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THE IDEA OF GENRE IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

An Overview of the Work in Genre in the Fields of Composition and Rhetoric and New Genre Studies

Anne Herrington and Charles Moran

GENRE IN CLASSICAL RHETORIC

Genre is an idea with a history perhaps as long as that of thought itself. Early creation myths often speak of a creator who brings form out of a formless chaos—in Scandinavian mythology, a cow licks the form of the first human out of a shapeless ice block; in Judeo-Christian mythology, a creator brings order out of a universe “without form and void,” and then in the next six days populates it with the “kinds” of animal and plant life. But for our limited purposes here, an inquiry into the value of explicit attention to genre in the teaching of writing, we begin with Plato and Aristotle, both of whom have, in different ways, framed the issues the teachers and students in subsequent chapters will struggle with. What are genres in writing? Do they exist as ideal forms in an empyrean, or in the structures of the brain? Or are these forms to be found in the language that participates in recurring social action? And how are these genres, once described and understood, best taught and learned? In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates argues that advice about form in the existing handbooks is misguided because it ignores the organic relation between form and content. He outlines advice about the form of a speech allegedly drawn from contemporary handbooks:

Socrates: “First, I believe, there is the Preamble with which the speech must begin. This is what you mean, isn’t it—the fine points of the art?”

Phaedrus: Yes.

Socrates: Second come the Statement of Facts and the Evidence of Witnesses concerning it; third, Indirect Evidence; fourth Claims to Plausibility. And I believe at least that that excellent

Byzantine word-wizard adds Confirmation and Supplementary Confirmation.

Phaedrus: You mean the worthy Theodorus?

Socrates: Quite. And he also adds Refutation and Supplementary Refutation, to be used both in prosecution and defense. Nor must we forget the most excellent Evenus of Paros, who was the first to discover Covert Implication and Indirect Praise. (Plato 1995, 266d–276a)

Socrates' point is that form is not fixed but organic: that the parts must relate organically to the whole, and that form cannot be abstracted from content and practice, then codified, then taught. "Every speech must be put together like a living creature, with a body of its own; it must be neither without head nor without legs; and it must have a middle and extremities that are fitting both to one another and to the whole work" (264c). For Socrates, and by inference Plato, handbook rules will not guide you to this organic unity; the true guide is not the rhetorician's prescriptions but the soul's memory of its experience of the "heaven" of the true and the beautiful.

Aristotle, as Plato's pupil, echoes the language of organic form, particularly in the *Poetics*, where he divides poetry into kinds or categories: "I propose to speak not only of the art in general, but also of its species and their respective capacities; of the structure of the plot required for a good poem; of the number and nature of the constituent parts of a poem . . . Epic poetry and Tragedy, as also Comedy, Dithyrambic poetry—and flute and lyre-playing—are all . . . modes of imitation" (1954, 1447a).

The emphasis in the *Poetics* is most steadily on its description of the structure of the "species"—which we want to begin to consider *genres*: the epic, the tragedy, the comedy. True, for Aristotle the study of drama is valuable because of its social use: the function of tragedy, for example, is famously the *catharsis*, a process by which the performance leaves the audience better than it was through the "proper purgation of the emotions." But the emphasis in the *Poetics* is upon the formal properties of the performance, an emphasis that has carried into the idea of genre in contemporary literary criticism.

Shakespeare's plays, for example, are most often considered tragedies, comedies, or history plays. Those plays—such as *Much Ado about Nothing*—that do not fit these genres have been considered Shakespeare's "problem plays." Until the arrival of the postmodern and the (perhaps) attendant move of English toward cultural studies, literature courses were

typically organized around a genre: Nineteenth-Century British Poetry, Elizabethan Drama, The Eighteenth-Century Novel. Literary genres were seen to have origins and trajectories, as in Wellek and Warren's *Theory of Literature* (1942, 235) and Ian Watt's landmark study, *The Rise of the Novel* (1957). Northrop Frye, in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, developed a taxonomy of literary genres in terms of both transcendent aesthetic forms and rhetoric, "the conditions established between the poet and his public" (1957, 247). And, far from dead today, genres survive in MLA job descriptions, where we find advertisements for those qualified to teach these kinds of literature. Literary genres survive as well outside the academy, in the cottage industry that is "genre writing," where aspiring writers can find contemporary handbooks that will instruct them in the writing of "Young Adult Fiction" or "Romance" or "Science Fiction and Fantasy."

In the *Rhetoric*, as in the *Poetics*, Aristotle observes and classifies, discovering and making manifest the forms that are there to be seen. He finds these forms, however, not in an empyrean of pure forms but manifest in the world about him—in actual arguments made in actual and recurring social situations. In his derivation of genre through observation of actual rhetorical performance he anticipates the approach of the functional structural linguists, such as Michael Halliday, who have developed outlines for the study of units of language longer than the sentence—the generic features of extended texts—and linked these genres to recurring social situations. Aristotle lines out the kinds of oratory: forensic, political, epideictic; the kinds of persuasion: logos, ethos, and pathos; and the kinds of argument: the *topoi*. Yet to a greater degree than in the *Poetics*, these divisions are all keyed to communication/performance in particular and recurrent social situations. As Kenneth Burke noted, "Though Aristotle rigorously divided knowledge into compartments whenever possible, his *Art of Rhetoric* includes much that falls under the headings of psychology, ethics, politics, poetics, logic, and history" (1969, 51). We might add to this list "anthropology," so long as we understand Aristotle as describing the recurring social situations, and their attendant forums, of ancient Greece, and not of all societies in all times. Aristotle instructs us in audience analysis, in the presented persona of the speaker, in appeals to reason and to emotion—all located in social settings, in public forums.

We fast-forward here, through the development and sophistication of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* by Cicero and Quintilian, through the dispersion and loss of the Middle Ages, through the recoveries of the Renaissance, to the redefinition and reduction of genre in nineteenth-century American

writing handbooks to the “modes of discourse”: exposition, persuasion, description, and narration. These “modes” were based not upon the discourse used in recurring social situations but upon the faculty psychology of Hume and Locke as understood by the eighteenth-century rhetorician George Campbell, whose *Philosophy of Rhetoric* defined the four functions of mind—understanding, imagination, emotion, and will—that corresponded to the four ends of discourse: to inform, to please, to arouse emotion, or to influence action. Robert Connors finds the first American appearance of the “modes of discourse” in Samuel Newman’s *A Practical System of Rhetoric*, published in 1827 and reprinted some sixty times by 1856 (Connors, 1981, 445). Connors traces the history of the modes—exposition, persuasion, description, and narration—through Alexander Bain’s 1866 *English Composition and Rhetoric* and Genung’s *The Practical Elements of Rhetoric* to universal adoption in the rhetoric texts of the early twentieth century. In Connors’s words, “From the middle of the last decade of the nineteenth century, through the Great War, and into the middle of the disillusioned decade following it, the modes controlled the teaching of composition through complete control of textbooks” (449).

THE REACTION TO THE MODES: THE WRITING PROCESS MOVEMENT

The importance of the “modes” to the story of genre in composition studies is the hostile reaction to the modes, and to the forms of school writing in general, that begins in the 1960s with what Maxine Hairston has called the “paradigm shift” of the writing process movement (1982, 76). The process movement defined itself against the “other” of “current-traditional” teaching, which was characterized by the prescription of traditional forms of school writing—resulting in what Ken Macrorie would call “Engfish”. The attack on the modes, and the concurrent establishment of the “five-paragraph theme” as the antagonist, began with Albert Kitzhaber and continues even today in the strand of pedagogical theory that James Berlin has labeled the “expressionist” school (1987, 145) Kitzhaber’s attack on the modes was uncompromising. In his frequently cited doctoral dissertation, written in 1953 but just recently published, he wrote, “The effect of the forms of discourse on rhetorical theory and practice has been bad. They represent an unrealistic view of the writing process, a view that assumes that writing is done by formula and in a social vacuum. They turn the attention of both student and teacher toward an academic exercise instead of toward a meaningful act of communication in a social context” (1990, 139).

From Kitzhaber on, the reaction to the “modes,” and to writing taught by formula, has characterized a powerful strand in the teaching of writing, one in which the teaching of genres has been forced into the background. The documents that issued from the 1966 Dartmouth Conference defined the principal aim of instruction in English as personal growth (e.g., Dixon 1967) and paid scant attention to the teaching of forms. James Britton’s influential *Language and Learning* (1970) established a set of “kinds” of writing based not on form but on function, upon what the writing did for the author. “Transactional” writing helped the writer participate in the work of the world; it was “language to get things done” (125). “Expressive” writing helped the writer make sense of her world; and “poetic” writing was expressive in its function but included as well an element of “formal arrangement” (177). The function of poetic writing was “to be an object that pleases or satisfies the writer” (1975, 91). In *The Development of Writing Abilities (11–18)* (Britton et al. 1975), Britton explicitly attacked the teaching of the “modes,” which, he wrote, “have shown a remarkable capacity for survival” and “survive unscathed in the most influential of contemporary manuals” (3). In Britton’s view, school writing focused too intensely on the transactional, leaving little room in the curriculum for the expressive and its consequent participation in students’ personal growth. In the writing classes that followed the “personal growth” model, transactional writing was devalued, and this closed off the possibility of explicit teaching of the kinds of writing we do to “get things done,” including the genres of academic writing.

For classrooms based on the work of James Moffett (1981), genres emerged organically from the students’ writing as it was composed, and could be reinforced and coached by the teacher as it emerged, but not explicitly assigned or pre-taught. In *Active Voice* (1981) Moffett writes, “Coming up with a subject, a reason for writing about it, and a form to write it in can often happen rather naturally for individuals in an integrated language arts program where writing is going on in close conjunction with dramatic activities, work in other media, and reading in literature and other areas” (18). In classrooms based on the work of Donald Graves (1983), the teacher was to “[s]urround the children with literature” (65) and let genres emerge from the reading and writing that the teacher orchestrates in the elementary classroom. Donald Murray’s influential book, *A Writer Teaches Writing* (1968), deals only briefly with genres in his section on creating assignments. He echoes the “modes of discourse” when he suggests that “most students will probably learn best

in the beginning through description” (134), and suggests that student writers be encouraged to increase the range of genres in which they are writing, but he says nothing beyond this brief mention of genre about if or how form should be understood and taught—perhaps the perspective of the journalist, for whom forms of writing become habitual and therefore transparent.

This reaction to the teaching of the “modes,” with its concomitant understanding of genre as form, continues today in textbooks that follow an expressivist epistemology. In their *Community of Writers* (1995), Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff describe the genre “essay” in these terms: “The essay is a slithery form; perhaps (notice we only say *perhaps*) we all recognize an essay when we see one, but few of us could actually define the form. This may well be its strength” (232). In Elbow and Belanoff, we ask our students to write essays, but we are not to try to be explicit about the formal properties of the genre. This approach, contemporary genre theorists would be quick to point out, excludes all who are not “we,” which is a group of writers and readers steeped in the masterpieces of Western literature. A writer outside this “we” is left to figure it all out on his or her own. Elbow and Belanoff continue the long-standing attack on the teaching of the five-paragraph theme: “This is a school-invented genre, and unfortunately, it is the only genre that some students are taught” (132). “But it is a handy formula in certain conditions where you don’t want to think an issue through—either for lack of time or because you’ve already worked it out. . . . Thus, it is a handy genre for timed exams: ‘In twenty minutes, explain the importance of the Civil War.’” In recent editions of the textbook, there is more attention to genre, but this is genre understood as form and not as linked to recurring social action (126).

This reaction to the “modes” appears as well in Tom Romano’s recent advocacy (2000) of the multigenre paper, a composition that might include prose, poetry, dance, music, and graphics. In the teacher testimonials that Romano includes in his first chapter, the teachers say again and again that the multigenre papers they get are “more interesting” than the research papers they used to assign and read. In their words we hear the echo of Ken Macrorie’s attempts to root out “Engfish” from his students’ writing. Romano shares with Macrorie, and with Moffett, the assumption that his students, given the freedom to draw on a number of forms, will discover the appropriate forms and order them appropriately. Nowhere in his book is there explicit teaching of genre, and nowhere in the book is an understanding that genre is connected to social action.

And the reaction to the modes appears as well in the exploration of alternative discourses that was such a powerful strand in the 2001 CCCC (Powell 2002, 11) and in the subsequent publication of *AllDis* (Schroeder, Fox, and Bizzell, 2002), in which the authors advocate subverting an assumed standard academic discourse with alternative discourses—at times (Bizzell 2002) to open up new ways of thinking, and at times to create a “contact zone” between a monolithic academic discourse and other, marginalized discourses (Long). This book feels revolutionary in its intent, with its dedication “to everyone who has the courage to experiment with alternatives.” In the preface this radical motive becomes overt: “*Alternative* evokes a sort of counter-cultural image that bespeaks the political resistance to hegemonic discourse that these new forms express—thus we see that the old left-liberal, social-justice-oriented agenda that motivated ‘The Students’ Right to Their Own Language’ resolution maybe reemerging in a new guise” (ix). If we can tie the writing process “paradigm shift” to the “old left-liberal, social-justice-oriented agenda,” as James Marshall (1994) so fully does, then *AllDis* can be read as following the line that we began in this section with Albert Kitzhaber and the reaction to prescriptive, acontextual modes of discourse. Important for our genre studies as well is the assumption in the work of the *AllDis* authors and of Tom Romano that teachers, and their student writers, have some say in the definitions of the genres in which they will write.

GENRE AND WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

The rise in writing across the curriculum (WAC) programs and scholarship in the 1970s and 1980s has its roots both in the writing process movement and in the study of rhetoric. Reflecting these different emphases, WAC has been characterized as comprising two strands: writing to learn and writing in the disciplines. While these distinctions are overly simplistic, they do reflect different stances toward genre and its role in curricular planning and learning. The “writing to learn” strand focuses on having students use writing to engage in exploratory thinking and learning in ways assumed to be useful in any classroom, in any discipline. Inspired by the developmental theories and research of James Britton, Nancy Martin, and their colleagues in the United Kingdom, proponents of this approach in the United States championed the expressive function of writing, which Britton et al. claim “may be at any stage the kind of writing best adapted to exploration and discovery” (1975, 197). Extrapolated from this claim is a sense that transactional functions (e.g., report, analogic)—functions

associated with public genres and their writer-audience relations—are not as conducive for learning. As Randall Freisinger has written, “Language for learning is different from language for informing” (1980, 155). This more dismissive view of the learning potential of transactional functions was also linked for Britton et al. with their research finding that this function, coupled with a “pupil to examiner” writer-audience relationship, predominated in British schools over poetic and expressive functions. Arthur Applebee (1974) reached the same finding in a study of writing in U.S. schools.

For writing to learn advocates in the United States, the approach of Britton and colleagues was compatible with the view of writing as personal growth that issues from the 1966 Dartmouth Conference and progressive, expressivist traditions that viewed genres as narrow forms that constrained creativity and exploration of one’s own ideas and voice. In his history of WAC in the United States, David Russell notes the connection with expressivists of the 1920s and 1930s who “dismissed the established genres and styles of academic writing as too confining and encouraged students to find more creative approaches for writing about experience, whether studying English or other subjects” (1991, 207). Also influential to WAC at this time was the focus on the process of writing, specifically Janet Emig’s claim in “Writing as a Mode of Learning” (1977) that the activity of writing has a unique cognitive value for thinking and learning for the *writer*. From these various influences, “writing to learn” pedagogy came to be characterized by a focus on the value of writing for the learner and less so for its social function for readers, which meant a de-emphasis on genres and an emphasis on exploratory writing to a teacher in an assumed audience role as participant in a “teacher-learner dialogue.” Journals—a genre themselves, although not presented as such—were advocated as a tool for learning, because they were assumed to invite expressive writing and were assumed to be free of the formal constraints of public genres. They were valued above transactional writing, which was represented as aiming to display knowledge (Fulwiler 1987, 1979).

While we see this limited conception of the learning potential of transactional writing as mistaken, we also acknowledge the valuable work accomplished by advocates of this approach: by working directly with faculty from a range of disciplines to urge them to incorporate into their courses more expressive writing, through journals and other informal writing, they were working to broaden the types and functions of writing practiced in specific learning contexts across the curriculum.

The other strand of writing across the curriculum scholarship, characterized as “writing in the disciplines,” focused on having students learn the ways of writing and reasoning assumed to be characteristic of academic contexts. The pedagogical focus of this approach is seen in such texts as Maimon et al.’s *Writing in the Arts and Sciences* (1981) and Bazerman’s *The Informed Writer* (1981). Both conceptualize writing in terms of types—for example, the research paper, book review, laboratory report, journal—that entail particular kinds of thinking (e.g., interpretation, synthesis) and forms (e.g., types of documentation). For this group, genre represents an important concept for planning curriculum and writing assignments and for learning. This approach was influenced more by rhetorical theory than by developmental theory. The basic assumption was that by learning the genres of a given discipline or cluster of disciplines (e.g., humanities, natural sciences), one learned ways of thinking and problem solving. In other words, by learning and writing in public, transactional genres, students were *learning*. With this approach, audience is more of a focus, particularly the conventionalized assumptions of academic audiences. Using the metaphor of an informed conversation, Bazerman tells students that they will be learning to participate as “informed writers” in an academic conversation, learning “the issues, the level of the conversation, the typical ways of speaking, and the rules of proof and audience” (5). While these texts are conceptually sound, a practical limitation is that they were designed for composition courses taught most often by teachers trained in English. Thus, the informed conversation was with an audience not necessarily knowledgeable of the issues and lines of reasoning of particular disciplines. A more general critique is that this approach lends itself to a master-apprentice model where students are to be socialized into disciplines in uncritical ways, accepting the genres—and thus, the practices and ideologies of specific disciplines and the academy in general—as authoritative (Malinowitz 1998).

Research linked with this approach included both studies of professional contexts and texts (e.g., Bazerman’s historical study of the evolution of the genre of the scientific research report, *Shaping Written Knowledge: The Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article in Science* [1988]) and classroom-based studies, including my (Anne’s) own study of the functions of writing in two chemical engineering classes (Herrington 1985). What is striking to me now as I look back at that study is that although I examine two distinct genres (laboratory report and process design report) and associate them with forensic and deliberative forums, I never mention

the term *genre* or invoke genre theory explicitly. In hindsight, I see that omission as reflecting the intermingling of the writing to learn approach with its focus on functions and negative construction of genres. Thus, while I drew heavily on argumentation theory (e.g., Toulmin, 1958) and Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, I focused less on genre and text features and more on function, writer and audience roles, and lines of reasoning.

Within the still relatively small community of WAC scholars and practitioners, the complementarity of these two strands has increasingly been recognized, leading to a dual focus on both exploratory thinking and writing (that is, invention), and genres as potentially flexible guides for that invention and social action within a given discourse community. If genre is an aspect of social action, manifest in the creation and reception of texts in specific situations, then it becomes important to consider not only conventions of typified texts, but how texts function in specific situations and what writer and audience roles are taken up in specific situations. In classrooms, this means attending to typified texts that teachers assign—whether it be a research paper, an argument, a journal—and the functions those texts serve for students and teachers in specific situations. That is a goal of this collection.

CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO GENRE

Although genre was forced into the background in the writing process movement, and although it was not at the center of the writing across the curriculum movement, elsewhere it was the focus of substantial theoretical and practical work. Aviva Freedman (1994) has divided this work on genre into two schools, the North American, which derived chiefly from a line of rhetorical theory, and the Australian, or “Sydney School,” which derived chiefly from M.A.K. Halliday's theory of functional linguistics, the fundamental assumption of which is that how language is used determines how it is organized (1985, 191). While Halliday's book, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, focused on the sentence level, theorists and educators associated with the Sydney School applied his theories to the text level, viewing genre as texts with conventionalized features as linked to recurring social purposes and contexts of use. One of the more influential pedagogical approaches associated with the Sydney School is that of J. R. Martin (1993), as implemented in the LERN project for the Disadvantaged Schools Program in Sydney. This approach begins by analyzing and describing texts in their functional contexts. The result of this analytic process is a set of text types, or genres, which, once defined and

codified, can be taught explicitly to student writers. The motive, which we admire, is to make explicit the “rules of the game” and by doing so, to give students access to the “games” played by those with power and status. The curriculum typically begins with the analysis of examples of the genre with discussion of function as well as form, followed by scaffolded performance (Cope and Kalantzis 1993a; Martin 1993; Macken and Slade 1993). The work of the Sydney School has had an importance influence on the movements called English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Special Purposes (ESP), which form the context for the work of Kapp and Bangeni, chapter 6 of this volume.

We have to admit that we feel uncomfortable with the prescriptiveness of the curricula that derive from this approach. Yet it is important to recognize the context from which the work of the theorists and practitioners of the Sydney School, and, to a degree, the work of the EAP and ESP movements as well, has emerged: a school or college system in which many of the students have had little or no prior exposure to academic discourse. In this situation, it can seem cruel not to teach the forms of academic discourse. Mary Macken-Horarik, a researcher studying a class in the Disadvantaged Schools Program in Sydney, argues that “students at risk of failure fare better within a visible curriculum” (2002, 17). This argument is similar to ones made by Mina Shaughnessy in the 1970s and more recently Lisa Delpit, both focusing on the analogous situation of students in U.S. schools who have had little exposure to Standardized American English and academic discourse. The attractiveness of the explicit teaching of genre, or of teaching the rules of classical grammar, is that both teachers and students can feel that the rules have been made visible and they do have “something to shoot for.” The risk is that this visible curriculum can too easily be reduced to a focus on form, where what is taught is a reduction of the complex social interactions that constitute the situations for writing.

We are not, ourselves, convinced that genres are stable entities that can so easily be classified, defined, and taught, at least in the form-first manner of approaches associated with Martin and colleagues. Instead, we find ourselves, geographically and pedagogically, in what Freedman and Medway have termed the “North American” school of genre studies (1994c, 3), drawing on the work of Carolyn Miller (1984, 1994), Freedman (1994, 1995), and Freedman and Medway (1994a, 1994b, 1994c, 1994d), and through them Bakhtin (1986), for our favored approach to the teaching of genre. In 1984, Carolyn Miller published a seminal article in the

Quarterly Journal of Speech in which she argued that genre was not a closed form but a “recurrent, significant action” that “embodies an aspect of cultural rationality” (165). Genres are, in her definition, “typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations” (159). Drawing on Aristotle, Burke, and Bitzer, she grounds her work with genre firmly in the rhetorical tradition. “The understanding of rhetorical genre that I am advocating is based in rhetorical practice, in the conventions of discourse that a society establishes as ways of ‘acting together.’” Because these ways of “acting together” are not fixed but change over time, genre “does not lend itself to taxonomy, for genres change, evolve, and decay; the number of genres current in any society is indeterminate and depends upon the complexity and diversity of the society” (163). Catherine Schryer makes the same point in slightly different words: she holds that “the concept of genre can help researchers describe a ‘stabilized-for-now or stabilized enough site of social and ideological action’” (1994, 107). In a later piece, Carolyn Miller defines genre as a “cultural artefact,” which she takes to be “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” (1994, 69).

Just to complicate this transcontinental division we have implied between Australia and North America, we want to include Gunther Kress, another linguist associated with the Sydney School and systemic functional linguistics. (Indeed, he was involved with the LERN project cited above.) Diverging somewhat from J. R. Martin and similar to those associated with rhetorical approaches, Kress takes a more social/rhetorical view of genre. As Cope and Kalantzis (1993a) characterize his approach, he is “less interested in classifying textual forms than he is in the generative capacities and potentials of using certain kinds of text for certain social purposes” (13–14). In a 1999 article in *Language Arts*, Kress looks at such kinds of texts as “Rules and Regulations” and, in a fascinating analysis, finds in different examples of the genre expressions of different social worlds. For Kress, and for us, “the important point is to be aware of a fundamental tension around genre, between regularity and repeatability, on the one hand—the effect of social stabilities and of regulations erected around text to keep them close to ‘convention’—and the dynamic of constant flux and change on the other—the effect both of inevitable social change . . . and of the constantly transformative action of people acting in ever changing circumstances” (1999b, 466). He concludes, “[A] newer way of thinking may be that, within a general awareness of the range of

genres, of their shapes, their contexts, speakers and writers newly make the generic forms out of available resources” (468). This sounds very much like the situation of Aristotle’s rhetor. Unlike Aristotle, however, other contemporary theorists of genre argue for a critical approach to our understanding of genre, asking us to consider how genres relate to the distribution of power in society and, in particular, how a particular genre approach to teaching might impact learners. Literacy scholars such as Allan Luke, and composition scholars such as Harriet Malinowitz (1998), have questioned genre approaches that aim to socialize students to conventionalized dominant genres without engaging them in a critique of the ideologies and social roles embedded in those genres. Luke would argue that a focus on the generative potentials for any writer needs to be couched within a critical literacy approach where consideration of “available resources” includes “power relations in particular *institutional sites* and *cultural fields*” (1996, 333). One such site is a classroom.

CONTEMPORARY TEXTBOOKS BASED ON GENRE THEORY

Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis (1993a), in describing the application to genre theory in the curricula of Australia, write that this move “means a new role for textbooks in literacy learning” (1). Insofar as the writing process movement, and its companion, the whole language movement, devalued textbooks, they are right. Explicit teaching of genre can be facilitated by a text that provides materials: prose models for analysis and explanations of the relationship of the genre to the social situation that it arises from. Not surprisingly, there have been a number of American texts based on genre theory that are designed for first-year college writing courses. We choose two popular texts from major presses as our examples.

Rise Axelrod and Charles Cooper, in the sixth edition of *The St. Martin’s Guide to Writing* (2001), show their grounding in genre movement as they write, “We have tried to emphasize that writing is both a social act and a way of knowing. We try to teach students that form emerges from context as well as content, that knowledge of writing comes not from analyzing genres alone but also from participating in a community of writers” (vii). In their introduction they present an approach very similar to that associated with the Sydney School: “reading texts that work well for their readers,” “writing the kinds of essays you are reading,” and “think critically about your learning” in order to “become self-reflective as a reader and writer” (4–5).

Each chapter in their textbook follows the same approach. At the beginning, Axelrod and Cooper name specific genres and present models

that they explicate, identifying purpose, audience, text, and other features. While they stress variation and creativity, the process is to analyze prose models and then to write following the features of the models. Recurring form is expected by particular groups of readers, they argue, yet there is room for the writer's agency: "Each genre's basic features, strategies, and kinds of content represent broad frameworks within which writers are free to be creative" (2001, 6). A key term is here is *within*: not *writing against* or *bringing in new features*, but writing *within* the form—not a critical stance, but a conservative approach that permits existing genres to reproduce themselves and thereby to reproduce existing power relations.

The title of John Trimbur's *The Call to Write* (2002) suggests its relationship to genre theory: we write because we are called to write by social situations. For Trimbur, as for Carolyn Miller, genres are rhetorical action and reflect "recurring writing situations." Addressing the student user of the textbook, Trimbur forecasts, "You'll see how writers' choice of genre takes into account the occasion that calls for writing, the writer's purpose, and the relationship the writer seeks to establish with readers." Under the boldfaced heading "Understanding Genres of Writing," Trimbur includes letters, memoirs, public documents, profiles, fact sheets/FAQs, brochures, Web sites, commentaries, proposals, reviews (and not the college essay!). And he argues, with Bakhtin and Freedman, that genres are not fixed, but evolve: "This, of course, is by no means a comprehensive list of all genres of writing. Nor are the genres of writing fixed once and for all. New genres are always emerging in response to new conditions. . . . In the following chapters, we have selected some of the most common genres to illustrate how writers respond to the call to write—genres you will find helpful when you are called on to write in college, in the workplace, and in public life" (109).

Yet as the book and the argument progress, the focus is less on the recurring social situation and more on the form of the writing, what we might think of as "text type." For instance, Trimbur writes, "Letters are easy to recognize . . . have a predictable format that usually includes the date of writing, a salutation" (111). But he also includes the social situation: "[T]he letter is the genre that comes closest in feeling to conversations between people." And, referring to an example of a letter, he writes, "Notice how the occasions that seem to be calling on the two individuals to write their letters come from their involvement in the larger social context" (115). Each genre-focused chapter begins with a section, "Thinking

about the Genre.” The “Public Documents” section feels to us especially fine: “Public documents speak on behalf of a group of people to articulate the principles and procedures that organize their purposes and guide their way of life” (183).

Both the Axelrod/Cooper and the Trimbur texts, despite their attempt to construe genre as rhetorical action, too often slide toward a representation of genre as decontextualized form. As Alan Luke has noted, “The danger lies in going too far towards analysing and reproducing genres, in effect freeze-drying them in a way that would obscure the dynamic cultural, economic and political forces vying for airspace and airtime, image and voice” (1994, viii). We see this “freeze-drying” as an inevitable outcome of the first-year college writing textbook, in part because of the “frozen” nature of text itself (that was one of Plato’s concerns about writing) but in part, too, because American first-year college writing courses seemingly operate without a powerful context: they are designed to teach academic writing, but what *kind* of academic writing? Which of the many particular discourses, and, within those discourses, which recurring social situations? Lacking a clear context to refer to, textbook authors inevitably privilege form. We believe that the chapters that follow will function as a “good” textbook, one not for the student, but for the teacher. Here the teacher will find models of practice, descriptions of the practice of other teachers who have integrated the teaching of genre into their pedagogy in ways that both support and empower the student writer.

PREVIEW OF CHAPTERS

While the chapters that follow look at courses across disciplines and a range of genres, they are similar in presenting genre as situated within specific classrooms, disciplines, and institutions, the assignments embodying the pedagogy of a particular teacher, and students’ responses embodying their prior experiences with writing. In each, the authors define a particular genre, define their learning goals for their students implicit in assigning that genre, explain how they help their students work through the assignment, and, finally, discuss how they evaluate the writing their students do in response to their teaching.

In some of these courses, a genre approach guided these teachers from the outset in designing their full curriculum (for instance, Kapp and Bangeni; Petroff); in others, the concept of genre is implicit in the design of particular assignments (e.g., Peagler and Yancey); and in others, the concept of genre is used to understand emerging and hybrid genres (e.g.,

Edwards and McKee; Palmquist). Some of the chapters illustrate teachers presenting an established genre for students to learn; one shows a teacher working against an established genre (Kynard); others illustrate teachers assigning writing for new situations where genres are still in flux (e.g., Edwards and McKee).

In the first section, “Genres across the Curriculum: General Education and Courses for Majors,” the book takes the reader on a cross-curricular journey, looking at the ways genres are used and negotiated in courses in comparative literature, history, and biology. The first two chapters focus on teaching genres with substantial histories, although for different primary pedagogical aims: one more often associated with a general-education course and “writing to learn,” the other more often associated with a course for majors and “writing in the disciplines.” In chapter 2, “Reading and Writing, Teaching and Learning Spiritual Autobiography,” Elizabeth Petroff writes of her course, *Spiritual Autobiography*, in which this genre structures the entire course in that students both read and write spiritual autobiographies. For this general-education course, Petroff’s aims for students include not only development of writing and reading skills, but also personal growth. Chapter 3, “Writing History: Informed or Not by Genre Theory?” Anne Beaufort, a composition specialist, and John Williams, a historian, focus on teaching and learning the genre of “the historical argument,” with Williams examining Beaufort’s assignments and teaching approaches and Beaufort studying one history major’s work to learn this genre over the course of three years. The aim that interests Beaufort and Williams is for students to learn to master a genre central to the work of a particular discipline. The next two chapters move into biology classrooms, and again, we pair a course for nonmajors with one for majors. In chapter 4, “Mapping Classroom Genres in a Science in Society Course,” Mary Soliday, a composition scholar, examines the function of writing in a variety of genres—including journals, critical arguments, and public interest brochures—in biologist David Eastzer’s general-education course for nonscience majors, *Science in Society*. Here, the professor’s aims were for students both to learn the fundamentals of scientific research and to think critically about science in their own lives. Chapter 5, “‘What’s Cool Here?’: Collaboratively Learning Genre in Biology,” also the result of a project undertaken by a composition scholar and biologist—Anne Ellen Geller and David Hibbett—focuses on a biology seminar for majors in which Hibbett asked students to write mini-review essays for *Nature*, a magazine for educated nonspecialist readers. The focus of this chapter is

on pedagogy, specifically how students and faculty can learn from explicit negotiation of genre in writing workshops.

In the second section, “Genres in First-Year Writing Courses,” chapters 6 and 7 present new takes on genres often associated with first-year writing and general-education courses: argument and the research paper. Very likely reflecting the rhetorical training of the teachers, these chapters, in contrast to the chapters in “Genres across the Curriculum,” emphasize not only the enabling power of genres but also their shaping and constraining power. In “‘I Was Just Never Exposed to This Argument Thing’: Using a Genre Approach to Teach Academic Writing to ESL Students in the Humanities,” Rochelle Kapp and Bongzi Bangeni focus on teaching academic argument in an ESL academic literacy course at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. Reflecting the direct approach to genre instruction often associated with ESL and the Sydney School, they call for explicit instruction in the genre, but accompanied with critical reflection on academic as well as home discourses. In “‘Getting on the Right Side of It:’ Problematizing and Rethinking the Research Paper in the College Composition Course,” Carmen Kynard demonstrates a critical approach as well, in this case a challenge to the traditional construction of the research paper as an acontextual “encyclopedia-type form” with rigid formal conventions, accrued over time and enforced through departmental curricular guidelines. In both of the courses described in these chapters, a central aim of the teachers is to teach students to engage with other texts and authorities while also encouraging them to question conventions and establish their own authority, including the authority of their own knowledge. In chapter 8, “The Resumé as Genre: A Rhetorical Foundation for First-Year Composition,” Shane Peagler and Kathleen Blake Yancey focus on a genre less often identified with first-year writing, the resumé, making a case for how it can be used—as could other genres—to teach key issues in writing, including the link of text to context, the representation of self, and the writer’s understanding of audience.

The chapters in the final section, “Mixing Media, Evolving Genres,” look at what happens when teachers include other media—speech, the Web—into the “writing” that their students do in their courses. In chapter 9, “Teaching and Learning a Multimodal Genre in a Psychology Course,” Chris M. Anson, Deanna P. Dannels, and Karen St. Clair—a composition scholar, an oral communication scholar, and a psychologist—focus on the psychologist’s course, *Controversial Psychological Issues*, to examine a

hybrid-genre assignment where writing and reading are brought together in a common performative event. They consider the pedagogical rationale of the assignment, how students interpreted it, and the decisions they made regarding how to integrate the oral and written components. The next two chapters focus on Web-based texts and the questions that arise as teachers ask students to compose texts in a medium where genres are more in flux. In “The Teaching and Learning of Web Genres in First-Year Composition,” Heidi McKee and Mike Edwards focus on how they and their students negotiated expectations and genres in the process of students’ work to compose Web sites for their classes. In chapter 11, “Writing in Emerging Genres: Student Web Sites in Writing and Writing-Intensive Classes,” Mike Palmquist explores the same question, but shifts the focus from a first-year writing course to a speech communications course taught by a colleague. To provide a frame for considering the challenges these teachers and students face, Palmquist also reviews recent work on the emergence of new genres.

In a closing chapter, we reflect on what we have learned as we have read, responded to, and edited the chapters as they came in. We approached this book project with certain assumptions about genre and with certain questions as well, particularly about how both teachers and students see the experience of writing in certain genres as relating to students’ learning, and about the utility of genre as a concept for guiding course planning. The chapters that we have commissioned, read, and edited have pushed and complicated our understanding of genre and, to an even greater extent, our understanding of the place of genre in college and university teaching.