

The Man, The Moth, The Legend: The Role and Function of Folklore in Queer Appalachian Social Media Communities

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a panel discussion on Queer Dialectology
and Folk Linguistics

Linguistic Society of America

Committee on LGBTQ+ [Z] Issues in Linguistics
(COZIL)



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Rural Queers and Queer Appalachians



The lives and experiences of rural queer and queer Appalachian people are, generally speaking, **discounted and ignored**.

Some Misconceptions That May Contribute:

- “Rural queers and queer Appalachians **don’t exist**”
- “Rural queers and queer Appalachians **do exist, but there’s not enough to matter.**”
- “**They do not differ in any significant way** from their queer urban or cisheteronormative rural counterparts.”

Rural Queers and Queer Appalachians



But really...

Queer Appalachians complicate **metronormativity** (Halberstam 2005)

- Rural and urban are spatially and socially opposed
- Urban spaces=queer community and liberation

Queer Appalachians also **complicate** the discourse of **Appalachianness** as being intrinsically tied to **cisheteronormativity**

Thesis



- A multimodal critical discourse analysis (MMCDA) of 4 years worth of posts from the QA Instagram account
- These folkloric discourses are both a **substrate for and byproduct of social interactions** within queer Appalachian online social media communities
- Specifically, **Mothman**.

Thesis



Some Important Functions of QA folkloric discourse:

- 1) the reconciliation and union of queerness and Appalachianiness
- 2) leftist praxis and antifascist, antiracist, pro-queer resistance

I attribute this to:

- 1) Reclamation of queerphobic and anti-Appalachian/rural monster/predator discourse (i.e., *Deliverance*)
- 2) (Re-)claiming leftist political heritage

Who is Queer Appalachia & the Electric Dirt Collective?



Fag Hillbilly • Dirt Femme •

Chocolate Spoonie • Latinx • Queer •

Farm-Her • Two Spirit • Affrilachian •

Swamp Diva • Muslim • Indigenous •

Thaibilly • Faggot Farmer • Veteran •

Black • Dirt Witch • Farm Femme •

Granny Witch • Positive • Lesbian •

Trans • Dreamers • Disabled • Dirt

Goth • Transsexual • Fat • Poor-Op •

Dirt • Femme • Dyke • Farmer •

Swamp Witch • Dirt Princess • Crip •

White Trash/White Treasure •

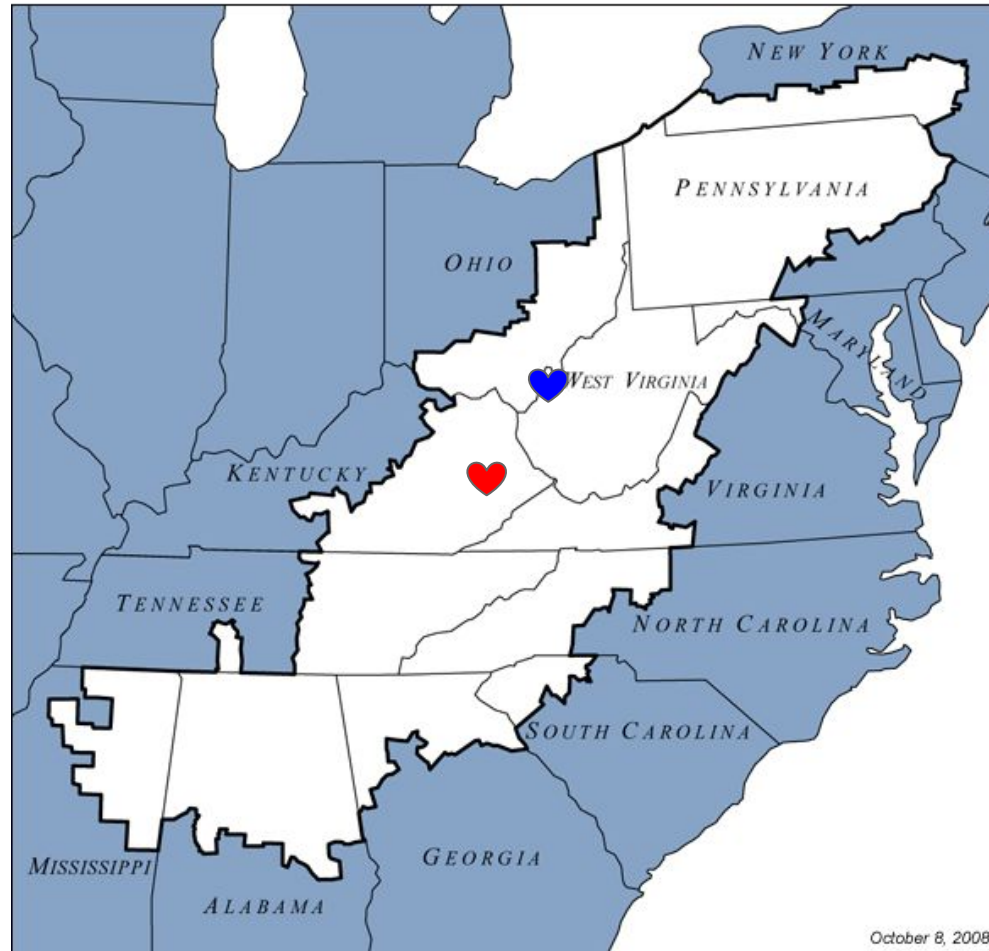
Undocumented • Nonbinary • Gender

Fuck • Feral • Bi • Faerie”

Who is Queer Appalachia & the Electric Dirt Collective?



- @QueerAppalachia on Instagram
- A memorial project for the late Bryn Kelly, a trans woman writer, artist, activist, and self-proclaimed 'Granny Witch'
- Began in 2016 as an online community and resource collective for queer Appalachians and Southerners
- Reclaiming and redefining queer (and) Appalachian narratives
- Fostering mutual aid and harm reduction efforts re: Appalachian and Southern public health issues



October 8, 2008

Source: Appalachian Regional Commission

Timeline of Events: 1966–1975

First sighted by gravediggers in nearby Clendenin, WV

Nov. 12th, 1966

The Collapse of the Silver Bridge, causing the deaths of 46 people. Mothman sighted.

December 15th, 1967

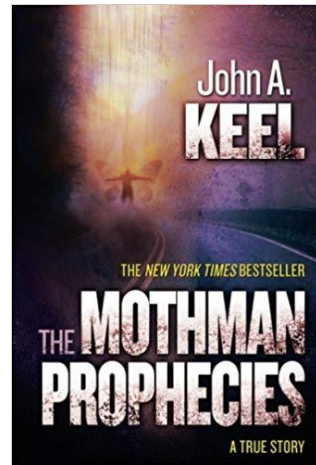
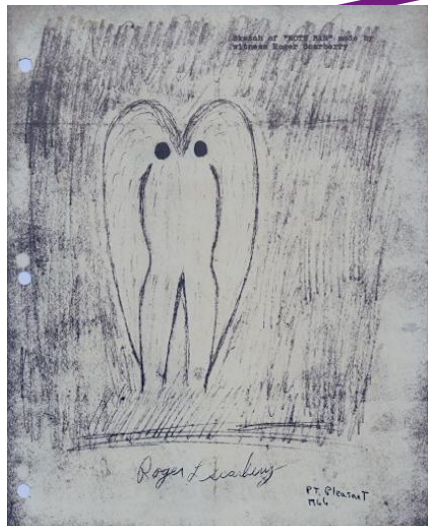


November 15th, 1966

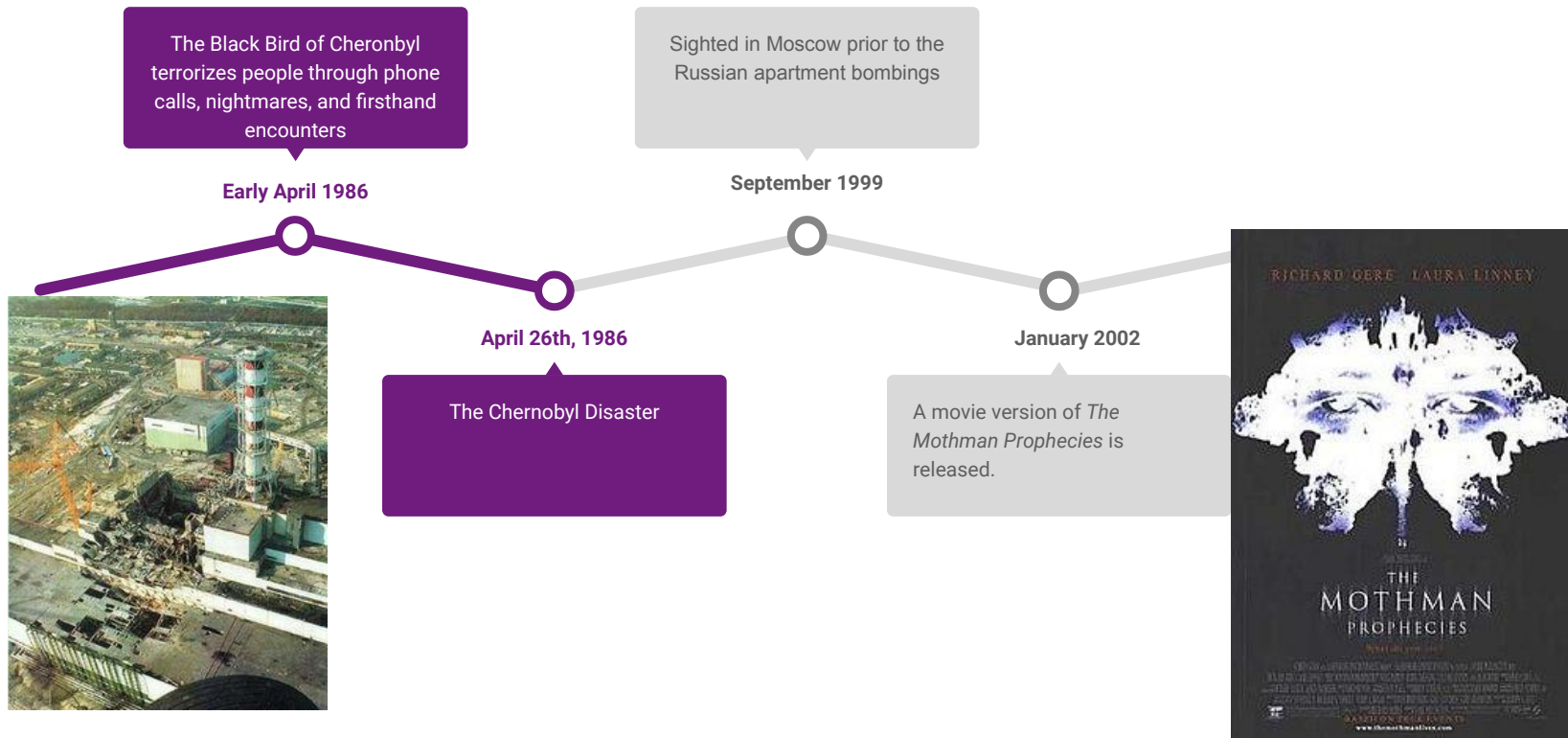
The TNT area incident. In this well-known account, the creature terrorized two young couples.

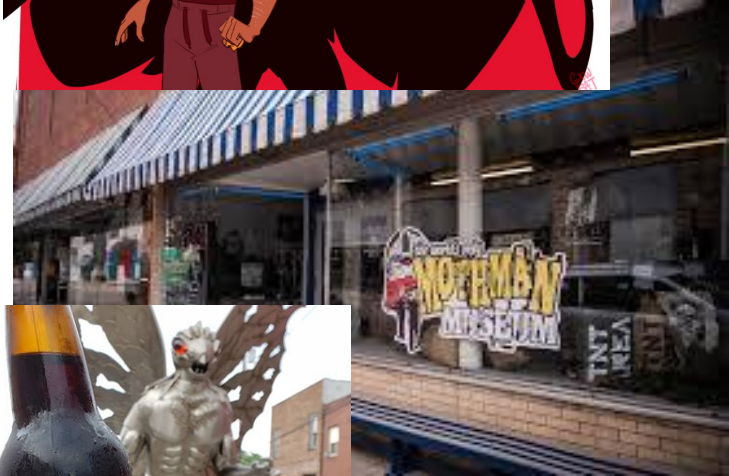
1975

Mothman Prophecies, a book by John Keel, is published



Timeline of Events: 1986–2002





Literature Review



- **Identity** is “done” through **performativity**
(Austin 1962)
 - All utterances are performative actions, in that they enact that which they describe (i.e., “I now pronounce you...”)
 - Butler (1988): gender is enacted through performativity (constitutes the very thing it performs)
 - Can be applied to other dimensions of identity, such as race and sexuality
- Identity is **not pre-discursive**; that is, it emerges through interaction

Literature Review



Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989; 1991)

- Any analysis of queer Appalachian community practices requires an **intersectional** approach
- queer Appalachians are ‘caught’ in the intersections of both queerphobia and anti-Appalachianism
- The intersections of queerphobia and anti-Appalachianism factor into the lives of queer Appalachians in ways that cannot be captured by looking at them as separate components
- Queer Appalachians experience queerphobia and anti-Appalachianism, they experience it in ways unique to them
- As an example of a synthesized kind of antagonism towards queer Appalachians, *Deliverance*

Literature Review



Discursive Enregisterment

- **Realtime enregisterment of folkloric discourse** as indexically linked to queerness, Appalachianness, and queer Appalachianness
- Cramer (2013): residents from Louisville, KY (a linguistic and cultural border zone) **have access to multiple regional affiliations** and therefore multiple discourses to draw upon in order to realize those affiliations
 - Helpful to think of **queer Appalachia social media communities** as a sort of **virtual border zone**
- Walker (2019): discourse subjects with strong indexical ties to regional identity can affect dialectal shifts in speech production, further establishing discourse itself as a site for indexicality

Queer dialectology & queer folk linguistics



- Divergent from traditional dialectological and variationist work
 - Multimodal analysis
 - Synthesis of social media and folkloric discourse
 - Centering queer Appalachians/Appalachian queers
 - Beginning with the rural and working from there

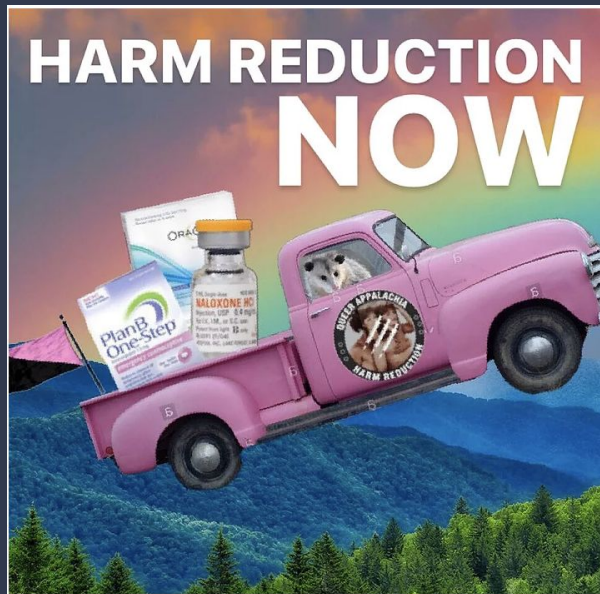
Methods



Multimodal critical discourse analysis (MMCDA)

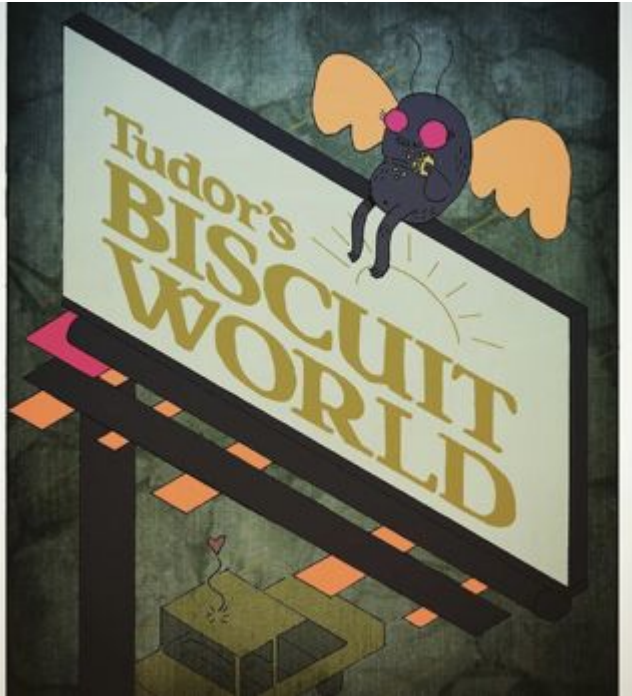
- Based on **Moran and Lee (2013)**, an MMCDA of Australian surgical websites selling genital cosmetic surgery
- Visual psychology methods from **Machin & Mayer (2012)**, as well as **Braun & Clarke (2006)** and **Gleeson (2011)**
- Iterative process of (re-)identification and notetaking of both written and visual content, which is done in two separate, parallel processes; labelled, categorized, re-analyzed, grouped
 - Collected on December 18th 2019
 - 168 posts from the beginning of the account on May 22nd 2016

Who is Queer Appalachia & the Electric Dirt Collective?



- A memorial project for the late Bryn Kelly (1981-2016), writer, artist, activist and Granny Witch
- Electric Dirt Zine
 - The underrepresented and misrepresented get to represent themselves
 - No gatekeeper; just submissions
- Harm Reduction & Mutual Aid re: the opioid epidemic
 - Narcan, Naloxone, home HIV test kits, fentanyl test strips, emergency contraception, sharps containers, RX disposal bags, on-the-spot Hep C testing and more

From the Instagram of @queerappalachia



From the Instagram of @queerappalachia

- Jorts~Daisy Dukes
- Daisy Dukes + (Moth)Man ~ overt sexuality, Chippendale's dancer, queerness
- Daisy Dukes + South/rural~ Dukes of Hazzard, Dixie car horn, General Lee, rebel flag
- Jorts ~ not indexical of CSA/white supremacy
- This image (Mothman, jorts, etc.) ~ emergent as indexically queer & rural & Appalachian



From the Instagram of @queerappalachia



don't love
me at my

deserve
me at my



Liked by anzthabaka and 3,527 others

queerappalachia #appalachiaedition #jdvdance author of
#hillbillyelegy & @elizabethcatte w #mothman author of
#whatyouaregettingwrongaboutappalachia #shotsfired
#queerappalachia #electricdirt

[View all 22 comments](#)

cfigsnap As always: fuck JD Vance in the eye with a

Conclusions



POINT PLEASANT, WEST VIRGINIA

- The importance & utility of folkloric discourse as a resource for queer (and) Appalachian identity work
 - How Mothman and witch folklore are used by members of the QA Instagram community
 - The usage of these folklores in this kind of discourse is **intersectional** in nature; **defies the binary and reflects the lived realities of queer Appalachians**
 - The versatility of nuance of Crenshaw's model of intersectionality to understand
 - 1) Systems of oppression and marginalization
 - 2) How intersectional identities are discursively and interactively created/managed/enacted etc.

Conclusions



POINT PLEASANT, WEST VIRGINIA

- The fluidity and freedom of folklore
 - Folkloric subjects ~ “discursive canvasses,”
lessened social norms/constraints
 - Folklore’s vital role in identity work with
disjunctive constraints
- Appalachia is being (re-)defined by queer
Appalachians and their communities
- Affords new possibilities for queer Appalachian ways
of being; beyond the normative
- Queer Appalachians
 - make the once-imaginary, real
 - Claim both queerness and Appalachianiness in their own
ways and on their own terms.

Thank you



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