In this chapter, we hope to add to a growing “complicated conversation” (Pinar, 2004) about qualitative research methods. We argue for a language that can work across and through multiple approaches in sophisticated and nuanced ways, in ways that can open a more nuanced discussion that might enable truly inter- and multimethodological approaches. Specifically, we offer an account of what we see to be the prevalent chronotopes of inquiry that ground and inform most qualitative research (and the social sciences generally). Our task is akin to the one undertaken by Birdwhistell (1977) in response to his students’ queries about whether Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson had a methodology. These queries led Birdwhistell to argue that theory-method complexes, which he termed “logics-of-inquiry,” guide all research.

Our task is also similar to Strike’s (1974) construct of “expressive potential.” Strike argued that all research endeavors are governed by an expressive potential that delimits the objects worthy of investigation, the research questions that may be asked, the units of analysis that are relevant, the analyses that may be conducted, the claims that may be made about the objects of
investigation, and the forms of explanation that may be invoked. We argue here for a new language that can be used to talk across a range of disciplinary and methodological approaches, from ethnography to genealogy and rhizomatics. In working toward such a language, we highlight both the possibilities and dangers of this moment of meta-disciplinary coalescence. Informed by this, we close by offering a new metaphor for the qualitative researcher—that of the genealogist.

**Why Chronotopes?**

Although similar to “logics-of-inquiry” or “expressive potentials,” the construct of chronotopes of inquiry also extends these constructs in important ways. To the best of our knowledge, Bakhtin (1981) borrowed the term “chronotope,” which literally means “time-space,” from Einstein and applied it to the study of language and literature. For Bakhtin, chronotopes do not simply link particular times and spaces with specific cultural events. Instead, they delineate or construct sedimentations of concrete, motivated social situations or figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998) replete with typified plots, themes, agents, forms of agency, scenes, objects, affective dispositions, kinds of intentionality, ideologies, value orientations, and so on. In this regard, chronotopes are like “x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring” (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 425–426).

Chronotopes are normalizing frames that render the world as “just the way things are” by celebrating the prosaic regularities that make any given world, day after day, recognizable and predictable for the people who live in it (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 87). They connote specific ways to understand context and the actions, agents, events, and practices that constitute those contexts. Bakhtin was clear about the fact that chronotopes are not a priori structures but durable structuring structures (e.g., Bourdieu, 1990; Giddens, 1979) constituted within concrete histories of human activity across time and space. Among the ways in which he illustrated this idea was to show how the public square in ancient Greece or the family at the height of the Roman Empire were constitutively related to specific modes of rhetorical and literary activity common to those time-spaces.
Chronotopes are a lot like what cultural studies scholars (e.g., Grossberg, 1992; Hall, 1992; Hebdige, 1979; Willis, 1977) refer to as cultural formations—historically formed/informed and socially distributed modes of engagement with particular sets of practices for particular reasons. Chronotopes describe the lines of force that locate, distribute, and connect specific sets of practices, effects, goals, and groups of actors. Such articulations not only involve selections and configurations from among the available practices, but also a distribution of the chronotopes themselves within and across social time and space. To understand and describe a chronotope requires a reconstruction of its context—the dispersed yet structured field of objects, practices, agents, and so on by which the specific articulation reproduces itself across time and space. Chronotopic assertions are thus “strategems” of genealogy. All chronotopes have their own “common cultural sense,” “sensibilities,” “tastes,” “logics,” and so on. These dimensions of being become embodied in the people who work within a chronotope such that they become part of the chronotope itself. What seems natural, proper, and obvious to individuals becomes aligned with what is the “common cultural sense” within the chronotope. For our purposes, then, chronotopes of qualitative inquiry index durable historical realities that constitute what is common, natural, and expected by collectives of social scientists who conduct particular kinds of qualitative research.

Although other scholars might argue for slightly fewer or slightly more, we focus on four primary chronotopes of inquiry currently operating in powerful and pervasive ways within the contemporary scene of educational research, especially in relation to literacy studies. We settled on the following “names” for the chronotopes that we believe most commonly ground qualitative inquiry within education and literacy studies:

1. Objectivism and Representation
2. Reading and Interpretation
3. Skepticism, Conscientization, and Praxis
4. Power/Knowledge and Defamiliarization

All four chronotopes engage with the Enlightenment project, but in different ways—some more resonantly and some more
dissonantly. Each chronotope embodies a different set of assumptions about the world, knowledge, the human subject, language, and meaning. Each also embodies or indexes a particular set of approaches/methods for framing and conducting research. Finally, in different ways and to different degrees, each has exerted considerable power in sustaining and reproducing particular logics of inquiry within our field and within the larger world of the social sciences. We propose this loosely coupled taxonomy simply as a heuristic for understanding some of the different ways in which qualitative inquiry is typically framed and how different frameworks predispose researchers to embrace different epistemologies, theories, approaches, and strategies.

**Chronotope I: Objectivism and Representation**

Perhaps the roots of this chronotope extend back to early critiques of “correspondence theories of truth” and a “logics of verification” that inhabited representational approaches to research in anthropology and philosophy (e.g., Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Rorty, 1979). “Correspondence theories of truth” posit the possibility of directly and unproblematically mapping symbolic representations onto the facts in the world in a one-to-one fashion. Approaches driven by “correspondence theories of truth” derive from Descartes’s dualism of mind and body and have become all but synonymous with the scientific method. This dualism renders the individual human subject as radically separate from the external world but able to know this world through reflection and thought. A variety of methods and research tools have been developed within the chronotope of objectivism and representation. These methods and tools are predicated on the inviolability of the mind-body binary. Language is construed as a neutral medium for accurately representing observed relations in the external world.

A considerable amount of the qualitative research that is conducted in the field of language and literacy, for example, fits comfortably within the chronotope of objectivism and representation. E. D. Hirsch’s (1987) work on cultural literacy is one example. Within a cultural literacy framework, it is assumed that there is a neutral canon of key cultural knowledge that all students should know. It is also assumed that this body of knowledge
exists outside of the individual subject and can be learned, usually through direct instruction and study. This neutral body of knowledge is transmitted to individual subjects through the neutral medium of Standard English. Finally, Hirsch asserts that if students lack a particular and prescribed set of cultural knowledge, they will be unable to read and write adequately and to function productively in society. The cultural knowledge that Hirsch has in mind is presumed to be “common culture,” not elite culture, even though it derives primarily from canonical works within a white, European American, middle- to upper-class heterosexist tradition.

Knowledge here is considered to be entirely separate from power relations or any other dimensions of context. A radical separation of subject and object is assumed. Language and literacy practices are assumed to be neutral vehicles for representing equally neutral facts. The real world and talking or writing about the real world are held radically separate. The idea that language and literacy might be able to shape and constitute thought, practice, or circulation of power is eclipsed. Such a construal renders language and literacy practices as little more than conduits or vehicles for preexistent thoughts or conditions, and it occludes the idea that such practices have ontological substance and constitutive power themselves. Questions about whether our relations with and within the world are at least partially constituted by language and literacy practices become unimportant. Little, if any, conceptual room is allocated for political praxis or social change through language and literacy practices because fact and value are believed to be independent of each other. Instead, language and literacy practices are evaluated according to their relative effectiveness in representing a priori cognitive or communicative entities or events. Positing effectiveness as a primary (or sole) evaluative criterion galvanizes the tendency to view language and literacy as little more than simple conduits for communicating established perspectives or existing sets of conditions, and it eclipses processes of imagining the constitutive roles that these practices might play in the construction of knowledges, identities, and fields of social practice.

Accepting the separation of subject and object or language and world as “given” or “natural” positions the field of language and literacy studies as a second-order field of inquiry that is de facto
subservient to more legitimate fields and dependent on their theo-
ries and methods for its existence. It is not surprising, then, that
many of the constructs and methods deployed within research
on language and literacy conducted within the chronotope of
objectivism and representation derive from other disciplines
such as psychology (e.g., schema, motivation), sociology (e.g.,
symbolic interactionism, conversation analysis), anthropology
(e.g., speech event, participant observation) or literary studies
(e.g., reader response, genre studies). By drawing heavily on con-
ceptual frameworks developed in other fields (especially psychol-
ogy), research agendas often focus not on actual language and
literacy practices but on internal or hidden variables such as read-
ers’ motivations (e.g., Turner, 1995) or writers’ intentions (e.g.,
Flower & Hayes, 1981). When language and literacy research are
located within the chronotope of objectivism and representation,
one wonders exactly what language and literacy practices are
involved and where they can be found. Are the reasons for prac-
tices always to be found outside of the practices themselves—in
some hidden or deep structures or an Oz behind the curtain?
Is nothing important evident in the surface of things? As we
move through the discussions of all four chronotopes, we will
show how actual, observable practices have become increasingly
important as legitimate resources for explaining the nature and
functions of language and literacy activities. And their increasing
legitimation as both data and interpretive/explanatory resources
has presented serious challenges to canonical ways of thinking
about qualitative research practice.

Chronotope II: Reading and Interpretation

Not all approaches to research conducted within a modernist
framework adhere to positivist epistemologies and their attendant
assumptions. One framework that is modernist but not positiv-
ist is what we call the chronotope of reading and interpretation.
Grounded in social constructionist epistemologies, this chrono-
tope is not predicated on a complete rejection of Enlightenment
perspectives on knowledge, rationality, and truth, but it does
rearticulate these perspectives to render knowledge, truth, and
rationality as relative (or perspectival) rather than absolute. Such
a move rescues these constructs from the hegemonic clutches of scientism and instrumental reasoning without jettisoning these perspectives altogether. Knowledge, reason, and truth are no longer conceived as the representational mirroring (through language and other semiotic media) of an already existing world. Instead, knowledge, reason, and truth are believed to be constructed through the symbolic acts of human beings in relation to the world and to others (e.g., Heidegger, 1962; Rorty, 1979). Concomitantly, science is no longer about verification within a correspondence theory of truth but about human interaction, communication, dialogue, and reasoned argument.

Modernism, then, embraces not only scientistic modes of reason grounded in objectivist epistemologies but also modes of reason that are linguistically (or semiotically) mediated and grounded in the experience of “being-in-the-world.” As we noted earlier, chronotopes are fluid, leaky, and flexible, and it is possible to have both objectivist-modernist articulations as well as interpretive-modernist ones. From this perspective, the existence of a real world external to human subjects is assumed, but faith in the timeless, universal nature of the world-knowledge relation and thus the possibility of generating representations that map that world in absolute or foundational terms is rejected.

This shift from “brute facts” to semiotically mediated facts is far from trivial. Among other things, it marks the need to replace a correspondence theory of truth with a consensus theory of truth, which implies a human discourse community as the arbiter of knowledge and truth claims. Gadamer’s (1972) work is instructive here. Gadamer argued that truth does not emerge through the application of technical tools or methods but within and through embodied engagement within a “horizon” of experience within a human community. He went even further to claim that truth will always elude capture by technical methods because knowledge is always semiotically and dialogically constructed. Truth is never an act of reproduction but always an act of production within the limited horizon of a community’s texts and meanings. Because knowledge (and thus truth) always emerges out of the embodied, rich, and messy process of being-in-the-world, it is always perspectival and conditional.
Within the chronotope of reading and interpretation, the subject-object dualism of the Enlightenment project is also assumed, but subject and object are placed in dialogic tension. This tension is a hallmark of philosophical hermeneutics, which is the foundation (i.e., antifoundation) on which the chronotope of reading and interpretation was built. The term “hermeneutics” derives from the Greek word hermeneuein with its obvious linkages to Hermes, the fleet-footed messenger of the gods. This derivation would suggest, then, that the origins of the chronotope of reading and interpretation lie in early Greek thought. Most philosophers of science and social theorists, however, usually place the beginnings of the chronotope reading and interpretation in nineteenth-century German philosophy, especially the work of Schleiermacher and Dilthey.

Although the term verstehen is often used as a generic term for interpretive social science, Dilthey (1976/1900) has been credited with developing a specific verstehen approach to understanding. This approach basically refers to the process of understanding from another subject’s point of view. The verstehen approach, according to Dilthey, is achieved through the psychological reenactment or imaginative reconstruction of the experiences of others. In other words, it is intersubjectivity achieved basically through empathy. The extreme psychologism of Dilthey’s position has been challenged and tempered by other philosophers including Husserl, Heidegger, and Gadamer.

Most contemporary uses of the term “hermeneutics” refer to the general process of coming to understand a phenomenon of interest (e.g., text, experience, social activity) or constructing an interpretation of such a phenomenon without placing such a heavy burden on intersubjectivity through empathy. Instead, hermeneutic or interpretive inquires are predicated on understanding meanings and practices in relation to the situations in which they occur. Such modes of inquiry draw on the notion of the “hermeneutic circle” as a unique and powerful strategy for understanding and knowledge building. Using this strategy, understanding the “part” (a text, an act, a person) always involves also understanding the whole (the context, the activity setting, the life history) and vice versa.
Heavily influenced by this notion of the hermeneutic circle, qualitative inquiry conducted within the chronotope of reading and interpretation does not aim to generate foundational knowledge claims. Instead, it aims to refine and deepen our sense of what it means to understand other people and their social practices (including language and literacy practices) within relevant contexts of interaction and communication. Put in philosophical terms, these forms of inquiry link the Enlightenment or modernist project of discovering knowledge with a genuine interest in understanding and enriching the “life worlds” (Habermas, 1987) or “lived experience” of others (i.e., our research participants). Researchers operating within a chronotope of reading and interpretation espouse a linguistically mediated view of existence and knowledge wherein both are constituted (and not just represented) in and through human language practices. They study language practices such as conversation, storytelling, disciplinary writing, and the like in order to reveal and understand the contexts and ontologies that they index.

Although the historical roots of the chronotope of reading and interpretation may be traced to nineteenth-century German philosophy, it has grown exponentially during the past two decades. Interestingly, and a bit ironically, this trend was not particularly visible in the major language and literacy journals until just a few years ago, even though it has been quite visible in journals from allied disciplines (e.g., *Anthropology and Education Quarterly, International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*). It has also been quite visible for some time within dissertations, presentations at professional literacy conferences, and books. The fact that research conducted within the chronotope of reading and interpretation was resisted in our mainstream journals and had to be smuggled into our field through less mainstream venues is testimony to the powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting grip that the chronotope of objectivism and representation has had and still has on qualitative inquiry in our field. Nevertheless, the chronotope of reading and interpretation has managed finally to become a force to be reckoned with in research on language and literacy.

Among the earliest and most durable instances of literacy research representing this force grew out of the ethnography of
communication (EOC) tradition, with its focus on the relations among language, community, and identity. Shirley Brice Heath’s (1983) now classic *Ways with Words* is one of the best exemplars of this tradition.

In outlining the research strategies she used to conduct the research for her book, Heath (1982) virtually recreated earlier descriptions of the hermeneutic circle, arguing that her research involved “the collection of artifacts of literacy, descriptions of contexts of uses, and their spatial and temporal distribution within the life of members of the community” (p. 47). She went on to claim that she studied how people used literacy artifacts, the activities and events within which the artifacts were used, whether links were made between symbolic representations and their real-world equivalents, how artifacts were presented to children, and what children then did with them (p. 47). Clearly, she came to understand parts in relation to wholes and vice versa.

A central question that motivated Heath’s research was “what were the effects of preschool, home and community environments on the learning of those language structures which were needed in classrooms and job settings?” (1982, p. 2). Heath explored and documented language and literacy practices common in the homes of families in three different communities in the Piedmont Carolinas: a working-class black community (Trackton), a working-class white community (Roadville), and an integrated middle-class community (Maintown). Based on findings from ten years of research, Heath argued convincingly for how the knowledges and “ways with words” of people living in these different communities were historically and socially constructed in very different ways. In Heath’s words, “the place of language in the cultural life of each social group is interdependent with the habits and values of behaving shared among members of that group” (p. 11). For example, the kinds of interactions that parents and children from the three communities engaged in while reading storybooks were linked to different ways of living, eating, sleeping, worshipping, using space, and spending time. These interactions were also linked to different notions of play, parenting, truth, and morality.

More generally, Heath explained that “for the children of Trackton and Roadville … and for the majority of the mill workers
and students in the Piedmont schools the ways [of the people of Maintown] are far from natural and they seem strange indeed” (1982, p. 262). Importantly, these differences resulted in different consequences for children’s success in school. Finally, Heath traced constitutive relations between the identities of people in these communities and their language and literacy practices. In this regard, Heath worked with teachers in the local schools—all of whom were from Maintown—to understand the “ways with words” of the children they taught and to adapt their classroom practices to be more culturally relevant. This process induced changes in the identities, knowledges, and language practices of teachers and students alike.

Central to the work of Heath and other researchers working from within the chronotope of reading and interpretation is the fundamental notion that language practices constitute both individual and community identities. All of these studies presuppose the central assumption that it is not biology or geography or universal structure that constitutes identity and community but the discursive construction of shared meanings and practices. In Heath’s work, for example, the predispositions toward books and reading held by the children and parents of Roadville or Trackton have no a priori existence but are continually produced and reproduced through the specific language and literacy practices common to the respective communities. As important as these practices are, however, Heath (and others located within the chronotope of reading and interpretation) never addresses questions about the larger social, political, and economic forces that make specific language and literacy practices visible and available in the first place. These questions are more central to the chronotopes we discuss later in the chapter.

The chronotope of reading and interpretation is embedded within a social constructionist epistemology and deploys hermeneutics as its most common theory-approach complex. From within this chronotope, language is theorized not as a vehicle for representing an already existent world but as the most powerful means available to human beings for constructing what is “really real” (Geertz, 1973) and fundamentally meaningful about that world. This chronotope holds onto the modernist notion of the
individual rational subject but views this individual as fundamentally grounded in and constructed within the language and literacy practices of the speech and discourse communities in which he or she participates.

From within the chronotope of reading and interpretation, scholars also reject the idea that science is fundamentally about prediction and control, technical-instrumental rationality, and the gradual accumulation of all knowledge. Instead, researchers operating within this chronotope are committed to reflexively participating in the “language games” (Wittgenstein, 1958) of hermeneutics and the communities that they study with a desire and a willingness to enter into the conversations they find there. From this perspective, ongoing dialogue between researchers and research participants is a primary requirement of knowledge production and understanding.

**Chronotope III: Skepticism, Conscientization, and Praxis**

Although the chronotope of reading and interpretation constituted the very foundation of early qualitative research, it came under attack for failing to deal adequately with the power-laden political contexts in which presumably “open dialogue” occurs and “genuine understanding” is constructed. In other words, classical interpretivism rooted in hermeneutics did not address the ways in which dialogue can readily become complicit with the hegemonic structures of power in which it is always embedded. Historically, for example, many ethnographers have also been missionaries or military personnel whose “dialogue” with natives was motivated largely by religious and colonial interests masquerading as paternalistic (or maternalistic) benevolence. This social fact is true even into the middle of the twentieth century, when ethnographers shifted their gaze from “exotic” natives in distant places to equally “exotic” natives in American inner cities (e.g., Blacks, Asians, Jews, etc.). Accusations about the absence of attention paid to ideology and domination within the chronotope of reading and interpretation promoted the development of more critical forms of interpretivism within the Enlightenment or modernist project. We refer to these forms under the rubric of a chronotope of skepticism, conscientization, and praxis.
The roots of a chronotope of skepticism, conscientization, and praxis can be traced to linkages between the hermeneutic tradition and various strands of critical social theory within the tradition of neo-Marxism during the middle of the twentieth century. The name for the chronotope itself is a play on the term “hermeneutics of suspicion,” which was introduced by Paul Ricoeur (1970) to refer to modes of interpretation that are radically skeptical about whatever is presumed to be the truth. Building on Ricoeur’s basic insights, John B. Thompson (1990) constructed a systematic theory-method complex, which he called depth hermeneutics. Echoing the classic line attributed to Karl Marx, Ricoeur and Thompson argued that ideologies often “operate behind people’s backs,” which makes it impossible to escape completely the bonds of “false consciousness.” Gadamer (1972) had something similar in mind when he claimed that, more than our judgments, our interests or our prejudices constitute who we are. Built largely on the neo-Marxist concerns with ideology and ideology critique, the goal of a critical or depth hermeneutics is to deconstruct or unmask the “reality” or “truth” of prejudicial understanding and to reveal the contingency, relativity, and historicity of consciousness, other people, and the world. Finally, we included Freire’s (1970) term “conscientization” in the name of this chronotope to underscore its praxis orientation. For Freire, conscientization refers to critical reflection and its articulation with social action to enact individual and collective emancipation.

Like the chronotope of reading and interpretation, the chronotope of skepticism, conscientization, and praxis is grounded in social constructionist epistemologies. Unlike the chronotope of reading and interpretation, the chronotope of skepticism, conscientization, and praxis embraces the challenge of interrogating how ideology functions to “naturalize” and privilege some forms of knowledge and being-in-the-world over others. It also embodies an imperative for democratic social change. Operating within this chronotope, researchers assume that surface-level meanings and actions hide deep structural conflicts, contradictions, and falsities that function to maintain the status quo.
The neo-Marxist foundations of Chronotope III

To better understand the chronotope of skepticism, conscientization, and praxis warrants a detour into neo-Marxism. Certain neo-Marxists, including Antonio Gramsci (1971), George Lukács (1971), and Louis Althusser (1971), challenged the economic determinism of traditional Marxism, arguing that power derives not so much from base economic conditions but from cultural ideologies, which are only informed by economic/political configurations (e.g., feudalism, capitalism, socialism).

Another group of neo-Marxist thinkers known as the Frankfurt School theorists concerned themselves with understanding what they believed to be a set of constitutive relations among capitalism, epistemology, and politics. Although steeped in modernism, many Frankfurt School theorists were downright suspicious about the Enlightenment vision of an increasingly free and more democratic society through technical-instrumental rationality (i.e., science). In the words of Horkheimer and Adorno (1988), “in the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their authority. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disastrous triumph” (p. 3). The radical skepticism of the Frankfurt School did not so much mark a break with the Enlightenment or modernism project as an extension of it, which included a radical critique of the technical-instrumental rationality that had become so central to the project. Frankfurt School theorists were fundamentally concerned with interrogating why the presumed social progress of the project had resulted in “the fallen nature of modern man” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1988, p. xiv), and the goal of their work was to rescue and reanimate “the hopes of the past” (p. xv).

Frankfurt School theorists did not attempt to disrupt the subject-object dichotomy central to Enlightenment and modernist work, however. Indeed, they struggled to preserve the idea that individuals are both rational and free but wanted to demonstrate how these inalienable characteristics had become distorted and corrupted by what Adorno (1973, p. 5) called “identity logic.” Identity logic, according to Adorno, is radically subjectivistic and embodies the desperate human need to eliminate the distance...
between subject and object. It is rooted in the hubristic desire to know “things-in-themselves,” to experience first hand what is indexed by the notion of a “correspondence theory of truth.” The propensity for mastery and control, which is implicit in Adorno’s identity logic and which was central to the Enlightenment project’s notion of human freedom (and freedom from suffering), was viewed by Adorno and other neo-Marxists as the primary cause of the Enlightenment’s demise and the disintegration of a logic of verification within the logical positivist tradition. Although Adorno often “affirm[ed] the wildest utopian dreams of the Enlightenment project” (Bernstein, 1992, p. 43), he thought that equating human reason and technical-instrumental rationality would negate the possibility of a critique of ideology and critical self-reflexivity. In this regard, he saw lived experience and material reality as far richer and more complex than could ever be captured by human thought and language. To imagine otherwise, he believed, was wrongheaded and arrogant. Worse than this, he argued that such arrogance eclipsed people’s capacity for reflexivity and self-reflexivity in human thought and action.

The work of Frankfurt School scholar, Jürgen Habermas, perhaps went the furthest in laminating an emancipatory logic onto the basic modernist project. In his theory of communicative action, Habermas (1984, 1987) offered a critique of modernism, which shifted the locus of human agency from the Cartesian ego to the possibilities of dialogue inherent in language itself. Importantly, this shift entailed a concomitant shift in the locus of agency from the individual to the social. Finally, he rejected the technical-instrumental rationality of the Enlightenment without rejecting rationality itself, an issue we take up below.

Habermas’s (1984, 1987) theory of communicative action is both a theory of rationality and a theory of society. In this regard, he viewed rationality as a social, dialogic process with both political and ethical valences. According to this view, rationality is not a property of the transcendental ego or individual subject. Instead, it is produced within “ideal speech situations” wherein people engage in communicative acts that are free, unconstrained, dialogic, and therefore undistorted. Ideal speech situations are defined or constituted by four “validity claims.” Whatever speakers say must be...
(a) meaningful, (b) true, (c) justified, and (d) sincere. Truth is the goal or promise of this model, and it is defined in terms of agreement or consensus achieved through critical dialogue and debate. Rational consensus is determined on the basis of who offers the better argument with the most adequate evidence and warrants. Reasoned argumentation is thus the ultimate court of appeal.

Habermas’s insistence on the importance of the ideal speech situation was rooted in his ethical and political commitments. Because he believed that the colonizing forces of capitalism were rooted in technical-instrumental rationality, he rejected this form of rationality and posited two alternatives: (a) practical rationality and (b) emancipatory rationality. Practical rationality (or Habermas’s version of praxis) is the means by which people reach mutual understandings through unfettered dialogue. Emancipatory rationality is a mode of thinking/being that allows people to escape the lures of hegemony and oppression through self-reflection. By acknowledging the workings of these three forms of rationality in social life, Habermas was able to account for how language is a constitutive force both in generating shared understandings (and thus truth) and in the exercise of power and domination. Social movements such as second-wave feminism, the civil rights movement, and the ecology movement are good examples of how Habermas’s rational, emancipatory, de/recolonization project have been concretely realized in history. In our own field, one might argue that “whole language” pedagogies, Gravesian versions of the “writing process” pedagogies, and many incarnations of the “critical literacy” pedagogies are all grounded in Habermas’s practical and emancipatory forms of rationality, as well as how these pedagogies have been assaulted by hegemonic regimes rooted in and legitimated by technical-instrumental rationality.

The praxis turn

The general interest in practical reason or praxis has a long history in philosophy. Aristotle (e.g., Nichomachean Ethics, Book VI) contrasted poesis with praxis, arguing that poesis involves instrumental action that results in making or producing things whereas praxis involves action that results in acting or doing things with and for others that promote moral goodness and “the
good life.” Thus, praxis always has to do with what people do in relation to each other to enhance their respective lives. Aristotle also believed that, through these acts, people also promote the democratic goals of the state.

More generally, the term “praxis” has often been used to refer to the general process of linking theory and practice, knowledge and action to enhance the possibilities of communitas and to make the world a better place to live in for all people. For the most part, knowledge has remained the privileged term in this binary but practical knowledge and not knowledge for its own sake has been emphasized. Since the so-called crisis of representation in anthropology (e.g., Marcus & Fisher, 1986), praxis has often been used to refer to the practical and dialogic/reciprocal relationships that researchers may forge with research participants. Within these relationships, researchers have often imposed mandates on themselves to work with research participants to help them improve the conditions of their lives (e.g., Lather, 1991, 1997). Less common, but at least as important, is a political sense of praxis such as that developed by Gramsci (1971). This sense of praxis unites theory and practice in such a way that neither is subservient to the other. Researchers and research participants enter into reciprocal relationships wherein the common work experience has to be as much a venue for both intellectuals and workers to advance their points of view and interests. Reciprocal relationships must lead to the development of common goals, and these goals must in some ways express the transformative possibilities of a dialogic community.

**Chronotope IV: Power/Knowledge and Defamiliarization**

When most people think about “critical” qualitative research, they presume that it is always framed within postmodern and/or poststructural epistemologies and theories. Although we argued against this generalization in the previous section, critical qualitative research has been increasingly grounded in postmodern and poststructural perspectives. Because power/knowledge and defamiliarization are constructs that are central to these perspectives, we have used them to characterize the next chronotope we discuss. Partly because of its almost exclusive alignment with
postmodernism and poststructuralism rather than modernism and structuralism, this chronotope is partially discontinuous with the chronotope of skepticism, conscientization, and praxis.

**Power/knowledge and games of truth**

Perhaps the hallmark of postmodern and poststructural critical theorists is the extent to which they debunked modernist notions of knowledge, arguing that knowledge is always related to power. For example, they rejected Habermas’s (1984, 1987) dialogic/consensus model of knowledge made possible by the inherent potential of language to afford an “ideal speech situation.” Contra Habermas, Baudrillard (1983), Foucault (1977), Lyotard (1984), and others warned that consensus is a hopeless vestige of modernism that actually elicits complicity with totalizing regimes of knowledge and truth, and they set out to demonstrate the ways in which knowledge and power are co-constitutive. Foucault’s (1975, 1977, 1990) genealogies of madness/the asylum, criminality/the prison, and the discourses of sexuality, for example, showed how what is considered true or false is dependent on specific “games of truth” or “regimes of power” upon which the possibilities of making any and all knowledge claims depend. Different games of truth afford and allow different knowledge claims. For example, Foucault (1990) raised several doubts about the presumed “repressive hypothesis” of modern society beginning with the Victorian age:

First doubt: Is sexual repression truly an established historical fact? … Second doubt: Do the workings of power, and in particular those mechanisms that are brought into play in societies such as ours, really belong primarily to the category of repression? … Third and final doubt: Did the critical discourse that addresses itself to repression come to act as a roadblock to a power mechanism that had operated unchallenged up to that point, or is it not in fact part of the same historical network as the thing it denounces (and doubtless misrepresents) in calling it “repression”? [p. 10]

Foucault went on to claim that these doubts about the repressive hypothesis “are aimed less at showing it to be mistaken than at
putting it back within a general economy of discourses on sex in modern societies since the seventeenth century” (1990, p. 10). And he argued that this relocation ushers in new (and more important) questions about sexuality such as “Why has sexuality been so widely discussed, and what has been said about it? What were the effects of power generated by what was said? What are the links between these discourses, these effects of power, and the pleasures that were invested by them? What knowledge (savoir) was formed as a result of this linkage?” (p. 10).

The human subject

Besides reconceptualizing knowledge in relation to power, postmodern/poststructural critical theorists went much further than modernist critical theorists in decentering Enlightenment notions about the human subject and displacing the locus of rationality from the mind of this subject. For example, although Habermas (1984, 1987) rejected the idea of the Cartesian subject and argued for viewing rationality not as a possession of the individual subject but as a dialogic social process rooted in the potential for an “ideal speech situation” inherent in language, he still viewed subjectivity as coherent and progressive.

For postmodern/poststructural critical theorists, the subject is neither autonomous nor coherent nor teleological in nature. Instead, the subject is constructed within various “discursive systems” or “discourses” that normalize what it means to be a subject in the first place (Foucault, 1977, 1990). These discourses are not linguistic and textual alone but involve habituated and largely unconscious ways of thinking, talking, feeling, acting, and being. Discourses are practical “grids of specification” (Foucault, 1972, 1977, 1996) for classifying, categorizing, and diagramming the human subject in relation to the social. Discourses are forms of power that both literally and metaphorically inscribe/produce the individual and the collective social body. Indeed, the residue of such production processes litters our vocabulary: “the culturally literate citizen,” “the naturally literate child,” “the educated gentleman,” “the child author,” “the reader of romance,” “the functional illiterate,” and “the academically prepared student.” These classifications are almost always also classed, raced, and gendered.
Language

Although we have already touched on the views of language and discourse central to the chronotope of power/knowledge and defamiliarization, we want to return to this topic and to address it more explicitly. The roots of understanding language and discourse within this framework seem to lie in postmodern notions of deconstruction. Importantly, however, like Habermas’s communicative ethics, deconstruction never entirely escaped from the inherent dualism of transcendental philosophy or the foundational status of subjective experience. Again, Foucault offered some insights that allow us to address/redress these problems. So, we will outline the contours of deconstruction and then show how Foucault identified and responded to some of their inherent weaknesses.

Deconstruction decentered traditional notions of the relations between signs and their referents (e.g., Saussure’s signifiers and signifieds). Derrida (1976), for example, made the provocative claim that there is nothing outside of language (or semiotics more broadly conceived). Extending the “negative dialectics” of Adorno, he argued that we can never make the relation between the sign and its referent identical. In uncompromising terms, this claim brought into high relief the possibility that the referents of all signs and symbols, including those of natural language, are not objects in the world but other signs and symbols. Unmediated knowledge of the referents in themselves is a radical impossibility.

No particular signifier (sign) can ever be regarded as referring to any particular signified (referent). Baudrillard (1983) extended this idea further with his construct of the “simulacrum.” According to this construct, the sign is actually more real than the reality it represents. The real forever recapitulates the imagined. Postmodernity, Baudrillard argued, is “hyperreal.” We do not live in reality but “hyperreality” where everything is simulation and objects seduce subjects rather than subjects rationally choosing objects. What he meant here is that the boundary between the real and the imaginary has been dissolved. Reality is no longer a court of appeal for experience and knowledge. The “more real than real” has become existence itself. In an age of “hyperreality,” signs exert more power and influence over people than material reality, and reality itself is experienced as mysterious and illusionary to a large extent.
Defamiliarization

The construct of defamiliarization becomes important for exploring the tactics at the heart of conjunctural analysis, and for understanding the ways in which Chronotope IV reflects a sharp break from the other chronotopes, especially with regard to the nature and process of research, and the stances of researchers toward the “objects” of their research. In his efforts to imagine an ethnography for the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Clifford (1988) talked about a “hermeneutics of vulnerability,” which foregrounds the ruptures of fieldwork, the multiple and contradictory positionings of researchers and research participants, the imperfect control of the ethnographer, and the utility of self-reflexivity.

In one sense, self-reflexivity involves making transparent the rhetorical and poetic work of the ethnographer in representing the object of her or his study. In another perhaps more important sense, self-reflexivity refers to the efforts of researchers and research participants to engage in acts of defamiliarization in relation to each other. In this regard, Probyn (1993) discussed how fieldwork always seems to result in being “uneasy in one’s skin” and how this experience often engenders a virtual transformation of the identities of both researchers and research participants even as they are paradoxically engaged in the practice of consolidating them. This is important theoretically, because it allows for the possibility of constructing a mutual ground between researchers and research participants even while recognizing that the ground is unstable and fragile. Self-reflexivity as defamiliarization is also important because it encourages reflection on ethnography as the practice of both knowledge gathering and self-transformation through self-reflection and mutual reflection with the other. Importantly, these acts of defamiliarization can help people recognize the fragmentary, historically situated, partial, and unfinished nature of their “selves” and promote processes of self-construction/reconstruction in relation to new discourses and others.

Summary and Conclusions

The taxonomy we have used to organize our argument is not meant to be read as a taxonomy in the classic Aristotelian sense. Instead, it should be used as a heuristic device that helps move us
down the road in our thinking about the complex and nuanced ways in which particular epistemes, epistemologies, theories, and methods have coalesced in emergent ways to become “regimes of truth” that inform inquiry practices in powerful and pervasive ways. Importantly, we did not find these regimes of truth lying around in the basement of a philosophy department; we produced them. They are neither “real” in any universal sense nor are they mutually exclusive. Together, however, they constitute a useful continuum for thinking about how different articulations or assemblages of subjectivity, rationality, language, knowledge, and truth emerged historically, became durable chronotopes, and continue to affect in very powerful ways how qualitative inquiry is imagined and practiced within literacy studies, education, and the social sciences. Imagined as points positioned on a continuum, the chronotope of objectivism and representation embodies many traditional Enlightenment logics such as Descartes’s rational subject and a correspondence theory of truth, whereas the chronotope of power/knowledge and defamiliarization probably goes the furthest in disrupting these particular logics and replacing them with alternatives.

Translating these ideas to research practice, perhaps what is most important is to generate as good a fit as possible between research questions or objects of interest and where to locate oneself on this continuum of chronotopes. This requires deep reflection on the relations among various epistemologies, theories, approaches, and strategies. In some ways, each chronotope is uniquely valuable for pursuing some research projects more than others. But this is a bit of an overstatement. Seldom is a researcher ever really located within a single chronotope. Additionally, depending on their values and goals, two different researchers might choose to locate ostensibly the same research project within different chronotopes. For example, although Heath’s famous *Ways with Words* (1983)—the classic ethnography of reading across three communities in the Piedmont Carolinas—located itself quite firmly in Chronotope II, one could imagine locating similar work within Chronotopes III or IV. Indeed, certain critiques of Heath’s work have suggested that this might have been a good idea—that it should be less descriptive and more critical. Similarly, Luke’s
(1992) poststructural work on discipline and reading in Australian elementary schools could readily have been conducted within Chronotope II. Indeed, many more “neutral” interpretive accounts of read-alouds and story discussions have been written.

So where does this all leave us and our fellow qualitative researchers today? How might our philosophical and historical reflections inform the ways in which we imagine and enact research practices as we move through the twenty-first century? Many metaphors have recently been proposed to describe the possible futures of qualitative inquiry. Each is predicated on particular ontological and epistemological assumptions, and each calls attention to the complexities and difficulties of conducting research a globalized, fast-capitalist, media-saturated world. We conclude with brief descriptions of a subset of these metaphors.

Locating themselves primarily within Chronotope IV, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) famously call for qualitative researchers to be “bricoleurs,” mixing and matching the multiple logics and tools of qualitative inquiry in pragmatic and strategic ways to “get the job done,” whatever one imagines that job to be. The goal of research, according to this metaphor, is to produce “a complex, dense, reflexive collage-like creation that represents the researcher’s images, understandings, and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis” (p. 3).

Located more in Chronotopes I and II, Hammersly (1999) responded to this metaphorically informed call with another one rooted in more cautionary, pragmatic, neomodernist impulses. Briefly, he argues that qualitative researchers should imagine themselves not as bricoleurs but as “boatbuilders.” This metaphor derives from what is known as Neurath’s boat, named after the German sociologist Otto Neurath, who compared the work of scientists with the work of sailors who must often rebuild their ships at sea, never able to start from scratch and always aware that their reconstructions must result in a coherent whole that floats. Hammersly goes on to argue that producing collage and pentimento can never be a basis for good boat building and that the impulse toward “bricolage” threatens to “sink” the qualitative inquiry ship. “A central message that ought to be taken from Neurath’s metaphor,” Hammersly claims, “is that because we are always faced with the
task of rebuilding our craft at sea, everything cannot be questioned at once” (p. 581). He argues further that “those who want to be poets or political activists, or both, should not pretend that they can simultaneously be social researchers” (p. 583). Unabashedly modernist, Hammersly urges that we “develop a coherent sense of where we are going and of how we need to rebuild our vessel to sail in the right direction” (p. 579), which, among other things, will require thoroughgoing knowledge of where we have been.

A third metaphor, and the one that motivated many of our arguments in this chapter, is the “genealogist.” Thinking genealogically forces us to see disciplines as the ongoing work of invested actors, not as paradigms we must uncritically occupy. Traditionally, researchers have been encouraged to see research traditions and methods as immutable, with parameters that are defined a priori. Genealogists have no given lineages, but different histories at their disposal.

Using these histories, they attempt to understand how any “subject” (e.g., a person, a social formation, a social movement, an institution) has been constituted out of particular intersections of forces and systems of forces by mapping the complex, contingent, and often contradictory ways in which these forces and systems of force came together to produce the formation in the precise way that that it did and not some other way. From the perspective of genealogy,

[history becomes “effective” to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being—as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself. “Effective” history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting. [Foucault, 1981, p. 88]

Guided by this sense that knowledge is “for cutting,” we choose methodological directions strategically but with full knowledge that there no “safe spaces,” no alibis for our decisions. Although genealogists call into question naive realism
and the authority of experience, they also try to deploy such constructs in thoughtful and partial ways. Deleuze and Guattari (1987), for example, do not claim to rid the world of binaries but to create new ones that are more productive for achieving democratic ideals. Genealogists realize that they need to appropriate extant epistemologies theories, approaches, and strategies to do their work, but they are aware that there are no “pure” choices, no guarantees about what these appropriations will produce or how they will produce it. To understand such outcomes requires intense retrospective analysis, constantly looking back and trying to understand how our accounts were constructed in the ways they were and not in other ways.

In closing, we want to underscore that we have presented these three metaphors because we believe that all of them (as well as others we might have discussed) are powerful and productive for thinking about the central topic of this book—the logics of qualitative inquiry—past, present, and future. These metaphors index tensions that have always existed in the field of qualitative inquiry and will probably always exist. Together, they map the many imperatives and impulses that we, as qualitative researchers, must struggle with in our daily work, especially with respect to locating ourselves strategically within and across chronotopes and creating epistemology-theory-approach-strategy assemblages that are both principled and pragmatic.

References


