

5 Genre in Rhetorical and Sociological Traditions

At the end of Chapter 4, we began to draw some general distinctions between linguistic (particularly English for Specific Purposes) and rhetorical genre approaches, having to do with differences between their communicative and sociological emphases, and with the extent to which genres can and should be taught explicitly. Both linguistic and rhetorical approaches to genre—whether in the form of Systemic Functional Linguistics, English for Specific Purposes, or Rhetorical Genre Studies—share a fundamental understanding of genre as inextricably tied to situation. As Aviva Freedman recently put it, “both insist on the limitations of traditional conceptions of genres which focused only on recurring textual features. Both stressed the need to recognize the social dimensions of genre. . . . Both approaches emphasize the addressee, the context, and the occasion” (“Interaction” 104). Yet while both linguistic and rhetorical genre approaches recognize genres as connecting texts and contexts, the point of emphasis and analytical/pedagogical trajectory of each approach has differed, as Freedman and others have noted (see especially Hyon, “Genre in Three Traditions”; also Hyland, “Genre-Based Pedagogies” and Paltridge, *Genre and the Language Learning Classroom*), and these differences have had significant implications for how each tradition recognizes the work that genres do, how genres can be studied, and the ways genres can be taught and acquired.

In the case of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS), the differences in emphasis and trajectory can be traced to each field’s guiding definitions of genre and the traditions that inform them. Following John Swales, ESP genre approaches have generally defined genres as communicative events which help members of a discourse community achieve shared communicative purposes. As such, genres are *forms of communicative action*. Within RGS,

and following Carolyn Miller, genres have been defined as *forms of social action*. The next chapter will explore in greater detail what it means to think of genres as forms of social action and its implications for the researching and teaching of genres within RGS. But first, in this chapter, we will compare RGS's and ESP's guiding definitions of genre in order to clarify their communicative and sociological emphases. Then we will situate RGS's guiding definition of genre within the rhetorical, phenomenological, and sociological traditions from which it grew. We will conclude the chapter by describing recent genre scholarship in Brazil, which has synthesized the sociological, rhetorical, and linguistic traditions (while also drawing on French and Swiss genre pedagogic traditions) in ways that reveal the possible interconnections between these traditions.

COMMUNICATIVE AND SOCIOLOGICAL ORIENTATIONS TO GENRE

Within ESP genre approaches, the aims of genre analysis have generally been to examine what a discourse community's goals are and how genre features (structurally and lexico-grammatically) embody and help its members carry out their communicative goals. Thus, as generally understood in ESP genre research, it is communicative purpose (defined in relation to a discourse community's shared goals) that both gives rise to and provides the rationale for a genre, and shapes its internal structure. It is communicative purpose that often serves as a starting point for ESP genre analyses, which then proceed toward an analysis of a genre's rhetorical moves and steps, then to textual and linguistic features that carry out the moves and steps. Because ESP approaches have tended to define genres as forms of communicative action that help members of a discourse community carry out its work, the trajectory of inquiry has tended to go from context to text. That trajectory has been used to great effect by scholars and teachers to help, in particular, graduate-level, international, non-native speakers of English gain access to and participate more effectively within various academic contexts by explicating and teaching the genres that coordinate the work of these contexts. Significantly, such an internal, linguistic trajectory has tended to take the existence of a discourse community and its goals as a given—a starting point for the identification and analysis of genres.

Rhetorical Genre Studies has tended to focus more on how genres enable their users to carry out situated symbolic actions rhetorically and linguistically, and in so doing, to perform social actions and relations, enact social roles, and frame social realities. At the same time, RGS has also focused on how genres, through their use, dynamically maintain, reveal tensions within, and help reproduce social practices and realities. For RGS, then, context provides more than valuable background knowledge regarding communicative purpose(s), discourse community membership, genre nomenclature, or even genre chains and occluded genres—significant as these are. Rather, within RGS context is viewed as an ongoing, intersubjective performance, one that is mediated by genres and other culturally available tools (Bazerman, “Textual Performance” 387). The focus of genre analysis within RGS has thus been directed toward an understanding of how genres mediate situated practices, interactions, symbolic realities, and “congruent meanings” (380): in short, the role that genres play in how individuals experience, co-construct, and enact social practices and sites of activity. So while ESP genre scholars have tended to understand genres as communicative tools situated within social contexts, RGS scholars have tended to understand genres as sociological concepts mediating textual and social ways of knowing, being, and interacting in particular contexts. In RGS, understanding contexts (and their performance) is both the starting point of genre analysis and its goal.

Such a performative, sociological view is captured in Charles Bazerman’s often-cited description of genre:

Genres are not just forms. Genres are forms of life, ways of being. They are frames for social action. They are locations within which meaning is constructed. Genres shape the thoughts we form and the communications by which we interact. Genres are the familiar places we go to create intelligible communicative action with each other and the guideposts we use to explore the unfamiliar. (“The Life of Genre” 19)

From this perspective, genres can be understood as both habitations and habits: recognizable sites of rhetorical and social *action* as well as typified ways of rhetorically and socially *acting*. We inhabit genres (genre as noun) and we enact genres (genre as verb). Elaborating on what it means to think of genres as nouns and verbs, Catherine Schryer

explains: “As discourse formations or constellations of strategies, genres provide us with the flexible guidelines, or access to strategies that we need to function together in the constant social construction of reality. They guide us as we together and ‘on the fly’ mutually negotiate our way from moment to moment and yet provide us with some security that an utterance will end in a predictable way. They are, as Lemke suggested, ‘trajectory entities,’ structured structures that structure our management of time/space” (Schryer, “Genre and Power” 95). As such, Schryer goes on to explain, genres “are profoundly ideological” (95). At the same time, as Bazerman has emphasized, genres are profoundly socio-cognitive. They are “meaning landscapes” that “orient us toward shared mentally constructed spaces” (Bazerman, “Textual Performance” 385) as well as “tools of cognition” connected to “repertoire[s] of cognitive practices” (Bazerman, “Genre and Cognitive Development” 290) that contribute to our “sense-making” (Bazerman, *Constructing Experience* 94).

The focus in RGS on the study of genres as forms of situated cognition, social action, and social reproduction has come somewhat at the expense of the more precise linguistic analyses performed in ESP and Systemic Functional genre research. This in part has to do with the traditions (rhetoric, sociology, phenomenology, philosophy, psychology [particularly sociocultural psychology], communication, semiotics, technical and professional communication, Writing in the Disciplines) that have informed research in RGS, as well as the disciplines from which RGS scholars are generally trained, mainly areas such as English, communication, education, technical communication, and less so, linguistics. But equally, it has to do with a different theoretical orientation to genre. RGS did not emerge out of a pedagogical imperative as Systemic Functional and ESP approaches did. Although RGS scholars early on recognized genre’s pedagogical possibilities and took those up in the context of Writing Across the Curriculum and academic writing (see for example, Elaine Maimon’s “Maps and Genres,” Bazerman’s *The Informed Writer* and *The Informed Reader*, and Amy Devitt’s “Generalizing”), the turn to pedagogy within RGS has remained a subject of debate. As we shall see, the theoretical, historical, and ethnomethodological studies of genre that established the field of RGS developed an understanding of genre as rhetorically and socially dynamic, “stabilized for now” (Schryer, “Genre and Power”), ideological, performative, intertextual, socio-cognitive, and responsive to and also

constructive of situations. Such an understanding of genres suggests that they cannot be explicated, explained, or acquired only through textual or linguistic means; they also cannot be abstracted from the contexts of their use for pedagogical purposes. Because learning genres is about learning to inhabit “interactionally produced worlds” (Bazerman, “Textual Performance” 386) and social relationships, to think and act and recognize situations in a particular way, and to orient oneself to particular goals, values, and assumptions, some RGS scholars have questioned the value of explicit genre teaching, while others have more recently sought to develop pedagogical approaches based in genre awareness, ethnography, and situated apprenticeship. RGS continues to work through what it means to teach genres in ways that honor the field’s understanding of them as complex, dynamic socio-cognitive actions. At the same time, recent work among genre scholars in Brazil offers possibilities for synthesizing the various pedagogical approaches.

RHETORICAL CRITICISM AND GENRE

“If I had to sum up in one word the difference between the ‘old’ rhetoric and a ‘new,’” Kenneth Burke wrote in 1951, “I would reduce it to this: The key term for the old rhetoric was ‘*persuasion*’ and its stress was upon deliberate design. The key term for the new rhetoric would be ‘*identification*,’ which can include a partially ‘unconscious’ factor in appeal” (“Rhetoric—Old and New” 203). This shift in the understanding of rhetoric—from persuasion to identification—has had a great impact on what it means to study and teach rhetoric, starting in the early to mid-twentieth century.

According to Burke, rhetoric is a form of symbolic action; it is “the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols” (*Rhetoric of Motives* 43). Rhetoric allows human beings to function within and construct social reality—to use language symbolically to establish identification and induce cooperation. At the same time, rhetoric is also contingent and dynamic as language users vie for and negotiate identifications (how they identify themselves and others against how they are identified), how they establish and change affiliations, and so on. David Fleming has described this view of rhetoric in anthropological terms as the condition of our existence—as a way of being, knowing, organizing,

and interacting in the world (176). Not only has the notion of rhetoric as symbolic action thus expanded our understanding of the work that rhetoric performs; it has also expanded the realm of rhetorical scholarship to include the study of rhetoric in areas that were once thought outside the purview of rhetoric, areas such as the rhetoric of science and rhetoric of economics. Such an expanded view of rhetoric would come to play an important role in the understanding of genres as complex forms of rhetorical and social action.

RGS has contributed to the work of new rhetoric by examining how genres—as typified rhetorical ways of acting within recurring situations—function as symbolic means of establishing social identification and cooperation. In her groundbreaking and influential 1984 article “Genre as Social Action,” Carolyn Miller drew on and built connections between new rhetorical conceptualizations of rhetoric as symbolic action and scholarship in rhetorical criticism and sociology that focused on rhetorical and social typification. The notion of *typification* (socially defined and shared recognitions of similarities) would prove central to a view of genre as social action.

Rhetorical criticism, since at least the work of Edwin Black and Lloyd Bitzer in the 1960s, has recognized genres as fundamentally connected to situation types. Black, for instance, critiqued traditional (Neo-Aristotelian) rhetorical criticism for being too focused on singular rhetorical events and strategies. Such a focus on singularity, Campbell and Jamieson explain, “did not, and perhaps could not, trace traditions or recognize affinities and recurrent forms” (14). For Black, a recognition of traditions and recurrence enables rhetorical criticism to examine why and how certain rhetorical forms and strategies, over time, become habitual and influential (35). That is, such traditions allow rhetoricians to study how habitual rhetorical forms and strategies come to shape the ways we recognize and are inclined to act within situations we perceive as similar. From this understanding, Black proposed a generic perspective on rhetorical criticism based on the premises that “there is a limited number of situations in which a rhetor can find himself;” “there is a limited number of ways in which a rhetor can and will respond rhetorically to any given situational type;” and “the recurrence of a given situational type through history will provide the critic with information on the rhetorical responses available in the situation” (133-34).

Around the same time as Edwin Black, Lloyd Bitzer had also begun to develop a theory of rhetoric as conventionally bound to situation. In “The Rhetorical Situation,” Bitzer describes a rhetorical situation as not merely a backdrop to rhetorical action but rather as a precondition for it. Bitzer acknowledges that all discourse takes place in context, but the distinguishing characteristic of *rhetorical* discourse is that it emerges from and responds to a perceived *rhetorical* situation. The same exact utterance will be rhetorical in one situation and not rhetorical in another, depending on whether it takes place in a rhetorical situation or not. One of Bitzer’s central claims is that rhetorical discourse achieves its status *as* rhetorical discourse not by virtue of inherent, formal characteristics nor even by virtue of an individual’s persuasive intentions, but rather by the nature of the situation that calls it into being. A rhetorical situation, thus, calls forth rhetorical discourse.

Bitzer defines rhetorical situation as “a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence” (304). In general terms, an exigence is characterized by an urgency: a need or obligation or stimulus that calls for a response. In Bitzer’s formulation of rhetorical situation, however, certain conditions must obtain for an exigence to be rhetorical—that is, for an exigence to invite a rhetorical action. For one thing, an exigence must be capable of being modified or else it cannot be considered a rhetorical exigence (304). (For example, an earthquake is an exigence, but it is not a rhetorical exigence because it cannot be altered through the use of rhetoric. However, an earthquake can create a rhetorical exigence when a governor, say, calls for emergency funding to rebuild infrastructure in an earthquake’s aftermath.) Likewise, for an exigence to be considered rhetorical, it must be capable of being modified by means of discourse, and not through other non-discursive means such as the use of material tools (in the above case, the Governor would use speeches to make the case for emergency funding). Finally, for an exigence to be considered rhetorical, it needs to occur within a situation comprised of individuals who are capable of being acted upon by the discourse so as to modify the exigence (the need for federal government officials who have access to emergency funding).

In developing her theory of genre as social action, as we will describe, Carolyn Miller would later challenge some of Bitzer's assumptions regarding the nature of rhetorical situations, but Bitzer's work, along with Edwin Black's, would provide some important foundations for RGS. For one thing, by positing rhetorical situation as generative of rhetorical action, Bitzer recognized the "power of situation to constrain a fitting response" (Bitzer 307). Using as an example the related situations generated by President Kennedy's assassination, Bitzer describes how the range of rhetorical responses were constrained by the nature of the situations (first the need for information, then the need for explanation, then the need to eulogize, then the need to reassure the public) as well as by the expectations of the audience, so that "one could predict with near certainty the types and themes of forthcoming discourse" (306). The rhetor's intentions to act in certain ways, at certain times, using certain types of discourse were largely determined by the kinds of situations for which they were perceived as fitting (306-07).

Another of Bitzer's contributions, which would prove influential to RGS, was his acknowledgement that some situations recur, giving rise to typified responses:

From day to day, year to year, comparable situations occur, prompting comparable responses; hence rhetorical forms are born and a special vocabulary, grammar, and style are established. This is true also of the situation which invites the inaugural address of a President. The situation recurs and, because we experience situations and the rhetorical responses to them, a form of discourse is not only established *but comes to have a power of its own*—the tradition itself tends to function as a constraint upon any new response in the form. (309; emphasis added)

Here, Bitzer not only describes how recurring situations give rise to rhetorical forms (such as genres); he also suggests (following Black's notion that rhetorical conventions can predispose future audience expectations) that the rhetorical forms can come to have a power of their own in shaping how individuals recognize and respond to like situations. That is, the socially available rhetorical forms come to influence how subsequent rhetors define and experience recurrent situations as

typically requiring certain kinds of rhetorical responses. Indeed, as Miller and other RGS scholars would later elaborate, the forms of discourse and the situations to which they respond are bound together in ways that make it difficult to establish a cause-effect relationship between them.

Another influence from rhetorical criticism on RGS has been the work of Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. In *Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action*, Campbell and Jamieson extend Black and Bitzer's work by recognizing genres as "stylistic and substantive responses to perceived situational demands" (19). Campbell and Jamieson begin by arguing that situational demands (not theoretical, apriori categories) should serve as the basis for how we identify and define genres.¹⁴ Instead of starting with apriori genre categories, Campbell and Jamieson advocate for a more inductive approach, whereby genres are identified as emerging in dynamic relationship to historically grounded, perceived situations. What gives a genre its character is the "fusion" or "constellation" of substantive and stylistic forms that emerge in response to a recurring situation. As Campbell and Jamieson put it, "a genre is composed of a constellation of recognizable forms bound together by an internal dynamic" (21). "These forms, *in isolation*, appear in other discourses. What is distinctive about the acts in a genre is the recurrence of the forms *together* in constellation" (20). It is this "dynamic constellation of forms" (24) within a genre that functions to produce a particular rhetorical effect in a recurrent situation.

According to Campbell and Jamieson, the constellation of forms that constitutes a genre not only creates a typified alignment of meaning and action; it also functions as a cultural artifact—an ongoing record of how individuals draw on and combine available forms in order to respond to the demands of perceived situations. As a result, genre criticism enables rhetoricians to study how "rhetoric develops in time and through time" (26). As Campbell and Jamieson explain: "The critic who classifies a rhetorical artifact as generically akin to a class of similar artifacts has identified an undercurrent of history rather than comprehended an act isolated in time" (26). As such, "the existence of the recurrent provides insight into the human condition" (27). This sense of genre as both a site of typified rhetorical action and a cultural artifact would provide a significant foundation for RGS and its study of genres as social actions.

SOCIAL PHENOMENOLOGY AND TYPIFICATION

In establishing the idea of genres as “typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations” in her article “Genre as Social Action,” Carolyn Miller also drew on the work of sociologist Alfred Schutz, whose philosophy of social science and notion of *typification*, grounded in phenomenology, provides another important influence on Miller’s and subsequent RGS scholars’ understanding of genre as social action.

Phenomenology is a philosophical tradition that began at the beginning of the twentieth century in Germany with the work of Edmund Husserl and later expanded through the work of Martin Heidegger (for an accessible historical review, see Sokolowski). Generally speaking, phenomenology emerged as a challenge to the Cartesian split between mind and world, the internal and the external. It rejected the idea that consciousness is self-contained, interiorized, and solitary (Sokolowski 216)—something privately held and formed through mental associations and introspective awareness. Instead, Sokolowski explains, “Phenomenology shows that the mind is a public thing, that it acts and manifests itself out in the open, not just inside its own confines” (12). As such, phenomenology seeks to account for how things manifest themselves to us and how we experience these manifestations—how, that is, objects in the world become available (are given) to our consciousness.

At the heart of phenomenology’s outer-directed view of consciousness and experience is the notion of *intentionality*, understood not as a practical act (as in, “I intend to go shopping for groceries this afternoon,” or “I intend to have a beer on the deck before dinner”) but as a cognitive, sense-making act (as in, I intend grocery shopping or I intend a beer on the deck). In the former examples, intentionality is a plan for action (a description of what one intends to do), but in the latter, phenomenological, understanding of intention, intentionality is an act of object-directed cognition (Sokolowski 34-35), an act of making something available to our consciousness. When we intend grocery shopping, we connect our consciousness and experience to the objects of grocery shopping: parking lots, grocery carts, the making of shopping lists, the categorization of food in different aisles, the use of coupons, standing in the check-out line, and so on.¹⁵ The phenomenological notion of intentionality would prove to be significant for RGS. In the same way that intentions bring objects to our consciousness,

genres bring texts and situations to our consciousness. Genres inform our intentionalities.

Another key concept within phenomenology that would influence RGS, and one intimately related to the notion of intentionality, is *life-world*. The life-world is the “world of common experience,” the “world as encountered in everyday life” (Gurwitsch 35). We carry out and make sense of our lives and social activities within the life-world, which becomes the taken-for-granted world of shared intentionalities. In bringing phenomenology to bear on sociology, Alfred Schutz contributed to an understanding of the life-world as a fundamentally intersubjective and social phenomenon in which human experience and activity are learned, negotiated, and distributed in mutually construed, coordinated ways. As Schutz explains, “the life-world . . . is the arena, as well as what sets the limits, of my and our reciprocal action. . . . The life-world is thus a reality which we modify through our acts and which, on the other hand, modifies our actions” (Schutz and Luckmann 6, 7). Such an understanding of the life-world would come to inform Bazerman’s notion of genre systems and would be compatible with current work in genre and Activity Systems theory (Russell, “Writing in Multiple Contexts”), which we discuss in Chapter 6.

Central to the construction and experience of the life-world are what Schutz calls the “stocks of knowledge” which mediate our apprehension of objects. Our perceptions of things (the way that things are manifest to our consciousness) are mediated by our stocks of knowledge, which are socially derived and confirmed rules, maxims, strategies, and recipes for behaving and acting in typical situations (Gurwitsch 49-50). According to Schutz, *typifications* constitute a major part of our stocks of knowledge that mediate our experiences of the life-world. Typifications are the stocks of knowledge that derive from situations that we perceive as similar and that are “constituted in inferences from . . . previous direct experiences” (Schutz and Luckmann 74). Typifications are related in fundamental ways to situations (99), and are based on the experience and assumption that what has worked before in a given situation is likely to work again in that situation. Typifications are part of what Schutz calls our habitual knowledge (108); they are the routinized, socially available categorizations of strategies and forms for recognizing and acting within familiar situations. Motivation and typification go hand in hand. Schutz, for example, describes how we develop “in order to” motives that are related

to typifications: In order to achieve this particular result (get groceries) in this particular situation (at the grocery store), I must (or should or might or could) do this (make a grocery list). In short, we define ourselves, our actions, and others in the world “by way of typifications and constructions, modes of how ‘someone’ traditionally behaves or is expected to behave in certain situations” (Natanson 118).

Since we encounter and negotiate the life-world as a series of situations (some more and some less routine than others), typifications play a crucial role in how we recognize and act within the life-world (Schutz and Luckmann 113). Yet while typifications help arrange our subjective experiences of the life-world within certain structures (Schutz and Luckmann 92), typifications are not static or completely determinative. Rather, they are subject to (or brought into contact with) unique, immediate experiences and “biographical articulations” (78), which then modify our typifications. As Schutz explains, typifications are “enlivened . . . arranged and subordinated to the living reality” of our immediate experiences (Schutz and Luckmann 77). Our encounters with situations are thus defined by the contact between our concrete experiences/unique biographies and the socially derived, intersubjective typifications available to us for acting in recognizable situations. This contact allows for the possibility for new typifications to emerge: “a type arises from a situationally adequate solution to a problematic situation through the new determination of an experience which could not be mastered with the aid of the stock of knowledge already at hand” (Schutz and Luckmann 231). This understanding of how types emerge would prove influential to RGS’s understanding of how genres emerge and come to shape social action within recurrent situations.

Schutz’s key contribution to RGS, as Miller would articulate it, is that in order to act in a situation, we must first determine it (Schutz and Luckmann 114). And our ability to determine a situation, as Miller would emphasize, is related in fundamental ways to socially available typifications. As such, how we determine a situation is based not so much on our direct perception of the situation but more so on our ability to define it by way of the available typifications, which then shape our perceptions of how, why, and when to act. Interpretation, meaning, and action are thus interconnected for Schutz. We act within contexts of meaning that we interpret via available typifications, and our actions become meaningful and consequential to others

within these contexts of meaning. Miller's key move within RGS was to recognize genres as such typifications.

GENRE AS SOCIAL ACTION

In developing the idea of genres as social actions, Carolyn Miller drew on the work of Burke, Black, Bitzer, and Campbell and Jamieson in rhetorical criticism and connected that to Schutz's work in social phenomenology to arrive at an understanding of genres as socially derived, intersubjective, rhetorical typifications that help us recognize and act within recurrent situations. This understanding is captured in her famous definition of genres "as typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" ("Genre as Social Action" 31). Miller's crucial contribution to RGS is her formulation that genres need to be defined not only in terms of the fusion of forms in relation to recurrent situations (described within rhetorical criticism), but also in terms of the typified actions produced by this fusion (described within social phenomenology). Miller's focus on *action* and the idea that actions are "based in recurrent situations" have had important implications for RGS, particularly for the way that scholars in RGS understand genre's dynamic relationship to exigencies, situations, and social motives—in short, genre's relationship to how we construct, interpret, and act within situations.

In "Genre as Social Action," Miller begins where Campbell and Jamieson leave off, by arguing against theoretical, deductive genre approaches and instead for an understanding of genre based on the actions produced in recurrent situations—an inductive approach that emerges from "the knowledge that practice creates" (27). Miller advocates for what she calls an "ethnomethodological" approach, which is best suited to allow genre researchers to identify and locate genres in the environments of their use, as well as to describe the actions genres help individuals produce in these environments.¹⁶

An ethnomethodological approach also enables researchers to examine another of Miller's important contributions: How genres participate in the construction of the situations to which they respond. In defining rhetorical situations, Bitzer, as we saw earlier, emphasized their ontological status. A rhetorical situation exists apriori to rhetorical discourse and rhetors, and the exigence which characterizes a rhetorical situation is likewise materialistic and apriori in nature, defined

as “an imperfection marked by urgency; . . . a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be” (Bitzer 304). For Miller, “what is particularly important about rhetorical situations for a theory of genre is that they recur, as Bitzer originally noted, but in order to understand recurrence, it is necessary to reject the materialist tendencies in situational theory” (28). Without considering its implications, Bitzer himself seems at least to have acknowledged this more sociological view of recurrence at the end of his essay, where he explains that as situations recur, the rhetorical forms that emerge in response to them come to have a power of their own in shaping how individuals recognize and respond to these situations. These forms come to mediate how individuals perceive and respond to recurrent situations.

Informed by the work of Alfred Schutz, Miller recognizes the mediated relationship between situations and responses, and therefore the social construction of recurrence. As Miller argues, “situations . . . are the result, not of *‘perception,’* but of *‘definition’*” (29; emphasis added), meaning that our recognition of a situation as calling for a certain response is based on our having defined it as a situation that calls for a certain response. “Before we can act,” Miller explains, “we must interpret the indeterminate material environment” (29). It is our shared interpretation of a situation, through available typifications such as genres, that makes it recognizable as recurrent and that gives it meaning and value. Actions are inextricably tied to and based in interpretations. As such, defining genres as rhetorical actions means recognizing genres as forms of social interpretation that make possible certain actions.

From her understanding of rhetorical situation as a social construct, Miller reconceptualizes the notion of exigence in likewise important ways. An exigence does not exist as an ontological fact, something objectively perceivable by its inherent characteristics. Instead, the social construction of situation is bound up in the social construction of exigence. How we define and act within a situation depends on how we recognize the exigence it offers, and this process of recognition is socially learned and maintained. As Miller explains, “Exigence is a form of social knowledge—a mutual construing of objects, events, interests and purposes that not only links them but makes them what they are: an objectified social need” (30). What we perceive as an exigence

requiring a certain response is predicated on how we have learned to construe it as such.

The process that leads to the mutual construing of exigence starts quite early in one's life. When she was three years old, Anis' daughter was at an outdoor concert where she noticed a young boy dressed in a princess costume. Enamored of princesses and princess paraphernalia, she was eager to talk to the boy about his dress. Later, when her parents noted how wonderful it was that there was a boy wearing a princess costume, she insisted that the boy was a girl, secure in her knowledge that only girls wear princess costumes. No matter the attempts, she would not concede that the child was in fact a boy. Her socially learned gender definitions in this case had already begun to inform her recognition or construal of objects, persons, and events in the world. Her socially learned and shared typifications had already begun to be formed. While this may be an example of an extreme case, it does underscore the degree to which our ability to recognize, make sense of, and respond to exigencies is part of our social knowledge, and part of how we come to shared agreements on what situations call for, what they mean, and how to act within them. Even in cases where the situation clearly originates in a material reality (the death of a President, a severe flood, the birth of a child, etc.) how we make sense of that situation—the kind of urgency and significance with which we mark it, what it occasions us to do, who it authorizes to act and not act—is part of our social knowledge and mutual construing of typifications. While exigencies are not objective in the sense that they exist in and of themselves, they do become “objectified” as over time their mutual construal renders them as habitual, even inevitable, social needs to act in particular ways in particular situations.

As Miller argues, genres play an important role in mediating between recurrent situations and actions. In positioning genre as operating between socially defined situation types (forms of life) and recognizable symbolic acts (forms of discourse), Miller shows how the existence of genres both helps us recognize situations as recurrent and helps provide the typified strategies we use to act within them (35). Charles Bazerman makes the connection between genres and Schutz's notion of typification explicit: “typifications of situations, goals, and tasks can be crystallized in recognizable textual forms, deployed in recognizable circumstances—or genres. . . . The textual features of genres serve as well-known solutions to well-known rhetorical prob-

lems arising in well-known rhetorical situations” (*Constructing Experience* 18). Because genres are how we mutually construe or define situations as calling for certain actions, they help supply what Miller calls social motives: “[A]t the level of genre, motive becomes a conventionalized social purpose, or exigence, within the recurrent situation” (35-36). By associating social purposes with recurrent situations, genres enable their users both to define and to perform meaningful actions within recurrent situations. As Amy Devitt elaborates, “Genre not only responds to but also constructs recurring situations” (“Generalizing” 577). Part of the actions that genres perform, through their use, is the reproduction of the situations to which they respond.

For Miller, then, genres must be defined not only in terms of the fusion of substantive and formal features they embody within recurrent situations, but also by the social actions they help produce. Within recurrent situations, genres maintain social motives for acting and provide their users with typified rhetorical strategies for doing so. This is why genres not only provide typified ways of acting within recurrent situations, but also function as cultural artifacts that can tell us things about how a particular culture defines and configures situations and ways of acting. Anticipating the research and pedagogical implications of such an understanding of genre, Miller concludes,

[W]hat 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: we learn that we may eulogize, apologize, recommend one person to another, instruct customers on behalf of a manufacturer, take on an official role, account for progress in achieving goals. We learn to understand better the situations in which we find ourselves and the potential for failure and success in acting together. As a recurrent, significant action, a genre embodies an aspect of cultural rationality. For the critic, genres can serve both as an index to cultural patterns and as tools for exploring the achievements of particular speakers and writers; for the student, genres serve as keys to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community. (38-39)

The tenets and implications embodied in Miller's notion of genre as social action have helped shape the field of RGS, enabling researchers to study cultural patterns and practices while also challenging researchers to consider how genres might best be used to help students understand and participate in social actions.

As we will examine in more detail in the next chapter, Miller's phenomenologically informed understanding of genre as social action has been taken up and expanded by RGS scholars over the last twenty-five years to include the idea of genre systems as well as Vygotsky's Activity Theory and theories of social cognition. David Russell has recently pointed out how a phenomenological/sociological view of genre is "deeply compatible with Vygotsky's [psychological] view of mediated action" that informs current RGS research on genre and activity systems ("Writing in Multiple Contexts" 357). Early on in his research on genre, Charles Bazerman had already begun to articulate the connections between socio-rhetorical approaches to genre and implications for socio-cognitive development (more recently, Bazerman has described genres as "psycho-social recognition phenomena" ["Speech Acts, Genres, and Activity Systems" 317] and as "tools of cognition" ["Genre and Cognitive Development"]). As Bazerman explains in *Constructing Experience*, "the typifications of situation, intentions and goals, modes of action, and textual genres that the writer applies to the situation create a kind of habitat for the writer to inhabit both psychologically and socially. That is, typifications give writers symbolic means to make sense of things; in turn, those means of sense-making help set the stage and frame possible action" (19). At the same time, genre-based typifications also help establish sites of shared cognition wherein our sense-making procedures interact with others' sense-making procedures (94).

Such social grounding of cognition can be seen in what Bazerman calls "the mutual creation of social moments" (*Constructing Experience* 174) that we inhabit by way of genres and that help orient our understanding of where we are and what we can do (Bazerman 94). Bringing a sociologically-based understanding of genre to bear on the classical rhetorical notion of *kairos*, Bazerman explains how genres help us create, recognize, inhabit, and act within moments of opportunity and significance (178). By learning genres, "we are learning to recognize not only categories of social moments and what works rhetorically in such moments but also how we can act and respond" (178). At the

same time, we are learning how to negotiate our typifications with those of others in “ways that are compatible or at least predictably conflictual . . . for us to meet in mutually recognized moments” (184). Through such “kairotic coordination” (how we interact with each other in shared moments), “we learn the elements of timing and the appropriate responses and the genres of communication; even more, through that learning we discover how we may participate in these forums and sort out how and whether such participation will meet our goals” (181). Through his reinterpretation of *kairos*, Bazerman thus elaborates on the sociological and psychological implications of genre: both as a way in which “we imagine and thereby create social order” (188) and as a way in which we cognitively reflect on, anticipate, and make sense of our placement and interactions within social order.

We will discuss how genres symbolically coordinate spatial and temporal relations in more detail in the next chapter. But here it is worth noting Bazerman’s observation of the ways that genres abstract and reorient situations and actions within various genres’ symbolic environments (“The Writing of Social Organization” 223). In his historical research, Bazerman describes how a number of written genres originated as “overt representations of social situations, relationships and actions,” such as letters and transcriptions (225)—see for example Bazerman’s study of the evolution of the experimental article in science, which began as correspondence reports read at Royal Society of London meetings (“The Writing of Social Organization” 228-29; *Shaping Written Knowledge*). Eventually, the genre of the experimental article would shift from indexing situated interactions that occurred at a meeting of the Royal Society to establishing its own forms of organization and symbolic interaction that writers and readers of experimental articles would inhabit: “Simultaneous with the emergence of the format, contents, and style of the experimental article, the scientific community developed roles, values, activities, and intellectual orientations organized around the production and reception of such articles” (228). Here once again we see how genres symbolically create social order and coordinate social actions.

THE FRENCH AND SWISS GENRE TRADITIONS AND THE BRAZILIAN GENRE SYNTHESIS

Genre research in Brazil has been especially instructive for the way it has synthesized the linguistic, rhetorical, and social/sociological tradi-

tions that we have been describing in the last three chapters, while also drawing on the French and Swiss genre traditions. In so doing, Brazilian genre studies offer a way of seeing these traditions as compatible with one another and as providing analytical and theoretical tools by which to understand how genres function linguistically, rhetorically, and sociologically.

The French and Swiss genre traditions, particularly the theory of “socio-discursive interactionism” that informs them, draw on theorists such as Bakhtin, Vygotsky, Wittgenstein, Foucault, and Habermas, all of whom are familiar to RGS scholars. Yet the theory of socio-discursive interactionism itself has not had much direct influence on North American RGS, although its Vygotskian conceptualization of activity and action clearly parallels RGS’s adaptation of Vygotsky’s Activity Theory, as we will see in the next chapter. Insofar as it is grounded in sociological, linguistic, and rhetorical traditions, however, and has proven to be influential to Brazilian genre studies, socio-discursive interactionism deserves mention here as a theory of human action based in social and discursive contexts and grounded in genre.

Developed by Jean-Paul Bronckart, Joaquim Dolz, Bernard Schneuwly, and others (see Bronckart; Bronckart et al; Dolz and Schneuwly), socio-discursive interactionism (SDI) “postulates that human actions should be treated in their social and discursive dimensions, considering language as the main characteristic of human social activity, since human beings interact in order to communicate, through collective language activities and individual actions, consolidated through texts of different genres” (Baltar et al. 53). Within SDI, genres are considered both “as products of social activities . . . and as tools that allow people to realize language actions and participate in different social activities” (Araújo 46). The influence of Bakhtin is evident in SDI’s focus on language-in-use and genres as typified utterances. Likewise, the influence of Vygotsky is also evident in SDI’s key distinctions between *acting*, *activity*, and *action*. The term “acting” describes “any form of directed [i.e., motivated] intervention;” it is the motivated doing of something. The term “activity” refers to the shared, socially defined notion of acting in particular situations. The term “action” refers to the interpretation of “acting” on an individual level; it involves an individually carried-out activity (Baltar et al. 53).

Individual *action* is thus framed within socially defined *activities*. Such socially defined activities give recognizable meaning to individ-

ual actions at the same time as they associate actions with particular individuals who are authorized to enact the activities at certain times, in certain contexts. As such, we are constantly negotiating between, on the one hand, the socially sanctioned activities which supply social motives and authorize certain roles and, on the other hand, our immediate, situated actions (Baltar et al. 53-54). Within this framework, SDI pays attention to actors' *motivational plans* (their reasons for acting), *intentional plans* (their purposes for acting), and *available resources and instruments* (habitual strategies, familiar tools) (Baltar et al. 54).

In the same way that social actions involve a negotiation between socially defined activities and individually instantiated actions, Baltar et al. explain, so too language actions involve a social dimension (a context that defines an activity) and a behavioral or physical dimension (the act of making an utterance or text or discourse) (54). Language actions thus involve an *act* of enunciation/text/discourse as defined in relation to an *activity* that "predetermines the objectives that can be wished for and that gives the sending and receiving actants a specific social role" (Baltar et al. 54). Within SDI, genres play a mediating role between the social and behavioral dimensions of language (the activity and action).

SDI has been used to develop both analytical and pedagogical models for genre study. Analytically, the model "consists of examining: (a) the content with which, the place where, and time when the participants engage in interaction; (b) the participants in their physical space; (c) the social place in which the interaction takes place; (d) the participants' social roles; and (e) the writing effects" (Araújo 46). Pedagogically, the model has provided a way for language teachers to teach writing at a textual rather than grammatical level, and to situate the teaching of writing within genres and their contexts of use. Towards that end, Dolz, Noverraz, and Schneuwly describe what they call a "didactic sequence" which facilitates genre acquisition via "a set of school activities organized, in a systematic way, around an oral or written genre" (97). SDI allows teachers to situate students' writing within social activities that define it as meaningful and consequential social-discursive actions. We will discuss the pedagogies growing out of the Brazilian tradition in Chapters 10 and 11.

It is especially worth noting the way that Brazilian genre studies have synthesized various traditions: the French and Swiss genre pedagogical traditions, European philosophical traditions, Critical Discourse Analysis, the Systemic Functional Linguistic genre tradition,

English for Specific Purposes, and RGS (see Araújo; also Bazerman, Bonini, and Figueiredo). Araújo's study of genre research in Brazil from 1980 to 2007 reveals that while the focus of genre investigation remains predominantly on the description of genre features, 20% of the studies utilized some kind of ethnographic, action-research, or case study approaches to get at richer genre contexts (50-51). At the same time, while socio-discursive interactionism is the most preferred theoretical approach for analyzing genres, that approach is often combined with a number of perspectives that are used to describe structural and lexico-grammatical aspects of genres (51). The Brazilian synthesis suggests that rhetorical and sociological genre traditions need not be incompatible with linguistic traditions, and that when interconnected, these traditions can provide rich insight into how genres function and can be taught at various levels.

In the next chapter, we will examine the major developments that have informed and emerged from work in RGS over the last twenty-five years, including notions of genre and activity systems that parallel research in SDI. The emphasis within RGS has been to show that genres are not only communicative tools. Genres are also socially derived, typified ways of knowing and acting; they embody and help us enact social motives, which we negotiate in relation to our individual motives; they are dynamically tied to the situations of their use; and they help coordinate the performance of social realities, interactions and identities. To study and teach genres in the context of this socio-rhetorical understanding requires both a knowledge of a genre's structural and lexico-grammatical features as well as a knowledge of the social action(s) a genre produces and the social typifications that inform that action: the social motives, relations, values, and assumptions embodied within a genre that frame how, why, and when to act.