MAKING LITERATURE MATTER:
ACTOR-NETWORK AND NON-REPRESENTATIONAL APPROACHES
TO SOCIALLY TRANSFORMATIVE LITERATURE PEDAGOGIES

By

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ABSTRACT

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In this dissertation, I seek to open new approaches to thinking about the relationship between literature and social change. As such, the project begins in the thick of ongoing scholarly and practitioner conversations about the role literature pedagogy might play in engendering better futures. Many teachers and scholars argue that literature pedagogy must build a more equitable and just world, and they construct literature pedagogy around this aim. This dissertation begins by examining patterns of current approaches to socially transformative literature instruction, focusing in particular on the assumptions these pedagogies make about how change happens. I argue that current socially transformative literature pedagogies treat social change as the consequence of willful, rational behavior and thus reflect critical theory's emphasis on human agency. To make space for more ways of understanding how literature might foster social change, I introduce two discourses—Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and nonrepresentational theories (NRT)—that challenge critical theory's emphasis on agency and offer alternative explanations for how change happens. I flesh these discourses out at length and argue that current approaches to socially transformative literature pedagogies are incommensurate with the insights they offer. Finally, I playfully consider how these discourses might help English teachers and English Educators imagine new ways of fostering social change through literature instruction.

For my mother and my father;
For Lynn and Mary,
And for the countless other actors and affects tangled up
in the days and weeks and years that led me to this project

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Before acknowledging the individuals that contributed to this scholarly project, I'd like to acknowledge the way Actor-Network Theory and non-representational theories have complicated this task for me. If a course of action is the consequence of assemblages of actors and affects, if there exist "many metaphysical shades between full causality and sheer inexistence" (Latour, 2005, p. 72), then how can a scholar possibly offer an account of the individuals that made a dissertation possible? The task feels Herculean. Still, I'd like to try.

First, of course, are those individuals—those actors—who read my work, provided feedback, and pushed my thinking in generative directions. Dr. Ellen McCallum was gracious enough to join my committee late in the game—after I had already defended my proposal—and I am incredibly grateful that she was willing to be my "ringer" from the English department. Her insights helped me to consider how my interest in literature pedagogy might leave the realm of English education and curriculum theory and engage with conversations happening in the field of English. Dr. Sandro Barros's sometimes wild perspectives on theory and pedagogy opened new possibilities for my thinking and helped me to question the basic assumptions on which my project rested. I thank Sandro for making a mess out of my *mots* and my *choses*: his engagement with my work left me equal parts inspired, energized, confident, and baffled. Dr. Janine Certo's inexhaustible energy and enthusiasm for my project carried me through many of my doubts and misgivings while her work as a poet inspired me to take chances with my writing and to play with form and structure. I am grateful, too, that I had the chance to work with Janine in a poetry group during the year that I wrote this dissertation; I cannot imagine that the final chapter would look the way it does without the confidence I gained in that writing group.

In addition to these three committee members, I must also thank my advisors Dr. Mary Juzwik and Dr. Lynn Fendler, scholars I admire for their integrity, humility, courage, and curiosity. It is particularly hard for me to express my gratitude to these women because this dissertation was shaped not only by their thoughtful and generative feedback, but also by their careful mentorship, their patience, and their support of me as a scholar and a person. Mary offered me an incredible wealth of professional opportunities and helped me to find ways to weave my disparate scholarly interests into current conversations in the field of English Education. I am grateful for her guidance and friendship: I am not sure how I ever would have survived the last five years without our regular research club meetings, complete with hot tea, dark chocolate, and boisterous bursts of laughter. Lynn stoked my interest in the theories and scholars I otherwise would not have encountered in my program and helped me—over the course of countless conversations in her office and over a beer at Reno's East—to see that I am more free than I think I am (though I think I am still learning that lesson). It is hard for me to imagine producing this dissertation without Lynn's faith in me or the many pints of Reds Rye that we shared over the last few years.

A great number of my friends and fellow graduate students are a part of the "motley assortment" of actors that generated this dissertation; indeed, I suspect that nearly every peer I've encountered in my coursework, my teaching, or my life outside of Eirckson Hall contributed to this project. In particular, though, I'd like to thank Mandie Dunn for her feedback during our Friday research club meetings; Scott Jarvie for his inspiring curiosity, thoughtful and detailed feedback, and inexhaustible interest in hashing out all things critical over expensive coffee and cheap beer; Karenanna Creps for being a caring and supportive sounding board each Monday at our Pie Company writing sessions; Connor Ryan for sharing his English department perspective

on theory and pedagogy and for teaching me Cribbage—an ideal way to unwind during long Michigan winters; Wanfei Huang, James Wright, Perry Parks and Chris Thelen—four Critical Studies regulars—for jumping into New Materialism with me and always complicating my understanding of the world; Alecia Beymer for keeping me sane by discussing poetry and The Good Wife throughout my dissertation year; Eddie Glayzer for countless games of softball and peaceful lunches in the park and for helping me build a balanced and happy life in Michigan; and, finally, my first mentors at MSU, Kati and Mike Macaluso, for their guidance and kindness throughout the last five years.

There are more actors to acknowledge, of course. If I were to take this seriously as a New Materialist exercise, I'd trace connections between this dissertation and the coffee I sipped throughout the writing process, the cabin a high school friend so generously leant me during difficult weeks of mid-winter writing, and the television shows—Gilmore Girls and The Good Wife, in particular—that provided me with company and drama when the lonely life of dissertation writing took its toll.

This list could go on, and since it's likely already gone on too long, I'll end here: thank you, finally, to my mom and dad, two people whose lives have intersected with mine in such complicated ways that I can't imagine that I'll ever sort out just how much of this dissertation is a product of their deep love and support. Thank you, mom and dad, for encouraging my dreams.

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Windows and Mirrors, Faith and Doubt

Walter Dean Myer's 1999 young adult novel *Monster* opens with the image of the protagonist, 16-year old Steve Harmon, peering at his reflection in the mirror that hangs in his cell at a New York City detention center. On trial for allegedly participating in a robbery that ended a man's life, Steve spends the entire book looking for evidence that he is still the same person he was before his trial started. And in his opening journal entry, he describes the surprise he experienced when he looked into his cell's small rectangular mirror, a surface disfigured by previous inmates who had etched their names into it: "I see a face looking back at me but I don't recognize it," he writes; "It doesn't look like me" (p. 1).

While the novel opens with Steve's journal entry, the majority of the text is written as a movie script, drafted by Steve in order to tell the story the trial. Steve is never clear about *why* he writes up his experience as a film script, but his final journal entry, written 5 months after he is acquitted for the murder, suggests that Steve used his film script to make sense of his experience and his identity. In this entry, he writes that in the months after the trial, he has continued to create films. In these new films, he constantly films and re-films himself telling the camera who he is, setting up his camera from various angles, sometimes turning the camera's lens on his reflection in a mirror. He does this, he explains in the novel's final paragraph, in order to gain self-knowledge. "I want to know who I am," he writes; "I want to look at myself a thousand times to look for one true image" (p. 281).

Framed by the images of a distorted mirror and Steve's futile attempts to film "one true image" of himself, *Monster* displays a skeptical orientation towards representational tools. Neither the mirror nor the camera, it seems, will offer an unmediated or accurate glimpse of

reality. At the same time, however, Steve's dogged pursuit of "one true image" suggests that lives and livelihoods are often tied up with representational tools in profound and high-stakes ways, a point underscored in both the world of the novel and the production of the novel. For example, the trial itself is a contest between opposing representations of the crime in question, and Steve's future depends upon his lawyer's ability to represent him and the crime effectively, thus convincing the jury that Steve played no part in the murder. And Steve turns to representational tools--a film script and journal entries--in order to "make sense of" trial (p. 4) and retain a sense of his own humanity during a dehumanizing process. As he writes in a journal entry, he hopes the script with keep him from "going crazy" in the detention center" (p. 45). Finally, the novel itself is an attempt to produce humanizing representations of black children. As Walter Dean Myers (2014) explains, "books transmit values," and in writing about young people of color, he has two aims: first, to make sure that children of color see "humanized" representations of themselves in literature, and second, to encourage "future white loan officers and future white politicians" to see "human" images of children of color (n.p.). To borrow Bishop's (1990a) language, Myers aims to represent Black life so that his books can function like mirrors that reflect Black experience to Black children and windows that "help them understand the multicultural nature of the world they live in" (p. 1).

Myers's aims feel particularly salient to me in the spring of 2017, a moment "haunted" (Baker-Bell, Butler, & Johnson, 2017) by the murders of Black and Brown women and men, the mass incarceration of people of color, the school to prison pipeline, and a White supremacy that operates in both obvious and insidious ways. Several months ago we elected a president who built a zealous following by running on a platform of racism and xenophobia, and his election emboldened the amplified the voices of white nationalists. Racism--explicit and implicit,

individual and institutional—is very much so a part of the American landscape in 2017 and its effects destroy lives and communities. Thus, the political and social stakes for representing Black children in humanizing ways—as Myers sets out to do in *Monster*—are incredibly high.

Despite the important role that representation plays in the novel, however, *Monster* does not perform a straightforward faith in representational tools. Instead, it demonstrates the same skeptical orientation suggested by the framing of the novel. The end of the trial illustrates this skepticism. Although a jury acquits Steve of the murder, his script ends with an image that undermines the verdict: as Steve opens his arms to hug his attorney, she turns her back to him and the camera zooms out as Steve stands still with his arms outstretched like "some strange beast, a monster" (p. 277). Of course, the word "monster" is precisely the label the prosecuting attorney used to represent Steve during her opening statements, so the final image of the film encourages the film's audience--and the readers of the novel itself--to question the verdict. Thus, although Steve doggedly attempts to portray his experience "as it actually happened!" (p. 9), the final scene gestures towards the futility of his attempts to represent himself and his experience during the trial.

I am not sure what to make of this tension—how to square *Monster*'s skeptical orientation towards the efficacy of representational tools with the political stakes Myers sets out for his novel—but I discuss this tension at length because it parallels my own conflicted orientation to representation. During the five years I spent teaching secondary English Language Arts (ELA) in rural Iowa, I designed my literature pedagogy around the belief that books like *Monster* would help my primarily white students, middle-class and heterosexual students better understand systemic oppression like racism, classism, sexism and homophobia. Like Myers, I had faith that the representations that literature offers would provide a window into the

experiences of others and that these insights might make the world a better place. But over those five years, I also developed a skepticism towards the efficacy of representational tools. I began to wonder whether or not literature functions as a window and whether or not it can make the world a better place. This skepticism probably emerged slowly, the product of many attempts to foster social change through my literature pedagogy, but in my memory this doubt was ushered in by one experience in particular: the time two students read *Monster* as part of a social justice themed literature unit.

It was late in the year and my students were participating in literature circles, reading young adult and canonical books that explored the relationship between power and oppression. Two of my students—both white 16-year old boys—were reading *Monster*. I had put *Monster* on the list of books that students could choose for their literature circle assignments because the book highlights institutionalized and systematic racism: the prosecutor calls Steve a "monster" in her opening remarks and spends the bulk of the trial associating Steve with racist stereotypes of young men of color; Steve's attorney tells him that because he is Black, the jury assumed presumed him guilty from the moment they laid eyes on him; witness testimony highlights the endemic racism endemic of the police and the justice system.

The book's clear representations of institutionalized racism were lost on my two students. I remember drawing up my chair to them one day during their discussion and asking them to tell me about their take on the effects of social injustice on Steve's life. For them, there was no question about it: the novel was not about social injustice, it was about a young Black man who-- like so many of the Black men they saw in movies and in conservative news media outlets--made a bad decision and now might spend his life in prison. I remember working hard to argue against their perspective. I pointed out the way that the prosecutor relies on racist stereotypes to paint the

image of Steve as a criminal and I argued that the evidence supporting Steve's conviction was so flimsy that had he been convicted, it most certainly would've been a manifestation of the jury's bias against young Black men.

The boys in my class listened, but when they walked out of class I felt the sting of failure, and I wondered what I could have done differently to help them see and interrogate the systems of power at play in the book. Furthermore, as time has marched on, I have only grown more convinced that their engagement with *Monster* did little to encourage my students to understand and attend to institutionalized oppression. I say this because I am connected with these two students via social media, and thus I have been privy to displays of their political and social beliefs. One of these students--now in his early 20s--recently began sharing his political beliefs quite openly on Facebook, ardently supporting Donald Trump and critiquing liberals and liberal causes. Earlier this year, he posted a video by the conservative talk-show phenome Tomi Lahren in which she excoriates Colin Kaepernick for kneeling in protest of racism in America, and on election day, he posted a meme that declared, "Election prediction: Democrats to take an early lead which will drastically change later in the afternoon once Republicans get off work." The doubt that I felt that day my students and I discussed *Monster* flares up each time I encounter this student's political posts because I can see that my unit on literature and social change did little to help him understand the relationship between race, class, power, and privilege.

Despite my teaching experiences, however, I cannot quite shake my faith that literature pedagogy has the capacity to catalyze social change, and this tenacious faith has shaped my work as a teacher educator. As the instructor of *Reading and Responding to Children's Literature*, I asked my students to read books that featured unfamiliar children and communities and asked them to consider the ways those texts functioned as windows and mirrors. I asked them to

imagine how a book like Shaun Tan's *The Arrival*—a wordless picture book depicting an immigrant's experience moving to a new, unfamiliar land—might challenge discrimination against migrants and how Jacqueline Woodson's biographical book of poetry *Brown Girl Dreaming* might help children think through the intersections of race, gender, religion, and sexuality. I carried this approach to literature pedagogy into my work as an instructor of the English methods course at Michigan State, asking my preservice teachers to create unit plans that would engage secondary students in critical analysis of race, class, gender, and sexuality in a young adult novel. As you can see, experiences as a teacher have given me doubts about the efficacy of using literature to catalyze social change, but they haven't entirely undermined my faith. Like Myers and Steve, I can't shake my faith that despite all the evidence to the contrary, representational tools can help support justice, equity, and dignity.

This interplay of faith and doubt in literature pedagogy undergirds this dissertation. On the one hand, the project stems from my doubts about the efficacy of current approaches to socially transformative literature pedagogies (STLPs); on the other hand, it engages with my faith that despite all evidence to the contrary, literature classrooms *can* be sites of social change. Buoyed by my faith in literature pedagogy, I turn to two unexpected bodies of scholarship-- actor-network theory (ANT) from sociology and non-representational theory (NRT) from cultural geography--to see if they might help me to reimagine socially transformative literature pedagogy. Although these "theories" (I use scare quotes because scholars of ANT and NRT reject grand theory) emerged in fields quite distant from the field of English Education, they both re-conceptualize the social, the subject, and the political, and the nature of change in ways that can impact English Education's understanding of the role literature plays in fostering social

change. Indeed, I think that ANT and NRT open up exciting new approaches to STLPs, and in this project I aim to persuade you to agree.

Literature, Social Change, and Pedagogy

Before moving on, I'd like to take a step back and clarify a few of the key terms of this project, beginning with literature. Literature, as Macaluso (2016) argues, is "notoriously fluid," a term that variously refers to "a language art of narrative, poetic, or dramatic quality" (p. 5), narrative fiction (e.g. Alsup, 2013), any piece of evocative and creative writing, including creative nonfiction and song lyrics (Purves and Beach, 1969), and all "fictional and nonfictional narrative, poetic, and dramatic texts" (Macaluso, 2016, p. 5). For the purposes of my project, I open up the term "literature" to include the any kind of text that scholars and teachers use to theorize or engage in socially transformative literature pedagogy. My understanding of literature thus includes canonical texts traditionally considered high "quality" (e.g. Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, Petrone, 2014; Choo, 2016), young adult novels (e.g. Blackburn , Clark & Nemeth, 2015; Malo-Juvera, 2014, 2016), children's books (e.g. Brooks and McNair, 2015; Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014), comic books and graphic novels (e.g. Low 2017; Park, 2016), hip hop and songs (e.g. Belle, 2016; Kelly, 2015), and poetry (e.g. Xerri & Agius, 2015).

In addition to clarifying the term "literature," I would also like to clarify my use of the terms "socially transformative" and "social change." I use these terms to describe any kind of literature pedagogy intended to challenge and reimagine the status quo. In some cases, these pedagogies are framed in activist terms. For example, in his call for a critical English Education, for example, former National Council of Teachers of English president Ernest Morrell (2005) argues that ELA teachers and English educators should see themselves as activists who "seek to use the discipline to transform the world" (p. 319). More recently, Baker-Bell, Butler and

Johnson (2017) argue that ELA classrooms should fight back against the recent deaths of Black and Brown women and men by engaging in "transformative conversations about anti-blackness, anti-brownness, homophobia, and other forms of xenophobia" (p. 123). In other cases, however, attempts to challenge and reimagine the status quo are less explicitly tied to activism. Alsup (2013), for example, calls for literature instruction that will contribute to social change by supporting readers' abilities to empathize while Choo (2016) advocates for a model of literature instruction that might foster a more cosmopolitan world by engendering openness and hospitality to strangers. Because I would like to consider myriad approaches to upending the status quo, I define the terms "socially transformative" and "social change," broadly, using them to describe explicitly activist pedagogies and more moderate and cautious attempts to change the world.

Finally, I use the term "pedagogy" broadly as well, to refer to any and all teaching practices that aim to foster social change through engagement with literature, including but not limited to curriculum, instructional strategies and lesson/unit planning. As you'll see in the next chapter, these pedagogies can take a variety of forms and use literature in myriad ways. In some cases, literature functions as a launching-point for critical conversations about power relations, conversations intended to help students interrogate and transform inequity and injustice. In other cases, literature functions as a mirror or a window, giving students and empowering glimpse into their own cultures and communities or offering insight into the lived experiences of people from other cultures and communities.

Socially Transformative Literature Pedagogies

As the opening of this introduction suggests, the impetus for this project is deeply personal: the tension between my faith and doubt in current approaches to STLPs compelled me to imagine new ways of catalyzing social change through literature pedagogy. But this project is

not merely an intervention into my work as an ELA teacher and teacher-educator; it also engages

in a field-wide conversation about the purpose of literature instruction.

Stakeholders of English Language Arts have long disagreed over the aims and purposes

of literary study. Oft referenced histories of the school subject English (Applebee, 1974; Gere et

al., 1992) highlight the field's "identity crisis" (Brauer and Clark, 2007) and argue that English--

and literary study in particular--has been charged with a myriad of often-contradictory aims: to

improve morality, cultivate a productive workforce and intelligent citizenry, perpetuate an elite

class, foster students' personal development, and counteract social inequality (Gere et al., 1992).

Indeed, as Applebee (1974) points out, English has been shaped by conflicting aims ever since

its emergence as a school subject in the 1890s, when it was "fully intertwined" with at least three

aims: to support moral and cultural development, intellectual growth and to foster students'

appreciation for literature (p. 1).

Today, the messiness and "incoherence" (Luke, 2004; Sperling and DiPardo, 2008) of the

myriad aims of English Language Arts is particularly visible in debates around the Common

Core State Standards and their effects on the curriculum of the English Language Arts

classroom. Developed by governors, and state commissioners of education from nearly every

U.S. state and territory, the Common Core State Standards are "consistent, real-world learning

goals" for English Language Arts and Mathematics intended to "ensure" that "all students,

regardless of where they live, are graduating high school prepared for college, career, and life"

(tinyurl.com/lged58f). While some teachers, scholars, and English educators have argued that the

standards are commensurate with well-established and celebrated approaches to ELA (Beach,

Thein, & Webb, 2016; Isero, 2013; Jago, 2011; Smith, Appleman, & Wilhelm, 2014), others

recoil at the CCSS, arguing that its neoliberal emphasis on standards and accountability (Brass,

2016; Newkirk, 2012) is at odds with alternative goals of ELA, including the pursuit of pleasure (Smith, Appleman, & Wilhelm, 2014), wisdom (Smith, Appleman, & Wilhelm, 2014), and social justice and understanding (Alsup, 2013).

These debates around the CCSS are of particular interest to me because they have fomented energetic defenses of the teaching of literature. Critiques of the CCSS literature standards attend in particular to the CCSS' emphasis on "complex texts" and the fact that the CCSS materials differentiate between "stories and literature" and "more complex texts that provide facts and background knowledge" (National Governors Association). Critics argue that this emphasis on text complexity and the method the CCSS makers used to measure text complexity has the potential to "devalue" "traditional fiction, particularly long novels" (Alsup, 2013, p. 181). In addition to this line of critique, teachers and scholars have also criticized the CCSS emphasis on text-dependent questions (Alsup, 2013; Gilbert, 2014; Newkirk, 2013), which many teachers and scholars believe is a "sterile and...inhumanely fractured model of what goes on in very deep reading" (Newkirk, 2013, p. 28).

In the wake of what many read as an assault on the teaching of literature, teachers, scholars and English educators have drafted impassioned defenses of literature pedagogy in academic journals, popular newsmedia sites, and professional and personal blogs. These defenses make myriad claims about the power of literature pedagogy, but I am particularly interested in the regularity with which I see teachers and scholars critique the CCSS ELA standards because the standards ignore the power of literature to make the world a better place by fostering social understanding (e.g. Aguilar, 2014; Alsup, 2013; Belluck, 2013; Chiaet, 2013; Strauss, 2016). The power of literary fiction, these critics contend, cannot be captured by the CCSS's measures of "text complexity" or "text-dependent" multiple choice questions; fictional texts, they argue,

"change our hearts" and that means that "reading shapes who we are as people and what we stand for as adults" (Strauss, 2016). According to these critics, the problem with the CCSS lies in its emphasis on standards and its failure to make space for their vision of the purpose of ELA: to teach character education (Strauss, 2016), empathy (Simmons, 2016), and social understanding and justice (Alsup, 2013).

In some ways, this project is aligned with scholars and commentators like Straus, Simmons and Alsup. After all, it stems in part from my faith in literature pedagogy capacity to make the world a better place. At the same time however, the project also stems from my doubts about current approaches to STLPs. As such, this investigation into new approaches to STLPs is intended to align with *and* extend the argument that schools and teachers should not reduce literature pedagogy to the mere transmission of literacy skills.

Re-Imagining How Change Happens

To wrap up this introduction, I would like to provide some insight regarding my choice to rely on ANT and NRT in my investigation into new possibilities for STLPs. My inspiration for this move is Fendler's (2016) essay "How is it possible to make a difference? Agency, actors, and affect as discourses of change in Education research." Fendler's essay analyzes three discourses--critical theory, ANT, and non-representational theories--by considering the assumptions each discourse makes about "how it is possible to make a difference" (p. 29). She argues that through the lens of critical theory, "change is possible when human agents resist the progressive encroachment of--or colonization by--instrumental reasoning into the life world" (p. 31). In critical theory, then, it is possible to "make a difference" because humans have agency, which allows them to change the world through resistance to "dominant or hegemonic social, cultural, political, and economic forces" (p. 31).

Fendler contrasts this assumption to how change is made with the assumptions at the heart of ANT and non-representational theories. As she points out, ANT rejects the notion of agency as an explanation of change and replaces it with "networks or assemblages of associations involving an indeterminate number of 'actants'" (p. 34). Through the lens of ANT, all elements of the world become actors in their own right, entities that "make a difference" (Latour, 2005, p. 71). In ANT, baskets, hammers, tea kettles, and speed-bumps are conceptualized as social actors (p. 71). Crucially, nothing in ANT acts as a determining force. While critical theory treats hegemonic social forces and human action as the source of change, ANT asserts that change occurs through interactions between sets of coactors that all contribute to the creation of difference. Baskets, Latour says, do not "'cause' the fetching of provisions" and hammers do not "'impose' the hitting of the nail" (p. 71); instead, "there might exist many metaphysical shades between full causality and sheer inexistence" (p. 72). Things may not determine outcomes in the world, Latour argues, but they might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on" (p. 72).

After contrasting ANT with critical theory, Fendler moves on to describe non-representational theories and their assumptions about how difference is made. Like ANT, non-representational theories imagine that change is produced in the interaction of heterogeneous associations of entities. In non-representational theories differ from ANT, however, in opening generating an "infinite number of relationships," all of which have the capacity to generate change. Non-representational theories have this capacity, Fendler argues, because of their special emphasis on the role affect plays in catalyzing change. Understood as something separate from emotion, affect "refers to what happens the moment the human body encounters something in the world" (p. 38). Because of this special role for affect, Fendler contends that non-representational

theories are able to "consider the widest possible set of entities as having the capacity to make a difference, which may include people, objects, atmospheres, feelings tones of voice, ambient noise, machinery, Leffe Blonde, and constitutional law" (p. 38).

Reading Fendler's essay jolted me into seeing STLPs in a new way. Her description of how critical theory understands change resonated with my understanding of how current approaches to STLPs understand the role that literature will play in fostering social change. Indeed, I could see myself and my own pedagogy in her description of critical theory, since I had hoped that interrogating institutionalized racism in the book *Monster* would make challenge racism in their daily lives. Indeed, I had hoped that my literature pedagogy would produce change agents and that these students would leave my classroom and attempt to fight back against "dominant or hegemonic social, cultural, political, and economic forces" (p. 31). In addition to illuminating the alignment between my literature pedagogy and critical theory, Fendler's article also suggested that ANT and non-representational theories might offer fruitful paths for reimagining how literature might foster social change. I wondered, for example, what it would look like for STLPs to reflect ANT's conception of change as the product of a heterogeneous assortment of actors, including, texts, students, teachers, the texture of students' desks, the lunch the cafeteria is serving that day, and the classroom ceiling fan that only spins at the highest speed possible. Likewise, I wondered what it might mean for STLPs to account for the non-representational emphasis on affect. Would attending to affect make it easier or harder to catalyze social change?

In short, Fendler's article released my imagination, inviting me to consider literature pedagogy as a catalyst of social change in ways that I never had before. I suppose you could say

that it--along with a whole slew of actors, including things and affects--jolted me into imagining new approaches to literature instruction.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation begins from Fendler's (2016) inspirational analysis of three different discourses of change and investigates how ANT and NRT might help the field of English Education imagine new approaches to socially transformative literature pedagogies. I begin by mapping current approaches to STLPs and investigating patterns in the design of these pedagogies and the assumptions that undergird them. In my description of current STLPs, I make three main points: first, that these pedagogies are often designed with a specific social problem in mind; second, they are designed with a specific student in mind; third, they privilege the representational functions of language. I then briefly introduce both ANT and NRT and argue that these three aspects of STLPs are at odds with the insights of ANT and NRT. To close the chapter, I draw from some "outlier" examples of STLPs in order to gesture towards new possibilities for fostering change through literature pedagogy.

Following this mapping chapter, I then turn to ANT in chapter three. This chapter begins by outlining ANT's central tenets. To do this, I—following Latour—juxtapose ANT with what Latour calls the "sociology of the social." Because ANT grew out of sociologists dissatisfaction with the sociology of the social, juxtaposing the two helps me to highlight its commitments. After outlining ANT, I draw special attention to ANT's metaphysical principles, which include actors, irreduction, translation, and alliance; in addition to these metaphysical principles, I also discuss ANT's understanding of power and politics. Once I've established these principles, I argue that current approaches to STLPs are incommensurate with ANT, and I explore how STLPs might incorporate the insights of ANT.

The next chapter focuses on non-representational theory. Like my chapter on ANT, I begin my chapter on NRT by outlining its central tenets. I focus here on NRT's commitment to practices, an associative account of the social, a decentered subject, and events that keep the world unfolding. I then consider how these central tenets shape NRT's conception of the potlical and political action in order to emphasize the deeply political nature of non-representational thought. Finally, I turn again to literature pedagogy and consider how NRT's central commitments and its understanding of political action might shape the way the field of English education thinks about the relationship between literature pedagogy and social change.

Finally, I end with an experimental conclusion. The insights of both ANT and NRT make it difficult to imagine leaving readers with a tidy recast of the big ideas of this project. In lieu of such a chapter, I instead draw from Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affects* and compose a number of short pieces written in a variety of different tones and styles. My intention here is to present the "series of little somethings" "spawned" (p. 9) by my dissertation project. My aim in this last chapter, then, is not to represent some final word on the dissertation project; instead, I aim to provoke and unsettle.

CHAPTER 2
BOOKS AND BETTER FUTURES: MAPPING CURRENT APPROACHES TO SOCIALLY TRANSFORMATIVE LITERATURE PEDAGOGY

Introduction

This project begins in the thick of ongoing and passionate scholarly and practitioner conversations about the role English Language Arts (ELA) might play in engendering social change. Many teachers and scholars argue that English Education must help build a more equitable and just world. As Alsup et al. (2006) write, "while we may want to teach our students, K-adult, to read, write, and create texts in a variety of forms and genres, we also want to do no less than help them change their world" (p. 929). Of course, there are many ways to help students change the world--many problems to respond to, many approaches to take--and the variety of different approaches ELA for social change is evident in the vast array of journal issues devoted to the topic. *English Journal,* for example, has published a number of issues that approach this question from different angles, including their March 2017 issue on the impact of Black textual expressivities, their September 2016 issue on Native Feminist Texts, their November 2013 issue on teaching English to support democracy, and their March 2013 issue on teaching ELA in the age of incarceration. Research-oriented journals also openly explore this question. For example, *Research in the Teaching of English* recently published an issue that considered how the field might challenge the colonial legacies of English Education (May 2016) and one investigating relationships among racism, linguistic discrimination, and writing assessment (February 2014). For its part, the *Journal of Language and Literacy Education* recently published special issues titled "Literacy and/for Social Justice" (2014) and "Activist Literacies" (2013). Many of us care deeply about the role that ELA plays in reifying or challenging the status quo, and as these many themed issues illustrate, the field of English Education returns to the topic again and again to

grapple with exactly how our work as teachers, teacher-educators, and researchers might help to build better futures.

To grapple with this question, researchers and practitioners often attend to a specific component of the ELA curriculum: while some scholars consider the role that writing instruction or assessment plays in promoting social change, others consider the role of speaking/listening, or the role of non-fiction texts in promoting social change. Because *my* project aims to open up new possibilities for thinking about socially transformative literature pedagogies (STLPs), I begin by sketching current conceptualizations of STLPs. To map these current trends, I read peer-reviewed research and practitioner-oriented articles published since 2012, a modest body of about 100 articles that I collected by skimming seven prominent journals[1] in the field of English and/or literacy education. I supplemented this search by reviewing the last five annotated bibliographies of the field published by *Research in the Teaching of English* in order to identify relevant articles published in other journals. Each article used in creating this sketch of the field puts forward a vision of literature education that links literature pedagogy with social change, but the format of the articles differs greatly: some pieces (especially those aimed at practicing teachers) detail specific unit or lesson plans designed to cultivate social change; other pieces consider the power of literature pedagogy to change the world through a theoretical lens; still other pieces are empirical, designed to examine the efficacy of and/or reactions to literature pedagogy designed to foster change.

Of course, my aim in this chapter is not only to sketch the contours of the field; I also would like to argue that the field of English Education would benefit from exploring how new materialist theories--actor-network theory (ANT) and non-representational theory (NRT), in

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[1] The journals I focused on in my first round of literature collection included *English Journal*, *Research in the Teaching of English*, *Reading Research Quarterly*, *Changing English*, *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*, *English Education*, *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*.

particular--can help us to imagine new ways of fostering social change through literature pedagogy. To this end, I organize this essay around three trends in STLPs that became visible when I read this body of scholarship through the lens of ANT and NRT. First, scholars and researchers tend to produce and/or theorize STLPs by first identifying a social problem and then constructing lessons and units around this problem. Second, scholars and teachers not only pre-identify the social problem to which their teaching will respond, they also *a priori* categorize their students, dividing them into one of two categories: (a) those marginalized by the social problem their pedagogy addresses and (b) those unaffected and/or privileged by the problem (e.g. pedagogy intended to challenge transphobia will address *either* trans* students *or* cis-gender students). Finally, these pedagogies privilege the representational functions of language, ignoring other possible ways of engaging with text. The way I articulate this last trend may require a bit of explaining, since it may be tricky to imagine that language has functions that *aren't* representational. To treat language as representational is to use it as a symbolic "pointer to meaning," a meaning that is "assumed to lie 'behind' or 'beyond' words" (Fendler, 2014, p. 4). But language has other functions. As Fendler points out, language can be representational, performative, and/or figurative. This will become important later in this chapter (and again in chapter four) because NRT pays special attention to the non-representational functions of language.

The bulk of this paper fleshes out these trends. In the section that follows, I detail the social problems to which current STLPs respond, emphasizing how these social problems function as the impetus and guiding force of each literature pedagogy. Once I've established the relationship between current social problems and STLPs, I then describe four categories of STLPs, using this portion of the paper to highlight how STLPs are shaped by their intended

student audience and an emphasis on the representational functions of language. After explicating these trends, I briefly introduce ANT and NRT and explain how three ideas from ANT and NRT shaped the way I sketched English Education's current conceptions of STLP. In this portion I also argue that English Education's understanding of the relationship between literature pedagogy and social change contradicts the insights of ANT and NRT. In closing, I attempt to set the stage for chapters three and four by discussing a few "outlier" STLPs that do not quite fit into the framework established in this essay as a way to gesture towards alternative ways of cultivating social change through literature pedagogy.

STLPs: Responses to Social Problems

The vast majority of STLPs outlined or studied in the field of English Education identifies a specific social problem in which literature pedagogy might intervene. In each article, the identified social problem functions as the foundation of the piece's vision of literature pedagogy and its enactment of that vision. It shapes the pedagogy's explicit or implied aims, its curriculum, and its instructional strategies. In this section, I'd like to take a closer look at some of the social problems that function as the foundation for the field's understanding of literature pedagogy's role in promoting social change, focusing in particular on how author's frame this social issues.

Over the last five years, a great deal of work has engaged with the question of how literature pedagogy might challenge racism. For example, in their editorial introduction to the *English Education* special issue *From Racial Violence to Racial Justice: Praxis and Implications for English (Teacher) Education*, Baker-Bell, Butler and Johnson (2017) spend three pages detailing the recent deaths of Black and Brown women and men across the U.S., deaths that "haunt" the authors (p. 116). They argue that although racial violence is nothing new--indeed,

they still sit with the haunting of Emmet Till, killed August 28th, 1955—the sheer number of

Black and Brown deaths in recent years demands that the field ask "*What should be the

responsibility of* all *English educators in the wake of terror, death, and racial violence?"* (p.

123). For the authors, this question points to the need for ELA classrooms to use all aspects of

instruction, including literature instruction, to challenge anti-blackness and racial violence.

While they do not talk explicitly about the role literature instruction can play in challenging

racism, they do gesture towards their vision of STLPs when they argue that the literature

classroom perpetuates racial violence when it fails to "include literature that portrays Black and

Brown people as heroes and victors" and "Black and Brown women as heroines and activists" (p.

124). Implicitly, then, the authors of this very recent special issue advocate for literature

pedagogy that responds to racial violence by not merely including more representations of black

and brown people, but including representations that underscores heroism, agency, and activism

in the black community.

Like Baker-Bell, Butler, and Johnson, a great number of other scholars and teachers have

grounded their vision of STLP in the need for ELA classrooms to challenge racism and racial

violence. For example, those who advocate for grounding literature education in hip-hop (e.g.

Alim, 2007; Belle, 2016; Hall, 2017; Kelly, 2015; Petchauer, 2013) argue that using hip-hop as a

literary text has the potential to reframe what counts as a literary text and in the process engage

students marginalized by racism in critical conversations around power, knowledge, and art, a

move that they contend will combat racial violence. As Belle (2016) argues, this kind of

literature pedagogy challenges the status quo and supports social change by encouraging students

to see that "their opinions are valuable" (p. 293). Like supporters of hip-hop pedagogy, scholars

and teachers invested in anti-racist literature pedagogy for primarily White students (Borsheim-

Black, 2015; Haddix & Dennis-Price, 2013; Low, 2017; Schieble, 2012) also aim to challenge

racism through literature pedagogy. Borsheim-Black's (2015) study, for example, points to the

complex nature of anti-racist literature pedagogy in White contexts and challenges the field to

produce innovations that might better prepare teachers to resist racism in these contexts. For her

part, Schieble (2012) constructs an anti-racist literature pedagogy that use Young Adult novels to

engage White students in critical conversations that "critique how power has an impact on

people's social, material, and psychological lives" (p. 213). These are just a few of the many

STLPs that respond to racism[2], but these examples nicely point out the wide variety of STLPs

that respond to racism and racial violence.

Teachers and researchers also produce STLPs in response to homophobia and

heteronormativity in the hopes that their literature pedagogy will make schools and society safer

places for LGBTQ youth (Blackburn, Clark and Nemeth, 2015; Burke and Greenfield, 2016;

Dodge and Crutcher, 2015; Logan, Laswell, Hood & Watson, 2014; Malo-Juvera, 2016).

Blackburn, Clark and Nemeth (2015), for example, argue that fiction portraying a variety of

sexual and gender identities might disrupt received notions of sexuality and gender, thus

providing "students with a wider array of ways of being in the world" (p. 44). While Blackburn,

Clark and Nemeth consider the role that the literature curriculum might play in supporting

students marginalized and school and in society by their gender or sexual identity, Dodge and

Crutcher (2015) analyze LGBTQ fiction in order to select texts that might disrupt homophobia

and the bullying that homophobia often produces in school contexts. And in one of the first

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[2] To keep the above paragraph concise, I skimmed the surface of scholarship that develops
literature pedagogy in response to racism and racial violence. Other recent scholarship includes
Braden & Rodriquez (2016); Campano, Ghiso & Sánchez (2013); Cartledge et al. (2016);
Cherry-McDaniel (2017); Engles and Kory (2013); Haddix & Price-Dennis (2013); Hill (2013);
Kirkland (2017); Low (2017); Lysaker and Sedberry (2017); Schieble (2012); Sciurba (2015);
Ship (2017); Thomas (2015); Yuan (2017).

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quantitative empirical studies to measure the effects of LGBTQ literature on students'

homophobia, Malo-Juvera (2016) illustrates how a unit that promoted reader-response

engagements with the queer YA novel *The Geography Club* lowered students' homophobic

attitudes, as expressed on a post-unit survey. As such, his work suggests that literature pedagogy

has the capacity to foster social change by challenging LGBTQ discrimination.

While racism and homophobia are the most common social issues to which STLPs

respond, there are a number of other social problems with which STLPs engage. For example,

some scholars have considered how literature pedagogy might help to challenge gender

inequality (Ajayi, 2015; Chi, 2012; Hayik, 2016; Malo-Juvera, 2014). They argue, as Ajayi

(2015) does, that literature pedagogy can encourage women to "interrogate" gender hierarchies

and rewrite unequal social structures. Others have attended to how literature pedagogy might

combat language discrimination and inequality (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; Devereaux &

Wheeler, 2013; Park, 2016), how it might challenge the legacy of colonialism and support

Indigenous rights (Chaudri & Schau, 2016; Metzger, Box & Blasingame, 2013; Strong-Wilson,

Amarou, Phipps, 2014; Wiltse, Johnston, & Yang, 2014), and how it might humanize

documented and undocumented migrants (Cummings, 2013; Dooley, Tait & Zabarjadi, 2016;

Xerri & Agius, 2015). There are of course, many other, less commonly discussed social concerns

that give rise to STLPs, including religious intolerance (Davila, 2015), discrimination against the

disabled (Hayn, Clemoons and Olvey, 2016), and discrimination against the poor (Labadie, Pole

& Rodgers, 2013)[3].

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[3] This list illustrates the values of the field of English Education at the present moment and thus
gestures towards gaps in what we consider to be a "social problem." Although I absolutely stand
behind the values and concerns illustrated by this list, I am simultaneously concerned about the
omission of other social and political issues, including environmental degradation and injustice,
neoliberalism, capitalism, Islamophobia, and religious intolerance.

Before closing this section, I would like to point out that although most of the scholarship that advances a STLP responds to a pre-identified social problem, there are exceptions. Choo's (2016) article on literature instruction an ethical cosmopolitanism argues that one way literature instruction might foster social change is by helping students cultivate a "hospitable openness to others without conditions, particularly those from communities that are distant and discriminated against" (p. 404). This openness can engender better social futures, Choo suggests, because it has the potential to support ethical cosmopolitanism, a "transnational commitment to the fraternity of human beings" (p. 403). Choo's STLP, then, does not respond to a specific social problem; instead, it attempts to help students develop more equitable and fair orientations towards others. For their part, Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, and Petron's (2014) also theorize an STLP that does not respond to a specific social problem. In their essay, they outline an approach to teaching canonical literature that engages students in critical conversations about power structures. Their framework provides guidance to teachers who would like students to interrogate power structures, but it does not respond to a particular kind of social problem. These two pieces however, are the exceptions that prove the rule; by and large, STLPs respond to a specific and pre-identified social problem.

Approaches to Cultivating Social Change through Literature Pedagogy

In this section, I would like to continue to map the field by organizing these pedagogies around four categories: (a) "critical literature pedagogies for liberation," (b) "critical literature pedagogies for allies," (c) "mirror pedagogies," and (d) "window pedagogies." I use these categories because they help me to highlight the second and third similarity between STLPs: that they are designed with a specific kind of student in mind (either a student marginalized by a social problem or unaffected/privileged by that problem) and they prioritize the representational

functions of language. As I illustrate in figure 1, two of these four categories -- critical literature

pedagogies for liberation and mirror pedagogies--are designed for students who are

marginalized, traumatized and/or violated by the social issue to which a specific STLP responds;

the other two categories--critical literature pedagogies for allies and window pedagogies--are

designed for students who are unaffected or privileged by the social problem. Because STLPs are

also shaped by assumptions about how literature affects readers, an STLP can also be

categorized based on whether it assumes that a text on its own can make a difference or if the

text must be accompanied by instruction that underscores the role of power in the text and/or the

production and reception of a text. Thus, although window and mirror pedagogies are designed

for different kinds of students, both kinds of STLPs assume that a reader's encounter with a text

is enough to foster social change; critical literature pedagogies (for liberation and allies), on the

other hand, assume that the reader's encounter with the text will not foster change on its own, an

assumption aligned with Glazier and Seo's (2005) assertion that "the text cannot stand alone to

achieve desired ends" (p. 688). Critical literature pedagogies, then, incorporate instruction that

engages students in critical conversations about the relations of power represented by the text.

Figure 1. Four approaches to socially transformative literature pedagogy

Critical Literature Pedagogy for Liberation	Critical Literature Pedagogy for Allies
Mirror Pedagogy	Window Pedagogy

 For the rest of this section, I discuss each of these four broad approaches to cultivating social

change through literature pedagogy by discussing a few exemplars in each category. In my

descriptions, I highlight how each type of STLP is designed for students whom teachers have

pre-identified as either "marginalized" or "non-marginalized" and emphasize how each approach

prioritizes the representational function of language.

Critical Literature Pedagogy for Liberation

My notion of Critical Literature Pedagogy[4] for Liberation is grounded in critical literacy,

an approach to literacy pedagogy (including literature pedagogy, writing pedagogy, public

speaking, etc.) that draws from Freire's (2014) call for education that "enables young people to

read both the word and the world critically" (Janks, 2014, p. 349) in an effort to foster social

transformation (Garcia et al, 2015). Practitioners of critical literacy respond to Freire's call by

supporting students as they deconstruct texts in ways that help them to see the "existing power

relations" at play (Morrell, 2005, p. 313). This kind of critical engagement with texts often

follows the same pattern: first, students "call into question and name what is constructed as

'normal' or 'natural;'" next, they "examine how these normalized social arrangements produce

systems of oppression, domination, inequities, and injustices"; and finally, they "promote social

action designed both to expose oppressive social relations and to create more equitable and

human ones" (Petrone and Bullard, 2012, p. 123). In short, critical literacy aims to use literacy

instruction to foster transformation and social change (Morrell, 2005, p. 313).

Critical *Literature* Pedagogy reflects the commitments of critical literacy practices by

encouraging students to attend to and "deconstruct" (Morrell, 2005) relations of power, including

the power relations represented in a piece of literature *and* the power relations at work in the

production of or reception of a piece of literature. Critical literature pedagogy *for liberation*

involves critical engagement with literature for the purpose of supporting marginalized students

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[4] My essay uses the term "critical literature pedagogy" slightly differently than Borsheim-Black, Macaluso & Petrone (2014), who use the term (abbreviated "CLP") as a framework for engaging critically with canonical texts in the ELA classroom. My use of the term, then, is much broader, since I have opened up the boundaries of "literature" to include Young Adult novels, hip-hop lyrics and videos, children's books, and poetry.

as they "work toward empowered identity development and social transformation" (p. 313). Braden and Rodriguez (2016) align themselves with this approach to literature pedagogy in the framing of their analysis of Latino children's books, arguing that using Latinx literature in dialogic classroom spaces has the potential to support children as they "discuss, interrogate, and 'talk back' to the social problems they often live and struggle to make sense of in and outside of classrooms" (p. 58). They argue that this kind of literature pedagogy requires teachers to choose books that portray Latinx experience "accurately" (p. 58) and requires teachers to "facilitate conversations that prompt children to ask questions that can uncover ideologies in books" (p. 71). According to the authors, combining careful text selection (with attention to accuracy) and instructional activities that foster critical conversations, teachers can disrupt social problems encountered by Latinx people, including racism, linguistic discrimination and xenophobia.

A number of other articles are aligned with this vision of literature pedagogy. Ajayi (2015), for example, describes how he asked young women at a Nigerian all-women high school to critically engage with gender through the analysis of a number of texts, including a short story--"The Rivers Osun and Oba"--that represents sexist stereotypes and an unequal gender hierarchy. In order to do this work, the teacher selected texts that highlight the unequal gender structures in Nigeria, and provided opportunities to "question the message of social inequality" and the "social production of gender" (p. 238), including asking students to visually represent the story and rewriting the story so that it no longer reflects sexist gender hierarchies. This work thus encouraged students to "interrogate texts and reconstruct unequal social structures" (p. 216). Likewise, Blackburn, Clark, and Nemeth (2015) align themselves with critical literature pedagogy for liberation in an article that considers "what queer literature can offer young adult readers" (p. 1). The authors argue that incorporating a variety of queer literature into the class

curriculum in conjunction with instructional approaches that encourage students to interrogate

gender and sexual norms may "inform students to a wide array of ideologies, or ways of viewing

the world that may support, complicate or even contradict their own" (p. 45). This literary

pedagogy, they argue, has the potential to foster social change by "liberating" students,

especially LGBTQ students, from restrictive notions of sexuality and gender (p. 44).

In addition to being designed for a specific kind of student, critical literature pedagogy

for liberation also privileges the representational functions of language. This emphasis on the

representational functions of language is evident in the careful way teachers aligned with this

STLP select literary texts. Braden and Rodriguez (2016), whose intended students are Latinx

youth, this means selecting children's books with what they call accurate representations of

Latinx identities; for Ajayi (2015), who teaches young women in Nigeria, this means selecting

texts that represent gender inequalities in Nigeria; and for Blackburn, Clark and Nemeth (2015),

who seek to liberate LGBTQ youth--"even if only in his or her English language arts class" (p.

44)--this means choosing texts that represent a variety of different kinds of sexual and gender

identities, thus providing the opportunity for students to interrogate and perhaps break free of

norms that constrain sexual and gender identities. This emphasis on the representational

functions of language is also evident the way these pedagogies use the text in order to foster

critical conversations about the structures of power that impact their students' everyday lives.

Braden and Rodriquez (2016), for example, treat texts as representations of ideologies and

encourage teachers to construct lessons and units that will uncover the hidden ideologies in

children's books. For her part, Ajayi (2015) used writing and drawing assignments to encourage

her students to notice and analyze the way gender is represented in the short story "The Rivers

Osun and Oba." And Blackburn, Clark and Nemeth (2015) argue that in order to actually foster

social change, teachers need to construct lesson and unit plans that encourage students to examine representations of sexual and gender identities in the texts they read.

Critical Literature Pedagogy for Allies

In addition to supporting social change through critical literacy aimed at marginalized students, ELA classrooms also engage in socially-transformative literature pedagogy by encouraging students who are not marginalized by a particular social problem to care about, critique and challenge the problem. Despite the fact that only one article that I encountered in my literature review uses the word "ally" (Burke and Greenfield, 2016), it is the best word I can think of to describe the kind of person teachers and scholars hope to produce through this kind of critical literature pedagogy. For the purposes of this paper, I define ally as a person who is not negatively affected by a particular social problem but nevertheless aligns themselves with marginalized people in an effort to combat a particular social problem. Importantly, I use "ally" despite recent pushback against the term, especially cultural commentaries produced outside of academia. The website indigenousaction.com, for example, argues that when one functions as an "ally" one actually does little to actively fight in the struggles of marginalized peoples. What's worse, the article argues, is that the "ally" identity has produced an "ally industrial complex" and a "nonprofit capitalism" that allows non-marginalized people to build careers and identities (thus capitalizing and exploiting) out of the struggles of marginalized and minoritized people (p. 1). The website recommends that allies transform themselves into "accomplices," people willing to "fight back or forward, together" thus "becoming complicit in a struggle towards liberation" (p. 2). Despite the recent popularity of the word "accomplice," however, I stick to the word "ally" because not all of the pedagogical practices that fit into this category of socially transformative literature pedagogy want to produce students who will actively fight against injustice; in many

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cases, these pedagogical practices merely aim to foster students' attentiveness and concern for social issues that affect others.

A few scholars and teachers in the field of ELA align themselves with this approach to socially-transformative literature pedagogy by teaching literature in anti-racist ways that critically interrogates whiteness. Borsheim-Black (2015), nicely illustrates this approach in her description of a white teachers' attempt to use *To Kill a Mockingbird (TKM)* to encourage white students' to notice their racial identity and acknowledge their white privilege. While Borsheim-Black's study focuses on the complex nature of anti-racist work with white students (in part by drawing attention to the ways that anti-racist white teachers still reinforce whiteness), her description of the teacher's aims for her unit and her pedagogy approach nicely illustrate critical literature pedagogy for allies. Prior to the study, the teacher, Ms. Allen, had used *TKM* to engage with race, but was disappointed that her white students tended to engage in colorblind discourse, "rely on familiar stereotypes," and avoid implicating themselves in the reification of racist structures. In order to produce better allies in the fight against racism, Mrs. Allen revised her unit by drawing from antiracist pedagogy: "she prioritized a focus on institutional racism, she integrated texts to honor voices of people of color, she engaged students in reading against racial ideologies in *TKM*, and she encouraged students to reflect on Whiteness through open dialogue" (p. 407). Like the teacher in Borsheim-Black's study, Schieble (2012) also illustrates critical literature pedagogy for allies. Schieble argues that interrogating Whiteness is a "critical component of literacy teaching that aims to critique systems of oppression," and contends that literacy teachers can engage students in this kind of work by "facilitating critical conversations with young adult (YA) literature" (p. 212). Schieble encourages teachers to have students interrogate YA novels that present problematic discourses of whiteness and to engage in

classroom activities that build reflexivity among white students, thus encouraging these students to see how they are implicated in the production and maintenance of problematic discourses of whiteness.

Teachers invested in fostering other kinds of social change also produce pedagogies aligned with critical literature pedagogy for allies. Deveraux and Wheeler (2016), for example, aim to combat linguistic discrimination by engaging students in unit analyzing dialectically diverse literature. To do this, the authors asked students to read literature that featured dialectic diversity and code-switching (including works by Zora Neale Hurston, Lorraine Hansberry and Harper Lee). In addition to the curriculum of the unit, the authors lead students "interrogating language ideologies underlying a text" in an effort to support them as they "critically question language, power, society, and identity" (p. 99). For their part, Burke and Greenfield (2016) aim to engage non-LGBTQ students in critical conversations around heteronormativity and homophobia in an effort to "address social injustice and the silencing of LGBTQ individuals" (p. 46). To do this, they encourage secondary ELA teachers to develop literature units focused on children's books banned for their LGBTQ themes (including *And Tango Makes Three*, *Uncle Bobby's Wedding, King and King, Heather has Two Mommies,* and *My Princess Boy*) and asking students to analyze representations of gender and sexuality and discuss whether these books were "banned to protect the innocence of childhood" or to "silence segments of society?" (p. 47).

Like the instructional strategies used in critical literature pedagogy for liberation, the pedagogies I discuss above emphasize the representational functions of literature. For example, the anti-racist pedagogy of both Borsheim-Black (2015) and Schieble (2012) relies on the use of texts that represent and draw from problematic discourses of Whiteness and thus can be analyzed in ways that draw attention to the way that discourses of Whiteness perpetuate racism. Deveraux

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and Wheeler's (2016) unit uses texts that represent dialect diversity and dialect discrimination and requires that teachers foster critical conversations about the linguistic diversity represented in the text. And for their part, Burke and Greenfield's (2016) lesson encourages teachers to select children's books banned for the way they represent LGBTQ life and identities and to scaffold students as they interrogate why these texts have been banned.

Mirror Pedagogies

My understanding of mirror and window pedagogies draws from Bishop's (1990a) argument that literature can function as either a mirror or a window. When literature functions as a mirror, it reflects one's culture, identity and/or lived experience back to the reader, allowing them to "see something of themselves in the text" (Tschida, Ryan & Ticknor, 2014). Drawing from this language, I use the term "mirror pedagogies" to describe literature pedagogy that attempts to produce social change through the use of literature that reflects marginalized students' experiences and identities. According to educators aligned with mirror pedagogies, using literature that reflects students' lives is an essential social justice task because if children do not see themselves in books, or "when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable" then students "learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part" (Bishop, 1990b, p. 557). Mirror pedagogies thus attempt to challenge inequity and injustice by encouraging youth to see themselves as valuable members of their society and communities.

This approach to literature pedagogy is illustrated throughout the *English Journal* special issue on Black textual expressiveness, an issue in which authors argue that drawing literature by Black authors and about Black experience has the potential to "help students to name themselves" (Cherry-McDaniel, 2017) and see the classroom as a space for transforming

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traditional racist hierarchies. Brooks and McNair's (2015) literature curriculum for young

African American girls also echoes this assertion. Drawing from Bishop's (2007) argument that

teachers can challenge racism and white supremacy by presenting children with "authentic

representations of themselves, cultural practices, and their historical legacy" (p. 299), Brooks and

McNair offer a text set of children's books about African American hair that "provide a context

in which [African American girls] can better understand the role of hair in their lives" (p. 305).

Because they offer a mirror of African American culture and the resist "normative European

beauty standards" (p. 305), the authors hope that books like the ones they have selected "can be

utilized to challenge racism and white supremacy while helping Black children develop a healthy

and positive image of themselves" (p. 306).

A number of other researchers and teachers advocate for a mirror encounter approach to

cultivating social change through literature pedagogy. Belle (2016) for example, uses hip hop

literature as a "mirror" of their culture and experience in the hopes that bringing these texts into

the English classroom in the hopes that it helps her students reimagine the classroom as a space

where "their opinions are valuable" (p. 293). For their part, Hayn, Clemons and Olvey (2016)

argue that incorporating literature about a student with a disability helps students with disabilities

see themselves in literature, thus helping to "build self-confidence" (p. 68). Finally, Metzger,

Box, and Blasigname (2013) detail a Native American Literature they created for a high school

in Mesa Arizona with a Native American population of 10.6%. The course developed in an

attempt to provide Native American students with mirrors with which they could see and

examine their own cultures and histories, an effort that the researchers and the members of the

school district agreed was "essential to establishing and maintaining equity in our society" (p.

58).

Text selection is a crucial component of mirror pedagogies, and the way teachers and scholars write about text selection underscores their emphasis on the representational functions of language. In order to support African American girls as they resist white European beauty standards and to develop a positive self-image in the face of white supremacy, Brooks and McNair (2015) call for teachers to incorporate picture books that portray Black hair accurately and positively. The hip hop texts that Belle (2016) used in her hip hop unit were chosen carefully so that they reflected students' cultural backgrounds, and Hayn, Clemons and Olvey's (2016) STLP combating discrimination against children with disabilities relies upon a YA novel that represents disabled students as "functional, independent, and proactive role models in realistic settings" (p. 9). Finally, Metzger, Box and Blasingame (2013) carefully selected texts that accurately represented a variety of different tribal communities.

Window Pedagogies

While mirror pedagogies help readers to see themselves in literature, window pedagogies encourage readers to "view the world around them" via literature (Tschida, Ryan & Ticknor, 2014). Educators and researchers who rely on window pedagogies to foster social change hope that the literature they choose will offer privileged students a view into the experiences of people marginalized, traumatized and/or violated by social problems. Lysaker and Sedberry's (2015) study of white children's exploration of race and culture through picture books nicely illustrates window pedagogies. The authors ground their study in the argument that children in homogeneously white settings rarely have opportunities to interact with those from different racial and cultural groups, so they advocate for using picture books as a way for white students to "meet" children of different races and develop "empathic understanding and raise cultural sensitivity" (p. 110).This faith in literature is grounded in the argument that reading fiction

requires one to imagine "the thoughts, feelings and intentions of characters during reading," thus completing the reading to join characters in the narratives "landscape of consciousness" (p. 105). According to the authors, readers' entry into characters mind helps readers make "personal and empathetic responses" to books, encouraging them to care about problems that they do not encounter in their own lives (p. 105). In the lesson they describe, children listened to read alouds of Jaqueline Woodson's *The Other Side,* which tells the story of a black girl separated from a white neighbor by an un-crossable fence, and Eve Bunting's *One Green Apple*, which tells the story of a Muslim girl who moves to the US and cannot speak English. The authors conducted the read aloud and then children were invited to retell the stories several times as a way of making sense of the experiences of the protagonists in each book. The authors argue that reading these books has the potential to support social justice because the stories point to issues of "fairness and justice" and encourages them to notice when and why characters felt "sad, left out, or isolated" (p. 106). The authors contend that noticing issues of fairness and justice in the books might "result in a new commitment to social action" (106), and thus promote social justice.

A number of other scholars construct literature pedagogies that attempt to cultivate social change by treating texts as windows. For her part, Cummins (2013) contends that ELA classrooms can challenge the ubiquitous stereotypes of immigrants and undocumented workers by presenting secondary students with YA literature that represents migrants in more accurate and humanizing ways. She notes that for many readers, the fictional migrants they encounter in YA novels "could be the only undocumented migrants they ever know," so the opportunity to enter the "state of mind of a fellow adolescent who is a migrant" may be one of the only times when the reader will encounter the struggle of migrants (p. 71). Likewise, Xerri and Agius (2015) argue that presenting students with poetry depicting the experience of asylum speakers

("The Sea Migrations" by Somali poet Caasha) is one way to build empathy for migrants. They argue that when they asked students to read "The Sea Migrations," students encountered the struggles of someone unlike themselves and empathized with the speaker. The authors hope that in identifying with the speaker, the students were "nudged" "into a long-term embrace of the emerging multiculturalism" of their society (p. 75). Finally, Dávila (2015) argues that students should encounter a variety of different texts that offer a window into myriad religious traditions and practices. Including more religiously diverse texts in the classroom, she argues, are one way to "cultivate religiously pluralistic thinkers" (p. 60) and citizens who "affirm and understand (micro)cultural diversity" (p. 62).

Like mirror pedagogies and critical literature pedagogies, text selection is crucial to window pedagogies. Because they treat the encounter with the text itself as a catalyst for social change, window pedagogies pay special attention to the way that texts represent people and communities. Lysaker and Sedberry (2015), for example, selected texts with care because they wanted the books they chose to offer a window into racism and discrimination while at the same time inviting students into the imaginary world of the text by being "accessible" and "hospitable" to students. Text selection is also crucial for Cummins (2013) and Xerri and Agius (2015). In both cases, the authors attend to the way that migrants and migration are represented and suggest that selecting texts with nuanced representations of migrants is essential to the project of challenging stereotypes and misinformation. And even though Dávila's (2015) study focuses on preservice teachers' attitudes towards religious diversity, she frames her work around the need for teachers to incorporate more representations of religion in the classroom, arguing that diversifying representations of religion through literature is one way to help children develop pluralistic attitudes towards religion.

STLPs Through the Lens of ANT and NRT

As a former English teacher and an English teacher educator, I see power and promise in the current ways that teachers and scholars in English Education conceptualize STLPs. Indeed, like many teacher educators I ask my preservice teachers to create literature-focused lessons and units that will challenge social injustice, and as my *Monster* anecdote suggests, I created and performed these kinds of literature pedagogies myself. But as I noted earlier, my recent interest in ANT and NRT has complicated my faith in current conceptions of STLPs. To conclude the chapter, then, I'd like to introduce ANT and NRT and discuss how three ideas from these theories shed light on current approaches to STLP.

Although it is called actor-network *theory*, ANT is not actually a theory. Instead, it's an approach to sociological research that attempts to account for as many actors as possible in its explanation of the social. In ANT, all manner of things become actors that contribute to the social: clouds, amino acids, bank statements, iPhones, pots, bees and Christmas lights, just to name a few. ANTs attempt to account for as many actors as possible because they reject the tendency for traditional sociology to rely on social determinants (e.g. capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy) to explain social behaviors, practices, and patterns. Instead, ANTs seek to "explain" the social by tracing connections between the heterogeneous actors that produce the social. So while traditional sociologists might explain a Catholic woman's refusal to use any form of birth control by arguing that the patriarchy caused the woman to refuse birth control, ANTs would balk at this oversimplification. Instead of explaining her decision by naming social forces, ANTs would attempt to understand this behavior by describing the many co-actors that contributed to it, perhaps including the chemical compounds in the birth control pills she refuses to take, her social network, her husband, CNN, the Bible, Barack Obama, the Catechism of the

Catholic Church, and Roe v. Wade. As Harmon (2009) notes, "we can never explain religion as the result of social factors" or "World War I as the result of rail timetables" (p. 14). For the purposes of this short introduction, then, ANT might be best understood as a sociological methodology that rejects traditional sociology's use of social explanations and replaces this emphasis on explanation with an emphasis on description.

NRT and ANT share a number of qualities. Like ANTs, non-representational thinkers attend to the complexity of the world and reject social science's reliance on social forces as an explanation for the behaviors, practices, and patterns that exist in our messy world. But while ANT responds to traditional forms of sociology, NRT responds to the practices of critical cultural geography, which tend to read everything that happens on the surface of the "really real" world (including behaviors, practices, and social patterns) as representation of underlying social and cultural forces, a practice they refer to as representationalism. As the name suggests, non-representational scholars reject representationalism. They argue that a great deal of everyday life is improvisatory (Thrift, 2009) and "nondiscursive and elusory" (Cadman, 2009, p. 1), and thus cannot be treated as a representation of some inner social order. So instead of reading the external world as a representation of some interior force, they pay attention to how the world unfolds through surprising events and ever-present change. Crucially, for non-representational thinkers, the world does not unfold solely because of humans' deliberate and rational actions upon the world; instead, the world unfolds with/in the interactions of myriad entities, including entities that act on pre- or non-cognitive levels. NRT thus shares ANT's associative account of the social, but its interest in how change happens at pre- and non-cognitive levels means that its conception of the social includes even more entities, including affects, ghosts, memories, atmospheres, and other materials for which ANT cannot account (Thrift, 2008, p. 116).

Pre-Identifying Social Problems

Both ANT and NRT contributed to the framework I used to map the way the field of English Education conceptualizes STLPs. First, in this essay I argue that STLPs tend to respond to a pre-identified social problem. I pointed out, for example, that scholars like Belle (2016), Borsheim-Black (2015), and Scheble (2012) construct their pedagogies around the problem of racism and racial violence while Blackburn, Clark and Nemeth (2015) and Malo-Juvera (2016) construct pedagogies around the problem of homophobia. I was inspired to underscore this trend in STLPs because of NRT's conception of change and its consequences for social and political change. NRT attends to non- and pre-cognitive catalysts of change, and because of this, non-representational thinkers argue that social and political change often happens at non- and pre-cognitive levels: politicians energize voter bases not merely by appealing to reason, but also by mobilizing affect. NRT's conception of political and social change helped me to notice the rational nature the field's attempts to promote change through literature pedagogies. After all, STLPs emerge as teachers and scholars notice and make sense of social problems and devise solutions to those problems.[5] This work is highly cognitive, highly dependent on rational analysis of the world and careful deliberation over possible solutions to those problems.

This is not to say that this cognitive problem solving approach is bad or that NRT suggests that it's wrongheaded for teachers to approach social change in this way. Instead, the NRT lens illuminated the fact that with the exception of Choo (2016) and Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, and Petrone (2014), STLPs respond to problems that are currently thinkable. There

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[5] I would argue that the practice of naming a problem and treating pedagogy as a possible solution to that problem highlights the legacy of Paulo Freire and his notion of praxis, which he defines as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (1970, p. 36). Praxis requires one to notice injustice and to engage with it as a "limiting situation which they can transform" (p. 34). As I see it, scholars and ELA teachers of treat literature pedagogy as a form of praxis, a moment when they--having already reflected on the world and noticed a particular injustice--have the chance to act "upon the world" in an attempt to transform it.

are, of course, *unthinkable* problems, including problems we do not yet see through rational deliberation or problems that we cannot yet name and represent through language. Because these problems cannot be thought, teachers cannot build literature pedagogies around them. I wonder, of course, what it would mean to build a literature pedagogy around social problems not yet thought. Perhaps, following Choo (2016), it would mean that STLPs would aim to foster new orientations to strangers. Or perhaps, to borrow from Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, and Petrone (2014), it would mean that STLPs would aim to foster frameworks for attending to unequal social patterns.

Categorizing Students

After pointing out that SPLPs respond to a pre-identified social problem, I argued that SPLPs are designed with a specific kind of student in mind: they are either marginalized by the social problem that guides the pedagogy or they are unaffected or privileged by this problem. I pointed out, for example, that pedagogies designed to combat racism look different when they designed for students of color (e.g. Belle, 2016; Brooks and McNair, 2015) than when they are designed for white students (e.g. Borsehim-Black, 2015; Sciurba, 2015). I attended to this trend in SPLPs because ANT complicates social science's use of a priori categories. For Latour (2005) and other ANTs, the rejection of social determinants (e.g. capitalism, the patriarchy, white supremacy) means that there are also no social forces that function as a "big reassuring pot of glue" (p. 37) that keeps social groups together. Instead, social groups are constantly made and remade by the actors that participate in the social. This insight from ANT helped me to notice that STLPs depend upon stable categories of students. Indeed, they do not only depend upon the stable categories of "marginalized" and "non-marginalized" students, these categories

themselves are dependent upon other a priori social categories including "Black," "Brown," "White," "Man," "Woman," "Gender-Queer," "Migrant," "Disabled," etc.

Like the previous trend I discussed, I do not want to imply that the practice of designing pedagogy around a particular kind of student is always wrong or problematic; instead, I'd like to suggest that ANT's rejection of a priori social categories opens up new possibilities for thinking about how literature pedagogies might cultivate social change. But what would it look like for a teacher design an STLP without a particular kind of student in mind? To once again borrow from Choo (2016) and Borsheim-Black, Macalus, and Petrone (2014), it might mean that the STLP attempts to help *all* students develop new orientations to strangers or new frameworks for attending to inequity in many kinds of forms.

Privileging the Representational Function of Language

Finally, the third trend that I highlight in this essay is the tendency for STLPs to privilege the representational functions of literature. As I point out earlier, text selection is a crucial aspect of all four categories of STLPs. Whether teachers use a piece of literature as a launching pad, a mirror or a window, they prioritize the representational functions of language by paying special attention to the accuracy and authenticity of the identities and experiences represented in a text. This was noteworthy for me because my experience with NRT has encouraged me to attend to the more-than-representational functions of language. Because NRT opens up the social to include all manner of entities, it "allows the greatest possible range of possibilities for attributing change" (p. 14). Because of this, it becomes possible to treat *language* as an entity that makes a difference, thus giving it *more* than representational qualities. Language no longer gestures or points to meaning, language becomes "responsive and rhetorical" (Thrift, 2008, p. 122). This

insight from NRT, then, helped me to see that current conceptions of STLPs do not account for more-than-representational functions of language.

It is very hard to imagine how ELA classrooms might account for and take advantage of the more-than-representational functions of language. If we did, it might draw from the insights of Dooley, Tait and Sar's (2016) analysis of linguistic diversity in children's books. In the study, the authors explore the possibility of cultivating an opness towards linguistic diversity and an "ethics of responsibility for communication in linguistically diverse settings" (p. 96). They suggest that this openness might be cultivated through engagement with translingual picture books, which would provide a "moment of translingual contact" (p. 104) for monolingual English speakers in English-dominant communities. This particular vision for socially transformative literature pedagogy does *not* rest on the representational functions of language; it rests on the fact that the language *does something* to the reader. In this case, the use of an unfamiliar language will "call forth some translingual disposition from the reader" (p. 105).

Conclusion

As I have mentioned throughout this chapter, I do not highlight the incompatibilities between new materialist theories and current approaches to STLPs in order to argue that the field of English Education should jettison critical literature pedagogies or window/mirror pedagogies. Instead, my aim is to point out these inconsistencies in an effort to open up new ways of thinking about how literature pedagogy might contribute to social change. As the above section suggests, I am not certain that I know how ANT or NRT can help us rethink STLPs; but I find their insights provocative and suspect that they might jolt us into new ways of thinking. In the next two chapters, I explore these instincts.

CHAPTER 3
IN THE MIDDLE OF THINGS: AN ANT APPROACH TO SOCIALLY TRANSFORMATIVE LITERATURE PEDAGOGY

Introduction

This chapter explores how Actor-Network Theory might help the field of English Education reimagine our hopes for literature curriculum and instruction. At first glance, this pairing may seem incongruous. ANT, after all, is a social science methodology that "tells stories" about how human and non-human entities assemble and act (Law, 2007, p. 2), and its practitioners are not overtly interested in literature or literary interpretation; instead, their studies trace the networks of heterogenous entities to consider how they contribute to scallop conservation practices (Callon, 1986), the development of the Anthrax vaccine (Latour, 1988) or the creation of the New York electricity supply company (Hughes, 1983). Even social scientists of education who draw from ANT to study literacy practices bypass discussions of literary interpretation, and instead they use ANT to analyze the "social space" (Leander, 2006) in which literacy practices occur (e.g. Leander 2006, Moje et al 2008). Furthermore, as literary theorist Rita Felski (2015b) has pointed out, ANT "ignores or explicitly rejects many of the themes that have occupied literary scholars in recent decades: representation, the linguistic turn, textuality, the symbolic, negativity, alterity" (p. 737). After all, ANT challenges interpretive social science methodologies that hold that the world is a text, it and has no time for interpretive practices that attempt to unveil the social determinants (e.g. capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy) at work in a text or the world at large. As such, ANT's aims and its attitude towards hermeneutics make it difficult to imagine how ANT might productively contribute to conversations about literature curriculum and instruction.

Despite this incongruity, however, I would like to submit that ANT *can* help English Education reimagine socially transformative literature pedagogies (STLPs). I'd like to argue that its promise lies in its metaphysics, its theory of the social, and its understanding of politics. In this chapter, I provide a rather long explication of Latour's *Reassembling the Social*, a book that summarizes and introduces the methodology of ANT. I focus primarily on the first half of the book, in which Latour sketches out ANT (or, as Latour calls it, "the sociology of associations") by juxtaposing it with the methodology of what Latour calls "the sociology of the social." This first section of the book paints a detailed picture of ANT, so I explicate it in order to distill and highlight the metaphysics, the theory of the social, and the understanding of politics that guide the empirical work of ANT scholars. Then I outline these aspects of ANT and discuss how they can help English Education rethink the role that literature instruction and curriculum can play in building better futures. Like ANT itself, this chapter will ask you to be patient as I slowly outline ANT before returning to my goal of reimagining the relationship between literature and social change.

Re-Imagining the Social

"Where should we start?" Latour asks in the opening chapter of *Reassembling the Social* (2005). The question is rhetorical, of course, and his answer quick to follow. "As always," he writes, "it is best to begin in the middle of things, *in medias res*" (p. 27). And with that, Latour throws readers into a long paragraph describing a single edition of a newspaper that—"like a rain, a flood, an epidemic, and infestation"—inundates the reader with stories of groups that have been made, unmade, and/or remade: a CEO complains that years after a merger, the company does not work cohesively; a tech reporter draws a boundary between "Mac users" and "PC users" and derides Mac users for their love of an inferior machine; in a letter to the editor, a

Scottish citizen distinguishes between the Scots and the British by claiming that Scots are far less Europhobic than Englishmen are (p. 27). The list suggests that groups are made and unmade by academics, reporters and citizens every day, and because the first chapter advances the claim that there are no fixed groups—no stable "classes" or "roles" or "organizations" (p. 28)—the deluge of examples does indeed situate the reader *in medias res*: in the middle of the key controversies that shape Latour's chapter.

But it's hard to read Latour's promise to begin *in medias res* without tracing a connection between the phrase "in the middle of things" and Latour's theory of action, which asserts that *all things*—cats and chlorine, cartographers and Columbia—"make a difference" and should be considered actors. As I explain in this chapter, Latour's theory of action guides his "vast empirical labors" (Harman, 2009, p. 14) and his understanding of the political consequences of these labors. Thus, when Latour contends that it is best to begin in the *middle* of things, he is not only advocating for throwing the reader into the concepts and controversies taken up in the chapter, he is also emphasizing the importance of beginning amidst *things*: newsprint, ink, the company CEO, corporations, Mac users, and the pugnacious Scotsman.

Because this chapter explores how ANT might help the field of English Education reimagine the relationship between literature pedagogy and social change, I think it best to begin where Latour himself begins--in the middle of things: flagellant nuns, a mosque in Bali, the history of Science and Technology studies, the "tiniest polypeptide, the smallest rock, the most innocuous electron, the tamest baboon" (p. 99). Beginning in the midst of these things will allow me outline the central concepts of ANT and the social theory on which ANT rests. Once we're solidly enmeshed in the midst of these things, I will then focus in particular on two aspects of

Latour's work—his metaphysics and his understanding of politics--that might be mobilized in an effort to reimagine the relationship between literature instruction and social change.

ANT is a social science method used to "trace" (Latour, 2005) or describe (Law, 2007) the heterogeneous materials that assemble and create ANT's understanding of the social. These materials include entities often thought of as "social" (i.e. humans) and those often considered "non-social" (e.g. animals, machines, objects). Social scientists who use ANT (scholars who Latour calls "ANTs") argue that "networks of objects-and-people" both "participate in" and shape the social (Law, 1992). For ANTs, the heterogeneous nature of these networks requires a new set of methodological tools that can help researchers trace the associations between these materials.

Latour argues that ANT is a mostly "negative" method (p. 142), one developed in opposition to what Latour refers to as the "sociology of the social." Latour argues that traditional and critical sociologists—whom he categorizes as "sociologists of the social"—treat the social as both a "specific type of ingredient that is supposed to differ from other materials" (p. 1) and the underlying metaphysical determinant of all states of affairs. When studying religious traditions, for example, sociologists of the social treat religious practices as if they were embedded in a stable metaphysical substance called "the social" and then they use the social in order to explain these practices: the "frenzy of flagellant nuns" (Harmon, 2009, p. 18) might be conceptualized as a manifestation of a patriarchal social structure and the Hindu response to a Balinese mosque's call to prayer might be treated as a representation of the social order at work in Bali and/or Indonesia at large. In effect, sociologists of the social treat their objects of study—a religious ritual, a pedagogical practice, a sporting event—as a mere manifestation of this metaphysical material called "the social."

ANT rejects this conception of the social and sociologists' use of "social explanations" as an appeal to a Deus ex Machina. This rejection of a metaphysical explanation for interactions leads Latour to reimagine sociology as a science that traces associations between a variety of human and nonhuman actors. Sociology of the social, he argues, treats the social as the glue that holds the world together, and Latour challenges this, arguing that the social is "*what* is glued together by many *other* types of connectors" (p. 5). For Latour and other ANTs, then, the flagellant nuns cannot be "explained away" (Harmon, 2009, p. 18) by social forces; instead, they should be "explained by the specific *associations*" (p. 5) at play in any given state of affairs. Sociology, he continues, should transition from the "science of 'the social'" (p. 5) to the science of "*tracing of associations*" (5). Reimagining sociology in this way allows Latour and other sociologists of associations to treat the social not as a special "ingredient" or "material," but instead as an adjective designating a *"type of connection*" (p. 5). Furthermore, because ANT rejects the a-priori distinction between some material called "the social" and all other kind of materials or ingredients, ANTs make no a-priori assertions about what can be tied together via social connections; indeed, they assert that all entities—human and non-human alike—participate in social connections.

Sociologists' work reduced things to manifestations of the social, and ANT emerged as a response to the reductionism of sociology, a point underscored in the many origin stories that ANTs tell about its development. Law's (2007) outline of these stories emphasizes the role that things played in early ANT work: in their work on large systems like electric supply companies and car manufacturing processes, Hughes (1983) and Callon (1980) had to acknowledge the fact that these systems were "socially and materially heterogeneous" (Law, 2007, p. 4); Latour's (1993) immersion in a scientific laboratory compelled him to confront the "promiscuous"

relations between the "social and the natural" (Law, 2007, p. 4) that give way to scientific

discoveries; Callon's (1986) study of scallop farming illuminated the way that scallops,

fisherman and scientists all shape the cultivation of scallops; and Latour's study of Louis Pasteur

acknowledged the role that heterogeneous networks of "domesticated farms, technicians,

laboratories, veterinarians, statistics and bacilli" played in shaping Pasteur's discovery of a

vaccine for anthrax. In each of these studies, the researcher's own entanglement within a network

of things—institutions, people, animals, atoms—contributed to their contention that the world is

shaped not by god-like "social forces," but by the links forged by "heterogeneous materials"

(Law, 1992 p. 381). As Latour (2005) reflects in *Reassembling the Social,* the observations he

completed in laboratory spaces kindled his rejection of sociology of the social and their emphasis

on metaphysical sorts of "social explanations:" "I remember how inescapable I found the

conclusion: the social cannot be substituted for the tiniest polypeptide, the smallest rock, the

most innocuous electron, the tamest baboon…the social explanation had vanished into thin air"

(p. 99).

Five Controversies

As Latour's critique of sociology of the social makes clear, ANT is built on a very

different social theory than more conventional styles of sociology, and the first half of

Reassembling the Social sketches the components of this alternative social theory. Latour

organizes this outline by juxtaposing the way the sociology of the social and the sociology of

associations respond to five "controversies" with which sociology must consistently grapple:

"the nature of groups," "the nature of actions," "the nature of objects," "the nature of facts" and

the role of research and writing in the construction of the social (p. 22). The sociology of the

social, Latour argues, can treat the social as its own kind of material and as a determinant

because it overlooks these sources of uncertainty; ANT, on the other hand, constructs its social theory by "deploying" the controversies (Latour, 2005, p. 23).

In this section, I summarize Latour's description of ANT's theory of the social in order to introduce and explain the concepts undergirding my understanding of how ANT can help the field of English Education reimagine STLPs. I have summarized this work in the most economical way possible. I cannot, however, replace this overview of controversies with a quick outline of the central concepts in Latour's social theory because I have come to appreciate Latour's assertion that in order to reimagine the social through the lens of ANT, one must "pile" all five controversies "on top of one another, with each new one making the former even more puzzling until some common sense is regained—but only at the end" (p. 22).

The First Controversy: The Nature of Social Groupings

Latour begins sketching out ANT's theory of the social by juxtaposing how the sociology of associations and the sociology of the social understand the nature of social groupings such as those based on social class, race and ethnicity, occupations, educational experiences, lifestyles, etc. For Latour and other sociologists of associations, groups are never stable; they are always in the process of being made and remade by actors inside and outside of these precarious groups. Latour illustrates this claim by gesturing towards the contents of a single newspaper: the interview with a CEO emphasizes how quickly two companies can become one; the critique of Mac computer users creates a temporary dividing line between two different groups of consumers; the letter highlighting a difference between Scotland and the rest of the UK underscores the way that citizens can resist being grouped into particular social aggregates. Sociologists of the social, on the other hand, stabilize social aggregates in their studies. They begin their projects "by setting up one—or several—types of groupings" that ground their study;

for example, they decide a-priori that they are interested in a social aggregate that they call "conservative Catholic women" or a group they call "at-risk urban high school students." And while sociologists of the social sometimes point out that their delineation of these groups is "somewhat arbitrary," they bypass the uncertainty by arguing for the "obligation to limit one's scope" or "the right of a scientist to define one's object" (p. 29).

According to Latour, the difference between these two schools of sociology springs from their competing conceptions of the social. Because the sociology of the social believes in a "social force" that functions like a "big reassuring pot of glue" (p. 37), it can ignore the dynamic nature of groupings and treat them as stable entities. Indeed, the choices that sociologists of the social make when defining groups are "not absolutely crucial" because in the end, all groups will become manifestations of social forces. As Latour remarks, in the sociology of the social, all groupings "are simply somewhat arbitrary ways to delineate the same big animal" (p. 36); in the final reading, the group "conservative Catholics" and the group "at-risk urban youth" will be reduced to a manifestation of the patriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism, or the ultimate social force: power. In contrast, the sociology of associations contends that "society is not what holds us together, it is what is held together" (Latour, 1984, p. 276), which means they do not believe that social forces like the patriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism, and power are a "pot of glue" (Latour, 2005, p. 37) that hold the group's "conservative Catholics" and "at-risk urban youth" together; as Law (1992) notes, in ANT, power is an *effect*, not a cause (p. 387). Instead of treating groups as manifestations of the social, these scholars argue that groups are made by precarious assemblages of actors whose associations consistently construct and reconstruct groups, making it impossible to define groups and group membership in any stable way. There are no groups, Latour writes, "only group formation" (Latour, 2005, p. 27). So instead of

beginning with stable groups, ANTs follow and assemble traces left in the wake of group formation, including the way group spokespeople conceptualize the group, the way these spokespeople compare their group with other groups, the work that spokespeople do to redefine groups and the way that academic, technical and theoretical concepts get taken up and mobilized in the process of group formation.

The juxtaposition between the way the sociology of the social and the sociology of associations responds to the uncertain nature of groups not only underscores the far-reaching impact of their different conceptions of the social, it also highlights how these two schools have very different ways of conceptualizing "the means"or "tools" with which the social is produced (Latour, 2005, p. 38). Because sociology of the social assumes that groups are mere manifestations of the social order, Latour argues that for them, the social is produced through *intermediaries*, which, according to Latour, "is what transports meaning or force without transformation" (p. 39). So when sociologists of the social study conservative Catholic women and argue that their refusal to take birth control is a manifestation of sexism and the patriarchal structure of the Catholic church and society beyond, they assume that these Catholic women transport these social forces "without transformation." ANT, on the other hand, argues that the social is produced through *mediators*, which *translate* meaning and forces. So for ANTs, the actors who participate in Catholic religious practices do not *transport* the force of, say, the patriarchy, they *translate*—they betray, displace, misrepresent, transform—the meaning and forces that they encounter within assemblages.

The Second Controversy: The Nature of Action

The second source of uncertainty shaping ANT's theory of the social concerns the nature of action: How does action happen? Who or what is responsible for action happening? The fact

that actors "are never alone in carrying out a course of action" (p. 44) is a sociological intuition

shared by both the sociology of the social and the sociology of associations, one made manifest

every day. For example, when I visit the local "hip" coffee shop to work on this dissertation—the

one my fellow graduate students frequent—I cannot help but notice that many of us are dressed

in similar styles and using nearly identical computers and smartphones and it becomes clear to

me that my decision to work at this particular shop, to wear an oversized sweater and leggings,

and to purchase an apple computer was not entirely my own doing. But exactly who or what

determines my apparel, computer, and/or coffee selection? Who or what makes me an actor? The

sociology of the social responds to this uncertainty swiftly: It asserts that agency comes from a

"limited list of agencies" (p. 51) including, for example, the patriarchy, white supremacy,

capitalism, and other "social forces." Through the lens of the sociology of the social, Catholic

women refuse to use birth control because they are handmaids of the patriarchy, and I own a

MacBook because of capitalism and social class.

The sociology of associations, in contrast, does not treat the social as a ready-made

material acting unilaterally upon the world. This refusal opens up more possibilities for

understanding how action happens. As Latour contends, this school of sociology believes "it is

crucial *not* to conflate all the agencies overtaking the action into some kind of agency—'society',

'culture', 'structure', 'fields', 'individuals', or whatever name they are given—that would *itself*

be social" (p. 45). Instead, ANTs contend that action happens not because of a single agency like

"social force," but as a consequence of precarious assemblages of myriad "heterogeneous

relations" (Law, 1992, p. 384). Thus, in ANT, actors are made to act by networks of linked

entities: A Catholic woman might refuse birth control as a consequence of a network of factors

including church doctrine, her partner's religious beliefs, and the chemical makeup of the birth

control pill; I might have purchased a MacBook because of advertisements, the consumption

practices of my peers, the smooth edges of the keyboard's corners, its weight, the relative ease of

transferring my files from my old computer to my current computer, and the speed of its

processor.

Crucially, in ANT the heterogeneous entities that make up these assemblages are

mediators and not *intermediaries,* which means they translate the meanings and forces they

encounter. Even though she does not use any form of birth control, a Catholic woman does not

faithfully transport the force of the church doctrine or her partner's beliefs, and even though I

have a MacBook, I do not faithfully transport the force of Apple's advertising campaign or the

consumer practices of my friends. The world that ANT imagines is made up of "*concatenations*

of mediators" (p. 59) that translate forces and meanings in networks of links: I translate Apple's

advertising campaign, but so do my peers, and our translations "trigger" (p. 59) other mediators,

perhaps impacting university computer policies, the ratio of Mac-centric to PC-centric computer

repair shops, and the Apple company itself. Because actors are "made to act" (Latour, 2005, p.

46)[6] by heterogeneous concatenations of mediators—mediators that do not faithfully transmit the

action and meaning they receive from some other cause--action in ANT is always *dislocated,*

rendering relationship between causes and effects uncertain (p. 58).

The Third Controversy: The Role of Objects

The third source of uncertainty—the role of objects in the social—flows from the first

two. If, as ANT argues, the social is not a ready-made a priori material but a set of associations

that are constantly being made and remade, then it becomes a "type of momentary association

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[6] At first glance, the phrase "made to act" seems to suggest that actors are like puppets,
controlled by some outside force that pulls and twists their strings. However, because Latour
rejects social determinants and produces an associative model of the social, actors are "made to
act" by virtue of their association with other actors. As Latour puts it, "an actor-network is what
is made to act by a large star-shaped webs of mediators flowing in and out of it" (p. 217).

which is characterized by the way it gathers together into new shapes" (p. 65). And if action is overtaken by concatenations of mediators that include everything from church doctrines to graduate school peers, the chemical makeup of birth control to the processor in my MacBook, then the social—the "momentary associations" (p. 65) in which ANT is interested—must be composed of both humans and objects. Objects, however, have traditionally been "explicitly *excluded*" (p. 69) from sociological inquiry. Because sociologists of the social could treat the social as a "pot of glue" (p. 37) holding the world together, they had no reason to consider the role that objects play in generating action or assembling the social. Remember, too, that the world of the sociology of the social is filled with *intermediaries*, where objects are viewed as mere transporters of social force and meaning: in the sociology of the social, my MacBook does not act, it transports the force of capitalism and social class.

The sociology of associations, on the other hand, argues that the controversies surrounding actors and agencies require them to treat "*any thing* that does modify a state of affairs" as an actor. On Latourian principles, a baseball bat is an actor because it modifies a state of affairs when I hit a homerun and when a cat knocks it over in my shed; likewise a coffee cup is an actor when it holds my coffee and when a fly lands on its handle and gets stuck on a drop of honey I've failed to clean off. This is not to say that objects *determine* action or outcomes. Because there are few—if any—intermediaries in ANT, single actors are never treated as determinants. Instead, Latour argues, "there might exist many metaphysical shades between full causality and sheer inexistence" (p. 72). Objects, then, do not cause or determine, but they might "authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on" (p. 73). The doctrine of the Catholic church, for example, cannot be read as an

intermediary or determinant in ANT's theory of the social, but provided that it "modifies a state of affairs," it can certainty be treated as an actor.

The Fourth Controversy: The Nature of Facts

The fourth source of uncertainty that guides ANT concerns the nature of facts. ANT contends that facts are constructed, having "humble" but "visible" (p. 88) origins that can be accounted for by "mobilizing various entities" (p. 91) that produced them. To say, for example, that the Anthrax vaccine was constructed is to say that it was made within an assemblage of entities, including Louis Pasteur himself, his laboratory, domesticated farms, and bacteria (Latour, 1988). Sociologists of the social—and in particular, those sociologists invested in social critique—have interpreted the claim that facts are constructed to mean that they are *socially constructed* and therefore not made of "real stuff" but instead made of "the social in which it is 'really' built" (Latour, 2005, p. 91). Thus, while ANT understands constructivism as a call for "an *increase* in realism"—a call to carefully trace the assemblages of mediators that have generated facts—the sociology of the social bypasses this uncertainty and jumps immediately to the claim that "'*even* science is bunk'" (p. 92) and can be understood and explained by social forces.

ANTs not only assert that not "even the tiniest polypeptide" can be replaced by the social (p. 99), they also claim that objects—polypeptides, rocks, genes—deploy many more types of agencies than the narrow role given to them in empiricist accounts" (p. 111). Genes, for example, "take so many contradictory roles, obey so many opposite signals, are 'made up' of so many influences" that is it impossible to assert that genetic makeup functions as an "inflexible drive" (p. 111). Consequently, ANT does not treat any actor or agency as a "matter a fact;" instead, it treats all agencies as "matters of concern." These matters of concern are "uncertain and loudly

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disputed" agencies that are nevertheless "real and objective" (p. 114). When ANT embraces this uncertainty, reality becomes fabricated and disputable, but no less real.

The Fifth Controversy: The Nature of Texts

The final source of uncertainty embraced by ANT emerges out of its concern for the role that the process of study itself plays in the world. Sociologists of the social, Latour contends, would "much prefer to be like 'hard' scientists and try to understand the existence of a given phenomenon, refusing to consider the written account" and aiming to write "transparent and unmediated" reports of the phenomenon" (p. 124). ANTs, on the other hand, treat their reports as ways of participating in the virtual gathering around disputed but objective matters of concern. A report, they contend, "*can put aside neither the complete artificiality of the enterprise nor its claim to accuracy and truthfulness*" (p. 133). Furthermore, participating in the gathering around a matter of concern turns both the researcher and the research report into actors in this network of associations: each becomes a mediator, triggering other mediators. Thus, in ANT, a report is successful and interesting to the degree that it does the work to become attached to other actors, to become a mediator in other actor-networks.

<center>**Actors, Irreducation, Translation, Alliance, and Power**</center>

At this point, I owe readers a hearty "thank you" for their patient trudge through the above sketch of ANT and its deployment of the five sociological uncertainties that the sociology of the social tends to bypass. The move through ANT is, as Latour argues, "agonizingly slow" (p. 23), and I am sure it feels particularly slow to my readers because grappling with these uncertainties has deferred my engagement with the stated aim of this chapter: to reimagine the relationship between literature and social change. What, you may be asking, does a methodological text for a sociology of associations have to do with literature and literature

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curriculum? Unfortunately, before jumping into the aim of the chapter, I must test your patience

a bit longer to distill the central concepts of ANT—its theory of the social, and its conception of

politics—that I will mobilize to reimagine literature curriculum.

Although ANT is, on its surface, a social science method for tracing associations of

mediators, a philosophically "deep" metaphysics guides it (Harmon, 2005, p. 12). Harman

(2009) outlines four Latourian metaphysical concepts: actors, irreduction, translation, alliance.[7]

These metaphysical principles serve well to describe ANT's radical conception of reality.

Actors

First, ANT argues that the world is made up of ontologically equivalent actors. All

actors—humans, everyday objects, institutions, atoms—are ontologically equivalent because

they are all mediators that participate in networks of associations by *interpreting* force and

meaning. On Latourian principles, a rock worn smooth by a river has interpreted (translated the

meaning or force) of the river's water. For Latour, this parallels the way I interpret (translate the

meaning or force) of some of ANT's central texts in order to write this dissertation. The rock and

I are both actors because we act through networks of mediators, but we are also ontologically

equivalent because we are both agencies that make a difference in some state of affairs. The

rock, for example, affects the water that runs over it and I am confident my dissertation will

make a difference in *some* way—even if it merely puts my committee members to sleep!

Crucially, the argument that the word is composed of ontologically equivalent actors is

not a call to establish "an absurd symmetry between humans and non-humans" (Latour, 2005, p.

76). This becomes clear when the claim of ontological equivalence is considered alongside the

five controversies outlined in *Reassembling the Social*. Making the claim that ontological

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[7] Harman (2009) refers to Latour's metaphysics as "the most underrated philosophy of our time"
(p. 6)

equivalence is a matter of establishing a symmetry between humans and non-humans would require an a priori division between the human and the non-human, a move that would speed past *all* of the controversies that ANT works to slowly deploy: it bypasses the difficulty of determining what entities belong inside of groups and which belong outside of groups; it obscures the uncertainties that arise when action is overtaken; it ignores the role that objects play in the production of the social; it overlooks the fact that what counts as a human and a non-human is actually a *matter of concern*, an "effect generated by a network of heterogeneous, interacting, materials" (Law, 1992, 383); and it conceals the role that professional research has played in the shaping of these categories. So while it's true that ANT "does not celebrate the idea that there is a difference in kind between people on the one hand, and objects on their other" (p. 383), making all things ontologically equivalent actually obviates the a-priori distinction between humans and non-humans, the "social," and the material (Latour, 2005, p. 75). As Latour (1988) noted in his earliest metaphysical treatise, "we must not believe in advance that we know whether we are talking about subjects or objects, men or gods, atoms, or texts" (p. 167).

Irreduction

The second Latourian metaphysical concept that Harman introduces is the principle of irreducation. In ANT, no thing "is inherently reducible or irreducible to any other" (Harman, 2005, p. 14) because to reduce something "is see it as an effect explainable in terms of a more fundamental layer of reality" (p. 18). Reductionism not only presumes an a-priori set of stable forces that act on the world, it also treats entities as intermediaries that transfer force and meaning onto some thing. But because ANT holds that states of affairs are produce by concatenations of mediators, it is impossible to reduce any thing to any other. As such, in ANT "we can never explain religion as the result of social factors" or "World War I as the result of rail

timetables" (p. 14); nor can we treat the birth control practices of Catholic women as a manifestation of the patriarchy or use global capitalism to explain my decision to buy a MacBook.

Translation

Third, the actors of the world of ANT are linked through *translation*. For Latour, translation and interpretation is not a practice of "purposeful humans, intentional persons, and individual souls" (indeed, that would contradict the argument that all things are ontologically equivalent); instead, "hermeneutics is not a privilege of humans but, so to speak, a property of the world itself" (Latour, 2005, p. 245). Rockstranslate the water around them just as I translate Latour. Importantly, interpretations are not *transfers* of meaning or force, they are "betrayals" (Latour, 1988, p. 178): "if a message is transported, then it is transformed" (p. 181). Crucially, although ANT argues that actors are linked through the betrayal and transformation of forces and meaning, this betrayal does not mean that "the interpretation of the real" can be "distinguished from the real itself" (Latour, 1988, p. 166). For ANT, *all* that exists is interpretations upon interpretations upon interpretations. And though this initially sounds like a return to the Derrida's (1997) assertion that *il n'y a pas de hors texte*, the social construction disappears when we recall that in ANT *all* entities interpret: humans and teacups, rocks and dissertations. In short, the argument that the real cannot be distinguished from its interpretation is merely to say that the real is constructed by assemblages of mediators, each one translating the agencies to which it is linked.

Alliance

The final metaphysical principle holds that an actor's strength is shaped by the alliances they develop with other actors, or, as Latour (1988) writes, actors "can gain strength only by

associating with others" (p. 160). Because actors are ontologically equivalent, no actor can be inherently 'stronger' or more 'forceful' than another. Instead, the actor's strength is determined by its ability to "amass a formidable army of allies" that may include both human and non-human entities (Harmon, 2009, p. 19). Harmon, drawing from Latour's (1988) study of Pasteur, argues that the success of Pasteur's anthrax vaccines was *not* a consequence of the work of a single heroic man but instead a consequence of the fact that Pasteur developed alliances with a "motley" array of mediators including politicians, equipment and bacteria. Thus, those entities that we call "powerful," "durable," "strong," or even "true" are *effects* of heterogeneous networks in which actors have made "larger portions of the cosmos vibrate in harmony with their goals" (Harman, 2009, p. 19).

These four concepts not only radically modify the "basic structure of reality itself" (p. 5), they also produce an alternative social theory. By conceptualizing reality as made up of irreducible actors that translate the forces and meanings with which they are aligned, ANT seeks to "rebuild social theory out of networks" (Latour, 1996, p. 2). And as I have noted a number of times, if understood as an assemblage networks of actors, then the social cannot be "a place a thing, a domain, or a kind of stuff" (Latour, 2005, p. 238). Instead, in ANT "the social" detonates "a provisional movement of new associations" (Latour, 2005, p. 238); or, as Law (1992) writes, ANT treats the social as a verb instead of the "*fait accompli* of a noun" (p. 380).

Power and Politics

Before wrapping up this distillation of the central concepts of ANT, I'd like to discuss its understanding of power and politics, topics that also contribute to my exploration of how ANT might help the field of English Education reimagine STLPs. Since ANT rejects social theories that treat "the social" as cause or determinant, what we call "power" is not always-already

present in the world; rather, it is an effect of patterned heterogeneous networks of associations (Law, 1992). As such, ANT certainly does not deny that the world is patterned by inequalities and hierarchies or the existence of stable and ostensibly intractable injustices like racism, transphobia, and sexism. What ANT *does* claim is that we cannot understand or challenge these patterns unless we reject the argument that these forces exist *a priori* and instead "demystify" (p. 390) power by attending to its mechanics, the way it emerges out of heterogeneous assemblages. As Latour pointedly argues, "if there is no way to inspect or decompose the contents of social forces…then there is not much that can be done. To insist that behind all the various issues there exists the overarching presence of the same system, the same empire, the same totality, has always struck me as an extreme case of masochism, a perverted way to look for a sure defeat" (p. 252).

ANT's rejection of deterministic social forces and its alternative metaphysics allows ANT scholars to reimagine the political stakes of sociology and what it means to make a political intervention. Law (1992) articulates the political stakes of ANT explicitly when he contends that in ANT, "the task of sociology is to characterize these networks in their heterogeneity, and to explore how it is that they come to be patterned to generate effects like organizations, inequality and power" (p. 381). To use Latour's language, in ANT, the task of sociology is to turn matters of fact into matters of concern by writing risky reports. These reports will attempt to both trace associations *and* build alliances with other actors. They are risky, then, because they could easily fail to achieve either of these aims. If they achieve the aim of building alliances with other actors, then they may contribute to and/or challenge troubling social patterns and forms. Thus, the contributions of ANT are always political and "ethically charged" (Law, 2007, p. 16). ANT scholars respond to the political nature of their task in a variety of ways. Donna Haraway, for

example, asserts that scholars ought to "interfere with and undermine politically and ethically obnoxious realities" (Law, 2007, p. 16). Latour, for his part, contends that sociology (and the humanities) ought to participate in the composition of a common world (2010), turning matters of fact into matters of concern interpreted and translated by more and more actors (2004).

<div align="center">**Literature Pedagogy and The Good**</div>

So how does this reimagining of the social shape our understanding of the relationship between teaching literature and effecting social change? First, ANT fatally compromises the current approaches to socially transformative literature pedagogies (STLPs) that I outline in chapter two because treating literature as a tool for promoting a specific kind of social change is at odds with ANT's conceptions of reality, the social, power and political intervention. Second, although ANT compromises a critical literacy approach to literature instruction and complicates the notion of "social change," it nevertheless provides insights that might help the field imagine new ways of thinking about how literature contributes to better futures.

Current Approaches to Socially Transformative Literature Pedagogy

As I argue in chapter two, teachers and scholars in the field of English Education tend to develop STLPs in response to specific social issues. In that chapter, I talk briefly about why this approach to literature pedagogy might be at odds with the insights of ANT, and here I flesh out this argument a bit more.

Current approaches to STLPs are at odds with ANT in no small part because they draw from a metaphysics more aligned with the sociology of the social than the sociology of associations. Take for example a vision of literature instruction that uses a text like Walter Dean Myers's young adult novel *Monster* as a tool to foster social change by taking anti-racist action or challenging white supremacy. When a teacher treats the text like an intermediary that

transfers the meaning he/she intend for it to have, he/she reduces the text to a handmaid of the his/her will. This vision of literature pedagogy thus contradicts the principles of action, irreduction, translation, and alliance. First, in imagining that a text will transfer the force of the teacher to the students, current STLPs do not treat the text *or* the students as an ontologically equivalent to the teacher; instead, they a priori assumes that teachers have more power and can bend the text and students to their will. Second, this vision of literature pedagogy contradicts the principle of irreduction because failing to treat all entities as ontologically equivalent reduces the text and the students to expressions of the teacher's will. Finally, treating a text as an intermediary ignores the principles of translation and alliance, which assert that all entities *translate* the forces and meanings of the other entities with which they are allied. Within an ANT metaphysics, books alone cannot function as an impetus for social change because the book translates forces and meanings it encounters within an assemblage of actors acting upon it. *Monster* itself translates the actors with which it is allied (perhaps including the author, the publisher, the paper on which it's printed, the cover image chosen by the publisher, the students reading the book etc.) and the students also engage in translation by interpreting the meanings and forces of the heterogeneous entities assembled during their interactions with the text and with each other about the text.

In addition to contradicting ANT's metaphysical insights, current STLPs also counter ANT's reconceptualization of the social. Employing literature as a tool that can be used to alter or change some "material" called the social contradicts ANT's conception of the social as the "provisional movement of new associations" instead of a "place, a thing, a domain, or a kind of stuff" (Latour 2005 238). Furthermore, in ANT, the "social" is composed of a *heterogeneous* movement of new associations, including both human and non-human objects; as such, it

obviates the a-priori categories of the "material" and the "social" and treats *every thing* that acts as a part of *one* category, "the social." At first glance, it may seem like STLPs are aligned with ANT's rejection of the categories "material" and "social;" after all, my hope that my students' encounters with *Monster* would help them understand and challenge white supremacy seems to treat *Monster* as an actor, an entity that will "make a difference" In the lives of my students. However, because I treated *Monster* as an intermediary--a tool that would *transfer* a particular force and meaning--I was upholding the divide by denying *Monster* status as a mediator that *translates* force and meaning.

Finally, my earlier approach to literature instruction is at odds with ANT's understanding of power and what it means to intervene in the political. ANT treats power as an *effect* of heterogeneous associations and not an always-already present *cause*. As a consequence, in ANT politics "is no longer a matter of gesturing toward the hidden forces that explain everything; it is the process of tracing the interconnections, attachments, and conflicts among actors and mediators as they come into view" (Felski, 2015a, p. 171). The way I approached *Monster*, however, treated politics as a process of unmasking the hidden machinery of power and oppression at play in the novel. I asked my students to treat the text as evidence of white supremacy and racism at work in the world of the novel and hoped that asking students to unmask the role of power in the novel would encourage them to challenge these power structures in their everyday life.

The incompatibility between current approaches to STLPs and ANT does not completely undermine the hope that literature instruction might help to cultivate social change, but the incompatibility does render the relationship between literature and social change more uncertain and more dependent upon precarious and ever-moving assemblages of actor-networks. The rest

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of this essay explores the potential for ANT to help reimagine STLPs by first considering how ANT can foster new ways of thinking about reading and then sketching out three ANT-inspired principles that might contribute to the field's thinking about literature's role in fostering better futures. After establishing these principles, I will wrap up the chapter by describing two possible ways that ELA teachers might bring the insights of ANT to bear in their literature classrooms.

From the Social to The Good

Before considering how ANT might shape literature instruction, however, I would like to slightly revise the language I've been using to discuss the aims of this essay. Until now, I've been framing my study around the relationship between literature pedagogy and social change, but if we align ourselves with ANT's assertion that the social is "a provisional movement of new associations" (Latour, 2007, p. 238) then the phrase "social change" becomes redundant. In ANT the word social *already* implies movement and change. If an assemblage of networks is *not* moving—if the actors are static and do not act upon each other in some way that makes a difference, a change—then according to ANT they would not be social. Since the social always implies change, it is nonsensical to use the phrase "social change" when discussing ANT. In lieu of this term, I'd like to borrow from Law (2007) and replace "social change" with the phrase "the good" (p. 16-17). As I pointed out earlier, ANT holds that power is an *effect* of heterogeneous associations, so detailing the links that give rise to these associations is an effort to to better understand and resist effects like inequity and hierarchies, work that Law argues is "simultaneously responsible to both the real and to the good" (p. 17). I take Law to be using the phrase "the good" to refer to challenging and resisting inequality and hierarchies, so for the purposes of this chapter, I will use it instead of the phrase "social change."

I'd like to reconsider the relationship between literature instruction and the good by first

considering how ANT invites the field of English Education to explore new ways of thinking

about the act of reading. Here I'd like to draw primarily from literary theorist Rita Felski's

uptake of ANT. In a number of recent works, Felski and several other literary theorists (e.g.

Biers, 2015; Muecke, 2012; Outka 2013) have drawn from Latour and ANT in an effort to

challenge the ubiquity of critique in the field of literary studies and to outline possibilities for

"post-critical" styles of literary study and criticism (Anker and Felski, 2017; Felski, 2011; Felski,

2015a; Felski, 2016). Like other alternatives to the hermeneutics of suspicion (Ricoeur 1970)[8],

Felski's post-critical reading discourages skeptical reading practices that demystify, unearth, or

unveil the power dynamics at work in a text itself or in the production and/or reception of the

text. These reading practices, Felski argues, "limit interpretation to a single-minded digging for

buried truths" (Felski, 2015a, p. 33), and position the critic in a position of an all-knowing and

all-seeing authority, a detective who can "identify causes and assign guilt" (p. 87).

In painting critique as a practice of digging for buried truths and identifying causes and

assigning blame, Felski portrays literary critics in ways that parallel Latour's description of the

sociologists of the social. Like the sociologists of the social, critique-focused literary theorists

speed past controversies regarding action and actors, hastily arriving at social explanations for

the questions they pose about texts and their production and reception. Drawing from Latour's

(2004) assertion that critique's habit of "resorting automatically to power, society, [and]

discourses" has "outlived" its usefulness, Felski argues that the act of uncovering power

dynamics at play in a text--the homophobia that undergirds a novel's character development, the

sexism that determined another text's reception--has made critique less capable of fostering the

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[8]These alternatives include Eve Sedgewick's "reparative reading" (2003), Heather Love's (2010)
"close but not deep" reading, Franco Moretti's "distant" reading, and the notion of "surface"
reading outlined in Best and Marcus's edited issue of *Representations* (2009).

emancipatory politics it espouses. The field of English, Felski argues, must turn their attention away from "monocausal explanations of what and how a text signifies" (2015b, p. 739) and towards "the many actors with which literature is entangled and the specifics of their interaction" (2015a, p. 189). Through the lens of ANT, literary studies can only account for the "social meanings of art" by "multiplying actors and adding mediators rather than pruning them away" (p. 182), a project requires scholars to treat reading as an "act of composition" (p. 182) a linking together of diverse actors that mediate and are mediated by texts and readers. For Felski, then, ANT offers a helpful standpoint from which she can "de-essentialize" (p. 3) critique in literary studies and imagine new ways of accounting for the social meanings of literature.

Felski's ANTwork

At first glance, Felski's uptake of ANT may not seem immediately applicable to the question of how the field of English Education might reimagine STLPs. Felski's focus on the ubiquity of critique contributes a great deal to contemporary debates over the value of critique in the field of literary studies, but has little to do with the field of secondary English Education. Despite the fact that Felski is more interested in literary *scholarship* than in the *teaching* of literature, her uptake of ANT nevertheless sheds light on how ANT might be mobilized by the field to rethink the role of literature pedagogy. In particular, her work offers three insights that English Educators might embrace in an effort to reimagine literature instruction: interpretation is a co-production involving more actors than previously thought; reading is an act of composition; literary texts cannot be reduced to a manifestation or vehicle of power; and literature acts in the world by virtue of its attachments.

As Felski points out, the act of interpreting texts is not at odds with ANT. In Latour's conception of the social, all things act because they translate the forces and meanings they

encounter. Because of this, in ANT "hermeneutics is not a privilege of humans, but, so to speak, a property of the world itself" (Latour, 2005, p. 245). While ANT does not preclude the act of interpretation, its principles require us to reconceptualize what happens during textual interpretation. Because ANT posits that all things are mediators that are themselves mediated by a heterogeneous assemblage of actors, literary interpretation becomes the product of a "motley assortment of coactors" (Felski, 2015a, p. 170). This conception of interpretation challenges models of reading that give the reader power to outsmart the text or a text the power to "bludgeon [readers] into submission" (p. 177). Through the lens of ANT, the text becomes an actor, one that "orients us in certain ways and draw us down interpretive or perceptual paths" (Felski, 2015b, *p. 739*). But because ANT treats the social as a precarious and ever-moving assemblage of actors, texts do not act upon us on their own; instead, texts act "as coactors and codependents, enmeshed in a motley array of attachments and associations" (p. 170). Readers' mediations of texts are *also* enmeshed in associations, and as such they are neither "centers of meaning" nor products of social forces, but instead are mediators who interpret texts within precarious and heterogeneous assemblages. Interpretation, in this light, is co-produced by a motley assortment of things, which not only include texts and readers, but also what the reader ate for lunch that day, the paper on which the text is printed, reader's knowledge of current events and world history, the image on the front cover of the text.

Literary Interpretation as Composition

Because ANT invites us to treat interpretation as a co-production, it also encourages the field of English Education to treat the act of reading as an "act of composition" (p. 182) instead of an act of decomposition or deconstruction. Just as Latour's *Compositionist Manifesto* (2010) calls for the humanities to eschew the dismantling moves of critique and instead engage in the

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political by assembling actors and composing a common world, so Felski (2015b) encourages literary critics to treat reading as "a matter of composing and cocreating, of forging links between things that were previously unconnected" (p. 741). To borrow from Meucke's (2012) essay on object-oriented criticism, reading-as-composition would aim to "flesh out the multimodal or multirealist networks that intersect in a writing or reading event" (p. 51), avoiding the modernist distinction between the "material" and the "social" in order to link seemingly incommensurate actors.

Felski does not explicitly describe what it would mean to treat writing as an act of composition, but she and a handful of literature scholars have gestured towards some possibilities. Felski (2015b), for her part, imagines that reading-as-composition might invite scholars to consider how a particular piece of literature makes a difference in a particular network, or to explore the degree to which "certain features of texts" foster "empathy or recognition, absorption or disorientation," or to study what it means to "identify with a character" (Felski, 2015a, p. 181). Outka (2013) draws upon Latour in order to read two modernist texts that feature ghosts of WWI soldiers. While critique-minded scholars treat ghosts as manifestations of "wish fulfillment or repressed grief," Outka links these texts with developments in psychology and the "peculiar relations between literary metaphor and WWI" (p. 254) in order to make the claim that the belief that these soldiers had risen from the dead "had considerable power and thus the ability to effect change" (p. 254). For his part, Hensley (2015) experiments with a Latourian network analysis textual production by linking Andrew Lang's body of writing to popular culture producers, "knowledge forms" from a number of disciplines (including anthropology, economics and trout fishing), a variety of institutions (including publishing companies to social clubs), and distinct moments in historical time. Treating reading

as an act of composition, then, might take a variety of forms, but each will perform a

commitment to creating and composing instead of denuding and destroying.

Interpretation and Attachments

Finally, the uptake of ANT in literary studies encourages the field of English education to

treat literature as an actor that impacts the world only by virtue of its attachments. As Felski

argues, "art's power and presence are...made possible by its relations" (Felski, 2016, p. 750);

thus, the "motley assortment" of actors that are linked to a text contribute to a text's impact in

the world. This assertion draws from Latour's concept of alliance, which holds that actors "can

gain strength only by associating with others" (Felski, 2015a, p. 160). Thus, like Pasteur's

anthrax vaccine (Harmon, 2009), literature can only "make a difference" by building alliances

with other actors. A popular series like Harry Potter, for example, can grow in popularity only by

linking with a variety of actors, including readers "in all their commonality and quirkiness"

(Felski, 2015a, p. 171) and editors, publishing houses, bookstores, advertising firms, the movie

industry, HR employees school libraries, the internet, and the generic qualities of fanfiction.

Together, these three insights from literary studies' uptake of ANT's re-imagination of

the social gesture towards new ways English educators might think about the relationship

between literature and social change. Through current conceptions of socially transformative

literature instruction, literature can make a difference--can contribute to the good--by fostering

empathy, providing a mirror that empowers students, and/or helping them to critically examine

structures of power. As I pointed out earlier in this section, however, this vision of literature

pedagogy treats texts as intermediaries of an a priori entity, *the social*, and therefore current

STLPs are at odds with the interpretive vision offered by ANT. Instead, an ANT style of

literature pedagogy would first and foremost treat interpretation as a co-product between a

motley assortment of coactors. When secondary students read a text like *Monster*, the text does

not have power over the student and the student does not have power over the text; instead, the

students will produce unique and unpredictable interpretations of *Monster* in messy assemblages

of other actors, including, perhaps, the peer relationships in their classrooms, their prior

experiences talking about race, the time of year we read the book, and/or what they had for lunch

that day. Because of the messy and precarious nature of ANT's understanding of interpretation,

ELA teachers aligned with ANT might consider treating reading as an act of composition, one

that invites students to "forge links" between "previously unconnected actors." If students

engaged in reading-as-composition practices, then they will not be digging under the surface of

texts to make a claim about how power works, they will instead be tracing networks inside and

outside the world of a text in order to answer questions about how the text (or its characters, plot,

dialogue, etc.) "make a difference." Finally, an ANT approach to using literature to foster the

good would recognize that teaching a book like *Monster* might very well make a difference in

the world, but it will only do so because of the precarious and unpredictable alliances it builds.

The Good in the ELA Classroom

To conclude this chapter, I'd like to consider what it might look like to integrate these

three insights into literature instruction that seeks the good. While there are likely myriad ways

to draw from ANT to reimagine literature instruction, I would like to sketch out two possibilities.

First, I believe that ANT invites teachers to use literature pedagogy as an opportunity to

encourage students to attend to the links between heterogeneous actors and the way these

assemblages of actors produce inequity and hierarchy; this practice, I argue, has the potential to

cultivate practices of attention that students might one day employ as they analyze the world

outside of their literature classrooms. This possibility for the ELA classroom draws from

Levine's (2015) argument that reading practices cultivated in literature study may develop habits of attention that can be used to intervene in the political. For Levine--like Latour--power is not always-already present in the world; instead, it is produced. Unlike, Latour, however, Levine argues that social life is composed of "loosely and unevenly collected" arrangements of order (p. 17), and she argues that readers should close read texts to examine how these arrangements-- wholes, rhythms, hierarchies, and networks--produce power relations. Such close reading practices, she contends, may help readers cultivate habits of attention that they can use to examine "the complex ways that power operates in a world dense with functioning forms" (p. 9). In short, while Levine's conception of the social is not entirely commensurate with Latour's, I borrow from her work to argue that ELA might align itself with ANT's metaphysics and understanding of power and politics if it helps students close read the way that actors assemble and make a difference in both "the word" and "the world" (Freire, 2014).

Asking students to attend to the way that that heterogeneous actors generate relations of power is to invite them to perform the task that Latour (2007) outlines for the sociology of associations: to "*deploy* actors *as* networks of mediations" (p. 136). For Latour, this task not only requires researchers to describe allied actor-networks, it also requires them to *assemble* these actor-networks in a way that augments or amplifies the agencies at work in a particular assemblage (p. 138). To use less technical language, to "deploy actors as networks" is to "add in a messy way to a messy account of a messy world" (p. 136). Literature instruction that fosters ANT habits of attention might take two slightly different paths: teachers might ask students to deploy actor-networks at play in the world of the text; alternatively, teachers might ask students to describe and assemble the actor-networks that mediated their interpretation of a text. While both approaches to cultivating ANT styles of attention require students to create "messy

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accounts" of a "messy world," they would look quite different when enacted in the ELA classroom.

In order to trace the actor networks at work in a given text, students could rely on descriptive reading practices like Love's "close but not deep" reading (2010; 2013), which borrows "practices of close attention" from the social sciences, including practices of ANT, in order to describe the "surfaces, operations, and interactions" (2013, p. 375) in texts. As readers see in her close-but-not-deep reading of *Beloved*, Love attends to the surface of Morrison's novel by focusing on the shifts in point of view that occur during the first account of Beloved's murder and arguing that these shifts perform the impossibility of recognizing and remembering Beloved (p. 386). A classroom devoted to deploying the actors at work in a text might engage in similar "close but not deep" reading practices, but in the case of an ANT-style analysis, readers will describe how a variety of different kinds of actors--including characters, settings, nonhuman objects--act upon each other and contribute to the relations of power at play in the world of a text. These relations of power might be particularly evident in the relationships between characters or the events that occur during a text's narrative arc, so the ELA teacher might ask students to describe the actor-networks that produced hierarchies between characters or the injustice produced by actor-networks at deployed withinin the world of a text. Of course, describing the actor networks at play in the relationship between characters or in a moment in the plot may require readers to build links to actors outside the world of the text. For example, a teacher working with the book *Monster* may ask students to trace the actor-networks that produced the hierarchy between Steve and the jury, who, according to Steve's lawyer, "believed [Steve] was guilty the moment they laid eyes on [him]" (Myers, 1999, pp. 78-9). To compose a reading that explore the actors at play, the readers will certainly have to rely upon the novel to

describe the actors at play in various assemblages. They will have to attend to the way Myer's describes the setting of the courtroom to consider how the space and the objects in the room contribute to the relationship between Steve and the jurors, and they will have to rely on whatever details Myer's uses to describe the jurors themselves. But students will also likely have to rely on outside sources, linking their interpretation of the relationship between Steve and the jury to informational texts about how jurors are selected and nonfiction texts about racial bias in the American justice system. Like all interpretations, a reading of *Monster* that deploys the actors that contribute to patterns of inequality in the world of the text will be a composition, one that sometimes relies on thoughtful speculation to assemble the actors that "make a difference."

In addition to tracing the actors at work within a text, an ANT approach to literature instruction might also encourage students to consider the actors at work in their own processes of interpreting a text. Through the lens of ANT, *all* interpretations--textual and otherwise--are produced within assemblages of motley assortments of coactors, so one way to practice attending to actors is to trace the actors at play in one's interpretation of a text. Like the above task, deploying *these* actors would require students to employ close but not deep reading practices, but in this case, they would use these practices in order to describe the way they made sense of a text. In a unit on *Monster*, a teacher might invite students to write up their understanding of the text, detailing their understanding of Steve's character, the events of the trial, the events leading up to the trial or perhaps the outcome of the trial. After stabilizing their initial interpretation of salient aspects of the text, students might then trace on the actors at play in their engagement with the text.

This activity would, of course, be imaginative and likely require a great deal of modeling and scaffolding by the teacher, but students like the two young men in my class all those years

ago might consider the actors that shaped their own assumptions that Steve was guilty. This task might require them to think about their understanding of justice and the people, institutions, and experiences that have shaped their understanding of justice, and it would certainly require them to think about their understanding of race and the people, institutions, and experiences that have shaped their understanding of whiteness and racism. Perhaps they associate Steve with a friend or with a character they once saw in a movie, or perhaps they themselves have been involved in a robbery and they bring their own guilt with them to their reading. It's possible, too, that this reflective activity would draw students' attention to how the space of their classroom, their relationships with their class peers, or their history with me--their teacher--makes a difference in their interpretation of the novel. Like all ANT accounts, this one would be "risky" and probably more likely to fail than not. But this speculative act of tracing associations might also help students to see that their interpretations are complicated products and that their assumptions about how race works or how justice works are products of precarious knots of coactors.

Finally, ANT can also align the literature classroom with the good by encouraging students to participate in the composition of a common world (Latour, 2010) by gathering text and other actors in virtual conversations focused on a shared "matter of concern" (Latour 2004). This way of engaging with the good parallels ANT's understanding of social science's role in promoting better futures. As Latour famously argues, critique no longer has the political impact that it used to have: it has run out of steam. While unveiling relations of power may have once intervened in the political by illuminating dangerous inequalities and injustices, critique has become a tool employed by our enemies who use it to undermine scientific studies asserting the impact of global warming or to challenge the fact that the U.S. was attacked by terrorists on 9/11. ANT, then, rejects critique as the only form of political intervention, choosing instead to

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contribute to virtual discussions occurring around important and always-disputable "matters of concern." Contributing to these virtual discussions, Latour argues, differs from the destructive force of critique: is an act of creation, of contributing to the composition of a common world.

I'd like to argue that the final way that ELA classrooms might rethink the relationship between literature instruction and the good is to treat literature instruction as an opportunity to participate in the composition of a common world. ELA teachers might ask students to consider the "matters of concern" to which the books they read might be linked and to link their reading of the text to these matters of concern. A book like *Monster,* for example, might be productively linked to a number of salient matters of concern, including conversations around racism in America, the efficacy of the justice system, the prison-industrial complex, and the complex nature of legal representation. Participating in the composition of a common world, then, would require students to add the text--and their interpretation of the text--to these ongoing conversations, forging links between previously unconnected actors. A student reading *Monster* in 2017 might contribute to larger conversations around race and the justice system by linking *Monster* to the Black Lives Matter movement, to the deaths of Michael Brown or Tamir Rice, to the twitter feed of activist reporter Shaun King, to news media programs that reject the claim that the justice system perpetuates racism.

CHAPTER 4
LIGHTNING STRIKES AND JOLTS: A NON-REPRESENTATIONAL APPROACH TO SOCIALLY TRANSFORMATIVE LITERATURE PEDAGOGY

If This Works

If it works, this chapter will be a turn on a tire swing. If it works, you'll hold tight to the

ropes that tie tree to tire while I—like some mischievous sibling, shins streaked with dirt, a

splinter in my thumb—shove and spin the swing. You might bend backwards and shriek as your

hair collects woodchips and your eyes trace a mess of leaves and sky and cloud. Or you might

close your eyes and grip the rope tightly, gritting your teeth while your stomach lurches. I don't

know. I don't know what kind of reader you'll be. But it doesn't matter if you keep your eyes

open or not; if this works, the effect will be the same: when the ride ends and you slide off of the

tire, the ground will bend and dip in ways you've never felt before.

I should say this upfront: non-representational theory and literature pedagogy are strange

bedfellows. NRT emerged out of cultural geography as a challenge to the ubiquity of

representational modes of thinking in that field, and since then, its style of thought has primarily

affected the study of geography, contributing "new actors, forces and entities" in geographic

research and producing "new modes of writing…and styles of performing geographic accounts"

(Anderson and Harrison, 2010, p. 2). It is not fully contained, of course. NRT has leaked past the

boundaries of geography and has been taken up in performance studies, marketing,

anthropology, and sociology, but besides a very small slice of literacy research (e.g. Ehret and

Hollett, 2014; Leander and Bolt, 2012; Smith, 2017; Wargo, 2015) very few scholars have linked

the central concepts of NRT with literature instruction.

But the emergence of non-representational styles of thought are not only tied to a

rejection of representational modes of thinking, they're also tied to a desire for new approaches

to political intervention, new ways of creating publics, new avenues for cultivating better futures. NRT attempts to "rematerialize democracy," to make our conceptions of political intervention attentive to and entangled with the ever-changing (human and non-human) worlds in which we live. As such, if it works, this chapter might push us towards new ways of thinking about how our engagements with literature—engagements that take place inside messy worlds of secondary ELA classrooms—might intervene in the political, might contribute towards the good.

I used the word patience in my chapter on ANT, and this chapter will certainly require patience. Like my work with ANT, this chapter will defer discussion of literature instruction, focusing first on non-representational styles of thought. But I suspect it will require something else. As you'll see, in an effort to jolt audiences into new ways of experiencing worlds, nonrepresentational styles of thought encourage experiment and play. They disorient. They purposefully and unabashedly bemuse audiences. And so in addition to your patience, I'll need something else. Something that implies less melodrama than "forgiveness" and less benevolence than "generosity." "Kindness" gestures in the right direction, but it, too, is missing something: the word lacks weight and wings. And I could keep trying to stumble upon the right way to say what I mean, but I suspect it's a fool's errand. Like they say, words will always fail me.

Unless, of course, it's the other way around.

Beyond Constructivism

I chopped my hair off when I first read Nigel Thrift's 2008 *Non-Representational Theory*. To be sure, I understood very little of what I read, but I was moved from the very first page of the preface when Thrift declares that he "keeps faith" with experimental scholars who seek to invigorate the world, including

> those who want to rematerialize democracy, those who want to think about the exercise
> of association, those who want to make performances in the interstices of everyday life,

those who are intent on producing new and more challenging environments, those who want to redesign everyday things, those who, in other words, want to generate more space to be unprecedented, to love what aids fantasy, and so to gradually break down imaginative resistance (Thrift, 2008, p. vii).

It's possible that my heart skipped a beat when I read that sentence for the first time. Yes, I wanted to break down imaginative resistance. Yes, I wanted to generate space to be unprecedented. And while I wasn't quite sure what it would mean to "rematerialize democracy," I suspected that I wanted that, too. Change, possibility, innovation. Yes I said yes I will yes and all that: I told my hairdresser to use the clippers.

At the time, I was deeply enmeshed in the literature of linguistic turn and its effects on social science research, so I read the text as an invitation to consider how rejecting the discursive practices of the social sciences would "gradually break down imaginative resistance." And while I wasn't entirely wrong about this—indeed, social scientists like Phillip Vannini (2015) have experimented with NRT-style social science methods that embrace the fact that "depiction…is futile" (p. 1)—I've found that focusing on the production of academic writing is not the best way to understand its potential for cultivating change and opening up the possibility for better futures. To make that connection, I had to come to understand NRT's rejection of representationalism as a rejection of a far-reaching *mode of thought* and not a mere echo of the linguistic turn or the crisis of representation.

Representational thinking is the "dominant mode" of thinking in geography and utterly ubiquitous in the social sciences since it undergirds social constructivism, the "dominant mode of social and cultural analysis" in social sciences and humanities in the 1980s and 1990s. Because it attends to the manifestation of social and cultural orders, social constructivism treats "bodies, habits, practices and behaviors" as representations of underlying social orders. Using this kind of representational logic, social scientists and cultural commentators analyze the material world of

bodies, practices, landscapes, and spaces as texts that "await our discovery, interpretation, judgement and ultimate representation" (Lorimer, 2005, p. 84).Through the lens of this mode of thinking, for example, my students' failure to notice and care about the effects of institutionalized racism on the protagonist of the book *Monster* might be read as a manifestation of their race, the values and norms of the rural Midwest, or perhaps their socio-economic status.

While their project challenges representation, proponents of NRT do acknowledge that social constructivism and its "obsession" with representation fostered important insights for human geography and the social sciences more generally. First, it illuminated the constructed and arbitrary nature of social or symbolic orders and second, it underscored the "contested (or at least contestable) nature" of these orders (Anderson and Harrison, 2010, p. 5). Despite these insights, however, non-representational thinkers argue that this mode of thinking and the representational logic that undergirds it produces a problematic model of the world, one that severs the really real—"all 'things coarse and subtle'"(p. 6)—from signs and representations and one that allows representation to "take precedence over lived experience and materiality" (Thrift, 1996, p. 4). This representational model of the world focuses on the the inner-workings of the symbolic order (Thrift, 1996); consequently, it ignores all that exceeds or resists representationalist readings, including the "nondiscursive and elusory" (Cadman, 2009, p. 1) elements of the everyday world and the way that "meanings and values may emerge *from* practices and events in the world" (Anderson and Harrison, 2010, p. 6). The non-representational thinker, then, would challenge the social constructivist readings of my students' encounter with *Monster*, and instead focus on how their encounter with the book develops in concert with their routines and habits, the relationships at play in my classroom, and the affect transmitted by a panoply of human and non-human entities.

But I've gotten ahead of myself in listing the possible ways a non-representational thinker might engage with my students' reaction to *Monster.* So let me slow down and concentrate for a moment on exactly how NRT's attention to practices challenges representationalist modes of thought. As an organizing framework for this discussion, I'd like to illustrate how NRT's rejection of representationalism undergirds both its theoretical-empirical project and its political aims. With regard to its theoretical-empirical agenda[9], I will argue that NRT's understanding of the social, the subject and the nature of change/action emerge out of its challenge to the "static notions of culture" (Thrift, 2010, p. 185) that undergirds representational theories and the empirical methodologies built on social constructivism. Likewise, I will also argue that its political agenda grows out of its rejection of representational thinking, pointing out that the non-representational model of the world is open to intervention and highlighting NRT's commitment to producing a "modest supplement" to extant forms of politics, a supplement that would open up new prospects for political action (Thrift, 2008, pp. 19-20). In the two sections below, I sketch out the theoretical-empirical and political projects of NRT, highlighting the role that NRT's rejection of representationalism plays in these projects.

But first, a caveat. As one might expect from a mode of thought committed to a "contingent foundationalism" (Thrift, 1996, p. xi), non-representational styles of thought were not produced as a systematic response to a pre-determined set of concerns about representationalism; instead, they emerged out of a heterogeneous set of events and concerns, including the production of English translations of the work of Deleuze and Latour (Anderson and Harrison, 2010, p. 3), a nascent concern for "embodied practice" in human geography in the

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[9] I link theory with empiricism because NRT "questions the divide between theoretical and practical work by ceding certain theoretical conundrums to practice" (Thrift, 2008, p. 22). To put it another way, NRT "displaces theory from its explanatory role" and instead transforms it into a "modest supplement to practice," one that might provide a "toolkit to engage and expand the world" (Cadman, 2009, p. 4)

1980s and 1990s (p. 3), generational shifts in geography (p. 3), and individual scholars' interests, like Thrift's "obsession" with time-space, the "sensuousness of *practice*," the nature of the subject, and the nature of agency (Thrift, 1996, pp. 1-3). Because the sections below take up the pedagogical task of highlighting how NRT developed in relationship to its rejection of representational logic, I risk performing a representational reading of NRT, one that suggests that NRT's project and commitments can be reduced to a reaction against representational modes of thought. At the same time, however, it might be that NRT's rejection of representational thought allows me to perform this reading: after all, NRT treats language as "responsive and rhetorical, not representative" (Thrift, 2008, p. 122), thus providing a great deal of space for scholars to describe and distil NRT in ways that make sense for the rhetorical, pedagogical, and performative aims of their projects[10]. Perhaps, then, this caveat was superfluous.

The World Unfolds

Non-representational thinkers argue that the representational mode "degrades" lived experience and materiality by reducing it to a representation of a static symbolic/cultural order. As Thrift (1996) writes, representational modes of thought "produce a logocentric presence which then becomes the precondition of research, a towering structure of categories lowering over the ant-like actions of humans and other which constitutes the 'empirical' raw material" (p. 4). This "towering structure of categories"—including pre-established social hierarchies, norms, values, meanings and identities—obscures the "flow of everyday life" (p. 4) and fails to account for to "the on-going or improvisatory element to social life" (Thrift 2010, p. 185). For Thrift, social science's use of "immutable" categories make little sense because life is an emergent

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[10] The fact that NRT leaves plenty of space to describe NRT in a variety of ways means that reading across the texts that introduce it is a dizzying task, one made even more difficult by the fact that, as many commentators (e.g. Popke, 2009; Cadman, 2009; Thrift, 2008; Vannini,) have noted, NRT is notoriously difficult to flesh out.

process. When I walk to campus, for example, the route I take is shaped by something other than a structuring social order: I instinctively skirt a car that speeds at me as I cross Harrison Road and I catch a glimpse of a blooming dogwood tree down the block; feeling drawn to the vibrant pink (recalling, perhaps, fragrant dogwood trees from years past, the rubber texture of their leaves between my forefinger and thumb), I eschew my regular (shorter) route to take the long way down Harrison, stopping for a moment to smell the flowers. To draw from Anderson and Harrison (2010), "much of everyday life is unreflexive and not necessarily amenable to introspection" (Anderson and Harrison, 2010, p. 7), and social science needs new practices that account for the improvisatory nature of everyday life.

Non-representational theory responds to the deadening pitfalls of representational thinking by paving the way for theoretical-empirical approaches to geographic work that focus on the "external" world (Thrift, 1996). This means that NRT rejects the "established academic habit of striving to uncover meanings and values" and instead turns its attention to "how life takes shape and gains expression in shared experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions" (Lorimer 2005, p. 84). Crucially, NRT is not merely interested in attending to these everyday experiences—indeed, the annals of social science are filled with social constructivist readings of everyday experiences, so mere attention to the everyday is not a hallmark of NRT style work[11]; rather, NRT attends to how *life takes shape* in the everyday, to the way life emerges in "the manifolds of action and interaction" (Thrift, 1996, p. 6). And this focus on the way life emerges with/in the everyday—the way my route to school emerges in the moment—transforms the world from a static, deadened world

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[11] "Dominated by an obsession with the politics of representation, an interest in the everyday has not always translated into sustain considerations of the place, or the productiveness, of practice" (Latham and Conradson, 2003, p. 1901)

waiting to be discovered into a "processual," unfolding world, a world composed of "infinite

becoming and constant reactivation" (Thrift, 2008, pp. 113-4), a world that resists a "last word."

Practices

Essential to this project is a non-representational understanding of practice. To borrow

from Thrift's careful language, practices are relatively stable "material bodies of work styles"

that gain stability through routines, tools, and disciplinary techniques that foster their

reproduction (p. 8). But this careful language likely says little to those unfamiliar with non-

representational theory, so let me provide an example drawn from Thrift's 2008 chapter *Driving*

in the City, which attends to the practice of, well, driving in the city.[12] Through the perspective

of NRT, driving in the city is a practice because it involves a set of actions made stable by a

myriad of technologies (including the automobile and its electronic and ergonomic accessories,

asphalt, and a city's grid of streets) and because drivers are schooled into particular behaviors

when they get behind the wheel (watching for pedestrians, slowing down at a speed bump, using

a turn signal, "reading" other drivers' intentions despite the "limited cues" we get about their

intentions). Thus, although driving in the city is a practice that cultural commentators have read

in "representational terms," NRT is interested in this practice because it cannot be explained

through representational thinking; instead, to return to language used a bit earlier, driving in the

city emerges in "the manifold of action and interaction" (Thrift, 1996, p. 4).

The example of driving in the city nicely highlights the central components of NRT's

conception of practice. First, practices are not the property of deliberative actors, individuals

"with prior intention," but instead are "dialogical and processual" (Cadman, 2009, p. 4). The

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[12] Driving in the city is just one of a number of practices explored by non-representational geographers. I could also have considered dance (McCormack, 2003; Thrift, 2000), hiking (Wylie, 2005), gardening (Crouch, 2003; Lorimer, 2005), attending a rave (Saldanha, 2005) or listening to music (Anderson, 2004).

practice of driving in the city, then, is not the product of prior intention, but instead emerges in

conversation with the roads it drives, the urban planners who organize traffic patterns, the

software downloaded into vehicles, the ergonometric driver's seat, etc. Of course, for practices to

be dialogical, they must be in conversation with something else, and NRT calls the concatenation

of entities with/in which practices emerge the *background*. In NRT, the background is the

"surface on which life floats" (Thrift, 2008, p. 91) and it shapes how we encounter the world,

"bending" bodies towards particular behaviors, actions, and encounters (p. 91).[13] Crucially, this

"bending" occurs not because the background fosters conscious deliberation, but instead because

it works on an embodied pre- or non-cognitive level. Consider, for example, the wide-range of

computer software included in new cars. These software systems control "engine management,

brakes, suspension, wipers and lights, cruising and other speeds, parking maneuvers, speech

recognition systems, communication and entertainment, sound systems, security, heating and

cooling, in-car navigation, and…a large number of crash protection systems" (p. 84). In

providing these services, the software programs contribute to the background with/in which the

practice of driving in the city emerges, shaping how drivers instinctively feel, hear, and respond

to the road. The background shapes practice by working at the level of what Thrift calls "bare

life," "that small space of time between action and cognition" (Thrift, 2008, p. 24), meaning that

the background generally works through *affect*, conceptualized as intensities that "prefigure

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[13] The background should not be mistaken as an inert backdrop against which life occurs.
Instead, life emerges with/in the background. At one time, the bulk of this background would
have consisted of entities which existed in a 'natural order', all the way from the vagaries of the
surface of the earth through to the touch of currents of air or the itch of various forms of clothing
through to the changes in the sky. But over time, this background has been filled with more and
more 'artificial' components until, at the present conjuncture, much of the background of life is
'second nature'; the artificial equivalent of breathing. Roads, lighting, pipes, paper, screws and
similar constituted the first wave of artificiality. Now a second wave of second nature is
appearing, extending its fugitive presence through object frames as different as cables, formulae,
wireless signals, screens, software, artificial fibres, and so on" (Thrift 2008 p. 91)

encounters, which set up encounters, and which have to be worked on in these encounters" (p. 116)[14]. Finally, although NRT treats practices as stable patterns, they are not immutable since the inclusion and/or subtraction of background entities will foster new (or perhaps just slightly different) practices; after all, as I point out above, the practice of driving in the city has changed with the advent of software that affects the way a driver feels, hears and responds to the road. To summarize, this rather long excursion into the NRT's conception of practices, non-representational practices are relatively stable—but not immutable—sets of actions that emerge through embodied (non- or pre-cognitive) dialogic interaction with/in a background that mobilizes affect.

As the "driving in the city" example suggests, NRT's definition of "practices" and its assertion that meaning and value emerge out of practice challenges social science's "more deep-seated habits of thought" (Latham and Conradson, 2003, p. 1901). For the remainder of this section, I discuss how NRT's theoretical-empirical project reimagines the social, the subject and the nature of action.

The Social

Because practices emerge with/in backgrounds composed of myriad entities—because software shapes drivers' habits of listening and feeling the city while drivers' habits shape the design of streets and the engineering of asphalt—NRT draws from an "associative account of the social" (Anderson and Harrison, 2010, p. 13), one that puts *everything* on the same qualitative plane (Fendler, 2016). It's here, perhaps, where NRT's relationship with Latour (2007) is most

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[14] Like other scholars involved in the "affective turn," non-representational geographers take great pains to point out that affect is not "simply emotion" (Thrift, 2008, p. 116). However, despite the general agreement that affect differs from emotion, affect remains a slippery and elusive concept in NRT, with scholars drawing from diverse philosophical and empirical traditions in order to define the concept. For a thorough discussion of competing "translations" of affect, see Thrift's 2008 chapter "Spatialities of Feeling," in particular pages 175-182.

pronounced, since this associative account of the social expands the social to include all manner of material bodies[15]. Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari's "plane of immanence" and writing in the style of the "Latour litany" (Bogost, 2012), Anderson and Harrison (2010) point out the "sheer multiplicity of materialities" that NRT brings together in its associative account of the social: "beliefs, atmospheres, sensations, ideas, toys, music, ghosts, dance therapies, footpaths, pained bodies, trace music, reindeer, plants, boredom, fat, anxieties, vampires, cars, enchantment, nanotechnologies, water voles, GM Foods, landscapes, drugs, money, racialized bodies, political demonstrations" (Anderson and Harrison, 2010, p. 14). I supply this list in full not only because of its poetic portrayal of NRT's conception of the social, but also because the inclusion of "atmospheres," "sensations" and "ghosts" gestures toward an important distinction between ANT and NRT's conception of the social. Although both make a space for all manner of materialities, ANT attends to "steely" presence (Thrift, 2008, p. 110), while NRT's social is made up of "entities that are *both* present and absent" (Anderson and Harrison, 2010, p. 16) and "unmarked" change-agents (Thrift, 2008, p. 110), including affects and other subjective states . In NRT's conception of the social, "everything takes-part and in taking-part, takes-place: everything happens, everything acts" (p. 14).

The Subject

In addition to shaping its notion of the social, NRT's non-representational conception of practices also reinvents the subject. Because practices emerge with/in dialogic encounters with an affective background chock-full of heterogeneous materials, embodiment no longer "consist[s] of the particular consistencies of flesh;" instead, "it is radically extended by tools of

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[15] In his 1996 *Spatial Formations*, Thrift draws from ANT in order to argue that practices emerge within a dialogic relationship with things, arguing that "there is a need to recognize the degree to which objects become a crucial part of the performance of subjects, the kind of principle embedded in actor-network theory" (p. 41).

various kinds which are an integral part of what we call humanity, rather than being something

set to one side of individual human bodies as a means through which these bodies attain various

goals and meanings" (p. 126). Indeed, as he shows in "Driving in the city," the line between

"human" and "car" has become ever more uncertain as software programs and ergonomic design

allow the "identity of person and car kinesthetically intertwine" (p. 80). In NRT, then, the

"classical human subject which is transparent, rational and continuous no longer pertains"

(Thrift, 2008, p. 14). Instead, the human subject becomes fragmented, distributed across the

myriad materialities—airbag software, Bluetooth technology, the shape of a car's turn signal

lever--that make embodied practices possible. Experience, through this lens, is "trans-

subjective," meaning that it is "not contained by bounded singularly human subjects" (Blackman,

2016, p. xv). As such, through the lens of NRT, people become "rather ill-defined constellations

rattling around the world" (Thrift, 2008, p. 118); they still exist, but "as much looser allocentric

formations with porous boundaries over which they have only limited control" (Thrift, 2008b, p.

85).[16]

Despite its fragmented and decentered nature, however, the human subject in NRT is not

entirely erased (Thrift 1996; 2008). Indeed, Thrift argues that it might be a "step too far" to

"[drop] the human subject entirely" (2008, p. 13) because human beings do have unique

capacities that should be accounted for in understandings of how practices emerge in dialogue

with the background. Thrift makes this point especially clear by juxtaposing NRT with ANT's

conception of the human subject, arguing that "human expressive powers seem especially

important in understanding what is possible to associate," and as such, "human capacities of

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[16] I like Thrift's poetic phrase "ill-defined constellations" and the romantic imagery it evokes, but Thrift is not always so poetic in his reflections on the decentered subject. In his short 2008 essay "I Just Don't Know What Got Into Me: Where is the Subject?" he writes that in NRT, individual subjects become "mimetic soups, waxing and waning territories of interest and desire, usually produced semiconsciously through proprioception" (p. 85).

expression, powers of invention, [and] of fabulation" should not be denied the in service of the flat ontology of ANT. Thus, in NRT, the human subject is decentered and fragmented but not entirely extinct.

The Nature of Change (The Event)

As I emphasized earlier in this section, practices are mutable. What it means to drive in the city has shifted over the course of the last 50 years because the background with/in which these practices emerge has changed in myriad ways. In non-representational thinking, then, social life "is a continual process which goes on and on and on without any kind of end" (Thrift, 2010, p. 185). Representational thought, on the other hand, cannot account for "the on-going or improvisatory element to social life" (p. 185) because it treats the really real world as representations of static social systems and cultural categories. In its attempt to reproduce "the other as the same" (Phelan quoted in Thrift, 2008, p. 113), representational thinking produces a "purified system," a system that "is inured to the idea that 'nothing is settled; everything can still be altered" (Lévi-Straus quoted in Thrift, 1996, p. 6).

NRT accounts for the processual world in non-representational ways by attending to *events* and treating all practices as *performances*. Attention to the event allows non-representational thinkers to think about "how change occurs in relation to the on-going formation of 'the social'" (Anderson and Harrison, 2010, p. 22). While non-representational scholars differ in their precise conception of the event—some believe events are always-already happening while others argue that events must produce "absolute surprise" (p. 21) and thus are quite rare[17]-- they agree that in any case, an event "does not resemble, conform, or reproduce a set of *a priori* conditions" (p. 22). In other words, an event does not *represent* a given set of inputs; it cannot be

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[17] See Anderson and Harrison (2010) for a more thorough discussion of these divergent notions of the event and their philosophical antecedents.

"foreshadowed" (Thrift, 2008, p. 114)[18]. One way that NRT attends to the "surprisingness of the event" (p. 114) is by treating practices as *performances*. As a metaphor, performance "refers to, and operates through, the enactment of events with what resources are available in creative, imaginative ways which lay hold of and produce the moment" (p. 124)[19]. The metaphor of performance, thus allows NRT to "articulate embodied practice" and at the same time maintain "its inherent openness amid the flow of the world' (Cadman, 2009, p. 5). Using this language, driving in the city is an event, one produced through the performance of driving, a performance made possible by an ever-shifting background and the driver's creative use of and response to this background.

Before moving on, I'd like to emphasize that NRT's use of performance as a metaphor does not mean that events are produced through fully-deliberative acts of creativity, a point underscored by Thrift's interest in dance. When performing, a dancer tends to use resources in pre- or non-cognitive ways, they think "through the body" (McCormack, 2015, p. 1825). A dancer may, for example, be non- or pre-cognitively moved (by a burst of air, the affective texture of the audience, a sudden crescendo in accompanying music, the sudden memory of their grandmother's beef stew) to slow down, speed up, or move across a performance space. Even when a dancer performs a specific dance with a pre-determined set of steps and movements they may be moved in non- or pre-cognitive ways to linger in their bow or to perform those steps with more or less precision. Because dance involves non- and pre-cognitive improvisations, NRT

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[18] This is not to say that the event is guaranteed or that there are infinite possible ways that change might emerge. As Thrift (2008) notes, "the potential of events is always constrained. Events must take place within networks of power which have been constructed precisely in order to ensure iterability" (p. 114). Driving in the city may become an event—the possibility is always there—but the "surprisingness of the event" is constrained by the technologies, habits and routines that discipline behaviors.

[19] I hope Thrift's attachment to some notion of the human subject makes more sense than it did earlier in the paper. For him, events—which keep the world "bowling along" (2008, p. 114)— require specifically human capacities like imagination and creativity.

conceptualizes dance as "a form of ambulant 'theorizing' (Stewart quoted in Thrift, 2008, p. 141). The emphasis on dance, then, highlights the fact that the metaphor of performance does not imply deliberate acts of creativity; instead it highlights the embodied nature of performance.

Openings

NRT's understanding of politics reflects its dynamic and associative account of a social composed of de-centered human subjects and a vast array of things. As Thrift notes, because NRT conceptualizes the social as a "fragile and temporary construction," it cannot treat politics as a stable or static process; instead, in non-representational theory, the political is ever-changing and "politics is a precious thing, a fragile form of life" (Thrift, 2003a, p. 2021). In emphasizing the fragility of politics and connecting politics with its dynamic and associative model of the social, NRT simultaneously opens up new possibilities for political action *and* emphasizes the uncertainty inherent in any kind of political endeavor. In this section, then, I'd like to flesh out how NRT opens up new understandings of the political. In particular, I would like to highlight how NRT's model of a "complex, emergent" world (Thrift, 2008, p. viii) reimagines the composition of the political, the nature of political action, and the role that non-representational thinking might play in supporting justice and equity.

Before jumping headfirst into this discussion, however, I'd like to be clear about a three things. First, this essay rests on a broad definition of "politics" that combines the insights of two non-representational thinkers. First, I borrow from Amin and Thrift's (2013) definition of politics as "the process by which an organized force aims to set out in a particular direction" (p. x); to this definition I add Rose's (2010) assertion that politics is "about desiring to bring about change—about attempting to create or produce a difference and, significantly, a difference for the better" (p. 342). So the purpose of this essay, I treat politics as a process through which

organized forces attempt to foster a particular kind of change, a change imagined as a "difference for the better." Second, my understanding of "a difference for the better" parallels Amin and Thrift's (2013) conception of "progressive politics," which they define as "the domain of practice in which new orientations toward a just society can emerge" (p. 1);[20] consequently, the middle portion of this section will specifically explore how the insights of NRT might foster a more just and equitable society. Finally, I'd like to note that the organization of this essay implies that NRT's theoretical-empirical project shapes its understanding of how to produce "a difference for the better." In some respects this is true: as you'll see, NRT's theorization of the social, the background, and the event certainly contributes to the way that it understands the composition of the political sphere and how political intervention happens. But the organization of this essay is also misleading since NRT emerged out of the political imperative to "open Human Geography's conception of what the political means—i.e., what counts as a proper political question" by upending the "epistemological logic of traditional forms of social/political theory" (Rose, 2010, p. 341). Thus, although I've organized this chapter by first presenting key components of NRT's theoretical-empirical project and then using this language to present its understanding of politics, the two projects are actually much more interdependent.

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[20] My assertion that NRT aims to open up possibilities for a more just society challenges some scholars (e.g. Popke, 2009; Rose, 2010) who argue that NRT fails to offer a coherent vision of what better futures look like. Rose (2010) comes down particularly hard on NRT, arguing that in its rejection of representation NRT gives up the tools to "figure out what constitutes ethical/political action given this dispersed, complex, unknowable and, hence, un-judge-able political field" (p. 342). My reading of Thrift—in particular *Non-representational theory* (2008) and the book *Arts of the Political: New Openings for the Left* (2013), co-written with Ash Amin—leaves no doubt that, for better or worse, Thrift's concern for "the recurring evils of inequality, oppression, and exploitation" (Amin and Thrift, 2013, p. xi) unmistakably aligns him with the values and aims of the Left.

The Composition of the Political

NRT radically alters the composition of the political by bringing new entities into the political fold. The inclusion of these new entities emerges from its model of the world, a model that considers "the widest possible set of entities has having the potential to make a difference, which may include people, objects, atmospheres, feelings, tones of voice, ambient noise, machinery, Leffe Blonde, and constitutional law" (Fendler, 2016, pp. 37-8). And because politics is about making a difference, NRT thus opens up the widest set of possible political entities-- (including, perhaps, people, objects, ambient noise and Leffe Blonde--so that we become "entangled, in ethical and political ways, which a panoply of non-human cohabitants" (p. 85).

Because NRT not only maintains an associative account of the social but also understands difference as an event that emerges with/in an affective background, non-representational scholars are particularly interested our political entanglement with affect. Or course, non-representational thinkers recognize that affect has always been an element of politics (see Amin and Thrift, 2013), and indeed, plenty of representational styles of research attend to the role of affect in politics.[21] NRT, however, contends that the nature of affect's role in the composition of the political has changed as different political organizations (in particular corporations and the Right) have learned to mobilize affect, thus fostering "new political registers and intensities" (Thrift, 2008, p. 173). As Thrift argues, "the suite of practically formulated political technologies developed recently for deploying affect have never been so powerful" (p. 252). Of course, the deployment of affect for political ends means that the inclusion of affect in the composition of the political provides the powerful with new ways to manipulate the public (p. 173), and NRT argues that although passions cannot be controlled, they

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[21] For example, Koch (2013) recently argued that soft authoritarians mobilize the affective power of sport as a way to inure citizens to a "paternalist state-society relations" and legitimate "the unequal distribution of power and wealth" (p. 49).

are increasingly "metered and modulated" by organizations that have grown in their ability to

mobilize affect (Amin and Thrift, 2013, p. 166). As such, NRT's commitment to opening up the

political sphere to affect and "testing the limits of what counts as the political" (Thrift, 2008, p.

20) is not merely a manifestation of its commitment to an associative model of the social;

instead, it's an attempt to understand the relationship between affect and the power relations that

foster inequity and injustice.

To illustrate the role of affect in NRT's conception of the political, Thrift (2008) details

five developments in the engineering of affect and describes how the political sphere has

mobilized these developments, thus turning affect into an essential component of the current

political scene. First, the "massive increase in the mediation of society" has produced new means

for transmitting affect (p. 245), and political organizations have grown more and more effective

in deploying affect through media, which Thrift attributes to "increasing familiarity with

television technique, growing professionalization of the presentation of politics…the burgeoning

of available media outlets and the subsequent net expansion of political programing, and

increased media access" (p. 249). Second, because politicians are "increasingly treated as

commodities to be sold" (p. 249), political organizations have drawn from the corporate world's

ability to "generate passions" through commodity design and brand affiliation (p. 245)[22].

Because of this, political marketing increasingly involves "the use of the small signs of affective

technique structured as various kinds of performance of style" (p. 249). Third, it has become

easier for organizations to know about their consumers and constituents (through profiling, data

mining, etc.), and thus easier for them to better estimate how susceptible certain segments of the

population will be to "particular affective cues" (p. 246). The political sphere has mobilized this

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[22] Because I am in the thick of the television show "The Good Wife"—a show where a man's campaign for attorney general rests on the affective power of his wife and her commitment to him—this point is particularly salient to me.

insight by treating campaigns as marketing and using advances in polling techniques to "identify a susceptible constituency as accurately as possible" to market their campaign to this group. Fourth, the ubiquity of the internet has allowed politicians and political organizations to maintain constant contact with voters, putting them in touch with constituent concerns that can be mobilized by politicians (p. 250). Finally, the engineering of affect in the corporate sphere has accelerated the speed at which "commodities can be inserted" into consumer's lives (p. 247), and political organizations have taken up this insight by turning politics into a continuous process, one constantly "stirred" by media, thus producing affective intensities organizations can measure and deploy for political ends (p. 250). In short, the politics of early 2017—a moment marked by mass media and new technologies for measuring and transmitting affect—can mobilize affect in a way it never could before, making it a more powerful tool than ever before.

Political Action

NRT's conception of affect's role in politics suggests that the world is "more open to influence than is often made out to be the case" (Thrift, 2003, p. 2021), and as such, it might be susceptible to different kinds of political action than we've previously imagined. But this does not mean that the world can be influenced easily or predictably; after all, NRT's commitment to an associative social filled with human and non-human entities that *all* contribute to the production of difference makes it impossible to assume that any particular input will produce an expected output. Because its understanding of political intervention is grounded in both possibility and uncertainty, non-representational thinkers cannot outline a political "a manifesto, a template, or even a plan" that might help the Left "move forward in the struggle to voice a politics of social equality and justice" (Amin and Thrift, 2013, p. ix)[23]; instead, NRT provides a

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[23] Thrift is even more emphatic about his refusal to provide specific political plans in his interview with Anderson and Harrison (2010): "I'm very unkeen, for example, on the idea that

number of modest insights that might be deployed as part of the progressive political project. In this section, I'd like to discuss two of these insights: first, I'll discuss NRT's assertion that a progressive politics must account for affect; second, I'll discuss the experimental ethos that undergirds NRT's understanding of political action.

First, because it includes affect in the political fold, NRT underscores the need for progressive politics to *mobilize affect*. As I've discussed above, NRT's focus on affect illuminates that politics is "dripping with affect" (Thrift, 2008, p. 253), and non-representational thinkers have built on this insight to argue that progressive political organizations will need to account for affect in the creation of counter-publics that challenge neoliberal forces. These thinkers point out that corporations have done the best job harnessing affect, a point made particularly clear in Thrift's 2008 chapter "Re-invention Invention," which illustrates the way that corporations have woven commodities ever-more thoroughly into consumer's lives by mobilizing affect. Corporations' ability to mobilize affect thus foments a "dark force which is part and parcel of the new liberal settlement" (Thrift, 2008, p. 240). The powerful nature of this pernicious force makes proponents of NRT adamant that the Left cannot continue to neglect affect. Instead, progressive politics needs to engage in "the active cultivation of alternative feelings so that new affective connections can be forged and a general desire for other ways of being in the world can emerge, and can be built into new political causes" (Amin and Thrift, 2013, p. 158).

I like that above quotation from Amin and Thrift because out of everything I've read, this is the most specific formulation of the relationship between the mobilization of affect and progressive politics. But even this formulation is a bit obtuse, so I'd like to flesh it out using the

you can dictate political programmes from abstract theory. In fact, I'm pretty sure you can't. Indeed part of the whole issue of politics i[s] that actually that there is an enormous degree of uncertainty involved in i[t] and that's a good thing, as well as a bad thing" (p. 185).

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example of the Obama campaign, which Thrift discusses in his 2010 interview with Anderson and Harrison. While Thrift notes that Obama is likely not the "savior of the American left or anything like that"—a prescient remark if I've ever heard one—he argues that the campaign nonetheless illustrates the "best" of the political mobilization of affect. During that election, the Obama campaign actively fostered new affective connections between constituents by developing a "politics of hope" that actually fostered the development of new kinds of events (in particular, volunteering) that brought people previously disengaged with politics into the political fold (Thrift, 2010, p. 197). To use Amin and Thrift's language, the campaign mobilized affect so that it fostered "a general desire for other ways of being," and an openness towards new possibilities for life in the United States and beyond.

Of course, as I noted above, NRT's worldview is too tentative, too infused with uncertainty to give rise to a program that describes how progressive politics can deploy affect for its own ends. In place of a plan or manifesto, Thrift advocates for an *experimental* orientation towards political action, arguing that "political experiment and invention" may create "more room in the world for new political forms" (p. 22). One reason that experiment has the potential to produce political change is because experiments changes the background, thus inherently producing new kinds of affective responses which might lead to the generation of new publics and new political questions. Again, I suspect an example or two will be helpful here. One example of an experimental attempt to mobilize affect in order to foster new political forms and orientations is the Bunjilaka gallery's *Koori Voices* exhibition that Witcomb (2013) describes in a recent article on affect and museum spaces. This Australian exhibition includes three walls of photographs (from ethnographic and historical collections) of Indigenous people and short video interviews with twenty-first century Indigenous people, all positioned at eye-level. At first

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glance, these videos look like still portraits, but when the visitor stands in front of the frame, the video begins to play, drawing the viewer into a "dialogue" (p. 264) with an Aboriginal person. The installation wraps around visitors and as one walks around it, producing what Whitcomb experienced as an unsettling space, one that disrupted feelings of historical, geographical, and socio-cultural separation between her and the Aboriginal people presented in the gallery (p. 264-265). The gallery's experimental mobilization of affect, then, had the effect of creating a fleeting political formations that included Witcomb, photographs, the ghosts of Indigenous people, video technologies, body sensing software, and a concatenation of affects, some easily named--anger, guilt, sadness, contrition, conciliation--and others that elude language.

Like the *Koori Voices* exhibition, non-representational geographic work also aims to produce experiments that may mobilize affects in ways that might generate new publics and new political formations, and my recent engagement with an experimental ethnography also aligns nicely with Thrift's conception of an experimental politics. Vannini and Taggart's (2016) ethnography of life "off the grid" in rural Canada plays with innovative forms of data presentation by reporting on the project over a variety of media, including a book-length scholarly text, a beautifully shot film, a website, a blog, sound-cloud files, a Facebook page, Instagram posts, and tweets. Not only does the project exist over multiple forms of media, even the book resists academic conventions, eschewing a literature review, cohesive theoretical framework and methodology (one might say that it, too, has left the "grid"). I cannot, of course, name the affective effects of this experimental project, but I do know that I has moved me in ways that I cannot clearly articulate: I was moved, for example, by the percussive beats that shook my speakers as the researchers' car drove up a mountain pass during one scene of the movie. Did the project reorient me to space and place? Did it generate new affective intensities

and new political forms? I don't know. But then, I wouldn't *know*; I would have to *experience*. In the end, I can only say that something happened in my encounter with Vannini and Taggart's work, and that something might "create new forms of life" (Cadman, 2009, p. 6).

These two examples highlight how experiments might work in pre- and non-cognitive ways to foster new political formations. But Thrift also contends that experiments are powerful because they can also generate new kinds of thinking. As he explains, he'd like for experiments to generate moments when people reflect in ways that help them "think about the world a bit differently" (Thrift, 2010, p. 196)[24]. This faith in experiment's capacity to cultivate reflection contributes to Thrift's interest in the performing arts, which, as he notes, has the ability to "jolt" people, moving them "into places they never thought they'd get" (p. 196). And although people can—and do!--reject thoughts produced by this "jolt," Thrift argues that it is important that people get there: "in some cases, it produces moments of epiphany; in some it still produces apathy. But at least you've had a go" (p. 196). Witcomb's (2013) experience at an Australian heritage site called Greenough nicely aligns with Thrift's thinking here. A settlement established in the nineteenth century but abandoned over 50 years ago, Greenough is now home to a heritage museum that, according to Witcomb, relies on a series of "shocks" in order to disorient the visitor in ways that foster critical reflection on the role of colonization in Australian history. For example, one room of the museum consists only of four objects "displayed on plinths with individual lighting from above as if they were art objects" (p. 261). Two of the objects were bars of soap covered in wrappings that read "'This soap is Sarah's Conservation Soap' with the words 'Sanitises before public display,' 'Try it on your site,' 'Extraordinary Cleansing Powers,' 'Removes All Unsightly Buildings and Stories,' 'Produces Absolute Cleanliness on Heritage

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[24] In a surprising answer to a question about politics posed by Anderson and Harrison (2010), Thrift declared, "I'm not anti-rationality. I'm quite pro-rationality" (p. 196). And I think I'd be remiss not to add that I imagine him saying this as he stomps his foot playfully.

Sites'" (p. 261). Witcomb notes that the bars of soap unsettled her and encouraged her to reflect on the "constructed nature of heritage sites" and made her begin to question her reasons for visiting Greenough (p. 261). We might say, using the language of Thrift, that the museum "jolted" her and that jolt encouraged her to think about the world differently.

My experience with Vannini and Taggart's (2016) "Off the Grid" parallels Witcomb's experience at Greenough because like the site's museum, "Off the Grid" jolted me into thinking about the world a bit differently. As I examined the materials that make up the project, I was struck by my admiration for the folks who live "off the grid." This admiration surprised me because I've been well-trained by American higher education to jump to critique, to look cynically and suspiciously at the world for evidence of wrongdoing. But instead of viewing these homesteaders as anti-social or romantically and naively nostalgic for the period of Westward expansion, I found myself admiring their tenacity, their commitment to environmentally sustainable practices, and the stories they told about their new orientations to the material world. Could I move out to Western Alberta to live in a homemade cabin off the grid? No, I don't think I could. But did the project alter—however briefly—my thinking about sustainably, community, or my responsibilities to my human and non-human neighbors? Yes, I feel that it did.

In emphasizing NRT's commitment to affective and experimental approaches to political intervention, I hope to underscore the deeply modest nature of NRT's political project. This approach to politics not only opens the sphere of politics to include non-human entities and affect, it also "recognizes that all manner of activity can be political; small projects and modest enterprises can produce political outcomes" (Thrift, 2004 p. 124). And if all manner of activity is political, than political work is always-already happening because it's "woven into the fabric of life" (Thrift, 2003, p. 2021). But this political work is necessarily tentative, its consequences

unpredictable and unknowable, and so Thrift rightly refers to NRT's political project as a "modest supplement" to the everyday (Thrift, 2008): a form of action that does not "elide the complex, emergent world in which we live" (p. viii), a series of "escape attempts" that may or may not "take root" (p. 4).

Making Literature Matter

And now--after sketching out NRT's theoretical-empirical and political projects--we have arrived at the heart of the matter (which happens to be a matter of my heart): can NRT contribute to new ways of imagining the relationship between teaching literature and generating social change? And if so, how?

With regard to the first question, my answer is a confident "yes." NRT, after all, imagines that everything (and I mean *everything*) has the capacity to make a difference, which means that literature has the capacity to make a political difference. But NRT also asserts that the world is processual: it changes moment-to-moment depending on interactions among members of the social, and new practices emerge with/in ever-changing backgrounds. And the processual nature of non-representational model of the world makes it impossible to answer the second question: the world moves too fast to establish procedures and write up directives. As such, this section will be no manifesto. Like a great deal of non-representational work, it will provide nothing more than a couple of tentative gestures towards a reimagined vision for literature pedagogy that might foment social change.

As I explain in an earlier section, through the lens of NRT, political intervention requires the mobilization of affect and an ethos of experimentation. The mobilization of affect is an essential component of political intervention because NRT "positions affect as central to individual and collective political dispositions" and as an important element of "contemporary

forms of governing" (Cadman, 2009, p. 6). As Thrift points out throughout the second half of

Non-representational Theory, powerful entities have cultivated a new "suite of practically

formulated political technologies for deploying affect" (p. 252), and progressives can no longer

afford to neglect it. NRT's ethos of experimentation stems from its associative worldview and

the fact that the non-representational worldview makes it impossible to predict an output from a

set of inputs. Thus, the mobilization of affect is always a political experiment aimed at fostering

new political formations or jolting people into new ways of thinking about the world.

If literature instruction aims to reorient society to justice and equity by mobilizing affect

in experimental ways, it will have to look much different than my unit on *Monster*, which neither

mobilized affect nor cultivated an ethos of experimentation. Reviewing my *Monster* unit

alongside non-representational work underscores the deeply cognitive nature of the unit. Despite

the fact that I wanted students to have an affective encounter with the book--I wanted them to get

a feel for what Steve experienced and thus develop care and concern for institutionalized racism-

-my approach to fostering this kind of response to the book was grounded in rational and

cognitive engagement with the text. When I visited students in their lit circles, I listened to their

conversation and then pushed them to identify and explain moments of injustice in the text and to

draw from specific passages in the book to support their claims. For their final assessment, I

required students to analyze the effects of injustice in Steve's life. Sadly, the unit was no more

experimental than it was moving. My organization of the lit circles lacked innovation and risk:

each day students began the day with a shared journal question and then broke into small groups

to discuss the reading they were assigned the night before. And as I noted above, for a final

assignment, all students had to produce a literary analysis essay that considered the role of

injustice in the life of a character in their book. The unit also did not push students to be

experimental. If they did not attend to their lit circle texts in the way I asked them to--if they, for example, spent their time talking about whether or not Steve was guilty instead of how his story reflects injustice in the U.S.--then I would bring them back to the task by joining their group and asking questions focused on issues of justice and equity.

Unfortunately, although reading my own lit circle unit alongside non-representational literature highlights the incompatibility between my curriculum and a non-representational approach to political intervention, it says little about how I could have done the unit differently. To think through what it might mean to attend to affect and foster experimentation, I turn to a few insights generated by a handful of scholars in the field of literacy studies (Ehret & Hollett, 2014; Leander and Boldt, 2013; Smith, 2017; Thiell, 2015; Wargo, 2015) who have considered literacy practices and literacy education through the lens of NRT and other new materialist theories. When read together, these accounts of literacy practices provide three insights that might contribute to new ways of imagining the relationship between literature instruction and social change. First, and perhaps most emphatically, this literature suggests that the mobilization of affect and an experimental ethos will likely require attention to the background with/in which literature curriculum occurs; second, and relatedly, this literature as encourage me to think in new ways about the space of literature curriculum and the affective and experimental affordances of that space; finally, these studies highlight the need for literature teachers interested in fostering social change to embrace surprise and the unexpected.

Non-representational and new materialist literacy scholarship tends to foreground the entanglements of humans and non-humans that produce the background with/in which literacy practices emerge. For example, Leander and Bolt's (2013) non-representational presentation of a boy named Lee's playful engagement with manga at home on a Sunday highlights the role that

non-human entities played in his embodied experience as a reader. This presentation illustrates how a child's affect-laden engagements with literature (Japanese manga books, specifically) occur with/in "his experience of a comfortable reading chair in his living room on a Sunday morning. Environment, objects, body, internal states, story world, and time are coexperienced" (p. 29). Importantly, this assemblage of human and non-human entities is not an inert backdrop against which Lee reads and/or acts out the manga narrative; instead, they argue that his "body is forever changing and emerging anew through its constant responsive interaction with the assemblage of time, place, material objects, and worlds of manga" (p. 29). Like Leander and Bolt, Smith (2017) also draws from non-representational theory to shed light on the important role that non-human entities play in generative affective engagements with literacy practices. At one point in her study of a prolific adolescent writer named Emily, for example, Smith points out that Emily often experienced flashes of intensity and affect that often led to bursts of writing. Importantly, these bursts occurred with/in relationships with non-human writing technologies, smartphone applications, and the the characters of her fiction (p. 134).

Both Leander and Boldt (2013) and Smith (2017) suggest that if classrooms aim to produce and deploy affect in an effort to foster social change, their experiments will have to account for the concatenations of humans and non-humans that contribute to the production of affect. Unfortunately, I have not walked away from this insight with a sense of how exactly ELA classrooms might attend to the assemblage of human and non-human entities in its attempt to produce affective engagements with texts that might help students see the world differently; instead, the insight has fostered some provocative questions. What role do nonhuman entities play in the production of an affective background with/in students read narrative texts that introduce readers to lives of people unlike them? How might a teacher deploy these assemblages

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in order to cultivate classrooms that encourage and/or leave space for students to be moved by literature? How might a teacher make use of the new media technologies that are often employed in the mobilization of affect--film and television; smartphone applications like Instagram, Snapchat, and Pinterest; music sharing sites like soundcloud and bandcamp--in order to mobilize affect in her classroom? And, finally, if affect emerges through embodied interactions with the background, how might schools make more room for embodied experiences that might lead to affective entanglements with books?[25]

In addition to foregrounding entanglements between humans and non-humans, new materialist literacy scholarship has also underscored the role space place in the emergence of literacy practices. Here again, the foundational study by Leander and Boldt (2013) provides an illuminating account of the role space plays in the production of affect. Throughout the study, the authors pay special attention to the spaces in which Lee's reading practices occur and the affordances of these spaces. They note that when Lee's friend Hunter arrives, the two boys "moved freely among multiple spaces"--including Lee's porch swing, the front yard, the kitchen, Lee's bedroom, and the online spaces of fan sites--as they read manga, acted out scenes, and discussed their favorite books and characters. Each of these spaces had different affordances and constraints--the front yard provided room for the boys to engage in a sword fight, while their time on fan sites inspired them to spend 45 minutes drawing scenes from their favorite book--and Lee and Hunter move among these spaces as their literate practices unfold. Literacy, the authors argue, is "unbounded," and the "unbounded" nature of literacy practices give rise to its ability to "participate in unruly ways" (p. 41). Like the Leander and Boldt piece, Wargo's (2015) study of

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[25] I am very inspired, for example, by Thiell's (2015) re-description of children's play as "complex embodied literacy work" (p. 46), but I do not know how secondary teachers might subvert classroom and school norms in order to invite students to "participate in improvisational play" or to engage with text "through movement rather than verbal responses" (p. 46).

a youth's Snapchat storytelling practices highlights the role of space in literacy practices and emphasizes the "unbounded" nature of literacy. The study follows a youth named Ben who uses the smartphone application Snapchat in order to "(re)live, reexamine, and document a myriad of phenomenological experiences" by filming and photographing spaces so that they tell the story of his first kiss (p. 48). Wargo emphasizes how the affective nature of this literacy task moved Ben across spaces (and times), and he contends that when "unbounded" and "left to unfold," youth composing practices will literally meander, stretching "across a multitude of planes" (p. 60).

The work of Leander and Boldt (2013) and Wargo (2015) suggest that English classrooms that want to mobilize affect for progressive ends might need to consider the affordances and constraints of the space(s) in which literacy curriculum takes place. Again, this insight has led me to a series of provocative questions instead of a set of procedures for mobilizing affect through the deployment of space. First, and perhaps most cynically, this insight has made me wonder if a powerful affective response to *Monster*, the kind that might function as a "jolt" that would have helped my students see the world differently, would ever be possible in a classroom space that primarily serves the purposes of disciplining bodies and conditioning children to instrumentalist forms of learning. But these insights generate other questions, too. They make me wonder, for instance, how an institutionalized space like a high school classroom might be better designed (through the organization of furniture and resources, the use of plants, the use of color, the lighting, the smells and the textures in the room) to cultivate affective responses to particular texts and/or approaches to literature teaching. I wonder, too, what opportunities there might be for English classrooms to "unbound" literature instruction, moving it across a number of spaces that each have different sets of affordances. What kinds of affective

resonances might be produced if students engaged with texts across a number of spaces? What might happen if a teacher who wants to challenge racism through the teaching of literature invited students to leave the comforts of their "home" spaces and read a text like *Monster* with/in spaces that carry the resonances of America's racist past and present? Would attention to space enliven literature teaching in ways that produce new publics or jolt readers into new ways of thinking about the world?

Finally, non-representational work in literacy studies has also suggested that teachers who want to ignite social change through experimental mobilizations affect will have to embrace surprise and uncertainty. After all, when everything exists on the same "plane of immanence," then everything acts and interacts, making it difficult to predict outputs based on a series of inputs: some experiments will work while others fizzle; our attempts to mobilize certain kinds of affect might mobilize others; reading practices will emerge in surprising ways once our students--the decentered human subjects that they are--engage with our curriculum. As Leander and Boldt (2013) note, the challenge of weaving the insights of NRT into the classroom is that the teacher must "make space for fluidity and indeterminacy as the nature of things" and to "recognize difference, surprise, and unfolding that follow along paths that are not rational or linear…" (pp. 43-44). Failure and uncertainty, then, are part and parcel of the non-representational literacy classroom and literature teachers interested in experimental mobilizations of affect will have to embrace this as part of their pedagogy.

CHAPTER 5
LITTLE SOMETHINGS

> "Everyday life is a life lived on the level of surging affects,
> impacts suffered or barely avoided.
> It takes everything we have.
> But it also spawns a series of little somethings…"
> Kathleen Stewart, Ordinary Affects

When Do You Stop?

I can't help but to think about the teacher/student dialogue that Latour stages in the middle of *Reassmbling the Social*. In it, Latour offers some advice to a bewildered student who's been told by his advisor to visit Latour to see if ANT might be a suitable theoretical frame for his sociological study. Latour bristles at the suggestion, telling the student that ANT is not a framework to impose on a data set, it's an invitation to describe, describe, describe!

"You always say 'more descriptions," his baffled student cries. "When do you stop?"

Latour shrugs--at least, I imagine him shrugging. "You'll stop when you have written your 50,000 words."[26]

Monster in Rural Iowa

I read Myers's *Monster* for the first time during the mentored advanced project I worked on the summer between my third and fourth years of college. Over the course the summer, I read multicultural young adult novels and used discourse analysis to analyze transcripts of a teacher/researcher anti-racist book club my professor had started in a school district in rural Iowa[27]. It was hot that summer, and I spent my days inside the library, trying to make sense of James Gee and interpreting the way the teachers in this book club performed racial identities through discussions of multicultural young adult literature. I began to know the transcripts the way an actor knows a play. I began to relate to the characters.

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[26] (Latour, 2005, p. 148)
[27] See Lewis, Ketter, and Fabos (2001) for one analysis of this book club

During research meetings we talked about colorblind discourse and the intersection of gender and race. We talked about the ways that the teachers avoided talk about race, the way white supremacy were reproduced through the book club dialogue, the way the teachers used multicultural books as mirrors of their own lives and experiences and not windows into the experiences of others. I began to judge the characters of the transcripts. To cringe each time one of these teachers said something that we—analyzing from a safe distance—could refer to as colorblind discourse.

Why did *Monster* move me as much as it did? Was it my ability—honed over three years of English and sociology courses at a liberal art's college—to analyze race and racism in literature? Or was it the play of characters whose voices sang in my head as I read the transcripts? Was it the heat of that summer, the lime green library couches, the ice cream Friday's at the administration building? Or was it the ever-present fear of my own racism?

Why did I ever think *Monster* would move my students the way it moved me?

Read Alouds

What if we asked preservice teachers to read to people in retirement homes[28]? What if they pulled a chair next to a Gertrude or a Walter or a Henry and read

"Mrs. Dalloway said she would be the flowers herself" or

"It was a pleasure to burn" or

"124 was spiteful."

Would the words sound different? Would they feel different? Would they be sharper, softer, heavier, lighter? Would they have a different flavor? Would their hearts beat a different rhythm as they turned the page? Would it make a difference?

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[28] I must thank Mary Juzwik for this inspiring thought.

Lingering Questions: Agency

I am still grappling with the notion of agency.

As Fendler (2016) discusses, in critical theory, agency refers to the capacity for humans (working alone or collectively) to make a difference. As such, it is the "linchpin" needed to explain how an otherwise powerful social order "might be changed for the better" (p. 31). A great deal of writing in English education reflects critical theory's emphasis on agency, which is to say that a great deal of writing in English education suggests that fostering agency among students and teachers will help to change the social order for the better. Morrell (2005), for example, calls for English Education to help students become agents of change who will use literacy skills to "disrupt existing power relations" (p. 313), while Cherry-McDaniel (2017) discusses how curriculum might support students as they grow into "change agents in their communities and beyond" (p. 43). In order for ELA classrooms to support students' development as change agents, teacher education courses must encourage teachers to support students' agency. As such, Miller's (2014) objectives for his course on Critical Pedagogy in English Education include "Make a difference" in students' lives by "sharing critical ideas that can lead to transformative learning opportunities and agency" (p. 53). Likewise, Bieler and Burns (2017) call for English teacher preparation to produce teachers who will use "reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and visually representing" as opportunities to cultivate "personal agency and voice through the critical examination and creation of texts" (p. 149).

I bring all of this up because, as I said, I'm not sure what to do with the idea of agency. On the one hand, ANT and NRT compromise the notion of agency and provide a much more complex image of how change happens. ANT's emphasis on heterogeneous actor-networks and NRT's emphasis on affect's role in the unfolding of the world open up exciting new ways for

thinking about how change happens, as I detail in chapters three and four. But I'm not sure that that means that we should jettison the notion of agency altogether. After all, even Thrift (2008) retains "a sense of *personal authorship*" a decision he explains by arguing "how things seem is often more important than what they are" (p. 13).

Safety Nets at Work

You might get away with experimental English teaching if you have nothing to lose.

A Sense of Loss

I have learned that its best not to write about literature that really matters to me. To do so is to lose one's grip on the ineffable.

Ten years ago I wrote a tidy paper on Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*, arguing that the protagonist's erratic behavior illustrates her attempts to "knit up" her traumatic past. It drew heavily from a single quotation, one with beautiful imagery and verse-like prose, a quotation that enchanted me for reasons I still can't explain. But when I squeezed the quotation into the essay the spell evaporated. Just like that.

Robinson writes that "memory is the sense of loss" and "loss pulls us after it."[29] If that's true, then I've been pulled along in this project by the sense of loss I experienced when I wrote my essay on *Housekeeping*, pulled along by the memory of magic and a visceral sense of loss.

I wonder if we can ever "do justice to what literature does and why such doing matters."[30]

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[29] (Robinson, 1986, p. 194).
[30] (Felski, 2015a, p. 13)

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