Cultivating Discontinuity: Pentecostal Pedagogies of Yielding and Control

JOSH BRAHINSKY
University of California, Santa Cruz

Exploring missionary study at an Assemblies of God Bible college through ethnography and training manuals demonstrates systematic pedagogies that cultivate sensory capabilities encouraging yielding, opening to rupture, and constraint. Ritual theory and the Anthropology of Christianity shift analytic scales to include “cultivation,” a “third term” enabling simultaneous apprehension and consolidating of the oppositions (experience–doctrine, revival–church, or spontaneous rupture–restrained continuity) internal and central to Pentecostalism. Further, cultivation complicates valorizations of the disjunctive “event” as militant radical icon.

The Nudge: Reed’s Story

Here is the spooky part . . . 5 am, driving with the missions team to the airport—4 team members, me and my wife. Get a call, flights are cancelled, we pray and are booked on a better flight. First obstacle fixed. Halfway through the jetway I get yelled at. “Come back. We don’t have you on this flight.” The rest of team is already on. I tell ’em we are a team, we will meet in a little town in Romania and I need to be with them, I’ve never done this before. The guy at the counter looks up. He says “Trust me.” Then [two more times] “Trust me.” Well, he books us up to first class. I am a big guy, not so comfortable in small seats. Now, I am giddy but looking around, nobody is smiling—where is all the comfort and happiness? I open up to thanking God for getting me there in comfort to do his work.

[In a Romanian church]
Something tells me to lay my hand on this little lady. It is a cold snowy day, even in church we are wearing jackets. I am praying with my hand over her. It is like something pours oil from the top of my head and my whole body warms up from the top down. Not to the sweat but just a warm feeling. The pastor is speaking in tongues. Romanians around me are speaking in tongues. I had heard it before but never had it interpreted or understood it. Then there was a clarity. To me they were speaking plain English, the Romanian over here was speaking plain English. I was like, “whoah that’s bizarre.”

The lady turns around and just openly starts weeping. I’m like, “great what have I done now? Who have I offended?” Well come to find out, she is speaking of a vision that she has had for the past six months. Dreaming of someone with my face, my build. You know, big guy, goatee, bald, the whole thing. She even drew pictures, and the pictures looked like me. I have a sword in one hand and with the other I am pulling young people up into heaven. It was a powerful thing but I still have the hesitancy, the skepticism. “OK who is the weird Romanian lady speaking this stuff to me.” I go to the pastor who organized the conference. “Do you know her? Does she speak prophecies a lot?” He says yeah, shuffles some papers around. Has this quizzical look about him. “She is usually right. What did she say?” That’s when it kind of hit me full force. The shock of the tongues and then the prophecy was like domino effect. It was a big thing. Something is telling me you can do more with your life serving God than serving chemicals. I had the gentle nudge . . . . Came back, resigned from the company, went back to school [for ministry], I am loving it. Took a youth program from 2 to 40 kids. It’s like a fire that’s contagious. It’s not like I need real training. I just have a heart.1

* * *

Reed’s story—sublime, sincere, and compelling in its insistence upon spontaneity—exemplifies Pentecostal testimony. Without challenging his sense of the tale’s veracity, we can see it map onto multiple other narratives aimed at energizing evangelism. The parallels are striking: the supernatural permeating the mundane and verified by physicality, the...
shock of the “event” or rupture that reconfigures the self, and the reference to a contagion that can’t be taught. These all invite us into Reed’s world, where these testimonies emerge from, circulate through, and consolidate into broad sensibilities, training manuals, doctrine, and denomination. While such narrative predictability might build from sweeping cultural forces, or perhaps Pentecostals simply tell these stories often enough to produce a consensus, I argue that centralized planning and careful propagation of the Pentecostal culture offer an unusually distinct project of worldmaking: the cultivation of discontinuity. I describe a carefully directed pedagogy, “culturally taught, socially expected, and deliberately deployed” (Csordas 2011:146)—which, of course, has no bearing on its success in realizing a particular telos, or on its spiritual legitimacy. In fact, for Assemblies of God (AG) Pentecostals, the cultivating of sensory aptitudes becomes especially concrete via a textual tradition explicitly aimed at nurturing specific relationships in-between bodies, Bibles, and spiritual experience. As such, Reed’s tale likely materializes via these pedagogies that teach the means to realize an experience as well as patterns for understanding, containing, and relating it. They invite a ruptural practice cultivated as spontaneous that bounds and grows Pentecostal communities.

By detailing the extensive cultivation rendering practitioners capable of speaking in tongues and experiencing spiritual rupture, this article joins anthropologists intervening in a literature where the success of Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and other social movements and cultures emerges either from continuity, rupture, or some version of their interplay. More recent works refigure and more deeply enmesh these binaries (Bialecki 2006; Kirsch 2008; Elisha 2011; see Robbins 2004 and Bell 1992 for the big picture). The current ethnography offers tools to further thicken the relationships between church and revival as well as their persistence in the face of the other. Observing cultivation necessarily shifts scales from explorations of rupture or continuity to the reciprocal relations by which rupture and continuity coproduce each other. Like moving from particle to field and then quantum physics, differing scales offer unique lessons (Gleick 1987; Wiens 1989; Sayre 2005). Most simply, few have noticed that nurturing a capacity for yielding toward rupture can involve forming almost-doctrinal training texts, narratives, as well as embodied skill sets. These texts and practices sit literally between church and revival, and can inspire in either direction. Further, this in-between is the space for differentiating Pentecostals from their constitutive others (Bell 1992). As we will see, the boundary-making genealogy of dualistic legitimation among Pentecostals speaks to the staying power of these polarities. Finally, posing rupture against continuity has become central to contemporary debates over social movement mobilization. Cultivating discontinuity thus gives flesh for modeling the simultaneous, yet seemingly dissonant, coexistence of continuity and rupture, and exploring its implications for mobilizing communities.

For Pentecostals, cultivating sensations and sensory aptitudes is evangelism—a process of expanding and deepening participation in the church. Pentecostals were some of the most effective evangelists of the 20th century, growing from negligible numbers in 1900 to more than 500 million globally, including a 700% increase in the past 30 years. Pentecostals now comprise roughly two-thirds of all Protestants (Anderson et al. 2010:2). Essential to this growth, they developed a relatively coherent training project with extensive educational infrastructure. In particular, the Assemblies of God (AG), with their 60+ million members, built Bible colleges, of which they now run over 2,000, and developed a vast literature to support their pedagogy. This paper examines one of their training projects: Bethany University, the first Assemblies of God Bible college. An ethnography of Pentecostal missionaries in training along with a reading of recent AG training texts, reveals how AG prepares people for the missionary encounter. In particular, I examine the Pentecostal “sensorium,” or sensory culture (Ong 1991) for exercises that render people capable of rupture that legitimizes evangelism. This skill and subtlety in developing
pedagogies of persuasion (Mahmood 2005) takes collectively cultivated sensory experience, which often evokes spontaneous rupture as well as collective constraint, and joins it to a broader project of cross cultural communication and mobilization, thus forming a particular “structure of feeling” for evangelism (Williams 1977).

These pedagogies arouse fiery debates among Pentecostals as they aim to simultaneously invite and bound distinctive, and often ruptural, experience of “gifts of the Spirit,” including speaking in tongues and faith healing. They argue constantly over what makes devotional experience legitimate and spiritually mobilizing, and also how to nourish its prerequisite sensibilities and aptitudes. Training texts offer commentary on practice where Scripture is prime arbiter. They portray a sense of human agency in inducing and achieving spiritual experience and in keeping it within the bounds of acceptability. Yet—here is the rub—these texts are also deeply indebted to the proposition that most, if not all, mobilization lies in the hands of an all-powerful God. This tension between human and divine agency becomes especially important when it finds traction in the strained relationships between Pentecostals and the rest of the world. For example, among Pentecostals “yielded” prayer is often opposed to mechanical “ritual.” This article pivots on the entangled dynamic between cultivation, yielding, and control, exploring its ethnographic present and textual legitimation—working somewhere between policing, inspiring, and simply letting it all be. Picture the assiduous cultivation of a yielded sensibility, drained of intent, open to immediate transformation.

Recognizing simultaneous institutional constraint and spiritual expansion challenges narratives that rely on their incompatibility. For instance, in posing a common trajectory from vital sect to sleepy church, theorists of rationalization, or movement lifecycles, agree that churches—perhaps other movements too—tend to bureaucratize (Troeltsch 1931; Weber 1930; Wallace 1956). The increasingly stultifying weight of tradition slows development and expansion, and saps life from the project. Earlier generations of Pentecostals in the United States, for instance, described significantly more experience of the supernatural than today’s adherents (Poloma 1989). By contrast, instead of seeing rigidity as a problem, others see vitality in the subcultural sense of resistant otherness produced by a church with especially stringent doctrine (i.e., Kelley 1986).

Pentecostals however, do both continuity and event, structure and experience, pedagogy and spontaneity, solid and breaking, perhaps in sequence, perhaps simultaneously, but clearly in some linked entanglement. Infallible Bible readings provide a seemingly immobile ethical structure, while the search for immediate, personal connection to God justifies constant challenge to their own establishment; Poloma calls it “continuous charisma” (1989). This tension inspires religious uprisings as new experience pushes congealed structures but such that a solid core of the project reconstitutes in the aftermath or simply continues on. And they do regularly fragment. However, many groups appear to survive, and flourish, in the very Protestant storms they cultivate.

AG, for instance, emerged to institutionalize and contain one revival sequence while encouraging another. In 1914, AG called tongues and healing the only legitimate manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Later, successive internal revivals challenged, expanded, and renegotiated these initial boundaries. This process inspired a vernacular sensory tradition and a doctrinal counterpoint for discerning and inviting appropriate devotion. If you query Pentecostal certainty that God exists, many respond with supernatural narratives like Reed’s. Yet, digging deeper, the sensibilities that stabilize these accounts involve a vernacular of sensory-based certainty, a colloquial understanding that the body serves as core of critical theological affirmations (Brahinsky 2012). Simultaneously, questions of spiritual practice are contested through AG training texts as they struggle to both police and motivate devotion. It is an anxious, but vital space, stretched between control and release (c.f. Turner 1969; Elisha 2011; Pfeil 2011).
Inhabiting and cultivating these tensions may contribute to both the boundaries and the tremendous success of Pentecostal missions. On one hand, as with any musical instrument or dance, structured practice of bodily technique underpins improvisation. Perhaps the dynamic between cultivate, yield, and constrain is simply the basis for freedom (MacIntyre 2007)? Others might say that Pentecostals inhabiting this paradox lack coherence or display contradictory consciousness (Gramsci et al. 1971; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). I suggest that the cultivated interplay between concerted practice and discontinuous spontaneity to some degree gains its energy from struggles to refashion and distinguish the boundaries of the church and its members (Pfeil 2011). Early Christianity posed as spontaneous and genuine against the perceived limits of Jewish law. Today, born-again rupture and speaking in tongues differentiates Pentecostals, especially when performed publicly.

Recently, rupture became something of a cause célèbre among academics interested in left movement building. When post-1989 communism lost cogency as the “outside” to capitalism, a search for new radical-militant subjectivities began. Some framed the incredible force of Global Christianity—especially Pentecostalism—as reliant on radical discontinuity (Jenkins 2002; Robbins 2004). For some recent Continental philosophers, the Bible story of Paul’s revelation on the road to Damascus where he is suddenly born again became a paradigm of militant political radicalism (Agamben 2005; Badiou 2005; Žižek 2003; see also Robbins 2010; Bialecki 2009). Left-anarchist thinkers involved in the Occupy movement have closely engaged this analysis of political possibility (i.e., Ramsey 2012; Stein 2012). In response, this paper suggests a different vision of Christian movement building dependent upon neither continuity nor rupture, but cultivation.

As such, I query more closely the relationship between two seemingly opposite poles. How does cultivation link church and revival, continuity and rupture? That this concerted, intentive, and repetitive nurturing of a Pentecostal sensorium is read as spontaneous and as demolishing distinctions between the sacred and the profane stretches previous theorizations of ritual, perhaps to a breaking point. In response, I shift scales, moving away from the microdetails of rites, individual phenomenological alterity, or the debate between claims of continuity and rupture. Instead, I look at the very concrete day-to-day practices that make for much of the Pentecostal distinctive, and in doing so find a third process, neither church, nor revival, but the cultivation of their dialectical relationship (Bialecki 2006:154). Engaging other “third term” (Brahinsky 2012) efforts to obviate Cartesian dualistic hierarchies—phenomenological (Csordas 1994, 1997, 2004) and practice oriented (Bell 1992)—and building from recent anthropology of learning (Luhrmann 2004, 2012), I emphasize history, strategy, process, and collectivity. Rupture remains, as does continuity, with both gaining potency as “strategic essentialisms” (Spivak 1987) solidified via Pentecostal boundary making. This analysis challenges readings of discontinuity as the key to evangelical success and to political or cultural radicalism. In all, cultivating discontinuity reimagines Pentecostal practice as anxiously entangling continuity–rupture, thought–action, and individual–group polarities; it is a vibrant, tension filled site for mobilizing and bounding a community (c.f. Tambiah 1979; Ortner 1984; Kirsch 2008; Pfeil 2011).

Bethany University

Begun in 1919 as Glad Tidings Missionary School, by 2007 Bethany University, the oldest AG Bible college was small—roughly 500 students—and, like Bible colleges more generally, ignored in narratives of secularizing higher education. Yet, since the Scopes Trial, as focal points for a diffuse network of conferences, summer camps, radio stations, and journals, these colleges knit together nonliberal Christianity (Carpenter 1997). By 1966, Bethany added a liberal arts curriculum to their pastoral and missionary training.
Recently, however, they began reaching back for AG’s roots, its “DNA,” described as missions, worship, and a more concerted rejection of contemporary culture.

In early 2007 I contact a few Bethany faculty, am warmly welcomed into classes, introduced to administrators, and given full permission to explore by President Shelton. They clearly hope I will join them, but are also proud of their project and easily offer it up to the ethnographic eye. In three years visiting Bethany (2008–2011) I attend classes and chapel, hang out on the lawn, interview 70 students, many faculty and administrators, collect 150 online surveys of alumni, and read piles of missiology—missions theory—training texts taught at Bethany and other AG colleges. As some describe breakdance testimonials in missions to South Africa and others train to sing pop music for Jesus, I am told repeatedly that the Pentecostal spontaneous ruptural experience generates a kind of epistemological and cultural flexibility that encourages missionary success. I look here for hints as to how a small Pentecostal world might develop such far-reaching impact.

**Body Logics**

Pentecostal rupture manifests very clearly in the body. In a previous article, I explored transitions in the Pentecostal cultivation of their sensorium by tracing AG approaches to the body from early chaos to the institutionalization of a doctrine of tongues and healing, and then to more contemporary colloquial sensibilities in which most any sensation verifies the presence of an active God. When Bethany students describe certainty that God exists, most participate in a sensory vernacular, a form of everyday sensory intelligibility and communication that foregrounds physical sensation as confirmation, what I call a “body logic.” This physical authority emerges from a carefully cultivated sensory culture where sensate devotion marks spiritual growth (Brahinsky 2012; c.f Luhrmann 2004, 2012). The present article continues this exploration by focusing more explicitly on the contests that channel appropriate devotion and the training texts produced by AG that consolidate everyday debates into something with heft, continuity, and denominational authority, perhaps the next best thing to scripture, a Mishnah, or Sunna for “Gifts of the Spirit.”

For Bethany students, confidence in God’s presence comes in many forms, but for every story of personal survival, the incomprehensibility of evolution, or of natural beauty unsurpassed, several simply say “I felt him,” or something similar. One student explains,

> In the doctor’s chair, I thought I would die. Started praying the Lord’s Prayer and heard the words “Do you really mean it? Do you really mean what you are saying?” I said “Yes” immediately. Then I physically felt a warmth. Like somebody wrapped one of those hot blankets all around me.

And it permeates the mundane: “I walk around feeling that.” Some combine the sensory and the pragmatic, “I felt him inside. I heard him talk to me. I felt the warmth. I’ve seen a difference in my life.” Common-sense narratives evoke the physical as a pivot for God’s voice and for life change.

Yet, these are not simple reductions to the senses. Late in my third year of fieldwork at Bethany I hear more complex responses than initially. Perhaps I now signal more understanding? Students are more comfortable? Some describe discursive interpellation, merging with the Scriptural narrative. Others suggest body–mind holism. A few explicitly disregard rational arguments and pose most everything as straight-ahead faith.

Even so, given the explicit Pentecostal effort to attune responsive bodies, it makes sense that off-the-cuff responses to questions of certainty often return to what one student calls a “tangible understanding.” As another described, “Sometimes I would say I feel there is heat coming over my body . . . there’s been times like in church services where my hands have
become really red.” Then she links sensation to spirit: “It’ll be because the spirit of God is just covering me.” Further, beyond simply tongues, a broad array of sensations matter. “I might cry, I might rock back and forth, or I might speak in tongues.” Such tales regularly evoke a moment of realized change, transformation of the deepest recesses of the self. Yet, this sensory experience is carefully cultivated in Bethany culture and AG texts.

Cultivation

Daily chapel at Bethany is a required space for community consolidation, a form of guided devotion where students nurture their sensory aptitudes and learn to teach others as well. An ID card reader precisely tracks attendance, with clear consequence for absence. Usually between 100 and 200 students and faculty sway—dancing is not allowed—to contemporary Christian pop performed by a rotating cohort of student bands. Eyes close, arms raise, and faces curl in supplication as the simple, repetitive rock-and-roll chords wash over them. I am especially attentive to open mouths because loose-jawed imagery fills Pentecostal training texts. Students describe music pulsing through their bodies, the desire for transcendence in their hearts, and the struggle to participate appropriately: with integrity, true spirituality, and within bounds.

On rare occasion, leaders pause and ask that the Spirit fall. It is time to open to, invite, or generally encourage spiritual experience. Some suggest students make nonsense noises, loosen their tongues, and yield to God. Students describe friends or neighbors surrounding them speaking in tongues, hoping to stimulate the same. Others explain their own effort as simply “gibberish.” One begins by “babbling.” Then devotion. “I prayed for myself and had others pray for me. And what do you know, it happened.” A physical attuning joins with faith to render new capabilities.

Some recognize that faking tongues is quite common, one route to acceptance or perhaps simply rehearsal. “In school it was what everybody else was doing and a way to show your closeness to God . . . so we often all faked it.” In fact, most of the students I interview pretend tongues before achieving something they describe as genuine. Perhaps pretending is simply part of the learning process?

Even so, for many, acknowledging cultivation undermines legitimacy. Clear direction certainly frustrates. As Amy explains, “The preacher says ‘raise your hands, receive this . . . repeat after me’ [and it] always pisses me off.” Her assessment resonates with the modern consensus that valid religion provides a self-evident subtext requiring little human effort beyond simply believing (Asad 1993). However, Amy’s education continues, “Then in chapel, it just came out.” Spontaneously? “A feeling of peace. It wasn’t that I couldn’t stop speaking, but why would I?” Is she rendered capable in spite of her resistance? Perhaps. Finally, the link to meaning effectively engages. As she says, “[It is] a solidification of my connection to God.”

The AG valorization of speaking in tongues generates pressure to succeed. As one Bethany alumnus explained, “I do not believe in speaking in tongues. Although for many years I ‘tried’ to speak in tongues and thought I was not Christian enough because I didn’t do so.” Many fail their training. According to Dr. Wilson, “more fail than succeed.” After much effort, Daniel comes up short:

I have had people try to get me to speak in tongues . . . my pastor wanted me to speak in tongues but I was uncertain . . . as they pray they put their hand on your forehead. They speak in tongues. . . . They say, “Try not to fill your mind up with words. Try to accept it. Try to have your mind empty.”

Like other meditation, speaking in tongues requires a particular focus, one Daniel struggles to achieve. “My mind is always thinking of something [else].” For him, AG’s
high regard for tongues becomes an irritant. “I would go up to the altar specifically to have that: to speak in tongues. The AG, they believe that that’s your spiritual baptism.” Daniel comes to disagree. “I’m not sure that everyone needs to speak in tongues. [There are] other gifts: educational, pastoral, leadership.”

The cultivation of particular capabilities is certainly part of Bethany’s broader pedagogical project. However, much of the effort aims to render people capable of submission, something akin to noneffort.

**Yielding**

Pentecostals don’t speak of cultivation, preferring “yielding” as a more God-centered depiction of spiritual experience, one that can open to an experience of rupture. As one put it, “[There is a] connection between tongues and a sense of being yielded to God’s will... when I am not in complete obedience I notice it is a lot harder to speak in tongues and now when I feel totally submitted it comes much easier.” Another described, “learning to allow myself to do those things. I prayed to allow my defenses to open (which is a big deal for me, since I am painfully shy).” In fact, some of the most intense stories of training and cultivation can be inverted to argue for yielding. As one alumnus wrote, “When I was a child, certain adults (AG) tried to force me to speak in tongues, mainly by putting oil on my head, grabbing my shoulders, and shaking me till I cried. WTF?” He pushed back. “Ever since then, I rejected such things as tongues, carefully avoiding them out of fear.” Yet, such resentment did not bar the door to an experience generated without training or force, seemingly effortlessly. “Then one day I simply started speaking in tongues in private prayer. It’s not something I ever learned or tried to learn, neither can I do it on demand.” Effort is thus deployed as evidence for its own ineffectiveness in relation to spontaneity. Indeed, MRIs of people speaking in tongues suggest a nonvolitional neurological state (Newberg et al. 2006).

Letting go though, in this model, means accepting another’s direction. As Dr. Wilson describes, “I don’t know, but God does. I’m gonna make myself available... in order to speak in tongues you have to let yourself flop... the idea of being possessed by the spirit means relinquishing yourself.” That is, he trains to give up ambition and accept direction from elsewhere. Stan also describes a practice of active yielding. “The backstory: I said I don’t want it. It’s not for me. I just thought it was weird. But at youth camp I was told, ‘You’ve given God your life, why not give him your tongue too?’ ” He decides to try. “[I said] God if you want this, then give it to me now.” It came, says Stan. This kind of request might be intentional yet still assumes God decides. As Stan explains, “I don’t control it. Its something God gives you—peaceful—I am speaking to God in a language only he understands.” Yet, however much it appears beyond personal control, Stan still approaches tongues like other training. “[I am] trying to get a deeper grasp on it. [I’ve] done studies on it—praying for it, reading more about it.” Thus, he recognizes that study brings learning. “It gets easier. Before I’d pray ‘God let your spirit fill me’ but, sweet, I don’t have to pray anymore. Now it just happens.” Stan systematically hones his sensory aptitudes for the sake of relinquishing control; he cultivates his ability to yield to God.

Most stories involve complex interactions among intent, practice, and release. Anne’s sister inspires her, “My older sister spoke in tongues at teen camp and told me about it. I began praying for it.” Anne persists. “Over a six month period I was praying and drenching my self in Jesus, not thinking of anything but Jesus.” She succeeds. “Next thing I knew I was speaking in tongues.” Her self-reflexive analysis emphasizes yielding. “I read about the gifts and asked God to fill me and use me. I opened my self up and he did [it].” Here, God is agent. Jim, on the other hand, blends agency and passivity, “Speaking in tongues...
just kinda happened one day." Spontaneous, but sometimes action is required. "Gifts often require you just have to step out and do more than anything else," he continues.

Youth camps provide fertile soil for tongues training. Blanche responds to altar calls, where pastors ask volunteers to the stage to receive the baptism of the Spirit. "It’s a thing with us [Pentecostals]. We go to camps. [I] went to every altar . . . I would always go and ask God, ‘I want to be filled with the Spirit. I want to speak in tongues.’ And I never did.” Until later. First, she needed to rechannel her aspiration. “I learned that when we’re seeking a gift but not God it is not how he designed it. We should pray for [tongues] but it shouldn’t be our primary focus. It should be knowing God.” Aiming for connection, she accomplishes speaking. She emphasizes the sense that direct human aspirations may be ineffective and perhaps even profane.

Texts Teaching Gifts

In my search to explain broad consistency among narratives of gifts of the Spirit, I expect common reference to Scripture but am surprised when I also find a vernacular textual tradition of explicit pedagogies that articulate tensions between yielding and cultivation while pondering the boundaries of appropriate physicality. These are scripts in the most literal sense, detailed plans to galvanize experiences of the Holy Spirit. All the following are published by AG’s Gospel Publishing House through their Evangelism Commission’s annual Holy Spirit emphasis: The Youth Ministry Institute Manual (Crabtree 1998), Helping Others Receive the Gift (Enloe 2008), When the Spirit Speaks (Bullock 2008), and Hungry? A Study in the Baptism in the Holy Spirit (Huffman and Lindell 2006). While the texts are not uniform, they share basic themes. Rhetorics of yielding dominate, although the very fact of organizing for revival signals cultivation as well. Looking closely however, a contest becomes apparent—a negotiation between daily practice and interpretation that invokes both the authority of Scripture and anxiety about outsider perceptions of Pentecostal practice. Despite a superficial coherence, then, these texts produce a tension-filled channeling of appropriate physicality that often rejects the viability of pedagogy and training.

Yielding, submission, relaxing, and “letting God take over” all appear regularly in these pedagogies. One text prescribes, “Relax . . . worship God . . . seek the Giver, not just the gift . . ..” It continues with a push toward language. “Leave your native language so you can speak a new language . . . trust that you are getting what you asked for.” Perhaps the tongue offers an exceptionally effective channel to yielding the total self. “The tongue is the most unruly part of the body (James 3:3–6). And yet like the rudder of a large ship, it can set the direction for our entire behavior.” It is a bearing contingent upon release, not control: “Speaking in tongues is an act of submission, indicating that we have given our entire beings to God” (Huffman and Lindell 2006:13, 8). These texts regularly reiterate the primacy of God’s agency in spiritual process.

Nonetheless, specific efforts at cultivation dominate. Such texts share a step-by-step pedagogy for attuning believers to the presence and participation of the Holy Spirit: pray, describe the process and its impetus, and the Holy Spirit emerges (Enloe 2008:26–27, Griffin 2008:116). Pastors invite participants to “align themselves so they are ready to receive” (Enloe 2008:85). They develop an atmosphere and describe a specific program aiming toward speaking in tongues. “Develop consensus in the room” (Enloe 2008:27), not through dialogue, but via clear messaging: say “‘you might hear words in your spirit’ or ‘you might feel a tension in your tongue.’ Encourage them [participants] to . . . open their mouth and release the language . . .” (Cramer 2008:47). Manuals encourage community; they rely heavily on something akin to Durkheim’s collective effervescence, especially as stimulated by singing together (Crabtree 1998:134). Some individuals are called to lay
hands on seekers. “Radical worshippers set an atmosphere and environment that is charged with the anointing, and people just get baptized” (Cramer 2008:42). With children especially, seeing another child receiving the Spirit can inspire (Gerhold 2008:110). The group imprints upon individuals, rendering them more capable than before.

Eventually, after the atmosphere is engaged and the plan laid out, newly capable practitioners are called to act: “Now just speak in tongues” (Grogan 2008:53). “Speak, even if only a few syllables” (Crabtree 1998:135). As one wrote, “It takes a bold, deliberate step (Huffman and Lindell 2006:8). Or, “You will never speak if you keep waiting for the Spirit to put you in some kind of trance and do it all for you. It will be your mouth, your tongue, your voice—but His words” (Crabtree 1998:134). Like Christian rebirth, Spirit baptism involves choice—sure, choice as production and enactment of a collective context and perhaps even collective subjectivity, but some sort of choice in methods of cultivation and choice in the moment of yielding. “The Spirit doesn’t just overpower a person’s will. We cooperate with Him and invite Him into our lives . . . God does the baptizing, but you’re responsible for how you proceed” (Huffman and Lindell 2006:12). Thus, actively, “Leave your English . . . altogether” (Crabtree 1998:134). Such action often involves specific physical direction, especially of the mouth and tongue. “I usually mention that I’ve never seen a person filled with the Holy Spirit with their mouth closed. People need to relax, open their mouth and give praise to the Lord, and expect they will speak in a language they don’t understand” (Erickson 2008:68). These texts suggest extremely close attention to microscalar bodily sensations in the nurturing of a “spontaneous” state of active participation. “You will get to the point where your tongue feels like it’s too big for your mouth, and you want to say something” (Bullock 2008:59). The tongue is cultivated as guide, but success in yielding requires specific moments of action and choice.

Detailed instruction and exhortation toward exertion exist in constant tension with affirmations of God’s agency. “Only Jesus can baptize someone in the Holy Spirit, so relax” (Enloe 2008:27). Perhaps worldly actions are impotent, and only belief matters? Thus, after 55 years of seeking through faithful tithing and good works, a person hears: “the Holy Spirit baptism cannot be earned; it is a gift,” and only then he does receive (Erickson 2008:65). At the same time, believers clean up their lives, “getting right with God” before expecting baptism (Anderson 2008:135–137). Perhaps the spirit–earth divide is a bit ambiguous?

One has to wonder also: What translates physical experience into powerful belief? Broad consensus among participants that their activities are spiritual certainly compels. Further, students suggest that unique feelings, and improvisation beyond their personal limitations suffice to prove divine origins. But pastors also follow specific directions to consolidate the supernatural interpretation of tongues. They assure participants “that God will not play tricks on them, so they are not making up the words” (Grogan 2008:52). And, “We need not worry about having a false experience” (Hurst 2008:33). Yet, of course as good moderns, they do worry and work to contain excess—pastors and students both.

**Containing Rupture**

[She] goes off the deep end. A “Pentecostal experience.” [sarcasm] She was speaking in tongues—but not doing anything that made sense. Fully on the ground, screaming like a banshee. In her church the wilder you are, the more spiritual you are. I stepped in and said [her name] “Olibile. Didi Mala!”—[it means] Shut Up! Shut Up!

I’m telling her to shut up? This is heresy.

I said, “I want you to sit up. What’s going on? You’ve been taught that God comes and takes over and throws you on the ground. That’s not God. Maybe evil spirits do that, but that’s not God, maybe Demons.” [In her church] being spiritual is not about being spiritual but about yelling loud.11
In this story, Dr. James Stewart, a missionary, professor at Bethany, pastor, and white male South African critic of racism, reaches his bounds of acceptance. Olibile, a female black South African convert, needs some guidance, or so he suggests. Dr. Stewart’s response makes sense—a movement needs structure. Pentecostals are mocked for their excess. Secularist, Fundamentalist, and mainline critics all agree: Pentecostals are chaotic, crazy, too much. Cultivated yielding generates rupture, unpredictable rupture. In response, Pentecostals offer continual self-policing, or what they call, “discernment.” Dr. Albrecht, another Bethany professor, explains, “the mystic left alone spins into all kinds of heresy.” Yet, along with this narrative of containment, Pentecostal practices also suggest fluidity and openness to change. “When you think you got God squished into a box,” Dr. Stewart says, “cut the sides off. God will only move freely when he’s got the freedom to move.” Tensions between freedom and constraint animate the Pentecostal organizing tradition.

Hype or chaos incites scrutiny, and Bethany faculty are responsible for containment as well as inspiration. Dr. Stewart explains, “Some see Pentecostals swinging from the chandeliers and all that good stuff . . . watching folks running in the aisles, the pastor’s wife jumping across the pews.” Or as Dr. Albrecht says, “Wacky things can happen, you’ve got to admit . . . that it’s not the Spirit, its some emotion. It’s something else . . . [However] you have to be careful in discernment that you’re not saying things are inauthentic.” Misdiagnosing emotion as spirit, for Dr. Albrecht, at times even incites strong language: ‘I think I’m gonna say, ‘you know that person’s a nut!’ ” Another Bethany professor, Dr. Espinosa’s boundary articulates differently. “If you have your Bible and go out in the woods, enjoy. Just don’t stay there.” That is, relish the break from the everyday, just return afterwards.

Students also struggle to find boundaries. Brad, a new Bethany pastor, inspires controversy by encouraging tongues. He speaks in tongues and provides translations for others. Some students haven’t heard translations rooted in the Bible, and they provide legitimacy. Others feel uncomfortable. One describes “flack” for her more austere prayer practices, and anxiety because tongues “scared the heck out of me.” Some feel unsure. “[These] fruits of the spirit . . . I am really skeptical about, super skeptical.” Students struggle to find bounds for acceptability: What is necessary? Ok? Real?

Challenged by suspicion, Onella describes tongues as genuine even though cultivated. “It’s not like I can say that there was just this one night and I fell over, but honestly it began out of the understanding that there was that gift and praying for it.” Much of her description aims at an imagined critic—someone questioning the integrity of her practice. In response, she says, “I really felt that it was true. Not just making it up. I don’t really feel like I ever made it up. I don’t like just doing it to do it—I think that it’s definitely real . . . the best way I can explain [it, is] that it’s not contrived.” That the practice takes its own path mitigates concerns about human agency. “I’ll be earnestly praying about something hard core, you know, something so deep on my heart and something so important that English or whatever is coming out of my mouth is not strong enough to express it. I’ll be praying but it’s like God, ‘this isn’t enough, it isn’t expressing how deep this is on my heart,’ it turns into something different—tongues—not that I meant it to.” The lack of intention signals sincerity and increased depth.

By contrast, Andrea sees tongues as contrived unless linked closely to Scripture:

I had never spoken in tongues, I know people who claimed they have. Pastor Brad is the only one who I’ve felt comfortable with . . . He came to the front and said the Lord is giving me word as far as what this [tongues] means and he said it was a [Bible] verse. [Previously] it seemed like they were just saying things and then making something up, but this felt more solid. Even if it wasn’t exactly that translation, we were going back to the Bible and that is the foundation for our beliefs . . . It’s not like “you’re gonna find the guy that you’re supposed to marry.”
With tongues reliant on text, her confidence increases—a dialectic of the charismatic and the textual.

Linked to the textual authority of the Bible and made available to community discernment, interpreted tongues seem more sure. Thus, interpretation becomes an important element in AG’s distinguishing itself. Similarly, Bethany student Chet uses interpretation as criterion for sound spirituality. “With no interpretation it meant someone was speaking out in disorder, more like conflict . . . [Interpretation] shows some sort of validity to our belief.” He distinguishes personal from public experiences, “I practice mostly by myself. I think that tongues in a group needs interpretation.” At Bethany he finds that tongues does not always reflect spiritual growth. “I’ve seen people abuse the gift, use it to show off. [To claim to be] superior to others who don’t have it.” For Chet, interpretation solidifies meaning, but leaves room for abuse. It is, however, one form of containment among many.

Containing Rupture II: Training Texts

Like the discourse of Bethany professors, AG texts encourage tongues but include a cautious undercurrent, warning of excess and “hyperemotional” devotion, or “fanaticism,” expressed physically. This is likely a response to modern critique but also to previous revivals that unsettled AG. For instance, within AG, both the Latter Rain Movement (1950s) and the Toronto and Brownsville “laughing” revivals (1990s) defied and expanded upon AG’s doctrine of tongues and healing. Like the broader Charismatic movement, these revivals valorized multiple physical experiences as spiritual, and their more expansive body logic faced censure from within and without AG. Yet from its start, AG structured itself to both encourage and contain such insurgencies: its balancing of loose fellowship with clear doctrine explicitly aims to regulate struggle. Further, providing multiple and everchanging sites of power within AG makes room for resistance and revival without a full-on split.

At first glance, AG texts emphasize flexibility. Gifts are not “cookie cutter” and might be loud, soft, accompanied by laughing, at home, church, and so on. It sounds quite open, but boundaries here are actually highly inflammatory. “These manuals aim to describe adequate teaching on how to encourage, guide, correct, and respond to these gifts” (Bullock 2008:8). Encourage, guide, correct, and respond: it runs the gamut from inspiration to discipline.

The AG concern over chaos and unintelligibility manifests in desire for interpretation but also in devotional processes that encourage some, and discourage other, forms of participation. Bullock affirms churches that position elders throughout the service to guide vocal gifts and ensure comprehensibility by collecting requests to speak tongues. They alert the pastor who then slots particular tongues appropriately into the program (2008:29). The dynamic between believer and spirit hinges on order. “The Spirit does not ‘possess’ or ‘overpower’ the speaker . . . [in fact] what the Spirit has to say will be said in an orderly and intelligible way . . . He speaks through the controlled instrumentality of the believer’s own mind and tongue” (53). As such, tongues speech is a conjoining of human and spiritual agency.

AG texts describe many sensations as emotional and thus less authoritative. One author posits tongues as superior to fallible human emotions:

Emotions must not determine the reality of their experience. The evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, according to the Scripture, is that the believer spoke in other tongues. The evidence is not what he or she felt or the emotions that were or were not displayed. People’s feelings vary dramatically. [Juoni 2008:72]

The text expands its critique of emotions into the physical realm, suggesting that while people cry, feel like they’ve been hit by lightning, or experience a quiet peaceful feeling,
none of these are significant. Instead, “the reality of what people experience is not based on what they do or do not feel. The evidence is in speaking in other tongues” (Juoni 2008:72). All the texts agree, “the baptism is not the result of emotionalism . . . keep your head” (Crabtree 1998:133–134). At the start of the 20th century, nonliberal Christians looked to science for authority. Since then, Pentecostals have described tongues as scientific evidence and regarded emotions as far more ephemeral.

Yet, as AG doctrine faces the challenges of modern skepticism and internal revivals, it mutates such that some physicality outside of tongues gains acceptance, especially when posed as almost-tongues or Biblical. Thus, a youth training manual opens the door to a more expansive interpretation, “Some physical things may happen. Stammering lips, tears of joy, and trembling or shaking (cf Isaiah 28:11; John 7:38,39).” Yet simultaneously, the boundaries around acceptability are further delimited. “Remember: Goose Bumps are not the baptism” (Crabtree 1998:133). Here, a recent expansion of the limits of the Biblical sensorium encounters a broadly applicable body logic and congeals new clarity: stammering, but not goosebumps. Others, however, prescribe differently. Enloe says, for instance, “you may or may not be overcome with goose bumps.” His key evidence, in fact, is broader sensory awareness. “You will at least be gently aware of his presence descending upon you in some distinct time” (Enloe 2008:25). Similarly, falling over or being “slain in the spirit” occurs quite regularly within Pentecostal revivals such as Brownsville, Toronto, Latter Rain. Yet in AG publications, “falling over doesn’t function as biblical evidence of either Spirit baptism or as a signpost of any stage of the process of receiving” (Enloe 2008:24). AG does not, in this version, accede to its internal challengers, or its vernacular body-logic, when it comes to devotion. Clearly, physicality is not set in stone, or Scripture, but is an ongoing negotiation.

Theorizing Cultivation

However much rupture might appear to be a Pentecostal distinctive, I hope it is quite clear by now that the cultivation of enduring capabilities, including the capacity to rupture, is also significant. And while it is certainly no revelation that meditation or other forms of trance require training, scholars struggle to describe the connective tissue that joins continuity and disjuncture, church and revival. For me, “cultivation” shifts scales to voice the space of enmeshment between them while also recognizing the recurrent vigor of such polar formations. In doing so, shifting scale provides two analytical moves. The first is temporal, out from event, rupture, or ritual, toward the before and after. The second involves a similar but distinct move from the solidified thing itself—person’s rupture, community’s church—to the relationships between them. Thus the most decisive intervention of this paper adds density to the process of in-between, the materiality of the dialectic, by observing the things (i.e., training texts, skills, sensibilities) that congeal as that process I call cultivation.

By joining Catherine Bell’s (1992) practice-oriented theory of “ritualization” to Tanya Luhrmann’s (2004, 2012) anthropology of learning, cultivation provides a means for observing how previous thought-action and individual–group polarities plaguing social theory—especially ritual theory—are entangled within Pentecostal community and boundary-making projects. For Bell, when anthropologists assume that ritual is outside the social, they reify Cartesian divides. Thus, ritual is better analyzed through its genealogy, the politics and process of its boundary formation. This she calls “ritualization,” a strategic differentiation between ritual and the quotidian accomplished through cultivated learning and legitimated via resonance between polarizations at multiple layers of a community. Thus, ritualization can be observed when the Pentecostal cultivation of sensory aptitudes both builds and bounds their practice. Luhrmann, by contrast, explores
the cultivation of these capacities among practitioners in intimate detail. Taken together, Luhrmann’s psychology of learning and Bell’s sociological analysis ground my recognition of a cultivated practice that nurtures powerful discontinuities.

Cultivation provides traction for engaging with Pentecostal challenges to ritual theory. Most broadly, ritual theorists struggle with dualisms of thought and action, and affiliated concepts. When seen as generating symbolic meaning and/or modeling social dynamics through mindless collective enthusiasm or the repetition of traditional forms, mechanical ritual is often opposed to ostensibly deeper impulses of individual self-reflexivity, spontaneity, and creativity: control against freedom. In response, some analyses, like Jon Bialecki’s dialectic between charisma and the Bible and Thomas Kirsch’s description of spirit and letters as “synchronically” engaged and “complementary,” provide compelling visions that might explain joined polarities (Bialecki 2006; Kirsch 2008:17; see also Elisha 2011). Yet, the tradition I examine among Pentecostals adds a very material third element to the institution–charisma binaries these scholars seek to overcome: cultivation congealed in text or in skillful sensibilities that bind scripture, church, and rupture. It is the tension within Bialecki’s dialectic made increasingly concrete. Further, without accepting the innate hierarchies assumed by ritual theory, the differentiation enacted through cultivation might explain how Pentecostals validate certain elements of these binaries more than others.

Pentecostalism challenges the assumed dualisms of ritual theory further by expanding ritual deep into the everyday, perhaps voiding the power of the ritual–quotidian divide. Csordas describes “subsum[ing] quotidian practices within the sphere of ritual activities (2011:129)” or the ritualization of life, interpersonal space, the domestic space, civic space, geographic and natural space, and time (Csordas 1997:102). Likewise, Pfeil sees testimony “achieved in and through talk of the lowest register, in the most common way, about the most banal, bodily, and ugly of things” (Pfeil 2011:289). Off-the-cuff and “high affect” thus become the outward sign of profound interiority—the everyday as sacred. Pfeil argues that Pentecostal-Charismatic practice “demands the mundane as a necessary medium of devotion, perhaps even to the point of exaggerating or staging the mundane . . . arranged so as to appear disordered and messy. It is a form of ritual action that depends . . . on its status as not ‘ritualized’ and not separate.” If the process “eventually leaves no room for distinction between sacred and secular action even in everyday life” (Csordas 1997:108), why hold onto the term ritual? Yet from outside the Pentecostal world, their iterative practices appear obvious; they have not disappeared. In other words, whatever we call these repetitions, they work to differentiate between the sacred community and the profane community—the internal and external—but they do not allow for clear rite–mundane distinctions.

Thomas Csordas hopes to resolve Pentecostalism’s challenge to ritual theory with an exploration of the microscale of phenomenology, very much in sync with his informants view of subjectivity.12 As he argues, if spiritual experience is a precultural, preobjective human capacity rooted in fundamental alterity, it might be constituted before, or beneath, mind–body dualisms (Csordas 1994, 1997, 2004). Yet, while his microlevel essentialism might be minimal enough to avoid the risks of broader dualisms, I do suspect he forecloses a variety of ways of relating to the body at this scale. But more to the point, because he bars cultivation from the deepest interiority, Csordas asserts the human capacity to rupture but does not explain how one group developed the skills to be so good at it. Further, perhaps through a personal commitment to the immediate experience of otherness as “the sacred,” or from his deep inhabitation of Pentecostal-charismatic subjectivity, Csordas emphasizes elements of a self quite congruent with modern Protestant-secular subjectivity—individual, discontinuous, inherent. By contrast, the story I tell puts cultivation and collectivity at the center, a foregrounding I suspect that will help resolve some challenges of
ritual theory and speak to the success of Pentecostalism without necessarily reifying the modernist subject.

Instead, Catherine Bell’s theory of ritualization grounds my effort to shift scales and describe Pentecostal cultivation. Like Csordas, Bell aims to disrupt Cartesian dualisms, but rather than an individualistic ahistorical phenomenology that valorizes the discontinuous, she evokes history, collectivity, and process (Bell 1992). Bell’s practice-based theory (c.f. Bourdieu 1977, 1990; Sahlins 1976) responds to dualist hierarchies with “ritualization,” a shift in scales away from specific rites or immediate experience toward exploring collective processes of strategic differentiating and validating particular practices in relation to others. As Bell sees it, previous ritual theory mistakenly denigrates ritual as a “particularly thoughtless action—routinized, habitual, or mimetic—and therefore the purely formal, secondary, and mere physical expression of logically prior ideas” (Bell 1992:19). Even those aiming to reintegrate thought and action, either by mediating between communitas and the social order (Turner 1969), the social and the individual (Durkheim 1965), or worldview and ethos (Geertz 1971), reify the thought–action hierarchy within their ethnographies and between the thinking ethnographer and the acting informant. Performance theorists, she says, similarly fail to undo these dichotomies because reading ritual as a text reiterates the interpretive endeavor of searching for coded meaning as opposed to action (c.f. Tambiah 1979; Ortner 1984; Wuthnow 1987).

Bell sees dualisms within processes of perception as inevitable, but their saliency in hierarchies—the problem—relies on differentiation enacted through routinization, regularization, and repetition in social life. Ritualization thus involves “setting some activities off from others . . . creating and privileging a qualitative distinction between the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane,’ and . . . ascribing such distinctions to realities thought to transcend the powers of human actors” (Bell 1992:74). As she responds, “even the exact repetition of an age-old ritual is a strategic act with which to define the present” (101). Here, formality, fixity, and repetition are present, not as defining features of ritual but rather as collective and historically constructed practices that effectively produce the situational and strategic distinctions of ritual. Cultivation, as I develop it, revoices Bell’s ritualization to internalize its sense of strategy, enhance its connection to intimate sensory aptitudes, and further emphasize agency.

While several recent scholars speak to the cultivation of metalevel religious practice and commitments, (Keller 2005; O’Neill 2010) Tanya Luhrmann (2004, 2012) provides a basis for recognizing entrainings of more intimate sensory aptitudes that might work well joined with Bell’s theory. Luhrmann’s pedagogically informed theory of self-cultivation developed while observing Evangelicals constructing sensorially apprehendable divinity. She shows Evangelical practice enhancing the experience of “moments of total attention that somehow completely engage all of one’s attentional resources—perceptual, imaginative, conceptual and even the way one holds and moves one’s body,” what Luhrmann calls “absorption” (2012:199). In dialogue with practice theory stressing the social, historical, and strategic lodged in the act, the body, and its ritualization, Luhrmann might be seen to detail the specific tools used by Evangelicals to develop the “practical mastery” Bell describes as key to schemes for ritualization (Bourdieu 1977 in Bell 1992). Luhrmann thus offers psychological and physiological detail for the process Bourdieu calls a “structural apprenticeship, which leads to the em-bodying of the structures of the world” (Bourdieu 1977:89). Luhrmann’s process of nurturing sensory aptitudes by skilling and attuning groups and individuals entwined over time might effectively mesh with Bell’s emphasis on the social, strategic, and historical dimensions of ritual (c.f. Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Robbins 2011) rather than either Csordas’ spontaneous self-making or ritual theories’ mechanical mindlessness.
Thus, following Bell, Luhrmann, and a host of scholars who stress the historicity of contemporary sensory cultures (Mauss 2006[1935]; Howes 1991; Mellor and Shilling 1997), cultivation shows minds, bodies, and their interrelationships congealing physical–mental sensory apparatus over time. To find sensation or thought outside a history of collective attunement or previous resonance seems unlikely. Even seemingly pure physicality, in its genetic and epigenetic genealogies, can be read through this view of cultivation.

The cultivated subject also offers a particular relationship to others, to structure, and to change. Here agency might be relational and collective. Thus in this paper, I focus on forms of “becoming with,” co-constitutive relationships between participants, which involve teaching, rendering capable, learning, attuning, and constraining (Haraway 2008). Unlike an individual facing distant structure, I choose a perspective that allows me to examine how these groups cultivate and nourish local formations with agency scaled over a lifetime, or more, not simply a moment. For instance, in my survey of 150 Bethany alumni, over 50% have left AG. This might demonstrate a range of resistance and refiguration, perhaps “relatively empowered” (Bell 1992:221) rather than simply molded and stuck in their conditioning. And, of course, power is not easy to grasp. “No single individual is smart enough or powerful enough to manipulate fundamentalist discourse fully, and in certain ways, the discourse manipulates him” (Boone 1989:15). Yet, instead of ritual as a form of top-down control, cultivation describes attuned and capable bodies developing improvisational aptitudes, where recurrent motifs are played back and forth as propositions that lure. These make possible seemingly spontaneous, ruptural events so unpredictable they incite strenuous disciplinary response. In doing so, from the perspective of cultivation over time, collective constraint engenders conflict productive of the collective and the individual. Sadly perhaps, even to build one’s own cage is certainly a form of agency. However, instead of emphasizing the disciplinary structures that engender subjectivation, cultivation shows participation in building the conditions of possibility, a form of collectivity without determinism.

Cultivation entangles. For metaphor, I follow Vicky Kirby’s description of change and continuity joined in Saussurean linguistics, pushing even this cleanest of the humanities into complex reciprocities:

What is perceived as creatively innovative and uniquely individual in its expression will also imply the “coming to voice” of an elaborate inheritance of constraints and potentialities. Ironically, perhaps, what is heard as the self-present immediacy of voice is, in the final instance, the articulation of history, informed by the living burden of infinite mediation. . . . [This suggests that] the opposition, for example, so confidently assumed to divide event from system, to separate individual from community, parole from langue, and even the speaking subject from language—these differences become vulnerable to a “force” that somehow involves and entangles each of these categories within the other. [Kirby 1997:38]

That is, without denying the social facticity of the sense of individual spontaneity, Kirby suggests that a more historical approach adds a layer of understanding and also helps reframe Cartesian dualisms. Kirby’s “force,” as I see it, is the cultivation that draws together these seemingly incompatible nodes of a polarized continuum toward “relational in-habiting” (Kirby 1997:40). This analysis resonates with cultivation’s emphasis on relationships across the continuum that seem to excite social mobilization: from the individual to the collective, from ruptural agency to continuity. For instance, Pentecostals hold this space of linkage through high tension between yielding to the determinism of God through the spontaneous agency of individual tongues. Both positions exist in relation to the other, neither collapses, and the tension energizes conversion and boundary making.

Thus, cultivation describes the process by which Pentecostals nurture their sensory culture and develop the capability to yield through—and bound—their religious practice. It makes for the reciprocity in which relatively ephemeral sensations, ideas, and moments
of testimony solidify into, and emerge from, more consistent and durable sensibilities, dispositions, aptitudes, rites, or sensory vernaculars; gain traction when congealed as tradition; and garner even more solidity when tied to training texts, doctrines, or Scriptures, thus forming the crystalline structures that enable rupture; all of which, in turn, nurture the ephemeral.

The cloth of cultivation links multiple distinct threads, knotted formations, gaps, and colorful patterns of tradition. Simultaneously, slow accretions of wear encourage an openness in yielding to the wind, bursting threads, tearing patterns, and opening ruptures.

Rupture

Neither rupture nor tradition disappear amid cultivation. Instead, they both gain solidity from cultivated differentiation, which, as I pose it, is differently scaled from the things distinguished. Coconstitutive with, but on a separate analytical plane from the others, cultivation is a process of nurturing aptitudes among mind–bodies, in support of either their rupture or continuity. But these scale makings and scale readings are contested. In this case, Pentecostals generally value the scales that enhance rupture and continuity over cultivation. In other words, rupture and church are their strategically formed essentialisms—built on a particular scale—especially powerful for energizing us–them dynamics often considered integral to mobilization. To be clear, strategic essentialism is not the idealist dream: assert, and it is. On the contrary, I am describing severely material, enfleshed, and relational entities whose cultivation realizes semisolid boundaries congealed from among a myriad of other possible formations at different scales. More like, we nurture, and certain scales congeal while others get less play.

This productive tension between solidity and cultivation is internal to the Pentecostal sensorium. Most Pentecostals find process-oriented readings of their rupture, like ritual theory, abhorrent and mechanical. Dan Albrecht, unusual among Bethany faculty for his use of the term ritual, explains how for many colleagues “ritual” simply means “unspiritual” (1999). Likewise, one Bethany alumnus fervently argues against cultivation as goal oriented. “You got it all wrong! The outside, visible things of the Holy Spirit aren’t the real thing. The real thing is the Holy Spirit in my life. The speaking in tongues and the experiences are just the results of the Holy Spirit in my life. They are not the goal... at all.” Albrecht, however, insists, and he taught me, that Pentecostals learn, reiterate patterns, and, he says, employ “ritual” (1999). To me, this sounds akin to cultivation; to many Pentecostals it sounds like heresy.

Thus, when my fieldwork recognizes spontaneity, but also places cultivation as central, I risk years of careful trust building between myself and my informants. This highlights the ethnographic gap, the void of intelligibility central to even the most immersive, thickly described participant observation. It seems that either I am right that this is training or it is truly spontaneous. Perhaps Bell is correct to insist on the inevitability of blindness and misrecognition: Does religion require false consciousness? Instead however, I suggest that posing affective spontaneity (intimately scaled) against rationalized cultivation (a bit broader) is a scalar category mistake.

At a certain point during fieldwork I do conclude that Pentecostal practice shows cultivation in addition to the spontaneity claimed by participants. Because this claim runs right counter to their dominant self-description as unmediated spontaneity, the tension now moves between me and them—they argue actively. I ask informants to read my conclusions and offer their own. Dr. Wilson, former president of Bethany and scholar of Latin American Pentecostalism, questions the term training. I offer rendering capable as more agentive. I think perhaps self-reflexivity can act as the next best thing to impossible objectivity. So, in the interest of full disclosure, I admit that something akin to
Pentecostal cultivation is my passion. I spend much of my time in the thick of community building and organizing. Yet I didn’t write Pentecostal training—rendering capable—texts. I didn’t ask for faked tongues in the process of attuning. As such, even given my bias, does this story of cultivation seem compelling? And if so, how do we read Pentecostal denials: As strategic? Confused? Brilliant?

Put differently, while in this ethnography, rupture nearly disappears, it continues to haunt the project. Why? For Pentecostals, rupture becomes deeply poignant through stories of early Christian formation (no longer Jewish, no longer Pagan), individual transformation (baptism, conversion, and gifts of the spirit), and discontinuous eschatological futures. As such, the emphasis on “event” over process in Christianity gains traction from relationships between converts and the unconverted.

While rupture is deeply Protestant, Pentecostals expand it farther than most. The 16th-century break from Catholicism required a sharp demarcation of emerging Christianities, one especially reliant on contests over visible, ruptural moments like baptism. As such, Paul’s road-to-Damascus revelation regularly exemplified Protestant subjectivity. Later, 18th-century Evangelicals founded their primary distinctive in the “born again” experience. Finally, 20th-century Pentecostals, perhaps the savants of rupture, expand the Evangelical impulse toward total break by joining eschatological urgency to bodies and minds in overt expressions of lost physical control and lost intelligibility, all manifesting the possibility of new subject formation before our eyes. With speaking in tongues and other gifts of the spirit signifying newly cleansed souls, church revival, and coming endtimes, rupture resonates from born-again self to community and world renewal, and back again.

Likewise, Pentecostals contest secular hegemony such that believing becomes an act of resistant world consolidation. Solidifying their coming to believe—converting—might be strategic at the scale of liberal individuals partaking of plan with telos, but more clearly it resonates (Connolly 2008) with the broader boundary-making projects within Pentecostalism. Regardless if they explicitly articulate rupture as proper Pentecostalism, which many do, or if they simply inhabit the Pentecostal agenda of conversion and expansion, resonance builds between the long-term project of defining converts and Pentecostalism as distinct and the very immediate experiences of conversion, baptism, and speaking in tongues. The “external strategy” of ritualization that bounds the outer edges of community parallels an “internal strategy” that bounds individual subjects, generating homologous oppositions and hierarchies (Bell 1992).

So, picture, for a moment, rupture as the glue that aligns the body–minds of believers while also consolidating community margins into solidified walls. Nearly every person I speak with narrates discontinuity. Extensive practice and patience aims at conversion or similarly disruptive spiritual experience. Clothing, lifestyle, friendships, politics, and most intimate daily practices change drastically. Transformation is reiterated through testimony and preaching decrying the past, articulating the present. Rupture manifests both avowal and disavowal, a self-fashioning affirmation of the new rejecting the old. The broader community forms via parallel forces.

Yet, how can readers adjudicate between cultivation and rupture? On one hand, they don’t need to; to question the real is likely best understood from inside. Further, to question the ontological status of informant claims seems colonial, culturally insensitive, or simply beside the point. We describe culture, not judge it. Still, I persist: first, because my informants engage the same debate; second, I suspect the strain between emic (insider) and etic (outsider) readings of Pentecostal rupture impacts struggles to define the bounds, and thus the membership, of their movement; and finally, because Pentecostal rupture has been appropriated for multiple other movement building philosophies, it seems valuable to complicate its emergence.
Yet, the same event might adamantly appear as either extended cultivation or spontaneous rupture. Just as certain scaling emphasizes cultivation, other scales make Pentecostal claims to rupture intelligible. In fact, adherence to particular scale provides coherence to their experience that might read well from outside their world. Examined from the proper intimate perspective, we see volitionless, fully yielded moments, brief, and in a context of striving to be sure but unstable tears in the intentional accretion of skills and sensibilities, a place for conversion and tongues to manifest authentic breakthrough. Thus, from a phenomenological or similar perspective, rupture is fundamental. Likewise, for critics who say Pentecostals retrospectively name ruptures that never were, scale also serves. Here, stepping back to explore both before and after shows that sensory–mental interpretation is not purely retrospective because cultivation involves rendering participants capable of, and interested in, future ruptures. In other words, scale matters: A liberal shouts “I am myself, free,” the Marxist rebuts with “we,” and Pentecostals debate the two with autonomy dominant. Each consolidates scale, politics requires it. The world can appear as one organism (Mauss 1967), or each individual can enclose millions. Thus, in this ethnography, scale is neither epistemological (what scale do we analyze with?) nor ontological (what scale exists?), but rather onto-epistemological (what scales become salient in the struggle over apprehension and existence?) (Barad 2007).

The born again or glosollalic rupture then, real as any other effective social fact (Durkheim 1982[1919]) or historical individual (Weber 1930), is nearly as sedimented via relational ontology (Sharp 2011) as the value of money, or god himself—not that god is necessarily only relational.14 The fracture emerging from extended cultivation still breaks, marks actual discontinuity, is strategic in its differentiating one action over the rest. Something is solidified, enfleshed, named, made object, given power, and resonates with 500 years of Protestant boundary making, an essentialism with solid grounding.

The Politics of Cultivating Discontinuity

By reading cultivated discontinuity within Pentecostal practice I suggest a politics distinct from recent portrayals of global Christianity and radicalism more generally. Instead of primary reliance on spontaneous and disjunctive Pauline-like “events,” I show also slow accretions of collective self-fashioning as central to Pentecostal spontaneity or improvisation. Recognizing cultivation leaves less room for isolating the disjunctive as the radical response to the malaise of neoliberalism.

Even a brief look at contemporary philosophy and its politics can show the challenge posed by cultivation. After the fall of communism, in the face of postmodern uncertainty and neoliberal hegemony a “widespread search for a new militant figure” (Badiou 2003:2), inspired contemporary French philosophy to explore the event. “The event,” writes Bosteels, “is precisely that which unites almost all the great thinkers on the scene of French philosophy today” (2011:175), and, I would add, Paul, from the Christian Bible, is often the exemplar (i.e., Agamben 2005; Badiou 2003; Zizek 2003). For Alain Badiou, “Paul is a poet-thinker of the event, as well as one who practices and states the invariant traits of what can be called the militant figure” (2003:2). The event for Badiou involves an unpredictable seizing by grace without any prefiguration: “unconditioned,” “suddenly emerging,” “a thunderbolt, a caesure” (2003:18, 36, 17). He does link the event to process, the “thought-practice that is this rupture’s subjective materiality” (2003:2), the institutions to ensure fidelity, and the event as reiterable, but all his examples follow, instead of preceding the event (Hallward 2003:xxxii, 159). In other words, there is none of the tarrying, waiting, hoping, and training of the prospective work of cultivation that we see among Pentecostals or among early Jews awaiting the messiah. For Badiou, radicalism is more like simply “breaking with”15 than digging deep over time to uproot problems.
However, I do find Badiou’s argument partially compelling in that politics, on a given scale, is a matter of decisive action in the face of ambivalence. Regardless of the fuzzy boundaries that multiple scales make visible, to act is to overcome uncertainty, a faith in the possible, or perhaps “staying with the trouble” (Haraway 2010) as we strategically essentialize, choosing fidelity to a particular scale even while recognizing its narrow domain. Instead of action though, Badiou’s schema emphasizes a militant practice of waiting for the event and then building from there, not cultivating the capacity or the courage to do event (2003:111). It is also true that Badiou claims his work as philosophy explicitly not politics. Yet, because these specific philosophical disputes are permeating current conversations around the Occupy movement, it seems worth further exploring their implications in the light of tremendous Pentecostal organizing successes.

Epilogue

“Method, think method!” Superficially, Dr. Stewart’s exhortation sounds like a supremely mechanical approach to Spirit. However, while his detailed genealogies of mission size and logistics make explicit the pedagogical-planned-cultivated side of his project, the not-so-hidden thesis is always an incitement to “yield” to “the Spirit.” Spiritual experience undergirds successful missions, he explains. Further: beware, missionaries stifle. “Where we have missionaries, the works aren’t growing. Where we don’t, they are exploding... Sometimes God moves people’s hearts best when there isn’t that orchestration.” Reed provides a similar polarity, “Giving my life over to God? It’s scary ... the human side of me wants control.” This tension between human and transcendent agency permeates Pentecostal pedagogies. Yielding is considered the clear superior, but methodical cultivation is difficult to deny. In class one day, Dr. Chandler pushes me: “One of the things I hope Josh comes to in his research is that this is not human effort alone. From the beginning, this is supernatural... more caught than taught.” And he may be right. I have, however, shown a multifaceted story, a coherent set of pedagogies emphasizing Chandler’s yielding and submission while also offering incitement, training, collective aspiring, and discipline.

Pentecostals are among the most effective organizers of the 20th century; the means by which they propagate their movement matters. Yet, a study of missionary methodology focused on Bethany and training texts cannot discern the effects of Pentecostal pedagogies in the field; this supply-side analysis provides one piece of the picture, music from the perspective of the composer. I portray the tensions channeled within Pentecostal pedagogies: the uneasy ways rupture, yielding, and control sit together; and the negotiations among doctrine, practice, and everyday vernacular narratives that mold missionary spirituality. Perhaps cultivating tensions between revival and church helps to evade Troeltsch’s trajectory toward stifling rationalization. Most clearly though, I am fascinated by the systematic attention to metabolizing and diffusing Pentecostal practices. These pedagogies for nourishing gifts share a sense of possibility in making the world anew. While we anthropologists may not always find alternate worlds to galvanize us, “a life really worth living” (Schneider 1967:viii), if we recognize that all social movements involve ears, eyes, bodies, and minds, we might take the Pentecostal cue to think deeply and methodically about the sensory aptitudes, including decisive ruptural capacities, that we can cultivate together.

Josh Brahinsky is a doctoral student in the History of Consciousness Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz (jbrahins@gmail.com).
Notes

Acknowledgments. Thanks so much to Barbara Epstein, Jim Clifford, Susan Harding, Jon Bialecki, Rachel Brahinsky, and all the faculty, students, and staff at Bethany University who helped with this project.

1. Unless otherwise referenced, all of the quotes in this paper were culled from interviews at Bethany University between November 2009 and May 2010. If not otherwise noted, they are from undergraduate students. Bethany faculty are distinguished as Dr.

2. Robbins provides a genealogy of continuity and moves toward rupture. Bell details ritual theory’s approach to questions of continuity and rupture.

3. For more on the sensorium see Ong 1991 and Hirschkind 2006. Sensorium and habitus (Bourdieu 1977) are both theoretical approaches to structures of feeling (Williams 1977) that have great promise. I use sensorium strategically as it makes slippage into cognitivism especially difficult.

4. “Rendering capable” is a frame developed by Vinciane Despret that might soften the deterministic and paternalistic edges of other training language (Despret 2008).

5. While Spivak has disavowed this term as a permit for ignoring the strategy element and simply accepting essentialism, I think it sheds light on a critical and necessary process within seemingly fluid social movements and ought to be resuscitated (Spivak 1991).

6. I quote students using aliases but consider faculty public representatives of the pedagogies and use names. Drs. Chandler and Stewart teach missions, Drs. Albrecht, Espinoza, and Ku teach theology and history. Dr. Wilson is a past Bethany president.

7. For an exploration of the political suggestions that emerge from theologies of yielding or surrender see Kintz 2007. The Pentecostals I worked with don’t seem to clearly deploy yielding outside of theology.


9. I initially wondered if these might be a late-20th-century response to declension in Pentecostal worship. However, in searching old AG book catalogs I found a tradition of similar training texts running back to AG’s first few decades, and their strategies are quite similar.

10. Biblical references in the texts codify appropriate physicality.

11. Certainly white male control of black woman’s spirituality is deeply problematic. However, Dr. Stewart outspokenly advocates racial equality in a traditionally whites-only denomination, which has led me to deemphasize these particular power dynamics here.

12. His studies are actually of Charismatics, who are often included in the Global Pentecostal tradition.

13. I have had several interesting moments when informants questioned my assessment—most outside the bounds of this article.

14. Here I challenge the idea that social facticity implies the primordial social, asserting instead the social and its facts as coconstitutive (Chakrabarty 2000:16). Also, I use the masculine advisedly.

15. Even Robbins’ rich and well balanced evaluation of the European analysis of Christianity succumbs to a sense that radical means ruptural (Robbins 2010).

16. It is a challenge Badiou recognizes, but simply disavows with no explanation.

References

Agamben, Giorgio


Albrecht, Daniel


Anderson, Allan, Michael Bergunder, Andre Droogers, and Cornelis Van Der Laan


Anderson, Gordon


Asad, Talal


Badiou, Alain


Barad, Karen

Bell, Catherine

Bialecki, Jon

Boone, Kathleen

Bosteels, Bruno

Bourdieu, Pierre

Brahinsky, Joshua

Bullock, Judy

Carpenter, Joel

Chakrabarty, Dipesh

Comaroff, Jean, and John Comaroff

Connolly, William

Crabtree, Loralie, ed.

Cramer, Ken

Csordas, Thomas

Despret, Vinciane

Durkheim, Émile

Elisha, Omri

Enloe, Tim

Erickson, Scott
Geertz, Clifford

Gerhold, Jim

Gleick, James

Gramsci, Antonio, Quintin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith

Griffin, Allen

Grogan, Gary

Hallward, Peter
2003 Badiou: A Subject to Truth. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Haraway, Donna
2008 When Species Meet. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Hirschkind, Charles

Howes, David, ed.

Huffman, Carey, and John Lindell

Hurst, Randy

Jenkins, Philip

Juoni, Bill

Keller, Eva
2005 The Road To Clarity: Seventh Day Adventism in Madagascar. New York: Palgrave.

Kelley, Dean

Kirby, Vicky

Kintz, Linda

Kirsch, Thomas

Luhmann, Tanya

MacInlyre, Alisclair

Mahmood, Saba
Mauss, Marcel
Mellor, Philip, and Chris Shilling
Newberg, Andrew, Nancy Wintering, Donna Morgan, and Mark Waldman
Ong, Walter
O’Neill, Kevin Lewis
Ortner, Sherry
Pfeil, Gretchen
Poloma, Margaret
Ramsey, Joseph
Robbins, Joel
Sahlins, Marshall
Sayre, Nathan
Schneider, David M.
Sharp, Hasana
Spivak, Gayatri
Stein, Andrew
Tambiah, Stanley
Troeltsch, Ernst
Turner, Victor
Wallace, Anthony
1956 Revitalization Movements. Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co.
Weber, Max
Wiens, J. A.
Williams, Raymond
Wuthnow, Robert
Zizek, Slavoj