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## Anyone For Tennis?\*

Anne Freadman

[...]

### Part 1

My father put a hex on me, one day, when he was trying for the nth time to teach me to hit tennis balls against the back lav. He told me I had no ball sense. What he meant, of course, was what we nowadays call hand-eye coordination, and I've since learnt to separate the issues. But it's had untold consequences. One is that tennis can never be more, or less, for me than a metaphor. Or maybe I mean a simile. Or an allegory.

Imagine a game of tennis, preferably, of course (if you have any ball sense), singles. The players are not exchanging balls, they're exchanging shots. The ball, like the rackets, the players themselves, the court with its markings, and the rules of the game, is one of the things that make the shots possible. Without the ball, and with everything else, the shots are possible but not realized. Even this problem has been solved for board games, such as chess, but only by means of the ingenious invention of material substitutes for the board and the men (men, in chess, includes the queen). As Saussure said, any substitute for the piece will work exactly like the piece, if the rules governing its piece-hood (its manhood?) are spelled out. The material determinants of tennis balls are more intractable: you need another tennis ball, though children make do with almost anything.

Let us take the distinction between exchanging balls, and exchanging shots, as something like the distinction between exchanging meanings and exchanging signs, respectively. I expect you thought I should have made an equivalence between 'ball' and 'sign', and 'shot' and 'meaning'. This shot is about why I didn't. Imagine hard little pellets of meaning travelling towards you like a Mandlikovan serve. Then duck. Michael Reddy (1970) calls this 'the Conduit Metaphor'.

If we said, about tennis or any ball game, that what we were exchanging was the ball, scoring would not be possible. The game would be posited on the absolute

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symmetry of the players, and its objective, if objective there were in such circumstances, would be its maintenance. There are games in which the confirmation of balance is the only stake, and the loss of balance a sign that the match should not have taken place. I heard, for instance, of a betrothal ritual from the Cameroons. In it, the fathers of the prospective couple enter into an intellectual joust, where they match their respective funds of cultural knowledge and skill. They argue for as long as they are well-matched, and a ritual ending marking neither victory nor defeat proclaims that the match is a good one. Winning becomes important in a situation such as this only if one of the protagonists, with his seconds, begins to lose respect in a systematic or protracted way, for his opposite number; then he must win, to demonstrate publicly that inequality was the proven outcome; the marriage, then, will not take place. This is not unlike the system of 'seeding' in championship tennis: any one match between top seeds may be won or lost, where the understanding is that the result could reverse at the next round. The contrast with the single singles match is not, after all, so great: in any given match, winning is what the players are trying to do, though they must be well-matched for the game to be worth playing. While in the most ritual of jousts and the most equal of display games, equality, no less than winning and losing, depends on scoring. Scoring depends on shots, not on balls.

Player A plays a shot; player B plays it back. What is this 'it'? It is not useful to say "'it' is the ball'; and it is manifestly inaccurate to call it the same shot. Player B is, let's say, the 'receiver', but to *receive* a shot s/he must return it, play, that is to say, another. The same shot, then – Player A's serve – has a *different value* for each of the two players: a 'good shot' may win a point for its player, but, well-received, it may turn against her/him, its speed, its turn, or its angle enabling an unexpected return.

If I return, now, to the silent comparand, you may well wish to object that we have always known this, that words or texts have different meanings for any two interlocutors, that it's what we do with them that counts. So I'd best not return, just yet. If tennis is to be a simile, it had better pay off better than that.

[...]

To suppose that discursive interaction is the giving and receiving of *meanings* is like describing a game of tennis as the giving and receiving of balls. To suppose, on the contrary, that it is the playing of shots is to allow the value of those shots to be subject to play, and the meaning of the interaction to be the upshot of the perpetual modification of each shot by its return.

Each shot, in this analogy, produces value in two ways: in what it enables, or prevents; and to either player. Each shot is formally determined by the rules of the game, and materially determined by the skill of the players, and each return shot is determined by the shot to which it is a response. Responses, then, are not 'freed', or bound even by what is loosely known as pragmatic circumstance as if this latter were 'outside' the text. Returns, and readings, work within certain clearly marked conventions, and *with the material at hand*. They are both enabled, and constrained,

by the formal-material determinants of the signs they read and the signs they will write.

Our signs, then, our semiotic artefacts, bid for value in a field of like and unlike: and their value as objects resides neither 'in' them nor in their owners. Rather, using the analogy of the marketplace, the extent to which they are kept in play – the number of times they are bid for, the changes they effect around them, the bids they make of place and function within this field – they have no value if they are not constantly renegotiated. Priceless, they say, of paintings, and of conversation-stopping jokes.

So... maybe... then... too... (if I go on)... (allons, Gogo, il faut me renvoyer la balle de temps en temps)... a metaphor, a simile, or an allegory, is just this: the play of a sign between two systems of values, itself an allegory, of what it is to play ball, or to make sense.

## Part 2

What is the value of this very elaborate metaphor? – you may well ask. It seems to have worked well enough as a way of writing about Communication, or Discourse, and it is tempting to take the metaphor of a *game* to correspond with the notion of 'genre'. The authority for this usage is Wittgenstein (1953: sec. 23).<sup>1</sup> Yet there is little evidence in his use of the metaphor of the 'language game' that it designates in his writings a concept commensurate with that conventionally associated with 'genre'. The kind of thing meant by 'language game' might be, for example, 'referring', or 'asking questions', and could be said to *overlap* with that of 'genre' to the extent that 'genre' is either modelled on, or thought through, the concept of the *speech act*. Literary theorists, and linguists concerned with discourse, have been led, quite fruitfully, to consider genre as an extension of speech acts, and have, accordingly, attempted to construct *theories of genre* that extend the *theory of speech acts*.<sup>2</sup> Historians of what we are wont to call ideas argue that there is a great deal in common between the Wittgensteinian notion of the 'language game' and the theory of speech acts deriving from Austin (1967). Both, they would say, are strategies to contest the dominance of the formal models used by logic to describe meaning. They would also say that this move in philosophy is paralleled by the move in literary theory, which has adopted pragmatic notions of *discourse as social action* to contest formal models of textuality (cf. Pratt 1977), or the more traditional notion that the meaning of a text resides solely in its 'referential function', i.e., what it can be said to represent. In all these places, discourse is thought in terms of 'doing things with words' and terms like 'perform', 'function', 'act', 'action', 'moves', 'strategies', 'tactics'... figure large in such theories. Since a lot of this vocabulary is common to the ways in which we talk about playing games and those in which we talk about our engagement in social forms and forces, it is tempting to talk about a *genre* as if it were a *game*. It seems to suggest a combination of the serious and the playful, and to authorize the use of the model of constitutive rules (as in the description of games) with the need to talk about individual action in relation with regulative rules (as in the description of social facts). The authority for this combination is Searle (1978), who



in many ways combines Wittgensteinian notions (e.g., taking 'referring' as an act) with the impetus given to speech act theory by Austin.

However, 'the game' - or rather *a* game - may be a misleading metaphor for genre. It may require some adjustment. It suggests that once you have learnt the rules - implicit and explicit, and including rules such as those that constitute the basis of skill (e.g., one's grip in golf or tennis) - the playing of a correct game follows automatically, like the output from a simple algorithmic programme in a computer. Obviously individual variables such as actual skill, mental and physical agility, and so on, play a part, but they are not an issue if what is at stake is whether what you are doing *counts* as the playing of that game. To use this metaphor for genre suggests that a text is the output of a set of rules. This is what I call the 'recipe theory' of genre. We have known for many years that a very wide range of 'texts' - far beyond what usually pass for 'literary', 'artistic' or 'creative' texts - fail to be usefully described as conforming with a generic recipe; we have also known for many years that it is this kind of genre theory with its failures that has caused the discrediting of the very notion of genre, bringing about in turn its disuse and the disrepair many of us found it in, within the last, say five to ten years, when we attempted to apply it in the emerging set of problems in literary and semiotic theory. What constitutes a game as distinct from other games is its rules, their rules, and the difference between them. This is important. But we need to adjust our metaphor to accommodate the idea that these rules are *rules for play*.

In the description of the game I have given in Part 1, I have described the playing of a shot in terms that converge in the notion of 'uptake'. This may be said to correspond to the 'tactical' level of game playing; on this analogy, the 'strategic' level corresponds to the attempt to determine the terms in which the interaction - the game - is set up. 'Update' is a term from speech act theory, and it is said that kinds of speech acts (requests, commands, invitations . . .) determine a, or a set of, appropriate uptake(s). The strategic level of game-playing is that level where a (set of) medium-term goal(s) is established, and the tactics planned in accordance with this. It is the relation between strategy and tactics that suggests that genre might be a generalization over speech-acts, or an extension of the notion. But it is also this relation that shows us that we are no longer talking about a game and its rules; we are talking about the playing of a game. In the very elaborate discussion of chess strategies, so formalized that they take on the status of *kinds of games*, there is no discussion of the relating of these strategies with the tactics of the play at any given point, except in the detailed descriptions of particular matches. You might just as well substitute 'particular texts', in the previous sentence. Now the playing of a game is a *ceremony* which involves a great deal more than the game itself. There are the preparations, the choice of partners, occasion and venue. There is the warm-up, the toss, and, at the end, the declaration of the winner and closing down rituals - showers, presentations, or the drink at the bar.

There may be no important ethnographic or sociological difference between the notion of a ceremonial and that of a game, but I need to retain the two terms for tactical purposes. Ceremonies are games that situate other games: they are the rules for the setting of a game, for constituting participants as players in that game, for

constituting participants as players in that game, for placing and timing it in relation with other places and times. They are the rules for playing of a game, but they are not the rules of the game. Games, then, are rules for the production of certain acts in those 'places'. To the extent that the grammatical rules of my language permit me to make this distinction, I could say that where ceremonies are rules for playing, games are rules for play. That there be 'play' at both these levels is important: knowing the rules is knowing how much play the rules allow and how to play with them. I want to suggest, then, that each of the moments, phases, stages or 'places' in a ceremonial is a genre, and that speech-acts might have the function of the opening or closing of the ceremony, the marking of the passage from one phase to another, as well as of tactics 'within' any genre. If this is the case, the notion of genre and the notion of speech-act are not coextensive, and are not usefully thought of as deriving one from the other.<sup>3</sup> I also want to suggest that it will be useful to think of most of our talking and writing as ceremonial, and that what we can mean, in the semiotics of discourse, by 'social setting' can be usefully explored by means of this series of analogies.

There are points of similarity between the framework I am setting up and the Hallidayan model of register.<sup>4</sup> Schematically, on the assumption that games are formalized symbolic structurings of interlocutory relations, then field:tenor::ceremonial:game. My terminology has the advantage of declaring the kind of relation that might hold between the two 'levels' but this may not be a difference worth fighting over. On the other hand, there are significant differences between the two models. Mine is a model in general semiotics, which starts from the postulate that 'texts' are the product of the interaction of a variety of 'languages', or semiotic systems, none necessarily homologous with any other. The Hallidayan model and its derivatives arise from the postulate of a functionalist linguistics, which maps social structures onto the single semiotic system we call 'natural language' or 'human discourse'. The argument for the general semiotics position is that it is practically impossible to find a text that mobilizes only one language: the relation of speech and gestures is the most immediately available example of this claim; the relation of typesetting and other publishing conventions with the 'written' forms of language is another. In this perspective, film is not an exception to this semiotic rule, but a particularly rich exploitation of it. The limitations of linguistic models of, or premises for, a theory of discourse arise quite naturally from the theoretical and methodological enterprise of linguistics itself. The argument against the linguistic model is, then, that if we are to account for what it is to make a text, we are unlikely to find out a great deal from studying the properties of only one of its languages.

There is another difference between me and the linguists with respect to the more precise question of genre; but the problem I wish to raise is not in this case a direct product of the premises of linguistics. Rather, I am taking issue with the whole tradition of genre theory as it derives from literary studies. Most unfortunately, it seems that the linguists have taken over some tacit assumptions from this tradition and have fallen into the 'traps for young players' that recent literary theory has attempted to undo. Briefly, these assumptions are:

- 1 that a text is 'in' a genre, i.e., that it is primarily, or solely, describable in terms of the rules of one genre;
- 2 that genre is 'in' a text, i.e., that the features of a text will correspond to the rules of the genre.<sup>5</sup>

If, as I am suggesting, a genre is a game, then it will be more useful to think of it as consisting, minimally, of two texts, in some sort of dialogical relation. For example,

- theoretical debate;
- brief and report;
- play and audience response;
- essay question, essay, feedback.

Some of these will be in the same ceremonial, and others will be in distinct ones, for example,

- a recipe and its making, and the meal.

Sometimes the insertion of a text into an inappropriate ceremonial will make a parody (as Malcolm Muggeridge is said to have said, 'how better could you parody this letter [which appeared in *The Times*] than by reprinting it verbatim in *Punch*?'), but at other times, such as misappropriation just makes nonsense, or at best restates, or recuperates the borrowed text in the terms of the borrowing ceremonial. For example, the use of simulation techniques in the ceremonial frame of 'straight' classroom practice subverts the simulated game: its stakes are no longer at stake; the stakes of playing are those of playing the usual work for marks and teacher's feedback game. What has gone wrong is that the pairing of the text produced by the simulation with its appropriate uptake has been broken. It has simply become another assignment.

If genres are usually described as pairs or groups of texts, certain implications follow:

- 1 texts, like speech acts, are tactical;
- 2 the rules of a genre, and the formal properties of a single text, will not correlate; but rather
- 3 the two texts of a generic pair will have different properties, like question and answer, theory and refutation;
- 4 one of the things a text will do is to play its partner, whether or not that partner is 'present'. In order to do so, it must *represent* its partner - previous, current, future, fictional or ideal. The rules for such representations are an integral part of any genre in precisely the same way as the rules of a game include the rules of the interaction of the partners.<sup>6</sup> But texts may, and frequently do, play several games - and thus, several partners - at once.

The rest of my discussion will dwell on the level of genre, not of text. This is because I think there's a need for working over what we mean by this term. Discussions of genre usually take the form of discussions of 'classes of text', or 'text types', and proceed on the basis of the assumption that a classification is constructed by a series of descriptions of similarity and difference. I shall start by doing just that, and go on to show how statements of similarity and difference require to be construed through the notion of ceremonial place. Tennis will recur, but only fleetingly. To discuss how a text plays its game(s) requires close readings - another genre.

#### 'Like-statements'

'Like-statements' are statements which we use to classify things, either to establish the class, or to include something apparently different within it. Frequently they are strategies for sorting out what might count as salient properties, understanding something unfamiliar by asking whether it shares this or that feature with something familiar. To claim that items x, y and z form a class is to make certain features salient above others, and to claim that these features go some way towards describing how each member functions, or is placed, in relation to others not sharing these features. In the description of genres, or of texts in terms of generic classifications, 'like-statements' look like this:

You could say that

- an architect's plan is like a recipe,
  - and that a doctor's prescription is a recipe that can only be made by a qualified pharmacist,
  - preparing an article for publication in such-and-such a journal,
  - writing sonnets
- are also like recipes; but do we get good sonnets and good science reports from instructions in this form? Recipes are a genre; but genres are not recipes.

#### 'Not-statements'

Most theories of genre concentrate on 'like-statements'; most descriptions of individual texts in terms of generic generalizations concentrate on 'not-statements'. I want to propose a way of thinking about genre theory that takes 'not-statements' as its starting point.

Doors are like windows, but they are not windows.

It is important for us to know the difference between an architect's plan and a recipe, and it may be that this is best described in terms of social setting. Saying that we



have something like the *same genre* turning up in different settings may be important for genre theory, in order to avoid the social determinist position, which might claim:

- 1 that genres are specific to social (e.g., disciplinary or institutional) setting and
- 2 that social relations such as class and institutional hierarchies determine genre.

Such claims can be refuted by linguistic and discursive analysis of textual features.<sup>7</sup>

It is also important for us to know, and to be able to describe, the differences between a doctor's prescription and a doctor's referral letter to another doctor. Being able to describe this difference is the business of genre theory, and knowing it in practice matters for getting on with the business of getting the right professional advice from the right 'person'. These two kinds of text are strategies for doing two things:

- 1 dealing with a diseased and suffering body;
- 2 asserting the structural and functional relations that make a profession more than a collection of trained workers. This assertion needs to be made in order to make the profession work as such, and it also needs to be addressed to the patient, in order that s/he use it as a profession. Not to do so is equivalent to misusing it, or using it incorrectly; it makes the system dysfunctional in respect of that case.

Let us suppose, then, that a 'medical consultation' is a ceremony, consisting of several genres: greeting, the eliciting of presenting symptoms, examination, decisions for treatment. Within each of these genres, different tactical moves are made by both players, and these moves can be described as speech acts: commands, requests, complaints, advice, reassurance. . . as well as the less formal acts that structure the relationship of doctor and patient. The question then arises whether there is any tactical leeway in the writing of prescriptions or referral letters. In the former case it is minimized and regulated as much as possible, to guard against possible mistakes, but I am certain that if the doctors would allow us to collect a corpus of their referral letters, a considerable range of variation would be discernible. In particular, I would wager my professional integrity on the following hypothesis: that they have all sorts of ways of indicating to one another not only their medical judgments, but their assessments as to the patient's supposed character, his/her way of handling suffering, and specifically, his/her tactical manoeuvres in medical consultations. This latter, of course, neither in detail nor as such: I suspect the patient's game-playing abilities are what provide the 'evidence' for assessments as to character and personality.

We should also note that the fact that prescriptions are not typewritten, and that doctors by and large give bad handwriting the status of a characteristic of their profession, are both able to be described as tactics designed to preclude the patient from the position of addressee of this kind of text. However, the exclusiveness of the language used in prescriptions, though it may have this effect in a secondary way, is generic, rather than tactical, since this language defines the professional relationship of doctor and pharmacist, and mediates their professional difference.

A medical consultation is not the same as a consultation with a lawyer: this is a difference of institution, but the ceremonial may be usefully described as similar. The consultation (patient to doctor, client to lawyer) is the ceremonial that situates the genre we call 'referral' in the one case and 'brief' in the other, but 'referral' and 'brief' may be similar, and when we say so, we can make some sense of the variety of situations in which we find 'briefs'. A brief fulfils a certain function within a profession, mediating two functionally and hierarchically different places, such that one can request work from the other. It is frequently the case that the person to whom the brief is addressed is placed *by the brief* in the position of specialist, but this does not necessarily correspond with hierarchical superiority. A government, for example, briefs an expert, or a committee, from a position of uncontested authority, by contrast with the professional hierarchization which places an instructing solicitor 'below' the barrister s/he briefs. Briefs may also be addressed to and by colleagues who are formally or informally equal, as requests to intervene in a debate or meeting 'from a different point of view'. A brief, in effect, mediates a highly complex network of different social placings, addressing a request where a simple hierarchy would address a command. Nevertheless, it does seem to be a rule that briefs cannot go from below to above; nor can they be addressed from a specialist to a place of authority. Like a command, a brief places boundaries, or states parameters, defining the substantive form of the text that will be its uptake, and that text will respond by restating these, giving the brief as the site and source of its informing intentions. Tactics within the brief include requests for advice, the provision of information describing the case in such a way as not to pre-empt specialist opinion, but so as to justify the choice of this, rather than another, specialist. In a medical system such as that which obtains in Australia, where all consultations of a specialist are mediated by a generalist, the manners of a referral letter include the request for advice and impose the obligation on the specialist to respond accordingly. That is, though the specialist may take over the effective treatment of the patient, s/he will inform the generalist of the diagnosis and decisions for treatment, thereby maintaining the fiction that s/he is acting on behalf of the generalist, and that the patient is the generalist's patient.

The manners of a referral letter and the response that it elicits are not those of a formal or informal discussion between the same two doctors about the same case. Such a discussion may occur before the writing of a referral letter, after that but before the patient's visit to the specialist, or at any time after this, during – or indeed following – treatment. What is different is certainly not the concepts deployed, but the uptake expected in that place. Sometimes, indeed, the same information must be reproduced in a different place in order to take on a different function.

'Not-statements' are useful in precisely this sort of situation. The point of a not-statement is to make a distinction between two terms – kinds of texts – which in other respects are described by a like-statement. Starting from the class of all texts, or discourse, the not-statement is the first move establishing a generic classification. Indeed, it is the first move establishing the very postulate of genre. Nevertheless, typical genre descriptions take the form: 'like . . . but not . . .' The 'like' part of the generic description establishes the domain of pertinent comparisons; the 'not' part

establishes a boundary, not in the sense of a limitation, or a limit on possibilities, but in the sense of locating 'this kind' of text in a space, and *vis-à-vis* other kinds. The not-statement gives this kind of place among other places.

The strategy I use to describe the genre of a text is contrastive: it starts from a not-statement. This is by contrast with the recipe, which starts from the ingredients. To be effective, such negative descriptions rely on strategically chosen contrasting genres. For example, a recipe book is like:

- 1 manuals, and other how-to books;
- 2 menus.

It is also unlike both in crucial respects, particularly because menus are not like manuals.<sup>8</sup> The characteristic inclusion of handy hints, household advice, and personal anecdotes, marks it off and allies it with still other genres.

'Not-statements' are not just made by genre-theorists about texts: they are frequently made by texts themselves as a self-situating strategy. But they need not be in the explicit propositional form of a negative description. It is useful to note some examples of this explicit form before finding what might count as equivalents:

This work is an essay in Peirce's epistemology, with about an equal emphasis on the 'epistemology' as on the 'Peirce's'. In other words our intention *has not been to write exclusively a piece of Peirce scholarship* – hence the reader will find no elaborate tying in of Peirce's epistemology to other portions of his thought, no great emphasis on the chronology of his thought, etc. Peirce scholarship is a painstaking business. His mind was labyrinthine, his terminology intricate, and his writings are, as he himself confessed, 'a snarl of twine'. This book *rather* is intended perhaps even primarily as an essay in epistemology, taking Peirce's as the focal point. The book *thus addresses a general philosophical audience and bears as much on the wider issue as on the man.* (Davis 1972: vii; my emphasis)

Notice that the not-statement precedes the positive description, but that even were they are in the reverse sequence, the positive description would not be specified without the negative. Without the not-statement, the sentence 'The book is intended primarily as an essay in epistemology, taking Peirce's as the focal point' would tell us no more than the title: alone, the title sets up two possibilities – that this is an author study ('Peirce scholarship') – and that this is a topic study ('epistemology'). When the not-statement is made, it distinguishes these as two genres of philosophic writing. The question of genre is tied to the question of audience, and thus to the question of expectations and predictions: a topic study is addressed to philosophers, whereas a book 'on Peirce' might well find that it had relatively few readers who defined themselves as philosophers, and relatively many from such fields as semiotics and literary theory. Peirce is in this respect something of a special case; yet were we to put, say, Kant in the place of the proper name of this title, the specification would still hold, distinguishing for instance historians of ideas from philosophers in the technical sense.

This book is nominally an abridgement of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, but *has in fact* cost its compilers more labour, partly because the larger book was found *not to be easily squeezable*, and partly owing to changes in method *unconnected with mere* reduction in quantity. The one merit, however, that they feel entitled to claim for the C.O.D. has been preserved to the best of their power in the abridgement – that is, they have kept to the principle that *a dictionary is a book of diction, concerned primarily with words or phrases as such, and not*, except so far as is needed to ensure their right treatment in speech, *with the things those words and phrases stand for*. This principle, while it *absolves* the dictionary-maker from *encumbering his pages with encyclopaedic information, demands on the other hand that he should devote much more space than that so saved to the task of making clear the idiomatic usage of words.* (Preface, *Pocket Oxford Dictionary*, 1955; my emphasis)

It appears that the important not-statement is the one that contrasts the *Concise* with the *Pocket Oxford*, but they are more 'like' than 'unlike' in that they share a not-statement that sets all dictionaries in contrast with another genre. The crucial contrast that constitutes the definition of a dictionary is that a dictionary is 'not an encyclopedia'. This opposition, which plays out in a special way the 'words vs. world' dichotomy, has needed to be made since the first encyclopedias, dating from the eighteenth century, jostled for position in the space occupied by the much older, traditional genre which took on its conventional features in the age of Humanism. The history of the Encyclopedia as genre is a most interesting question, which goes, I'm afraid, beyond my present brief. What I do wish to dwell on for a moment is the fact that 'a dictionary is not an encyclopedia' seems to be a more important or urgent statement to make than, for example, 'a dictionary is not a grammar'. We might find this latter statement in treatises of linguistics. The former statement is found in those places where there is possible confusion that arises as a result of a like-statement: the layouts of dictionaries and encyclopedias are very similar. They both have columns dividing their pages, and each column consists of an entry, having the *form of a word*, followed by explanatory information about the 'word'. Dictionaries, however, define them as the names of things. The convention whereby encyclopedias illustrate their information with images – diagrams, photographs, maps, portraits and the like, has as its function to demonstrate the distinction between the 'word' and what it names by showing the thing named in a form other than verbal. The convention whereby dictionaries illustrate their explanations as to usage by *uses* (quotations) demonstrates their fundamental claim, that the conventions of a language explain that language, that the rules of usage do not lie outside the language, but within it. When Ferdinand de Saussure (1986) defined a language as 'something like a dictionary', he was relying on the generic conventions of dictionaries to make this analogy. When, furthermore, he defined a sign by its place within the rules of usage, *rather than* as the name of a thing, he was relying on the not-statement whereby dictionaries and encyclopedias are contrasted, and he was saying that the generic conventions of dictionaries provide a better analogy than those of encyclopedias for

a linguist concerned with the problem of how a language determines meaning. (Since then, semioticians have done loads of interesting things with the [generalized] notion of the encyclopedia. But all this, too, lies beyond my brief.)

Let me return briefly to my earlier statement, that there is a difference between saying 'a dictionary is not an encyclopedia' and 'a dictionary is not a grammar'. Each of these not-statements serves as a particular purpose. The former, as I have said, plays out the words vs. world dichotomy; the latter serves to distinguish two kinds of information that linguists provide in the descriptions of languages. Both, however, are statements as to genre. This seems to suggest that a genre cannot be defined by a single not-statement, but rather, that a generic definition ('definition' is, literally, 'the tracing of boundaries' rather than the discovery of an essence) arises as (or 'from') a series of contrasts which position 'this' kind in amongst other adjacent kinds of texts. Think, for instance, of the public transport tickets available in your town or city: there may be:

- single passes (for a one-way trip);
- day passes (for travel between given hours on one day, using any number of vehicles and kinds of vehicles, in any direction);
- weekly passes (similar to the above, but valid over a longer period);
- monthly passes (ditto).

The difference between the tickets giving you these rights will be marked in a variety of ways: they may be colour coded, and a difference made between those that must last (printed on card), and those that *must not* last (printed on flimsy paper). Single fares will be identified by the amount paid, but passes for longer periods will be identified with dates and times. They may also be personalized. It is useful to recall from this example that although we may be inclined to believe that the genre is marked inherently on each kind of ticket, those markings only work because they are correlated with *places in a system of contrasts*. To rely on the inherent features of each is the 'recipe theory of genre'; to take into consideration the system of contrasts is the alternative that I am proposing.

What you will be reading here are the results of my research. *They are not intended as a biography in the usual sense, but as a kind of casebook, told in the words of those who were closest to the individual at the time.* (Buzacott 1987: 8)

Think about who writes casebooks, and for what purposes. Buzacott's claims (for his fiction, NB!) is not only that it is 'true'; it uses the documentary mode to contest the coherent narrative form that makes the subject of a biography a hero. The subject of this study is a 'case', appearing on 'documents' independent of the story-telling proclivities of a narrator.

This form is *not* to be completed by people who propose only a visit to Australia for a period of temporary *rather than* permanent settlement. *Separate forms* are available for these purposes.<sup>9</sup>

The not-statements in this text distinguish forms for prospective immigrants from forms for tourist visas and temporary settlement visas. This distinction is crucial for the work of the Immigration Department, but it may be far less crucial for a theorist of discourse whose brief, is, for instance, to describe the genres in use in Australian Government offices. S/he might be tempted to group all 'forms' together: questions of layout, printing, kinds of purpose, and the function of spaces on the form, are common to all forms. We 'know' a form when we see one,<sup>10</sup> and although an immigration form might ask for a certain amount of information that you would also find, for instance, in a curriculum vitae, nevertheless we know the difference between these two genres. On the other hand, having made the statement I have just made, it occurs to me that it may be useful to group together *c.v.s* and forms, and to say that the crucial difference between them is in the social settings in which they function. Both work to identify a person in a 'liminal' situation, attempting to pass from one space into another, and both present the information that might be necessary for that passage to be authorized. However, here I am discussing the curriculum vitae as if it were coextensive with a job application, whereas in fact it is only a part of it; in isolation, a curriculum vitae is more like a biography whose events are listed rather than narrated. Job applications and visa applications are by and large the same ceremonial, used in different institutions.

This discussion illustrates a statement I made earlier, about different classificatory statements making different features salient. It also demonstrates that different like-statements and different not-statements are used for different purposes. This suggests that 'genre' is not absolute (let alone 'primitive', as some linguistic uses of the term need it to be): it is pragmatic. This does not mean, however, that it is merely whimsical, or subjective. It means that:

- 1 generic descriptions are a genre; and
- 2 this genre turns up as a game in a variety of social settings:
  - filing systems,
  - library classification systems,
  - publishing and bookselling,
  - institutional administration,
  - the construction of school syllabuses,
  - any theoretical activity designed to describe the pragmatics of discourse,
  - etc.

It also has a great deal to do with how we separate the learned disciplines from one another.

I have suggested above that not-statements can be made in a variety of ways, and are not restricted to explicit negative descriptions. Two of my examples illustrate this point: the transport tickets make their not-statements by means of the variety of contrastive codings that I have sketched out. Forms make not-statements with black lines, and code these lines as 'heavy' or 'light' in order to group bits of information and separate them off from other groups. Just as two kinds of typeface are used in dictionaries and encyclopedias, to distinguish 'word' and 'explanation'



within the entry, and paragraphing and columns, to distinguish entries, so do these sorts of typographical techniques provide ways of saying 'not that, but this', in other kinds of printed objects. Columns do not, but boxes do, distinguish articles in a newspaper or magazine, and conventions of paging as well as boxing organize such objects into ordered collections of genres. The system of titles that override headlines makes these classifications explicit where this is necessary. The same news item may occur twice in the same issue of the same newspaper, working to 'mean something different' depending on the genre with which it is grouped. Such things as an event in the business community may count as 'news' on page 1 or 2, and be repeated as useful information for investors in the business pages. The death of a famous person may count as news, and then be repeated, for instance as an obituary somewhere else (some papers have quasi-permanent obituary columns). If the famous person is a woman, the obituary may be printed on the women's pages (which are generically distinguished in most Australian newspapers), or these same pages may carry a general article about the woman and her work, using the death as pretext and occasion. Women's pages in newspapers function to make the statement 'women count as news, too'; which is precisely a way of saying that we don't – or at least, that it's not the same kind of news!

It may be argued that such considerations on newspaper and magazine layout are too mechanically formal to count as genuine genre descriptions. I wish to argue the contrary, but of course, the lines and squares do not in and of themselves count as generic descriptions. They are the not-statements that are tied to the like-statements. They work to say 'this is like news' and it is also 'like other articles of interest to the girls'. Then we need to find out what is implied by such a grouping. 'News' makes the death of Simone de Beauvoir 'like' any news item involving an internationally famous person; but the locating of an article about her life and work on the women's pages makes the *salient feature* the fact that she was a woman. The not-statement suggests that classifying might always be reclassifying, that it is useful to think of it as an act, and a strategy; it also suggests that the 'place' of the text in some sense *precedes* the features that we take to be characteristic of it.

### The Metaphor of 'Place'

The metaphor of place is not a mere convenience in genre theory. Its tactical usefulness goes back for centuries, and is one of the generic markers of the treatises on 'Poetics' following the authorial example set by Aristotle. Indeed, it may well be the case that the metaphor of place is more than a tactic; there are good reasons for thinking that it is actually germane to the problems of doing classifications in general, and generic classifications in particular. It may not, then, be an accident that we so often use diagrams to represent taxonomical and other classificatory forms, that we talk about 'borderline cases' when we are not sure whether something fits in this, or another, class, or that when we describe the genres of television and radio we use the notion of the 'time slot'. I shall return to this last non-accident shortly.

[...]

### Place and Time

All generic descriptions rely on a more or less explicit 'filing system', and it is said that the earliest attempts to formalize genre theory arose from the need to rationalize the classifications and systems of location of the collections in the great libraries of the ancient world. It is clear in this example that 'place' must be taken quite literally, and the same is true of newspaper layout. Taking the index, always to be found on one of the outside pages of a newspaper, certain rules as to the location of given kinds of items can be discerned. This is not to say that the television programmes and meteorology reports will always be found on page 10; rather, they will never be found on the first or last page. Similarly, it is not helpful to think of library locations as corresponding to particular shelves in particular rows: rather, PN books come before PQ books, and after B books. This suggests that the notion of place that we need to discuss in such questions is relational, rather than absolute, and that such systems have a time, or a sequence built into them such that they impose a pattern of use which determines what counts as first and last, before and following, front and back. The rules for the use of the system are rules for mapping together actual spaces, such as library buildings, with systemic places, such as the Library of Congress classification. They are set out in indexes, guides to classifications and locations, tables of contents, and these are necessarily sequential. Television and radio programmes do the same sort of thing with actual times.

Another sense in which the notion of place must be taken quite literally in the description of genre is this: some kinds of texts occur necessarily, or always, in kinds of places, between participants defined by their social roles. The briefs and referral letters I mentioned earlier are a case in point; so would be the rulings of an administrative tribunal or a judge. Office memoranda, lectures, board meetings and a million other examples must be defined in this way, and it is clear that what gets said, and the kinds of interlocutory relationships that are produced, are largely determined by this notion of place. I might tell a story about how someone jostled me in a queue, or how someone pulled rank to be promoted ahead of me, or seen out of turn at the doctor's. If I tell this story to my neighbour over a drink, it is a story about the other person, or about social injustice; but if I tell the same story to my psychiatrist, it is a story about me, my lack of personal confidence, and my failure to self-assert. [...] This [...] leads me to suggest that when we are talking about genre, and ceremonials, it may be useful to talk about 'the manners of a text'. If the rhetorical rules of a genre are thought of as an etiquette, rather than as fixed laws, it is easier for us to think of them as being to do with how people get on with one another. In some cases, etiquette is best thought of as rules appropriate to a pre-existing situation, but this is far less often the case than we might suppose. Manners are instrumental in organizing and determining role-relations, and thus in forming settings. They 'make' the person, in more senses than one. Etiquette may be written as an immutable code, and expressed in the form of dogmatic deontics; when it is, we tend to find it ridiculous and out of date. But this does not mean that we don't observe an etiquette appropriate to whatever occasion, and social groups continually renegotiate the forms of acceptable behaviour in relation with an implicit

or explicit criterion of appropriateness. We take for granted that such rules are pretty arbitrary, and we may be more comfortable with the fiction that our rules are not real rules, and need not be spoken. But even this fiction is 'good manners' in a group that thinks of itself as unregulated by anything but spontaneity and fellow-feeling. Such rules, like the rules of genre or of a ceremony, are there to 'make things work'.

Nevertheless, manners are never a matter of simple conformity with a normative model. They can be used for the purposes of an interaction, not just followed; they are good or bad shots, productive or not of situations requiring inventive uptakes.

The identification of time-slots in television programming is a particularly interesting case, which shows, among other things, that the 'place' precedes the 'internal' features of a given genre. The identification of kinds of audiences by the times of the evening at which they might watch the box is also a factor in the determination of those audiences: 'children', 'family viewing', 'late night' and so on are slots in rather the same way as in a printed form which organizes bits of information into different places on a sheet of paper, and thereby creates groupings and ways of relating those bits of information. They may even create, or determine, that information. Given the economics of TV programming, it is an important fact about television genres that they are written for, produced for, and bought for slots, and not the other way around. But these slots are not just empty spaces: they are spaces in a relational system that is organized around key points – before and after the early and mid-evening news, to take the obvious example (this is called 'the hook') – which have the function of marking boundaries, and thus making the not-statements, that produce the major differentiations (see Paterson 1980). It is an interesting fact that it is the news programmes that have this crucial function: this is the genre that makes explicit the major generic distinction in Australian television – the differentiation of 'information' from 'entertainment'<sup>11</sup> – and at the same time shows the extent to which the patterns of television programming are derivative of the patterns of arrangements of texts that make up newspapers and magazines.

A recent survey of television violence is of some interest here. It has long been an assumption of most work in the sociology of television that there is 'more violence' in the 'late night' slot than in the 'family viewing' or 'children's' slots, but, using explicit criteria for the identification of violence, this was shown not to be the case. There is a great deal more violence in, for instance, cartoons, than in the genres where we might expect to find it – police series, thrillers, horror movies and the like. What seems to be at issue here is that it doesn't count as violence in sports casts, cartoons, and soap operas: what counts as television violence for the sociologist is what counts as socially dangerous. It is 'not dangerous' to show a crocodile mauling a body, not dangerous to show a punch-up on a football field; not dangerous to show a character zapping another beyond all recognition in a cartoon. This is because what counts as violence for the viewer is governed – 'made intelligible' – by generic criteria. It is these that rationalize it and make it acceptable. To be the viewer of a cartoon is to know the difference between fantasy and the real; to be the viewer of a sports cast is to be on a side; to be the viewer of the news is to do your duty, knowing what's going on in the world, however nasty it might be. The moral dimension of 'realism' has its full force here. It may well be that the violent content in such

programmes is more worrying on some criteria than the conventional struggle of marginal characters with each other and the forces of law and order, but the point is not, for the moment, there. The 'content' of victors and victims is the same; it just works differently, has a different status, and thus means something different depending (a) on its relation with other generic conventions, and (b) on its slot and the production of viewing habits in a type-audience. This is the same point as that made in speech-act theory, according to which 'the same propositional content' functions differently, and thus means something different, according to its performative setting. Meaning is not content; it is place and function.

### Place and Function

Let me retrieve my problem of games and ceremonials. In, for example, court proceedings, the important stages or phases of the event can be said to be places (or times) marked out and occupied by different kinds of texts. The clerk of the court reads what counts as the title of the hearing, the proper names in a conventional order that shows which is defendant and which prosecution. There is the choice and swearing in of the members of the jury, where appropriate, and the judge's instructions to them, the opening addresses of the counsel, calling of witnesses and cross-examination, addresses to the jury, the jury's deliberations, their recall and the pronouncement, the judge's address and passing of sentence. Each of these moments is a genre, though it may be occupied by several texts, and each of the texts will deploy a range of tactics. It is, of course, quite possible to isolate, say, all the texts pronounced by the prosecution counsel, or the judge, or a witness, and there are certain purposes – for instance, for the jury's deliberations – which make this a useful thing to do. Anybody studying the career or personality of one of these participants would likewise need to make this set of choices, rather than the choices governed strictly by generic criteria. Yet it would be misleading to overlook the generic place of the texts, even in such a study, for to do so would be to neglect the question of strategy – what is said, not said, and how represented – for the particular purposes dictated by a given 'place' in the proceedings. To understand the rules of the genre is to know when and where it is appropriate to do and say certain things, and to know that to do and say them at inappropriate places and times is to run the risk of having them ruled out. To use these rules with skill is to apply questions of strategy to decisions of timing and the tactical plan of the rhetoric.

The same sorts of considerations bear on the decision to use, for instance, the place of a speech at a graduation ceremony to make a statement about the funding of graduate study, or an after-dinner speech to pull the rug from under a beset and beleaguered politician. All sorts of things may be said on such occasions: the genre of the after-dinner speech is not set by its inherent features so much as by the range of uses to which this place can be put. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that 'place' in this sense is not empty, neutral, or uninformed. Just as with the television audiences, the roles of the two interlocutory participants, their predictions and the kind of behaviour that is appropriate to them, are set by the occasion. These may



indeed determine features inherent to the modes of address, and a text can be fruitfully studied for the way it constructs its audience positions. These may well be genre-specific, but a lot of work remains to be done before we find the most useful ways of describing them. What we can say, however, is that it is place, in the complex of meanings I have attempted to sketch out for this term, that determines the reading of linguistic or other formal features. It is most unlikely, however, that any linguistic feature taken in isolation could be held to be characteristic of a genre; rather, what we might expect is that combinations of features might count as the conventional markers of a genre. It is a quite other question whether such combinations of features count as *constitutive* of a genre in the same way that the use of performative verbs in the first person, present tense indicative mood indicate the typical cases of many speech acts. My argument leads me to suggest that it is place, rather, that constitutes genre, and that the functions and roles entailed by place determine the interlocutory structure of a genre. Conversely, if one of the tasks of a text is to mark itself generically in relation with others in order to get its partners to play ball in the appropriate manner, this can be said to constitute at least some of the parameters of its place.

#### Place and Framing

The notion that our texts arise within ceremonials, and that their form is determined by their ceremonial place and function, can be restated to say that the ceremonial frames a time and space, setting it apart from others, and marking its specificity. The distinction I made earlier, between 'a game' and 'the playing of that game', can also be made between a piece of music and its performance, and a play and its performance. The performance in either case is not restricted to the players: it includes the constitution of the audience, their assembly in particular time and place, and the rituals whereby that assembly marks the audience *as* audience, rather than as a collection of discrete units, setting them in position to make the playing possible. Reading a book, attending and giving lectures, dinner conversations, filling in forms, interviews . . . and a host of others are all ceremonial frames and/or the genres that occur within them. On this view, it is not stretching the point to argue that the publishing conventions that makes books the way they are – with covers, titles, bibliographical and cataloguing information, title pages, tables of contents, acknowledgements, prefaces by series editors, footnotes, indexes, glossaries, etc. – are notational frames for the ceremonies of reading. The variety of liminal and closing texts, their arrangement, and their formal features, have a great deal to do with the business of setting the genre of the text they enclose. A book is a material space, like an office or a classroom. Like books, the material arrangement of the space in which a text occurs has a bearing on the sense of that text and has a lot to do, necessarily, with the briefs we give the architects of the institutional, industrial, commercial and domestic spaces that design our signs. A discussion between two executives, one slightly superior in the company hierarchy to the other, will work differently, depending on whether the piece of furniture between them is a desk or

a lunch table, and depending on whether the desk is the superior's or his subordinate's. The piece of furniture together with the other 'props' define a space and the ceremonial appropriate to it. It may well be that the participants might try to have 'the same' discussion in both places, but the choice of one or another ceremonial alters the conditions of speech and understanding. We might be inclined to say that the choice of lunch for such business conversations is 'more relaxed', or a way of getting away from the formal rituals of the office with its hierarchies; but I think this is misleading. We never leave the space of rituals for a space of non-rituals: we choose one ritual instead of another.

It is clear in this example that the notion of 'genre' and that of 'ceremonial' are effectively coextensive; but it is equally clear in the example of the court proceedings that this is not the case. Neither would it be useful to make 'genre' and 'ceremonial' coincide when talking about the theatre, or about music. A sonata has formal properties which make it recognizable as a sonata in the printed score, differentiating it crucially from a concerto, in much the same way as this latter is differentiated from a symphony. Criteria such as solo vs. orchestral playing, the relation of soloist to the orchestra (outside the orchestra or within it), as well as the formal harmonic properties associated with instrumental arrangements such as these, are important here. Some musical genres have effectively lapsed with the virtual disappearance of home entertainment, and in this case, too, it is important to specify both the generic and the ceremonial criteria. Some genres, on the other hand, subsist in different ceremonials from the ones in which they conventionally arise. In such cases, they take with them the signs of the lost ceremony, connoting that ceremony and the social relations it governs. For all these reasons, the problem of the formal properties of a genre will not go away.

In the history of genre theory, it is a remarkable fact that we have not, by and large, felt the need to theorize or otherwise make explicit the features of those genres which are so thoroughly specified by their ceremonial places that they seem self-evident. With the recent interest shown by linguists of discourse in these questions, this is changing. Discovering the implicit rules for the self-evident is the very project of the linguist and the sociolinguist. But traditional genre theory rarely asked what the *constitutive* form of a prayer or a sermon was,<sup>12</sup> and although certain questions about the rhetoric of preaching, pleading, and other forms of public speaking were indeed the stock-in-trade of the treatises of oratory, these were broached as questions of etiquette and of tactics, as if the question of generic specificity was unproblematical. It seems that genre theory has only been concerned to differentiate those genres that can occupy the same, or very similar places. So we have worried about the differences among the genres of the theatre, but not about the difference between novels and plays. Within the history of philosophy, and library cataloguing, we had to worry about the difference between psychology and the philosophy of mind, placing considerable distance between them to signify that difference. And since the Renaissance, we have come to worry about the generic specificity of what we call 'poetry', because the ceremonials defining the place of lyric verse (e.g., accompanied recitation) have been lost. Verse itself has been said to be not constitutive of poetry, and following the loss of a musical setting, the typesetting conventions have also been



disturbed: poetry has 'broken bounds' as it has come to be read under material and ceremonial conditions very similar to those appropriate to the reading of prose fiction. The continual debate about 'prose' and 'poetry' is a debate about a contested boundary; but it is also the play for generic specificity *within the same space*. My very strong suspicion is that we can generalize from this case: the question of the constitutive status of formal features arises when, and only when, there is more than one game possible in a single ceremonial setting.<sup>13</sup>

[...]

### Finish

The ceremonial of a game marks its ending: 'game, set and match'; applause; home; or 'back to square one'. I could attempt to maintain the fiction – ring the bell, propose the toast, or close the proceedings with a wave of the hand and an anthem. Yet there is a very important sense in which that would be inappropriate. My text is not a game, but a move in a game. It expects an uptake.

In this place, this uptake could come from two apparently distinct, but effectively convergent quarters – the genre-theorists, or the curriculum developers and teachers. I have remarked previously that generic classifications can arise in a variety of settings, of which theories of discourse and the writing of a syllabus are only two. It is not only the classifications that can find themselves in these places. More importantly, the principles adopted for taking 'genre' or 'a genre' as object and focus of an investigation both arise from the place of that investigation, and themselves have a bearing on the use that can be made of the classifications arising from them. It is in terms of the principles underlying the very notion of genre that I have been playing my game.

In the debate between the process-writing theorists and the linguists (see Sawyer and Watson 1987) and responses (Martin *et al.* 1987), the question is whether genre is called 'primitive', i.e., whether it is basic to the form of a text, or peripheral. This cashes out in the debates about pedagogical strategy as to whether it can be taught as a set of rules, and practised in writing exercises, or whether on the contrary it is most appropriately added in during this process of refining the final drafts of a text. I agree with neither of these views. On the one hand, the assumptions that appear to underlie the process theory mobilize an effective separation of 'form' and 'content'; apparently, we could learn the 'content' of science, for instance, and thereafter learn the appropriate expository forms. We do not, however, learn the 'content' of a game – whatever that could be – and then learn its rules. A game – and likewise a genre – is *constituted* by its rules and the techniques for implementing them. It is only for the special purposes of psychology that a game is thought of as a personal expressive activity; such things as chess and basketball are not usefully thought of as spontaneous behaviour regulated in a second phase by rules of the do and don't variety.

To this extent, I agree with the linguists: my game analogy makes genre a central concept in the theory of discourse, and an informing concept in the constitution and

processing of texts. But – I now play my other hand – I cannot agree with them if their position is that it is *linguistic forms* that are constitutive of genre, and that teaching these forms will result in appropriate texts. I have introduced the notion of the ceremonial and its attendant notion of 'place' in order to make the point that language interacts with other semiotic systems to form texts, and the conventions that mark a genre derive from all of these. I would concede that in texts that are predominantly verbal, it is frequently the linguistic forms that secure uptake *once the 'receiver' is positioned in the right game*. But the genre – the game of the text – is constituted by its ceremonial place, and this is appropriated by the full range of semiotic systems available as strategies or enablement conditions to that genre. It follows from this position that if we are to teach the effective practice of genres as the basis for writing and speaking skills, it would be wise to teach the full range of 'languages' – their rules, and the rules of their interaction – that form any genre. This would vastly expand the list of ingredients, and may even go some way in the direction of expounding the 'method' as well. Even so, it would also be wise not to confuse the recipe with the rules of place and appropriateness, nor constitutive rules with regulative rules.

My text expects an uptake; but it is also, itself, an uptake – albeit a mite disobedient. I was asked to draw out the implications of this way of thinking about genre for the practical purposes of curriculum design and classroom practice. I decline this clause of my brief, insofar as I can claim no competence in these fields. I have chosen instead to repeat in this place what we know so well in others: that we don't learn to write until we can read. Here, I mean 'read' in the very strongest sense.

If writing is a craft (and there is no other definition of any strategic use to a teacher), then perhaps we should think about apprenticeship. An aspiring carpenter learns the job, acquiring a practice of tasks, tools and techniques. Particular techniques and tools are geared to kinds of tasks and materials. Poets and painters in the Renaissance taught their arts in just this way, delegating big toes and drapery to their pupils, and studying with them, in the work of their peers and predecessors, effects and the strategies for achieving them.

Whether in the traditional academic disciplines, or the vocationally oriented genres, doing the task effectively is the operative criterion. Not doing it effectively is, by contrast, socially disempowering. The understanding of the task is surely crucial: what is its place, what are the interlocutory positions defined by this place, what are the functional requirements in the interchange of each of the interlocutory roles? If writing – or speech – involves discovering the practical difficulties likely to arise each time that kind of job is to be done, and acquiring an arsenal of tricks to deal with them, then 'reading' is part of the apprenticeship.

Knowing a genre is also knowing how to take it up: the manners are reciprocal. What do you *do* with a form, if you've never been taught to fill one out? What do you do with theoretical writing, if all you have learnt to read with is narrative? How do you take a parody, if you've never met parody or the genre that it spoofs? Using a text is primarily a matter of understanding its genre and the way it plays it – recognizing it, certainly, but also reading its tactics, its strategies, and its ceremonial place. Learning to write, equally, is learning to appropriate and occupy a place in

relation to other texts, learning to ensure that the other chap will play the appropriate game with you, and learning to secure a useful uptake: the rules for playing, the rules of play, and the tricks of the trade.

The questions start when you ask why – and how – you would play tennis in the classroom. Come to think of it, the wall of the back lav was a very wooden partner.

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### Notes

- 1 The notion has been taken up and its use extended by Lyotard (1984).
- 2 Cf. Todorov (1978), Bakhtin/Volosinov (1973). Derrida assumes the continuity of the two notions in his critique, 'The Law of Genre' (1980).
- 3 [1994 update: On this argument, I had gone on to suggest in the original article that 'genres' and 'speech acts' were *therefore* not coextensive. I have modified my position on this. It may be that it is on the distinction between the formulaic and the non-formulaic that the class of 'speech acts' is established in practice; but it does not follow that this practice is well or usefully theorized as a distinction between genre and speech act. Clearly, the formulaic and the non-formulaic define a range, not a clear-cut distinction; and equally clearly, a rhetoric of genre worked out, for example, in terms of *topoi*, makes the distinction untenable.]
- 4 Halliday (1978); cf. the use made of Halliday's work by Frow (1980); and more recently by Kress (1985a, 1985b). Cf. also Martin and Rothery (1980). Halliday, as distinct from some of his followers, does invoke the notion of 'the semiotic system that constitutes the culture' (in Frow 1980: 73), but the assumption that this is a *single* system, coupled with the failure to investigate its operations, results in a reduction of this notion to those of 'context' and 'situation'. This is a simple text/context model, where 'text' is the output of two sets of rules, linguistic and social. To name this latter 'social semiotic' changes very little in practice. For a critique of the notion of 'register' in terms of its inadequacy to deal with 'genre', see Reid (1987b).
- 5 [1994 update: Jean-Marie Schaeffer (1983) has explored the ramifications of this issue in a significant article, 'Du texte au genre'.]
- 6 Note that this requirement is not included in the notion that the rules of a game are the rules governing the pieces (e.g., of chess) and the uses to which they can be put; cf. Lyotard (1984: 10; glossing Wittgenstein).
- 7 This claim is made on the basis of arguments contesting the place of 'discourse' in a model of the generation of texts, but *mutatis mutandis* holds for genre as well. See Lee (n.d.). [1994 update: I now wish to nuance this statement in respect of 'being specific to a social setting': no genre is exclusive to one institutional or disciplinary setting. But it is clear that a genre might have a 'home' setting, and that it can be adapted or cited in others; the home setting might be a factor in the interpretability of the cited genre, while its citability is an assumption from the oldest tradition of genre theory, and is elaborated as a principle by

Derrida (1972). There is also the question of disciplines, which do develop their own rhetorics and behave like genres; see John S. Nelson *et al.* (1987), in particular the study therein by Charles Bazerman of the style manual of the American Psychological Association. It is consistent with Lyotard's argument (in *Le Différend*), and with the logic of classification that I go on to expound in the following pages, to consider disciplinary distinctions as coming under the same set of problems as generic distinctions. The error, then, would consist in counting disciplines as sociological phenomena enjoying a distinct ontology that would permit them to 'cause'/'determine'/'explain' discursive phenomena in some way. They may, however, like ceremonials, organize genres into sets or fields which would account for (some of) the relations of uptake mentioned above.]

- 8 [1994 update: Alistair Fowler (1982) draws fruitfully on Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblances' to deal with this aspect of generic classes.]
- 9 Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, application for entry for settlement. Form M 47 (8-78) 14, Attachment 1, Chapter 12, front of form.
- 10 [1994 update: Well, we may 'know' a form, depending on our previous training. Teachers of English as a Second Language to migrant groups in Australia address this as one of the primary practical literacy needs of their clients.]
- 11 [1994 update: Latterly (1994) 'infotainment' has made its appearance in media commentary, showing that the 'mixed genre' occurs at the boundary marking a crucial differentiation. See my argument concerning 'mixed doubles' in Freadman and Macdonald (1992).]
- 12 Such genres are, however, included in Frow's categorization of discourse genres (1980: 75).
- 13 [1994 update: A detailed argument along these lines is made in respect of the historical emergence of 'prose' as a formal practice of writing, in Kittay and Godzich (1987). The historical argument concerning the forms of written French in the Middle Ages is the reverse of the story of reading practices in the post-print age where, I suggest, the distinction documented by Kittay and Godzich is partially collapsed; but the theoretical implications of the two stories are similar. Prose emerges as a distinct category with the demise of the *jongleur* in medieval Europe, his loss of the socio-institutional place of his power, and the rise of distinct rhetorical practices to guarantee the authority and the stability of the text. Although Kittay and Godzich argue that this distinction 'exceeds the scope of genre' (p. xiii), I am inclined to think that the classificatory mechanisms, and the relation of semiotic practices with them, are parallel and demonstrate the same paradoxes.]

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## Chapter 4

# Rhetorical Community: The Cultural Basis of Genre

Carolyn R. Miller

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

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

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

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

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