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Questions for genre theory from the blogosphere

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The blog illustrates well the constant change that characterizes electronic media. With a rapidity equal to that of their initial adoption, blogs became not a single genre but a multiplicity. To explore the relationship between the centrifugal forces of change and the centripetal tendencies of recurrence and typification, we extend our earlier study of personal blogs with a contrasting study of the kairos, technological affordances, rhetorical features, and exigence for what we call public affairs blogs. At the same time, we explore the relationship between genre and medium, examining genre evolution in the context of changing technological affordances. We conclude that genre and medium must be distinguished and that the aesthetic satisfactions of genre help account for recurrence in an environment of change.

1. Introduction

The weblog, or "blog" as almost everyone has come to call it, illustrates well one of the pervasive qualities of the electronic media—constant and rapid change. The blog burst upon the contemporary discursive scene in 1999 and quickly became the *genre du jour*. For the next several years, the number of blogs grew exponentially, the amount of commentary about blogs in other media and genres proliferated, and new blogging technologies were rapidly developed and adopted. The astonishing uptake of the blog suggested that this genre was addressing a recurrent exigence that was widely and deeply felt. But the growth of blogs wasn't simple or linear: blogs began to change and adapt, to speciate, as it were. Shortly after everyone thought they knew that a blog was an online diary, we started to hear about j(ournalism)-blogs, team blogs, photo blogs, classroom blogs, travel blogs, campaign blogs, and more. The forms and features of the blog that had initially fused around the unfolding display of personal identity were rapidly put to use for purposes of political advocacy, corporate tech support, classroom interaction, and public deliberation. With a rapidity equal to that of their initial adoption, blogs became not a single discursive phenomenon but a multiplicity.

Change is one of the issues that Giltrow and Stein highlight in their introduction to this volume. Indeed, they note, the new media invite attention to change because they "reconfigure the conditions to which pragmatic features of language respond." Thus, internet genres have been "volatile," they have proliferated, they have differentiated into multiple "sub-species" (9). Giltrow and Stein also alert us to the multiple issues involved in the process of genre change: how do new genres arise? how are they related to antecedent genres? why do they proliferate? how do they differentiate or speciate? how do genres migrate from one setting or medium to another? how do genres decay and die? what is the relationship between change in forms (that is, in linguistic or other symbolic features) and change in function (that is, in the action performed or the need served)?

Nevertheless, there's something problematic about the very idea of genre change. Genre change problematizes precisely what makes genre generic. Our understanding of genre as a recurring, typified, reproducible, "stabilized-enough" (Schryer 1993: 204) symbolic action requires that it resist change. If a genre is a mark of recurrence, what is it that recurs, especially in a setting of dizzying volatility like the internet? how do communities create collective typifications when neither technology nor culture will hold still? what is it that can be reproduced sufficiently to create genre identity in varying instantiations? can there be a stable or identifiable dimension of a genre as it is adapted from one medium to another?

Early scholarship on rhetorical genres was at pains to justify its focus on the general and the recurrent. Against the prevailing neo-Aristotelian critical regime that focused closely on unique rhetorical events, Edwin Black in 1965 and then Campbell and Jamieson in 1978 advocated criticism that examined the relationship between such events and the history and traditions in which they were rooted, as well as comparable events that might illuminate them. But the immediate reception of this work warned that a focus on genres rather than individual texts would lead to reductionism, pointless taxonomies, and blindness to the qualities of particular achievements. More recently, Dorothy Winsor expressed concern that genre theory "underplays the role of agency and change" (1999: 201), and Judy Segal found "an excess of enthusiasm for the generalizing move" at the expense of attention to the local and the particular (2002: 172). In response to these concerns, genre critics and theorists began emphasizing the dynamism, flexibility, and change inherent to genres. Drawing in part on Bakhtin's insights into discourse as a field of both centrifugal and centripetal forces, in part on social theory that explores the relationship between agency and structure, and in part on linguistic studies of variation, this body of work reminds us that genres are continually in flux.

Case studies have examined the birth and differentiation of a variety of genres, as well as their diachronic development and their relationship to sociocultural institutions, for example, the scientific research article (Bazerman 1988, Ch. 3;

Berkenkotter & Huckin 1995, Ch. 2), the presidential inaugural (Campbell & Jamieson 1990), the apologia (Downey 1993), the business memorandum (Yates & Orlikowski 1992), the drug autobiography (Zieger 2007). And others have formulated ways to conceptualize change more generally. In Berkenkotter and Huckin's sociocognitive approach, for example, genres constantly and gradually change "in response to the sociocognitive needs of individual users" (1995: 6). Change is initiated materially, and genre change is part of the sociocognitive adaptation to such change. Amy Devitt adds a mechanism to this model of change, pointing out that genre change is both synchronic (genres are "flexible") and diachronic (they are "changeable"), with the former quality enabling the latter. Because rhetorical situations are never identical, she argues, the genre "through which people act in [a] situation and out of which people construct a recurring situation" must be flexible, capable of varying and therefore of "adapting over time to changes in contexts and uses" (2004: 89, 90). Genres originate not only from changes in situation, context, and culture but also from other genres, in an evolutionary process, and occasionally from the conscious effort of individuals to fill a previously unmet need. Campbell and Jamieson's work on the genres of the U.S. presidency illustrates this dual characterization well. They see the presidential genres as both constitutive and flexible, such that they define and sustain the presidency over time and through the temperaments of many presidents, allowing each to affirm his (or her) particular place in the succession of leadership (1990). And Catherine Schryer describes genres not only as dynamic, evolving sites of action but also as ideological sites of power and therefore as contested; such contestation, presumably, is what both requires and allows for change. Drawing on the work of Bourdieu, Schryer proposes that genres are "regulated improvisational strategies" that are "triggered" by the interaction of agent and social structure (2002: 84).

If we can now take it as given that genres change over time and that such change is enabled by the variation inherent to any socially typified construction and provoked by differing complexes of social, psychological, economic, and technological change, then it may be time to start the pendulum back in the other direction and have a careful look at the nature and sources of stability and recurrence. Berkenkotter and Huckin tell us that genres "are always sites of contention between stability and change" (1995: 6), but at this point, stability and recurrence have perhaps been underconceptualized, an oversight made all the more urgent by the digital environment of the internet. In fact, given the proliferation of change that the internet represents and makes possible, it's remarkable that anything as stable as a genre has arisen there at all. But the general agreement that there are already multiple genres that are "native" to the internet, as well as replicated or "remediated" versions of print or other genres, is indicative not only of relentless change but also of some kind of recurrence. What recurs?

How do we construct or "determine" recurrence (in Schutz's sense) and reproduce it (in Giddens's sense)?

In what follows, we explore the short but increasingly complex history of the blog for what it can reveal about the phenomena and dynamics of genre change and recurrence.[1] Blogging makes a good case example because it arose suddenly and apparently spontaneously and has evolved continuously. We first review the initial appearance of the blog, the cultural moment in which it arose, the technology that made it possible, its major rhetorical features and forms, and the recurrent exigence to which it was understood to respond.[2] This early form we call the *personal blog,* in view of its major features and the motivations expressed by the participants. We then explore the rise of what we will call *public affairs blogs*, asking when and how the distinction between personal and public oriented blogs arose, what it is based on, and who recognizes it, again sketching out the kairos, the technology, rhetorical features, and the exigence for comparison with the personal blog. Our contribution to genre theory aims to clarify the relationship between the centrifugal forces of change and the centripetal tendencies of recurrence and typification, stability and cultural reproduction. At the same time, we explore the relationship between genre and medium, examining genre evolution in the context of changing technological affordances. These conceptions may have particular traction as we contemplate the phenomenon of digital genres, but we hope they can help in understanding oral and print genres as well.

2. Re-examining the personal blog

We can divide the history of personal blogging into three phases. Prior to 1999, blogs were used primarily by web-savvy individuals, generally designers or programmers working in the technology industry, to share information with each other. These "filter" blogs had three primary features: they were chronologically organized, contained links to sites of interest on the web, and provided commentary on the links. These early bloggers not only had to be able to locate information on

1. Our account here is limited to the United States. We should note, though, that recent Technorati data indicate that blogging is an international phenomenon: more blog posts are in Japanese (37%) than in English (36%), with 27% in other languages, including Chinese, Russian, and Farsi. The data also show that blog posting goes on around the clock and thus, presumably, around the world (Sifry 2007). Nevertheless, the situation in the U.S. is complex enough that we necessarily restrict our focus to the American con

2. These issues have all been explored in more detail in our earlier study (Miller & Shepherd 2004), and the next section summarizes and updates that study.

the web before search engines became as accessible as they are today, but they had to be able to code their own HTML pages. In 1999, a number of blog-hosting sites (including Blogger, LiveJournal, and Xanga) were started, all offering easy-to-use editing tools that require no coding.[3] These changes in technology opened the way to the second phase of blogging, with a new kind of user, younger and less technically adept, and a new emphasis on personal commentary rather than links, self-disclosure rather than information sharing. As McNeill found in her study of "blog narratives" on a popular blog-hosting site, the personal blog "incorporates 'trademark' diary features, with regular, dated entries that focus on the diarist/narrator's experiences and interests" (2003: 29). In her widely cited blog entry on the history of weblogs, Rebecca Blood noted that bloggers seemed to engage in "an outbreak of self-expression" (Blood 2000). McNeill takes this a step further, positing that, by publishing online with a mechanism for interaction with readers, bloggers created "diary conversations" in which responses are not "just imagined but actual" (2003: 29). Once hosting sites emerged, the popularity of blogs grew quickly. A 2003 Perseus Development Corporation survey on eight leading blog-hosting services found that new blogs increased by more than 600% between 2000 and 2001, with over four million blogs by the time of the survey (Henning, 2003).

Technorati's "State of the Blogosphere" also shows significant growth, with the number of new blogs doubling about every six months between March 2003 and July 2006. The consistent, continuing growth marked by Technorati occurs alongside another technological development, social-networking services, which allow users to connect with one another. The three most popular social-networking sites, Friendster, MySpace, and Facebook, all launched between 2002 and 2004. The advent of social-networking marks the third phase of blogging. In April 2005, an update of the Perseus survey estimated 31.6 million blogs on twenty popular hosting sites (Henning 2005). By March 2007, Technorati was tracking 70 million blogs (Sifry 2007). Though the numbers are impressive, neither Perseus's survey nor Technorati's tracking includes blogs on these popular social-networking sites. According to MySpace's blogging home page, that site included more than double that number, over 150 million blogs as of June 2007, and after its launch in 2003, MySpace became one of the most popular sites on the internet. By July 2006, it had topped Yahoo! in page views, outpacing MSN, AOL, and Google, as well (Sacco 2006). Though Myspace's popularity has waned

3. In October 1998 OpenDiary launched, the first site that included tools for reader comments. It claims to be "the oldest online interactive diary community" (Open Diary 1998: http://www.opendiary.com/about.asp).

somewhat, in March 2008 the number of blogs on the site still outpaced those tracked by Technorati by 57 percent.

The primary change in this third phase of personal blogging is the way in which readers access a blog. On a blog-hosting site, the reader lands on the blog's most recent entry and may click a link to read more about its writer; blogs on social-networking hosts are accessed via a link on the user's profile. However, the features and uses of these sites show a strong continuity with those of the phase two blog hosting sites. In our earlier study, we noted two major themes in the generic social action of blogging: self-expression and community development. Both can be achieved by the self-disclosure that blogging permits and seems to encourage.[4] Compared with the blog-hosting sites, social-networking sites have more features that enable community development. Users create a profile that includes a personal description, basic demographic data, and information on their interests, hobbies, and personal tastes. They can then request that other users become their friends, and a list of those friends is displayed on the profile page. In addition, users can search other user profiles, create or join groups, share photos, and post blogs. However, much user interest remains focused on the self-expression capacities. In the case of MySpace, users' lack of interest in the search function (Olson 2006) suggests a greater interest in self-expression and identity creation than in connection and community. Some social networking sites limit networking, with user-defined zones of privacy or with limits on chain length (Boyd 2004). But even for the completely open networking capability of MySpace, development has centered on user expression—on "building a site that easily allowed users to create their own little online treehouses, adding photos, music, and blogs" (Levy & Stone 2006). Facebook, a social-networking site that initially restricted networks to actively enrolled college students, is described by the site's spokesperson, Chris Hughes, as a vehicle that allows students to "fashion [themselves] in a new way in a new space … emphasizing different aspects of [their] personalit[ies]" (Cassidy 2006: par. 32). The *New Yorker* writer who interviewed Hughes summarized his interviews with Facebook users by noting that the site "quickly became a platform for self-promotion, a place to boast and preen and vie for others' attention as much as for their companionship" (Cassidy 2006: par. 11). Social-networking sites quickly became known as "me media."

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4. In our earlier study, we connected these themes to the social psychology of self-disclosure as summarized in Clay Calvert's discussion of mediated voyeurism and exhibitionism. Self-disclosure is said to serve four purposes: self-clarification and social validation support self-expression, and relationship development and social control support community development (Calvert 2000).

Formal features of blogs have evolved relatively slowly across these three phases. Blogs are still identifiably composed of dated, time-stamped entries, organized in reverse chronological order; most also include a link for reader commentary and the author's name. The reverse chronology and time-stamping of posts create an "expectation of updates" (Hourihan 2002) and thus a motivation for readers to return. The use of the present tense in the dated entries creates a semantic immediacy, as in diaries. Although there has been no longitudinal research on pronoun use, one study found in a 2004 sample that diary-like blogs characteristic of the second phase show "much greater use" of first-person pronouns than filter-like blogs characteristic of the first phase (Herring & Paolillo 2006: 448). First-phase bloggers noted the combination of links and accompanying commentary (Hourihan 2002) and the frequency and brevity (Mortensen & Walker) of postings as significant formal features, but in a 2003 random sample of 203 blogs, only one-third of blog entries contained any links and the average interval between entries was 5 days (Herring et al. 2005). Perseus's 2003 survey concluded that of the estimated 1.4 million active blogs, about 80% include external links (Henning 2003), though the study does not distinguish between home page and entry-specific links. The Perseus survey reported that active blogs were updated on average every 14 days, that fewer than 3% of the hosted blogs were updated at least once a week, and that fewer than 2% were updated daily (Henning, 2003). The picture of the average blog contrasts with that of celebrity blogs, those read by tens of thousands of visitors each day, which are almost without fail updated at least once a day and sometimes more frequently. The Perseus report concluded that these widely read and frequently updated blogs were "the tip of a very deep iceberg" and not characteristic of the iceberg as a whole. Though it is difficult to determine link usage in current high-profile blogs, posting frequency appeared to remain consistent in 2006, with most on Technorati's Top 100 list of the web's most linked-to blogs updated at least daily (*Technorati* 2006).[5]

The cultural moment in which second-phase blogs took off was a *kairos* of confession, celebrity, and commercialization. It shifted the boundary between the public and the private and the relationship between mediated and unmediated experience (Miller & Shepherd 2004). Sherry Turkle has described this *kairos* as a "culture of simulation," which includes not only virtual environments but also mediated aspects of contemporary life such as Disneyland, shopping malls, and television, all of which ultimately devalue direct experience, making it seem less compelling and ultimately less real (Turkle 1997). The "reality" movement in the

5. We periodically reviewed Technorati's Top 100 for the frequency with which they were updated. Consistently, at least ninety of the sites had been updated that day.

media has seemingly supplanted the reality IRL (In Real Life), and validation increasingly comes through mediation, that is, from the attention and intensification that media seem to offer. Viviane Serfaty's study contributes an understanding of how the computer medium potentiates the probably unprecedented interweaving of the public and the private in the personal weblog, a phenomenon that motivated our original study. The computer screen, she says, serves bloggers as both a mirror and a veil, mirroring the self (including the blog readers who reflect the writer back to herself) and veiling the "gaze of the other," thus encouraging self-disclosure and the pretence of privacy (Serfaty 2004: 13).[6]

During the third phase of blogging, the reality trend on television and in publishing continues. By June 2007, Yahoo! TV's programming page lists nearly 1000 reality series, almost 10 times more than two years before, and *American Idol* remains one of the top-rated television series. One significant change is the trend toward celebrity reality programming. New series feature celebrities competing in talent/reality hybrids, such as *Dancing with the Stars* and *Celebrity Fit Club*, or offer seemingly unfettered access to their private lives, as with *Kathy Griffin: My Life on the D-List*. In book publishing, memoirs and autobiographies remain popular. For example, three of the bestselling nonfiction hardbacks in 2003 (*Living History*, *A Royal Duty*, *Kate Remembered*) were memoirs of and about celebrities (Hillary Rodham Clinton, Princess Diana, and Katherine Hepburn, respectively), Bill Clinton's autobiography was a 2004 bestseller, and in 2005 James Frey's controversial memoir of drug abuse and recovery, *A Million Little Pieces*, was second only to *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* in overall sales. Both celebrities and "regular" people remain willing to expose their private lives to public scrutiny, continuing the intricate relationship between mediated voyeurism and exhibitionism.

The third phase of blogging also gained strength from another of the internet's recent trends, user-generated content. The social-networking phenomenon has been accompanied by technologies that empower users to produce and share information, a development that takes interactivity to new levels. This movement was epitomized by *Time Magazine's* selection of "You" as the 2006 "Person of the Year" (Grossman 2006). Flickr (launched in February 2004) and YouTube (launched in November 2005) allow users to upload, tag, and share photographs and videos, respectively; the content of both of these sites, including the tags used to organize information, is almost completely user generated. YouTube, which carries the tagline "broadcast yourself," bears a striking resemblance to MySpace. Users may set up an individual "channel," much like a MySpace profile, with "subscribers" taking the place of "friends." Two other popular sites, Craigslist, the online

6. Two other studies published since we originally wrote have foregrounded the issue of public and private in the weblog (Keren 2004; McNeill 2003).

classified-advertising hub and virtual town square, and Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia, rely on their users both to supply their own content and to police content supplied by others. Sites like Amazon and Netflix, founded in 1994 and 1997, respectively, have increasingly relied on customer input. Both allow users to enter reviews and ratings and to share information with friends, through wishlists or queues. These features exemplify what Christine Rosen of the Ethics and Public Policy Center has called "egocasting, the thoroughly personalized and extremly ~~[sic]~~ narrow pursuit of one's personal taste." Rosen also points out that "people who use networks like Facebook have a tendency to describe themselves like products" (quoted in Bugeja 2006). Users who allow increasing access to their personal purchasing information so that retailers might serve them better have ultimately facilitated the creation of online identity based solely on consumption and taste.

In our earlier study of the second phase of personal blogging, we identified the exigence of these blogs as a widely shared, recurrent need for cultivation and validation of the self that emerged at the intersection of the private and public realms, where questions about identity are most troubled. Combined with its focused and repeated effort, the blog's public disclosure—its exhibitionism—yields an intensification of the self, a reflexive elaboration of identity.[7] Phase three blogging is essentially no different. The advent of the interactive technologies within the kairos of celebrity and commercialism has served mainly to enhance the connection between the self-expression and community-building functions of self-disclosure, rather than to displace the former with the latter. The multiple motivations for both voyeurism and exhibitionism, according to Calvert, share one quality, which is the need for connection, the desire to be part of the world around us, whether that world be material or virtual. This need seems to exemplify the relationship between celebrities and their publics, reality television participants and their audiences, personal bloggers and their readers. The need persists—recurs—and to such an extent that multiple new technologies are being made to serve it: blogging has been joined but not replaced by social networking and media sharing sites.

3. Exploring the public affairs blog

The recent visibility of blogging derives less from these diary-like personal blogs, however, than from the increasing presence of blogging in political life and public affairs. While the personal blog takes advantage of internet technologies of

7. This analysis is compatible with the later one of Michael Keren, who finds in blogs an impulse toward "emancipation ," both personal and political, that is ultimately defeated by what he calls "political melancholy," characterized by both solitude and political passivity (2006).

interaction and connection in the interests of identity construction, these same capabilities have been put to other uses, which have action and social change as their goals. As the *Columbia Journalism Review* put it, blogs can be both diaries and soapboxes (Jensen 2003). The question we will be exploring here is how to think about the genre status of these more public blogs. The genre status of personal blogs seemed unproblematic, because of the rapid and fairly uniform agreement among early bloggers about what they were doing and why. But the proliferation of uses and motivations over the past eight years has complicated the picture and raised the question of what can be recurrent, or generic, within this multiplicity. Because our original study began with the question of how the public and the private were intermixed in the early blogs, we turn here to the blogs that seem most different on this dimension from the personal blogs. And in order to capture the broadest scope of blogging that is arguably concerned with public affairs, we include in our exploration here blogging that resembles journalism as well as blogging that is closer to political speech, aiming to leave open the question of what or where a genre or genres might be.

The Pew Internet and American Life report on blogging, based on telephone interviews with 233 bloggers in 2005–06, helps document a distinction between personal and public blogging. The most common topic that bloggers reported covering was "my life and experience," at 37%, with politics and government second at only 11% (Lenhart & Fox 2006: ii). Slightly more than half of bloggers say they blog mostly for themselves, and one-third mostly for an audience. Also, 52% said that a major reason for blogging is to express themselves creatively, and 50% to document and share their personal experiences; many fewer identified as main reasons motivating other people to action (29%) or influencing the way others think (27%). Approximately one-third identify their blog as a form of journalism. The Pew report concludes that relatively small numbers of bloggers consider blogging to be "a public endeavor" (Lenhart & Fox 2006: iii, v).

Despite their smaller numbers, public affairs bloggers have apparently had significant public effects. They are given credit for (or claim credit for) the resignation of Howell Raines as Executive Editor of the *New York Times* after the Jayson Blair scandal, the resignation of Trent Lott as Senate Majority Leader after his remarks about Strom Thurmond (both in 2002), the early success of the Howard Dean presidential campaign in 2003, the 2004 resignation of Dan Rather from his anchor position at CBS News after the controversy about the George W. Bush National Guard documents, the failure of the Bush plan to privatize Social Security, the indictment of Jack Abramoff in 2005, and Congressional hearings on the firings of U.S. Attorneys in 2007 (Bahnish 2006: 141; Jensen 2003; McDermott 2007; Perlmutter 2006). Public affairs bloggers exert their influence indirectly; they focus public attention by noticing and linking to obscure reports (as in the case of the

firing of the U.S. Attorney for Arkansas), accumulating information provided by readers, linking to related information on the internet, checking and challenging facts and interpretations, and, importantly, being read and linked to by many others, including the mainstream media (McDermott 2007).[8] Perlmutter attributes to politically oriented blogs "the powers of instant response, cumulative knowledge, and relentless drumbeating" (2006: B6).

Although there are many fewer public-affairs bloggers than personal bloggers, they have far more readers. Influential public-affairs blogs have tens of thousands of daily readers. For example, TalkingPointsMemo, which gets credit for the U.S. Attorney firings story, has 100,000 daily readers (2007). The site meter for the DailyKos, one of the most popular political blogs, shows nearly 500,000 site visits per day through most of 2007 and double that in early 2008 (presumably because of the presidential election cycle) (Moulitsas Zúniga 2002: http://www.sitemeter.com/?a=stats&s=sm8dailykos&r=33). Technorati's analysis of inbound links from other blogs showed that in April 2007, 22 blogs were among the 50 most popular internet sites (most of the remaining sites were mainstream media, with the *New York Times* at the top); this figure was up from 12 six months before (Sifry 2007).

Observers of public affairs blogs have discerned several recurrent categories by comparison with traditional news media. Axel Bruns identifies three: what he calls "micro-news," or participatory journalism on local affairs; eyewitness reports on unfolding world events such as 9/11 and the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami; and republishing and commentary (2006). Nicholas Lemann produces a similar three-fold classification: "citizen journalism" by "supposedly inspired amateurs who find out what's going on in the places where they live and work," republication of information originally published elsewhere, and political opinion (2006: 44). Along these same lines, Matt Welch names four contributions that blogging has made to journalism: "personality, eyewitness testimony, editorial filtering, and uncounted gigabytes of new knowledge" (2003). Beyond these journalistic functions, blogs have also been put to use in party politics, where they have been compared to the party caucus system, fund-raising strategies, campaign literature, campaign rallies, "meet the candidate" events, tv ads, and talk radio (Perlmutter 2006). In fact, the blurring of the categories "news" and "politics" in the blogosphere is what led us to use the vaguer label "public affairs." As we head into the 2008 U.S. elections, it remains to be seen whether blogs will primarily serve traditional political and journalistic functions or will be able to perform some genuinely new public rhetorical action.

8. One of the frequently repeated mottos, attributed to blogger Ken Layne, is, "we can fact-check your ass" (de Havilland, Lukas, & Amon 2002; see also Chaudry 2006).

Major changes in political discourse often occur in national election years, and the evolution of politically oriented blogs is tied to this cycle. The internet became a major factor in political campaigns when it played a key role in the successful gubernatorial election of Jesse Ventura in 1998 (1999). The first politically oriented weblog, Josh Marshall's TalkingPointsMemo, appeared in November 2000, during the divisive election recount in Florida. TalkingPointsMemo followed exclusively the issues surrounding the recount, with a single-mindedness and a political orientation quite unlike personal blogs. The DailyKos was founded by Markos Moulitsas in May 2002, during the congressional midterm election cycle (Anderson 2006). Howard Dean's campaign blog served as the "nerve center" of his challenge to the Democratic party establishment in 2003 (Price 2004: 772). Building on the success of Dean's campaign, Democratic nominee John Kerry was able to raise over $80 million through his website and the attendant blog. Because of the success of the Dean campaign and the rising popularity of such political commentary blogs as Glenn Reynolds's Instapundit, national parties could no longer ignore the role of blogs and provided press credentials to a number of bloggers during their 2004 conventions (Adamic & Glance 2005: 1–2), marking a new level of legitimacy.

But the evolution of public blogging was related not only to national politics in the U.S. but also to world events. In 2001, according to Welch, "Like everything else, blogging changed forever on September 11" (2003). Reynolds started his blog in August 2001 and by September 10 had around 1600 readers; his readership, he says, tripled the next day (2006: xi). Many others were motivated to begin blogging at that time, including those who were present at the sites of the attacks and those who were dissatisfied with mainstream media coverage (Welch 2003). Andrew Sullivan, a journalist who had started blogging about a year earlier, says, "Suddenly, it felt as if this event were not just happening to me—but to all of the little community the weblog had pioneered. I started writing about my feelings, and readers responded with an intensity I've never felt in any other journalistic form.… People sent in poems; stories; first-person accounts, until the site became a clearing house for September 11 reflection. The blog almost seemed designed for this moment." Sullivan's audience "doubled literally over night" (Sullivan 2002: par. 7). With the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan that October and the subsequent invasion of Iraq in 2003 came "warblogging," and in December 2004, eyewitness blogs provided "raw and immediate" accounts of the Indian Ocean tsunami, leading the *New York Times* to conclude that "For vivid reporting from the enormous zone of tsunami disaster, it was hard to beat the blogs" (Schwartz 2004; see also Outing 2005). Bloggers also helped organize aid efforts for the victims. Similarly, blogs played a role in national awareness of and response to Hurricane Katrina in August 2005, with blogs to document the events, collect donations, and connect displaced persons and pets with families (MacManus 2005).

These disasters apparently served as rhetorical exigences for large numbers of people, as did the political election cycle. Our questions must be whether there is a recurrent element of these specific exigences and, if so, why blogging was a fittingly typified rhetorical action. These questions require an examination of the kairos, the cultural moment in which these events unfolded in the early 21st century. Why did the public affairs blog appear when it did? Why did it arise after the personal blog? Was there some recurring condition that motivated the turn to public affairs, or are we looking at a coincidental set of unrelated exigences? We can find clues to some answers in the commentary of bloggers and those who have made close studies of blogging, and although we cannot be assured that our information is comprehensive, the themes we found are repeated so often that we believe they have explanatory value.

One strong and recurrent theme in these sources is dissatisfaction with the mainstream media (MSM). Reynolds claims that he, like many, was "unhappy with the mass-market journalistic product" (2006: xi). In their book, *Crashing the Gate*, bloggers Jerome Armstrong and Markos Moulitsas also attribute the movement they celebrate to the perceived failings of the MSM: "Readers increasingly doubt the authority of *The Washington Post* or *National Review,* despite their grand-sounding titles and large staffs. They know that behind the curtain are fallible writers and editors who are no more inherently trustworthy than a lone blogger who has earned a reader's respect" (2006: xv). Sullivan explains that in the crisis of 9/11, "the very personal nature of blogs had far more resonance than more impersonal corporate media products. Readers were more skeptical of anonymous news organizations anyway, and preferred to supplement them with individual writers they knew and liked" (2002: par. 7). Chaudry's analysis for the *Columbia Journalism Review* claims that "The galvanizing cause for the rapid proliferation of political blogs and their mushrooming audience was a deep disillusionment across the political spectrum with traditional media" (2006: par. 9). Similarly, Michael Keren points to "deep frustration" with political communication and a general "culture of deceit" as motivations for bloggers and readers of blogs (2006: 149). These dissatisfactions and frustrations have accumulated into what Stephen Cooper characterizes as significant and legitimate media criticism on the part of bloggers, focusing on the topics of "accuracy, framing, agenda-setting/gatekeeping, and journalistic practices" (Cooper 2006: 18).[9]

Bloggers express their dissatisfaction with the mainstream media in two distinct and recurring ways. First, corporate media are voiceless and impersonal, whereas

9. Interestingly, Cooper calls these "genres" but means by this something quite different from what we do.

"blogs are personal" (Armstrong & Moulitsas Zúniga 2006: xv), a quality that is commented on repeatedly: the intimacy of connection with readers (Welch 2003), the "intensity" and "resonance" that Sullivan highlights (Sullivan 2002: par. 7), the "interactivity" that enables participation (Bruns 2006; Chaudry 2006; McDermott 2007). Rosen calls the MSM "voiceless," (Rosen 2005: par. 20), and Reynolds calls them "thin and flavorless" (2006: xi). Blogs and blogging communities, by offering a variety of viewpoints, fill this void: "In a media world that's otherwise leached of opinions and life, there's so much life in [blogs]" (quoted in Welch 2003: par. 18). Armstrong and Moulitsas comment on their own motivations in these same terms: "Both of us started our blogs because we wanted a voice in our nation's politics. We had hundreds, then thousands, of readers, as we somehow tapped into a greater need for strong progressive voices—voices that had been shut out of the corporate media outlets. And the online medium allowed a level of participation nonexistent in traditional media. It wasn't us talking down to our readers. It was all of us collectively having a conversation" (2006: xv). Because of these changes in voice, and an attendant loss of faith in the ethic of objectivity, Rosen sees "conditions resembling intellectual crisis in the mainstream press" (Rosen 2005: par. 20).

The other way in which dissatisfaction with corporate media is frequently expressed is by reference to the First Amendment freedom of the press, possibly because many public-affairs bloggers have, or had, careers as journalists with traditional media. Rosen, who is on the journalism faculty at New York University, puts the point this way: "Freedom of the press belongs to those who own one, and blogging means practically anyone can own one.[10] That is the Number One reason why weblogs matter.… With blogging, an awkward term, we designate a fairly beautiful thing: the extension to many more people of a First Amendment franchise, the right to publish your thoughts to the world" (2005: par. 42). Journalist Matt Welch has noted that the blogging movement means that "Freedom of the press belongs to nearly 3 million people" (2003: par. 16).[11] Sullivan has also thought in these terms. He finds blogging to be "a publishing revolution more profound than anything since the printing press," a development that enables people to "seize the means of production." He goes on, "It's hard to underestimate what a huge deal this is" because it bypasses the gatekeepers, editors, publishers, and advertisers, who are part of the traditional media (2002: par. 2). Much other commentary touting the value of "citizen journalism" stems from this same kind of dissatisfaction with the mainstream press.

10. See Rosen's blog (2006).

11. See Welch's blog (2001).

This current of dissatisfaction with the media has a specific source in the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the result of intense lobbying on the part of the media industry. The Act "rewrote the regulatory regime" for communications media, eliminating most regulation on media ownership (McChesney 2004: 51). Although ostensibly designed to foster competition, the act instead "unleashed a stampede of media consolidation," according to the dean of journalism at the University of Maryland (Kunkel 2004).[12] Accelerating a process of deregulation begun in the 1980s, the 1996 act focused on the goals of economic efficiency for broadcasters at the expense of localism and diversity (Phillips 2004). The result has been a dramatic reduction in the number of media companies, consolidating not only traditional broadcast media but also cable, internet, film, music, and print publishing. The number of companies holding a controlling interest in North American newspapers, magazines, television stations, and book publishers has declined from 50 in 1984 to 10 in 1996 to 6 in 2002 (Moyers 2002). At about the same time, media critic Ben Bagdikian put the number of conglomerates owning most of the media sources in the U.S. at five (2004). In 2003, *CQ Researcher* reported that five media corporations controlled up to 80% of prime-time programming and that one company, Clear Channel Communications, owned more than 1200 radio stations (Hatch 2003), six times its closest competitor. The corporatization and consolidation of media ownership has led to downsizing of journalistic staffs, repackaging of news from one medium to another, and underinvestment in the news capabilities of new technologies—trends that have likely contributed to public dissatisfaction with the media (Klinenberg 2005). Federal Communications Commission proposals for further deregulation of media ownership in 2003 were vociferously resisted by over two million Americans who protested to the FCC and to Congress (many of them galvanized by the internet advocacy group MoveOn.org). Senate Commerce Committee Chairman John McCain said it was the greatest spontaneous outpouring of citizen reaction he had ever seen (Blethen 2004), and media scholar Robert McChesney called it an "extraordinary uprising" (2004: 254). This reaction corroborates our belief that media consolidation was widely perceived as a public exigence.

Yet another part of the kairos in which public-affairs blogging developed is technological. The technologies that made personal blogging popular—server-side capabilities that allowed users to produce web-ready material without doing the coding—were in place by 1999 when the blog hosting services were launched. Later developments that enhanced the ease of connection between blogs and launched

12. McChesney characterizes the drafting and passage of this bill as shot through with "collusion" and "corruption" (McChesney 2004: 52).

the third phase of personal blogging include permalinks (developed at Blogger, early 2000), web syndication (RSS, adopted by the New York Times in 2002, and Atom, adopted by Google in 2003), TrackBack (an acknowledgment for a link, developed at Movable Type in 2002), blog search engines (Technorati was the first in 2002), and tagging (user-provided categories that can be searched and linked, implemented at Flikr in 2004).[13] These features are part of what is perceived as a transformation of the web from a static to a dynamic medium, a transformation that is sometimes referred to as Web 2.0 or as the "live web" (O'Reilly 2005; Searls 2005), and they all appeared or were made widely available in the same years as the political events and media dissatisfaction that we have tracked above. Around this same time, one additional technical development, the blogad, made it possible for people like Andrew Sullivan and Markos Moulitsas to devote themselves full time to blogging. First proposed in 2003 to Josh Marshall of TalkingPointsMemo by Henry Copeland, blogads were a way to broker advertising to bloggers, who then acquired a revenue stream that for some provided a reasonable profit; the ads were supporting Marshall within six months (McDermott 2007).[14]

These new technological capabilities, or affordances, helped make blogging a *fitting* rhetorical response to the recurrent exigence we have identified. For an exigence characterized by the corporate commodification of news, perceived loss of authentic public engagement, and a shared sense of political impotence, blogs provided ways to engage issues, to participate in discussion, to undercut corporate media homogeneity, and to turn audiences into participatory communities. These effects addressed directly the growing unease with public discourse. The interactive capabilities, the immediacy of response, and the ease of access all contributed to

13. There is, to our knowledge, no single authoritative source for the history of these technologies. We have relied on a variety of online sources, including Wikipedia (as of June 2007), and in every case have corroborated the dates with at least one additional source including history pages at Blogger.com, Flikr.com, and MovableType.com (Carvin 2007; Jensen 2003).

14. Interestingly, blogads highlighted the online blending of politics and journalism when the Federal Elections Commission introduced rules that made bloggers, unlike traditional journalists, subject to the rules governing campaign finance. The FEC "excluded all Internet communication from the definition of public communication" (Stevenson 2007: 77). This exclusion made it difficult for individual bloggers to attain the requisite "press exemption" that allows the media to "report and comment on political campaigns and elections without having to disclose the cost of this activity to the FEC" (10). The revenue stream from blogads apparently made bloggers subject to these regulations. Several blogging networks challenged the FEC rules based on a 1997 Supreme Court ruling, that the protections in the First Amendment not only applied to online material, but that "online content is subject to greater protection than that found in other more traditional media." The FEC eventually concluded that such activities were entitled to the press exemption.

the hope that blogging could support what Benjamin Barber has called "strong democracy," which he characterizes in rhetorical terms as "a democracy that reflects the careful and prudent judgment of citizens who participate in deliberative, self-governing communities" (1999: 585). Those engaged in public-affairs blogging have seen the fulfillment of this technological promise in the bottom-up involvement of ordinary citizens on the internet, which they call the "netroots" movement, (Armstrong & Moulitsas Zúniga 2006: 146). Sullivan, for example, claims that blogging "harnesses ... the true democratic nature of the web" (2002: par. 15), and Moulitsas maintains that "the word 'blog' still implies a certain level of citizen involvement, of giving power to someone who is not empowered" (qtd. in Chaudry 2006: par. 14). Barber himself was more cautious about the new communication technologies, recognizing that as much potential as they have for strengthening democracy, they can also support the "vices of politics as usual," the trivia of popular culture, and the anarchy and irresponsibility of user-controlled media. To return to an image we opened this section with, a blog may aim to serve as a town meeting but can also be just a soapbox. However, the influence that blogging has already had on public affairs suggests that the democratic potential is real, and the professed motivations of public-affairs bloggers certainly promote this potential.

The picture that we have been able to put together here suggests that public-affairs blogging became a recognizable social typification and is thus a candidate for genre status. This typified rhetorical action was enabled by a kairotic confluence of technological capabilities and widely felt, pervasive dissatisfaction with the political condition arising out of changed media regulation, commodified political discourse, and shared concern about disastrous global events. All this occurred against a continuing backdrop of the culture of celebrity and self-disclosure that motivated personal blogging. Blogging was a fitting response to the exigence that this confluence represented because it provided a way to address specific features of the exigence with specific capabilities of the medium. If genres are indeed rooted in recurrent rhetorical situations, and if we understand exigence as the defining feature of situation, then we might decide that the exigences of public-affairs blogging and personal blogging, and the shared motivations of these different groups of bloggers, are different enough that they underlie two different genres, or perhaps two clusters of closely related genres.

Of course, the situation continues to change, with increasing penetration of the blogosphere by the mainstream media and other commercial interests. Mainstream media have created their own blogs. Independent bloggers have signed contracts with MSM (for example, Andrew Sullivan is no longer blogging independently, having moved his blog to *The Atlantic Online*) or have entered into other commercial arrangements with publishers or other media groups, selling

ads through their blogs, marketing books about blogging, and generally vitiating their own claims about "seizing the means of production" to create a democratic discourse.[15] The distinction between the MSM and public-affairs blogging may not be sustainable. With the current turmoil in the configuration of the media business, the public-affairs functions of journalism, and the conduct of party politics, the kairotic coupling of exigence and affordances that we described above does not last long. The lack of a common user-generated name that distinguishes personal from public-affairs blogging, an absence that brings genre status into question (Miller 1984), may simply reflect the speed at which these situations have changed. It's telling that Moulitsas has reportedly claimed that the word "blog" may have outlived its usefulness (Chaudry 2006: par. 12).

Many questions about the blog as genre remain, even as they are rapidly becoming historical questions. Did the public affairs blog develop *from* the personal blog, or does it have completely separate roots? Can we distinguish citizen-journalism, journalistic opinion, political campaign, and political-movement blogs as genres or sub-genres? Should we distinguish public-affairs blogs that feature a strong central voice from those with multiple voices or authors? We do not intend to answer these questions here, and they may well be unanswerable in any objective, empirical sense. However, such questions about the evolution of blogs are interesting theoretically because they require us to understand the process of genre birth and differentiation, and the forces of recurrence and change, better than we do.

4. Discerning genres on the internet

In using these two brief explorations of blogging genres to think generally about the phenomenon of genres on the internet, we wish to take up two issues that now seem central: the nature of recurrence and the relationship between genre and medium. We will address this latter issue first, because it can inform our thinking about the former, although our arguments in both cases will have to be preliminary, as both issues deserve extended historical and observational research. In looking at blogging, we have emphasized the pace of change, which problematizes the phenomenon of recurrence, and we have also looked at some of the

15. In 2004, the listing of j-blogs on the Cyberjournalist site showed 116 published independently, 86 published on professional news sites, and 62 on journalists' personal sites. The corresponding figures in 2007 were 96, 199, and 51 (Cyberjournalist 2007). Sullivan's online biography chronicles his move to the *Atlantic* without commenting on the irony of it, given his earlier "manifesto" about the power of independent blogging (Sullivan 2007: http://andrewsullivan.theatlantic.com/the_daily_dish/bio.html).

affordances, the technical capabilities of the medium that distinguish blogging from other genres, as well as making possible such rapid change. Blogs are generically distinct in part because they are "native" to the internet, and specifically to the web, which is to say that they could not exist as they do in another medium, such as print or even stand-alone digital form. They are inherently linked, public, and malleable. So the nature of the medium is bound up in the genre, and our question here is whether that is a rhetorical relationship.

What makes a genre "native" to one technology or medium rather than another depends in part upon what the medium allows for, or its affordances. "Affordance" is a concept originally developed by psychologist James Gibson to describe the interaction of an animal with the natural environment (1986), then applied by Donald Norman in his discussion of how humans interact with the designed environment (1989), and later taken up with some enthusiasm in the field of human–computer interaction. It is a useful way to think about the rhetorical potentialities and constraints specific to a medium of communication. One of Gibson's early definitions is still suggestive: "The *affordances* of the environment are what it *offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes,* either for good or ill" (Gibson 1986: 127, emphasis original). For example, a given natural environment affords materials and locations for birds to build certain kinds of nests but not others. In the context of the internet, affordances take the form not of material properties or ecological niches but rather properties of information and interaction that can be put to particular cognitive and communicative uses. Links, instant distribution, indexing and searching, interactivity, and other features of the internet constitute affordances that differ from those of print media, and a specific configuration of affordances is what constitutes the blog as distinct from other internet media.[16] Gibson's definition suggests further that there is a suasory aspect to affordances, in the same sense that "artifacts have politics" (Winner 1980). An affordance, or a suite of affordances, is *directional*, it *appeals* to us, by making some forms of communicative interaction possible or easy and others difficult or impossible, by leading us to engage in or to attempt certain kinds of rhetorical actions rather than others. The affordances of blog hosting sites led many people to believe that they really did want to create public online diaries, a conclusion that few might have reached in the absence of the technology.

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16. Some have suggested or implied that print media do not have affordances, or "functionality" (for example, Shepherd & Watters 1998), or that the medium is a factor in web genres but not (by implication) genres in other media (for example, Askehave & Nielsen 2005). We believe it's more useful to compare media on the basis of their differing affordances.

The affordances of communication media have informed several relevant lines of thinking. Meyrowitz, for example, has characterized work by scholars such as Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong and Katherine Hayles as "medium theory," which describes the general cultural and psychological effects of orality, scribal literacy, print, and electronic media. Early observations about electronic media, for example, note that in contrast to print media, they reprise several qualities of oral cultures, including simultaneity of action and reaction, widespread access, an emphasis on feeling over analysis, and a weakening of centralized authority (Meyrowitz 1994: 57–58). Another line of thinking that has connected genre and medium through affordances draws from Vygotskian activity theory, which examines goal-directed activity as a process involving objects, instruments, actors/collaborators, divisions of labor, domain knowledge, and communities. In much of this work, genre is explicitly treated as an instrument within the activity system~~, a tool,~~ and is identified primarily with the medium in which it is manifested—a piece of paper, an interface, even a writing implement (e.g., Russell 1997; Spinuzzi 2003).

None of this work, however, has explored the rhetorical relationship between medium and genre, that is, the way that the suasory aspects of affordances "fit" rhetorical form to recurrent exigence.[17] The migration and adaptation of established genres into the new internet medium, as well as the emergence of "native" genres, suggests that affordances are not determining but rather that they interact with exigence, as objectified social need. Sometimes a new suite of affordances fits an exigence in much the same way as an old medium did, and the genre then simply adjusts, meeting the same recurrent exigence in a somewhat new, possibly better way; the distribution of peer-reviewed research articles in PDF form is an example. But sometimes, as seems to have been the case with the blog, the new suite of affordances potentiates an exigence that had not yet been met, had not yet perhaps even crystallized. The medium, in this case, serves a maieutic function for the exigence, coaching—or coaxing—into being a latent social motivation that, when available, is instantly recognizable to large numbers of people. For the personal blog as we described it in our earlier study, that exigence was the postmodern destabilization of the self, the endless play of subjectivity in a time of mediated voyeurism, widely dispersed but relentless celebrity, and challenges to the boundaries between

17. In her rationale for the adaptation of rhetorical criticism to the internet, Warnick argues that online s can be examined with traditional rhetorical concepts but that the medium itself requires new critical methods to comprehend a variety of changes introduced by the new medium, but she does not consider genre (2007).

public and private (Miller & Shepherd 2004). This is not to say, necessarily, that the medium creates the exigence, or that the exigence develops in direct response to the medium, for in an important way the social needs develop also in interaction with a larger cultural moment, though they may be inchoate and unsatisfied. But it might be fair to say that the new genre arises from the combination of exigence and affordances, along with the modeling of forms and topoi offered by antecedent genres.

In the case of what we've called the public affairs blog, a different exigence arose in the wake of the events and influences we've described above: a frustration with corporate news media and political communication as usual against the background of political events, natural disasters, and international terrorism. As noted above, the affordances offered by blogs—interaction and connection, immediacy, instant access, low overhead—fit the exigence in rhetorically compelling ways, and because a great many people construed the exigence in about the same way at the same time, these blogs gained multiple adherents very rapidly. A dynamic interaction between medium and exigence much like that for the personal blog focused a diffuse set of social motivations in a distinctive way, even as the technology and the conventions continued to change, with multiple authorship, syndication, tagging, and advertising. Influence from antecedent genres, which we have not had time to examine here, probably came from traditional journalism and political uses of older media, including talk radio and tabloid journalism, as well as from older genres of vernacular political communication such as the eighteenth-century pamphlet and broadside and the nineteenth-century penny press.

The blog, it seems clear now, is a technology, a medium, a constellation of affordances—and not a genre. When blogging technology first became widely available through hosting sites, it was perceived to fit a particular exigence arising out of the late 1990s, even helping to crystallize that exigence, and the personal blog multiplied its way into cultural consciousness. The genre and the medium, the social action and its instrumentality, fit so well that they seemed coterminous, and it was thus easy to mistake the one for the other—as we did. As the cluster of affordances multiplied repeatedly, recurring again and again on the screen, reproducing and creating expectations, the blogging medium itself seemed to be the motivation for all that rhetorical action. And as the technology evolved, and as multiple users engaged in ceaseless experimentation and variation, the suite of affordances called blogging was discovered to fit other exigences in different ways, so other types of blogs proliferated, other genres—public affairs, corporate, tech support, team, etc.—and the coincidence between the genre and the medium dissolved. We suspect that something like this process may have happened with earlier media, such as the letter, the book, the memo, the radio broadcast, and email: when

they were new, the medium *was* the genre; but adoption and experimentation led to differentiation and the multiplication of genres anchored in the same medium.[18] In this process, what persists is not only the medium but also the recurring rhetorical forms that it enables, or even requires (such as, for blogging, reverse chronology, links, comments, present tense, brevity), as well as the audience expectancies that these forms promote (such as frequent updating, connection, authenticity).

The persistence of form over time and across changing situations and cultural conditions, which Kathleen Jamieson calls the "momentum of form," brings us back to the question of recurrence, which is the focus of Jamieson's early study of antecedent genre as rhetorical constraint. Her essay provides a useful counterpoint to our inquiry, based as it is on two institutions—the papacy and the presidency—that have endured for centuries and are quite the opposite of volatile (1975: 410). In Jamieson's Darwinian approach to genres, influential or habitual or status-bearing forms represent the "chromosomal imprint of ancestral genres" (1975: 406) that resists change. Such imprints can produce genres that are not optimally adapted to current situations: the papal encyclical carries imprints of Roman imperial documents, even today, and the early state of the union addresses and congressional responses were strongly influenced by the relationship between the British monarch and the parliament, a model of governance that had in fact just been rejected by the new nation. The antecedent genres in both cases led to specific rhetorical performances that were, in Jamieson's judgment, not ideally adapted to the contemporaneous situation. The persistent forms also produced genres that *realized* the exigences, and indeed the entire rhetorical situation, in ways that could have been otherwise, generating expectancies and conventions that reflexively helped define the institutions and the genres.

Such persistence of inappropriate form might be due either to oppressive institutional constraints or to the inadequate inventional powers of a rhetor. In either case, such recurrence can be attributed, paradoxically, to what we might think of as an excess of decorum, an over-deference to precedent or to authority. Kenneth Burke might call such deference a kind of "piety" toward form, a sense, however misplaced, of "what goes with what" (1965: 75). "Piety," he says, "is a schema of orientation …. The orientation may be right or wrong; it can guide or misguide." In his example, the flock of birds that rises with the flight of one that senses danger was right if the danger was real, but "If the danger was not real, the flock was wrong. In either case it had been pious" (1965: 76).

Schemas of orientation, or what Alfred Schutz called the types that constitute our social stock of knowledge, are built up over time from birth, through experience both

18. For a suggestive description of this process with respect to the letter, see Bazerman (2000).

direct and indirect, and are strongly resistant to change (Schutz & Luckmann 1973). These typifications are sedimented and reified in language, socially reinforced, and put to use as interpretive and pragmatic resources. Through the process that Anthony Giddens has called "structuration," such types serve as both resources for and outcomes of social action (1979); that is, we rely on them for mutual recognition and we produce and reproduce them as we engage in mutually comprehensible social action. The phenomenon of recurrence, then, relies on typification for its material, both psychological and sociological, and on structuration for its self-perpetuating process. But piety, as Burke discusses it, is the motivation, the engine of recurrence. It derives from "the yearning to conform with the 'sources of one's being'" (1965: 69). Our pieties are deeply psychological, "since in childhood we develop our first patterns of judgment, while the experiences of maturity are revisions and amplifications of these childhood patterns" (1965: 71). But pieties are also fundamentally sociological because they are also, as Burke says, proprieties, connected to the needs, interests, and moralizing of the flock.

Piety toward form may help explain recurrence on the internet, that is, our ability to find, or construct, stability within volatile or chaotic environments, to resist change even as it continually washes over us. The volume and volatility of information, fragmentation of attention, speed of dissemination, multiplicity of connection that characterize the internet are accompanied by the facile replication of form, sometimes imposed by a technology, sometimes habitual, sometimes deliberate. These features produce what some have called a "viral" circulation of discourse but also a kind of stability through the increased possibilities for recurrence. Our pieties would incline us to notice and cling to these possibilities.

Piety toward form is not sufficient, however, to explain the recurrence that underwrites genres, if we understand genre not centrally as form but as social action, as appropriate response to recurrent exigence, which is in turn a socially objectified—and thus a repeatable—motive. We must have pieties toward exigences, yearnings for shared schemas of motivation. But if, as Burke also tells us, "motives are shorthand terms for situations" (1965: 29), then such pieties will necessarily summarize the typifications of situations already necessary for social action. Piety toward political frustration or toward the destabilization of the self is a kind of identification, a recognition of and sympathy for a shared situation, a validation of one's own and others' shared "yearnings"—for the rightness of the familiar and the familiarity of that which is right.

But if shared pieties become proprieties, then we are in the realm of decorum, which is the rhetorical representation of piety, the "fittingness" of form to action to exigence. In the Ciceronian tradition, as Michael Leff reminds us, decorum points in two directions (1990). It directs us outward toward the situation extrinsic to the rhetorical act, toward the accommodation of substance, form, and style to audience, tradition, material conditions. And it directs us inward toward the

intrinsic qualities of that act, toward the accommodation of substance, form, and style to each other. The former is a pragmatic criterion, the latter an aesthetic one.

As the crystallization (and sometimes, as Jamieson reminds us, the fossilization) of decorum, genre operates both extrinsically and intrinsically. Extrinsic accommodation is what recent genre studies have paid most attention to, the ways that the conventions of genre help typify a situation and serve as resources for invention, constraints on form, improvisational routines for addressing the situation. Intrinsic accommodation has received less attention, and we have thus seen genres largely in functional terms, without concern for the satisfactions—even the pleasures—they may provide through the merging of substance, form, and style into an aesthetic whole. The personal weblog, because it is almost invariably a voluntary activity, requires us to think about generic satisfaction and pleasure, unlike the professional and academic genres that have been frequently studied. But if we look, we may discover that these official genres can also provide their compensatory pleasures.

Together, the intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of decorum comprise what Leff calls an "architectonic force, the point at which thought and action, form and content, and wisdom and eloquence coalesce" (1990: 112). Generic decorum thus comprises precisely the "internal dynamic" that Campbell and Jamieson describe as "binding together" a genre's constellation of forms with its situation (1978: 21). Such a dynamic reflexively serves as a focus for our rhetorical pieties. And it explains the power of both types of blogs we have examined, personal and public, to replicate and proliferate, to create communities, to inspire widespread rhetorical passion. The way the blogging medium fits these recurrent (and evolving) rhetorical situations, producing a model of social action that is both functional and pleasing, is an achievement that can only be understood as aesthetic. That aesthetic power produces a situated decorum that helps stabilize the churning volatility of the internet—if only briefly—thus making genres possible.

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