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Chapter 4

Rhetorical Community: The Cultural Basis of Genre

Carolyn R. Miller

In my essay 'Genre as Social Action', I claimed that a genre is a 'cultural artefact' (Miller 1984: 164; corrected version Chapter 2, this volume) that is interpretable as a recurrent, significant action. At the time I didn't think very carefully about what I meant by 'cultural artefact'. I was, in part, trying to emphasize that a rhetorically useful notion of genre should be grounded in the conventions of discourse that a society establishes as ways of 'acting together' (in Kenneth Burke's phrase), that we should look to ethno-categories of discourse rather than to the theoretically neat classifications that seemed to control most discussions of genre at the time. I was also, in part, groping toward an understanding of the problematic relationship between action and structure that, I now realize, has engaged many others in a variety of disciplines.

I haven't written much about genre since then, although my convictions about it organize much of my teaching; I think, for example, that there is something specifically *generic* to be learned about what it means to write a progress report, or an application letter, or a research article, or even an essay. As I said, in 1984,

> what we learn when we learn a genre is not just a pattern of forms or even a method of achieving our own ends. We learn, more importantly, what ends we may have...; for the student, genres serve as keys to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community. (1984: 165).

I don't necessarily know how to *teach* these things very directly, although I've learned a lot from people like Charles Bazerman, Tom Huckin, Leslie Olsen, and John Swales. Since 1984 I've also come to appreciate the effect that our understanding of genre has on the structure of curricula and, in particular, how the failure to understand genre as social action afflicts the typical first-year college writing program in the United States; it turns what should be a practical art of achieving social ends into a productive art of making texts that fit certain formal requirements (Miller and Jolliffe 1986: 378).

But the opportunity for 'rethinking genre' at this point is an especially welcome one, for two reasons. First, I find that I can now clarify or at least contextualize better some issues I left unresolved in the earlier essay. And second, the concept

of genre can help us think through some other issues I've recently become interested in, specifically those having to do with participation in a community. What I'll be doing here, then, is to rethink parts of my earlier work on genre and to connect it to some of my more recent writing about rhetorical community.

One aspect of 'Genre as Social Action' that now strikes me as naively prescient is the emphasis it places on middle-level phenomena, on a sense of genre as somehow located *between* what I've learned to call the micro-level and the macro-level of analysis. My speculative suggestion that cultural-linguistic phenomena could be arrayed on a hierarchy from the micro-level of natural-language processing to the macro-levels of 'culture' and 'human nature' placed genre somewhere toward the middle, connected to levels above and below by a semiotic system of constitutive and regulative rules; in this model pragmatic social action is constructed out of syntactic form and semantic substance in a neat, cumulative array. I still find this a persuasive image, and it does have some corroboration from theorists and researchers in other areas.[1] But it remains merely a nifty hypothesis at best. In the lower levels of the hierarchy, from language up through genre, I relied on the pretty firm foundation of pragmatic linguistics and conversational analysis, and it is here that the triple nature of each level is comprehensible; that is, each level is interpretable in its pragmatic aspect as action, in its syntactic aspect as form, and in its semantic aspect as the substance for the next higher level of meaning. At the higher levels I can't demonstrate that this is the case, and whether the semiotic relationships pertain in any analytically useful way at levels higher than the genre I don't know. I did claim that 'genre serves as the substance of forms at higher levels', and that 'as recurrent patterns of language use, genres help constitute the substance of our cultural life' (1984: 163), and it's this claim that I'd like to explore a bit further here.

What is a culture and how is it constituted? Are genres at least some part of that constitutive substance? This is an extremely complex issue; Raymond Williams (1976) has called 'culture' one of the two or three 'most complicated' words in the English language, with three main senses. I'll take as a working definition Williams's second sense, developed in the nineteenth century and underlying the work of anthropology: culture as a 'particular way of life' of a time and place, in all its complexity, experienced by a group that understands itself as an identifiable group (1976: 80). It surely is the case that in different times and places different sets of genres appear. It is probably also the case that a genre that seems to occur in two rather distinct times and places will not really be 'the same' in an important sense, although to support this notion rigorously you'd have to be a better comparative anthropologist of discourse than I am. To take a familiar example, however, the Athenian polis had a genre set consisting of (at least) deliberative, forensic and epideictic speeches. Undoubtedly, the ancient Athenians had many additional recurrent situations in which discourse was used – in education, for example, or in business transactions, or in diplomatic relations or religious ritual – and the traditional restriction to these three may tell us more about Aristotle than it does about Athens. It does not serve us very well to characterize discourse that takes place in our courtrooms as a 'judicial' genre in the same sense that Aristotle did, however; there are too many substantive and procedural differences – the laws, the decision-making procedures (the size of the

juries, the distinction between judge and juries), the rules of evidence, the definitions of crimes, the possible punishments are all quite different. We might want to refine further our judicial discourse into such genres as opening and closing arguments, cross-examination, *amicus curiae* briefs, *voir dire* of witnesses, and the like. These all constitute courtroom discourse, which we might want to conceive of on a higher level than genre, as a form of life. But surely we would also find that courtroom discourse in North American democratic culture in the late twentieth century bears recognizable resemblances to courtroom discourse in fourth century BC Athenian culture, through an evolutionary heritage. What is similar or analogous is the general social functions being served. Although these cultures are related and although they comprise many similar social functions, they are far from the same, at both micro and the macro-levels.

I'll mention several other brief examples of how genre and culture have been understood together. Bazerman (1988) has shown that the nature of the experimental research article has changed over the past 300 years – its function within the scientific enterprise, or form of life, has evolved, as have its characteristic modes of representation, its topoi, its appeals. It is not exactly the same genre as it once was; the genre and the scientific form of life have evolved together within the changes in western culture at large. Jamieson (1975) has discussed this evolutionary process in her work on antecedent genre as rhetorical constraint, noting that Roman imperial documents are evolutionary ancestors to the contemporary papal encyclical and that the King's Speech to the parliament gives rise to the early presidential inaugural addresses in the United States. Finally, 'new historical' work in literary studies has begun to understand genres as cultural constructions that reflexively help construct their culture. In one of the earliest programmatic statements about such work, Greenblatt introduced a special issue of the journal *Genre* devoted to cultural forms and power in the Renaissance by claiming that 'the study of genre is an exploration of the poetics of culture'. By problematizing the traditional distinctions between literature and political power, for example, new historicism understands aesthetic forms and their relationships to 'the complex network of institutions, practices, and beliefs that constitute the culture as a whole' as themselves 'collective social constructions' (1982: 6), that is, as cultural artefacts.

Calling a genre a 'cultural artefact' is an invitation to see it much as an anthropologist sees a material artefact from an ancient civilization, as a product that has particular functions, that fits into a system of functions and other artefacts. Thus, much of what we know about ancient Greek culture we have learned from recurrent patterns – in the pottery, sculpture and architecture as well as in the discourse; and not only in the extant judicial, political and epideictic discourse but also the ways the Greeks had of telling their own history, the nature of the drama and rhapsodic poetry, the treatises and dialogues on intellectual matters. As bearers of culture, these artefacts literally *incorporate* knowledge – knowledge of the aesthetics, economics, politics, religious beliefs and all the various dimensions of what we know as human culture. As interpreters – historians, anthropologists – we in the twentieth century must try to reconstruct the knowledge that it takes to see these patterns as significant and as interrelated. We make inferences from specific artefacts, or from

specific actions, to culture as a whole. Thus, it seems that we might characterize a culture by its genre set – whether judicial, deliberative and epideictic or experimental article, grant proposal, poster, peer review and the like. The genre set represents a system of actions and interactions that have specific social locations and functions as well as repeated or recurrent value or function. It adumbrates a relationship between material particulars, instantiations of a genre in individual acts, and systems of value and signification.

The general issue here is how to understand the relationship between, on the one hand, the observable particular (and peculiar) actions of individual agents and, on the other, the abstract yet distinctive influence of a culture, a society, or an institution. Do speech acts, moves, episodic encounters – the micro-discursive levels – somehow cumulate, as I implied, and 'add up to' culture, to the Athenian polis, the scientific community, the Renaissance court? And if so, how? And exactly how do the macro-levels (genre, form of life, culture, etc.) contextualize the micro-levels? To put the matter most broadly, what is the relationship between the micro-levels and the macro-levels? How *can* we bridge 'the gap between action theory and institutional analysis', as social theorist Anthony Giddens put it (1981: 161)? What *is* the relationship between minds and institutions, as anthropologist Mary Douglas put it (1986: 7)? As I noted earlier, this issue has been a focus for much social theorizing recently, and it is these perspectives that are missing from my earlier work, which focused more carefully on the micro-levels. As several social theorists have noted, this issue became more prominent with the collapse of positivist empiricism in the social sciences, for 'covering laws' can no longer be invoked causally and determinately to connect action and structure (Giddens and Turner 1987; Knorr-Cetina 1981). The general issue has been represented in many ways and taken many forms: micro vs. macro-sociological analysis, subject vs. society, action vs. institution, innovation vs. regularity, subjectivism vs. objectivism, private vs. public, cognitive vs. social.

Giddens's solution lies in what has come to be called 'structuration theory'.[2] 'Structuration' describes our experience that social relations are structured across time and space. The structures of social relations consist of rules and resources; rules, as in linguistics, are both constitutive and normative (1984: 17–21); resources are the means by which rules are actualized – they are 'capabilities of making things happen' (1981: 170). These structures are largely tacit, matters of practical knowledge that are mutually held by members of a society (1984: 4); in another formulation, Giddens calls structure a 'virtual order', meaning that structure exists 'only in its instantiations in. . .practices and as memory traces orienting the conduct of knowledgeable human agents' (1984: 17). The traditional 'dualism' of action theories and institutional theories is avoided by what Giddens calls the 'duality of structure', a phrase used to mean that structure is 'both medium and outcome' of the social practices it recursively organizes (1984: 25); structure, in other words, is both means and end, both resource and product. The analogy to linguistic rules and structures applies; uttering a grammatical and meaningful sentence requires drawing upon a set of mostly tacit semantic, syntactic and pragmatic rules, and the instantiation of these rules in an utterance reproduces them – reinforcing them and making them further available.

Structuration thus serves as the explanatory nexus between individuals and collectivities, between, that is, the concreteness and particularity of action and the abstractness and endurance of institutions. Two features are important here. One is that although structure has only a virtual existence, out of space-time, it yet must be instantiated in space-time, in the actual flow of material existence. Hence, actors must *create* structure, for themselves and for others, must schematize existential situations, must interpret or 'indexicalize' the 'inherently equivocal' confusion of possibilities in which they find themselves (Cohen 1987: 292). They do this, of course, by relying, recursively, on already available structures, on shared classifications and interpretations, which necessarily are social. Substituting duality for dualism thus enables Giddens to moderate the postmodern dilemma of whether the human 'subject' can be a centre of conscious control or must be decentred into oblivion (1984: xxii). He also shows how social and institutional power is wielded. As Douglas notes, although institutions do not have purposes or 'minds of their own' (1986: 9), they do have immense power: 'Institutions systematically direct individual memory and channel our perceptions. . . They fix processes that are essentially dynamic, they hide their influence, and they rouse our emotions. . . they endow themselves with rightness' (1986: 92).

The second important feature in Giddens's structuration theory is that the instantiation of structure must also be the *reproduction* of structure; as he says, 'the conduct of individual actors reproduces the structural properties of larger collectivities' (1984: 24). Reproduction is thus a stronger way to characterize what rhetoricians have called 'recurrence'. As I used the term in my earlier essay, it seemed to be a matter primarily of intersubjective perception: 'Recurrence is implied by our understanding of situations as somehow "comparable", "similar", or "analogous" to other situations' (Miller 1984: 156). What the notion of reproduction adds is the action of participants; social actors *create* recurrence in their actions by reproducing the structural aspects of institutions, by using available structures as the medium of their action and thereby producing those structures again as virtual outcomes, available for further memory, interpretation, and use.

What I want to propose, then, is that we see genre as a specific, and important, *constituent* of society, a major aspect of its communicative structure, one of the structures of power that institutions wield.[3] Genre we can understand specifically as that aspect of situated communication that is *capable of reproduction*, that can be manifested in more than one situation, more than one concrete space-time. The rules and resources of a genre provide reproducible speaker and addressee roles, social typifications of recurrent social needs or exigences, topical structures (or 'moves' and 'steps'), and ways of indexing an event to material conditions, turning them into constraints or resources. In its representation of and intervention in space-time, genre becomes a determinant of rhetorical *kairos* – a means by which we define a situation in space-time and understand the opportunities it holds.[4]

To see genre in this way as a mid-level structurational nexus between mind and society suggests the specific contribution rhetoric makes to the problem in social theory; this derives from the nature of rhetoric as 'addressed'. The practical need to marshal linguistic resources for the sake of social action connects the micro and

macro-levels. In his discussion of 'speech genres', Bakhtin, for example, emphasizes what he calls 'addressivity' as a 'constitutive feature of the utterance' (as contrasted with the sentence); hence 'the various typical forms this addressivity assumes and the various concepts of the addressee are constitutive, definitive features of various speech genres' ([1852] 1986: 99).[5] Similarly, Thomas Farrell has recently suggested that the 'goods' internal to rhetorical activity 'are necessarily relational' (1991: 187), that is, that the qualities 'actively cultivated through excellence in rhetorical practice' require other persons; such goods include civic friendship, a sense of social justice, strategic imagination, competitiveness, empathy and the like. My point is that this addressivity, or relational quality, provides a specific mechanism by which individual communicative action and social system structure each other and interact with each other. The individual must reproduce patterned notions of others, institutional or social others, and the institution or society or culture must provide structures by which individuals can do this. The mutual, cultural knowledge that enables individual actors to communicate as competent participants includes structures of interaction, of exigence, of participant roles, and of other rules and resources. Genres, as Douglas might have put it, help do our rhetorical thinking for us.[6]

I do not mean by my emphasis here on Giddens's notions of structure and structuration to revise my claim that genre is social *action* to the claim that genre is social *structure*. I would still maintain that structure, or form, is a constituent aspect of action and that action is primary. Giddens claims that 'the structural properties of social systems do not exist outside of action' (1984: 374). Although structures are what is recognizable as constituents of society, for it is structure that is reproducible, action is what is significant, and it is in action that we create the knowledge and capability necessary to reproduce structure. The primacy of action is a strong theme in social theory. As Blumer noted, 'human group life consists of, and exists in, the fitting of lines of action to one another by the members of the group' (1979: 147). Burke put it this way (and I believe that Blumer would concur): in acting together, we have 'common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes'. These make us 'consubstantial' ([1950] 1969: 21), they give us a common substance, which, reciprocally, enables and enhances our common actions. Giddens's 'duality of structure' also captures this reciprocity.

This brings me to my second major agenda here. We cannot fully understand genres without further understanding the system of commonality of which they are a constituent, without exploring further the nature of the collectivity. As Swales has insisted, 'genres belong to discourse communities, not to individuals' (1990: 9). Of the many terms for collectivity – society, institution, culture, community – it is the last that has recently become an important and contested term in a variety of social disciplines – in science studies, literary studies, composition theory, linguistics, political theory, and probably in sociology as well. It was a powerful but hidden undercurrent in classical rhetoric, acquired prominence from the social constructionism of the early part of the twentieth century, but is still not well conceptualized, politically or rhetorically. It is a troublesome concept, one that seems to devalue individual rights and capabilities, to privilege the domination of a majority or an orthodoxy; it is a concept that makes it difficult to account for change, a notion that can be – and has been – vague, comforting and sentimental. I have explored elsewhere

the resources that classical rhetoric offers us for conceiving of community and the recent debate in political theory and postmodernism (Miller 1993a; 1993b). Here, however, I'd like to focus on what it takes to make a community a specifically rhetorical one, as distinct from a speech community, a political community, a discourse community.

In his contribution to an essay collection on the micro/macro-problem, Harré explores what he calls the 'metaphysical status of collectives' (1981: 140). He suggests that there are two sorts of collectives, which he calls 'taxonomic' and 'relational' (1981: 140, 147). Members of taxonomic collectives have similarities, perhaps even shared qualities or beliefs, but these are shared only in the sense of being common to the members, who have no real interrelations with each other. The collectivity exists in the mind of the classifier (1981: 147). Members of relational collectives, in contrast, have real relations with each other, by means of which active sharing occurs, and the collective itself has a structure: it is differentiated. Harré believes that social research often identifies taxonomic collectives (such as the group of British passport holders) about which little more of 'sociological interest' can be said:

> merely showing that a taxonomic group exists . . . is no ground for concluding that that group has any other, more elaborate, structure. And if it is the case that inductive sociological methods can establish no more than the fact of taxonomic groupings when the scale is greater than that of institutions and the like, there is a clear limitation to the empirical employment of macro-social concepts. (1981: 148)

It might be interesting to examine various rhetorical and linguistic treatments of community to see whether they yield taxonomic or relational groups; I suspect, for example, that some definitions of speech community tend toward the taxonomic, since it is common linguistic behaviour that is being examined, not relational actions or structures; although members of a speech community, by definition, are capable of interacting with each other, Nystrand points out that they 'are not ever required, either by rule or definition, to actually interact with each other' (1982: 15). Swales notes several reasons why speech community is not a sufficient notion for socio-rhetorical purposes, all of them tied to the fact that a socio-rhetorical discourse community must be relational in the way that speech community is not (1990: 24). But I want to suggest that there's a kind of community that has yet a third metaphysical status, in contrast with both taxonomic and relational collectives, a status that Giddens might call 'virtual', rather than material or demographic. A rhetorical community, I propose, is just such a virtual entity, a discursive projection, a rhetorical construct. It is the community as invoked, represented, presupposed, or developed in rhetorical discourse. It is constituted by attributions of characteristic joint rhetorical actions, genres of interaction, ways of getting things done, including reproducing itself. Like Giddens's structures, rhetorical communities 'exist' in human memories and in their specific instantiations in words: they are not invented anew but persist as structuring aspects of all forms of socio-rhetorical action. Like genres, rhetorical communities 'exist' on a discourse hierarchy, not in space-time; they exist, however, at a much higher level of cumulation than genres. I believe that many rhetoricians have

committed a category fault analogous to that of the sociologists whom Harré chides: they have been looking for community demographically and geographically – in classrooms, civic task forces, hobby groups, academic conferences.

How does a rhetorical community *operate* rhetorically? It works in part through genre, as we have said, as the operational site of joint, reproducible social action, the nexus between private and public, singular and recurrent, micro and macro. It operates more generally, however, as a site where centrifugal and centripetal forces must meet (to use Bakhtinian terms). If we look carefully, for example, at the Greek city-state as a rhetorical community, what we see is not primarily comfortable agreement or a dominating majority: what we see most of all is contest, the *agon*. As I elsewhere characterized the polis, the ur-rhetorical community, it is

> most centrally a site of contention. Certainly it was a site disputed by the sophists and the aristocrats. More generally it is the site of political debate between citizens, a locus of self-defining communal action [as well as a site of suppressed contest between citizens and non-citizens]. Because there are many citizens, there are differences; because there is one *polis*, they must confront those differences. (Miller 1993a)

Farrell makes similar observations about what he calls the rhetorical forum:

> What is critical to the power and constraint of the forum is that two very different sorts of loci may always intersect there: first, is the cumulative weight of customary practice: convention, commonplace and *communis sensus* associated with the forum's own history; and second, the inevitably uncertain fact of otherness. (1991: 198)

It is this inclusion of sameness and difference, of us and them, of centripetal and centrifugal impulses that makes a community rhetorical, for rhetoric in essence requires both agreement and dissent, shared understandings and novelty, enthymematic premises and contested claims, identification and division (in Burke's terms). In a paradoxical way, a rhetorical community includes the 'other'.

So rather than seeing community as an entity external to rhetoric, I want to see it as internal, as constructed. Rather than seeing it as comfortable and homogeneous and unified, I want to characterize it as fundamentally heterogeneous and contentious. The centrifugal forces of difference are important, and I do not want to seem to minimize their power, which derives in part from the multiplicity of communities in which and by which any given person can be engaged. Before concluding, however, I would like briefly to identify some centripetal forces that are rhetorically available to keep a virtual community from flying apart (or dissipating). The first is genre, of course; genre's power to structure joint action through communal decorum should be apparent from all I've said so far. Another is metaphor, or figurality in general. This dimension of language provides us a wealth of ways to create similarity out of difference, to wheedle, as it were, identification out of division (Miller 1993b: 19). Another is narrative. Several writers have recently emphasized this unifying,

community-building function of narrative, among them Rouse (1990), as well as MacIntyre (1984). Rouse notes, for example, that 'membership in . . . communities is . . . constituted in substantial part by sharing [a] past as a basis for further action, and by our accountability (to ourselves and others) for the intelligibility of those actions in terms of that past' (1990: 184). In effect we must be able to tell ourselves, and others, stories about that past and our location in it:

> the intelligibility of action, and of the things we encounter or use in acting, depends upon their already belonging to a field of possible narratives. On my view, we live within various ongoing stories, as a condition for our being able to tell them, or for doing anything else that can count as an action. (Rouse 1990: 181)

Furthermore, Rouse suggests that narrative has specifically the function of holding heterogeneity together:

> Sharing a situation as a narrative field thus makes possible meaningful differences along with convergence. The need to make differences intelligible and a common project possible compels an ongoing struggle to keep in check the divergence of versions of the community's story . . . This struggle takes the form of a shared concern to construct, enforce, and conform to a common narrative which gives common sense to everyone's endeavor. (1990: 185)

Social order, continuity and significance are effects of structuration; structuration is accomplished through the actions of individual actors, and some of their actions are rhetorical. Rhetoric provides powerful structurational resources for maintaining (or shoring up) social order, continuity and significance. Figures make connections that otherwise can't be made; narrative imposes intelligibility on past events; genres impose structure on a given action in space-time. There may be others, as there are undoubtedly non-rhetorical resources. Genre, however, I want to maintain, is the only one of these three resources that has specifically pragmatic power as social action. Narration and figurality are structural and semantic capabilities that become socially and rhetorically meaningful only within pragmatic activities like speech acts or genres. Narration, for example, can be used within many genres, from simple story-telling to scientific reporting to eulogizing. Genres, then, in their *structural* dimension, are conventionalized and highly intricate ways of marshalling rhetorical resources such as narration and figuration. In their *pragmatic* dimension, genres not only help real people in spatio-temporal communities do their work and carry out their purposes; they also help virtual communities, the relationships we carry around in our heads, to reproduce and reconstruct themselves, to continue their stories.

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Notes

1 I would now also point to work by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), who develop a system of discourse analysis for classroom talk using a 'rank scale', or hierarchy in which 'each rank can be expressed in terms of the units next below' (p. 20); the ranks they identify are lesson, transaction, exchange, move and act (p. 24). Coulthard (1985) provides a table (similar to my Figure 2.1 in this volume) comparing categories of analysis used by several discourse analysts, with ranges similar to those used by Sinclair and Coulthard. In a somewhat similar vein, Freadman (1987: 100; condensed version Chapter 3, this volume) suggests that genres consist of moves, or speech acts, and that several genres together comprise a 'ceremony', such as the consultation (medical or legal).

2 Giddens acknowledges that this is an 'unlovely term at best' but disclaims personal responsibility for it (1984: xvi).

3 Giddens admits the 'central significance of the "linguistic turn" ' in social theory (1984: xxii) and the 'fundamental role' of language in social life (1984: xvi).

4 For recent discussions of *kairos* see Kinneavy (1986) and my essay on *kairos* in science (Miller 1992). Freadman's (1987) discussion of genre emphasizes the importance of place and time in understanding the appearance and significance of genres.

5 I should note here that Bakhtin does not seem to distinguish, as I wish to, the generic speech act (a reproducible schematic action that can be as short as a single word or as long as a Dostoyevsky novel), whose boundaries are 'determined by a change of speaking subjects' ([1952] 1986: 71), from the genre as a macro-unit of discourse that is built up from smaller units such as speech acts and patterned sequences of speech acts; its boundaries are determined by a relatively complete change in the complex called the rhetorical situation, with a socially identifiable exigence at its core.

6 What she did say was that institutions 'do the classifying' (Douglas 1986: 91).

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Chapter 5

Systems of Genres and the Enactment of Social Intentions

Charles Bazerman

'A theory of language is part of a theory of action'.

(John Searle)

In this chapter I want to build upon what we already know about genres and connected sets of genres, what we know about intertextuality and systems of intertextually-linked documents, what we know about speech acts and writing as forms of social action, and what we know about individual micro-acts and social macro-structure. I want to do this to present a vision of how people create individual instances of meaning and value within structured discursive fields and thereby act within highly articulated social systems. The action is accomplished through performance of genres that have highly specific, systematically contextual requirements and well-defined consequences for further generically-shaped social acts.

That is, I wish to present a vision of systems of complex located literate activity constructed through typified actions – typified so that we are all to some extent aware of the form and force of these typified actions. As we become more informed and involved with these typified literate actions, we come to share a more precise set of functional meanings and consequential relations through the kinds of texts. By using these typified texts we are able to advance our own interests and shape our meanings in relation to complex social systems, and we are able to grant value and consequence to the statements of others.

From the viewpoint of the mythical outside observer, I want to present a system of a complex societal machine in which genres form important levers. From the viewpoint of the participant in society, which we all are, I want to identify how the genres in which we participate are the levers which we must recognize, use and construct close to type (but with focused variation) in order to create consequential social action. This machine, however, does not drive us and turn us into cogs. The machine itself only stays working in-so-far as we participate in it and make our lives through its genres precisely because the genres allow us to create highly consequential meanings in highly articulated and developed systems.

I will pursue this project through the example of the patent, choosing particulars from the latter half of the nineteenth century; this choice of materials is a consequence

Genre and the New Rhetoric

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