

9 Genre Research in Public and New Media Contexts

As dynamic discursive formations used to carry out particular social activities, language practices, and interpersonal relations, genres function as sites of ideological action. As such, they are also tools for accessing, critiquing, and bringing about change within cultures and publics. While most genre studies have focused on professional and workplace genres or academic and disciplinary genres, more recent studies have turned our attention toward public genres. As with studies of workplace and academic genres, researchers who examine public genres are interested in how genre knowledge is produced and disseminated in publics, how genres are embedded in overlapping and shifting cultures, and how public genres evolve and change. In addition, as the communicative landscape changes, researchers are beginning to see the potential for studying social relations and actions as they are transformed by digital or electronic communicative forms and new media. In “Genre and Identity: Citizenship in the Age of the Internet and the Age of Global Capitalism,” Charles Bazerman exhorts rhetoricians to take note of how “the changes facilitated by the internet and the social creativity released by the new medium facilitates rhetoric’s responsiveness to changing politics” (34). This chapter will focus on public genres that contribute to “the protean shape of the several and evolving public spheres” as well as the “changing forms” of participation brought about by new media (34).

RESEARCH ON PUBLIC GENRES: CONSTRUCTING AND MAINTAINING KNOWLEDGE

A few studies to date have focused on public genres and their role in constructing and maintaining knowledge and disseminating information. Charles Bazerman has examined how tax forms demonstrate the

interaction of information and genre, motivating citizens to produce appropriate information as they fill out forms. The Internal Revenue Service tax form “orients taxpayers to a land filled with requests for particular information to be reported in particular formats” (qtd. in Bazerman, Little, Chavkin 458). These forms compose a bureaucratic identity and create an informational landscape that is intergeneric and composed of past filings and current documents prepared by employers, clients, financial institutions, charitable organizations, and other financial entities. Tax forms demonstrate a salient interaction between information and genre:

When the tax form annually arrives in the taxpayer’s mailbox, the taxpayer knows that there will be consequences if he or she does not fill the blank spaces. The taxpayer must fill it, moreover, with information of the proper form and with proper pedigrees produced in related genres that are part of adjacent activity systems. (459)

These publicly genred sites enact participation as citizens produce information and seek to represent themselves and to construct a relationship with governmental agencies.

The ways that public genres create and maintain knowledge is also the focus of a study by Janet Giltrow, entitled “Genre and the Pragmatic Concept of Background Knowledge.” Giltrow studies crime reports in a Canadian metro newspaper, comparing 1950 reports to 1990 reports. Drawing on discourse and genre analysis, Giltrow focuses on three features: types of events, use of reported direct and indirect speech, and forms of expression used to refer to the offender. Her findings reveal gaps in conceptual background knowledge, with 1950 reports, unlike 1990 reports, assuming background knowledge of the family as a support structure that wards off violent action while assuming no background knowledge of therapeutic responses to violence (such as mentions of counseling). Giltrow concludes that, because news report genres situate violent acts, background knowledge assumptions will change as situations change. This evidence of change “confirms the richness of genre as an archive of cultural imprints” (174).

Moving from a Canadian to a Brazilian journalistic context, Adair Bonini examines the border between two newspaper genres: news and

reportage. From a corpus of 337 texts, including news and reportage from three editions of *Jornal do Brasil*, Bonini selects 84 texts to analyze. He finds that the boundaries between these journalistic genres are blurred, with overlap in rhetorical moves. The activity systems of newspapers revolve around obtaining information, but this shared activity system can result in multiple genres—genres that emerge from the data and information gathered. Drawing on the concept of genre ecologies (Spinuzzi 2003), Bonini argues that “genres exist in a complex ecology of gradual distinctions” and given cultural differences (such as the differences between Brazilian and American journalistic contexts), “we could affirm that there are different journalistic genre ecologies in the world” (222). Further confirming the richness of genres as “ecologies” or as cultural archives, the next section will focus on archival, historical research of public genres.

HISTORICAL RESEARCH ON PUBLIC GENRES

Historical research of public genres examines how genres evolve and change, reflecting cultural shifts and changes. One of the earliest genres, the letter, is the subject of study in David Barton and Nigel Hall’s collection of essays, *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*. Researchers in this collection explore how letter writing is embedded in particular historical and cultural contexts and how letters have mediated, throughout history, a diverse range of human interactions. In his essay in this collection, “Letters and the Social Grounding of Differentiated Genres,” Charles Bazerman examines the history of letter-writing as well as the history of genres that have emerged from letter-writing, arguing that letters have served as antecedent genres for some of the most powerful forms of text, from business genres (forms, invoices, reports) to the scientific article, to the patent, to the stockholder’s report.

In addition to the letter’s role in the formation of genres across various public and professional communities, letters also played more particular roles structuring human relations within specific social and institutional contexts, as chronicled by Les Perelman in “The Medieval Art of Letter Writing” (in Bazerman and Paradis). In his historical overview of letter writing in the Middle Ages, Perelman argues that the genre of the letter, particularly formal letter writing or *ars dictaminis*,

stabilized secular transactions at a time when rapid change was taking place and ecclesiastical authority was increasing in medieval Europe.

The papal encyclical or didactic letter is one of three public genres (including state of the union addresses and congressional replies) examined by Kathleen M. Jamieson in "Antecedent Genre as Rhetorical Constraint." While Jamieson describes her method as "genre criticism," she carried out a systematic analysis of a corpus of historical texts. To illustrate the ways in which genres are culturally embedded and culturally evolve, Jamieson identified antecedent genres, such as Roman imperial documents that give rise to the papal encyclical or the King's Speech to the Parliament that gives rise to early presidential inaugural addresses in the United States. She concludes, "Without recourse to generic method, the early state of the union addresses and their replies as well as the contemporary papal encyclical would be in some important ways inexplicable" (415).

Extending this focus on public communication addressed to citizens or their representatives, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen M. Jamieson (*Deeds Done in Words*) carried out a study of presidential genres, including the inaugural address, state of the union, veto messages, farewell addresses and speeches on war, impeachment, and pardons. Drawing on linguistic, genre, and institutional analysis, they explored how these public genres mediate between contextual forces and individual choices and between stability and change. Noting that some genres have undergone change as institutional boundaries have been redefined, while others have remained fairly stable from the time of George Washington to the present, they reinforced the importance of a genre-based method of research: "A generic perspective applied to the major types of presidential discourse emphasizes continuity within change and treats recurrence as evidence that symbolic institutional needs are at least as powerful as the force of events in shaping the rhetoric of any historical period" (8).

The power of genre to shape events can be seen in a study of nineteenth century land deeds used to appropriate land from indigenous people in British Columbia, Canada. Focusing on deeds used in the 1850s, researcher Shurli Makmillen found that there are conflicting interpretations of the colonial treaty, with "widely divergent uptakes" by 1) European colonists who needed access to land sanctioned by colonial policies and laws and 2) aboriginal groups who needed control of their fate (99). Based on her research findings, she introduces a con-

cept of a “contact genre” whereby two or more groups participate in a genred activity but have conflicting purposes and no shared sense of the rhetorical situation to which the genre responds.

Continuing this focus on conflict within genred activities, Amy Devitt (“Genre as Textual Variable”) applies a generic perspective to her quantitative study of stylistic variation and linguistic change, examining two complementary sets of data: results from a study of linguistic usage in Scots-English genres between 1520 and 1659 and of usage in American English genres between 1640 and 1810. Exploring the correlation between genre and language, she found that “genre functions as a historical variable, as different genres are affected differently by language change over time” (293). Like Campbell and Jamieson, Devitt acknowledges the significant impact of a genre perspective on methods of data collection and ultimately argues for making genre a significant variable in linguistic research. The results of her research raised the question of “why a text’s genre should correlate so significantly with linguistic usage,” which she explained by turning to the relationship between situation and genre: “Each genre reflects its own recurring situation, and those situations and those genres will be different in different times and different cultures” (301).

Further illustrating how public genres evolve and change, Bazerman conducted a study of the patent and examines the early antecedents of the patent in 17th and 18th century petitions to the Crown and royal grant. His study of a corpus of texts composing the genre of the patent illustrates the highly intertextual, intergeneric nature of complex social systems. Bazerman describes the system the patent participates in as follows:

The patent is a legal document that has been approved by the patent office, under authorizing and regulating legislation from the US Congress in fulfillment of constitutional provisions. The patent application is reviewed by a patent examiner who takes action to approve or disapprove the patent according to particular criteria, established by the enabling law and interpreted through the courts. The patent grants economic ownership to the invention claimed therein for a specified number of years (17 in the nineteenth century and today). Thus through legal means the patent realizes a policy of trading tempo-

rary monopoly privileges for the encouragement of new arts and the public dissemination of these arts with the end of general improvement of the national economy. (“Systems of Genres and the Enactment of Social Intentions” 81)

Bazerman’s study moves on to explore the historical evolution and mutual development of the patent genre, patent intentions and the social system of patent grant. Examining the genre’s petitionary format and features, Bazerman discovered that inventor and examiner collaborated in the creation of the patent, resulting in a “multivocal” patent text. They also created “new value” or “a new property to be owned—and that property was a license to attempt to make money from a particular technology” (95). As a result, the patent is a genre that also participates in legal systems, participating in a complex web of interrelated genres and discourse circulation systems.

RESEARCH STUDIES OF GENRE SYSTEMS IN PUBLICS

Extending this research of knowledge production within a large social system is A.D. Van Nostrand’s study of the US government’s sponsorship of military research and development (R&D). Van Nostrand carried out a study of the public genres that formulate a record of how the Department of Defense (DoD) procures Research and Development and the labs that perform R&D. These public genres “constitute the public record of a culture.” The participants in this culture include “customers” or agencies within DoD that fund research and “vendors”—the hundreds of university laboratories and other non-profits that perform the research (134). As these participants interact over the terms of a project, they may have differing objectives and conflicting priorities. However, six transactional pre-contract genres are used to mediate between these roles, with three initiated by the customers and three initiated by the vendors. Drawing on Swales’ five criterial features of genre, Van Nostrand finds that all six genres share a basic structural similarity and rhetorical mode of problem-solution. However, while the genres carry out a shared communicative purpose from a synchronic standpoint, diachronically, they test Swales’ notion of how the commonality of purpose links genre to discourse community: “Considered over a period of time, the discourse community is a construct of separate audiences that form and dissolve and form again

in different alignments to serve the governing purpose of forming an R&D project” (144). In this culture, the roles of the participants illustrate rhetorical complexity, with purposes ranging from collaboration to competition. In addition, rhetorical purpose varies from one research project to another, resulting in a discourse community with shifting alliances and blurred boundaries.

The shifting and complex relationship of participants in a public genre system is also explored by Ryan Knighton in “(En)Compassing Situations: Sex Advice on the Rhetoric of Genre.” Knighton carried out a case study of two syndicated sex-advice columns, one called “Ask Rhona,” an internationally syndicated column appearing in the weekend edition of Vancouver’s *The Province* newspaper, and the other Dan Savage’s “Savage Love,” an “alternative” column that appears weekly in Vancouver’s *The Georgia Straight*. Based on his collection of a corpus of columns from 1997, Knighton examined the rhetorical strategies in the exchanges between solicitation and advice letters. He found that the solicitation letter encompasses the situation (defines a problem) in such a way as to constrain or enable possible responses or “uptakes.” The advice letter then “re-encompasses” situation and generates different valuations and generates a course of action. While the generic encompassment preserves the community and goals of the participants, it also regenerates the genre, thus regenerating the community and mediating between “outlanders” and “inlanders.”

RESEARCH ON THE MEDIATION OF INDIVIDUAL AND PUBLIC ACTION

Following studies of public genres that play a mediating role, such as sex advice columns, a few studies have examined genres that mediate between public and personal, such as Judy Segal’s study of breast cancer narratives. Studying personal narratives of breast cancer across a range of media—books, popular magazines, websites, blogs, and chat rooms—Segal argues that the personal narrative dominates public discourse on breast cancer, thus regulating the potential range of responses that might be useful to other cancer patients. This powerful genre of the personal narrative, with its standard conventions and storyline, works to “suppress or replace other genres in which breast cancer might be queried or explored” (“Breast Cancer Narratives as Public Rhetoric” 4).

Personal accounts appearing in the public media are also the subject of a study by Débora de Carvalho Figueiredo, who investigates three women's accounts of their cosmetic plastic surgery as they appear in Brazilian women's magazines. She concludes that this genre constructs hegemonic models of female identity, which is reflected by the structure of the personal accounts—all moving from the initial negative physical description of the narrators, to their decision to undergo cosmetic plastic surgery, to the final positive evaluation of results. According to Figueiredo, “certain genres of the media (such as media personal accounts) perform the social action of creating idealized identities that interpolate and imbricate individuals by and into gendered narratives” (“Narrative and Identity Formation” 261).

While the above studies share findings regarding how genres constrain action or change, other studies have demonstrated how genres can bring about changes in behavior or public policy. Bazerman explores the role of informational genres in mobilizing citizens and fostering public opposition to government policy on nuclear testing in the 1950s. He analyzes a corpus of citizen-produced texts, with a focus on three issues of a 1958 activist newsletter called *Information*, which establishes a “citizen science” for conveying information that serves the public interest (“Nuclear Information” 285). Once the citizens' information is established, the newsletter broadens its informational scope, moving from anti-nuclear testing issues to environmental issues, with the newsletter eventually evolving into the scientific journal called *Environment* and playing a significant role in the formation of the environmental movement.

Further exploring environmental genres, Bazerman, Joseph Little, and Teri Chavkin carried out a case study of the genre of the environmental impact statement (EIS), examining how the genre responds to a perceived social need for information about the effects of human activity on the environment. For instance, the 1972 Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act “[set] in motion standard genres for the registration of pesticides, the reporting of data, regulatory judgment, and criminal prosecution, in the pattern of other regulatory agencies” (461). In addition, the National Environmental Protection Act carried out its regulatory goals via the genre of the EIS, which required the production and presentation of extensive information regarding the environmental impact of a proposed action (adverse environmental effects, alternatives to the proposed action, short-term

uses of the environment versus long-term productivity, and irreversible commitments of resources). The EIS is a highly rhetorical genre that functions for multiple audiences and agencies and for which the informational landscape is shaped by the goals and needs of the agencies. Through their study of the genre system of the EIS, the researchers discovered that the EIS and related genres worked to change the social landscape of knowledge production and use: "Creating genres for the production, contemplation, and decision making of information is an essential part of the reflective monitoring of collective behavior and its impact on the world" (474).

While the previous studies carry out systematic research on public genres, further research on public genres is needed. In "Genre and Identity: Citizenship in the Age of the Internet and the Age of Global Capitalism," Bazerman sketches out a brief history of the genres of citizenship and political participation, beginning with classical genres of forensic, deliberative and epideictic rhetoric and moving to literate genres of written law and court records, polemics and manifestos, ballots and newspapers and, finally, his main interest—political websites. Bazerman's interest in publics as discursive sites points the way to possible avenues of research on public/private oppositions, the identity of citizenship, and the perceived decline in the quality of citizens' participation. Similarly, Bazerman is interested in how a public, through its genres, "speaks and inscribes itself into existence and by which individuals talk and write themselves into citizens" (34). Further research is needed on how public genres embody not just the rhetorical practices that construct and sustain but also challenge publics. Studies of public genres—genres whose social function is to bring about action/change—would enable rhetoricians to examine sites of intervention, analyzing how such genres enable participation in public processes while also limiting intervention and social action. Studying public genres might also challenge rhetorical genre studies to look beyond fairly stable, bounded, institutionalized contexts like workplaces or academics and to examine what happens when genres are much more diffused.

RESEARCH ON GENRES AND NEW MEDIA

Bazerman's interest, noted above, in electronic public genres—such as political websites—is another area of research gaining ground in

Rhetorical Genre Studies. Recent studies of genre and new media, while still very few in number, are beginning to examine how participation in genres and genre systems is not only shaped by activity systems, social groups, and organizations—whether academic, workplace, or public—but by medium, with researchers using genre as a tool to explore how communicative practices across contexts are influenced by new media. These studies seek to explore how established print genres are imported into a new medium or how genre variants or even new genres develop and emerge in electronic environments. The principle of genre re-mediation—how familiar genres are imported into new mediums—has been the subject of studies by researchers who have examined the email template as genre descendent of the memo heading or by researchers who have studied weblogs' genre antecedents in journals or written logs.

Bazerman's travel metaphor is particularly apt for describing this process of genre use in new media or new communicative domains: "When we travel to new communicative domains, we construct our perception of them beginning with the forms we know. Even our motives and desires to participate in what the new landscape appears to offer start from motives and desires framed in earlier landscapes" ("Life of Genre" 19). The "new communicative domains" of new media have changed the generic landscape, and in doing so, have brought about new research interests in how the medium that genres participate in shapes genre knowledge and genre action. For example, Jack Andersen describes new genre-based research in Library Information Sciences—studies on digital libraries—that have broadened understanding of how knowledge is organized and communicated. Noting that "genre-related research in LIS is closely linked to the growth of digital media," Anderson demonstrates how genre-oriented perspectives on digital document genres can inform research across a range of topics, from electronic document management to web structuring to information retrieval to organizational communication to e-democracy (345). A genre approach to new media sites can increase understanding of new communicative forms in the digital universe.

In "The Evolution of Internet Genres," Marcy Bauman argues that genre theory should "well equip us to understand the widespread changes now sweeping educational and institutional landscapes"—changes brought about by technology and new media literacies. Likewise, Gunther Kress, in *Literacy in the New Media Age*, has described

how multimedia and multimodalities are leading to increasingly hybrid genres. Researchers are interested not only in how genres are “re-mediated” but in how digital contexts for communication alter access to genres, reconfigure constraints (including time constraints), and bring about new forms of collaboration—an “evolution” of genres that is of interest to those who study the functions of genres in both academic and workplace contexts.

STUDIES OF NEW MEDIA GENRES IN ACADEMIC CONTEXTS

In “Academic Literacies in a Wired World: Redefining Genres for College Writing Courses,” Alice Trupe argues that “the move into electronic environments rapidly began to revolutionize classroom practices and genres” (1). Her study has convincingly argued that texts produced electronically require a new set of literacy skills and challenge our teaching of single mode genres, moving us toward a model of multimodal or hybrid genres. Contributing to our understanding of multimodal genres, Chris Anson, Deanna Dannels, and Karen St. Clair conducted a study that focused, additionally, on oral and spoken contexts for communication and the effect on genre. Their “teacher-research” or classroom-based study forecasts challenges not only to teachers of writing but also students who find it difficult to participate in what they call “generic border-crossing.” They argue that “students clearly need to be more fully supported in their acquisition of strategies and skills in an increasingly complex world of discourse” (190), and they conclude by calling for further research that might explore these complexities.

Responding to this call, a few recent studies have explored the integration of media genres in the classroom for teaching both oral and written genres. Marcos Baltar carried out action research on the production of radio genres in an elementary school in Brazil. For their school radio broadcast, students wrote and revised scripts and then recorded programs on school news and events and on topical issues like the environment, technology, and food and health. Through a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods—meetings, interviews, questionnaires, direct observation in the classroom—Baltar found that students’ performance of radio genres does indeed develop the critical reading and production skills of oral and written genres, engages students in meaningful language activities, and strengthens students’

socio-discursive interactions with the school community. In addition to “the systematic teaching/learning work of written and oral genres,” school radio offers “the possibility of developing a series of skills, providing the subjects involved with a more stimulating educational dynamic” (68).

In addition to radio genres, web genres have also been the subject of pedagogically based research studies. Mike Edwards and Heidi McKee conducted a classroom-based study of web-based writing assignments in their first-year composition courses and collected digital copies of students’ websites along with their writings about their websites. They also kept teaching journals and interviewed each other’s students about their experiences creating their websites. Both teachers asked their students to develop a persuasive essay as a multipage Web site incorporating links and graphics. While some student essays tended to follow a mode of argumentation much closer to print-based arguments—with a linear progression—others were more “multilinear” and challenged the syllogistic reasoning and progression of thought usually associated with argument. Both teachers discovered, however, that students’ success often depended on their familiarity with the variety of web genres and that this prior genre knowledge influenced the rhetorical choices they made in their own web documents. When students were asked during interviews if they had any types of sites in mind as they were planning their own, they often pointed to various commercial sites, such as couples sites or profile sites (personal web pages) that emphasized the need to focus more on understanding and analyzing genres. According to the researchers, “we discovered that we had missed opportunities to engage with students in critical discussions of how Web genres get constructed, circulated, accepted, and altered” (214) by failing to draw on the genre knowledge that students brought with them to class. Edwards and McKee further discovered that the web genres and web sites they were familiar with as teachers did not always match the websites that students were reading and were familiar with. As a result, the researchers discovered that “employing genre as an analytic tool requires that we not only recognize the multigeneric nature of Web texts, but also develop strategies for helping students—and ourselves—identify and analyze the origins of our frequently differing conceptions of Web genres” (214). Their research, then, supports a genre approach in the classroom. By focusing class time on genre analysis—cultural and rhetorical analysis of the Web

sites students frequently read—students will be better prepared to participate in these new media genres as knowledgeable, critically aware writers of digital texts.

This genre awareness was found lacking in students in a study that Mike Palmquist carried out on student web sites in writing and writing-intensive courses across the disciplines. Palmquist's case study approach involved interviews with six students writing for the web in different disciplines: two each from a speech communication course, an undergraduate Web development course, and a graduate Web writing course. He explains that he chose students from three courses "to increase the likelihood of obtaining findings that were not influenced by the genre conventions suggested by a particular faculty member" (226). In the interviews, Palmquist asked students to reflect on their experiences reading and writing Web documents and to reflect on genre features like document structure, navigation tools, digital illustrations, and page design. Although all six students had used the Web for personal and academic purposes, only two students had ever developed their own Web sites, making it a new genre for most of the students. Additionally, Palmquist found that the undergraduate students were less familiar with the genre and thought of Web sites as a more monolithic genre; however, graduate students had a more nuanced understanding of the multiple genres on the Web and the different functions among types of Web sites, such as search sites, news and information sites, educational sites, commercial sites, government sites, organizational sites, etc. Palmquist also discovered that when faced with a newly emerging and evolving genre, students tend to turn to other genres to search for recurrent patterns in structure and design and that they also borrow from print genres, such as structuring a site based on an academic essay or including a table of contents, a navigation tool familiar in print genres. As in the previous study by Edward and McKee, Palmquist's findings confirm that there is no stable genre definition of Web documents. As a result, he encourages instructors to emphasize the emergent nature of genres on the web and the range of choices that writers have: "If instructors inform their assignments with an understanding of the Web as a home to multiple genres, those assignments are more likely to attend to issues concerning organizational structure, page design, navigational tools, and the use of digital illustrations" (244). Following the implications from the previous study,

Palmquist's research supports a pedagogical approach informed by critical genre analysis, which we examine in more detail in Chapter 10.

GENRE-BASED STUDIES OF WEBLOGS IN ACADEMIC SETTINGS

While the above studies focus on students' creation of web genres or web sites, a few studies have examined "emergent" genres of weblogs. Just as the above studies argue for approaches to teaching digital genres that are informed by critical genre analysis, this section will begin with a genre analysis of the weblog, an analysis informed by empirical research.

In "Blogging as Social Action: A Genre Analysis of the Weblog," Carolyn Miller and Dawn Shepherd study the substance, form, and rhetorical actions of weblogs or "blogs." Drawing on ethnomethodology, they examine a corpus of blogs and collect and analyze bloggers' reflections on their blogs, noting that blogs carry out typified social actions of self-expression and community development. Through the function of self-disclosure, bloggers seek to develop relationships and build connections with others or manipulate their opinions through the features of linking and commentary. An important aspect of their study is examining the evolution of the genre; as a result, Miller and Shepherd also examine the history of blogs and their ancestral genres, claiming that the blog is a complex rhetorical hybrid with genetic imprints from prior genres, such as the diary, clipping services, broadsides, commonplace books, and even ship's logs. Ultimately, they argue that the blog is a distinctive genre that combines the personal and public in its rhetorical form and allows bloggers to cultivate the self in a public way, noting that "the blog-as-genre is a contemporary contribution to the art of the self" (11).

Testing Miller and Shepherd's finding that blogs contribute to "the art of the self," Kathryn Grafton and Elizabeth Maurer carry out a case study of two blogs that perform public actions, one focused on a community literary event (Canada Reads) and the other on the issue of homelessness. Through analysis of blog posts and the blogs' interactions with other public texts, such as news articles and broadcasts, the researchers find that bloggers construct "mediated selves" within publics and cultivate and validate self "by engaging directly with publics and arranging for their discourse to be recognized by these publics" (50).

Another finding by Miller and Shepherd is that “the blog is already evolving into multiple genres, meeting different exigencies for different rhetors” (6). Extending this discussion of multiple weblog genres as well as the interaction of public and private, a group of researchers—Kevin Brooks, Cindy Nichols, and Sybil Priebe—studied different types of weblogs (journal, community, or notecard/filter) and sought to discover which weblogs engage or motivate student writers. Drawing on survey data and responses to open-ended questions, the researchers investigated the relationship between these weblog genres and student motivation over two semesters in a variety of courses, from first-year to graduate courses. In these courses, students were asked to set up and maintain a personal blog and to contribute entries about controversial social issues discussed in class. While Miller and Shepherd found that blogs integrate public and private, these researchers found that first-year students were not interested in the public dimension of weblogs or their academic potential but instead preferred the personal and expressive dimensions. For that reason, the journal weblog was most preferred, while the graduate students appreciated and valued both the journal and the community weblog, where they could share observations about a reading or discuss issues relevant to class (for a study of collective blogs in K-12 education, see Sousa and Soares). The researchers concluded that journal weblogging is most popular because it remediates a familiar print genre (journals) with positive connotations. However, it can also cause generic interference for learning other types of weblog genres.

While Miller and Shepherd define blogs as a new genre and Brooks, Nichols, and Priebe argue that there are multiple weblog genres, a study by Susan Herring, Lois Ann Scheidt, Sabrina Bonus, and Elijah Wright suggests that weblogs are a “bridging genre”—a hybrid genre that is neither unique or new nor remediates or reproduced. In their quantitative analysis of 203 weblogs, the researchers seek to provide an empirical snapshot of weblogs and to contribute to a theoretical understanding of how technological changes trigger new genres and change the genre ecology of the Internet. Their research is based on the assumption that “recurrent electronic communication practices can meaningfully be characterized as genres” (144). Their results reinforce findings in the previously discussed studies, noting that blogs are very much an individual enterprise and are used primarily for a personal purpose. Blogs resemble another online genre—the

online journal—a genre reproduced from diaries and share similarities to digital genres like homepages. Extending the list of ancestral genres noted by Miller and Shepherd, Herring et al. argue that blogs also have offline antecedents in genres of editorials and letters to the editor in print newspapers. Rather than having a single source as an antecedent genre, blogs are “a hybrid of existing genres, rendered unique by the particular features of the source genres they adapt, and by their particular technological affordances” (163). They conclude that “the flexible, hybrid nature of the blog format means that it can express a wide range of genres, in accordance with the communicative needs of its users” (164). This flexibility in composing in new media contexts and the ability to formulate a wide variety of genres or multi-genre responses to meet the communicative needs of users obviously has implications not just for research on academic genres but for research on genres in workplace or professional contexts, which is the focus of the next section.

STUDIES OF ELECTRONIC GENRES IN WORKPLACE CONTEXTS

New electronic technologies and the demand for more efficient and effective forms of interaction are influencing organizational communication as well as research on organizational communication. In an overview of communication media and organizational genres entitled “Genres of Organizational Communication: A Structural Approach”, JoAnne Yates and Wanda Orlikowski identify two streams of research on new media: one focusing on the factors that influence use of media in organizations and the other focused on how media influences communicative behavior. The limitation of this prior research, they argue, is that these approaches fail to acknowledge “the reciprocal and recursive relationships between media and communication over time” (310). Another concern is the conflation of the terms “genre” and “media.” While careful to differentiate between genres of communication and the communication media, Yates and Orlikowski posit that “medium may play a role in both the recurrent situation and the form of a genre” (310), making the combined lenses of genre and medium “a powerful alternative approach to studying communication in organizations” (311). Utilizing this research approach, Yates and Orlikowski trace the emergence and institutionalization of the memo genre over time, from its status as a business letter in the mid-1800s to the elabo-

ration of the memo genre in email in the 1970s-1990s. Examining the reciprocal relationship between genre and medium, they study (via historical and contextual methods) the influence of the established memo genre on communication in email and the widespread use of email that sets the stage for the emergence of new computer mediated genres of organizational communication. They conclude with a look toward future research: "Empirical research is needed to investigate the various social, economic, and technological factors that occasion the production, reproduction, or modification of different genres in different sociohistorical contexts" (320), noting that new media may be triggering the modification of existing genres.

In a number of their articles, Orlikowski and Yates reiterate their argument that genre is a useful tool for investigating the effects of new media in professional organizations or workplace settings. In "Genre Systems: Structuring Intervention through Communicative Norms," they illustrate this claim empirically as they study the use of a collaborative electronic technology in a corporate setting. In order to illustrate how genre systems structure communicative interactions in organizations, their study focused on three teams of employees in a high-technology company in the northeastern US ("Mox Corporation") and their use of a collaborative application called "Team Room" technology. After tracking the posting of 492 messages over seven months of use, they carried out a genre analysis of the messages and conducted interviews with team members using a variation of the discourse-based interview. Their study identified three genre systems used by all three teams: meeting, collaborative authoring, and collaborative repository. The meeting genre system consisted of communicative activity surrounding face-to-face meetings, such as postings of logistics or agenda and distribution of minutes. Collaborative authoring referred to the circulation of drafts and responses, with interactions among all team members. Collaborative repository included communicative activities such as coordinating schedules, brainstorming, or initiating discussions—for example, using the Team Room as a "Place to Brainstorm on Communication Ideas" as one team invited members to "Compose comments whenever you get inspired" (22). Yates's and Orlikowski's findings indicate that the enactment of the three genre systems within the framework of the new media of Team Room both reinforced and, in some cases, changed the communicative interactions. In addition, as these genre systems structured interaction in Team Room, there

was sometimes an explicit awareness of genre expectations and their coordinating role, and in other cases, it was more tacit and habitual. Yates and Orlikowski conclude by noting that “For users of such new media, we believe that making assumptions explicit that have previously been tacit may facilitate adjustment to the new medium, both to avoid misunderstandings and to encourage experimentation that may lead to change in genre systems” (33).

Further exploring the changes in a workplace community’s genre repertoire within the context of electronically mediated communication is a study by Cristina Zucchermaglio and Alessandra Talamo called “The Development of a Virtual Community of Practices Using Electronic Mail and Communicative Genres.” This study is focused on three research questions related to the ways in which the e-mail system contributed to the construction of specific genres, the ways in which the community’s genre repertoire changed over time, and the ways in which the changes in genre repertoire reflect and reinforce changes in the community members’ relationships. Examining electronic-mail communication within an organization of software-developers, the researchers gathered a data corpus of 794 e-mail messages produced over a three-year period by an interorganizational group creating a software interface and categorized each of the messages according to its communicative goal and formal features. Results indicated that the community members identified five genres as part of their repertoire: the note, report, dialogue, proposal, and memo, with notes (brief, informal and often personal communications) comprising the most-used genre in the repertoire and constituting 66% of the messages exchanged (265). Other genres, such as memos and proposals, represented a much smaller percentage of the e-mail communication, perhaps reflecting, according to the researchers, “the prevalence of an informal communicative and work style” among these organizational members (281). Perhaps most interesting is that the e-mail system contributed to the construction of specific genres, such as the dialogue genre, which the researchers define as “a form of written interaction modeled on oral conversation and made possible by electronic mail’s capacity to insert all or part of a preceding message (defined as embedded text) in the new text the writer is creating” (267). Dialogue genres share the communicative goal of responding to a preceding message and share unique formal features of embedded text from previous exchanges. For this single virtual community, then, the technologically

mediated communicative practices resulted in changes to the genre repertoire and facilitated informal exchanges among co-workers.

While the above studies examine electronically mediated genres within community contexts, one recent study explores genres that are uprooted from their native contexts by new mobile technologies, such as personal digital assistants or PDAs. In "Coherent Fragments: The Problem of Mobility and Genred Information," Jason Swarts conducted an observational case study of a veterinary teaching hospital and fourth-year students with PDAs. Because PDAs make information mobile across space and time and beyond particular contexts of use, it is up to the user to adapt the information to context or "recontextualize" the information. Making it more difficult to recontextualize and translate information across contexts of use is the fact that, for PDAs, the genre's characteristic features are both semantically and physically reduced, thus obscuring the connections between fragments of information and a context in which they are used. The purpose of Swarts' case study was "to observe how students used PDA-accessible information, in conjunction with environmentally accessible information, to create information artifacts that supported cooperative medical activity" (176). The veterinary students that Swarts studied were each supplied a PDA by the school, and the PDAs were preloaded with medical calculators, tutorials, procedure videos, clinical references, and relevant databases. Based on observations of seven students on two rotations and interviews with students about their PDA use, Swarts examined how students connected the fragmented information on their PDAs (a virtual genre ecology) with environmentally available information. Most significant in terms of findings is Swarts' observation that understanding a genred context of use means understanding "the modality of information" that complicates an understanding of a genre's "embeddedness" in a culture.

The modality of information is also the subject of Helen Caple's study of a corpus of 900 news stories from the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Based on her analysis, she proposes that a new multimodal genre has emerged, which she calls the "image-nuclear news story." She is interested in the element of play between the textual and visual in the corpus she analyzes, particularly the interaction between the heading and image, which are often light and playful, thus putting them in start contrast to the hard news story. The headings and photos appeal to human interest, using idiomatic expressions and cultural allusions

that create solidarity with readers and that encourage them to read the news story that follows. However, Caple concludes that this new genre “has demonstrated great awareness of the potential of the internet and other media platforms to threaten [the] future” of traditional news genres while also holding the promise of increasing readership and circulation (256).

As multimedia and multimodal texts interact within new genre ecologies and systems and genres mediate discourse activities across contexts and medium, the problems and possibilities of “recontextualization” will be ripe for further study. In addition, further studies, such as Orlikowski’s and Yates’s research on collaborative electronic technologies will facilitate understanding of changes in communicative interactions associated with the adoption of new electronic media:

Understanding organizing processes mediated by new technologies becomes increasingly important, as more and more organizational work becomes a matter of electronic symbol manipulation and information exchange. The genres through which information is shaped and shared for particular purposes (reports, spreadsheets, meetings, or teleconferences) are no longer merely an aspect of organizational work; rather they are the organizational work. (“Genre Repertoire” 572)

As communities adopt and use new media, further studies will be needed to examine the process of importing existing genres and genre systems, improvising around them, and learning to take advantage of new and emergent genres.

CONCLUSION

In the 15 years since Aviva Freedman issued her call for more research on genre, genre scholars have conducted a wealth of studies in academic and workplace contexts, with some studies of genre in public and electronic contexts becoming more prevalent. In fact, in a recent book with Natasha Artemeva called *Rhetorical Genre Studies and Beyond*, Freedman has since acknowledged the “especially extensive empirical research” that “has provided composition researchers with a very rich body of highly textured, largely qualitative work that has explained

and elaborated on the discursive practices of professionals in their workplace and students in universities” (1). Freedman is able to reflect on how the body of empirical research has revealed gaps or limitations in genre theory and to illustrate how scholars have addressed these gaps by turning to other complementary theories, such as activity theory, theories of situated learning, perspectives on distributed cognition, and linguistic approaches. In “Interaction Between Theory and Research,” Freedman acknowledges the complex, reciprocal relationship between theory and empirical research, noting that “sometimes the data force researchers to reconsider the theory—to modify, revise, or possibly even reject aspects or the whole of a theory that had been in use” (102). While research has strengthened the powerful conceptual framework of rhetorical genre studies, it has also informed our “use” of theory, namely through approaches in the classroom. The next two chapters in Part 3 will focus on pedagogical applications informed by genre theory and research.