition, the ability to participate actively in a community of readers who have agreed on some principle of reading, a hermeneutics if you will, a set of texts to be treated as significant and a working agreement on the appropriate or valid interpretation(s) of those texts.”<sup>11</sup> Such a definition, as etymology shows us, will necessarily have made shifts in context. It will be important to take note of these slippages and see what such historical movements show us – what kinds of echoes or shadows these shifts are still producing, just outside today’s thought.

### Historically: Literacy and Illiteracy Through Time

David Abram, in his work *The Spell of the Sensuous*, writes that “our first writing, clearly, was our own tracks, our footprints, our handprints in mud or ash pressed upon the rock.”<sup>12</sup> In what I see as a particularly rich setting, Abram is situating us back into the *body*, and more generally, the body as *embedded* and continuous with what he calls the “more-than-human-world.” In working out from the footprint and making the connection to Saussurian signifiers, Abram writes that “Later, perhaps, we found that by copying the

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<sup>11</sup> Olsen, *The World on Paper*,

<sup>12</sup> Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 96.

distinctive prints and scratches made by other animals we could gain a new power... [that is] identifying with the other animal, taking on its expressive magic in order to learn ... these are ways of placing oneself in distant contact with the Other.”<sup>13</sup> Situating us back into the body in regard to writing shows us that writing is undergirded by a necessary inter-connectedness. Such connectivity rubs up against the binaries of subject-object, inside-outside, thought/mind-body. Dichotomous, neat organizations of ways of tracing influence and affect begin to coalesce and muddle together when we start at the beginning of the history of writing and inscription. This chapter traces the historic emergence of literacy and illiteracy as concepts that suppose a dichotomously organized reference to a yes (she can read and write) or no (she can't read and write) binary. It can be argued that the emergence of alphabetical language – and by extension, literacy – created an ontological separation between the human-world and the more-than-human-world, effectively allowing there to be a conceptual negative space that allowed for a negative definition of what illiteracy really is. Literacy begins to be associated with an understanding of language as – only – a human construct and creation, rather than something that emerges from a synesthetic, lived-experience. Of course, literacy in general has allowed there to be an incredible freedom of abstraction and rational speculation, but as abstractions begin to breed abstractions, complexity becomes inevitable and, sometimes, indelible. The payoff in following the history of writing and inscription and literacy is to problematize this dualism.

To start at the beginning of writing's history is to show that there were no conceptual binaries; the kind of pictographic system of inscription we've already referred

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 96.

to is a reminder of Egyptian hieroglyphics, which, according to Abram and his sources, “first appeared during the First Dynasty, around 3000 B.C.E. and remained in use until the second century C.E.”<sup>14</sup> In continuing the “tradition” of human communication emerging from an embeddedness in the “more-than-human-world,” many of these hieroglyphics represented humans as always interacting with other types of plants and animals and objects found in the world. These types of markings and images – which were also utilized in China in the early fifteenth century B.C.E., as well as in Mesoamerica in the sixth century B.C.E. – usually included “ideograms.” An ideogram, Abram writes, is “often a pictorial character that refers not to the visible entity that it explicitly pictures, but to some quality or other phenomenon readily associated with that entity.”<sup>15</sup> For example – to invent what may have been an ideogram – a tortoise with four legs may have signified ‘patience,’ while only a shell shown may have signified ‘protection.’

What’s particularly important about these ideograms for the purpose of tracing the history of literacy is that they are the first instance of a paradigm shift in the way humans communicate and understand other things and themselves. Instead of relying on voices and noises made by other humans and other organisms, humans were recursively referring back to symbols they had made and etched into a tablet, or onto a wall. Of course, these ideograms still were interconnected with the larger, sensuous world of experience and reminded the viewers of their embeddedness in (and indebtedness to) that world – effectively “keeping the world (literally) in mind” for humans. But as thought

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 97.

became more complex, human experiences of the world demanded written symbols to keep up with the evolution of the ideograms. The only problem was that there weren't any ideograms that represented these abstract concepts and experiences: for example, try coming up with an ideogram that adequately captures the verb "to believe."

The way in which to get around this, as scribes practiced, was to use pictographic puns – think of an image of a "bee" and a "leaf" as referencing the concept of believing. These were called "rebuses," as Abram explains, and they were employed by "scribes in ancient China and in Mesoamerica, as well as in the Middle East, to record certain terms that were especially amorphous or resistant to visual representation."<sup>16</sup> This innovation, over time, gave rise to "syllabaries" where sound-syllables, as they were captured by rebuses, began to be recorded and turned into original words, and in turn, by around the "1500 B.C.E."<sup>17</sup> the Semitic scribes created characters or "letters" based off of the "silent consonantal elements [of every syllable of their language] plus an element of sounded breath – that which we would today call a vowel."<sup>18</sup> These syllabaries laid the foundation, then, for what would become the alphabet.

This new aleph-beth, created by the Semites, effectively created a character, or letter, for each consonant of their language, while the vowels – or the sounded breath added to the written consonants – had to be an extemporaneous choice of the reader. This aleph-beth, which reduced the sounded consonants for the many different symbols being used at the time down to just twenty-two, was soon picked up and used not just by the Hebrews, but by the Phoenicians, the Aramaeans, the Greeks, the Romans, and, as Abram

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>17</sup> Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 89.

<sup>18</sup> Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 99.

writes, “eventually gave rise (directly or indirectly) to virtually every alphabet known.”<sup>19</sup> Here is where the next paradigm shift in how literacy occurs, separating the human from the “more-than-human-world.” As we noted for the first shift, the pictographic symbols used for the hieroglyphics almost always referred the “reader” back to the world “out there” and the necessary connection between thoughts, actions, and the environment. With the advent of the phonetic aleph-beth, however, the characters began to refer *only* to the sounds made by the human mouth. This means, then, that there started to emerge a dramatic shift away from any sort of sensible phenomenon that the symbol was actively representing to what Abram calls “the shape of the utterance itself, now invoked directly by the written character.”<sup>20</sup> The things(s) referred to started to become no longer necessary; the human utterances and sounds being made were starting to become directly inspired by human-made signs. As Abram writes, “the larger, more-than-human-life-world is no longer a part of the semiotic, no longer a necessary part of the system.”<sup>21</sup>

It is in this move past the hieroglyphic, pictographic rebuses and the incorporation of the aleph-beth where the connection between the world and the body as the foundation for the linguistic and the symbolic begins to fall away and language begins to become a function of “human reason.” Language, as the Bible reminds us, was beginning to be a purely human power: one which gave the human being dominion over that which he or she saw.<sup>22</sup> And this “falling” away from the sensuous world was exacerbated by the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>22</sup> Obviously, this is a reference to Adam and Eve. For example, in the book of Genesis, animals are not given voice and do not speak their names to Adam. Rather, Adam – with the power of language and speech – gives each animals a name. And even before Adam, the Hebraic, anthropocentric God is the word, and the “word is God.” This type of translation places logos, or reason, before all else. It’s an easy extrapolation to begin seeing how a Cartesian dualism could fit itself comfortably into this sort of mythos.

Greek scribes when they appropriated the phonetic aleph-beth of the Semites, and made it their own with slight modification around the eighth century B.C.E.<sup>23</sup> As Abram writes, “Thus, *aleph* – the name of the first letter and the Hebrew word for ‘ox’ – became *alpha*; *beth* – the name of the second letter, as well as the word for ‘house’ – became *beta*; *gimel* – the third letter, and the word for “camel”, became *gamma*, etc.”<sup>24</sup> These names had older, nongrammatological histories and sources – they emerged from the much more complex relationship with a more-than-human-world. The shift taken by the Greeks here allowed for this indebtedness to the world to fall away from language and the roots of (what became under the Greeks) the *alphabet*.

Interestingly, however, as the literacy historian Eric Havelock notes, for the first two or three centuries after the alphabet made its appearance in Greece, it wasn’t widely practiced or desired. He writes, “the alphabet was an interloper, lacking social standing and achieved use. The elite of society were all reciters and performers.”<sup>25</sup> It wasn’t until the first two written texts were produced in Greece – the *Iliad and the Odyssey* – that literacy became more diffuse. This was because, for the first time in Greece, the literate culture was allying itself with the oral tradition. And indeed, the Homeric epics were oral creations – a fact uncovered by the work of Harvard classicist Milman Parry and his assistant Albert Lord.<sup>26</sup> This achievement – transcribing the Homeric epics into documents – acted as the catalyst for the proliferation of literacy. A change, too, in the way communication was understood and thought about was also influenced by this

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<sup>23</sup> Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write*, 79-97.

<sup>24</sup> Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 102.

<sup>25</sup> Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write*, 87.

<sup>26</sup> See Adam Parry, ed., *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*.



specific popularization of written texts in the vowel-laden Greek texts. As Havelock writes, “It is only as language is written down that it becomes possible to think about it ... the alphabetized document, the medium became objectified ... no longer just a function of ‘me’ the speaker, but a document with an independent existence.”<sup>27</sup> With the proliferation of literacy in mind – happening a few centuries after the eighth century – Abram notes that we can see the influence of the “literate” mindset on the pre-Socratic philosophers who were writing during the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. For example, one may think of the written fragments of philosophers such as Heraclitus, Empedocles, or Thales. As Abram writes, “these thinkers are still under the sway of the oral-poetic mode of discourse – their teachings are commonly couched in an aphoristic or poetic form... [yet] they seem to stand at a new distance from the natural order, their thoughts inhabiting a different mode of temporality from the flux of nature.”<sup>28</sup> There seems to be a tension between that which gives rise to the world one can write about, and the recursive thoughts themselves coming, one feels, strictly from human reason. As Thales writes, “all things are full of gods,”<sup>29</sup> a fragment that exposes a literate, poetic reflection on a more-than-human-world that feels to Thales like it’s full of immanent powers and divine energies.

Literacy, however, would gain a stronger hold on the oral-poetic imagination. By the fourth century B.C.E. – which, coincidentally was during Plato’s lifetime (428 – 348 B.C.E.) – the alphabet had begun to be widely incorporated into Athenian life. As Illich and Sanders write, “Plato, in the early fourth century B.C., stands on the threshold

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<sup>27</sup> Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write*, 112.

<sup>28</sup> Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 108.

<sup>29</sup> Wheelwright, ed., *The Presocratics*, 45.

between the oral and written cultures of Greece. The earliest epigraphic and iconographic indications of young boys being taught to write date from Plato's childhood."<sup>30</sup> Such a time in the development of the human intellect – i.e. when literacy was just becoming widely taught – is made that much more fascinating when we juxtapose the philosophies of Socrates, a largely non-literate philosopher, and his student, the literate Plato. This association, Abram brings out, could very well exemplify the “hinge on which the sensuous, mimetic, profoundly embodied style of consciousness proper to orality gave way to a more detached, abstract mode of thinking engendered by alphabetic literacy.”<sup>31</sup> To think of Socrates is to think of his method or dialectic in which he would interrupt or aggressively question his interlocutors so as to get them to break out of their mnemonic, oral spell. This method, for Socrates, allowed for conversations to become emerging events that were tied up with the environment and the people participating. Of course, Socrates still desired to get at what, say, virtue was in the pure abstract, but he (Socrates) kept to excavating moral concepts or qualities – that is to say, ephemeral qualities that couldn't be correlated with exactly one situation or object in the world. For Plato, on the other hand, one thinks of his notion of the “Platonic Ideas” – those eternal essences of things that all material instantiations are continually bent towards. In Plato's philosophy, there's the “idea” of a tree, and all trees in the world are only copies or shadows of the essence (or idea) of what a tree is. In a very real way, then, there's an equivalence between Plato's Ideas and the written words themselves. Both the letters in the alphabet and the Platonic Ideas do not exist in the world outside of the human

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<sup>30</sup> Illich & Sanders, *ABC: Alphabetization of the Popular Mind*, 22-23.

<sup>31</sup> Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 109.

intellect. Rather, both inspire a sort of epistemological and aesthetic impetus that springs forth from the material of the world and overlays it like a dust.

This connection between the Platonic Ideas and alphabetic literacy has major implications for the way in which we conceive of the mind as informed by a “literate reason” versus a mind informed by an “animistic reason.” Recall the earliest pictographic signs utilized for inscription and communication. These signs – while “caught” and concretized on a type of surface – still were directly inspired by organisms and objects in-the-world, effectively reminding the viewers or “readers” that there was still a connection between any type of communication and the environment in which that communication was taking – or had taken – place. When the Greeks appropriated the aleph-beth, however, and included vowels (creating the alphabet) there was a double removal in regards to the signs themselves still being connected to – and reminding the “readers” of – the more-than-human-world. Rather than signs standing in as directly related to animals and natural phenomena (e.g. the moon, the sun, the wind, etc.) the words became the sounds of the words – readers began to “hear” the words, rather than see and feel the roots or objects of the words. The words also became in a very real sense invincible: removed from the ravages of time and tempestuous space and able to be, once recorded, returned to in their pristine form. This kind of recursive, reflexive awareness was called by Socrates and Plato the *psyche*. As Abram writes, “For Plato, as for Socrates, the *psyche* is now that aspect of oneself that is refined and strengthened by turning away from the ordinary sensory world in order to contemplate the intelligible Ideas, the pure and eternal forms that, alone, truly exist.”<sup>32</sup> The Socratic-Platonic *psyche* becomes the

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<sup>32</sup> Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 113.

“literate intellect” and the beginning of the schism opened up in language about what it means to be literate, versus what it means to be illiterate.

This massive paradigm shift is entwined with the advent of literacy, and yet many twentieth-century scholars hardly consider the impact literacy had on the human’s understanding of her being-in-the-world. Indeed, the work of Havelock, Illich, Ong, and others with whom I’ve been working all seem to comment on the way in which phonetic writing influences societal structures, patterns of cognition, and/or the way in which it has influenced human language. While these topics are all important, what’s left out is the way in which the phonetic alphabet has actually influenced the way in which we interact with the organisms situated within this world. Abram writes that, “[this kind of study of the alphabet] itself reflects an anthropocentric bias wholly endemic to alphabetic culture. In the absence of phonetic literacy, neither society, nor language, nor even the experience of ‘thought’ or consciousness can be pondered in the isolation from the multiple nonhuman shapes and powers that lend their influence to all activities.”<sup>33</sup> Indeed, there is a continuity with the wider-world that seems to be, at least in part, severed when the written word began to diffuse and influence important philosophical thought and the ways in which societies wrote about themselves. The next questions to raise, then, are what kinds of ways, conceptually, changes occurred, due to the literacy that influenced the organization of epistemology and ontology.

### Conceptually: Inside/Outside & Thought

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 123.

Literacy is a valuable tool and way of being. As Goody writes, “Literacy is absolutely necessary for the development not only of science, but also of history, philosophy, explicate understanding of literature and of any art, and indeed for the explanation of language itself.”<sup>34</sup> And yet there’s still a sense in which something is “lost” in this move towards entering into the “spell” of literacy, by learning how to “spell.” Or perhaps what *it* is isn’t so much lost as it is buried – sequestered to the shadow cast by the words that come from literate culture itself. Words have a visual presence – a materiality that sound lacks. Sound, speaking and listening and reacting, are an *event*, just like emotions. They come and overwhelm us, or come out of us, and then pass by. There’s a visceral magic to this kind of happening: I need go no further in coming up with an example than referencing any kind of musical experience the reader may have had. Sound – and by extension words, speech, rhetoric, music – is dynamic: it affects and makes a change to the very essence of a kairotic (opportune or eventful) moment. On the other hand, writing can be conservative: keeping track of lists, thoughts, dates, notes – but in return, as Havelock notes, “[writing also] enables the mind to turn itself to new speculation.”<sup>35</sup>

One of the ways in which this “new way of speculating” manifested itself was through the syllogism: i.e. when a conclusion is drawn from two or more given premises or propositions. A.R. Luria, in his work *Cognitive Development: Its Cultural and Social Foundations*, noted that when he attempted to teach illiterate students principles of abstract classification, they were unable to operate with formal deductive procedures of

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<sup>34</sup> Goody, *Orality and Literacy*, 15.

<sup>35</sup> Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write*, 41.

reasoning, and instead would revert to situational rather than categorical thinking. This is to say that, yes, while syllogistic thinking relates to thought, in day-to-day goes on – i.e. “practical” matters – people rarely think in syllogisms. For example, logical abstraction, layered on top of actual organisms and objects in the world was difficult for Luria’s students: from as “advanced” as the syllogism, to as “simple” as geometric shapes. As Ong writes, “a circle would be called a plate, sieve, bucket, watch or moon.”<sup>36</sup> The same sort of difficulty surrounding abstraction applied to self-awareness, too. Since self-analysis requires an ability to intellectually fall away from the present moment and reflect back on a sense of self – removed from the specific moment in time and space – illiterates who hadn’t had much experience with any sort of written texts had a hard time talking about, what was for them, effectively the center of their every experience: i.e. their body. When Ong spoke to a middle-aged peasant man who had been born and raised in an oral community and asked him what sort of person he thought he was, he answered as follows: “What can I say about my own heart? How can I talk about my character? Ask others, they can tell you about me. I myself can’t say anything.”<sup>37</sup> In this exchange, we see how the oral (but also illiterate) man feels a strong sense of connectivity to others, and *understands* that how and who he is, is just as much how he makes people feel, as it is what kinds of decisions he makes.

Of course, to make a clean conceptual split between the outside and the inside as it correlates with the emergence of literacy and illiteracy would be a deductive fallacy, as Goody reminds us. He writes that the “written word does not replace speech, any more

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<sup>36</sup> Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 50.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

than speech replaces gesture. But it adds an important dimension to such social action.”<sup>38</sup>

In other words, the differences in the way in which writing influences organizations, societal constructs, actions, and, to an extent, thought, is due to the fact that literacy is a *different communicative act*, tethered to different ways of viewing the world and different skills that maximize or make vestigial other ways of relating to the world. In a pre-literate society, as we’ve mapped, there seems to be more of a chance of the society swallowing up the individual and influencing – in an obvious way that exceeds, or perhaps precedes concepts such as interpolation – an individual’s thoughts about themselves. Here, we see the importance of rhetoric through time, as Goody explains how “culture is a series of communicative acts, and differences in the modes of communication are often as important as differences in the modes of production, for they involve developments in the storing, analysis, and creation of human knowledge, as well as the relationships between the individuals involved.”<sup>39</sup> On one hand, what literacy does as a mode of communication is encourage criticism and irony, while, on the other hand, reify the importance of the book and all “knowledge,” e.g. dates, notes, thoughts that were written down. As such, epistemology moves further away from the animate world and deeper into the conceptual framework actively being created as the culture of each literate society continues to produce, experience, and concretize.

More individualistically and not as socially, even the concepts of inside and outside are necessarily tautological. One might here think of Derrida’s thoughts in his work, *For Hospitality*, in which he deconstructs the concepts of “home” and “guest” as

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<sup>38</sup> Goody, *Domestication of the Savage Mind*, 14.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

falling apart when put under the microscope – inevitably having parts of what they aren't already inhering in their meaning. Ong will similarly critique the concepts of “inside” and “outside,” writing that, “interior is defined by ‘in’ which is defined by ‘between’ which is defined by ‘inside’ and so on round and round the tautological circle.”<sup>40</sup> And yet there has absolutely been, throughout the history of philosophy and by extension colloquial thought, a real belief in what Newton saw as absolute space: an “out-there” that exists and is completely removed from an “us” or an “inside.”<sup>41</sup> There's a way in which literacy has played a part in opening up a different way of engaging with the world and with each other. Ong writes that “after print and the extensive experience with maps that print implemented ... human beings, when they thought about the cosmos or the universe or ‘world’ would think primarily of something laid out before their eyes ... ready to be explored.”<sup>42</sup> And a very large part of this phenomenon is due to the emergence of “context-free” language (Hirsch, 1977, pp. 21-3, 26) and “autonomous discourse” (Olson, 1980a) all due to literacy. That is to say that, with literacy, there's a sense in which words can reverberate with each other endlessly without exhausting themselves, all words reflexively referring to more signifieds, synonyms, symbols, without allowing the human to attune themselves to the environment or the Other so as to get a literal and metaphorical grounding.

Coincidentally, it's exactly this emergence of “context-free” language that also evolved the major discipline of ancient rhetoric. As Ong writes, “in ancient Greece, the

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<sup>40</sup> Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 72.

<sup>41</sup> It's just as right here to mention a belief in Cartesian dualism, and indeed, that's implicit in my mentioning Newton's belief in absolute-space and absolute-time.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.



study of ‘philosophy,’ represented by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, for all its subsequent fecundity, was a relatively minor element in the total Greek culture, never competitive with rhetoric either in the number of its practitioners, nor in its immediate social effects.”<sup>43</sup> Around this time – a time dominated by orality and extemporaneous communication – rhetoric was at the heart of all things public: public speaking, oral address, and political announcement. Ong describes how rhetoric’s history was couched in proving or disproving a point against an opposing point: effectively, then, rhetoric was a sense of discovery and ‘invention’ – finding in an argument – and in the context in which the argument was taking place – a way in which to lodge and defend your own beliefs. In Quintillian’s terms, this was considered the “seat” of an argument: the *topoi* (or places; ‘loci’ in Latin) of an argument, or that which inspired an argument or discussion, and were called, as Ong writes, “the *loci communes* or commonplaces when they were thought of as providing arguments common to any and all subject matter.”<sup>44</sup>

Over time, however, as the “literate mindset” influenced ancient pedagogical practices – and communication practices in turn – rhetoric shifted from the oral world to the choreographic, literate world, and by the sixteenth century rhetoric text books were, according to Ong, omitting the “memory” part of the traditional five parts of rhetoric: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. As Ong notes, rhetoric, like pedagogy and the way in which humans thought about their relationship with the greater world seemed to “[follow] the drift of consciousness away from an oral to a writing economy.”<sup>45</sup> And this drift was exacerbated by the emergence of the printing press, an

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 107. Also see: Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, 194-205.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 114.

invention which reified the materiality of words as it aided literacy in becoming more diffuse. This kind of shift in the means of producing the written word both encouraged the belief in knowledge as a quantifiable, empirical resource that could be read and consumed (as well as sold), and influenced the way in which the human psyche expected the sensuous world to be organized: e.g. the loci became “headers,” “titles,” “paragraphs” to be read from left to right, and so on.

This kind of dramatic shift in the expectation humans had of visual experience – and by extension, the way in which knowledge and “valuable” experience could be collected – encouraged, as Ong writes, “human beings to think of their own interior conscious and unconscious resources as more and more thing-like, impersonal and religiously neutral. Print encouraged the mind to sense that its possessions were held in some sort of inert mental space.”<sup>46</sup> Of course, this isn’t to say that there’s a differentiation in the way in which we as human beings physically experience the world writ large: both as an illiterate-body and as a literate-body. Both ways of being are still completely immersed in the visual, tactile, sensuous world that is mediated through our sensory modalities. No, the difference is that of a gradation of affect, not a separation of affect. This is to say that the distribution of what we can sense – in other words, the distribution of the sensible – is recursively categorized and “thought” about fundamentally differently (in degrees) if one is literate, compared to if one is illiterate. And this difference in degrees provides the necessary space for the mind of the literate to recursively and discursively construct an “inner” space, removed from the “outer” world, that pantomimes the demarcations and limits of the book: i.e. knowledge is inside and neatly

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 129.

organized – it can be opened and added to (via writing) but necessarily needs a certain kind of validation or wrapping to be considered legitimate. In other words, the dependence on institutional power-approved legitimacy becomes that much more dangerous as the printing of the word and what can not-so-hyperbolically be called the production of knowledge becomes more widely conventional. The word effectively became a commodity and the practice of silent reading, of silent communication removed from the environment and the limits of the page, contributed to the importance of endings, of complacency, of feeling a sense of closure when being told to stop thinking, or reading, or writing. These kinds of limits – of the end, of the beginning, of the middle – not the least of which was the limit of inside and outside of the human psyche and of human experience, support what Hartman will call, “thinking as textual,” but as he writes, it’s important to remember that “texts are false bottoms... text is fundamentally pretext.”<sup>47</sup>

All of this is to say that language and literacy has become a structure – an assemblage – through which multiple powers run, and from within which various kinds of literacies can be created and experienced: like windows one looks through or doors through which one enters, seeing and feeling entirely new and different layers of reality. And the metaphor of windows, of porousness, is an important inclusion when speaking of literacy and language in architectural metaphors. There are no closed systems, and there never have been, Ong reminds us – and this includes language and literacy. Yes, the way in which the human feels herself in the cosmos has become more complex over time, allowing for a symbolic recursivity that isn’t natural to the oral or illiterate world. It must

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 166; Also see Hartman, *Saving the Text*, 66.

be remembered, however, that the illusion that reason, language, or logic is a closed system is just that, an illusion exacerbated by the way in which things necessarily have to become actualized in the world: as materially bounded instantiations always slipping into and out of affective states of resonance.

And this illusion of a closed system was and continues to be especially dependent on the literate as he or she fills positions of social power and leverages visual, literate symbolic organizations such as the table, the list, and the box so as to validate the literate way of thinking, thereby reinforcing a dichotomy between inside and outside, “primitive” and “advanced,” and ultimately “literate” and “illiterate.” But this dichotomy isn’t necessary, as Goody writes. In fact, it’s inadequate to dealing with the complexity of development and experience, and “proposes no reason for the difference(s) [experienced in the world] and no mechanisms for change. [Change that inevitably happens.]”<sup>48</sup>

It doesn’t necessarily have to be this way. Even though the notion of literacy has been set against our bodily experience of the world – with our experience of the world having been inverted so as to be purportedly described more accurately through a “transcendental logos” – there’s a way in which to trace the fault-lines of our concepts and open them up so as to create a larger space for literacies (which would also always already include notions of various illiteracies). Each of which would be understood as informing and influencing other kinds of literacy, and in turn influencing the way in which the world affects us in each sensuous or remembered (intellectual) moment. Of course, re-planting literacy back into the more-than-human-world would also demand a change in the way we talk about and describe our experience of our bodies situated in

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<sup>48</sup> Goody, *Domestication of the Savage Mind*, 147.

these assemblages of power, of which the most powerful depends on literacy-as-transcendence.

To re-examine the body as situated in a literate-world, it is necessary to follow the way in which there are now different modes of being that act as lived-experiences: being-scriptural in one vein, and being-asriptural in the other. This isn't to say that being-scriptural, or more generally scriptural, is the same as being-literate, just as I'm not saying that being-asriptural is the same as being-illiterate. Rather, being-scriptural can be understood as being able to convey specific information, a way in which one engages in a socio-economic symbolicity that demands successful receiving and sending of accepted texts with the goal of participating in an economic ecosystem that's been created and constructed. Literacy, on the other hand, is a fundamental way of being: concomitant with ontology and symbolism – an intensification of ontology and symbolism in which symbols writ large are felt in a different way, and not necessarily engaged in a constructed economic ecosystem or even a specific kind of sociology. Further, illiteracy can be understood as any kind of lesser aesthetic intensification of the symbolic within a specific kind of literacy and the inability to tap into the aesthetic resonance of other kinds of literacy, whereas a-scriptural is the inability to participate in the kind of socio-economic symbolicity that is obligatory to textual symbol and sign usage within the kind of literacy that organizes this thesis.

The kind of relationship I'm referring to here between literacy/illiteracy and being-scriptural/being-asriptural can be conceptualized as a graph in which there is an "x-axis" (the horizontal axis), and a "y-axis" (the vertical axis). The horizontal axis, in my use of these concepts, is all of reality, including all things that exist and that

participate in various kinds of literacies. There, on this horizontal axis, an indefinite number of organisms that all are aesthetically influenced and “influence-able” are participating in an infinite number of symbolisms and, by extension, literacies. Some organisms are more complex than others and have various kinds of aesthetic prehensions which shape their ability to formulate new literacies. As a result, being-scriptural is *one kind* of literacy that is particularly complex for the human being due to how systemically impactful it is in most societies today (for the accumulation of both monetary and cultural capital), and the kind of history of change it has, while being literate in the language of, say, trees is demonstrably different, with an entirely different assemblage on the horizontal axis, emanating from an entirely different organism (a tree versus a human). Put simply, being-scriptural is one mode of literacy on a horizontal plane of literacy and symbolicity: one that, as I’ve said, has a complex assemblage that correlates with the vertical axis, and that has a profound intensity to it.

The vertical axis, then, is the way in which each individual organism experiences its own being on the horizontal axis of symbols and affect where being-scriptural is but one way in which to experience one’s own literacy. This is to say that all things exist and participate on a horizontal plane of ontological symbolicity, but each individual organism doesn’t experience itself as existing on an ever-expanding and horizontal plane, but rather experiences a vertical relationship that grows out of that horizontal plane. Imagine a piece of fabric laid flat out. Then imagine pinching together a section of that fabric so that a ridge is created. This is the kind of relationship I’m envisioning. Literacies are vertical experiences of immanent potential, organizations of infused value that depend upon the type of other organisms surrounding and coalescing around the individual organism as

it's situated on the horizontal plane of ontology and various symbolism, and which create a kind of aesthetic and material milieu in which the individual organism exists and develops.

In other words, the verticality produced on the horizontal plane is inevitable as things exist and feel and move; we all experience various literacies as vertical – some more strongly and reified, with a longer history, than others. But that isn't to say that the verticality of each experienced literacy is the only way in which to experience literacy writ large; rather, there are an indefinite number of other literacies that one can potentially experience and that inevitably contribute to the way in which any one specific kind of literacy is experienced and possible. And this is all aesthetically connected and influenced, which is what constitutes the horizontality as such – since movement on the y-axis can only ever occur by virtue of organisms being open aesthetically, and thus symbolically, to influence the ontological connectedness represented by the x-axis, which accounts for the ability of entities to change and evolve into complex organisms that can formulate increasingly complex literacies. The aesthetic is, arguably in my conception, the scalars of the vector space I'm mapping out, that which allows there to be communication and continual production between the many different interactions between these axes. This must, then, also include a z-axis, which runs perpendicular to the two dimensional organization of the x-axis and y-axis, and which gives the verticality of the y-axis a certain profound intensity, a thickness that accounts for the intensification of a particular literacy, such as something like the history of the scripturality of our current socio-economic milieu. The z-axis is the conception of other

universes and worlds of literacies: intensities that allow for there to be new layers of experiencing a specific kind of literacy.

And these intensities are porous; in other words, it's not necessarily the x-axis that comes before the y-axis. Rather, it's the movements of all things – which inevitability create verticalities – that make up the x-axis, and the z-axis is the unknown number of versions of the same sort of literacy you can experience through space-time, and that are being influenced by other literacies as well, no matter the depth you go in it or the profundity of the intensity to which you feel it. Think of an ocean. As you get deeper, it gets darker, more difficult to move around depending on the kind of sensory apparatuses you have available to you: both biologically and technologically. But it's still the ocean: coextensive with the rest of the many infinite layers and areas of the ocean. The same with literacy.

What I'm trying to say is part of the reason why I'm even able to make this argument, that literacy and illiteracy need to be collapsed into each other, that the bifurcation needs to be dismantled, is because we've confused the history of symbolism and by extension literacy with ontology. We're deep into scriptural literacy and its abstract power. We've created modes of being-scriptural that reflect our intense positions (on the z-axis) as we've continued to move along the y-axis, vertically. There are many implications to this depth, but one important consequence is that we've allowed this evolved symbolism – this literacy, and this specific kind of literacy (scripturality) to fill the space where we believe we get our information, where we search for truth and knowledge. The space we open ourselves up to isn't the emotional or the affective or the aesthetic, anymore. The slope of our history of literacy, the cavernous creation of our



ivory towers and economic ecosystems, always already depends on a relationship between the y-axis (the organized lived experiences of things) and the x-axis (things in their mutual actuality), which are allowed to create a current or an arc because of the aesthetic scalars firing at all times.

Literacy, then, is always already horizontal and vertical and of indefinite scope and intensity. This chapter is about the historical emergence (or even the historical intensification) of a specific kind of vertical relationship to a certain kind of literacy (being-scriptural), that influences the way in which we think about and feel our own ontology. But the hope is to travel through the porousness of these literacies to show that there are always aesthetic scalars exploding and arcing with each other, and because of these aesthetic explosions there are ways to enter into new ways of feeling, and thinking about, literacy. The next chapter will trace the ways in which the two modes of being we've isolated – being-scriptural and being-ascriptural – are in fact co-dependent, and when juxtaposed expose different ways in which to orient ourselves towards new ways of thinking about literacy and illiteracy.

## CHAPTER III

### MODES OF BEING: SCRIPTURAL & ASCRIPTURAL

In this chapter, I explore the two modes of being that I introduced in chapter two – being-scriptural and being-ascriptural – and that are a part of the specific kind of literacy we experience as human beings. Tracing these two kinds of modes of experience (being-scriptural and being-ascriptural) will, I hope, begin to expose the aesthetic arcs that undergird both ways of being, and will provide avenues for exploration as we continue to search for ways to more conceptually connect the intense experience of being literate with the equally intense experience of being illiterate – since both literacy and illiteracy are equally influencing the other concurrently. Specifically, these two modes of being have been introduced so as to be concepts that can be substituted for how we now, colloquially, conceptualize literacy and illiteracy. If you're literate and exist in the depths of being-scriptural, you're inevitably illiterate in regard to the horizontality of other illiteracies.

In what follows, I will explore both being-scriptural and being-ascriptural, noting the characteristics of being-scriptural that align with David Abram's retelling of a history of separation from the more-than-human-world that the emergence of literacy reified, and then tracing the ways in which being-ascriptural always already stays the scriptural-being: effectively providing an opening for how we may read and write outward, leveraging our own recursive literacy so as to try and more intensely feel the horizontality of literacy writ large, situated as we are in our ways of being.

## Modes of Being: Being-Scriptural

Michel de Certeau writes in his work, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, “It is through an analysis of this economy, of its historical implantation, of its rules and the instruments of its success – a vast program for which I shall substitute a mere sketch – that one can best begin to locate the points at which voices slip into the great book of our law.”<sup>49</sup> With the scriptural environment in which we’re currently living, voices – the echoes of an orality that used to be dominant – can only seep through, what are now, small pores of an almost airtight scriptural economy, situated as it is next to the felt but not conceptually captured literacies on the x-axis. And it’s these pores that we must work to locate and widen by tracing both modes of being, that of being-scriptural, and being-as-scriptural – encountering these slippages will be the payoff for the exploration within our specific vein of literacy.

In describing two different terms, however – that of being-scriptural and being-as-scriptural, I’m not here setting up a false binary between literacy and illiteracy – orality and writing, scripturality and ascripturality, or language and speech-acts. Rather these kinds of conceptual antinomies expose, as de Certeau writes, “a unique origin (a founding archeology)”<sup>50</sup> that must always come back to the affective body and deal with the affective nature of experience itself: the aesthetic movement that gives rise to recognition

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<sup>49</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 132.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

of both literacy and illiteracy alike. These “unities” (e.g. literacy and illiteracy; orality and writing) are the result of what de Certeau calls “reciprocal distinctions within successive and interconnected historical (and aesthetic) configurations.”<sup>51</sup> These two ways of being are situated on an aesthetic gradation – a specific vein of literacy – and the inherent tension between the two allows there to be a sort of concretization of actualities (and their symbolisms) in the world. One form of literacy will always make it so that other forms remain ambiguous and stuck in a nebulous space of indeterminacy, what de Certeau calls “a position of inertia, subjection, and opaque resistance.”<sup>52</sup> However, this nebulous, indeterminate space gives rise to novelty. Think of ascriptural as that which surrounds scriptural at the edges. It’s both what brings scriptural into focus (since scriptural has to swallow newness and turn it into text), while also being the residue of what’s left over, since as scriptural evolves historically it will necessarily ignore and discard much of what may be experienced.

The problem, however, is that the tension that allows for movement (from ascriptural to scriptural and back again) establishes power relationships that favor one mode of being over the other. For instance, today’s dominant forms of communicative action are informed by the cultural silos organized by writing: e.g. literature, poetry, film (scripts), education, politics (policy writing), etc. This would mean that those who could write – who were effectively literate – would have an exponentially better chance at infiltrating and influencing the infrastructure of the culture, since the requisite navigational skill in the scriptural economy is scriptural literacy. As de Certeau writes,

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 133.

“The origin is no longer what is narrated, but rather the multiform and murmuring activity of producing a text and producing society as a text. ‘Progress’ is scriptural in type.”<sup>53</sup> In other words, you would only have opportunity to contribute directly to the way in which the society progressed by being-scriptural whether that contribution occurred in the realm of the sciences, academia, politics, or the “regular” workplace.

This makes sense, too, since from a phenomenological point of view being-scriptural connotes a sense of mastery of “space” and “object” that we don’t read about or seem to experience when exploring the histories of those cultures who have been a-scriptural through time. Michel de Certeau explains how, with writing, one necessarily starts with a “blank page,” a surface on which one is expected to inscribe something. This action on what he calls the “autonomous surface” is the “Cartesian move of making a distinction that initiates, along with a place of writing, the mastery (and isolation) of a subject confronted by an object.”<sup>54</sup> The ability of writing – and then being able to write on *a thing*, sometimes indelibly – grants the writer (or author) a sense of transcendental power that influences how the writer views her being-in-the-world, including her relationship with those things that *can’t* write in the way humans understand writing to be and look like. It’s a real sense of power: both practically and ostensibly.

Furthermore, the writing itself is a kind of agreed upon system (most often described as rationality actualized) that necessarily has been constructed so as to extend off the page and influence the very organization of the spaces on which the text can be inscribed, effectively re-organizing space itself so that it becomes already “written” and

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 134.

waiting for more “writing.” Writing and being able to write corroborates, then, the desire to accumulate the dates, people, and events of the past so as to create a “history,” which supports a writing towards the future, analogous to thinking about and anticipating the future. For de Certeau, writing becomes “capitalist and conquering,” appropriating those whose bodies aren’t “initiated” via education and discourse to a scriptural way of thinking and organization that supports the dominate modes of production and oppression.

This kind of rite of initiation, when diffuse and adopted by the majority, enacts a politics that is subtly – and sometimes not so subtly – exclusive, and that influences the ideological foundations of what it means to be political and to hold power. This ideological significance that necessarily follows from an economy of being-scriptural includes, as de Certeau writes, a redefinition of what “truth” is. He writes that “‘truth’ no longer depends on the attention of a receiver who assimilates himself [sic] to the great identifying message. It is the result of work – historical, critical, economic work... [dependent] on a ‘will to do.’”<sup>55</sup> Truth and being, in this conceptualization of reality, become synonymous with modes of production closely tied to capitalism, in which writing both produces a material instantiation of ideology and also assumes a space on which it will write itself again. Put simply, the history (of scripturality) manifests an ontology of power.

The subject that emerges within a scriptural economy, if we’re to follow de Certeau’s argument, is a subject that necessarily needs to write in order to be and to become in the dominant scriptural sphere. And within this sphere of “applicability” –

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 137.

meaning the sphere in which scripturality acts as a specific kind of literacy – the subject’s relationship not only with truth but also with language is shaped by the demand to produce. De Certeau explains how the system of language is disrupted when the “first speaker” (whether God or a god-like figure in many origin stories of language) is removed. All that is left is a hole in which the subject must always be moving or producing: both speaking and writing so as not to lose a sense of agency and identity in the void of a disseminated language that has no touchstone. In lieu of a language that is emergent and continuous with the more-than-human-world, language, understood as being-scriptural, becomes a mode of production and an object which implies, according to de Certeau, “a distancing of the living body (both traditional and individual) and thus also of everything which remains, among the people, linked to the earth, to the place, to orality or to non-verbal tasks.”<sup>56</sup>

Being-scriptural means being a part of a specific strain of literacy that contributes to the sphere of contemporary power. One that takes control of languages, writes history, and informs the way in which socioeconomic gradations are organized and the relative mobility that those living in certain gradation can engage in. Fundamentally, writing writes the body into a new way of being: one that is removed from the more-than-human-world and is almost completely ensconced within the “written-sphere.”

Fundamentally, the type of literacy being critiqued comes down to three factors that work together: 1) a model or a “text,” 2) the instruments used for writing or inscribing the model, and 3) the material on which the text emerges: i.e. the material that instantiates the body, the book, or anything in the world that bears script. As de Certeau

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 138-139.

writes, “using tools to make a body conform to its definition in a social discourse: that is the movement.”<sup>57</sup>

I am not arguing against the fact that the body is symbolically constructed and symbolically innervated. In fact, I’m in complete agreement with that premise, since it’s only because of the many other symbolisms and literacies all participating with one another aesthetically that the specific kind of literacy being critiqued is able to exist and continue. What I am concerned with, however, is the equivalence of the tools that multiply and indefinitely fragment so as to adapt to the many different ways an individual human being can experience reality (or a specific kind of literacy) on the one hand, and the symbolic nature of reality that eclipses the human realm of epistemology on the other. They are *not* the same thing, and cannot be allowed to be defined as such. The body is “postulated as the signifier (the term) in a *contract*”<sup>58</sup> but that contract, well before the “scriptural, human-tool constructed contract” even comes into being, is an agreement – a response-ability – with the affective nature of reality writ large. This kind of response-ability that always presupposes the designation of “tool-ness” to a “tool” can be felt in what de Certeau calls the interaction between the “tools” and the “flesh” – the flesh being the sensing or affective body itself. He writes that this interaction creates “on the one hand... a change in the fiction (a correction of knowledge) and, on the other, the cry, which shrieks an in-articulable pain and constitutes the un-thought part of bodily difference.”<sup>59</sup> And this cry is the way in which we’re always already a-scriptural underneath and all around our being scriptural, situated within a scriptural economy.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 145.



I'd argue that being-scriptural needs to inflate its definition of what a "tool" is to the very images – what de Certeau calls the empty centers – themselves that the tools try and capture and concretize into what can be assimilated into knowledge or the "symbolic" – again, as if the symbolic is only a construct of the human mind, or sequestered to human experience. And de Certeau comes very close to doing this when he describes tools as marking the gap between the fictions and simulacra (or symbols) on one side and the continuum of "natural forces, of libidinal drives and instinctual outpourings,"<sup>60</sup> on the other. He then describes how this "boundary" is beginning to break down with the advent of "second-wave of literacy" that strain of literacy connected to technology and the internet. That is to say that the instruments or the tools are slowly becoming, in de Certeau's world, obsolescent: anachronistic in the move towards a faster, more electronic world.<sup>61</sup>

But in my own argument, the "tools" themselves are continuous with both sides of the bifurcation of "knowledge" and "natural forces." The tools emerge from the "natural forces" since the natural forces themselves are the catalysts behind the human recognizing something as a tool, and having the desire to capture some sort of affect inspired by the natural, libidinal forces always washing in from the more-than-human-world. This kind of interaction, then, would be like the concrescence of a wave washing onto the beach: as the natural forces wash in as a wave, they come into contact with the material actuality of the sand, creating bubbles of foam that act as the transient knowledge of the human on the beach. The "tools" then, which we're able to use in order

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>61</sup> And this kind of extrapolation is, I believe, what gave rise to Heidegger's fear of technology to the point of condemning it as much as he did in his later work. As if technology contributes to our becoming "less-human" or less connected to the more-than-human-world.

to interact with the more-than-human world, are primordial, just as the symbolic is: the beach has always been there, with an infinite number of grains that can or already do contribute to the bubbling up of new spheres of thinking – new spheres of applicability, new kinds of literacies. The problem, as I see it, is defining the apparatuses that are constructed on the beach of experience as the “tools” themselves, bypassing the very real and sensuous and always affecting “tools” that are the infinite grains on the beach – i.e. the many different organisms that make up our reality, that are things in themselves, and that contribute to our experience.<sup>62</sup> All of this is also to say that certain “tools” will be caught up within the vortex of a moving literacy, and be appropriated so as to be only strictly a tool within that literacy, effectively reifying the validity of that literacy as a symbolic structure that can sustain itself – at least for a time – along the z-axis as it moves through time and space, and new organisms come into and out of its “atmosphere.”

As de Certeau questions, “where and when is there ever anything bodily that is not written, remade, cultured, identified by the different tools which are part of a social, symbolic code?”<sup>63</sup> Answer: what is bodily is just as much at the limits of the “human-made” tools, as it is within the tools themselves. While there are the tools that contribute to a societal symbolic-structure that write on the body and force the body to conform within the lines of what can be said and what can’t, at the limits there is the scream, the pure affect that is also always bodily and contributing to the body – affecting it, and pushing it along, like a pulse. This, too, is the symbolic and contributes to the creation of

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<sup>62</sup> Take the tree, for example. It can be considered a “grain” of experience, since it both contributes to an environment due to its body, while also working as the lungs of the world: breathing in and out: allowing there to be clean air. Without trees, life as we know it wouldn’t have come into existence.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 147.

and utilization of “tools.” There are codes, yes, that emerge through reiteration of a certain system that seems to work, but forgetting that the code and the systemized, conventional way of utilizing tools were, themselves, birthed by a wave of affect which came from the more-than-human-world and other literacies is a mistake that writing and being-scriptural needs to learn from. To return to our diagrammatic understanding of literacy, the many infinite organisms that move on the y-axis, and that make up the x-axis, are always feeling and being influenced by the other organisms and their literacies via aesthetic prehensions that make up each kind of literacy. As things are now, there is a strong desire – a valid desire – to be recognized within a dominant societal “code” that grants power-positions – or at the very least, positions from which one can survive as a body – to those who fit the definition of a tool-user, or a reader of the pseudo-symbolic that is laid over the more-than-human-world of the symbolic. In this case, that pseudo-symbolic drapery is the scriptural literacy we’re following. But that which opposes this passion for conformity and identity – and that which pushes the zeitgeist further on its roll – is the affect, and this affect needs to be re-recognized by the scriptural economy as part of the symbolic and as laying the groundwork for the scriptural: a groundwork that is fundamentally a-scriptural, and that is also infusing a validity and a valuable-essence to all that exists: from the very small (e.g. a pebble) to the very complex (e.g. an a-literate being). Until then, the mode of being-scriptural will be stuck on the side of a negative feedback loop that contributes only to the reification of inorganic systems of control: not saturated in the very passionate, affective stream of life that allows one to feel the foam of the world as it washes over their bodies, flowing in such a way so as to always be creating something new and beautiful. Being-scriptural must incorporate the scream, the

laugh, the ascriptural experience, the affect, so as to see (and feel) the porousness of the type of literacy it depends upon (scripturality), and write towards and with those kairotic moments of feeling, dazzling at the sparks of new-reality that are created during the friction of a moment, an emotion, and a movement.

### Modes of Being: Being-Ascriptural

Towards the end of his chapter on the scriptural economy, de Certeau writes that “the time is thus over in which the ‘real’ appeared to come into the text to be manufactured and exported ... the text mimes its own death and makes it ridiculous ... it is no more than the illusory sacrament of the real, a space of laughter at the expense of yesterday’s axioms.”<sup>64</sup> In other words, because of the recursive nature of the symbolic that is believed to be strictly situated within the human realm of experience, the words play off of each other, refracting and reflecting until all that is left is irony and cynicism: a space in which honesty and sublimity are scoffed at and treated as a joke, or as satirical; where one has to feel like they’re “in on it” instead of allowing themselves to be opened up to and overwhelmed by a truth that isn’t already appropriated by the economy of the scriptural – awash in a moment of lucidity that overflows description.

Foucault acknowledges this same recursivity of language when he writes that:

“somewhat before the invention of writing, a change had to occur to open the space in which writing could flow and establish itself, a change ... that forms one

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 152.

of the most decisive ontological events of language: its mirrored reflection upon death and the construction, from this reflection, of a virtual space where speech discovers the endless resourcefulness of its own image, and where it can represent itself as already existing behind itself, already active beyond itself, to infinity.”<sup>65</sup>

This kind of virtual space that is opened up by language so as to allow writing in is what Foucault will call death: the “limit and the center” in and through which the human – and all things – always murmurs, repeats, restates, and continues on, never ending. The problem, however, that one encounters in this virtual space that is opened with writing is that language becomes, as Foucault states, “lodged and hidden” within this ever-repeating stream of mirrors, with “a work of language only [advancing] more deeply into the intangible density of the mirror, [calling] forth the double of this already-doubled writing.”<sup>66</sup> This kind of burrowing into the mirror of what, fundamentally, is the symbolic of a speech – which has its own ideograms and phonetic elements – creates universes of new opportunity for sociality and communication, while creating a web so dense that it’s difficult to get through the membrane of language to any sort of “outside” from which language can replenish itself. This is the question: how is it that language and rhetoric are never exhausted amidst the towering creations of the human imagination and intellect, all of which need – demand, even – a certain kind of energy to keep them running?

The answer, I think, can be found in the way in which being-as-scriptural allows for a certain open-ness, a certain exposure and feeling of attunement towards the outside

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<sup>65</sup> Foucault, *Language to Infinity*, 3.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

without the necessity of an interiority to uphold its membrane. Of course, this kind of feeling is always already concomitant with being-scriptural. That is to say that the way in which what goes “unheard” in community (a community of the scriptural, mind you) is exactly that stream of affective sensitivity that a body can’t ever be rid of, and is that which allows for language to always have more “energy,” more “affect” and “feeling” to reproduce and contend with. In other words, a-scripturality is what reinforces scripturality without scripturality formally recognizing a-scripturality as a contributing factor. Abram writes that “in learning how to read we must break the spontaneous participating of our eyes and our ears in the surrounding terrain (where they had converged in the synesthetic encounter with animals, plants, and streams) in order to recouple those senses upon the flat surface of the page,”<sup>67</sup> but even in the learning of how to successfully make the “break,” our bodies don’t fully disengage with the more-than-human-world that’s always already existing and allowing us a place to be and to dwell. There are many other literacies, then, always already contributing to the one in which we find ourselves. And these other literacies and organisms provide both a foundation on which to work outward, and an energy source from which the aesthetic circulates, like a current, allowing there to be movement and innovation within the specific vein of literacy (being-scriptural) that we’ve been critiquing.

This kind of relation with the Other – both the other as another human and the more-than-human-world – creates a relation with, as Blanchot writes, the *Autrui* (or the others) which “exceeds me absolutely”<sup>68</sup> and cannot be captured within the realm of

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<sup>67</sup> Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 131.

<sup>68</sup> Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, 61.

representation at all, but that must contribute to the Foucauldian murmuring: the haunting that allows for there to always be a movement. This kind of relationship with the outside, with the *Autrui*, is a presencing that is always immediate, always now; it exceeds “all direct relation, all mystical fusion, and all sensible contact... a relation escaping power.”<sup>69</sup> This escaping from power should remind us of the power that seems to flow through the assemblage of being-scriptural. In other words, it’s exactly this immediate Other-ing that is always already there, providing space, place, and feeling to a body that can only ever regurgitate it out – even if such a regurgitation occurs through a system of literacy. It’s not the system of literacy that allows for newness, it’s the encounter with the other that creates an “eruption of exteriority that pierces the smooth ordering both of my ‘world’ and of my sense of interiority, making an entry while resisting my power absolutely.”<sup>70</sup> This kind of othering can never be captured and always contributes to the newness of concepts that are captured and appropriated into the lexicon of the colloquial language. In not so many words, this Other-ing – the *Autrui* – is the more-than-human-world as it is felt: influencing and affecting us by creating moments of rapture within the scriptural economy, overflowing what this literacy can afford from within its own practices. I’d argue that being-scriptural is always built atop of what it means to be a-scriptural. The two are connected aesthetically through vibrations up and down so as to create ripples that are immanent to both ways of being. In fact, it is these affective currents that allow for there to be communication in between different modes of being: even though one plateau – being-scriptural – is working through a system as invisible as the one that the other plateau – being-a-scriptural – is working with (that is, both are being

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>70</sup> Davis, *Inessential Solidarity*, 53.

influenced by the aesthetic). One imagines the scriptural-body moving through the landscape, naming and thinking, while the ascriptural-body moves, feels, and reacts in a much more sensuous, conscious way – that is to say, conscious of the affect, and not leveraging the consciousness so as to name things.

My contention is that this pre-originary feeling that defines ascriptural ways of being are still available and active in the scriptural way of being – hence the two being folded together. I’d argue that this kind of feeling is what seems to allow for the very creation of any sort of scriptural economy – and community – in the first place: a necessary affective attunement that allows for a feeling of solidarity with the “Other” who both creates an identity for the singular individual, and who<sup>71</sup> allows for there to be vibrations of either verbal or bodily communication through these connections of affect. This kind of sense of community is for Diane Davis centered around “the death of its members” – “of those whom we call, perhaps, wrongly it’s members – that is, around, ‘the loss (the impossibility) of their immanence.’”<sup>72</sup> That is to say that, if we’re to cite Charles Bukowski: we’re all going to die, all of us, what a circus! That alone should make us love each other...<sup>73</sup> And even if it doesn’t necessarily make us all love each other, that kind of inevitability of death, that inalterable finitude, is what opens an individual – in this case, “me” – to a sort of primordial rapture in which I realize both that my birth and my death are – (and were) – inevitable bookends to the life I will live, and to the lives that all things will “live,” regardless of sentience. This kind of realization –

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<sup>71</sup> The “who” here is more of a concept than it is an actual individual entity; the “who” that is always in excess of a singular identity and that must always be both a part of, but removed from, the singular, feeling organism experiencing itself and its environment.

<sup>72</sup> Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 14.

<sup>73</sup> Bukowski, *The Captain is Out...*, 18.



but even more than a realization, this kind of affect and *feeling* – is the “presenting ... [of] my existence outside myself [ to myself] – my ekstasis, my exposedness.”<sup>74</sup> This kind of primordially affective sense of community – which both creates a sense of self, and then pushes the “self” outside of “itself” – creates the sense of responsiveness and response-ability that calls for you to be aware of your exposure to the outside that creates an inside, and that demands a reinterpretation of what it means when we say someone is literate versus someone who is illiterate.

What I think has happened, however, is that this feeling of exposedness has been swallowed up by the language that is also “out there,” rather than the Other being that created an affect. In other words, instead of feeling the community of inevitable dying, feeling corpses and organisms that all share a sense of finitude, one loses themselves in the web of rational thought: a reminder of the culture that makes necessary a need to produce and create and consume. This kind of leaning into the written language, and being – or becoming – dependent upon the scriptural and literate economy creates an environment in which truth becomes taken as *literal truth* and emotion; solidarity, and love must be literally conceived and seen. As Abram writes, “literal truth is entirely an artifact of alphabetic literacy: to be *literally true* originally mean to be true to the “letter of scripture” – to “the letter of the law.”<sup>75</sup> A move, then, necessarily needs to be taken that allows for a more faithful, more ecological approach to the more-than-human-world and to the other-bodies and organisms that surround, envelop, create, and protect us:

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<sup>74</sup> Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 26.

<sup>75</sup> Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 264.

indeed, affecting us always, and allowing for there to be a solid foundation on which a literate intellect may be built and emerge.

The question that arises is how to capture a sense of connectedness, of embeddedness while still leveraging the usefulness of scriptural literacy yet avoiding reverting to a scriptural economy that writes over the historical emergence of literacy from the more-than-human-world at the expense of acknowledging an ontological affectivity. For Abram, this capturing happens through “story-telling,” at least in the oral culture, but I am not talking about oral culture so much as being-ascriptural within a culture of the script. The main point behind Abram’s utilization of stories, however, can still be saved for my point. He writes that stories are not judged on how well they adhere to a “literal” kind of reality, but rather they are “judged according to whether [they] make sense. [Which is to say] to enliven the senses.”<sup>76</sup> Abram continues by writing that “to *make sense* is to release the body from the constraints imposed by outworn ways of speaking, and hence to renew and rejuvenate one’s felt awareness of the world.”<sup>77</sup> This kind of attunement to the senses and to the more than human world was one that was diffuse in oral cultures<sup>78</sup> and that carries over into ascriptural being: mainly in the feeling of the tension between being ascriptural (illiterate within a scriptural economy) and being literate (that is, literate in scripturality). In other words, those who are illiterate do desperately want to be literate, and they understand the importance of being able to communicate in such a way, but there’s also a sense of losing a certain kind of attunement, a certain kind of being, that allows one to perhaps more deeply, more

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>78</sup> See *The Spell of the Sensuous*, chapter five.

emotionally connect to and react to the more-than-human-world. The important lesson to learn, then, from those who are, or who have been, functionally illiterate and ascriptural and who have lived and worked/moved within a scriptural economy is how they *felt* while being illiterate and what kinds of *feelings* they were able to bring into their new way of being: i.e. being-scriptural. These kinds of experiences – these kinds of *stories* – create currents of recursivity within the stream of human-language-literacy that run counter to the dominant current of scripturality, being influenced by alternate literacies and affects that expose the porousness of each strain of literacy, and how these pores can be moved within and through.

In order to enliven the senses while situated within a scriptural economy it's important to expose the fault-lines of the dominant literacy narrative – that of cultural capital and currency – and explore the ways in which there are undercurrents of different narratives that present themselves as also contributing, even in a small part, to the way in which literacy is understood and lived – especially from the vantage point of those who were functionally illiterate and ascriptural. As Richardson argues, “literacy acquisition is not a set of skills to be mastered. It is looking inward into one’s own thought and cultural/language patterns and history, while looking outward into the world’s, seeking to intervene in one’s own context.”<sup>79</sup>

Richardson’s description of literacy, here, seems to be much more attuned to the lived experience rather than literacy’s connection to any sort of socio-economic mobility that seems to dominate de Certeau’s description of living within a scriptural economy. This definition of literacy suits the experiences narrated by four adults – Violeta, Chief,

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<sup>79</sup> Richardson, *African American Literacies*, 116.

George, and Lee Ann – who all “came into literacy” after living a large portion of their adult lives as illiterate. Laura Rosenberg follows their ascriptural lives situated and working within the scriptural economy in her dissertation, *Rewriting Ideologies of Literacy: A Study of Writing by Newly Literate Adults*. Their experiences open up the dominant literacy narrative by exposing the dynamic forces of ideology, power, experience, and affect at work underneath the ostensible structure of an economy. Their narratives showcase the porousness endemic to being-scriptural as it relates to other literacies and affects.

The kinds of experiences that the four people in Rosenberg’s study recall as illiterates can be called, as Freire explains, “limit-situations” which are situations that are “directed at negating and overcoming, rather than passively accepting, the ‘given’”<sup>80</sup> which in this case is the literate-way-of-being. Freire goes on to write that even though there are lived experiences on the “other side” of dominant ideologies and narratives, those who are living them, “once they come to perceive these situations as the frontier between being and being more human, rather than the frontier between being and nothingness, they begin to direct their increasingly critical actions towards achieving the untested feasibility implicit in that perception.”<sup>81</sup> In other words, the illiterate-way-of-being can be considered as a subaltern position within or beside the strain of scriptural literacy that currently is the most dominant. The stories of Rosenberg’s participants allow for there to be a construction of a counter-hegemony, or a counter-strain of literacy – an

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<sup>80</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 99.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

alternative narrative that pushes at and past the boundaries of what's considered conventional within the hegemonic assemblage of scripturality itself.

A particularly interesting finding of Rosenberg research was that “contrary to critical pedagogues’ belief that a critical perspective must be taught, the newly literate members of my study already have a perspective from which they critique culture, especially their own subject position as non-literates. They do not need to be told how to interrogate their experiences.”<sup>82</sup> As an educated person myself, I can attest to the experience of being told the narrative that school is necessary in order to “think critically” and engage with society and the world in a thoughtful way. Through interviews, Rosenberg is able to isolate four “alternative literacy narratives” that her case study members articulate: 1.) “Illiteracy” as a Social Violence – a narrative of recognition; 2.) complicating the literacy myth – a narrative of critique; 3.) pleasure versus self-improvement – a narrative of excess; and 4.) critical citizenry “without” literacy – a narrative of resistance. These four counter-narratives are organized so as to depict experiences by Rosenberg’s study participants that directly subvert four particular narrative-pillars within the strain of literacy I’m calling scripturality. What these narratives do is tell a story that opens up scripturality to show its interconnectedness – how there is actually *something* instead of *nothing* on the other side of each strain of literacy, and these many somethings all contribute to the specific current of literacy we find ourselves in at each moment.

In the first alternative literacy narrative, Rosenberg recalls George and Lee Ann’s experience as (ascriptural) illiterates in which they were able to recognize and name an

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<sup>82</sup> Rosenberg, *Rewriting ideologies of literacy*, 180.

oppressive situation that leveraged literacy as a violent power. Rosenberg begins this section by writing that “according to Freirean principles, the first step towards praxis is the ability to name oppressive situations. Identifying power and recognizing that it is used to maintain unequal relationships is the beginning of critical self-awareness.”<sup>83</sup> For both George and Lee Ann, this kind of recognition happened even though they were both illiterate. Here’s an excerpt of a conversation George had with Laura Rosenberg:

**George: You got an education; you can fend for yourself. You know, you know, I mean, a person don’t. You can’t really write, you don’t know whether it’s right or wrong; you know what I mean?**

**George: But, if you, um, got, you know, you can figure it out for yourself, you know, you’ve got to learn, you know, you know, get an education.**

**Lauren: So, it sounds like, it sounds like you’re thinking that it sort of give you a way to be in the world, like, a way of approaching situations and dealing with the world.**

**George: Yep. If you, if you go to court right now, if you go and I go to court right now. Let’s say we have to stand up in front of the judge and, and plead our case. Quite naturally you are going to plea your case twice time better than I plead mine. Thing is I might want to say, and I might, you know; but I don’t know how to put it in the proper word -- So, the judge ain’t going to listen.**

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 181.

For Lee Ann, her experience was when she was illiterate, but wanted to sing in the church choir. What happened, however, was that after joining the choir, the director eventually found out that she was illiterate and embarrassed her in front of the rest of the choir. She says that:

**He tested my voice, and he, so he said, he put me on the man's side. All the women was over here, and all the men was over here [she gestures]. Okay? He put me over there. So what happened is, so, I think he wanted to discourage me going, and didn't want me involved in, in, in the program.**

In both instances, George and Lee Ann are calling attention to how power structures are influencing the way in which they, as bodies situated within an ideological framework, are treated. This kind of recognition establishes a counter-narrative to the dominant narrative that “illiterates” are oppressed and unable to critique the “way things are.” To the contrary, both George and Lee Ann *feel* very strongly the way in which power operates, and both are able to critically understand their position, even though they are – or were – illiterate (ascriptional). In both experiences, George and Lee Ann are able to put words to the scream that de Certeau names in his work – that which exceeds the “knowledge” that is supposed to be instilled by the dominant literacy. In fact, what George and Lee Ann expose is that the scream and the knowledge aren't mutually exclusive (de Certeau describes them as being dichotomous; one on this hand, and the other on that hand): both are always entwined and there are ways in which certain kairotic moments of experience and affect provide ways to experience the kind of

mutuality of literacy and illiteracy an organism finds itself in. Each strain of literacy is mutually affective with illiteracy always – resonating with aesthetic vibrations that are not contained within historic, evolved forms of being scriptural or ascriptural (the z-axis).

The second alternative literacy narrative that Rosenberg presents – a narrative of critique – explores the way in which George acts as a “border-crosser” between literacy and illiteracy, demonstrating how ideologies, “inequalities, power and human suffering are rooted in basic institutional structures.” When people are able to move in between and around these structures, they are “moving in and out of borders constructed around coordinates of difference and power,”<sup>84</sup> in this case, the coordinates of difference and power as related to literacy-as-scripturality and illiteracy-as-ascripturality and beyond. For George, this kind of crossing inspires the following narrative:

**Lauren: So, when you say here, you say “Education for everybody help to make a better world.”**

**Geroge: It does.**

**Lauren: Is that, is that sort of what you’re thinking?**

**George: Yup. You know, if everybody in the world have an education, there’d be less crime. There’d be less people on welfare. There’d be less people in, in the shelter.**

**Lauren: Mmm hmm.**

**George: And this country would feel better.**

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<sup>84</sup> Giroux, *Border Crossings*, 29-30.



George goes on to describe that the country would “feel” better because those who are educated are more likely to think twice before making mistakes (and I don’t disagree with him) but I think his initial statement that the country would “feel” better is particularly fascinating and informative. His comments here show how George has been and currently is distinctly attuned to the way in which communication and judgement (which is itself a form of communication) feels for the individual. I’m thinking here of the way in which Davis describes the pre-originary rhetoricity of affect that permeates all interaction. For George, he’s able to critique the material conditions of the scriptural economy and society he finds himself in from two points of view: that of the illiterate (as ascriptural) and that of the newly literate (within a scriptural-economy). In both cases, he exposes the aesthetic connection that binds the two together: the feeling that underlies interaction and movement, and which inevitably influences the way in which material reality becomes organized. And in “crossing the border” between ascriptural and scriptural, he doesn’t lose the aesthetic attunement that was available to him as an ascriptural. Rather, by entering “into” and still “feeling” scriptural, George is able to understand and state that the more people are able to become literate, the better the world would be for it. I think the important aspect of this recognition is that George himself is coming into being scripturally-literate, rather than having been raised within it and its ethos. This seems to mean that George doesn’t take literacy for granted and as a natural aspect of the human experience. There’s an important distancing from the scriptural-economy that allows George the space to feel scriptural as a construct – an assemblage – and a community, while also calling attention to the importance of the feeling itself: that which gives rise to his recognition of the structure of scriptural. And the fact that

George can still “fit-into” the scriptural economy even after having “come into it” later in life, means that George’s recognition of the feeling of scripturality is always already there within being-scriptural. In other words, scripturality and ascripturality are folded into each other and connected through aesthetic vibrations that influence individual organisms’ experiences.

The third alternative literacy narrative is that of pleasure versus self-improvement. Rosenberg details the experience Chief has of scriptural literacy. She writes:

**Lauren: When you say now, “It opened up a whole new world for me,” is that like the world that’s past that place that you couldn’t get past?**

**Chief: Yes, because I like that, I been reading about ancient history and all that. And it’s stuff that I like to know about. I didn’t know all these things. And I read about books about, ah, ancient history all back in, uh, Christopher Columbus and all that, ah; that’s what’s big, the great stones over in England there?**

**Lauren: Stonehenge?**

**Chief: Stonehenge. And I read that book and I get --- I love, I love to read about the ancient history.**

In this detailed experience, Rosenberg writes that Chief is expressing a narrative of pleasure that exceeds the confines of the dominant narratives of a scriptural economy, i.e. the accrual of cultural and economic capital. In this kind of experience, Chief is revealing

“that pleasure has a purpose outside of any kind of gain. Through his pleasure in reading and writing, Chief points to a desire to rework the world according to his own terms.”<sup>85</sup>

This kind of retelling of an experience of literacy-as-scripturality exposes how Chief is able to experience a real, pleasurable affect from “entering” into different worlds or “ways of being” that the medium of literacy-as-scripturality and the written word is able to crystallize and communicate effectively. For Chief, there’s no sense of domination, but rather an opening up – a willing vulnerability – from which he returns with a renewed sense of happiness, contentment and connection. This kind of experience of literacy also, as Rosenberg points out, allows Chief a way in which to overflow and exceed the dominant narrative of scripturality as a currency and a socio-economic mobility race. For Chief, he’s able to exceed the borders of that narrative, leave them behind and instead show how a different sphere of applicability can be entered into that is outside of the dominant narrative of scripturality. Chief feels a strong sense of solidarity with parts of the world and with other people and organisms that he hadn’t had the opportunity to experience when he lived an ascriptural life. Of course, because George is a border-crosser between ascripturality and scripturality, the experience of these different spheres of applicability opened up by literacy is that he’s able to *feel* the affect of entering into these other ways of being and experiencing. Instead of allowing these kinds of educational, literate experiences to be neatly organized within a demarcated “reading to learn” box of understanding, Chief allows himself to lose himself within the emotions and movements of each book and world that is opened up.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 201

In my reading, such an experience seems to resonate with the experiences of an oral culture and their relationship with the more-than-human-world. That is to say, Chief seems to experience the book in the same aesthetic way that an orally based person experiences the world: where he's able to leverage the technological, material aspects of being-scriptural – reading a book or a text – so as to peer into other kinds of realities as explained within the strain of scripturality, like many different honey-combs of scriptural-experience, with certain rhetorical moves made so as to construct the image in a certain way. Of course, we all do this, and all text is written rhetorically, but what makes Chief's story significant is that he focuses on the affective nature of the text and by extension the affective nature of the place or topic being discussed in the text, which highlights the way in which literacies writ large make us feel and move. That's the point that Chief drives home: literacy makes us feel and that feeling is a requisite component of every type of literacy – especially scripturality.

Finally, in the fourth alternative literacy narrative, Rosenberg speaks with Violeta, who expresses a counter narrative that exposes a critical citizenry without her being dependent upon literacy or being literate so as to have a type of “scriptural-citizenship.” The following is a piece written by Violeta:

## **My Conversation with Rosa Parks**

**Violeta Blanca**

**February 18, 2004**

**One day I had a dream that I was sitting next to Rosa Parks on bus. I said, I am proud of you because you never gave up. You are a strong woman. You helped the black people to not be segregated. You decided to bring the people together to make a protest. You helped get justice to the black people. The white people were prejudiced to the black people. Thank you for your story because we learned about your good work.**

Lauren Rosenberg then goes on to talk to Violeta about this piece:

**Lauren: And I was wondering was it, was it really? Did you really dream that? Or did you ... was it like fiction? Were you making it up, like a story?**

**Violeta: Uh huh, making it up, fiction. At the time, well, we picked out that one, and I was getting in my head, you know, like, um, like a movie. You know, and I start to write it.**

**Violeta: I'm magic, you know. I see how she see, how that happen. And sometimes we talking about story, we get it in our head, and I think of she was like that. I knew how she was. I think she was like that. That's the kind of imagination that you have in your head.**

**Lauren: In that, um, well, a number of things struck me in this. You say, “I am proud of you because you never gave up.” Now, maybe I’m just connecting these because they’re one after the other --- but, do you think Rosa Parks is like a single mother? In the way she’s strong?**

**Violeta: Uh, I think the way she’s strong is because it was bad thing that happen in her life. And she never gave up. You know, she keeping going. And I think she just the kind of person, when she wants something, she going the right way: “that’s what I want, I want to learn.” She never gave up, she front of everybody that was accusing her, she ego, “This is what I want, this is the kind of person that I am. And right here, I want to do this, and I want to do it.”**

Violeta creates an image of Rosa Parks: as a strong woman who cannot be overcome by the forces acting on her. By extension, Violeta herself draws inspiration from this image, and emulates this kind of radical resistance which recasts Violeta not as a paralyzed, ignorant agent type-cast by a dominant view of illiteracy, but rather as a strong, capable woman, positioning herself as a resister, harnessing her *feelings* of individuality and desire. This kind of re-positioning shows that, as Laura Rosenberg writes, “Violeta is recreating herself as a figure that confronts the limit-situations of poverty, single-motherhood, and non-literacy.”<sup>86</sup>

This kind of re-positioning for Violeta exposes two important observations. First, the kind of desire Violeta shows to situate herself as a resister against the oppressive material conditions of her life and her environment exposes an attunement and

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 211.

recognition of those material conditions. Her resistance demands that she uphold a certain awareness of her subject position as an ascriptural woman situated within a scriptural economy. This upholding, this endurance, demands that she learn from and feel how oppressive conditions move through and shape her subject-position. This is to say that Violeta must have felt and been able to critique her material and ideological conditions while being ascriptural. She was literate in the ontology of power without the benefit of scriptural prowess. And obviously, as she becomes more literate and more scriptural, she's able to express how she felt and what she thought during that time in her life, in addition to being able to describe what she is currently thinking about her situation.

The second observation is that Violeta's critique of her material conditions resists "a dominant narrative of civic participation that insists literacy gives people the right kind of voice to participate in public conversations."<sup>87</sup> Of course, Violeta is benefiting from her literacy training, but as Rosenberg notes, her "critical perspective does not depend on this dominant narrative."<sup>88</sup> Rather, as a border-crosser like the three other people in Rosenberg's case study, she was and is able to experience her environment in a way that resonates with an aesthetic attunement to her material and ideological conditions. Violeta's lived-experience demonstrates the fourth alternative-literacy narrative that can be argued for in Rosenberg's work: that being a critically engaged, active citizen does not demand an adherence to the dominant mode and narrative of literacy. Rather, one can *feel* themselves into critical positions of resistance, situated as they are within a scriptural economy. From this position of resistance, if they do become scriptural like Violeta does

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 212.

they can then have a different, more affective relationship with writing and scriptural literacy, one that they can leverage for continued work as a critical citizen.

And indeed, this is exactly what Violeta and every other participant in this study does. They *do* engage in the scriptural-economy, and feel themselves as being in a state of becoming, as they react and write back to power which establishes them within fluid positions of identity. And this kind of fluidity, when it comes to subjectivity, has implications for the way in which the scriptural-economy itself continues to evolve and exist. As Barbara Biesecker argues, the idea of a shifting subject also destabilizes the idea of an audience, meaning that as each of these subjects learn to write and enter into the world of scripturality they influence the ways in which audiences are created within the scriptural economy. Effectively aspects of the scriptural economy itself shift to better feel those subjects who are border crossers themselves. As Biesecker writes, “it becomes possible to read discursive practices neither as rhetorics directed to preconstituted and known audiences nor as rhetorics ‘in search of’ objectively identifiable but yet undiscovered audiences.”<sup>89</sup> In learning how to write and become-scriptural, Violeta and Chief and George and Lee-Ann are creating audiences that react to the subjects created in their writing, effectively engaging in the work of creating aesthetic opportunities for emancipation and solidarity aided by non-scriptural forms of symbolism.

### Beginning to Undo: The Need to Unfold Outwards

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<sup>89</sup> Biesecker, *Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation*, 126.



In the last two sections, we've traced the ways in which being-scriptural and being-ascriptural influence on one hand the dominant ecological and economic environment that both ways of being find themselves in, and on the other hand, how the individual being is influenced by this environment, dependent upon their lived experience of being-scriptural or being-ascriptural. Both ways of being are inevitably influenced by the more-than-human-world, regardless of the ideological and socio-economic circumstances. What's particularly important for my study is that those who are, or who have been functionally illiterate and have lived an ascriptural life, "already have the critical perspectives that theorists believe they must be taught."<sup>90</sup> Their retelling of alternative narratives showcase their ability to give a voice to their story – very much in line with how Abram articulates the need for stories to make sense and resonate with us and our feelings, even after one becomes literate and scriptural.

Having explored these four stories and four alternative narratives that present themselves against the dominant narrative of illiteracy as the "dark other," Rosenberg instead shows that her case study participants articulate desires and purposes for seeking literacy that surround their lived experience that they express through the telling of alternative literacy narratives."<sup>91</sup> These acts of resistance and critique showcase the underlying connection between both modes of being: that of an aesthetic attunement to, and connection with, language and the more-than-human-world that allows scriptural being to emerge.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 215.

The aesthetic connection between being-scriptural and being-ascriptural demands, then, that we dismantle the dichotomy of literacy and illiteracy so as to better explore the interconnectedness. We must ask what perceptions, imaginings, feelings, and cognitions are sacrificed when we learn to read and write? And, perhaps more importantly, are they really ever lost? The answer I've tried to argue for is no, but it's these questions that motivate a desire to overflow the boundaries of literacy and illiteracy as defined within a dominant assemblage of knowledge and power. Understanding that literacies are like strains or strings of experience suggests that one may find what answers one can outside of the boundedness of dominant narratives by listening to marginalized voices write and speak back to power. There is more to illiteracy and literacy than we're taught and like the four individuals in Rosenberg's case studies – Violeta, George, Chief, and Lee Ann – we will have to re-orient ourselves so as to feel this excess to literacy such that it may influence our speaking about – and teaching – literacy and illiteracy.

## CHAPTER IV

### RE-ORIENTATION: EXPLORING A SYMBOLIC OF AFFECT

The kind of re-orientation that must take place for us to submit a new narrative of our own about the relationship between literacy and illiteracy must necessarily engage with the current conceptual organization of these terms. That kind of relationship, as we've traced in the last chapter by following the two different modes of being – scriptural and ascriptural – is dichotomously arranged within the dominant discourse that has emerged with literacy. As we've also noted, there's a valid argument for stating that this arrangement is false, and that it leaves large parts of experience, literate and illiterate, out of the conversation – a silence that highlights the ramifications of how this kind of discourse influences our being-in-the-world. As I noted in the last chapter, literacy is generally thought of as a skill-set: an ability to read and write in the dominant language of one's socio-historical milieu, while illiteracy is generally thought of as a lack. In order to continue dismantling this dichotomy, in this chapter I'm especially interested in exploring the implications of situating literacy and illiteracy on the horizontal axis I introduced in the last chapter, and connecting these implications to the field of rhetorical theory. In particular, I'm interested in shifting the definition of literacy and illiteracy into an aesthetic register and exploring the consequences of this re-orientation. My hope is to remove literacy and illiteracy from being considered as only epistemological skills and to consider literacy and illiteracy as different degrees of aesthetic perception, with the presupposition that all organisms are ontologically equal – that is, that there's no ontological difference between those objects and subjects who are considered “literate” and those who are considered “illiterate.” This way, rather than determining the

pragmatic value of literacy and illiteracy, we may determine the creative value of both ways of being, in addition to exploring how these ways of being influence each other explicitly and implicitly. Such a move also demands a new way of relating to language as such. Specifically, I submit both literacy and illiteracy as both equally symbolics of affect, permeable, immanent, and rhetorical. With this, then, I turn to more deeply explore the different way of thinking about literacy that I introduced in chapter two. This diagrammatic reconceptualization of literacy and illiteracy clears the way to begin talking about the illiterate as a way of being that demands to be reconsidered and resituated within our understanding of language, aesthetic theory, and ecological thought.

Remember in the first chapter of this thesis, when I introduced Eva-Maria Simms? In “Questioning the Value of Literacy,” she explains how “reading and writing seem to be harmless, innocuous skills, mere addenda to the basket of natural skills that children develop throughout their formative year.” However, when the agreed upon value of literacy is stripped away and the question of how literacy affects our consciousness and relationship with the world is posed, there is, in her own words, “a surprising silence on this topic.”<sup>92</sup> This silence she points to is what Edmund Husserl would call an example of our “natural attitude”<sup>93</sup> about literacy: viz. that it is useful and necessary for communication in our day to day activities, and so is accepted without reflection or concern. In suspending as she calls it, “the goodness of literacy,” and engaging in a phenomenological analysis of the act of being literate – which she defines as “the ability to read and produce written text” – I believe she’s on the right path toward breaking down the binary of literacy and illiteracy, specifically by focusing on the body and the

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<sup>92</sup> Simms, *Questioning the Value of Literacy*, 20.

<sup>93</sup> Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, 1.

way in which literacy and illiteracy influence bodily perception and environmental attunement. In this chapter, I will also be working out from the body in order to undo the dichotomy constructed between literacy and illiteracy, and to map the consequences of incorporating my diagrammatic-aesthetic description of the relationship between literacy and illiteracy. In particular, I will be exploring how the emergence of literacy as scripturality reified a bounded-ness of the body, and how a different conception of literacy problematizes that bounded-ness. I will also be exploring how the diagrammatic conception of literacy and illiteracy introduced in chapter two clears a space for me to move literacies past the human and to consider the consequences of symbolisms and literacies that don't require human concepts, or even epistemology, to be operationalized. These two consequences presuppose that literacy and illiteracy are not functions of the human mind. The body, then, is the place to start this chapter.

At the beginning of his work, *Parables for the Virtual*, Brian Massumi writes, “when I think of my body and ask what it does to earn that name, two things stand out. It *moves*. It *feels*.”<sup>94</sup> Threading together an intrinsic connection between movement and sensation, Massumi also entwines the body with change, writing: “the slightest most literal displacement convokes a qualitative difference... as directly as it conducts itself it beckons a feeling... [and qualitative difference is] change.”<sup>95</sup> In other words, even with the slightest of movements, a body will feel something, and it is this feeling or emotion that conveys and is experienced as change. By explaining that the body can move and feel, Massumi sets up what he will call a paradox within the body recognized as an

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<sup>94</sup> Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 1.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

organism: that is, that “the ultimate paradox of the dynamic unity of movement and sensation” ... [is that the] “unity is purely virtual.”<sup>96</sup>

If we're to take Massumi at his word, then this means that each body and organism necessarily interacts with and exists in the realm of the virtual. Further, if all bodies are either literate or illiterate bodies, then this also means that there must be a connection between literacy and illiteracy that passes through and is influenced by the virtual. In other words, in a move past phenomenology, I am arguing that the virtual is a necessary quality of being and becoming that allows for an understanding of language as part of a symbolic of affect. This is because, in my understanding, the virtual is the space that is created by the aesthetic currents being felt and then refracted back out by individual organisms.

As Deleuze writes, the virtual realm is “an aggregate of noncausal correspondences which form a system of echoes, of resurrections and resonances, a system of *signs*... an excessive quasi-causality.”<sup>97</sup> The virtual, transcendental realm itself is made up of – and is analogous to – the symbolic itself, in that both presuppose an aesthetic undercurrent of apprehension that is both dynamic and unpredictable, but also always happening and allowing apprehension – and reality – to be. This connection and communication via the virtual realm is also corroborated by Steven Shaviro when he writes that, “alongside the actual material ‘connection’ of physical causes to one another, there is also a virtual relation, or a ‘bond’ linking ‘effects or incorporeal events’ among

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>97</sup> When I use virtual here, I'm thinking of how Deleuze references virtuality: as something that is real but not actual; that is, something that is “as if it were real” but cannot be pointed to or touched.

<sup>98</sup> Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 170.

themselves.”<sup>99</sup> Aesthetic feelings are always already there then – in the virtual realm – and when they influence the actual realm (of the body), they create newness and concrescences. This includes the way in which language influences us – it will necessarily always make us feel something – meaning the virtual covers language, and all things, like a coat of paint, conducting currents with the aesthetic. I also submit that the virtual breaks down the boundedness of the body to show that there’s a permeability inherent to both – and in between – the literate-body and illiterate-body, and that these bodies qua body can be understood as different actualities conditioned by a symbolic of affect, while still existing within a common, dynamic virtuality (the horizontality referenced in chapter two) that is our reality as perceived vertically. In other words, the virtual realm surrounds the x-axis of organisms and aids in the conducting of movement on the y-axis of each type of literacy that is aesthetically created and felt by each organism.

It’s in and through the virtual realm, which is also the realm of the aesthetic and is what allows symbolisms to emerge, that Whitehead is able to posit that “the basis of experience is emotional”<sup>100</sup> and that, as Shaviro writes, “even though the ‘thing in itself’ is unknowable, or unrecognizable, nevertheless it affects us in a particular way . . . and expressing ‘the way we are affected,’ space and time establish immanent, noncognitive connections among objects, between the object and the subject, and between the subject and itself.”<sup>101</sup> This means that every prehension, which is coincident with symbolism, is made up of three different factors: the subject prehending (the body), the datum

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<sup>99</sup> Shaviro, *Without Criteria*, 35.

<sup>100</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 176.

<sup>101</sup> Shaviro, *Without Criteria*, 54.

experienced, and the ‘subjective form’ which is *how* the subject prehends the datum.”<sup>102</sup>

This *how* is the new concept of literacy I’m submitting: with literacy understood as the way in which each organism aesthetically feels, moves, and responds to the rest of the world on the x-axis. Indeed, the ‘thing in itself’ that Shaviro is referencing is, in my own view, the aesthetic, and what is established through space and time (on the x-axis) are the many different literacies.

While we’ll remember that Simms provided us with a general definition of literacy – that is, the ability to read and write – a more robust definition will help us move forward as we continue to grapple with the virtual and my diagrammatic conceptualization of literacy and illiteracy. In particular, it’s important for me to explicitly describe the problem with the current definition of literacy. In his work, *The World on Paper*, David Olsen argues that literacy is “competence with a script,” and that “we may think of literacy as both a cognitive and a social condition, the ability to participate actively in a community of readers who have agreed on some principle of reading, a hermeneutics if you will, a set of texts to be treated as significant and a working agreement on the appropriate or valid interpretation(s) of those texts.”<sup>103</sup> Such a definition while comprehensive for the literate-body, calls for a negative extrapolation when inverted in an attempt to define the *illiterate*-body. By following Olsen’s definition, it would have to be assumed that the illiterate-body is one that would be “unable to participate actively” in a community of readers – a definition that would sequester the illiterate as the “negative other” as compared to the “positive” or “valuable” literate-body. It is in this lacuna of meaning or value for the illiterate-body that the previous

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<sup>102</sup> Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 23.

<sup>103</sup> Olsen, *The World on Paper*, 274.



chapter problematizes, and this chapter explores more deeply. This “lack of meaning” in defining the illiterate-body acts as evidence for the inherent problem of putting epistemology underneath ontology. In other words, literacy and illiteracy can no longer be understood as strictly a part of the realm of epistemology; rather, we must open up our understanding of illiteracy as also always a part of, and influencing, our status as an ontological being on the horizontal axis to even *begin* to talk about the epistemic as such, since the epistemic necessarily categorizes: naming one thing so as to differentiate it from the many other things that surround it. In order to begin exploring the consequences of the move of folding literacy and illiteracy into each other on the horizontal x-axis, and recognizing that there are an indefinite number of literacies that move out past any literacy understood as human, it’s necessary to begin breaking down the myth surrounding the individual in thought – that is, the boundary between the I-Self, and the Self-as-always-Other. For this move, a necessarily rhetorical one (as I’ll argue), I turn to, first, David Abram’s work, and then to rhetorician, Diane Davis.

As I introduced in chapter two, Abram follows the history of literacy and the types of effects it had on the human psyche. Most importantly for this chapter, Abram notes how literacy established an inside/outside binary that placed the bounded body on one side of a relationship with the more-than-human-world, and that allowed the human body and the world itself to be written upon. In establishing this emergence of a dichotomy in critical thought, I’m interested in subverting the perceived boundedness of the body via a rhetorical critique. In the introduction to her work, *Inessential Solidarity*, Diane Davis writes that her task is to “expose a solidarity that precedes symbolicity,” an originary (or preoriginary) rhetoricity – “an affectability or persuadability – that is the

condition for symbolic action.”<sup>104</sup> This “irreparable openness to affection/alteration”<sup>105</sup> is what Davis will call – citing Lucretius – the *clinamen*,<sup>106</sup> in and through which symbol-sharing-beings – literate and illiterate-bodies – are brought into being. Davis comes to this observation by citing Jean-Luc Nancy, when he writes that “one cannot make the world with simple atoms”,<sup>107</sup> rather, in order for a world to exist – especially, in Davis’s case, a world with communicative human beings – there must be a kind of *sensus communis* through which symbol-sharing beings, and beings with bodies who both feel and move, are able to recognize and respond to each other – at one and the same time communicating and co-creating both each other and their environment.

The concept of the *clinamen* is useful for our purposes in breaking down the boundedness of the body by positing that the self as “I” is only ever brought into being by responding to the “Other” – a breaking down of outside/inside, or in other words the boundaries of the body. However, Davis posits that the symbolic comes after, or is only possible in the wake of the originary response-ability to the other that brings “me” into being. In contrast, Whitehead will argue that, “the human mind is functioning symbolically when some components of its experience elicit consciousness, beliefs, emotions, and usages, respecting other components of its experience.”<sup>108</sup>

In other words, Whitehead is arguing that the experience of the world for the human mind is always mediated via symbolism, not just after experiencing the presence of another human being who calls me into question, but from the moment of birth.

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<sup>104</sup> Davis, *Inessential Solidarity*, 2.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>106</sup> The Latin name Lucretius gave to describe when atoms would swerve and collide with each other, allowing reality to come into being.

<sup>107</sup> Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 3-4.

<sup>108</sup> Whitehead, *Symbolism*, 8.

With Whitehead, the very sense of extension is itself a symbolism, and symbolism is working at every level of being continuously. Suzanne Langer in her work, *Philosophy in a New Key*, corroborates this point of Whitehead's when she references A.D. Ritchie: "As far as thought is concerned, and *at all levels of thought*,<sup>109</sup> it [mental life] is a symbolic process... the essential act of thought is symbolization."<sup>110</sup> What this means, then, is that it's not the "Other" (or the symbol-sharing-human being, per say) that Davis's main argument calls for that breaks down the boundedness of the body and that makes me a me. Rather, it's all things that elicit consciousness, beliefs, or emotions – in other words, everything that makes us a body. And this everything is, arguably, all things that make up the world itself, humans and non-humans, sentient and non-sentient organisms alike. This excerpt by Ritchie signifies, too, that there is *no* threshold *into* the symbolic. The symbolic, rather, is concomitant with every level – every gradation – of epistemology until we drill down into ontology. This also means, too, that Davis's concept of *response-ability* can be married to and made concomitant with Whitehead's theory of symbolism, meaning that both are co-travelers with each other, each happening at one and the same time. The ethical component of Davis's argument – i.e. that we are beholden to the other symbol-using being well before we even begin to communicate with and know them – can be extended and attributed to all interactions that presuppose symbol-sharing or existing-together: meaning that we're also ethically inclined towards, and in solidarity with, both organic and inorganic beings at all times. It is necessary with these thoughts in mind, however, to more deeply explore the implications such a

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<sup>109</sup> This means, then, that there is no threshold into the symbolic, through which thought crosses. Rather, the symbolic is concomitant with the ontological nature of all things before any privileging of epistemology takes place.

<sup>110</sup> Ritchie, *The Natural History of the Mind*, 278-279.

synthesis of response-ability and symbolicity have on our understanding of our use of, and discourse around, symbols and thoughts. With this exploration in mind, I turn to Langer.

In exploring symbolization, Langer marks a difference of degree between *signs* and *symbols*. She writes that the “use of signs is the very first manifestation of mind... as soon as sensations function as signs of conditions in the surrounding world, the animal receiving them is moved to exploit or avoid those conditions.”<sup>111</sup> If we think back to Massumi and his observation that a body both moves and feels, and we put him into conversation with Langer’s observation that signs and sensations inspire movement, then we begin to notice that a body only moves *because* of its feeling/sensation and its use of signs. Langer goes on to establish a degree of difference between signs and symbols by writing that “most of our words are not signs in the sense of signals... they serve, rather, to let us develop a characteristic attitude towards objects *in absentia*, which is called ‘thinking of’ or ‘referring to’... ‘signs’ in this capacity are... *symbols*.”<sup>112</sup> What Langer allows us to say, then, is that there is an ontological, aesthetic kinship between humans and animals, indeed between all things that sense and react and persist in time and space. And this kinship is the horizontal x-axis in my diagrammatic model. Considered on this axis, an indefinite number of organisms equally make use of signs and symbols although they necessarily showcase profound aesthetic variation in practice, which is acknowledged via the vertical axis of differentiated literacies. Rather than any sort of opposition when it comes to literacy and illiteracy, the difference between being-literate and being-illiterate is all about aesthetic variations and continuities, not ontological

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<sup>111</sup> Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 29.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

separations that set up a dichotomous model of epistemology. Put more simply, literacy and illiteracy are not separate from each other – any dichotomous organization of literacy and illiteracy ignores the aesthetic-symbolic connection. Rather, they are immanent to and continuous with each other, just like the many different depths and ecosystems found in the ocean, and different literacies are dependent upon the types of aesthetic experiences each organism can biologically experience. This continuity across or by virtue of movement in – and interaction with – the world is indicated by the fact that symbols are predicated on signs, which are predicated by sensations functioning symbolically. By way of Langer, I submit that the aesthetic is the ontological ground of the symbolic, and that rather than the literate-body being diametrically opposed to the illiterate-body, there are instead degrees of aesthetic variation in how symbol use is executed within an organism's being-in-the-world, including their ability to move within and apprehend the world writ large.<sup>113</sup> And these aesthetic variations, in turn, allow for there to be different kinds of literacies produced and experienced simultaneously by each individual organism.

To return to Whitehead and Davis, this recognition of a difference of degrees between signs and symbols establishes a set of gradations of adjustment in how we project (and understand/experience) our spatial and temporal world – one that is premised on the sensation of the aesthetic, and one that necessarily needs to incorporate more than just the human Other. In a move towards breaking down the anthropocentric inside/outside conceptualization that literacy and illiteracy's contemporary definitions

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<sup>113</sup> And this kind of continuation of degrees of aesthetic variation doesn't begin at the level of complexity of the animal and stop at the level of complexity of the human, but rather continues on in either direction: down to the infinitely small, and the infinitely large. More to come on that.

have created and that have, in turn, been mapped onto the body, Whitehead will write that each individual thing in the world is a “concrete moment” only because of its relationship with other “concrete moments” via presentational immediacy, causal efficacy, and locality. Here, Whitehead recognizes presentational immediacy as that which we perceive with our sensory apparatuses in the moment, without any sort of temporal thickness, while casual efficacy is “the overwhelming conformation of fact, in present action, to antecedent settled fact.”<sup>114</sup> That is to say that each organism that makes up the world is always beholden to the previous moment, in which all organisms continued to communicate with each other aesthetically and contributed to reality writ large. Locality, in Whitehead’s terms, refers to where an organism is positioned within the world. Whitehead writes that each individual organism – i.e. human beings, animals, objects – “arises from its determinate relativity to the settled world of other concrete individuals.”<sup>115</sup> What Whitehead’s thoughts allow me to do, then, is to still hold onto the clinamen that Davis introduces, while also inflating it to include all other organisms or “concrete moments.” All things, then, in Whitehead’s terms and in Davis’s terms, inspire a pre-originary rhetoricity, a persuasiveness that is entwined with the aesthetic conditions that allow organisms to move and to feel, which gives rise to divergent literacies. This space past an exclusively human Other is what Whitehead will call “a community of organisms... [and] the community as an environment is *responsible* for the survival of the separate individuals that compose it; and these separate individuals are *responsible* for their contributions to the environment.”<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Whitehead, *Symbolism*, 41.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 78-79.

In other words, (to glance back at Langer's gradient of signs and symbols and to put her in conversation with Whitehead) understanding communities as made up of individual organisms that are all response-able to each other sets up the argument that the complexity of symbol-use is constructed as a gradient of aesthetic variation – grounded on an aesthetic-ontological similarity. It's only through a shared ontology and symbolicity (which are co-travelers – you can't have one without the other) that each of our experienced literacies are able to exist as such, and be co-created as a communal affect, since each literacy would also be contingent upon other literacies as well as illiteracies.

Davis's response-ability and Whitehead's symbolicity are part of the same phenomenon of apprehending the world, and contribute to the creation of multiple kinds of literacies. This move also begins to show the necessary non-human turn in this way of thinking about symbolism, in that symbolism can no longer be sequestered to the mind of the human only, but is also a necessary part of every object's – both sentient and non-sentient – ontological experience of the world. Obviously, humans aren't the only organisms thinking and feeling in the world – there are animals, trees, and bacteria. If we're to follow the implications of my argument and include all organisms that make up the world, this would also include non-sentient objects, for example, rocks. With the indefinite number of organisms and objects that make up reality each experiencing their own literacies, while incorporating Whitehead's conception of symbolism and the aesthetic at the base of the ontological, the next move is to consider the implications of the epistemic in relationship to literacy. Thinking, per Langer, is predicated on signs. Signs are a unit of symbolicity. Symbolicity is dependent upon aesthetic experience. In

order to move with and exist in the world (the clinamen), all entities necessarily feel and respond at some level. If we think about the influence symbolism (and within the symbolic, literacy and illiteracy) has on our general understanding of apprehension and co-creation of reality, then there must be a careful consideration of the validity of what is now referred to as panpsychism, or the more-than-human distribution of consciousness as a metaphysically necessary principle.

In definition literacy, Olsen writes that it is “a hermeneutics.” For Shaviro, in laying out Whitehead’s theory of affect, the problem with “hermeneutical modes of interpretation”<sup>117</sup> is that they reduce what is not yet known to an ignorance, a lack, much like the illiterate-body. In replacing the basis of experience with feeling, rather than cognition – as Whitehead and Davis both do – the act of symbol use (language) demands to be understood as aesthetic (or as a symbolic of affect). As a result, the subjective experiences – and subjective forms – of the illiterate-body and the literate-body demand to be understood as immanent to existence, that is, part of a gradient of symbolic prehension, rather than a binary that has no way of influencing the other.

Beginning a conversation about the relationship between literacy and panpsychism is important in that it subverts the narrative that there is only one kind of way in which to define literacy. In not so many words, panpsychism posits that consciousness is a universal feature of all things – varying in degrees of complexity, but universal nonetheless. This premise undercuts the prioritizing of certain kinds of literacy – such as an anthropocentrically, epistemologically centered reading and writing literacy – and instead opens up the concept of literacy to a whole field of possibility: for example,

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 63.



what literacies must a tree possess to exist as it does? How does an animal, a mollusk perhaps, experience literacy? How so with a neutrino, et al.? If we're to take seriously that the symbolic is concomitant with ontology, then all things and organisms are reacting to and affected aesthetically and symbolically, meaning that there necessarily must be a way in which they respond to and create something from their interaction with the symbolic and the aesthetic. That kind of dynamic, to me, seems like a literacy of sorts – one that moves outside of our own limited kind of literacy and that begins to talk to and about the indefinite x-axis of organisms and the y-axis of their literacies that I referenced in chapter two. And the indefinite number of ways in which each kind of organism responds to the world and creates a literacy of variety that is necessarily dependent upon the kinds of sensory apparatuses – or lack thereof – each individual organism has for its use. Talk of the sensory apparatuses available to each organism – or their own biological complexity – also incorporates the z-axis. This is because the z-axis – which is the ontological scope that each literacy develops over time and space – has layers of complexity. Other kinds of literacies created and then experienced by less biologically complex organisms may not be as intense or function as being-scriptural, for example. No matter the level of complexity or intensity of each literacy, each literacy *is* fundamentally dependent upon the experience of the symbolic, which every organism necessary always already can experience. It's important to stress this point because this means, then, that literacy extends all the way up the ontological food chain to the very complex, and all the way back down to the very basic. And this applies to both literacies created by individual organisms – in that literacies can be more complex than other kinds of literacies – and the organisms themselves, in that certain organisms are more complex

than other organism, ergo experiencing and producing more complex symbolisms and literacies. By discriminating the different kinds of symbolisms, I'm able to state that even though some symbolic experiences will feel more basic so as to be considered a priori for the complex organism, like the human, that doesn't mean that they aren't also creating a kind of literacy, which in turn also contributes to the complexity of the many other kinds of literacies being created. In that regard, I argue there is no hierarchy of literacies when it comes to symbolic experience and expression. Instead, there is an open field of symbolic possibilities and potentialities, all of which are harmonizing together to create a world in which there is the possibility for new literacies, and more generally, newness of feeling, expression and experience.

This possibility includes, then, being-illiterate as always already a way of being that each individual organism can't escape since each organism can't possibly be able to experience *what it is like* to be a different organism. For example, surely there is some way of being that is specific to being a tree: it is *like something* to be a tree, out of which specific kinds of literacy – specific kinds of ways in which symbolic affect is understood and felt and responded to – is constantly becoming. For the human, this kind of literacy can only ever be tangentially felt through our own literacy; we are functionally illiterate in – but still affected by – the literacy of a tree. In each moment, the symbolic has to do with the way in which a body interprets – both physically and mentally – the world around it. Indeed, as Whitehead explains, every entity is “essentially dipolar”<sup>118</sup> with a physical pole and a mental pole situated in a body. That is to say that there is a constant mediation between the physical and the mental – one does not exist or work without the

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 239.

other. This also means, then, that the literate-body and the illiterate-body – which are both already always symbolically sensitive and structured – would each be influenced aesthetically by shifts in symbolic degrees. In other words, as Shaviro writes, “every entity’s simple physical feelings are supplemented by its conceptual feelings.”<sup>119</sup> The symbolic always has to do with how a body responds to and moves through the world. The response and the movement of the entity, in my reconceptualization of literacy, corresponds directly with the various kinds of aesthetic prehensions available to each entity, and the kind of literacies that come out of those experiences. For example, the rock will understand and react to its environment via its specific kind of literacy – a literacy that is both dependent on and influencing the environment and the many other kinds of literacies concurrently taking place and coalescing. And while these literacies are all influencing each other, they are dependent upon each other. This relationship between many different types of literacies all co-creating while co-existing together points towards an aesthetic of separation, in that each literacy experienced contributes to the symbolic itself – and the many layers of symbolic gradation that correspond to the many different actualities that sentient and non-sentient organisms represent – beginning to self-divide and create different distributions (or gradations) of the sensible world, which spin-off, creating new ways in which to experience the symbolic, effectively new kinds of literacies.

A turn towards Jacques Ranciere helps clarify the immanent, osmotic relationship between literacy and illiteracy that I’m arguing for. He writes in his work, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, “To pretend is not to put forth illusions, but to elaborate intelligible

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<sup>119</sup> Shaviro, *Without Criteria*, 87.

structures.”<sup>120</sup> And what is literacy if not a pretending at what is already the intelligible structures of the world, as we noted in chapter two? The creation of a veritable symbolic structure that attempts to capture the aesthetic experiences always already before and inspiring the symbolic reactions? It could be argued, then, as Ranciere does about the aesthetic revolution of the Romantic Age, that the emergence of literacy effectively “[blurred] the borders between the logic of facts and the logic of fictions”<sup>121</sup> and made the science of history dependent upon this blurring. Further, literacy has created a *regime* of meaning that has become completely dependent upon literacy itself as the primary mode of communication contemporaneously and through time, and that has gone almost completely un-challenged and un-examined since it started its work with the advent of the Guttenburg press in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This kind of regime has since created the emergence of other, new regimes of the aesthetic, as Ranciere points out, since the human being is “a political animals because he is a literary animal who lets himself [sic] be diverted from his ‘natural’ purpose by the power of words.” What happens with literacy, then, as Ranciere will argue, is that the actual body of the illiterate and the literate – situated within the regime of meaning saturated with literacy – is overtaken by literary locutions, which themselves define “variations of sensible intensities, perceptions, and the abilities of [these] bodies”?<sup>122</sup> These bodies, in turn, become *quasi-bodies*, or bodies that produce “lines of fracture and disincorporation into imaginary collective bodies”<sup>123</sup>, which is to say, new “regimes” of the sensible in the already imaginary regime of

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<sup>120</sup> Ranciere, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 36.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 39.

literacy, situated atop the feeling and sensing body itself. Literacy, then, creates a landscape of signs and symbols in which the “map of the sensible” is reconfigured, due to literacy “interfering with the functionality of gestures and rhythms.”<sup>124</sup> If we remember back to chapter two, this landscape that Ranciere is referring to is the way in which the experience of the world (the vertical y-axis), is influenced by the intensity and becoming-intense of the x-axis, establishing veritable symbolic structures on top of an organism’s experience of the world as they are constantly-becoming by feeling and moving. And as I’ve been arguing, this applies to each individual organism: each of which has varying literacies of varying complexity and intensity.

In order to establish a better visual that incorporates both lines (from my diagrammatic understanding of literacy) and spheres of experiencing literacy for each organism, I conceptualize my own understanding of literacy as a synthesis of both Ranciere’s ‘regimes’ and the biologist Jakob von Uexküll’s *umwelts*. Agamben references von Uexküll when he writes “where classical science saw a single world that comprised within it all living species... Uexküll instead supposes an infinite variety of perceptual worlds, that, though they are uncommunicating and reciprocally exclusive, are all equally perfect and linked together, as if in a gigantic musical score.”<sup>125</sup> Like concentric circles, each environment experienced by each individual entity – from as biologically complex as a human, to as “simple” as a rock – and each literacy that is created by each feeling and moving organism, harmonize together. The description of “perceptual worlds” by Agamben presupposes an organism’s ability to perceive – an act that, following Langer and Whitehead, is concomitant with symbol-use and symbol-

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>125</sup> Agamben, *The Open*, 40.

sharing. As Whitehead writes in his work, *Modes of Thought*, in his chapter on “perspective,” “every form in its very nature refers to some sort of realization... thus the forms are essentially referent beyond themselves... the realm of forms is the realm of potentiality, and the very notion of potentiality has an external meaning. *It refers to life and motion (development of actuality)*.”<sup>126</sup> In other words, each “perceptual world” that is created and experienced by each organism is real (actual), in that it is also potential, referring beyond itself in space and time to other actualities that are also potentialities admixed together in a soup of affect, and that create meaning out of that affect via symbolisms. Actualities, then, as Whitehead shows us, are actual only *because* of their communication – via potentiality – with other actualities. This conceptualization provides another way in which to think about the many degrees of aesthetic variation when it comes to apprehending the world as such – that is, the many different kinds of literacies possible and constantly becoming. The symbolic - which literacy and illiteracy are mutually entangled gradations of – is not in the epistemological mind, but is a necessary ontological aspect of an organism’s being that corresponds with the many, immanent layers of apprehension and feeling that each organism necessarily experiences.

And these different types of perceptions and prehensions that correspond with the layers of feelings presuppose different kinds of prehensive formations which correlate with Deleuze and Guattari when they write that each “singular” organism isn’t singular, but rather is, from the outset, a multitude. This is an important point, because both Ranciere’s quasi-bodies and Agamben’s reference of *umwelts* both can be confused as presupposing an already constructed body that is then influenced by an “outside” source.

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<sup>126</sup> Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 69.

What Deleuze and Guattari clear up for us is that the body, also, is an always dynamic, affecting amalgam of its positionality (locality) and complexity. Each individual organism is an assemblage: a shifting constellation of feelings and senses that can, at specific, kairotic moments, feel other parts of reality or other literacies, creating new experiences and feelings that shift and change reality – (like ecosystems, for example) – and the assemblage of the individual organism itself. Fundamentally, though, the individual organism is *always* immanent with and continuous with the plane of immanence, and that’s what I’m arguing for when I talk about literacy and illiteracy. Being literate or illiterate are themselves not thresholds in the way an organism experiences reality, but instead are aesthetic gradations of environmental adjustment towards how each organism changes its own assemblage amidst the flat ontology of reality, or what Deleuze and Guattari will call the plane of immanence – just like Ranciere’s various regimes are themselves indicative of these changing assemblages. As Deleuze and Guattari write “in a book, in all things, there are lines of articulation, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of de-territorialization and de-stratification . . . all this, lines and measurable speeds constitute an assemblage.”<sup>127</sup> The book, then, is an assemblage itself, just as each organism in the world is an assemblage, situated on the plane of immanence in which “assemblages combine in a regime of *signs* or a semiotic machine.”<sup>128</sup> These various assemblages of signs which create the way the literate-body and illiterate-body interact with the world are themselves influenced by the way in which a body responds to signs itself, however. That is to say, these assemblages of signs create literacies. And this makes sense in terms of mimetic evolution, in which

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<sup>127</sup> Deleuze, and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 3-4.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

Peckham writes that “as evolutionary development increases and more complex organisms come into existence as a result of that randomness, the brain’s potentiality for randomness accumulates and increases with each emerging species.”<sup>129</sup> And with the emergence of literacy, humans-beings were already selected for survival – with literacy being a supplement to what is already a regime of meaning, and what becomes a distribution of the sensible for the majority of humans who have the potential to experience the world as mediated by the prehensive formation of literacy, which itself corresponds back to the various *umwelts* that all harmonize with each other to create a reality writ large that allows each of its organisms and aesthetic prehensions to continue to *happen* and *vibrate*. In other words, literacy is just another way in which a felt world is created – a distribution of the sensible, and then a regime of the sensible – that is both continuous with (in that it harmonizes with other worlds of aesthetic variation) and affectively different than other *umwelts* in that the distribution of the sensible within a specific literacy correlates with the actual organisms’ sense modalities. In other words, there are an infinite number of literacies in which there are regimes and *umwelts* – (I like the idea of spheres of aesthetic prehension, which can coalesce and create larger spheres in and through which individual actualities experience regimes) – all of which are always open to each other, influencing and affecting.

This re-orientation of the way in which we understand and talk about our being-in-the-world will have consequences for how we conceptualize our many relationships: with the land, with ourselves and others, and with every type of community we identify – ideologically, ecologically or geographically – as a part of. Mapping these different types

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<sup>129</sup> Peckham, *Explanation and Power: The Control of Human Behavior*, 165.



of relationships will be the work of the next chapter. Specifically, the hope is to begin to try and open up our different symbolisms – (that we’ve started to talk about in this chapter) – so as to see where one can work across symbolisms, and where there might already be overlapping experiences that we hadn’t attended to before. The space has been created, however, in our reconceptualization of literacy and illiteracy, so that we to begin seeing where there may be aesthetic similarities and openings in experience. These kinds of similarities and connections will be, in the end, what contribute to constructing a new pragmatic, pedagogical system that addresses the teaching of literacy in a different, more aesthetic way.

## CHAPTER V

### ECOLOGY OF LANDSCAPE & LANGUAGE: RE-SITUATING RELATIONALITY

#### Consequences of Re-Situation for Relation

In the previous chapter, I argued for breaking down the theoretical boundary between inside and outside, and the dichotomy between subject and object if we are to feel (and understand) literacy and illiteracy as immanent with each other. I situated symbolicity in the body as concomitant with aesthetic prehension, which allows for communication and affectability between organisms. In this chapter, I will be navigating the consequences of this reorientation of symbolicity. What may be extrapolated from the premise that the symbolic is a co-traveler with ontology? For instance, how does human relationship to the land change when we begin to think of symbolicity as synonymous with the aesthetic? What happens to our relationship to our self and the Other? And to push this thought of the “Other” further, what becomes of our relationship to community? Do normative literate, rhetorical discourses gloss over an important aspect of community that a symbolic of affect (re)discovers? I will address these questions in this chapter so as to begin tracing the consequences of resituating literacy and illiteracy for pedagogical theory.

#### Relationship to Land

Towards the beginning of the introduction to his work, *Ambient Rhetoric*, Rickert writes: “A mind needs a body, and a body needs a world... we do not have a body; we

are bodily. We do not have a world; we are worldly.”<sup>130</sup> On first pass, this seems like a philosophical platitude: few would argue that this progression of needs is nonsensical. The relationship between mind, body, and world is important to Rickert’s description of “ambient rhetoric.” For my purposes, I’m interested in tying ambience to literacy, establishing an “ambient literacy” that allows one to imagine scriptural literacy in direct communication with the many other literacies that exist (in what I have described as a horizontal relationship). To add on to Rickert’s poetic sentence, then, I’d add that we “do not have literacy, we are already literate” just as we “do not have illiteracy, we are also always already illiterate.”

Rickert states that “Rhetoric can no longer remain centered on its theoretical common places such as rhetor/subject, and audience ... rather, it must diffuse outward to include the material environment, things (including the technological), our own embodiment, and a complex understanding of ecological relationality as participating in rhetorical practices and their theorizations.”<sup>131</sup> To understand the way in which different bodies interact each other and how that interaction is shaped and “stabilized” by the environment, we must understand our being-in-the-world as part of a complex, dynamic entanglement. This entanglement is what enables and even compels us. Taking into consideration the complex ways that literacies and their attendant rhetorics are influenced by ecological forces, literacy must become more conceptually diffuse. Indeed, we should move past an anthropocentric lens and “attend to the ways that the body and the local

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<sup>130</sup> Thomas Rickert, *Ambient Rhetoric*, 10.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

environments are literally built into the processing loops that result in intelligent action,”<sup>132</sup> which involves being-literate in a variety of forms of symbolisms.

Relying on Rickert’s concept of ambient rhetoric I nonetheless want to make a move that Rickert rejects: namely, making symbolism concomitant with ontology. Rickert’s ambience informs my own attempt at an “ambient literacy.” Instead of arguing for a rhetorical agency that is diffuse into the environment and *prior* to symbolic communication, I will keep ambient rhetoric and rhetorical agency tethered to symbolism, keeping ontology as a co-traveler with symbolism always. To the extent that all things exist materially, so too do they have and exercise symbolic agency. Each entity is embodied, and its embodiment requires that it engage symbolically with its surroundings. This symbolic agency necessarily evolves types of literacy.

As Rickert writes, “while perception remains important to understanding ambience, other important aspects include feeling, mood, intuition, and decision making. This gets us to the issue of *attunement*.”<sup>133</sup> While Rickert relies heavily on a Heideggerian understanding of attunement, I argue that attunement can be understood as a sensitivity to what Whitehead will call *feeling*, which is, as Shaviro explains, “all the ways in which entities interact with one another, or affect one another.”<sup>134</sup>

Describing ambience as affective attunement, Rickert echoes Whitehead writing that “feelings, whether they are socially refracted and circulated emotions or the more deep-seated moods characterizing how we find ourselves, are neither subsidiary to human existence nor impediment to rational activity ... they are fundamental.”<sup>135</sup> My contention

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<sup>132</sup> Andy Clark, *Being There*, xii.

<sup>133</sup> Rickert, *Ambient Rhetoric*, 8.

<sup>134</sup> Shaviro, *Without Criteria*, 59.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

picks up when he begins to separate out the various ways in which ambient attunement is prior to the symbolic, as if the symbolic has to be kept strictly within the realm of anthropocentric epistemology.

There are significant implications to understanding symbolism and thought as no longer strictly human attributes, but what I'd like to focus on is how such a way of thinking impacts consideration of the experience of being literate. Particularly, I'd like to explore what Rickert calls the "kairotic" moment, where, citing Debra Hawhee, he writes, "one invents and is invented, one writes and is written, constitutes and is constituted."<sup>136</sup> Such an understanding of kairos focuses on "the rhetorical encounter itself and the forces pushing on the encounter."<sup>137</sup> If we're to think of an indefinite number of entities participating in each type of literacy, symbolism is integral to how each entity feels each moment, and literacy is the way in which it moves in reaction to those feelings. Situated within this larger conception of literacy, each entity is like a fractal, swirling out to be affected by other entities contingent to specific kairotic moments. There's no telling what will happen when one enacts a given form of literacy – concomitant with movement, feeling and symbolic experience are radically open, continuously encountering new kinds of tensions and interactions. Novelty is created with these new relations and through the material communication that accompanies them. We are, then, always written while writing – always read while reading. Reading and writing are always being influenced by the other symbolisms that always already condition our own. Being-scriptural is thus embedded in a much larger world of "reading" and "writing."

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<sup>136</sup> Hawhee, *Kairotic Encounters*, 18.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

The purpose and value of relationships with the land (understood here as nature, writ large) – of situating writing and reading and art and thought back into the land and listening, being attuned – is to trace the places where our thought begins to break down, and where we can begin to feel more deeply those other realms of perception in which the overall value intensity is upheld by individuals who value themselves. In those moments, new concepts will be made, and the concrescence of our relationship to the land will continue to move, always fluid, always dynamic, by attempting to write and read into and out of these spaces and feelings. This way, we may, as David Abram suggests, better replant our scriptural language and literacy back into the more-than-human-world.

#### Relationship to Self / Other

Having explored what Whitehead would call the “Great Outdoors” of theory and how it reconnects to literacy theory, I will next consider the ways in which a reorientation of symbolism changes our relationship to the body. I return to Brian Massumi in order to work through the complex relationship “one” has with his or her body as a moving, sensing, seemingly-bounded apparatus for existence. Massumi writes that the two things that stand out when we begin to question what the body itself is are that it *moves* and that it *feels*. He echoes Whitehead when he states that “feelings have a way of folding into each other, resonating with each other, resonating together, interfering with each other, mutually intensifying, all in unquantifiable ways apt to unfold again in action.”<sup>138</sup> This raises the question of how a body moves – and, more generally, through what and in what

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<sup>138</sup> Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 1.

ways does a body move? Answers to such a question will have implications in regards to my more broad argument for an affective symbolism that is concomitant with the ontological at every level of complexity, especially as I work to consider the ways in which I may connect the body, its interactions, its movements, its noises and its feelings with current conceptions of literacy studies and literacy pedagogy.

Massumi questions the validity of understanding the body as socially constructed, for example, male or female, black or white, human or nonhuman, etc. The problem with such a geography of identity, he explains, is that it freezes the body within a pre-coded, ideologically organized framework that treats the body like a game piece without there being any exploration of new territory. In short, there isn't any creativity. Concepts correlate with pre-coded categories, and who I am is mediated via interpellation. There is "gridlock." From an artistically aesthetic point of view, if there were a master-ideological-code that controlled the movement of bodies, it would follow that artworks, writings, and all works of creativity would also correlate with these pre-approved zones of feeling. There would not be moments of sublimity or novelty and movement for the zeitgeist – and within the zeitgeist, for the symbolic, too – only infinite, recursive loops, as if we were skating around and around. A pre-disposed space in and through which the body moves would be contradictory to any symbolism of affect. What happens, then, to the hypothesized structure when a symbolic of affect is posited? And further, what are the consequences of how we relate to, think about, and write/read with the body?

To side-step the conceptual dead-end that the body as social construct leads one into, Massumi posits that "in motion, a body is in an immediate, unfolding relation to its

own non-present potential to vary.”<sup>139</sup> The body is not so much moving through the grid-like space of socio-cultural identities, but rather is transitioning, phase-shifting its way through the conditions that stabilize the body in each instant. As Whitehead writes, “time in the concrete ... the conformation of state to state, the later to the earlier.”<sup>140</sup> If the body is understood as an unfolding process, then it exists as an undetermined state of dynamic unity that is captured retrospectively as an object only once a particular moment has passed. Whatever stability of the body we perceive, it is felt after the fact as we’re unfolding forward again, continuously caught and held and then pushed forward again within our entangled affective relations. It’s only when we return to these concepts we’ve collected as being unfolds that we freeze the “dynamic unity, the continuity of [the earth’s and our] movements.”<sup>141</sup>

The body understood as a dynamic, unfolding event has important implications for re-thinking the relationship to the body and the symbolic, as well as the symbolic’s relationship to literacy and illiteracy. This freezing, Massumi posits, is analogous to only viewing one dimension of the reality that is always already unfolding and multitudinous: like looking through a kaleidoscope and only seeing one color. And yet, as I’ve explored with the emergence of literacy through time, we have mistaken the history of writing, fundamentally the history of an indefinite number of concepts, as ontology – as the capital-t truth, rather than concepts situated in time, that will necessarily co-evolve with certain movements, feelings, and kairotic experiences. Reorienting our thought to consider scriptural-literacy – reading and writing – as also always evolving and moving

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>140</sup> Whitehead, *Symbolism*, 35

<sup>141</sup> Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 6.



and being affected would, I believe, drastically influence the way in which we think about and use our own symbolisms – especially our scriptural symbolisms.

If the symbolic is part and parcel of every experience, then every experience requires an organism – in our case, a human body. I then argued that, via Whitehead and his notion of symbolic transference, movement itself and the way in which organisms interact with each other in the world is dependent upon the symbolic, due to the fact that it is only because of a subject or organism’s ability to interpret via causal efficacy their surroundings that they are able to persist and keep persisting. In other words, what we can begin to do in and through Massumi’s work is trace the symbolic as a co-traveler, always, with the body, applying the same ambiguities of movement to the symbolic itself. When it comes to the symbolic, like the body and movement, the “emphasis is on process before signification or coding.”<sup>142</sup> Before the elaboration of the symbolic into codified languages that have multiplied and traversed the world, and that were later inked and codified into iterations of written form in which literacy was birthed, – which would be the freezing that I mentioned in the last paragraph – symbolism was and continues to be a process of becoming, just like being itself as a body-organism is.

Such an understanding of the body and the symbolic flattens out the hierarchies of “able-body” and “disabled-body”, of “literate-body” and “illiterate-body.” In other words, being-scriptural isn’t unique so much as it is another (powerful) way of experiencing literacy for an organism.

Each way of being and its concomitant modes of literacy is continuous with the next, so it follows that each way of being is in constant communication with other

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 7.

organisms and ways of being. These mutually immanent kinds of relationships would extend all the way up to more complex entities and all the way down in regards to less complex entities. At every level, there's an "exchange," an affective engagement that can never not happen. The separation of "I" and "Other" and "We" are blurred. We are, then, as Derrida would remind us, always already arriving at separation that is incomplete. Each of our literacies, especially being-scriptural, is always influenced by the material actualities that it comes into contact with, the environments that it inhabits.

As Massumi writes, the body's "positionality is an emergent quality of movement,"<sup>143</sup> meaning that a position, or a concept, or – we may extrapolate as we trace the symbolic with the body – a language (and a person's being-literate or being-illiterate in regards to that language/symbolism), is only retroactively created after emerging from the flux of reality via a recursive dynamism. Such an observation by Massumi influences him to move past using the concept "ontological" in describing concepts like "field," "body," and "organisms" and to describe them as *ontogenetic*: i.e. "equal to emergence."<sup>144</sup> In other words, flux and indeterminacy – creativity, in Whiteheadian parlance – are what keep everything moving, while concepts are created via the concrescence that creates a past that is concurrent with the present. That is to say that each one of our literacies – since the past is always a harmonizing of all things, and the present emerges out of the past – is dependent upon each one of the past actualities that continue to be actual via casual efficacy, contributing to the potentialities that individual organisms – and by extension, their literacies – may experience.

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 8.

Such a resituating of concepts – the ontological with the ontogenetic – also demands a deeper exploration of the “walls” of the body, or the fingertips, as I referenced in the last paragraph. As we’ve noticed throughout the last chapter and this chapter, if there’s one thing the body does, it “feels” – it senses and experiences sensation. But what is sensation underneath sensation? By this I mean, isn’t sensation itself just another feeling of a feeling? This question then leads one to ask if the logic behind the semantics would go on, ad infinitum until we reached a point in which to declare the argument *reductio ad absurdum*. But instead of cutting off our creative impulses at this juncture, Massumi invites us to delight in the vagueness of the body – to “sense” this infinite folding of sensation as “complicating immediacy of self-relation,”<sup>145</sup> or what he invites us to call an “intensity.” In this sense, Massumi writes that the body becomes, in part, a surface of sensory apparatuses in which the intensity felt is experience itself, writing that “the conversion of surface distance into intensity is also the conversion of the materiality of the body into an event.”<sup>146</sup> And this is the same experience the symbolic and our own literacies experience: a type of conversion of surface density into intensity, in which symbolism is both experienced, in each moment, as an event and as a material signifier – something that both is and is constantly affecting and becoming. This then, at least theoretically, begins tangentially to refer to the contemporaneity of the virtual (aesthetic) and the material aspects of the body – the disjunctive unity of what makes a body both move and feel: a unity that is concomitant with the symbolic as such, and that is experienced within the field of a particular organisms’ kind of literacy. This intensity that

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 14.

is the body correlates with what I was beginning to explain in the last chapter, in which the body is a vibration continuous and contiguous with the rest of the world and the rest of the world's organisms and their literacies experienced in each moment. However, the big difference that Massumi includes in his work is a reallocation of the self not as a bounded self, situated within a Cartesian dualistic version of reality, but rather as a self -. That is to say that the hyphen symbolizes the relation, or the porousness of the body, that is always already there, "distributing" as Massumi explains, "subjectivity ... along the nature-culture continuum."<sup>147</sup>

Self-literate; self-illiterate; self-body; self-emotion, self-scriptural, self-as-scriptural: these are all connections that point towards openings in the spheres of applicability that make up positionalities on the horizontal axis of my diagram of literacy to other literacies and lived experiences that are vibrating and communicating symbolically. And the intensity that is the body can be linked up to codified ways of being that have been concretized by the concrecence of our movement on the plane of immanence (or the horizontal axis); for example, the body-as-scripturality influences the very intensity of the body so that there becomes a different type of aesthetic-symbolic intensity that influences how we view the world, just as there's a different type of intensity for the body as self-as-scriptural. These types of beings both experience competencies within their own types of literacies, and experience illiteracies when thinking about their relationship to other types of symbolisms and literacies.

Of course, the nature-culture continuum needs further explaining. This continuum could be thought of as synonymous with the plane of immanence or my own horizontal

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 14.

axis – that is, the flattening of ontology so that everything in its individuality becomes a part of the process of ontogenesis – with the caveat of thinking this plane or field through the human mind’s eye: that is, attempting to differentiate between the social and the pre-social, as humans are, as Aristotle reminds us, social animals by nature. This leads us, then, to French philosopher Gilbert Simondon, and his philosophy that there is a becoming-social and becoming-culture that is always at the cusp of the concrescence of both sociality and culture, always. In this way, sociality and culture are, just like concepts, retroactively created, codified and concretized so that we can experience what is ostensibly a society or a culture. And this includes, necessarily, the creation and reification of our own scripturality as symbolism and as literacy. This, too, is retroactively constructed. Underneath, though, there is what Massumi calls a “sociality without determinate borders”<sup>148</sup> that begins to blur the distinction between the individual and the collective. It’s here where we may begin to understand, within this written medium that I’m producing, that everything I’m producing is dependent upon this underneath, nebulous space, in which feelings are flowing, always in flux, allowing certain materialities, like the alphabet, to symbolically rise up. And these thoughts provide the theoretical basis for stating that there’s an immanence in between being-scriptural and being-as-scriptural, just as there’s an immanence between being-literate, and being-illiterate. Here, then, I transition to the implications of a symbolicity of affect that implicates our relationship to the community as such, for it’s exactly this blurring of the individual and the collective that the concept of a community evinces, and that gives rise to the concept of any type of literacy through time and experience.

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 9.

## Relationship to Community

The ethical consequences of a diffused understanding of literacy and illiteracy extend beyond self-other relations to community relations. In the last chapter, I cited Diane Davis's discussion of *clinamen*, or the "inclination or an inclining from one toward the other" due to the fact that, as Jean-Luc Nancy writes, "one cannot make the world with simple atoms."<sup>149</sup> Nancy reminds us that the *clinamen* has to be the "community" of the individual, for if it weren't for the "simple atoms" coalescing and communicating in some way, no great "ocean of life" would have a chance of emerging. Davis extends this idea, writing that "solidarity is at least the rhetoricity of the affect as such, the individual's irreparable openness to affection/alteration."<sup>150</sup> The 'rhetoricity of the affect,' in my own thoughts points towards what I stated about ambient rhetoric: a sense of affectability persuading and connecting individual actualities. The irreparable openness highlights the importance of community as a *clinamen* of colliding, communicating drops of experience that come together to form a *demos* and an *ethos*. This section explores what happens to community after having re-oriented literacy from being-scriptural, which seemingly binds a community together by severing it from the more-than-human-world, to literacy as affective symbolism which binds a community together by its entanglement with the world. My main interest is to think new ways of talking about community that open members up to feeling a sense of connectivity to all

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<sup>149</sup> Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 3-4.

<sup>150</sup> Davis, *Inessential Solidarity*, 4.

things. How do we keep both the intimate connectivity of a community present while also, simultaneously, allowing ourselves to feel those outside communities that influence our own and appreciate the literacies that flourish there?

If we're to follow Heidegger – a la Davis, but with a nod back to Rickert – he reminds us that Dasein is always already a being-with, a *mit-da-sein*, that necessarily means that there is no essential individualistic actuality in the world in the world, but rather an always “we” where an “I” is claimed to be – in which an I can be thought of as a Mobius strip, weaving itself in and outside of the many spheres of influence it rubs up against, coalesces with, and co-creates with. This kind of reconceptualization of being, Jean-Luc Nancy writes, means that prior to the emergence of the individual being, there's a being-in-common that demands an inversion of the question of community. Posits Nancy, “the question should be the community of being, and not the being of community. Or if you prefer: the community of existence, and not the essence of community.”<sup>151</sup> What is it that allows for this community of existence to be, and give birth to, a million different individual actualities? Where does the symbolic fit in? Contra Davis, I'd like to argue that there's still here, before the emergence of the “symbol-using being,” symbolicity at work in its nascent post-human – or maybe pre-human – manifestation, meaning that there's a way in which to (re)connect the concept of community to better ‘feel’ the literacies always already allowing our own scripturality-as-literacy to evolve and become more intense/complex.

In stating that a body finds itself part of the community before it becomes a singularity, Nancy writes that the body is a kind of unending exposure in which “to be

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<sup>151</sup> Nancy, *Of Being-in-Common*, 1.

exposed is to be on the limit where, at the same time, there is both inside and outside, and neither inside nor outside” where there is both “division and distribution.”<sup>152</sup> This concept of there being a division and distribution should remind the reader of the division of the symbolic as we become literate-in-scripturality that I mentioned in chapter three, and the distribution of the subject along the nature-culture continuum that I referenced in the last sub-section of this chapter. As for the argument that the body is the site of exposure, this type of observation corroborates exactly what Massumi was arguing for in his work when he expanded on the disjunctive-aspect of the body, in which there is, concurrently, both a past-ness and a present-ness to the body, just as there is a community and a singularity whose coalescing at the site of the body creates an ectopia that allows for there to be what Whitehead will call the interstices of life, in which the creative, aesthetic flow of life can move and create new-ness – both for the body and for the community. This ectopia that is the body makes it so that the subject who has a body can and does recursively reflect on the impossibility of capturing the body as a concept without that concept always branching out infinitely to connect to and weave itself through interactions, emotions, people – in sum, exterior influences, effectively creating communities by way of these connections. This means that the body becomes to the individual an exposure of *finitude* – that is, the porous boundary which separates what is effectively the “inside” from the “outside” – and this finiteness that is represented to the individual “exists as communication” with everything outside of it, which is the necessary move we’ve been making for the past two chapters, by tying together

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 7-8.



ontogenesis and the symbolic – effectively stating that literacies always already exist as organisms exist and move, using and reacting to – as they must – the symbolic.

Considering the question of what a community is, Nancy writes we “must expose ourselves to what has gone unheard in the community”<sup>153</sup> instead of trying to find a collective identity. Rather than rely on the representative powers of language and ideology to organize and demarcate what should and shouldn’t be said or done in the community, one should accept the theoretical baselessness of community, which then places a burden on everyone to appreciate community as a “gift to be renewed and communicated”<sup>154</sup> If a community is to persist, a central tenet of what is communicated is the very feeling of necessity to keep communication itself always open always toward the “Other(s).” Nancy calls this kind of “keeping open” an “intensity of death,” but in regard to a diffused sense of literacy, we can think of it as an intensity of affective symbolism that demands to be felt. Understanding that the body – as it moves and speaks and interacts with Others – is concomitant with the symbolic and that all bodies create literacies through their feeling and movement allows us to get past an anthropocentric, scriptural framing of community. As Whitehead writes, “symbolism is inherent in the very texture of human life”<sup>155</sup> and so we should broaden the scope of how we think literacy shaping the experience of community. By embedding a Whiteheadian sense of literacy into Nancy’s discussion of community, I’m interested in trying to conceive of new ways to write and read, both with and toward communities beyond those defined by being-scriptural.

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<sup>153</sup> Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 26.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>155</sup> Whitehead, *Symbolism*, 61-62.

Whitehead continues, “communities with geographical unity constitute the primary type of communities which we find in the world” and “societies of the higher animals, of insects, of molecules, all possess geographical unity,” which “dispel[s] the notion that social life is a peculiarity of the higher organisms.”<sup>156</sup> The ethical consequences of opening the understanding of community is to “foster[s] this diffused feeling of the common possession of a treasure infinitely precious.”<sup>157</sup> This treasure, Whitehead will explain, is that which keeps social systems together: the “instinctive emotions clustered around habits and prejudices.”<sup>158</sup> The ability to feel the community and the Other(s) while also “feeling” ourselves – in sum, literacies as I have defined them. Symbolic expression preserves society in that it accomplishes the feat of “adding emotion to instinct, and secondly affords a foothold for reason by its delineation of the particular instinct which it expresses.”<sup>159</sup> Prior to reason and epistemology there’s the symbolic and the aesthetic and the literacies that attend them, which are embedded in communities writ large, even before the community begins forming itself. And every aspect of the community, every individual entity that is part of the whole environment, has an important role to play in everything both working properly (surviving and persisting) *and* creatively unfolding into novelty. Part of the novelty involves creating openings within already formed literacies on the one hand, and forming new literacies all together on the other. As Whitehead writes, and he’s worth quoting at length here:

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 68-69.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 70.

the world is a community of organisms; these organisms in the mass determine the environmental influence on any one of them; there can only be a persistent community of persistent organisms when the environmental influence in the shape of instinct is favorable to the survival of individuals. Thus the community as an environment is responsible for the survival of the separate individuals which compose it; and these separate individuals are responsible for their contributions to the environment.<sup>160</sup>

In sum, what a symbolic of affect begins to show us is how there is no separating the symbolic from the aesthetic, both of which are always firing as reality continuously unfurls in new organizations of complexity and splendor, and what follows from this ubiquitous symbolism are literacies that contain within them aesthetic instincts inherent within diverse entities. These literacies are responsible to and for the environment in which they persist, meaning that it's necessary to re-orient our own literacy-as-scripturality toward communicating with the more-than-human-world, our largest community.

Having situated ourselves as always open to unfinished community building, the only way to foster new ways of creating communities – new “lines of flight” within our current communal-assemblage, Deleuze and Guattari would say – is to let go of our ultimate reverence for codified symbol-systems and work to find the openings where we can better “feel” that which allows our codes to exist in the first place. We need to open ourselves, as a community, to a fearlessness of constant, never-ending revision – always

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 79.

working collaboratively to push past the limits of propriety and to explore the vagueness of the emotional that gives rise to the material literacies: our own texts and scripts and books. In this sense, being-as-scriptural and illiteracy within other kinds of literacies gain a new-found importance in the scriptural communities of the present day. Rather than literacy-as-scripturality holding a position of power and prestige – understood as closer to a humanistic “truth” than ascripturality – we can think of illiteracy as a type of symbolic lived-experience that always informs but never envelops our own, literate-sphere of scripturality. In this way, there are emotions that have yet to be captured in our community of literacy that the other literate-spheres may hold. Perhaps we’ve felt them, but don’t have the words. I don’t have the words here, either. My only hope is that such a re-thinking of community helps us collectively open wider the pores that allow us all to feel that which escapes our scriptural reasoning; together, peeling back layers until we see and feel more of what’s underneath the surface that shapes and nourishes our own literacy. There needs to be a fearlessness of exploration within the world of scripturality, in which those who are scripturally literate test the boundaries and communicate back to their community of scribes where the walls of their own literacy are weakest – where they feel other forms of literacy with their attendant symbolisms. To think of community as a collective attempt at always being more aesthetically inclusive, with a changing and dynamic symbolism – that is my hope.

### Literacy as Landscape: Writing Outward

At the beginning of her work, *Finitude's Clamor; Or, Notes toward a Communitarian Literacy*, Diane Davis recounts an entry made in Gustave Flaubert's published collected letters – this specific letter detailing his time exploring the Orient. While on his trip, Flaubert had come across the name *THOMPSON*, etched in large, ostentatious letters across a column erected by Pompey. Incredulously, Flaubert has written that “there's no way to see the column without seeing the name ‘Thompson’ and consequently without thinking of Thompson.” Having introduced this experience, Davis then pivots to Avital Ronell – who also has written about this specific Flaubert passage: “unless one is a complete jerk, one leaves this earth insecure over one's name: one remains stupid about its destination. But Thompson, his name arrived.”<sup>161</sup>

As I've been tracing throughout this chapter and the last, a necessary tension exists between the vagueness of the aesthetic experience of the symbolic, and the materialization of the symbolic itself. Whitehead wrote that “the art of free society consists first in the maintenance of the symbolic code,”<sup>162</sup> but more importantly, in light of Nancy's concept of community as perpetually incomplete, free society needs to be fearless in revising such a code so that it may continue to be free. It can be quite easy to lose oneself completely on one side or the other of this tension between maintenance and revision – between the aesthetic and the epistemic, and in this case, between writing to announce oneself, and writing so as to open oneself up and connect and feel.

In her work, Davis correlates the self-assurance of the graffiti “Thompson” with the myth of self-conscious presence that seems to be taught to composition students. It is

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<sup>161</sup> Ronell, *Confessions of an Anacoluthon*, 20.

<sup>162</sup> Whitehead, *Symbolism*, 88.

possible to present oneself, through writing, to those reading; it is possible to be equal to one's signature and to be confident that there's an assurance of individuality in such a presentation. This kind of assurance through writing encourages "students to trace and retrace what Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* call their molar lines, lines of rigid segmentarity associated with a so-called personal history, at the expense of their molecular and/or flight lines."<sup>163</sup> Massumi warned of organizing the socio-cultural environment as a grid because it traps us in an amalgam of either/or binaries. His warning resonates with what Davis is arguing. She too recognizes the tight and very sanitized space that scriptural writing has been pushed into: a 'white wall/black hole system' that proffers the myth of self-presence, and though it allows one to speak from and for particular positions, it does so at too great a cost, promoting a kind of political/social economy at the expense of the experience of community."<sup>164</sup>

As Ranciere explains to us in his work *The Politics of Aesthetics*, when one thinks of art, they think of it entirely – or mostly entirely – divorced from the "real," from the empirical, in which "life" happens. But, as he writes, "the aesthetic revolution rearranges the rules of the game by making two things independent: the blurring of the borders between the logic of facts and the logic of fiction *and* the new mode of rationality that characterizes the science of history."<sup>165</sup> In other words, the way in which stories and poetry had been told and created via creativity and aesthetic inspiration began to diffuse outward into the material world, where the romantic age took hold and "plunged language into the materiality of the traits by which the historical and social world

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<sup>163</sup> Davis, *Finitude's Clamor*, 122.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>165</sup> Ranciere, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 36.

becomes visible to itself.”<sup>166</sup> While this type of blurring was and could be confusing for the modernist, Ranciere’s description reminds us of the prescience of the Romantic age in regards to its resonance with a post-structuralism type of thought about the way the world is organized and created, or always be-coming. In my opinion, this type of understanding of signs corroborates my own argument for the importance of an acceptance of a symbolic of affect, for as Ranciere explains, signs and symbols already are – and always have been – affective. He writes, “This literary arrangement of signs... is the association between... the accelerations or decelerations of language, its shuffling of images or sudden changes of tone, all its differences of potential between insignificant and the overly significant... and on the other hand, the modalities of a trip through the landscape of significant traits deposited in the topography of spaces, the physiology of social circles, the silent expression of bodies.”<sup>167</sup> This description of the signs that are always in use, and that have yet to be used, shows that underneath the hermeneutical interpretation of the social and historical world, there’s always the aesthetic at play, giving rise to literacies that accelerate and decelerate at various speeds, and which influence the topography of the spaces we find ourselves in – sometimes negatively.

In further exploring the aesthetic play underneath the nature-culture continuum – in a nod back to Massumi – Ranciere writes that politics and aesthetics have material effects in the way we perceive and retroactively organize our individual and collective reality. Ranciere is worth quoting at length, here, when he writes that political statements (rhetoric) and literary locutions (literacy-as-scripturality):

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 37.

define models of speech or action, but also regimes of sensible *intensity*. They draft maps of the visible, trajectories between the visible and the sayable, relationships between modes of being, modes of saying, and modes of doing and making. They define variation of sensible intensities, perceptions, and the abilities of bodies. They thereby take hold of unspecified groups of people, they *widen gaps, open up space for deviations, modify the speeds, the trajectories, and the ways in which groups of people adhere to a condition, react to situations, recognize their images.*<sup>168</sup>

These gaps that are opened up by literarity are what allow the human to be a political animal, insofar as the human – if we think back to Whitehead – can transcend her instinctual drives and be overtaken by the symbolic of affect – effectively becoming quasi-bodies, or Massumi’s self- that introduces lines of flight within the current assemblages of society. And, when these quasi-bodies, or scriptural-bodies – for our own purposes – diffuse outward they “cause modifications in the sensory perception of what is common to the community, in the relationship between what is common to language and the sensible distribution of spaces and occupations.”<sup>169</sup> Indeed, this sentiment is exactly the importance, in my argument, for a literacy of landscape – an understanding of the importance of writing outward to expose oneself to the environment and the Other,

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 40.



effectively attempting to infuse the more-than-human-world back into literacy-as-scripturality.

As Deleuze and Guattari write in their works – and as a potentially appropriate neologisms for our purposes in understanding how to reconceive of the “writer” or the “literate” – an individual is like a haecceity which consists “entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and to be affected.”<sup>170</sup> And when this individual writes, she traces the fault-lines of these affectations, opening herself up to the spaces and individuals that move her and sway her in each instance. She is written while writing. And yet, interpretive, hermeneutical understandings of literacy bar one from this feeling of interconnectedness that is necessary for literacy-as-scripturality to emerge in the first place. Of course the affect is still there, buried beneath the retroactively erected ideologies of humanism and epistemology, but the gap in which to feel it is layered-over – shrunk. A communitarian literacy, on the other hand, “obeys the sole necessity of exposing the limit: not the limit of communication, but the limit upon which communication takes place.”<sup>171</sup> Such a communitarian-literacy would teach writers to, as Derrida says, “write texts that don’t return, that take off on their own, like a child that starts talking and goes on talking by itself.”<sup>172</sup> Our task, then, of re-establishing this communitarian, post-humanist, ecological literacy would be to, as David Abram encourages, “release the budded, earthly intelligence of our words, freeing them to respond to the speech of the things themselves – to the green uttering-forth of leaves from the spring branches. [We must] spin stories

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<sup>170</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 261.

<sup>171</sup> Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 79.

<sup>172</sup> Derrida, *The Ear of the Other*, 157.

that have the rhythm and lilt of the local sound-scape, tales for the tongue, tales that want to be told again, and again, sliding off the digital screen and slipping off the lettered page to inhabit these coastal forests, these desert canyons, those whispering grasslands and valleys and swamps.”<sup>173</sup> This kind of re-orientation for scripturality would, I hope, over time enact a paradigm shift within our current thoughts about literacy, allowing for a more inclusive, creative, feeling-orientated practice (and teaching) of reading and writing.

This kind of turn in literacy studies won't be easy, and much of what I've outlined in these past few pages is strictly theory. What then of a move towards proliferating this type of communitarian literacy? An acceptance of literacy and illiteracy not as a bifurcation, but as an immanence that when understood aesthetically opens us up to different molecular lines of material and conceptual movement? In a word, different literacies? It's my belief that such a paradigm shift needs to start and spread out from our own pedagogical methods – especially our pedagogy surrounding literacy studies. A move towards a new, re-conceptualized type of pedagogy is the subject of my next, and final, chapter.

## CHAPTER VI

### TURN TOWARDS A NEW PEDAGOGY

It's been the work of this thesis to problematize the bifurcation of literacy and illiteracy as concepts inherently separated, and to call into question literacy understood as

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<sup>173</sup> Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 274.

an autonomous skill-set situated squarely within the realm of the epistemic, and illiteracy as the lack of that skill-set. With these goals in mind, I began chapter two with a detailed, historical account of the emergence of literacy as a concept. By following this emergence of reading and writing through time, I noted the concepts that were introduced as reading and writing became diffuse – especially noting how the emergence of a scriptural literacy seemed to introduce a separation of the individual from the more-than-human-world. It was also in chapter two that I introduced a new way of thinking about literacy and illiteracy: not as epistemological skill-sets, but rather as ways of being that are multiple and immanent to each other, horizontally situated on an axis of flat ontology. In chapter three, I put forth new concepts to replace our colloquial definitions of literacy and illiteracy: substituting literacy for scripturality, and illiteracy for ascripturality. These new ‘modes of being’ were introduced to set up the evidence that there’s an immanence between major literacies, and within literacies, meaning that every type of literacy is never a skill-set, but always a way of being continuous with its environment, with systems of power, and with other kinds of literacies. In chapters four, I worked to explore the aesthetic immanence between the organization of literacy diffused on a horizontal axis and argued for a new way in which to relate to the symbolic, namely as a symbolic of affect. Then, in chapter five, I pivoted to extrapolate the influences this new way of relating to the symbolic may have on important conceptual and ethical relationships we have as human beings, specifically relating to nature, to the body-as-self and the body-as-other, and to community. Finally, in this chapter, I will make a hard turn into thinking about different ways of organizing a practical pedagogical methodology for literacy,

taking into consideration the theoretical arguments I've been making for the past five chapters.

At the beginning of his work, *The Ethnography of Literacy*, John Szwed writes that, “assumptions are made in educational institutions about the literacy needs of individual students which seem not to be born out by the students’ day-to-day lives. And it is this relationship between school and the outside world that I think must be observed, studied and highlighted.”<sup>174</sup> At its heart, this thesis has been focused on working to excavate how best to re-orient literacy studies and the rhetoric surrounding literacy studies so as to subvert the dominant ideology surrounding the value of literacy that the major pedagogical methodologies and institutions reify – (or perhaps, the value of accumulating capital that arguably leads from one becoming-literate). Indeed, one can argue for the perversion of the school system as already influenced by the demand for a system of cultural capital and currency that inevitably effects the way the major discourses – and motivations – surrounding literacy are communicated and taught. As Linda Brodkey writes:

Take tests for grades, exchange the grade for credentials, use the credentials to launch a career, measure by the number of promotions and the size of the paychecks and the amount of the stock. Writing is only incidental in this cycle. It is incidental because the cycle deflates the value of the intellectual work of practices like writing in order to artificially inflate the value of ritual performance

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<sup>174</sup> Szwed, *The Ethnography of Literacy*, 303-311

(achievement tests, reading scores) that can be calculated and minted as cultural currency.<sup>175</sup>

The use of the word “ritualistic” is a nod towards the way in which ideologies (in this case the capitalistic ideology) have provided the illusion of autonomous agency situated within an institutional apparatus very much like Brian Massumi’s grid that I mentioned in chapter three, in addition to a proffering of the myth that literacy is an autonomous skill-set, independent of the ideological grid, that can be taught to those willing to learn. Such an anthropocentric centering of agency and literacy creates the sense of choice for the agent, providing a normalized, dichotomous understanding of right and wrong, left and right, black and white, literacy and illiteracy, while continuing to erect systemic assemblages and institutions of oppression, power, and privilege, all of which contributes to the marginalization of bodies, movements and radical thought. A different, more liberatory pedagogical model is necessary, then – one that incorporates a different way of thinking about literacy that doesn’t fetishize being-literate as an autonomous skill-set but rather appreciates literacy and illiteracy as ways of being that allow rather than obstruct communication with other ways of being. This, I submit, is the pedagogical goal I have in mind in this chapter: attempting to lay the down the first steps to constructing an emancipatory pedagogical methodology that incorporates a re-orientated relationship to the symbolic and to literacy and illiteracy as ways of being, rather than skills.

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<sup>175</sup> Brodkey, *Writing on the Bias*, 30-51.

To begin, if you ask most of the western world where they learned to read – really learned to read and write and to interact in the dominant language of their socio-economic milieu, the answer most of the time will be school. The next question we have to ask, then, in peeling back the layers of how to allow for change in thinking about and teaching literacy is: what is school? I realize that’s a large question, and how I orient my argument in relation to this question will leave much out, but I hope, at the end, it will make sense that those bits of the argument necessarily need to be left out so that dynamic movements of pedagogy may have some room to breathe. To return to the question of what a school is, we necessarily need to think about what it is that constitutes a school: both theoretically as the superstructure, and materially, as the structure itself. Foucault is especially helpful for these kinds of genealogical demarcations. As Deleuze writes in his work on Foucault, (and this isn’t specifically referenced to institutions of pedagogy alone, necessarily, but can be assumed to include them): “[in Foucault’s work] we have encountered three dimensions: the relations which have been formed or formalized along certain strata (Knowledge); the relations between forces to be found at the level of the diagram (Power); and the relation with the outside, that absolute relation with the outside... which is also a non-relation (Thought).”<sup>176</sup>

In beginning to dismantle the parts of the school that necessarily need to be rethought for the teaching of literacy to undergo an aesthetic shift, we can assume that in the creation of an assemblage of the school, or the pedagogic site itself, these three dimensions: knowledge, power, and thought, all go into the mix in (sometimes) unequal distributions. What makes the site of the pedagogic so fascinating is the recursivity of its

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<sup>176</sup> Deleuze, *Foucault*, 80.

ontological nature. The fact that it is both an assemblage constructed by already concretized concepts that we classify as knowledge and that it inevitably engages in the very concrescence of the creative advancement of thought; it allows for the coming together of various energies and vibrations and intensities that, when coalesced, create raptures that, at best, enact a paradigm shift on a microcosmic level in each of the students, encouraging them to think beyond the page and beyond the textbook, and at worst, are captured and appropriated by the power-system that allows for the school-building itself to be built, and for the curriculum to be taught.

This is to say that, like all things operating with the predominant scriptural economy, pedagogy relies on discursive parameters that insinuates a “this, not-that” mentality. Every concept and its signified must have “its ontological and epistemological parameters”<sup>177</sup> in order to establish itself within discourse and to be built, discussed, or critiqued. And so it is with school and those who make up the staff of a school: the teachers, principles, administrators, superintendents, etc. Each position – each slot on the grid – comes with a job description and a discourse that informs who fills the position and how. Such a placement, in turn, informs how we think about and talk about “clever children” or “talented students” or “success stories.” The power flows unilaterally, and in its wake is how the rest of the world, and especially the pedagogical assemblage, finds itself structured. In our case, with the world largely organized by global capital, the power-flow is dominated by production and consumption. This theoretical observation corroborates Brodkey’s above comment about the normalization of writing as incidental and only functional amidst the machinery of a capitalistic model of reality.

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<sup>177</sup> Butler, *Giving an account of Oneself*, 18.

There's a necessary politico-ethical component inherent with the pedagogical system being discussed here, in which the pedagogical is understood as an act of exposure that necessarily leaves both the "teacher" and the "student" fragmented. Inevitably, as Nancy writes, all communication, whether conscious of it or not, "obeys the sole necessity of exposing the limit: not the limit of communication, but the limit upon which communication takes place."<sup>178</sup> In pedagogical moments of inspiration and communication and affect, experiences occur which exceed the institutionality of the context itself to create moments where, as Butler writes, "we ask ourselves what it might mean to continue in dialogue where no common ground can be assumed, where one is, as it were, at the limits of what one knows yet still under the demand to offer, and receive acknowledgement: to someone else who is there to be addressed and whose address is there to be received."<sup>179</sup> Arguably, moments like these happen all the time in the classroom, but their creativity and dynamism are swept aside by a reflexive stance taken by the teacher who has been conditioned to think and teach in a certain "grid-like" way – the necessary next question must be one that takes up the mantle of the unknown by asking "Who" and "How"? That is to say, "who are you" and the question of "how" to learn. I take up this question of "how" to learn by considering orientations towards pedagogy that radical thinkers have taken.

In his work, "Pedagogy of the Event," Dennis Atkinson asks this very question: "how can we understand the idea of risk taking? Is it possible to provide a theoretical basis upon which to enhance our understanding of this concept that takes us beyond the

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<sup>178</sup> Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 79.

<sup>179</sup> Butler, *Giving an account of Oneself*, 21-22.



prosaic idea of ‘taking a chance’ [in pedagogical moments] and thereby provide pedagogy with a more substantive theoretical underpinning of this concept?”<sup>180</sup> In a gesture toward Alain Badiou, Atkinson argues that “taking a chance” necessarily needs to involve movements toward a “new or changed ontological state” that takes into consideration the always already fluid state of being. In Massumi’s terms, this is the ontogenesis of our communicative concepts and our moments of communication with each-other. This kind of pedagogy Atkinson wants to call a *pedagogy of the event*, where the event understood is understood as that which exceeds the situational context, but that nevertheless affects and effects the situation itself so as to allow for novelty to occur. This kind of pedagogy would be focused on epistemic limits or, in a Derridean sense, where our knowledge and concepts break down and fall in on themselves. A pedagogy of the event would focus on those moments of break down, moving the class as a collaborative collective forward, unafraid and curious, toward a continuous state of becoming. This aligns with what Davis describes as an emancipatory “being-with.” I envision this pedagogical stance as an exploratory, seminar-style organization, where literacies are discussed as various, lived-ways-of-being, and where reading and writing are practiced as ways in which to communicate not within but past the limits of a body and system of thought. The practice would be to strive to feel connections between different literacies, especially ascriptural ones, that are currently left to the dark side of “illiteracy.”

With his “pedagogy of the event,” Atkinson posits a method of teaching which always breaks up our frameworks of understanding and looks for “gaps in the

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<sup>180</sup> Atkinson, *Pedagogy of the Event*, 2.

symbolic”<sup>181</sup> that appear when our epistemological concepts fail under an influx of unrepresentable experience needing to be symbolized. It is necessary to move past Atkinson, however, because he situates the symbolic firmly on the side of epistemology – effectively making the dichotomy between ontology and the symbolic stronger. Keeping the symbolic firmly tethered to the ontogenesis of the body, I’d like to connect the Badiouian concept of the event where “truth” is what bursts open and out of the event, with Whitehead’s concept of feeling. Badiou writes, “education (save its oppressive or perverted expressions) has never meant anything but this: to arrange the forms of knowledge in such a way that some truth may come to pierce a hole in them.”<sup>182</sup> Indeed, in order to move towards a new pedagogy, a re-orientation of literacy and illiteracy will necessarily have to take into account the emancipatory characteristic of learning. To be successful, a new pedagogy will have to sense what to break-down and how to open itself up. In our thinking about literacy, too, it was necessary to break the concept of literacy-in-school away from the perverted expression of literacy-as-scripturality and pedagogy-as-currency that’s endemic to institutionalized education.

As Laura Rosenberg writes in her work, *Rewriting Ideologies of Literacy*, “what people desire in their education is not usually the actual literacy of school (unless you are an educator), but the *currency* assigned to school literacy.”<sup>183</sup> The currency assigned to literacy, I would argue, is the film – like a layer of dust – that’s powdered the concept of literacy since its inception as the way in which to communicate. Scriptural literacy is the ultimate conveyance of an individual amidst other individuals. It’s necessary to separate

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>182</sup> Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 9.

<sup>183</sup> Rosenberg, *Rewriting Ideologies of Literacy*, 35.

the metaphorical – and literal – currency of literacy from the value of literacy, for it's the value that gets at the importance of the *feeling* of literacy. Literacy is not a truth, nor is the accumulation of currency the ultimate goal. Rather, by stripping away the currency of literacy it is possible to understand the need to write outwards, to communicate outwards, to teach outwards: always with an eye towards the continual emergence of both the community and the student-teacher simultaneously.

This kind of pedagogy-as-becoming seems to resonate most with the work of Jacques Ranciere, Paulo Freire, and Ivan Illich: three scholars with whom I'll be pulling from as I write my way towards filling out a new kind of pedagogy. Resituating how pedagogy should be organized also informs how I believe literacy should be taught, in addition to how illiteracy should be thought about. As Freire writes about in his work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, "the very structure of their [the oppressed] thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men [or women]; but for them, to be men [or women] is to be oppressors."<sup>184</sup> The way in which educational systems are generally organized, and the power-dynamics that make it so, monopolize thought and ideology, creating what is effectively a brain-washed preliterate intent on "graduating" into the petit-bourgeoisie by engaging in similar methods of oppression and a mind-set that applauds the "individual" versus the "community." This kind of thinking, I would argue, also stems from the false belief that scriptural literacy is a "True" way of being; that literacy is a fundamental way of being that is "Right" and "Individually" accessed, rather than being connected to and

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<sup>184</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 27.

necessary for hegemonic, oppressive power-systems that organize the very process of becoming literate in the first place.

However, the paradox that presents itself when one begins to critique the systems in place is exactly this: “how can the oppressed, as divided, unauthentic beings, participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation?”<sup>185</sup> Freire responds by pointing towards the indeterminate space that always needs to be fitted in between a dichotomy: the interstice through which one discovers other ways of being and which never exhausts its potentiality. This kind of “middle-way,” a searching and striving ethos, “is born in the labor which brings into the world this new being: no longer oppressor, no longer oppressed, but human in the process of achieving freedom.”<sup>186</sup> What it is that makes us human is exactly this idea of continuous transformation: engaging with the world and opening ourselves up to change and to being changed, to affect and to being affected endlessly.

Freire says as much when he tackles the paradox of objective transformation and subjective immobility. He is worth quoting in full:

“the denial of objectivity in analysis or action, resulting in a subjectivism which leads to solipsistic positions, denies itself by denying objective reality. Neither objectivism nor subjectivism, nor yet psychologism is propounded here, but rather subjectivity and objectivity in constant dialectical relationship.”<sup>187</sup>

The only change I’d make is to note that the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity isn’t dialectical so much as it is immanent – always in tension and yet

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 32.

entwined like a Mobius strip, where the tension between the two is the indeterminate interstice where novelty emerges. Oppositions are generative of novelty, and the opposition that I've been tracing throughout this thesis is the one between the individual body and the community as established by scriptural literacy. My goal has been to ask how we may take on a new way of thinking and feeling about the symbolic so as to reorient our relationships to individuality, community, and as a result, pedagogy.

As Freire reminds us, "World and human beings do not exist apart from each other, they exist in constant interaction."<sup>188</sup> But again, this interaction is more of a constant flux immanent to ontology. The fact that potentiality in each actuality is never exhausted but keeps replenishing itself, favors the sort of pedagogy I am advocating for. As Nathan Stormer writes in his work, "Everything Moves, Even When It Doesn't," an event's "actuality is flickering, modal, but the capacity for such events endures, if only as an intuition of loss and arrival that cakes every instant like a layer of dust."<sup>189</sup> This means, then, that if we're to connect back to Atkinson and Badiou, that a pedagogy-of-the-event would necessarily always be moving – and the various potentialities of the pedagogy would, in each moment, be opening and closing. In this sense, kairotic moments of pedagogy become all the more important. How does a teacher-student, or a student-teacher interact and react to an event that exceeds the contextual situation they find themselves in? To cultivate a sensitivity to these moments would then become the actual goal of a pedagogy-of-the-event. Such a sensitivity would necessarily be understood as the way in which one is aesthetically responsive to their environment and

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>189</sup> Stormer, "Everything Moves, Even When It Doesn't", 5.

the many different actualities that make up that environment. This pedagogy would present a different way of teaching literacy in the concrete, and teaching about literacy in the abstract. That is to suggest that, within the space of the class itself, a reiteration of the necessity to overflow the context of both the class and the body – connecting to the excess that allows there to be any structure – should more seriously influence the way pedagogy itself is practiced and organized.

This kind of pedagogy would not be a deposit of information into students. Rather, this kind of pedagogy of literacy, and pedagogy in general, would demand a critical analysis of the environment and situation one found themselves in, in each moment – a real kind of attunement that would be aesthetic and that would demand a response. As Freire writes,

there would be no human action if there were no objective reality, no world to be the ‘not I’ ... just as there would be no human action if humankind were not a ‘project,’ if he or she were not able to transcend himself or herself, if one were not able to perceive reality and understand it in order to transform it.<sup>190</sup>

The wording that Freire uses deviates ever so slightly from my own metaphysical understanding of being and becoming, but the gist of what he’s getting at, I can get behind. First of all, the objective reality he posits shouldn’t be understood as a sort of Newtonian-absolute-objective-space, but rather as that which is outside of the body, but also continuous with the body, allowing the body to move in and through time-space. Furthermore, Freire’s use of “understand” seems to fall on the side of an idealism that puts the human intellect outside of the environment it finds itself in – an extrapolation

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<sup>190</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 35.

that I've argued against in chapter four of this thesis. That being said, positing that the body-mind of the human is embedded in the "rest of nature" doesn't mean that there isn't, situated within the human, a potentiality to affect the environment and create change. Quite the contrary; all things, in each moment, have the potentiality for change, and do, consistently, create new-ness. This is all to say that with a few quick changes, Freire still very much aligns with my argument. And anyway, the part that I'm specifically interested in using is when he writes that humanity is always a project, always working to transcend itself *through* reality. The reason behind my interest in this specific piece of Freire's statement is due to the fact that it is almost verbatim what Ranciere will argue for with his concept of *universal teaching*: a pedagogical method that, in Ranciere's philosophy, provides the model for intellectual emancipation.

Ranciere is also interested in working in between the potentiality and actuality of things: what Freire calls the dialectical movement in between subjectivity and objectivity, but that is always necessarily the interstice in and through which, as Whitehead will say, life happens. As Ranciere writes,

One must learn near those who have worked in the gap between feeling and expression, between the silent language of emotion and the arbitrariness of the spoken tongue, near those who have tried to give voice to the silent dialogue the soul has with itself, who have gambled all their credibility on the bet of the similarity of minds.<sup>191</sup>

In situating the gap or the interstice between feeling and expression instead of Freire's subjectivity and objectivity, Ranceire is echoing the importance of the aesthetic regarding

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<sup>191</sup> Ranciere, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 68.

political and pedagogical matters. And to be sure, Ranciere's situating of "the gap" doesn't necessarily exclude Freire's. This gap is immanent – a virtual realm of creative potential that fosters kairotic moments to create novelty.

In order for us to better understand what Ranciere means when he uses the concept, "universal teaching," Joshua Ewalt, in his work "Rhetoric, Poetics, and Jacques Ranciere's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*" provides us with an easy-to-follow outline. Ewalt writes,

the logic of universal teaching is as follows. From the start of life, all humans learn through observation and repetition, exemplified first by the act of acquiring language and using that language to communicate. A child first learns a word and "relates everything else to it" in order to eventually more skillfully navigate the material exteriority of language.<sup>192</sup>

Ranciere, following the pedagogy of teacher Joseph Jacotot – who found that he could teach something he didn't know anything about to students who also didn't know anything about the subject – posits that there is an intellectual equivalence between all (human) beings, and that the way in which to teach, then, is to leverage material things so as to create a "bridge of communication between two minds" that allows an emancipatory relationship to form in that both the "student" and the "teacher" don't necessarily feel subordinated to the other. Instead, both interact and respond to each other via a material medium that they both can sense and feel in equally "intelligent" ways – that is, in their own types of literacies.

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<sup>192</sup> Ewalt, *Rhetoric, Poetics, and Jacques Ranciere*, 6.



This type of pedagogy doesn't necessarily need to be focused on any one kind of topic, but is rather more interested in, as Ranciere writes, "rais[ing] up those who believe themselves inferior in intelligences, to make them leave the swamp where they are stagnating – not the swamp of ignorance, but the swamp of self-contempt, of contempt in and of itself for the reasonable creature. It is to make emancipated and emancipating men [and women]." <sup>193</sup> The goal of universal teaching is to create more points of emancipation within the society via people who are aware of the normalizing oppression of hegemonic systems of power, but that who are also aware of the illusory inequality of inherent ability – intellectual or otherwise. These people work to proliferate the emancipatory quality of a radical pedagogy like the one Jacotot believed in by leveraging materiality itself, even the materiality of language or the written word as they manifest within literacy-as-scripturality.

This is how I believe literacy-as-scripturality should be taught: not as a currency that needs to be collected and then used for personal gain, but as a valuable, material, symbolic intensification of the body that allows for a different way of relating to ourselves and others, and that can be used to show that all others are just as capable, just as intelligent, just as connected to everything and everyone, as anyone else, and that there are ways in which to explore each kind of literacy, pushing the boundaries, so as to feel other kinds of literacies. As Ranciere writes, "we can never say [that is, we can never empirically prove] all intelligence is equal... But our problem isn't proving that all intelligence is equal. It's seeing what can be done under that supposition." <sup>194</sup> And

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<sup>193</sup> Ranciere, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 102.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47.

assuming that illiteracy, in teaching literacy, is just as important and primordial to ontogenesis as literacy – that is to say, the symbolic – then those who are illiterate within a scriptural economy have entirely different ways of relating to the world and to the language of scripturality that they are “entering” into. These other relations to the world necessarily afford new ways of thinking, speaking, and becoming for them, including the ways in which they become scripturally “literate” more generally. These new ways of thinking, speaking, and becoming allow us to introduce new potentialities already “flowing” through the scriptural economy. As a result, one is neither “completely literate” nor “completely illiterate” within certain symbolisms, but rather always both at the same time – just as one is both an actualization and a potentiality at each moment. And as more emancipated individuals feel themselves becoming scriptural, literacy-as-scripturality itself can become a site for emancipation from the inside – opening itself up and out, rather than retreating inward to the myth of the individual, self-possessed literate, and the myth that there being is only one type of anthropocentric literacy, that of scripturality. It follows that if we’re to teach literacy more accurately, then, it will have to be with a nod towards the immanence of illiteracy to literacy, rather than teaching literacy as if it’s a threshold one crosses. We must remember, as Ranciere writes, that “all men [and women] hold in common the ability to feel pleasure and pain.”<sup>195</sup> Which is to say that all beings hold in common the ability to *feel*, which necessarily dismantles the dichotomy of inside-outside, individuality-community, literacy-illiteracy, and shows that there is no ultimate static way of being, so much as a constant becoming that one can

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 70.

only ever feel, react to, and keep feeling, all the while constructing symbolisms in the wake of their movement.

After all that I have said, however, I am not arguing that literacy is a bad thing or that we should valorize being-as-scriptural over being scriptural. Obviously, there are incredible advancements made in every intellectual field due to the fact that words, ideas and numbers can be written down and persist through time. Rather, what I am calling for in regard to pedagogy aligns with how Ewalt brings out the difference between “rhetoric” as Ranciere understands it, and poetics. Admittedly, Ranciere doesn’t have a high opinion of rhetoric. He writes:

Poetic language that knows itself as such doesn’t contradict reason. On the contrary, it reminds each speaking subject not to take the narrative of his mind’s adventures for the voice of truth. Every speaking subject is the poet of himself and of things. Perversion is produced when the poem is given as something other than a poem, when it wants to be imposed as truth, when it wants to force action.  
*Rhetoric is perverted poetry.*<sup>196</sup>

If it seems like there’s a Nietzschean tint to this statement, that’s a good thing. One could say that we have forgotten that we’ve “made” up what Ranciere here calls rhetoric, or what I would call scripturality – that these ways of communicating aren’t, in fact, True. And yet, they’re still necessary – literacy and rhetoric, that is. As Ranciere writes, there couldn’t be a society of pure poets. Rather, the best we can do is teach rhetoric so that the

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 84.

rhetors never forget that they are poets, just as we can teach scripturality, so that those literate in scripturality never forget that they are also, and will always be to some degree, illiterate.

In a move towards accepting the inherent “violence” or “perversion” of rhetoric as necessary, but also potentially conducive to movement and opening up spaces for equality, James Crosswhite argues for an understanding of rhetoric as a “deep rhetoric,” a “rhetoric as a form of transcendence, the event by which human beings (but not necessarily only human beings) are not simply entities, enclosed within themselves, but are movements toward and away from each other, movements towards and away from the world...”<sup>197</sup> He goes on to write that it’s not so much an individual transcendence that is integral to an understanding of deep rhetoric, as it is always a co-transcendence, in which there’s a collective movement towards the “good” or what Whitehead would call “beauty” via rhetorical argumentation and communication. I’d go further in this statement by arguing that literacy, too, allows for a kind of transcendence in and through which one can have “a view of the many ways that kairotic realities form themselves... the kairotic is the view from within some acknowledged reality but with an awareness of its transient and provisional character and of its real possibilities.”<sup>198</sup> I’d also make a similar argument for illiteracy, as both have their own kinds of rhetorics and their own understandings of the many different kairotic moments that swirl and fluctuate around them. For example, the literate might be more attuned to the kairotic moments that present themselves in a certain academic discourse, while the illiterate might be more attuned to the kairotic

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<sup>197</sup> Crosswhite, *Deep Rhetoric*, 174.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

moments found in the material world, away from, or underneath, the realm of the written word. Either way, the illusion, as Crosswhite writes, is “the view from within a kairotic reality but with no experience of or perspective on its being anything else but the way things really are.”<sup>199</sup> In both cases of the literate and the illiterate, the importance of understanding and feeling immanence is so that there can be an opening up – a feeling of the ways in which one can, even for a brief moment, be informed by a different way of being. I’d argue that one enters into various kairotic moments naturally and organically, which in turn influence their being-literate, or their being-illiterate within various kinds of symbolisms. It seems that if one is both at the same time, then one can become more-literate in one instance, and more-illiterate in the next: a realization that may seem banal, but that has, as I’ve been arguing, serious implications for how one talks about and teaches literacy-as-scripturality.

To return back to my earlier statement that literacy should be taught not as a currency, but rather as a valuable way in which to interact with and open oneself up to the world as a symbolic-aesthetic intensification, I’ve still yet to answer how we should actualize such a pedagogy. That is to say, what kind of model would I propose for this radically different way of thinking about, and by extension, teaching literacy so that we can multiply the number of emancipated-literates who always remember themselves as also illiterate, as also poets who can speak to the beauty of the kairotic moments and potentialities in every instant, cognizant of the horizontally adjacent indefinite number of literacies that influence (and can still be felt within) the dominant literacy. In response to this question of a new pedagogy, I admit that I don’t have any definite answers for

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 332.

organization. I'd say, even, that I've spent a large amount of this chapter arguing against any sort of institution that would try and teach scriptural-as-literacy. Even though I've argued that there are dangers to having educational methods structured within a specific type of institution that convinces or confuses people into believing there's only 'one way in which to learn' or that there's only 'one type of literacy' I also realize the importance of having structure – even a flexible structure – to act as a foundation for exploration. Keeping this in mind, I submit that there needs to be a changing of the way in which we think about reading and writing. Specifically, I'd like to see scripturality appropriate the current, colloquial definition for literacy (that is, competence with reading and reading in a dominant language), and for literacy to be thought of as a lived-practice. This fundamental shift in concepts would have major implications for teaching in general. I think, perhaps, it would be useful to encourage classes that study the history of symbolism and writing throughout history, problematizing the Western conception of literacy, and educating students about the past interaction with the world that laid the foundation for a scriptural symbolism to emerge. I would also encourage training – for students and teachers alike – that mirrored the training literacy tutors receive when working for non-profits that specialize in literacy education. These kinds of non-profit trainings focus extensively on socio-economic status, various kinds of symbolisms and discourses that go along with those statuses, and generally encourage an ethics and pedagogy of caring, in which the tutor is also always trying to learn from the tutee and teach scriptural-as-literacy in such a way that it makes sense to the tutee. That is, so they are able to connect scriptural life in a way that allows them to be more organized and mobile within the scriptural-economy without losing sense of their

interconnectedness and empathy. Thinking of including the type of literacy training non-profits offer, I'm reminded of Ivan Illich when he writes that "efforts to find a new balance in the global milieu depend on the denationalization of values."<sup>200</sup> In particular, I believe the pedagogy practices in the education institutions now have a lot to learn from the type of volunteering pedagogy practices that are encouraged by non-profits.

Instead of a literacy pedagogy that presumes the singular truth of its ontology and the achievement of individual accolades that necessarily support the belief that not all intelligences are equal, I'd advocate for a literacy education that incorporates a sense of vulnerability, empathy and connectivity. I call for a pedagogical methodology that allows for movement and dynamism and the belief in a multitude of literacies, all of which should be mobilized so as to, as Illich writes, "enhance [each person's] ability to tend and care and wait upon the other" knowing that each Other harbors within them a completely unique, poetic, literacy that has the potential to move the ever-changing concepts of rhetoric and literacy closer to beauty. In this way, the dichotomy of literacy and illiteracy, of self and other would be dismantled without losing the lesson it teaches us: that there's a response-ability always there, always informing us. There are many ways in which to engage with this responsibility. The only incorrect way is to think that there shouldn't be a change – that there isn't something one should do for the Other, for the world. The dichotomy needs dismantling, and folding literacy and illiteracy into each other, like a mobious strip on a horizontal axis, is just one very small way in which to lower the walls that have been erected.

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 114.

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