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AUTHOR   Coe, Richard M.
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ABSTRACT

        "Genre" has become the keyword in a movement to
create a more dynamic, dialectical, contextual conception of
"dispositio," of structure as a factor in psychological and social
processes of writing. A dynamic conception of genre as social process
in symbolic action can be reached by combining Kenneth Burke's
technique of "prophesying after the event" with a key principle from
Michel Foucault's "archeology" and Marilyn Cooper's metaphor of
composition as an "ecological" process. The structures writing
teachers observe empirically in texts are artifacts; and writing
teachers should treat the texts as archeologists treat the artifacts
they dig up--try to infer functions, to resurrect the strategies
implicit in the structures and relate them to context. The second
metaphor is ecological, emphasizing that genres exist in contexts and
need to be explained as somehow fitting those contexts, for genres
evolved as people adapted to communicative concepts. How to teach
genre depends on the contexts of situations, and most especially on
the students, on what they already know, on how the situations are
experienced. Sometimes writing teachers should create situations in
which students can reinvent the wheel of a genre. With some students,
it may suffice to have them analyze and explain rather than reinvent
a genre. More than particular types of writing, the most important
lesson for student writers is to learn to notice genres, to make
sense of genres, even to renovate genres. (Contains 25 references.)
(RS)

(Prof.) Richard M. Coe
English Department
Simon Fraser University
Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6
CANADA

"Prophesying After the Event": The Archeology and Ecology of Genre

[Much of this presentation was excerpted from a longer piece, "Teaching Genre as Process," forthcoming in an as yet untitled Boyton/Cook anthology being edited by Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway of Carleton University (Ottawa).]

When the teaching of composition was revolutionized under the banner of "Process," everything that smacked of its contrary, the F-word, "Form" (as in "formalist") was suspect. So terrible was the sterile formalism of traditional composition instruction that we rejected rather than transcended it. More recently, when we turned to study writing as social process, however, we found that discourse community usually includes knowledge of generic structures and that writers use (and sometimes abuse or are abused by) generic structures in their writing processes. Genre has become the keyword in this movement to create a more dynamic, dialectical, contextual conception of dispositio, of structure as a factor in psychological and social processes of writing.

The issue is how to factor the reality that most discourse communities prefer and prescribe genres, as well as the reality that successful writers use (and, in Foucault's sense among others, are used by) genres, into our understanding of writing processes and into our students learning processes. In this paper, I shall propose a a dynamic conception of genre as social process in symbolic action. To reach this synthesis I combine Kenneth Burke's technique of "prophesying after the event" with a key principle from Michel Foucault's "archeology" and Marilyn Cooper's metaphor of composition as an "ecological" process.

There are at least three ways in which genre and process come together. One is in the writing processes of individual writers. "Once committed . . . to a particular genre, the author finds that the act [of writing] not only makes demands of its own, but has certain built-in resources of its own which beg to be exploited" (Rueckert 80). A second, closely related way in which genre and process come together is genre as reader expectation. A third way in which genre and process come together turns on the sense in which genre is social process. Indeed, one might say genre epitomizes the significance of approaching reading and writing as social processes in which individuals participate without necessarily being entirely conscious of how social the processes are--which is why we were able to write and teach writing for so long without considering how social writing processes are.

2

Genres embody our social memory of standard strategies for responding to types of situations we encounter repeatedly. When we see past the uniqueness of a particular situation and recognize it as familiar, we activate (at least provisionally) a structure we have previously decided is generally appropriate to that type of situation. And, as Kenneth Burke warned us long ago, "when these [communicative situations] become traditional, men [sic] of lesser enterprise, forgetting [where] these various tactics originally arose . . . devote themselves mainly to the accumulated internalities of tactics, picking up a special . . . jargon . . . simply as insignia of membership in a lodge" (Philosophy, 86-87, fn 3). Genres should be understood both as structures and as social processes. New and radically different types of situations call for new strategies, which may need to be embodied in new structures (cf., Coe, "Rhetoric 2001," "Eco-logic," and "Closed System").[1]

Rhetorical Context

To understand and explain rhetorical structures we should restore to consciousness the situations to which they cor-respond, the strategies they embody, and the ends they are structured to serve. Thus should we exploit the etymological connection between our word tactics and the Greek name for the department of rhetoric concerned with selection and arrangement, taxis. Any socially standard (i.e., generic) form has been abstracted from specific strategic or tactical responses to specific situations, for "principles reside in the genre only by residing in individuals that compose the genre" (Burke, "Kinds," 276).

My first metaphor for thinking about genre is archeological. The aspect of genre we usually start with--the structures we can observe empirically in texts--are artifacts; and we should treat them more or less as archeologists treat the artifacts they dig up, i.e., try to infer functions, to resurrect the strategies implicit in the structures and relate them to context of situation. In terms somewhat parallel to Foucault's, this leads

[1]Generic structures are both generative and constraining, i.e., heuristically, they stimulate writers' inventive processes; textually, they constrain what writers can do. When a writing specialist intervenes in the writing processes of a social institution, one technique is to devise a new generic structure. For instance, after extensive consultation, we said to the writers at the B.C. Workers Compensation Review Board, instead of organizing your written decisions as you traditionally have, use this new 6-part structure we have devised for you. In part because of the consultation, in part because management was on side, they adopted the new generic structure-- and the result was a major transformation of textual practices (for both writers and readers of these decisions). This instance has both rhetorical and ethical implications that call for careful consideration. (Harper)

to an archaeology of form, the analysis of generic structures as fossilized rhetorical processes.

Thus the proper first step for preparing to teach a particular genre is often to locate it in situational context. Though unconscious knowledge <u>may</u> suffice for writers, teachers should explicitly understand the genres they teach. They should ask how the form is functional:

> **What purposes does this genre serve? how do its particular generic structures serve those purposes?**
> **How is it adapted to its particular readers?**
> **How is it appropriate to its context of situation?**

Why is it usually functional for business letters to state in the first sentence or two what the letter is about? If you don't know the answer to that question, you don't have a reasonable basis for asking your students to follow the rule--and humanists should be reasonable, not dogmatically authoritarian. Is the standard opening of a business letter perhaps related to a context of situation where efficiency is a key value and in which the first reader will often be a clerk or secretary who is reading the letter only to classify it and redirect it to a second reader?

Even to frame such questions directs our attention in ways that are immediately useful in our writing, teaching, and researching. Practitioners--both writers and teachers of writing--can and should investigate and analyze the genres they write and teach. I do it, my students do it--and we are empowered by our increased mastery of each genre, by our increased understanding of how we can sublate the constraints of genre, and by our increased ability to teach ourselves new genres. To answer such questions fully and properly is a theoretical and empirical megaproject, but any writer or teacher of writing can--and should--ask such questions, specifically, about the genres that matter to them. As Swales asserts, "the rationale behind particular genre features may prove elusive, but the process of seeking for it can be enlightening for . . . instructor and student" (7). And only thus can the tyranny of genre reliably be overthrown.

The reduction of communicative strategies to generic structures sometimes seems convenient for both teachers and writers. But it masks the grounding of genre in what Malinowski called "context of situation." It interrupts the logical flow which should take us from considering strategies to considering the ends those strategies serve--and hence from rhetoric to ethics.

4

Burke suggests that we think of "critical and imaginative works [as] answers to questions posed by the situation in which they arose"; thus we may usefully analyze genres as "strategies for the encompassing of situations" (Philosophy 3). Once we accept Burke's thesis that each individual act of writing is "historical--a particular mode of adjustment to a particular cluster of conditions" (Counter-Statement 107), "we find different genres exemplifying forms of adjustment often peculiar to themselves" (Knox 10).

> [W]hen you begin to consider the situations behind the tactics of expression, you will find tactics that organize a work technically because they organize it emotionally. . . . Hence, if you look for a . . . [writer's] problem, you will find the lead that explains the structure of his solution. (Philosophy, cited in Rueckert 65-66).

One way to focus students' rhetorical attention is to insist that each piece of writing have a specifically defined rhetorical context, which may be stipulated in the assignment or by the student.

> **What am I (are we) trying to accomplish? (Purpose)**
> **With whom? (Audience)**
> **Under what circumstances and in what genre? (Occasion)**

My students state the rhetorical context in a sentence (or two) on the title page. Then I respond to (and grade) each piece of writing according to my estimate of how well it would achieve the stated purpose(s) with the stipulated reader(s) on the specific occasion(s). The ultimate criterion becomes Donald Murray's question: "Does it work?" If in my estimate the piece of writing would totally fail to achieve its purpose(s) in reality, then it fails in my course--which, as in a real writing situation, means not an F, but a rewrite. Thus genre becomes an aspect of communicative context and reader expectation.

And thus my second metaphor is ecological, emphasizing that genres exist in contexts and need to be explained as somehow fitting those contexts, for genres evolved as people adapted to communicative contexts. One implication is that, as a genre moves from one context to another, it may become erroneous. That is to say, it may lead writers to create texts that fail to achieve their communicative purposes. A genre is erroneous (in the etymological sense) if it takes writers off the path, if it does not get them where they are trying to go. Particularly in changing situations (and in times of change), writers need to pay particular attention to old genres that might lead them astray-- which is the problem with teaching genres dogmatically, statically, as structures, for unless one understands a genre functionally, as a communicative response to a type of situation,

5

one does not know when to abandon it (as the situation changes).[2]

There is a great danger when genres get reduced to structures, when they get separated from their environments, when the strategies are forgotten.[3] Students need to aware of this, which is why we need to teach them the process of genre analysis, so they can think critically about genres. When they join a community (e.g., by getting a new job) and someone presents a genre in which they will have to write, they should know how to figure out what's going on. We should never talk with them about genres without providing (or helping them discover) contextual explanations.

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[2]Popken, for instance, presents these examples of genre interference, written on a college entrance examination by students who obvious did not know the norms for ending an examination essay:

> . . . we, as teenagers in America, must pray that the voting public of this nation "under God" will see what they have done to their young people. . . . Politically speaking, life will not begin [for us] until we are eighteen years old, and then we will be . . . equal men preparing to be the "leaders" of tomorrow." Oh God, I pray that it will come to this!

> To have what one wants and be able to get it by the previous years of hard work. With this eagerness to achieve this goal has to say something for this person.
> I, for one, believe that I am of this calibre and hope that this reading has justified the topic derived for the paper.
> Thanks Again for Your Time.

The first would be an appropriate ending for a sermon, the second ends like a letter of application (in direct violation of the prohibitions against direct address and overt mention of the real purpose in test essay performances..

[3]I saw this while working with the white experts who were writing the technical evidence for the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en aboriginal title court case. These experts were by and large academic social scientists, and many of them were writing their evidence in the same way they had written their dissertations. In a standard social science way, they were presenting data, considering all the divergent interpretations, allowing that various interpretations might have merit, and finally presenting their own opinions near the end, carefully qualified and understated. And I was telling them that, because their purpose was to move a judge, they should turn all that around. They should begin by asserting their expert interpretation (and then present the data to support it), that when they referred to a contrary interpretation, they should state flatly, "In my expert opinion this interpretation is wrong"--the sort of order and statement discouraged in academic genres. In short, I was telling them to think strategically about the situation--not to produce writer-based prose, not to unthinkingly use their standard genre.

Teaching Genre as Process

How should we teach genre? As social process, archeologically and ecologically. What precisely does that mean come Monday morning? That depends--on our contexts of situation, and most especially on our students, on what they already know, on how they are experienced. Students need to learn to discourse in genres, but that does not necessarily mean teachers must teach genre knowledge explicitly, nor that students' knowledge cannot be tacit.

Certainly it is important for writing teachers to understand genres--teachers almost always need more explicit, articulated knowledge than do practitioners--or they may misadvise their students. To what extent writers and writing students should be explicitly conscious of the genres they use is more variable, as is the extent to which students can usefully be told what the defining features of a genre are, the extent to which they will be better off if they reinvent the genre through an experiential process or through their own analysis. And so our pedagogy should be comparably variable.

Sometimes we should create situations in which students can reinvent the wheel of a genre, thus experiencing viscerally its connection to rhetorical context. For instance, by reconstituting a class as a community of inquiry, we might lead them to reinvent genres of academic discourse (cf., Reither and Vipond). Or we might assign a task and rhetorical context that constrains them to reinvent a genre, as in this assignment:

> Your task is to communicate technical or specialized knowledge briefly and effectively to readers who are only moderately literate (below "grade 8" reading ability) and have little or no background in the specific subject area. Choose a topic on which you have special knowledge and a specific group of readers who need such knowledge. The choice of subject, purpose, and readership is yours; but the reading occasion must be voluntary, and you are limited to the number of words (and graphics) that can be presented effectively on a brochure folded from a single sheet of legal-size paper (8½" x 14").

When I use this assignment, I begin by presenting students with a pile of incompetent brochures to critique. I also strongly encourage them to do this assignment collaboratively, two or three students to a brochure.

With some students, it may suffice to have them analyze and explain rather than reinvent a genre. In our advanced writing course at Simon Fraser University, we teach techniques of discourse analysis and provide a heuristic for analyzing any

particular type of writing in order to learn it (cf., Coe, "Advanced Composition," and Process, chapter 10). The students are assigned to choose a specific type of writing--feminist criticism of Shakespeare, storybooks for young children, feature articles for ski magazines, term papers that get A's from literature professors--and then to create a mini-manual for people who might want to do that type of writing. The assignment makes explicit much of what freelance writers do before writing for a particular medium. Although students may refer to published manuals as secondary sources, their research must be empirical, based on their analyses of samples of the genre-- because one object of the assignment is to create self-reliance and self-confidence. The heuristic, Metaheur, helps students generate a description of the constraints within which writers produce the genre. And, paradoxically, because the immediate focus is on written products, success depends upon the students' prior understanding of writing as process as well as on their understanding of the practical relationship between structure and strategy, product and process.

Sometimes we should use other, less time-consuming pedagogical strategies for helping students grasp this functional, contextual conception of form. Taking an experiential tack, we might teach them several generic forms for the same general function (e.g., Classical and Rogerian persuasion), thus confronting them with the implications of generic choices (see Coe, "Apology," esp. 24-26; cf. Teich). Or taking a more analytic tack, we can present a standard form (e.g., for a scientific report or a proposal) and teach them how to analyze, archeologically and ecologically, the functional implications of the prescribed structures, to see the form as heuristic. When this analysis leads to contradictions (e.g., between their communicative purposes and the standard structure of term papers in their majors), we should help them understand and perhaps sublate those contradictions--as experienced writers often can (see, for example, MacDougall).

Sometimes, with students who have mastered the concept and practice of genre, it may be most efficient for us simply to present a new genre, explaining how its structural features are strategically functionally in communicative context. Indeed, for such students, it might be a waste of their time and energy to make them reinvent or rediscover the genre. But whatever pedagogies we decide are best for particular students and teaching situations, we should lead students to understand formal structures generically in relation to rhetorical contexts and discourse communities.

More than particular types of writing--there are, after all, so many, and the world is changing too quickly to allow us to predict accurately which our students will need five or ten years hence--the most important lesson for student writers to learn is

8

that genres are socially real, that to participate effectively in a discourse community one usually must adapt to (or around) readers' generic expectations. They should learn to notice genres, to make sense of genres, even to renovate genres.[4]

LeFevre argues that to understand rhetorical invention we must consider it as a social process. Rhetorical form is even more social. Indeed, one way in which invention becomes social is when an individual's act of creation is mediated by conventional forms preferred or prescribed by a discourse community. One way discourse communities preserve their boundaries, their integrity, is by restricting the communications of those who have not learned the standard forms. The rhetoric of genre is, therefore, especially applicable to literacy and education. As Paré asserts, "students need to discover that the communities within which they read and write influence, even determine, the meanings they can make . . . . [S]tudents need to see how groups both authorize and restrict discourse, how they permit some conversations while prohibiting or discouraging others" (60).[5]

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[4] See Giltrow for a wonderful example of an empirical genre analysis which discovered that most practitioners of the genre used ineffective generic structures--a genre analysis which concluded by advising writers how the genre ought to be modified for the writers to achieve their purposes. Giltrow discovered that most practitioners were using classical argumentative strategies in a situation where more Rogerian, consensual strategies would more likely move the audience.
    See Harper for an excellent study of an attempt to renovate an institution's discourse by eco-engineering a new genre. Her study demonstrates that this can be done, although attempts to inculcate generic features contradicted by the writers' context of situation are likely to fail.

[5] "Aristotle's Rhetoric centres in the speaker's explicit designs with regard to the confronting of an audience," says Burke. "But there are also ways in which we spontaneously, intuitively, even unconsciously persuade ourselves" (Language 301). And genre is one.
    Juxtaposing Paré with Burke thus raises another issue, that of "informed consent"--and dissent. Genres, because they guide the selection/deflection of potential statements (cf. Rueckert, cited above), because they are one means by which we "unconsciously persuade ourselves to state this and leave that unsaid, are often ideological. Do we have the right to help students learn to use particular genres without making them aware--or making sure they have ability to think critical about genre and to make themselves aware--of such ideological biases?

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