Writing Genres

Amy J. Devitt

Dedicated to my colleagues in genre theory,
for their generosity of time and depth of scholarship

One of the great appeals of studying genre, to me, is that genre is based on what people already know and do. People recognize genres, and people are the ones who define whether a genre exists. Shania Twain understands that everybody has to be something, everything participates in genre. Only by ignoring what language users themselves know can we ignore the significance of genre. It is the intriguing job of genre scholars to figure out what lies behind what everyone already knows.

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An Analysis of Genres in Social Settings

Explanation entails simplification; and any simplification is open to the charge of "oversimplification."

—Kenneth Burke, "Philosophy of Literary Form"

Describing the social significance of genre is at once necessary and impossible. As complex as society is, so is genre's working within that society. As we complicate our understandings of society, its relationships and workings, we must similarly complicate our understandings of genre and how it works, for genre develops within, embodies, and establishes society's values, relationships, and functions. In the preceding chapter, I explored genre's relationship to situation and genre's rhetorical power, and I distinguished three kinds of contexts: contexts of situation, of culture, and of genres. In this chapter, I deepen the examination of genre's rhetorical contexts by exploring genre's relationship to the particular social structures and groups with which it reciprocally interacts. In terms of figure 1.1, this chapter examines especially the mediating level between contexts and individual actions. Groups, social structures, and genres translate contexts into socially specific settings, and they transform individual actions into contextually meaningful social actions.

Genres operate socially, as what Miller calls social actions. But what makes genre inherently social? First of all, genres require multiplicity, multiple actions by multiple people. All discourse is predicated on two people, a writer and reader or speaker and listener (though one could debate whether one person can play both roles or whether discourse makes a sound if it falls in an empty forest). But genre is predicated on more than two people, on multiple people acting repeatedly, thus creating the perception of recurrence. The social nature of genres involves more than simple multiplicity, though, for that perception of recurrence

comes from socially developed understandings of situations. People recognize grocery lists, to use an example from the last chapter, because they have participated in supermarket shopping trips. Students come to learn lab reports as they come to learn the particular expectations of science courses. Lawyers learn briefs as they are trained in law school and practice to use briefs. The multiple actions that comprise genres are constituted and interpreted within particular social structures and particular groups. That genres are always imbricated socially is a claim assumed and demonstrated by many genre theorists (Berkenkotter and Huckin; Bazerman, *Shaping*; Swales; and C. Miller, "Genre"). One common way of describing genre's social involvement is to claim that genres function for a group of language users to fulfill the group's needs. The rhetorical situation to which a genre is related arises from the functional needs of a particular group; hence those who encounter that situation are those who need and use that genre. Genres function for people in their interactions with one another in groups and through social structures; they are social actions.

Social function has thus been used to explain genres' purposes and to elucidate their features. Explanations based on social function can clarify genres' features and their functioning, but they have a danger of focusing too heavily on the group and too little on the social structures. Because they mediate contexts, the particular social structures and groups encompass contexts of culture as well as situation. Genre analyses in the past have sometimes been primarily situational (examining local purposes, participants, and settings) and insufficiently cultural.[1] Because genres operate within society, they are enmeshed in the complex relationships that are society, including such issues as power differentials and ideological identities. Consider a few simple examples of the interaction of situational and cultural contexts, social structures, and genres. The school lab report fulfills the social function of demonstrating that an experiment has been conducted and results achieved; the people involved in such a situation are teachers and students, the genre users. Many of the features of the lab report can be explained through this attention to social group and situation. To understand fully the genre of school lab report, however, the analysis must also recognize the social structures involving all teachers and students in science courses, the complex relationships of teachers to students in North American schools, and the epistemology of science and its belief in observable data. Understanding the social setting requires also understanding the cultural setting. Consider another example: the request-for-proposals genre fulfills the

need to specify purposes and criteria for grants, but it also reflects more broadly the power relationship between institutional grant givers and institutional grant receivers, and it reflects and reinforces the ideology of the grant-giving institution. Since social structures and groups mediate contexts, to examine the social setting of genres is also to examine their cultural embeddedness.

I will explore how genre functions socially and culturally in this chapter by proposing and explaining six basic principles. Stating such basic principles risks stating what to some might seem obvious, but I hope to show that none of these principles is simple. Stating basic principles also has the benefit of opening them to scrutiny and clarifying assumptions that need further research, as Berkenkotter and Huckin demonstrate in their first chapter of *Genre Knowledge in Disciplinary Communication*, in which they lay out five principles of how genre functions as situated cognition, a model to which this chapter is indebted. To avoid becoming too removed from situated practice, however, I will follow the theoretical discussion of principles in this chapter with an examination in the next chapter of how they work out in a specific case, the case of writing done by tax accountants.

Genres Within Different Kinds of Groups

The social nature of discourse, and of genre, has been one of the most fruitful rediscoveries of textual study. Bakhtin states broadly that "verbal discourse is a social phenomenon—social throughout its entire range and in each and every one of its factors, from the sound image to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning" ("Discourse" 259). Further, Volosinov writes that all forms of "little speech genres" "operate in extremely close connection with the conditions of the social situation in which they occur and exhibit an extraordinary sensitivity to all fluctuations in the social atmosphere" (20). Historically, too, genres connect to social groups, for "[e]ach period and each social group has had and has its own repertoire of speech forms for ideological communication in human behavior" (Volosinov 20). The connection of genre to a group's activities and needs has been argued strongly in all major schools of genre theory.[2] Followers of Halliday in the Australian school emphasize generic function for particular groups. Scholars in the fields of English for specific purposes and English for academic purposes emphasize the relation of generic textual traits to communicative purposes for disciplinary groups. Finally, new rhetoricians have concentrated on the genres of professional communities, and the social structures with which genres interact.

The heart of genre's social nature is its embeddedness in groups and hence social structures. Rhetorical situations are likely to be perceived as recurring by the same group of people, whose experiences are similar enough and repeated in similar enough ways to be perceived as recurring situations. It is also groups of people who are in a position to pass genres on to new participants, who form the groups with which new members interact. The genres that develop from a group's interactions, then, reciprocally reinforce the group's identity and nature by operating collectively rather than individually. It is no logical leap to argue that genres, which reflect and construct recurring rhetorical situations, also reflect and construct a group of people. To extend Bitzer's well-known example, the speeches of prosecution and of defense evolve from the recurring rhetorical situation of a trial with its rhetorical exigencies to charge and defend. That rhetorical situation also involves a recurring social setting, that of the legal system and lawyers, and even the cultural context of American notions of justice. The genre of defense speech interacts not only with its immediate rhetorical situation but also with the social structure of the legal system and the judges and lawyers who inhabit that system. Clearly, genres need to be understood in terms of their social structures and groups.

Beyond Discourse Communities

For many scholars, that social setting is described in terms of its inhabitants, the members of the social group, although those members, like situation and genre, are both the creators of the group and created by the group, constructing and constructed, as I will discuss more fully in the next section. One common label for such a group is "discourse community." The concept of discourse community developed usefully in composition theory for several purposes, among them to help specify the overly vague abstraction of "context" and to call attention to the social nature of texts (e.g., Bizzell). The considerable discussion over the past fifteen or more years includes some telling criticism of discourse community as an idealistic and naive concept (e.g., Harris, "Idea"). Since genre has so often been closely tied to the concept of discourse community, I wish briefly to review the initial concept and its modifications before suggesting modifications of my own.

The connection of discourse community to genre has been explored most fully by John Swales in his 1990 book *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*. Echoing Martin and other functionalists' emphasis on communicative purpose but applying it to writing,

for academic purposes, Swales states the social embeddedness of genre for many genre theorists: "Established members of discourse communities employ genres to realize communicatively the goals of their communities" (52). Deriving from the linguistic notion of speech community, the concept of discourse community has provided a way of defining relevant groups of language users, and the establishment of community through discourse has proven useful for genre theorists. Swales initially defines discourse communities as "sociorhetorical networks that form in order to work towards sets of common goals" (9). He then describes six defining characteristics that identify a discourse community:

1. A discourse community has a broadly agreed set of common public goals. . . .

2. A discourse community has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members. . . .

3. A discourse community uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback. . . .

4. A discourse community utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aim. . . .

5. In addition to owning genres, a discourse community has acquired some specific lexis. . . .

6. A discourse community has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discoursal expertise.

(24–27)

Swales defines genre by connecting genre to one component of rhetorical situation—purpose—and then connecting purpose to discourse community:

A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style. (58)

The "communicative events," that genre comprises also have social force, in Swales's terms, for he defines such events as "comprising not only the discourse itself and its participants, but also the role of that discourse

and the environment of its production and reception, including its historical and cultural associations" (46). Genre, then, is shaped by a rationale determined by a discourse community and operates within a historical and cultural environment.

The problems with discourse community as the definer of genre's social nature are several, many of which Swales has recognized. Swales himself has described the criticisms of idealism and circularity and the problems of definition that he and others have pointed out (*Other Floors* 21–22, 196–204). Also, Swales's original emphasis on the "expert" or "established" members of the community disguises the heterogeneity of actual communities, with members at various stages of expertise, some on the periphery of the community, and all with different degrees and kinds of power within the community. Joseph Harris, in *A Teaching Subject*, has suggested the metaphor of city rather than community to reveal the diversity of membership, among other things. People also participate in multiple communities, so the borders of a discourse community are not as distinct as Swales's original criteria might make them appear. People move in and out of and among multiple groups, leaving communities more fluid and dynamic than the concept of discourse community has tended to capture.

I also find it counterintuitive to define groups according to the discourse they use, though doing so solves several problems of group identification and is convenient for scholars of discourse. Privileging discourse in this way does reveal that discourse helps to establish the community, though Swales cites studies by Dwight Atkinson and Yu-Ying Chang in concluding that

> [t]he discourse community concept was thus more useful for *validating* the existence of groupings that already shared a complex of ideas and sentiments, and less useful for seeing how such groupings were initiated and nurtured, or for assessing the precise characteristics of any purported collectivity. (*Other Floors* 21, emphasis in original)

On the basis of his own research, Swales concludes that a redefined conception of discourse community remains a viable and helpful approach to genres and his method of textography, one especially appropriate for rhetoricians and discourse analysts. Others, too, have redefined and refined the concept to solve various problems and respond to different criticisms (e.g., Killingsworth and Gilbertson, Porter). I find, though, that defining communities in terms of their discourse, while

convenient for discourse analysts, has two significant and related problems that make any further refinement of the definition of discourse community irrelevant: the concept of discourse community privileges discourse above other group activities, motives, and purposes; and it disguises the social collectivity that shapes the very nature of the group and of its discourse (and its genres). As a result, it emphasizes too heavily the role of discourse in constructing groups and not enough the role of groups in constructing discourse.

It seems odd that lawyers and judges, for example, should be defined primarily as a community who share discourse, though of course discourse is central to the functioning of their community. Rather, what lawyers and judges have in common underlies the discourse they share. Speech communities in linguistics, on which the concept of discourse community is partially based, are grounded in the idea that people who share experiences tend to speak in similar ways. Usually, a speech community has been identified by its shared experiences, by its common demographic and social identity: middle-aged, upper-class white men in Philadelphia, for example, or teenaged working-class Latinas in Los Angeles. In those instances when speech communities are discovered through their common speech characteristics instead, sociolinguists seek underlying commonalities of identity. In the classic study of the speech among residents of Martha's Vineyard, for example, William Labov found different pronunciations among what would appear to be a homogeneous social group. What revealed the pattern of those different pronunciations and explained their basis was the difference in whether the young speakers planned to remain on the island or planned to move to the mainland. Those who planned to remain had pronunciations different from other young people and more similar to the pronunciations of older residents of the island. Two speech communities within the group of young people developed through different underlying loyalties, different identities. Transferred to the concept of discourse community, the concept of speech community shows that common traits of written discourse are significant to the extent that they reveal underlying commonalities of identity or values; they are not meaningful in themselves, just as saying "dog" rather than "chien" is not meaningful in itself. Recognizing common genres within a group, therefore, is but the first step in recognizing a community. The definer of that community must be some nondiscourse commonality that the common genres reflect and perform. Communities thus are better defined by their common goals, values, or identities than by their common discourse or genres.

Lawyers and judges, then, share common goals, values, and identities, a fact to which their common genres attest and which their common genres promote. Of course, those common genres also attest to the fact that lawyers and judges communicate with one another often, that they have shared experiences. The young speakers on Martha's Vineyard must have not only identified with the older speakers on the island but also had contact with them, the basic insight of dialectology from which sociolinguistics and the concept of speech community developed. People must speak with one another, even indirectly, in order to speak like one another. Similarly, people who share genres must have contact with one another. It seems an obvious statement, but its implications extend beyond the obvious. People have different kinds of contact with different people. Some people are nodding acquaintances, some are colleagues, some are friends, some are family members. People know some people through a single shared interest, others through daily common endeavors. Contact with some people is voluntary; with others it is required to accomplish particular goals, perhaps even required to keep a job or an intact family. Linguists have long known that the degree and type of contact influence the degree of influence on people's speech. The same can be argued for communities and genres. There are different types of groups who develop genres, and those different types may produce genres with different relationships to the groups.

The kinds of groups that Swales and many other genre scholars most often describe are professional or disciplinary communities, especially ones that have frequent, work-related contact. In his recent study of the groups working on three floors of a building at the University of Michigan, Swales refines Porter's concept of a "place discourse community" to capture "a group of people who regularly work together" and whose members "have a settled (if evolving) sense of their aggregation's roles and purposes" (*Other Floors* 204). He goes on to add definitional criteria, including the existence of common genres, so that he can distinguish such communities from other groupings of people. As a result of his narrowed criteria, Swales concludes that one of the groups he studied, the Computing Resource Site, does not constitute a place discourse community. Its high turnover of staff (participants in the group), its participants' resulting weak sense of history, and the relatively low number of texts produced at that site, among other things, counteract its distinctive ethos among some participants, its consensus about the relationship between theory and practice, and its appearance as a working group, leading Swales to eliminate it from place discourse community status

(205). Attempting to establish defining criteria for discourse communities leads Swales to eliminate from consideration one group that clearly operates as a group, that has frequent daily contact around common endeavors. The other two groups Swales does classify as place discourse communities, though one, the Herbarium, clearly fits the criteria while the other, the English Language Institute, has one criterial problem.

Rather than refining the criteria to establish narrower definitions of types of discourse communities, to exclude some groups from further examination, I would prefer to see all three groups as interesting for discourse and genre analysts and as differing in their characteristics, both in kind and degree, in ways that might well relate to the differences in their discourse and genres. The fact that the English Language Institute contains two groups with potentially clashing cultures, rather than positing a problem for discourse community researchers, could create a rich area for research into how people negotiate ideologies through discourse when conflicting ideologies are present within the same working group. The fact that the Computing Resource Site has high turnover and relatively few texts produced within the group could present an opportunity to study how coherence is established (or not) within a rapidly changing group and what role discourse from outside the group plays. By making the Herbarium the model of a place discourse community, Swales and others who privilege traditional professional groups determine that the social contexts will be of particular kinds, limiting as well the range of genres examined. Swales, for example, would not examine the weather forecasts, a category of discourse that people identify with a generic name (*Other Floors* 198).

In order to include the whole range of genres, with all their multifarious ways of operating within groups, I would prefer to begin with the whole range of groups, with all the multifarious ways that people gather and that social structures organize those people. I would prefer to step back, to look at larger definitions of ways that people group themselves, and to see what kinds of discourse are used by these generally different groupings of people. In advocating a return to such vague "terms of art," as Swales calls them, I am advocating a return to a broader understanding of the interaction of society and genres. Perhaps renewed research can examine how genres interact with multiple kinds of groups, rather than primarily with the kinds of groups most distinct and most based in discourse. Such research as Peter Medway's on architecture students' use of architects' notebooks, with his discovery of what he calls "baggy genres," that I described in chapter 1, illustrates how

different the genres might be that exist in different kinds of groups. Such research might eventually reveal patterns of relationships among groups and genres, guiding further research. Until enough research into a wider range of groups and genres has established those patterns, however, beginning with some "baggy" types of groups can serve to provide some focus without overly restricting our perspective. I propose beginning with three types of groups: communities, collectives, and networks.[4]

Communities, Collectives, and Networks

Groups of people who share substantial amounts of time together in common endeavors would seem most clearly to merit the label *community*. Such relatively homogeneous communities would include Swales's place discourse communities but also the Computer Resource Site, academic departments, professional organizations with active publications and meetings (perhaps including an electronic discussion list), work groups or businesses, and social organizations with frequent contact like sororities or fraternities. Although homogeneous compared with more diffuse social groups to be discussed below, these communities, like physical communities, still contain the heterogeneity of multiple cultures and of diverse people, experts and novices, powerful and peripheral members, sycophants and rebels. Even though these communities pervade people's lives, people still participate in multiple communities and move among them, sometimes easily and sometimes with conflict. While I agree with Swales that "[h]uman beings are not chameleons" (*Other Floors* 202) and that participation in some groups is more significant for constructing people's identity than participation in other groups, people do indeed participate in multiple groups and shift identity and motives from one group to the next. I am a member of an academic English department but also of a university and of the Conference on College Composition and Communication and of the American Dialect Society. (Notice that each of these communities is also easily named.) My presence in each of these communities helps to shape them and shapes me, and my participation in these multiple communities affects each of the communities and at times causes conflicts (though to different degrees, depending on how central a member I am). Each of these communities also has genres through which participants act to fulfill the goals of that community, as many genre scholars have described. My department uses such written genres as memoranda, ballots, minutes of meetings, bylaws, teaching manuals, course descriptions, syllabi, writing assignments, and grade sheets. The university shares the genres of

grade sheets and memoranda but has its own genres of handbooks, policies, and a variety of forms. Both professional organizations work through the genres of conference abstracts, conference papers, journal articles, and subscription notices, but one also acts through committee reports, winter workshop announcements, and mailing lists, while the other acts through an electronic discussion list, a newsletter, and word lists. Though unlikely, it is possible that a community exists that uses no written genres in its actions, though spoken genres are surely necessary for any communication to occur within the community.

In the next chapter, I will examine more closely how genres operate within one community in an extended example of writing by tax accountants. Much research within genre study examines such communities, including Thomas Huckin's study of proposals for the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Graham Smart's study of writing at the Federal Bank of Canada, and Catherine Schryer's study of veterinary records, among many other studies of professional communities. Such groups fit my label of community because of their common endeavors, the closeness and frequency of their interaction, and the distinctness of their identification (the ability to name them), as well as the existence of shared genres. The genres of such communities would also seem to be functionally specific and well defined, yet they must be flexible enough to enable participants to act in complex ways in multiple and complex contexts.

The borders of communities are not rigid or static, for people not usually participating in a community enter and leave at specific times for specific purposes. A trial, for example, operates within the legal community, but it draws into that community people who do not usually participate in the legal community—defendants, witnesses, and jury members, for example. The fact that a community "owns" that activity (as early Swales in *Genre* and Berkenkotter and Huckin might put it), however, is evident in the comfort of some participants (lawyers, judges) with its purposes and methods, purposes and methods with which other participants (first-time defendants, witnesses, and jury members) are less familiar. Similarly, student representatives may join departmental or university committees, but the subtexts and procedures of committee meetings "belong" more to some committee members than others, committee members who regularly participate in the department community. Particular kinds of activity, with their attendant ways of acting through genres, can be seen as operating within, "belonging to," particular communities, though still communities with permeable borders.

Such distinct communities are not the only kind of group, however, for people organize themselves in diverse ways. Some groups form around a single repeated interest, without the frequency or intensity of contact of a community. These *collectives* would include interest or volunteer groups, hobby clubs, task forces that cross communities, and academic classes such as an English composition class.[5] Either for a short time (as in an academic class or task force) or at infrequent intervals (as in a club or interest group), these collectives act for a shared purpose that is often singular and focused. Political committees form to get their candidate elected, task forces are charged with suggesting solutions, volunteers gather to organize a book sale, or students and teachers join a class to fulfill a requirement, to offer certification, or to learn or teach something. Although they usually are, such collectives need not be physically together, something that might be required for the closeness of a community. For example, the on-line auction service eBay unites sellers and bidders electronically, who submit item descriptions and pictures, bids, and evaluations of completed sales. Users of eBay form what one journalist called "an instant community of like-minded souls united by common interests" (*Kansas* 14). Research that examines the writing in a particular course would fall into this category, but relatively little of genre research has investigated the genres of such collectives. Collectives have a clarity of focus and purpose that does not exist at the other levels I am proposing, for they lack the complexity of purpose and relationships of communities while maintaining still a definable goal. Their genres, similarly, develop for specific functions—flyers, reports, newsletters, advertisements, syllabi, examinations, and research papers.[6]

Some genres develop within groups that are loosely linked *networks*. The concept of social network, developed in sociology, has been extended by Lesley Milroy and James Milroy in linguistics to explain relationships among people and their speech that are not as tightly knit as that of a speech community and that may reflect more urbanized settings. Social networks are the connections made by one person knowing another person, who knows another person, who knows another person (like the linking made popular by the play *Six Degrees of Separation*). Social networks often form the basis of networking, making contact with someone who knows someone one knows. Social networks are common but often unrecognized in discourse study. A few genres that would seem to come from a social network include wedding invitations, weather forecasts, catalogues, and e-mail spam. One place social networks have become more visible is in electronic mail, in the address lines of an electronic message. People

often receive jokes through e-mail, for example, with address and copy lines filled with long lists of e-mail addresses, the set of people who form the sender's social network for jokes. People in that network may never have met one another, but they are receiving common discourse. As the recipients of that joke forward the message to their own social networks of joke lovers, the original social network expands. Similar networks are made apparent through chain letters, but social networks exist for all people in less visible ways as people link one to another through all their contacts in a society. The interactions and influences of such social networks are less easily traced than those within tighter communities, but they exist nonetheless, as Lesley Milroy's work has more fully demonstrated.

Some e-mail genres, like e-mail jokes, I would argue, are developing through just such social networks. In e-mail messages, genres exist that many people created relatively recently through adapting existing genres to the new context of electronic mail. The form of e-mail messages looks most like a memorandum, as Orlikowski and Yates point out (554–55), yet the technology is used for communications external to as well as internal to the organization. Since people call the discourse "e-mail" or an "e-mail message," it seems so far to be perceived as a single genre. Over time, though, I would expect the different kinds of messages to gain labels reflecting different genres. Already, e-mails from friends are taking on different forms from e-mails from colleagues, both reflecting their different situations. The different kinds of relationships and the different nature of the groups, in particular, seem to be distinguishing one potential e-mail genre from another. Although sharing some common traits, e-mail messages now can reflect quite different situations: I receive messages from my departmental chair announcing a lecture, from my dean requesting budget figures, from an editor discussing a textbook proposal, from my friend in Duluth keeping in touch, from the dozens of cousins who copy each other with bits of news on their cousin network, and from my mother, who just got her first computer. Right now, my address book represents a loosely connected network of e-mail correspondents, all of us linked through e-mail. As the technology continues to be integrated within different social groups, only some kinds of messages, like jokes, will continue to reside within networks. Others, like discussion lists and professional correspondence, will clearly be positioned within collectives or communities.

Although only more research can uncover the nature of genres within social networks, it makes sense that a genre that might develop from a social network would be different from a genre that develops from a

closer community. People have reasons to communicate with one another in a social network; that communication is what establishes a social network. But that communication may be unidirectional, is more infrequent or sporadic, and may be more variable in its purposes, participants, and contexts. With such infrequency and such variation in context of situation, actions might recur less often than in genres from collectives or communities. The resulting genres surely reflect those differences but not necessarily in predictable ways. Since a genre within a social network may occur only occasionally, it might develop less particular or firm expectations. On the other hand, such an infrequent genre need not adapt to as many different or complex situations as do genres within a community, so it might develop a simple and relatively fixed set of expectations. Wedding invitations are quite specifically defined, but jokes allow a range of approach. Weather forecasts fall somewhere in between. More research into genres that are attached loosely to social networks rather than intimately to communities is necessary to sort out such distinctions and to discover further factors influencing their nature and development.

Swales's insight that genres function within groups to fulfill their communicative goals remains critical to an understanding of the social nature of genres. The diverse nature of those groups and their participants, however, may affect their genres and so requires further investigation. The three types of groups I propose—communities, collectives, and social networks—may be redefined as more research examines how genres operate in different kinds of societies, but the differing ways people gather, however they are defined, will surely influence the genres people use to achieve their purposes. Thus I propose a first principle of the social nature of genres:

1. *Genres usually develop through the actions of many people, in groups. A genre operates within a group of language users, but the nature of that group and hence of its genres varies, from communities (people who share substantial amounts of time together in common endeavors) to collectives (people who gather around a single repeated interest, without the frequency or intensity of contact of a community) to social networks (people who are connected once—or more—removed, through having common contact with another person or organization).*

Genres Through Human Action

Remaining difficulties with examining genres in terms of the groups that create them are the issues of the fluidity of groups' borders and mem-

berships and the nature of how genres are "used" within those communities. One way to resolve the problems is to stop defining genre's social nature in terms of the groups of people for whom they operate, to stop equating socialness with group inhabitants. Social structures rather than social groups can be described and examined. Such an approach has been taken by structuration theory and activity theory, and both have been applied to genre theory.

One approach that moves sharply away from discourse communities while maintaining a social communicative purpose is to define genre as a tool within an activity system. Activity theory, as explained by Russell and based in Engeström's development of Vygotsky, avoids the reduction of defining the group in terms of its discourse, for it sees that "collectives" have "long-term objectives and motives beyond conversation," and "some shared object and long-term motive of the collective to do some things to, and some things with, some other things beyond discourse" ("Rethinking" 507). The object of study in activity theory is the activity system, "any ongoing, object-directed, historically conditioned, dialectically structured, tool-mediated human interaction" (510). Both individuals and groups operate within activity systems, using tools to accomplish their social actions. A genre, according to activity theory, is "the typified use of material tools of many types by an activity system" (513). Genres are routinized, common operations, what Russell shorthands as "operationalized social action" (516 and elsewhere).

Activity theory recognizes that people participate in multiple collectives, for people move in and out of activity systems. It also builds in the interactive nature of collectives, including that activity systems interact with one another. As an attempt, too, to bridge the macro and micro levels of analysis, activity theory discourages simple dialogism in favor of multiple voices and undercuts rigid dualities, as Russell argues well. For genre theory, however, it leaves two related difficulties: it analyzes genre more as a tool than as an action, and it diminishes the role of people in creating and using genres.

In spite of Russell's calling genres "action," activity theory appears to emphasize the nature of genres as tools. They are analyzed not at the level of activity system or action but only at the level of operation (table 1, 515), and they are most often associated with mediational means (tools) rather than with the two other components of an activity system, subjects or objects motives. "[A]ctivity systems are made up of specific goal-directed, time-bound, conscious actions," according to Russell, "which are, in turn, operationalized by *variable mediational means*

"(choices of tools, including genres)" (514, emphasis in original). To include genres as "choices of tools" and to define genre as the routinized use of tools is to remove genre from the level of social action, especially from motives and outcomes, which are separate components of activity systems. It is not a far step from equating genre with the use of tools to equating genre with form; nor is it a far step from equating genre with "a routine operation, usually unconscious" (515) to equating genre with formula. To the extent that genre becomes a tool, it loses its rhetorical nature. Communicative purpose remains an integral part of collective action but not an integral part of genre.

One might argue that genre is a common way of using tools rather than the tools themselves, keeping it an action in at least some sense, but such treatment would raise an issue of level of analysis: genre is somehow not part of one component of an activity system—not a mediational means—yet it is also not the activity system itself. A related difficulty is the interaction between genres and people. Russell defines genre, again, as "the typified use of material tools of many types *by an activity system*" (513, emphasis added). Genre is used not by people but by an activity system. The use of tools, which when operationalized becomes a genre, "mediates the behavior of people in activity systems in specific and objective ways," according to Russell's interpretation of Leont'ev (511). People move in and out of activity systems with the systems apparently existing separately from them. Although the prior existence of genres (what I called the context of genres in chapter 1) does affect how people perform their social actions and achieve their communicative and social purposes, this version of activity theory would seem to make genre an agent acting on its own, through the actions of an equally inhuman activity system.

The identification of genre as either tool or agent is one of the most central assumptions underlying many theories of genre, seen among other ways in scholars' choice of subjects ("people use genres" [tool] *versus* "genres perform these acts" [agent]). For genre to be a tool alone is to reduce its force, as I just described, to limit the nature of genre to formal formulae, a preexisting, static, material object that people can pick up and use or just as easily set aside. For genre to act as agent independent of human operators is to magnify its force too much, to enlarge the nature of genre to material action that makes people do things or that does things without working through people. It is instead the nature of genre both to be created by people and to influence people's actions, to help people achieve their goals and to encourage people to act in cer-

tain ways, to be both-and. Genres never operate independently of the actions of people, but the actions of some people influence the actions of other people through genres.

Such a reciprocal interaction of human action and genre is similar to the interaction of contexts and genres that I explored in chapter 1. People construct genres, but then genres construct people, especially the identity or roles of people, as Russell among others recognizes. Once genres are established by people, they exist institutionally and collectively and have the force of other social expectations and social structures. Since people do not exist in a world without preexisting genres, people are always already operating within a context of genres, a context of genres that originates in the actions of people.

The concept of duality of structure, taken from Anthony Giddens's social theory, captures further the reciprocal, constitutive relationship of people and their social structures, including genres.[7] As explained by Yates and Orlikowski in their study of how organizational genres changed in response to technological changes,

social institutions . . . are enacted through individuals' use of social rules. These rules shape the action taken by individuals in organizations; at the same time, by regularly drawing on the rules, individuals reaffirm or modify the social institutions in an ongoing recursive interaction. ("Genres" 299–300)

Thus, people who "follow the rules" are operated on by those rules, and their actions in following the rules reproduce (reinforce and recreate) those rules. On the basis of Yates and Orlikowski's research, Berkenkotter and Huckin "paraphrase Giddens . . . paraphrasing Marx" in concluding, "it is the social actors that are the agents of change . . . , but not through conditions of their own making" (21).[8]

With the help of the concept of duality of structure, perhaps genre, in its role as a social structure, can be seen as both tool and agent, both constructed and constructing, always constructed by people but not always by the same people who are acting with it at that moment. Duality of structure helps to explain also all of the interaction of people and their contexts—context of culture and situation as well as context of genres. Cultures and situations, like genres, are constructed by humans responding to material conditions and perceiving similarities. As people interact with cultures, situations, and genres, they are shaped by those contexts and reaffirm those contexts. Even as people use a particular genre to mediate between those contexts and text, they both operate within and

recreate that genre. Genre's mediation between the macro and micro levels defies that dualism, for it reproduces the macro in the micro and alters the macro through its creation in the micro. Or, that is, *people*, through genres, mediate, defy, reproduce, alter, and create.

Genre is inherently social because people are inherently social and people act through genres. Thus I propose a second principle of the social nature of genres:

2. *Genres do not exist independent of people, though the generic actions of some people influence the actions of other people. To say that genre is a social action is to say that people take action through their conceptions of genres; genre is a human construct, not a material tool nor an agent.*

Genres and Social Function

Having cautioned that genres must always remain connected to people and not be disembodied, I return to Swales's basic insight, that genres function within groups to fulfill their communicative goals, for understanding the functions of genres for groups remains critical to an understanding of the social nature of genres. The group and functional connections of some genres are quite obvious, especially in the spheres of business, law, science, and other spheres that we tend to view as highly pragmatic. Certain tasks must be accomplished in a trial, for example; to fulfill those tasks, different genres have developed. Briefs are written to make arguments to the judge before the trial begins, saving time and laying the groundwork for the trial's arguments. Judges' decisions are handed down to settle legal issues and establish justification. Questioning of the witnesses and cross-examination serve to establish and counter the "facts" of the case. Summation speeches on both sides argue each side's position, reviewing the conflict. Jury instructions define the relevant law and direct juries' actions. The jury's verdict concludes the debate, designating the "winner" and "loser." The judge's sentencing determines the action to be taken (prior to appeals). These genres do the work of the trial. The lawyers, judges, and juries have certain tasks to accomplish. The genres help that group of people accomplish those tasks.

The difference between this claim—that genres function for a group—and that of the preceding chapter—that genres reflect and construct recurring rhetorical situations and contexts—is one of perspective, not of definition. Obviously, in the trial example, each genre is reflecting a rhetorical situation, answering the situation's question, in Burke's terms, meeting a rhetorical exigence, in Bitzer's terms, and adapt

ing to a field, mode, and tenor, in Halliday's terms. Each genre in the trial is operating within the contexts of culture and genres as well as situation. Shifting from a more local situational perspective to a cultural perspective, however, reveals not only how that genre fulfills a purpose for the participants but also how that genre interacts with other genres, other purposes, and other situations to fulfill the more general needs of groups. In this case, the group needs to conduct a trial, which itself is needed to determine guilt, which derives from the legal system's raison d'être. The social workers' case report is another clear example, as are most kinds of business memoranda and letters and the genres of tax accountants, to be discussed at length in the next chapter. Most academic genres function to test one skill or another that the disciplinary or university community has been charged with certifying: the research paper for research skills and incorporation of a field's epistemology, the lab report for scientific method, the freshman theme for literacy and basic coherence of thinking, the essay examination for comprehension of essential concepts, and so on. As these academic examples suggest, functions are not simple nor usually singular, especially not in the genres through which communities, rather than collectives or networks, achieve their goals, and functions are often ideological as well as practical. A genre might be describable in terms of one primary function, but most discourse modes or aims, which attempt to reduce the complexity of all discourse to single characteristics. Instead, generic functions must remain complex and multiple and socially embedded. Explaining genres' functions discourages equating genre with category and encourages embedding genre within both rhetorical purpose and social contexts. As complex and multiple as groups are, so are the goals they have and the genres through which they achieve those goals. As ideological as groups are, so are the functions of their genres, as will be discussed more in principle 6 below. Genres help people to fulfill the group's complex needs and fulfill its complex purposes. Those social and group functions affect the constitution and construction of the genre.

The functional nature of genres can be overstated if genres are reduced to "taking care of business" in an uncomplicated, mechanistic manner, as I believe Martin et al. come dangerously near to when they state, "Genres represent the most efficient ways cultures have at a given point in time of going about their business. It is in this sense that genres are functional" (6.?). As rhetorical acts, genres cannot be transparent and purely efficient uses of language or they would not be able to adapt to

the particularities of each communicative event.[9] Elsewhere, Martin takes a more moderate stance that more appropriately describes the functional nature of genres: "Genres are how things get done, when language is used to accomplish them" (1985, qtd. in Swales, *Genre* 26).

Do all groups have their own genres, as Swales in *Genre Analysis* claims in his fourth characteristic of discourse communities? The problem with this question is its potential circularity. If a group does not have its own genre, according to Swales, then it is not yet a discourse community. Borrowing genres from other communities is not sufficient, yet according to the argument about classification offered in chapter 1, whether the analyst says two communities have the same or different genres will depend largely on the analyst's purposes. Are all business memoranda a single genre? Are all research papers? If so, multiple communities use them. Of course, an analyst can find differences between the research paper in psychology and that in history, so they can be claimed as different genres. But quibbling over such classifications, as I argued in chapter 1, is beside the essential point of genre. Requiring all groups to have their own genres unnecessarily raises such classificatory questions. As Russell says, groups have multiple goals, some of which are not communicative. Yet it is difficult to imagine how groups will achieve their goals without communication of some sort, since it is in the very nature of groups that individuals must cooperate and cooperation requires communication. Although it seems a philosophical possibility that groups could achieve goals without genres, it seems an unlikely reality, though a genre may not be unique to a particular group.

Do all genres function always within groups? Although all genres certainly develop through group action (one person doth not a genre make), that claim must at least be complicated to apply beyond the more obviously pragmatic genres. What is the group that provides the rationale for poetry? novels? letters to friends? grocery lists? Having expanded the conception of groups to include collectives and networks as well as communities makes possible a group function for some genres that might otherwise not seem attached to a group. I discuss the group functions of literary genres more in chapter 6. Such genres as letters and grocery lists may develop, like e-mail messages, from the social networks within a culture, while more specific types of letters and lists might develop within communities of families and intimates. Do all genres serve some function for a group of people? That claim may be upheld. Novel readers pick up a novel for a purpose, a purpose that the genre of novel fulfills (again, I discuss literary genres more in chapter 6). Letters to friends,

serve important purposes of bonding and cementing relationships for the friends. Grocery lists enable the shopper and the keeper of the inventory to perform their tasks most efficiently, even when the two roles are filled by the same person. Even poetry may be seen, from a social view, to have a function for those who write and read it (and today, writers and readers of poetry may even be becoming a tightly knit and exclusive community). Without a doubt, the functions for a group are more significant for some genres than others, but the complex social functioning of genres within groups is central for understanding many genres and may be enlightening even for those genres where social function is less transparent. Thus I propose a third principle of the social nature of genres:

3. *Genres function for groups, though those functions are typically multiple and ideological as well as situational.*

Interpreting Social Function Through Discourse

Since genre is a concept that mediates between texts and contexts, discourse will typically show marks of its genres and of the contexts with which the genre interacts. Since genres function socially for groups, discourse will typically show traces of those social functions. In simple terms, discourse typically has traits that make sense because of the genre's functions for its group. Such an obvious statement is worth making because it, too, needs to be elaborated. Much of hermeneutics and rhetorical criticism is based on interpreting the meaning of discourse features. Generic traits can be interpreted situationally, as discussed in chapter 1, and they can be interpreted culturally. Lab reports are structured as they are, for example, not only to serve the immediate situation most appropriately (clearly labeled sections, fixed order, and so on) but also to embody the scientific method representative of the group's ideology. Interpreting discourse features thus requires not only situational but also cultural astuteness. Because ideologies, values, assumptions, and epistemologies are rarely explicit, however, those participating in the group with the genres being examined are the most reliable interpreters of the discourse's cultural as well as situational meaning. It is difficult for those who have not acted through the genres to recognize the full meaning and significance of textual features. Just as users of the genres are the most reliable definers of a genre, they are also the most reliable interpreters of that genre. On the other hand, people are shaped by their contexts and genres, and no one can be fully aware of the complexities of a group or its genres or fully conscious of their ideological effects. To some ex-

tent, interpretations are always informed guesses colored by ideological frames, and, if our understanding is to advance, there must always be analysts-critics as well as users-participants. Genres and their social meanings can be interpreted through discourse, though cautiously. Thus my fourth principle:

4. *A genre commonly reveals its social functions with characteristic discourse features, but interpreting those features may require active participation with the genre and can never be complete.*

Genre Sets

Rarely does a group accomplish all of its purposes with a single genre. More often, as I argued in my study of tax accountants' writing, a set of genres functions for the group, and the interactions among those genres affect the functioning of each genre ("Intertextuality").

Todorov describes the largest set of genres when he writes, "the choice a society makes among all the possible codifications of discourse determines what is called its *system of genres*" (10, emphasis in original). Todorov's system of genres describes what I have called in chapter 1 the *context of genres*, the set of all existing genres in a society or culture. Speaking of it as a system, however, as Todorov does, implies a tighter, more static structure than I believe the context of genres involves. The context of genres must remain flexible and dynamic, for the society from which genres develop is always changing, as Bakhtin notes:

The wealth and diversity of speech genres are boundless because the various possibilities of human activity are inexhaustible, and because each sphere of activity contains an entire repertoire of speech genres that differentiate and grow as the particular sphere develops and becomes more complex. ("Problem" 60)

What Bakhtin describes as the "repertoire" of genres (a term Orlikowski and Yates also adopt) is more particular than the context of genres. It is the set of genres that exists within a particular "sphere of activity" or group. As Bakhtin notes, the genre set develops as the group develops, still serving the group's needs. Thus, the genre set of the legal community may long have included the genres involved in a trial but may more recently have developed genres involved in arbitration. As the needs of the group change, the genre set changes to reflect those needs, thereby also changing the larger context of genres.

Acknowledging the significance of genre sets emphasizes the significance of intertextuality to genre. Intertextuality plays an important role in individual genres as well as genre sets, of course, for the development of a genre always requires at least two actions for recurrence and typification to be perceived. Kristeva's intertextuality and Bakhtin's dialogic theories would argue that all discourse contains such exchange among texts. In genre theory, Anne Freadman offers a comparable dialogic analysis of genre in her unusual and insightful article "Anyone for Tennis?" In this article, Freadman argues that genre is best described as a game and one that requires at least two texts related dialogically (97–98), an interaction that she later describes in terms of "uptakes" ("Uptake"). No genre exists without at least two texts, for no class can contain only one member. The notion of genre set extends this intertextuality across genres. Extended to genre sets, the concepts of intertextuality and dialogue allow us to see the inherent relatedness of genres within the same social group and its actions. Within the legal community, the genre set that operates within a trial again offers a clear example. Achieving a trial's purposes requires a charge, which requires a plea; opening statements and summations, which respond to each other; witness questioning, which results in cross-examinations; and, with increasing frequency, a verdict requiring sentencing, which is responded to in an appeal. Of course, trials are set up as debates, so their intertextual nature is pronounced, but they represent the less obvious intertextuality of all genres. A memo announcing a meeting is related to minutes of that meeting; both may be related to proposals, regulations, or other documents that result from the purpose of that meeting. A single letter, business or personal, often results in a series of letters. A marriage proposal is tied to wedding invitations, cards of congratulations, guest books, marriage vows, thank you notes. Understanding the marriage proposal requires understanding all the other genres that it entails.

In examining genre sets, there is some benefit to connecting genre sets to activity systems as well as to groups, whether communities, collectives, or networks. The trial is clearly an activity system, and its genres interact essentially and functionally. The participants in a trial, as I noted earlier, include defendants, witnesses, and jury members as well as the usual participants in the legal community, lawyers and judges. Using activity system as the unit of analysis, therefore, enables a clearer depiction of diverse participants and roles, of an overarching purpose for multiple genres, and of multiple genres as the means of achieving that purpose in a trial. Genre sets operating within activity systems that are

similarly distinct might likewise benefit from an activity system analysis. There also exist, however, different kinds of genre sets that do not fit so neatly into an activity system as defined apart from its group. Lawyers act within many genres that are not contained in the activity system of a trial: all their work that does not result in litigation. The genre set of this and other professional communities operates to achieve the multiple functions of such a group without a distinct overarching activity. Some genre sets are used in multiple systems and communities as well. Yates and Orlikowski ("Genre") describe what they call the meeting, collaborative authoring, and collaborative repository genre systems that develop from a commonly used networking program. These genre sets transform as well as reinforce the interactions of the team they studied, an effect presumably present in other activity systems and other communities that use the same program. Genre sets help the community to cohere and define itself, among other functions, and are more clearly viewed, I would argue, from the perspective of the community's operations than from the notion of activity system, which I argued earlier is too easily removed from human enactment.

The difference, I propose, can be captured by complicating our conception of genre set to encompass different kinds of genre sets, more kinds than even the two just described. Some genres work together to perform different roles in achieving a common purpose, like the genres directly involved in a trial. This set of genres interacting to achieve an overarching function within an activity system I would call a *genre system* (a term Bazerman in "Systems" has adopted for all of what I have termed genre sets). Larger ideological purposes that analysts might identify, such as helping a group cohere, will come into play for other kinds of genre sets: the term *genre system* I would reserve for a genre set identifiable by those who use it that has clearly linked genres with a common purpose. Calling such genre sets "systems" implies more potential rigidity than they actually have, but the term does capture the regularity and often rule-governed nature of the interaction of genres within a distinct activity. Other genre sets that might be considered genre systems would include those genres involved in assigning grants or bids (requests for proposals or bids, proposals or bids, granting documents, reports, requests for grant extensions, etc.); those genres involved in a job search (job advertisements, resumes or curricula vitae, application or cover letters, invitations to interview, thank you notes, rejections, job offers); those genres involved in writing class assignments (writing prompt, student drafts, teacher commentary, possibly extending to revised papers, and

grades); or those genres surrounding a wedding (proposal, acceptance or rejection, invitations, RSVP's, bridal registries, gift cards, thank you notes, vows, marriage certificates, toasts, etc.). Each genre system can be described in terms of a particular activity it accomplishes. As the close linking and necessary ordering of these last examples show, a genre system might also be called a genre sequence, though genre system might better capture the complexity of interaction in more complex activities like trials. As the last two examples also suggest, a genre system is still flexible, for not all genres in the system must be used for the purpose to be achieved and there are alternate genres for achieving the same ends.

More often discussed as genre sets since my depiction of the sets of tax accountants are what I would now call *genre repertoires*, following the term of Bakhtin and the general use of Yates and Orlikowski. A genre repertoire is the set of genres that a group owns, acting through which a group achieves all of its purposes, not just those connected to a particular activity. The genre systems of a particular activity could be part of a larger genre repertoire, as the trial genre system would be part of the legal genre repertoire. *Repertoire* is an especially helpful term for this set, for it connotes not only a set of interacting genres but also a set from which participants choose, a definer of the possibilities available to the group. The genre set that I described for tax accountants I would now call a genre repertoire. Most professional communities, if not all (a matter for research), have genre repertoires, though they might or might not contain genre systems. The genres within a repertoire do interact, though often in less obvious ways, with less clear-cut sequencing and more indirect connections than exist in a genre system.

I would expect research also to show that genre sets differ in different kinds of groups. The genre repertoires of communities define the work of a relatively coherent group, people with complex goals and often well-developed or long-standing ways of achieving those goals. People in collectives also have genre sets that help to define their work, though they may less often have the complexity of a genre repertoire. For example, task forces have a range of functions to fulfill or a repertoire of genres to choose among. Volunteers organizing a book sale have established ways of advertising, organizing, and enacting the donations and selling of books, though their genres might less often be written. For these more loosely defined sets of genres, associated through the activities and functions of a collective but defining only a limited range of actions, I would retain the term *genre set*. Some collectives certainly

might have a genre repertoire, if a single-interest group has a long history and has developed more complex functions. Some collectives certainly do have genre systems, especially those with a single, well-delineated activity as their reason for being. The participants in the eBay online auction that I mentioned earlier, for example, have a distinct system of item descriptions, bids, notifications of sales, and evaluation of transactions that have a specified sequence and work together to achieve a common task, the sale of items, yet they form a group, a collective, only for that task. Genre systems may more likely operate with collectives, since collectives more often have single, well-defined tasks. Networks, on the other hand, may more often have no genre sets at all but rather only single genres that reflect their connectedness. The network of people who receive e-mail jokes, after all, may connect those people as a group only through that one address heading. Again, research is needed to explore how the types of genre sets operate in different types of groups. My first hypothesis would be that communities more often operate through genre repertoires, collectives more often through genre systems or genre sets, and networks more often through single genres interacting with other genres only in the largest context of genres.

Genres may interact with one another in more particular relationships as well. Yates and Orlikowski note that some genres overlap in function and situation, so the term *overlapping genres* might also prove useful for the analysis of how genres interact. Some genres would seem to fit a *call and response* pattern, as a request for information results in a letter giving information. Some genres would seem to serve as *supergenres* for other genres, providing the basis of and reference point for other genres, as tax regulations operate for other tax genres, scriptures for religious genres, laws for legal genres. Janet Giltrow has explored genres that describe or proscribe other genres, what she terms *meta-genres*, such as guidelines or proscriptions. Research will continue to reveal other ways that genres interact with one another as scholars increasingly examine relations among genres.

If a group of people does share more than one genre, that set of genres as a unit will serve that group's needs and will have a functional significance beyond the significance of each part.

5. *A group usually operates through a set of genres to achieve the group's purposes, but the nature of that genre set varies among different types of groups. Genres interact with one another in the context of genres and in genre repertoires, genre sets, genre systems, overlapping genres, call*

and response genres, supergenres, and other possible relationships that further research will uncover.

Ideologies Through Genres

Because people in groups develop genres, genres reflect what the group believes and how it views the world. As Todorov writes, "Like any other institution, genres bring to light the constitutive features of the society to which they belong" (19). A genre and a genre set, like any other artifacts of a society, reveal those who use them. Somewhat statically, Volosinov again describes the enmeshing of genre with its social context:

> Each situation, fixed and sustained by social custom, commands a particular kind of organization of audience and, hence, a particular repertoire of little behavioral genres. The behavioral genre fits everywhere into the channel of social intercourse assigned to it and functions as an ideological reflection of its type, structure, goal, and social composition. The behavioral genre is a fact of the social milieu: of holiday, leisure time, and of social contact in the parlor, the workshop, etc. It meshes with that milieu and is delimited and defined by it in all its internal aspects. (97)

Pierre Bourdieu expresses this social situatedness of genre more broadly, as Thompson explains in his introduction, seeing every linguistic exchange as

> situated encounters between agents endowed with socially structured resources and competencies, in such a way that every linguistic interaction, however personal and insignificant it may seem, bears the traces of the social structure that it both expresses and helps to reproduce. (2)

The kinds of social facts that genre reflects are many, but some stand out as common to and significant for most genres and their groups. Freadman describes those social facts in terms of the rules of the game, who can do and say certain things, when, and where ("Anyone" 113). Bizzell describes them, for the academic community, as "characteristic ways of interacting with the world" (229). Bourdieu concentrates on their reflection of power. Berkenkotter and Huckin list "norms, epistemology, ideology, and social ontology" (21). Frequently noted by many are a group's ideology, epistemology, assumptions, beliefs, and values. Encompassing several of these descriptions, I would describe genre as

reflecting especially and commonly a group's values, epistemology, and power relationships—its ideology.

Although the extended example of tax accountants' genres will clarify this principle more fully, a few relatively obvious examples may help. Dorothy A. Winsor found that the genre of the work order helped to maintain existing hierarchical social structures. The trial genre system, to continue an example, reflects the power relationships among judges and lawyers in many ways: objections are addressed to the judge, the judge is the only one permitted to "rule." Defendants seem especially powerless in the trial genre system, for they are not even permitted to speak except in response to the lawyers' questions. In fact, their ability to choose silence may be at times their only real power. The legal community's epistemology, its ways of knowing truth, are everywhere evident in the trial genre system: witnesses must be "expert" or "material" to testify, their stories must withstand cross-examination, each utterance of witness, lawyer, or judge must be supported by the legally defined "facts," and the final truth comes from common consensus in the form of the jury verdict, which the judge could still overturn on the basis of the law. The values of the legal community, as a remaining catchall, appear in many conventions: such values as explicit courtesy ("if it please the court") and the right of the defendant to have the last word (the sequencing of the two summations). These values, epistemology, and power relationships are reflected in many other aspects of the trial (clothing and seating assignments, for example), but each genre and the genre system also reflect them in ways that may be less easily recognized.

The generic acts of objecting, ruling, testifying, and cross-examining, however, also act to reinforce the ideology in which they were created. Addressing objections to the judge gives the judge the power to rule. Describing witness expertise in testimony tells the jury that expertise matters. Cross-examining keeps the truth from ever having only one side. Genres not only reflect but also reinforce the ideology of the group whose purposes they serve. In some significant ways, the group's beliefs constitute the genre and the genre constitutes the group's beliefs. This shift from simple reflection to reflection and construction is represented in Berkenkotter and Huckin's shift (conscious or not) from describing how genres "signal" a group's values to stating that genres "instantiate" those values (21–23). Once genres are established that, as we have just seen, reflect the group's values, epistemology, and power relationships, the existence and continued use of those genres reaffirm those very values, epistemology, and power relationships. If genre is "a zone and a field of

valorized perception, . . . a mode for representing the world," as Bakhtin writes ("Epic" 28), then using that genre reinforces that perception, that representation of the world.

This reciprocal relationship between the group's ideologies and its genres is characterized well by Giddens's concept of duality of structure, a concept I described earlier in this chapter and that Yates and Orlikowski and Berkenkotter and Huckin discuss more fully. Berkenkotter and Huckin summarize the idea: "As we draw on genre rules to engage in professional activities, we *constitute* social structures (in professional, institutional, and organizational contexts) and simultaneously *reproduce* these structures" (4). Using the verb *reproduce* to describe this reciprocal relationship also calls up the specter of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity, for our view of the influence of language upon thought or perception will determine how rigidly defining we consider this cycle to be. My view here is *not* that the genre determines how its users view the world; rather, I would argue only that the use of a genre privileges one way of viewing the world, the view of the group from which it stems. Early work by Bakhtin suggests a similar perspective, where genres represent multiple perspectives:

> [A]ll languages of heteroglossia [including language of genres], whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values. ("Discourse" 291–92)

Later work by Volosinov, however, is more deterministic, with world-view being inescapable (e.g., 85). Ongstad, too, argues for the constructivist turn back from the genre to the group, though he edges toward the deterministic in spots:

> The socialization *to* genres implies socialization *through* genres. This means that the genres carry a world picture (Whorf), an *ideology* (Bakhtin/Volosinov), a doxa (Barthes) or a tacit culture which is forced upon the user through the communication. . . . The genres *are or constitute* the experienced kind of community which are often associated with the term "society." . . . The genres which constitute the groups, the language or the sign systems as a whole in a given society *are that society*. . . . We think that genre community in a modern society might be more significant as social dimension

than general terms like class, social-economic groups, strata. (23–24)

Leslie Olsen, reviewing the research on discourse communities, states a more moderate and reciprocal view that not only do the context and values of the community affect the content and form of the document but "a few of the studies also suggest that there is sometimes an effect of the content and form of a document on its context, including helping to define the sense of community and to project its set of values and attitudes" (188–89).

Many scholars have examined particular genres for their ideologies and have demonstrated that the genre encourages a particular ideology (Yates and Orlikowski; Bazerman, *Shaping*; Schryer, "Records"; among dozens of others). As Winsor concludes, "As a textual tool used to accomplish work, genre is a profoundly political force" ("Ordering" 181). Prince goes even further in examining what happens when people learn to use genres different from those they already know, and he argues that learning those genres requires that they learn new epistemologies and values as well. He cites Whately as having seen that

an institutionally sanctioned genre—here the school declamation—imposes a specific interpretation of what counts as knowledge. The habitual composition of such a form changes thought and character, creates a youth who is self-alienated, frigid, empty, artificial, "dressed up in the garb, and absurdly aping the demeanor of an elderly man!" (732)

Similarly, he points to his three-year-old child's experiences and those studied by Scollon and Scollon of the Athabaskans, indigenous peoples of Alaska:

For the Athabaskans, learning to write essays was not simply a matter of acquiring a few new verbal skills (e.g. proficiency in forming a thesis, organizing paragraphs, and so on). Rather, the new genre implied cultural and personal values that conflicted with pre-existing patterns of thought and behavior. . . . In each case the discourse to which they have been habituated to a great extent determines the nature and direction of intellectual development. (741)

Although I do not want to argue that using a genre "determines the nature and direction of intellectual development" (and I will, in chap

ter 5, deal directly with the issue of individual choice and variation within a genre's ideology), it does seem evident that the relation of group and genre is reciprocal, that the group's values, epistemology, and power relationships shape the genres and that acting through those genres in turn maintains those same values, epistemology, and power relationship, though it is such actions that also must construct that ideology.

How this principle interacts with the differences of types of groups and genre sets that I have proposed is an interesting area for speculation. It would not surprise me if further research discovered that genre repertoires reproduce communities' ideologies more forcefully than do the genre sets of collectives. The very closeness of a community, including the frequency of its participants' interactions, would suggest that it is more deeply entrenched ideologies that its genres promote. A community repertoire also contains more genres to reinforce its ideology. On the other hand, the complexity of a community requires more flexibility in its genres, to enable them to adapt to local situations; the narrower expectations of a collective's genre system might retain tighter control over variations from the group's procedures and hence its ideology. research is needed here as well to complicate our understanding of how genres, groups, and ideologies interact.

Summary of Six Principles of the Social Nature of Genre

Altogether, the six principles I have sketched here characterize the social nature of genres, how they interact with one another, how they develop and operate within group settings, and how their use in turn affects their groups and social structures.

1. Genres usually develop through the actions of many people, in groups. A genre operates within a group of language users, but the nature of that group and hence of its genres varies, from communities (people who share substantial amounts of time together in common endeavors) to collectives (people who gather around a single repeated interest, without the frequency or intensity of contact of a community) to social networks (people who are connected once—or more—removed, through having common contact with another person or organisation).

2. *Genres do not exist independent of people, though the generic actions of some people influence the actions of other people. To say that genre is a social action is to say that people take action through their conceptions of genres; genre is a human construct, not a material tool nor an agent.*

3. *Genres function for groups, though those functions are typically multiple and ideological as well as situational.*

4. *A genre commonly reveals its social functions with characteristic discourse features, but interpreting those features may require active participation with the genre and can never be complete.*

5. *A group usually operates through a set of genres to achieve the group's purposes, but the nature of that genre set varies in different types of groups. Genres interact with one another in the context of genres and in genre repertoires, genre sets, genre systems, overlapping genres, call and response genres, supergenres, and other possible relationships that further research will uncover.*

6. *A genre reflects, constructs, and reinforces the values, epistemology, and power relationships of the group from which it developed and for which it functions, though the forcefulness of that reinforcement might vary in different kinds of groups and in different kinds of genre sets.*

These six principles do not capture all there is to say about the social nature of genres, nor will they all remain unaltered by other scholars and future research. What they do attempt to capture is some of the complexity of society as it is reflected in the complexity of genre.

Such general proposals suggest avenues of further research, including that into the particularities of language users acting through genres. Do genres differ in significant ways in different kinds of groups, whether those groups are defined as communities, collectives, and networks, or defined as some other configuration? What kinds of relationships do genres privilege over others? How do the different kinds of people in groups differently influence the formation and modification of genres? How do people gain the conceptions of genres cognitively? How do groups deal with conflicting functions of genres? Which kinds of discourse features are most consistently revealing of generic ideologies? What other kinds of intergeneric relationships exist? How do those relationships affect genres' operations within groups? Do some groups and genre types

reproduce ideology more fully than do others? What various forms do the interaction of group, genre, genre set, and ideology take?

Because I have tried in this chapter to outline general principles and describe the most essential aspects of how genres operate in society, the chapter necessarily omits the rich, local situatedness of actual writing, the particularities that such generalizations overlook. Examining the particular writer writing particular texts exposes different realities, as evidenced, for example, in a work such as Swales's recent study described in *Other Floors, Other Voices: A Textography of a Small University Building* and, I hope, evidenced in the next chapter. Proposing, examining, and illustrating general principles exposes other realities, in this case how people with common experiences share common perceptions and actions. Whether viewed at the theoretical level or examined in a particular situation, genres are part of our cultural heritage and our social context; hence we can use them both to enable and to constrain. Understanding genres can enlighten our understanding of discourse, communities, and cultures—and of ourselves.