Literacy Potentials: Agency, Embodiment, And Hybridity In Cesar Chavez's Discourse Practices

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LITERACY POTENTIALS: AGENCY, EMBODIMENT, AND HYBRIDITY IN César Chávez’S DISCOURSE PRACTICES

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DEDICATION

For Alicia, Quinn, and Finnegan
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CHAPTER ONE: Towards Embodied Literacies: Folding Corporeal Bodies and (Social) Discursive Bodies in Literacy Research

“Discourse is undeniably a primary means by which we constitute identities for ourselves and are constituted by others. But, by conceiving meaning solely as a web of textual relationships, we bracket and ignore the material flow within the entire performance, especially the loop we call writing” (Kristie S. Fleckenstein “Bodysigns” 766)

1. Introduction: Ideological and Embodied Approaches to Literacy Research

Early in the disciplinary formation of composition and rhetoric, scholars such as Linda Flower and John Hayes worked to theorize the writing process by drawing from interdisciplinary work on cognition. As they explain in “A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing,” Flower and Hayes offered “a theory of the cognitive process involved in composing in an effort to lay groundwork for more detailed study of thinking processes in writing” (274). However, serious interdisciplinary inquiry into cognition and writing was roundly rejected by the field following the social turn of the 1980s and the field’s subsequent critique of the cognitive model for failing to balance the emphasis on universality in prevalent cognitive models with the culturally situated and constructed forces underscored by postmodern theorists and researchers. For many critics, like Patricia Bizzell, the cognitive model over emphasized universal micro-forces of cognition in its model of how the writing process takes place within the mind. Problematically, these critics argued, the cognitive model failed to consider the macro-forces that affect writing processes, such as the historical, social, and material conditions that flow through specific discourse communities. These criticisms were persuasive, influencing much of the field to turn away from cognition.
Since then, few compositionists have yet to seriously look back at cognition, leaving the tension between micro-oriented cognitive models of writing and macro-oriented sociocultural models of writing unresolved. This trend is illustrated by Linda Flower’s response to James Berlin’s critique of her earlier cognitive process work with John Hayes, which Berlin published in “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class.” In Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement, Flower responds to Berlin by acknowledging that her earlier work with Hayes was too individualistic in its focus on cognition and did not sufficiently account for broader sociocultural forces. Further, Flower argues that because the debate over the cognitive process model was largely about the “empirical, cognitive, and individually focused perspective,” the critiques offered by Berlin, Bizzell, and others turned toward a discourse of critical theory borrowed from literary studies. Thus, the social turn became a movement away from the writer and toward the conventions of discourse (92). The shift might more starkly be characterized as a movement from the body of the writer toward bodies of discourse.

Flower’s work in Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement seeks a balance between cognition and culture, arguing that in order to respond to the critiques of the cognitive model, we need

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1 At the 2009 Conference on College Composition and Communication, Ronald T. Kellogg presented his research on writing and cognition as a key note titled “Acquiring Advanced Writing Skills: A View from Cognitive Science.” While this indicates a tacit interest, not much research within the field has seriously considered current research on cognition in psychology or neuroscience. Recent work that draws on this body of research includes Trainor’s Rethinking Racism, and Cooper’s “Rhetorical Agency as Emergent and Enacted.” For published accounts of Kellogg’s work, see Kellogg “Training Writing Skills” and Kellogg and Whiteford “Training Advanced Writing Skills.”
a more fully envisioned account of thinking, feeling social subjects *doing writing* as a part of their social-cultural contexts and *responding* (in ways we have yet to adequately understand) to those contexts. By context we [mean] not only the forces of social ideology, convention, and power but also the demands of individual values and goals, conflicts, and contradictions (94; emphasis added).

In short, Flower suggests that we need to return to micro-theories of composition and connect them with our well-established ideological and sociocultural situated macro-perspectives on writing. Yet the challenge we face in such a project is that we do not have an in-depth understanding of how individuals discursively respond to context, as it is framed by Flower. When we understand context as an ecology of both macro- and micro-forces, then taking up a primarily ideological or macro-orientation is insufficient. This theoretical approach should be paired with theories of the mind and body that enable us to understand how “the demands of individual values and goals, conflicts, and contradictions” combine with “ideology, convention, and [social] power” to shape discursive agency (94).

Until we holistically understand how any given subjectivity is a confluence of macro- and micro-forces on the one hand, and how “context” refers to an ecology of sociocultural practices and embodied affective and cognitive phenomena like feelings, emotions, attitudes, on the other hand, we will be left with partial accounts of writing that privilege representation and social convention over writing and embodied cognition. In this chapter, I argue that the failure to holistically consider the body stems, in part, from the focus on macro-social structures in literacy research. This focus on the macro, or ideological, limits our ability to generate a holistic account of affects and the felt dimensions of embodiment that shape our literate practices.

My response to this impasse follows Kristie Fleckenstein who argues in *Embodied Lit*—
eracies that we must “disestablish our definitions of literacy as dominantly and aggressively lin-
guistic. We need to seek an alternative imaginary that enables us to conceive of writing-reading as something more than words, more than language” (2). Although reading and writing are most certainly linguistic practices, as a field, we cannot holistically understand how we use language without also understanding the relationships between language on the one hand, and the corporeal and social bodies within which language operates on the other. The field has neither systemati-
cally nor rigorously addressed these concerns.

While our field has developed powerful theoretical and methodological strategies for inter-
rogating social discursive bodies, we have few well-developed resources for understanding the role played by embodiment in reading and writing. I aim to contribute to literacy studies in com-
position by pointing out that, for the last thirty years, literacy researchers have developed insight-
ful perspectives on the relationships between discursive bodies and social bodies through con-
cepts like “institutions,” “power,” and “resistance,” but have failed to holistically address the re-
lationships between discursive bodies and corporeal bodies. The power of the ideological model over the last thirty years has left the field in what seems to be kind of “mental inertia,” to use Donna Qualley’s term (50), and as Marolina Salvatori notes, it is time to take a critical look back at the ideological model (67). As a field, we do not fully understand the relationships between our bodies and the various ways we use language, including writing. Without a complex under-
standing of the dynamic interrelationship between embodiment, affect, thinking, and language, our efforts to conceptualize writing and literacy through frameworks like institutions, power, and agency will always be limited and incomplete. In short, I aim to propose new avenues for devel-
oping the kinds of “threshold concepts” that can move literacy studies into new territories of re-
search and analysis (50).

Therefore, in the following chapter, I first examine the ideological model in order to
highlight its inability to account for the micro-dimensions of writing. Second, I review existing
work on embodiment in literacy studies to trace out what amounts to a tacit history of challenges
to the ideological model. This review is necessary for the field to conceptualize where to go next.
The final section of the chapter briefly proposes a further direction for theory and research that
pulls from recent work on theory and empirical research on affects and situated/embodied cogni-
tion.

2. Limits of the Ideological Approach to Literacy Research

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, literacy researchers began to mount substantial chal-
 lenges to the autonomous model of literacy (Goody and Watt; Havelock; Olson; Ong), which
maintained that along with alphabetic literacy comes distinct cognitive capabilities like abstract
thinking, historicizing the past, and linear logical reasoning. These arguments were largely ab-
stract theorizations untethered to empirical considerations of actual uses of literacy and were
amplified to apply to any practice of alphabetic literacy, whatever the sociocultural milieux. In
contrast, the responses to the autonomous model that emerged during the 70s and 80s variously
argued that literacy researchers should look at the actual uses of literacy in a given community
and attend to the broader historical, social, political, and economic contexts of those uses (Graff;
Heath; Scribner and Cole; Street; Szwed).

This work was brought to a head in Brian Street’s argument for an ideological model of
literacy research, which he grounded in a synthesis of the emerging responses (e.g. Heath) to
Goody and others who argued for the autonomous model of literacy. As Street explains in “The
New Literacy Studies,” the ideological model consists of both ethnographic research that enables
a detailed study of literacy practices, as well as an analysis of the ways those practices are socially
constructed and given meaning by culture and ideology. Street’s ideological model thus focuses
on the actual uses of literacy, but locates the significance of those actual uses through an
analysis of macro-power in society. Street’s ideological approach to literacy study has been widely
influential, along with the important work of Shirley Brice Heath, James Paul Gee, and others
who advocate a situated approach, because it offers a blueprint that facilitates cross-cultural
comparisons of literacy research grounded in empirically-driven contextualized accounts of individu-
als’ actual uses of literacy interpreted through ideological frameworks. However, as I argue
below, while this coupling of qualitative inquiry with macro-social analysis offers important in-
sight, it continues to stand as the limit of current approaches to literacy research, for it can only
offer a partial view of literacy in society.

Nonetheless, the relationship between language and the felt dimensions of our bodies
seems rather obvious when we think about oral uses of language – consider, for example, the role
played by gestures, intonation, and facial expressions in oral communication. Orality is undeni-
ably an embodied practice primarily marked by the face-to-face orientation between two or more

2 See Ekman for a discussion of the important role of facial feedback loops in emotionality.
individuals. Nonetheless, written language has long been framed as a primarily cognitive undertaking (Flower and Hayes; Lunsford), thus emphasizing the role of conscious intellectual thought centered around abilities of abstraction and representation. Further, the experience of writing seems to displace the body and the prerequisite for face-to-face interactions by extending the temporality of linguistic communication. My chief claim here, however, is that writing is always more than conscious intellectual thought for we cannot really separate conscious intellectual thought from other embodied emotional and felt experiences (Damasio Descartes’ Error; LeDoux The Emotional Brain). Without a complex understanding of the dynamic interrelationship between embodiment, affect, thinking, and language, our efforts to conceptualize writing and literacy through frameworks like institutions, power, and agency will always be limited and incomplete.

In the following section, I raise this argument by briefly tracing out the ideological model articulated by Street and Gee, showing how Gee differs from Street in his greater focus on individuals and identity. I then discuss James Collins and Richard Blot’s critique of Street’s focus on what they call “macro-power,” which I extend to apply to Gee’s work. Although Gee’s model of ideology and literacy offers a better (although limited) account of individuals and the felt-dimensions of corporeality, his work remains tied to ideology and macro-power, a point I illustrate through an analysis of Gee’s work. Finally, I conclude that we should move past the ideological

3 This claim obviously sidesteps the displacement caused by telephonic communication. While talking over the telephone usually involves a displacement of space where each individual cannot see the other’s face and bodily gestures, other embodied aspects of oral language, such as tone, for example, continue to shape the construction of meaning within the conversation.
model by developing methods for both theorizing and analyzing the embodied dynamics of literacy.

3. Corporeality and the Ideological Model

In “The New Literacy Studies,” Brian Street offers perhaps his clearest articulation of the ideological model. In this chapter, Street emphasizes the close relationship between social power and cultural practices by looking at the cultural construction of literacy practices from an ideological perspective that understands “ideology” as “the site of tension between authority and power on the one hand and resistance and creativity on the other.” Further, Street argues, “This tension operates through the medium of a variety of cultural practices” including both language and literacy (434). For Street, ideology is (1) closely tied to the duality of empowerment and disempowerment seen through the lens of broad social and institutional systems, and (2) a constellation of knowledge materialized through cultural practices. Thus the meaning of specific cultural practices, such as speaking or writing, exist only in conjunction with broader social currents of power, authority, resistance, and creativity.

In Literacy in Theory and Practice, Street demonstrates this ideological approach through his research on the literacies practiced in Cheshmeh, a small rural village of Iran in the 1970s. In this important work, Street shows that the consequences of literacy, as described by advocates of the autonomous model, are neither universal nor autonomous, but are instead inflected by broader ideologies manifest in the cultural practices associated with institutions such as the Islamic school known as a Maktab. Street highlights the ideological by pointing to the relationship between institutions and literacy practices, and showing how commercial success in Cheshmeh de-
pends on the acquisition and adaptation of Maktab literacies to commercial contexts. Thus, Street shows how the Cheshmeh Tajers (middlemen who transport and sell produce for village growers) are able to apply certain literate practices that were acquired in their Maktab schooling to commercial contexts, such as the practice of associating specific meanings with a kind of textual formatting. But while not all aspects of the Maktab literacies could be carried over to commercial contexts – for example, the authority embedded in commercial texts had to be constructed via signatures and stamps whereas the authority of religious texts used in the Maktab was passed down as if it were beyond the text itself – Maktab literacy generally “facilitated the wider use of ‘commercial’ literacy and ensured the broadening of the power base of those who had special expertise in it” (175). The key implication of Street’s work is that the significance of any given literacy depends on the constellation of literate practices, institutional structures, and ideologies (“social construction[s] of reality embedded in specific collective practices in specific social situations” [176]) that surround it. The relationships between macro social structures or institutions such as schools on the one hand, and individuals’ uses of literacies and language on the other, lie at the core of Street’s method for analysis.

James Paul Gee extends Street’s ideological model of literacy research in two ways: (1) by elaborating on the socializing connection between literacies and ideologies, and (2) by theorizing the impact that ideologies have on individuals through their literate practices. To account for the relationship between ideologies and literacies, and to acknowledge their effect on identity, Gee develops the concept of “Discourses,” which couples the uses of language (speaking/listening and writing/reading) with ways of being and acting in the world. The concept of Discourse
enables Gee to explore the historical and ideological forces that shape our social uses of language, whether written or oral. Both, Gee contends, are equally inflected by our own historical and cultural situations (which have their own ideological roots) and the ideological structures that shape the current social contexts in which we intersect and use language.

While the concept of Discourse encompasses both oral and written uses of language, it allows us to view literacies as practices embedded in both social/historical ideologies that are closely aligned with other embodied activities. Thus, each Discourse functions as an identity kit in that it entails certain combinations of talking, feeling, thinking, being, doing, dressing, acting, etc., that get one recognized as a certain who (socially recognizable identity) doing a certain what (socially recognizable activity). These saying-being-doing-feeling combinations may be understood as “‘theories’ about what counts as a ‘normal’ person and the ‘right’ ways to think, feel, and behave” that are often taken for granted by the individuals who enact them (4). Each of these tacit theories, Gee argues, are ideologies that have been and continue to be shaped by a conflux of historical, political, economic, and social currents of power. Like Street, Gee sees ideology as a constellation of knowledge manifested in cultural practice, but Gee moves past Street’s work by developing a theory that accounts for the direct impact of ideologies and literacies (Discourses) on individuals and their identities. Ideology, according to this view, thus operates on and through individuals.

Central to both Street and Gee is the relationship between macro-power (vis-à-vis the concept of ideology) and literacy. However, as anthropologists James Collins and Richard Blot rightly argue in their critique of the situated approach and its use of ideological analysis in their
book *Literacy and Literacies*, one limit to this school of thought is the almost exclusive focus on macro-power. By and large, Collins and Blot argue, the works of Street and others who practice the situated approach to literacy research insufficiently theorize the notion of power, for while they offer accounts of macro-power, they say nothing about micro-power.

Whereas *macro-power* may be conceptualized as state-power, or a power often exerted over and through social bodies (such as institutions) from the top-down, *micro-power* refers to a kind of power that operates on and through techniques of the corporeal body, for it works from the bottom-up with direct implications on identity or subjectivity. As Collins and Blot put it, micro-power looks beyond questions of privilege or disprivilege, empowerment or disempowerment; instead, micro-power looks at “how along with the distribution of material resources, there is also a distribution of persons – of kinds of persons and social subjectivities” (45). In this regard, the work of Collins and Blot is closely related to Gee’s emphasis on literacies as identity kits. However, Collins and Blot go beyond Gee by considering how identities may be either imposed from above or chosen from below (174).

Likewise, Collins and Blot’s argument for micro-power is closely related to Deborah Brandt’s analysis of literacy as an economic resource. In her research on generational changes in literate practices, Brandt examined how literacies affect the distributions of subjectivities in communities over time. Brandt’s work highlights the role of literacy “as an economic resource, as an object of development, investment, and exploitation around which both value and competition intensify” and acknowledges the status of literacy as “a technology, a process, a product, a form of work and play, a currency, an energy source, all in one” (183). By considering the impact
of literacy as an economic resource on the distribution of subjectivities, Brandt provides a means for analyzing literacy and identity through a macro lens rooted in an appreciation of broader historical and economic forces at play in a social context.

So for example, Brandt’s analysis of Raymond Branch and Dora Lopez shows how their respective efforts to learn literacy in a second language (computer programming language for Branch and Spanish for Lopez) carried differing implications due to broader economic structures, even if the outcomes of their literacy learning affected their subjectivities. Thus, Brandt writes, “A comparison of the informal literacy learning efforts of Raymond Branch and Dora Lopez suggests not merely how one social group’s literacy practices may differ from another but how everybody’s literate practices are operating in an economic structure that affects opportunity and reward” (180). Brandt’s conclusions point to broader (macro) economic structures (such as the midwest economy that underfunds Spanish language services and places a premium on computer language services) in an effort to better understand the distribution of subjectivities in relation to literacy practices in a given social context.

Collins and Blot move past Brandt by focusing on how literacy affects the distribution of subjectivities from the bottom-up rather than the top-down. That is, from the perspective of individual bodies within social contexts, Collins and Blot urge us to ask: how does literacy affect the distribution of subjectivities? This question, how literacy affects identity, is not a new one to the field, as both Gee and Brandt (among many others) taken it up; Collins and Blot push the conversation by attending to micro-power, the implication of which, I argue, is the need to better understand and discuss the relationship between literacy and the body.
To this end, Collins and Blot argue that in order to fully account for “power-in-literacy,” or “the myriad ways in which writing is both an effect and a form of power,” we need to better understand the relationships between micro-power and writing (61). Collins and Blot propose to do so by drawing from poststructuralist accounts of power (e.g. Bourdieu; deCerteau; and Foucault) while combining ethnographic research with historical case studies in order to more fully consider the multifaceted nature of power and the formative relationships between texts, power, and identity.

Collins and Blot’s work is significant because it makes an important critique of the ideological model, arguing the field needs to account for the myriad ways power is manifest. However, while Collins and Blot point to the corporeal body via the notion of “micro-power,” their work never fully arrives at the level of felt experience. That is, they lack a holistic assessment of social power and the individual corporeal body. Relying on poststructuralists to theorize micro-power, Collins and Blot remain blinded to the limits of discourse. Collins and Blot point to the body via “micro-power”, but do not fully arrive at the body. However, as Richard Miller points out in *Writing at the End of the World*, while it is easy to take up Foucault and think that all the world is a text, ultimately, discourse and the body each pertain to irreducible aspects of the human condition (32). Thus, we must recognize that discourses and corporeal bodies are irreducibly different aspects of our humanity while, at the same time, acknowledging that we can never fully understand discourse without some account of the body, for literacy is always both an embodied and social practice.

In their account of power-in-literacy, Collins and Blot argue that literacy functions as
both a shield and weapon. To the extent that literacy reproduces social power by reproducing the Discourses associated with a dominant Discourse and thus implementing identities from above, it serves as a weapon; to the extent that literacy may be used to protect disempowered groups by reproducing/preserving their cultural practices and choosing identities from below, literacy serves as a shield. For example, Collins and Blot point to the practice of Citing-Up in Jamaica where Bongo, a black Jamaican Rastafarian preacher, modifies the text of the Bible to incorporate elements that reflect the experience of his Black congregations. Because the Bible (as it is written) does not adequately represent Black consciousness or tradition, oral/aural modifications are made to the text; for instance, “understanding” becomes “overstanding” to remove the negatively inflected morpheme “un” in favor of the positively inflected morpheme “over”.

This “busting” of the words is a practice of textual citation or inscription that realigns individuals’ relationships to the acts of reading and interpreting the text by incorporating “up-full” or “livical” sounds that better reflect the lived experience of the black Jamaican people (164). That is, it is an example of how individuals combine disparate literacies (Anglo-Christian discourse on the one hand, Rastafari and African discourse on the other) to reshape the ideological currents that the community finds embedded in the text. The strength of Collins and Blot’s focus on micro-power is that it enables us to see how individuals combine marginalized and empowered discourses to forge new hybrid identities via literacy practices empowered not by macro-power but from below, by the desire of individuals, in this case, to inhabit discourses and identities that respond to their multiple positions as black Jamaicans, Christians, and Rastafarians. The limit of Collins and Blot’s approach to micro-power is that they fail to move beyond discourse
itself to see how it is shaped by the embodied dynamics of being embedded in disparate cultural and social conditions.

Nevertheless, I would extend Collins and Blot’s critique of Street to include Gee’s work on Discourses, for although Gee extends Street’s ideological analysis to focus more on the individual and embodied dynamics of being, Gee’s analysis of social power remains rooted at the macro-level. As Gee argues, Discourses are socially and historically constructed synchronized performances, which the individual enacts through embodied practices (feelings, utterances, actions, etc.) that are defined internally and in relation with other Discourses and social hierarchies of power. Power and ideology are thus interwoven with Discourses, and Discourses are interwoven with human corporeality, existence, and experience.

But because Discourses are always more than language, and represent coordinated patterns of embodied practices, Gee argues that meta-knowledge – or the conceptual, abstracted understanding of what a Discourse entails, and how it works – is insufficient for acquiring a secondary Discourse. For Gee, learning is a process that centers around teaching, explaining, reflecting, analyzing, and attaining understanding through access to meta-knowledge. Acquisition, on the other hand, entails a process of exposure to others in a natural, meaningful, and functional context. That is, acquisition occurs through affective experiences that Gee suggests often occur at the level of the subconscious, but which yet entail getting a feel of how things work or how to recognize and enact specific practices in specific situations. While learning gives us the tools for
critique, according to Gee, acquisition gives us the tools to recognize and get recognized.4

Despite the importance of affect in the acquisition and enactment of Discourses, Gee’s method of analysis does not enable a consideration of these affective features of Discourses, and few alternatives exist for those interested in emotions and the body in literacy research5. For example, in his second chapter on Discourse analysis where he illustrates how the method operates, Gee focuses on the example of Leona, a young African American girl who tells two stories in class (the puppy story and the cake story) in order to “discuss why they [Leona’s stories] were not accepted by her teacher as ‘successful’ sharing-time turns at school.” This stands in contrast to other more successful examples (that of Mindy), thus “allow[ing] us to see the workings of sense making in social contexts with all their political and ideological ramifications” (130). While Leona’s story form is rejected, Mindy’s story gets validated as the teacher scaffolded its development; Gee’s point is that while Leona’s story is marked by African American Discourses that are in great conflict with the dominant Discourse, Mindy’s story draws from Euro-American Discourses shared by the teacher. Gee works to show how the structural elements in Leona’s stories relate to each other through his method of Discourse analysis. As he explains, “The line and

4 As Gee notes, Although we might ‘learn’ a Discourse to which we otherwise have no access, few Discourses are actually learned strictly through a processes of learning. Even a mushfake Discourse, which combines a partial acquisition of the target Discourse with meta-knowledge, fails to give the individual anything beyond “stilted performances” of the Discourse that never afford the individual full recognition by others as anything but an outsider (166).

5 While the field has begun to pick up an interest in affect, there is little explicit development of methodology. See Burton for an example that has very little discussion of affect despite the prevalence of emotion in its analysis of literacy. See Trainor (Rethinking Racism) for the most developed (and most recent) treatment of affect in literacy studies currently available.
stanza structure of a text … works together with the other aspects of the discourse system 
(prosody, cohesion, contextualization signals, thematics) to generate the sense of the text, a sense 
with many (and not completely determinate) layers of meaning” (142).

What I wish to point out here is that Gee’s analysis attends to the structural elements of 
language in order to contextualize, historicize, and deconstruct the symbolic and contingent 
meanings of a given discourse, which taken together, account for the political and ideological 
ramifications evident in Leona’s language use. Rooted in the Discourse of her own African 
American home community, Leona’s story is not supported by the dominant practices of her 
school, which are reinforced or monitored by the teacher. Gee notes that during Leona’s story 
telling, the other children seemed to enjoy her stories, and in fact, participated in the telling by 
interjecting “sound effects and glee” (144). However, he continues, because of the historical and 
social circumstances that have shaped her Discourse, “Leona’s language [in her stories] is an in-
vitation to the other children to participate with her in sense making, to achieve solidarity with 
her, and they readily accept this invitation. The teacher did not. Leona was regularly told to sit 
down because she was either ‘rambling on’ or ‘not talking about one important thing’” (empha-
sis added; 144).

This analysis raises the following question: What is the cumulative effect on the language 
practices and sense of socio-political agency in the context of the classroom for a student whose 
attempts to construct knowledge are systematically and repeatedly rejected, who gets told to sit 
down for rambling on, and is effectively reprimanded for not talking about “any one important 
thing?” To put it another way, while Gee’s approach to literacy study offers a wealth of insight on
this interaction from a macro or ideological view of power, there is nothing that directly and explicitly accounts for the micro dimensions of power, the felt experiences of literacy enactment that acutely shape Leona’s experience in this classroom.

To better appreciate the stakes of a more holistic account of the micro dimensions of power in literacy, it is worth considering the very different experience of Leona’s white classmate, Mindy. Here, I consider a different question: What exactly keeps the teacher from accepting Leona’s Discourse as acceptable or legitimate in the classroom? Gee writes, “Leona is telling a story out of a social language that the teacher does not recognize, and that ‘goes against the grain’ of the social language to which sharing time is intended to apprentice children” (145). Although Gee pauses to note that “even African American teachers who are elsewhere adept at Leona’s sort of style do not ‘recognize’ it once they shift, in school, to their school-based social languages and identities” (146), he does not provide a wider perspective of the interaction between Leona and the teacher. The dissonance between the two is accounted for as one of “recognition,” but the affective implications or instigations of this failure to recognize remain unaccounted for.

Rather than consider these effects explicitly in the analysis, Gee turns next to Mindy, whose candle-making story conforms to the teacher’s expectations, as she provides Mindy with “clear and elaborate guides” to fully form the desired story structure, thereby affording Mindy positive encouragement or reinforcement in the classroom, as “Mindy and the teacher manage to be ‘in sync’” (146). So while “Mindy’s school sharing-time turn was considered appropriate and successful by the teacher; Leona’s turns were not” (145). And what remains unanswered is how
these affective experiences of success on the one hand, and failure on the other, are re-circulated
time and again in the classroom for each student. How are these reinforcements or valuations of
the students’ Discourse performances made by the teacher looped back into the students’ percep-
tions of schooling and education? How do these affective layers of experience impact future lan-
guage use in the classroom?

Gee’s discourse analysis and larger project are certainly interested in these effects, but the
method of analysis he offers is insufficient. The ideological model offered by Street and Gee en-
ables us to account for certain social aspects of literacies, but can say little about the embodied,
affective, material dimension of literacies - phenomena that are each both biological and social in
nature. Collins and Blot’s micro-power points us in this direction, but is too tightly wound
around discourse. As compositionist Rául Sánchez urges us to do, we must ask what, if anything,
we can say about writing at the level of the individual body (97-8).

Further, we must ask if we can fully understand the social without a rigorous account and
understanding of the biological – of the body that performs and practices literacies. My answer is
that we cannot, and given the rise of interest and scholarship in the relationship between social
bodies and corporeal bodies throughout the humanities and social sciences, now is the time for
literacy studies to develop models that treat social discourses and affective bodies as equal con-
stituents in the practice and signification of literacies.

4. Embodied Literacies

Inasmuch as literacy and orality are intertwined, literate practices are inexorably embod-
ied. However and wherever we read or write, we do so as an embodied individual who experi-
ences the act of writing or reading simultaneously with various other bodily sensations, emotions, and feelings. That our embodiment affects our literacies should be readily apparent. Consider, for example, the experience of suddenly realizing you have to use the bathroom while working on a conference paper or reading a letter from your child’s daycare facility (or any other literacy practice). However urgent that text may be at that moment, you cannot escape the fact that you read and write within a body that has biological processes – such as producing waste or consuming food and water – that must be fulfilled on a regular (and occasionally urgent) basis. Indeed, anyone who has taught a writing class just before lunch time can attest to the ways hungry bodies may affect students’ literate capabilities.

When we consider the relationship between literacy and embodiment, the effects of the body are rather clear in the case of the drives, as the above example illustrates. However, in addition to the drives, we must also consider other aspects of embodiment like emotions, feelings, sensations, attitudes, moods, and other non-conscious mind-brain-body phenomena that constitute our being-human and thus shape literacies in significant ways that, nonetheless, remain understudied. As Etta Madden points out in her archival study of early American spiritual literacy practices, embodied events (such as one-time events like the death of a loved one), as well as sustained activities like spiritual practices may empower reading and writing (5). What the field lacks, though, is the capacity to fully consider the range of embodied phenomena that empower and disempower our various everyday activities, including reading and writing. Because affective phenomena such as emotions, feelings, attitudes, and moods are highly complex embodied phenomena that have roots in both our biological and social environments, and carry implica-
tions for our literate practices, they deserve focused attention from the field.

As I argue in the previous section, the ideological approach to literacy studies, established through the works of Street and Gee, is limited because it fails to offer a holistic account of affects and the felt dimensions of embodiment that shape our literate practices. We should, as Fleckenstein argues, work to redefine literacy as something that exceeds linguistics and incorporate embodiment in our research on literate practices. In order to establish an alternative approach to literacy studies that rigorously concerns itself with affect and embodiment, I provide an overview of existing work in the field that looks at embodied literacies, as well as related work outside the field that has important implications for how we might think about embodied literacies. Within the field, there are two groups of texts that are relevant to this project: first, I look at recent work on spirituality and literacy that has taken up the body as an important dimension to spirituality, which is often experienced through affective dimensions of the body (Daniell; Madden; Moss; Tolar Burton); second I consider work in literacy studies that directly addresses issues related to embodiment (Cintron; Flower; Gorzelsky; Kress; Long; Trainor).

The texts that I review in this section all implicitly challenge the ideological approach by seeking out questions of literacy and embodiment in a variety of ways. However, as I argue below, in doing so, these texts are limited in that they generally fail to provide a well-developed theorization of affects and embodiment – a project that I begin to undertake in the final section of the chapter. It is important for the field to develop a dynamic theory of affects, embodiment, and literacies. Since affects, emotions, feelings, etc., are complex non-conscious phenomena that carry substantial implications for how we think and use language, a holistic appreciation of these
phenomena must be grounded in a diverse array of interdisciplinary scholarship, including neuroscience, cognitive psychology, and the humanities. As I discuss below, while composition theorists have increasingly turned to theories of affect in the humanities (Albrecht-Crane; Edbauer-Rice; Micciche; Trainor), theory and research on affect and cognition in psychology and the life sciences has been underused. By building a layered, interdisciplinary theory of affects and their relation to language and literacy, we will be better prepared to observe and analyze the role played by emotions, attitudes, moods, and other non-conscious phenomena during the course of researching literate practices.

*Spiritual Literacies*

Over the last ten years a subfield of literacy scholarship on spirituality has emerged, including work on the literate practices of women in an Al-Anon (Alcoholics Anonymous) group in the Appalachians (Daniell), practitioners of the religious sect known as the Shakers (Madden), and the 18th century Methodist preaching of John Wesley and his associates (Tolar Burton). As Beth Daniell explains, although spirituality points to aspects of our humanity that occur before or beyond our linguistic capacities, our ability to communicate spiritual experiences depends on language, or “words that, while perhaps inadequate, are never neutral but always sermonic, ideological, rhetorical, and thus always related, though often covertly, to issues of power” (14). That is, understanding how the written uses of language correspond to the embodied experiences of spiritual practice requires an understanding of the ideologies or power dynamics that accompany our social uses of language. But at the same time, the function of those spiritual/literate practices is to communicate, express, or otherwise deal with something that is often experienced before or
beyond language through complex bodily processes like emotions and feelings that often escape easy definition through language, yet wield important influences on our linguistic communications.

For instance, Daniell argues that spirituality is about a kind of personal power that stems from a recognition of human powerlessness, but is aimed at attaining a personal power that affords an inner peace (13). In her study, Daniell looks at a small group of women who all participate in an Al-Anon group in Mountain City, which is located in the Appalachian Mountains. As Daniell explains, the Mountain City women write to deal with emotions, negotiate identities, and attain power that is more personal and spiritual than political. Grounding her understanding of spirituality as an embodied and psychological phenomena, Daniell writes that these women “seem to reach a place where they are no longer reading for identification of the problem, for easy consolation, or for symbolic solutions. They are reading instead, for spiritual – emotional, psychological – growth” (87). For the Mountain City women, writing enables these women to grow in ways that are rooted in both the mind and body and afford a kind of learning of themselves, their alcoholic family members, and the disease itself. For Daniell, spirituality is an embodied and psychological phenomena.

Using this framework of spirituality as both embodied and psychological, Daniell examines how literate practices function in the Mountain City Al-Anon group. For example, Daniell looks at how these women circulate various texts, including literary texts. The literate practices of the Mountain City women, Daniell argues, is as inextricably linked to orality as it is to embodiment; the terms reading/literacy, talking/orality, and feeling/embodiment form a holistic model
of language use and spirituality. The books that elicit emotional responses – that “‘trigger feel-
ings’ – become the catalyst for these round robin conversations” shared by the women as the
book gets passed around. One participant, Lilly, explains how this holistic model of language use
functions in relation to the mission of personal change emphasized by the Al-Anon group:

They [the shared books] touch feelings, and then I have to find words for the feelings. The only way I can find words for feelings is to talk about it with lots of people, because they often have the words that I’m looking for. Sometimes the books give me the words. Or they will give me the situation, a picture. The picture helps. It begins to make the feel-
ing clearer until I find the words. The words make the feelings very clear when I can find the language for the feeling. I still have to do the feeling. In doing the feelings, sometimes I have to be patient. So the words become important in terms of being able to share the feelings, and also to find some ease with the feelings in terms of understanding it. Language seems very important in terms of that (119).

For the Mountain City women, their shared literate practices empower a process that allows
these women to come to recognize, understand, label, and respond to the feelings that emerge in
their relationships with alcoholic loved ones. Thus, as Lilly explains, literacy entails more than
just the deployment of words, for those words occur in a body and mind that both experience and
understand the world through feelings as well as representational systems like language. This is a
point that is certainly appreciated by Gee’s Discourse theory, but unlike Gee, shows up more di-
rectly in Daniell’s analysis.

At the core of work on spirituality lies an interest in embodiment vis-à-vis spirituality
that, while not directly challenging the ideological model, offers some traction toward an expan-
sion of literacy studies to better consider embodiment in its research on and analysis of literacies.
For example, in her work on Shaker literacies, Etta Madden takes as her central question, what is
“the role of readers’ and writers’ bodies in their interpretive and expressive acts,” through an ex-
amination of the literate practices of a religious sect, the Shakers, that took as a theological position, the view that the spirit is an embodied phenomenon (8). Madden grounds this interest in embodiment as the result of both her personal experiences as well as recent scholarship in literacy studies, both of which emphasize, she argues, that people’s bodies are “integral to reading and writing processes” (4).6 However, while Madden takes up a question of embodiment as it relates to spiritual and literate practices, she nevertheless declines to explicitly position this focus as a challenge to the ideological model.

*Ethnographies of Emotions and Literacies*

Beyond spirituality, a host of scholarship taking up embodiment has surfaced in literacy studies over the last fifteen years (Cintron; Flower; Gorzelsky; Hicks; Trainor), including Ralph Cintron’s ethnography of emotions in *Angels’ Town*, and most recently, Jennifer Seibel Trainor’s analysis of the role played by emotions in racist discourses in *Rethinking Racism*. Whereas scholarship on spirituality *implicitly* concerns itself with embodiment, much of this work takes on the body much more directly. Nonetheless, like the work on spirituality, the focus on embodiment largely remains under-theorized, with the exception of Trainor’s text, which develops an

6 Importantly, while Madden points to “Recent literacy studies and [her] own experiences [that] have emphasized” embodiment in the context of literate practices, she only qualifies this body of work by pointing to recent work on “the roles of culturally constructed codes upon gendered, sexual, and class relations [that] has produced insightful semiotic readings of such material signs as dress and body language in a variety of settings” including, for example, subjects like “the performances of elementary school reading circles and the multiple, interactive audiences of composition classrooms” (4). Otherwise, there is no justification specifically rooted in the literature. Additionally, she does little to clarify what about her personal experiences give movement to embodiment. Nonetheless, her research stands on its own right in demonstrating how literacies and affects may be understood as intertwined phenomena.
explicit theory of emotion.

In *Angels’ Town*, Cintron explicitly raises the question of emotion through his ethnographic study of a Latino/a community in an urban working class neighborhood of Chicago. By writing what he calls an “ethnography of emotion,” Cintron examines individuals’ rhetorical and literate practices in order to understand the force of felt experience in individuals’ efforts to create respect in conditions of no respect. Through this focus on emotions in combination with rhetorics and literacies, Cintron works to show how individuals shape the formless, and inscribe writing on the empty spaces of their everyday lives in order to feel strong. For example, while the institution of school inscribes a young boy, Valerio, as learning disabled (formless), and while a broader metropolitan area (Chicago) and civic government (Angelstown) assign Valerio’s Mexican-American community as economically marginalized (formless), Valerio creates respect for himself by hanging posters (a practice Cintron describes as an act of writing) of sportscars and athletes on the empty walls of his room because it makes him “feel strong.” Valerio tries to resist being identified as *chero* (unmodern, of the old ways) and so protects himself with images of the American modern, including posters of sportscars and athletes. Importantly for Valerio, this act of writing shapes the shapeless by creating respect for himself in a world that offers none, thereby making him “feel strong” (108).

These images made Valerio feel strong while others inscribed him as deficient by drawing from modern American ideologies of strength (fast, masculine, and powerful sportscars and athletes continue to be dominant markers of male American strength). Cintron’s discussion of Valerio thus demonstrates how emotions have both public and private functions and are shaped by
ideologies. The images that hang in Valerio’s room extend his subjectivity, projecting it onto the wall while reflecting strength back onto his body. In his school and surrounding community, Valerio is not otherwise afforded this feeling of strength, and must seek alternative spaces upon which he can write an identity marked by strength and respect. The circulation of hyperbolic imagery in Valerio’s room of sports cars and athletes thus works to amplify, represent, and reflect a fantasy life that counters the labels of chero and learning disabled.

By focusing on questions of emotion, such as the feeling of strength in the case of Valerio, Cintron implicitly challenges the limits of the ideological approach. Indeed, Cintron prefaces his project as an ethnography of emotions, which he describes as an effort to understand the intensities of everyday life as largely driven by ideological forces. As Cintron explains, his ethnography is “deeply embedded in the intensities of particular feelings that over the years have not dissolved but have become, to a significant degree, the core of a worldview, an interpretive frame, a heuristic. These intensities, then, have coursed through this project, from fieldwork to text” (6).

The significance of Cintron’s work, I argue, is that it highlights emotions, affects, and embodiment throughout its ideological analysis of literate and everyday rhetorical practices, and in doing so, locates an analytical focus not yet taken up by literacy researchers. However, while Cintron locates this analytical focus on emotionality and its relationship to meaning-making through language practices, he does not offer a rigorous, interdisciplinary theorization of emotion. Nonetheless, that is not to say that Cintron fails to theorize emotion, only that his theorization could not take into account the substantial work on emotion in fields such as psychology and
neuroscience that has emerged following Cintron’s research and publication of *Angels’ Town*.

In order to examine Cintron’s effort to theorize emotion, I turn to an example of what Cintron calls the “logic of violence,” which he describes as “a tight knot of emotions, real experiences, and ideological beliefs” that shape individuals’ ethos by giving them “a sensible way (in some cases, a guaranteed way) to handle particular problems” (153). Cintron discusses the experience of Martín and his act of vengeance against his friend, Fidel, to illustrate the logic of violence. As Cintron explains, Martín and Fidel were both arrested for selling drugs, though Martín took the bigger rap. However, because Fidel publicly blamed Martín for their arrest, and never fully thanked Martín for taking the bigger hit with the judicial system, Martín carries a grudge. He thus arranges to have some other individuals steal Fidel’s expensive stereo equipment and generally “fuck up” Fidel’s car.

The logic of violence, Cintron explains, functions because it presumes certain emotions are shared by members of a community. Thus, in order to feel his respect was recuperated, Martín had to make pain communal – the public disprespect displayed by Fidel toward Martín was reciprocated by the deliberate and arranged “fucking up” of Fidel’s car. Undoubtedly, Martín’s arrangement for Fidel’s car to be damaged is an example of a deliberative agency. However, this preplanned act is largely shaped by a nonconscious response to Fidel’s disrespect to Martín that occurs at the level of affect or emotion. The emotion of anger experienced by Martín and directed at Fidel provides the motivation and intensity for the acts of vengeance that follow, thus providing Martín with a way to respond to his anger through an act of vengeance that overrides his personal friendship with Fidel.
Cintron’s logic of violence is an important hallmark for embodied literacies because it functions at two levels simultaneously: one, at a conscious, ideational, deliberative level, and two, at a non-conscious, emotional, affective level. The significance of Martín’s act of vengeance is that it demonstrates (1) how a phenomenon such as vengeance results as much from emotion as from deliberation, and (2) how ideational and emotional life work together as both private and public, ideological, processes that together shape the ways we act in social situations (146).

However, while Cintron sheds some light on emotion and feeling within a broader project of literacy research, the foundational concepts of his argument, namely emotion and affect, remain untheorized. So despite Cintron’s work to inductively theorize the concept of a “logic of violence” as a simultaneously ideational, emotional, and ideological process, the first principles of emotion, for example, are only superficially treated. But this is not a problem of Cintron’s so much as of the field in general, for nearly all research in literacy studies that draws on feeling, emotion, or affect in its analysis fails to rigorously account for the complex affective phenomena that shape our being human, such as emotions, feelings, attitudes, moods, etc. The single exception in this case is Jennifer Seibel Trainor’s recent work, *Rethinking Racism*.

Like Cintron, Trainor’s work on literacies and embodiment emerged inductively through the ethnographic project. However, because her work followed in the wake of a surge in scholar-

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7 Note: although Lutz and Abu-Lughod’s edited collection, *Language and the Politics of Emotion*, explicitly addresses affects in the context of literacy research, it generally fails to escape an orientation grounded in Foucaultian discourse analysis. Thus, while the collection attends to affects and emotions, it fails to establish a distinction between bodies and discourses. Doing so, I argue, is necessary if we are to either holistically understand affects or to fully appreciate the complex relationships between affects and reading/writing practice.
ship on emotions, affects, and embodiment in the humanities that drew from diverse fields such as psychology and neuroscience, Trainor had a substantial body of work to draw from. This timing enabled Trainor to extend her theorization of emotion and its relation to culture and language beyond the limits of the ethnography. Trainor explains in *Rethinking Racism* that she began to recognize the important role played by emotions in racist discourses, she had to switch her theoretical approach and develop a framework for understanding and accounting for affects. Significantly, Trainor draws from what she calls the critical study of emotion (including work by scholars such as Abu-Lughod and Lutz; Barbalet; Boler; Gross; Massumi) to establish the following principles of emotion: (1) emotions are distinct from reason, though intertwined with rational thought; (2) emotions are socially experienced and constructed, and are central to rhetoric and rhetorical processes; and (3) emotion is taught and learned at home and school – the sites of social control.

Trainor’s ethnography looks at an English class in a midwestern high school and argues that efforts to sustain critical pedagogy and critical literacy learning must better appreciate the affective dynamics of discourses in order to effect change in students’ practices and worldviews. The strength of Trainor’s work is that while it demonstrates the importance of an ideological approach to literacy research, it also shows that the ideological is not enough to understand students’ racist discourses. In her analysis, Trainor connects racist discourses in the classroom with two vectors: the hidden curriculum and emotioned rules. Trainor defines emotioned rules as “norms of behavior, ways of valuing and viewing the world that are taught via feeling” (79). Using this framework, Trainor argues that the persuasive power of racism is not racism, or “nega-
tive attitudes or feelings toward nonwhite people arising from ignorance, lack of empathy, or a desire to maintain race privileges” per se (23). Rather, it stems from a host of emotions conditioned through, in this case, the school’s hidden, invisible, and unstated curriculum. The force of Trainor’s analysis is that it shows how “we need to see student racism as a mediated emotioned phenomenon that emerges from and responds to the routines and culture of schooling” (102)

For example, Trainor points to one student named Tom who comments that all black people are lazy. Through her analysis, Trainor shows that the school gives an affective force to his lazy comment by sponsoring negative perceptions in relation to the view that a strong work ethic does not entail lazy behaviors. From an ideological perspective, the resonant part of Tom’s comment is the reification of Black people as “lazy” rather than industrious or self-motivated, for this sort of conclusion often follows from an ideological analysis that looks at how cultural views get disseminated through broader social structures and institutions, like public schools. This approach would often look at the school’s curriculum in order to locate the discourses related to such a racist ideology.

In contrast, Trainor’s approach differs in that she takes an approach grounded in an interdisciplinary model of emotions and culture that enables her to recognize that the resonant part of Tom’s comment for Tom is the negative feeling associated with the view that a strong work ethic does not entail laziness. Further, through her analysis, Trainor locates a disjoint between the conventional ideological assessment of racist discourses on the one hand, and the conclusions drawn from an affective analysis on the other. While she uses this conclusion as a basis for questioning critical pedagogies, it also demonstrates how literacy scholars might usefully extend the
ideological model.

By drawing from interdisciplinary research on emotions, Trainor was able to rethink “the persuasive appeal of racist discourses [as] affective and emotioned, rather than logical or rational” (3). Moreover, in doing so, Trainor also provides the first substantial, interdisciplinary theoretically rigorous treatment of affect in literacy studies, and should therefore be viewed as a landmark in embodied literacies that warrants further work in this direction, especially given the more tacit or under-problematized treatment of the topic in the earlier works of Hicks, Collins and Blot, and Flower. We should ground our theories of affects and emotions in a wide range of disciplinary approaches to embodiment because they are complex phenomena that often escape conscious awareness – for example, we often experience feelings without being able to say (in words) why we feel as we do.

5. Towards a Theory of Embodied Cognition in Literacy Studies

The major claim advanced by this chapter is that the dominance of the situated, ideological approach to literacy studies has limited our capacity to theoretically and methodologically appreciate the various ways literate practices occur within corporeal bodies and social bodies. To respond to this impasse, I argue that the field should work to combine the well-established socio-cultural approaches to literacy with recent theories and empirical studies of mind and body in order to more holistically understand how individual writing agents act in contexts that are always framed in both biological and social terms for the writing subject. As my review of literature on embodiment and literacies demonstrates, while some work has tacitly followed in the spirit of this critique, more focused research is needed. In the following, I suggest that one way
we can accomplish this goal is to adapt scholarship in rhetorical studies, such as Marilyn Cooper’s argument for rhetorical agency as an embodied and emergent phenomenon, for the purposes of research in literacy studies.

The underlying premise of this section follows Gwen Gorzelsky’s argument in her recent chapter, “Literacy in a Biocultural World,” that literacy is an “inherently biocultural phenomena” (122). Gorzelsky points to Gee’s work on Discourse, which shows us how the process of acquiring proficiency in a given Discourse can have important implications on “one’s experience of self” by shaping and modifying our ways of saying-being-doing-feeling. Further, Gorzelsky argues, “Because such proficiency requires learning to see and think in terms of the new practices, for instance, to think like a lawyer or to perceive the world as a streetwise teen, developing proficiency reshapes perception, cognition, and even values and emotional responses. Such phenomena are all, in significant part, biological” (123). Gorzelsky further develops this observation by looking at the neuroscience of neuroplasticity which shows that “biological dimensions are (re)shaped by one’s life experience, … by culture” (123). Building from this position, Gorzelsky argues that we should develop cross disciplinary research that integrate humanities-based and scientific-based approaches in order to better understand how we can better “use culture to intervene in biology through literate practices” (121). While I agree with Gorzelsky that such cross disciplinary research teams could yield novel and important insights into literacy and literacies, I argue that we can also draw on research in cognitive psychology and the neurosciences to inform our theories and empirical studies of literacies from within our own field, too. That is, I believe
attending to recent research in affect, cognition, and neuroscience can help us better research and understand literate practices through the field’s prevalent modes of ethnographic and archival research.

Composition studies offers two important (and recent) examples that illustrate the potential that recent cognitive studies can offer the field (Cooper; Rickert). In the following, I’d like to briefly discuss one of these texts (Cooper) to illustrate how composition studies has used research in the neurosciences in order to argue that literacy studies can and should make similar moves. While Cooper’s work focuses on agency as a rhetorical concept, both her argument and the interdisciplinary scholarship upon which she develops her argument can help respond to the limits of the ideological model in literacy studies. Marilyn Cooper’s article “Rhetorical Agency as Emergent and Enacted” draws on the field of neurophenomenology (Freeman; Maturana; Thompson; Varela) in order to articulate a feedback cycle that illustrates agency as an embodied process that connects experience in the world with conscious and nonconscious cognitive systems as well as embodied processes, including emotions. Cooper thus takes up the principle established in recent neuroscience and cognitive studies research that an organism’s situatedness in the world and its embodiment (a term that refers to the physical corporeality of an organism as well as both non-conscious and affective dimensions such as feelings, emotions, etc.) play key roles in cognition (Clark; Damasio *The Feeling*; LeDoux; Noë; Shapiro; Thompson).

Building on this bed of interdisciplinary research on cognition, Cooper analyzes President Obama’s 2008 Philadelphia speech, which was itself a response to the political crisis that emerged around Reverend Jeremiah Wright’s sermons (Wright was the head of Obama’s church).
The Philadelphia speech addressed the issues of race latent in the Rev. Wright crisis in a way that allowed candidate Obama to position himself as representative of America’s melting pot ethos (426). Cooper takes up Obama’s speech because it illustrates the concept of “emergent rhetorical agency” that Cooper develops from the research in neurophenomenology. Emergent rhetorical agency describes how our actions emerge from dynamic feedback loops between the mind/body organism and the environment in which the individual operates. Cooper describes this ongoing process of conscious and nonconscious cognitive functions as a cycle that connects the nonconscious events of intention, action, and interpretation of sensory stimuli with the more conscious modes of learning (the sedimentation of sensory interpretations into memories and dispositions), short- and long-term goals, and emotions (429).

Each function located on Cooper’s neurodynamic intentional arc shapes the potentiality of doing one thing over another. Thus, nonconscious interpretation of stimuli and conscious functions like memories, dispositions, goals, and emotions may each inflect the possibilities for taking consequential action in real social situations. This potential for action emerges from each individual’s own embodied socio-cultural history, and shapes the contours of rhetorical agency as it happens in a given rhetorical situation, as Obama’s example powerfully illustrates. Cooper explains: “Obama’s response [to the Wright controversy] was not dictated by the rhetorical situation nor by his past experiences, but it also clearly was not a response that came out of nowhere; it was a choice he made among options.” Those options were cultivated over a lifetime of being in America. Thus, Obama’s response to the Wright issue “emerged from the ongoing process of his becoming the person he is, as he responded to the world he encountered and the history he
studied and as neural populations interacted within the complex system of his brain, creating emotions, intentions, moods, dispositions, meanings, memories, goals, and narratives” (426).

This rich bed of embodied and culturally hued (virtual) material created potentials for acting in specific ways that exceed deliberate or conscious intention. While Obama had the conscious goal of responding to the race issue in the campaign (430) and although he remarked to his advisors David Axelrod and his speech writer Jonathan Favreau that he could turn the Wright situation into a “teachable moment,” Obama’s capacity to act on those goals quickly depended on the rich set of embodied experiences described above. For instance, Obama’s “emotions in response to the situation were shaped by his particular experiences with race and his study of the history and literature of the civil rights and black power movements as well as by his short-term goal of demonstrating presidential leadership abilities and his long-term goal of changing the public response to race” (431). Cooper’s neurodynamic intentional arc helps us to understand how these rich experiences contributed in shaping Obama’s response to the Wright controversy.

Obama’s speech, unlike most political speeches at the national level was not pre-planned. Rather, it is a response situated in a specific moment in time. Cooper explains, “On the day after ABC broadcast the video clips from Reverend Wright’s sermons, [Obama] told David Axelrod that he wanted to give a speech on race, and late at night on the next day, he called his speech-writer Jonathan Favreau and dictated his thoughts in a stream of consciousness that Favreau called ‘pretty much a first draft’” (429-30). Although the structure was revised by Favreau, Obama directed Favreau and the other speech writers to not make any “substantial changes” in
the final draft that Obama himself had crafted.

Because of the impromptu nature of this literacy event, Obama’s example illustrates how the sedimentation of one’s rich cultural history contributes to one’s interaction with the surround to shape emergent action in ways that exceed conscious thought. As Cooper puts it, “Obama’s shaping of [the speech’s] narrative, its intricate synthesis of emotions, dispositions, memories, cultural beliefs, and study of civil rights history, was, again, not the work of a couple nights of focused thought, but emerged through the complex systems of an individual interacting with his surround” (434). Obama’s possibility for responding in the way he did therefore depended on his prior experience as well as the emotions and dispositions shaped by his interaction with his current situation. Such “possibilities for action are often so engrained in the nervous system that their deployment is barely conscious; they prepare – or dispose – a person to act in a certain way in a given situation, and to do so instantly and seamlessly” (434). Understanding how these potentials for action emerge from one’s situated socio-cultural experiences and get either enacted or not enacted in a given rhetorical situation can extend the limits of current research in literacy studies beyond the limits of ideology, for although Cooper’s work accounts for the influence of ideology and culture on individual action, it also accounts for the influence of memories, emotions, sensory perceptions, etc. on literacy practices. Cooper’s argument thus suggests that recent research in the neurosciences can help us better understand processes like emotions, memories, dispositions, goals, attitudes, actions, and agency in ways that exceed the opportunities for understanding offered by the methodologies currently prevalent in research studies.
By emphasizing the need to reconceptualize literacy as an embodied practice that emerges over time, and through experience in dynamic, ever-shifting contexts, my argument aligns with the recent critiques of literacy studies that critique the limits of current theories and research in literacy studies (Flannery; Horner; Parks; and Salvatori). First, Flannery argues that we should resist simplistic views that categorize community-literacies as liberatory and academic literacies as repressive. Second, Horner argues we must attend to both temporal dimensions of literacy (e.g., emergence, and practice) rather than just the spatial dimensions of literacy (e.g., textual features), for attending to the composing labor of marginalized groups can help us avoid fetishizing certain features of texts as qualifications for “literacy,” and thus avoid reifying the autonomous model in our scholarship and teaching. Third, Parks points to Flannery and Horner as a way forward for literacy studies in composition, noting that an alternative model might take up literacy as process through which “any one ‘literate’ moment is a resting point within a dynamic relationship between a series of diffuse literacy practices” (43). Finally, Salvatori, like Parks, points to Flannery and Horner as important guides for literacy studies, highlighting three areas of concern for the field: (a) we haven’t sufficiently theorized “literacy”; (b) reconceptualizations of literacy take for granted reading and writing; and (c) we fail to criticize the ideological model. Underlying these areas of concern are the persistent divides between the autonomous and ideological models, as well as between academic and non-academic literacies in our scholarship. Salvatori argues, and I agree, that grappling with these concerns only matters if it impacts how we teach reading and writing, and how we seek to counter the prevalent norms of academic literacy. This project aligns with these arguments by seeking a retheorization of literacy that ac-
counts for embodiment and emergence in ways that can contribute to our writing pedagogies. Opening up our conceptualizations of academic versus non-academic literacies, as Flannery encourages us to do, may be accomplished, I argue, by taking up work like Cooper’s argument for agency as an embodied and emergent process. Doing so would allow us, I believe, to situate any given literacy practice as a resting point dynamically emerging in contexts that we have spatially defined as academic and/or non-academic.

In order to pursue the research agenda that I propose above, we must buttress the existing situated ideological approach to literacy studies with relevant research from the humanities, psychology, and neuroscience in a way that works to understand and explain how humans are mind-brain-body organisms inexorably situated in a world that affects and contributes to our cognitive capacities and processes. The situated and ideological approach already enables a complex view of the diverse sociocultural practices that intersect individual writers in specific situations, and seeks to explain the systems of linguistic representations manifest through various literate practices. Thus, our attention should focus on developing a more rigorous understanding of embodiment and its relation to cognition, as implied by Trainor’s work, and persuasively demonstrated by Cooper’s argument for rhetorical agency.

Drawing on neuroscience and cognitive science research offers opportunities for the field to revisit first principles like agency and literacy practices in a new light. For instance, by aligning the theoretical concerns taken up in literacy studies, we may be able to address the growing divide between rhetoric and literacy as frameworks for understanding composition noted by Brenda Glascott’s analysis of the last decade of publications in the field. Indeed, drawing on and
adapting Cooper’s argument for rhetorical agency as a concern of rhetoric for the purposes of literacy studies research seems to address part of Glascott’s concern. Moreover, by developing a theoretical perspective that accounts for how subjectivity and agency are constituted by interactions between brain, body, and world, literacy scholars will be better positioned to theorize and empirically account for literacy as it is experienced from a holistic perspective that ties the cognitive undertakings of literate agents to the rich ecologies of mind-body-world in which these agents find themselves situated. These kinds of insights might, in turn, allow us to rethink how we structure literacy practices in our composition classrooms, as well as how we recognize and respond to discursive agency in our students’ work.

6. Methods, Methodology, and Overview of the Project

In my approach to studying reading and writing practices, I work to emphasize the role of embodied dynamics of being human in a sociocultural world. This aim is largely shaped by Raul Sanchez who argues that writing should be understood as a “hybrid” that brings together in the act and fact (i.e., the practice and text) of writing, both the non-representational embodied processes, along with the social, discursive, and representational functions of writing, such as meaning, knowledge, rhetoric, ideology, subjectivity, etc. Sánchez’s view of writing as a hybrid of micro- and macro-dimensions of non-representational embodiment and socioculturally based representational dimensions echoes Collins and Blot’s argument that we should understand the ways literacy and identity formation are shaped by both micro- and macro-dimensions of power. Collins and Blot emphasize the dual function of literacy to serve as a weapon of domination and a shield for the disempowered in civic engagements. While Collins and Blot allude to the embod-
ied dynamics of being human, as I explain earlier in the chapter, Sánchez asks us to consider this aspect more directly. Thus, in approaching the project, I am interested in exploring Sánchez’s question: “At the level of the individual body, how does the socially and culturally embedded (f)act of writing occur and what can be said about it” from a non-representational perspective (97-8).

In order to offer a response to this question, I work to understand how individuals learn or acquire a non-assimilationist discursive fluidity, or hybridity, from a perspective informed by recent research and theory on the mind, brain, and body, as well as a holistic view of the sociocultural, ideological, and historical currents that shape individuals’ identities and potentials for action. This notion of hybridity underpins the entire project as I work to better articulate ecological perspectives of literacy as comprised of embodied, psychological, and sociocultural processes. Therefore, the broadest statement of purpose for this study is to develop simultaneously micro- and macro- perspectives on human literate activity.

In this chapter, I critique the methodology dominant in composition studies research, which has largely been shaped by the New Literacy Studies model advanced by Barton, Street, Gee, and others, by arguing that literacy research would benefit from more rigorous theoretical understandings of embodiment (including affects, emotions, and cognition) and its role in our social uses of language. While literacy researchers have developed rich descriptions of literacies from macro-perspectives informed by well-grounded theories of ideology and culture, we do not look closely enough at individuals as embodied agents.

However, while I criticize the situated-ideological approach to literacy studies for failing
to fully account for the role played by embodiment in literacy learning and practice, this project does not aim to reject qualitative, or other empirical research methods and methodologies. Rather, I argue that we should combine existing empirical methods with a stronger theoretical understanding of embodied/situated cognition. For this project, I have adopted a historical/archival methodology to investigate literacy in order to develop a more robust view of social power and its affects on individual subjectivities, agency, and literate practices. While I cannot directly access bodies using an historical approach, the archives provide a long view of literate practices over several years. This broad perspective on experience affords some insights into embodied cognition by way of the formative role embodied doing, a point more fully developed in chapter two.

Over the last thirty years, the situated-ideological model of literacy has been crucial in showing how meaning-making practices are shaped by the ideological and cultural forces that circulate in a given community. Early ethnographic work like Shirley Brice Heath’s study of the literacy learning in the Piedmonts of the Carolinas and Paul Willis’ study of working-class literacies in England each persuasively show that individuals’ ways with words are shaped by their home, family, and community environments. However, as Collins and Blot argue, the situated-ideological approach, as it has been largely developed through ethnography, has largely failed to fully deal with the relationships between power, identity, and literacies. Collins and Blot respond to this impasse by buttressing the situated-ideological model of literacy research with historical accounts of literate practices. Because the ethnographic gaze is constrained to a specific place during the time the ethnographer participates in the field, Collins and Blot argue, it is difficult to
generate holistic and complete views of social power with ethnography alone, unless researchers develop substantial longitudinal studies, such as Marcia Farr’s study of Mexicanos in Michoacan and Chicago in *Rancheros in Chicago*ácan. Given that such a longitudinal ethnographic study is not feasible for this dissertation project, I have developed a project grounded in historical research in order to better understand the dynamics of social power and individual identity and agency. More specifically, the archives that I examine in this dissertation project include Chávez’s daily writings produced over a period of several years. These materials present an ideal opportunity to consider how agency emerges out of a wide bed of experience.

The purpose of this archival study is to understand the meaning of discursive agency by using research on affect and cognition that explains human ecologies of mind, body, and sociocultural worlds, and archival case studies of the Latino-American civil rights and labor activist César Chávez. Chávez was active in the Community Service Organization, which served poor Latino/a communities in California during the 1950s, and co-founded the United Farm Workers union (UFW), which led the nation’s first successful agricultural strikes during the mid-1960s and early 1970s. Chávez’s experience is an important site for investigating discursive agency because he combined multiple discourses to form hybrid discourses that facilitated new possibilities for action in contested political and economic spaces. The project focuses on Chávez’s literate practices through the 1950s when Chávez produced a set of daily writings as part of his work as a community organizer. The project examines both Chávez’s early formative years growing up in Arizona and California, as well as his writings as an adult in order to understand how he folded in disparate secondary Discourses to forge new hybrid Discourses, and to understand how
those hybrid Discourses enabled new potentials for action in spaces of social and cultural con-
flict.

When taken together, the archival materials enable complementary perspectives on litera-
cy, agency, and action through the frameworks of learning and using hybrid discourses on the
one hand, and teaching hybrid discourses on the other. The archival material related to Chávez’s
experiences illustrate how an individual may learn several competing discourses to forge hybrid
discourses that open new possibilities for action in social situations. Chávez combined the dis-
courses he acquired in his youth (including Mexicano, working-class, and Roman Catholic dis-
courses) with the discourses he learned later in life, such as discourses of labor politics with Saul
Alinsky and non-violent protest through his devoted study of Gandhi. Chávez often seamlessly
combined these into hybrid discourses that were noted for appealing to multiple audiences (rang-
ing from largely Spanish speaking Latino/a laborers to Anglo-American politicians). The primary
source material includes drafts and audio-visual recordings of various speeches that Chávez gave
to farm workers, politicians, and the general public, other participants’ first-hand accounts of
Chávez’s preparation for and execution of these literacy events, and oral history accounts of
Chávez’s acquisition of various discourses from himself and his family members.

The study’s historical perspective enables an examination of the relationships between
discourses and action by combining close textual study of the archives with two sets of lenses:
research and theory on agency in the context of the ecology of mind, body, and world, and
broader sociocultural, political, and economic lenses. By analyzing archival texts through the
lenses of research and theory on agency, I will show how Chávez’s specific literacy practices en-
abled new hybrid discourses that opened up revised possibilities for political action, and that those new possibilities emerge from complex ecosystems of mind, body, and world. By analyzing these texts through the lenses of their sociohistorical, political, and economic contexts, I will show how identity is created in contested spaces where literacy is used as weapon and shield. Collins and Blot demonstrate that identity is embedded in hybrid discourses shaped by broader sociohistorical forces. My project analyzes how possibilities for new identities and forms of action emerge through these new combinations of discourses. I presume that identity/subjectivity emerges through discursive action and that these actions cannot be examined without the ecological contexts of mind, body, and sociohistorical world. This combined focus provides for an opportunity to investigate the following question: By tracing out the learning and teaching of hybrid discourses, what can we learn about the connections between literate practice, discursive agency, and the possibilities for civic engagement?

The project is grounded in the study of the United Farm Workers' official archives (comprised of thousands of linear feet), which includes the papers of César Chávez and many of his associates during the farmworkers' strikes of the late 1960s and early 1970s, at the Walter P. Reuther Labor Archive at Wayne State University. The Chávez archives include speeches, drafts, notes, memos, letters, and essays produced by Chávez, as well as interviews with, and photos and videos of Chávez giving speeches and working with farmworkers, labor leaders, politicians, and other members of the public. Additionally, there is an extensive oral history archive that includes interviews with Chávez, many of his family members, and several high- and low-ranking members of the United Farm Workers active during the strikes of the late 1960s and early 1970s;
the oral history project is digitally housed by the United Farm Workers.

6. Methods and Methodology

While there has been a great deal of historical research in composition studies, the question of historical methodology has been an underdeveloped issue for the field. Most published accounts of historical scholarship fail to provide the kind of explicit discussion of methodology that is common in qualitative research on writing and literacy. This lack of a substantial body of scholarship on methods and methodology for historical inquiry is noted by Alexis Ramsey, Wendy Sharer, Barbara L’Eplattenier, and Lisa Mastrangelo in their introduction to their edited collection, *Working in the Archives*. Ramsey, Sharer, L’Eplattenier, and Mastrangelo remark that existing guides to archival research “do not account for many of the unique contexts and situations in which archival work in rhetoric and composition gets done. Publications that do directly address methods for archival research in rhetoric and composition are few, taking the form of isolated articles in journals or chapters in edited collections that address larger themes” (2). To address the lack of a strong body of scholarship on methodology, this section works to describe the methods and objectives of the research undertaken by the dissertation through a consideration of the two poles that Stephen North argues constitute historical inquiry.

In *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*, Stephen North situates the historians as occupying a line of inquiry that lies between the scholars who develop dialectical approaches and

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8 The general lack of a canon of scholarship on archival methodology and the need for such a canon was also noted by participants, including Liz Rohan and Brian Kauffman, in the “Negotiating Archival Spaces Workshop” at the *Conference on College Composition and Communication* in Atlanta, GA (6 April 2011).
the researchers who require a tangible record for their research. North also establishes two core modes for historical research: an empirical stage of identifying, gathering, assembling, and validating relevant archival texts, and an interpretive stage of explaining the meaning of the empirical data. Following North’s description, and perhaps due to a general lack of well-developed training as historians in the field (Ferreia-Buckley; Ramsey, Sharer, L’Eplattenier, and Mastangelo “Introduction”), historical researchers in composition have developed methodologies that share much in common with qualitative research methodologies.

Historical research is like qualitative research in several ways: (1) historical research is emergent and relies largely on inductive reasoning grounded in empirical data; (2) the scope of a study depends on access to and the content of the archives (similar to the limiting effect of the qualitative researcher’s fieldsite); (3) making meaning of the data is a fundamentally interpretive process that depends on the researcher and her own theoretical and sociocultural situated-ness; and (4) triangulation, or the use of multiple methods, is often used to establish the reliability and validity of data.

While an historical research methodology may share much in common with qualitative research, there are crucial differences. Foremost, unlike qualitative research, historical inquiry does not take place in a “natural setting,” and often the human subjects at the center of the research are dead. However, historical research may, on the other hand, take a more holistic view of the social contexts that surround, inform, and sponsor specific literate practices. Deborah Brandt makes this argument in *Literacy in American Lives*. Using oral history methods, Brandt develops accounts of individuals’ literacy experiences across the grain of their lifetime. Turning
to secondary historical accounts, Brandt contextualizes these individual histories with broader views of the social, political, and economic conditions that these individuals experienced.

For instance, Brandt focuses part of her discussion on four generations of the May family in Wisconsin, beginning with Genna May in the late 19th century, and ending with Michael May in the late 20th century. Brandt discusses the social, economic, political, and technological changes that occurred over this century-long period in order to analyze the oral history accounts provided by each family member. By weaving together the broad historical view with each individual’s account of “the circumstances, materials, people, and motivations that animated” their literacy memories, Brandt was able to develop profiles of each member that explain how and why specific literate practices emerged out of and were affected by broader historical trajectories of social, economic, and political change (76). Together, the various accounts of the May family enabled Brandt to analyze how specific literate practices are shaped by economic conditions. Brandt’s project thus echoes Collins and Blot’s argument that the terrain of literacy practices is historical: it entails power of language, by language, and in language (154).

In their study of literacy, Collins and Blot suggest that “historical perspective” matters as much as “ethnographic detail” in our efforts to define what “literacy is” (xvii). Indeed, each approach brings unique possibilities to the table: while ethnographic study enables a detailed study of literacies in natural settings, historical inquiry enables a broad view of the the socio-politico-economic conditions that surround, permeate, and shape specific literate practices. Although Collins and Blot ultimately support a balanced approach that utilizes both perspectives, their argument also provides a rationale for taking an historical perspective on literacy. The major con-
trast with Brandt’s historical project, though, is that whereas Brandt focuses on the connections between economic conditions and literate practices, Collins and Blot focus more squarely on power and identity, and their connections to political and economic conditions.

Through their historical examination of political, economic, and social practices, Collins and Blot develop a theory of literacies that works to explain the interrelationships between texts, power, and identity. Collins and Blot draw from poststructuralists to develop an historical approach that responds to their own critique of the field’s current preference for detailed ethnographic views of literacy. According to that argument, Collins and Blot acknowledge that “Gee’s expansive view of literacy is coupled with an account of identity which emphasizes the fluid, changing nature of identity and the likelihood of identity conflicts” (174). This conclusion, they note, is well supported by the work of Rose and Gilyard, whom Collins and Blot discuss at some length. However, Collins and Blot argue that Gee fails to provide enough attention “to constraint, to identities imposed, as well as chosen,” for “the situated or sociocultural accounts, while a considerable advance over autonomous models and the literacy thesis, take insufficient account of the long-term historical pattern, of the place of literacy in ‘the great metaphysical, scientific, technical, and economic venture of the West’” (174). Thus, responding to this criticism of the situated approach to literacy, Collins and Blot employ a methodology that combines the synthesis of various ethnographic accounts with a heavy emphasis on historical studies of literacy in order to develop a theory of literacies that accounts for the ways that power, texts, and identity inter-penetrate one another.

Drawing on these examples of literacy scholarship and historical research, this study
combines oral history and the synthesis of various published ethnographic accounts with primary archival research and secondary historical resources in order to examine the relationships between literate practices, subjectivities, and broader social, political, and economic conditions. As Brandt and Collins and Blot suggest, such an approach will enable a stronger, more holistic account of social power and its effects on literate practice and subjectivity.

Historical Inquiry, Real-World Contexts, and Pedagogy

As composition has emerged as a discipline, it has turned back on itself through historical analyses of its past pedagogies, including much research on the rise of English departments and composition programs (Berlin; Brereton; Carr, Carr, and Schultz; Crowley; Kitzhaber; L’Eplatte-nier and Mastrangelo; and Thomas Miller The Evolution of College English), as well as scholarship on the teaching of writing in school settings outside of mainstream college-level academics (Enoch; Gold). Much of composition studies’ archival scholarship fits with Stephen North’s description of historical researchers, whose projects recover or preserve historical pedagogical methods, examine composition’s institutional history, or focus on the sociocultural and ideological forces that have affected composition pedagogy (66-7).

At the heart of North’s model of historical scholarship, and motivating much historical inquiry in the field, is pedagogy itself. Ann Ruggles Gere challenges this emphasis on pedagogy in the formal classroom in archival scholarship in her essay, “Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms: The Extracurriculum of Composition.” Gere makes the common-sense argument that “writing development occurs regularly and successfully outside classroom walls” by pointing to the writing learning that occurs in community organizations that succeed with “individuals deemed un-
successful by their composition instructors” (277). Gere suggests that the ways in which we tell our own disciplinary stories is one reason these groups are successful with the students our composition pedagogies fail to serve. As Gere argues, historical studies of composition in the classroom have omitted these community sites, thus omitting what Gere calls the field’s “extracurriculum.”

According to Gere, the extracurriculum extends from the past to the present, encompasses a wide variety of contexts in which individuals use and seek to improve their literacy beyond the classroom, involves a wider diversity in terms of race, class, and gender than we often see in college classes, and “avoids, as much as possible, a reenactment of professionalization in its narrative” (279). By decoupling composition from the school, the pedagogy from the pedagogue, Gere suggests we can develop more holistic perspectives on the acquisition and learning of literate practices away from the simulacrum of the composition classroom. Looking at the extracurriculum enables historical researchers to examine literacy learning among self-motivated individuals who see their actions as “having social and economic consequences” (279).

In my approach to historical research, I am influenced by Gere’s argument that we should consider the wider historical contexts of writing that surround and inform classroom walls. Gere focuses her essay on writing workshops that retain an explicit pedagogical purpose, even though they are removed from the formal “classroom.” However, in my project, I extend her position, arguing that we should develop historical perspectives of writing and literacy outside the classroom more broadly. Examples of historical literacy scholarship that consider literate practices outside of classrooms include Burton’s analysis of early Methodist practices, Daniell’s work on
spiritual literacies in a twelve step program, Fishman’s examination of Amish and Mennonite literacies, Gorzelsky’s discussion of late 17th century British and early 20th century Pennsylvania labor movements, Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, and Kolstad’s analysis of workplace literacies, Moss’ work on spiritual literacies in African American churches, and Sharer’s work on women’s political organizations in the early 20th century. This dissertation takes up a similarly broad social project by looking at reading and writing among a largely Latino/a labor organization during the 1960s and early 1970s.

An important implication of both Brandt’s argument in *Literacy in American Lives* and Gere’s argument in “Kitchen Tables, Rented Rooms” is that we should consider writing and writing pedagogy in “real” situations in which the social and economic consequences of obtaining and developing writing skills and practices is felt by the participants. Gere describes such writing events as being organized by a pedagogy of desire, for the participants are highly motivated individuals who see their own writing practices as making possible specific transformations in their personal relationships and socio-economic circumstances (279). Other research in composition and literacy studies has developed strong connections between such meaningful, contextualized purposes for writing that operate outside of the composition classroom and traditional composition pedagogy, including work that has emphasized the importance of apprenticeship (Heath), scaffolding (Smit), and writing for real purposes to literacy learning (Wardle).

For instance, in “‘Mutt Genres’ and the Goal of FYC: Can We Help Students Write the Genres of the University,” Elizabeth Wardle questions the “realism” of the kinds of writing genres typically assigned in composition classrooms in her analysis of a two-year study of 25 sec-
tions of first year composition classes. Wardle describes the writing assignments typically given in composition classes as “mutt genres” because they fail to serve the same functions as the genres outside the classroom that serve as the basis for class-based writing. Drawing on other research on writing genres, Wardle notes that genres are not easily mimicked outside of their own meaningful rhetorical situations and exigencies. Thus, Wardle concludes that the “mutt genres” assigned in composition classes get assigned and completed for their own sake. A more productive approach, Wardle argues, is to require students to reflect on, and write about their own writing processes, for these reflections would operate in a meaningful context within the classroom. Such reflection assignments would thus supplant the “mutt genres” with purpose-full writing in a FYC course that she describes as “Writing About Writing.”

In such a course, the subject … is always writing: how people use writing, how people learn to write, how genres mediate work in society, how ‘discourse communities’ affect language use, how writing changes across the disciplines, and so on. The research is about language, the discussions are about language and the goal of the course is to teach students the content of our discipline (784).

In this vision for FYC courses, Wardle positions disciplinary knowledge about writing as the aim and engine of college writing courses. By drawing such a strong connection between disciplinary knowledge and writing curricula, Wardle’s argument opens up a path for research on writing outside the classroom to contribute directly to composition pedagogy. In my approach to historical research, I focus my research on an historical study of writing and language use outside the classroom, and work to fold the implications of my findings into an explicit discussion on literacy teaching and learning.

*The Archive and Interpretation in Historical Epistemologies*
Because historical research is situated between humanistic and empirical research, the knowledge claims advanced by historical researchers are (1) dependent upon the existence of a material archive of tangible documents or artifacts and the limits of that archive, and (2) the interpretive process employed by the researcher. Thus, two core issues affect the reliability of historical epistemologies: the limits of the archive and the subjectivity of the researcher.

What is the role of the archive in an historical epistemology? In the field of composition studies, Connors alludes to the limits and possibilities presented by the archive as he argues that researchers must bring questions to the archive in order to search/play with those ideas before meaning may be made. In a more explicit argument, Carr, Carr and Schultz argue that historical methodology is shaped by the content of the archives. However, as Ramsey, Sharer, L'Eplattenier, and Mastrengelo, and others note, there is a general dearth of work on archival methodologies in the field of composition and rhetoric. Thus, looking outside the field, I turn to work on archival methods from scholars outside of the field of composition and rhetoric.

Any given archive is defined by its own physical collection of artifacts. While such a collection is typically measured by the linear feet that the archive physically occupies, the archive must also be measured by its histories and its power to shape conclusions drawn from its contents. The sociologist Elizabeth Danto points out that historical documents are unreliable due to the varied acts of exclusion and inclusion that generated the archive over the course of history. Therefore, Danto argues, we must use multiple methods whenever possible, and to the extent afforded by the range of records preserved in the archive. Historian Antoinette Burton argues that the archives, as well as our own situation as researchers, limits what may be found ‘there.’ Re-
jecting a traditional view that claims archival research is “objective,” Burton writes that this view “pose[s] a challenge which must be met in part by telling stories about [the archive’s] provenance, its histories, its effects on its users, and above all, its power to shape all the narratives which are to be ‘found’ there” (6). Together, these forces shape our complex processes of selection and interpretation that form the basis for archival stories. To attend to the tensions between the limits of the archives and the study itself, I will work to account for the archive’s contents, limits, and potentialities, as well as the multiple methods I use to work in and with the archives.

Turning to the limits posed by the researcher, Burton extends her comments on the limits of the archives, arguing that the researcher’s experiences with the archive, including his complex processes of interpretation, are shaped by “one’s personal encounter with the archive, the history of the archive itself, and the pressure of the contemporary moment on one’s reading of what is to be found there” (8). Anthropologist Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney echos Burton’s argument, pointing out that the historical records do not exist simply by having survived, for their existence results from “the subjective and cultural sifting of perspectives, insights, and ‘facts’” by those who created, maintained, and perhaps encountered the records over time (4).

Further, Ohnuki-Tierny argues that comparable subjective and cultural factors impact the researcher as she attempts to sift through the archives and make meaning of their contents. Historical researchers “are often unknowingly constrained by their membership in a particular society at a particular period in history, by their gender, age, and class, and most important, by the power inequality that often exists between the observed and the interpreters of history” (4). To respond to these limits of historical representation, Ohnuki-Tierney urges researchers to draw
from the reflexive traditions embedded in anthropological and ethnographic methodologies.

Responding to the constraints articulated by scholarship on archival methodologies, Cheryl Glenn and Jessica Enoch emphasize a dialectical relationship with the archives, and argue that historical research provides us the opportunity to talk with and listen to others through the archives in their essay “Invigorating Historiographic Practices in Rhetoric and Composition Studies.” As Glenn and Enoch explain, ethnography and historiography are “slippery” because they are both fueled by the process of interpretation, or “the task of connecting the ‘real’ and the discourse” (24). Therefore, Glenn and Enoch encourage researchers to practice critical reflection throughout the research process because

historiographers, like ethnographers, concentrate on connecting the experiences of *someone* to the representation of those experiences by *someone else*. Thus, the issue is not so much *why* we approach various groups of people or archival collections but *how* we work to understand and honor their perspective, their experience. The goal of accurate interpretation is never enough. When we engage in research, we need to know what our self-interest is, how that interest might enrich our disciplinary field … and resolve to participate in a reciprocal cross-boundary exchange, in which we talk *with* and listen *to* Others, whether they are speaking to us in person or via archival materials (24).

Since researching in the archives does not afford the opportunities to build organic relationships between the ethnographer and living participants, the position of the researcher seems heightened in the process of historical interpretation. To be successful, historiographers must come to listen to their subjects through the existing and available records, and to honor their experience and understand the functions of literacy in their world and experience. By reflecting on our own positionality and interestedness throughout the research project, we may, Glenn and Enoch argue, better listen to the Others in the archive, and to come to better understand how our own “stance
channels us to write one kind of history and directs us away from other possibilities” (22).

Liz Rohan contributes to this argument in “The Personal as Method and Place as Archives,” by urging researchers to reflect on their emotioned engagements and attachments with the archive in order to better understand what they read and see in the archives (246). Through a description of her own archival research on a turn-of-the-century Detroit woman named Janette Miller, who became a missionary in Angola, Rohan notes some of the tension she experienced in writing up her history of Janette: “Even though she [Janette Miller] is no longer living and obviously would never read my research about her, I was concerned with representing Janette’s writing and life with empathy and respect, even though at times I neither understood nor respected her” (232). Apparently, much of Rohan’s struggle seemed to be related to Janette’s own racism as a white missionary in Africa.

To overcome some of her own subjective limits, Rohan used a process of critical self-reflection that enabled the imagining of new pathways for writing described by Glenn and Enoch. Rohan’s initial focus as she first set out to write up her dissertation was to use the concept of “sacred space” to frame the project, which, she explains “would refer to the religious views important to Janette like Bible teaching, as symbolized by the loss of architectural spaces” that had been important in Janette’s life (indeed, many had been destroyed in the intervening years. “The idea being: these places and ideas were ‘sacred’ and mostly gone, outdated, and forgotten” (235). Through her own self-reflective practice, Rohan explored the physical landmarks that occupied important parts of Janette’s life and reflected critically on the assumptions she brought into the project.
Through this process of “Using the landscape and [her] emotions in concert and while reading both material archives and supplementary reading,” Rohan came to see Janette’s life and work through a different perspective, as she “abandoned a framework of analysis connoting loss and alienation apart from a world that might misunderstand or abuse it, the sacred-space theme; [Rohan] was to think of [Janette’s] texts as mapped onto and into the world, working in and on this world” (245). The shift was important to Rohan precisely because it was more ethical, enabling a narrative that would respect Janette’s experiences.

Finally, Rohan underscores the importance of considering the relationships between the archive, the researcher, and the written product by drawing from a paper given by Sarah Robbins, who presented her own work on some of Janette’s missionary colleagues on a panel with Rohan at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. As Rohan explains, Robbins has worked to theorize historical methods and “the interplay between a ‘body’ of archival artifacts, the absent ‘body’ of the original author, and the ‘body’ of the researcher, who not only assembles evidence but also composes identities” (Sarah Robbins, qtd. in Rohan 245). Balancing these three constituents of archival research is key, Rohan argues, to create histories that treat their subjects ethically.

These arguments for systematic reflection in the course of historical research are echoed in the literature on qualitative and ethnographic methodologies. Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw argue that no researcher can be a fully neutral, detached observer in Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes. As the ethnographer interacts with the participants in the field, she invariably must interpret, or “make sense” of what is happening. While this does not preclude the
ethnographer’s efforts to record observations, or concrete sensory-oriented details, Brian Street and Shirley Brice Heath urge ethnographers to note their interpretations as separate from their concrete descriptions of events on the one hand, and the interpretations offered by participants in the field, on the other in *On Ethnography*.

Practicing this reflexivity is important because it strengthens the reliability of the research by enabling us, as Emerson, Fretz and Shaw explain, to “see and appreciate how our own renderings of others’ worlds are not and can never be descriptions from outside those worlds. Rather, they are informed by and constructed in and through relationships with those under study. Hence, in training the reflexive lens on ourselves, we understand our own enterprise in much the same terms that we understand those we study” (216).

While archival researchers may not interact with the subjects of study in the same way as do ethnographers with their participants, both methods broadly share a common goal – to inductively develop epistemological claims grounded in empirical research by way of an interpretive process in which the researcher filters data through a lens that is shaped by the researcher’s own sociocultural situation, historical moment, theoretical commitments, etc. As John Creswell argues in his seminal text, *Research Design*, we cannot escape personal interpretation (182). Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw elaborate on Cresswell’s point, arguing that

the ethnographer’s assumptions, interests, and theoretical commitments enter into every phase of writing an ethnography and influence decisions that range from selecting which events to write about to those that entail emphasizing one member’s perspective on an event over those of others. The process is thus one of reflexive or dialectical interplay between theory and data whereby theory enters in at every point (167).

The theory that Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw argue enters into the research at every point is com-
prised of a researcher’s own subjective assumptions, interests, and disciplinary, or theoretical, commitments. In order to responsibly acknowledge and fold this theory into our research, Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw urge ethnographers to practice reflexivity over the course of the qualitative study.

Historical researchers face a task similar to that of ethnographers, as they must sift through records and make decisions that range from selecting texts to examine more closely, emphasizing one set of records or perspectives over another, consulting one collection rather than another, and so on. As the historian W. H. McDowell argues in *Historical Research*, historical inquiry is a dialectical process in which the researcher may bring certain questions to the archive hoping they will be answered by the available evidence, only to find that the evidence may challenge her assumptions and persuade her to “ask further questions which [she] had never thought about” (9). This dialectical process is complicated by the fact that historians are shaped by their own contexts. For example, McDowell explains that historians writing after World War I wrote more pessimistic accounts of war than in the period before World War I.

While historians must, as McDowell explains, “provide the best interpretation of the events which is possible and is supported by the available primary and secondary source material” (10), I argue that historians must also develop methods that account for their sociocultural and historical situatedness. Therefore, to return to an issue discussed above with Glenn and Enoch, a key question for empirical methodologies in composition studies, such as historical and ethnographic methodologies, is not *why* we take up our research, but *how* we enter into our research, whether our research takes place in a “field” or an “archive.” In my approach to the
archives, I respond to Glenn and Enoch’s suggestion that we view historical research as similar to critical ethnographies, and use self-reflexive notes throughout the research process in order to acknowledge and understand my own self-interests and positionality in engaging with the archive.

Representing Historical Data

Another point of comparison between qualitative and historical methodologies is the question of representation. For instance, North underlines the role of narrative as a vehicle for representing experience, truth, and data for historical researchers; indeed, several composition scholars have employed a narrative strategy (Burton; Enoch; Gorzelsky; Kells). Vicky Tolar Burton’s work in *Spiritual Literacy* uses a descriptive methodology of representation that suggests that historical accounts can give us a sense of “having been there,” similar to ethnographies that draw on the tradition of Clifford Geertz’ emphasis on detailed descriptions of the field.

However, the balance between narrative representation and the role of primary and secondary documents in forming the narrative has been raised by some scholars in the field. Most poignantly, in “Historical Studies and Postmodernism,” Xin Liu Gale forcefully critiqued the historical studies of Cheryl Glenn and Susan Jarratt in order to argue that historical representations must be intimately entwined with traditional emphasis on records, even when the narrative is shaped by postmodern perspectives, such as Glenn and Jarratt’s use of feminist methodologies. Gale’s critique prompted a series of responses by Glenn, Jarratt, and Hui Wu who all defended the methodologies employed by Glenn and Jarratt. Wu offered the most detailed response in “Historical Studies of Rhetorical Women Here and There” in which she argues that progressive
scholars may reject traditional historical methodologies without jeopardizing their research, provided that they carefully describe the purposes and meanings of their methodology and provide fair and accurate treatment of their sources (94).

Glenn responds to this debate in “Truth, Lies, and Method” by arguing that Gale overlooked Glenn’s careful treatment of primary sources, and argues that the traditional methodologies advocated by Gale, which suggest that the truth of historical representation lies in the records themselves, is flawed. Rather, Glenn argues, “all historical accounts, even the most seemingly objective historical records, are stories. And even those stories are selected and arranged according to the selector’s frame of reference” (388). According to this view, history writing emerges from a dialectical relationship between the “object under study and the discourse performing the analysis” (388). Jarratt echoes Glenn’s emphasis on the role of discourse in her response to Gale, titled “Rhetoric and Feminism.” Jarratt describes criteria for evaluating a progressive methodology for representation, including the following questions: “Does this history instruct, delight, and move the reader? Is the historical data probable? Does it fit with other accounts or provide a convincing alternative? Is it taken up by the community and used? Or is it refuted, dismissed, and forgotten?” (391).

In my approach to representation, I agree with Jarratt’s account, which balances the data with the narrative. Glenn is right to argue that all historical accounts are stories. Those stories are limited in part by the archive itself, as Burton argues in Archival Stories.

7. Overview of the Dissertation

In the following, I explain how I develop a literacy research project that combines the
interdisciplinary scholarship on affect, embodiment, and cognition with an archival study of the United Farm Workers, which advocated for and organized migrant farm workers in California under the leadership of César Chávez and Dolores Huerta during the late 1960s and early 1970s. I focus particularly on Chávez and Luis Váldez who led El Teatro Campesino (a theater troupe affiliated with the UFW that wrote and produced short plays to help educate the largely non-literate farm workers about their labor conditions and the affairs related to the union and the strike), as case studies of what I call discursive readiness potential.

In Chapter Two, “Composing Agency: Discursive Readiness Potential,” I argue for a more embodied theory of agency by developing the concept of discursive readiness potential. The chapter develops this theoretical frame by surveying views on agency from composition and rhetoric (Flower; Brandt and Clinton; Cooper; Rickert; Lu and Horner; Trimbur) as well as interdisciplinary research on embodiment (Blackman; Noland; Thrift), affect (Massumi) and neuroscience (Schwartz and Begley). Discursive readiness potential is one’s capacity to navigate multiple emergent potentials for action that are shaped by one’s prior experiences as well as one’s embodied and embedded situatedness in socio-cultural worlds. The concept of discursive readiness potential emphasizes not only the formative role of embodied experience – the practice of Discourse practices – but also the mindfulness with which one may intervene in established habits and compose new potentials for action in socio-cultural situations.

In Chapter Three, “Cultivating Hybridity: A Discourse Genealogy of César Chávez (1927-1957),” I develop a Discourse genealogy that traces out the layers of primary and secondary Discourses evident in Chávez’s experience through the late 1950s when he began to more
explicitly focus on labor organizing. Chávez grew up in a migrant working family of Spanish speaking Mexicanos in Arizona, learned English, acquired working-class and community-organizing Discourses by working with Saul Alinsky’s Community Service Organization, cultivated non-violent Discourses through the study of Gandhi’s work, and often drew from Roman Catholic Discourses in his service to Latino/a causes. Through his speeches, Chávez frequently addressed multiple audiences at once, including Anglo middle-class, Mexicano/a migrant workers, and Catholic/Christian audiences. The chapter seeks to understand how Chávez folded in both dissonant and consonant Discourse elements to forge hybrid Discourses by focusing on Chávez as an example of a literacy learner whose cultivation of a hybrid discursive readiness potential substantively shaped his civic engagement.

My approach to the Chávez material is shaped by the work of rhetoricians John Hammerback and Richard Jensen who describe Chávez as an ideal speaker to both Mexican-American and Anglo-American audiences. As Hammerback and Jensen explain, Chávez emphasized in his worldview the importance of discourse – of reading nonviolence texts, writing his own speeches, and giving public speeches despite an overwhelming private orientation. Through his use of Mexicano and dominant Anglo discourses, Chávez successfully organized the migrant workers and accomplished change with and through dominant institutions that better served rural Mexican-American communities throughout California.

In order to consider Chávez as an example, I draw from the following archives: (1) speeches given during the late 1960’s and early 1970s, including drafts and notes in the Walter Reuther Library Archives and the original Chávez texts published in John Hammerback and
Richard Jensen’s unedited collection of Chávez’s written material in *The Words of César Chávez*; (2) Chávez’s responses to interviews, including both oral and written interviews; (3) essays, memos, and other texts from Chávez’s office; and (4) Chávez’s statements made while participating in various oral history projects, including Jacques Levy’s transcripts of interviews with Chávez and family members in the unedited volume *Autobiography of La Causa*, published during the grape strikes.

Whereas Chapter Three looks at hybridity and potentiality in order to understand how individuals learn or acquire hybridity, Chapter Four, “The Entailments of Genre/Experience: Discursive Readiness Potential, Genre, and Literate Activity,” examines Discursive readiness potential in the context of civic engagement. Through an archival study of Chávez and the United Farm Workers, I seek to examine the connections between the cultivation, learning, or acquisition of various literacies chronicled in Chapter Three and the emergence of readiness potential within scenes of civic engagement. The chapter focuses on the 1957 unplanned march for farm-worker’s rights to work in Oxnard, California in order to illustrate how Chávez’s readiness potentials enabled specific kinds of civic engagement grounded in his reading of Gandhi and liberal Catholic theology, as well as other experiences organizing communities in California.

The field of composition studies is situated between two discursive worlds: while the field is charged with teaching the language of power, it advocates for students’ rights to their own (often marginalized) Discourses. A variety of positions have emerged in relation to this spectrum: Rodriguez argues the primary discourse should be abandoned for the public secondary discourse; Shor urges us to begin with students’ home discourses to bridge toward the dominant Discourse;
Bartholomae points out that the secondary discourse is often an unstable construction that must re-emerge with each writing event; and Gale urges us to acknowledge that as writing instructors we are connected to both formal and informal discourses, and that we can use this duality to build multi-layered connections with students.

The tension between dominant and marginalized discourses lies at the core of composition, and has surfaced in a wide range of sub-fields, including working-class discourses (Bloom “Freshman Composition”; Durst; Lindquist; Parks *Class Politics*; Seitz), African American discourses (Delpit; Richardson *African American Literacies*, Royster *Traces*; Royster “When the First Voice”), Latino/a discourses (Guerra; Kells; Kells, Ballestar, Villanueva), and Native American discourses (Cushman “Toward”; Lyons). Perhaps because of our Janus-like orientation to both dominant as well as marginalized discourses, we have adopted a set of metaphors that allow for us to open lines of movement from one to the other. For example, we often talk about bridging the gap or making transitions from where our students are to the dominant discourse.

In Chapter Five, “The Potentials of Embodied Literacies: Implications for Further Research and Teaching,” I consider how discursive readiness potential and the case studies of Chávez (as examples of discursive readiness potential) offer the field ways to rethink the spaces between marginalized and dominant Discourses as thresholds upon which discursive readiness potential emerges. I will draw on Chapters three and four to show how they managed to occupy the thresholds, or spaces, between competing discourses, and that by doing so, opened up new and richer possibilities for action.

By focusing on the metaphor of “threshold” I aim to draw a distinction between the mod-
els of growth that currently dominate the field of composition pedagogy. Often we seem to conceptualize the space between discourses as an unconnected gap, a ravine that must be “bridged,” or an unreachable height that must be “scaffolded” in order to afford access. In contrast, the concept of “threshold” collapses the gaps between competing discursive rooms/realms. The chapter suggests that by conceptualizing student writers as occupying thresholds (rather than crossing bridges, climbing scaffolds, passing through gateways), we may begin to develop pedagogies that better enable students to move between competing discursive spaces.

This chapter challenges these assumptions by (1) defining the space between conflicting discourses as a threshold and (2) examining the ecology of writing as a web of sociocultural forces, affective and embodied forces, and cognitive semiotic forces. I argue that by focusing on hybrid Discourses through composition curricula, we may begin to rethink writing as a place where the personal/academic, private/public, individual/institutional are always interwoven rather than one subjugated to the other. Unlike the other architectural metaphors that shape our understanding of discourse learning and growth, the threshold model opens up ways to imagine discourse change and movement between discourses as much less problematic than bridge crossing or scaffold climbing. While this argument does not try to efface the inherent challenges that our students regularly face, it does work to reconceptualize how we think about movement between competing discourses and it redefines the distinctions that we draw between competing discourses.
CHAPTER TWO Composing Agency: Discursive Readiness Potential

“The body has to learn to play itself like a musical instrument in this world’s compositions.” Kathleen Stewart “Worldling Refrains” (341).

1. Introduction: Agency in Literacy and Composition Studies

The concept of "agency" has been a contested issue since postmodernism and the death of the subject (Cooper; Reddy). With the rise of the postmodern and poststructuralist critiques of subjectivity and agency, our theories of language and action have placed broad social constructs like discourse and ideology in the author’s chair (Flower). Problematically, this theoretical shift came at the expense of our ability to understand how individuals make decisions to act or not act in complex rhetorical ecologies comprised of both the inner and outer worlds that individuals inhabit. In literacy and composition studies, the overwhelming focus of our scholarship on agency has been to view our various socially constructed discourses as the engine of individual action (our ways with words) in rhetorical situations, while agency has been reserved as a marker for either acts of resistance against dominant forms of power or as a lack of agency in scenes of marginalization (Lu and Horner).

Critiques of the postmodern/poststructuralist erasure of the individual agent (i.e., the death of the author) in composition studies have argued that the notion of rhetoric as an individual undertaking does not work without some functional theory of agency (Cooper; Flower). Our

1 This argument is echoed by scholarship outside the field. William Reddy makes a parallel argument in history, arguing that the notion of a historically relevant individual does not work unless we have a workable theory of agency, despite the prevalent critiques of subjectivity. Scholars in sociology have been developing theories of agency that respond to critiques of poststructuralism as being too deterministic since the early 2000s by pointing to the connections between embodiment and agency (Ahearn; Campbell; Clegg; Coole; Maxwell and Aggleton; McNay).
field must be able to conceptualize how individuals make decisions about which discursive move they select among a range of potential options available to the rhetorical agent in any given rhetorical situation. For example, in her recent review of literacy studies texts examining Discourses, affect, and agency, Beth Daniell points out that James Gee’s influential Discourse theory cannot account for individual agency.

Gee conceptualizes social languages as Discourses that are comprised of our ways of saying-being-doing-feeling and allow us to be recognized as certain whos doing certain whats. Gee makes an important distinction between primary Discourses, or the Discourses we acquire at home, and the secondary Discourses we learn in the various public spaces and institutions that we pass through, but does not explain how individuals navigate the multiple Discourses in real-time, sometimes forging hybrid Discourses to deal with the (sometimes unexpected) rhetorical situations they face. As Daniell points out, since Gee argues one cannot fully engage with a Discourse until one has acquired fluidity and control, Gee leaves little room for personal agency. Discourse learning and hybridization are thus under theorized by Gee, and the kinds of agency required to alternate and recast discrete elements of one identity kit to serve the purposes of alternative identity kits simultaneously are not considered by Gee in detail. However, while Daniell highlights this problem of agency in Discourse theory, she does not actually define what agency is.

As Daniell notes, Lisa Delpit makes a similar critique of Gee in her book *Other People’s Children*.

John Duffy’s study of literacies in a Pacific Island community illustrate this point as well.
The aim of this chapter is to theorize discursive agency, or the process of acting within and across Discourses in response to specific rhetorical situations. While I am not trying to write discourse out of agency, I want to point out that, as others in our field have argued (Cooper; Flower), there is more to agency than discourse or ideology. The turn to affect across the humanities and the social sciences has persuasively shown us that despite poststructuralist claims about ideology and discourse, our capacities to affect and be affected as human beings entails an intensity that exceeds language and consciousness (Blackman and Venn; Brennan; Connolly; Damasio; Massumi; Sedgwick; Thrift). Moreover, the burgeoning interdisciplinary research and theories on affect in fields such as neuroscience, cognitive psychology, sociology, and the humanities have led us to rethink the role of the body as it relates to discourse, being, doing, etc.

In the following chapter, I develop what I call “discursive readiness potential.” The concept of “readiness potential” comes from affect theory in both neuroscience (Schwartz and Begley) and the humanities (Massumi). As a provisional definition, readiness potential is a concept that rejects the notion of free will as the gatekeeper of action, which is a model that privileges intentionality and deliberation. Instead, readiness potential points to the potentialities, the possible actions that may be actualized at any given moment. Readiness potential is bound to our socialized embodied processes, and underscores the importance of material practices in shaping our actions in the present. An example of readiness potential is the memorization of music – at first it is a deliberative and cognitively demanding task, but over time and with practice, the player develops a readiness to perform the song which gets stored in what musicians call muscle memory (note that athletes describe practice and performance in similar terms). Furthermore, as the musi-
cian learns more and more pieces, and practices scale after scale, these experiences accumulate into additional readiness potentials that allow the musician to perform a new piece of music through a practice of sight reading. While the musician may not have seen the new music, she can, nonetheless, enact the range of performance potentials that had been internalized through countless hours of careful, mindful practice. Likewise, we could extend this to our thinking about the embodied and material practices that surround and constitute the act of writing. As I discuss below, Marilyn Cooper, for instance, makes a similar argument about the emergence of capacities to act over time in her article “Rhetorical Agency as Emergent and Enacted.”

The possibilities of an action are potentialities until they get actualized, narrowed down into one reality. Approached in this light, a theory of affects and agency asks questions about not just what is to be done by a body in a situation, but how the body has been regulated or modulated to act in a situation – what is its readiness potential in a discursive situation and how is that readiness potential constructed and experienced in the mind-body complex? In order to develop such an account of agency, I first establish embodiment as a concern for literacy studies in composition. Then, I look at recent critical approaches to agency in composition studies, which I subsequently buttress with interdisciplinary views on agency that emphasize potentiality and action. Finally, I synthesize the broad range of scholarship on agency, practice, and potentiality into the notion of “discursive readiness potential.”

2. Embodiment and Literacy Studies

As composition matured into a discipline of its own right during the 1980s and early 1990s, scholarship in the field increasingly focused its analysis of writing on concepts such as
knowledge, ideology, culture, rhetoric, and subjectivity. Indeed much work in composition and rhetoric continues this hermeneutical model of scholarship today. However, as Raúl Sánchez compellingly argues in *The Function of Theory in Composition Studies*, by rooting itself in hermeneutics, composition theory has limited itself from presenting writing as anything other than a technology of representation (3). Under such a representational paradigm, composition theory and research has been satisfied with projects that take up writing in pursuit of what Sánchez calls “something else,” or in other words, questions of knowledge, ideology, or culture have been understood in composition theory as something else, something other than writing, that yet function to drive the act of writing (4).

Writing has thus played a secondary role as a function knowledge, ideology, and culture, representing and reproducing meaning as an effect of these more fundamental concepts. Given this assessment of writing in dominant composition theory and research, we might usefully frame “writing” (as it has been understood in composition studies) as having the status of an “intermediary.” Sánchez’s proposal, on the other hand, is to conceptualize, theorize, and research “writing” and more specifically, the act of writing, as having a “mediator” status. As Bruno LaTour distinguishes between these terms in *We Have Never Been Modern*, an intermediary “simply transports, transfers, transmits energy” (77), while a mediator “is an original event and creates what it translates as well as the entities between which it plays the mediating role” (78). Writing, Sánchez argues, has been positioned as an intermediary in composition theory: transporting, transferring, and transmitting the ‘energy’ of knowledge, ideology, or culture from the immaterial realm to the materiality of the text. Sánchez’s project, on the other hand, is to advocate a concep-
tion of writing as a mediator, or an event that creates knowledge, ideology, and culture as it simultaneou
sly translates these broader categories into the linguistic forms embedded in the textual artifact. This notion of producing culture through the (re)iteration of writing practices is developed in more detail below (Lu and Horner; Noland).

To that end, Sánchez argues for a non-representational theory of writing that will enable the field to further examine and understand writing beyond the scope of representation. Certainly as a linguistic technology, writing will always entail the representation of thought and experience, but writing has always been, and remains today an embodied activity – whatever media get used in the writing process. In order to pursue this work, Sánchez calls for a nonrepresentational theory that might “account for the force and function of writing” by bracketing representation or meaning as a function of writing (5). For Sánchez, the term ‘non-representational’ refers to the textual, material, embodied circumstances of the act of writing, or what Sánchez characterizes above as the “force and function” of writing. This non-representational paradigm would address a central question, posed by Sánchez as: “At the level of the individual body, how does the socially and culturally embedded (f)act of writing occur and what can be said about it?” (97-8). Sánchez’s argument thus calls attention to two simultaneous dimensions of writing: the fact of writing, or the product of the text that reproduces cultural knowledge, etc, and the act of writing, which is an inescapably embodied process that (re)ifies cultural practices. Scholarship must therefore combine, in Sánchez’s view, non-representational, or embodied accounts of the (f)act of writing with broader analysis of socio-cultural functions of writing, including knowledge, ideology, and culture, as well as rhetoric, subjectivity, and agency.
This project responds to Sánchez’s argument by developing a perspective on agency in composition and literacy that is carved out of scholarship in composition studies and other fields that foregrounds writing in a broader context of embodiment. In order to pursue a richer understanding of embodiment, I turn to Lisa Blackman, whose influential survey on the interdisciplinary work on affect and the body, *The Body*, argues that we cannot ask questions about what a body is. Instead, we must examine what bodies do, for bodies are always emerging in an ongoing state of becoming in which various physical capacities are folded into social activities and various tools, objects, and non-human actors into assemblages that allow us to do something.

Drawing on the anthropologist AnneMarie Mol’s work on embodiment, Blackman explains that we must move beyond a notion of the body as all of the material stuff contained by our skin in order to think about how our bodies connect to and are extended by “other bodies, human and non-human, to practices, techniques, technologies and objects which produce different kinds of bodies and different ways, arguably, of enacting what it means to be human” (1). Our field has shown how we all have multiple Discourses – each its own way of saying-being-doing-feeling – but the connections between multiple Discourses and the body hasn’t been fully developed (as I argue in Chapter 1). Blackman’s survey of research on embodiment suggests that we must think about how embodiment is not a singular stable phenomena; rather, our bodies are always in a state of becoming.

Thus, Blackman urges us to move past notions of “bodies as substances” by theorizing bodies as “sites of potentiality, process, and practice” (5). First, bodies are sites of potentiality because they exceed any singular or stable definitions through their connections with other bo-
dies, things, and practices. Drawing on Bruno Latour’s notion of “assemblage” as a term that describes relationships between human and non-human actors, Blackman describes how bodily capacities to act (potentials) get enacted in various ways depending upon the assemblages between human and non-human actors in a given situation (122). Thus, it is these “relational connections that articulate what the body is capable of, what it can do, what it might become” (123). Second, bodies are sites of process because “Bodies do not remain fixed or static but are mediated by processes and practices that produce dynamic points of intersection and connection” between bodies, bodies and things (both human and non-human), as well as bodies and practices. Thus, Blackman explains, “The focus on process is on composing rather than composed, pre-formed entities. The focus on composing looks at how bodies become assembled in particular ways through their coupling or conjoining with particular objects, practices, techniques and artefacts such that they are always bodies in the making rather than ready-made” (107). Discourse agents, according to this view, are in a continual process of composing the body through the (re)iteration of discourse moves in a constantly unfolding flow of becoming a who doing a what. Third, practice, which is a concept at the core of literacy and composition studies, refers to the coordinated ways of doing certain situated bodies. Thus, “practices do not simply describe the body [e.g., describe the literate practices practiced by (some)body], but rather create what the body might become, and in that sense both enact and have the potential to do the body differently” (126). Practices describe what the body might become in the sense that practices compose through repeated action identities (Discourses), ways of doing meaningful action (what Carrie Noland calls “ Gestures” below), as well as cognitive and neural processes.
Blackman’s repositioning of the body shifts embodiment from a stable container that holds multiple subjectivities to a more dynamic interrelationship between corporeality, subjectivity, discourses, and ways of saying-being-doing-feeling that is marked by becoming rather than being. According to this view, when we consider practices like literate practices, we must think about how the potentials for acting in literacy scenes depends on the relationships between human and nonhuman actors (Brandt and Clinton; Rickert); how literacy functions as a process of becoming through practices over time and the various assemblages between human and non-human actors that we encounter in social situations (Brandt and Clinton; Cooper; Rickert); how practices, or the practice of practices, creates the possibilities for becoming literate in specific culturally defined ways (Trimbur).

Hence, in pursuing the question “what is agency in literacy practices and processes?”, I am interested in understanding how embodiment as a process of becoming shapes our capacities to act (potentials); to affect and be affected through literate practices, which invariably fold the body, ideation (or conscious thought), social structures of meaning, and various tools of literacy into ever-shifting, ever-emerging discourse assemblages.

To open the conversation, I would like to briefly show how in many ways these tensions have always been with us in literacy studies. For example, in Shirley Brice Heath’s groundbreaking work *Ways With Words*, Heath accounts for individual discursive agency – individuals’ ways with words – by analyzing literate actions in the context of broader community-bound ideologies of language use. Although Heath’s account of the literacy practices of the children in Roadville and Trackton implicitly illustrate how literacy practices entail specific affective processes (emo-
tions, attitudes, beliefs, feelings, etc.), Heath does not organize affects in either her theorization of literacy or in her summary remarks on the future implications for research and teaching. Rather Heath’s project is to show that literacy practices gain meaning from the ideologies structured by local settings. Nonetheless, many of Heath’s examples illustrate how coming to act in literacy events requires individuals to grapple with both intra-personal and inter-personal dynamics as they confront and cross discourse conflict zones.

Thus Heath argues that understanding the differences in learning how to use language in Roadville and Trackton is key for understanding the ways stories are constructed and employed by the members of each community. First, although Trackton stories begin in fact or experience, they focus on social relationships and report with exaggeration or twist endings, and freely insert feelings and emotions into the telling (170). Second, Roadville stories recount actual events witnessed, or previously authorized as ‘good’ (legitimate) stories by others, test the boundaries of social relationships, identities, and norms, and may feature exaggeration and hyperbole, but these must be qualified as such (152). Trackton stories generally fluctuate in structure, have little chronicity, incorporate much evaluation, are originated by the storyteller, emphasize strengths of the characters involved, elicit interaction from the audience, and largely serve as entertainment or celebration of the characters’ virtues (185-6). On the other hand, Roadville stories use strict formulaic intros, are chronically organized, report only direct discourse while omitting indirect or explicit explanation or interpretation, are invited to be told by others, and relate personal experiences and tales of transgression while staying “true to the facts,” qualifying exaggeration as such, and relating the episode to some moral or didactic point (185-6).
Heath’s point is that our ways with words – here telling stories – very from community to community, culture to culture. When these home-based discourses come into conflict with school-based discourses, alternating between the two cultural worlds can make using words more challenging. When the Roadville kids head to school, they come to face very different notions of what a story is. As Heath writes, “These children must come to recognize when a story is expected to be true, when to stick to the facts, and when to use their imaginations” (294). However, learning these different ways of telling stories is more than simply learning about the form or structure of the story. Rather, the children must confront an ethics of discursive agency that is markedly different than that constructed by their home literacy practices.

Used to telling nonfictive stories in their home community, Roadville students, in contrast to Trackton students, succeed in the first few years of schooling in recounting nonfictive stories—a form already very familiar, as it represents the dominant story form practiced in Roadville. Nonetheless, Heath points out, “when asked to create fictive stories, Roadville children have little success. They either retell stories read to them at school or repeatedly quiz the teacher on what she wants them to do” (301). For example, Heath recounts Jed’s response to his teacher’s instruction: “Tell about something that happened to you, or make up a story about a pet” (301). As Heath observes, “Before he told the story, Jed had spent several minutes thinking quietly. He had seemingly rehearsed the story in his head” (301). One wonders what exactly Jed was thinking about during those several minutes, and Heath’s account seems to be speculative. For instance, why would he have to rehearse the story?

Perhaps Jed rehearsed the story, but perhaps he grappled instead with the internal felt-di-
dimensions of transgressing one discourse to achieve success in another. Ultimately, we don’t know. Nonetheless, while Heath does not elaborate on Jed’s classroom habits, and specifically whether he usually or occasionally would spend several minutes formulating a response in his head, her comments seem to suggest that this is an unusual occasion. Heath intuits that Jed was likely deliberating between the two ethics regarding story structures: one familiar, personal and nonfictive, the other unfamiliar and fictive. Indeed, Jed chose the latter, as we see him experiment in his response with an unfamiliar fictive story form:

One day I was outside, and my dog was hiding in the bushes
and I walked by the bushes and he jumped on me
and I had to fight to get up
I went in, and my mother yelled at me
so I had to change my clothes. (301)

While Jed may have delivered a fictive story, he does not stray far from the conventions of Roadville storytelling: this example is linear, does not exaggerate, and gives the impression of sticking to the facts according to the testimony of a witness (even if these facts are actually fiction). Also, the story partially mimics the moralistic Roadville tales by positioning Jed as having done something wrong, though the story also moves away from Roadville tales by pointing to the dog as the culprit. Clearly Jed understands how to make up a story, as he tells a lie in narrative form. However, it would seem that although he decides to make up a story during his several minutes of quiet deliberation, Jed appears to be bound to the affective gravity of Roadville’s ethics of story form and its emphasis on moralistic tales, but ultimately, he performs neither the school-based Discourse nor his home-based Discourse.

It is the affective and ethical tension evidenced Jed’s silence that is lacking attention in
Heath’s account, and which I want to recover in a theory of agency. Here is the issue at stake: moments of discursive agency in scenes of cultural conflict entail complex ideological and affective tensions that must be navigated by the individual. Heath’s analysis of Jed shows how his literacy in the classroom was shaped by the community-based practices that he encountered growing up in Roadville. Heath’s project, like most literacy studies projects that take up the situated ideological model, is interested in understanding how broader socio-political forces shape the cultural practices in and through which individuals come to use texts. However, these approaches are limited in their ability to account for the micro-dimensions of literacy practices, including the affective dynamics of using texts in social situations.

As I argue below, Marilyn Cooper’s work on combining rhetorical analysis and neuroscience shows how the accumulation of rich cultural experiences and practices in the form of memories, dispositions, etc. combine with various conscious and nonconscious cognitive processes to shape individual action. Crossing discursive boundaries is inescapable for all of us, as long as we maintain social lives. Our field is adept at accounting for ideological tensions, but offers few resources for explaining the affective and embodied tensions that enable and limit discursive agency. Cooper’s work demonstrates the power of this argument since she seeks to recover agency from the dustbins of poststructuralism. Our understanding of agency in literacy studies would be strengthened by theorizing how issues of affect, embodiment, cognition, and ideology shape the ways in which we act in rhetorical situations. For instance, when we are confronted with unfamiliar discursive situations or genres, how do we activate our prior knowledge and experience in ways that allow us to choose – and often to choose nonconsciously – to enact
the appropriate modes that fit our situation, purposes, etc.? In the case of Jed, an alternative
analysis focused on the influence of embodied phenomena like emotions, feelings, memories,
dispositions, goals, perceptions, etc., would ask how these conscious and nonconscious cognitive
processes inflected Jed’s choice to craft the story as he did.

In “Agency and the Death of the Author,” John Trimbur foregrounds a notion of agency
that stands in contrast to the concept at the center of hermeneutic approaches to composition re-
search. Drawing on de Certeau, Trimbur argues that “agency is not about explaining but about
maneuvering, […] not the theory but the practice of practice” (287). Key to Trimbur’s argument
here is that agency is not a matter of theories, explanations, interpretations, discourses, but is in-
stead about action, movements, flows, strategies, tactics, maneuverings, the practice of practice.
That is, the repeated, culturally situated, embodied practices that get enacted time and again must
be navigated by the individual. This capacity to maneuver and choose between various possible
consequential actions is a kind of agency rooted in the everyday moments of being literate.
Trimbur’s notion of agency would thus ask us to consider how and why Jed navigated the possi-
ble story forms available to him (e.g., Roadville, school-based, and/or hybrid story forms).

Trimbur’s argument thus extends our thinking by reframing agency not as the result of a
deliberate interpretation that is the gatekeeper of action, but instead as a structure of feeling.
Structures of feeling are affective presentations of embodied experience to the mind in a holistic
yet nondiscursive process that we register as feelings (as in the feelings of discomfort or comfort,
or of hostility and confrontation) and which seem private, but which are thoroughly social phe-
nomena experienced within the theater of the body and registered by the mind although just at
the edge of semantic representation. These structures of feeling are important not because they happen, but because they shape the performance of an action giving it contours and intensities that later get interpreted and linguistically represented by the mind. At the cusp of action, however, we only have these structures of feeling that are at once both intensely personal and thoroughly social. For Trimbur, agency is just such a thing: “Agency … is a kind of excess that is neither determinately given nor freely enacted” (288). Agency is about excess and potentiality – capacities to act – rather than intention and determination. Thus, as Trimbur explains, agency results from “our feelings about the possibilities of consequential action and how we recognize and justify what we do” (288). Understanding those feelings is crucial to a project that aims to holistically understand agency as an aspect of literacy practice(s), and to view writing as an embodied act, which of course, it is.

3. Recent Critical Approaches to Agency in Composition Studies

In order to recuperate the agent in a theory of rhetoric and discursive action, I turn to the work in the field that seeks to reestablish the position of agency in composition studies by accounting for (a) the deeply embodied processes that shape individual agency, and (b) the ways in which agency exceeds local situations and human actors. First, Linda Flower argues that in scenes of cultural conflict, rhetorical agency emerges in relationship to Others and one's own internal affective and ideational processes. Second, Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton adapt Bruno Latour’s widely influential Actor Network Theory for literacy studies by emphasizing the critical role played by nonhuman actors in literacy scenes. Third, Marilyn Cooper situates agency as an embodied process that emerges in a feedback loop consisting of information from one's me-
mories, emotions, goals, and rhetorical situation in her article "Rhetorical Agency as Emergent and Enacted." Fourth, Min Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner reframe agency as a term capable of describing everyday discursive acts, even when those acts seem to do little more than reproduce dominant or heterogeneous ideologies, or sameness as they put it. Finally, Thomas Rickert connects Heiddeger’s *stimmung* (often translated as mood or attunement) to theorize agency as an emergent process of attunement to the surround, which consists not only of rhetorical situations, but ongoing interactions between various human and non-human actors. The aim of this section is to synthesize the wide ranging views on agency that have emerged in composition studies since the turn of the century in order to articulate a notion of discursive agency that may be brought into conversation with recent interdisciplinary scholarship on affect and embodiment.

In *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*, Linda Flower works to understand how community members construct meaning across cultural differences using rivaling as a rhetorical strategy for recognizing others’ situated perspectives on scenes of cultural and social conflict. Flower’s book both documents the ways in which community members use Flower’s method of intercultural inquiry and develops a theory of agency based on her observations of these intercultural rhetorical engagements in the Community Literacy Center. Flower reframes agency in the book as a rhetorical process of engagement in a specific situation. Her definition seeks to expand current prevalent notions of agency that take up “either the power and will of charismatic individuals or … the social structures that confer the authority to speak and be heard to a privileged few” (5). By opening up prevalent theories of agency, Flower seeks to carve out room for the marginalized and reframe the agency for ordinary people as a two-part
question. First, Flower emphasizes the importance of individuals’ “willingness to engage with rival interpretations” in order to “understand a problem.” Second, Flower underlines the importance of “going public, choosing to stay in dialogue with alternative realities” by articulating one’s one perspective while attempting to understand the Other’s perspective (6).

Flower’s argument for rhetorical agency and the role played by situated knowledge in our processes of constructing meaning and acting on that meaning in social situations is crucial because it underlines the complex ways our bodies, affects, emotions, feelings, sensations, and experiences inform our capacity to act in specific ways in a given situation. Flower further extends her thinking on discursive agency by problematizing the kinds of markers we look for as indicators of agency. Highlighting Ellen Cushman's work in *The Struggle in the Tools*, Flower notes that Cushman's analysis points out that the problem with theories of agency in critical theory lie in the markers we look for to identify discursive agency (197). Flower draws on Cushman to make the point that we’ve been using the wrong markers to identify agency. This problem is illustrated most powerfully by one student writer's work with the Community Literacy Center (CLC).

Raymond writes a complex screenplay that uses a dream sequence to comment on drug use by teens in his community, and incorporates elements of “narrative, drama, flashbacks, gothic dream effects, teen talk, rival hypotheses, and dialogue with the reader” (208). Unsurprisingly, Flower characterizes Raymond’s work as one of the “most rhetorically complex [texts] in the CLC booklet” (208). Raymond’s screenplay seeks to examine drugs from his point of view as “a teenager trying to grow up on streets where danger and drugs are omnipresent, live options,” ra-
ther than as some other imagined perspective, such as “a gang member or drug-savvy insider” (208). Raymond developed his screenplay with a CLC mentor, who had to leave the project in its final stages due to jury duty. Despite this loss, and Raymond’s work commitments, he continued to work on the self-designed screenplay.

While Flower and the CLC celebrated Raymond's "ambitious plan" that resulted in an "impressive piece of work despite its rough edges, "Raymond's English teacher was angry" for his "unedited text, with its mix of unconventional punctuation and dialogue, Black English Vernacular, and garden-variety errors of grammar and spelling" had demonstrated for her that the CLC had "puffed [Raymond] up." Raymond's English teacher complained that Raymond now seemed to think that "he was a 'writer.' And this had made her job – of showing him that he indeed was not – twice as difficult" (189). The problem with this conventional view of agency as a property marked by fluency and control over a discourse, Flower argues, is that it limits our ability to understand the complex inner struggles and social hurdles that marginalized writers must cross in order to take deliberate discursive action in rhetorical situations.

Raymond doesn't meet the criteria of agency when it is reduced to issues of "fluency" and "control" in one specific discourse (e.g., Academic discourse). As Flower wryly observes, "Students qualify as rhetorical agents when they can control such elite discourse. In denying this status to the author of a nonstandard text, we assume we are just being realistic, passing along lessons he will learn soon enough in the school of hard knocks" (192). This notion of agency - that a writer has agency as a writer only when he/she is fluent in the discourse and can control its features – has much currency in the fields of literacy studies and composition pedagogy where
"many composition scholars ... argue that what minority students like Raymond need most is to learn the strategies of academic discourse – the tricks of this mainstream trade" (192). Thus, Raymond's example poses a dilemma: on the one hand, his writing does not exhibit the markers of an academic writer, which for many in the field, Flower suggests, would mean that Raymond does not have the markers of agency in an academic context. Agency, Flower seeks to argue, is not the same as successfully using specific discourse conventions. But on the other hand, Raymond's writing shows an ability to creatively address the issue of drug use among teens in his community – surely an act of agency as a writer addressing a local problem.

Raymond’s project is a good example for examining agency because he does not entirely succeed. While Raymond struggles with control over standard English and the genre, his example illustrates that successful rhetorical agency is more than fluency and/or control with a discourse, for Raymond makes “significant and difficult choices, in the face of a demanding, self-designed rhetorical task with multiple, competing goals” (209). For example, Raymond decides to continue developing his ambitious plan for the CLC even though he lost the support of his mentor, and had to sacrifice time working on his project in order to meet work obligations. While Raymond does not overcome all difficulties, he persists in a deliberate engagement aimed at bringing together multiple perspectives and situated understandings of a problem – in this case, drugs. Raymond’s case illustrates the importance of recognizing agency as the deliberate decision to take discursive action in a rhetorical situation, even when the agent lies somewhere just outside or on the boundary of a given discourse.

Hence Flower asks the following question: how do we acknowledge agency for those
who do not have authority in the dominant secondary discourses, such as academic discourse? To answer this, Flower considers two prevalent theories of agency before developing her own notion of rhetorical agency. First, one model of agency emphasizes the individual agent's ability "to be a mover and shaker – or at least to attempt to do so out of conscious, willed choice" (193). Key to this model of agency is the presumption that only action grounded by the "perception of control" counts as agency. This individualized model, Flower argues, goes too far in assuming that the "conflicting values, assumptions, goals, and ideologies a writer must confront" are always "out there" in the world, for these very same qualities are often to be found within the individual as well, "in the complexities in one's own thinking and feelings called into confrontation by the effort of understanding" (195). Flower criticizes the argument that agency is grounded in deliberate control for failing to take into consideration the complex inner affective processes that are necessary for an action to emerge - to happen.

Second, another set of prevalent theories of agency replace the agent with socialized constructs like discourse or ideology. This model emphasizes the array of social forces that construct ideologies, which inflect the meanings spoken "through the writer. Individuals, authors, actors, and agents are rewritten as subjected subjects. Writers either appropriate or are appropriated by the discourse, which circulates as knowledge " (195). This view of agency, as offered by critical theory, organizes its view of human action around ideology, recognizing acts of resistance as willed choices. Rather than emphasizing actions for something, it privileges actions against (195). This paradigm, Flower argues, "produces a rather anemic vision of agency and human action. Not only is agency limited to a process of resistance, it is also mounted not by a human subject
but by competing ideologies that appear to have assumed the Author's chair" (196). This view of agency, Flower argues, limits our ability to recognize the deliberate actions of the marginalized, unauthorized writers and rhetors, like Raymond, who seek to act within rhetorical situations, for we may become “blind … to the distinctive forms ‘agency, capacity, and ability’ may take in nonheoric, ideologically enmeshed lives within the press of limiting situations” (201).

Flower's twin critiques of agency as a highly individualized process of rational decision making, and agency as action organized by ideology as resistance (a point echoed by Lu and Horner below), opens space for another perspective on agency that emphasizes the complex non-rational decision making processes that inflect action, as well as our capacity to act for something in ways that are not neatly wrapped around ideologies of resistance. Flower thus sheds markers like action, choice, and control as indicators of agency, in favor of engagement as the key marker for rhetorical agency. By situating agency as a rhetorical concept, and by underlining engagement, Flower emphasizes the situatedness of any action, and encourages us to view rhetorical agency as engagement in "deliberative, interpretative, constructive encounter[s]" with Others in which action results from external as well as deeply internal processes. Yet, Flower is not arguing for a theory of agency in action in “real time” per se, but rather a practice about practice. Rivaling is an extended literacy practice that develops choreographed presentations of scenes of cultural conflict in order to understand how others’ situated knowledge shapes their social actions. The goal of rivaling seems to be to shape understanding through the kinds of deliberative encounters that Flower discusses with the hope that those public engagements will, in turn, alter individuals’ agency in action by cultivating new possibilities or potentialities to act that are more
responsive to one’s embodied and embedded situation.

While this formulation creates space for the nonconscious processes, Flower’s view of agency remains tightly tied to the premise that one has deliberate control over one’s actions - a view that appears to contradict Cooper. Yet, what is significant about her project is that she opens space for similar kinds of nonconscious processes emphasized by Cooper, Rickert, and others. Further, Flower’s idea of rivaling as a discursive practice aims to build a meta- or highly-conscious understanding of how situated knowledge shapes our construction of meaning (c.f. Haas and Flower) in scenes of cultural conflict. This understanding can help us better understand how we take action in rhetorical situations, and gets addressed more explicitly by Cooper and Rickert below. What needs to be addressed, however, is the question of how ideology structures those nonconscious processes and what we do with that in the theory of agency.

Thus, Flower’s work highlights two key insights to agency. First, social action is often underwritten and motivated by one’s situated knowledge. Situated knowledge is a complex amalgamation of embodied experiences, thoughts, feelings, and memories that gets activated in our process of constructing meaning in social situations. Second, when we maintain fluency and control over a given discourse as the primary markers of agency, we write out lots of (marginalized) actors from our theory. Flower’s project sets up rhetorical agency as a highly mindful/conscious exercise that may cultivate one’s own transformed understandings of others’ situated knowledge with the promise or hope of generating new potentials for acting in scenes of cultural and social conflict that are informed by these new transformed understandings. While I think the kind of deliberative practice articulated by Flower can yield transformations in how we act in the
world, a more holistic perspective of discursive agency that seeks to understand daily encounters must not be constrained to a deliberative, intentional model of agency. Rather, our everyday agency is distributed across a network of human and nonhuman actors (Brandt and Clinton), emerges in social situations through both conscious and nonconscious cognitive systems (Cooper) through a (re)iterative process over time (Lu and Horner).

Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton criticize literacy studies for limiting its theories of agency to local human actors, and propose a theory of agency that seeks to account for the globalized nonhuman actors that inflect literate practices by drawing on Bruno Latour's implication for agency in the field of literacy and composition studies in their article "Limits of the Local: Expanding Perspectives on Literacy as a Social Practice." Brandt and Clinton take up Latour's theory of agency in order to respond to the "methodological bias and conceptual impasses" that have resulted from the field's exaggerated response to the autonomous model of literacy. While Brandt and Clinton agree with the situated approach and its critique of the autonomous model's de-contextualization of literacy, Brandt and Clinton argue that the situated approach may have moved too far away from literacy as an autonomous force.

Brandt and Clinton critique the dominant situated approach to literacy studies as moving too far in its response to the autonomous model by (1) under theorizing the global in its narrow focus on the meaning of literate practices in local situations, and (2) over theorizing literacy as an outcome or effect of practice rather than as a participant in social situations. In the situated approach, literacy scholars respond to the autonomous view by arguing that literacy is defined by its local socially situated context. Further, Brandt and Clinton argue, "Context became associated
with ethnographically-visible settings (the here and now), and the technology of literacy was
demoted in relationship to the human agent who held power in assigning meaning to acts of liter-
acy" (343).

To respond to these limits of the situated approach, Brandt and Clinton take up Latour's
work on nonhuman actors and the complex interactions between the local and global through ob-
jects. First, Brandt and Clinton discuss Latour's argument that objects have agency. According to
Latour's view, objects play two key roles as agents: first, they "hold steady a certain frame such
that a discrete interaction can take place" (344). To illustrate this principle, Brandt and Clinton
describe how the objects in a bank hold the participants (loan borrower, loan officer) within a
specific framework that prompts them to enact specific roles. Brandt and Clinton explain that
"The objects help to stabilize a piece of reality so that even if the two of you engage in friendly
banter about some other subject there is still no confusion about what the two of you are doing.
Things hold you in place" (345). Second, objects "mediate and aggregate events – to relocate
them – in a network of events" (344). Brandt and Clinton return to the bank example to illustrate
this point: the "same objects – forms, files, contract, calculator, computer, data base" that hold
you to a certain frame for action also "aggregate your loan transaction for use in other settings;
you become part of somebody else's calculations – at the local bank, in a regional clearinghouse,
maybe eventually ... in bankruptcy court" (345).

These two principles of nonhuman agency – objects hold us to a certain social frame for
action, and objects mediate and aggregate our local actions to global contexts – show how the
meanings of literacy are not fully constructed or exhausted by local situations or human actors.
Brandt and Clinton thus redefine the role of objects in literacy:

Objects especially provide for and speak to connections beyond the here and now. Manufactured, delivered, positioned, still there when the talk around them or about them or through them has stopped, objects mediate our interactions with other places and other times. Instruments gauge, count, compile, classify, sum up, save, send. Objects are animated with human histories, vision, ingenuity, and will, yet they also have durable status and are resilient to our will. Our objects are us but more than us, bigger than we are; as they accumulate human investments in them over time, they can and do push back at us as "social facts" independent and to be reckoned with. We find this an accurate description of literacy in its historical, material, and especially technological manifestations. (345)

This view of objects and literacy suggest that our texts exceed our local situation, and carry with them meanings imbued by the local situation in which they are created to broader global contexts. The thing-ness of literacy allows it to act through its objects and technologies on human actors, and to connect the local and the global through its trans-contextual networks.

Brandt and Clinton's reframing of literacy to account for nonhuman actors and transhuman networks reveals two implications for literacy studies. First, we must reframe the ethnographic gaze beyond local contexts and human actors. As the situated approach to literacy studies has well established, "human agents, individually and collectively, mediate literacy practices whenever they take them up – imbuing them with local intentions, resisting their often hegemonic currents, recrafting them to fulfill their needs a hand." Latour's theory of agency adds to this perspective by "ask[ing] us to see that objects are dong the same or possibly other things. They also are active mediators – imbuing, resisting, recrafting" (346). Second, focusing on objects allows us to bridge the micro-macro divide. As Brandt and Clinton explain, while Latour emphasizes the global, he nonetheless argues that "everything is local. No larger forces or larger social structures sit out somewhere in space bearing down on us: All is made of local interactions."
However, local events can have globalizing tendencies and globalizing effects, accomplished often through the mediation of globalizing technologies (347).

Brandt and Clinton develop the notion of literacy-in-action in order to take into account the thing-ness of literacy, as illustrated by the arguments for nonhuman actors and trans-contextual networks advanced by Latour. Literacy-in-action seeks to replace the idea of literacy events (Heath) because literacy events privileges human actors. In contrast, literacy-in-action emphasizes the "role of literacy in human action: how readers and writers mediate their social world through literate practice (i.e., literate action as part of our action)," but extends this framework to consider "how literacy acts as a social agent, as an independent mediator (i.e., literacy, itself, in action)" (349). The concept thus has a double meaning: it highlights at once literacy as a part of human action, and literacy (its objects, technologies, etc.) acting or influencing others in social settings. Literacy both acts and gets enacted. By highlighting both aspects of literacy-in-action, the term allows us to analyze how things frame our literate actions, and how our literate actions get carried into transcontextual networks. Literacy-in-action thus has a double meaning that allows us to see how literacy gets enacted and how literacy (through its tools, etc.) acts on us.

The shift described by the notion of literacy-in-action reframes the concept of literacy practice as something more akin to literacy process. By emphasizing doing – how literacy does and how literacy actors do – we are necessarily thinking about literacy in terms of time rather than simply space (an argument echoed by Lu and Horner below). Further, by emphasizing doing as a capacity to act – or a capacity to affect others and be affected – Brandt and Clinton’s work
shows how embodied agency is distributed among human and nonhuman actors. Literacy-in-action holds our body into certain formations (i.e., what Carrie Noland would call gestures below), such as having a somewhat relaxed informal conversation with the bank manager that is nonetheless situated in a broader framework of conversations about getting a loan that are held in place by the desks, computers, calculators, bank forms, interest rate notices, bullet proof glass, and so on. These nonhuman actors shape the potentials of acting in certain ways by enforcing a socially and historically situated framework of “bank” that carries with it all sorts of Discourse conventions and possibilities. Literacy-in-action thus invites certain formations of saying-being-doing-feeling, or certain formations of the body enacting literacy while making the actualization of other potential ways of using words hard or impossible to realize in any successful way. For instance, while one may carry out financial transactions with the bank, using discourses of numeracy and economics, one may not necessarily give a poetry reading in most day-to-day encounters with a bank. Such expectations are not only sedimented in our memories, but are also elicited by the flows between human and nonhuman actors. The salient point in Brandt and Clinton’s work is that agency is distributed among human and nonhuman actors, and to understand agency we must look at the flows from local things to global contexts, and visa versa.

Marilyn Cooper notes in "Rhetorical Agency as an Emergent and Enacted" that agency has been a contentious issue in the field since postmodernism and the death of the subject. Cooper’s work resonates with Flower’s emphasis on the role played by internal affective and cognitive processes in moments of individual agency by developing a more detailed description of how those processes contribute to our sense of agency. Cooper argues, if we are to make claims
about the "efficacy of rhetoric," then we will need a working theory of agency. Recognizing agency in discursive situations means that we are “open” to speakers and listeners as “responsive beings who … will understand or assimilate meanings in their own way” (441). At a pragmatic level, it provides for us “Respect for listeners’ opinions, being open even to ‘unreasonable’ opinions, to ‘troublemakers’” (441). Further, Cooper suggests we should not ground our theory of agency on "conscious intention or free will," but instead on the basis of an "individual's lived knowledge that their actions are their own." Such a theory, Cooper maintains, positions agency as "an emergent property of embodied individuals," for our felt sense of agency emerges through a complex feedback loop (cycle of causation) that connects experience to our memories and dispositions, which in turn shape our actions. The process that Cooper articulates is a fundamentally embodied process that tightly weaves cognitive processes with affects, emotions, and feelings.

Cooper criticizes subjectivity as a notion for understanding action in the world. Cooper argues that "a workable theory of agency requires the death not only of the modernist subject but of the whole notion of the subject" (423). The problem with subjectivity, Cooper suggests, is that subjects are "inescapably defined" by their own "agonistic" relationships with objects/Others. As Cooper explains, "the subject attempts to control the object/Other in order to escape being controlled, but, cut off from the real by language, the subject, as Lacan conceives it, is 'interminably ensnared in [the] unanswered question' of what the other desires" (423). Therefore, Cooper argues, theories of agency that presume subjectivity are "hamstrung from the start" for the subject cannot satisfactorily "account for any action that is not either determined by or resistant to semiotic, social, political, and material others or orders" (423). Further Cooper argues, while some
have attempted to "do away with the troublesome subject-object dyad" (e.g., Husserl; Levinas; Heidegger), their work has left "no room for any notion of embodied agency and individual responsibility" (424). Individual responsibility is crucial for a functional concept of rhetoric.

To reconcile this theoretical impasse, Cooper turns to Bruno Latour who moves past the subject/object problem by viewing humans and nonhumans as actors in the sense that their actions affect other actors. From this position, Cooper concludes that "Unlike subjects, agents are defined neither by mastery, nor by determination, nor by fragmentation. They are unique, embodied, and autonomous individuals in that they are self-organizing, but by virtue of that fact, they, as well as the surround with which they interact, are always changing" (425). Agency according to this model is not a stable property, but a fluctuating sense of one's capacity to affect others and be affected that emerges on the basis of an individual's current goals, emotions, perceptions as well as ongoing memories and dispositions.

To rescue the agent, Cooper articulates LaTour's notion of self-organization and agency as an ongoing fluctuating process through the lens of complexity theory and enactive approaches to mind. Work from these interdisciplinary fields, Cooper explains, view "agency as the process through which organisms create meanings through acting into the world and changing their structure in response to perceived consequences of their actions" (426). This feedback loop, in its most rudimental form connects the organism and the surround by defining the interaction between the two as one in which "Interacting units are neither autonomous nor determined by the other, but instead continually restructure themselves as the structure of each unit responds in its own way to perturbations from the other" (427). The organism and the surround are thus tied to-
gether in a feedback loop, or a cycle of continuous causation, in which both continually respond to fluctuations in the other (427). This ongoing, cyclical interrelationship between the organism and the surround thus ties human and nonhuman actors through the conscious and nonconscious processes of emotion, intention, action, interpretation of sensory stimuli, memories, dispositions, short- and long-term goals, etc.

Cooper further draws from Maturana and Freeman, theorists of the enactive approach to the mind, who argue that neurons are not units that store information (the classical view of neural activity) but instead construct representations by interacting with each other to create dynamic patterns. The pattern that emerges as neurons interact with each other and in response to stimuli from the organism's surround is shaped by the brain to be "compatible with the history and goals of the organism" (428). This naturally occurring dynamic neural system in which patterns are assimilated by the brain into meanings compatible with our histories and goals forges our sense of self, and results in "the formation of memories and dispositions" – types of meanings that are provided to the agent on the basis of the process itself (428). Thus, Cooper argues, our sense of self as an agent emerges through experience. Further, the meaning we get for free from this dynamic process accumulates nonconsciously as we experience and make sense of the world, and "accounts in large part for our ability to respond quickly to rhetorical (and other) situations" (429). This meaning both includes and exceeds the ideological because it is forged not only by thought content shaped by ideology, such as emotions and ideas, but also by a myriad of other nonconscious information that escapes ideology, such as intensities of feeling and perception.
Cooper illustrates this point by examining Obama's quick draft of a major campaign speech from the 2008 US Presidential Primary (the "Philadelphia speech"). To analyze this process, Cooper uses a "neurodynamic intentional arc" or feedback loop that shows how largely non-conscious processes in turn cause and are caused by conscious processes: intention > action > interpretation of sensory stimuli > learning > short-and long-term goals > emotions > intention (429). Cooper works to show how Obama's experiences, which accumulated for him as memories and dispositions, made possible an immediate response to a complex rhetorical situation in a way that was both powerfully received by his audience and made possible by his own experiences. Experience, enshrined in memories and dispositions, enable specific potentialities for responding to a given situation to become actualized in a manner that is experienced by the individual as agency for it allows a sense of self-responsibility for one's own actions. This argument suggests that one must navigate several possible options for acting in a situation. Cooper underscores this notion of potentials for action when she writes that "the skills that enable a skilled rhetor to realize possibilities for action are often so engrained in the nervous system that their deployment is barely conscious; they [the rhetorical skills] prepare – or dispose – a person to act in a certain way in a given situation, and to do so instantly and seamlessly" (434).

Cooper’s project on agency persuasively shows us how we can think about agency as an everyday property of individuals in ways that exceed, but include ideology. Flower laid the groundwork for the same argument by emphasizing the role played by affect and embodiment in discursive actions, but Flower’s project was aimed at thinking about how we can generate transformed understandings of others’ situated knowledge in scenes of cultural conflict. Cooper’s pro-
ject is aimed at theorizing how agency can function as an analytical concept in composition studies. To that end, Cooper’s argument for rhetorical agency as an emergent property allows us to reframe agency as a theoretical concept that accounts for the ways in which our prior memories, dispositions, affects, embodied experiences, goals, etc., inform and shape discursive action in a rhetorical situation. When we take up this view of agency from Cooper and connect it with Brandt and Clinton’s emphasis on the relationships between human and nonhuman actors, we can refine Cooper’s emphasis on the fundamental feedback loop between organism and surround as one that is constituted by human and nonhuman actors that link local and global settings to forge complex historically and socially situated situations in which action unfolds.

In order to further extend the discussion about agency through concepts like emergence, and human and nonhuman actors, I turn next to Thomas Rickert who refracts rhetorical theory through actor network theory, Heidegger, and distributed cognition to develop a theory of rhetoricity grounded in the complex interrelationships between human and nonhuman actors that accounts for the situational dynamics of rhetoric in Ambient Rhetoric. Like Cooper, Rickert emphasizes the complex feedback loops between agents and their surrounds. For Rickert, the notion of “ambient rhetoric” refers to the complex ecological relationship between rhetors and the world, and in doing so, attempts to breaks down subject/object divisions. In taking up Heidegger’s concept of stimmung, which Rickert translates as attunement (others, such as Flatley, use mood instead), Rickert argues that “Attunement is not an I fitting into the world in order to do, say, and make, but an I-world hybrid already replete with an a priori affectedness. Rhetoric emerges in being there, ambiently” (xviii). That is, we do not fit ourselves into discrete spaces in which we
deploy the rhetorics mastered through our previous experiences. Rather, we are always thrown into the world in some historical culturally hued situation, which is to say that in any given situation, the surround is jammed with all sorts of other human and nonhuman actors, each with its own histories and capacities for affecting others and being affected. Rhetoric is not so much something we unfurl from our belt of mastered skills and abilities, but something that emerges from the interdynamics between individuals and the surround.

To pivot the argument towards literacy studies, Rickert is not trying to define a concept like Gee’s Discourse (saying-being-doing-feeling combinations). Rather, Rickert seeks to problematize the ways in which we think about processes like discourse acquisition and enactment in social and rhetorical situations. That is, Rickert’s project accounts for how we do whatever it is that we do emerges from our own personal history of being in the world as well as our interplay with the situation. Cooper makes a similar point in emphasizing the feedback loop between organism and surround, when read in conjunction with Brandt and Clinton: while the individual carries with her all sorts of idiosyncratic emotions, memories, dispositions, goals, etc., the surround also is full of its own nonhuman actors, each of which has its own socially situated histories, and each of which have the potential to enter into a flow of action with the individual’s own embodied and embedded histories that are composed of culturally shaped possibilities of acting in certain ways - of being certain who's doing certain what's.

Thus, investigating ambience is also investigating how embodiment and situatedness shape identity and action. Quoting the distributed cognition theorist Andy Clark, Rickert explains: “The point is not just that we are bodily and feel or need, or that being worldly is charac-
terized by constraint and enablement, deprivation and sustenance; rather it is that we must attend
to ‘the ways the body and the local environment are literally built into the processing loops that result in intelligent action’” (10). Agency for Rickert emerges from “a dynamic interchange of
powers and actions in complex feedback loops; a multiplication of agencies that in turn transform, to varying degrees, the agents” (10). Rhetoric has often concerned itself with issues grounded in intent and self-consciousness. Ambient rhetoric expands this view of rhetoric by taking an ecological perspective on rhetors and rhetoric. Thus, “ambient rhetoric – its embodied and embedded or situated character, its dispersal across things that themselves have gradations of agency, and its dynamic emergence within an environment that occasions certain effects – suggests that intent is only one element in a large array of things, feelings, peoples, and forces all complexly interacting” (36). Ambient rhetoric accounts for a wide field of actors each affecting others while themselves being affected.

Rickert also accounts for a depth in the field of action through the notion of a priori affectibility as a feature of all actors. For “insofar as rhetoricity inheres in language, rhetoricity takes its bearings from a materiality that always in advance affects us, making persuadability a matter not only of an a prior relationality among animate beings but also an a prior relationality and exposure to the world” (164). Our experiences in the world as embodied rhetorical actors thrown in one rhetorical situation after another accumulate, as Cooper’s theory of rhetorical agency articulates. This always prior affectibility, accumulated and embodied in the agent, this “Worldly affect, modulated in persuasion, itself hollowed out the space for rhetoric’s emergence” in a given situation; “it is rhetoric’s condition of possibility” (164). Our historical and current
relationality carves out various rhetorical possibilities.

Rickert’s use of Heidegger resonates with cultural studies scholar Jonathan Flatley’s use of *stimmung*, which he translates as mood, in *Affective Mapping*. Flatley argues that we are all always in one mood or another, but the moods we find ourselves in are historically constructed and shape the kinds of values, attachments, and actions available to us. Flatley writes, “we all only have access to the moods that we find around us, the moods into which we have been educated, and the moods that have been shaped or determined by the concrete historical context in which we coexist” (19). Moods are “foundational and primordial” and “To be in a mood is to be ‘attuned,’ an attunement that is the foundation or starting place for everything else, the ‘presupposition’ for our thinking, doing, acting … One is never not-attuned; one is always in one mood or another” (21). Yet, while moods shape what we attend to, what we value, how we be in the world, we are not necessarily aware of our own moods – they are tacit formulations that pass through us, though available to critical awareness through reflection (21).

As such, mood (*stimmung*) resonates with Gee’s notion of Discourse as a way of talking about how individuals get socialized to act in specific, historically prescribed ways. However, as Flatley points out, mood goes a step further than concepts like Discourse by positing a notion of potentiality. Flatley writes, “The knowledge we gain by way of *stimmung* is authentic in the sense that it tells us what is collectively possible at that moment; it tells us what our shared situation is and what may be done within this situation” (22-3). This knowledge is historical, situated, and practical for depending on which mood we find ourselves in at any given historical moment, “certain objects come into view in a particular way, certain persons (or social formations) appear
as friends and others as enemies, and even some kinds of actions present themselves that might otherwise not come into view” (23).

Rickert’s analysis of helps to better illuminate the importance of relationality as it pertains to potentiality. Reading across ancient Greek uses of kairos as well as scholarship on kairos from the 19th century through the present, Rickert offers a broad definition of kairos as “a rhetor’s relation to a unique opportunity arising from an audience, situation, or time, one that calls for a proper response in order to gain advantage or success” (75). As Rickert points out, this definition cedes much to the rhetor’s ability. Rickert’s project in taking up kairos from an ambient perspective, however, is to problematize kairos across the subject/object axis by folding a spatiality that is rooted in the earliest Greek uses of kairos into the terms’ temporality. Thus, Rickert argues “I am trying to embed kairos more concretely in place to see what happens when you attend to kairos’s material emplacement and unfolding and not just its timeliness or decorum” for kairos is empty without a “more materialist understanding of emplacement” (76). By grounding kairos in materialist situations/places/spaces, kairos extends conventional views of subjectivity by dispersing subjectivity, connecting it to the “external environment” (77).

Following a close reading of Debra Hawhee, Nietzsche, and Victor Vitanza’s work on kairos, Rickert underscores the important role played by situation in kairos. For instance, Hawhee’s work on bodies and kairos in “Kairotic Encounters” reframes kairos as “invention in the middle” in which the rhetor acts on the situation simultaneous to the situation acting on the rhetor. Thus, for Hawhee, Rickert explains, “The middle designates not a stable realm between poles but an always moving, temporally unstable, and emergent moment that eludes control” by
a subjectivity that is now dispersed (82). This materiality of kairos emphasizes the material and discursive mutuality of rhetors and situations in kairotic encounters (90). Rickert further explains that “Viewing Kairos with … an emplaced and dispersed subjectivity suggest kinds of invention attuned less to seeking advantage over or success against an audience than to work[ing] with what an audience and a material situation bring forth” (91). Here, Rickert illuminates the moment of readiness potential that I am most interested in understanding. How do we cultivate an activate the potentials for action demanded by or elicited by or seduced by (e.g., without our conscious awareness) the situation while also accounting for the a prior affectibility that has shaped the potentials for action available at this time/place?

In order to understand this situation, Rickert argues we must move away from metaphors that emphasize dyadic relationships between subjects and objects (e.g., poles, middles, etc.). Instead, Rickert urges us to conceptualize subjectivity in the frame of ambient rhetoric “in terms of embedded and embodied immersion rather than connection, dispersed and interactive flow rather than node, conditions of possibility rather than static presence” (92). Pointing again to Andy Clark, Rickert drives home the point about action, subjectivity, and situation as co-constitutive vectors in rhetoricity. Rickert argues, we should not view everyday practices as the outcome of “precomposed bodies, interacting with an exterior, precomposed world of things and discourses” but rather, our everyday practices “at all times compose new brain-body-thing-world circuits. A situation on this account, is something simultaneously embodied, materialist, and emplaced” (92). Rhetorical action – when viewed under the lens of kairos – “is no longer something simply willed or achieved by an individual; it is no longer solely human doing” (95).
Rather, subjectivity becomes “condensations of probabilities realized in movement, materialized in space, and invented in place” (97). In the end, kairos, for Rickert, “is not about mastery but instead concerns attunement to a situation … a gathering that springs forward” (98).

Extending the conversation about temporality (i.e., emergence, becoming) and more closely tying potentiality to agency, Min-Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner observe in “Translingual Literacy, Language Difference, and Matters of Agency” that the field’s notions of literacy and literate practices and conventions have been limited to a spatial framework, “identifying them in terms of insides and outsides, borders and margins; and identifying relationships between them in terms of degree of distance or even overlap, and hierarchy” (587). This position has constrained agency by setting it against structure, for when agency is dialectically opposed to structure, we mark agency as the generation of a difference that is counterposed to existing structures. This approach treats “creative innovations” and inferior or marginalized deviations from standard, or dominant discourses as recognizable forms of agency, marked by either a productive transgression of heterogeneity or a lack of familiarity with the dominant modes of language use. Unacknowledged as agentic by this view, however, are the (re)iterations of sameness by mainstream writers, whose discourse moves are marked as either evidence of the writers’ “‘native’ status” or evidence of the “nonmainstream” writers’ mastery of dominant discourses or betrayal of their home discourses (583).

This perspective thus assumes a limited notion of agency because it only recognizes difference when that difference generates creative innovations of dominant modes or problematic deviations from dominant modes. Other kinds of difference-making, like (re)iterating dominant
modes, are not acknowledged as agentic uses of language. Lost by this monolingual approach, which assumes relative stability of discourse forms, is the recognition of (re)iterations of standard discourses as valuable moves by the agent. Further, Lu and Horner argue, “mainstream writer agency comes to be identified solely with the production of … deviation – with ‘resistance’ to the supposed norm – with all the risks conventionally attending such resistance” (584).

In contrast, Lu and Horner argue for a concept of literacy - what they call translingualism - that takes difference as the norm of language use rather than the exception. Translingualism does not refer to the variety of languages, discourses, or dialects used by an individual, but instead a “disposition of openness and inquiry toward language and language difference” (585). Translingualism appreciates all discourse forms as generative moments of discursive agency, including the (re)iteration of discourse moves “that are ordinarily recognized as producing simply ‘more of the same’: conventional, unoriginal, ordinary, conformist” (585). The pay off for this approach is the acknowledgment not that “all writers face the dilemma of whether to be ‘different’ in their writing,” but that all writers face “questions of what kinds of difference to make through their writing, how, and why” (585). Translingualism thus frames all instances of writing and language use as generative moments of translation and (re)creation or renewing of language. Rather than assuming that writers achieve lasting relationships with discourses described by terms such as “mastery” that describe the agent’s relationship with the discourse in spatial terms (e.g., inside or outside the discourse), Lu and Horner argue that we should think more about how we come to use or make certain discourse moves over time, including the (re)iteration of sameness (moves that have seemingly already been “mastered”).
The concept of translingualism exceeds the current spatial notions of language and literate practice by emphasizing the temporal dimension of language acquisition, learning, and use. Lu and Horner argue that, instead of situating language, language users, language practices, and language contexts as “discrete, preexisting, stable, and enumerable entities, a temporal-spatial frame [e.g., translingual approach] treats all of them as always emergent, in process (a state of becoming), and their relations as mutually constitutive” (587), an argument echoed by Cooper and Rickert. Lu and Horner argue that discursive agency emerges over time through continual acts of iteration and reiteration, decontextualization and recontextualization.

To make this argument, Lu and Horner draw on Judith Butler’s performative theory to develop a concept of language practice as emergent and sedimenting. From this perspective, language conventions are not stable entities, but are continually recreated through our discrete literate practices. Each literate practices entails a recontextualizing of some word, phrase, rhetorical move, etc., from one context to another. Over time, each successive (re)iteration of discourses contributes to a sedimentation of the discourse. This sedimentation represents the internalized structure of language, but is the object of ever-ongoing flux as we continually (re)iterate discourse in action (588).

Every discourse act, according to Lu and Horner’s concept of translingualism, is a moment of agency in which one must navigate potential choices. Lu and Horner argue that if every instance of language use modifies the language at the same time that it reproduces the language, “then every instance of the use of language, including what is recognized as repetition, represents an exercise of agency, a choice, whatever the level of conscious ness in the making of it, and a
contribution of sedimentation” (589). Every time we take discursive actions, we exhibit agency as we actively reconstruct language and contribute to our own sedimentation. Every action is a (re)construction of the language forms available to the individual according to the situation. Each discourse act recontextualizes language from one spatio-temporal context to another. Hence, we “recontextualize – reform – the very feature or meaning we appear to borrow from (our own or others’) previous instances of language use” (590). Thus, Lu and Horner argue, discourse practices and contexts, and discursive agency continually emerge through a process of (re)iteration.

Writers can thus be seen not as writing in a language or context, but as always writing, or rewriting, language, context, and subjectivity. Culture, ethnicity, nationality, race, geography, and environments are likewise seen as emergent and relational, in a state of becoming, not only informing but also informed by how we negotiate – reconstruct, remember, and reconfigure – identifications or ‘knowledge’ of ‘the context’ of our life and work and our practical senses of the relations and conditions most urgently requiring meaningful responses (591).

That is, writers are always (re)iterating discourses in emergent contexts that dynamically change over time, as persuasively shown by Cooper. By situating structure and language practices as “mutually interdependen[t],” translingualism directs our attention to discursive agency, or “the ways in which individual language users fashion and refashion standardized conventions, subjectivity, the world, and their relations to others and the world” time and time again, without a presumption that the discourse agent is squarely located within a stable discourse world (591).

To illustrate these ideas, Lu and Horner point to the “White Shoes” essay used by David Bartholomae’s important essay that directly addresses the challenges of (re)iterating dominant discourses, “Inventing the University.” The “White Shoes” essay illustrates for Bartholomae’s project “the normative stability of discourse at the expense of both the writer’s situation and the
eventfulness of language itself” (Bartholomae, qtd. in Lu and Horner 593-4). Lu and Horner, however, take it up in their essay because it “appears to iterate norms with a vengeance – to wallow in conventionality” (594). Indeed, in a conversation about (re)iterating dominant discourses, or (re)inventing the university, the “White Shoes” appears to be unremarkable from conventional literacy or composition studies perspectives (e.g., the monolingual approach that emphasizes spatiality in its theorization of “mastery” or “acquisition” of dominant discourses). But from a translingual approach, which emphasizes temporality in relation to spatiality, the “White Shoes” essay raises questions about the discourse agent’s (re)iterations in relationship to a wider field of potential discourse actions. Lu and Horner explain, such a temporal-spatial approach would take up the “essay’s conventionality in terms of difference to the recontextualization of that conventional discourse might potentially accomplish by its temporally different iteration of it, asking what kinds of semiodiversity, and difference in power relations, that iteration might produce, and how and why the writer of the essay might find it meaningful to work toward such potentialities” (594). In other words, or all the discursive moves available to the agent, why choose this one; or conversely, why not the others? What potentials for action emerge in relation between these discourse moves and other human and nonhuman actors, including oneself? By acknowledging all discourse moves as agentic, Lu and Horner’s approach also creates a space to theorize any given (re)iteration of a discourse as a generative move that has meaning in contrast to a field of other potential discourse actions.

Taken together, my analysis of agency as a theoretical concept in composition and rhetoric scholarship supports the following general points about agency:
• Our disciplinary scholarship cannot take place without a workable theory of agency

• What counts as agency should be broadened to include specific, purposeful engagement (action) in rhetorical situations.

• We should not reserve the term “agency” to mark moments of discursive action that counter hegemony (revolution) or fall too far short of dominant ideology (remediation)

• Agency is a relational process of action; it is fundamentally shaped by its context, including the subjectivity or individuality of other speaker/listeners and readers/writers. This perspective allows us to consider the internal processes of meaning making (conscious and nonconscious) that allow us to act.

• To understand agency fully, we must theorize both the spatial and well as temporal vectors of language use with concepts like literacy-in-action, or literacy as process.

• Agency emerges from feedback loops that tie the individual with Other human and nonhuman actors. These feedback loops consist of conscious and nonconscious process, including sense perception, short-term and long-term goals, memories, dispositions, emotions, etc.

• The notion of agency depends on a felt sense of self to select an action among a possible range of actions. This sense of self emerges through experience. The range of possible actions in a rhetorical situation are shaped by one’s perception, memories, etc. as well as by the nonhuman actors that work to frame a scene.

• The meaning of agency exceeds the local situation, as our actions get folded in to globalizing networks by the objects, tools, and other nonhuman actors taken up in scenes
We can see these principles fleshed out in an example from Ellen Cushman’s work with marginalized Black inner-city women who struggle with white gatekeepers for access to social power in *The Struggle and the Tools*. Cushman uses the metaphor of "tools" to describe how discourse is used to act in certain ways in scenes of social conflict between Black inner-city residents and White institutional gatekeepers. Through her ethnography, Cushman observed Black members of an inner-city community use linguistic or discourse tools in their attempt to meet specific goals in a broader struggle against the social institutions that these community members perceived to be limiting. As Cushman explains, “To transfer language in gatekeeping encounters, people gather, select, and deploy their rhetorical skills according to the social particulars of the situational context” (12). Reading Cushman’s work from the perspective of agency in composition studies as explained above, individual discursive agents bring with them a variety of rhetorical skills (potentials for action), which they gather through both prior experience and strategy sessions between community members in preparation for a gatekeeping encounter. Further, these skills get selected, or emerge, out of the interdynamics between the individual and the surround in the gatekeeping encounter (ambience). While Cushman frames the discourse moves enacted by the participants in her study as the result of choices and selections, the research on agency above would suggest that we consider how these moves emerge in nonconscious ways, too.

For example, Cushman argues that one of these Black community members, Lucy, code switched between "White English" and "Black English" in order to negotiate a gatekeeping conflict in which the White case worker was limiting Lucy's access to services until Lucy was able
to present specific documents. In this scene, Lucy is missing just one birth certificate, which the gatekeeper acknowledges is already on file in another department of the institution. The case worker, nonetheless, requires Lucy to return with the paperwork at another time. Cushman uses the metaphor of tool in order to isolate specific discourse forms, such as Lucy's use of White English phrases like "I came in last week and got a list of all the papers I need to fill out" and her use of Black English phrases like "I been having her on my case though" in order to show how Lucy uses these phrases as tools to enact specific identities and to attempt to meet certain goals (14).

Cushman’s ethnography demonstrates how literacy-in-action functions for Lucy. The phrases available for her use act on both herself and the White case worker in different ways. For instance, the first phrase using a Standard English acts as a marker for Lucy’s subjectivity (Discourse) by suggesting that Lucy is a reasonable and responsible participant willing to work within the system. The second phrase, in which Lucy enacts her Black Discourse that is otherwise dis-acknowledged or delegitimized by the institution, also acts on the gatekeeper and Lucy in complex ways. For instance, Lucy’s use of Black Discourse resounds with echoes of her African American home community carrying with it possibilities for expressing resistances that perhaps don’t fit with the dominant Discourse she faces in the gatekeeping encounter. The phrase likewise acts on the gatekeeper by holding Lucy (from the gatekeeper’s perspective) in a subject position that suggests Lucy is outside the boundaries of the power flows that underwrite the institution, perhaps that Lucy is somewhat hostile in the exchange.

Lucy’s conversations with her community members helped her shape one set of responses
in standard English (12). When those strategies/tools failed to work/act as desired, Lucy resorted to a discourse that better enabled her to express her intentions, and to position herself in the unfolding dynamic. One interpretation of this situation might be that Lucy undermines her own attempt at leveraging the gate open at the counter. But, on the other hand, the Black Discourse offers a whole other world of possibilities for Lucy that exceed the limits of the dominant Discourse. While we can talk about how those tools emerged through a lifetime of experience in negotiating cultural conflict in the inner-city community where she lives, we can also, however, talk about how her agency emerges as the situation unfolds. Lucy begins with one intention/goal - to acquire the document using standard forms of English (tools), but switches her approach when those tools fail to act. Her capacity to switch/alternate suggests this second set of marginalized discourses were always available to her in the situation, but were not actualized, perhaps because of her wider goal to achieve the desired ends using an alternative approach.

The scholarship on agency in literacy and composition studies emphasizes the importance of accounting for the complex interrelationships between individuals and the surround. Further, those relationships are understood as unfolding through feedback loops that weave together human and nonhuman actors with conscious and nonconscious cognitive processes that are deeply rooted in and shaped by embodied practices and experiences. Finally, this scholarship establishes the idea that any given action is part of a wider field of potential actions that each carry their own consequences for both the individual actor as well as other human and nonhuman actors that constitute a given situation.

For instance, Lucy’s example illustrates how one’s readiness potential to act offers va-
rious possibilities as well as limitations, depending on one's relationship to the surround. In Lucy’s case, her use of the dominant Discourse as a tool limited her overall ability to meet her goals in the encounter. When the dominant Discourse failed to affect the gatekeeper in desired ways, Lucy code switched to another potential for action - Black discourse. Lucy could have continued using dominant Discourse forms, or she could equally have enacted Black Discourse throughout the entire encounter. However, the white human actor as well as the nonhuman actors like the counter, the birth certificate, the locked cabinet, etc. seem to hold Lucy to a certain soci-ally and culturally constructed space in which the dominant Discourse offers potentials for action not available to Black discourses. The next section extends these perspectives by drawing on inter-disciplinary scholarship on agency, neuroscience, and affect.

4. Embodying Agency: Interdisciplinary Scholarship on Agency

The turn to affect in the humanities and social sciences initially responded to the limits of poststructuralism as a critical framework for understanding affect and emotion. Rei Terada argues, for instance, in *Feeling in Theory* that although poststructuralism destroyed the illusion of the subject, emotion highlights the problem of the death of the subject as a theoretical tenet, for we need concepts like identity, reflection, and subjectivity to understand emotion. Taking another tack, historian William Reddy draws on cognitive psychology and critical anthropologies of emotion to argue that the binary notion of *différence* in poststructuralism cannot account for the varied and simultaneous translations that occur across multiple sensory modalities, procedural habits, and language structures in routine acts of meaning making (80). For instance, “An apple that is beginning to rot has a particular appearance, a particular feel, smell, and taste. If it is
thumped it will sound different from a fresh apple." In order to coordinate these varied multi-modal inputs, they must be situated as equivalent streams of information, and made available as thought material that is translatable across modes, such as a linguistic mode: “this is a rotten apple.” (86). While these multi-modal thoughts may occur inside and/or outside language or discourse, the point here is that “thought material exists in many codes, linguistic and extralinguistic” and the binary of signifier and raw signified is too limited to account for the multivalent translations that occur beside language (87).

What binds Terada and Reddy is their emphasis on the body as an excess to linguistic thought. Research in the cognitive sciences and cognitive psychology has repeatedly demonstrated this point: bodily affect (here understood broadly as emotions, feelings, moods, nonconscious decisions and actions, etc.) exceeds conscious thought (Damasio Descartes’, The Feeling; LeDoux; Ekman; Griffiths; Schwartz and Begley; Tomkins). This scholarship, in turn, spurred a range of critical cultural studies in the humanities interested in the nonrepresentational, including affects, emotions, feelings, moods, etc. (Ahmed; Cooper; Flatley; Hemmings; Massumi; Ngai; Noland; Sedgwick; Trainor; Thrift).

Nigel Thrift, for instance, adopts the term “bare life” to describe our nonrepresentational being - the excess of conscious thought. This term synthesizes for Thrift “the body practices that comprise ‘us’” (60), our relationship to and extension of self by objects (59), nonconscious thought, such as emotion (58-9), and our bodies as sites where various socialized identities and forces get mapped out (57-8). Thrift rather poetically describes Bare life as “that little space of time that is much of what we are, a space not so much at the edge of action as lighting the world”
(60), and as “that blink between action and performance in which the world is pre-set by biological and cultural instincts which bear both extraordinary genealogical freight – and a potential for potentiality” (61). Bare life, in other words, describes the liminal space between cognition and doing where potentiality resides. Thrift assigns the body a potential for becoming, for entering new socio-political territories, for becoming certain who does certain what as events unfold.

To open this space, Thrift argues we must attend to the body as a mechanics of movement in space, to appreciate and attend to the relationships between body and things, and to view that which follows bodily practices not as cognition, or at least conscious cognition (62). Rather, Thrift argues, we must look to the cognitive unconscious. “And this cognitive unconscious rises out of the layerings and interleavings of body practices and things” for “every moment is processed as a prior intent, style or force which arises from perception-in-movement, every moment is the fleeting edge of a sensory forecast … quite literally a stance in the world” (63). I turn to Thrift because his notion of bare life exposes the question: how does a body’s capacities to act (to affect and be affected) emerge from a field of potentials (possible actions not yet realized) conditioned by the body’s ideologically hued socialized history and conditioned by its relations with human and nonhuman actors?

The following section pursues the question of potentials for action first by looking at Jeffrey M. Schwartz and Sharon Begley, from a neuroscience tact, followed by an alternative take on the same question by the philosopher Brian Massumi’s canonical text on affect and potentiality, Parables of the Virtual. I focus on these two scholars because (a) they both actively respond to Benjamin Libet’s research showing a half-second gap between experience and self-aware ac-
tion; and (b) each text stands metonymically for broader currents of thinking. Although both Massumi and Schwartz and Begley are influenced by similar research in the cognitive and neurosciences, Massumi writes from a humanities perspective while Schwartz and Begley write from a scientific perspective. It is my hope that juxtaposing these two texts will help develop a more rounded understanding of potentials for action (readiness potential). Taking these views together, I work to ground potentiality in the body’s signifying assemblages through a discussion of Bruno Latour’s concept of articulating the body and Carrie Noland’s work on gestures.

The term “mental force” was coined by psychologist Jeffrey Schwartz to account for the full effort of awareness and attention that humans are capable of producing in any given situation. Mental force points to the intersection of affective and cognitive awareness and is thus both physiological and psychological. To illustrate how mental effort is a process rooted in both the body and the mind, I’d like to ask you to imagine the experience of driving during a snowstorm or perhaps a heavy rainstorm. In the process of driving under such dangerous conditions, the mind and body synergetically turn themselves to the task at hand - driving the car in the dangerous snow – producing the so-called white-knuckle effect. It is a moment of agency that is felt as much as thought-through. While this is a dramatic example, Schwartz’ research demonstrates that all our actions share a certain capacity for deploying varying degrees of mental effort, and that this mental effort is key to producing change in the sense that the likelihood that any single possible action will be actualized can be increased through habitual action attended to by mental effort.

In Libet’s first set of experiments, he asked individuals to decide to flick or flex their
wrist at a time of their choosing. The participants were outfitted with devices on their scalps that could measure electronic brain activity. Libet’s finding in this first set of experiments was that brain activity dramatically increased about one half-second prior to the movement of the wrist. The brain activity that fills this half-second, which has been called the “readiness potential”, was long thought to have been “related to the process of preparing to make a movement” (304). But Libet’s research found that not all brain activity was followed by a motion. As Schwartz and Begley explain, “the readiness potential [that Libet] was detecting appeared too long before muscle activation to correspond directly with a motor command to the muscle” (304). To determine, then, what happens during this half-second, Libet devised another set of experiments aimed at determining when conscious intentions to execute some action arise. According to Schwartz and Begley, the traditional view in neuroscience and psychology was that because will or agency is something that initiates action, “this sense of volition would have to appear before the onset of readiness potential, or at worst coincidently with it” (305). Most neuroscientist, then, like most compositionists, shared the view that a sense of volition (agency) must precede an intentional behavior. However, Libet’s research found that individuals’ sense of agency emerged after the onset of readiness potential.

In Libet’s second set of experiments, individuals were asked to, once again, flick their wrist at a time of their choosing, but to also report the time at which they became aware of this decision. Following forty trials of five individuals (a set of experiments that has since been replicated by other researchers), Libet found that the half-second readiness potential (which amounts to 550 milliseconds) continued to precede movement. However, within that half-second, Libet
found that “Awareness of the decision to act occurred about 100 to 200 milliseconds before the muscle moved” which leaves about 350 milliseconds of readiness potential prior to awareness of a decision to move. Free will thus follows a significant amount of brain activity (306).

As Libet’s findings show, our actions are shaped by both conscious and nonconscious processes. In order to fully understand agency, we must understand readiness potential, for our sense of agency exists not to initiate or invent an action, but to narrow the field of potential actions by allowing and suppressing possible actions. This research thus complicates our notion of agency as a matter of deliberation and intention.

In Parables for the Virtual, Brian Massumi articulates his theory of affect as it relates to culture and human action. Massumi grounds his theory of affect in a Spinozan view of the body as a capacity to affect and be affected. As Massumi explains elsewhere, “a body … is what it can do as it goes along…A body is defined by what capacities it carries from step to step. What these are exactly is changing constantly” (Zournazi 106). Our capacities to act – which is to say our potentials for action that get actualized in a linear physiological progression – are constantly shifting in a process of becoming defined by the dynamic feedback loop between the organism and the surround. For Massumi, affect is this changing in capacity, when seen from two sides of the same coin – first, the body’s perpetual movement across thresholds from potential action to the actualization of movement in a linear, exhaustive, stepwise manner, and second, the doubling back of experience through recursive links that inexorably tie sensation to the body via memory, perception, awareness, and other systems that necessarily follow the body’s doing because of the missing half-second The body’s experience (doing; affecting) is thus doubled by the experience
of the experience (awareness or understanding of doing; being affected). Intensities of experience (affecting) become qualities of experience (being affected).

For example, in “Fear (The Spectrum Said),” Massumi explains how feeling follows bodily movement - the activation of potential actions. Examining the Bush-era color-coded terror alert system, Massumi analyzes the activation of the feeling of fear. Drawing on William James’ often cited notion that we feel afraid because we run, Massumi argues that threat and fear are mutually constructed, for experience lies in the feeling (fear) rather than the activated movement of the body (running). Affect and action are indistinguishable at the start, but “the action is linear, step-by-step, and dissipative, it exhausts itself. it runs its course along the line of flight” eventually giving way to some other, successive action. However, “The affective intensity, on the other hand, is cumulative” – it snowballs beyond the action becoming registered as “the reality of the situation” through perception, memory, etc. (“Fear” 37).

In the “stop beat of action,” or the moment in which doing yields to the recursive awareness and interpretation of actions and sensory information at the end of the half-second gap, Massumi argues that the intensity of experience recursively emerges as the “content of experience” – the intensity of running becomes the feeling of fear; it becomes phenomenological. Massumi writes, “The unfolding reality of that fearful feeling has become the feeling of that fear enfolded in perception. The perception has been wrapped in reflection and the reflection, in turn, has been taken up in memory.” Here, reflection might be understood as the qualification or “interpretation of sensory stimuli” (to borrow a phrase from Cooper), whereas memory refers to the long-term storage of such interpretations and sensory imagery. The affect folds back into the
phenomenological at the threshold of action – a “conversion point” – where action gets ex-
hausted and the affect gets converted into a content of experience through memory-laden re-
flexive awareness or perception of that action. At the stop beat of action, the intensity gains magni-
tude, becomes countable as one aspect of the whole of the experience, thus becoming simulta-
neously eligible for comparison to other previous/similar incidents (“Fear” 38).

From a broader view, Massumi describes affect as “the virtual co-presence of potentials”
like memories, habits, and tendencies to which the body’s capacities to act are inseparably linked
(Zournazi 107). Further, “Affect is simply a body movement looked at from the point of view of
its potential – its capacity to come to be, or better, to come to do” (108). Because Massumi’s
term of affect describes our relationality from the perspective one’s potential for action or mo-
vement, affect is an ethical issue, but not a moral issue. There is no positive or negative spin on
affect for Massumi; rather, Massumi argues, we should consider affects as ethical in terms of
which potentialities get actualized - which fields of affect get tapped into and expressed by the
individual is an ethical question because any given movement has consequences. Cooper takes
up these questions, too, but ties them to rhetoric as a means for understanding the consequences
of action. That is, what it means when one action gets actualized from a field of potential actions.
As Massumi explains, “Whether a person is going to joke or get angry when they are in a tight
spot, that uncertainty produces an affective change in the situation” - it has consequences on self
and others as well as future movements by self and others (109).

Like Schwartz and Begley, Massumi frames this theory of affect and potentiality in Par-
rables of the Virtual as a response to Benjamin Libet’s findings on the half-second delay between
cognition and action. Massumi argues that this half second is missed because it is overfull – consciousness is a subtractive function of the mind that is derived from a rich bed of nonconscious thought material. While volition involves cognition, it is largely “performed by autonomic, bodily reactions occurring in the brain but outside consciousness, and between brain and finger but prior to action and expression” (29). Further, Massumi argues, the body infolds cognition, which is to say that one’s conscious and nonconscious cognitive functions turn back into the body, shaping the contours of actions that later get actualized from a field of possible alternative actions. Cooper’s feedback loop of acting describes with more clarity how conscious and nonconscious cognitive functions follow action, yet fold back into the body’s action through processes like the interpretation of sensory stimuli, and the qualification of experience as emotions, etc.

For Massumi, intensity describes the process of doing that largely falls outside of consciousness (e.g., the missing half second). However, actually doing something does happen out of nowhere. Instead, the incipience of action emerges from a field of potential actions that emerge from the body’s past. The field of potential actions that press toward actualization are described by Massumi as affect, or intensity. This “Intensity is incipience, incipient action and expression … the beginning of a selection: the incipience of mutually exclusive pathways of action and expression, all but one of which will be inhibited, prevented from actualizing themselves completely” (30). In the field of potentials, innumerable potentials for action press towards actualization, towards becoming, but they lie on mutually exclusive tracks, for the body is linear. Action follows a linear progression, for new actions arise as other actions exhaust themselves.

Thus, Massumi explains, the “trace of past actions, including a trace of their contexts,
were conserved in the brain and in the flesh, but out of the mind and out of the body … Only if past actions and contexts were conserved and repeated, autonomically reactivated but not accomplished; begun but not completed” (30). These traces of past actions begun but not completed, and folded back into the body, persist in a field of potential actions out of which only one action may be actualized at any moment. This process of unfolding potentials for action into a single actual action – that is, an action that actually occurs – is intensity. Therefore, intensity is incipience, the beginning of selection of “mutually exclusive pathways of action and expression” – only one of which will not be inhibited, prevented from full actualization. The inhibited tend toward completion by a different path where they open directly into the future, with no present, for “the present is lost with the missing half second, passing too quickly to be perceived, too quickly, actually, to have happened” (30).

The missing half second thus demands a rethinking of the body, Massumi argues. Because these potentialities happened too quickly to actualize, they are virtual. “The body is as immediately virtual as it is actual” – the virtual is the pressing crowd moving toward actualization, it is the realm of potential where normal opposites coexist, “where what cannot be experienced cannot but be felt – albeit reduced and contained” for “out of this crowd of virtual/potentials an individual action or expression will emerge and be registered consciously. One ‘wills’ it to emerge, to be qualified, to take on sociolinguistic meaning, to enter linear action-reaction circuits, to become a content of one’s life” (30-1). The virtual, or the potential, is a superlinear abstraction that is organized differently but coincides with the actual concrete activity and expressivity of the body. Thus, “The body is as immediately abstract as it is concrete; its activity and expressivity
extend, as on their underside, into an incorporeal, yet perfectly real, dimension of pressing potential” (31). The body is both potential action and actualized action, and affect describes this double-sidedness, for the two are not opposed (virtual:actual), but are beside, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick put it (8). Thus, unrealized, unactualized, or unenacted potentials for action persist, and get folded back into the organism as potentiality according to Massumi. These potentials exist as the excess or remainder of actual action, and without the continual cycle of emergence in which potentials yield to actualization and return to the field of potentiality, things (both human and nonhuman things) would not have agency; there would be only death.

While agency certainly is a matter of intention, as Schwartz’s research demonstrates, it is also much more than conscious deliberation. Thus Schwartz and Begley write, in summarizing the research of Benjamin Libet, “the prefrontal cortex plays a central role in the seemingly free selection of behaviors, choosing from a number of possible actions by inhibiting all but one and focusing attention on the chosen one” (312). The power of agency lies in narrowing the field of potentiality; therefore, if we want to effect change on an individual’s capacity to act, we must work to strengthen the likelihood that a possible action will emerge as an actualization. Accomplishing this requires the individual to deploy mental force.

Because Libet’s research demonstrates that agency is as much a process of nonconscious dimensions of the human mind/brain/body complex as it is of conscious thought occurring in the prefrontal cortex, Schwartz and Begley counter the likely criticism that “This may seem an enfeebled sort of free will, if [free will] does not initiate actions but only censors them. And yet the common notion of free will assumes the possibility of acting otherwise in the same circum-
stances, of choosing not to perform actions that tempt us each and everyday” (308). The distinction that Schwartz and Begley make, is that in order for a possible alternative action to enter into the algorithm of choosing an action, it must be one that is felt rather than experienced as just theoretical.

In Schwartz’ research and therapy with OCD patients who, for example, might repeatedly wash their hands, he found that the OCD brain circuit that represents “go wash your hands” would fire repeatedly. In therapy, patients were introduced to the idea that they could do something else at that moment, besides washing their hands. Schwartz suggested to his patients that they might go to the garden instead of the sink. However, the brain circuitry that represents “go to the garden” would enter into decision making processes in the prefrontal cortex as a much weaker signal early in therapy; thus having a lower probability of occurring.

Early in therapy, the possible action of going to the garden was no more than theoretical. As Schwartz explains, in the circuit that represents “wash your hands” (as in any other circuit that represents a behavior such as “go to the garden”), the potentiality to both wash and don’t wash co-exist. Early in the therapy, however, the brain “wave representing ‘release neurotransmitter’ in the OCD circuit has a higher probability than the wave representing ‘release neurotransmitter’ in the garden circuit” resulting in the patient being “much more likely to go to the sink.” The release of neurotransmitters enable brain circuits to express a command through the neural system, resulting in some behavior (362-3).

Nonetheless, Schwartz and Begley explain, over time and by exerting mental effort, the patient is able to change the balance of probabilities so that the potential action of going to the
garden increases its odds of happening. Early in therapy, the “go to the garden” alternative is little more than a theoretical option for the patients as they were consistently unable to break away from the sink. However, as the “go to the garden” circuit gathers strength over time and through practice, it becomes a felt possibility - which is to say patients begin to feel they have a choice. Once the alternative action becomes a felt possibility, “The OCD patient can now act on this thought and go to the garden. This increases the chance that, in the future, the ‘garden’ circuit will prevail over the ‘wash’ circuit. Up to this point, the behavior is an act of mental effort or conscious will. “If the patient regularly goes to the garden instead of the sink, neuroplasticity [which refers to the brain’s ability to physically alter its structure] kicks in: brain metabolism changes in a way that strengthens the therapeutic circuit. As a result, future OCD urges are easier to overcome.” And the OCD patient, who arguably had no agency before, begins to gain control over his or her actions (363).

Drawing from Schwartz and Begley’s work, we can thus understand agency as a simultaneously physiological and psychological process that narrows a field of potential actions into a singular act. This field of potential actions is brought forth through the non-conscious brain activity termed readiness potential. Therefore, following Schwartz and Begley, I frame potentiality here not as a matter of cognitive awareness, but as a set of actions available to us at any given moment because of a specific history of practice combined with mental effort. Together, repetition and mental effort strengthen the probability that any given possible action will become actualized.

In order to extend Schwartz and Begley’s work on readiness potential, I turn to Bruno
LaTour and Carrie Noland, who talk about the relationship between habitual patterns of doing, potentiality, and embodiment. First, Bruno Latour takes up William James’ remark “to have a body is to be affected” in Latour’s essay “How to Talk About the Body?” by developing the notion of articulation, which seeks to push past the problem of subjective and objective dichotomies or physiological and phenomenological dichotomies without resorting to a holism that reduces these two aspects. Using an extended example of the odor-kit used to train individuals to distinguish between scents, to develop a “nose,” Latour describes the process of articulation as the process by which the body is mediated by various nonhuman and human actors. The body folds in both “artificial and material components” allowing one to have a body overtime.

Articulation is the emergent process of cultivating capacities for making meaning out of contrasts, or “being affected by differences” (210). In developing a nose, one begins with two contrasts, and works across ever smaller contrasts developing the capacity to distinguish (make meaning) out of ever more similar odors. Coextensive with the body, the odor kit becomes part of the body in the sense of articulation (287). There is no end to articulation; rather, the more articulation is undertaken, the “more embodied body” one acquires (212). In other words, “The more you learn, the more differences exist” (213).

Embodiment follows a process of body practices (re)iterated over time; the body becoming. Thus, Latour writes, “the odour kit ‘articulates’ pupils’ perceptions with fragrances by the industry and demonstrations given by the professor. If difference is what generates meaning, to have pure odours bottled in little flasks and opened on schedule, beginning with starkest contrast so as to end up, after many repetitions, with smaller ones, is a way of giving a voice, that is a
meaning, to whatever conditions generate odour tasting” (210). The material odor kit (chemicals, tubes, etc.), the professor teaching the odor class, the demonstrations, each of these artificial or material things gets folded into the body as contrasts are gradually mediated by these various instruments as significant (signifying) differences – in this case, recognizing and understanding the difference from one scent to the next. Articulation thus describes how potentiality gets composed through practice and by various nonhuman actors through several scenes where contrasts are signified by the individual.

In Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Cultures, theorist Carrie Noland extends this idea of embodiment and practice through a model of agency that threads between deterministic constructivist theories, such as Foucault and Derrida, and autonomous models that overemphasize the individual’s capacity for intentional or deliberate self-fashioning (8). Noland frames her project as one that brings together views on embodiment in order to account for agency despite poststructuralism’s erasure of individual agency. Embodiment, Noland argues, is “the process whereby collective behaviors and beliefs, acquired through acculturation, are rendered individual and ‘lived’ at the level of the body. Agency, it follows, is the power to alter those acquired behaviors and beliefs” for multiple purposes (9). Noland takes up critical theory, phenomenology, neuroscientific, and cognitive psychological perspectives to ask “How socialized beings convey spontaneous, unscripted meanings through sedimented forms” (56). At the heart of Noland’s project is the argument that kinesthetic sense, or the capacity to recognize
one’s own body as different than others, is key to understanding agency. Noland’s argument thus resonates with Schwartz and Begley’s concept of mental effort because both sets of scholarship theorize the importance of one’s self-aware feedback of doing as crucial interventions in cultivating specific potentials for action.

To make this argument, Noland takes up the concept of gestures because they highlight the nexus of embodiment and signification. Noland adopts a general definition of gestures as “techniques of the body” that are learned through socialization. Gestures, according to Noland, are ways of “sleeping, standing, running, dancing” or inscribing, and consist of “small or large muscle movements consciously or unconsciously executed” (15-16). Noland’s concept of gestures is broader than the kind of gesturing used in daily communication, such as a fore finger extended horizontally at the end of an outstretched arm, pointing at some desired object in the room. Rather, Noland’s concept of gestures is more akin to the kinds of saying-being-doing formations described by Gee’s account of Discourse, for gestures are wrapped up in culturally formed routines that carry social signification, and are performed at varying levels of conscious and nonconscious attention. As Noland explains, “Gesturing is the visible performance of a sensorimotor body that renders that body at once culturally legible (socially useful) and interoceptively available to itself” (21). Noland describes this process of rendering the body as socially useful while making the experience of that culturally inscribed movement available to the self as the structuring principle of the body. Noland writes, “To view the moving body as a “structuring”

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4 See also Damasio and Reddy for comparable arguments for a sense of self that navigates one’s agency.
principle’ … is to approach the body as agentive kinesis, a kinesis that parses anatomical possibilities into distinct gestures available for *bot not equivalent to* social meanings” (57). Crucial in this formulation is that one’s sense of self enables one to cultivate various embodied potentials for action into distinct socially useful or meaningful gestures.

The material body consists of unpredictable potentials for action that may be enacted to create culture. Noland argues that by activating or performing various gestures as culturally meaningful assemblages, we are writing the body as the body writes (213). Noland explains: “Like any element of a conventionalized or procedure, gestures are iterable, but when performed *by me* they are not necessarily iterations. There is a first time for *my* body to perform what other bodies already have learned to do. And there is a first time for *my* body to perform the gesture in an idiosyncratic and potentially subversive way” (214). This principle of iteration strongly resonates with Lu and Horner’s emphasis on the (re)production of sameness as an important moment of individual discursive agency. While these kinds of actions may not be revolutionary, they are the crucial moments where one writes one’s own body as one writes; inscribing culture into distinct bodily formations or assemblages that may re-emerge later as potentials for action in future literacy scenes.

Noland develops her ideas about how we acquire embodied culturally specific routines by drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on the body and the sedimentation of habitual action via the notion of “I cans,” or one’s “repertoire of historically contingent and culturally specific” capacities to act. Noland extends Merleau-Ponty’s idea of “I cans” by turning to scholarship in cognitive psychology and neurobiology, including the neuroscientists Francisco J. Va-
rela and Alain Berthoz. Synthesizing their work, Noland writes, “Berthoz and Varela both find that the sensorimotor capacities of the body are not entirely free and unpredictable but are underwritten (‘written objectively’) by neural circuits laid down by past actions (‘the animal’s embodied history,’ in Varela’s terms, the ‘library’ in Berthoz’s)” (74). While past actions get underwritten by neural circuits, Noland points out that both Varela and Berthoz find room for creativity, for “otherwise the animal’s embodied history would overdetermine every action that the animal could ever take” (74).

When our sedimented or acquired routines of action do not fit an emergent situation, we undergo a “neural reorganization,” in which “the system hesitates, searches among a ‘myriad of possibilities,’ multiple ways of creating new aggregates, connections, circuits, and eventually, behaviors” (74). To get through this conflict, Noland argues, we must draw on creativity that is “constrained by the kinetic dispositions and realized gestural routines (the ‘embodied history’) of the organism itself” (75). It is because we have these neurally inscribed “I cans” that we are able to respond to novel situations with flexibility and in unpredictable ways while relying on socio-culturally shaped behaviors or gestures. Noland thus writes,

our body’s incorporation of the social in the form of a body hexis (neural pathways inscribed through imitation and training) provides a sort of “library,” a choice of responses, that we can draw from to “deviate” the given and “elude” the automatic. That which would, from another perspective, hem us in and potentially crush us (our social construction) instead contributes to forming an “embodied history” of gestural possibilities that ensure our (albeit limited) freedom from unreflected action. And these possibilities, although sometimes available to consciousness, are not the mind’s but the body’s: they belong to a motor intelligence that has learned to recognize social cues … [This] Motor intelligence must involve an ability to engage “intense proprioceptive feedback” (86-7).

Noland’s argument here deeply situates potentials for action in neural pathways cultivated over
time and views agency as a capacity that is both strongly socially structured but also open enough to allow individual creativity or limited freedom of action that hinges on one’s self-aware feedback of the body doing. We quite literally compose agency as potentials for action in the (re)organization of neural pathways that get materialized as discrete embodied assemblages of doing, gestures of meaning that exceed subjective meaning.

Noland opens up the binary of structure and individual action by emphasizing the important role that kinesthetic sense plays in agency. Noland analyzes gestures by considering the ways in which they fold in motor behavior, cultural signification, and kinesthetic awareness that becomes available to reflection (62). Gestures reveal the structuring body that organizes capacities of movement into meaningful actions, and in turn the “agentic kinesis” of the individual. This emergent and embodied agency, Noland argues, “parses anatomical possibilities into distinct gestures available for but not equivalent to social meanings. No gesture is ever entirely relieved of social meaning; however, by focusing on the sensations [e.g., kinesthetic awareness] produced by acts of gesturing, the subject momentarily detaches movement from meaning, thereby recognizing that movement and meaning might be coupled in different ways” (54). This reflective awareness provides the individual with the capability to spontaneously generate new gestures out of sedimented forms. Without this flexibility, any attempts at developing a functional theory of agency will be mired in an overly deterministic social constructivism or a voluntarism that fails to account for the social.

5. Discursive Readiness Potential

Discursive readiness potential is like a kind of discursive muscle memory that at once
points to one’s history of practice and capacities for action in a given situation. To illustrate, and tentatively define this core concept, I’d like to talk about one experience I had in writing a conference paper a few years ago for a major conference in the field, located a few states away from my home, but in driving distance. In this particular instance, I had proposed an ambitious paper that would require a good deal of new thinking and writing to pull the project together. However, at the same time, I was struggling with teaching four composition sections for the first time, and in the week leading up to the conference, I was taking care of my two young children alone while my wife enjoyed a well deserved vacation with her mother and sister on the East Coast. These circumstances seemed to compound and block my own perception as I struggled with the pre-writing and drafting phases of my paper. To perhaps understate my felt experience of the conference paper, I was overwhelmed, and that feeling was intensified by my own uncertainties about the genre, my audiences’ expectations, and the range of discursive possibilities available to me. Thus, I felt hemmed in by both the rhetorical situation represented by the prospective Thomas Watson Conference audience and by the specific genre conventions of the conference paper. As the conference drew near, I could not move past my felt sense of the argument I wanted to make. I didn’t know how to materialize those hazy ideas into a coherent paper, and I could only imagine not giving the talk, for the task of writing the paper seemed too cognitively taxing for me to manage.

Giving the talk itself would be a moment of discursive agency, but actually giving the talk depended on the sense that the discursive act was available to me, that I had already folded under my belt the abilities (I cans) as potentials for future enactment. For some time, the paper
felt quite viscerally unavailable to me; I felt paralyzed. I could only imagine *not doing the paper*, and so I looked for ways to professionally bow out of my obligations. My perception was blocked by my inexperience with and lack of understanding of the rhetorical situation and the genre conventions, in addition to the other life pressures I struggled with at that time. I did not feel that the discursive act of the conference paper was within my grasp, as a latent potential available to become actualized; I had no discursive agency.

Yet, as a graduate student, I was clearly adept at writing persuasive arguments, having easily written thousands of pages of essays throughout my undergraduate and graduate career. But I had very little experience in writing conference papers, and I had absolutely no understanding about the expectations I might face in the rhetorical situation of the Watson conference. Given the constraints that I experienced in this discursive situation, I seemed to not have the experience or awareness necessary to transfer the rich body of experience in essay writing into the moment of drafting the conference paper. The only potential action that I could imagine realizing was not writing – and in fact, I discussed this very position with my mentor via email. However, through a series of focused meetings with her, we talked explicitly about the genre conventions of the conference paper and worked to collaboratively imagine the range of possibilities for developing my ideas into a paper that would meet the audiences’ expectations. With this revised meta-awareness of my discursive situation, I was able to imagine possible ways to structure my argument; by doing so, I was also able to open the field of possible actions available to me. In the end, I did successfully write my conference paper, and the panel was well received, leading to a number of conversations that I was able to carry out with other colleagues in the halls and
through email after the conference.

The notion of “discursive readiness potential” describes such a range of possible actions available to an agent in a specific discursive situation. Likewise, it also describes the range of possible actions that may not be felt as immediately available due to the contours of the situation, as as possible actions that may not be available because the discourse actor may not be aware of them at all. Furthermore, as this brief anecdotal example suggests, various external resources (both human and nonhuman) can play important roles in bringing potentials for action to the actor’s awareness, or helping the actor feel that those possibilities are available, or ready to be enacted. These kinds of interventions might happen through conversations, revised interpretations of sensory stimuli, mindful repetitions of scaffolding practices, etc.

The function of agency, in this model, is to winnow that range of possible actions into one actuality, one action. The agent does not invent actions from an empty field, but can only operate when there is a field of possible actions available to an individual. These potentials for action get folded into the body through repeated practice overtime, sedimented as potential bodily assemblages eligible for signification in layered neural pathways. Literacies as process entail the composing of agency through discrete practices accumulated over time and enshrined in sedimented forms, potentials for action. Discursive readiness potential thus describes the range of potentialities available to an agent through practice and awareness within the space of a discursive situation. Discursive readiness potential provides the agent with flexibility; agency is the capacity to navigate that flexibility.
CHAPTER THREE Cultivating Hybridity: A Discourse Genealogy of César Chávez (1927-1957)

"[L]earning how to speak in ways that others can hear, in finding a way to move and be in more than one world at once ... The practice of the humanities, so defined, is not about admiration or greatness or appreciation or depth of knowledge or scholarly achievement; it's about the movement between worlds, arms out, balancing; it's about making the connections that count" (Miller Writing at the End of the World 198).

1. Introduction

Discourse, as the term has been used by James Paul Gee, describes the combinations of saying-being-doing-feeling that allow us to recognize and get recognized by others as certain whos doing certain whats. As Gee often describes Discourse, it functions as an identity kit that allows us to take on and recognize all sorts of socially constructed subjectivities, including migrant farmworker, college student, labor organizer, Catholic Priest, police officer, and so on. As a theoretical framework in literacy studies, the notion of Discourse foregrounds the principle that our ways of using language (speaking, writing, listening, and reading) are a form of social behavior that are tied to a range of practices (being-doing-feeling) that exceed the language itself. These practices are shaped by one’s experiences in the social spheres one encounters throughout one’s life, for each distinct social sphere presents new and possibly unfamiliar Discourses.

Discourses are thus grounded in histories of practice through which they gain social value or meaning. In James Paul Gee’s book Social Linguistics and Literacies, Gee contrasts the experiences of two elementary-aged children each taking her turn telling a story in their class’ story time. While Mindy, a white student, uses a Discourse closely aligned with the Discourse expectations of her teacher (thus winning Mindy praise for her performance), Leona, a black student,
gets her story rejected by the teacher. Leona uses a set of language practices dissimilar to the dominant Discourse valued by the teacher, but as Gee points out, Leona’s language practices are rooted in the Discourse practices of her home community. Gee highlights Mindy and Leona in order to demonstrate the point that each Discourse has its own history. In the case of Leona, African-American Vernacular English (sometimes called Ebonics) has its own rich history of practice stemming from the West African languages that were mixed with English (and other Native American languages) in the long period of slavery through the 20th century, when Leona is called upon to tell a story using the Discourse practices most available to her.

Discourses have histories, but they are also spaces that we inhabit in order to relate with others in rhetorical situations. Each Discourse provides its user with a set of practices hewed through sometimes hundreds of years of practice, one generation after the next. Once a Discourse becomes available to the user, in whole or in part, those practices present themselves as potentials for action – possible combinations of saying-being-doing-feeling that offer the promise of recognition as a certain identity performing a certain activity. But just as each Discourse has its own history of practice, so does each discursive agent. We do not simply come into the world of meaning-making with a singular Discourse. As Gee points out, we take up a primary Discourse in our home community, but as we go public, we engage with all sorts of secondary Discourses, such as Discourses of school, work, and religion. Through our practices, these Discourses combine and coalesce in unpredictable ways, unique to each individual’s experience, sometimes leaving deep impressions on our primary Discourse, and other times leading us to occupy multiple Discourses at once.
Gee develops two related terms to describe these processes of multiple Discursivity. First, Gee uses the term “Lifeworld Discourse” to refer to our primary Discourse from the vantage point of adulthood, after it has “undergone many influences” from our experience in the world, endlessly moving from scene to scene (195). Each community-based Discourse (secondary Discourse) that we practice, and in turn master, hues our primary Discourse. The Lifeworld Discourse is thus the result of a lifetime of experience, practice, and negotiation in scenes of cultural conflict and engagement. Second, Gee uses the term “hybridity” to describe how we sometimes use or attempt to use multiple Discourses at once, sometimes blurring those Discourses at once, and at other times, alternating between two or more Discourses in one social scene. Drawing from Bakhtin, Gee argues that “what Discourse we are in is often a matter of negotiation, contestation, and 'hybridity’” or “an integration or mixture … of several historically distinct Discourses” (182). Gee elaborates on this point, though without explicitly referencing hybridity: “My actions, words, or thoughts at certain times are very often a compromise or ‘balancing act’ between several different Discourses. One Discourse is not just influencing another, I am actually trying to be in two or more discourses at the same time, as if I tried to play a role in two different plays simultaneously” (195); or as Richard Miller puts it, “the movement between worlds, arms out, balancing” (198). Hybridity in literacy studies, as framed by Gee’s work, thus represents the

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1 See Collins and Blot for a more robust description of hybridity as a deep integration of multiple Discourses to forge a new hybrid Discourse that may serve as both a shield and a weapon for the user in scenes of cultural conflict. While Collins and Blot’s account goes deeper into hybrid discursivity than Gee, their concept of hybridity does not fall beyond the scope of Gee’s definition described here.
balancing, or harmonization, of otherwise dissonant Discourses and Discourse practices.

This chapter examines the archival record of César Chávez’s literate practices in order to develop a complex understanding of the range of Discourses with which Chávez engages, acquires, masters, and practices throughout his first thirty-five years of life. By tracing out the various Discourses evident in Chávez’s record of experience, I aim to develop what I call a Discourse genealogy, or a historical account that attends to issues of power and practice as they relate to Discourses throughout an individual’s life. This Discourse genealogy offers a picture of Chávez’s emergent lifeworld Discourses from birth in 1927 through the late 1950s, up to the point at which he began to organize the migrant farmworkers under the auspices of the Community Service Organization in Oxnard, California (1957-8), and later in Delano under what would eventually become the United Farm Workers (see Chapter Four for a discussion of these periods). By tracing out Chávez’s lifeworld Discourse, I aim to describe the range of potential Discourses that he had available for action in the late 1950s. These insights will become crucial resources for understanding Chávez’s discursive readiness potential during the late 1950s and early 1960s (see Chapter Four).

Therefore, this chapter analyzes the connections between Discourses throughout Chávez’s life in order to argue that César Chávez’s experience was marked by paths between Discursive worlds, balancing identities and practices to meet short- and long-term goals as a farmworker, social activist, and community organizer. This genealogical analysis of Chávez’s lifeworld Discourse further shows that the hybridization of dissonant Discourses hinges on the consonant elements shared between each Discourse. Thus, Chávez’s experience suggests we shift
our understanding of hybridity to appreciate the important role played by consonance or same-
ness in bringing together different Discursive strata.

By focusing on Chávez’s early life and Discourse practices, this argument contributes to exis-
ting scholarship on Chávez’s rhetorical career. John C. Hammerback and Richard J. Jensen
have already examined Chávez's rhetorical practices after the early successes of the United Farm
Workers in the 1960s through his death in 1993 in their important book *The Rhetorical Career of
César Chávez*. Hammerback and Jensen argue that Chávez was able to persuasively transform
his audiences' "self-perceived identities" by identifying with the audience and deploying an un-
characteristically successful rhetorical style that was marked by what Fred Ross has called a
"quiet power" rather than the more typical fiery style of charismatic orators (7). Hammerback
and Jensen's project develops this argument by looking at Chávez's public speeches and writings,
including audio and video recordings of Chávez speaking between the early 1960s and the early
1990s. Their work shows that Chávez

consciously gave discourse a central place in his worldview, painstakingly developed
principles and techniques of communication that would be effective for him and his
coworkers, consistently told supporters of the crucial importance of discourse to achieve
his movement's goals, and exhaustively engaged in a career-long rhetorical campaign for
his cause. He was an extraordinarily skilled communicator who placed his discourse at
the very heart of his career (3).

Nonetheless, Hammerback and Jensen's project largely glosses over Chávez's childhood
and his work as a young man in Community Service Organization (C.S.O.) — dedicating only a

2 The notion of sameness that is applied here resonates with Lu and Horner's argument that the
field should revise its notions of difference as the key markers of agency to incorporate sameness
as an important agential discourse move (see Chapter Two).
single chapter to the first 35 years of his life. Furthermore, Hammerback and Jensen locate the beginning of Chávez's career in the 1960s, which is accurate if one defines his career as "labor organizing." However, such a scope overlooks a rich and formative period during the 1950s as Chávez developed a broader social and theoretical awareness that helped him to frame his personal experiences as a migrant farmworker. Additionally, while it is fair to characterize Chávez as a "highly skilled communicator" in the early and mid-1960s when the farmworkers' union took shape, Chávez's early experiences in the CSO were substantively different, as Chávez learned how to organize people and how to interact with socio-political institutions through talk, text, and action. Hammerback and Jensen further argue that Chávez's success as a rhetor and discourse agent in the 1960s-1990s greatly depended on his ability to combine knowledge and experience from his youth: "To accomplish this herculean task [i.e., unionizing a powerful industry - corporatized agriculture - that had never been unionized], Chávez would need to inform, persuade, and/or change the self-perceived identities of various audiences. And for this rhetorical feat he would draw upon two powerful sets of resources: his knowledge, understanding, and commitment, and rhetorical abilities; and his heritage, life, and appearance" (11). Chávez’s readiness to act was cultivated through his prior experiences as part of a land-owning family, migrant farm working family, and later as a community organizer who became interested in reading a range of texts focused on political, spiritual, economic, and historical accounts of organizing communities and servicing the poor.

I extend Hammerback and Jensen's claim by further developing our understanding of Chávez's literate, rhetorical, and Discursive practices during these formative years. In the follow-
ing, I examine at length Chávez's experiences as a discursive agent just before his work began to focus on organizing labor in 1957 as part of C.S.O., a period which is addressed in Chapter Four. Thus, the scope of this chapter ranges from Chávez’s birth in 1922 through early 1957. Moreover, whereas Hammerback and Jensen focus on some of Chávez's most important speeches as a union organizer, this project looks at his more private writings in the 1950s as a community organizer. As Wendy Sharer argues in her archival study of Women's political organizations in the early 1900s, "Focusing on celebrated essays, speeches, and treatises diverts attention from the cumulative rhetorical power of everyday micropractices of rhetoric and the rhetorical skills needed to use them most effectively" (7).

The major goal of this chapter is to account for Chávez's everyday micropractices as a discursive agent in order to understand how those micropractices accumulate and stick to one another in hybrid and lifeworld Discourses, thus making possible future potential discursive actions in critical rhetorical situations. By tracing out Chávez’s lifeworld Discourse, I identify key moments in Chávez’s Discursive history where he extends consonant practices between Discourses and folds in dissonant practices from one Discourse to another to form hybrids composed of several Discourses that have been stratified through Chávez’s experiences. Further, each Discourse practice sedimented in Chávez’s lifeworld Discourse represents a potential for action that affords Chávez new agential resources. The concept of lifeworld Discourse, which comes from Gee (see below) describes Chávez’s primary Discourse viewed from a perspective that appreciates his engagement with various secondary Discourses. This process of engagement invariably hues the primary Discourse, reshaping it to accommodate the agent’s emergent practices. The
concept of hybridity describes in its most general sense the ways in which elements or practices from one Discourse reshape, supplant, merge, or join with elements or practices of another Discourse.

The chapter’s argument is based on the analysis of two sets of data. First, I draw heavily on oral histories conducted by Jacques Levy with Chávez during the early 1970s, and published in Levy’s widely cited book *La Causa*. In this work, Levy acts as an archivist assembling transcriptions of Chávez’s oral interviews, which were selected and compiled by Levy into book form, but without any editorial narrative synthesizing or otherwise bridging Chávez’s recollections. The only other voices present in the text are those of other participants, such as Chávez’s family members and colleagues, such as Fred Ross. Like other scholars writing about Chávez, I treat this text as a primary resource. Second, I analyze Chávez’s daily activity reports produced as part of his role as a C.S.O. organizer between 1954 and 1959. These documents are part of the United Farm Worker’s Collection, which is housed at the Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor Archives at Wayne State University. In my study of this archive, I focused on material that was typed or written in Chávez’s script. Using an inductive coding method, I focused on passages that described how Chávez used texts in his work as a C.S.O. organizer. Working through an initial coding of about 20% of the selected materials, I identified the following codes: (1) using texts to help others, including by filling out official forms (e.g., citizenship applications, tax doc-

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3 Chávez’s daily activity reports forms the majority of the Fred R. Ross, Sr. Papers (1.5 linear feet). The existing archives include entries for almost every day between 1954 and 1956. The record is much thinner beginning in 1957, with significant gaps between sets of daily reports.
uments, etc.), reproducing texts for others, and other miscellaneous purposes; (2) conducting C.S.O. Business, including C.S.O. Board/governance purposes, holding classes for community members, registering voters, and other miscellaneous purposes; and (3) using texts to interact with local print, radio, and other media.

2. Discourse Genealogy

This archival study examines César Chávez as a literacy learner outside the boundaries of conventional educational institutions. Following other historical scholarly work in composition and rhetoric that moves beyond the classroom (Burton *Spiritual Literacies*; Gere *Intimate Practices*; Hall Kells *Hector P. Garcia*; Sharer *Voice and Votes*), the purpose of this study is to examine César Chávez's literate practices and their implications for Chávez's discursive agency in the late 1950s in order to better understand Discursive hybridity and agency. This chapter focuses in particular on Chávez's daily writings from 1954 until 1957, which are housed in Wayne State University's Walter P. Reuther labor archive library. By tracing out the Discourses of Chávez and his family, I work to develop a Discourse genealogy that accounts for the wider range of practices associated with a given Discourse. In doing so, I attempt to understand how ways of saying-being-doing-feeling were cultivated, sponsored, practiced, and hybridized by Chávez and his family.

The notion of a "discourse genealogy" builds primarily off of Vicki Tolar Burton's notion

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4 The activity reports were also coded for two other purposes (using texts primarily for legal/governmental purposes, and using texts primarily for correspondence), but too few results were found in the full body of material considered in this study.
of a "literacy genealogy," which she uses in her book *Spiritual Literacy in John Wesley's Methodism* as a tool for summarizing and analyzing the literate practices deployed in Wesley's family, including his maternal grandfather, parents, and siblings, in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. In *Spiritual Literacy*, Burton situates the literacy genealogy as a genre closely related to the widely used literacy narrative genre (c.f., Brandt; Heath; Rodriguez; Rose; Villanueva) in which "a writer describes how acts and practices of reading and writing function in an individual's life, a family, a community, a culture" with particular attention paid to "issues of power, access, and agency" (33). Through this analysis, Burton is able to identify dozens of distinct literate practices, categorized according to the several distinct themes, and concludes that her findings illustrate not only the family's practices, but also provide a view of practice during a specific historical moment (62). While Burton seems to form her analysis around the notion of genealogy as a family tree of practices, I develop my framework, instead, around Michel Foucault’s argument for genealogical analysis as a strategy for understanding the historical discontinuities that collectively form the object of analysis through a process of sedimentation.

Foucault develops his genealogical analysis as a way of uncovering and examining the heterogeneous strata that make possible the existence of the thing being analyzed in a couple of short writings. First, Foucault argues in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" that "The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of
Foucault's genealogical approach works to examine the body and the disparate constituencies that imbue the body with meaning using a vertical analysis that seeks out the strata that collectively constitute the body. This approach contrasts with a horizontal analysis that removes discontinuity in order to demarcate the causal flow of history from one event to the next. Thus, Foucault argues, "The purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity, but to commit itself to its dissipation. It does not seek to define our unique threshold of emergence, the homeland to which metaphysicians promise a return; it seeks to make visible all of those discontinuities that cross us" (95). By marking the discontinuities, Foucault argues we may in turn articulate the disparate strata that together form the object of analysis.

Foucault further elaborates his notion of a genealogical analysis in the introduction to *The Archaeology and the Discourse on Language* where he argues that the genealogical approach to history urges us to articulate the various strata that make up the body of the thing being analyzed and to interrogate the subdivisions and relations among various strata. Thus, Foucault writes, "the problem is no longer one of tradition, of tracing a line, but one of division, of limits; it is no longer one of lasting foundations, but one of transformations that serve as new foundations, the rebuilding of foundations" (5). Foucault’s genealogical method highlights discontinuities, or dissonances between historical strata in order to analyze how disparate lines of power inflect the object of analysis. The old mode of history Foucault rejects rearranges discontinuities in order to reveal continuity.

Foucault moves past this approach by repositioning the discontinuous from a position of
unwanted obstacle to a tool in the analysts’ belt; “a working concept” that allows us to identify and examine the ends of strata, and to locate the connections among various strata that constitute “series of series” of strata without resorting to a unified center that holds the strata together, but instead in a layered space of dispersion (9-10). By identifying the discontinuities, we may also articulate the relationships among strata. This approach to analysis focuses the researcher’s attention on the dissonances between strata in order to identify various relationships among strata that distinguish one stratum from another. Thus, as Foucault explains rather clearly, “The notion of discontinuity is a paradoxical one: because it is both an instrument and an object of research; because it divides up the field of which it is the effect; because it enables the historian to individualize different domains but can be established only by comparing those domains” (9).

Foucault’s emphasis on the dissonances between strata underwrites Gee’s notion of multiple Discourses, and the field’s general interest in tracing out multiple literacies. Other concepts in literacy studies, such as hybridity, also build off the understanding that each of us practices multiple Discourses, and that sometimes we create mash-ups of dissonant Discourses to create a new harmonized hybrid Discourse. For example, Collins and Blot describe hybrid literacies as the bringing together of dissonant literacies (colonized and colonizing) to forge a new hybrid that allows subjects, such as Bongo (see Chapter One) to use literacy as a shield that protects his marginalized literacies and identities and as a weapon that engages with dominant literacies in order to transform them. Following Foucault, our field has cultivated our concepts of literacy and literacies, and of Discourse and Discourses to take up notions of discontinuity and dissonance as both the tools and effects of analysis. Whereas Burton seeks to articulate the rich bed of literate
practices extant in the Wesley family home as a way of understanding the conditions that made possible John Wesley's own literacy development as a child, and later as a man, my argument for a Discourse genealogy seeks to expand the scope of analysis beyond textual practices.

By taking up Discourse in this genealogical analysis, I am reframing the focus of study to consider how individuals learn and acquire various Discourses. As Gee explains, a given Discourse "is composed of distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too, writing/reading coupled with distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing, with other people and with various objects, tools, and technologies, so as to enact specific socially recognizable identities engaged in specific socially recognizable activities" (155). Gee further argues that we all acquire a primary Discourse, which is the home Discourse practiced by our family early in life. "Our primary Discourse gives us our initial and often enduring sense of self and sets the foundations of our culturally specific vernacular language (our 'everyday language'), the language in which we speak and act as 'everyday' (non-specialized) people, and our culturally specific vernacular identity" (156). As we grow up, though, we are exposed to social situations outside the home where various secondary Discourses get enacted (such church, school, and other public spheres). Gee further argues that we acquire some of these secondary Discourses through close relationships with other individuals who have already mastered these secondary Discourses; other secondary Discourses, however, must be learned because we have
no access to deep relationships with others who have already mastered the target relationship. Throughout our life, we may combine, hybridize, switch between, and even shed away any given Discourse, for Discourses are mutable, ever shifting ways of recognizing others and getting recognized by others as certain whos doing certain whats.

Therefore, the Discourse genealogy expands the scope of analysis to consider how individuals' ways with "ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing, with other people and with various objects, tools, and technologies" get tied to specific Discourses. Further, at another level, the genealogical analysis seeks to understand how an individual’s array of Discourses make possible the enactment of various identities and hybridization in social settings. In this way, a Discourse genealogy may focus on a single individual's home practices (as Burton does), but also the range of Discourses that are taken up, acquired, learned, practiced, or dispensed by the individual accumulate to forge a lifeworld Discourse. This multifaceted picture of one individual’s Discourse genealogy allows us to better understand at a given historical moment how the array of Discourses at hand make possible specific socially recognizable responses to specific social situations.

In order to understand one’s discursive readiness potential, we must understand one’s history of Discourse practices. This emphasis on prior experience in order to account for readiness potential resonates with Marilyn Cooper’s analysis of Obama’s Philadelphia speech as a moment

5 The term acquisition refers to an apprenticeship-type mode of acquiring the Discourse that is marked by close contact with one who has mastered the target Discourse. Learning, on the other hand, refers to an explicit program of getting the Discourse using metacognitive strategies combined with practice. See Chapter 1 for a fuller discussion of these two terms.
of emergent agency. As I argue in Chapter Two, Cooper’s argument for emergent agency illustrates the principle of readiness potential as a condition of possible discursive action hewed from one’s prior experiences sedimented through a recursive practice and a feedback loop involving short- and long-term goals, dispositions, emotions, perceptions, memories, etc. Therefore, in the following account of César Chávez’s Discourse genealogy, I seek to trace out Chávez’s experiences with textuality and agency in order to describe a threshold of discursive readiness potential occupied by Chávez in the late 1950s. This understanding will allow me to analyze key rhetorical events undertaken by Chávez in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Chapter Four.

3. A Tale of Two Childhoods: Arizona and California

Chávez's childhood was split between two very different worlds: on the one hand, he was born to a family of land owning growers; on the other hand, he and his family were forced to migrate to California where they meagerly subsisted as itinerant farmworkers, following the harvest up and down California's central agricultural valley. These two worldviews were shaped by the environments in which Chávez and his family lived and worked, and are marked by their stark contrast between one another. In Arizona, Chávez was part of a stable, close-knit family-based community of Mexican-Americans. While the family was not wealthy, they owned and worked on a large piece of land in addition to a few small local businesses. In California, Chávez and his family rarely stayed in a location more than a few weeks due to the ever-moving harvest as one crop yielded to another. Furthermore, the Chávez family endured seemingly impossible living conditions, and deep poverty accented by a persistent and ironic hunger, as they worked to reap boundless produce from California's fertile irrigated farmland. Bridging the gap between these
experiences became necessary for the family's survival once the Chávez family lost their land in Arizona. Moreover, crossing the Colorado River into California also marked a significant discourse shift as the family was forced to transition from land-owners to itinerant farmworkers.

For the first eleven years of his life, Chávez lived in a close-knit community that largely consisted of his immediate and extended family on a 40-acre farm situated alongside the Colorado River in the North Gila Valley just outside Yuma, an agricultural center tucked in the south-west corner of Arizona along the Mexican and California borders made fertile by the river running along its western edge, separating Arizona and California. Chávez's grandfather and namesake Chávez Chávez (Papa Chayo) had first settled this huge tract of land in the valley during the 1880s when he escaped from the Hacienda del Carmen in Chihuahua, Mexico. At first, Chávez worked small jobs in El Paso until he could bring over his wife, Dorotea (Mama Tella) and their children, including Chávez's father, Librado, who crossed the border when he was two years-old. Later, Papa Chayo and Librado built a 160-acre homestead featuring a long adobe house just north-east of Yuma by hauling heavy loads for the mining industry. Later, Chávez described the home as having "two wings divided by a covered breezeway about nine feet wide. It looked like it had been there forever; a long, low, solid structure that seemed to curve with the soil and be a part of it. There was an endless droning of flies around it, a sound that seemed to always be there and to have been there always. The house seemed indestructible, with walls eigh-

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6 Haciendas were large plantations that used a system to tie workers to the land in slave-like conditions while the hacendado, or owner of the hacienda, earned great profits. Haciendas were based on agricultural, mining, or manufacturing work. Chávez escaped because the hacendado was going to ship him off to the Mexican Army.
teen inches thick supporting a foot-thick flat roof made of dirt piled on top of elm or cottonwood beams" (Levy 10). Chávez's description of his childhood home underscores a deep relationship between the security of the family and the land upon which the Chávez family lived and worked for three generations. The family’s way of being was firmly grounded in both the land and the permanence of their home, as Chávez’s description suggests.

While the land provided security, sustenance, and community for Chávez's family, they were soon faced with the prospect of losing everything they had built over a half-century. Chávez's father, Librado, worked on Papa Chayo's farm well into his adulthood, caring for Mama Tella after Chávez's death. In 1924, Librado married a local woman, Juana Estrada, at a time when both were in their mid-30s. After the two married, Librado acquired a small grocery store, auto repair shop, and pool hall. Shortly after Chávez's birth in 1927, the Depression hit the southwest, yet the Chávez family fared well. As Richard Griswold del Castillo and Richard A. Garcia explain in their influential biography of César Chávez, "The Mexican community, composed mostly of small landholders and farmers, was almost self-sufficient, not dependent on industrial employment or relief" (4). Further, with the Chávez's large extended family in the Valley, they had "a built-in clientele for their business" (4). During this time, and perhaps to diversify the family's income, Librado purchased a 40-acre plot of land near the store.

Chávez was heavily influenced by his mother, who as Chávez puts it, "kept the family together" through her use of dichos (proverbs) and consejos (advice). Chávez explains "When I look back, I see her sermons [dichos and consejos] had tremendous impact on me. I didn't know it was nonviolence then, but after reading Gandhi, St. Francis, and other exponents of nonvio-
lence, I began to clarify that in my mind" (18). While Chávez recounts a wide range of *dichos* and *consejos* used by Juana, several are related to her principles of nonviolence. For example, Chávez recalls

> Now that I'm older I see she is nonviolent, if anybody is, both by word and deed. She would always talk about not fighting. Despite a culture where you're not a man if you don't fight back, she would say, 'No, it's best to turn the other cheek. God gave you senses like eyes and mind and tongue, and you can get out of anything.' She would say, 'It takes two to fight.' That was her favorite. 'It takes two to fight, and one can't do it alone.' She had all kinds of proverbs for that. 'It's better to say that he ran from here than to say he died here.' When I was young I didn't realize the wisdom in her words, but it has been proved to me so many times since. Today I appreciate the advice, and I use quite a few of the dichos, especially in Spanish (Levy 18-9).

Chávez's accounts of his mother's *dichos* and *consejos* show how her patterns of responding to situations of conflict with *dichos* that emphasize nonviolence seem to have been internalized, as he is able to recount several iterations of a broader category of nonviolent *dichos*. Also, the account suggests that while Chávez internalized these phrases and their concomitant ways of being, it wasn't until later that he developed the meta-awareness of what his mother was doing, and how or why her *dichos* were significant. Additionally, we can see how he developed connections between his readings on nonviolence (St. Francis and Gandhi, for example), which he did not read until the early 1950s, and his rich experience as a young man.

Chávez's mother, Juana, also played an important role in shaping Chávez’s ways of being. Chávez learned his religion not only from Mama Tella, but also from his mother, Juana Estrada Chávez, because there were no priests in the valley. Chávez's mother "believed in saints as advocates, as lobbyists, to pray to God for her. Her patron saint was St. Eduvigis" (Levy 25). St. Eduvigis was a Polish duchess who gave up her material possessions in service of the poor. Every
year on St. Eduvigis' day, Juana would

find some needy person to help and ... invite people to the house, usually hobos. She
would go out purposely to look for someone in need, give him something, and never take
anything in return. If a man was selling pencils, she would give him some money but
wouldn't take a pencil. She would look for people who were hungry to come to the house.
Usually they would offer to do some work, like chop wood, in exchange for a meal, but
she would refuse because, she said, the gift was invalid (25-6).

Juana often recruited the children, including Chávez, to help find such needy persons. This prac-
tice of self-sacrifice for the good of others continued even after the onset of the depression, and
after the family was forced to sell the land and shops (Ferriss and Sandoval 16). For Juana, this
practice of helping those who needed help, even when she and her family had little to offer, was
a rhetorical and material practice that enabled her to express a deeply held spiritual worldview.

Juana’s practice of helping the needy had a deep impact on how Chávez saw the world
throughout his adult life. After the Chávez family transitioned to migrant work and figured out
how to succeed as migrant farmworkers through much trial and error, Juana would help out their
fellow farmworkers new to the "migrant stream." For instance, she would pick up entire families
and would lead the Chávez family in helping these strangers learn the system in a mentor-type
relationship. Chávez recalls that "After we sort of gave them an apprenticeship, they felt confi-
dent, and they'd take off. My mother did a lot of this work. I didn't realize how important it was
until years later. I didn't even understand what she was doing. In fact, I didn't particularly like the
idea very much. The things she did, being unlettered, were really amazing, just dealing with the
problems and trying to help people" (Levy 70). Years later when Chávez had his own family,
they, too, would help needy families like Juana did, until once when a large family came in and
"swiped everything we had" (70). After that, Chávez no longer brought families new to farm
working into his house, although his commitment to helping others persisted.

Another important influence on Chávez as a youth in Arizona was his grandmother,
Mama Tella. Along with Chávez's mother, who shared Mama Tella's deep interest in religion, she
helped shape Chávez's Catholic spirituality, as she had been taught to read and write in Latin and
Spanish at a convent as a young woman in Mexico. Chávez recalls: "Every evening she would sit
in bed, and we would gather in front of her. As we knelt by the doorway to her room, we would
join her in the Rosary that seemed to drone on endlessly. We were required to kneel until the
prayer was over, and if we started giggling, she would hit us with her cane. After the Rosary she
would tell us about a particular saint and drill us in our catechism" (Levy 26). Later as Chávez
and the other children grew closer to the age of their first communion, his mother took them
twenty miles out of the valley into Yuma to talk with the priest. At first, the priest refused them
the possibility of communion, for the children had not taken catechism classes. Yet, his mother
pushed against this resistance, telling the priest she couldn't possibly bring the children twenty
miles into town each week. She urged him to ask the children something about the catechism.

During the examination, Chávez recalls that he and his siblings "were very nervous. The
quiet of the church bore down on us, broken only by the argument between [Chávez's] mother
and the priest, and we knew the importance of the first communion" (Levy 26). Eventually, Juana
convinced the Priest to quiz the children, and "when the questions came, [they] knew the an-
wers. Mama Tella's tutoring had been long, intense, and thorough" (Levy 26). Thus, Chávez ex-
perienced a strong and focused education in Catholic doctrine, as demonstrated by the priest’s
remarkable acceptance of the (unschooled) children’s catechism. Typically, young Catholics learn their catechism through some form of Sunday school or Bible study. However, because Chávez’s grandmother was raised in a convent, and could read the Bible, and was well trained in Catholic theology, she was able to provide Chávez with a robust Catholic education that was deeply embedded in his primary Discourse.

While his mother was an important influence on Chávez, he describes her as "a very illiterate pacifist. She never learned how to read or write, never learned English, never went to school for a day" (Yinger 29). Other than Mama Tella, who was literate in Latin and Spanish, Chávez recalls only two other family members with the ability to read and write in Spanish. First, Chávez recalls learning to read Spanish from his mother's brother-in-law, Uncle Ramon Arias, around the same time he began to learn to read English in school – though he "found reading Spanish a lot easier than trying to learn English in school" (Levy 25). Second, Chávez's Uncle Chico Salazar would read Mexican newspapers to the young children, including Chávez. Uncle Chico, as Chávez recalls, "was an old shriveled-up man with a black patch over one eye, the result of an explosion or a mining accident. We had a lot of respect for him, and he, too, taught us a lot" (25). Other than these two, who were "Probably ... the only two literate ones" in the family, Chávez's only other interaction with adults who could read and write happened in school, and in English (25).

Chávez's early experiences in school were harrowing. The Chávez family lived in a re-
region of Arizona that was just a few miles from the Mexican border, and was in fact Mexican soil until the end of the U.S.-Mexican war in 1848, only three years before Papa Chayo was born in 1851. The Chávez family, like most Mexican-American families, remained more comfortable speaking Spanish than English, though Chávez and his siblings all grew up speaking English and Spanish. As Chávez explains, not being able to speak in Spanish at school was a significant problem for him, as he and his siblings were often told to “go back to Mexico” if they wanted to speak Spanish and physically punished (e.g. beaten) for breaking the school’s English-only rule (24). Chávez's experience in school underlines the deeply rooted racism prevalent in Arizona during his youth. The educational institution presented Chávez with a difficult dilemma between the rich language and customs embodied in his home community, which largely consisted of family members, and the language and customs of white America. These tensions had a negative effect on Chávez’s own sense of identity, as he began to experience a profound, though not uncommon, shift in his sense of self within the community. Encountering these Discourses of racism and marginalization marked moments of dissonance in which Chávez’s primary Discourse arrived at a boundary where the readiness to act afforded by that primary Discourse failed to provide Chávez with the tools or practices needed to be recognized in the same ways he had experienced in Yuma.

For some time in Yuma, whites and Mexicans played and learned together, but when southern whites came to Yuma after the construction of a nearby dam, Chávez became the object of racial comments like 'dirty Mexican,' which Chávez found to be very painful and unforget-
As Chávez tried to reconcile the derogatory comments from his peers and teachers (who often told him to go back to Mexico if he wanted to speak Spanish) on the one hand, and the rich Mexican culture of his home community on the other hand, he found no satisfactory answers. For example, Chávez recalls that he once tried to figure out who he was. When he told a teacher that he was a Mexican, she quickly corrected him, "in a nice way" that he, like the rest of the class, was an American. When he asked his mother about this, she couldn't resolve the conflict for him either. Chávez recalls, "She said I was a citizen, but I didn't know what a citizen meant. It was too complicated. Yet it was not something that I could dismiss or forget. There were too many reminders, too many times I would be called a Mexican in tones of ridicule or contempt" (Levy 24-5). Chávez carried his home Discourse not only in his language and physiology, but more deeply in his sense of self. Thus, Chávez’s sense of self was coming into conflict with dominant American ideologies of selfhood, such as the notion that being “American” supersedes ethnic identity as “Mexican,” and that citizenship is a formal class of civic identity to which Chávez belongs. These exchanges represent the interleavings and stratification of disparate conceptions of selfhood that ultimately are tied to Discourse practices, as indicated by categories of American and Mexican. Moreover, while Chávez’s experiences at school raised the issue of identity to the surface, the move to California immersed Chávez into a world

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8 The territorial shift was significant: Mexico lost about half of its territorial land and about 1% of its population, and the United States nearly doubled its land mass when the Mexican-American War ended with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Included in this transfer was all or part of the area that became the states of Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming. Texas had already ceded from Mexico prior to the Mexican-American war, and was a contributing factor in the lead up to the war (Gonzalez 80).
marked more by its discontinuities between dominant Euro-American Discourses and Chávez’s non-dominant Mexicano Discourse than its similarities with Chávez’s life in Yuma.

During the Great Depression, Chávez’s family lost their Arizona Homestead. Like countless other landowners in the 1930s Librado found himself unable to make the mortgage payments on a 40-acre plot, and was pressured by a nearby businessman associated with the mortgage lender to sell off the grocery store to make the missed payments (5). This forced the Chávez family to move back to the 160-acre farm with Mama Tella, where "The family was barely self sufficient" (5). The final blow to the family's security, however, came in 1937 when a $4,000 tax bill came due on the land. While Librado qualified for a New Deal Loan, the local bank president, Archibald J. Griffin, coveted the Chávez property because he owned property adjacent to the Chávez ranch on the south and west boundaries. Since Griffin was the bank president, he refused to give Librado the New Deal loan. Despite Librado's appeals to government officials, including the governor, and after a failed attempt to win the land at auction, the Chávez family was finally forced to leave the farm in 1939 when it was bulldozed by the new landowner - Griffin. The family’s failures aside, this shows the Chávez family had a provisional understanding of how to interact with governmental officials.

Although Chávez recognized that the loss of the family farm was an important event when it happened, he didn't really appreciate the magnitude of the moment until later. "When we left the farm, our whole life was upset, turned upside down. We had been part of a very stable community, and we were about to become migratory workers. Landownership is very important, and my dad had very strong feelings about the land. If we had stayed there, possibly I would
have been a grower. God writes in exceedingly crooked lines" (42). Landownership enabled Chávez to live in a stable community whose members shared the same cultural practices and values. While Chávez’s Mexicano Discourse may have been non-dominant when he carried it to school where he encountered the dominant Discourse of American English-based schooling, Chávez experienced his primary Discourse at home in a close-knit, supportive community that presented few oppositions to this worldview.

Chávez's home life in Yuma was rich with meaningful interactions between aunts, uncles, siblings, and cousins. Through these interactions, Chávez began to acquire and refine a Discourse identity that enabled a readiness to act in specific ways. For instance, Chávez describes the long hot summer days on the family farm before he and his family was forced to leave in search of farm work in California. In the evenings, the family would gather for barbecues and stories. Chávez's uncles would tell stories of life in Mexico, including the mines, haciendas, and wars. Chávez recalls:

Stories were told over and over again of how Papa Chayo escaped from the hacienda, how no one could speak out for their rights, how they feared for their lives, how they were driven to flight. They never talked about revolution, but still it was there just under the surface. We learned that when you felt something was wrong, you stood up to it. Later, for example, when we were on a job, my father considered it dishonorable to be fired for being lazy; but if somebody was fired for standing up for a person's rights, it was quite honorable. I remember my dad would stand up for the rights of others, so we automatically did too (Levy 33).

The practice of standing up to injustice was woven into the fabric of Chávez’s family-based Discourse, and would later become a recurring theme in his life. For example, Chávez recalls several such incidents in which a family member would identify an injustice in one of the California mi-
grant camps. This realization would prompt the family to drop their work and walk out, as Chávez explains, no matter how badly they needed that job for their own personal well-being:

If any family felt something was wrong and stopped working, we immediately joined them even if we didn't know them. [...] When we felt something was wrong, we stood up against it. We did that many, many times. We were constantly fighting against things that most people would probably accept because they didn't have that kind of life we had in the beginning, that strong family life and family ties which we would not let anyone break. It made no difference whether Rita [Chávez's sister] said it, Richard [Chávez's brother] or I, if one of us felt very strongly there was something wrong, my dad said, 'Okay, let's go.' There was no question. Our dignity meant more than money. I remember time when it was a little hard to quit – we needed the money – but we didn't consider that. Our attitude was, we have to do it, and we accepted it (Levy 78-9).

The practices outlined here illustrate how Chávez and family not only stood up to injustice through action, but willingly made self-sacrifices to do so. The Chávez family's readiness to act in ways that resisted the injustice of the working condition they faced was shaped by the lessons learned by the family's stories during the summer evening gatherings in Yuma and by the close family-based community that forged the strong family ties that Chávez emphasizes above. This readiness to sacrifice self-interest for the common good was strong enough to carry over into California where the family had far fewer resources to rely upon than they did in Arizona.

The move to leave to California was itself a Discourse act that extended the practice of agricultural work already deeply familiar to the family, yet the contexts in which they practiced that work were so different that key parts of the Chávez family’s landowning Discourses became marginalized, or disempowered. For instance, Chávez describes his experience of driving around rural California looking for work during the early phase of the family’s transition to itinerant work:
As we drove around, my father was always admiring the land, noticing how fertile it was and noticing the equipment. He would get down and look at the ground, taking some dirt in his huge hands. 'You could really raise things here!' he would say, or 'Look at that plow! Look at that tractor!' Often he wouldn't agree with the methods being used. He would say this crop could have produced more if they had watered it on time. He was always noticing mistakes, looking for ways of improving things. As for me [Chávez], I was at that age where I didn't know what it meant to be without land to farm. I just felt restricted by all the No Trespassing signs. I felt caged (48).

Being landowners provided Chávez and his family with a sense of stability, social status and rights, and cultivated for the family a set of potentials for action that were not easily shaken when the family found itself immersed in the migrant farm working stream. Chávez's account of his father's deep connection to the soil suggests a different kind of relationship to the environment than other migrant farmworkers, who perhaps had always been migrant farmworkers. As a man who spent much of his life (more than 40 years by the time they move to California) as a landowner and grower in Arizona, Librado’s actions, as described by Chávez, express a potentiality for working with the land dissonant from the orientations of migrant farmworkers who own almost nothing, including their housing. While this example most directly describes Librado's reaction, Chávez seems to map his own experience on to his father's conflict as a grower-farmworker. The land’s agency disempowered Librado’s and Chávez’s readiness to act that they had cultivated in Yuma, offering only limitations, such as working the land but not growing the crops and trespassing rather than moving freely. As Librado’s comments suggest, these potentialities were decentered by new ways of saying-being-doing-feeling as a migrant (landless) farmworker; stratified but not erased. Learning how to stand in between these two worlds would be one of Chávez's first examples of hybridity.
This account of Chávez’s first few years of boyhood suggests a dense family life where the home Discourse shared by his Mexican-heritage Spanish-speaking family was dominant, with few intrusions from the perspective of an eight-year old child. This experience constituted Chávez’s primary Discourse – a threshold from which he engaged with very different world-views, first at school in the North Gilla Valley, and later in California when the family became migrant farmworkers. Without question, though, Chávez’s elders found themselves in a different world than Chávez as a child, often working for and against the wealthier Anglo ranchers who enjoyed greater legal and social protections than the Chávez family. While Chávez was likely aware of some of these experiences, the existing accounts emphasize landownership and the closeness of a family who shared work, land, and a rich Mexican heritage.

The Chávez family first left for California in 1938 while they were still fighting to keep their ranch. After finding farm work in Oxnard, Librado brought the family across the Colorado River into California. Unfortunately, the family headed west during the Dust Bowl immigration of 1938/9, which saw thousands of families moving to California in hopes of finding more fertile lands. However, landownership was not feasible because farming in California requires a great deal of capital in order to build the irrigation systems necessary for cultivation and much of the land was already owned by large growers and corporations who welcomed the influx of farm workers in order to drive down wages. The Chávez family stayed only a short time in Oxnard and left because "the competition for jobs was too great, the wages too low, to make [Librado’s] project [to regain the ranch] successful" so they returned to Yuma until August 1939, when Archibald Griffin gained final possession of the land. With no land left to work in Arizona, they
headed back to California, into the migrant stream for good.

The contrast family's experience as farmworkers in California and Yuma was stark. When they first arrived in Oxnard, the Chávez family moved into a small house enclosed by a fence within a larger plot filled with similar quarters. Chávez found these conditions to be too confining: "The days passed slowly, and I no longer felt free. I was like a wild duck with its wings clipped. I felt trapped. There were fences everywhere, too many people, and too much fighting. I couldn't understand how neighbors could live without knowing each other or talking to each other" (Levy 38). The transition for Chávez, who at the time was a young boy of almost ten years, was challenging. The only place Chávez felt the same kind of freedom that he had enjoyed at the ranch in Yuma was on the ocean beach (38). Finding appropriate living conditions was an ongoing struggle as the family moved from town to town, following the crops. Sometimes, the family lived in a tent that never really dried and couldn't hold the entire family, forcing Chávez and others to sleep outside in the cold winter nights (Levy 56). Chávez recalls that "There were hundreds and hundreds of people in the camps," yet no facilities for washing, using the bathroom, etc. (66). At other times, they lived in small "tarpaper-and-wood cabins" that had neither plumbing nor paved streets (Griswold del Castillo and Garcia 11). Chávez describes one of the better homes they occupied during this period as "just a roof" with a small heater and wooden floors, which for his mother was "beautiful" (59). Ultimately, living in California was far removed from the stability and comfort! provided by the family’s lost adobe home in Arizona.

Second, Chávez (and his family) had to learn the difference between working for themselves in Arizona and working for others in California. Chávez recalls that "Unlike the ranch, the
work [in Oxnard] was drudgery” (39). In part, this drudgery stemmed from the awareness that their work was not their own since the family no longer owned any land. Moreover, the Chávez family encountered a social system that positioned ethnic Mexicans like Chávez and his family at the bottom of the social ladder. The Chávez’s were treated worse than the Okies who flocked to California to escape the Dust Bowl because of their racial and ethnic identities (Ferriss and Sandovol 25). For example, Chávez biographers Ferriss and Sandovol cite the comments made by one assistant Kern County Sheriff, who said "We protect our [white landowning] farmers here in Kern County. They are our best people. They are always with us. They keep the county going. They put us in here and they can put us out again, so we serve them. But the Mexicans are trash. They have no standard of living. We herd them like pigs" (26). This deep-seated racial discrimination represented by comments like this introduced a profound change in Chávez’s experience in public spheres, for as Chávez explains, “We had never experienced discrimination in Yuma when we lived there, but we encountered White Trade Only signs [e.g., shops that would only do business with Whites] all over California” (83).

The injustices of the migratory labor system were not limited to the civic and social leaders. The labor contractors - individuals who organized farmworkers to meet the needs of local growers and who were often Mexican-Americans, too - regularly cheated the farmworkers. Chávez describes the various ways labor contractors would cheat him, his family, and other farmworkers, including under-counting the number of bags of produce picked, under-reporting the total weight of produce, charging workers extra for goods and services like drinks, cigarettes, etc., and using young girls for their own sexual pleasure (Levy 61-3). The Chávez family had
strong attitudes toward such unfair work practices, as evidenced by the family’s practice to walk out of a job any time a “family felt something was wrong” (see above). Chávez and his family would take this action under any circumstances, no matter which member of the family called for the action, and regardless of whether they personally knew the victims of the injustice. As Chávez poignantly put it, “Our dignity meant more than money” (78-9). This attitude represents the family’s readiness to privilege the common good over the family’s interest. This Discourse practice resonates with the family’s relationship to work as their own enterprise in Yuma, an experience in great contrast with the experience of work for most migrant farmworkers. Thus, Chávez ties the family’s sense of community and social justice to his and his family’s experiences living on their own land, surrounded by a supportive family in Yuma. Given the severe conditions in which the Chávez family lived and worked, with barely enough income to buy food and clothes, it is remarkable how much they were willing to risk for people they sometimes didn’t even know.

While Chávez and his family faced a very different social strata in the California migratory stream that placed them in a lower social class and hierarchy, and although they had to develop new skills to adapt and subside within what was often a duplicitous system, the landowning and family-based Discourse community they left in Yuma continued to shape their actions in California. As Chávez suggests, this their experience in Yuma opened up possibilities for action that other families who perhaps had always been migrant workers may not have seen, or known how to implement, or perhaps were unwilling to take the risks associated with walking out of a job when the associated income barely provided sustenance. Chávez lived in both worlds, and
knew what it was like to be both a farmworker and a landowner. Chávez acquired two competing, though related Discourses: his initial primary Discourse was that of Mexican-American growers in Arizona tied to a close-knit extended family community who shared much in common with each other. This Discourse was substantively revised by Chávez’s experience as a migratory farmworker. While some of the physical practices of agricultural work may have been shared between work in California and work in Arizona, nearly everything else was changed.

In addition to the corruption, the work often demanded extraordinary physical capabilities. For example, Chávez describes working the short-handle hoe to thin lettuce:

I would chop out a space with the short-handle hoe in the right hand while I felt with my left to pull out all but one plant as I made the next chop. There was a rhythm, it went very fast ... it's like being nailed to a cross. You have to walk twisted, as you're stopped over, facing the row, and walking perpendicular to it. You are always trying to find the best position because you can't walk completely sideways, it's too difficult, and if you turn the other way, you can't thin (12).

In order for the family to make it, all of the family members worked in the fields. Shortly after leaving Oxnard (when he would have been around 14 years old), Chávez got an hourly job, a rare accomplishment for farm workers at the time. Chávez was paid $.08 an hour to hoe melons, which, like the lettuce description above, was back-breaking work because it required Chávez to walk bent-over down rows that stretched out for one half to one full mile with almost no opportunities to rest. Chávez explains that "On weekends we worked ten hours a day starting at 6:00 in the morning, while during the week I just would work after school" (65). Given these conditions, it is no surprise that Chávez describes himself and his classmates as "men of the world" (65).

Despite the need for Chávez and his siblings to work while going to school, his mother
pushed the children to get an education. As Chávez recalls, "Because my mother was illiterate, she made us go to school. She would say, 'I didn't learn, so you have to go.' Even if we were in a place only one or two or three days, we'd go" (Levy 65). Nevertheless, Chávez decided to drop out from school because his father had been in an automobile accident in 1942. After that incident, his mother and older sister Rita were working in the fields full time to help sustain the family. Chávez recalls that "No one had to tell me how bad off we were. I saw how hard they worked in the fields. It was an automatic thing for me to say, I'll go to work, and I'll go to high school in two years. But I never got there" (73). Chávez’s education was fragmented by his early exit from school in order to work so his family could subsist, but also because of the constant disruptions he experienced as he moved from school to school whenever the family migrated to follow the harvest and the work. Chávez’s mother valued education, but the family couldn’t escape the pressing need to get everyone in the fields, especially once Librado was sidelined.

Later as adults, Chávez and his siblings counted the schools they attended, and came up with thirty-seven different schools; a number that is alarming on its own, is nonetheless, magnified by the fact that Chávez attended the first few years of his eighth-grade education at a single school near his home in the North Gila Valley. When Chávez reflected on the impact of this highly fragmented education, he remarked, "From the accumulation of all the things we had to go through, I can see now that we [Chávez and his siblings] were really pushed back, beaten back, that education had nothing to do with our way of life" (65). And when he was at school, the discrimination, abuse, and general mistreatment of Chávez, his siblings, and Mexican-Americans in general continued to be a negative force. Chávez recalls they often felt like "monkeys in a cage"
rather than valued students (Levy 65).

During his teenage years, Chávez briefly adopted the Pachuco style, which was fashionable for Latino teens at the time. Pachucos, as the teens were called, wore zoot-suits in the early-to mid-1940s predominately in California. Zuit-suits consisted of a long coat and pegged pants worn in a flamboyant style, and were taken up by these young men as a symbol of their collective identity as Mexican-Americans. For Chávez, the Pachuco style was a way of fitting in with his peers. “We needed a lot of guts to wear those [zuit-suit] pants, and we had to be rebellious to do it, because the police and a few of the older people would harass us. But then it was the style, and I wasn’t going to be a square. All the guys I knew liked that style, and I would have felt pretty stupid walking around dressed differently” (82). The older generation, including Chávez’s father, did not like the Pachuco style, “And in Delano [where Chávez lived during this period] there was a whole Mexican-American community who opposed pachuco clothes” (82). Chávez recalls wearing the zuit-suits as a way of rebelling against traditional Mexican culture, including the music, his mother’s use of herbs, and her religion, but not against the notion of being "Mexican." Furthermore, it was a way for Chávez to rebel against the injustices he experienced as a young Mexican-American: “We were a minority group of a minority group. So, in a way, we were challenging cops by being with two or three friends and dressing sharp. But in those days I was prepared for any sacrifice to be able to dress the way I wanted to dress” (83).

Although Chávez eventually recovered his love for "mariachis and all those other [traditional Mexican] things I was rebelling against" (Levy 84), the Pachuco movement shifted Chávez’s primary Discourse, re-orienting it toward a stronger sense of Mexican-American in
contrast to the Mexican Discourses of his parents, represented for Chávez by the music, use of herbs, and so on. As renowned Chicano historian F. Arturo Rosales explains in his influential history of Mexican-American civil rights, *Chicano!*, the Pachucos of the 1940s were part of a generation of Mexican-heritage youths who responded to social injustices, such as discrimination and segregation, by emphasizing their rights to be American. This attitude contrasts with previous generations who often responded to injustices by strengthening their identity as Mexican. This new “Mexican American ideology” carried with it an “irrevocable message of permanency, i.e., the right to live in the U.S. and enjoy constitutional guarantees. Mexican Americans no longer saw themselves as visitors being mistreated but as natives who were denied full equality” (90). These attitudes, evident in Chávez’s comments about his Pachuco experience, were carried forward by Chávez into the early 1950s when he became involved with the Community Service Organization (see below), which focused on addressing the needs of Latino communities by organizing citizenship and voter registration drives for older generations, thereby establishing for these individuals a formal identity as American.

Chávez continued working full time until 1944 when he joined the Navy as a deckhand at the end of World War II, though he never saw combat. During Chávez’s time in the navy, he visited a theater in Delano while on a seventy-two hour leave. In the 1940s, the theaters were segregated by section, which meant blacks and Mexicans had to sit in different sections than white and Japanese patrons, who were not restricted in their seating. While Chávez had accepted this segregation on previous visits in theaters in the San Joaquin Valley, he decided that he "shouldn't accept such discrimination" on this particular visit (Levy 85). Chávez recalls that "It wasn't a
question that I wanted a free choice of where I wanted to be. I decided to challenge the rule even though I was very frightened. Instead of sitting on the right, I sat down on the left" (85). When Chávez was asked to move, he refused, prompting a call to the police, who took him to jail. Chávez wasn't booked with a crime, and he recalls that the sergeant didn't know how to charge Chávez, and that the sergeant’s calls to the district attorney and magistrate didn't result in any specific charge. Chávez was eventually let go, after a lecture from the sergeant. Chávez recalls that "I was angry at what happened, but I didn't know then how to proceed. It was the first time I had challenged rules so brazenly, but in our own way my family had been challenging the growers for some time. That was part of life" (85).

Part of the Chávez family’s worldview was that one had to stand up and respond to injustice, as demonstrated above. It is impossible to say why Chávez chose this particular moment to stand up against the discriminatory policies prevalent in theaters and other public places throughout California and the San Joaquin Valley, as Chávez simply notes that "something told me that I shouldn't accept such discrimination" (85). Both Chávez’s experiences in the field and his brief experience as a Pachuco lay groundwork for taking action against injustices, though, as Chávez’s comments about the theater suggest, he may not have been fully aware of this readiness for action at the time. Nonetheless, it seems to be an important thread weaved into his secondary Discourses as farmworker, Pachuco, serviceman, and Mexican-American citizen. Chávez thus extends his family’s Discourse, folding in its readiness for action in service of socio-cultural rights into these discontinuous secondary Discourses. Viewed from another perspective, Chávez extends these secondary Discourses to forge hybrids that are stratified in relation to his primary
Discourse, yet harmonized with its emphasis on action for others.

Hammerback and Jensen argue that Chávez's experience as a child and young man on his family farm in Arizona and in the many fields of California as a migrant provided for Chávez as a labor organizer the sense of potentialities beyond the frustrating, limiting, and corrupt conditions of migrant farm work. Chávez, too, saw his own potential for successful labor organizing as emerging from his personal experiences as part of a landowning family: "I bitterly missed the ranch. Maybe that is when the rebellion started. Some had been born into the migrant stream. But we had been on the land, and I knew a different way of life. We were poor, but we had liberty. The migrant is poor, and has no freedom" (Levy qtd in Hammerback and Jensen 12).

Chávez’s lifeworld Discourse at this phase of his life, when he was in his early 20s, incorporates elements of various Discourses, including landownership, migratory farm work, Catholic, nonviolent civil action, Navy serviceman, Pachuco, and Mexican-American Discourses. Viewed from the perspective of Chávez’s lifeworld Discourse, each of these secondary Discourses has been layered upon one another, creating continuous and discontinuous relationships between the series of practices that constitute each Discourse. Chávez’s primary Discourse, which he acquired as part of an extended family of ethnic Mexicans living in Arizona, was repeatedly challenged, extended, and hybridized through his experiences in California. Undoubtedly, by the time Chávez reached adulthood, he had acquired the Discourse practices of a migrant farmworker. Moreover, these practices are difficult to dissociate from his primary Discourse, yet they are discontinuous, as evidenced by Chávez’s evocative remark above that while both he and other migrant workers were poor, Chávez had liberty while they knew no freedom.
Chávez straddled multiple worlds, occupying thresholds situated as the interstices between the interwoven strata of his various Discourses, such as grower farmworker and migrant farmworker. From the position of these thresholds, Chávez had available to him certain potentials for action circumscribed by each Discourse. The stratification of experience disperses a series of Discourse practices, yet in the process of stratification, it also extends and makes more complicated the potentials for Discursive action available to the agent. Hybridity means both continuity and discontinuity – sameness and difference – for Chávez because it extends the consonant or familiar elements (such as farm working) in order to fold in the dissonant or unfamiliar elements (such as no freedom).

4. A Tale of Two Mentors: Father Donald McDonnell and Fred Ross

After Chávez returned from the Navy, he married Helen Fabela. Chávez met Helen at a malt shop in Delano when they were both around fifteen years old. Five years later, the two were married, and stayed in a one-room shack near Helen’s family in Delano for about a year. The home had no plumbing, electricity, or heat. After that, the couple moved to San Jose where Chávez’s brother Richard lived with his wife. Chávez spent the next few years working in the fields near San Jose before moving to Northern California to work for a lumber company. After about a year and a half, Chávez and Helen returned to a barrio in San Jose called Sal Si Puedes (get out if you can) where Chávez first met his two key mentors - Father (Fr.) Donald McDonnell and the organizer Fred Ross. Both the philosophical Fr. McDonnell and the pragmatic Ross were native Californian Euro-Americans who had committed their life work to serving the poor Mexican-American communities in the state (Pawel 26). Through Chávez’s experience with Fr. Mc-
Donnell and Ross, he began reading a range of texts on social justice, and to work as and write about being a community organizer for the Community Service Organization. These experiences led directly to his pivotal role in organizing migrant farm-working labor in the 1960s.

While Chávez’s youth was marked by the acquisition of several Discourses with little meta-cognitive learning, Chávez's work with Fr. McDonnell was both an apprenticeship as well as a teacher-student relationship. Fr. McDonnell, who was part of a group of liberal Catholic ministers dedicated to social justice and known as the "mission band" (Ferriss and Sandoval 46), came to Sal Si Puedes because there was no Catholic church in this Mexican-American barrio (Levy 89). McDonnell and Chávez were almost the same age and as Chávez explains, they "became great friends when [Chávez] began to help [Fr. McDonnell], doing a little carpentry work, cleaning up the place, getting some chairs, and painting some old benches. [Chávez] also drove for him and helped him recite mass at the bracero camps and in the county jail" (89). The Bracero program was a program organized by the federal government that brought Mexican nationals to labor camps in California to work in the fields. These Mexicans had fewer rights than the local Mexican-American population, were easily replaced, and helped to drive down wages
throughout the agricultural industry. Chávez biographer and scholar Mario T. García argues that Fr. McDonnell "took on the responsibility of completing the education that César had never had. But it was a special kind of education centered in Fr. McDonnell’s own personal interest in social justice and nonviolence" (8).

Fr. McDonnell was working to teach the farmworkers around San Jose about "the church's social doctrines on labor organizing and social justice, hoping that they would begin to organize themselves to improve their lot" (Griswold del Castillo and García 23). Chávez's education from Fr. McDonnell is an outgrowth of this larger mission undertaken by the priest and dovetails with Chávez’s upbringing. After Chávez accompanied Fr. McDonnell on trips to the strikes in Tracy and Stockton, he started doing "a lot of reading" with Fr. McDonnell. As Chávez recalls:

9 A number of factors led to the Bracero program. After World War II, Europe, outside Russia, relied on U.S. agricultural imports because of the widespread destruction of the war. The American southwest quickly grew as the country's major agricultural region because of its vast stretches of land and the rate at which it modernized and mechanized its farm work. California surpassed Iowa as the top agricultural state in the union by 1945. Thus, new sources of labor were needed to continue the region's development, especially since the existing farmworkers were moving to urban centers as the war got underway. Manuel Gonzalez, the noted historian of Mexican-American history, observes that "Mexico was the obvious answer" for this new source of labor since the war had cut off Asia from the labor market. President Roosevelt brokered a deal with Mexico that was ratified in the summer of 1942. The new bracero program brought more than 250,000 Mexicans to work on American farms by 1947. The program was renewed several times throughout the 1950s, and remained relatively unchanged despite updates at each renewal. By the time of the program's conclusion in 1966, about 4.8 million Mexicans worked in the program (174-5). Braceros were supposed to return to Mexico at the end of the growing season, and were only supposed to be used when there was insufficient supply of local workers. However, in practice, Braceros often became cheap labor used by the growers to lower their costs, thus causing deep divides between the Mexican-Americans who shared much in common with the Braceros.
That's when I started reading the Encyclicals [including Pope Leo XIII's *Revum Novari-um*, which proclaimed that the Catholic Church supported "workers and social justice" (Hammerback and Jensen 16)], St. Francis [of Assisi, patron saint of the Franciscans, an order of Catholic priests dedicated to serving the poor], and Gandhi and having the case for attaining social justice explained. As Father McDonnell followed social justice legislation very closely, he introduced me to the transcripts of the Senate LaFollette Committee hearings held in 1940 in Los Angeles. I remember three or four volumes on agriculture, describing the Associated Farmers, their terror and strikebreaking tactics, and their financing by banks, utilities, and big corporation (91).

Chávez's education with Fr. McDonnell thus included spiritual texts that emphasize social justice (Encyclicals, St. Francis, and Gandhi), transcripts of a major governmental hearing; a socio-political/economic text that emphasizes agricultural labor concerns, and general political texts (Chávez also read Machiavelli and de Tocqueville with McDonnell [Ferriss and Sandoval 47]).

These readings started to "form a picture" for Chávez that connected spirituality with political action aimed at social justice. Chávez describes this emerging picture:

> When I read the biography of St. Francis of Assisi, I was moved when he went before the Moslem prince and offered to walk through fire to end a bloody war. And I still remember how he talked and made friends with a wolf that killed several men. St. Francis was a gentle and humble man. In the St. Francis biography, there was a reference to Gandhi and others who practiced nonviolence. That was a theme that struck a very responsive chord, probably because of the foundation laid by mother. So the next thing I read after St. Francis was the Louis Fischer biography of Gandhi (91).

Chávez recalls that when he read the biography of Gandhi, he "knew very little about him except what I read in the papers and saw in the newsreels. There was one scene I never forgot. Gandhi was going to a meeting with a high British official in India. There were throngs of people as he walked all but naked out of his little hut. Then he was filmed in his loincloth, sandals, and shawl walking up the steps of the palace" (92). The scene symbolized for Chávez the point that Gandhi “didn’t ask people to do things he couldn’t do himself.” But Chávez did not try to copy and paste
Gandhi’s tactics into his own work. “You’ve got to take the whole philosophy and try to adapt it to your needs. I want to experiment with some of the things [Gandhi] did but not imitate him, because I don’t think that can be done.” While these comments were recorded in the early 1970s during Chávez’s oral interviews with Levy, they demonstrate nonetheless the power that Chávez’s reading and learning had on his worldview and practice as an organizer.

Indeed, the Fisher biography had such an impact on Chávez that he worked to read everything he could on Gandhi throughout the rest of his life. Griswold del Catillo and García argue that "The Mahatma's values struck a responsive chord that echoed in Chávez's experience. Gandhi spoke about the complete sacrifice of one-self for others, about the need for self-discipline and self-abnegation in order to achieve a higher good. These were values that Mexican farm workers could understand, not only in the life of Christ but in their own family experience" (23). Further, Gandhi’s teachings strongly echoed Chávez's mother's own spirituality of non-violence. Chávez’s life-long effort to learn how Gandhi organized others to solve social and political problems is a key example of how hybridizations include both consonant and dissonant elements, harmonized by Chávez as a nonviolent Discourse. In this case, Chávez extends his mother’s deep commitment to nonviolence and the broader Mexican cultural tradition of self-sacrifice for a higher good by folding in the dissonant elements of Gandhi’s focus on action for political ends (see Chapter Four for further discussion of how Chávez incorporated Gandhi into his own hybridized Discourse practices).

Together, Chávez’s recollection of reading with Fr. McDonnell suggests that Chávez was actively making connections with his previous experiences - perhaps reflecting on and gaining
new perspectives on his mother's non-violent spirituality and contextualizing his own experience as a migrant worker in a broader socio-political framework. Chávez recalls that Fr. McDonnell once showed Chávez "a picture of a worker's shanty and a picture of a grower's mansion; a picture of a labor camp and a picture of a high-priced building in San Francisco owned by the same grower. When things were pointed out to me, I began to see, but I didn't learn everything the first time" (91). Chávez’s readiness potential to recognize and respond to social injustice was already highly developed through his work in the fields with his family as a migrant worker. However, with his fragmented eighth-grade education, Chávez "knew a lot about the work, but ... didn't know anything about the economics" much of which he learned from working with Fr. McDonnell. Chávez’s Discourse provided him an expert’s view on the nature of farm work from the perspective of being a farmworker. Fr. McDonnell extended this readiness to act (understood here as a capacity to identify, analyze, and respond to injustices in the fields) by folding in new Discourses – new strata – of theological, political, and historical Discourses. These hybridizations would become closely aligned with Chávez’s lifeworld Discourse, as his work in the C.S.O., and later in the National Farm Workers union and the United Farm Workers union demonstrate.

But Fr. McDonnell’s lessons were not all directly rooted in conversations of the texts that often lasted past midnight (Hammerback and Jensen 16). In one powerful example that would have a significant impact on Chávez as an organizer, Fr. McDonnell showed Chávez how texts can enable agency. Fr. McDonnell worked with Chávez to use legal texts to help others. Chávez recalls that a Mexican woman who attended Fr. McDonnell’s masses needed help when her mother died, for the family was too poor to afford burial services. Chávez's first response was to
solicit donations from the community and see if Fr. McDonnell could persuade some of the Catholic Charities to help with the cost. Since this had happened a few times in the past, Chávez assumed that Fr. McDonnell would simply agree to follow this plan of action. Instead, Fr. McDonnell suggested that they claim the body and bury it themselves, outside of the expensive funerary industry. Chávez thought it couldn't be done, but Fr. McDonnell listed what they could do to resolve the problem themselves.

When Chávez, Fr. McDonnell, and the daughter went to the hospital to claim the body, the hospital worker stated the three of them could not recover the body, and that they would have to hire an undertaker. Chávez recalls that "Father McDonnell said no, and he pulled out the health and welfare code" and pointed out to the hospital worker that the next of kin could claim the body. Fr. McDonnell’s act of using a text to claim legal agency "started an episode that lasted about three hours" in which the question about whether the next of kin could claim the body moved up the ladder from the hospital supervisor, to the administrator, county counsel, district attorney, and finally, the California state attorney general, Pat Brown, who said "Sure they have a right to claim the body" (90).

Chávez would later use this same strategy in the Community Service Organization and the United Farm Workers (91). It was a powerful lesson for Chávez, who at the time, was still a farmworker earning just enough to survive with his wife and young children. Having lived a life with little access to political power, Fr. McDonnell’s example showed Chávez the power of legal texts to invoke authority and reposition oneself as an empowered agent. As Mario García argues, Fr. McDonnell’s education of Chávez "reinforced many of the same principles that his mother
and grandmother had taught him: nonviolence, helping those in need, sacrificing for others, re-
spect for others, and for one's self” (8-9). The Discourses Chávez acquired from his mother and
Mama Tella are tied to the Discourse Chávez learned from Fr. McDonnell by similar themes
(self-sacrifice in service of others, help for the needy, and nonviolence), yet they use different
tactics to fulfill their shared objectives. For instance, Chávez’s mother showed him how to sacri-
fice himself to serve the poor and hungry members of the community outside of formal social
institutions by centering this service in and around the family home. Fr. McDonnell, in contrast,
showed Chávez how to mobilize formal social and political institutions such as the law, hospital
administrators, etc., to serve others. Fr. McDonnell’s lessons for self-sacrifice are different than
Chávez’s mother’s practices in that the self becomes an agent for others in need of help by acting
as a wedge that leverages dominant power on the behalf of others. This modification of Chávez’s
primary Discourse represents a hybridization of his primary Discourse, and it would become crit-
ical for his work as a community organizer, and later as a labor organizer. This example thus
demonstrates again how hybrid Discourses stratify dissonant elements along with consonant el-
ements of ways of saying-being-doing-feeling. Each strata further entails readiness to act in cer-
tain ways, such as citing the text of the law to negotiate a desired outcome, or sacrificing one’s
self for the benefit of others.

The second pivotal figure that Chávez met in Sal Si Puedes was Fred Ross, the labor or-
ganizer and founder of Community Service Organization (CSO), a foundation that worked to or-
ganize Mexican-American communities throughout California in order to address the systemic
failure of regular civic government to address the needs and concerns of this population. Mc-
Donnell recommended Chávez to Fred Ross, who was working to organize individuals into a CSO board that could address the issues affecting the Mexican-American community in San Jose. Chávez recalls that when he met Fred Ross in June 1952, and began following Fred to house parties where they would try to convince other community members to join the CSO, "Fred became sort of my hero. I saw him organize, and I wanted to learn. Right away I began to see all of the things that he did, and I was amazed – how he could handle one situation and have a million things going in his mind at the same time" (Levy 99). Though Chávez generally says less about his mentorship with Fred Ross than he has about McDonnell, he underlines his work with Fred Ross and the CSO as a foundational experience. Chávez recalls: "I learned quite a bit from studying Gandhi, but the first practical steps I learned from the best organizer I know, Fred Ross ... He changed my life" (Levy 93).

Immediately after meeting Fred, Chávez began following Fred as he worked to organize the community. On the first day Fred met with Chávez in a house meeting hosted by Chávez at his own home, where Chávez was so impressed by Fred, despite a deep suspicion before the meeting began, that Chávez followed Ross to his next appointment (99). Fred recalls his first day working with Chávez that "he understood it almost immediately, as soon as I drew the picture. He got the point – the whole question of power and the development of power within the group. He made the connections very quickly between the civic weakness of the group and the social neglect in the barrio, and also conversely, what could be done about that social neglect once the power was developed" (Levy 102). Fred describes Chávez as someone who had an ability to read the social situation both in a micro way (e.g., the dynamics within a group of 4-5 people at a
house meeting) as well as a macro way (e.g., the relationships between community problems and political power).

Once Chávez joined the CSO in San Jose, he began working on a voter registration drive. At first, Chávez shadowed Fred in the voter registration drive, but after Fred left San Jose, he left Chávez in charge of the voter registration. Chávez immediately changed the tactics used by the group, replacing the college student volunteers with Chávez’s Mexican-American friends and drinking buddies. In just a few months, Chávez and the San Jose CSO had registered 6,000 people, which threatened the Republican Central Committee, leading them to harass voters at the polls with questions like "Are you a citizen? Read from here!" People were scared away" (Levy 104). Fred returned to San Jose to help Chávez and the CSO deal with the Republicans. He urged the CSO to write a letter to the US Attorney General, but the San Jose CSO President, Herman Gallegos, "said he couldn't [sign] because he was working with the welfare department, and this would jeopardize his job." The rest of the committee gave similar statements, until Chávez, who was the newest member of the board (and as he puts it, "probably the least person on the board") volunteered to sign the letter (105).

The act of signing put Chávez's name in the public record, and led to a visit from the FBI to investigate the CSO's accusation that the Republicans were illegally intimidating Mexican-American voters. The FBI brought Chávez and the Republicans together for a meeting, "which turned into a shouting match. That's the first time [Chávez] started shouting at Anglos, shouting back at them" (106). The FBI said they didn't want the same kind of problems they were having in Mississippi out in California, so they told the Republicans that they couldn't intimidate people...
at the polls. Later, the Republicans accused Chávez of being a communist (at the height of the
McCarthy era) with articles in the local papers. These reports had negative effects on Chávez's
relationships with his co-workers at the lumber mill where he worked. As he responded to these
accusations, Chávez relied on Fr. McDonnell and other Catholic Priests who cleared his name in
the Mexican-American community. But more importantly, Chávez notes, he began to be ap-
proached by other liberals in the community. Chávez recalls:

From then on, every little place I went, I met the liberal lawyer, the liberal teacher, the
liberal social worker. We would get together, and I got an education. I was pretty green,
and I was impressed by almost anyone. I wanted to learn. I began to grow and to see a lot
of things that I hadn't seen before. My eyes opened, and I paid more attention to political
and social events. I also began to read in a more disciplined way, concentrating at first on
labor, on biographies of labor organizers like John L. Lewis and Eugene Debbs and the
Knights of Labor (108).

While Chávez describes his first experiences reading about social and political issues with Fr.
McDonnell as an education directed by the priest, Chávez's comments here indicate that he has
taken ownership of that education and has begun to cultivate a similar reading-for-learning prac-
tice on his own. Furthermore, Chávez’s reading on issues of social justice, nonviolence, and la-
bor included at this time a wide range of texts including readings from Catholicism, Gandhi, the
U.S. Labor Movement, and congressional documents. These strands represent not only an expan-
sion of Chávez’s reading practices, but also a folding-in of alternative worldviews into his prima-
ry and secondary Discourses. For example, while Debbs developed an eloquent, principled, and
intellectual approach to organizing that was influenced by Marx, entailed self-sacrifices (such as
serving prison terms), and featured arguments often presented in terms consonant with Christian
Discourses, Lewis was known for using more aggressive tactics, including violence, election
fraud, and red baiting that, nonetheless, earned him a great deal of success and a loyal following.

After the November election and his confrontation with the FBI and the Republicans, Chávez continued to work on the San Jose registration drive. Chávez needed more deputy registrars to help register members of the community, but met stiff resistance from the registrar. Notably, Fred had successfully negotiated with the registrar before he left San Jose:

Fred was gone, and we needed more deputy registrars to get ready for the general election. Fred had fought the registrar of voters before the primaries and won. Now it was my turn. Although I was pretty frightened, I got mad right away and lost my fear. I got into a big argument with the registrar and walked out of his office. That's when I realized you can't do anything by talking. So we began to harass him with telephone calls. I got a lot of people, members of church groups, labor leaders, everyone I could, to call him. Then every single day I called him, came to see him, and had a big argument with him. (109)

In this formative experience for Chávez, he appears to lack the Discursive tools to successfully negotiate with the registrar as Fred had done prior to Chávez’s attempt described here. Chávez won the deputy registrars that he wanted in the first place, but not until he mobilized the community to insert their collective political power. The problem from Chávez’s perspective was that talking afforded Chávez no leverage over the bureaucratic power of the registrar, but by organizing bodies to protest the registrar’s decision, Chávez found an alternative power source with which he could negotiate to meet the organization’s objectives. Fred saw this accomplishment as "a great thing," but Chávez did not see the importance. Chávez recalls, "I was so green, that I knew nothing about power structures, so I wasn't confused like a few college guys in the CSO leadership who knew too much and were fearful of the power structure" (109). This instance represents for Chávez an important learning experience about how bureaucratic political Discourses
function, for after that event, Chávez understood that argument alone wouldn’t win him success at the negotiating table. Instead, from that point on, Chávez wouldn’t enter into a potential confrontation without having some kind of political power over that person, such as the power of the community to demonstrate its support of Chávez’s position through mass phone calls.

The registration drive, however, was limited because of the relatively few number of American citizens in the broader Mexican-American community, so Fred began a citizenship drive that included ten citizenship classes meeting twice each week. As part of that effort, Chávez worked to help assemble the required evidence for citizenship applications. Chávez explains:

We were confronted with people who wanted to become citizens, but their immigration status was not up to date. Those cases were a lot of work because documentary evidence was needed that they had remained in this country since the time they had arrived. Proof was needed back to 1924 when the law was passed, but I would get evidence back to when they entered the country, whether it was 1924, 1905, or 1890, because it made it easier for the case. Reconstructing a person's whole life was hard because people were old, impatient, and couldn't remember. There were many of those cases, and it took a lot of time (110).

This work required Chávez to work with a number of different documents. First, it required an understanding of the law and the application form to which he had to attach the supporting documents. Second, Chávez had to be able to read and interpret any number of Spanish documents that could possibly satisfy requirements listed on the English application form. This practice extends the use of documents to acquire some kind of formal status evident in Chávez’s prior practices, including when Chávez demonstrated knowledge of Catholic theology without having read the Bible in Catechism classes in order to gain membership within the Catholic church, and when
Chávez and Fr. McDonnell referred to the law in order to claim their agency to recover the woman’s body from the hospital. The differences between each of these examples are notable; however, the commonalities string them together in a vertical stratification when considered from a genealogical perspective, for each example illustrates how Chávez learned through practice in various social contexts how citing texts can make available certain kinds of potentials for action. Throughout Chávez’s work in the C.S.O., this practice of using documents to leverage political, legal, and social power became a core part of his Discourse as a community organizer, as discussed in more detail below.

Chávez focused on the citizenship project at first, but the scope of this work soon grew. At first, he did the work in the evenings when he came home from work, but Chávez found that he needed to take time off work and to spend weekends working with individuals in the community. Eventually, Chávez left his job altogether when Fred Ross offered him a paid position as a CSO organizer. Chávez first left San Jose for Oakland, where he organized a CSO in 1953. After Oakland, Chávez went to Madera, California, just north of Fresno in the San Joaquin Valley. Chávez and his family left with the understanding that they would likely remain in any given location for about ninety days before moving on to the next community. At each stop, Chávez would work to establish a CSO board that could address the community's needs in a self-sufficient manner.

Together, Fr. McDonnell and Fred Ross's combined training laid the foundation for what would become Chávez's spirituality, argues García in The Gospel of César Chávez. "Just as McDonnell had furthered the spiritual training that would be the seedbed of [Chávez's] work, Fred
Ross taught César how to organize people around issues that mattered to them. But the two were interrelated. Chávez's spirituality was based on his love of and care for others and their liberation from poverty and oppression" (9). Further, García argues, this spiritually-based worldview was grounded in the Latin American Catholic groups who were responding to Pope John XXIII's Vatican Council II, which urged the Catholic Church to become "more relevant to the modern world" (9). Chávez read texts that were clearly spiritually grounded, including biographies of Gandhi and St. Augustine, as well as the Papal Encyclicals calling for a Catholicism focused on improving the living conditions of the world’s poor laborers. Other texts, though, expanded Chávez’s understanding of socio-political events and labor movements, including the Senate proceedings on labor and farm work, as well as the biographies of Lewis and Debbs. Through his mentorship with Fr. McDonnell and Ross, Chávez synthesized these disparate worldviews, folding them into primary Discourse practices already available to Chávez, especially his practice of making self-sacrifices to take action that helps others, which was spiritually grounded by his mother’s habit of helping others in tribute of St. Eduvigis. As García notes: "César was not schooled in liberation theology, but he practiced it nonetheless" (9), and his practice constituted a hybrid Discourse that brought together widely dissonant Discourses under the banner of penitential service for others.

*Chávez Commits to Organize: Community Service Organization (1954-1959)*

Once Chávez was recruited by Fred Ross to join the Sal Si Puedes C.S.O., he quickly became involved in organizing other members of the community to serve through house meetings, eventually working with Fred in the voter registration campaign, and serving as the first Vice
President for the Sal Si Puedes C.S.O. chapter. A few months later, in 1953, Fred put Chávez in charge of the Decoto C.S.O., and hired him to serve the California C.S.O. as an organizer for just $35 a week through the Industrial Areas Foundation, an organization headed by Saul Alinsky that supported local community organizing efforts (Matthiessen 48). Chávez’s responsibilities in this role required him to help communities develop their own C.S.O. using many of the same organizing tactics Fred Ross introduced to Chávez in the Sal Si Puedes chapter.

Chávez was sent to Oakland in one of his first major assignments as a paid C.S.O. organizer to set up a new C.S.O. chapter in Oakland. Following the pattern established by Fred Ross, and used by Fred to recruit Chávez in Sal Si Puedes, Chávez began to organize in Oakland by setting up house meetings. At the house meetings, Chávez would listen to the community members’ concerns, drum up support for the C.S.O., and urge attendees to set up additional house meetings at their own homes. Late at night, after the meetings had ended, Chávez spent his time, as he explains, “going over the whole thing, playing the tape back, trying to see why people laughed at one point, or why they were for one thing and against another” and “learning to read and write … I had left school in the seventh grade and my reading wasn’t the best” (Dunne 69). As Chávez moved from community to community, spending about 8 weeks in each location, he wrote daily activity reports that described his organizing activities for Ross and Alinsky, an impressive accomplishment given that Chávez started focusing on developing his reading and writing skills once he started moving around the state. As Chávez describes the activity reports,

I worked between fourteen and sixteen hours a day, seven days a week, but I was young. I could go day in and day out. I loved it. At night I’d come home, lie down in bed, and, because Alinsky wanted daily activity reports, I would dictate them to Helen. I don’t
know how I did it, and I’d never do it again, but Helen would write longhand as I dictated, just piles of it every single day. Eventually it became a habit. These days I no longer write daily reports down, but at night, the last thing I do is just review what happened that day. I cannot sleep unless I start in the morning and go step by step, through the whole day (116).

While many of the early activity reports are indeed written in Helen Chávez’s script, there are also many documents written either in Chávez’s distinctive script, or are typed by Chávez.

In the following section, I discuss the findings from my inductive coding of Chávez’s activity reports housed in the Walter P. Reuther Labor Archives’ Fred R. Ross collection. I analyzed Chávez’s activity reports by focusing on how Chávez used texts and textual practices in his work as a C.S.O. organizer, and I primarily chose texts that were typed or written in Chávez’s script. In my analysis, I coded 64 documents that span from late 1954 through early 1957 for the following themes: using texts or textual practices primarily for C.S.O. business (evident in 69% of the documents); using texts or textual practices primarily to help others (evident in 41% of the documents); using texts or textual practices primarily for purposes related to mass-media (evident in 50% of the documents); and using texts primarily for legal purposes (evident in 13% of the documents)10. In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss the findings, illustrating each code with examples from the document set, as well as Chávez’s recollections from his work during this period as recorded in his oral interview with Levy in order to develop a more robust description of Chávez’s Discourse practices during the mid-1950s.

10 The documents were also coded for one additional theme (using texts primarily for correspondence purposes), but the findings were too limited to make any significant claims about Chávez’s Discourse practices.
Throughout his career working with C.S.O., Chávez continually found himself helping others negotiate with socio-political institutions. As Chávez explains, often the problems that he helped others addressed emerged in the small and intimate CSO house meetings:

When we held a CSO house meeting, there always were one, two or three persons that would want to talk to me alone after the meeting. They’d bring their personal problems. There were many. They might need a letter written or someone to interpret for them at the welfare department, the doctors office, or the police. Maybe they were not getting enough welfare aid, or their check was taken away, or their kids were thrown out of school. Maybe they had been taken by crooked salesmen selling fences, aluminum siding, or freezers that hold food for a month. Since I had the inclination and the training, helping people came naturally. I wasn't thinking in terms of organizing members, but just a duty I had to do. That goes back to my mother's training. It was not until later that I realized that this was a good organizing tool" (Levy 110-1).

As this comment points out, Chávez’s work in the C.S.O. was premised on his hybridization of primary Discourses with other secondary Discourses that he became acquainted with through his work with Fr. McDonnell and Fred Ross. In this instance, Chávez underlines his intrinsic motivation or inclination as well as his training to understand and respond to the community members’ needs. Moreover, Chávez understood this work not as part of a work obligation, which it was, but rather as something closer to deeply held long-term goals and orientations toward helping others. This attitude is explicitly grounded here in the lessons he learned from his mother. In the moment of working with community members struggling with significant problems in their community, Chávez’s hybrid Discourse provided for him a readiness potential to recognize their problems and to take the appropriate steps necessary to respond to those issues, such as welfare, health, or policing needs.

At the heart of Chávez’s approach to working with communities was listening to what the
community members had to say about the community and its problems. Chávez learned this tactic both as a participant in Ross’s house meetings, but also through his own guided practice while he worked with Ross in the Sal si Puede C.S.O. chapter, and later by listening to recordings of his meetings and reflecting on how the meeting attendees responded to him. In order to build relationships with the communities he worked in, Chávez used his emergent literacies to help them address their personal and/or communal concerns.

Thus, Chávez used texts to help others in a variety of ways. On the one hand, this orientation to helping people was deeply embedded in the entire C.S.O. enterprise - hold house meetings to inductively identify the concerns marginalized Latino communities face, organize them through voter registration drives, citizenship drives, and through the instrument of C.S.O. as a mechanism for leveraging the voting power of a community to get city officials to address its concerns. On the other hand, and at a deeper level, helping others without concern for oneself was a practice engrained in the cultural background of Chávez’s family, stemming at least from his mother’s practice of helping the less fortunate during the Depression and throughout the family’s exodus as migrant farmworkers. This rich bed of experience cultivated for Chávez a readiness to sacrifice his own interests for the common good.

In his role as a C.S.O. organizer, Chávez helped members of the communities he worked in to complete a range of official forms, including citizenship/immigration papers, visa applications, voter registration efforts, passport applications, accounting books, income tax forms, official affidavits, unemployment and welfare applications, and forms related to deportation proceedings. Overwhelmingly, the primary focus of Chávez’s efforts to help others fill out or com-
plete official forms related to citizenship and immigration paperwork, which was a key political
tactic in the C.S.O. model of community organization. This work became possible following the
passage of the McCarren-Walter Act of 1952, a federal statute that revised U.S. Immigration and
Nationalization policies to allow individuals who were 55 years or older and who had been living
in the United States for at least twenty years to apply for citizenship (*Organize!*).

Assisting others complete immigration paperwork required Chávez to navigate a wide
range of Mexican and American documents that could serve as evidence from the government’s
perspective of one’s history in the United States. As Chávez wrote in one report from January 13,
1956,

> Mrs. Maria Briones called today she wants advice on Immigration and Naturalization. [T]here is no record of her crossing the border. In order to legalize her stay in this country I have to secure documentary evidence to prove her residence since 1924 – I wrote letters to the following; Husband’s employment records, Children Birth and Baptismal certificates, Children school records of attendance, and to her former Employers.

In the process of assisting others, Chávez must identify texts that can serve as evidence in sup-
port of an argument that the individual in question has fulfilled the statutory requirements for
citizenship. As this example suggests, doing so required Chávez to identify indirect evidence,
such as Mrs. Briones’ children's record of school attendance to establish her residency in the
United States. As Chávez describes the process of helping others applying for citizenship whose
“immigration status was not up to date” in his oral interviews with Levy:

> Those cases were a lot of work because documentary evidence was needed that they had remained in this country since the time they had arrived. Proof was needed back to 1924 when the law was passed, but I would get evidence back to when they entered the country, whether it was 1924, 1905, or 1890, because it made it easier for the case. Reconstructing a person’s whole life was hard because people were old, impatient, and couldn’t
remember. There were many of those cases, and they took a lot of time. At first I did this work in the evening, after getting off the job. But soon I didn’t have enough time because there was other help people needed. I started taking time off work to do it on my own, a half hour, or one or two hours off. The boss didn’t like it, but I got by with it. Then I’d just take off a whole day. I felt I had to do it. (110)

As Chávez’s description of the process suggests, assembling the documentary evidence was a time-consuming effort that despite its difficulty, was tied to Chávez’s deep commitment to self-sacrifice in the service of others. Furthermore, this process demonstrates an important extension of Chávez’s understanding that texts hold political agency, which he learned when he helped Fr. McDonnell recovered a body from the hospital for burial.

Chávez also helped others through the C.S.O. by reproducing various texts, including C.S.O. ballots, announcement cards for special events like C.S.O. meetings and Bingo nights, meeting notes, C.S.O. Treasurer’s reports, letters, lesson plans, visa documents, and C.S.O. constitutions. Other ways that Chávez helped individuals by using texts other than completing paperwork or copying texts included interpreting various texts related to a welfare application, giving advice about how to respond to a traffic ticket, responding to a citation for violation of a local building ordinance, helping to write invitations for a BAR-B-Q fundraiser, sharing a book that discusses how to hold a fair-type fundraising event, and asking a journalist friend to write a story about one of the community member’s young child who needed financial resources to combat his leukemia. What is striking in this inventory is that Chávez didn’t really start reading and writing until 1952 when he first began working with Fr. McDonnell and Fred Ross, and thus developed the readiness to practice these new literacies in only a few years.

When taken together, the textual practices that Chávez mobilized to help others meet
their goals illustrate how Chávez’s lifelong practices of service for others became deeply intertwined with his emergent capacities to use legal and civic texts for the purposes of engaging with socio-political institutions and leveraging dominant power structures on behalf of his community. Furthermore, when the range of reading and writing practices required to complete tasks like generating textual evidence of residency and producing an accurate and persuasive application for citizenship are taken into consideration, we can also see the growth in Chávez’s capacity to work with dominant texts. Given that Chávez’s awareness of and readiness to read socio-political texts only began to develop in 1952 when he first began working with Fr. McDonnell, the volume of Chávez’s use of various textual practices to help others work with and against social institutions demonstrates an emergent sophistication in Chávez’s readiness to act, evident in the variety of types of reading Chávez practiced during this time, including examples of organizing labor (Lewis and Debbs biographies), texts focused on spiritual values and practices (St. Augustine, Papal Encyclicals, Gandhi), and texts focused on political issues (Gandhi, Senate hearings).

While Chávez’s practice of helping others through textual practices certainly fulfilled his mission as a community organizer, Chávez also engaged in a range of textual practices more closely tied to official C.S.O. business. For instance, each C.S.O. chapter was governed by a board elected by the membership and defined by a set of by-laws approved by the community members. In the course of working with local C.S.O. boards, Chávez used texts in a variety of ways, including reading the by-laws from other C.S.O. chapters as models for the establishment of a new chapter’s by-laws, working with community members to draft and adopt formal by-laws for the chapter, writing letters to congressional representatives and leaders from other national
organizations like the NAACP, working with the Treasurer to help him/her keep the financial records, representing the local C.S.O.’s interests by suggesting changes to a radio script on farmworker issues, and working with C.S.O. officers to draft meeting agendas.

Chávez worked with both print and radio media to publicize the C.S.O. Chávez routinely contacted local newspapers regarding articles that publicized C.S.O.’s efforts, including voter registration drives, special interest meetings on relevant topics like police abuse of Mexican youths, and other unspecified C.S.O. business that Chávez described simply as “the work of C.S.O.” Also, Chávez would occasionally send clippings of local newspaper articles to Fred Ross and Saul Alinsky, and Ross would return the favor.

Chávez worked with both English and Spanish language radio programs to advertise C.S.O. activities. While Chávez most frequently contacted radio media about events of interest, he also wrote scripts for a radio program in at least one instance. In January of 1957, the C.S.O. president “asked if [Chávez] could write Radio Script for this Coming Sunday. Program script has to be in today before 4:00 p.m. started writing script immediately and took to Radio Station waited for approval of Script by Station Manager.”

In January 1957, Chávez worked with the San Jose C.S.O. to produce a brochure that would publicize C.S.O.’s work in the community. To do that, Chávez worked to collect statements from local civic and community leaders commenting on C.S.O., including the Vice Mayor, the members of a C.S.O. project funded by Ford Motor Co., the local Juvenile Department Director, County Supervisor, and Fr. McDonnell, the Catholic Priest who worked with and mentored Chávez when he first moved to San Jose in 1952. Chávez also worked closely with other C.S.O.
members, as well as the local printer that the group chose to use to print the brochure to develop
the layout of the brochure.

One of Chávez’s primary responsibilities in organizing a C.S.O. chapter was to combine
citizenship classes with voter registration drives. These initiatives were shared among C.S.O.
chapters across the state in the 1950s as they allowed each local chapter to develop political
power. Often the classes were presented to the community through a partnership between
Chávez, the C.S.O., and the local public school board. For instance, in January 1956, Chávez be-
gan to set up classes in San Jose, and “met with Mrs. Schosser, head of the Adult Education De-
partment San Jose Public schools and two of the teachers to discuss the lesson plan and also Mrs.
Schosser wanted to know if it would alright if the school could help in preparing the plan espe-
cially in Spanish.” Chávez also worked with other organizations, such as the Daughters of the
American Revolution, to develop the citizenship classes.

While Chávez experienced few problems establishing classes in San Jose, the local au-
thorities in other communities occasionally posed significant obstacles to establishing these core
C.S.O. missions. For instance, as Chávez explains students enrolled in the Bakersfield C.S.O.
citizenship class

were told by the teacher that every body had to speak and read English to become citi-
zens so the older people just stayed away from the classes[.] I send post cards and visited
some of them trying to straighten the error made by their teacher. He also turned some of
the younger people because he said I am not qualify to teach in English. The arrange-
ment made with the principle of the school was to hold everyone in the same class until
there were enough to start two class rooms one in English and one in Spanish. I have
also talked to the teacher and explained the McCarren Act [McCarren-Walter Act] so that
he understands fully who can take the examination in Spanish and who can’t.
The McCarren-Walter Act of 1952 outlined statutory requirements for immigration and naturalization (the process by which a foreign alien becomes a citizen of The United States) by bringing together the patchwork of prior laws related to immigration and naturalization as well as court interpretations of immigration policy into one statute for the first time (Bennett 130). According to the statute, applicants for citizenship must be able to demonstrate a “fundamental” understanding of U.S. history and government, as well as “an understanding of the English language, including an ability to read, write, and speak words in ordinary usage in the English language,” with an exception for applicants “over fifty years of age” and living in the U.S. for at least twenty years on the effective date of the act (Statute Ch.2 Sec. 312 (1) and (2)), which was December 24, 1952 (130). Unlike other examples where Chávez used texts to leverage social and political power on behalf of the Latino/a community’s interests, the Bakersfield conflict illustrates Chávez taking direct action with local officials and citing specific texts in these inter-personal encounters. Chávez’s interaction with socially and politically empowered officials formed a key of his responsibilities as a C.S.O. organizer. While we don’t know for sure the cultural background of many of the individuals Chávez interacts with, given the intense discrimination and segregation of Mexican-Americans in California during this period, it is unlikely that many of these individuals were of Mexican heritage.

Chávez also worked with local businesses to improve C.S.O. chapters’ ability to meet the needs of their communities. For example, in late summer 1956, Chávez worked with three other members of the San Jose chapter to seek funding from Ford Motor Co. for the C.S.O. Youth Programs. As the group prepared to make their pitch to James King, Community Relations Director
for Ford Motor Company at Milpitas, they discussed their plans with Fred Ross. As Chávez ex-
plains,

Fred gave the group pointers on what were the best points to bring up when we met with
King. It was agreed on that some of the most effective points to cover would be The type
of Organization C.S.O. is, Its history and Sponsors, Who endorses the Group Nationally,
State wide and Locally, Its accomplishments in San Jose with emphasis on the Youth
programs, and the accomplishments. It was further suggested that [Chávez] should get
letters from various County and City Public Officials to ascertain our claims.

In preparing their pitch for funding, the group broke the overall presentation into sections.

Chávez’s role was to “start the discussion by informing Mr. King the type of Organization the
C.S.O. is, the History, and National and State endorsers as well as the sponsors.” Others present-
ed information more specifically related to the Youth Program, including its unique approach to
working with youths, its efforts to limit delinquency and connect youths to employment pro-
grams, and the necessary organizational structures required to distribute any funding from Ford
Motor Co. Notably, this proposal eventually won funding not from the local Ford Motor Co., of-

cice, but from the larger Ford Foundation, a charitable arm of the Ford Motor Co., that continues
to support various ventures throughout the country.

In Chávez’s youth in Arizona, he had very little interaction with individuals from domi-
nant discourse communities. While Chávez came into contact with more individuals from domi-
nant groups as a migrant worker in California, his position in those interactions remained limited
by his disempowered status as a Mexican-American and a migrant farmworker. It was not until
Chávez started working to organize for C.S.O. that he began to interact with Euro-American in-
dividuals in bureaucracies like the county registrar’s office. These individuals had access to the
Discourses of power, and were situated in positions that carried substantial political and social institutional power. Initially, Chávez didn’t have the tactics to successfully negotiate with these individuals, as illustrated by his first encounter with a registrar of voters in San Jose in 1952. However, as these subsequent examples illustrate, Chávez developed the Discourse practices needed to interface with local political and civic leaders.

5. Conclusion

Tracing out Chávez’s Discourse genealogy allows us to develop a picture of Chávez’s history of Discourse practice and experience. This insight illustrates how primary and secondary Discourses are folded onto one another, sedimenting elements of one set of practices onto another, to form a lifeworld Discourse consisting of several hybridizations of various primary and secondary Discourses encountered and practiced by Chávez throughout his life. Sedimentation here refers to the processes of doing literacy practices from a perspective of feedback and feedforward loops that instantiate those practices into the individual’s mind and body (see Chapter Two). By the time Chávez completed his fourth year as an organizer for C.S.O. in 1957, his lifeworld Discourse included elements from a range of identity kits, including Mexican, Mexican-American, grower, migrant farmworker, community organizer, Catholic, nonviolent social activist, pachuco, and scholar of labor history. These Discourses emerge in Chávez’s practice as hybridizations, as discrete elements are pulled from one sphere into another. Thus, Chávez’s acquisition of political and economic Discourses is sedimented as part of a hybrid Discourse deeply connected to his lifelong practice of self-sacrifice for the common good.

Discursive readiness potential describes this stratification from the perspective of agency
as one’s capacity to do (or not do) *something* in a given situation. Chávez’s hybridized Discourses demonstrate how dissonant elements of one Discourse may be folded into another Discourse in parallel with shared practices. This process of hybridization steps aside notions of mastery of a Discourse as Chávez seems to appropriate the Discursive potentials for action most closely aligned with his short- and long-term goals to make self sacrifices in the service of the greater good. Moreover, while we might call Chávez’s efforts to fold in discrete elements from one Discourse to another as resulting in a stilted Discourse, to use Gee’s term, this framing carries with it a negative connotation that emphasizes lack. In contrast, Chávez’s experience demonstrates the importance of acknowledging the positive capacities for action that follow the appropriation of new Discursive potentials. In order to take on these roles, Chávez worked within, between, for, and against two starkly segregated communities: poor working class Mexican-Americans, and middle-class Euro-Americans. As discussed in the following chapter, when these experiences are taken together, they forged for Chávez a Discursive readiness potential that afforded him the capacity to take actions as a labor organizer for both C.S.O., and later the U.F.W.
CHAPTER FOUR The Entailments of Genre/Experience: Discursive Readiness Potential, Genre, and Literate Activity

1. Introduction

Our capacities to act in a given rhetorical situation are shaped by our prior experiences. As I argue in chapter two, the practice of literacy/literacies hews discursive action potentials through the (re)iteration of discursive moves. This process of (re)iteration composes for the agent a library of I-cans or capacities to act. Discursive readiness potential refers both to our capacity to act (the range of discursive moves available to us) as well as our capacity to navigate the range of potentials that emerge in a discursive situation. The argument in chapter two attempted to show how discursive readiness potential is composed from an embodied cognition perspective. By taking up interdisciplinary research in embodied cognition, neuroscience, and affect studies, I articulated a process theory for cultivating discursive action potentials that emphasizes the importance of experience in shaping the neural circuits that make one set of discursive actions more likely than another.

In the following chapter, I work to investigate discursive readiness potential by focusing on César Chávez’s genre use in the late 1950s. As such, the chapter also offers an extension of the Discursive genealogy developed in chapter three. Chapter three traced out Chávez’s lifeworld Discourse, arguing that Chávez cultivated hybrid literacies in a process by which dissonant Discourse practices were brought together by the connections afforded by consonances across disparate Discourses. In the following chapter, I take up Cooper’s argument in “Rhetorical Agency” that our capacities to act in rhetorical situations emerge out of our prior experiences as well as
the feedback and feedforward loops that connect us (embodied cognizant agents) dynamically with a world full of objects, technologies, and other nonhuman actors that inflect our actions (see Chapter One). As Cooper argues, composing happens in ecologies marked by the feedback and feedforward loops between embodied self and socio-cultural world/environment. Furthermore, that interconnection manifests in a neurodynamic arc that connects conscious and nonconscious embodied cognitive processes, including long- and short-term goals, actions, sensory/proprinoceptive awareness of actions, emotions, memories, etc. As Cooper and others (Gorzelsky; Micciche) argue, writing is always both a biological and socio-cultural system that we create as it creates us.

In the following, I combine the concept of genre uptake, which describes the ways we take up genres as well as the ways one genre connects to another, with the notion of schema from conceptual blending. Genres are typified ways of accomplishing social interaction within discourse communities. Schemas are irreducible higher categories of thought that organize conceptual operations. Blending describes the ways in which we combine, synthesize, and blend mental conceptual spaces to form new identities. This model of understanding cognition is premised on the notion that we think through metaphorical processes in which we identify consonant elements in conceptual spaces which, in turn, are projected into a blending operation that affords the emergence of new meaning. This approach resonates with the argument in chapter three that César Chávez combined conflicting discourses by connecting dissonant discursive elements across consonant elements. In blending, schemas are the conceptual categories that emerge from experience, and which organize our conceptual spaces in the mind.
I argue below that understanding how schemas afford actions, including the combination of thought material across genres and discourse communities, can allow us to better understand how genre uptake emerges out of our prior experiences. In order to trace out this process, I examine what I call genre blending, which describes the ways in which we combine elements across discourse community boundaries in genre uptake. The first section outlines research in rhetorical genre studies that conceptualizes genre as a rhetorical ecosystem that shapes the kinds of actions available to actors in recurrent situations (Miller; Bazerman; Bawarshi; Emmons). The second section outlines research on conceptual blending from cognitive linguistics, an arm of the loosely organized interdisciplinary embodied cognition research program (Fauconnier and Turner; Coulson; Hitchins; Slingerland; Johnson). Conceptual blending refers to the dynamic and emergent process of combining multi-modal mental spaces in ways that resemble metaphorical thought and afford new emergent meaning. My focus in the second section is on understanding how, according to conceptual blending theory, our prior experiences constitute the formation of conceptual schemas that afford the combination of consonant and dissonant thought material to generate new emergent meaning.

My goal in bringing together genre studies and conceptual blending theory is to develop a method for tracing out the dynamic connections between prior experience, emergent literate practices, and the embodied affordances of discursive situations at a scale amenable to literacy studies. Whereas much research in conceptual blending theory focuses on language at a micro scale (i.e., at the level of words, phrases, and sentences) and with idealized users (e.g., Fauconnier and Turner; Coulson), I am interested in adopting principles of conceptual blending at the
level of genre, which, I maintain, will provide a broader view of literate practices in balance with the archival record.

The third section offers an analysis of Chávez’s genre use during the critical period that propelled Chávez into labor organization. In 1957-8, Chávez worked to organize the domestic itinerant farmworkers living near Oxnard, California, an important agricultural center situated about 35 miles from Los Angeles. The case study is based on two primary sources: Chávez’s oral history recorded in the early 1970s and an account of the period published by Chávez’s friend and mentor Fred R. Ross in the 1960s, which was based on a series of taped recordings of Chávez’s account of the events shortly after he left Oxnard. The case study illustrates how schemas govern genre uptake by affording potentials for action.

2. Genre Studies

Genres are key elements of discourse communities, providing the primary means through which discourse communities interact. As Swales explains, “Discourse communities are socio-rhetorical networks that form in order to work towards sets of common goals. One of the characteristics that established members of these discourse communities possess is familiarity with the particular genres that are used” to meet those goals. Thus, “genres belong to discourse communities, not to individuals” (9). Genres offer a way to understand the social actions that comprise the socio-rhetorical networks that constitute discourse communities, for genre knowledge and genre use are intimately and recursively tied together in genre uptake (Freadman). This emphasis on social action follows Carolyn Miller’s pivotal conceptualization of genre as a typified form of recurring social (inter)action, a view that has been influential in rhetorical genre studies (Bazer-
man; Berkenkotter and Huckins; Randall). For example, Berkenkotter and Huckins frame genre as a form of situated cognition embedded in social activity. Russell develops an activity systems approach for genre analysis that argues we have to consider genre use within a social network of activity. To this end, Bazerman argues we should view genres as ecosystems that shape our social actions in “The Life of Genre, The Life of the Classroom”:

Genres are not just forms. Genres are forms of life, ways of being. They are frames for social action. They are environments for learning. They are locations within which meaning is constructed. Genres shape the thoughts we form and the communications by which we interact. Genres are the familiar places we go to create intelligible communicative action with each other and the guideposts we use to explore the unfamiliar (19).

For Bazerman, genres form ecosystems of social action within which we (inter)act, participate in meaningful communication, and use prior genre knowledge to navigate unfamiliar rhetorical situations. Once “we understand the dynamics and functions” of a genre, the genre as ecosystem of social action provides a range of possible discourse actions, though not determinatively. Thus when we invoke a genre, we simultaneously invoke a host of attitudes, values, etc., in our discourse (23). Even when we seek alternatives to genres, when they are “filled with dissension, dysfunction, or even deception,” those same genres have nonetheless still formed our “discursive and cognitive habits” – our ways of thinking and acting around and with texts (19). As Bazerman notes in “Systems of Genres and the Enactment of Social Intentions,” genres “identify a repertoire of actions that may be taken in a set of circumstances” and “possible intentions one may have. Thus they embody the range of social intentions toward which one may orient one’s energies” (82). Bazerman’s genre ecosystem, which emphasizes how genres shape the potential actions available in a discursive situation view of genre, resonates with the concept of discourse
readiness potential by underlining the importance of prior experience in forming the cognitive habits associated with genre use.

Anis Bawarshi extends Bazerman’s view of genre as an ecological system in *Genre and the Invention of the Writer*, arguing that genres play a crucial role in invention by structuring both the context of invention and the writer. As Bawarshi explains, genres are like ecosystems in that they “maintain rhetorical conditions that sustain certain forms of life – ways of discursively and materially organizing, knowing, experiencing, acting, and relating in the world” (9). There is reciprocity in Bawarshi’s formulation, though, for genres are simultaneously supported (reified) by writers through their enactment of patterns of saying-being-doing-feeling while they structure those same patterns of action. This view implies an important role of experience (i.e., acquiring habit), but Bawarshi brackets off experience, arguing that he is not interested in the time before genre, but the circulation of genre as it becomes what Berkenkotter and Huckins call “situated cognition” (10). Bawarshi’s project thus focuses on what happens to writers as they write. As I will argue below, a key distinction between my articulation of discursive readiness potential and Bawarshi’s argument for genres’ function of structuring human subjectivity and discursive action lies in the formative role played by embodied experience.

In order to address what happens to writers as they write, Bawarshi develops a concept of genre ecosystems that structure subjectivities and enable/constrain socially meaningful activity.

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1 I use the phrase “saying-being-doing-feeling” combinations following Gee’s formulation of social languages as sets of saying-being-doing-feeling combinations that allow us to be recognized as a certain kind of subject, while at the same time, allowing us to recognize certain subjectivities in others.
Drawing on the linguist M. A. K. Halliday’s work on semantic potentials, which distinguishes between the potentials for meaning in language structures and the actualizations of meaning through the iteration of language in rich socio-cultural contexts, as well as sociologist Anthony Giddens’ work on structuration theory, which accounts for how social structures shape activity, Bawarshi develops a more nuanced theory of genre as ecosystems that afford certain kinds of socially meaningful and recognizable actions and subjectivities. According to Bawarshi, genres cannot be sites of action if they do not also structure subjectivities or entail us to “act in certain ideological and discursive ways” (78). Agency, Bawarshi argues, lies between the writer’s intentions and the genre’s motives, which afford certain kinds of action within social systems. Genres are ecosystems because they mediate social activities and relationships through rhetorical forms, though not as mere passive backdrops, but as active participants in rhetorical and discursive action (82).

Bawarshi argues that genre structures are concepts that persist in our memory (conscious/unconscious) and actively “frame the ideological and epistemological boundaries of what we assume to be knowable, doable, or at least possible in any given situation” in both conceptual and material ways (i.e., textual production). If our capacities to act are shaped by our participation in discourse communities, genres are the ecological structures that mediate those capacities to act. This conceptual and material framing of actions is the genre’s motives, which are akin to an overall plan for action, align with a discourse community’s purposes, and often become naturalized such that we are unaware of how a genre structure frames our actions. We typically do not actively or consciously reflect on the ways genres afford certain actions, for as Bawarshi puts it,
“We just act” (89).

Yet, Bawarshi argues, action follows intention, which he describes as the individual’s interpretation of the social motives available to him- or herself that is shaped by each individual’s “social and psychological experiences, the demands of their immediate conditions, their social position and location within the larger sphere of culture, their metacognitive awareness of the genre, their knowledge of other genres, and so on” (91). A genre motive can do nothing on its own, it is a potential (what Bawarshi calls motive-potential) that must be actualized, and that actualization is mediated by a host of inner and outer forces between the agent and the genre as ecosystem. Agency thus emerges out of the tension between the actions afforded by a genre and the individual’s own situated interpretation of that genre.

Bawarshi illustrates this concept of genre and agency by discussing the challenges of choosing a gift card at the store. The gift card genre consists of an array of sub-genres, including humorous birthday cards for a friend, humorous birthday cards for a spouse, serious birthday cards for a friend, serious birthday cards for a spouse, and so on. Each card affords a certain kind of subjectivity, and by extension certain kinds of interactions with others. These possibilities are mediated by the genre’s motive-potential, which simultaneously affords a certain set of (inter)actions in social situations. For example, whereas one card may afford the potential for connecting with one’s spouse with a solemn and apologetic subjectivity as a gesture (action) of apologizing for missing one’s anniversary, another card may afford a more lighthearted and playful celebration of the same event. There is a choice, and as Bawarshi points out, we linger over the cards, looking for the one that best actualizes our desired potential actions, “one that appro-
appropriately actualizes our relation to the receiver as well as our sense of who we imagine ourselves to be” (108). For Bawarshi, genres invent subjectivities by framing the kinds of rhetorical interactions that are possible, but the actualization of those potentials critically depends on our intentions and interpretations of the genre and the kinds of action potentials that it sponsors. Agency is the act of interpretation, or choosing in this case, one card over another to suit one’s desired rhetorical (inter)action as well as all sorts of situational circumstances or exigencies.

Bawarshi and I (see chapter two) both arrive at the concepts of action potential and actualization as frameworks that account for the possible actions that are available in a situation (action potentials) and the actions that actually occur (actualizations), but we take different intellectual paths to these conclusions. As I explain below, these differences amount to a differential in how we value the constitutive role played by embodiment and nonrepresentational aspects of being. Bawarshi derives the concepts of action potentials and actualization from the linguist M. A. K. Halliday’s work in *Language as a Social Semiotic*. Halliday uses the term potential to describe the network of options available to an individual. According to Halliday, what we can actually say (lexicogrammatical system) is a function of a semiotic system’s meaning potential, or what we can mean (semantic system). Meaning potential is itself the realization of what we can do, or as Halliday calls it, our behavior potential. However, Halliday’s notion of meaning potential is abstracted from “what is going on in [the speaker’s] head” and potential is used as an abstract description of a semiotic system (39). For Halliday, language is a social system that affords a network of meaning potentials that exceed an individual.

Bawarshi argues that each genre creates its own eco-system, and in doing so, frames the
types of actions and interactions available to participants (i.e., action potentials), as well as the identities available within the genre’s eco-system. Like Halliday’s social semiotic system, Bawarshi’s genre is a social system that affords potentials for meaning. Bawarshi adjusts for this focus on social systems by developing the notion of motive-potential and ascribing for the genre user the role of interpreting a genre, an act that itself is the result of dynamic interactions between inner and outer forces, by which Bawarshi broadly refers to embodied, affective, emotional, and other psychological tensions that inflect how one acts within a genre’s ecosystem. In contrast, my approach to action potentials underlines the importance of understanding what happens in the embodied mind.

To that end, Kimberly K. Emmons’ work on genre helps move from Bawarshi’s concept of genre as ecosystem that outlines action potentials within a social system, toward an embodied perspective on genre, action, and potentiality in “Uptake and the Biomedical Subject.” Drawing on Bawarshi, Emmons makes a consonant argument for agency and subjectivity as crucial concerns to genre studies. Emmons focuses on the concept of uptake, or the act of taking up genres within scenes of social (inter)action. Emmons takes as her starting point the observation that Freadman’s view of uptake has been to situate uptake as an issue of taking up genres as well as the interstitial connections between genres. In contrast, Emmons argues that we must redefine uptake as an issue related to the “disposition of the subjects” resulting from genre use, for “Genres as social actions are powerful only when they direct or forestall human interaction” (137). For Emmons, the process of uptake inserts the actor’s physical body into the stream of social activity, thus complicating the discursive interactions. Uptake entails material consequences on
subjectivity and embodiment.

For example, Emmons points to individuals taking up depression quizzes (i.e., quizzes that offer to diagnose one as depressed or not depressed). In doing so, the genre transforms one’s bodily experience into a body ready for diagnosis. Emmons writes:

Without a doctor’s uptake of symptoms as evidence for a diagnosis, a patient is unrecognizable within the medical system and unable to receive treatment. But, before deciding to visit a doctor’s office, the individual must first take up experiences themselves as potential symptoms. Before the biomedical system can impose control or deliver treatment through medication, the patient must first acquire the habits of mind that comprehend experiences as symptoms, and then take up the genres of medical interaction which lead, ultimately, to the doctor’s office and the pharmacist’s counter. (136)

Emmons example suggests that what is at stake in genre uptake includes questions of how genres shape bodily experience and make possible (entail or afford) certain potentials for action, such as transforming experiences into symptoms, which in turn makes available a whole set of other genres and social and rhetorical interactions within the medical system. In this case, uptake of depression quizzes affords a transformation of one’s experience as a body marked by symptoms that warrant pharmaceutical interventions, in contrast to any number of alternatives, such as behavioral interventions. As Emmons argues, the power of genre is “genres’ capacity to position subjects and to allow them to inhabit (only) particular social roles” (138). Genre uptake entails not only perceptual shifts, but also shifts in embodiment as our body relates to and is quite physically changed by other material actors, such as pharmaceuticals.

Such consequences are a result, Emmons argues, of the “related practices of citation, ar-

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2 Emmons’ argument aligns with the view of the body as something one does rather than something one has. This notion of enacted embodiment plays a crucial role in my argument for discursive readiness potential in chapter two. See Blackman, Noé, and Clark for more on this view of embodiment.
ticulation, and entailment” (140). Agency according to Emmons, is a process of citing the circulating discourses, or the selection of one action from a field of potentials structured by the discourses available in a scene. Uptake is concerned with that process of selection. Agency has a double bind, Emmons argues (following Bawarshi), for one must articulate one’s own desires in ways that also cite the circulating forms, yet the citation of circulating forms (which permit or enable recognition in social settings) has material consequences on the physical body.

Thus, the main concern for uptake is “what is taken on when an individual takes up particular genres or discourses” (138). Medical patients articulate desires for treatment by citing the genres and discourses of a medical community vis-a-vis, for example, an online quiz on depression. By reframing experiences as symptoms and individuals as patients, genre uptake changes the dispositions and readiness potentials of individuals’ subjectivities, with material consequences on their corporeality. For example, taking up discourses of psychology, including the citation of key phrases like “chemical imbalance” readies or entails the transformation of a body ready for pharmaceutical interventions. These practices of uptake “draw forward previous forms” of genre and discourse in ways that have consequences for not only the social systems, but also the “shapes and trajectories” of individuals’ material and social subjectivities (152).

Following the work of Bazerman, Bawarshi, and Emmons on genre and action potential, we can conceptualize genre as an ecosystem that affords certain (inter)actions for a discourse community, which in turn, have material implications for the kinds of physical bodies, subjectivities, and identities that are enacted. The concept of genre marks the situational forces, including prior experiences, physical embodied practices, and patterns of saying-being-doing-feeling, that
collectively contribute to the emergence of action potentials. Genres structure the subjectivities and embodied actions sponsored by a discourse community as potentials for action. Uptake is a process of enacting genres and has social and material consequences for the individual by affording the actualization of certain sets of social actions that implicate our embodied capacity to dwell in rhetorical situations.

3. Blending Theory, Schemas, and Affordance

In the following section, I survey conceptual blending theory (or conceptual integration theory as it is sometimes called), which is an interdisciplinary model rooted in cognitive linguistics that seeks to explain how we create new emergent meaning out of existing knowledge (Coulson; Fauconnier; Fauconnier and Turner; Hutchins; Johnson; Lakoff and Johnson). Blending theory follows from the influential work of Lakoff and Johnson on metaphors, which (like other scholarship in embodied cognition) argues that our conceptual structures are fundamentally shaped by or emerge out of our embodied experiences in culturally rich social activity. Of particular interest in this section, however, will be the concept of schema (or image schema as it is sometimes used) which was introduced by linguists Mark Johnson (*The Mind in the Body*) and George Lakoff (*Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*) as a way to explain how conceptual structures stem from our repeated patterns of embodied and cultural activity. I take up schema in order to explain how language practices and patterns of experiences enable or cultivate potentials for discursive action at a micro-level. First, I introduce conceptual blending theory, then I focus more specifically on schema as an analytical focus for understanding the relationships between embodiment, language practice, and action potentials.
Conceptual Blending Theory

Conceptual blending theory maintains that meaning emerges from the integration of two or more input spaces in a blending process that shares the same cross-space mapping logic as metaphorical thought. This approach to theorizing language stems from Lakoff and Johnson’s seminal work on metaphors in 1980, which argues that the concepts we think with and through are rooted in our everyday embodied experiences in the world. As a theory of embodied cognition, Lakoff and Johnson’s work maintains that our embodiment and our embodied experience in the world shapes our capacities for conceptualizing the world, including both concrete and abstract concepts. Lakoff and Johnson’s early work matured in blending theory, which Fauconnier and Turner famously developed in *The Way We Think*, which is widely regarded as the central argument for blending by advocates of the approach.

More recently, Hougaard and Oakley argue that blending theory or mental space cognitive interaction theory, as they call it, stems from embodied views of cognition that see human thought and cognition as inseparable from embodied experience (16). Hougaard and Oakley argue that because research on embodied cognition posits “the mind as shaped by the body’s interaction with the world as well as extending beyond the individual to include the surrounding world,” the distributed or embodied theories of mind “provides a potential bridge to cognitively interested socially committed discourse analysis” (17). As such, I turn to blending theory in the following section in order to develop a method for analyzing literate practices that resonates with the principles of embodied mind that underwrite discursive readiness potential. Discursive readiness potential describes our capacity to act in a discursive situation. At the end of the section, I
work to synthesize the research on genre and uptake discussed above with blending and schema in order to develop an analytical approach for understanding literacy potentials.

Before further examining the analytical methods of blending theory, however, we must first look at how blending works. In their keystone work on conceptual integration networks, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind’s Hidden Complexities*, Fauconnier and Turner argue that blending foregrounds three key mental operations: (1) identity, or the recognition of sameness between two or more conceptual spaces in the mind, (2) integration, or the cross-space mapping of similarities between two or more conceptual spaces, and (3) imagination, or the creativity required to make connections between conceptual spaces and create emergent meaning that exceeds the input spaces (6). Blending, according to this model, entails identifying common elements between two or more conceptual spaces, integrating those common elements to create a third blended space that imaginatively creates a new emergent meaning. For example, the statement “the surgeon is a butcher” entails making identifications of similarity between the input spaces for surgeon and butcher, including elements such as that both cut bodies using sharp blades (scalpel; butcher knife). While both a surgeon and a butcher have elements of quality work, the phrase means that the surgeon is ineffective or perhaps even sloppy. The creative element of imagination, however, is fundamentally shaped by the schemas that work to organize thought material in the mental spaces that we enact.

Mental spaces are small dynamic groups of thought material in the working memory organized by broader conceptual frameworks that are recruited from long-term memory. While mental spaces are separate conceptual spaces within the working memory, they may be connect-
ed to other mental spaces in various ways, and may be synthesized (i.e. blended) to create new
mental spaces that consist of emergent meaning structured in part or whole by elements from one
or more mental space. Because mental spaces rely on more entrenched conceptual frameworks to
organize thought material, they are deeply tied to the cultural models that emerge from our so-
cial, cultural, and perceptual worlds (Turner 57).

Before looking at an example that illustrates how blending functions, it is worth examin-
ing the methodology used to analyze blends (see fig. 1). To trace out conceptual mapping, blend-
ing theorists use circles to represent mental spaces (input spaces, generic spaces, blended
spaces), solid lines to represent cross-space mappings (i.e., the identification of consonant ele-
ments between spaces), and dotted lines to represent selective projections into the blend. Input
spaces are mental spaces that provide conceptual structure to the blend. The generic space marks
the commonalities mapped out between the input spaces. The blended space is where thought
material, which has been selectively projected from the input spaces into the blended space, is
synthesized to form new emergent meaning. The process of synthesis is a creative one, as the
individual selectively projects certain thought material and conceptual frameworks from each
input. The blend yields emergent meaning by connecting the information projected from the in-
put spaces in ways that exceed the conceptualizations afforded by any one space on its own.

These dynamic mental operations are sketched out by scholars working with conceptual
integration theory as a way of understanding the connections and emergent meaning that underlie
embodied cognition. As Fauconnier and Turner explain, this notation system is a "static way of
Figure 1 – Blending Model
illustrating aspects of conceptual integration” that serves the ends of the analyst, for the diagram represents a dynamic process that may entail reframing input spaces according to any number of potential conceptual frameworks, or schema. Moreover, Fauconnier and Turner see that the various “lines in the diagram (lines that represent conceptual projections and mappings) as corresponding to neural coactivations and bindings” (46).

Blending theory argues that we create new meanings out of sedimented forms by mapping consonant elements between two or more mental spaces (which become input spaces in the blend) and a generic third space. The blending process begins with the mapping of consonant elements between or across input spaces. These connections as well as other dissonant elements that are not identified as having a significant or meaningful relationship to elements in other input spaces are selectively projected into the blend space, which is where emergent meaning is constructed. The blend thus entails a process by which one identifies similarities between mental spaces, then projects those identifications, along with other conceptual elements, into the blended space. Each mental space is organized by a schema or mental framework that holds the thought material in each mental space in some coherent order. As conceptual elements are selectively projected into the blend, the schemas offer a pattern of organizing information that may be completed to organize the elements in the blended space. However, these schemas do not serve a deterministic function, for the result of a blend is not a truth function of the inputs (Coulson 159). Rather, blending invites certain emergent potentials of meaning, for “speakers recruit blending to capitalize on inferences afforded by conventional mappings between” input spaces (172).

For instance, in *Semantic Leaps*, Seana Coulson illustrates how cultural models play key
roles in conceptual blending with the following example: Democratic Senator Tom Harkin criticized President George H. W. Bush with the comment “He’s a guy who was born on third base and thinks he hit a triple” (62). Harkin’s comment suggests that Bush has confused privilege with hard work, but the emergent meaning depends on the successful recruitment of at least two key cultural frameworks: (a) baseball and (b) Bush comes from a wealthy and privileged family. Discursive actors in the situation must activate cultural models of baseball and American social success in order to create the emergent meaning that Bush thinks his success stems from hard work when he was born on third base.

As Coulson explains, in the process of the blend, we make the following connections between the two input spaces (bush/batter; third base/wealthy family; and, hit a triple/do hard work [see figure 2]), yet Bush thinks he started at home (like any other batter) and hit a triple to arrive on third base. Given that third base is the last stop before the ultimate success of a home run, it is a place of high esteem. The baseball frame provides us with the insight that a batter always knows he arrived on a given base, and we know from the American Social Success model that Bush started on third base/with privilege. The blend thus widens the rhetorical potential to emphasize Bush’s delusion in the proposition that he hit a triple. The success of the blend “involves exploiting particular structural relationships that exist both within components of [cultural] models and between the different models invoked. It is the apprehension of these relationships and our ability to map them across disparate domains that result in the transfer of inference schemes from one domain to another” (177-8). Blending is not an inherent property of language, but an emergent cognitive process that depends on one’s embodied experience as a discursive actor.
Figure 2 — Mapping of the Bush/Baseball Blend
Conceptual blending allows users to combine and alter cultural models to adapt to unfolding situations, for “people can adapt cultural models in often novel and emergent ways because of the importance of imagination in conceptual blending” (Coulson “Conceptual Blending” 187). Thus, Coulson argues, cultural models do not have a deterministic effect on behavior; how they are employed to construct meaning depends on how agents assume the cultural models will affect behavior. Furthermore, the success of attempts to use certain cultural models depends on whether individuals accept the relation between a cultural model and its application as valid, and this process may likely be deeply affected by an individual’s long-term goals (205). Coulson explains, “The difference between blends we act on and those we do not depends as much on the ontology supported by our cultural values and practices as it does on the structural correspondences between the representations in different domains” (206).

Each cultural model entails certain ways of saying-being-doing-feeling that allow us to be recognized as a certain who doing a certain what (Gee). In that sense, cultural models are ontological – they open-up certain potentials for action within frameworks of cultural identity. The blends we perform or do not perform depends, then, on the cultural models available to us, and to the set of short- and long-term goals related to those models. Thus, Coulson writes, “While conceptual integration accounts for some of the mental operations necessary to incite action, the roots of action extend beyond the individual’s nervous system as conceptual blends are intimately intertwined with human doings” and “the ‘passion’ of deeply felt motivational frames” (206). In other words, blending is something we do in the process of enacting certain identities, and the outcome of blending is often deeply tied to the ontological sets of saying-being-doing-feeling
that we bring to bear on the discursive situation. The blends we enact or do not enact depend both on the genres supported by the cultural models that constitute our discourse communities as well as the connections we make between the various input spaces that constitute the blend. When we view genres as the ecosystems through which discourse communities fulfill their purposes, blending emerges as a way to understand how genre uptake happens, and possibly how genre uptake exceeds the structural power of a given discourse community.

In *What Science Offers the Humanities: Integrating Body and Culture*, Edward Slingerland presents blending as an alternative approach to analyzing cultural practices that escapes postmodernism’s dualistic assumption that our only access to reality is through language by drawing on interdisciplinary research on embodied cognition. As Slingerland writes, “The claim that human beings share a set of cognitive and normative universals needs to be reconciled with the blooming, buzzing cultural variety that is the single most salient phenomenon to humanists” (151). Thus any successful model of inquiry will appreciate both our biologically and ecologically grounded ways of generating pre-linguistic and pre-cultural meaning with the powerful and widely diverse array of cultural forces that shape our humanity. According to Slingerland, blending allows us to trace how individuals “can recruit basic sensory-motor patterns and images to use as templates for interacting with and understanding other, often quite abstract domains. Because these cross-domain projections can be combined selectively into novel metaphoric blends, they can very quickly create culturally unique life-worlds” (152).

Slingerland argues that the blending model provides space for theorizing concepts as being grounded in pre-cultural or extra-linguistic sensory-motor processes through the concept of
“schemas” which structure information in the blend, making possible the mapping, projection, and blending of various conceptual elements across the blend. Mental spaces are momentary constructs that draw from “more entrenched frames and mappings” organized by schemas (176). According to Slingerland, “Schemas are recurrent patterns arising from our sensory-motor interactions with the world” (163). Schemas are grounded in perceptual and motor experience, imagistic in the sense that they contain holistic multimodal sensory information related to experience, dynamically operate across time (i.e., they change and are not static), connect perceptual experience to conceptualization and language, are likely tied to specific neural patterns (i.e., what fires together, wires together), and “afford” certain pattern completions in thought processes (163-4). Of especial interest to this project is the concept that schemas present or afford certain potentials for completing thought patterns.

The notion of schemas as having such a thought potential comes from Mark Johnson’s work on schemas in Body in the Mind, which Slingerland draws on in his model. Johnson uses the notion of “entailment” to describe what Slingerland calls “affordance.” According to Johnson, entailments include the “perceptions, discriminations, interests, values, beliefs, practices, and commitments” tied with the schema (Johnson qtd in Slingerland, 164). Slingerland ties Johnson’s notion of entailment to Gibson’s notion of “affordances” which describes “plans of actions that perceived objects inevitably present to the perceiver. As a plan for action, a schema is dy-

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3 Some scholars working in cognitive linguistics use the term “image schema,” which was first coined in tandem monographs by The Body in the Mind and Lakoff Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things. When I am not directly quoting a source, I follow Slingerland in using schema rather than image schema, though I mean schema in the same sense as image schema.
namic, possessing its own logic and expectations” (164). A schema is thus, according to Slingerland, an “irreducible gestalt that cannot be reduced from its rich grounding in perceptual experience and modal images to abstract algorithmic logics for action” (164). Acquiring new schemas often entails neuroplasticity, or the restructuring of neural networks as a result of the repeated practice of cultural practices over time (209-10). Acquiring and maintaining schemas, including body schemas, such as those associated with motor-skills activities like wrestling or skiing, are shaped by cultural practices, a process Slingerland describes as “Putting the Culture in the Body” (210).

To illustrate schema, Slingerland points to Johnson’s discussion of the concept of BALANCE as a schema tied to one’s felt sense of balance cultivated through embodied experience. Slingerland writes, “The resulting feeling of ‘balance’ is thus the verdict of our body rather than on a modal, abstract aesthetic judgment” (166). When we use phrases like “I need to fix my work/life balance” or when we consider “Our understanding of what constitutes a ‘balanced’ life, a ‘balanced’ argument, moral or legal ‘balance,’ and the ‘balance’ we perceive in a pleasing work of art” our understanding stems from our felt sense of our own perceptual and motor experience of BALANCE and “cannot be fully captured in an amodal, formal definition” (165). Furthermore, Slingerland argues, “Because bodily simulations are so deeply and fundamentally involved, this judgment of balance also involves not merely a manner of speaking or an intellectual

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4 Slingerland’s argument for neuroplasticity and the reiteration of embodied socio-cultural practices echoes the arguments for composing agency in Chapter Two, especially the discussion of Schwartz and Begley and Noland.
apprehension of similarity, but rather a deep structuring of our experience” in ways that exceed linguistic or cultural structuring (166).

The BALANCE schema, as outlined here, illustrates how our capacity to structure abstract thought emerges from our embodied experience. Johnson updates his early work on schema by pointing to Gibson’s notion of affordance. Johnson defines schemas as “the recurring patterns of our sensory-motor experience” that shape our brain systems through recurrent experience, and which become available “to structure abstract concepts and to carry out inferences about abstract domains of thought” (“Philosophical” 18-19). Drawing on recent work in neural science, Johnson argues that schemas depend on our brain architecture, body makeup, and environmental affordances. The concept of affordance describes the potential relationship between an individual and objects in the environment, which emerges out of the dynamic structural interactions between the two, but which remains an aspect of the material object. Thus, a chair affords sitting for organisms with the neural and bodily capacities to interact with the chair in a sitting

5 See Dodge and Lakoff who argue that image schemas are tied to neural circuits, for they are created by brain structures that are coupled (i.e., wired together) through repeated action – both real action and imagined action. As Dodge and Lakoff explain, recent neuroscience studies show that conceptualization of activities activates the same neural patterns as physiologically doing the activity (74). Thus, when we imagine or use language related to walking, some of the same neural circuits that control walking fire. This suggests that elements of image schema are evoked by neural circuits related to the sensory-motor activity that grounds the very same schemas (84). Further, see Rohrer who argues that research in cognitive neuroscience suggests we conceptualize schemas as dynamic neural activation patterns. Rohrer surveys research showing that image schemas are correlated with neural maps (171-2). Rohrer used fMRI to show that hand-related language activated the same neural patterns as hand-related tasks, and found stronger overlap for literal rather than metaphorical sentences (183). The combined evidence suggests that we make meaning using the same brain regions used in sensory-motor activities. These studies further echo Schwartz and Begley’s work on neuroplasticity (see Chapter Two).
fashion, so for example, a chair affords the potential action of sitting for humans, but not sea slugs (19). That is, while the neural typical human has the brain architecture and bodily structure that provides a capacity for sitting, the chair affords the potential for sitting because it provides material features at the right scale for the human’s sitting potentials. The sea slug does not have the brain architecture or the bodily structures to sit, whereas the elephant, like the human does have such capacities, but may not interact with the chair in such a way that the chair affords elephant sitting. Schemas are constituted by the dynamic assemblage of brain architecture, bodily structure, and environmental affordances, and we acquire schemas through patterns of sensory-motor experience and activity. Thus, infants cannot sit at first, and develop the brain architecture and bodily capacities (i.e., muscular strength and coordination) to sit over time.

Schema allows us to meaningfully organize the recurrent patterns of experience into conceptual structures, primarily at the level of the body as illustrated by the BALANCE schema above. Schemas are dynamic self-organizing adaptive conceptual structures that emerge out of recurrent embodied activity (Johnson The Body in the Mind 29). Schemas are dynamic because they emerge out of repeated patterns of experience and are mutable in relation to future and ongoing activity patterns (30). They accumulate the repeated couplings of individual activity in dynamic interaction with various tools, technologies, objects, and other bodies in ecologies of mind, body, and socio-cultural-material worlds. Thus, the concept of schema underscores how embodied experience accumulates to shape our capacities to take meaningful action of any kind, including literate activities. Schemas constrain the kinds of worlds we invoke, inhabit, and enact via our embodied actions in socio-cultural situations (137-8).
Schema, like genre, offers a conceptual tool for understanding how the continual reiteration of embodied socio-cultural activity shapes language use. Genre studies, organized around the central principle that genre refers to typified ways of acting in recurrent social situations, offers a broad view of the array of situational forces that shape literate activity within discursive ecosystems. As I discuss above, genre uptake occurs within embodied activity, and affords certain ways of saying-being-doing-feeling, both rhetorically and physically. Conceptual blending theory, on the other hand, offers a more nuanced view of embodied cognition premised on a similar force of recurrent social action. Schema refers to the conceptualizations that emerge from such recurrent action, understood more directly here as an embodied process. That is, Schema (like conceptual blending theory more generally) underlines the constitutive role played by embodiment in the formation of conceptual processes. Moreover, the concept of schema within blending offers a way to think about how patterns of conceptualization and social action may coalesce, synthesize, and combine to constitute new emergent meaning potentials within and across discourses.

My aim in bringing together genre, uptake, conceptual blending, and schema is to outline how we can analyze genre practices in ways that appreciate the formative role played by embodiment and help us better understand the social activities that constitute discourse communities. Schemas, I argue, are foundational conceptual paradigms that emerge from and are tied to our embodied cognitive actions in the world. As such, they drive perception and thinking in discourse communities and govern genre uptake. Genres, on the other hand, are structures for using schemas in order to meet the goals or purposes of a discourse community. The cognitive process
of blending provides a way to trace out the connections that we make between schema and the thought material and social actions afforded by schema in ways that both reiterate and transgress prevalent modes of social, rhetorical, and discursive action in discourse communities leading to what we may call genre blending. Genre blending, I argue, consists of the various combinations of emergent schema which afford new potentials for action in rhetorical situations. Genre blending offers a way of tracing out how we combine rhetorical and discursive elements across discourse communities. Understanding this process of blending allows us to better see how uptake is rooted in our embodied socio-rhetorical experiences, and it represents a potentiality of our discursive and socio-rhetorical lives. That is, our capacity to uptake is a function of our readiness potentials to act in rhetorical situations, and our uptake emerges out of the dynamic and embodied interactions between our conceptualizations and the material socio-cultural worlds in which we dwell. These interactions are further governed, though not deterministically, by the schema ready at hand which enable the cross-fertilizations between discourse communities as our uptake unfurls.

5. Genre Use in the Farmworker Organizing by César Chávez and the Oxnard, CA Community Service Organization (1957-1959)

In 1957, Chávez and his family moved to Oxnard, California to organize the community. Looking back at this appointment, Chávez described Oxnard as "my worst project of all," for Chávez faced significant obstruction from local, state, and federal bureaucracies as he worked to address the community’s concerns about accessing local farm work (Levy 128). At first, Chávez followed the typical C.S.O. pattern of setting up house meetings to identify concerns and mobi-
lize the community, start a voter registration drive, prepare lesson plans and arrange for citizenship classes, recruit elderly citizens to attend the classes, and help them attain citizenship (18).

However, the labor situation in Oxnard required Chávez to adopt new methods for achieving his goals of organizing the community and pressuring local officials to provide meaningful employment opportunities for the local Latino/a farmworkers (i.e., non-braceros).

As Chávez probed for the issues that mattered to the community, he found time and again that the main issue were the Braceros, or Mexican national workers legally trucked in from Mexico to work on American farms; Oxnard happened to have the largest Bracero camp in the country with twenty-eight thousand workers (Levy 129). While it was legal to bring in Braceros, the federal statutes that allowed for Braceros also required that local American workers must be allowed to work before Braceros (Levy 88). Although the Braceros were farmworkers and shared much in common with the Mexican-American Spanish-speaking community of local farmworkers in Oxnard, Chávez had no problems working to push Braceros out of the area. According to Chávez, “The fact that braceros were farm workers didn’t bother me. There’s an old *dicho, no puede dejar Dios por Dios* – you can’t exchange one god for another. This was a question of justice, and I’ve never had any problem making a decision like that. The jobs belonged to local workers. The braceros were brought only for exploitation. They were just instruments for the growers. Braceros didn’t make any money, and they were exploited viciously, forced to work un-

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6 House meetings were held at the home of a community member who would invite friends and family to talk with the C.S.O. organizer about the problems in the community. The organizer would end house meetings by asking one of the participants to host the next meeting at his or her home.
der conditions the local people wouldn’t tolerate” (129). The Bracero issue was the most important concern in the community, and so Chávez began to study the Bracero program, learning that “according to the law [Public Law 78], braceros could not be used if there was local labor available. But they were being used, and the people could not get jobs. So I decided to find out how the system worked” (130).

To figure out how the system worked, Chávez entered the local farmworker stream by applying for jobs on a daily basis for several months, but like the other locals, was routinely rejected at the work site day after day:

For the first couple of weeks I'd get up early in the morning, apply for work, and make notes. When I applied for work at the bracero camp, they would tell me to register at the Farm Placement Service, which was in Ventura, about eight miles from Oxnard. The office opened at 8:00 A.M., and by the time I went there and back, it was almost 9:00. But the bracero camps opened at 4:00 and started dispatching people at 4:30. By 6:00, everybody had been dispatched. The guy would tell me, 'I'm sorry I can't take you because people are gone already. They've been dispatched.' So I came back the following morning at 4:00 or 5:00 and the guy told me, 'I'm sorry. I can't send you because this referral slip you have from the Farm Placement Office is outdated. It's yesterday's.' That was the gimmick. The whole system was rotten. The Farm Placement Service was in cahoots with the federal government, which was in cahoots with the growers to keep the local workers out of jobs, get all of the braceros in, and then exploit the braceros (130).

The growers’ uptake is governed by an apparent commitment to not hire local farmworkers in order to minimize labor expenses by using braceros. The growers exploited the braceros by paying them very little ($.75/hour), and by over charging them for basic services and needs like room, board, cigarettes, etc. Chávez continues,"After each refusal I'd go to the CSO office, sit down and type the whole report, just a little story. Then I'd file it. I got a hunch that if we used their own medicine and turned it into poison, we might be able to get them" (130). There are a
few related uptakes here: applying for the cards, accepting the referral cards, presenting the referral cards for work, and typing a narrative report of the series of events. While the corruption was obvious, Chávez’s participation in the system by way of taking up these genres seems to be governed by a schema of taking their medicine and using it against them. This disposition re-situates the genres as an extension of Chávez’s interventionist goals even while Chávez participates in the official bureaucratic genre system.

Chávez eventually recruited "a seventeen-year-old kid named Chavira, a short, handsome kid with black wavy hair – he was my first follower, I guess – and he agreed to go, just as a joke. We went, and we developed a little ritual going into the office" day after day, each time without success (132). The number of people applying with Chávez eventually increased: "Little by little a few more guys joined me. And after we had gone about four or five times, I had a chance to explain how the plan was working, and how I thought it could be handled. Then it began to work. The numbers who came to the office grew" (133). The group treated the daily application ritual as a kind of game: "I'd say 'Let's go to the Farm Placement Service,' and we'd start laughing. 'We know it's not going to work, but let's go just for the ride. You don't have anything to lose. Let's go.' Well, the guys weren't working, so why not?" (133). By the time Chávez arrived in Oxnard, there was already a well-established pattern of domestic Mexican American farm-workers not getting jobs; in fact, that was almost always the outcome. Certainly this pattern of experience over time contributed to the formation of schemas associated with the negative affect of systematic rejection.

We can view Chávez’s move to re-situate the uptake of the application as a move that as-
cribes within that uptake a shift in schema away from one that affords the continual expectation of rejection to one that affords instead a playful (though seemingly inconsequential) engagement with the system. However, taking up the genre, even if under the pretense of playing a game, reinserts the bodies of the workers into the genre system in consequential ways. Thus, while it was a game at first, the gravity of the issue wasn't lost on Chávez and the hopeful farmworkers: "I was trying to get work for the guys, and, to get them to come, day in and day out, they had to get a kick out of it. It just couldn't be done at that time on the basis of their going to get jobs right then. They just couldn't" get jobs through the placement office until the system fundamentally changed (134). Blending elements from game schema with the application process entailed new potentials for action marked less by the negative affect of not getting a job with the positive affect associated with playing the game. Changing the system would only emerge out of evidence of the system’s corruption. Chávez’s uptake of genres documenting the corruption experienced by himself and other workers (e.g., the narrative reports he typed up) seem to be governed by a schema that knowing requires showing evidence.

One of the challenges Chávez and the workers faced each day was that the application to work was incredibly complex: "It took us one and a half hours to get through the application, there were so many questions. They wanted the last time we worked, where we worked, everything. I gave them all they wanted and more. I would fill out two forms, one for them and one for me. After they were filled out, the man gave us referral cards to a grower" (133). Later, when there were several people going (sometimes as many as twenty people at once), they would spend all day applying:
We'd stay there all morning filling out forms, then we'd take time out to eat at 12:00, and sometimes we'd be there until 3:00. We filled out everything they wanted, employment records going back twenty years. I had to fill most of them out in the beginning. Then I began training others to do it. We made two copies, one for them, one for us. The whole idea was, let's use the system and let's make it work against them by documenting cases as they'd never been documented before (134).

The application and referral card genres were tightly tied together in the California farm worker system. While they were nominally situated in the bureaucracy to enable domestic workers to gain employment through the Farm Placement Office at local growers, they were deployed by the bureaucracy in ways that would inhibit this social interaction. Filling out the application demanded an astounding 90 minutes to complete and yielded a referral card to a local grower. The applicant then would have to present the referral card to the foreman at the Grower’s Association where the foreman would assign the worker a job. However, in practice, because the application process took so long to complete, the workers would invariably arrive at the Grower’s Association well after all jobs had been assigned to braceros. Each referral card required its own application in full, and referral cards were only good for the day on which they were assigned. Together, these texts could only afford the possibility of not gaining employment despite the content and ideology structuring these texts as instruments for gaining access to work.

The tensions in this situation illustrate how schemas govern the uptake of genres. On the one hand, the growers’ agents maintained schemas in their uptake of the referral card genre that afforded no opportunities to work. On the other hand, Chávez and the workers’ enacted schemas that afforded employment through the bureaucratic process that begins with the application and culminates in being hired (or more likely not) at the growers’ association based on a referral card
presented according to a certain prescribed ceremony. At this moment, Chávez persuades the
workers to continue taking up the referral cards in ways that conformed with the bureaucratic
process, for even if the prospect of immediate employment was unobtainable, they could demon-
strate the corruption by way of participation in ways recognizable by the empowered officials.

Chávez recognized that one of the problems with past efforts to change the Bracero pro-
gram was that the law's opponents had no evidence of the corruption in the system. Others who
wanted to change the law "knew what the problem was, talked about it, but they couldn't produce
the bodies. I set off to have the evidence. I don't want just complaints" (134). To gather evidence,
Chávez collected copies of each application that he and his fellow applicants submitted to the
placement office. Along with each application, Chávez drafted notes about what happened when
they tried to take the referral cards to the growers for work. Chávez’s plan was to keep asking
why they weren’t getting jobs with their referral cards, for as Chávez saw it, the system wasn’t
prepared for an organized and persistent effort. Chávez treated the application, referral, and re-
jection process as a research project: “hating those Referral Cards so much, I never dreamed I’d
do what practically amounted to a research job on them, but that’s what I start doing … I keep a
record of all the cards being issued and to whom. I phone Helen [Chávez’s wife] at my house
that so many people went to the Association today, who they are, and the numbers of the Referral
Cards” (Ross 61). Chávez explains,

By the time we had been doing this a month, we had any where from one hundred to two
hundred coming in every day. We'd form them single file, and I would shout "March!"
and we'd march in. ... We had people referred to all the ranches, so we had something on
each of the growers. And, in spite of all that activity, it took us forty-one days before we
got one worker placed. The authorities didn't know it, but I had nineteen hundred signed
affidavits by then, all notarized. Maybe altogether I had fourteen hundred people in-
volved, but some guys had about ten different complaints. We had a guy that came to the
Farm Placement Service for something like eighty-five days and couldn't get a job. And
we had the referral cards to prove it (Levy 136-7).

Chávez won a meeting with officials from the FPO and the Oxnard C.S.O. general mem-
bership through a series of telegraphs that leveraged his political power with elected officials
(Ross 55). Using this strategy of tracking the applications and the referral cards over several
weeks, and by citing the strength of the California C.S.O., which consisted of about 350,000 vot-
ers at the time, Chávez pressured Governor Pat Brown to compel Edward Hayes, State Director
of Farm Placement Service (which oversees the FPO), to become involved in the Oxnard situ-
ation. Hayes did so by connecting Chávez with John Carr of the State Employment Service. At
the meeting, Chávez and other C.S.O. leaders used registration cards to track hundreds of unem-
ployed farm workers in the area, and to bring those unemployed workers to the meeting with the
FPO. The cards enable this potential social interaction because of their detailed information
about each applicant. The meeting, however, largely failed to address the workers’ concerns, de-
spite the fact that C.S.O. member James Flores presented 1,500 affidavits from local unemployed
farm workers to the FPO officials showing that these locals had been denied work by the FPO.
This evidence was intended to refute the officials’ claim that the locals had no jobs because they
were bums and winos.

Immediately following the meeting, Chávez, James Flores, and other members of the
Employment Committee of the C.S.O. made a leaflet protesting Hayes’ decision to meet with the
growers instead of the C.S.O. Within a couple of hours, the group had distributed hundreds of
mimeographed fliers – enough to bring the leaflet to Hayes’ attention. Hayes quickly met with Chávez and a few other members of the C.S.O. to talk about their concerns with the growers, including their frustration that Bates does nothing with their complaints, which had been previously made verbally at the FPO office. One worker, Martinez, described his experiences with the FPO (i.e., his experiences not getting hired despite referrals). However, Hayes declined to take action, claiming that the workers’ testimony lacked enough detail, corroborating evidence, and written documentation filed to the FPO. Hayes intimated to Chávez that he could act provided he received a formal written complaint. Underwriting this scene of ideological conflict lie schemas about how to respond to a problem and the social actions afforded by those schemas. On the one hand, Chávez appeals to the local public attending the meeting with Hayes by way of a flier outlining the C.S.O.’s position against Hayes’ decision to meet with the growers. Martinez, as an agent embodying the C.S.O.’s broader complaints about the corruption in the hiring system offers his verbal account of the corruption. Both tactics are afforded by a schema that situates public testimony as a resource for conflict. On the other hand, Hayes’ rebuts Martinez’ complaint and declines action without a formal written complaint supported by sufficient corroborating action. In this instance, a schema for responsive action affords action only in response to textual documentation of the alleged conflicts.

Hayes’ position thus highlights the tension between the ideological structure of the genres and the embodied practice of using the genres in the Farm Placement Office and the Oxnard Growers’ Association where Zamora, on behalf of his employers (the collective union of growers in the Oxnard region), routinely and systematically rejected the domestic workers’ referrals
for employment. When we view the referral card from an embodied perspective where the artifact couples with the agent through repeated embodied action in socio-cultural situations, the card offers only the potential for not getting work from the worker’s perspective. In contrast, Hayes’ use of the card promises potentials for getting a job at one of the local growers. As this scene suggests, a genre can be inscribed with competing and irresolvable potentials for action through the structural coupling of the artifact with other embodied agents in contested socio-cultural scenes.

Chávez doubted Hayes’ promise to act on a written report, complaining to Hayes that no one has ever acted on the CSO’s prior (informal verbal) complaints. Nonetheless, at this moment in the conversation, Chávez realized that his efforts to turn the FPO applications and referral card system against the growers had been too limited because of the informal nature of the complaints as defined by the officials overseeing the system. Chávez recalls, “right then, I get this idea that the only way is to accumulate so much dynamite [textual evidence] against Hayes that we blow him the hell out of the whole state system!” (Ross 78). Following his meeting with Hayes, Chávez shifted his documentary campaign from recording the application and referral card process to focus on filling out, filing, and copying hundreds of complaint forms.

This was a key shift in Chávez’s campaign to replace the braceros with local workers, and it indicates a shift in how Chávez aligned himself with the referral cards. Chávez’s first phase in documenting the farmworker problem was to collect copies of the applications he and other workers submitted to the Farm Placement Office as evidence demonstrating that although they were applying for work, the Grower’s Association would not hire them. The second phase focus-
es on demonstrating how the referral card has become coupled with workers through practice in such a way that the only potential action it affords is not working.

In practice, this new documentary strategy was very time consuming. After being turned down at the Oxnard Growers’ Association, the workers who could write would jot down what happened, others would do their best to remember what happened. Chávez asked them to record information like “the time [they] arrived at the Association, what transpired, and the time [they] left.” Afterward, the workers returned to the CSO office where Chávez typed out all of the reports (71). Chávez explains, “as I’m filling out the form for each worker, I make a carbon copy. That way, we’ve got a record that we keep from that day on. It’s got the name of the worker, job capability, work experience, and the date that the form was made out. Besides that, it’s got the number of the ID card and of the Referral Card” (71). Chávez’s strategy was to collect as many complaints as possible without tipping his hand to Bates or the Association. In the end, Chávez accumulated several hundred notarized affidavits that showed the workers routinely applied for jobs but were denied work (Levy 136-7).

After collecting complaints for a few weeks, Chávez submitted three complaints (three originals and five copies) to Bates, who refused to take action because it was the workers’ word against the growers’ word, despite the evidence and witness testimony in the complaint forms (73). The following week, Chávez submitted seventy-five more complaints, but was rejected again. With no progress in the FPO office, Chávez contacted Carr, who informed Chávez that he had not received copies of the complaints, which meant they likely had never left the FPO office. At Carr’s request, Chávez began sending copies of each complaint he filed to Carr’s home ad-
dress.

Despite Chávez’s focused efforts to get the FPO to address the workers’ grievances, they saw no meaningful change. Tapping his contacts with local barmaids, Chávez asked the so-called Oxnard Barflies (a group of local barmaids who supported Chávez, the C.S.O., and the local workers) to collect the ID numbers of the Braceros working good jobs. This intelligence allowed Chávez to target Jones Ranch (one of the smaller growers in the OGA) who was hiring Braceros to thin tomato plants by taking the Bracero’s ID numbers to the FPO to demand that those jobs go to the locals. When Chávez and the workers arrived at Jones Ranch, the Braceros handed over their hoes to the locals until the foreman arrived, who nonetheless informed Chávez and the workers that the jobs were still going to the Braceros.

Meanwhile, Chávez had contacted Crittendon of the U.S. Department of Labor, who came out to the ranch after the foreman replaced the locals with the Braceros. Shortly after Crittendon arrived, the owner of the ranch, Bob Jones, showed up threatening Chávez until Crittendon advised Jones that he had already violated the law by hiring Braceros instead of the local domestic workers. After some discussion on site, Crittendon refreshed Jones’ recollection of the Bracero contract that he had signed with the government, which required Jones to use local workers first. Crittendon advised Jones to use the locals or risk de-certification in the Bracero program. The following day, Zamora sent out Braceros to Jones’ ranch again anyway, but Crittendon remained in town and visited the ranch finding the Braceros in the field. Crittendon told Jones in the field that he was going to file a full decertification complaint against Jones for hiring Braceros. Losing the Bracero contract and the low wages that come with hiring Braceros would
have been devastating for a small rancher like Jones.

About a week after the first set of challenges to the Braceros on Jones’ ranch, Carr came while Hayes was on vacation to take advantage of the Jones dispute. Carr called together everyone, including Crittendon, the FPO, Zamora, and the C.S.O. At the meeting, Chávez presented 1,400 complaints that concerned approximately 400 different workers (88). Following this presentation, Carr reprimanded Bates for failing to send these to Carr per his prior instructions, and further chided Bates for simply siding with the Growers’ Association without investigating the complaints. Chávez reminded the group that Hayes had stated that the only way to get action was to file the complaints. Chávez and the C.S.O. had had only 37 placements out of hundreds of referrals (400-500) despite thousands of Braceros working in the Oxnard area, and despite Chávez’s efforts to be placed every morning for two months.

Over the course of the next few weeks, the locals struggled to retain jobs working for Jones. For instance, in the week following the meeting with Carr, Crittendon, the FPO, Zamora, and the CSO, Jones paid the workers $0.85 per hour, but suddenly tried to change the arrangement to a pay-per-crate scheme that amounted to a significant drop in pay for the workers. After learning this news, the local workers were afraid that if they tried to negotiate Jones would simply bring in the Braceros again. While talking with one of the vocal workers who was complaining that they would lose the job at Jones’ Ranch, Chávez suddenly recalled “something I read in Saul Allinsky’s book on John L. Lewis … Don’t even leave your row. Just sit down” (93). Notably, Chávez studies studied labor organizing practices along with a bevy of other issues related to progressive social views on farmworking with Fr. McDonell in the 1950s (see chapter three),
and? this background, which Chávez considered to be his first real education, provided Chávez with concrete tactics that aligned with his broader and much deeper approach to nonviolence. That Chávez responded to the situation nonviolently is significant and follows from a very long history of practicing nonviolence, beginning with his mother’s *dichos* (sayings), and including a variety of other motifs in his life, including the family’s practice to help those in need and to take direct action when they perceived other farmworkers being treated unfairly. The schema of nonviolent action stems from the embodied experience of doing nonviolence as well as Chávez’s readings on nonviolent social protest.

Although Zamora sent Braceros to the field anyway, the tactic succeeded in pressuring Jones when Crittendon and Hayes arrived at the ranch. While Hayes refused to intervene on the part of the State of California, Crittendon acted on behalf of the United States, reminding Jones that he already had two labor violations and that a third would risk his contract for the Braceros (99). Following Crittendon’s mediation, the local workers went back to work at a higher rate of pay ($0.90/hour). The locals continued working at Jones Ranch for about a week until Zamora showed up at the end of one work day and fired them all, claiming there was too much Water-Grass mixed in with the seedlings (98). After a failed attempt to re-negotiate the locals’ jobs with Jones and Zamora, Crittendon of the U.S. Department of Labor re-instituted the local workers again. However, when they tried to return to work the following morning, Zamora fired them again, claiming the domestic workers couldn’t keep up with the Braceros (115).

The night before the march to Jones’ Ranch, Chávez was called to a hotel room to meet with an informant from the Bureau of Employment Security who told Chávez that the C.S.O.’s
work to get locals hired at Jones Ranch had the association of growers frightened. Chávez recalls the informant saying “these people [the growers] don’t want any investigations. They don't want anything public because this thing is a time bomb. They don’t want any publicity on it, and you’ve got everybody shook up” (Levy 139). Chávez recalls that he “didn’t realize the magnitude of the situation” prior to this conversation.

The following morning was a replay of the day before: Chávez dropped off truckloads of workers at Jones’ Ranch and Crittendon removed the Braceros from the fields. However, before they could work, Zamora made them all return to the FPO for referral cards. According to Zamora, because they were fired the day before, this was technically a new job, so they would all have to get referral cards in order to work. When Chávez found the workers at the FPO, they were visibly unhappy about the situation, grumbled their frustrations to Chávez, and began to walk away. Watching this scene unfold, Chávez realized what he should do to respond to Jones and the Growers Association: watching the workers “kinda marching” away from the FPO, Chávez realizes that he could organize the workers to intervene by getting them to march in the opposite direction, back to the ranch (Levy 122). Chávez realized that he could bring attention to the ongoing problem of getting domestic workers hired by staging a public protest. Again, this realization is not a happenstance, but follows a pattern of nonviolent action, and aligns especially with the protest marches widely publicized in the newsreels covering Ghandi, a figure that Chávez actively emulated. Additionally, as I discuss below, Chávez sensed that marching resonated with the cultural practices of Mexican Americans – their shared cultural model enabled a readiness potential to march. Notably, this march occurred just before the successful marches of the Civil Rights
movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr.

To achieve the greatest impact of the march, Chávez had James Flores contact the local media (Oxnard is only about 35 miles from Los Angeles, and thus well within reach of T.V. and print media). However, Chávez knew that in order for this demonstration to have an effect, he would have to slow down the workers long enough for the media to arrive. To do that, Chávez had the workers wait at the F.P.O. trailer where he publicly told the workers that they would wait for a new job to open in order to buy time, as he privately wasn’t sure what the group should do, and didn’t want to lose the workers’ presence at the office (123). Over the course of an hour of shuttling workers to the office, Chávez was listening to the workers complaining: “They’re all piled in around me there in the car, beefing about the lousy Referral Card trick Zamora pulled” when Chávez realized that he can “turn Zamora’s trick against him.” He used the formatting of the card, which took about an hour to fill out, to build in the time the group needed to organize the media. The arduous application process now worked in favor of Chávez’ broader goals of occupying the workers while they waited for the media. Here, uptake affords the same action potential (spending a significant amount of time filling out an application), but to new ends as the goal is no longer to get a job (the long time served the ideological purposes of not hiring local domestic workers), but to stall time until the media could arrive. Thus, while the referral card typically functioned to block or limit workers’ access to employment, Chávez aimed to realign the way in which the card extended the workers’ practice of seeking employment. In doing so, the referral card, as an extension now of the workers’ protest, undermined the employers’ ability to nominally follow the law by tying their actions to the referral card, which was invariably pre-
sented too late in the day for work due to the extensive application process.

This illustrates how genre uptake shifts according to the schema with which one takes up the genre. When the referral card was taken up under the premise of a schema that entailed getting work, the card was duly presented to the foreman, even though the workers knew they wouldn’t likely be hired. The mapping of the game schema on to this application process further enabled the reiteration of this getting work schema. However, the meaning and function of the card dramatically shifted when the schema governing its uptake (here a schema of protest) entailed the rejection of the corruption in the farmworker system symbolized by the card. That symbolic meaning emerged out of the routine experience of rejection despite the nominal and official promise of work as a due process affordance of the referral card.

Chávez had mixed feelings about this plan: on one hand, he had been working to get rid of the cards, but on the other hand, he saw the application process and the referral cards as a way to keep the workers together until they were ready to march to Jones’ Ranch. Chávez situated the cards as disposable, noting afterwards we can always tear ‘em up or something” (123). The cards had no meaningful purchase on employment, and their physical integrity did not directly matter to the employment process in any meaningful way. Further, this action of using cards to stall partially went against the broader strategy to get rid of the cards, since their function was to prevent domestic workers from gaining employment, but the long application process served another purpose - stalling the movement in order to bring media in. Once the group acquired their referral cards, they headed to the Farm Placement Office: "we marched – about sixty or seventy of us – to the employment office trailer. They registered about eight times each because we wanted to
get a lot of cards. We registered until the guy ran out of cards and went to Ventura to get more. Before we were through, we had piles of cards, everybody had eight, ten, twelve, or fifteen referral cards" (Levy 139).

After making final preparations for the march, including advising the workers and their families to stay along the side of the road, etc., Chávez gave a signal and the group began marching to Jones’ Ranch “to the tune and rhythm of Pancho Villa’s marching song, ‘La Adelita’” (125). The march thus enacted a blend that combined elements of the political nonviolent marches lead by Gandhi in the 1930s with elements of Mexican-American discourses, including the revolutionary marches from the early 1900s, stories of which filled Chávez’s boyhood in Arizona as his family members talked about their readiness to take direct action in México (see chapter three).

As Chávez later recalled, "That's when I discovered the power of the march. We started with a couple of hundred people in La Colonia, and by the time we got through, we must have had ten thousand people. Everybody was in it. Among Mexicans a march has a very special attraction. It appeals to them – just like a pilgrimage. I had been thinking of a march before that, from Calexico to Sacramento for the old-age pension – I guess for the same reason that marches attract Mexicans, and maybe that attraction was in me – but I had not gone through with that" (141). Moreover, Chávez was intimately familiar with Ghandi’s marches from the reading he did with Fr. McDonnell. Fr. McDonnell was a liberal Catholic Priest committed to improving the lives of migrant Mexican American families throughout California’s agricultural corridors and mentored Chávez in liberal philosophies of social justice, including the work of Gandhi (see
chapter two). Again, that Chávez led the group to take on a peaceful march stems from his readiness potential to act nonviolently. They could have done any number of things in response to this situation, including writing letters to representatives, organizing a mass migration to another agricultural center outside of Oxnard, pursued training for alternative lines of work, or staging violent protests by looting the city square in an armed rebellion, etc. Along the way from La Colonia to Jones’ Ranch, police cars joined in, as well as a caravan of forty cars with the wives and family of the workers, followed by another group of marchers who jumped off work trucks to join. Meanwhile, the local radio d.j. Villanueva interviewed workers about their story on air, and the local CBS reporter interviewed C.S.O. organizers about the march.

Once the parade reached El Rio, the small town near Oxnard where Jones’ Ranch was located, Chávez contemplated how everything would end. While some of the marchers, including one worker named Eddie Perez, wanted to storm the ranch and sit in the fields, Chávez wanted to avoid breaking the law (trespassing) and creating a violent conflict. There was no concrete plan once everyone reached the ranch. They knew that they wanted to show their force in numbers to the media and the growers, but what form that protest would take was uncertain, though it was clear that there should be some sort of climax to the march. According to Chávez, he recalled hearing the CBS reporter interview Chavira, one of Chávez’s first followers in Oxnard, asking what was going to happen next as Zamora interrupted the conversation, exclaiming “They could all be working right now if they’d done like I told ‘em and got their referral cards” (127). Zamora claims the workers could be working instead of marching if they’d gotten referral cards like he directed to them (i.e., following the bureaucratic process). Chávez realizes here the cards are the
problem, and that he should therefore do something with the cards as part of the group’s goal to
protest the Farm Placement system. As Chávez looked around the group of workers, he saw a
small group warming themselves around a small fire in the cool April air. Chávez realized at that
moment that he should burn the cards.

As the workers organized themselves, the growers and officials from the FPO seemed
worried about the march itself, publicly criticizing the workers for marching instead of working
in the fields, according to Chávez. However, once the workers began burning their cards one by
one in the fire, they grew quiet. Chávez describes the situation: the group "took a vote not to ever
again register to work because registration was a gimmick to keep us from getting jobs. I burned
my referral card, another joined, then another and another and another. Pretty soon everybody
joined in. We put them in a big pile and set them on fire. The TV cameras just ate it
up" (Levy140). With this act of burning their referral cards – the only ticket to getting employ-
ment for these men and women – each worker “is sort of committing himself never to go back
for another one” (Ross 129). The visceral act of burning the referral cards materializes the
metaphorical relationship between the workers and the Farm Placement Office symbolized by
the referral cards. Viewed another way, burning the cards is afforded by the schema that the cards
and the placement system does not provide employment. While ideology sponsored by the FPO,
the growers’ association, and other local, state, and federal officials inscribed the referral card
with the power to afford employment, the lived reality of the Oxnard farmworkers materialized
as an alternate schema that does not afford employment.

While the card burning was a dramatic protest aimed at pressuring the growers, the farm
placement office, and state officials, it did not result in jobs for the local workers. Everything that Chávez, the C.S.O., and the workers had done prior to this dramatic conclusion of the march entailed a potentiality that the card would win employment provided they did certain things, even if that potentiality was rarely realized. Rather, burning the card publicly reinscribed the genre of the card with a new potentiality - that it did not offer the possibility of employment. This potentiality was already felt on the part of the workers who were continually refused employment despite possessing referral cards. However, the cards also extended ideological arguments that they afforded the possibility for work held by the Oxnard Growers’ Association, the Farm Placement Office, and other governmental stakeholders in the California and Federal employment agencies.

In May of 1959, U.S. Secretary of Labor James Mitchell came to Oxnard - and because he couldn't provide Chávez and the CSO farmworkers with jobs, they picketed the Secretary at the airport when he landed, and later at the Lions Club in Ventura. "Later we had a march in town at night with candles. We were at a deadend, and we were just unloading all the pressure on them" (140). One of the women involved in the march brought, with Chávez's permission, a banner of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Chávez had her march in front – "That's where I got the idea that we needed some flag to identify us" (140). At first, the police threatened to arrest Chávez, claiming the parade was illegal, but Chávez and the group refused by insisting the police would have to arrest everyone; the police ended up providing an escort for the group as they marched for about two hours.

Chávez ended up winning some major victories - the CSO became a hiring hall, and the Federal agents helped him and the CSO replace Braceros on the spot with local Mexican-Ameri-
can farmworkers. But when Chávez left Oxnard, the hiring operation was left in the hands of the Packinghouse Workers Union, which led to a "factional fight" with the CSO. In the end, the whole operation collapsed within ninety days. Chávez returned "five or six" months later to find the Braceros all working in the fields, and the local farmworkers unemployed.

5. Conclusion

Discursive readiness potential is an aspect of literacy and literate practice that emerges out of one’s prior literate experiences. Genre, like the word schema, is a broad conceptual category that attempts to rein in a wide range language activities. Whereas “genre” points to the array of situational dynamics that inform and afford ways of rhetorical (inter)action, “schema” points to the powerful effects recurrent embodied practices, which are always embedded in rich socio-cultural contexts, have on individuals and language practices via conceptual blending. The analytical concept I have proposed in this chapter, genre blending, offers a way of understanding how discursive readiness potential emerges out of dynamically unfolding rhetorical situations. Whereas discursive readiness potential points to the power of recurrent experience in shaping potentials for action, genre blending points to how our dynamic situatedness within ecosystems affords the actualization of one set of potentials over another.

Literate practice is a function of experience; recurrent (re)iteration of practices cultivates potentials for action. The concept of schema suggests that recurrent embodied experience affords the cultivation of multi-modal conceptual capacities that, in turn, afford potentials for discursive action. Genre studies suggest that the ecosystems constituted by genres afford certain potentials for (inter)action, and that those patterns of (inter)actions have material effects on embodiment,
subjectivity, and identity. Agency emerges out of the dynamic interplay between our embodied- and experientially-based schema and our readiness potentials that we bring to bear on a situation, on the one hand, as well as the action-affordances entailed by the situational forces that comprise a genre’s ecosystem. Looking at agency in this way is to ascribe potentiality as an aspect of the actor (discursive readiness potential) as well as an aspect of the genre’s ecosystem (action-affordances).
CHAPTER FIVE The Potentials of Embodied Literacies: Implications for Further Research and Teaching

1. Introduction

This dissertation project has pursued questions of embodiment, agency, and literacy practices through the central concept of potentiality. The word potential may be defined as “Possible as opposed to actual; having or showing the capacity to develop into something in the future; latent; prospective” (OED). This definition of potential aligns quite nicely with the concept of discursive readiness potential, which I define in chapter two as our capacity to enact a practice out of a field of possible alternatives. Discursive readiness potential points to the actualization of one possible action, and since the concept is rooted in an appreciation of the power of experience (the practice of practice) to constitute potentiality, it is also about development; the latent prospects for future discursive action. Discursive readiness potential describes not only our capacity to act, but also our capacity to navigate multiple competing action potentials, as well as our capacity to develop or compose new potentials for action.

Potentiality shares the same Latin root word potentia as the word potence, which provides for us the word potency. This etymological lineage reveals another way of viewing potentiality, more directly related to power. The OED provides a couple useful glosses on this aspect of potentiality: “Possessing potency or power; potent, powerful, mighty, strong; commanding” and “Something that gives strength or ability, a power.” Discursive readiness potential marks the power of experience and a stance of readiness to act, for the power of potentiality is tied to the remembered powers of experience carried forward into new rhetorical situations. Discursive
readiness potential thus offers a way to view current literacy activities from the dual lenses of agency as (a) the memories of past practices sedimented as a readiness to act, and (b) the power to act in specific ways. Potentiality is both an aspect of growth and development as well as an aspect of one’s power encapsulated as a capacity to do.

In order to understand potentiality, I have argued, one must take an embodied perspective on literacy practice and the ways in which those practices situate corporeal literate bodies in the flows of socio-cultural activity systems already filled with various objects, tools, technologies, and other bodies engaged in various literacies and genres. Further, we must combine perspectives on how our embodiment shapes our minds, as well as how our material situatedness in the worlds we dwell in shapes both our bodies and minds. The payoff of such an approach to literacy studies, I argue, is a more holistic understanding of how we acquire and intervene in discursive agency.

Thus, the central problem explored in this dissertation has been to examine the relationships between embodied cognition and culture, and to understand how these forces affect literacy. The central theoretical framework has been discursive readiness potential, which, as I outline above, describes our capacity to navigate potential emergent literate actions and to revise the set of potential literate practices that may emerge in future contexts through a process of repeated practice combined with focused attention on our practice of discourse practices. This concept allows us to talk about individual cognitive processes without losing touch of cultural nuances, for the practices that we practice are invariably steeped in rich material socio-cultural situations and ideologies. However, the effect of repeating those practices has measurable material implica-
tions for our bodies, including the neural activation patterns that shape our readiness potentials.

In order to explore discursive readiness potential, this dissertation project has offered an archival study of César Chávez’s Discourse practices through the late 1950s when Chávez began to transition into the labor movement that would later define his life. This textual analysis addresses Chávez’s daily writings in the 1950s as well as Chávez’s oral history and oral account of the Community Service Organization’s efforts to address corruption in the farmworker system in Oxnard, California during the late 1950s. The primary strength of this methodological approach has been the wide view of Chávez’s life-long Discourse practices afforded by the archival record. For example, chapter three traces out Chávez’s Discourse genealogy in order to understand how that history of practice shaped potentials for action that form the contours of Chávez’s lifeworld Discourse. One of those potentials for action was Chávez’s readiness to take nonviolent action in response to situations of apparent social injustice. As such, the study of Chávez’s lifeworld Discourse in chapter three illustrates the latent power of experience in cultivating agency as a capacity to enact one set of potentials over other possible actions, while chapter four worked explores how the readiness potentials culled through a lifetime of experience regulates genre uptake.

Chapter four examines genre use in a case study of the protest march in Oxnard, California. Schemas are systems of organizing thought material that derive their logic from our patterns of recurrent embodied experience. Schemas are representations of our experience that are anchored in sensorimotor systems and tied to the neural circuits that correspond with specific action routines, such as marching. This material grounding in embodiment provides schemas with conceptual logic hemmed in by patterns of experience. However, schemas are generalized from
that experience, and allow us to employ the logics of sensorimotor experience to create more abstract conceptualizations of ourselves and the world. We enact schemas, I argue in chapter four, within genres; thus, schemas regulate genre uptake, thereby tying prior patterns of experience with an unfolding rhetorical situation and the conventions of a discourse community.

Cultural models are the key connection between schemas and genre uptake. Cultural models are akin to Gee’s concept of Discourses in that cultural models point to the sets of saying-being-doing-feeling that allow us to recognize others enacting specific cultural identities and activities. Schemas underwrite cultural models by tying social ideologies to patterns of sensorimotor experience, and by providing a logic of action and meaning grounded in embodied experience that may propel greater levels of abstract conceptualization. However, cultural models are not restricted to foundations in sensorimotor experience. For example, the farmworker march in Oxnard (see chapter four) combines cultural models of protest marches that Chávez likely acquired through his study of Ghandi as well as his identity as Mexican American, which as he notes, privileged social marches. These aspects of the cultural model at work during the Oxnard event point to ideologies acquired outside of direct experience. Additionally, the cultural model at work is related to schemas of nonviolent action in response to unfairness, a paradigm rooted in many spheres of Chávez’s life (see chapter three).

The concept of genre blending developed in chapter four attempts to bring together schema, cultural models, and genre by outlining how schema and cultural models regulate genre uptake. Genres, as I explain in chapter four, operate as ecosystems of social action that serve the ends of discourse communities. They are the sites of recurrent social action, and uptake describes
both the actions that constitute doing genre as well as the ways genres connect with one another. Bringing schema and cultural models into conversation with uptake allows us to see how our embodied experiences regulate the ways in which we uptake genres by affording certain potentials for action. These affordances shape the contours of genre uptake in ways that relate to a situation as well as our prior experiences. Because repeated experience has material consequences on our embodiment, including our neural activation patterns which make certain actions more likely to occur, we must appreciate the embodied aspects of cultural genre use in order to develop a holistic understanding of how we come to take up and practice genres in real time.

The project undertaken by this dissertation can be usefully extended in a number of ways, including by expanding the scope of the archival materials considered in my study of Chávez. Specifically, Chávez’s personal library is preserved in the César Chávez National Monument library at Keene, California. Looking at the various marginalia, underlinings, etc. in the texts read by Chávez (e.g., the biography of Gandhi, etc.) could offer insights in how reading practices shaped Chávez’s readiness to act. For instance, chapter four looks at Chávez first political or labor march in Oxnard, California, and suggests that Chávez’s uptake of the march genre was regulated by, among other forces, his readiness to act nonviolently, a practice well rooted in his childhood experiences. A few years later, Chávez returned to the march as a political act by orchestrating a major march that rivaled the scale of Gandhi’s marches in the 1930s in the sense that it incorporated tens of thousands of people in a 300 mile march from Delano to Sacramento, California. It is likely that an understanding of Chávez’s engagements with the texts on nonviolent social-justice action would enable further insights on Chávez’s readiness to act in high stakes
political and rhetorical situations.

The limit of this study, however, concerns its focus on textual analysis. In chapter two, the concept of discursive readiness is developed out of a conversation between recent scholarship in composition and rhetoric on agency with perspectives on embodied cognition, affect, and neuroscience. Taken together, this research emphasized the significant material consequences of (re)iterative literacy practices on the composition of one’s readiness to act in rhetorical situations. Key to the cultivation of readiness potentials and to the intervention in our readiness to act is our self-aware feedback of our embodied and embedded situatedness in dynamic and emergent discursive situations. This project theorizes the relationship between practice and experience through the lenses of embodiment, then traces out evidence of embodied discursive potentials in the textual record, but has no access to material bodies. Therefore, one of the critical implications of this study is the need for future research on literacy potentials using methodologies that afford perspectives on the dynamic feedback and feedforward loops between minds, bodies, and material socio-cultural worlds. The aim of this chapter is to flesh out how materiality and embodiment might play more central roles in literacy studies research.

The following sections further elaborate on implications of this dissertation project. Collectively, the ideas outlined below offer inroads to developing our understanding of potentiality, practice, embodied cognition, and hybridity. The first section suggests we return to cognitive-based approaches to composition and individual composing processes, as illustrated by this dissertation project. The second section argues for increased attention to the power of reflection in composing capacities to act. The third section outlines how we can apply the underlying princi-
amples of discursive readiness potential to pedagogies that emphasize practice. The fourth section discusses how my findings on Chávez’ literacies might change the way we think about education and language learning in the writing classroom. The chapter ends with some thoughts about how cognitive psychology might help to bring many of these pieces together in future research.

2. Toward a Second Wave of Cognitive Approaches to Composition and a Return to Process

The field of composition and rhetoric has had something of an allergy to cognitive approaches to the study of writing since the social turn in the 1980s. Scholars, including most famously Flower and Hayes, argue for cognitive approaches to understanding composing processes that emphasize decision making and problem-solving as key areas for analysis. Flower and Hayes’ cognitive theory of writing maintains that writing is a set of goal-oriented thinking processes hierarchically organized by the writer that are shaped by the writer’s network of goals, which are grounded in and are responsive to the writer’s own purposes and ongoing feedback from the writing process. Drawing on research from cognitive psychology, and using think-aloud protocols to analyze writers’ processes, Flower and Hayes’ articulate three units that shape writing in their cognitive model: (1) the task environment (including everything outside the skin); (2) the writer’s long-term memory, which contains stored knowledge and writing plans; and (3) writing processes (i.e., planning, translating, and reviewing). Critiques of this focus on the inner workings of the cognitive process include arguments that it does not account for the socially situated aspects of literacy (Bizzell; Faigley), fails to account for the unpredictable chaotic processes of composing (Berthoff), and ignores the formative role played by the nonrepresentational forces of emotion and affect in composition (Brand).
In “Reclaiming the Mind,” Kristie Fleckenstein addresses some of these critiques, and argues for a return to cognitive-based research in composition and rhetoric. As Fleckenstein explains, the cognitive approaches popular in the 1980s adopted an information-processing model of cognition that was critiqued for failing to sufficiently address embodiment and elements such as creativity in the composing process. Fleckenstein responds to these critiques by taking up Gregory Bateson’s work on eco-cognitive approaches to artificial intelligence and cybernetics. By reframing the mind/brain as information-processor to an ecological approach to the mind, Fleckenstein argues we may “recommit to research on the individual mind in action” without losing touch of embodiment and creativity.

Fleckenstein’s argument for a return to cognition as an embodied and ecological process resounds with other recent research in the field (Cooper; Gorzelsky; Micciche). Cooper, like Fleckenstein, takes a Batesonian ecological approach to theorizing composition by developing what Cooper calls a neurodynamical arc, which articulates the feedback and feedforward loops between an embodied organism and her surrounding environment. Micciche argues that socially-situated approaches to composition research (prevalent especially in literacy studies) have failed to keep up with the broader turn to new materialism, including embodied cognition and ecological views of our situatedness in material socio-cultural worlds. Finally, Gorzelsky argues that we should view literacy as a simultaneously biological and cultural undertaking and seek out research partnerships with colleagues in other disciplines, such as cognitive psychology or neuroscience, to incorporate findings from instruments such as fMRIs with our currently prevalent qualitative methods to better understand literacies. My project resonates with these scholars’
calls for revitalized approaches to embodied cognition in composition studies.

In order to return to process theories of composition, however, cognitive models should also demonstrate that we can theorize cognitive processes of composition in ways responsive to post-process critiques. Specifically, Thomas Kent argues that the writing process cannot be reduced to a generalizable, repeatable process, and Gary Olson argues efforts to theorize the writing process are “misguided, unproductive, and misleading” (9). According to Kent, post-process theorists maintain that writing is a public, interpretive, and situated activity, thus removed from the interior cognitive processes articulated by Flower and Hayes and others in the field’s first cognitive wave. In short, cognitive process models have been critiqued for being too individualistic and positivistic in their turn to cognitive psychology and articulation of individualized composing processes.

My argument for discursive readiness potential, however, provides a theory of writing process and agency rooted in neuroscience, affect studies, and the cognitive humanities that appreciates both inner and outer forces of writing, and remains open to views of writing as interpretive and situated without losing focus on how our mind is embodied and emplaced in richly material socio-cultural environments. A second wave of cognitive studies in composition and rhetoric should continue to pursue questions of the writing process in ways that account for our embodiment, including nonrepresentational forces like affect and emotion, as constitutive of cognitive processes, as well as the dynamic interrelationships between our mind, body, and material socio-cultural environment. That is, we should theorize and research how our writing process consists in part of a situated embodied mind that extends into the material world by drawing
from what we know in the cognitive sciences (e.g., neuroscience, cognitive psychology, etc.), the
cognitive humanities (e.g., work such as Noland and Massumi that adapts research in affect and
neuroscience to humanities’ contexts), and the field of composition and rhetoric about minds,
odies, and materiality.

Edward Slingerland provides a compelling rationale for pursuing such a research agenda
in *What Science Offers the Humanities*. Slingerland argues that postmodernism has outlived its
usefulness as a coherent theoretical or methodological approach. The central postmodernist ar-
gument that our only access to reality is via the mediation of language and culture (what Slinger-
land calls the strong social constructivist argument) does not hold water in the face of the recent
work on embodied cognition, which shows how cognition is also extra-linguistic. Slingerland’s
aim is to show how recent work in cognitive psychology, cognitive linguistics, and neuroscience
can allow us to retain our focus on cultural relativism (which we retain from the lessons learned
through postmodernism) without falling into the postmodernist bind of strong relativism. As
Slingerland writes, “The embodied approach to culture allows us to talk in a responsible way
about species wide conceptual, affective, and aesthetic norms, while at the same time enabling us
to remain sensitive to differences and focused on cultural nuance” (27). For instance, Slingerland
argues, research on enacted perception shows how humans have precultural access to the world,
which suggests we cannot maintain a blank-slate model of cognition. Rather, Slingerland argues
for a pragmatic embodied humanism, for biology helps us understand the evolutionary parame-
ters of human cognition, postmodernism and its cultural relativism helps us to see the differences
that matter across cultures.
A second wave of cognitive research in composition should pursue what Gorzelsky has called biocultural literacy by developing a robust understanding of how thought, language, and embodiment are intertwined from biological as well as cultural perspectives. The project I propose is to revisit the question of process in composition. Given the already social dynamic of embodied cognition, the time might be right to look at what we know about how neural typical humans learn as a starting point for conversations about literacy learning and theorizing composing practices.

3. Toward a Pedagogy of Reflection

Discursive readiness potential describes one’s capacity to act as a vector of embodied experience and provides a way for theorizing how we may productively intervene in our readiness to act in order to compose new action potentials. Key to this intervention is a mechanism of self-aware feedback of the body doing some activity in material socio-cultural situations. This aspect of feedback provides the actor with the awareness needed to focus on alternative actions that may challenge our already sedimented readiness potentials.

Interestingly, the principle of self-aware feedback as a monitor of unfolding activity figured in Flower and Hayes’ earlier models of cognitive writing processes. However, the field has not developed much research on reflection as a cognitive practice or a component of composition pedagogy. Yancey’s work on reflection in *Reflection in the Writing Classroom* stands as an important work on reflection, and conceptualizes reflection as a dialogical process that both looks forward to our goals while looking back at what we’ve done, putting both ends in conversation with each other in the process. Reflection is both process and product for Yancey – it is a dialog-
ic examination of what we’ve done and what we want to do that combines the cognitive, affective, and intuitive (6). This nexus of past practice with ongoing goals fits well with Cooper’s neurodynamic arc of learning, which outlines a feedback loop between various conscious and non-conscious cognitive processes as a way of theorizing emergent and embodied rhetorical agency.

My research raises additional questions about reflection, though. As I explain in chapter two, Schwartz and Begley and Noland mark an important role in reflective practices, including rehearsing potential actions in the mind and developing proprioceptive feedback about one’s actions in order to develop new capacities to act. In other embodied arts, including music and athletics, individual musicians and performers routinely reflect on their performances to learn about how they hold an embouchure or take a certain stance in a match, as well as to identify areas for future focused development. Likewise, how can we look back at our writing in ways that afford the development of new capacities to act and that identify new areas for learning and growth? How can reflection feedback into curricula in real time in ways that are manageable from an instructor’s or a program’s perspective?

4. Toward Pedagogies of Practice

Agency, I argue in this project, emerges from the practice of literacy practices as a readiness potential to act in rhetorical situations. This view emphasizes the importance of repeated practices in cultivating capacities to act and thus suggests pedagogical interventions that support repetition. Such a line of argument invites the skill-and-drill critique of grammar exercises that eschew rhetorical sensitivity and the complexities that come along with live (i.e. out of the class-
room) contexts. In the following section, I explore how discursive readiness potential might align with sentence-level pedagogies that emphasize the practice of practice without losing sight of the importance of contextualizing writing.

In “The Erasure of the Sentence,” Connors surveys scholarship analyzing sentence-level pedagogies through the 1990s. Connors focuses on three distinct pedagogical approaches: the Christiansen method (c.f., Christiansen); rhetorical imitation exercises (c.f., Corbett); and sentence-combining (c.f., Strong). Connors examines the origin, rise to prominence, and the relevant research supporting each method, finding that the record shows these pedagogies were effective. Moreover, Connors also examines the critiques to sentence-pedagogies that emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Key critiques included arguments that these sentence-pedagogies (a) miss the bigger rhetorical picture of writing, (b) are premised on faulty behavioral psychology that suggests practice forms non-conscious capacities to act, and (c) are insufficiently theorized. As Connors explains, critics argue that sentence-level pedagogies were “a practice without a theory, a method without a principle” (117). While research in the late 1970s and early 1980s showed the efficacy of sentence-level pedagogies, its critics (e.g., Bizzell) argued the practice lacked a sufficient social-constructivist rationale (118). As a result of these critiques (anti-formalism, anti-automatism, and anti-empiricism), the prevalence of sentence-level pedagogies in composition came to a halt and the aphorism that “research has shown that sentence-combining doesn’t work” was born. However, as Connors explains, there is no justification for these claims, as no research exists that “genuinely ‘disproved’” the gains created for students through sentence practice” (119). Thus, Connor’s project is to analyze the arguments for and against sentence-lev-
el pedagogies, culminating in a defense of this pedagogical approach.

Sentence-level pedagogies may offer a way to explore potentiality in pedagogical applications. For example, In “A Generative Rhetoric of the Sentence,” Francis Christensen outlines his sentence pedagogy, which centers around a main clause that serves as the kernel for further, and generative, sentence development. Christensen’s method operates on four major principles to develop what he calls the cumulative sentence. Christensen distinguishes the cumulative sentence as a mode that is “dynamic rather than static, representing the mind thinking” (156). Further, this mode of sentence development is rhetorical because “It serves the needs of both the writer and the reader, the writer by compelling him to examine his thought, the reader by letting him into the writer’s thought” (156). First, good sentence writing begins by adding new information to the kernel in contrast to emphasizing brevity, deletion, simplification, etc. Addition happens by adding new phrases to a kernel main clause. Second, because the Christensen method emphasizes addition, one must specify how new phrases relate to the kernel, which Christensen calls direction. New phrases may occur before, within, or after the kernel. Third, the writer must determine the level of specificity of the new phrases - whether they are abstract or concrete. Finally, the writer must develop texture by using modifying phrases, adjectives, and adverbs. Ideally, one’s sentences should achieve a variety of texture throughout the text. In this way, the Christensen focuses on using sentence exercises to generate ideas. Viewed another way, we might ask how the practice of certain sentence-combining activities enables the activation of certain meaning potentials.

In “The Theory and Practice of Imitation in Classical Rhetoric,” Edward P. J. Corbett
takes a different approach than Christiansen, as Corbett argues for the value of imitation as a generative practice for developing style. Noting that ancient rhetoricians, including Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Longinus, Cicero, and Quintilian, advocated imitation as a powerful learning strategy, Corbett situates imitation as part of a larger learning triad of theory, imitation, and practice. The goal of imitation, Corbett argues, is to make oneself similar to another writer; similar, but not identical. To imitate is to emulate, for “Imitation” in classical rhetoric “asked the student to observe the manner or pattern or form or means used by a model and then attempt to emulate the model” (244). There are two basic steps to imitation as a developmental exercise: analysis and genesis or emulation (245). While we don’t have access to the ancient pedagogies, Corbett draws on the Renaissance adaptations of classical rhetoric to develop the following imitation exercises: explication de texte; copy verbatim select passages; double translation; and paraphrase. While commonplace books were practiced also during the Renaissance period, Corbett does not value them as an imitation source, but notes instead their function as a collection of passages on various subjects (e.g., a collection of content rather than a study of form). Corbett’s model offers aligns with discursive readiness potential in that the (re)iterative practice of emulating others’ style may be viewed as a way of composing a readiness to (en)act that style in future rhetorical situations.

Like Corbett, Laura Micciche takes up imitation in “Making a Case for Rhetorical Grammar,” where she argues that the field should adopt grammar instruction as a rhetorical concern rather than as an end stage (error correction during editing) writing concern. While Micciche notes that “grammar instruction is unquestionably unfashionable” (716), she argues that
teaching grammar is as important as any other undertaking in composition pedagogy (718). Micciche’s approach is to emphasize grammar as a rhetorical concern in that it deeply ties the formation of thought to the expression of ideas through language structures. Thus, Micciche writes, “The grammatical choices we make – including pronoun use, active or passive verb constructions, and sentence patterns – represent relations between writers and the world they live in” (719). While critics of grammar instruction argue variously that focusing on grammar takes too much time away from higher order concerns or that ideas must be developed before sentences may be crafted, or that grammar instruction focuses on error through a disciplinary (e.g., control) framework, Micciche emphasizes rhetorical grammar as a concern of language and ideas. In this sense, we may, like Christensen (unmentioned in Micciche’s argument), note that rhetorical grammar is generative. Micciche defines rhetorical grammar instruction as “a tool for articulating and expressing relationships among ideas. The purpose of learning rhetorical grammar is to learn how to generate persuasive, clear thinking that reflects on and responds to language as work, as produced rather than evacuated of imperfections” (720).

Micciche’s approach to grammar instruction adapts the Commonplace books for the composition classroom. Students are asked to cite any passage from any text that they find interesting, for whatever reason. Accompanying each entry, however, is an analysis that examines the relationship between the form of the language and the ideas expressed in the passage. The pedagogy thus “encourages students to experiment with language and then to reflect on the interaction between content and grammatical form. While this approach entails study of sentence slots, structures like participial phrases and adverbials that add information to a sentence, and the dif-
ference between independent and dependent clauses, rhetorical grammar more generally requires students to think about the work these aspects of grammar achieve for a writer’s message” (722).

Micciche’s model offers the strongest connection to theory of discursive readiness potential developed in chapter two. The practice of imitating sentence-level prose, analyzing its style through a reflection on the nexus of style and content, then actively (re)iterating that style should strengthen one’s readiness potentials in rhetorical situations. Further research is warranted on this model to see whether sentence-level practices in the classroom strengthen one’s readiness to enact style, and whether that readiness to act also affects one’s capacity to generate ideas (content) as Christiansen and Micciche both suggest.

5. Toward Thresholds of Discourse Learning

César Chávez’s discourse practices demonstrate the power of hybrid literacies to combine disparate elements across discourse communities. Chávez’s practices suggest a continuity across many different literacy scenes, and as such, strikes me as an important example for the kinds of discursive flexibility I would like to cultivate for myself and encourage for my students. One of the central questions I approached this project with was whether it would be possible to develop a composition pedagogy that emphasizes acquiring dominant discourses without turning to colonializing or assimilationist frameworks. While this question is not directly addressed in this dissertation project, my findings may suggest some directions for pursuing this question further.

The foundation of much of our work as composition instructors concerns students’ movements (and attempts at movement) between their home discourses on the one hand and the standard academic discourse on the other hand. To grapple with these movements, we use con-
ceptual metaphors like “bridging discourses” and “scaffolding learning” in order to talk about student growth. While these metaphors help us think about the connections between discourses, they also construct conceptual spaces that limit the kinds of agency afforded by the controlling metaphors. So, for example, while a bridge constructs a space for linkages between two shores, it also imagines a kind of discursive agency between those shores that is distinct from the kind of agency afforded by a scaffold.

We use metaphors of bridges and scaffolds to talk about literacy learning in our hallway conversations, syllabi, and research on the acquisition and learning of literacies. While these concepts help us think about how we can help facilitate literate practices, I argue they imply problematic relationships and possibilities for movement between discourses. For example, bridge metaphors imply a large gap that is otherwise uncrossable without structural intervention, and which spans two parallel discourses. Scaffold metaphors align discourses in a vertical (hierarchical) relationship, implying the target discourse is unattainable without significant structural intervention. In contrast, threshold as a metaphor for construing the relationships between discourses better affords the notion of hybridity developed in this project. Thresholds bring discourses in close proximity to one another such that an individual may occupy multiple discursive spaces at once (i.e., standing on the threshold). Moreover, movement across a threshold does not imply that significant space has been crossed, as is implied by both bridge and scaffold metaphors. Thus, the threshold brings discourses in close alignment and enables fluid movement between multiple discourses. The threshold is both a conduit for movements as well as a place for occupation. Because the threshold is a subtle element within the architecture, it does not re-
direct our attention away from the agent in the same way that bridges and scaffolds emphasize their own complexity.

6. Conclusion

In order to understand literacy as a set of social actions undertaken by individuals, we need to develop perspectives on how our cognition shapes and is shaped by our embodiment and our situatedness in material environments. We can partially answer these questions through textual analysis by developing a theoretical framework that provides a way of thinking about how literacies are embodied. Developing alternative methodologies, such as exploring how else conceptual blending can be deployed in composition research, may offer further insights on embodied cognition in literate activities. Indeed, one of the central challenges of investigating agency and literacy from an embodied perspective is that our capacities to conceptualize others’ embodiment is limited by our access to that embodied experience. To that end, Micciche argues our conventional situated approaches to research (e.g., ethnography) may be insufficient to deal with the problems posed by materialism; Fleckenstein argues for a return to cognitive approaches within ecological frameworks; and Gorzelsky has suggested we work with colleagues in the fields of neuroscience and cognitive psychology to combine methods such as fMRI research with other methods prevalent in the field to understand literacy as biocultural, though such collaborations would be costly. Another option would be to pursue mixed-methods approaches grounded in cognitive psychology, an approach that would respond to Micciche’s critique of situated models, Fleckenstein’s argument for a return to cognition, and Gorzelsky’s call for mixed-methods in biocultural research of literacy practices. Cognitive psychology offers insights to learning that
emphasize deliberate practice combined with metacognition that leads to the transfer of learning from one context to another (National Research Council). Moving the project to intersect with this body of research will help clarify how the practice of practice, self-aware reflection or metacognition, and mindful deliberation (i.e., mental effort) contribute to composing agency.
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ABSTRACT

LITERACY POTENTIALS: AGENCY, EMBODIMENT, AND HYBRIDITY IN César Chávez’S DISCOURSE PRACTICES

by

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This project examines César Chávez’s writing during his work in the Community Service Organization in the 1950s to understand hybrid literacies and agency as an embodied aspect of literacy. Using a theoretical framework grounded in embodied cognition, this dissertation develops the concept of discursive readiness potential to describe agency as a capacity to act in discursive situations that emerges from one’s embodied practice of literacies. The project explores Chávez’s discourse genealogy through the first thirty-five years of his life in order to define lifeworld Discourse as an emergent hybridity that accounts for one’s capacity to act based on one’s history of sedimented literacy practices. The project also looks at a case study of Chávez genre use in Oxnard, California in 1957 in order to understand how genre blending across discourse communities emerges as an embodied literate practice. Finally, this dissertation offers suggestions for taking up the project’s core concepts in composition pedagogy.
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