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Making Sense: Rhetoric, Perception, and Materiality

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MAKING SENSE: RHETORIC, PERCEPTION, AND MATERIALITY

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the Faculty of Arts and Humanities
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by
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Abstract

This dissertation dwells on the intersections of language-use and perception. The premise is that language makes literal sense and this reality has profound implications for those Burke called “symbol-using/mis-using animals.” Communication scholars have long accepted a model of communication that positions language as “constitutive articulate contact” as opposed to a discrete means of transmission (Stewart, 1994), but a great deal of work remains to be done in terms of developing the implications for individuals and their language-use.

Chapter One explores the stances embraced by rhetorical materialists struggling to describe how language matters. The first chapter fields a series of critiques that essentially argue that a “grounding logic” is needed to organize our understanding of the processes of linguistic sense making. Embodied-embedded cognition serves as that “guiding logic.”

Chapter Two explores Embodied-embedded cognition, a counter-perspective to cognitivism – the approach that positions sense-making in a dualistic environment where the sense-able stuff of the “real world” and the sense-maker considering that world are different. Embodied-embedded cognition suggests an “enactive” view of worlding that recruits that attitudes and actions of the sense-maker in determining what ultimately becomes real.
Chapter Three ties these two conversations together through the use of metaphor, arguing that metaphors *make sense*. Metaphors can be looked at metaphorically, as a form of “grasping” at the world that is remarkably creative as well as abundant. This perspective on metaphors vindicates the stances of embodied embedded thinkers and rhetorical materialists alike that argue that language matters.

Chapters Four and Five speculate on some implications for public speaking pedagogy and ethics. Teaching language as a form of “grasping” changes fundamentally the kind of practice that is necessary to improve. Likewise, noting that the language that we employ has a literal effect on perception transforms the ethical implications of our speaking.

Chapter Five concludes by suggesting a logic of non-violence as a practical and productive response to the ethical demands placed on symbol-users.
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Section One: Preface

The first section of this dissertation, chapters One through Three, identifies a “Copernican shift” in the fields of communication studies and cognitive neuroscience alike. The phrase, borrowed from popular neuroscientist David Eagleman (2011), refers to the moment that Copernicus was able to prove using homemade telescopes that there are indeed objects orbiting the distant planet Jupiter. Eventually this revolutionized the geo-centric view of the universe that dominated astronomical inquiry to that point. The Earth fell from “the center” of the universe and became, instead, embedded in an awesomely large and infinitely complex system of interrelating bodies. Many of these bodies, like the gas giant Jupiter itself, could be said to be more like systems than discrete things, which of course only further troubled our ability to understand the cosmos. So significant was this shift, that the full complexity of the Copernican model of astronomy still, in many ways, frustrates those interested in understanding the heavens.

Eagleman takes up the phrase to lend perspective to a similarly awesome shift in cognitive neuroscience (explored in Chapter Two) that has accelerated radically since the advent of functional neural resonance technology. The early model of the brain as the seat of the self, including those notions which situated a “little person” (Descartes’ cogito) somewhere inside the brain, are rapidly giving way to new understandings of the brain as an ever-changing part of a massively complex, interrelated system. It turns out that while one can still call the brain “systematically organized,” the bodies, actions, interactions, and environments that surround the brain have profound effects on the
brain’s functioning and organization. This new model comes replete with several daunting implications. Rather than approaching thinking as something that one person (an individual) does, embodied-embedded cognition situates thinking as a kind of embedded *dividual* technique that is in many ways tied to the flowing world around it.

In this dissertation, I attempt to take this Copernican shift in cognitive science into the realm of rhetoric. I begin in Chapter One with a discussion about a third shift – this time between two competing models of language-use as understood by communication studies scholars. This shift, identified by Stewart (1994), situates language not as a means of transmitting discrete packages of “facts,” but instead as a very literal form of constitutive articulate contact. Stewart’s analysis starts with the so called “symbol model” which frames language as somehow different from or exterior to the world of “real facts” that language attempts to name. The “shift” comes when communication scholars instead conceive of language as *contact*. A model that positions language as contact embeds language in the “one world” – a semi-coherent sphere – inhabited by human beings (p. 136). The “one world,” Stewart explains consists of everything that affects us and everything that we affect. Humans cannot depart from their ‘worlds’ or even project themselves into ontological outer space; all human awareness is situated (to adopt a spatial frame) or historical (to adopt a temporal frame), and the space-time sphere is our ‘world. (ibid)

The question at the center of this dissertation, “how does language matter?” comes with a wide array of answers that I attempt to unpack in Chapter One. The materialist debates between rhetorical thinkers who have adopted the model of language as articulate contact beg questions of determinacy and contingency that have no clear-cut
answers. The *matter* rendered by language becomes, in Kenneth Burke’s words, “literal,” and the “literal” mattering that is on going among and within symbol users is impossible to pin down.

Like the Copernican view of the universe, the view of language as articulate constitutive contact may be widely accepted, but the full significance of the shift between models is still well beyond the abilities of contemporary theorists, including this one, to fully grasp. It is towards that lofty end that I offer in Chapter Three an examination of metaphor as a potent site of symbolic mattering. So if the guiding question of this dissertation is “how does communication matter?”, in Chapter Three I will argue that it matters, in part, through and with metaphor.

Language theorists (the most notable of which are Lakoff and Johnson and Kenneth Burke) have long drawn on metaphor as a tool that demonstrates the blurred lines between language and cognition. In the case of Lakoff and Johnson, the “perceptual” characteristics of language (which is inherently metaphoric) have generated interest among embodied-embedded thinkers (Glenberg, 2008). Stewart identifies Burke’s move from a “persuasive” (symbolic) understanding of communication to one rooted in “identification” as positively central to the shift between the “transmission” and “language-as-contact” models. Burke famously advocated metaphors as one of the Four Master Tropes, situating perspective-taking amongst the most substantive stuff of the generative human capacity he called “symbolicity.” Burke also argued that metaphors could thus be drawn on as a form of heuristic. Metaphor not only inevitably generates
human existence, but also enables us to take perspectives on the perspectives that we take – this kind of exploration Burke argued could be profoundly enlightening. As Burke’s notion of “trained incapacity” suggests, all enlightenment necessarily comes fraught with as many embarrassments as opportunities. And thus Burke advocated for a poetic perspective, a perspective that floats, transiently and restlessly, between perspectives, as the best possible hope for critical symbolic creatures.

My examination attempts to take a poetic perspective with regards to metaphor use itself. I emphasize the importance of these ubiquitous components of symbolicity in rendering the “sensible/able” world of humans. One of the reasons that metaphors excite embodied-embedded cognition theorists so much is because they are rooted in opposition. Metaphors, like senses, are perspective-driven kinds of meaning making that manifest their influence in ways both explicit and hidden. More often than not humans do not select the metaphoric framings drawn upon to think about or explain the world, but these framings can still be interrogated and explored. What’s more, innumerable alternate perspectives are not only inherently available to symbol-users but also creatively adoptable and adaptable. As the authors I canvas in Chapter Two argue so, too, with sensation.

Varying metaphoric understandings of the world and variable sensory adaptation alike can matter profoundly different worlds to otherwise “similar” people. The language we use changes, literally, what one can and cannot see or otherwise sense or experience. Phenomena like race, class, and gender, for example, are literal and incredibly real to
human beings. At the same time it can also be argued that these phenomenon do not exist “naturally” outside of our understanding of them. Class is not “stuff” in the universe, rather it is stuff that makes-class-sense.

This kind of matter is not “only in our heads.” Substances generated by symbolicity like race, class, gender, sex, identity, credibility, to name only a few, all exact very material influence on the so-called “physical” world (a notion that embodied-embedded cognition and constitutive contact models of language alike trouble significantly). I draw on the example of rainbows to explain how something can both be “real” and “perspectival” at the same time. Rainbows are both everywhere and nowhere at once. They are a “trick” of the sense-making abilities of our eyes. In fact, all sight is imbued with such trickery, this is how perception works to stitch together our sensible affective sphere into the seemingly unified whole of experience. By examining the ubiquity, potency, possibility, and consequences of metaphor-use I hope to begin the daunting project of exploring the importance of the “tricks” of symbolicity.

If I can successfully articulate the role that metaphor plays in rendering the sensible/able landscape for symbol-users, then the “I” at the center of the personal universe should tumble into an infinitely complex system of interrelation. “The way people are,” be they villains or fools, will have much more to do with the practical components of the experiencer’s symbolic rendering than with the substance or “natural character” of those people. Our treatments of others and of our world become literal treatments that transform, materially, the universe as we come to know it. In the
dissertation’s second section, I attempt to come to grips with the entailments for pedagogy and ethics.
Chapter One: What Matters? Rhetorical “Mattering” as Alternative to the “Transmission Model” of Communication

While the stuff of language may seem intangible, “abstract,” or “only” conceptual, a growing number of rhetorical and neuro-cognitive thinkers alike are arguing – or more accurately emphasizing - that language is one of the most concrete, material aspects of our being. Many of the distinctions that those of us in Westernized traditions have grown accustomed to when thinking of language, primarily those which separate thinking from doing, are melting away; and what results is a fundamentally different understanding of rhetoric: one that is not only material, but potently and spontaneously transformative.

Chapter One briefly examines an important shift in communication studies, the move from a “symbolic” or “transmission” model of speech towards an understanding of communication as “articulate constitutive contact,” and then traces the ontological consequences as rhetoricians have interpreted them. The first section summarizes a communication studies tradition that prioritizes the power of language to make sense over its ability to deliver meaning. This tradition challenges and heavily dilutes the representational characteristics of symbols and meaningful objects or events, and emphasizes the tacit and/or active acceptances of speakers and audiences alike.
Understanding this transition is important in that it situates communication as “contact,” a concept I hope to expand upon throughout this work.

To adequately review this transition, I then survey various rhetorical thinkers who are attempting to locate and account for the implications for matter as we understand it as well as for the resultant “new matter” that language (I eventually interchangeably incorporate Burke’s term “symbolicity”) produces in this new model. I argue that materialist rhetoric (stemming as it did from Marxism) was, at its onset, primed for a discussion about “new materialism.” This conversation is now moving to the fore in rhetorical thought as evidenced by a recent “(re)turn” toward affect and embodiment, as well as by the advent of “neurorhetorics.” While a growing number of rhetorical thinkers are taking on the challenges posed by sense-making language, what is still missing is a robust ontological framework: one that makes sense of the body’s ability to make sense with symbolic thought.

This language-as-sense model responds to two critiques in the rhetorical materialist tradition as I see it. The first critique targets what I dub the “transcendent” interpretations of rhetorical substance (represented in the works of Cloud, McGee, Black, Charland, and to an extent Greene), and argues that they leave fundamental questions about the experiential mattering of rhetoric unexplored. While many of these influential thinkers have developed useful individual-based concepts for understanding how societal surfaces like “human rights” or identities can come to be, the particulars of the lived experiences that individuals have (which are without a doubt inordinately important)
have, until only very recently, remained underdeveloped. The second critique targets what I’m calling the “embodied” scholars (rhetorical scholars who, like me, are attempting to figure the body as participatory in meaning making, including Blair, Dickinson, Condit, Ott, and, to another extent, Greene). The hallmark of this second group will be their collective interest in the imminent moments of every day life; but I argue that this group, too, leaves fundamental questions about the experiential mattering of rhetoric unexplored.

These interpretations of rhetorical materiality do well to turn to embodied-embedded logics that drive theories of affect, but they continue to struggle to account for the processes by which language operates within them. In other words, rhetoric since the “affective turn” still needs an explanation of language’s role in embodied-embedded sense making. This is true in part because embodied-embedded cognition (as a branch of cognitive science) itself has yet to fully tackle the challenges posed by language, and it is to this tradition, too, that I will ultimately attempt to speak.

I begin however with an exploration of the meanings behind the word “matter.” Throughout this project I attempt to illuminate the influence language wields in rendering the world as humans know it by playing on many of the potential meanings of terms like “mattering,” and “making sense.” While we often use these words metaphorically, one big point that I hope to drive home is the notion that the metaphoric conceptualizations that we engage to make sense of the world – actually make sense. When we talk of matter, when we think about matter, we are mattering matter. We might even say that
when we are making sense of a situation with deliberation what we are also doing is mattering.

This word, matter, has many uses: *What is Dark Matter?, That doesn’t matter!, All matter consists of atoms., What’s the matter with Sam?* I hope to use the word problematically throughout. It may not always be clear which usage I’m relying upon, the point being that it always must be “physical” and “conceptual.” Most importantly, I want to emphasize matter-as-verb as it is invoked when framing thinking as a literal mattering. This discussion will also hopefully prove fruitful in that it will emphasize two facets of the dissertation writ-large. First, the efforts being made across the literature that I engage to interrogate so called dualist notions of matter that separate matter and subject benefit from a problematic use of matter in that they are, in my eyes, insisting upon breaking down the distinctions between “real” and “conceptual” matter. Second, I want to explore ecological notions of matter that suggest a process of co-constitution – each time we “make sense” of something in our minds we give that thing form. We “see” it in ways that leave legacies in our sensing which culminate over time in embodied forms of non-rational understanding. The understanding that one arrives at ultimately must draw upon the matter that has literally been placed in his/her mind.

**What “Matters?”**

Even in an age that values the theoretical implications of post structuralism, the influence of a dualist model which positions matter as discrete, constant, isolated, and most significantly external is remarkably persistent. Dualist enlightenment thinking
renders subjects as encountering matter and, in theory at least, as capable of objectively removing themselves from its study. Asking, “what matters” from this perspective is pretty straightforward. Matter is defined by rigid boundaries that set it apart from the non-mattering stuff of language, thought, whimsy, imagination or emotion. In this case matter can be thought of as a noun - as people, places, or things - that can be externally validated or observed: so “that matters” or “this matters.”

I hope to “loosen” the meaning of matter, as Butler (1993) has, to account not only for the noun status (it is after all an inordinately important fantasy); but, more importantly, to include the various shapes of verb that the word might take. Butler frames matter “not as site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface” (xviii). When one attempts to grapple with the fact that sensorial experience consists not of discrete bodies engaging each other—but rather of a dizzying array of systematic contact points, judgments, associations, expectancy-laden re-engagement and further reductions (the foundational argument of embodied-embedded logic which will be explored in Chapter Two)—it becomes clear that the actions of the subject are positively central in what comes to be. Emotions, affects, imaginings, and the stuff of thought itself, in this view are felt, sensed, mattered into consciousness by the sensing and reducing brain. Language is an ever-

1 We live our lives as though bodies are discrete, as though matter is hardly changing, as though the “I” that engages this text right now is the same as the “I” that sat afraid in its chair on the first day of kindergarten – but incredibly none of these things are true. Yet each of these fantasies (the difference between “you” and “I” in a room, the fluidity and perceptual basis of matter, and the ongoing cellular and electrical reconstruction of the self) can be considered essential to basic human function.
present hum that works constantly to *matter* the world (as it is and as it is not) right in front of our faces. From this perspective, the ‘real world’ exists as a fluidly changing product of our own creative enaction.

As an example, consider rainbows. Rainbows are problematic for dualistic thinkers, and not only because they cannot be touched, weighed, or discretely measured. Most problematic for our purposes here is how particular one must be to sense rainbows - at least rainbows as humans know them. When people use eyes like ours to look from a particular standpoint across light reflecting from invisible beads of water in the sky (or off of various crystals or glass surfaces), with a sufficient light source wherever it needs to be at that particular moment, *only then* do rainbows *matter*. Rainbows, it could be said, are entirely *perspectival*. Perspectivity confounds notions of materiality that would situate a rainbow as *there* whether we were or not. Instead, for many animals on this planet rainbows very literally are not, ever, there or anywhere. And, technically, in the case of *homo sapiens*, there are potentially *billions* of rainbows the world over at any given moment – but because no one is where they need to be to perceive and make sense of those unseen rainbows, they do not *matter* at all.

Rather than suggesting that rainbows are not real, or “merely an illusion,” I advocate thinking of them as *mattering* in the minds of humans who view and share them. There, in the brains and perceptions of each of us, they matter profoundly. They excite expectant neuronal processes which make them appear beautiful. Rainbows are mythical, they are metaphorical, and they are political. All of these modes of mattering do
not have *substance*, so to speak, in the “external” sense of the word, but they are still substantial in the neural workings of our brains. In other words, rainbows emphasize the verb-mattering, while diminishing the noun-matter. Humans do not make sense of rainbows because rainbows *are*; we make sense of rainbows *because they matter* to our eyes, to our brains, to our hearts, and likewise through our symbolicity.

The transition of *matter* from noun to verb implicates every notion one might have of “making sense” of the world. When we ask rhetorically “*does that make sense?*” we are typically positing the question in the abstract, without really realizing (let alone emphasizing) that in our asking – it (whatever “it” might be) just has. The *kind* of sense made is really what we are after. Is it *certain* sense? Uncertain sense? Confused sense? Embarrassedly confused sense? Angry sense? Hateful sense? Enthralling sense? All of these senses *become* because we *move*, not only via our bodies but also (arguably much more so) via our symbolicity. From this perspective we can understand how humans, endowed with symbolicity, can “make sense” of things like economies, governments, stereotypes, relationships and identities in ways that can and will *matter* profoundly - from profoundly good to profoundly tragic.

This active understanding of language *mattering* is not lost on communication scholars. The Platonic tradition, which famously understands rhetoric as more-or-less ornamental and superfluous, has long stood at the center of a critique that alternatively positions language as “constitutive articulate contact” (Stewart, 1994). Rather than emphasizing a *transitory* nature of meaning, rather than positioning symbols as vessels
carrying meaning across or between bodies which either are or are not then persuaded, constitutive thinkers try to come to terms with how subjects make sense of the words they encounter. This does not mean that constitutive thinkers dismiss the transitive capacities of language entirely; after all, terms and linguistic orientations certainly do seem to convey an incredible amount of schematic information. But instead of emphasizing language’s ability to “carry” that information between bodies my perspective views “conveyance” as tactile and sensible in the very literal sense of each word.

The main implication of active mattering falls within debates over rhetorical materialism. Materialist thinkers have long recognized the “constitutive” nature of language-use, but what they have been lacking is a more comprehensive model that animates the interpretation of the culturally and socially arranged schematic confrontations and relations which ultimately matter to symbol users. In order to attempt to trace out such a logic, I must first outline the “Copernican shift” in communication studies as I see it.

**From Symbols to Constitutive Articulate Contact**

The symbol model of communication is a representation-driven model of communication rooted in persuasion. Contrasting with this model is a model of communication as constitutive articulate contact that situates the ontological implications for a sensorial understanding of language. The symbol model of communication positions discrete subjects who are using communication to transmit information (represented as directly or accurately as possible by the symbols being used) between them. Stewart
(1994) has argued that a “basic ontological claim” supports this “two world” perspective, namely “the fundamental belief that there is a difference in kind between the linguistic world and some other world – that of ‘things,’ ‘mental experiences,’ ‘ideas,’ ‘concepts,’ or some other ‘signifieds’” (p. 128). Dualistic models such as this render matter-as-noun. If I were to use a racist word without *intending* it to be racist (as is often the case in contemporary utterances of “Illegals” to refer to those who live in the US without proper documentation) then, the argument goes, the term is *not* racist. Individuals who rightly insist on interrogating racist language such as this are thus to be viewed only as especially political, vindictive in their arguing practices, or worse. You *could* identify the racist implications of that language, a symbol-model user might argue, but that’s just you making *something* out of *nothing*. The symbol-model’s understanding of how words work may seem seductively “practical,” but it is also deeply problematic.

Stewart’s four additional commitments elaborate on the problems inherent in a “symbol model” (I also refer to this model as the *transitory, representation*, or *persuasion* model) of communication: first, language is made up of knowable (“identifiable”) units or elements; second, “the relationship between these units and the units that make up the other of the two worlds is some sort of representational or symbolizing relationship” (ibid); third, the relationship between the identifiable units of language and this representational process is “systemic;” and last, humans incorporate this system as a “tool” or “instrument” which can accomplish goals. All of these
fundamental assumptions are challenged by the alternate model which Stewart dubs “constitutive articulate contact.”

Perhaps the largest problem with the symbolist perspective is that it fails to account for how words are made sense of. There are a lot of ways we can interpret statements (an infinite amount if we are patient or motivated enough) most of which could never have been imagined by the speaker. The interpretation phase becomes the central focus for constitutive thinkers, replacing the intended content of the message. For Stewart, communication involves “…the ways humans ‘do’ understanding and ‘make,’ ‘build,’ ‘remake,’ or ‘modify’ worlds” (p. 140). The symbol model’s failure to account for fundamental misunderstanding is, in Stewart’s eyes, neglecting what it means “to be a human.” More generally, as I see it, the symbol model ignores a key phase – autopoiesis – the individual moment of creative understanding that may or may not include the message that was inherent in the object that is being interpreted.

Constitutive articulate contact, in contrast, emphasizes production and composition along with reproduction or representation. In arguing that language is “constitutive,” Stewart emphasizes the participatory nature of meaning making. Meaning implicates subjects, and a large part of acknowledging meaning consists of endorsing or at least presuming a plethora of viscerally embodied subject positions. By framing language as “contact,” Stewart emphasizes the “social,” “communicative,” and “dialogic”

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2 The particulars of this critique as well as of those that I might offer with regards to Stewart’s alternative model are too numerous to explore in this brief introduction, but they will be integral to the argument as it develops. For more on this see section two of Chapter One which attempts to trace the discussion in rhetorical criticism regarding determinism and contingency.
function of language – that communication is a *joining* of identities, a merger. In a purely “external” sense, contact may appear to be but a momentary touching, when one accounts for the fact that touches leave legacies in embodied-embedded brains (touches are “remembered” because they physically “re-wire” the brains experiencing them) then contact becomes much more constitutive.

In framing communication as “articulate,” Stewart underscores how language is “differentiated” as opposed to “compact” (p. 142). The distinction between “differentiated” and “compact” dismisses the notion that an utterance works because it represents a complete accounting of a universal essence of the subject at hand. So to pull our previous example into this new framework, words like “illegal” (no matter how they are uttered) do not have a universal meaning in the cosmos. They are “differentiated” by our experience of them. Constitutive articulate contact explains how, on the one hand, some people (typically privileged people) can claim that they “do not see race” in terms such as these whereas others (typically those marked off by them as deviant or otherwise thusly oppressed) cannot help but see it. Even the most well-intended and naively ignorant utterances participate in rendering sensible massively disciplining constructs of race, that racism is there whether one sees it or not.

The constitutive understanding of communication affirms rhetoric’s place near the center of human living. Rhetoric endows humanity with multiple ways of being, all of which draw upon and implicate sensation and perception. Human communication and the people that it mobilizes can now no longer be seen to be discrete entities; they become in
many ways co-constitutive, and as ethicists from Buber to Levinas insist relationality (as goaded by symbolicity) is the primary “substance” in that process. Rather than conceiving of rhetoric merely as ornamental, it becomes an integral component of the fabric of human existence. Stewart’s distinctions between a symbol model and communication as constitutive articulate contact provide a broad framework from which to appreciate the scholarly conversation within rhetoric that is most relevant to the distinctions between matter as noun and verb: rhetorical materialism, or material rhetoric. This model will serve as a touchstone in future chapters to distinguish between perspectives that situate communication as acting upon matter as opposed to those which frame communication as mattering.

Rhetorical Perspectives on Materialism and “New” Materialism

Casting rhetoric as “productive,” as the constitutive articulate contact approach does, means enlisting new logical systems. The most influential logical system embraced by communication scholars in their attempt to account for the relationships between rhetoric and matter came from Marx. Marx’s linear narratives of class struggle have more or less been set aside, but his emphasis on the fluid and renewing nature of human ideology is an important step for criticism. This is because Marx’s is not a unified system; it draws on a “plurality of doctrines” and is thus incompatible with stable conclusions. As Baliber (1995) put it, “Marx is the philosopher of eternal new beginnings” (p. 6), beginnings constrained by rhetoric.
While Marx was clearly not a rhetorical theorist in the “general” sense of the term, the transformative capacities of the “deliberative process” of rhetoric are positively central to Marxist thought (Wilke, 1976, p. 233). Wilke summarizes Marx’s contribution to the project of rhetorical materialism by turning to a brief work entitled “Theses on Feuerbach.” There, Marx argued “the materialist theory that human beings are [merely] the product of surroundings and education, and therefore that other kinds of people are the product of different surroundings and different education, forgets that surroundings are in fact changed by people ….” (p. 534). Here we see the first influential accounting of how symbolicity matters, albeit in an incredibly historicized fashion.

As Marx saw it, material conceptualizations of the time accepted naturalistic understandings of the relationship between environments and bodies, but they did not have a ready answer for the rhetorical power of subjects to shape environments in meaningful ways. Marx was one of the first influential thinkers to take on this challenge. His approach is notable for a few reasons. The first reason is situated in the usage (Wilke’s) of the term “merely.” As we shall soon see, perhaps the most persistent question prompted by stances like Marx’s is that of determinism. Depending on how “strictly” one reads Marx’s argument, there will be more-or less room for subjective agency. As soon as one accounts for the influences of rhetoric, it seems, the question becomes can we possibly be beyond rhetoric? Language will matter less the more influential ideology-driven environments are said to be; and it will matter more if it is language (and not essential aspects of these environments) that makes sense. At the same time, language
works as a constraining (and yet generative and “constructive”) system in and of itself. A gradient appears, a range bleeding determinism into contingency. On this spectrum, the more influential and unchangeable the “external” components are seen to be the less agency is granted to subjects. The more ways that contingency drives reality, the more pliable reality becomes.

By introducing the forces of production inherent to humans being, Marx seems to inherently challenge determinism. In fact, as Marx saw it, the “spirit” was a “prisoner” to matter (Balibar) and a long line of thinkers since have argued that the efficient authority granted to “external” human-produced entities (like class) in Marx’s linear understanding of history underestimates or impoverishes the potential of the entire process. I engage many of those critiques later in this chapter where I discuss the debate about determinism and contingency as it has played out in rhetorical criticism. Essentially the question will become, if language makes ideology, can it re-make it? Or is language always-already subject to relatively un-changing sociological assumptions? Can we use rhetoric critically to shape human understanding in a way that makes living less determinant for the people involved, or – as strict interpretations of Marxist thought suggest – are those efforts too idealistic?

The second notable component of Marx’s rhetorical materialism is his inclusion, along with the “environment,” of education. Education, social deliberation and the resultant conceptual/material transcendences, involve an inherently symbolic process; be it thought or speech, ideas are represented in ways that have to be accepted before they
can even begin to make sense. For Marx (and for the “strict interpretations” of his thought), we see a rigid relationship between ideology and reality: longstanding ideological constructs naturally persist until they are met with sufficiently radical reactions and new ideological constructs are then born. Such revolutions are hardly ever successful, as the ideological constructs that precede them wield an influence that is never localized and always eager to co-opt or appropriate resistant stances.

Marx’s inability to account for the true vibrancy of language stands as one of his system’s fundamental limitations. Understanding this vibrancy is again of central importance when conceptualizing language as a sense. Revolutionary narratives can (often do) come in indignant, denunciatory, even patriarchal frames that may or may not extend problematic components of the ideological system that they are attempting to critique – but they certainly do not have to. The scope of potential for articulated revolution is, in actuality, as broad as the human imagination. It can be as broad as those involved are willing to make it.

The third notable component of Marx’s so called human sentient, practical act is that it changes the environment, the instructors change as they instruct. When this transformative capacity of Marx’s materialism is taken into account, what results is a very fluid model of material development. Though not directly speaking to Marx, some rhetoricians have used the term “protean” (Blair & Neil, 2007, p. 598), others draw on the biological development of rhizomes (Foust, 2010, p. 23). Both metaphors utilize logics of
feedback, expectation and emergence – logical systems that will be explored more in-depth when I discuss logics of dynamic complexity in Chapter Two.

The circuitous matter-making, rhetorical materialists will agree, is *mattering* all of the time in the form of human consciousness and human sociality. What results is a “deliberative setting for awareness” (Wilkie, p. 234) that is susceptible to revolutionary change. While we may not be the only organisms on earth to communicate, Marx and those sympathetic to his critical intellectual tradition (I am referencing particularly Kenneth Burke) see our *reflexive* abilities regarding language as significant. If we can make sense of our own sense-making, critics are then prompted to answer the question: what *kinds* of sense can we or should we attempt to make? Marx’s stance was perhaps the first (if not the most influential) effort to situate the matter of rhetoric, but as I have already discussed, Marx was not – in the strict sense of the term - a rhetorical thinker. More rhetorical contributions are going to be necessary to flesh out how impactful language might be.

Matter goaded by language becomes versatile, amoebic, and eager to take on new shapes to account for new potentialities, and “new” material implications lay at the very heart of the explanatory power of this tradition. Amoebic or rhizomal logics avoid reducing criticism to an active examination of a passive material (class structures, for example), which traditional Marxist approaches would in fact emphasize. These logics allow rhetoricians to venture explanations about how, for instance, “middle class” can cast such a wide shadow in the United States. Like rainbows, “middle class” subjects are
undoubtedly a sensed and influential presence in American life, and like rainbows the true substance of their middle-class-ness is entirely perspectival. When rhetoricians put too much emphasis on historical and material consequences, they neglect this perspectival potency, which is remarkably and substantively elastic.

One example is Johnson (2007). Instead of tracing deterministic *histories* that effect rhetoric (instead of studying the controlling historical and material consequences with causative influence on rhetoric), Johnson believes that rhetorical materialism benefits from asking questions about *geography* (2007, p. 30). Audiences are not “made” to do anything by an auditor; they are induced to various degrees of *compliance*. They *move* rhetorically through their world. They use it to “make sense” of the world deliberatively and otherwise. Johnson warns that even an accounting of geography, if it is situated within sufficiently deterministic historical and material consequences, risks once again framing rhetorical mattering as “passive” ultimately retaining “a division between language and materiality” (p. 31).

Johnson is responding to an ongoing debate between rhetoricians who are clearly in agreement on the fundamental question as to whether or not communication *matters* (they all agree, emphatically, that it does); but who are also clearly unsettled as to how determined or constrained that mattering is. Geographic framings of human mattering put the productive capacities in the hands of everyone, thus granting a “protean” or “rhizomal” logic that does not rely on linear growth narratives. What is more, geographic framings account for “erosion” – the impact that our mattering makes, sometimes
sympathetic, other times catastrophic – in the “surfaces” of sociality that humans move across.

Regardless of how “strictly” Marxist thinkers interpret this circuit, regardless of how deterministic they view the influence of matter on language to be, the non-essential nature of symbolicity prompts an account of the resultant “new” material that rhetoric enables. Forces such as capitalism, “appropriateness,” and so much more, now resolve as matter - as real as walls in a room with some important transformational exceptions - and the “new” matter that necessarily presents as a result of social perturbation plays just as active of a role (if not a significantly more active role) in defining reality as any other form of substance accounted for by the body.

It is precisely the matter that is generated when rhetoric occurs (along with the related question of determinism) that is the focus of McKerrow’s influential critique of domination and freedom. Foust argues that McKerrow’s critique of domination spans “traditional” and “firmly political” understandings of the time with a Foucauldian critique of freedom, which “encourages an immanent criticism” (Foust, 2010, p. 67). McKerrow argues that the materiality of rhetoric is doxastic, not epistemic, and nominalistic as opposed to universalistic. By casting rhetoric as “influential” as opposed to “causal,” McKerrow (1989) attempts to recognize “… the importance of absence as well as presence, [and it] perceives the potential for polysemic as opposed to monosemic interpretation, and [of] an activity that is performed” (p. 91). Each framing of the
function of rhetoric strikes at the generative potentials inherent in human symbol use. As McKerrow (1989) puts it, an ideal critical rhetoric

seeks to unmask or demystify the discourse of power ... to understand the integration of power/knowledge in society - what possibilities for change the integration invites or inhibits and what intervention strategies might be considered appropriate to effect social change. (p. 91)

From the onset materialist rhetoric was primed for a discussion about “new” materialism. The ongoing debate between the “real” place for subjects along the spectrum connecting “determination” to “contingency” is but one potent example and McKerrow is one of many influential rhetorical thinkers attempting to move the project along. For many, Marx was too restrictive in his understanding of the role of ideology. Marx’s move toward an intellectual tradition inclusive of rhetorical mattering invited rhetorical thinkers to conceive of a system of language that extended beyond the symbol model and which accounted for the kinds of contact enabled through discourse.

The question then became what precisely does this articulate contact mean for the relationship between language and the material world? How active is this relationship? How powerful? How rapid? How flexible is it? Can it be driven? How does it “work?” These questions and more like them have persistently attracted the attention of rhetorical scholars resulting in a constellation of answers. In order to situate my proposition that communication scholars ought to conceive of language as a sense, I will now briefly summarize some of the more influential responses, as encapsulated in scholarship on material rhetoric/rhetorical materialism.
Blair (2001) has identified three materialist “stances” produced by rhetoricians as they attempt to answer the questions of rhetoric mattering. The first stance attempts to account for rhetorical matter primarily as large-scale, external force, which participates in subject creation and management. The second stance attempts to implicate the body as a vibrant and active participant in this meaning-making process, and the third attempts to account for the material force of rhetoric itself. The first (following Marx) places strong emphasis on materiality as determined by (Cloud), or contingent upon (McGee, Black, Charland, Greene) production. The second stance considers the relationship between language and the body; how rhetoric constitutes and is constituted by bodies. The third stance is the most ambiguous and until only recently the least developed. Explorations into the material effects of rhetoric upon bodies as well as upon relations of production, and others mapping the rhetorical affordances that bring spaces and places to life, all grant material force to texts like cinema soundtracks or parks, or war memorials.

Blair also attempts to use “parables” to suture all three of these stances together using personal stories to trace the impact of the body on criticism and on the project of rhetoric itself. Blair traces prominent problems of rhetorical thought leading into this three-stance tradition (the politics of representation, “what counts” as the significant features of discourses or objects of study, the questions which surround “preferred” versus “dominant” readings of environments to name a few examples). This approach attempts to account for the critic as a productive participant in criticism itself, acknowledging that the bodies, orientations, and affective registers (the felt register of the
force of rhetoric itself) change depending on the particulars of the body doing the
surveying.

Each stance more or less accounts for the relationship between language and
matter, with the first positioning matter as the primary actor in the circuit, and the latter
two emphasizing language-use and the bodies (particularly the sensed actions of those
bodies) of subjects as foremost. Blair points out that these traditions (and the authors I’ve
selected to represent them) invariably blend into each other, and that the three stances are
not meant to be exclusive or even comprehensive categories. Instead they assist in
outlining the potential contours of rhetorical materialism that my model hopes to amplify.

I attempt to maintain two critiques throughout this survey. I argue that rhetorical
materialism as it is understood at the moment either focuses excessively on the
“transcendent” forces of rhetoric or it struggles to account for the variety of ways that
multitudes of individuals might make difference sense out of the same experience all the
while lacking a single coherent process through which language might work. Blair’s first
stance, the traditional stance, includes thinkers who have crafted incredibly helpful tools
for rhetorical critics interested in understanding the constitutive force of symbolicity
(McGee’s ideograph is a good example), but which lack the vibrancy of particular
subjective use. Blair’s second and third stances include scholars who are, in one way or
another, attempting to account for this subject-level oversight. While many of these
scholars reach to embodied-embedded understandings of language to do so, they lack a
model of language’s place in that system (as I have already alluded to, this is probably
due in large part to the absence of such a model in embodied-embedded thought itself).

Framing language as sensorial (in the embodied-embedded sense of the term) could offer the necessary insight to resolve both of these critiques, thus strengthening scholarship on material rhetoric/rhetorical materialism.

**I. The traditional stance.**

The first, “traditional” stance (essentially stemming directly from Marx’s concepts of a more determinant ideology) focuses on the material conditions of discourse – *the effect of matter on language*. From this perspective when we talk of the rhetorical substance of the world, we are talking primarily about transcendent concepts accessed by, but for the most part separate from, the subject. For instance, this stance illuminates entities like governments, economies, or disciplinary social mores as a primary *substance* of human thought, and attempts to articulate the ways that humans, as societies, make sense of them.

Cloud is perhaps one of the “stricter” materialist thinkers in Communication Studies. In her work, rhetorical materialism is an alluring “oxymoron,” which frequently allows theorists to forget that “discourse is not the only thing that ‘matters’” (Cloud, 1994, p. 141). She warns, “even if we concede that audiences can and do perform critical readings, their moments of critical consciousness in and of themselves do nothing to challenge structures of power” (p. 151). This traditionalist stance underscores the *external* nature of the material consequences of rhetoric, and suggests that subjects only *make sense* when their actions are observable or consequential in the “real world.”
Responding to celebrations of “new capitalism” which (she argues) suggest an end to industrial-styled labor concerns, Cloud (2001) emphasizes as “the most fundamental feature of workplace social relations and communication: a powerful class antagonism between workers and employers” (p. 269). Targeting a “misplaced faith” that times have changed and capital production is inordinately new, Cloud remains skeptical that ideologies can be so easily left behind. Cloud points to Fordist models of production that still dominate the manufacture of commodities. Many of the “new” strategies of corporate life place more emphasis on “gentler” kinds of engagement do not lead to better living conditions but, rather, only to profitability and more robust corporate survival. The “revolutions” of new corporate strategies designed to focus on worker safety and well-being are merely appropriated.

Cloud is right to hesitate on the assumption that classes are dissolving, but her work seems overly conservative in its estimation that “things staying the same” suggests resiliency. As I write, one of the most popular stories in the public news cycle is the investigation of a garment factory fire in Bangladesh that killed over a hundred young girls in ways too gruesome to describe. The factory was an example of one of Cloud’s sweatshops that do indeed still stand as the norm in commodity production at the moment; but careful students of history will note how potent disasters like this have, in the past, helped transform labor relationships in general.

The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire of 1911 was an almost identical incident in New York City that, some historians have argued, birthed the progressive movement that
enabled the New Deal. The similarities between the working conditions of these two disasters may suggest hopelessness, now over 100 years later we still see this kind of unnecessary tragedy. Or, we might look at the historical example – an especially potent “outdated” one at that” – as a moment of transformation that may well incite similar public response. The global marketplace of 2012 is obviously much more complicated than the lower east side of New York City and the American political system of 1911, but the interconnected nature of social network introduces untold amounts of rhetorical power to disasters such as this. Who knows what kinds of shifts lay in store, or how quickly they may come about - the point is that we have seen monumental and spontaneous transformations of public consciousness in the past, even in the face of resilient economic forces. Cloud, like Marx, uses hindsight to define the future – a practice which may make some sense in the present day but which completely neglects the sudden and unforeseeable moments of upheaval that leave lasting effects in all future discussions of ideology – even if they do not always lead to immediate change.

Perhaps none stand as prominently in this first materialist stance as Michael Calvin McGee. Like Cloud, McGee was interested in the constraints placed on subjects via ideological constructs; but unlike Cloud, McGee is less interested in analyzing the resiliency of ideology and more interested in tracking its development. Starting in the late 1970’s (and carrying on through the “disturbances of the late 1980’s and 1990’s” that Blair identifies as the locus for her catalogue of stances), McGee began bridging two potent fields of social inquiry: rhetoric and cultural studies. For too long, McGee argued,
the project of rhetoric devalued the practice of rhetoric, an argument very much indebted not only to Marx’s critique in general, but also to the animated, if not convoluted, contributions of literary critic Kenneth Burke. McGee’s approach stemmed from an effort to expand Bitzer’s (1968) notion of the rhetorical situation. Unlike Bitzer (who according to McGee casts exigencies as based on “motive”), McGee (1977) invites a broader use with reference to the flow of events in history. Rhetorical situations actually exist as dominant considerations of whole societies; they seem important in and of themselves because they have concrete and instrumental existence throughout recorded human experience. (p. 40)

For McGee, exigencies consist of “considerations,” which assume at least some notion of a collapsed subject with an implied perspective. Such perspectives, McGee (1980) argued, do not simply inform our rhetoric, they also constrain it (p. 9).

By 1980, McGee’s efforts had culminated into developing the “ideograph,” which would transform the way that communication and cultural scholars studied communicative artifacts. There is a material force to rhetorical exigencies that are reflective of the relationships presumed to exist by those who wield various rhetorical devices (like speaking for “the people”) which McGee dubbed ideographs. Notably extending Burke’s critique of Marx’s “atrophied” concept of ideology, McGee positioned the ideograph (a “fragmentary” word or term which rallies human collectivity and thought) as a forceful kind of gestalt. “Liberty,” “poverty,” and “democracy” are all possible examples of ideographic influences which have material consequences in human societies. McGee hoped to account both for their “fragmentary” (non-essential) nature and for their more-or-less tacitly accepted positions of authority within human societies.
Drawing on Hegelian philosophy, McGee situates this “integrant constituent” force right alongside economic, social, political, and psychological forces which shape the definitive experiential environments of humans (1977). It is a force that is made by individuals, but ultimately transcends them. While critics (Greene, 1998) argue that McGee excessively “fixes” subjects, the logic underpinning the subject-defining power of ideographs casts subjects as potential and fluid, reacting to and enacting rhetorical force in substantive ways.

“Human rights” is a well-elaborated (1987) example of McGee’s ideograph. Here we have an idea that is “foundational” to practically all forms of human governance but which changes drastically depending on the understandings of the people involved in making sense of it. Subjects in the Soviet Union, McGee argues, have a different understanding of the subject-state relationship than those in the United States. This material reality can help account for the vastly different – if not antagonistic – notions of “human rights” in each society.

A contemporary of McGee’s, Edwin Black, also saw a forceful nature to what he called “moral judgments;” and like McGee, Black focused primarily on transcendent implications of this material force. Moral judgments, according to Black, “… compel, as forcefully as the mind can be compelled a manner of apprehending an object” (1970, p. 109), and this manner of apprehension was, for Black, constitutively material. Rather than focusing on particularities of discourse (again, essentially neglecting the lived realities of subjects), Black renders this forcefulness as a ghost-like “persona.” Personae
set the “mold” for the audience to fill. Black understood that this process was particular to each individual and the point was never to suggest that personae ever actually come to be. Instead, personae stand as an a priori template through which audiences must pass in order to relate. They are forms of being which pre-empt and constrain subsequent rhetorical interaction; and which individuals embrace or reject to the extent that they are able.

This template emphasizes the relational presumptions (all that is taken on “good faith”) inherent in communication, from basic human discourse to ranted political scree. It inspired a whole host of other scholars (Wander, 1999; Cloud, 1999; Morris, 2002) to go looking for substantive persona elsewhere in human symbol use. Each variation on Black’s “Second Persona” represents an instantiation of the “traditional” material approach, in that each focuses on social entities which render the mattering substance as more or less beyond the reach of individual subjects, despite the fact that it is their participation which “matters.” While Black gives us the persona as a spirit that we can generally call “visible” in rhetoric, again we do not have a particular account of how that spirit might look to different people and, most importantly, why various subjects meld into some personae but not others.

One influential but still essentially “transcendent” method of answering the question of subject-persona interface comes from Maurice Charland. Charland also pays deference to Kenneth Burke, particularly to his emphasis upon “identification,” as opposed to “persuasion” as a model of human communicating; and to Althusser’s notion
of interpellation. Charland (1987) challenges understandings of “a-rhetorical” subjects that are inferred in “persuasion” (or symbol) models of communication (Charland, 1987, p. 133). For Charland, most of the socially constructed framework that makes us who we are is “beyond the realm of persuasion,” including “social identity, religious faith, sexuality, and ideology” (Ibid). Citing McGee, Charland (1987) argues that “political identity [for example] must be an ideological fiction” (p. 137), one that must be embodied and enacted, in order to matter. Thus, Charland argues that discourses act in ways that “call audiences into being” (p. 134), as was the case with the Peuple Quebecois in his famous example. It is obviously not so simple, but one might imagine a hailing of any sort (explicit as in an overheard “hey you!” or implicit as the constitution that called the Quebecois into being) inciting a multitude of Black’s personae. These personae are more or less accepted depending on the responses one embraces to the hailing itself, a response that is not necessarily always conscious, rational, or purposeful.

Extending Althusser’s term “interpellation,” Charland (1987) crafts this interruptive moment of rhetorical constitution: “as soon as an individual recognizes and acknowledges being addressed … an interpellated subject participates in the discourse that addresses” him or her (p. 138). As we shall see in the section outlining embodied-embedded subjectivity, the pre-cognitive realm plays a significant role in future perceptions and past memories. The fact that this realm is open to rhetorical inscription and praxis underscores rhetoric’s neural materiality. For Charland, interpellation paves the road for future kinds of “people,” the ideological or cultural contours of which may
now be completely unknown. This ideological materiality is hidden by the fact that all narratives “create the illusion of merely revealing a unified and unproblematic subjectivity” (p. 139). The taken-for-granted nature of symbolicity obfuscates its material consequence. But make no mistake, even the “utterly presumptive,” as Blair puts it, is grounded firmly in routinized and accreted historical practices (practices which I will argue in the next chapter are plasticized into the brain), and these practices can and do change as often as people will allow them to.

Charland’s basic notion of interpellation gives us the active component of rhetorical meaning-making, but it falls short of detailing the process at the individual level. We know, for instance, that individuals are constituted when they are hailed, but we cannot really speculate as to how. We can imagine individual people understanding hailing “constitutively” as Charland does and with these general descriptions we can account for the degrees of difference in response, but we do not get to see how language plays the role of crafting and sustaining those responses. Interpellation is grounded in individuals, but it does not give us a vocabulary or logic for describing each.

If Cloud is the strictest “traditional thinker,” then Greene stands as perhaps the “loosest” in this stance. Effectively spanning Blair’s first and second stances, Greene draws on Foucault to situate rhetorical materialism, too, in practice (“technologies of deliberation”). Greene argues that stances like Cloud’s fail to account for how various intersecting considerations collaborate to provide “landscapes” of reasoning. Technologies of deliberation are situated exclusively within the subject’s repertoire of
performative communicative choices. Like Johnson, Greene (1998) offers a “geographically informed research protocol committed to mapping the temporal and spatial coordinates of the different elements which traverse and structure the deliberative logics of a governing apparatus” (p. 22). Technologies of deliberation are not just determined; they are developed by people in order to navigate socio-cultural landscapes.

Greene’s (1998) materialist approach to rhetoric pushes “back and forth between a logic of influence and a constitutive model of rhetorical effectivity” (p. 38). The primary engines responsible for this tug of war are governing apparatuses, but we should expect to find rhetoric *mattering* in Greene’s sense anywhere that we find practiced reasoning—and not simply in a superstructure controlled by dominant ideological powers that govern Cloud’s deterministic moves. Greene’s *logic of articulation* (the logic which seeks to explain how the framing of institutional and public rhetorics manifest and interact) attempts to traverse the fluid in-between—the space between the fragments that are nameable if not knowable. This emphasis on the in-between spaces where the unknowable works upon the nameable will be essential in Chapter Two when I present the debate between cognitivism and embodied-embedded cognition, so exploring it in some detail here is important. As the assemblages of practices that make up these structures (often countervailing, often sympathetic) come together, their articulation occupies, as Foucault (1972) might say, “a position ‘in the true.’“ At the same time, they orient certain perspectives as *more or less* reasonable, thus confining the potentials for
transformation. This logic emphasizes discourses beyond “ruling classes” while at the same time accounting for those institutions that govern “authority” in public debate.

Technologies of deliberation are not fabricated in a machine shop. Their development manifests unpredictably in human subjects, in tangles of sensations that range within what Greene calls “normative [theories] of citizenship” (2004, p. 188). Rhetoric serves a mediating function for Greene, one that governs the interactions of publics. Greene preserves the day-to-day manifestations of rhetoric by focusing on this mediating function, but he focuses his effects of rhetoric on the societal level, once again contributing to what I am calling individual but transcendent notions of rhetorical materiality.

While rhetorical materialists need to make sense of the emergent infrastructures of rhetoric which seem to function en masse, there is a “smaller,” more personal level of rhetorical materialism that has yet to be accounted for. Greene’s move goes a long way towards implicating immanent subjective practices of every day life into the politics of rhetorical materialism, but it does not go far enough.

Johnson’s advocacy of memes - units of cultural transmission which Richard Dawkins formulated using the protean logic of genetics takes a similarly individual and yet transcendent approach. Examples of memes include fashion trends, catchy tunes, slang and other components of popular culture. Johnson argues that memes can be a useful tool to help scholars account for both the historical “depth” of rhetorical materialism and the geography of the landscape that symbolicity renders. In conjunction
with McGee’s ideograph, *memes* allow us to further detail the particulars of individuals who are encountering ideographs like “human rights” – which themselves never come in an unmediated form. But we still don’t know what a meme *feels* like, or perhaps more realistically *how* memes are felt. Memes, ideographs, persona, interpellation, and technologies of deliberation give critics potent tools for examining and critiquing the forms of material consequence that human symbolicity may engender. Yet, the lived experience of practicing subjects and the embodied-embedded logics of these experiences, so far, has been left to future generations. And it is there, in the visceral, “wet,” “salient” and repetitive discourses of every day life, that symbolicity *matters* the most.

For that we turn to the remaining stances that more or less invert the functional chronology of the first: rather than examining the effects of *matter on language* (rhetorical matter or otherwise), they interrogate the effects of *language on matter*. Likewise, each could be said to focus more on the *phenomenological* as opposed to the structurally *material* forces of rhetoric. As a result, we can implicate both the second and third stances as “new materialist” stances in that they attempt to speak to the *productive* capacities of lived-rhetoric.

**II. The body as participant.**

Blair’s second materialist standpoint is the first to embrace embodied-embedded logic, and it does so by focusing “upon the lived-in-body as a condition and consequence of rhetoric” (Blair, 2001, p. 288). The shape of the body (a concept which can now extend
very literally to the *attitudes* and felt *states of mind* of the bodies of symbol-users) drastically implicates the kinds of sense it can make. While this might sound very deterministic, as I develop throughout this dissertation, the body’s shape is actually vigorously and resiliently transformative—especially so if one includes symbolicity. On the one hand we are limited in our abilities by our biology; on the other hand our biology (including the material of the brain) “learns” in Marx’s sense, and transforms in the neurological sense. Over time (sometimes incredibly short spans of it) experiences that are otherwise wholly arbitrary (the act of carrying a ball across a line for example) can become positively exhilarating, or devastating, depending on how you identify them.

Scholars have developed the second stance by emphasizing the *phenomenological* as opposed to the *material* aspects of reason. In so doing, rhetoricians expand considerably the avenues for studying the materiality of language-use. This stance is perhaps best represented by the so-called “affective turn” embraced by contemporary rhetorical thinkers, but we see it, too, in the developing school of neurorhetoric. I have just argued that the thinkers who make up Blair’s first stance focus on “transcendent” notions of individuals, throughout this section I hope to sustain the critique that while this conversation *is* moving in productive directions by turning to more dynamic

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3 Sufferers of Cotard’s syndrome, for example, can find it incredibly difficult to live normally as they cannot identify many objects or even family members as “familiar.” This leads to the overwhelming feeling that a coffee table, or an in-law, is in fact an imposter. This syndrome can thus obviously be profoundly debilitating.

4 A budding rhetorical approach that focuses on (as described by Clough, Ahmed, Brennan, and many more) the body’s ability, to affect and be affected.
understanding of individual life, a fundamental ontological vocabulary situating language within embodied-embedded thought has yet to be developed.

A budding conglomeration of scholars are figuring “infrastructure, space, technology, and the body ... [situating] communication and culture within a physical, corporeal landscape” and “focusing on discourse as inscription in the material strata of sound, optical media, the built environment and the brain” (Packer & Crofts Wiley, 2012, p. 4). This community is also turning to affect scholars across disciplines, including media theorists, philosophers, and other social thinkers (Dean, Rice, Brennan, Ahmed and Massumi to name just a few) who attempt to take into account the “embodied contexts” of materialism and to situate rhetoric generatively within those contexts.

Clough (2008) frames the notion at the center of the affective turn “as pre-personal or pre-individual bodily capacity to affect and be affected or the augmentation or diminution of a body’s capacity to act” (1). Clough’s framing not only accounts for affective capacity in terms of the “human body,” but also in terms of technologies that mediate what Eugene Thacker (2004) refers to as the “biomolecular body.” This body is the product of a multitude of reasoning capacities, prompting many affective thinkers (Protevi, Damasio) to prefer Foucauldian a term like “bodies politic” over simple “bodies.” Importing affect into symbolicity is no easy task. The phenomenal aspects of conscious living trouble our understandings of time, space, motion, action, causation, intention, and more. I will explore the particular justifications of this troubling in Chapter Two.
In one of the emergent works to take up affect relative to rhetoric, Ott (2010) adopts a “multi-modal approach that focuses on the interplay of discourse, figure, and ground” and the “[mobilization of] viewers at a visceral level …” (p. 39.) Rhetoric in movies, for instance, works by “inviting” audiences from within affectively-primed “currents.” The extent to which audiences accept the affective conclusions intended matters less than the interplay between the affects as they are crafted and the audience’s reactions and re-actions to them. Bodies react strongly “because of what they bring to the film” (p. 49), not just because of what the film did to the body; but also because of how the subject understood her/his reaction. By rendering the cinematic components of film as rhetorical, Ott adds to our understanding of the political commitments in histories covered by Blair. He situates within the matter of film the expectations and “new material” creations of the audience as equally important.

Much of the scholarship within the second stance has considered rhetoric’s mattering primarily by expanding the domain of objects that can literally move us. While this work relates to affect broadly, much of it typically does not take on affective vocabulary, or logic, explicitly. Instead, it adopts spaces/places and public memory as the key texts, not because of what they “mean” but because of how they can come to be understood—as affecting bodies and subjects directly and constitutively. Dickinson, Ott, & Aoki (2006), for instance, have focused on historical places as “key sites in the construction of collective memory and national identity” (p. 27).
Dickinson et al., see museums not only as a part of the physical landscape, but also as parts of a “cognitive landscape.” They elaborate: “… experience of a particular place comprises not just the tangible materials available in that place, but also the full range of memorized images that persons bring with them” (Dickinson, Ott, & Aoki, 2006, p. 30). Rather than conceive of this imagery as simple, two-dimensional attributes, the authors embrace a much larger understanding of “imagery” that includes “a city in a novel, a film, a photograph, a city seen on television, a city in a comic strip, a city in a pie chart, and so on” (Ibid)\(^5\).

By situating the mattering of language as an integral material component of space/place experience (or by troubling the universal nature of such experiences via symbolicity), scholars working in the second material stance closely position themselves amongst embodied-embedded theorists puzzled by the implications of affective living (Brennan, Manning, Massumi, Ahmed). The kinds of bodies we have and the kinds of experiences those bodies encounter transform fundamental component of material experience, and these thinkers demonstrate many of the places in which language plays a part.

Given the range of the recent advances of neuroscientific technology (which more and more seem to sustain the development of “embodied-embedded” thinking), we

\(^5\) Lakoff & Johnson’s (2003) notion of “image schemata” comes to mind here, as the authors reach more for constellations of meaning conjured and “visualized” by the audiences. These constellations certainly are constrained, but they are clearly not predictive, nor are they comprehensively describable.
should not be surprised to see calls to re-examine some of the foundational components of rhetorical thought. Neurorhetoric presents itself as a potentially ideal home for these calls and stands firmly in Blair’s material tradition implicating the role of the body in rhetoric.

In their introduction to the 2010 *Rhetoric and Society Quarterly* (RSQ) special issue on neurorhetoric, Jack and Appelbaum (2010) not only acknowledge the “bourgeoning attention to all things neuro-.” They also identify two main approaches of inquiry for rhetoricians interested in contributing to the project of neurorhetoric, namely the *rhetoric of neuroscience* and the *neuroscience of rhetoric* (Jack & Applebaum, 2010, p. 412). The first route, “…[pays] careful attention to how cognitive neuroscience is shaped and circulated rhetorically” (Jack & Applebaum, 2010, p. 407). Meanwhile, the *neuroscience of rhetoric* essentially “[draws] new insights into language, persuasion, and communication from neuroscience research” (Jack & Applebaum, 2010, p. 412). Because the scientific constructions fueling the neuro-revolution are the products of symbol-using animals, the critical tradition of rhetoric can shed considerable insight into the problematic nature of their framing. At the same time it might become necessary to “…broaden our very definitions of rhetoric … [and ask] how communication occurs thorough different means, or how brain differences might influence communication” (Ibid).

Since the RSQ special issue, rhetoricians (Mays & Jung, Jackson, Johnson, Pryal, Pruchnic,) have busied themselves situating the brain’s functions into rhetorical
materialism and speculating about how rhetorical formulation changes the embodied-embedded brain. These perspectives draw heavily on theories of embodied-embedded cognition, including the work of Andy Clark, Walter J. Freeman, and Antonio Damasio who I will engage in more depth in the next chapter. Developing an ontology that stands between neurorhetoric and embodied-embedded cognition is one of the culminating objectives of this project.

Jane Bennett, an increasingly influential media critic working within embodied-embedded logics, argues for a “force of things” or “thing power” which emphasizes the “recalcitrance or moment of vitality in things” (p. 348). Like Blair, Bennett’s thing-power figures materiality as a protean flow of matter-energy and figures the thing as a relatively composed form of that flow … [and] seeks to promote acknowledgment, respect, and sometimes fear of the materiality of the thing and to articulate ways in which human being and thinghood overlap. (p. 349)

Bennett’s thing power situates “thinghood” in the body’s ability to sense substance and to render it “knowable.” This perspective activates matter, troubles stagnant conceptions of it, and argues for an understanding of material production routed in force.

Packer and Crofts Wiley (2012) examined approaches (particularly that of Mark Hansen) which focus on a subject’s “sensibility”—“the preconscious processes of sensation and cognition that occur prior to the perception of a meaningful phenomenal world … [treating] meaning as epiphenomena of more fundamental, diffuse, and less human-centered processes of composition” (p. 9). Here we see perhaps the closest iteration of language-use as sense: a focus on the abilities (pre-conscious but subject to
considerable rhetorical influence) to *sense* possible, probable, or even improbable meanings. If the second stance is defined by the ways that the lived-in body is a condition and consequence of rhetoric, the abilities of various bodies (goaded by various symbolicities) to make sense of the world defines the third stance.

Hansen’s *sensibility* brings rhetoric remarkably close to “affordance-driven sensation” as the famous embodied-embedded sensorial psychologist James Gibson understood it. The revelations of mirror neurons (neurons which fire upon contact with the real world *and* upon *observing* the real word) that have brought Gibson’s philosophy to the fore have potentially significant implications for rhetoric. Gibson’s approach argues that the brain makes sense of environments around it based on the kinds of actions it can take upon the observed world. While not officially observed in humans⁶, mirror neurons are thought to be widely dispersed, across variable sensory and motor cortices of the brain “arguing” various affordances of the object at issue, and thus, somehow, rendering it in experience. If this perspective bears out (and embodied-embedded thinkers argue that it does), language provides us with an opportunity to *play* the senses, to play the afforded realities that we experience. Theoretically, any time one engages in thinking symbolically this is exactly what is happening. We draw on the same neural matter that

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⁶ Mirror neurons have been well documented in laboratory mammals from rats to monkeys and apes and while non-invasive neural resonance technology is getting more and more refined there is, as of yet, no minimally invasive procedure devised to confirm their existence in humans. They are, however, thought to be foundational components of a brain’s processing abilities and no real argument exists as to why we should not expect to find them in humans when such technology becomes available.
participates in rendering the world when we think about it building connections that last, and transforming prior understandings at the same time.

The second materialist stance, perhaps more than any other, offers a promising home for a discussion that frames language as sensorial. Along with scholarship rethinking the relationship between material spaces, affect, and language; and neurorhetorics; rhetoricians have recently revisited Kenneth Burke’s influential rhetorical theory (which reads remarkably similar to the embodied-embedded perspective reviewed in Chapter Two). In 2008, Diane Davis observed, “the entire logic of [Kenneth Burke’s] identification has to be rethought” in light of mirror neurons (p. 233). Burke’s understanding as applied by most rhetorical thinkers is primarily analytical, subjects understand and analyze the dramatic components and then interact within them. This is not, however, the only way to read Burkean Identification. Debra Hawhee suggests that Burke may have been pointing rhetoricians towards mirror neurons all along. Instead of considering the identificatory process as a group of actions we select from within a well-understood “scene,” Hawhee figures the term in a way that is “as much postural and somatic as it is social and psychological” (p. 118). Burke, after all, relied heavily on Gesture Speech Theory (an embodied-embedded theory that is very sympathetic to Gibson’s approach and which relies heavily on the mimetic logics substantiated by the assumed presence of mirror neurons) when he crafted Identification. Hawhee quotes Burke as framing the symbolic act as a “dancing of an attitude,” if one extends the
dancing into the brain and beyond the gestural components of “oral-aural” speech it starts to become evident how intimate the relationship between meaning and body might be.

The argument I hope to develop figures language as a morphological part of a mattering body. Body parts not only render material realities on their own (again the mattering of rainbows is owed in large part to the particulars of the biology of human seeing systems), but they also adapt to account for still more meaning in the process of use. The various morphable parts of the body will in fact matter as much sense as they can. This sense is felt, manipulated, and transformed via symbolicity, which “mirrors” meaning corporeally. As important as this component of human sense-making is, however, it does still operate within a seemingly “external” social reality. The particulars of this seemingly “external” reality form the subject of Blair’s final material stance.

III. The materiality of rhetoric.

Blair’s third and final stance attempts to “[understand] rhetoric as itself material.” This stance accounts for the material force of symbolicity in humans and in critics, and attempts to formulate the necessary implications for matter. Like the second, the third stance accounts for influential veins of post-structuralism (particularly those of Foucault, Lyotard, deCerteau, and Deleuze as listed by Blair), all of which more or less attempt to account for the feedback process that take place between bodies and environments which ultimately determine the experiential particulars. These processes are unexplored in the traditional Marxist tilt of postmodernity (and rest at the heart of embodied-embedded subjectivity, as I develop in this project).
Blair traces the particulars of the public/private divide as it materializes in
memorials arguing that this sensed division (itself rhetorically constructed) is crucial in
the rhetorical mattering of these monuments. In her analysis comparing the rhetoric of the
Vietnam War Memorial and the AIDS Quilt, Blair (2007) argues that the Vietnam
Memorial democratizes the commemoration of the war by referring to the soldiers
inscribed thereon by name. While this no doubt brings the private life of the soldier into
the public, it does so in a fairly straightforward way – this is the name of a US soldier
who was missing or killed as a result of this war. The AIDS Quilt, on the other hand, built
by innumerable “authors,” and including innumerable personal stories (from buttons to
condoms) that are essentially inexplicable, but nevertheless relatable, prompts a private-
to-public exchange that is, in Blair’s eyes, all together different. This fluid, energetically
changing logic undergirds Blair’s approach. Commemorative places certainly attempt to
transmit stories but they are only successful to the extent that those stories are felt.
Visitors, drawing on politically and culturally inscribed life practices, make their
understanding of experience and while that experience will no doubt be influenced by the
presentational aspects of the commemoration, the experience itself is affective, not
effective. Some people who view the quilt can feel nothing but the tragedy of it all; others
see a celebration. The quilt conveys both to an extent (again I am not completely
dismissing a transitory understanding of speech) but it is the viewing and contemplating
subjects that register and navigate the affective particulars. This inclusion of the reading
of the quilt and the *making* of sense via culturally inscribed life practices greatly expands the meaningful exigencies that should be considered by interested critics.

As with the critique of the stances in Blair’s second approach, my critique here is that the ideas represented by this stance do well to turn to a more phenomenologically oriented approach to understanding individuals, but a great deal of work remains to be done if critics are to understand the processes and logics which individuals draw upon as they experience the world. The role of *feedback* in affective as well as embodied embedded logics is crucial, it is indeed emphasized in these perspectives, but more could be done to trace out how this *feedback* “works” in every-day life. One possible way of tracing this feedback process is an embodied-embedded, sense-making perspective on metaphor – this will be a focus of Chapter Three.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have traced the transition from a symbol model of communication dependent upon representation to an understanding of communication as language as articulate constitutive contact, and I briefly described the influences of Marxist thought on early and contemporary rhetorical scholars trying to account for the subsequent rhetorical materialism. Following my summary of Blair’s three materialist stances, I critiqued the first stance (represented by notions such as McGee’s ideograph, Black’s “persona,” and Charland’s phenomenon known as interpellation) as engaging transcendent communicative phenomenon. While scholars do emphasize individuals in
their approach to the study of rhetorical matter, they do not take an individual perspective which is essential as it is individuals who are mattering rhetorical thought.

In my examination of Blair’s final two stances, I attempted to demonstrate how rhetorical materialism expands the object domain to include an infinite number of affective possibilities. Rhetorical efforts to understand the substance generated by symbolicity should draw on “protean” or “rhizomal” logics. While these approaches make good use of embodied-embedded logic and active affective sense-making, the role of language – its abilities and potentialities to matter – is still not well understood. Both critiques posit the need for an embodied-embedded ontological understanding of language, which I hope to build through the remaining chapters.

The second chapter turns to the shift in cognitive science from a cognitivist model to one of embodied-embedded cognition. It describes sense-making in embodied-embedded thought and contrasts it with the understanding of most Western traditions that situate thinking as somehow disembodied. I attempt to demonstrate how the materialist implications inherent in the shift from a symbol model to one of constitutive articulate contact is reiterated and reinforced in the corresponding shift in cognitive science. Included are numerous examples that I will use to set the stage for an examination of language-as-sense to follow in subsequent chapters. I will emphasize how repetitive, active, selective action goads sensory development in ways which position metaphors as profoundly influential sensory contributors. This will prompt a re-examination of some of
the basic approaches to teaching and thinking about language including pedagogy and ethics.

Chapter Three will extend methodological capabilities of metaphor as conceived by Kenneth Burke and Lakoff and Johnson into a language-as-sense model. These theorists have already done the work which positions metaphoric structures as foundational in human symbolic thought, and by some accounts (Hawhee, Davis) Burke even suggested many of the same sensory implications that I am driving at. Metaphors are products of embodied thinking that are rooted in symbol using and they guide our pre-cognitive understandings in profoundly influential ways. I will briefly explore a few examples that attempt to show how racism, for instance, can be both visible and not visible, present and “not present,” at the same time. I argue that while it is obviously not reasonable to attempt to justify or rationalize mindsets that produce post-racial discourse, there is practical and ethical value in trying to better understand them. Post-racial discourses have proven to be remarkably resilient, this is in large part due to a misunderstanding in the public over what does and does not “matter” when race-influenced crime occurs.

While most communication scholars have adopted the language as articulate contact model some nagging components of the symbol model continue to persist. It’s not exactly breaking new critical ground to argue that the metaphors that we rely on are somehow complicit in our rendering of race or class. However, communication as a discipline continues to struggle to account for the implications of language-as-contact
within public speaking pedagogy. Public speaking education and communication scholarship have a deep, shared heritage in the traditions of “the West.” And while many public speaking texts have more or less adopted a language-as-contact model, many of the contemporary approaches to the topic rely on what I consider to be transmission-based understandings. Chapter Four attempts to demonstrate how, even though the communication discipline has more or less accepted that language is embodied, there is still much work to be done.

Particularly, Chapter Four turns to “professionalized” notions of public speaking education. The models that one uses in crafting lesson plans and learning environments will obviously exert tremendous influence on the kinds of learning that can take place. When one attempts to teach the methods of “professional” public speaking they are attempting to give their students the tools to transmit perceptions of confidence, credibility, and persuasive reasoning. Instead of focusing on the development of symbol-use these classes emphasize becoming better speakers. I take on a few critiques and then attempt to articulate what framing language-as-sensorial might mean for public speaking instructors and students.

Like questions of pedagogy, questions of ethics have a rich shared history with the development of the so-called Western communication studies discipline. Chapter Five works to elaborate on some of the ways that framing language as a sense interacts with questions of ethics. I will argue that nonviolence, which has received some attention in
the communication studies field, should be positively central to our understanding of what it means to be symbol-using animals.

Neuro-scientist-philosopher Walter J. Freeman (1995) has argued that both consciousness and causality become “ethical imperatives” (p. 7) when one takes on an embodied-embedded perspective, Chapter Five struggles to describe what that might mean for day-to-day symbol use. If one accepts that language senses the world thus rendering the material surfaces that s/he and those around her/him live within, the question then becomes what kinds of sense might we be able to make? Aspiring towards “better” sense is itself a profoundly political project, and so I turn to the ongoing tradition of nonviolent thinking to attempt to chart a more sympathetic course for those interested in taking on life-practices and perspectives that aspire to a more charitable and just world. Nonviolence has a deep history in the communications discipline, if nothing else Chapter Five aims to strengthen those ties.

In conclusion, this introduction has posed the question: how does communication matter? To understand how sensorial reason works, I turn in the next chapter to a very similar materiality debate that is taking place in cognitive science and, more specifically, to an “embodied-embedded” logic of sense making. This debate, and the embodied-embedded logic that appears to be prevailing, not only mirrors the “new material” implications of the efforts to make sense of a model of language as constitutive articulate contact, they also set the stage for an understanding of language as sensorial. I suggest that rhetorical and embodied-embedded scholars are driving at the same problem – how
is meaning made – and in both circumstances a more robust understanding can be had if we incorporate language-use into our sense-making capacities.
Chapter Two: Cognitivism versus Embodied-Embedded Cognition

…again and again that which has the status of object must blaze up into presentness and enter the elemental state from which it came, to be looked on and lived in the present… (Buber, 1937, p.40)

“Perception is not a process of passive absorption, but of active construction” (Blakeslee & Blakeslee, 2007, p.41).

This chapter starts with a brief summary of the debate in cognitive science (Shapiro, Noe, Damasio) between an embodied-embedded perspective (which situates brains as necessary but not sufficient to human cognition by emphasizing the role of enactment in perception) and a more or less defunct—and yet remarkably resilient—enlightenment model called “cognitivism” (an approach which places the brain as the seat of the self). I argue that the functional implications inherent in this debate reflect (and often underscore) those within the turn from the symbolic model to the articulate constitutive contact model in communication studies. The resulting emphasis on embodied-embedded thought as a model for human cognition has prompted cognitive scientists and brain scientists to go looking for “help from the humanities” (Damasio 1994, xiv) in order to fill in the gaps of scientific inquiry, this chapter attempts to respond to that call by positioning language as a sense. Language has not exactly enjoyed a charitable interest from scientists in the enlightenment tradition; and yet now it seems
that within our daily life, rhetoric could have substantial importance when it comes to the function and organization of the brain.

It should become evident that the move from a cognitivist model of cognition to embodied-embedded cognition demands “new material” understandings of rhetoric that are very similar to those prompted by the move to acknowledge rhetorical realities in postmodern criticism. The attempt to explain the new material understandings that are inherent to embodied-embedded cognition embraces models of emergent explanation that are driven by complexity theory; the second half of this chapter is dedicated to outlining those implications. It is my hope that the reader will engage the discussion of complexity theory with the material debates regarding determinacy and contingency in mind. While aiming at explanation, emergence-driven models like those rooted in complexity theory are by their very definition incapable of producing cause-and-effect understandings of the ways that symbolic thinking, acting, and perceiving lead to behavior. While critics often argue that approaches that rely on emergence lean too heavily on “mystery,” this critique largely misunderstands “broad reductionism” according to Clark (1997). Clark argues that emergent approaches have a great deal to say about “the ways in which the lower-level properties and features combine to yield [behavior]” which should help to “render the presence of higher-level properties unmysterious by [referencing a] multitude of lower-level organizational facts” (p. 104). The discussion of complexity theory will not offer answers to the rhetorical materialism debates in the preceding chapter, but it should
provide the working understanding of the “logic” that my prior critiques suggested were missing.

This chapter concludes by exploring some of the implications of embodied-embedded thinking on the notion of ‘embodiment’ itself and hopefully sets up metaphors as useful rhetorical sites for a more particular understanding of the material force of language. By situating metaphors as ubiquitous, potent, and productive components of symbolicity, I hope to be able to suture the phenomenological components of the last two stances offered by Blair in Chapter One, as well as the transcendent notions of individuals offered in her first stance to the now predominating theories in cognitive studies. This move should provide not only the founding logic that I have been promising for phenomenological thinkers in Blair’s second and third stances, but also a means of utilizing the transcendent approaches crafted by McGee, Black, Charland and others into the practice of everyday life.

**Cognitivism and Embodied-Embedded Cognition**

Cognitivism is rooted in a “top-down” approach to thinking which positions a subject as somewhere *in* the body and that subject engages the body to gather information about the world as it discretely exists. Shapiro (2011) defines “standard cognitive science” (or the “cognitivist” approach to the mind) as being primarily computational: “Commensurate with this view is the idea that cognition consists in the manipulation of symbols, where these manipulations often involve the application of rules for the purpose of deriving conclusions that go beyond the information contained in the input stream” (p.
Much like the symbol model of communication, the cognitivist approach situates symbols as *exterior* to the thinking human. While the conclusions drawn by this computational approach may be more than what is input (computer algorithms can be “productive” in that they can assess data for patterns or other forms of meaningful information), the incoming information is situated as discrete, isolated from the system that it enters. In Shapiro’s view

> the subject matter of cognitive science lays nestled between the peripheral shells of sensory organs and motor systems, making possible an investigation of cognition that needn’t concern itself with understanding the cognizer’s environment nor with examining the interactions between the two. (p. 28)

The cognitivist approach emphasizes a transitory understanding of meaning, somewhere *between* sensation and action sits the thinker. Thinkers *receive* information input which is then assessed and acted upon.

> This pattern of thinking is well-established in so-called Western thought.

According to Noe, Descartes most influentially lionized the “top-down” approach of cognitivism: “Descartes thought that inside of each of us there was a thing … a thinking thing – a ‘res cogitans’ in Latin – and this thing inside of us, it thinks, it feels, it decides” (Campbell, 2009, p. 5). The experience of this thinking thing was the only knowable truth for Descartes, the experience of “it” thinking was what gave Descartes comfort that he was, in fact, real and that his waking life was no mere illusion. Enlightenment reductivism saw the mind as a little man (and it was always a man) in the “boat” of the body. If he trained himself and guarded himself from the unnecessary and biased impulses of “the body,” that man could be purely reasonable. He could draw on the stuff’
of feeling and emotion to understand the world and then parse it down scientifically; purging it of all of the whimsy brought on by the initial “emotional” exploration, and thus come to know the truth. Cognitivism suggests that we see the world through this “man’s” eyes; “we” are that man.

In contrast, an embodied-embedded cognitive perspective situates the brain and all of its sensing parts as co-constitutive—meaning that the brain and body move together and that they move each other in ways that shape the body to be receptive of matter. This shaping – goaded by relational exploration – alters drastically the presence and character of matter as it can be known. Subjects are said to be embodied because the self is made up of a myriad of sensing systems feeding it situational information to locate the body within a milieu of sense-able conditions. Over time these sense-able conditions plasticize within the dynamically functioning brain resulting in a sensible world. This process (plasticity) not only constitutively renders the subject it also renders matter. Subjects are also embedded ecologically. Humans look to culture, language and the behavior of others with known identities for further clues to fill in and animate the embodied experiences that they encounter.

Sensation in this model is an active (Noe uses the term “enactive’) and ongoing process of meaning making, as opposed to something that is passive or transitory as the cognitivist model would suggest. What results is a “solipsistic” brain (Freeman, Shapiro) that nevertheless renders expectancy-laden reductions of the world based on its ongoing explorations of it. As Maturana and Varela put it embodiment suggests that “… only
those external environmental differences capable of being sensed and made sense of by an autonomous system can be said to exist for that system, can be said to make up the world of that system” (Protevi, 2009, p. 16). The kinds of explorations available ultimately dictate the kinds of matter perceived. Arguably, no form of exploration is more salient or repetitive for the brain than language.

Shapiro insists that it is important not to completely replace cognitivism with embodied-embedded reasoning (much like the noun status of “matter,” or the symbolic capacities of language, cognitivism remains an inordinately important fantasy); but the embodied-embedded approach problematizes several aspects of the “man in his boat” and ultimately prompts a whole new kind of thinking about subject production, meaning making, and how the human world matters. Most simply, it argues that the individual and the boat are the same stuff. They come to be, together. In the words of noted neurophilosopher Walter J. Freeman (1995), they are “con-substantial” (p. 28). The body (and very importantly the motivated actions of that body) and consciousness (our sensed state of being in the world) are intimately entwined via innumerable fibers (existing and spontaneously developing) of feedforward and feedback processing. The “pilot” model of cognitivism gets replaced with a “control” model, in which a massive percentage of the work of navigating the world gets “outsourced” to the body. Scent, sight, sound, touch,

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7 Borrowed from Glenberg (in Campbell 2008) who argues “… high level cognition is based on neural systems that control action, neural systems that control perception, and neural systems that control emotion. And this is in contrast to the previous 40 years or so in cognitive psychology where the Presumption has been that those high level cognitions have been analyzed humans [as Descartes “Cogito” suggests] as a separate sort of ability: something that’s unique to humans, perhaps something that required particular evolutionary changes” (1).
balance—these are no longer discrete interactions controlled at all times by the brain (the boat is no long “driven” by an otherwise separate “man”), instead they are modes of abstraction that inform what David Eagleman (2011) has likened to a “team of rivals”\(^8\) that all shout at once in our brain. The senses and other faculties thus tell us not only where we are, what we see, what we smell, and how we feel, but also what we know, what we don’t know, what we are thinking about, and even what we think about all of this thinking. Our sense-abilities constitute the many various pieces of *equipment* that we need in order to be – to live (an idea that makes all kinds of sense if you are familiar with the work of Kenneth Burke).

Eagleman has likened the resulting shift in understanding regarding human being and human agency that is coupled with the rise of embodied-embedded thinking to the jolts sent through the sciences when the “geocentric” view of the solar system got replaced by a “heliocentric” one. Initially the idea that there were multiple points of motion in the sky was too complicated, too preposterous to consider seriously. By observing the moons of Jupiter, Copernicus discovered and was able to prove empirically bodies in space do in fact orbit other bodies. Therefore, the Earth could *not* be the very center of the Universe. Once this indisputable proof existed, what ensued was over four centuries of an “accelerating slide from the center, [that deposited] us firmly as a speck in the visible universe, which contains 500 million galaxy groups, 10 billion large galaxies, 100 billion dwarf galaxies, and 2,000 billion billion suns” (Eagleman, 2011, p. 14). In

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\(^8\) Drawing on Doris Kearns Goodwin’s popular history of Lincoln’s cabinet.
very similar fashion, it was once thought that a thinking, being “sat” somewhere inside the human body acting as the focal point of our understanding of ourselves. What embodied-embedded research has yielded time after time is that the “you” at the center of your being is not a cohesive whole, but rather a somehow, seemingly, unified by a positively dizzying array of active, expectant, associative, and reductive sense-loops. As one neurologist put it, “I think the idea of what is ‘you’ is an outdated term, based upon the idea that we are conscious, rational human beings … we have choices within the limits of our biology” (Burton interviewed in Campbell, 2008).

Burton’s emphasis on the limitations of our biology is important when it comes to making sense of the world before us. We are, after all, limited almost exclusively to the equipment that we have “on us” at the time. But embodied-embedded thought also emphasizes the resilient plasticity of the human brain. Plasticity, according to Noe (in Campbell, 2009), is “the brain’s ability to change itself in response to novelty.” The brain was once thought to stay more or less stagnant after a theoretical “critical period” of development was eclipsed. It is now readily accepted that the brain does – in fact must – physically change in accordance with our ongoing experiences over time. \(^9\) And these changes are by no means incidental or periphery\(^{10}\). In many cases neural changes

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\(^{9}\) Thanks primarily to the research pioneered by Recanzone et al, 1992 which demonstrated neural topographic reorganization in the brains of owl monkeys trained to discriminate signals in novel auditory as well as tactile stimulus.

\(^{10}\) Though it could be noted here that University of Oregon neuroscientist Helen Neville has extended the implications of Recanzone et al into peripheral sight and hearing, demonstrating that plasticity is most likely linked to the especially acute peripheral sight in the congenitally deaf as well as to the especially acute peripheral hearing in the congenitally blind.
developed over even short periods of time lead to wholesale phenomenological differences in sensing and action potentials.

Perhaps the most startling example of the brain’s ability to rapidly acquire new sensory capabilities comes from the work of Paul Bach-y-Rita.\textsuperscript{11} Bach-y-Rita was an engineer and physiologist interested in restoring sight to people stricken blind. He essentially wanted to make prostheses for sight. Initial efforts linked a pad placed on one’s back with thousands of tiny electrodes to a movie camera. The electrodes worked similarly to pixels on a screen conveying intensities and movement, translating what was picked up by the camera into tactile touch on the skin of the blind participants. Initial trials were incredibly frustrating and early participants showed practically zero adaptability even over extended periods of time. This continued until one very important moment occurred. Apparently, in a fit of frustration, one blind participant walked over to the movie camera, \textit{picked it up}, and started moving it around. This had profound consequences. Within hours participants who not only experienced the stimulation \textit{but who also controlled the motion of the camera} were able to swat a moving ping pong ball, to pick up items off of factory-style conveyor belts, even to discriminate people, objects, and animals from across the room. This finding confirmed an earlier influential study conducted by Held and Hein (1963) that linked full visual development in kittens to self-actuated mobility\textsuperscript{12}. Lacking human test histories, the extent of the effect was completely

\textsuperscript{11} Found in Campbell, 2009 and many more.

\textsuperscript{12} In a rather gruesome series of experiments Held and Hein (1963) yoked kittens together during their brief critical period of development so that one kitten was actively controlling a shared visual field while the other kitten was only passively exposed. Only the kitten with active control over the visual
unexpected. Exposure, it turns out, is necessary but not sufficient to the full sensory
perception. By coupling exposure with action (action that is laden with expectancy and
which establishes an innumerable amount of measurable relationships), the brain can
incorporate whole new sensorial suites into its repertoire.

The reliance on self-actuated motion for sensory acquisition is what leads Noe to
refer to embodied-embedded cognition as an “Enactive” theory. Coupling action with
sensation enables not only feedback (from the nerves themselves) but also feedforward
(from the brain). Feedforward is colloquially explained by Blakeslee and Blakeslee
(2007) who suggest that as sensation is fed back to the brain “each area [of the brain that
is involved] asks ‘Is this what I expect? Is this what I predict? Does this conform to what
I already know is the case?’ … brain is constantly comparing information to what it
already knows or expects or believes” (p. 41). These processes obviously occur at electro-
chemical speeds making the entire “discussion” in the brain appear instead as a cohesive
present. Blakeslee and Blakeslee emphasize that that feedback fibers *from* the
speculative and creative brain appear to outnumber feedback fibers *to* the brain by as
much as ten to one (Ibid). This suggests that a large bulk of the world as we “see” it
exists, not because as Descartes’ boat metaphor suggests the world *exists* apart from us,
but because of the expectations, interpretations, and fabrications of the brain.

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Field developed full sight. The passive kitten was not blind, per se, but it did manifest marked
debilitations.
Bach-y-Rita could not restore sight as it was before but it was “sight” of a kind that was created and sustained by the brain despite having only short periods of experience and despite the fact that the participants in most cases were otherwise fully developed adults. Noe points out “it’s not as though the skin is being wired up to the brain in a new way” (Campbell, 2009, p. 13). Instead the two senses anchored by motivated actions somehow made new sense. This sense was possible only because of the embodied (autonomous explorative) potentials of the participants, and because of the “controlling” mechanisms of the brain, which resiliently understands and reduces even novel sensation into meaningful sense throughout our lives.

New sense is made, “scaffolded,” via the brain’s exuberant plasticity in all sorts of ways including no doubt many which we have yet to discover. As Freeman put it, “brains are creative. They do not wait passively like video cameras but actively stretch forth in search of input” (1995, p. 38). Clark and Protevi alike use the term scaffolding to account for the brain’s ability to acquire new sense making apparatuses. Add scaffolding to the “soft-assembled” body (a body with ready-made “control” functions which compact a staggering amount of feedback and feed-forward processing into simple, meaningful sensation) and what was once a monumental computational task (the ability to adapt new modes of sight, for example) becomes fairly straight-forward standard operating procedure.

13 And it is important to note here that the health of the visual cortex is imperative for these prostheses to work – congenitally blind patients cannot experience visual sensation in this way.
Unlike a strict computational or cognitivist approach that requires a ready-made inventory of the world around it, embodied-embedded cognitive approaches draw on connectionist philosophies that animate the world to explain human sense-making. Perhaps the most notable connectionist theories are those of James Gibson. Gibson took an “ecological“ approach to perception in order to tackle one of the more complicated questions of his day: how could a particularly shaped eye apparatus account for all of the variable shapes, distances, and dimensions of the world that it is trying to account for? Assuming a one to one representative translation from light point to eye, vision alone is inadequate for the kinds of perspective taking that human eyes appear to provide. When we look at objects we see not just light or no light, but also shape, color, motion, even (as Burke would emphasize) character. Linear beams of light impacting a necessarily round eyeball cannot explain all of this seeing. Gibson resolved this by suggesting that the physical apparatus of the eye was not, as conventional wisdom suggested, the sole source of vision in the brain.

The task of accounting for all of the potentially fluid kinds of surfaces that the eye can account for at seemingly any distance gets much easier if we rank that information stream among the astronomical sensing chorus of the brain. Not just the eye, but the movement of the eye, and on top of that the movement of the head, neck, abdomen, even knees, the precognitive dance that the body engages to look – all of the feedback that the body gets locking motion and expectancy to stimulus – *that* makes sense! Sense is not made predictively, and it is so not so much determined by the “lay of the land.” Instead,
the understood motions of the body coupled with the lay of the land yields frictional points of opportunity, *affordances* as Gibson famously called them, and presuming that those friction points offer some sort of insight or another the world comes to be seen. The brain, in mere microseconds, scrutinizes those affordance points and renders them as a seemingly unified visual field which consists of chairs, tables, floors, ceilings, as well as “up,” “down,” “coming,” “going,” and on.

An ecological, affordance-driven approach to sensation can be somewhat modeled by considering pin-art toys. Popular among children and adults, pin art toys are simple frames filled with potentially thousands of mounted dull pins. Any shape that one presses into one side of the frame will be represented on the opposite side of the toy as the pins conform to the pushing that they are receiving to various extents. No single pin is responsible for the shape that emerges, let alone for the fact that that shape is interpreted as a hand or a face. Instead it is all of the pins working in concert along with the necessary animations of cultural and social interpretation that cobble together the experience of seeing something. One might imagine that each pin represents a sense-loop of the brain and that each pin communicates not only in vertical depth but also in various forms of intensities. Only then can we begin to understand how complicated and embodied sense-making is. Eagleman’s reliance on a cosmic metaphor to explain the dissolution of the central “I” in embodied-embedded cognition is carefully chosen as the ramifications of adding motion or character to the pin art toy example are exponential. Each notion of sight (of which there are potentially millions) is not a one-to-one transfer
of data, but a monumental assessment, speculation, reassessment and reduction.

We can replace the person-in-the boat metaphor with our example from the previous chapter regarding rainbows. Again, the body does not brush against a rainbow, as noun-form of matter; technically, rainbows do not exist. And yet they are seen. Not because we look out from our “boat” of a body and encounter them, but because perspective, motion, sensation, and salience renders them as real. There is no isolated thing that can explain rainbows; they are not seen by a solitary figure in an otherwise separated boat. Instead we have to account for water, light, bodies, thoughts, perspectives, movement, and, of course, round sensing eyeballs. We do not see rainbows, rainbows appear to us because of ALL of this. We can engage them “theoretically” before ever actually witnessing them, pictures which “make visual sense” certainly help here, but that kind of sense-making is nothing compared to the “real thing” in terms of the impact it leaves in our minds. This is why when we “see it with our own eyes” we can become so reluctant to challenge that perception.

All told there is no real knowing how many kinds of sense-making conversations there may be going on in the brain at any one time, but one thing we do know is that a massive majority of it takes place pre-cognitively (outside of conscious awareness). In order to simply sit and read, the body has to account for the motions of the head to stay upright as well as to facilitate reading, the motions of the arms compensating for weight and shifts of positions, the steady flow of blood, the inhale and exhale of oxygen into the lungs and on and on and on. This seemingly simple task boggles computational thinkers
and yet it becomes remarkably simple if we outsource the lion’s share to the body. The muscle fibers in the neck and limbs participate in the body’s placement, firing nervous commands to move the neck this way or that with hardly any participation from the brain at all. The eyes move without being told, they are in fact always moving so as to inform the ongoing chatter of feedback and feedforward. Meaningful sensation comes to us not because it is there, necessarily, but because our moving bodies, as they are assembled, scaffolded, and used, sense it.

Burton (2008) calls this unseen work that the body does to render conscious existence the “hidden layer.” To Lakoff and Johnson (1999) it is the “cognitive pre-conscious.” The point is that the brain thinks all of the time, even when we are unconscious and especially when we do not actively know that it is thinking. The brain is listening to the carefully evolved more or less enthusiastically plastic sensing organs of the body as they interpret their surrounds and collapse the story. It is actively scrubbing biases and imperfections from view. The famous example here is the point in the center of the eye that has no photo-receptive cells on it because of the bundles of fibers coming together there. Technically speaking we should experience a blind spot in our vision and yet most of us do not. Our brains even (often) lie to us. Sense can even be made in ways that we as the sensing thing cannot detect. Blind-sight, for example, is a condition

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14 Time is constantly being restructured in order to syncopate the world of conscious experience. Technically speaking a baseball player should not see the ball that they hit until they have already experienced hitting it and moved to drop the bat and run. And yet many ballplayers will attest to seeing the moment of impact in the finest of detail. Most importantly, practically none of them report that they see the ball after they hit it as they chronologically should.
whereby someone who has suffered damage to the fusiform gyrus in the brain, which is primarily responsible for our ability to detect and detail faces. Individuals afflicted with this kind of damage upon being shown pictures of others will not be able to tell you if the photo is of a man or a woman, they cannot tell you the color of the eyes or if they have a pierced nose, nor can they tell you where that individual is looking. They can, however, tell you (if they are forced to guess) with a remarkable degree of accuracy if the individual they are “viewing” is happy, or sad. This is because sensed emotions emanating from the faces that they are otherwise unable to see follow alternate routes to our awareness (primarily through the amygdala) which do not require that we actually see the face itself.

Neuroscientists emphasize how much of our conscious living is thus constructed. The very feeling of embodiment, the feeling that we are in our body (or more particularly, in our heads) is a sensation that is created for us by our brains. Proper stimulation to various areas of the right temporal lobe produce the effect of the subject being wrenched from their body and can even result in the sensation of looking down on the body from above (Campbell, 2008, p. 14). Jet pilots, for instance, who experience just the right g-forces for sustained periods of time will report almost uniformly that they were instantly transported to the tail of their aircraft. They could see the plane, the ground, even their own head in the cockpit, and they could still, amazingly, control the plane. They could not, however, put themselves back into their own bodies until the g-forces subsided.
It should be a little clearer now that sensation is not a one-to-one arrangement between matter and sense. Instead, as Burton summarizes it, “modularity, combined with a schematic hierarchical arrangement of increasingly complex layers of neural networks and the concept of emergence serves as an excellent working model for how the brain builds up complex perceptions, thoughts, and behaviors (p. 59). As Burton suggests, in order to begin to piece together a picture of how this fluid, enactive sense making takes place theorists have turned to dynamic complexity theory and emergence. It is not essential that all of the “ins and outs” of emergence theory are understood to conceive of language as a sense, but if the goal is to begin to answer questions like how do people use language to be persuaded, or how determinate or constraining is material rhetoric, a basic understanding is helpful.

The Dynamic Complexity Driving Emergence

In order to explain how the hidden layer turns embodied-embedded, enactive sensation into consciousness, theorists in embodied cognition turn to perspectives of emergence. Emergent perspectives are the outcome of dynamic complexity coupled with plasticity. Complex systems are all the more complicated when they are dynamic, and the brain is incredibly fluid. Not only is over 90% of it water, it also processes astronomical numbers of intensity-guided feed-forward and feedback conversations in real time all while dreaming, reading, gossiping, driving, talking, running, or what have you. In order to do this all at once, the brain relies heavily on a hidden layer of cognition, itself a
product of emergent logics, to somehow sort and ‘pass upwards’ only the essential components of conscious experience.

Emergence is defined (perhaps as well as it can be) by Clark as a process of becoming rooted in organism-environment interactions that is takes place whenever “interesting, non-centrally controlled behavior ensues as a result of the interactions of multiple simple components within a system.” Pain is the quintessential example. There is no single point in the brain that is responsible for painful feelings, it certainly is not the stumped *toe* that hurts. Pain is best understood as something that is felt when certain “voices” in Eagleman’s Team of Rivals discord just so. These voices are each products of the nervous system and the electrical impulses that that system conveys but *pain*, itself, is somehow “bigger” than any one voice. Pain is an excessively mal-tuned “chorus” that requires a multitude of voices to function properly (or “improperly” as the case may be here) to emerge. It is not a one-to-one correspondence with any part of the body, but rather something that results when multiple parts of the body produce an overwhelming sense of discord. Pain is positively real (calling it “interesting” seems to be an understatement), but it is not *located* anywhere.

Like pain, lots of basic affective experiences are not anatomically discrete – surprise and gratitude are frequent examples of “higher order” emotions that cannot be stimulated into existence artificially (dependent as they are on complex social relations

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15 Although direct hierarchies become difficult to maintain in embodied-embedded thinking goaded by feedforward and feedback, scholars still rely on “upward” and “downward” notions of consciousness primarily because no other descriptions suffice.
for their production). And even though many other sensations are anatomically discrete (the sense of certainty is my favorite “non-voluntary” affect) that does not mean that their attachment to any particular experience is essential. Instead, these sensations are said to emerge from a combination of experience, action, sensation, and world.

Emergent transitions cannot be thought of as predictable or even for that matter describable from a causal point of view. Leo Tolstoy, in his many overlooked ethical works (2008), likened the shifting of human consciousness to a pitcher gradually sinking in a choppy body of water. It rocks back and forth, careening from extreme to extreme seemingly randomly, and gradually filling from here or there with water. No single water droplet sinks the vessel, and the sinking may take hours or it may happen all at once. Not even the best physics models can tell exactly when or how or even if it will sink, nevertheless the sinking happens and it happens in ways that we can study.

Similarly, isolating causation in emergent logics can be a tricky business. Clark points out that it is not that the emergent patterns are totally uncaused … rather it is that the observed patterns are largely explained by collective behavior (under specified conditions) of a large ensemble of simple components, none of which is playing a special leading role in controlling or orchestrating the process of pattern formation. (1997, p. 106)

Freeman emphasizes that emergent logics are non-linear. Apparently the communicative power of neuropil (the tissue that, along with the electro-chemical transmissions of the brain or “neuroactivity” makes up the primary functioning structures...
of the brain),\textsuperscript{16} does not even follow the first or second laws of thermo-dynamics\textsuperscript{17} (Freeman, 1995, p. 33)! These systems are rhizomatically spontaneous and generative, accumulating more and more neural topography, further facilitating future extensions, connections, and understanding.

One path of study for emergent phenomenon is complexity theory. Complexity theory attempts to explain how simple structures can more or less grow out of more complicated interaction between various component parts of a system. Emphasizing the importance of feedback loops in cultivating “basins of attraction” within a fluid dynamic, complexity theory “renders merely unpredictable, rather than undetermined” the behavior of vast systems (Protevi, 2007, p. 6). Feedback loops govern the development and presentation of sensation. “Touch” (for example) is fed forward by the nervous system but also fed back to the nervous system by the interpreting brain. Embodied subjects (especially those endowed with symbolicity) engage the world with a huge variety of morphologically developing capacities, capacities ultimately particularized by sensing subjects. As repetitive sensations accumulate, salient “troughs” of normalcy become not only more apparent but also more participatory. These accreted basins collect everything that is “normal.” Experiences of this kind are presented consciously as “more of the same” with little to no superficial novelty. If, however, the feedback/forward loops

\textsuperscript{16} In Freeman’s words “the tissue formed by neurons in brains which has emerged evolutionarily in only three known cases. Molluscs (octopus), crustaceans and vertebrates, “always as the bases for adaptive, goal-directed behavior.

\textsuperscript{17} The first law being that energy cannot be created nor destroyed, the second being that energy must deteriorate via a process known as entropy.
produce a groundbreaking new salient experience, it appears to us as a distinction and we inspect or interpret it further – potentially to the point of valley-ing out into a “normal” experience (creating a sensation of immediate normalcy out of what was initially abnormal, aberrant, or “strange”).

The back and forth looping process helps explain why Protevi crafts the resulting experience ( entrainment , he calls it) as both diachronic (deliberative) and synchronic (immanent). The “diachronic construction of functional structures in complex systems [achieves] a synchronic focus of systemic behavior as [it constrains] the behavior of individual components.” Protevi (2007) continues, “Synchronously arising or developmentally appearing patterns are said to emerge when a system’s feedback loops constrain the behavior of its parts so that a systematic focus of behavior becomes possible” (p. 8). A rather crude step-by-step examination of toe-stubbing would suggest that as the toe drives forward into whatever it is that it hits, the soft spongy tissue communicates with the brain diachronically and the experience gets synchronically experienced as pain. We do not exactly feel every piece of the toe as it connects with the object causing the discomfort, nevertheless there is a very concise conversation flowing back and forth between brain and nerves that tracks the contact points. As the gain of the conversation increases (as the toe drives more and more into the object) the synchronic realization of pain is, somehow, manifest in our conscious awareness as a focused sensation of pain.
A key component of complexity driven emergence for Protevi and others including Murphy and Brown (2007) is that so-called “whole” systems will ultimately end up exhibiting non-summative characteristics, modes of operating that cannot be reduced to a sum of that system’s parts and which may even prove to be disproportionately systemically transformative. This is how, despite the embodied solipsism of the brain, we can still detect a world outside of our own little bubble. If humans had nothing but a cognitivistic computing brain they likely would live only within the parameters of that computational system. By constantly stretching into the world in so many innumerable ways the brain can account for things that otherwise would not exist. This not only includes our sensing of the identities of Others (which will be the focus of a later chapter on ethics) but also the ability to use scientific exploration to detect natural phenomenon that otherwise are undetectable to the human body.

Conclusion

This chapter attempted to increase the reader’s understanding of the complicated, non-linear, interpretive, and creative capacities of sensation. Just as with the transition from the symbol model to one of constitutive articulate contact in the understanding of communication scholars, the transition from a cognitivist approach to an embodied-embedded approach in the cognitive science world comes fraught with new consequences for matter. Rather than being something that is contained and transmitted, in language (in particular) or in sensation (in general), matter becomes something that is fabricated as it is felt by an enactive, meaning making brain. Matter can be sensed all sorts of ways, but
never – ever – directly. It is always interpreted, “filled in,” reduced, and fed-upwards into consciousness by the circuits of the body. One of the many implications of this perspective is that it obliterates almost completely the cognitivist ambition for objective thought. As Burton puts it, “feelings such as certainty, conviction, rightness, wrongness, clarity, and faith arise out of involuntary [hidden-layer] mental sensory systems that are integral and inseparable components of the thoughts they qualify” (p. 139). “Certainty,” Burton concludes “is not a biologically justifiable state of mind, because there is no such thing as an isolated circuit in the brain that can engage in thought free from involuntary and undetectable influences” (p. 141). There is no “man” apart from his boat; once again the person and the boat are the same stuff.

My argument for this dissertation is that language should be situated as sensorial. Whenever someone is trying to “make sense” of something, perhaps that individual has just witnessed something she has never seen before, her linguistic explorations that attempt to “resolve” what was seen make sense. If that same individual has seen something like what she is trying to understand (sense-made), she will draw on that experience to categorize and characterize whatever it is that she is trying to make sense of. This is possible because these remembered experiences, these perspectives, have been incorporated (cognitive theorists use the term “scaffolded”) into her brain and they can thus be wielded through symbolicity.
Chapter Three: Metaphoric Sense Making

And however important to us is the tiny sliver of reality each of us has experienced first-hand, the whole over-all “picture” is but a construct of our symbol-systems. To meditate on this fact until one sees its full implications is much like peering over the edge of things into an ultimate abyss. And doubtless that’s one reason why, though [hu]man is typically the symbol-using animal, [it] clings to the kind of naïve verbal realism that refuses to fully realize the full extent of the role played by symbolicity in [its] notions of reality. (Burke, 1963, p. 493)

This dissertation began by asking the question “how does communication matter?” This chapter attempts a crude demonstration. I argued in Chapter One that rhetoricians are struggling to account for the “new materialism” inherent in the Marxist tradition; that missing in “transcendent” approaches (framed by those in Blair’s first material stance) is an account of the differences among individuals; and that the approaches which do attempt to account for individuals (like those in Blair’s second and third material stances) are in need of a more robust embodied-embedded logic. Chapter Two attempted to trace the debate between cognitivism and embodied-embedded cognition – suggesting that the material consequences from this shift are strikingly similar to those resulting from the move between the symbol model and the model of language as constitutive articulate contact. Complexity theory and emergence were offered as the grounding logic for an embodied-embedded approach to language, what is still missing is a working example.
This chapter examines the work of Lakoff and Johnson and Kenneth Burke in light of the joint shifts in communication scholarship and cognitive science in the hopes of exploring the role of metaphor in human meaning making. While metaphor is hardly a comprehensive example of the kinds of mattering that language might bring about, it is, for the purposes of this project, more than just a convenient one. Language, to the extent that it is symbol and concept driven, is inherently metaphoric - nevertheless, words make real sense. They make spatial sense, performative sense, temporal sense, emotional sense (including the emotive sensations of conviction and knowing), and more. And the kinds of sense making that we use most – the kinds that “make the most sense” – matter the most when it comes to the kinds of worlds that we can “see” in the future. Reliable perspectives matter, whether they are ultimately true or not.

Language’s mattering via metaphor (the scaffolded understandings that humans rely upon based on their ongoing metaphoric engagements with the world) isolates symbol-use, “symbolicity” as Burke called it, among all of our other sense-abilities as an especially generative material process. Language is remarkably resilient, spontaneous, transformative, and exuberant. More importantly language is fundamental to human existence. Burke and Lakoff and Johnson alike draw on metaphor because it is the most “ordinary form of analysis” (Burke, 1954, p. 95; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 3). Any comparison of experiences is inherently a comparison of perspectives, each prompting potentially numerous realizable (and thus material) outcomes. It is the ubiquity and limitless potentials of metaphoric understanding that makes metaphor such a fascinating
subject for rhetorical scholars and embodied-embedded thinkers alike. The plasticity and sensory acquisition studies discussed in Chapter Two (particularly the work of Bach-y-rita) emphasized that repetitive, salient, meaningful and purposeful sense-making can quickly yield new sensorial abilities, literally affording the blind a sort of sight. Experimentation on kittens discussed in Chapter Two also suggested that the inverse potential is also possible; certain kinds of engagement with the world can leave an otherwise healthy individual completely blind.

This chapter begins by examining the emphasis on metaphoric thought as a critical and practical embodied-embedded practice in the influential works of Kenneth Burke and Lakoff and Johnson. Next, I hope to explicate the ways that perspective-use makes sense in an embodied-embedded approach, particularly with regards to language. This explication happens in two steps. First, I unpack how conceptual scaffolding and motivated action guide sense making by examining the dexterity of the human hand. The “grasping” of something hidden, say in our pocket, is very much like the linguistic “groping about” that goes on when we try to “make sense” of events in the world, most notably with regard to the actions of others. I attempt to use this metaphor to understand metaphors themselves as a form of “grasping” at the world.

This “grasping,” depending on how it is carried out, can make some “surfaces” (like race, or class) “visible” to some and not to others. I argue, along with Burton, that we must have “sympathy for our biology” (in Campbell, 2008). This argument should not be read deterministically. My argument places the ability to see in practice which, in
theory, can and does change. The lives that people have lived assist them in “seeing” something that, for others, is completely absent. This explains how various individuals might look at a shooting, for example, and arrive at very different understandings of whether or not it was racially motivated. This is a reality that is not owed to a particular person’s indifference (though no small amount of indifference is required to persist in such mindsets once they are exposed and openly scrutinized). Humans have the ability to look at a shooting “as if” it were racist or, if they insist, “as if” it were not. The choices we make when presented with all of the alternative perceptions of others matter.

And in that regard this chapter is designed to be suggestive of the kinds of ethical conundrums that a natural dependence upon rhetorical sense making entails. I implore the reader, as Burke has, to use the power of metaphor to inexhaustibly convert “villains” into “fools.” Burke’s method of “humble comic irony” (Simmons, 2009; Jablonski, 2000) makes “fools” out of all of us by emphasizing how “foolish” incapacities practically and sensibly evolve in ways that can either lift us to the stars or threaten us with extinction.

This approach finds no fault beyond our utter dependence on our symbolic grasping and it emphasizes the potential not only for progress but also embarrassment afforded to those who would use symbols to criticize the world in which they live.

Making Sense Metaphorically

Two approaches to linguistic sense-making via an embodied-embedded perspective already exist that rely heavily on metaphor as method. The first approach was provided by literary-critic-cum-philosopher Kenneth Burke. Hawhee (2009) has
demonstrated the influence of Paget’s gesture-speech theory (an early and influential precursor to embodied-embedded cognitive studies) within Burke’s complicated thought. According to Hawhee, Burke drew upon the body as integral to the sense-making that informs our symbolic thought. She argues that “… Burke’s meditations on verbal choreography produce … an extension of Paget by which linguistic dance develops in reciprocal, mimetic relation between and among biological, psychological, and linguistic processes” (p. 118). As I discussed in Chapter One, Hawhee figures the term in a way that is “postural” and “somatic” (Ibid). Identification18, “so frequently figured by scholars as a sheerly social formation, first presented itself to Burke as an alliance formed between sounds made through similar laryngeal postures or through physical mimesis” (p. 117). Other sympathetic readings of Burke (Brock, Davis) have begun speculating on the ontological implications for symbolicity that arise when identification is so conceived; likewise this chapter attempts to ground identification in human physiology and sense-making. Arguably one of Burke’s more encompassing terms, identification essentially refers to the emergence of a more-often-than-not uncontested (but otherwise incredibly problematic) socially embedded self. While identification primarily occurs at a pre-conscious level (what Lakoff and Johnson might dub the cognitive unconscious), sociality and symbolic action nevertheless play important roles (Burke, 1941b, p. 227) and metaphoric understanding is at the heart of that relational participation.

18 Identification is a complicated term in Burkean logology which includes “one’s material and mental ways of placing oneself as a person in the world … one’s ways of seeing one’s reflection in the social mirror” (1941b, 227).
The second approach to metaphor was provided by linguist George Lakoff and philosopher-ethicist Mark Johnson. Lakoff and Johnson’s approach to metaphor has inspired rhetorical and embodied-embedded thinkers alike to focus on analogic thought as a “scaffolding” of an embodied brain that is profoundly constitutive. In other words, metaphors are not simply “thought experiments” or “mere” poetry. They matter substantively in ways that can be at the same time constraining and liberating. Lakoff and Johnson, in fact, argue that metaphors are perceptual: “the concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive ...” (1980, p. 3, emphasis added).

Indeed, one prominent embodied-embedded thinker, Glenberg, credits the forcefulness of Lakoff and Johnson’s analysis of language (as well as the same histories of affordance-driven models of cognition developed by James Gibson discussed in Chapter Two) for an experimental explosion of neurology and cognitive psychology work that tests how the body draws on basic experiences to arrive at meaning. Glenberg summarizes the link between metaphoric conceptualization and perception and cognitive operation:

Because of the sort of bodies that we have we are able to investigate containers; for example, using our fingers to feel the inside of a container and the outside of a container. And by virtue of that common experience of containers over the course of development, we develop what Lakoff calls an image schema for a container. And that image schema is not only visual but also has motoric components to it and, in Lakoff’s thinking, has a logic, part of the logic being that something can be inside the container or outside the container but not both at the same time. (Glenberg, 2008, p. 6)
It turns out that metaphors share a great deal with sensing in general. Metaphors draw on selectively reduced understandings of prior experience in ways that create symmetry as well as insightful opposition. From this perspective, it is not so much the content of a metaphor, as it is the oppositional or sympathetic understandings that stem from its use that grants it meaning. Similarly, it is not the content of the light that hits the eyes that generates a rainbow; it is the way the physical apparatus of the eye records the opposing experience rooted in action. Both rainbows and meaningful metaphors appear to us not because they are “out there,” but because we make sense of them.

Embodied-embedded experimentation\(^\text{19}\) suggests that the direction of motion, the force of motion, and even the character of motion (whether the incoming motion was a “warm embrace” or an “assault”) all rely upon embodied motoric components that pre-empt so-called rational thinking. In other words, we know whether or not an incoming action is aggressive, long before we can make sense of it in conscious awareness - certainly long before we see it in our visual realm. Understanding character, these studies suggest, is neurologically and motorically prior to seeing. This suggests that metaphor is more or less rooted in sensation, and that sensation is metaphorical. Or as Protevi put it in Chapter Two, we do not sense the world, we sense the world “as if.”

Burke and Lakoff and Johnson arrive at definitions of metaphor that are very similar and they each emphasize the embodied-embedded nature of metaphoric thought. Burke and Lakoff and Johnson alike emphasize the relational and character-driven

\(^{19}\) For an enjoyable and comprehensive summary see Glenberg (2008).
presumptions of metaphoric thought and they all use as their foundation the potential material consequences. For Burke (1945), “metaphor is a device for seeing something in terms of something else. It brings out the thisness of a that, or the thatness of a this” (p. 503). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue, “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (p. 5). For Lakoff and Johnson metaphors are a kind of action, and for Burke their visualization takes place within the framework of dramatism. 20

What is perhaps most important to note with both definitions is that they stand in stark contrast to cognitivist or symbol-driven models of sensing. For Burke and Lakoff and Johnson, the ability to sense predicates material rendering, not universal truths. In contrast to cognitivist or symbol models of human understanding (which Burke dubs “scientific realism”), for instance, Burke (1941) offers “poetic realism” which posits “that characters possess degrees of being in proportion to the variety of perspectives from which they can with justice be perceived” (p. 423). This perspective can account for the as if mattering of rainbows and rhetorical surfaces alike and it situates that mattering intimately in everyday human thought and practice.

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[20] In other words, “seeing” for Burke involved “... some kind of answers to these five questions: what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how did [they do] it (agency), and why (purpose)” (1945, xv). Burke went so far as to include “attitude” or the “manner” sensed (443), thus bringing his act of interpreting very much in line with what one might imagine when prompted with Lakoff & Johnson’s “understanding and experiencing.”
While there are many notable similarities between the two approaches to metaphor the distinct approaches of each have been so influential that a brief overview of each is warranted.

**The Thisness of a That**

Kenneth Burke’s logology of *dramatism* draws heavily on perspective for ontological substance as well as epistemological and hermeneutical development (Brock). Understanding metaphor means understanding A’s character (any thing, pattern, situation, structure, nature, person, object, act, role, process, event, etc., attributable to A) *from the perspective of B*. The ability to shift perspectives is not insignificant for Burke:

> Such shifts of interpretation make for totally different pictures of reality, since they focus the attention upon different orders of relationship. We learn to single out certain relationships in accordance with the particular linguistic texture into which we are born, though we may privately manipulate this linguistic texture to formulate still other relationships. (Burke, 1954, p. 36).

Herein, we see a vision of reality that is *not* bound by essence but is in fact “motivated” or “attitudinal.” Perspectives can be manipulated in various ways to prompt new considerations of “what’s out there” but only to the extent that those new moments of transcendence can be “fitted” into the “textures” already established (ibid). Metaphorical understandings of experience thus become central not only for our *current* experiencing of the world, but also for any and all transformations of “the future” that we might imagine or willingly conceptually occupy.

To this point, Burke’s *dramatism* may appear deterministic: if we can only “make sense” of the world to the extent that we can metaphorically frame it inside an
attitudinally-enhanced pentad, then we are more or less bound to things “just the way
they are,” or, at least, “as we see them.” And, indeed, in Chapter Two I discussed how –
to an extent – the sensing brain is ultimately solipsistic. But the brain is also profoundly
generative, and Burke redundantly emphasizes that humans are especially clever and
dexterous in our ability to sense new meaning, by making use of a perspective making
process:

By deliberate coaching and criticism ... characters can be considered tentatively,
in terms of other characters, for experimental or heuristic purposes. Examples
may be offered at random: for instance, human motivation may, with varying
degrees of relevance and reward, be considered in terms of conditioned reflexes,
or chemicals, or the class struggles, or the love of God, or neurosis, or pilgrimage,
or power, or movements of the planets, or geography, or sun spots, etc. (Burke,
1945, p. 504).

The magic of metaphor, Burke (1954) argues, is that it works by revealing “hitherto
unsuspected connectives ... [appealing] by exemplifying relationships between objects
which our customary rational vocabulary has ignored” (p. 90). Otherwise distinguished
conceptual screens can be overlaid on top of each other, at once constraining and
inevitably freeing auto-poetic thought at the same time.

The ability to shift metaphorical lenses dramatisically, and to explore (as
Nietzsche has) the destructibility of literally every symbol-driven reality now becomes a
profoundly transformative but equally frustrating skill for human agents. The kinds of
sense we can make are broadened as we are constantly imagining new angles or ways of
seeing which require no more biological adaptation than a willingness to think it through.
As humans “break” acceptable linkages, an opportunity for “analogical extension” opens,
and each metaphoric lens has entailments that to varying degrees do and do not make sense in the new context in which they are used. Each effort to re-examine a problem or potential from an alternate perspective might yield confirmatory, or equally enlightening contradictory, information, thus “solidifying” what we feel we know about the ever-elusive substance at the center.

In explaining this potential, Burke’s flamboyant writing style serves him well. To emphasize not only the scope of the ability at hand but also the patience required to truly entertain that potential the point warrants quoting at length. Unfortunately, the conventions of publication and citation prohibit this. Instead, the reader should peruse at her leisure (or ideally, at her insistence) pages 119 to 122 of Permanence and Change, where Burke describes the “cracking” process to which language should be subjected. Burke exhaustively lists some of the ways that metaphor can help us make sense, by turning “mastodons into microbes” or by revealing the “brilliance” of mosquitos. Disease might well be thought of as an “accomplishment” and one could fruitfully trace the development of medicine through a careful analysis of quackery. Essentially, Burke (1954) advocates here for the “merging of things which common sense had divided and dividing things which common sense had merged” (p. 113), not only to solve problems that we know we have, but also to “see” things we could not have possibly imagined before. The frustrating thing about summarizing Burke in this regard is that doing so skips the actual sense-making that readers do as they wade through his writing. No summary can render the argument as Burke has, and yet his rendering is but one (lengthy
and wonderfully challenging) interpretation of a method that really could go on and on and on.

Burke’s development of metaphor underscores how symbolicity is a form of contact that renders very real sense on/in the human mind. We should on the one hand be weary of any one voice telling us that it knows the way to go - that kind of minding being counter-productive in a heuristic model emphasizing truly frivolous exploration - but on the other hand we have to want to know what it means to, as Burke put it, find “Napoleonic” (as opposed to, say, merely McClellan-ian?) features in one’s dog. While we want to be pliable and insatiable in our analogical extensions, we at the same time, have to acknowledge that this methodology also suggests that the more we know about Napoleon, the more we may come to know about our dog. Confusing things more, the “this” and “that” of the “thisness of that” are at once substantive and arbitrary ... depending upon your perspective.

Burke suggests ways to draw on and to goad our development that contain hints of pedagogy\(^{21}\), but it is here his practical epistemology essentially stops. Developing exercises or techniques for broadening perspective (or otherwise taking advantage of the lessons of this new approach to language) will be part of Chapter Four. For now I need only to point out that insisting that the world “is what it is,” is perhaps the only way to do metaphor wrong.

\(^{21}\) For example, see Burke’s “contest” to “fill out” a metaphor, in Burke 1973, p. 145.
A system that situates metaphor so sensorially is unkind to individuals who lack the patience, the good faith, the doggedness, and the genuine curiosity to exhaustively engage and explore each “new” iteration they confront, all the while doing what they can to keep track of all of the old. If we chose, for instance, never to entertain what it means to feel Napoleonic (if we never imagine ourselves dramatically identifying to the fullest and most varied of extents that we are able with the diminutive genius/murderer), then we can only sense so much about our dog. Conversely, each effort to make sense of the French general potentially scaffolds senseable knowledge of pets, sports, human space exploration, or whatever.

The forms that historians, hobbyists, internet “trolls,” and other participants use to make sense of him, either in “actuality” or “merely conceptually,” cumulatively form a kind of terrain that those interested traverse and erode. For the disinterested, even the most thorough of inspection will yield next to zero geographic knowledge. For those who find themselves unable to do anything but wonder what Napoleon was really like (either because they love history, or because they love the era, or because they love military strategy, or because they love historical perspectives on masculinity, or because of anything else), the scaffolding they have accrued seems to enable them to walk knowingly along all the related symbolic terrain in the dark. And, to a remarkable extent (owed completely to the scaffolded understandings that came before), this is exactly what this scaffolding does. There will no doubt be catastrophic missteps, but for those enabled
by prior symbolic experiences that they relish, “feeling our way” into the unknown can be remarkably rewarding.

Confounding the issue still further is the fact that arguers will frequently feel like they are “comprehensively” identifying with Napoleon in a study of their pooch, but in “reality,” what is going on is the arguer is drawing on incomplete or grossly reduced biases (say about, “French people”). Worse still, arguers will - when exposed - cling to or ignore perspectival blindness for the sake of proving a point. As Buber puts it, instead of pursuing destiny, the convinced will only doom themselves to a self-selected fate. Failing to know all of the Napoleonic features of one’s pet may not seem like the end of the world (though there may be benefits in thinking of ways that it might be!). But as we shall soon see in our case study, selective blindness (particularly that predicated on privilege) “matters” in ways that, once informed, we should not continue to allow to be ignored.

In conclusion, Burke’s development of metaphor elicits the embodied-embeddedness of all rhetoric:

… our minds, as linguistic products, are composed of concepts (verbally molded) which select certain relationships as meaningful. Other groups may select other relationships as meaningful. These relationships are not realities, they are interpretations of reality - hence different conclusions as to what reality is. (Burke, 1954, p. 35)

Like it or not, all of these realities matter. Burke’s emphasis on embodiment drives at the visceral, the affective, the phenomenological components of metaphors in human being. Lakoff and Johnson take a much more conceptual (but no less embodied)
approach when they confront the force that metaphor exerts upon our thinking. Unlike Burke that implicates the participatory nature of the body and viscera in rendering the stuff of experience, Lakoff and Johnson focus on the conceptual forms of constraint that metaphoric sense-making entails.

**Metaphors We Live By**

In 1980, University of California Berkeley linguist George Lakoff and University of Oregon philosopher Mark Johnson released a deceptively simple text that has had enormous influence across a wide array of academic disciplines. Examining the systematicity of the *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue (in a move that excited constitutive rhetoricians and embodied-embedded scholars alike) that our conventional ways of talking about arguments …our very concept of an argument … is not poetic, fanciful, or rhetorical; it is literal. We talk about arguments [a certain way] because we conceive of them that way - and we act according to the way we conceive of things. (p. 5)

This approach positions language as *material* in ways that ingratiates Lakoff and Johnson to symbolic “constructivists” (Pfohl, 2008), rhetorical materialists (explored throughout Chapter One), and embodied-embedded cognitive thinkers (reviewed in Chapter Two) alike. Conceiving of an argument for instance as a “war” as opposed to a “soup,” changes, materially, the potentials for that all important activity. As with Burke, Lakoff and Johnson position metaphor in a way that accounts for how language operates materially on/with the mind.

Rescuing deliberative thinking from the neglect it received in the Enlightenment, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that
From a biological perspective, it is eminently plausible that reason has grown out of the sensory and motor systems and that it still uses those systems or structures developed from them ... it is only from a conservative philosophical position that one would want to believe in the old faculty psychology - in the idea that the human mind has nothing about it that animals share, that reason has nothing about it that smells of the body. (p. 43)

Before we ever have a chance to “coolly” reason, to think “objectively” or to separate our emotions from the facts, the cognitive unconscious (what neurologist Robert Burton has dubbed the hidden layer) orientationally performs everything we sense - from the “things” we sense in the world to the sense that we are sensing, to the sense that we are sensing as an “embrained” being (2008). The body becomes an active participant in our thinking; even the most “sterilized” of formal methods “bleeds out” into the affective mulch of subjective thought.

For embodied-embedded thinkers (Shapiro, Noe, Glenberg, Pfeifer & Bongard), the brain has always been necessary to an understanding of consciousness, but it cannot be sufficient. A brain-first approach lacks the ability to explain the ways that the environment of the embrained can change, including the innumerable ways that the environment can change based on how we actively “view” it. Humans change their conceptual reasoning about science, for example, by drawing on technology metaphors. At one point the brain was thought of as a clock, now most people frame it as a computer. Both perspectives are equally bankrupt, as the brain is massively more dynamic and complex (and not to mention biological) than either clocks or computers, but at the same time both perspectives make some sense. New metaphorical understandings of technology invariably prompt new insight, and new blind spots. This suggests that the
shapes of reason have an effect on the shapes of our brains, and because reason feels more or less indeterminate, so, too, is the brain.

From this standpoint, the linguistic artifacts known as metaphors offer us a glimpse into the realities of humanity that is every bit as “authoritative” as a meticulously crafted chemical experiment. Ten years before the discovery of mirror neurons, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) discovered in metaphor-use a systematicity that linked expression and reason to bodily experience, beginning with “categorization.” Experience, they argue, is “inseparable” from categories, and concepts:

Since we are neural beings, our categories are formed through our embodiment. What that means is that the categories we form are part of our experience. They are the structures that differentiate aspects of our experience into discernible kinds. Categorization is thus not a purely intellectual matter, occurring after the fact of experience. Rather, the formation and use of categories is the stuff of experience. It is part of what our bodies and brains are constantly engaged in. We cannot, as some meditative traditions suggest, “get beyond” our categories.... (Lakoff & Johnson, p. 19, emphasis in original).

Our bodies speak to us in highly reductive, experientially motivated ways. “Reality” is, by and large, body-made.

This means that foundational experiences such as time, events and causes, the mind, the self, morality, ontology, coherence, truth, objectivism, subjectivism and action all appear to us not as they are, but rather - “as-if.” The character of the good/bad “as-if” of each experience is predicated on relatable experiential prior states (and even “recorded” across generations) to give the otherwise arbitrary nature of “up” and “down”

22 Though again I insist that it would be useful, it is not my intent at the moment to suggest a reference to Burke’s usage of motive.
coherent meaning. Language, then, becomes an important place to begin to interrogate the nature of our sensical reductions; and nowhere in language do these reductions present themselves more plainly than in our uttered or implied metaphorical concepts.

Lakoff and Johnson ultimately develop a “Philosophy of the Flesh,” which emphasizes the importance of sensorimotor input in reasoning and understanding. Reasoning is not “simply thinking,” it is a very active and reductive doing of the brain that relies on our recollections and re-performances of the as-if past. Mirror neuron research seems to vindicate the idea that many (if not most) of the same components that go in to the “actual” doing of life are animated when we do “conceptually” – reading the word “spoon” and encountering and using spoons both rely on the parts that engage spoons (or other spoon-ish things). The question of moral responsibility (the necessary foundation for any and all pedagogy) then

… is understood metaphorically on the basis of our experience of more bodily responses. We do not project all of the structure of the experience of automatic, reflex responses onto the moral realm, since choice of alternative bodily responses introduces a crucial gap between the stimulus and our response to it. This gap allows us to be moved by the force of moral reason rather than physical forces, such as bodily desires, needs, and interests. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1987, p. 16)

By “minding the gap,” Lakoff & Johnson (1987) suggest, we can guide human development in ways that are more sensitive, ethical, and which can be rapidly and profoundly transformative.

As for the particularities of pedagogy, Lakoff & Johnson call for a reorientation of many of the “classic” human faculties. One example that might resonate particularly well with Burke’s flight into analogical-extensionism (moving toward a “perspective on
perspectives”) is *imagination*. For Johnson, it is imperative to “revive and enrich our notion of imagination if we are to overcome certain understandable effects of deeply rooted sets of dichotomies that have dominated Western philosophy” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1987, p. 140). These dichotomies include mind/body, reason/imagination, science/art, cognition/emotion, fact/value, “and on and on” (ibid). Johnson advocates “enriching” common senses of imagination to explore the role it plays in embodied-embedded meaning, understanding, reasoning, and communication.

More broadly, Lakoff and Johnson acknowledge and attend to the need for “critical tools” to make sense of the differences between choosing to enrich our understandings of the world versus not. Johnson, in his related works, dwells on *image schemata* (variously overlapping “abstract patterns in our experience and understanding”) which are “nonpropositional” in that they are dynamic patterns that function “somewhat like the abstract structure of an image”, connecting a range of different experiences to somehow render similar “recurring” structures (Lakoff & Johnson, 1987, p. 2). Although they are nonpropositional, dynamic image schemata can be broken down and critically studied all sorts of ways. Johnson explores several notions of *force* (as an ontology, orientation, or *interaction*) and demonstrates how the various schemata that these notions of force can take implicate reasoning and acting in human life.

Image schemata are governed by internal structures which Johnson (1987) dubs “gestalt structures” because they function “…as coherent, meaningful, unified wholes … [which] generate coherence for, establish unity within, and constrain our network of
meaning” (p. 41). These internal structures are not uniform, the known inconsistencies are as important as the consistencies. They are made of innumerable understood groupings and associations that connect concepts like “gravity” for instance with concepts like “momentum” practically from birth. We learn what to expect from the world as soon as we start acting within it, those expectations schematically inform all future explorations, including those done by our senses.

To illustrate how image schemata operate coherently to form *gestalts*, we need to look no further than to our presumptions about *force*. Johnson (1987) examines “the way in which patterns of typical experiences of force work their way up into our system of meaning and into structure of our expression and communication” (p. 42). Johnson (1987) outlines several presumptions about force: the sense that it is always an “interaction,” that it has a “vector quality,” that it has a “path of motion,” that it has “origins or sources,” that it has measurable “degrees of power or intensity,” and finally that it always necessitates a “structure or sequence of causality” - each of which might implicate reasoning systems that ought not think of *force* in such a way (ibid).

Notions of *compulsion* versus *attraction* for instance can have considerable influence in our efforts to understand, say, an assault. Depending on the schematic narratives ontologizing and orienting those *gestalts* we can expect profoundly different conclusions in terms of “what, exactly, just happened.” In other words, “reality” depends on the pre-cognitive or “hidden” experientially based categorization and animation of “the world” as it can appear to *each* person observing. The world matters for *each* of us
in ways that come to be thanks to our corroboration with the world. It does not exist in any meaningful way independently of any of us.

Human beings understand force as having a trajectory, having an origin, involving interaction and as structuring sequences within a causal narrative. Often it is the case that we attribute portions of these schemata inappropriately. Doing so can give us incredible insight into the world but it can also lead to tragic mis-perceptions. The lines separating being “followed,” “confronted,” and even “attacked” are much blurrier than they seem. The sensorial components that register the differences rely upon the history and experience of the subject. If experience suggests that certain kinds of people are “suspicious” (and experience can suggest this in many ways including through conversations, asides, books, magazines, movies, songs, history and more), it is because there has been an accumulation of symbolically driven narratives that corroborate that qualitative assessment of the approach.

Language participates in this scaffolding of suspicion almost constantly. It is the mechanism through which we identify “those people,” and the mechanism through which we compare and share our identifications with others. Depending on the kind of lingual environments that we are in, suspicion can mount in catastrophic ways. This is in part because the symbolic components of our metaphorical sense making are working in tandem with the somatic as-if components that are feeding us suggestive visceral affects.

In summary, then, while Kenneth Burke’s approach emphasizes the “dancing” of the body, Lakoff and Johnson’s perspective focuses on the reductive, presumptive
components of sense-making. On the one hand, the body performs (or “dances”) in ways that make sense of the world, on the other hand the metaphorical gestalt structures that we learn and develop over time participate in choreographing future dances.

Glenberg (2008) has identified several studies which suggest that we are much quicker to recognize that a sentence is coherent if we can indicate our acceptance with a sympathetic gesture. We can understand sentences like “Jake sent me the message” if we can indicate the coherence by pulling a lever (as if the message were being received) more quickly than if we are asked to indicate coherence through non-sympathetic gestures (like pushing the lever). The presumptions about orientation and interaction that make some gestures sympathetic and others not are more or less arbitrary (messages can, after all, arrive in lots of ways including many that are multi-directional and temporarily non-linear) but these sensed orientations and interactions still matter.

The next sections are going to attempt to put these two approaches together. First I will discuss the role of action in perception, attempting to trace not only the dancing that is necessary for sense making but also the ongoing dependence on structured gestalts. The section after that will attempt to ground this same approach in a concrete case study taken from an ongoing dispute about so-called “Stand Your Ground” laws in the United States.

The Role of Action in Perception

Action is a fundamental piece of the perspective-driven embodied-embedded approach. The body is “intelligent” from an embodied-embedded perspective, but not just
because of how meticulously and densely packed the sensing apparatuses of parts like our
hands are. Sense-making is often defined as a kind of “skillful behavior,” or most often as
a “coupling” (Shapiro, Noe, Pfeifer & Bongard). In Chapter Two, I discussed how
autonomous motion was imperative for normal visual development in kittens; this section
expands on that discussion to emphasize the other ways motion implicates sensing and to
demonstrate how relational (perspectival) understanding goads felt understanding. More
particularly it draws upon the immediately prior conversation combining the “dancing”
metaphorical approach of Kenneth Burke and the “gestalt-driven” approach of theorists
George Lakoff and Mark Johnson.

People who are looking for new ideas will often say that they are “feeling about”
for solutions; one of the most illuminating examples of embodied-embedded cognition
emphasizing motivated action is just that ordinary. If you have ever put your hand in your
pocket and felt an object you knew right away that to learn more about that object (or
objects as the case may ultimately be) you will have to move your fingers. The motions of
your fingers are important;\(^{23}\) if you were to keep your hand motionless in your pocket you
would feel whatever you felt initially but otherwise you would literally be blind. As your
fingers move, as you explore, various surfaces on the tops, tips, sides, and fingernails all
come into contact with the contents of your pocket and no single touch is responsible for

\(^{23}\) It could absolutely be argued that the motions of your reasoning are equally important. You move
between various memories, the last time you wore these pants, and last time you may have had
something to put in your pocket, and you deliberate about the possible contents as you explore with
your fingers. All of these explorations, the fingers moving, the memories moving, the deliberative
thoughts moving, provide various degrees of perspective that ultimately can resolve to a huge extent
even the unseen.
your ultimate realization that there are coins in there. You “see” the coins *between* all of
the various touches on your fingers.

Importantly, you do not just flail your fingers randomly about in your pocket. You
*search* it. And you use what you learn instantaneously it seems (because for the most part
the “realizations” of such searches are hidden-layer output), to govern the search as you
go. If you want to distinguish coins you will need to feel the *edges*. You will want to feel
the edges of various coins *against other coins*. US quarters and nickels will distinguish
themselves immediately, because we all know what quarters and nickels feel like (some
are larger, some are smaller, some are thick and some are thin) and because we are
looking for them. Dimes and pennies need more careful consideration. The dime-penny
distinction is minimal, but it is there if you are willing to “look.” Small distinctions in
size and the texture of a coin’s edge matter greatly to searching fingers/brains. These
distinctions are what clue us in to which gestalt structure “quarter” or “nickel” (each of
which work within still larger structures like “coins”) is most appropriate. Once one has
“grasped” the meaning of the sensation then the concept is locked in; that thicker fatter
metal thing becomes twenty five cents, a bout of pinball, one tenth of a one-way bus fare
and on.

Hands are remarkable at sensing in large part because of how dexterous they are.
The ability to *oppose* in various ways (against each other, finger tip to finger tip, fingers
into the palm, against the “sides,” “top,” or “bottom” of the sensable world via the wrist,
elbows and shoulders) enables the hand to move *against* surfaces, *along* surfaces, and
around surfaces. Things that we grasp are moved in relationship to our two offset eyes. We can shake various objects, moving them as we do towards one ear to see how it sounds over here as opposed to over there. We can use our hands to smell either bluntly like a child pushing a flower into a nostril or methodically like a chemist waving a gloved hand over a smoking vial. Many people gesture with their hands both when they know what they are talking about and (arguably more importantly) when they do not. Gestures like this do not “feel the air” so much as they “work the space” in sympathetic ways which, hopefully, jostle our thinking and symbol making in ways that facilitate understanding.

And when it comes to dexterity our hands do not stop there. They have soft, plushy, variously sensitive skin. Depending on where you press into the skin an entirely new constellation of perspectives becomes available. Experiences including temperature, texture, edge-type and more are possible because of the soft morphological material that covers our fingers and hands. The plasticity studies explored in Chapter Two suggest that places in the brain dedicated to finger skin are very different from the place in the brain

24 Grasping is a good example of how cognitive functions can be “outsourced” to the body, a conversation taken up in Chapter Two. Mirror neuron research suggests that even before we “decide” to grasp an object many of the neurons responsible for moving the hand to the proper shape are already firing. As the object is sensed within our peripersonal space (space in the “reachable” bubble around your body that is intimately mapped by the brain) the notions that we can/cannot grasp it are always already to some extent an integral part of our becoming aware of it. The body has already compared the map of the found object to the map of the hand as it knows it and determined the extent to which it can be grasped, that information is as essential of a component of our “understanding” that object normally as is the color or classification of the object. Equally important, the tendons, musculature, and bone structure of the hand give these otherwise computationally unwieldy devices very predictable, but still incredibly pliable form. The fact that our fingers seem to “fall together” when we relax is a testimony to fact that a huge part of grasping has been outsourced to the body.
dedicated to, say, thigh skin. Finger skin senses the thin film on the surface of the skin and several gradually thickening layers beneath, while thigh skin has no such layering.

The sensing activity across the surface of finger skin is likewise massively amplified. Temperature sensors are more densely packed on our finger neuronal regions, resulting in each case in much more lively (we often say “finer”) sensation across the board. This anatomical preferencing for finger skin sensitivity over thigh skin sensitivity is no accident. It is an emergent property of the innumerable fact that we are far more willing and more able to “make sense” of the world with our fingers and hands than we are with our thighs. Fingers and hands are good at making sense, we in fact often enjoy using them to make sense of the world, and so they matter immensely.

Language, too, is incredibly dexterous. It touches the body in incredibly literal ways. Part of understanding the word “knee” as you see it now in print relies upon the firing of millions of mirror neurons that are otherwise inseparable participants in the sensations and actions available to the thing you know as the joint in the middle of your leg. When we wince at pain inflicted in stories we feel the reality of words. Humans understand the “conceptual” nature of language, it could be argued that the naïve agreement that language is “only” conceptual is a large part of our ability to make sense of it at all, and more often than not we hesitate to grant words the material worth that they are due. But the old nursery rhyme “sticks and stones can break my bones but names will
never hurt me” could in a more free-verse form of equally real satire say “sticks and stones can break my bones but names can get me shot.”

Like our fingers we use language to “feel our way” through the world. But unlike our hands language is not necessarily impoverished by peripersonal space. Language can roam as far as the imagination will allow it. Humans use language to make sense out of the otherwise unseeable material of the cosmos and to make ideas like human rights, justice, and equality matter. As with all of our other senses, the how of the movement is imperative. The actions we take up against the surfaces of the symbolic excite reaction. Whereas bats and mammals in the ocean use sonar to “see” prey, mates, reefs, predators, and migration routes, humans use rhetorically infused sonar to make sense of the people and the culture around us. Importantly, this sense making is not the product of choice (though it sometimes can be), but rather more often the product of accreted sense-made over time. And so far as we can see, no mammals have mastered sonar to the extent that they can convey satire, irony, ribbing, or sarcasm. While it can be argued that these intended messages within messages frequently miss the mark, it is equally true that especially among those who know us the best, they can “bite.”

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25 Peripersonal space is the space within reach of the body or accessible tools that gets “annexed” (Blakeselee & Blakeselee, 2007, p. 3) by your brain’s body maps. The boundaries of this space are very elastic “like an amoeba, it expands and contracts to suit your goals and makes you master of your world” (ibid), but it is ultimately limited by the reach of your physical, visual, olfactory, and auditory sense making abilities.
Conclusion

As often as I am able, sometimes for hours a day, I participate in debates with friends, family, and strangers online. As a communication scholar who has made sense of post race discourses, the gun debate, the health care debate, and more; as a debate coach who has a pedagogical interest in nearly every issue that besets humankind, and as one who wants to learn to make sense of these discourses for and with others, I feel compelled to bring what expertise I have to bear on how the media portrays as many of these issues as I can. I attempt to offer as best I could a variety of suggestions to those who were willing to listen as to what other kinds of sense could be made of the tragedy. Each new stranger who engages me in discussion was not an individual to be won over, but rather a new font of opportunity to see these otherwise invisible worlds anew. I draw upon the metaphorical components of reasoning in an enactive way, utilizing and engaging various perspectives on important issues, not to learn the Truth (not to see the noun-status of reality behind them), but to see what sense was being made and, equally importantly, what sense I could, in good faith, participate in rendering.

These practiced sense-makings inform my ruminating on these subjects whether I can recall the particulars or not, and the efforts I explore to make sense each day influence my abilities to do so in the future. They inform my future attempts to confront and name the oppressive realities that I understand and they beg questions that perhaps I have not taken seriously enough to answer. It is not enough to simply think about these issues and it’s not enough to just read about them (though thinking and reading clearly
make sense). From the perspective developed in this dissertation, I have to engage the reactions of others as much as I am able, for only then can I see how the day-to-day enactment of symbolic sense-made feels.

Regardless of how many minds are changed, it is, I feel, incredibly important work if I (we) are to remain sensitive to the problems that beset our species. I often get asked by people who I would expect to understand, people in the communication field themselves, why do I bother arguing with so many people who are “clearly ignorant” or who “will never learn?” I am often told, “don’t waste your time arguing with him/her, it’s pointless” and asked more than a little suggestively if I don’t have better things to do with my time. All of these questions surprise me when they come from students of critical communication because they reflect a persistent symbol-model understanding of rhetoric that, in the face of the “new” rhetorical materialism traced in Chapter One, should be a thing of the past.

Such avoidance strategies when it comes to people we “don’t have time for” only participate in enabling the silence of post-race, for instance, and they certainly do not assist in mattering any kind of better sense for the future. Moreover they reserve for some undetermined future the work that I, as a communication scholar, must do if I want to be as accessible and informed as my rank of “PhD” suggests I am. And so I reply to these questions by reminding those asking that all we can do is continue to make the kinds of sense that we feel are justified, and to rely upon the sense-making capacities of others to assist them in “feeling the way” and feeling my own way in turn. As someone aware of
the sense-making potentials of metaphor I feel compelled to enact those potentials as often as possible, not only to manifest resistance to ideas that I do not make “good” sense to me, but also to check my own reactions against those of Others.

One potent example of metaphorical exploration that I encountered during the writing of this dissertation stemmed from the shooting of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black youth in Florida. I conclude with it here, to underscore the value of metaphor for rhetorical criticism, within an embodied-embedded logic. Martin was followed and ultimately shot by a self-appointed neighborhood watchman who ultimately was not convicted. The shooter’s non-conviction was owed to the laws in Florida that stipulated that, regardless of who instigated the conflict (a lot of the evidence suggested that Martin was not the instigator), if the shooter felt threatened he was justified in using lethal force. As I argued this issue, I confronted by all sorts of alternate perspectives on Martin and his murderer, some of which played into racialized notions of young black men as “thugs” and “gangsters” in an effort to vindicate the shooter. Other arguments focused instead on Martin’s youth, innocence, and the predictable outcome of the jury’s decision given the color of Martin’s skin.

One of the latter such reactions attributed to the Twitter accounts of several individuals questioned why the shooter did not stop to offer Martin a ride home to get him out of the rain. Instead of seeing a potential thug, the Tweet asked, why not see a kid trying to get home who needs a lift? Without expressly indicting race, this perspective implicates race in Martin’s murder. It also participates in the notion that the shooter (who
again had appointed himself a “watchman” of the neighborhood) was out to protect his community begging the question why this youth was targeted as “suspicious” or “threatening.”

I also encountered a potent perspective offered by columnist Michael Skolnik (2013), who altered via Photoshop the skin tones of the individuals involved. Very much like the “what if Martin was a young white girl” hypothetical offered by still more interested in interrogating race, this perspective challenges the role race played in the sensed credibility of the people involved by presenting the readers with the optics of a young white boy being murdered by a looming black man. By shifting the tone of the images the observe was essentially asked what kind of sense does this make now?

Of course I have my advocacy, and of course I believe that advocacy is best (as we all must because these advocacies “make the most sense”), but at the end of the day my understanding is that together my interlocutors and I will make sense (some good, some bad) of an incredibly important issue and, somehow, justice will come of it. Abraham Lincoln called this process the work of “folk wisdom;” perhaps Martin Luther King Jr. was invoking the same process when he famously argued that the arc of moral history bends towards justice. Rather than arguing to “win” I argue to make sense, and the ability to shift between various metaphoric perspectives on any given problem is a key component of that work.

Abandoning the persuasion model, unfortunately, means abandoning the expectation that when “better reasons” or the “best” means of persuasion have been
employed then the minds and attitudes of others will change like clockwork. More often, the organisms surrounding those minds will continue to “make sense” of the world as they have even after they have been “shown the light.” And yet, voices can and do haunt us. Perhaps real change only manifests itself in small ways that are hardly detectable at all. Perhaps instead of turning over like a clock, humans opt to go to our graves perfectly satisfied with the kinds of sense we have made of the world, regardless of the consequences that it may or may not have for others. What will ultimately be real for each individual is left to the lives lead, the choices each makes as they navigate the affective deliberative spaces. Those choices will interact with the choices made by those who inhabit that space who argue back. The ability and willingness to explore the world rigorously, to refuse to rule out “matters” that “don’t make sense,” to challenge one’s sense-making abilities, these factors will have a profound influence on the attitudes that seem reasonable.

While one can obviously never learn all of the perspectives available to humanity (a truth which potentially dooms us to at least veiled forms of endemic oppression) a heightened sensitivity to the potential inherent in symbolicity can be made immediately and remarkably clear. And, who knows, perhaps the human symbol-user is creative enough to fabricate a way around the seemingly inevitably violent marking off process that so defines us.

I conclude this chapter on metaphors with this illustration in part to situate metaphoric sense-making in day-to-day life, but also a means of demonstrating how
many of the fundamental understandings that communication scholars have about speech use must change. The metaphors discussed above, those which framed Martin as a “thug” and those which asked why he couldn’t be a kid who needed a lift, are the stuff of everyday life. The perspectives which insist that racism is “not” present in Martin’s murder “make sense” to enough people that these narratives circulate, despite the outrage that such narratives rightly prompt. The times that outrage is expressed, the environment of that expression, and the choices of the interlocutors that follows map the potential extensions of sense-making. If the metaphoric sense-making perspective accomplishes anything, it must accomplish a demonstration of the value of *multiple* perspectives. Solitary perspectives are the stuff of post-racism and denial. B, by opening up the space for those who see racism in the tragically predictable event, symbolic sense-makers more sensitively account for the full breadth of reality that symbolicity can enact.

Can this kind of sense-making be taught? Are humans doomed to enact the kind of careless sense-making that enables post-race mindsets in the wake of obviously racialized tragedy? The first section has attempted to situate the positive material that communication scholars have contributed to the questions of materiality and to contribute by tracing a sympathetic debate in embodied cognition and by situating a new model of language-as-sense within metaphorical life practices. The second section attempts to re-write some of the most basic ethical and pedagogical principles in light of my approach.
Section Two: Preface

My focus in Section Two is to highlight that the *mattering* of language necessarily re-orient basic components of speaking as practice – chapters Four and Five attempt to explore two components of this practice. In particular, Chapter Four explores how contemporary pedagogy is steeped in the necessary acknowledgements regarding the language-as-contact model, but in many ways still operates primarily from a transmission perspective. Texts that emphasize the ways that a student can *become* a better speaker as opposed to enabling her to work on developing the speaking abilities that humans innately possess are at the center of this critique. Because “better” can often be “worse” public speaking texts should emphasize adaptability and develop sensitivity to practices of speaking instead of relying on “best” practices.

*Practice* in the narrow sense (the sense that emphasizes focused, repetitive, drills) as well as in the broad sense (which emphasizes the every-day life-practice of symbol use) becomes the focus and many of the fundamental precepts regarding how public speaking should be taught that rely on “acting confident” or building an “effective” outline are de-emphasized as potentially restrictive. The classroom becomes a “gym” where students are encouraged to get as many “reps” as possible, not only in crafting, re-crafting, and articulating their ideas with symbols, but also in navigating the interactions that follow. From this perspective no single course in public speaking can make someone a better speaker. There simply is not enough time to do the kind of work necessary to truly hone a sense in even a semester-long course; but classes *can* emphasize various
kinds of exercises and reflexive self-scrutiny techniques which can hopefully motivate
the life-long goal of communicating more clearly and more sympathetically. The end of
Chapter Four attempted to suggest a few techniques that might be demonstrative in that
regard.

Chapter Five culminates the study of language-as-sense by turning to the
questions of ethics. At least since the days of Quintillian, ethics and communication have
been inherently yoked together. This is no less true when language is framed as a sense. I
argue in Chapter Two that the old nursery rhyme “sticks and stones can break my bones
but names will never hurt me” may well be changed to “sticks and stones can break my
bones but names can get me shot.” The names and schemas that humans use ultimately
craft the justifiable potentials for the future. Empirically, these affordances can include
destroying, mutilating, or simply callously ignoring the most vulnerable among us. I turn
to the project of nonviolence (as viewed by Tolstoy, Buber, Ruskin and others) to
emphasize and hopefully goad the material implications of language use.

Chapter Five argues that language use is inherently violent (Buber, Butler), it
suspends the fluid reality that embodied-embedded subjects operate in in an effort to
make stable sense of that environment. This inherent violence, to mash Buber’s and
Burke’s words, is the “original sin” of the symbol-using animal. Language makes us, at
once, villain and fool, emperor and slave, dominated and free. Language cannot be
overcome, but it can be used reflexively. Hope is endemic in reflexivity. Reflexivity can
be, as Burke points out, both profoundly productive and profoundly destructive,
frequently at the very same time but the “spirit” is always aiming at “better.” Staying sensitive to the fact that “better” is not always better cannot shield us from the delusions and selective violence of language, but it might be enough to “arc” humanity towards justice. This will only be the case if everyday languaging people understand the ethical impacts of their words.

If language is a form of contact and if humans are language-ing all of the time, then all of us are constantly sculpting the lives that we live as well as the very bodies and identities of others as we see them. Sensing Others and understanding our own lives alike are always already political tasks, and the entire process is rooted in the most “ordinary” rhetoric that we use to engage the world. This begs the question, what kind of politics might one attempt to adopt?

Rather than emphasizing a “right way” to go about communicating, nonviolence instead focuses on a reflexive sensitivity, a deference, to the influences of experience. An embodied-embedded approach to perception mobilizes infinite possible realities at once, the only way to engage this understanding incorrectly is to insist that various components of the world “are what they are” or to dwell on reality “as it is.” The theories of practical nonviolence that I review suggest that all humans biologically abhor violence and that the reasons that violence continues to “define” human existence is because of our insistences that it must. We simply “cannot see things any other way” or, worse, concede by and large that violence is inevitable. These concessions come most often in the form of simple dismissals of nonviolence (frequently rooted in misunderstandings of the theory itself)
that it is only nice “in theory,” or that it is ultimately too naïve to ever have any real impact on human life.

The practices of nonviolence do not offer a panacea, again language itself is inherently violent, but they can offer an alternative to fatalistic approaches to human living that presume that war and hatred are inevitable. Leaning on the demonstrably resilient and unpredictably potent potentials inherent in the wildly productive sense-making ability of symbol users, Chapter Five begs readers to begin and sustain the life work of interrogating the “helpless” situations that lead them into participating in violence. Until such questions as the ones posed by nonviolence can be taken seriously (and it is my feeling that even now, in our “enlightened” age of Civil Rights expansion that by and large they are not) then the best humanity can hope for is the contemporary environment where war is essential and hatred (even if only temporary) is justified. If the metaphors that we draw upon to understand the world matter as viscerally as Chapters One through Three suggest, then at some point humans have to ask the question what kinds of matter are we willing to embody? The framework established by the authors I review suggests that basic precepts of humility, good faith, patience, and a dogmatic commitment to renewal and rebirth can lead that inquiry - but only if humans make a concerted and consistent choice to make those attitudes a priority.

Humanity accepts all sorts of absurdity, from the relatively arbitrary governances of capitalism and individualism to the equally fantasy-driven notions of dividual nonviolence, and while each extreme may be equally arbitrary the differences matter
substantially to those living in their sway. Given the fact that the arbitrary choices that humans make matter so immediately, the questions of nonviolence in particular and of ethics in general are inherent in the Copernican shifts playing out among communication scholars and neuroscientists alike. If humanity can come to accept the absurdity of charity, if we can take seriously the role that benign, symbiotic cooperation has played in “elevating” us this far, then there is no telling how peaceful and sustainably productive we may be – even in spite of our ongoing humiliation. Exploring the sensitivity that must be earned for that future to play out comprises the final push of this project, in part to enlist the reader as an advocate and in part to emphasize the material consequences, globally, of language-as-sense.
Chapter Four: Learning to Make Sense: An Embodied-Embedded Perspective on Public Speaking Pedagogy

A brain scientist I heard interviewed once described how backwards scientists had been when it came to studying rats in a maze as a test of their intelligence. For decades intelligence tests were “2-dimensional” where the rats had to have all four feet on the floor and they were expected to navigate the hallways in a timed trial. As interesting as such studies were, this scientist quipped, they told us absolutely nothing about how rats navigate space. Studies such as these, the lecturer concluded, suggest even less about the intelligence of these amazing animals. This is because perhaps the single most important feature of a rat’s explorative behavior is its ability to climb.

When researchers incorporated climbing into the maze designs they found that the rats could discover routes through a maze that they had not even known existed. Research stretching as far back as the 1960s suggests that rats that do not have “enriched” environments (defined as environments which enable climbing and exuberant exploration) will in fact be neurologically underdeveloped compared to their more mobilized counterparts (Diamond, 2001). The initial mazes used to test the intelligence of rats not only failed to measure intelligence, they might have actively inhibited it.

I feel like a similar oversight exists in many conventional means of studying public speaking. If language is a sense, then speaking is a very literal form of climbing.
Routinizing speech practices, emphasizing strict memorization, “best” performances (frequently involving dress codes), and other common icons in traditional public speaking textbooks work 2-dimensionally. Approaches such as this, in a way, pin the students’ feet to the floor. Sensorial adaptation according to embodied embedded practice hardly works that way at all. This chapter sets out to explore some of the primary components of the “Copernican shift” in communication studies discussed in Chapter One, particularly those in public speaking pedagogy.

Perhaps one of the most frustrating components of the development of most mammalian brains as we understand them is that they undergo a “critical period” of development. Depending on the task and the mammal, that critical period changes: for kittens and rats it is a matter of days or weeks, for humans it can stretch into the late teens or mid twenties. The brain remains plastic throughout life, but at the same time large amounts of pruning – reductive, associated, neurological specialization – takes place that limits the future potentials of the action. In short, the longer one waits to confront the physiological frustrations that accompany speaking, the more difficult it will become to do so. The number of repetitions (or “reps” as coaches tend to say), the kinds of repetitions that a brain gets, matter.

For some reason, when it comes to our most meaningful behavior (speaking/deliberating/arguing), we leave the learning to the playground and the home. Class time, in most American public school models, is spent listening, writing, drafting, memorizing, and only rarely speaking. The few times that young people get to speak in
school and that the rest of us might speak at work are almost always couched in the
confines of providing a “correct answer.” This is hardly the kind of exploratory exposure
that brains need to make varied sense of their world. While there are a few “non-
traditional” exceptions to this rule, the sheer size of most school classrooms coupled with
the staggering demands placed on teachers alone is enough to inhibit the wide practice of
enabling young ones to make sense as much as they will want to.

Learning how to track interrelated statements (which can mean any number of
possible things), how to navigate the structural components of our thought as one
understands them, and how to diversify our means of expressing and exploring such
thoughts is an incredibly challenging, often frustrating, and never-ending project. The
kind of dogged determination and constant renewing of commitment needed to undertake
it may not be foreign to traditional public speaking texts, but it certainly is not central to
classroom practice. While co-curricular activities such as competitive forensics can
substantially increase the number of “reps” available, even four or eight years spent
competing seven to thirteen weekends a year in speech and debate offers only a
preliminary engagement with the kind of pliability that is going to be necessary to make
sense of all of the bewildering kinds of contexts that human sense-making can render.

It could probably be argued that since humans began speaking there has been
interest in how one might learn to do so “better” this chapter joins that endeavor. It is
important to note that treating speech pedagogy and ethics separately, as I do here and in
Chapter Five, dangerously limits one’s ability to fully understand what it means to be a
“better” speaker. This chapter focuses on the fact that practice (the kind of systemic, routinized, life-practice that builds and sustains conceptual scaffolding), not necessarily knowledge or precision, dictate effective speech acts. But this claim leaves unstated the kinds of practice (and the important differences they entrain) that are available to symbol users.

I have argued in prior chapters that rhetoric is a form of “contact,” not only upon the outside world but also with the outside world and that the kinds of relational contact that we are willing to make matter. Gehrke (2009) ranks the fact that students of public speaking may well use their skills for the purpose of evil (and I might add indifferent self-advancement) as “the single most persistent and important question in the history of the study of communication and rhetoric” (1), and he notes that fracturing the study of pedagogy from ethics diminishes significantly one’s ability to study the ethics and politics of communication alike. At least since Quintilian the “good person” and “speaking well” have been considered to be inseparable components of public speaking pedagogy. That emphasis on the ethical components of speech understood it as contact should only amplify. That ethical discussion will be the focus of Chapter Five.

I have separated these components of my project primarily due to a lack of imagination. I want to emphasize two integral points at once, first that public speaking does not get the practical appreciation that is due if it is, in fact, a form of sense-making (trouble with seeing typically leads to trips to an optometrist whereas most public speaking instructors I know insist many if not all of their students are more or less
“captives”) and, second that the kinds of symbolic contact that one makes matters. Blending these arguments together has produced a great heap of ideas and not much else. This chapter, then, focuses on the first question and the last chapter of this dissertation will focus on the second.

If experience can be trusted (and it often cannot) Americans avoid deliberating, either because it is “impolite,” “confrontational,” “egotistical,” “pointless,” “too time consuming” or because there is a debilitating doubt as to their ability to do so well. With all of our other sensations, perhaps most notably with hearing and sight, deficiencies or frustrations will become “conditions” that require attention, even medical intervention to address. With symbolicity, it seems, many if not most are prepared to live with this kind of communicating practice. This dissertation argues that rhetoric matters because it is a sense, and if it is a sense this kind of approach is arguably the worst way of confronting our frustrations with communication.

What speaking students need most are environments where they can try various kinds of sensible reps, including those which have been tried millions of times before and those which are profoundly problematic. Unfortunately, this is not how most public speaking curricula are formulated. It is no wonder so many Americans are terrified of public speaking, they have spent their entire lives neglecting their brain’s efforts to make sense. The “how to” of public speaking should give way to rampant “how’s this/how’s that?”. Only then, by “climbing” in pointed and motivated ways, do growing brains get
the redundant, and most importantly salient opportunities that they need to make sense of sense-making.

As discussed in Chapter Three, part of human sensation is trying to make sense out of the world by inflecting it with motives, attitudes, and intention. People come to know the world based on our perspective of it. If we think of “making sense” of the world as a literal sense-making, as the embodied-embedded perspective does, then early reflexive opportunities for exploration and enaction can offer much more than expectations, strategies, or tips. Components of the traditional perspective on public speaking will remain useful, to the extent that the students can make sense of them, but they will no longer be the focus. Through the lens of embodied-embedded thinking, practice, instead, becomes crucial. Key components of traditional models of public speaking like “confidence,” “eloquence,” even “success” itself, will likewise retain their importance (and in many cases they will reserve important aspects of their meaning), but fixing them in knowable space becomes impossible. The ability to navigate symbolically carries precedence over the ability to fulfill the understood burdens of “good” speakers.

In this chapter, I critique traditional, “instrumentalist” or “symbol-model” approaches to public speaking, and offer instead an embodied-embedded pedagogy focusing on practice, exploration, enaction, and reflexivity. To do this I have relied on a handful of representative textbooks (Sprague, Stuart, Bodary; O’Brien, Scholz, Grice & Skinner) and close to a decade of public speaking teaching experience to make a few basic claims about the way that public speaking has been theorized in the United States.
up until now: Namely, that we are not all born gifted speakers (or, put another way, that
good public speakers are somehow different from those who struggle); that public
speaking is a way of “getting ahead” in the world; that effective public speaking requires
a meticulously and expertly executed performance; and that audiences can be adapted to
and adjusted to in ways that make them more accessible to our ideas as speakers.

This chapter then draws on historical treatments of public speaking pedagogy
within the United States (Gehrke, Cohen, Bartannen) to trace the development of the
“instrumental” approach to public speaking in American pedagogy as well as to
demonstrate how evasive a more “embodied” classroom approach has been. I emphasize
here a move towards a *practice-oriented* perspective on public speaking that currently
dwells on more “discussion-oriented” class time (Cohen). While this trend is sympathetic
to the project of this dissertation, a grounding logic for embodied-embedded public
speaking has yet to be developed. While the movement from Elocution and hygienic
perspectives towards discussion and practice-based approaches points educators in the
right direction, the critiques from the front half of the chapter and the state of
contemporary pedagogy unveiled in the second half should demonstrate there is still a
great deal of work to be done.

Throughout this dissertation I have attempted to demonstrate that the ongoing
“new-materialism” debates in rhetoric and the vindication and general acceptance of
embodied-embedded logic for neural organization each open the door for a new theory of
how speaking *matters*. Chapter Three explored how metaphors work as integral
components of the linguistic scaffolding that symbolicity provides, enabling humans to view an act of violence in very differing ways. This felt “seeing” is the “sense made” through symbolicity, it arises like all other senses in grossly reduced components that emerge prior to our conscious awareness. The practiced use of this sense made will determine the kind of sense that can be made in the future. If sense is – for whatever reason – *useful*, it will persist. This chapter will attempt to put these observations into the practical context of speech education. Public speaking pedagogy is an important place to begin asking the question: *how pliable can my linguistic sense-making become?*

When a history buff recounts a particular story, say from the American Civil War, in a way that just draws audiences in, it is because that individual has learned to speak the language of history in particular, and the language of the Civil War in general. S/he pauses for pregnant inflection because that inflection *feels* right; it propels the story in a way that *makes useful sense*. Attempting to craft a thrilling historical expose from scratch, starting with the recipe’s generated in a text book on public speaking and applying all of the necessary content and thought does not guarantee a “good” speech. Only an entrained understanding of the nuances of the symbolic landscape can do that. The ability to merge various perspectives to shed insight onto frustrating problems is only one of the many benefits that come with our morphological relationship to language.

The chapter ends with a new schema for public speaking education (which I am calling the “gym”) and I offer a few exercises designed to emphasize the embodied nature of speech development. There are practical limitations on public speaking classrooms,
from class sizes to the times allotted for classes to occur. These limitations put surprising amounts on pressure on instructors attempting to provide fluid, conversational, drill space. The exercises suggested at the end of this chapter are by no means comprehensive or even “best.” They are meant merely to be suggestive as to how one might overcome these limitations and provide productive embodied-embedded opportunities to confront symbolic mattering.

**Four Criticisms of Contemporary Speech Pedagogy**

The first general argument to be made in response to text-book based public speaking education is that relying on scaffolding found in texts (learned lessons, outlines, and advice) is itself a “2-dimensional” approach to the task. Instead, I offer a dynamic, fluid pedagogy founded in an embodied-embedded perspective oriented around practice. Four general claims underline the arguments in contemporary public speaking texts. They are that effective public speakers must be *made*, that public speaking is a way of getting “ahead” in the world or of getting what one wants, that effective public speaking relies on expert execution, and that audiences can be analyzed and understood. I address each of these claims in this section.

The first basic claim implied and applied in public speaking texts is that not all of us are born gifted public speakers, we have to “become” great. There is, this stance suggests, a *sort* of greatness that must be achieved, and great speakers transmit it. Grice & Skinner (2006) begin their introductory text by emphasizing the “relative security” of the classroom as one of the bonuses that public speaking classes can offer. Students
“become intellectually and socially empowered” (p. 2, emphasis mine) through studying public speaking, reports the Carnegie Foundation in Grice & Skinner’s text. Like Grice and Skinner, Sprague, Stuart, and Bodary emphasize how successful effective public speakers are in the workplace and at home, suggesting that *becoming* a good speaker is financially and socially rewarding. Sprague et al. also equate giving a public speech to having a root canal. They then ask the reader which of several scenarios seem familiar and list scenarios in which someone is either too shy, lacking confidence, or unable to formulate thoughts into words (p. 3). An almost identical list of frustrations that inexperienced speakers encounter (but which presumably evade “good” speakers) can be found in the introductory pages of Lucas and Griffin as well.

It is no doubt true that some of us feel more comfortable speaking in public, and it is no doubt also true that the degrees of “success” experienced while speaking will vary. But the embodied-embedded approach emphasizes the fact that the brain is seemingly wired from birth to participate in the miracle of human behavior that is speech, so these differences in outcome owe a lot more to the relationships we have with the people interpreting our words than to our innate ability to transmit confidence or ability. Each individual will have their own frustrations which will change environment to environment stymying our efforts and leading to feelings of inadequacy when, instead, there is only a lack of familiarity. Overcoming the “I’m just not good at it” attitude that most Americans bring with them to public speaking is an important step (almost as important as overcoming the notion that “speech doesn’t matter”) that is often only
worsened when we approach public speaking as though there are fundamental differences in ability. “Good speakers” will bomb frequently if they are not careful, and “bad speakers” will frequently have “all the right arguments,” depending on the situation. Mobilizing these realities, exploring them as they exist for each speaker, makes more sense.

The second claim that traditional approaches to public speaking embrace is that public speaking is a way of “getting ahead” in the world. Practically every public speaking textbook that I have encountered emphasizes the professional, personal, and societal gains that can come from individuals interrogating their speaking abilities. Great speaking rewards us in ways that can range anywhere from lucrative business success to the ability to speak to a school board and thus save a teacher who could help children with disabilities (Lucas, 4). “Once you get the job,” Sprague et al. argue, “you can use these communication skills to shape your career environment, influence those around you, and gain personal satisfaction while being an effective and valued professional resource” (pp. 4 – 5). Similarly Grice & Skinner (2006) suggest that while “… changing the world may seem unrealistic and intimidating at this stage in your life, you do have the opportunity to help shape the values, beliefs, and behaviors of those around you and in this class”—and what’s more the various skills that studying speaking enables are transferable into other areas of life (p. 2). In this perspective, too, we find a reliance on some form of existing ability that can be effectively utilized and drawn upon in the times that matter most. Instead of viewing effective speaking as the sensitive navigation of
diverse environments as a language-as-articulate-contact perspective would, this perspective suggests that once learned it is kept. Speaking ability is something someone has and thus can use for success.

Professional advancement and personal acclaim are important objectives that can be facilitated by focusing on our speaking practices, but these are treated from an embodied-embedded approach as “symptoms” of more sensitive speaking; as opposed to objectives in and of themselves. Sustaining success is far less certain from an embodied-embedded perspective and is owed much more to one’s ability to sustain ethical relationships (a concept I will discuss more in the following chapter) and less to earned and kept speaking ability.

The third basic claim that most instructional and historical texts take for granted regarding public speaking is that it has a lot to do with the perfected execution of a carefully crafted task. Here is perhaps the most obvious perspectival approach that equates great speaking with effective transmission. Speeches in most textbooks are outlined meticulously, memorized if possible, and practiced as they are written with as few “ums,” or verbal hesitations, as possible. For Grice and Skinner (2006) this translates as speech that eventually “looks and feels natural, comfortable, and spontaneous” (p. 228). “Naturalness” “comfortableness” and “spontaneousness” are crafted.

If you lose your audience you can “enliven your delivery with movement and changes in volume. Such relatively simple changes in your delivery,” the authors suggest, “may revive their interest” (Grice & Skinner, 2006, p. 228). All texts emphasize avoiding
speaking “too fast” or “too slowly” (though the specifics of these rates of delivery are obviously never explored) and utilizing dynamic speaking strategically to maintain interest. Sprague et al go so far as to argue “speakers who have clear speaking voices devoid of vocal tics waste these good qualities if they speak hypnotically, with no variation in pitch, rate, or volume” (p. 361). Precision, enunciation, volume, and pacing are all emphasized across texts as tools available for a speaker to transmit meaning or excite interest, defining the range of acceptability however is an entirely different task. Speaking becomes something one does to an audience, not something done with them in constantly changing contexts.

Embodied-embedded speaking emphasizes, instead, ongoing, and reiterative exploration, which is open to and expectant of the kinds of speaking frustrations that trouble all of us and open as well to the idea that disinterested audiences may well just be disinterested. If we do not “make sense” for some audiences no amount of movement or vocal variety is going to help If one conceives of each thought that flits through the mind, each idea that is committed to paper or screen, each utterance we encounter or creative rendering that we manifest, is a practiced speech act, then suddenly “good speeches” are ubiquitous. Hardly any human environment depends on the perfect execution of a pre-determined text and for the most part we all move to some extent or another through social human life without a carefully maintained documentation of what we need to do to improve.
Acting confident, in the embodied-embedded model, is replaced with learned familiarity, not only with ourselves but with the kinds of ways that speaking can break down Practice and learning take place in our lived day-to-day life, not in the “preparation stages” of a project. If coming into the world is as Burke has described it, like entering a massive lobby already a-babble with long-standing and quickly changing conversations, then bewilderment and frustration should be expected. Each new group of people, historians perhaps or maybe “Beliebers,” will prompt similarities and differences and each will deftly wield words that we are unaccustomed to. The ideas that make the most sense will come readily to hand as the subject wades into the discussion, the places where we cannot make sense of the phrasings the ground will seemingly buckle and give way. As the familiarities with discourse communities and the related conversations mount, subjects find themselves on more stable ground. Rapidly, entire discussions begin to snap into view, becoming almost rote.

The fourth and final basic claim that embodied-embedded speaking takes issue with regards the relationship between the audience and the speaker. From the standpoint of the textbooks, audiences are things to be analyzed and prepared for; speakers are expected to demonstrate in as many ways as possible (from posture to their attire) that they are “trustworthy” sources, and speakers who do not take such steps are dismissed as disrespectful or unprepared. Lucas, Stuart et al., and Griffin all situate their discussions of “audience analysis” in the early “Preparation” stages of their texts. Most texts emphasize

26 Burke, 1941b, p. 110.
maintaining a relationship with an audience throughout the speech process, but in these sections of text we find potentially troubling suggestions such as “demographic audience analysis,” “psychological” analysis (Lucas), direct observation, systematic data collection, and interviews/focus groups (Stuart et al.), and even particular suggestions on how to deal with audiences that vary in gender, “racial, ethnic and cultural background,” education, religion, and values (Lucas, Grice & Skinner). One text (Grice & Skinner) goes so far to offer Lincoln’s Gettysburg address as an excellent example of audience adaptation despite the fact that most of the people at the address (including prominent speakers, politicians, journalists, and military leaders as well as members of the local public) panned the speech. Most historians agree that hardly anybody beyond the avidly devout Lincolnian Walt Whitman recognized the brilliance of that speech at the time, in large part because of how unconventional it was.

Regardless of whether or not the Gettysburg address is a good example of audience preparation, most public speaking texts suggest that knowing audiences (as things in the world) can facilitate an interaction and lead to success. “Learning about an audience’s demographic makeup, their attitudes toward your topic, and details about the speech situation can improve your ability to make the speech meaningful to the audience” according to Stuart et al. (p. 101). In Grice & Skinner’s terms, analyzing your audience allows you to “discover who your audience members are and what motivates them” (p. 73).
To be fair, most texts (like Lucas) do warn against “…compromising your beliefs to get a favorable response … [and] … using devious, unethical tactics to achieve your goal” (p. 98); however the emphasis on changing views, conveying meaning, and accommodating alternative mindsets in a way that can make others more sympathetic is consistent. This emphasis is rooted in a dualist notion of people as knowable and understandable things. Embodied-embedded cognition, remember, suggests that knowing and understanding are actively achieved (for better or for worse) based on the selections and understandings of the agent – audiences will look one way to one speaker and another way to another. Who is right? What kind of audience is present is a question that depends not only on the condition of the audience at that time and place but also on the kinds of reactions that individual presences will make when the conversations begin. Audiences are environments and like the impossibly complicated environment of our globe most efforts to “understand” and “prepare for” those environments will yield a little value and a lot of misunderstanding.

The idea that audiences are knowable and predictable, above practically all others, is the most damaging. It neglects the fact that human speaking is driven by fluid contexts, it is impossible to know what kinds of attire, posture, cadence, and tone are acceptable until we have some idea where and to whom we hope to speak. For aspiring young business professionals it makes a great deal of sense to encourage standing, dressing well, and careful practiced speech, but for the innumerable other environments where one might craft, navigate, and maintain their articulated thoughts, such practices are, in fact,
counter productive. Such approaches suggest that the orator is in control, that audiences are more or less passive, and that the “right kind” of manipulation will result in a positive result.

Rather than emphasizing the “best” approaches to public speaking then, this chapter will focus almost exclusively on practice. What I am calling for is a new approach to context, one that takes into account flexibility and scaffolding as it could be built in the act of speaking as opposed to prediction and control - the hallmarks of the instrumental model. If language is an embodied sense then it should be developed as a component of our embodiment and embeddedness.

In Chapter One I explored how the shift from a transmission model to an embodied-embedded model of rhetoric prompted a need to explain the “new material” implications of language, it could be argued that the same shift prompted a move toward a more embodied-embedded approach in communication scholarship. If this is the case one should expect to see a sympathetic shift in speaking pedagogy and, despite the criticisms leveled in this section, such shifts are visible. What these critiques suggest is that while the basic understanding of the relational nature of public speaking is set, the comprehensive nature of the implication for this logic are underdeveloped. The next section aspires to present a “macro” view of speaking pedagogy to support this claim of a trend towards embodiment in speaking pedagogy.
The Shift Towards a Pedagogy of Practice in Everyday Life

The “practice of everyday life” incriminates the ongoing “bubbling” of thought that takes place in our minds, the narratives we are exposed to in popular culture and familial life, and all of the symbolic acts in between. This is the brain “climbing” around with language. Over time, my argument suggests, these forms of symbolic action plasticize themselves into our neural workings in ways that can be manipulated, even exploited, but which may not necessarily be easily overcome. This is because rhetorical understandings of the world are more complicated when it comes to sense-making than they may seem. Michel de Certeau has argued that speaking cannot be reduced simply to knowledge of language. According to de Certeau

speaking operates within the field of a linguistic system; it effects an appropriation or re-appropriation, of language by its speakers; it establishes a present relative to a time and place; and it posits a contract with the other (the interlocutor) in a network of places and relations. (1984, xiii)

These incidental components of speaking could play out any number of ways. I have already explored in Chapter Two how notions like time are neural constructs, and in Chapter Three I examined how “as if” experiences code for sensations like threat or warmth. Each time we speak, these associative regions of our brain have already fired; the sensed symbolic confines that we encounter in speech represent the sense made by the brain up to that moment. And each time we select a form of speaking (framing an assault as an act of racism, for example) we make sense with these modules still more.

Over time, the more familiar one gets with various forms of sense-made, the more readily, viscerally, and acutely those senses get felt. This suggests that until a person has
discussed, read about, listened to, experienced and witnessed all of the ways that racism, for example, might work on various bodies in the world, sensing that racism could be incredibly difficult. It also suggests that narratives are our gateways into whatever world it is that we desire to understand. As humans we are, in a way, endowed with the ability to *install* forms of understanding into our brain, all that is required is that we practice those narratives in as many varied contexts as possible. The more contexts to which we have applied our narratives, and the more *versions* of those contexts to which we apply our narratives, the more pliable they become.

Public speaking pedagogy has been influenced by de Certeau’s notions of the life-practice of speech, but the dualistic approach to speaking has proven resilient nonetheless. As the understanding of language-as-contact has developed, so has pedagogy. But like the understanding of language as contact that I traced in the rhetorical materialist literature, the understanding of language as contact in pedagogy has developed in fits and starts.

Elocution-based approaches to speaking, which began in the United States as early as 1915 (Cohen) and which have persisted through today, tend to side with a “correct” way of speaking or “proper preparation techniques” that need to be learned. Elocution based approaches engage public speaking like a science oriented around correcting “bad habits of speech and gesture, and to make the body a fit instrument to serve the mind and soul” (Cohen, 1915, p. 7). Understanding one’s bad habits is
obviously important, but so is understanding that “bad habits” themselves are more or less context driven.

Fulton and Trueblood, two foundational thinkers in early American speech pedagogy, laid out the dualist mindset for speaking pedagogy by emphasizing (as Plato did) that speaking practice should emphasize the reproduction of the purest forms of good speaking. An embodied-embedded approach emphasizes instead how fluid such “proper” criteria can be in human environments, and emphasizes the exploratory process as a means of engaging as many contexts as possible. This is not a project that can be successfully undertaken in the classroom. It has to be something someone does throughout her or his life—so the goal of an embodied-embedded curriculum would be to prepare students to engage in such a long-term learning process, rather than attempting to convey all of the known formal processes of better speaking.

The practice of everyday life began to make its way into speech education in the 1930’s with the advent of approaches like mental hygienics. Mental hygiene was rooted in Freud’s and Dewey’s notions of well-adjusted personalities, and, in a move more or less novel to scientific thinking at the time, it incorporated speaking, thinking, and symbolic acting in that project. While the emphasis here was placed firmly on the everyday practices of rhetorical life, the dualist approach that elevated knowable forms of better speech persisted. Bryng Bryngelson, identified by Cohen (1928) as one of the earliest proponents of this perspective, framed those who struggled with speech as “speech defectives” and blamed their abilities on “inadequate adjustments on the part of
the human organism to their social environment” (p. 208). Cohen charts how mental hygenists emphasized the day-to-day, organic, embeddedness of speech acquisition, situating “effective” speech within various fluid social environments; as well as the ability of speech instructors to enlighten students with regards to their capabilities to adjust themselves to the environments they find themselves in, but at the same time these thinkers insisted on known “solutions” for the struggles that students would encounter. While the concept emphasized the use of language, the reliance on dualistic notions of “good” hygiene versus “bad” hygiene persisted (p. 121).

Cohen points out that many contemporary classes are turning to group discussion models, which get very close to the kind of lived-in exercises that embodied-embedded thinkers demand to learn, but even here the emphasis on “right” and “wrong” forms of speaking takes precedence. This is in large part because, at least in the United States, most discussion modes inevitably turn to a yes/no deliberation. Debate education has long been married to the project of public speaking pedagogy (according to Bartanen the first competitive debate programs in the US date back to colonial America); when those discussions are goaded entirely by one conception of argument (competitive/contest formations being by far the most popular), then the kinds of exploration that students might enjoy is profoundly limited.

Debate and speech competitions were, initially, a kind of decathlon that would send students into speaking environments that were interpretive, time-constrained, memorized and/or extemporaneous. This kind of “all purpose” debate education has
considerable benefits; however, the competitive spirit won out, and a history of “fractionation” (Trapp, 1990) began to divide the various events into their own little worlds as the desire to craft predictable forms of competitive success increased. Now, in 2013, it is hard to find tournaments that offer such a wide expanse of opportunities to young minds with educators and tournament administrators alike focusing either on individual speaking events or one of several kinds of debate and frequently doing so behind disparaging perceptions of the other kind of forensics. Rather than encounter and explore the kinds of forensics that do not make sense competitors and coaches alike are opting for “specialization.”

This kind of education is still preferable to relying solely on the classroom, as forensics competitions of all kinds afford students incredible mobility and numerous redundant opportunities over the course of their competitive careers to actively and responsively speak. Unfortunately, the trends of fractionation continue to divide forensics education in much the same ways that I described in 2009 (Donaldson, 2009). The failure of forensics educators (of all people) to see eye-to-eye on the need to stay together has proven costly and the overall future of forensics education as a stable locality for this kind of practice remains in doubt.

Despite the efforts to shift speaking education towards an active, practiced, and embedded perspective too many public speaking textbooks continue to rely on formulation and execution. The lingering components of an emphasis on formulation is seen in a number of ways including an emphasis on strategic and formulaic lists of tasks.
Getting and maintaining the attention of an audience, something that is obviously important to an effective speaker, is typically broken down formulaically and the entire process is more often than not framed strategically. “The speaker has to use just the right bait” (Lucas, p. 187) and doing so involves relating your topic to your audience, stating the importance of your topic, startling the audience, questioning the audience, or beginning with a provocative quotation or story (pp. 188–191). Other texts (O’Brien, Sprague et al.) suggest relying on a topical joke or other forms of humor for “capturing” the attention of your audience.

Most individuals who understand compelling speeches understand that they most often do start with something that gets the attention of the audience, and most of us are probably equally aware of how wrong a speech can go that follows all of the rules. Attempts at humor, especially, can go wrong quickly when they are forced for the purpose of “baiting” someone who does not want to be caught. The relationships that are cultivated and maintained as someone engages and fulfills our attention are complex and constantly changing. While it can be helpful to approach formulas such as these for new ideas, fulfilling them all line by line is no promise that we will speak well.

Instead of focusing on the strategic and formulaic capturing of an audience’s attention, embodied-embedded cognition emphasizes practice. Tell a short story about
something that you find interesting and then listen to and engage feedback from your audience. The practice of the story itself and gauging and engaging the response with your audience is more than most students have access to in a classroom setting and yet more often than not it is all that they need to develop into natural story tellers. Humans capture each other’s attention because they have a shared understanding of the “interesting” components of a shared landscape, a story that is mind blowing to one can be absolutely drab to another. Framing the process itself as a strategic gambit for a successful speech forces a substantial amount of focus on a single, albeit important part of what is going to need to be a sustained conversation. It cannot be faked, and it cannot be forced.

Another place critics can find a more dualistic conceptualization of public speaking pedagogy in contemporary text books is with the distinction between persuasive speeches, informative speeches, and speeches meant to entertain. Of the dozen books that I surveyed for this dissertation, nearly all of them made use of the method of separating speech types based on our motivation. This is perhaps most evident in the texts that break down these kinds of speeches into knowable formula in and of themselves. Persuasive speeches, for instance, can be broken into three types according to Grice & Skinner (2006), speeches to convince, speeches to actuate, and speeches to inspire (pp. 285-6). Speeches aimed at conviction target an audience’s beliefs, while speeches aiming to actuate works from established beliefs to prompt action. Speeches that aim to inspire attempt to “change how a listener feels” (Grice & Skinner, 2006, p. 286). Each of these
motivations can be broken down into knowable and executable strategies, the assumption being that if we can but execute *just* the right kind of persuasive speech at *just* the right time we will succeed in our efforts to persuade.

Much like earning and keeping the attention of an audience, however, persuasion is a remarkably complicated task. Between the research on all of the various kinds of selection or personal biases and the Western stigma attached to admitting defeat in an argument, it could be argued that deliberative persuasion (the “you were right and I was wrong” part of deliberation) is a myth! It is here that the arbitrary distinctions between persuasive speeches and informative speeches become incredibly problematic; as most individuals will not be persuaded by an argument that does not appear to be informative. And whether that argument is or is not informative has much more to do with that particular audience’s histories with the entirety of the discussion (as well as with the “kinds” of rhetors that they identify before them) than it ever could with a carefully executed tactic.

Persuasive speaking from an embodied-embedded perspective looks more like a bunch of chefs working together to season a soup than a “yes it is / no it isn’t” moment of advocacy. Rhetors bring their own personal tastes to the soup (perhaps it’s the debate about whether or not the United States should allow Stand Your Ground legislation), and rather than attempting to make the soup *one* thing in particular, the object is to react to the seasonings that are added by our interlocutors in a way that makes the soup at least somewhat enjoyable.
The formulaic emphasis on speech making stretches into all of the various phenomenon of public speaking, including “credibility” (which can be broken down according to Grice & Skinner among initial credibility, derived credibility, and terminal credibility for the purpose of study); a “supportive climate” for invitational speeches consists of “the condition of equality, the condition of value, the condition of self-determination” being successfully instilled within an audience (Scholtz, 229, 30); the lists go on. The point is not to disparage this list making, lists can be enormously helpful; instead it is to question an approach which puts so much emphasize on conceptualization and which ultimately must then put so little emphasis on enactment.

The difference is that the contemporary approach emphasizes a scaffolded understanding based on lists and best practices as opposed to a scaffolded understanding of sensitivity-driven practice. Drawing on both forms of scaffolding might just lead one into a career in communication. Maintaining credibility, let alone a complicated supportive climate open to input from all, is incredibly difficult. More often than not doing so is as much the product of good faith as it is of sound execution. An embodied-embedded perspective draws on lists for inspiration, but points to the doing and more importantly to the interrogation of that doing that can go on when we decide to practice speech.

The single greatest hurdle to classroom-based approaches to public speaking has to be the finite amount of time available to all of the students eager to get their chance to practice. This problem is only exacerbated by the disturbing trend to increase attendance
in online classes where presence itself is sacrificed for the digital tokens of a liberal education. This section focused on critiquing some of the more common places that dualistic conceptions of “better” speaking persist in contemporary speech pedagogy, the next section attempts to devise some alternatives.

“The gym” – A New Model for Public Speaking Classrooms

I have reluctantly embraced the gym metaphor to help articulate the kind of public speaking classroom that best mobilizes students in their efforts to learn how to become more sensitive and morphological speakers. There are many kinds of gymnasiums, those oriented for play, those oriented for weight lifting, those oriented for basketball, or racquetball, or even swimming. There is even such a thing as a “jungle gym” which barely fits the frame – all of these impressions (plus the many to be invented by readers) are involved in my invoking of the term. From an embodied-embedded standpoint, nothing substitutes repetitions and the primary goal for a public speaking classroom should be to maximize the chances students get to speak. Dialogue and extemporaneous speaking receive priority, as those are perhaps the most important kinds of scaffolding that speakers need to develop. This means not only incorporating a more discussion based approach to classroom learning – something many contemporary educators are already doing – but also letting go of some age-old assumptions regarding what is necessary to speak well.

For example, an embodied-embedded approach based on lived life practice more or less “outsources” the research component to the student’s daily lives. While there is
certainly tremendous value to learning and implementing rigorous research techniques, when it comes to public speaking, familiar research tends to be the most important. One’s ability to speak to their topic will have much more to do with their ability to recognize and articulate key components of the discussion, something that is more or less presumed in the “research” section of textbooks without any understanding as to how such familiarity comes about. Instead of having students prepare speeches about topics that matter to them, but which they may not have much first hand experience, embodied-embedded classrooms should encourage students to focus primarily on the kinds of claims that they feel that they can justify. Whether or not these claims are “right” or “wrong” is something that gets fleshed out in the back and forth that hopefully accompanies the numerous repeated opportunities to speak – as students are pressed for “better” or “more accurate” warrants or examples they will have to either produce them or change their argument. This is not to suggest that students do not need to do any reading or to engage with sources outside their own acquired knowledge – deliberation itself is a fantastic mode of doing just this – but rather to emphasize that this issue scrutiny is more or less inevitable if we are enabled to speak within the confines of topics that we already understand. Research becomes the stuff of life, not something that we do only when we are attempting to craft and deliver a speech.

The topic of organizing speeches, in most public speaking textbooks, is typically accompanied with a variety of various outlining exercises and techniques. Picking a traditional outline and sticking to it – at all costs – in the name of clarity and fluency
tends to be the focus, despite the fact that this kind of structure up front hardly accounts for the ways that humans reason. A good outline, like a good definition, is like a map in that its value is predicated entirely upon the use that it will be put to. And the uses of a speech are inevitably as varied as the audiences that may encounter the speech. Rather than emphasizing a strict approach to outlining and structuring, I argue that the ability to shift between and within outlines should be the priority. And instead of turning to “traditional” outline formats, I turn, once again, to Kenneth Burke for clues on what makes a good outline.

Burke, in his summary of what makes a good definition, tells us that definitions are usually the last thing that a speaker comes across. Speakers “hit upon” them as a “breakthrough” and we should keep trying for them until they “click” – remembering at all times that they may unclick at any moment. A good outline has “just enough clauses, and no more” and they should be arranged in a way that makes deriving “all of the properties attributed to the thing defined” understandable (Burke, p. 491). This is hardly the kind of specificity that “type A” personalities (those most likely to emphasize the kind of structured thinking that outlines offer) will suffer, but it speaks to the real fact that there is no “correct,” or even “better” way to arrange the matter of a subject. This should not be mistaken for a kind of structural relativism, organizing one’s thoughts and sign-posting their progress for their audience remain key forms of repetition and reiteration that enable embodied-embedded listeners to learn, but it does suggest that approaches which emphasize ONE outline might need to loosen up.
Style is perhaps one of the most elusive terms for embodied-embedded thinkers. The 2006 film *Idiocracy* written by satirist Mike Judge demonstrates how the “reasonable” and “calm” dialogue of one era could rapidly transform into the “weak,” “snooty,” or “arrogant” tone of another. No example stands so starkly as the seemingly over-scripted approach of a speaker who begins with “I had prepared some comments to read from, but I want to be genuine and speak to you from the heart.” Here we have an effort at “conversational” style speaking that, to some, immediately smacks of over-preparation.

Most texts on the subject emphasize business settings, as if though those are themselves uniform! Encouraging students to stand when they speak, to dress “appropriately,” to avoid the need to search for words or to pause for reflection. Failure to effectively meet these requirements tends to suggest (according to most texts as well as to public opinion) a lack of respect, preparation, or credibility: the penultimate failure of a speaking advocate. As complex and fluid as natural speaking is, as positively impossible as it is to artificially render, one might think humans could find more sympathetic understandings for such pitfalls. Instead, most tend to base their understanding of speaking on a form of dualistic *expertise* that creates arbitrary baselines dependent primarily on what kind of “expert” we’re asking for.

Speakers are encouraged to find their own voice, to be sensitive to topics that are controversial (especially if they do not appear so to the speaker), and to liberally sample from as many different styles as they can enjoy. Rather than thinking of humorous
moments as carefully crafted pieces of a speech, embodied-embedded speakers are encouraged to find humor where they will. Rather than encouraging students to dress a certain way, students are reminded of the pitfalls that one might encounter wearing a suit for the first time in public (sweat being the most obvious) and encouraged to explore meaningful “reps” in suites if that is something that matters to them. Hesitations, slips of phrase, the occasional “um” are, in fact, inevitable. The question should not be how many ways can we abolish such things but, rather, how might we feel comfortable when we encounter them?

Memory, like research, is more or less “outsourced” to the student in an embodied embedded classroom. Remembering is a complicated task for the brain, and the tricks of the trade are indeed numerous and well documented. Remembering in public, from the lectern, can be a monumental challenge for many, the odds of success increase significantly if the issue at hand is one that the student is deeply familiar with. Asking for prompts, taking time to recall, preparing basic notes that are neither distracting nor over-limiting, these are the techniques that embodied-embedded speakers rely on to remember all that they have to say. In this instance more than any other, practice, practice, practice, is the key. Practice admitting you are lost in your own thoughts, or practice stumbling over a word, if typical communication is anything to go by these forms of practice could be the most useful “real-world” public speaking assistance a class can offer.

Delivery, the act of articulation, the pace of the speech, the volume shifts of inflection and the kinds of physical gestures available to the speaker, too emphasizes
practice. When one stops to think of the dozens of muscles that make up the human face, tongue, laryngeal, and human breathing systems that are required for language, it is a miracle we can speak at all! And nowhere do we police the boundaries of “effectiveness” more thoroughly than with regards to delivery. Accents, mis-pronounced words or names, quiet shaking tones, we all know these can and do hinder our ability to communicate effectively, the question is what methods can we embrace to enable ourselves to work them all out? The use of visual aids and technology like Power Point or Prezi (slide show software that runs on projector screens) add an entire new dimension of technological complexity that most individuals, for whatever reason, assume they can jump into without complication. But what happens when the slide-show fails, when we do say a word wrong or find ourselves unable to speak as loudly as we would like? What then? Again, instead of viewing such challenges as signs of a “poor” speech, embodied-embedded pedagogy expects these moments and seeks redundant opportunities to exploit the necessary experience needed to overcome them. Each speaker has their own solutions, just as each sensing animal has its own means of accounting for the world around it, instead of emphasizing perfection in delivery educators ought to emphasize repetition and practice.

Exercises for Embodied-Embedded Speech Development

At the risk of sounding redundant, the goal of a public speaking classroom should be to enable practice. From this perspective, discussion oriented classes are ok, but focused drills and exercises are better. Nothing enables the kind of growth like rigorous,
4-8 year long engagements with competitive speaking environments can. Competitive debate, for example, has reached a point of “crisis” where instead of sound assessment of evidence and facts debaters frequently argue horrific cases (like those rooted in the Malthusian ethic of self-imposed population deflation), or use rates of delivery that exceed 250 words per minute to win strategic games (Rowland & Deatherage, 1988). I have already argued that by emphasizing Conflict Navigation, as opposed to the traditional expectations of debate educators steeped in Elocutionary or Mental Hygiene perspectives, even these kinds of “absurd” debate experiments can have meaning (Donaldson, 2009). The world is full of tasteless, cruel, and inhumane forms of reasoning, what better way to prepare for them than to devise an activity that exposes us to them and that encourages us to interrogate them early and often?

Extemporaneous and impromptu speaking are two competitive events developed through the competitive speaking communities in the US that offer profound potential. Instead of using class time to discuss a reading, public speaking seminars could parse these activities down to 2-3 minute drills that can benefit both the students doing the exercise and all of those listening. Prompts are given (quotations, political cartoons, objects, or current events questions of the day) and students are given limited time to prepare a response. Instead of focusing heavily on the “responsive” nature of their speech educators can craft arbitrary structural formats for students to try to work within. In the most extreme case I have even encouraged students to give so-called “blah-blah-blah”
speeches where the only articulated content in their speech is the structural language selected. Such speeches literally can sound like:

At the beginning of my speech, in my talking point, I would be talking about something I’m familiar with which demonstrates or contextualizes my thesis without giving it away. That would lead me to the prompt I’ve been given today which is the quotation “Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country” or, basically, my thesis – blah blah blah blah blah. Today, we will examine this thesis with three points of analysis. My first point would be a philosophical or literary point, like blah blah blah. My second point would be a historical point, like blah blah blah blah blah, and my third point is a contemporary point – blah blah blah blah blah.

While hardly exhilarating speech making, drills like this help students flex the embodied aspects of their speaking without the terrifying burden that they actually have something interesting to say. As students develop they can begin to take their speeches further, out of the intro and into the body of the speech for example, and maybe even start striving to include content which may or may not represent their thesis and/or prompt.

Outline exercises, too, can be devised to encourage students to shift between outlines as opposed to working from within the confines of one. An exercise granted to me by a colleague serves as a fitting example. Students are broken into groups of 3-5 and given an assortment of various singly-wrapped candies (eg. suckers, Jolly Rancher candies, Starbursts, Tootsie Rolls) and asked to arrange them in any way they see fit.
Each group, inevitably, will come up with their own take on the project, the order of each group “making sense” to them as they go. Some will organize their candies based on flavor, others on color, others on preference. Some may even go so far as to include such categories as sugar content, meltability, and on. Then, each group is asked to share their organization and the class, as a whole, compares and contrasts that organization to the others, making still more organizational sense and giving each group the ability to adapt to and even adopt organizational schemes that they had not thought of themselves. Without even noticing it, the student who explains the organization is delivering an outline. The more the outline makes sense to that student, typically, the easier it is to remember and draw upon. Instead of thinking of an outline as something that gets made, embodied-embedded perspectives emphasize the elaboration of useful structure, an emergent outline as opposed to one set in stone from the beginning. Even notions like internal structure can be addressed, as groups such as flavor can then be internally organized by color – hence the advent of superstructure—and as the exercise develops students deploy and manipulate the necessary language to navigate within each outline. This deceptively simple exercise has all sorts of practical opportunities for students to “make sense” in ways that matter to them, and while it may not always result in the most flawless outline delivery, the ability to use the outline to make further sense is more or less endemic.

Even single phrase exercises can be enormously helpful for individuals who are not used to speaking their mind out loud. In similar fashion to the blah-blah speech,
students may be given a prompt and then various amounts of time to write a single thesis that they would then read to the class when the time was up. The requirement would be that, like speech, they are not allowed to correct something they have written without saying it out loud. So if they scribbled part of their thesis out in the writing process, they would have to read “scribble scribble” when they announced it to the class. The class would then discuss what kind of thesis it was (is it a normative claim or a description? Does it require multiple claims to be developed or simply one?) and the next student would go. Encouraging students to find thesis in inanimate objects or “off the wall” prompts can add a good deal of humor to the enterprise without getting too wrapped up in who had “the smartest thing to say.”

This activity, which I have unhappily dubbed “thesis sharp-shooting,” emphasizes precision, reflection, and care without putting the students in the spotlight when they think. The next step, obviously, would be to merge this exercise with full-scale impromptu and extemporaneous speaking drills to get a larger “workout” in when the student felt ready.

More prepared speeches, too, can be explored from an embodied-embedded perspective. Prior classes I have taught were told to write a 1 – 2 page paper describing three issues, topics, or themes that they felt like they could talk about from a position of authority. Themes were as varied as “the best binding for snowboarders” to “the best episode of Gossip Girl” and, once collected, they were organized as best as I was able into “discourse communities.” Topics about TV shows might get lumped together, music
conversations could get lumped together, there really is no need for a rhyme or reason to the lumping provided the topics are at least tangentially related. Throughout the course students are expected to meet with their discourse communities to “make sense” of their topics as some sort of cohesive whole. These understandings are then presented – panel style – to the class at or near the mid-term as the first public “rep” of their practiced speech. Each student then is expected to meet with the professor to take the next step, from the confines of the discourse community to the topic of their speech – what do they have to say that matters? At the end of the term they are given 10 minutes to do what they will to explain their topic to the class.

Burke’s metaphor heuristic, discussed in Chapter Three, suggests that metaphor use itself could be a potentially useful form of linguistic “exercise.” The Metaphor game is an activity that selects an “artifact” (like The United States) and then gives students in groups or working alone time to select an image schema for exploring the artifact. Students come up with some that are obvious (America is a “melting pot”, America is an “experiment”) and some that are less obvious (America is an “old house,” America is a “smart phone”) and then more time is given for students to flesh out the entailments of their schema. After a few minutes, the instructor collects the metaphors through discussion, and, suddenly, everyone is contributing to a bubbling conversation. Disagreements crop up (like when one student defines America as a “terrorist”), the disagreements too pave their own useful paths for inquiry and practice. Sharing these entailments takes elaboration, the fact that there is no “right way” to describe America as
either a “melting pot” or an “Old House” opens the doors for students to explore into the realms which make useful sense.

America is obviously not a “thing” that has substance that can be measured, quantified, or contained. If America is anything at all it is a collection of all of these narratives. Those interested in speaking confidently about what America is or is not would do well to familiarize themselves with as many of these “as-if” approaches to their subject as possible. Rather than emphasizing confidence, this approach emphasizes familiarity. At the same time it insists that even the most mundane and predictable image schema can often produce startling and unforeseen arcs of understanding.

Because these conversations and talking opportunities are shared there are boundless ethical implications. What if participants insist on propagating hate speech? What if participants are abusive? How are those environments climbed over? The next chapter takes on the challenges of goading that development for the cause of good. Because if history has taught us anything it is that people can be persuaded to endorse all sorts of evil, overt and nefariously invisible, if their attitudes and doctrine permit it. At the end of the day words do not go out into an ether, as perhaps some of the “blah blah” styled exercises might suggest, they matter in the bodies of others. Once students are liberated to make the kinds of sense that they will, there must be an equally important insistence that they take care of the kind of sense that they make to and of others.
Chapter Five: Ethical Conundrums for Embodied-Embedded Speakers

Every [person] of the present day knows that all have an equal right to life and the good things of life, and that one set of people are not better nor worse than another, that all are equal. Everyone knows this, beyond doubt; everyone feels it in [their] whole being. Yet at the same time everyone sees all round the division of [people] in to two castes – the one, laboring, oppressed, poor, and suffering, the other idle, oppressing, luxurious, and profligate. And everyone not only sees this, but voluntarily or involuntarily, in one way or another, takes part in maintaining this distinction which conscience condemns. (Tolstoy, 2008, p. 78)

This dissertation has argued that language is a sense, that it makes sense as a result of contact in ways that are constitutive and real. Throughout I have begged the question, if language is a sense then what kinds of sense are we willing to make? To what extent will we allow ourselves to claim to understand other people? What kinds of justifications will we give to their actions? What impressions of others will we allow to govern or explain our responses to Others? Does an individual have a choice to experience racism, for example, or does it “wound” (Matsuda et. al.) like a bruise or a cut without our participation? These are not “simply” theoretical questions if language makes sense; they are material questions about practice.
The “Copernican shift” from a transmission model to a language-as-contact model suggests that speaking is not simply a sharing of abstractions, it is a form of touch. The move towards embodied embedded cognition and away from cognitivism enlists our imaginations in “moralistic” ways (Johnson, 1994) – if sensation is enactive then we participate in rendering Others as villains. Communicating matters and so those interested in using communication for good and not for evil will be forced to grapple with ethics.

In Chapter Two I argued that it is the most mundane and ordinary forms of discursive mattering that ultimately matter the most. If language is indeed a sense then so long as there is narrative action (mental, purposeful, or otherwise) then language is participating in rendering the sensible, contactable world. The language that we convey (purposefully, accurately or otherwise) strikes bodies, leaving what one advisor of mine has called “affective legacies.” These legacies are not just like scars - they are scars. Like scars not all language is painful; language also can heal. Language nourishes us, stimulates vibrant and happy growth, without it we all suffer tremendously.

Moralistically, each moment we spend framing Others, either as “conniving,” or as “liars,” or as “innocent,” or as “threatening,” enacts a sensorial mapping of their existence. The stories we tell ourselves and each other regarding the relationships we have, the expectations that we have, the patience that we have lost or the faith that is ill-placed, matter. These stories dictate how and what we can see. For a great and growing tradition of nonviolent thinkers this means that for true revolutionary rhetoric to “work”
(whatever that word might mean), it must be ever-forgiving, ever-humble, and always patient. Rather than focus on the *forms* (the noun-matter) of language, the focus for many of these thinkers is placed upon the *attitudes* (the verb-matter) that goad our symbolic explorations – and as I have argued in Chapter Three shifting the attitudinal frames of argument, for instance, from “fighting a war” to “making a soup” can have tangible and substantial effects. Ethical communication means acknowledging that our very existence as symbol-users is replete with sensorial lies like color, or balance; *all* sensation to one extent or another, is a story and *how* we tell those stories *matters*.

Take the idea of reciprocity for example. Notions of love, of justice, and most notions of peace rely in the typical on some form of reciprocity or another. Reciprocity exists in nonviolence, as an end (more of a *symptom* than anything), but never – ever – as a means. Expecting the best of other people while enduring the worst *could* (inevitably *should*) lead to mutual respect and a cessation of hostilities, but when put into practice, the barrage of aggression that represents status quo relating can quickly become deflating. This aggression is rooted in innumerable justifications like impatience, exhaustion, frustration, even love. Arguing with people who are willing to distort our image *feels* sacrificial, and in many ways it *actually* is, and it will always be enticing to “correct the record” or deal out retributive punishment. But enabling this kind of sense to be made unleashes still more of it into the world. Finding creative and self-critical outlets for aggression, refusing as much as one is able to “strike back,” “being the change that we want to see” – responses to aggression like this change materially the legacies left
behind and they transform completely the terrain of life that stretches forward from there for all involved.

If language is a sense than it inevitably follows that no other form of symbolic mattering has more potential to propel the human experiment more directly towards peace and prosperity than the practices of nonviolence as described by over a century of advocates including Leo Tolstoy, John Ruskin, Martin Buber, Gene Sharpe, and Marshall Rosenberg, to name a few. If humans can become as committed to nonviolent rhetorics as they are to violent ones, what potential futures might lay in store? It is said that Tolstoy and Ruskin’s works inspired Mahatma Gandhi, arguably the single most effective nonviolent advocate of all time, to quit his law practice and pursue a life of resistance that changed colonial history in India and the conversation about nonviolence worldwide forever. Moreover, Martin Buber famously served as an influential touchstone for Emmanuel Levinas, a deeply influential French existentialist and ethicist; and Gene Sharpe’s deceptively slim text “From Dictatorship to Democracy” reportedly is serving as the how-to manual for student resisters in Chile and protestors engaged in the so-called “Arab Spring” alike. Marshall B. Rosenberg’s communication-based textbook-style approach to “A Language of Life,” meanwhile, is a contemporary bestseller that motivates theologians, philosophers, and popular authors including William Ury (Getting to Yes) and Jack Canfield (from the hugely popular Chicken Soup for the Soul series). The potentials of nonviolent practice are plain enough, and yet nonviolence as a life-practice enjoys modest if not possibly growing public acceptance at best. The maddeningly
consistent tepid and often indifferent stance that most have to the immanent questions posed by nonviolence as it is outlined by these thinkers is responsible, according to Tolstoy, for 99% all of the violence in human life (p. 27). For Tolstoy, and for those who understand the material implications of language, the question of nonviolence is “the most essential question” (2008, p. 24). In his words, how can Christians in particular and society in general reconcile the perceived duties of love (or at least Justice) for all, neighbors and enemies alike, with our sensed compulsions to justify the use of force against those who would do evil? For embodied-embedded symbolic thinkers the question sounds more like how can those of us who believe that violence is never optimal, never good, reconcile ourselves with our willingness to participate in hate speech, uncharitable representations of Others, or blame?

This dissertation has pondered what it means, materially, to re-examine the role of language as constitutive articulate contact, this conversation culminates in a call to reassess the practical validity of nonviolence. Nonviolence offers the best politic to justly account for a human ethic of language as constitutive contact. If one accepts that language does matter, and if one believes that each of us ought to be valued the same, that we are each owed an existence that is to the greatest extent possible free of cruelty from others, then a troubling double-bind emerges. For as we use words to relate, we unnaturally crystalize our relating in ways that are always, to some extent, violent. Rather than offer a panacea in the face of violence, nonviolent histories offer an oppositional politic of humility, meekness, charity, and most importantly good faith. This politic
materializes human relating in important and transformative ways and, for the sake of this project, it also represents the only ethical way to account for the linguistic forms of mattering that symbolicity imbues into our lives.

I will begin with a discussion of the inevitability of violence (which in principle sits at the very heart of the suspending nature of perception) an in the “The “undefined, if not disingenuous” attitudes of “modern thinkers” (Tolstoy) and then explore some of the practical solutions advocated by those mentioned above. In particular I will explore the political practices suggested by Leo Tolstoy and Martin Buber. Both Tolstoy and Buber situate the transformative potential of nonviolence within the practice of life – they argue compellingly that unless humans take seriously the “commandments”27 of nonviolence then the atrocities of war and violent crime and hatred will continue. Put another way, humans have the potential to live nonviolently if and only if nonviolence matters through us. Nonviolence can, if we choose, form a sort of scaffolding – a perspective on perspectives as Burke might say - which offers humanity the ability to remain cognizant of the “new material” realities that language as contact imposes.

Human Nature is Violent, but Not Like That

Today, in an age when the call for Civil Rights appears to have an especially global clamor, hardly anybody will willingly justify cruel treatment, neglect, or violent behavior as a rule of thumb - and yet this kind of human relating persists. Why? The answer, according to nonviolent doctrine and embodied-embedded symbolic thinkers

27 Used in Tolstoy’s sense with an explicitly Orthodox tilt and in Buber’s sense with a decidedly “spiritual but not religious” sort of secular lean.
alike is startlingly simple: We refuse to be sensitive to the ways that we participate in violence and because we refuse to take the alternatives seriously.

Scientific libraries are full of texts depicting the “nasty, brutish, and short” nature of humankind. According to these perspectives humanity is doomed to some degree of violence because we are selfish and thus untrustworthy, deceitful, and (perhaps most famously) because we are excessively emotional and therefore vulnerable to swings of violent passion. Nonviolent advocates concede that there is a form of “natural” violence inherent in our being, but it is not this kind of violence. The endemic violence in our nature sits not in any competitive motivistic inevitability or even in some kind of emotional flaw but rather in the very nature of our kinds of perception and in a stubborn inability to recognize the power that our action in perception entails. The “undefined, if not disingenuous” attitudes of “modern thinkers” to the phenomenon of violence are the root of our ongoing tragedies, not some fatalistic human characteristic.

Despite the inherently violent nature of our symbolic reasoning that I will explore below, and contrary to the popular beliefs that the world is growing more violent due to “natural” human characteristics, Harvard experimental psychologist Steven Pinker (2011) has charted the “surprising decline in violence,” throughout recorded history. Pinker demonstrates that the linear increase in violence that humanity has experienced since the dawn of traceable time is inconsequential when plotted against the exponential curves in population growth and population density that have coincided with this increase. Any exponential trend plotted next to a linear trend will result in a runaway effect, in order to
keep up with the massively compounding densities of human settlements we would need to see unmitigated slaughter to even sustain the argument that we are remotely violent. Instead, we see a sterilization of violence as governments and non-state-actors alike attempt to account for the growing transparency of their crimes in the face of a horrified public.

If this more or less established fact of the benevolence of mammalian biology (see Bartal et al. 2011; Waal, 2007; Langford et al. 2006) seems excessively idealistic it is because it is not the common perspective that we put on our understanding of the “nature” of humans. Contemporary Western thinkers are used to thinking of evolution as a sort of “tooth and claw” process of naturally violent and destructive self-selection. This is, of course, not the only perspective one can take on evolution. Many scientific thinkers are re-examining the role of cooperation, co-existence, and pure symbiosis in natural selectivity including a seemingly growing number who insist that kindness is profoundly advantageous. One Harvard biologist and mathematician even goes so far as to suggest that naturalists replace the conservative and well-trodden perspective of the “struggle” to survive with a much more explanatory and representative notion of a “snuggle” to survive (Nowak, 2012); and a New York University astrophysicist has argued that evolution itself (observably governed by the acquisition of powerful technology) “ultimately selects for wisdom” (Soter, 2005, emphasis added).

Despite the growing acceptance of nonviolent practice and nonviolent principals there continues to be a lagging public commitment to the practices espoused by
nonviolent thinkers. Today, as ever, typical liberal and conservative members of the public alike will say they are “all for nonviolence, up to a point.” Tolstoy argues that believing in benevolence “to a point” only reduces the question of force to “a question of the definition of danger” (p. 26). Such a reduction prompts, an ultimatum: “Either [we must] find a real unquestionable criterion of what is evil or [we must] not resist evil by force” (p. 33). Many are too hard pressed to believe in the demonstrably transformative power of human mattering to take the leap that this ultimatum requires, and so instead we squabble over ever-changing and coldly indifferent kinds of criteria, and thus toll on the bodies and in the lives of people “just like us” continues.

Violence is inherent in our perception placing exhausting and often frustrating demands on the practices of our everyday lives. Sensation, perception, and even consciousness itself are all rooted in wholly non-natural felt moments of suspension. Chapter Two examined how the brain has to reconfigure the experience of time, shutting off the here and now in many regards to display a “new and improved” experience of the conscious moments leading up to and following, say, the connection of a baseball with a bat.

The uninterrupted view of the present felt by a ballplayer who has achieved a hit and turned to run towards first base is, in fact, a false history. As Campbell has pointed out, if we were to see the perceptions in real time we would not see the ball strike the bat until milliseconds after we had turned to run down the baseline. Instead, the brain inscribes the vision of the moment of impact into our memory at the same time that it
inhibits it from appearing when it should, at what would otherwise be a very “absurd” moment in our lives. In this regard “now” is, in many ways, really, a then and the as of yet unknowable future is always already inscribing itself in an active and receptive (but by no means subjective) flesh. We never experience the present, and the present felt in our symbolic thinking is no different.

An approach to language as articulate contact implies that the very act of figuring (like all acts of perception) is inherently violent towards a dynamic and emergent reality. Kenneth Burke routinely pointed out how integral negation is to definition. Butler summarizes, “… marking off will have some normative force and, indeed, some violence, for it can construct only through erasing; it can bound a thing only through enforcing a certain criterion, a principle of selectivity” (1993, xx).

In Martin Buber’s words, symbols craft the ever-changing world into a conglomeration of knowable Its.

[Humans] perceive … simply events, and actions as events; things consisting of qualities, events of moments; things entered in the graph of place, events in that of time; things and events bounded by other things and events, measured by them, comparable with them: [humans] perceive an ordered and detached world. It is to some extent a reliable world, having density and duration. It’s organization can be surveyed and brought out again and again; gone over with closed eyes, and verified with open eyes. (p. 33).

We must engage the world through these Its, they are in fact how we ourselves come to be, but they are not reality. Reality is much too large, and much too fluid, to ever be comprehensively accounted for through It. Language, even in its fluidity, is always already detached from the present moment, because presence, itself, is an experience
concocted as if by the brain. By working around and through language humanity is endowed with the ability to characterize and thus transform the present, but we are still not capable of living there. So while language does indeed possess incredible potential for the future, each future that is linguistically concocted is going to be rife with new challenges to which to become sensitive. The ethical problems with language are inherent in language itself. This means there is no end product for nonviolent thinkers and explains why the emphasis is always placed on attitude as opposed to form.

Each time we “make” an object for ourselves, either to experience it or to use it, we rob ourselves of the present and persist solely in the past. Events, actions, qualities, causes, even the sense of detachment itself are all rooted conceptually and biologically in our affordance-driven embodied-embedded existence, none of these experiences are necessarily fundamental components of the universe. Like rainbows, these experiences are real in that they do matter, but they are not necessarily universally real in any essential sense of the word.

For Buber, all of existence is a “meeting” and thus “relation is the cradle of actual life” (Griffin, 2006, p. 241). Experience itself must be rooted in subjectivity, itself a fiction fabricated and endorsed by our brains and minds, before it can ever be objectively experienced. Buber endears himself to embodied-embedded scholars in this regard, emphasizing not only that “a world that is ordered is not the world-order” (p. 31) but also that “it lies with yourself how much of the immeasurable becomes reality for you” (p. 32). The meeting processes of existence are not organized to create the world but, rather,
to assure us of our “solidarity with the world” (ibid). In emphasizing our role in relating, Buber implicates us always-already as violating the “real” state of nature (a relation that he terms Thou). In all of our voluntary and involuntary efforts to “make sense” we thus become straddled with a very secular notion of original sin. “We have to be concerned, to be troubled,” Buber implores, “not about the other side but about our own side, not about grace but about will” (p. 76).

Unfortunately, more often than not, humans do not take the time to become troubled or to become concerned. In 1884 when Leo Tolstoy wrote his influential treatise on nonviolence entitled What I Believe he was frustrated by what he described as a “persistent silence … as though by agreement” among “believers, and … unbelieving liberals” alike over the seriousness of the question posed by nonviolence advocates stretching back through most of recorded human time. Tolstoy charted the ways that most people will dismiss conversations about the potential of nonviolent practice and responded to each, demonstrating how more often than not they were rooted in misinformation or other forms of careless misunderstanding. The seemingly willful or at the very least negligent forms that misunderstanding about nonviolence takes, according to Tolstoy, is the reason why human violence persists.

The most prominent response charted by Tolstoy was that in the cases where violence was justified it was “only” because of extreme or extenuating circumstances. “I’m all for nonviolence,” the saying typically goes “… up to a point.” Every act of violence, from those of the genocidal murderers to those of the common gossip, in fact
must be justified this way; “all [people] who happen to be in authority assert that their authority is necessary to keep the bad from oppressing the good, assuming that they themselves are the good par excellence, who protect other good people from the bad” (p. 161). The point at which any leader is seen by their people to be a “senseless” or “wanton” murder or mere monster is also the point at which their reign – no matter how mighty or glorious or influential – will come to a quick and unrepentant end. The most powerful dictators the world has ever seen have all been forced into spending fabulous amounts of money on tragically farcical propaganda due entirely to this simple fact.

The reality is humans (both ancient and domestic) deplore violence. It takes an incredible amount of training and commitment to anesthetize the body to the many biological agonies induced by causing harm to Others. And even then - when the “soldier” has become completely objectified as an instrument of war - one cannot be too certain that the commitment to do harm will hold fast if it is not always completely “justified.” The longer one is asked to thrive doing the acts of violence that are not “justifiable,” the more likely it becomes that they will defect.

For Leo Tolstoy, too, the question is one of will. Will the revolutionaries, conservatives, positivists, or secularists take nonviolent practice seriously? Sadly, in his experience and in my own, the answer tends to be no. Tolstoy testifies that the conservatives refuse to consider nonviolence because “this principle would hinder their [persecution and punishment] … as applied to the revolutionist” and in a strange and tragic twist of revolutionary and conservative agreement the same applies for those...
standing in resistance. “Because this principle would hinder their resistance to evil as applied to the conservatives and the overthrowing of them” most revolutionists ignore the nonviolence conversation as well (78). What results is a human existence which at once avows an equal right to “life and the good things in life” but which is also replete with tremendous suffering and one cannot help but suffer from the “contradiction and [our] share in it” (ibid). This suffering, for Tolstoy, is the suffering of a people who have defied the single most important commandment of their God; the commandment of non-resistance to evil by force.

Tolstoy exposes three kinds of forms that the “exceptional” acquiescence to violence takes: the first frames war and violence as an “incidental phenomenon” owed to special political or economic situations; the second frames violence as something “cruel and hideous, but at the same time fated and inevitable, like disease and death,” and the third form views war “with a cool indifference” as something “beneficial in its effects and therefore desirable” (p. 92). Notably for Tolstoy the reality of human violence rests on attitude. “We are held fast in the toils of officialdom and red tape” Tolstoy argues “and too rude a shock would be needed to set us free” (p. 105). Violence is inevitable in a world where there are wicked people, and in Tolstoy’s view, wickedness comes from this “cruel superstition” that only violence can end violence.

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28 This frame in particular prompts me to recall a quotation by one of the many pacifists to serve in the US Congress, Jeannette Rankin (R-MT) who famously argued “you can no more win a war than you can win an earthquake.” Rankin notably stood alone in voting “nay” on the US’s involvement both in World War I and World War II.
This superstition is rooted in at least one gross misunderstanding of what nonviolence requires. The misunderstanding is that nonviolence involves “doing nothing” in the face of evil. Nothing could be further from the truth. The “oppositional” nature of nonviolent action asks advocates to put their very bodies on the line in the face of danger. Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. both demonstrated this willingness when they, along with their numerous followers, willingly walked into the blows of their oppressors. Rather than advocating “nothing,” these individuals argued that we are in fact obligated to name and to say “no” to violence – even if it means absorbing the brunt of violence ourselves.

For Tolstoy it is rooted in scripture that Christians must “turn the other cheek” and essentially allow the oppressors to demonstrate their wickedness. The example was set by Christ, via the crucifixion - a penultimate act of sacrifice that could only elicit from Tolstoy’s Savior genuine pleas for forgiveness on behalf of those who would so willingly do harm. There is no vengeance in presenting oneself to be crucified there is only the material example of good faith.

Such demonstrations will obviously inflict tremendous pain and even (all too often) death. History is replete with examples of nonviolent advocates who willingly gave their lives so that the brutality of their oppressors could be known. The visible rendering of this pain that the nonviolent advocate represents eventually brings condemnation. And for Tolstoy at least, no disciplining force among humans is more powerful than societal condemnation. No force on earth, he argues, can normalize that
which everyone in the community has agreed is “taboo.” Opinion governs our actions, not the threat of violence, and Tolstoy, Gandhi, King, and many many more operate under the good faith that public opinion will always (if only eventually) side with a demonstrably nonviolent oppressed as opposed to with the oppressors. If nothing else oppositional forms of “no” refuse to participate in rendering more violence. At the very least these forms of resistance manifest less violence because instead of two sides committing to oppression there is only one.

Both Tolstoy and Buber understand violence to be, to some extent or another, inevitable. This is not because humanity is flawed, but because humanity has not come to grips with its potential. This potential in both cases is rooted in life practice, which both thinkers cast as profoundly material. Relationships, governed in large part by how we will willingly cast Others via our symbolicity, matter. The fact that symbols are not transmitted but rather selected, interpreted, and understood in good faith suggests that while we may be inevitably violent in some regards, we are at the same time incredibly creative at generating alternatives to violence. These alternatives themselves introduce a whole host of new opportunities as well as (Burke would add) a whole host of new embarrassments. The next section in this chapter takes on the alternatives and the difficulties and promises that they hold.

**Destiny or Fate – the Pursuit of Thou**

Opposition, saying “no” through self-sacrifice and exposure, and naming but not participating in the kinds of violence that human action entails are the first steps for
Tolstoy. He quotes the signers of a 1838 peace convention who (in very Burkean terms) “expect to prevail through the Foolishness of Preaching.” The ability to argue, to reason, and to name and devise nonviolent practices in response to violence, according to these delegates – even in the face of “insult, outrage, suffering, yea, even death itself” was the only possible solution (p. 9). The Kingdom of God, therefore, is within us. All we have to do is have the courage to make it matter.

For Buber the willingness or unwillingness to take such steps is the difference between “destiny” and “fate.” Fate, in Buber’s eyes, is all that awaits a humanity that dwells in the world of It. The best humans can hope for if they opt to live a life monopolized by their own petty understanding is hell – we make our own fate by insisting that we are in control. Destiny is, in many ways, unknowable – but it is no less attainable. According to Buber, destiny stands “in need” of us. It does not drag us with “leading strings” but instead “awaits” (p. 59). What, exactly, destiny entails is an impossible question to answer – every effort one makes at defining and achieving destiny is only time spent dwelling in It. As Buber puts it Thou may only be “addressed, not expressed” (vii). The relation that reveals the face of Thou cannot be named or defined – Buber tells us that “when Thou is spoken, the speaker has no thing; [but rather] nothing” (p. 4). “Just as the melody is not made up of the notes nor the verse of the words nor the statue of lines, but they must be tugged and dragged till their unity has been scattered into these many pieces, so with the [relation] that I call Thou” (p. 9).
Love is as close as Buber can come to naming Thou, but even here he is hesitant. For love is often a fixation and a fiction, a motivated story we tell of all that we hold dear and all that we desire in Others. Such desires and fascinations are the stuff of It, the love of Thou is rooted in a reverence for the ever present moment and the never-ending potential that it holds. There are no expectations or social economies in the realm of Thou, expectations and economies are “fantasies” that we concoct and which lead only to fate. In 1862 economist John Ruskin (2006) took the fanciful nature of economics seriously and argued that humanity can chose to live either in an economy of taking (in a world where a very few are enabled to benefit tremendously on the suffering of the many) or in an economy of giving (a world where collaboration and charity lead to profits and production that previously could not have even been imagined). Every moment lived in Thou is “bound to become an It” (Buber, p. 33), “no saying of the Thou is able to yield final reality” (Buber, p. 88), and therefore the project of destiny is never-ending, always unfolding before us. Thus our lives of It and our lives of Thou are always “entangled” and only a reverence for the Other that is continual and unyielding can tease the two apart.

One of Buber’s more famous respondents was Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas characterizes a similar relationship between It and Thou as a discrepancy between the said and the saying. In Pinchevski’s (2005) terms, Levinas critiqued the tendency in communication scholarship to emphasize the said (the “contents conveyed in language – logos, information and knowledge”) as opposed to the saying (“the giving of a said to
another person; … the offering of signs to the Other”), which is the “primary mode” of communication in Levinasian ethics (10). Davis (2005) translates the saying as “a performative, an address that necessarily unsettles what is congealed in the already-said” (193). The Levinasian model posits communication as interruption which at once reveals or conceals Others and thus for Levinas, too, the project of philosophy ought to be situated “not as a love of wisdom but rather as the wisdom of love” (Pinchevski, p. 20). And this love cannot be codified in any form of said – it only exists in each iterative moment of saying.

Hyde (2010) brings Burke into conversation with Levinas and Buber by interpreting one definitive component of humanity writ Burke (that we are “rotten with perfection”) as an over-reliance on the said. In Burke’s terms, through symbolicity humans come to expect a “complete satisfaction” – “the mere desire to name something by its ‘proper’ name, or to speak a language in its distinctive ways is intrinsically ‘perfectionist’” (1963, p. 507). This “rotten” nature of the “symbol using/mis-using animal” can induce dissatisfaction not only with the inability of symbols to transmit meaning, but also with the inability to live a life as we think it ought to be lived. Our relationships with work, family and friends become wrapped in expectation that is, in truth, mere fantasy. When this fantasy is not fulfilled it can all seem hopeless. Despite the miracle that is our ability to ponder our lives, humans often end up bitter about the kind of mattering such pondering brings about.
In contrast, Rosenberg (2003) has described *I-Thou* relationality as “human growth [that] occurs through a meeting between two individuals who express themselves vulnerably and authentically” (p. 175); for Pinchevski (2005) it is “a discourse inclusive of the Other rather than constitutive of the self, a relation that reaffirms the Other in his or her singularity” which thus represents “the origin of communication: not merely … an empirical exchange of signs but … an intentional awareness of the existence of the Other” (p. 210). In all symbolicity is an inherent relationality, and the nature of that relationality is the nature of our material existence. Remaining sensitive to this truth, refusing to the extent that one is able the “economies” and expectations of sociality which render Others as knowable, we can pursue destiny. Neglecting this task or, worse, refusing it, dooms us to fate.

Tolstoy’s notion of Christian Love and Buber’s insistence that we live in *Thou* each put the burden of peace on all of us, as opposed to on the Others in our lives. For both this is because the ways that we render Others will ultimately predicate the ways that we will treat them. Once Others come to be seen as “evil” while we remain “good,” or once Others become understandable and predictable at all, they cease to be Others and instead become trapped in the fictions that we have crafted for them. And from those fictions we sense our way to all kinds of terrible treatment and abuse. Insisting upon a reverence of Others, even in the face of their cruelty, plants the seeds for an alternative.
Sensing Others – A Rhetoric of Nonviolence

A rhetoric of nonviolence is not a solution. There can be no truly nonviolent rhetoric, because all Symbolicity is ultimately a violation of what is real. And yet, through Symbolicity, we come to know what is real. Symbolicity is as real as the body that it is a part of, but none of the sensations that the body makes could be said to be universally true. From colors, to balance, to the notion that the “I” of the self is in one’s head, sensation is a chorus of illusions sustained by a speculating and affirming and ultimately solipsistic brain. Linguistic reality, like all embodied reality, is always perspectival.

The world gets stitched together in “because” statements and justifications; our reasons work like glue to suture an experience out of constellations of sensation. Memories, expectations (the acts of prediction that fundamentally transform what can and cannot be “afforded” opportunities to be), causation, trajectory, even reason itself, these are all kinds of “grasping” at the world. As one talks about Others they are in fact tracing them like a blind person putting their fingers to the edges of a surface. From this tracing details emerge, details that resolve “the bigger picture.” More often than not this “bigger picture” is reliable, but it is always to at least some extent a lie. Forgetting this is forgetting the present; it is forgetting to live.

The language one makes throughout life will afford them the opportunity to be, to see, and to feel “as-if.” The conglomeration of these “as-if” sensations, somehow, resolves into a “me.” Who that me is, the condition that it is in, the future it faces, and the reality that it occupies is, of course, predicated on a myriad of other conditions that are
well beyond the power of any one person to control. But at the same time the perspective that the me can take matters. Perspective taking renders the difference between “villains” and “fools,” which when it comes to human beings in particular can make all of the difference in the world.

**Conclusion and Future Directions**

When communication scholars began to consider communication from the perspective of articulate constitutive contact it prompted a conversation about “new materialism” – the matter of symbolicity became very real matter. Rhetorical materialists to this day continue to struggle to account for the ways that communication and symbolic thought participate in rendering human life.

Foss and Foss (2011) have identified two “paradigms of change” which are at work in rhetorical criticism - offering either a “constricted” or a “constructed” potentiality as potential perspectives on how humans make sense. In the “constricted” paradigm, “the potential for change is limited or constricted by the tangible material conditions on which communicators focus…” – this “…dominantly conventional paradigm of how change happens limits the options available to theorists and change agents” (p. 206). The paradigm of constricted potentiality focuses on “material conditions … elements that already exist and that must be discovered by communicators [which include] people, places, systems, organizations, events, documents, and artifacts as well as structures such as laws, regulations, and traditions” (p. 208). The primary strategy of change within a “constricted” paradigm is persuasion, “the effort to reinforce or
transform beliefs or behaviors” (Ibid). Persuasive efforts focus on the “external” world in an effort to make a change in the sensed material conditions (210). For Foss and Foss, the constrictive paradigm, “as useful as it is” has begun to function within criticism and society alike as a “terministic screen (Burke, 1965, 1966)” (p. 206).

The “constructive” paradigm on the other hand takes a much more open approach to the potentials inherent in the new matter of language. This perspective puts the “focus on the unlimited symbolic resources constructed by change agents” (Ibid). Change agents engage in a paradigm of constructed potentiality “when they choose to privilege symbolicity as they engage the dialectic between materiality and symbolicity” (p. 213). Rather than focusing on the material conditions which contextualize (or “constrain”) potential, “constructive” agents lean on “spoken, written, and visual symbols as well as the thoughts, interpretations, perceptions, and meanings represented by symbols” (Ibid). Like “constricted” potentials, “constructed” potentials is a “reality created by humans” but unlike “constricted” potential the “constructed” potential is “unlimited” (Ibid). Humanity never runs out of ways to apply symbols to problems and thus, so long as the focus remains on the symbols and not the “reality” of the trouble there is no end to the inquiry that one can conduct.

Constructed paradigms focus on interpretation, instead of persuasion, and drive at “self-change” as opposed to material transformation in the external world. This change route remains forever unspecified, again due to the infinite number of symbolic permutations that can erupt out of any known exigency. Foss and Foss do not attempt to
replace one paradigm with another – only to demonstrate the power inherent in switching between them. The dualistic mindsets identified by Stewart continue to play a persistent role in the ways that scholars understand communication, otherwise no such defense of constructivism would be warranted. Foss and Foss see, perhaps, a “trained incapacity” in the works of their peers, an over-reliance on a “constrictive” approach which insists that if language “matters” it hardly does so at all. The “constructive” model is not a new addition to communication scholarship, but it is a perspective that Foss and Foss suggest is underutilized if not misunderstood understood.

The gap between these two models demonstrates nicely the range of material scholars that I attempted to track in Chapter One. Rhetorical scholars have so far identified and traced either transcendent mattering (the macro-scale governing structures of thought provided by theorists like Cloud, McGee, Black, Charland, and to an extent Greene) or embodied mattering (the immanent components of communication as understood by Blair, Dickinson, Condit, Ott, and, to another extent, Greene). In the first case I argued that the individual experiences of symbolic sense-making were accounted for but under emphasized. In the second case I argued that the immanent experience had been emphasized but, so far at least, under developed. A governing logic of sense-making is missing that could explain all of the different ways that human beings made sense.

The need to explain the immanent stuff of communicative mattering was then followed to a conversation about neurorhetorics (Jack & Applebaum, Mays & Jung, Jackson, Johnson, Pryal, Pruchnic) to argue that a potent conversation between rhetorical
materialism and embodied-embedded cognitive study was already beginning, a conversation which could offer tremendous insight to rhetoricians and embodied-embedded theorists alike. This conversation was explored in Chapter Two first as a discussion about the debate in embodied cognition between so-called “traditional” or “cognitivist” approaches and embodied-embedded approaches (as represented in Noe, Shapiro, Clark, Freeman, Blakeslee and Blakeslee) and then through dynamic, emergence-driven logics of non-causal, “as-if” cognition (Protevi). This debate, I argued, mimicked the discussion tracked in Chapter One between the transmission model and language as constitutive contact model in that it abolished notions of dualism and replaced them with a reality where language-use and understanding very literally mattered.

Chapter Three took notions of symbolicity as embodied-embedded scaffolding developed through Chapters One and Two and attempted to demonstrate how metaphors (Burke, Lakoff & Johnson) in particular offered a convenient if not necessarily comprehensive glimpse into the scale of symbolicity’s participation in rendering human existence. I tracked how “post-race” discourses (as identified by Lacey & Ono, Gallagher, Halualani et al., Herakova et al., Cobb, Squires et al.) engaged racism in a way that made “non-sense.” If an individual relies on conversations of race like those rooted in the “race card,” it could be possible to look at the pursuit and murder of an unarmed black boy and not see racism. The denial of racism did not make the role race played in the shooting go away, it was obviously felt by individuals who responded to the shooting.
and subsequent acquittal of the shooter with outrage, but it could make racism disappear to those who insisted on wielding only these kinds of discourses.

Chapter Four attempted to explore how a sense-based approach to language changes the pedagogy of public speaking education by replacing transmission-driven understandings of great speeches (rooted in predictability, control, and essential notions of speaking excellence) with “the gym” – an embodied-embedded based attempt to provide constant, diverse, and active practice. Rather than attempting to execute a perfect speech, embodied-embedded speaking students turn to familiarity and practice, to sense-made, for confidence, research, and personal development.

Finally, Chapter Five attempted to culminate the discussion of the “new material” that is constantly produced through symbolicity by situating ethical communication within the frameworks of nonviolence as understood by Buber, Levinas, Tolstoy, Ruskin, and Sharp. Chapter Five argued that human violence is inevitable, but not because of some characteristic flaw in human nature. Instead, the fact that perception grounds experience in a suspended reality was cited as the source of inevitable frustration and the attitudes which dismiss nonviolent practice and theory were identified as the primary forces which allow that frustration to continue to manifest itself in actual violence. If language is a form of contact, and if we refuse to consider how that contact can become violent, violence will ensue. Relational approaches such as Buber’s I/Thou perspective taking could not resolve the endemic problems of violence, but they could produce a kind of sensitivity that, if properly practiced through oppositional nonviolence, could make a
tremendous material difference. Nonviolence advocates from Tolstoy to Sharp have argued that human beings are born with everything they need to make their lives more peaceful, no future development or understanding is necessary for us to begin living in a world where oppression and violence go unchecked. What is necessary is that human thinkers, speakers, and symbolizers take seriously the challenges set before them in their symbolically-motivated existence.

Future directions for interrogating the importance of the sense-making capacities of language might include coupling functional magnetic resonance imagery, positron emission topography, or any of the varied forms of functional brain resonance technology that scientists are developing, with practicing public speaking students. How do practicing speakers “make sense?” How does practice effect and affect the brain? Framing discrete research questions in the ways that science demands proves to be incredibly tricky, isolating the neural plasticity that results from pondering a question is even harder than isolating that which occurs as we grasp with our hands, but such efforts could be incredibly enlightening.

New scholastic models should be explored, including: how many forms of “practice” can 20-30-100 students do in a 1-hour or 3-hour time frame? There is no upper limit to this question; the creative exploration that it hopefully prompts ought to be resiliently generative. Getting “set in our ways” as speakers can be useful. Familiarity comes from tracing and retracing (and retracing) not only our steps, but also the steps of others. However, new modes of symbolic sense-making practice bring new challenges
encouraging us once again to cope with and confront the frustrations and anxieties that speaking well entails. Remaining familiar with those affects, too, is profoundly important.

The “affective turn,” as the renewed investment in the more psychological and phenomenological components of symbol use amidst rhetorical scholarship has been dubbed, too, might be an interesting place to extend the argument that language is a sense. Brian Massumi (2011), an affect-inspired social theorist, describes language as “open-range-abstraction” – he attempts to trace the free-flow implications of language use within the confines of complexity theory. The notion of language as an “open-range” form of abstraction draws on a navigational/explorative schema that language-as-sense could supplement.

Communication is mattering constantly; the material it produces governs our lives and our futures in very real often painful but frequently uplifting ways. The fact that all of us, throughout history, have relied so heavily on this feature of human ability gives us great hope, language can figure itself, it can figure racism, it can figure oppression of all sorts if we decide to use it thus. At the same time language, like all human sensation, is imperfect. The rockets humans made which put boot prints on the moon some 300,000 miles from Earth are practically identical to those which could deliver dozens of atomic warheads to cities all over the world, the only difference lies in their justification. That difference, itself just a thin margin somewhere on the continuum of cold-war induced paranoia, determines the future of our species. Humans have the ability to self-annihilate,
or the ability to literally travel to and step upon the heavens. The question is, in which of these futures will we matter most?
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