representations are equal, but it focuses our attention on the procedures and criteria by which these representations enter a communicative network and are evaluated, held accountable, and established as credible. People may resist this recognition as it destabilizes the absoluteness of knowledge and seems to undermine certainty of truth, but recognition of this concept provides a path to a more detailed understanding of how things reach the status of truth within different communities and the criteria by which truth is held. Knowing this can help us write more carefully and effectively to represent the world, events, and ideas credibly within and across communities and to discuss the representations of others in relation to the social worlds the knowledge circulates within.

2.2
GENRES ARE ENACTED BY WRITERS AND READERS

Bill Hart-Davidson

One of the more counterintuitive ideas in writing studies has to do with the nature of a genre—not just how the term is defined but also about what genres are. Common-sense notions of *genre* hold that that the term describes a form of discourse recognizable as a common set of structural or thematic qualities. People may speak about detective novels as a genre distinct from romance novels, for instance. We can also recognize nonliterary forms as genres, such as the scientific article.

In writing studies, though, the stabilization of formal elements by which we recognize genres is seen as the visible effects of human *action*, routinized to the point of habit in specific cultural conditions. The textual structures are akin to the fossil record left behind, evidence that writers have employed familiar discursive moves in accordance with reader expectations, institutional norms, market forces, and other social influences.

The idea that genres are enacted is associated most strongly, perhaps, with Carolyn Miller's argument in a 1984 article in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* titled "Genres as Social Action." Miller's (1984) argument was influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin (1986), and has been developed over the last thirty years by a number of scholars studying writing in organizational settings such as David Russell (1991), Charles Bazerman (1988), and Catherine Schryer (1993), among many others.

This view holds that genres are habitual responses to recurring socially bounded situations. Regularities of textual form most lay people experience as the structural characteristics of genres emerge from these repeated instances of action and are reinforced by institutional power

structures. Genres are constructions of groups, over time, usually with the implicit or explicit sanction of organizational or institutional power.

This view of genre has several interesting implications most newcomers to the idea find challenging and fascinating. One is that no single text is a genre; it can only be an instance of that genre as it enters into contexts (activity systems) where it might be taken up as such an instance. Readers and users of texts have as much to do with a text becoming an instance of a genre as writers do (see 1.2, "Writing Addresses, Invokes, and/or Creates Audiences,"). And because creating a genre is not something an individual writer does, but rather is the result of a series of socially mediated actions that accumulate over time, genres are only *relatively* stable. Generic forms are open to hybridization and change over time. This is why Schryer refers to the textual features of genres as "stable for now" forms, acknowledging that they can evolve.

JoAnneYates (1993) offers a fascinating historical account of this sort of genre hybridization in the context of the rise of American industrialization. In this account, we learn that standard features of genres, such as the header block of a business memo appearing in the upper left corner, become stable in use situations. When documents were stored in vertical stacks rather than in file cabinets, the memo block allowed for easy search and retrieval. This convention remains today even in email though we no longer need to flip through hard copies to find a message. As we might expect, the convention is less stable due to changes in the use context; users can choose to hide or minimize headers, for instance, in many email programs.

2.3

WRITING IS A WAY OF ENACTING DISCIPLINARITY

Neal Lerner

The central claim of this threshold concept is that disciplines shape—and in turn are shaped by—the writing that members of those disciplines do. In sum, the relationship between disciplinary knowledge making and the ways writing and other communicative practices create and communicate that knowledge are at the heart of what defines particular disciplines.

As an example of the relationship between writing and disciplinarity, consider the use of citations. On the most visible level, citation practices vary by discipline—and often within subdisciplines. Whether the practice is an author-last-name parenthetical system, author-last-name-plus-date