

Chapter 7. Circulating Agency and Emergent Identities

In Chapter 6, I outlined some issues with transfer, as well as some roots in transfer research that may be productively explored through the totality. Further research into the cases of May and Lilly uncovered a concept that emerged through the examination of a wider span of time and lifeworlds—the circulation of agency—that was revealed in the tracing of the bracketing and stacking of individuated uses of practice for a next first time. In this chapter, I study the cases of two writers further along in their careers (and their lifespans) than May and Lilly. John and Tom are writers in their 30s and 40s, respectively, who were, at the time of my work with them, pursuing graduate degrees in creative writing at a university in the northeastern United States. My work with them through the totality of the literate experience confirmed the utility of looking toward agency and its circulation to understand the lived reality of literate action development, but also suggested an additional concept: identity. Below, I articulate an ethnomethodological position on identity, which I then orient toward the issue of literate action development. I then draw on that refined position to make sense of identity in my studies with Tom and John.

Finding Agents for our Agency: Ethnomethodological Perspectives on Identity

Understanding the ongoing recirculation of agency through the studies of May and Lilly in Chapter 6 is related to an under-examined aspect of the emerging understanding of the lived reality in this text: identity. A significant amount of attention has been focused on how people use practices to make sense to themselves and others about what they are doing, but the ways in which this work is transformed into who they are becoming—that is, how identities form and reform as a result of that work—has remained unaddressed. While this aspect of literate action development has remained occluded in the cases so far, part of the reason for this occlusion may be the roots of this text in ethnomethodological study, which traditionally eschews issues of identity and selfhood.

Identity is caught up within the notion of *whole persons*, a concept that is pushed aside in ethnomethodological studies because of EM's focus on remaining a rigorously empirical enterprise. Whole persons cannot be seen acting in a given social situation: they are, for ethnomethodologists, as fictitious as whole corporations. One is unable, in a given moment, to see either operating. When we see an individuated actor doing work in a social situation, we are seeing one aspect, one facet, of a complex social being—one, in fact, that is never finalizable, never able to be rendered “whole” in a way that would not leave out some unfinished aspect of the person-in-process.

Just like whole persons, identity is not finished, not finalizable, and difficult to discern in the ongoing production of social order as an ethnomethodological respecification in the traditional sense. That is, *perspicuous settings* may be found in which people discuss their identities, talk it into being, but tracing identity across settings becomes more challenging in less perspicuous circumstances. As the study of Tom and John shows in this chapter, however, identity is a powerful shaper of literate action. What is needed, then, is a conceptualization of identity that is situated within the ongoing production of social order, even if not as perspicuously available as a traditionally-respecified EM understanding would suggest.

Such a conceptualization of identity would have to be *practiced* into being, just as any other aspect of producing social order. An identity must be practiced into the ongoing production of social order if we are to have an understanding of identity at all. Through the study of Tom and John, below, I attend to the tactical work of identity construction and build, from that tactical action, an understanding of the role that identity comes to play in lifespan literate action development.

Tom and John, in their 40s and 30s respectively, are creative writers in an MA program in northern New England at the time of the study. Both of these writers have been involved in a range of writing situations, from stand-up comedy in Las Vegas (John) to submarine maintenance in the U.S. Navy (Tom). Both of these writers also engaged in extensive notebook writing practices across the bulk of these writing experiences. The transformations of these notebook writing practices over time reveal not only the complex lifeworlds that Tom and John are part of but the ways in which their identities as writers have transformed in their interactions with and through that complexity.

The focus of the interviews—with the exception of John's first interview—were focused on these writers' notebook writing practices. John's interviews were caught up within a separate study of his development as a teaching assistant (Dippre, 2016). My first interview with John, a literacy history interview based on Brandt's (2001) methodology, was part of that initial study. Interviews 2 and 3 emerged from John's growing interest in talking about his writing process. Below, I identify the traces of identity work that emerged from my study of their literate action.

Submarines and Short Stories: Tom's Notebook Writing

Tom's notebook writing has a history that stretches back to his youth in northern New England. Tom always envisioned himself as someone who would become a writer, but struggled to take on that label for himself:

My father's a minister. And for some reason, whether it was the type of school I grew up in, or that my father was constantly writing, I always assumed I would be a writer of some sort. When I was younger, I had this idea that I needed to get older

before anyone would take me seriously as a writer. So I did attempt occasionally to keep journals. I was really bad at it. It's humorous to look back on.

Tom's initial sense of identity might be as a *potential future writer* in his younger years: he sees himself, looking back on his life, as having prepared for the work of being a writer in halting, uncertain ways. This halting development as a writer was caught up in conflicting circumstances that led him away from college and into the U.S. Navy after his freshman year.

I went to school for theology and English initially, switched it to English once I got there. I lasted one year in college the first time, when I was eighteen. So I joined the navy. I dropped out of college because my parents didn't have that much money. And they were taking out loans, and I was taking out loans, and I didn't see that college was doing anything for me that was worth the cost of that much debt. So I joined the navy as a sort of job training. I was assuming that I'd get some sort of, that whatever I did in the navy would be the equivalent of a college degree, which it did turn out to be for life.

Tom's movement from college to the U.S. Navy seemed, on the surface, to impact his work as a writer. But as our interviews unfolded, we discovered that Tom actually wrote regularly during his time in the service, and the notebook writing that he did, though adapted to life aboard a submarine, continued a complex set of practices that would eventually carry him into an MA program with a focus in creative writing. Tom notes of his time in the Navy that

It turns out that I still wrote, looking back on it I still wrote all the time. I just didn't ever think of it, I never thought of myself as a writer until much later. I'm still hazy about the term. It's a term that has some baggage for me. I'm not sure why.

Despite Tom's struggles to identify himself as a writer, he found himself regularly engaged in writing in various kinds of notebooks for various purposes. These writing experiences spanned both space and purpose: Tom wrote in submarines, in the business world, and in school; for his own entertainment, to track budgets in his family, and for to keep track of ideas. Below, I focus in particular on the ways in which Tom goes about using lists over time in order to understand how his literate action develops.

Framing Ongoing, Joint Action

The earliest records of Tom's list-keeping in the Navy—he had a notebook that he kept before entering boot camp that he would later return to, but personal items

were not allowed during basic training—can be found in his notebooks for his advanced coursework, what he referred to as “A School” (Figure 7.1). Here, Tom’s lists are shaped by the curriculum of the coursework that he is involved in. Tom notes that this tightly focused writing—both the lists in Figure 7.1 and the subsequent writing for the rest of his volume—are not typical of the work that he will later do. He notes that this is “the most professional thing I’ve ever done,” as he sees his later notes as deeply laminated⁷ with other aspects of his life that these notes don’t take up.

Tom’s initial work in A School is seen by him, in retrospect, as professional in a way that his later writing fails to take up. Applying the *ongoing, joint action* framing to Tom’s work suggests that this difference is not the result of past discipline or a future laziness, but a production of social order through which past practices were not rendered scenically available in the then-existing configurations of talk, tools, and texts. ‘A School,’ a specialist training school that follows on the heels of basic training, continued the work of separating Tom from previous practice use. The combination of past notebook writing practices being scenically unavailable and the present work of A School as tightly restricted according to the demands of the Navy.

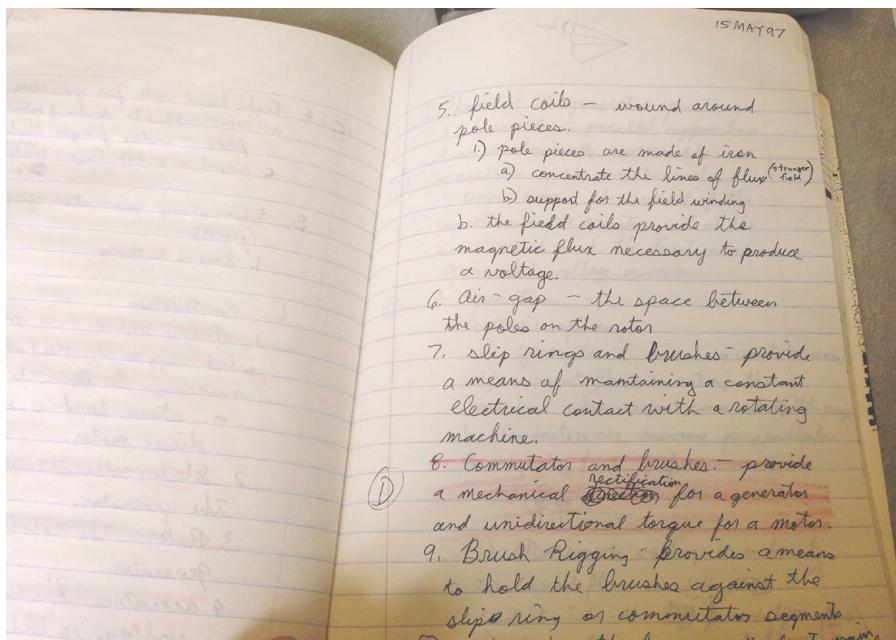


Figure 7.1. Tom’s A School notes.

7. Tom actually used the word “laminated” several times in our discussion, a reference to Prior and Shipka’s (2003) work, which Tom read as part of a methods course in his MA program.

In other words, like the note-writing of Lilly and May, Tom's notebook writing here is caught up within the ongoing production of order in a class, albeit a different kind of class. Tom's A School notebooks are almost strictly shaped by the demands of A School—his participation in ongoing, joint order brackets his past practices. But in the work that follows those classes—his work on submarines, for instance, and his eventual move to the private workforce and then, eventually, graduate work—we can see him begin to integrate his professional writing with practices of participating in the ongoing, joint order of other lifeworlds.

Framing the Individuated Actor

The initial notes of Tom from his early work in the Navy gives way, in his later notebooks, to a range of other lists. His notebooks—even those that he carries with him in his tours on submarines—carry within their pages lists of movies, of activities, of budget items, and—of course—of various tasks for work. Figure 7.2 is a particularly clear example of the ways in which Tom's lists come to be laminated with a variety of purposes within the space of the same page. As of the writing included in Figure 7.2, Tom has come to see the list as an important practice, a mechanism of ongoing uncertainty reduction. Tom uses lists to keep track of movies and jokes he wants to remember when he is ashore, and to keep track of his tasks when he is on a shift.

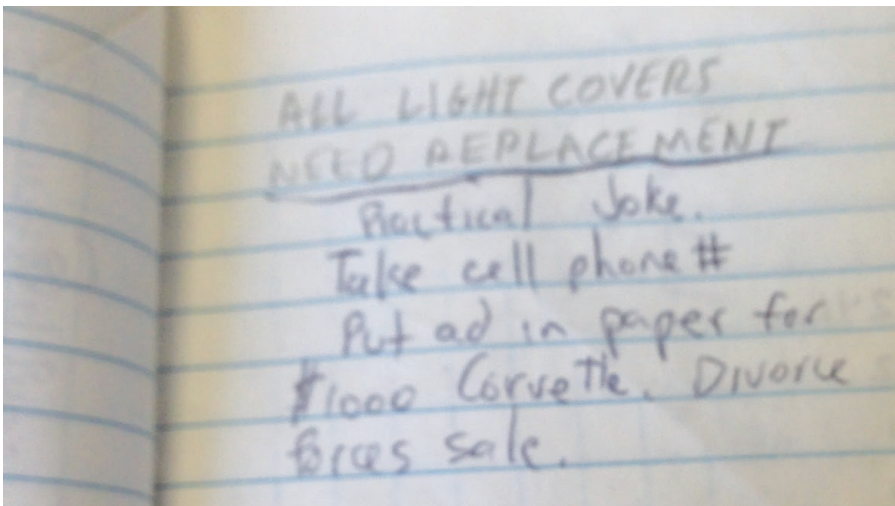


Figure 7.2. The co-presence of Tom's lists.

In his later work, however, Tom sees cause to repurpose the act of lists in his movement to the computer. The writing in Figure 7.3 occurs after Tom has completed his work in the Navy and has moved on to graduate school. Tom describes the lists that he developed in his older notebook writing as having migrated from

the space of a handwritten notebook to the Notes feature that Macbooks offer. This shift emerges out of the demands of his new circumstances: the lists that Tom composes are not merely for his own entertainment, but for the work of developing stories that will later come to compose his MA thesis. In one of his interviews, Tom registers surprise that he was continuing to use such a durable practice: "... that's actually the same exact thing I used to do, but I'm just doing it online now, I just never connected the two."

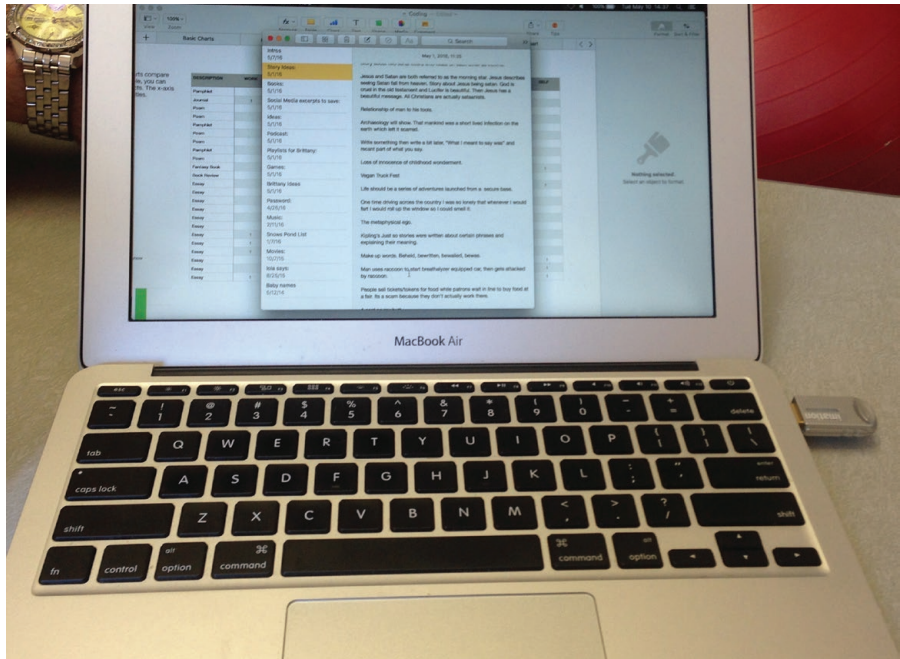


Figure 7.3. Tom's Macbook notes.

Much like Lilly in Chapter 6, Tom sees an increased uncertainty when bringing existing practices to bear on a particular problem. By bringing his practice of listing items to his electronic notes, Tom now has easy access to his ideas for writing, and can more effectively draw on those when in the space of composing stories for his MA thesis. The sometimes-nebulous nature of writing a master's thesis has now been rendered at least partly familiar, transformed from information into another instance of *What-Comes-Next*.

Framing the Scenic Work of Uncertainty Reduction

Tom's work to transform his practice of listing into this MA thesis can be materially traced across several mechanisms, each of which made the task of writing his thesis somewhat less cumbersome. Though Tom's transformation of his practice began with the realization of possibilities in a notebook and ended with the

realization of possibilities in a Notes function of a Macbook, Tom's recognition of new possibilities in the object of the laptop involved at least one intermediary: the iPod.

While in graduate school, Tom bought an iPod for himself, one that had a WiFi connection and a Notes feature on it as well. It was here that Tom recognized new possibilities for action in the iPod. The iPod, much like the notes that Tom had and very *unlike* the laptop he would later turn to, could be carried in his pocket: it was an unobtrusive addition to his life that he could turn to with similar ease to his notebook. In other words, the addition of the iPod provided Tom with essentially the same arrays of possibilities for writing lists as his notebook did.

The realization of the "sync" function on his iPod, however, kickstarted a more dramatic set of transformations in the array of possibilities that Tom recognized in the objects through which lists were developed. The ability that Tom had to make the notes on his iPod available on his Macbook eased the work of moving from lists of notes into the short stories that would constitute his MA thesis. This greater ease was somewhat hampered later by a failure of the syncing app that Apple offers, but by then Tom had begun to enter his notes directly onto his laptop. By rearranging the materials through which Tom made his lists, he was able to more fluidly move from his lists to his story writing, and thus render the uncertainty of his production of thesis writing more manageable.

Concept in Use: The Circulation of Agency

The work of Tom to move from his notebook lists to his laptop lists signaled a transformation of his literate action and, it seems, an enduring one—or at least one that endured across the entirety of the thesis. In the previous chapter, however, we saw that the reduction of uncertainty is not the final step in understanding the totality. As writers move from one moment to the next, from one situation to the next, researchers need to understand *how* that which is scenically available in a moment comes to be there. How, in other words, are literate actors able to circulate agency back to themselves from one moment to the next? Tom has certainly stacked his literate practices in productive ways, moving with effectiveness from the production of social order through notebook writing to the production of social order through note-writing on his laptop. But how was Tom able to make this transition possible? How does Tom possess the agency to make this move, the ability to bring a particular concatenation of talk, tools, and texts to bear in the production of his short stories?

Locating Tom's agency best starts, as we saw in Chapter 6, not in a particular object or moment but in an ongoing circulation of objects from one moment to the next. If we think back to the initial lists in Tom's notebook during A School, we see Tom initially following the work of his classes. But as time goes on, the work that he has to do—for his advanced training, for his work on submarines, for his undergraduate work—become saturated with other aspects of different

lifeworlds: movies he wants to see, quotes he wants to remember, plans for the future, traces of the past. Tom's work to splice together the notebook practice of writing lists enables him to envision his work of listing in his notebook as flexible, as multiply effective. When the time comes to write a thesis, then, he turns to the practice that he sees as beneficial to this thinking, as an ongoing accompaniment to his consistent production of social order over a twenty-year span: list writing.

As Tom moves from one instance to the next, as he finds himself no longer writing lists for himself but working through the challenges of composing an MA thesis, he envisions the chapters of his thesis not as components of a larger whole but as a list: a table of contents that needs to be articulated. The list, which is a natural space for the lamination of multiple lifeworlds, provides Tom with the flexibility to identify creative ideas that will lead to interesting short stories and, by extension, thesis chapters. Tom brings the idea of the list forward as he is working through the challenge of turning the nebulousness of the thesis into something that he values, something that he can have authorship over. By bringing the list to bear, by reducing the uncertainty of the thesis, Tom gains agency over the authorship of the thesis, is able to develop a sense of what it looks like, and the work that needs to get done in order to make that vision real.

It should be noted that not all attempts to circulate agency back toward himself were successful. For instance, when Tom returned to his Navy notebooks after leaving the service, he ran across parts of jokes that, at the time, he had hoped to remember. Present-day Tom, however, was unable to recall the whole joke for most of them, and had to turn to his fellow veterans on Facebook to see if some of the gaps could be filled in (not all were). This degradation of a move to circulate agency back to oneself through literate action poses an interesting complication in how agency is and can be effectively circulated over time, particularly long stretches of time.

Overall, however, from one moment to the next, Tom draws on the list in order to keep writing—and, by extension, social order—going. When he reaches the work of his MA thesis, Tom once again draws on the list, this time to both reduce the uncertainty of writing a thesis and have an agentive stake in the construction of that document. This circulation of agency toward a particular product can be productively complicated with the work of John, below, as he draws on his notes to circulate agency back toward himself across a range of lifeworld interactions.

Manual Labor and Creative Writing: John's Notebook

John, like Tom, was a graduate student in a creative writing MA program in northern New England when I met him. John was a middle child in a household that had two parents with advanced degrees, as well as other relatives who were writing regularly for work in PR firms and publishing houses. John is very aware of the idiosyncratic path toward the identity of a writer that he has crafted

throughout his life. His early life was split between an interest in athletics and an interest in academics. He grew up in what he describes as “affluent suburbs. Not outrageously so, but I was fortunate.” Remarking that, when you are young, “it’s important who you can bike to,” John noted that all of his friends growing up were extremely interested in athletics. While John was also interested in athletics, he describes himself as “definitely the kid who brought a book to the sleepover, and got ripped on.” Even with such an early interest in reading, and the literate acts he was frequently exposed to, John does not mark the start of his life as a writer until age nineteen, when he “got up one night and started writing a book.” Describing it as a “crime novel” that was “a mash of what I’d been reading for fun mixed in with some of the more bizarre things I’d been learning for school,” John seems to sense a change in his literate life from that moment on: “ever since then, I worked on writing.”

John finished his BA in philosophy with a history minor at a university in New England, and immediately turned to what he terms manual labor—painting houses, working for moving companies, etc.—for his primary income while working on writing in his spare time. Both his writing and his manual labor have their origins in his college life, with John painting houses in the summer while taking a creative writing class in his sophomore year.

Manual labor is an important part of John’s life. He spent six years working full time because “that was dignified in a way that I couldn’t give up.” He saw it as something that he “wanted to be able to do” and that he would be “really in trouble if I didn’t understand this world” of social action that was very different from what he would encounter in the white-collar world. John’s work to make manual labor and writing integral parts of his life are made visible through his notebook writing practices, as well as the various transformations that his literate action around and through those practices go through. In particular, I identify the genesis of his practice of writing down definitions of words in a notebook and trace it through a range of iterations over time. Through this practice, John is able to carry new words into future writing for another first time and, in doing so, further develops his writing career while simultaneously embracing manual labor in other parts of his life.

Framing Ongoing, Joint Action

When John was in college and majoring in philosophy, he found himself discussing the *Nicomachean Ethics* in a class about Aristotle. His professor used a word—“stochastic”—that he had not heard before. Even though he had never come across it before, John was struck by the fact that it seemed to be something he *should* know, and so he wrote it down with the intention of looking it up later.

In this moment, John was participating in the social construction of order in the classroom. Though no record of it exists, the position of his body in space, the movements of his hand over the page, and—perhaps most of all—the

way in which he let pass the mention of a word that he did not know enabled the class to continue to understand both what was going on (class) and what to do next (continue the discussion of *Nicomachean Ethics*). Much like May's fidget-writing, or Lilly's note-taking, John's scrawling of a word that he wanted to look up later did two things: it perpetuated ongoing, joint action in the moment and created an object that could be incorporated in to the later production of social action.

Framing the Individuated Actor

The word “stochastic” followed John out of the classroom quite literally, on the slip of paper that he wrote it on. This word was quickly followed by others, which he dutifully wrote down when he stumbled across and would later define in a handwritten record of words that he kept in a binder (Figure 7.4). The work of the class becomes individuated in the future production of social order by John when he chases down the words that he wishes to learn more about.

We can locate John, as an individuated actor, in his development of this particular practice of literate action. John's adumbrated participation in a particular class meeting or the reading of a particular text leads to the presence of information in the normal flow of *What-Comes-Next* through a word that John cannot make sense of. Drawing on his practice of defining words that he doesn't understand through the integrated work of note-card writing and binder use, John is able to reduce information into a manageable instance of *What-Comes-Next* and, by extension, keep writing going.

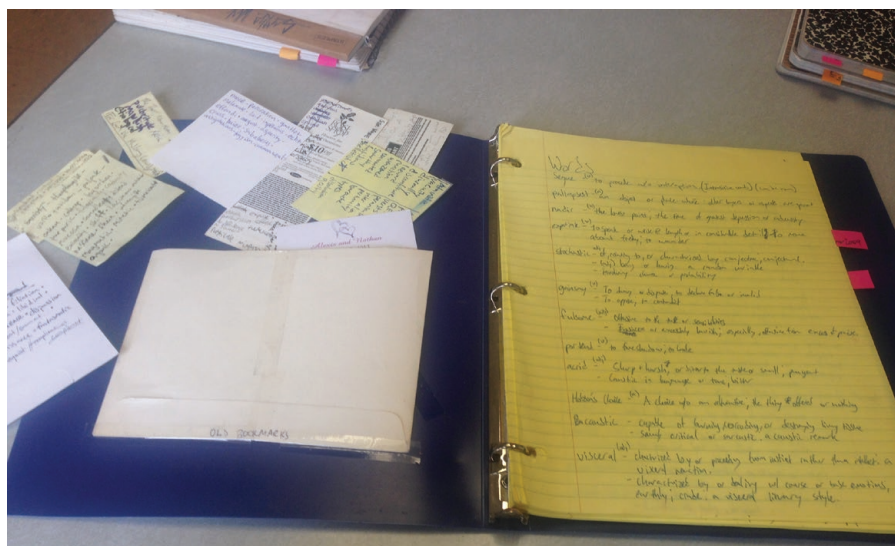


Figure 7.4. John's binder of definitions.

John's process developed over time, from just generating individual definitions to a system that allowed John to write down interesting words on notecards, then later define them more fully in his notebook. When John enrolls in graduate school, his professional life begins to change. The manual labor recedes into the background, and the bulk of the working day is taken up by writing and writing-related tasks. This transforms the social action that John's definition work co-constructs, and John finds himself doing some of that work on a computer. However, since John "almost always keep[s] a paper journal," the notecard-to-handwritten-definition process remains largely intact. Instead of bringing his binder with him wherever he goes to do work, John keeps the binder at his office desk, where definitions of new words can be managed.

Framing the Scenic Work of Uncertainty Reduction

John's system of definitions serves, for him, as a way of offloading some of the challenges of reading academic work. "It's become familiar to me," says John. "It allows me to keep reading if I don't know a word, because I know I will." John's acts to *keep reading going* through words he has not encountered before are made scenically visible by the presence of the binder of words he has. Because of this binder, "rare is the word that will stop me in the middle of a short story."

John's binder—and the notecards in it—co-construct a space for deep engagement with texts in his office. While leaving the binder in his office does not prevent John from reading and writing in other places, the presence of John's binder creates opportunities for engaging with text that he cannot find elsewhere. In other words, the texts that John reads are recognized as having new possibilities in them because of the situated work of a net of objects at John's desk—including John himself. John's past practice of writing definitions is made materially present by the definitions already in the binder, and the blank notecards and pages make materially available the investigation of new words in John's continued work of reading.

Concept In Use: The Circulation of Agency

John's work to define new words over time has transformed into an object that pulls him into positions of agency in future acts of reading. John can keep reading after jotting down a note on a notecard to define a word later or, if he needs to, he can stop what he is doing and begin writing up a definition. "If there's a word I know I want to get," he says, "I'll find it quickly." Any given re-use of the system is responsive to the demands of the reading. Referring to his readings for a Writing Studies graduate course, John notes that "I would look up words as I went. It would prevent me from getting through if I didn't know *heteroglossia*, for instance." John's definition-writing activity did not just allow him to reduce uncertainty in a given moment of keeping writing going: it gave him a flexible

practice that could be pulled—via the notebook that he kept his definitions in—into a range of reading situations that would give him agency over how he took up developing an understanding of new words. John’s definition-writing also supports his shifts into and out of the manual work he relishes in a very material way. When John enters his office, he can construct a space for engaging with texts—those he is reading, and those he is writing—that calls forward the material remnants of similar situations in the past, so that he can carry on the serial production of local social order with and through literate action. This same “calling forward” of past situations also allows him to bracket the work required of him when, say, painting houses.

John’s practice of defining new words over time also shows us the possibility that attempts to circulate agency back to oneself can fail. Though John conscientiously attends to his definitions, he occasionally forgets the definitions of words, or remains unsure how to pronounce them. Sometimes, John will write down the definition of a word only to realize that he has already included it in his binder. Such moments of disruption in the work of this practice offers John opportunities to revise that practice, but so far John has seen his work of defining words as effective enough to continue doing.

Dimensionalizing Agency Circulation: Extensions and Complications

The broader spans of time that Tom and John’s literate practices offer show a few extensions and complications of how agency might be circulated. In Chapter 6, I defined “circulating agency” as the ways in which objects are imparted with particular possibilities of use by individuated actors and then rendered scenically available in future situations of co-configured talk, tools, and texts. For May and Lilly, this meant the ways in which note-taking practices were rendered available—or deliberately rendered unavailable—in the work of co-constructing the social order of the classroom, the dorm conversation, or the field hockey film session. Tom and John’s enactment of notebook practices across a wider span of years—over twenty for Tom, and over ten for John—unveils more of the challenges of circulating agency back to oneself in the serial production of local social order. When Tom is making lists on a submarine, for instance, the lists allow him to, eventually, have the capacity to act toward finding movies he is interested in watching when on shore leave. But across longer stretches of time, his notebook practice degrades in its effectiveness—consider, for instance, his inability to remember the partial jokes he has listed.

John similarly signals some degradation in his notebook practice when he finds himself unable to remember words he defined, or writing them down more than once. In these instances, the uncertainty of *What-Comes-Next*, though reduced in the moment of the initial use of the notebook practice, is

elevated in an unexpected manner in a later instance. Such instances trigger further work of uncertainty reduction. For John, this means returning to his definitions. For Tom, this means reaching out to fellow veterans to find more information on the jokes. In each of these instances, the failure of a practice to make scenically available particular possibilities in an array of objects triggers new literate action, new opportunities to circulate agency to oneself in a future moment of literate action.

The complications of John and Tom's literate practices over a longer period of time suggest that bracketing and stacking—that is, the work of circulating agency to oneself through the use of practices—is not entirely within the control of the individuated actors under study. There are opportunities for complication that can disrupt a given instantiation of a practice and, in doing so, perhaps provide an opportunity for further literate action development by transforming such a practice. The details of the potential barriers to agency circulation are a worthwhile problem for further research to examine. What is it that interferes problematically with taking up objects that are circulated back to oneself for action? How might researchers best characterize the break in that circulation so that the hiccups, detours, and challenges to literate action development might be further understood? In the next chapter, I draw on case studies of two older writers to enrich our understanding of these boundaries.

Bracketing and Stacking Toward Identity (Re)Construction

Tracing the agential work of Tom and John, and their various stacking and bracketing of practices as they transformed their notebook writing over time, suggests that the logic-in-use of the totality may be ready to uncover another productive concept. As both Tom and John developed their literate action through notebook writing, their agency circulated back to them again and again through the objects that they co-constructed and came to, eventually, recognize new possibilities in. The work of agency circulation, however, brought with it some language suggesting that both actors were doing more than simply circulating agency back to themselves. In the process, they seemed to be working out, in some broad sense, who they were—that is, in the moment of literate action they are recounting—and its relationship to who they were during the course of the interview.

Tom provides particularly clear insights into this kind of serial work of identity construction—or, more accurately, (re)construction. He notes his lifelong movement toward an identity as a writer, even if he is uncomfortable, as of our interviews, with calling himself that. Tom's surprise with seeing the continued return of particular practices across a range of media suggest a transformed understanding of on several occasions a sense of embarrassment when looking back on some of his older writing, noting that "I'm not the same person" as he was when particular moments of writing happened. This suggests a shift in how Tom identifies himself over time, and suggests further that within the circulation of

agency, a kind of identity work is going on that is also caught up in the ongoing work of producing social order.

John's work on developing a sense of identity throughout his writing experiences are more subtle, but nonetheless present. Note the ways in which John draws on his definition writing (via the material presence of the binder) to create concrete situations for performing literate action that may render the shift from manual labor to graduate study more smooth. Tom's growing sense of identity shaped not only his sense of a future audience, but also the ways in which he goes about stacking and bracketing his practices. While an MA student, John takes on summer work painting houses, bringing in his past practice of working in the day and returning to his writing afterward (to quote John: "If you paint [houses] all day, you're ready for some Deleuze"). The way that his writing and his own split between academia and manual labor interact suggest an interesting role of identity construction in the ongoing circulation of agency. John's work to develop his definition-writing notebook materially supports this: he has built situations through which he can continue to engage in reading or discussion through a word he does not know while, at the same time, creating opportunities to further his relationship with and work through these unknown words. Furthermore, these opportunities allow him to more effectively move into the material work of reading and writing after a period of manual work has prepared him for a change of pace.

Tom and John's work, then, seem to expand the consequentiality of the practice bracketing and stacking that May and Lilly were engaged in. It would seem that such work does more than circulate agency: it also provides a mechanism for identity construction—or, in the sense of everything happening for "another first time," perhaps (re)construction is a better way to make sense of that identity work. Just as agency and its circulation proved a valuable concept for making sense of the ways in which May and Lilly stacked and bracketed their practices, identity (re)construction offers a productive concept for seeing how individuated actors come to construct presentations of themselves in patterned ways over time, and how those patterns change.

Examining identity (re)construction means attending to the ways in which actors situate themselves in relation to both texts and the production of texts. For Tom and John, this means locating their sense of selves in relation to the notebook writing they decide to share. Of course, because of the nature of the interviews and their structure, what we see of identity (re)construction is always partial—that is, we only have at our disposal the writing that the actors chose to bring with them, as John and Tom did. But even in such necessarily partial records, acts of identity (re)construction can be identified, traced, and situated in relation to one another. In the next chapter, I draw on a study of writers in their 60s and 80s to increase the robustness of this concept, as well as agency, for understanding literate action development through the lifespan.