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CCR 632: Writing Pedagogies  
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## **Towards an Activity Theory Made Whole(er): Non-Human Conceptions of Genre Theory in the Composition Classroom**

### **I**

In her *Toward a Composition Made Whole* Jody Shipka calls for a (re)conceptualization of composition and a (re)attunement of the compositional processes that have our attention. Working towards a richer, multimodal approach to composition instruction, Shipka suggests that we take up a sociocultural framework, one that “provides us with ways of attending to the social and individual aspects of composing processes without losing sight of the wide variety of genres, sign systems, and technologies that composers routinely employ while creating text” (40). To innovate in the ways that Shipka calls for requires us to be more attentive to what I will refer to as the *mundane* aspects of our writing process – the components of our composing that are devalued and overlooked, rendered invisible and yet remain just as essential to our process as drafting, revising, and commentary. Of particular concern in this paper are genre theory’s nuances, or more specifically Soliday’s conception of genres as constituting social actions that hold social groups together (xi). Combining aspects of Actor-Network Theory, Activity Theory, and Genre Theory, this paper posits a framework for genre that accounts not only for the sociocultural forces that instigate specific genres but also the human and non-human actants that are enmeshed in its relatively stable forms. In attending to the aforementioned multi-pronged tug-of-war that constitute a genre’s emergence, we can come to understand genres as not possessing the fixity we normally attribute to them and we can more readily perceive their boundaries as relatively stable and yet under constant negotiation.

Genre Theory marks a meaningful departure for our perceptions of writing situations and how they develop. Rather than genre establishing a static form for composer response, Genre Theory suggests we consider genre as emerging from rhetorical situations, not necessarily creating them.

Equally important, however, is that we acknowledge the need to understand the specific situations that specific genres respond to in order to employ them effectively. As Wardle explains of the relationship between genre and composer, “Genres arise when particular exigencies are encountered repeatedly; yet each time an exigence arises, people must be attuned to the specifics of the current situation in order to employ the institutionalized features of the genre effectively – or, in some cases, throw them out” (768). Herein lies two important peculiarities with genre: that it responds to specific rhetorical situations and also that composers engaging with the genre exhibit some agency in its development. To overlook these important relationships in the composition classroom could lead students to view genre as a static form divorced from any rhetorical purpose, or what Wardle refers to as a “mutt genre” (777). Soliday takes a similar stance with genre in her exploration of the tensions between what she puts forth as “wild” and “domesticated” genres. Soliday takes “wild genres” to be those that respond to a real life rhetorical situation whilst “domesticated genres” tend to be derivatives of these wild genres that act as social actions themselves (13). There is some slippage to be cautious of though when approaching genre assignments in this way for it is easy to unintentionally assign domesticated or mutt genres while striving for a wild genre. For instance, a domesticated genre may task students with imagining writing an editorial to their university’s student paper with teacher-generated, predefined guidelines. A logical conclusion to “fix” the domesticated genre would be to have students actually write and submit the editorial, to have them respond to the actual exigence. The fallacy in this ‘correction’ is that it does not consider the intrinsic motivation required of the composer; the student is still only completing the assignment because it was *assigned*.

As much as we can manufacture a purpose for students, this is far different from their seeing a purpose as composers. Not unlike the assigned “leader” who *exhibits* good leadership behavior without ever truly *becoming* a good leader, if we prescribe a purpose for student composing, no matter how authentic it may seem, it will always be, to some extent, performance and this performance will always be limited in impact. That is not to suggest that composition instruction is but a fool’s errand, on the

contrary, there is great potential for students to move beyond performance; it merely asks that instructors (re)attune the focus of the classroom toward the critical nuance and complexity of genre.

## II

Revisiting “Genre as Social Action” thirty years later – a followup paper fittingly named “Genre as Social Action (1984), Revisited 30 Years Later (2014)” - Carolyn Miller expands upon her original position that genres are categories/types of social action and that they act as intellectual scaffolds to construct community knowledge (58-59). In this way we can view genres as containers for knowledge, building blocks that then become part of new structures of knowledge that will then in turn be used towards even newer constructions of knowledge. In revisiting her work on genre theory, Miller makes strong considerations for the affordances that the internet has provided but also how these new affordances elucidate features of old(er) media we have grown accustomed to overlook, to take as a given: “The coming of new media has required us to notice the old media that were there all along but had become invisible through habituation” (64). This is not all that different from Shipka’s “Disappearance Effect”; albeit for Shipka this was more in reflection of the technologies themselves. Miller continues to develop a notion of genre as an anchoring force, a “boundary object,” which takes on “different functions and meanings in different theoretical and disciplinary contexts” (Miller 65). Considering that new media asks us to consider, among other things, the tensions between medium and product, material and symbolic, Miller suggests that we adapt our understanding of genre to accommodate these forces: “genre has become a much more complex, multidimensional social phenomenon, a structural nexis between action and structure, between agent and institution, between past and future” (69). It is important to emphasize the temporal aspect of genre because it establishes the important precedent that genres shift, interact, and develop over time. Moreover, this enmeshment of forces that ultimately define genre broaden our purview for how genres actually develop and how fluid they remain despite having a semblance of stability. We may then visualize

genre as what emerges when the accumulation of forces have distributed onto each other to a perceivable stalemate.

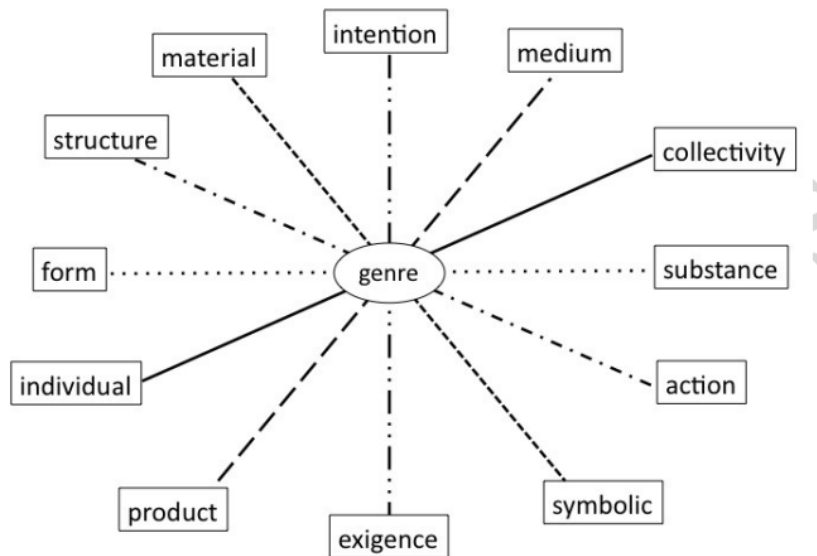


Figure 1 (Miller 69)

Genre manifests and is maintained in motion, a perpetual, multi-pronged tug-of-war between numerous sociocultural forces. This serves to position genre as always having been freed from the fixity we normally attribute to it, its boundaries are always under ongoing negotiation and therefore susceptible to shifts. More to the point, perceiving genres as a network, an enmeshment of forces, suggests that an alternate/updated theoretical apparatus may be appropriate and useful.

In “Rethinking Genre in School and Society” Russell asks that we view genres as “rhetorical tools-in-use” and “knowledge as the work of an ongoing activity system abstracted and commodified into more or less (but never fully) stabilized content” (546). We can think of a traditional activity system in its most simple form as a system where a human employs tools to interact with an object to achieve a desired outcome. What complicates this for us, and activity systems are indeed far more complicated, is when we consider the pervasive, rather complex, sociocultural factors woven into the activity system. Moreover, while Russell’s aforementioned observation is not all that different from how genres have been theorized thus far, Russell, taking from Cole and Engestrom, complicates his conception of activity theory even further by “[embracing] both human agents and their material tools,

including writing and speaking” (509). While activity theory does indeed address the interaction between subject (human) and object (non-human), in considering what Miller has provided, we have to account for agency in a more nuanced way. While I do not suggest jettisoning Activity Theory, I do propose we consider the creative possibilities of Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) because it accounts for non-human agency in helpful ways.

Activity Theory and ANT both contend with assemblages and to some extent humans and non-humans. Considering that we are complicating our notions of how genre functions to illuminate the multitude of influences working in the background, it will be useful to theorize how genre works within a network, what I will define as an assemblage of human and non-human actants. As Spinuzzi explains of genre in *Network*:

But at the same time, genres develop, hybridize, interconnect, intermediate, and proliferate to support development in those networks, providing the flexibility that networks need if they are to extend further and enroll other allies or activities. (17)

This description of genre aligns well with previously mentioned conceptions of genre boundaries that are not fixed but more so blurred, that what keeps them hinged together is not definitively singular but constitutive – it is not one thing connecting to one thing, but rather several things actively connecting together to form a distortion. In short, Spinuzzi opens a means to examine genre’s inherent instability, that as a networked entity, genre is more the result of overlapping, competing forces. In this view, as with Miller, genre emerges as a social action in so much that an action is needed to restore the instability that keeps the network reacting, sputtering along, growing. While there are clear parallels between the two, Activity Theory and ANT have important points of contention:

...activity theorists still argue humans are the final stop: individual and collective human agency is what asymmetrically drives the activity; even though mediational means increase and develop human abilities, those developing human abilities are at the core of

expertise. In contrast, actor-network theorists understand expertise symmetrically, as emerging from the assemblage rather than being driven by the human action. (191)

The role of the human and the role of assemblages are clearly important, but what happens if we do not choose one or the other as a driving force? Humans and non-humans have similar agency, but what that agency permits them to do is different. The role of the human in a network is different than say a database, but we can easily see that both have an essential function in that network, and that the network would be drastically changed without either's presence. Pushing Activity Theory more towards an Activity-Actor-Network-Theory (ANAT), we might imagine that humans provide certain affordances in an assemblage and that non-humans provide other, equally important affordances. In the specific case of genres, we may say that genres are taken up by humans to fulfill social action but at the same time they provide humans access to non-human affordances in a moment of conflating, but still in motion, forces. The human's inability to see the perpetual motion of the entanglement (genre) is a reminder of the actual limitation of their agency (these forces are too numerous and too ingrained for us to keep track of the assemblage in its entirety); non-humans are useful for keeping track of things we cannot on our own. Moreover, not unlike Latour's conception of the human/non-human hybrid, humans are granted important affordances by taking up assemblages (like genre). However, we must bear in mind that this system is far from deterministic, humans cannot be simply reduced to tools for the whims of the non-humans actants. Humans have agency. They do indeed influence genres when they take them up but that influence is not absolute.

An important feature of theorizing genre in this way is the role of the author/composer in taking the genre up and enacting the social action it surfaces in response to. Bazerman reaches a similar assertion in his "Systems of Genres and the Enactment of Social Intentions" explaining genre as the means with which human actants interact with "a complex social machine" albeit with an important caveat: "This machine...does not turn us into cogs. The machine itself only stays working-in-so-far as we participate in it and make our lives through its genres" (79). While I do not wish to challenge his

assertion, I am interested in how ANT's account of non-humans in the assemblage can complicate the agency Bazerman affords to humans; not to diminish human agency per se but rather to explore this connection between human and non-human with a tad bit more nuance. As with Miller, Bazerman explores genre as reoccurring solutions to rhetorical situations in addition to a means for human actants to navigate their respective roles; his example being the inventor and her invention's patent. Considering what we have explored with genre as emerging due to conflicting forces, and that in hybridizing with them humans are granted new rhetorical affordances, we may view the patent genre as a means for the inventor to address and navigate power relations afforded to governing bodies: that through the patent genre she accomplishes a social action, one that adheres to the parameters maintained by other human/non-human assemblages (lawyers/patent laws, judges/legal system, manufactures/product, etc.). Moreover, we must also understand that specific humans are not always distinctively at the center of these assemblages although they still play a part.

Bazerman's examination of the inventor in relation to her patent reveals an important relationship between the human and non-human in an assemblage, or more specifically an important distinction between the "Inventor" and an "inventor" – capital 'I' inventor versus lower-case 'i' inventor. The capital 'I' inventor would be the hybridization, the assemblage, of the inventor and all the other actants that go into enacting the patent itself (the invention itself, the researchers and lawyers assisting with the legal framework for the patent, the judge and the legal system which upholds the patent, and so on and so forth). The lower-case 'i' inventor is actually the human themselves – who is also part of the assemblage – the one who becomes synonymous with the capital 'I' assemblage that actually enacts the patent. We can think of a similar relationship with composers (figure 2), that there is

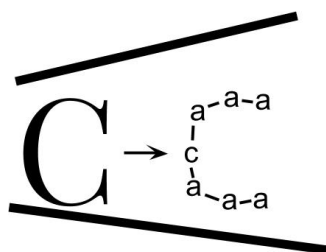


Figure 2

a capital 'C' composer which constitutes the complex human/non-human actant assemblage with which the lower-case 'c' composer is also a part. Another useful conception that Bazerman posits concerns "Systems of Genre" or the inter-relatedness of genres that interact and subsequently follow each other in a discernible manner. Bazerman provides the example of the systems of genre surrounding a job advertisement and all the other genres that surface around it during its implementation: "[Our] job ads are followed by letter of application, which are in turn followed by phone calls setting up interviews, and so on" (98). There are two important things to notice here: that this chaining of genres functions very similar to a network in its own right, complete with reactions that do not always progress linearly and singularly, and that there is an important murkiness as to whether or not humans or non-humans are perpetuating the chain. Again, this is not to assert that humans are merely tools-of-use, but rather, as with the case of an inventor or composer, they have agency in their functional roles which is aided by assemblages of humans and non-humans actants already.

### III

Thinking about these more complicated conceptions of genre and composer, I intend to take these meditations to task with analyzing my current curriculum and pedagogy in instructing a first year composition course this past term. In reflecting my decisions through the previously explored ANAT framework, I seek to explain the shortcomings of my conception of genre that ultimately lead to mine assigning student's writing activities which failed to instigate an important critical depth in regards to genre, composers, and composing processes. In critiquing my approach, I hope to identify specific areas for improvement that will allow me to devise a pedagogical stance and curriculum better suited to help students become receptive to what Reif and Bawarshi refer to as "boundary crossing" (330).

The rendition of first year composition examined here is a course divided into three units, each complete with a cumulative unit project. The general trajectory of the course was meant to transition students from more complicated conceptions of literacy in the first unit, then towards a more intense examination of visual literacy and visual/digital rhetoric in the second, and then finishing with a



remediation of the academic research article genre. Each unit was centered around a unit project with smaller weekly assignments meant to provide a space for students to work through the thought and compositional processes necessary to create their unit projects.

The first unit project was a digital literacy narrative. I instructed students to put together an assemblage, an accumulation of text, pictures, songs, videos, etc. that represented key moments from their literacy progression. These moments could be more traditional – such as the first time they were read to, the first book they read all the way through, someone who encouraged them or discouraged them from reading – but also the non-traditional literacy moments – such as the first music album they listened to all the way through, a card or board game that motivated them to learn to read, or even a movie that got them interested in subjects they study independently. Students would arrange these moments in a discernible way that makes sense to them (such as a timeline or a mind-map); the important part was for them to see connections between these seemingly disparate moments, to see the complicated mix of traditional and non-traditional literacy moments that constitute their individual literacy history. In the second part of this project, I had students write a reflection paper that traced out these connections (they needed to connect at least three moments into a larger trajectory). In preparation for this “inter-connecting” project in class, one class period was spent examining intertextuality specifically. We watched clips from films that borrowed/referenced other films and then we discussed how films intertextually connect to one another to align with themes and plot points but also to seize the attention of prospective audiences. We also examined how hip-hop artists strategically sample other artists in order to align their work within the larger discussions of specific communities; we then had a larger class discussion about defining ‘audience,’ in some cases, as identifiable communities with their own expectations that artists must compose towards. The smaller writing assignment assigned after the class period asked students to map the intertextual connections within a text of their choosing (again with a broader, non-print specific definition of ‘text’): I required students to select a book, song/album, movie, or videogame, and then identify and visually demonstrate at least

five connections (i.e. a mindmap). Students would then write a response that analyzed and discussed how the composer establishes these connections and what affordances their compositions obtain by doing so.

As with the aforementioned example, the smaller assignments were meant to prepare students to complete unit projects. This conceptual scaffolding was accomplished largely through non-traditional composing genres that asked students to identify their own subjects to work through in their composing rather than the instructor dictating what the subjects of their compositions would be (student choice was a key component). These smaller weekly writing assignments were paired with reflective journal entries that asked students to analyze the connections between their reading and composing. While students did work through textbook chapter readings and academic articles, I also supplied examples of video essays and TED talks that possessed a similar level of depth; the rationale being that if students were to be encouraged to experiment with genre boundaries in their unit projects, then they should be exposed to compositions that themselves pushed at these same boundaries (namely medium and mode). Genres, taken in this way, functioned as “aids to thinking and action” (Prior 17) and were meant to be activities that students engage with to spur iterative writing that would then be built upon throughout the unit as they approached their unit projects. The composing process for students was meant to be a chaining of genres that would intertextually weave together to form a unit project; the feedback received from their instructor and their peers was meant to instill an awareness of how students’ composing is constituted-by and in discourse-with voices other than their own. The course also sought to have composers make their own choices as it pertained to prompts, to encourage students to ascertain what form their approach to the genre would take; the prompts were to become increasingly more a description of an exigence than dictating a genre in its entirety.

Essentially, the course sought to help students develop an awareness of composing as a multimodal practice, that pushing at perceived boundaries in genres was not only a normal and regular

practice but also a necessary one. It sought to achieve a similar effect to what Prior finds in “Speech Genres to Multimodal,” that students come to understand that all composing is already multimodal :

Multimodality has always and everywhere been present as representations are propagated across multiple media and as any situated event is indexically fed by all the modes present, whether they are focalized or backgrounded. In this sense, all genres are irremediably multimodal; the question then becomes what particular configurations of multimodality are at work in a particular genre system. (27)

Importantly, there is no need to bring multimodality into the classroom for it is already always present, rendered invisible by the different privileging of different aspects of composing. We should not be teaching students to “bring” multimodality into their coursework for this is aligned more with a product-oriented approach to composition. Therein lies an important shortcoming of the aforementioned composition course, it undermines its own emphasis on process by attending to multimodality as something “new” or additional rather than as something already inherent in all composing. As we continue our exploration of this important slippage with this composition course, it may be useful to explore how the specific smaller assignments functioned, what relationships they had to not only teaching composing as a process instead of product but also how the smaller writing assignments as genres (knowledge containers and building blocks) contribute towards students’ formation of their unit projects. For the remainder of this section, I will examine how the aforementioned intertextuality assignment which was meant to work in conjunction with the digital literacy narrative unit project.

Broadly defined, intertextuality is the inevitable connecting between texts – texts being defined broadly and encompassing print-based media in addition to music, film, videogames, etc. – that texts rely on the existence of and engagement with other texts in order to exist. Having students think about how knowledge builds upon other knowledge is not that difficult to grasp when it comes to research, but when it comes to their own composing it is difficult to recognize the implicit, below the surface

ways that they are influenced by texts. What students do understand quite well is references, or rather recognizing references to other texts. Popular culture makes its connections to other texts rather obvious, with television shows like *Family Guy* and movies like *Shrek* referencing other texts for comedic purposes. To understand the references is essential to getting the joke; students prevent themselves from being outsiders in so much as they learn what they need to know in order to “get it.” As Bazerman explains in “How Texts Rely On Other Texts” the easiest layers of intertextual connection to notice are those with *intertextual distance*: “Intertextual relations are also usually most easily recognizable when the textual borrowings involve some distance in time, space, culture, or institution” (5). Outside of making references, the aforementioned intertextuality analysis assignment tasked students with picking a text and then tracing its different intertextual connections. To prepare them for this assignment, students watched two video essays that looked at two drastically different ways intertextual references are used in film and TV shows (the first suggested that composers might use intertextuality to bypass shallow composing by playing to an audience’s nostalgia whilst the second suggested intertextuality enriches viewer comprehension because it is building upon prior knowledge); students then completed a journal response asking them to identify these perceived differences and what they felt intertextuality was. As mentioned previously, in class students worked through the intertextual connections that hip-hop artists carefully craft into their music. The important takeaway was for students to understand that hip-hop artists like Kendrick Lamar accomplish more than selecting a catchy beat, that they pull strategically from previous musicians’ work in order to borrow their authority in addition to bringing these influences into the forefront of the current hip-hop music scene. In specific regards to audience, there is an expectation that composers are aligned with their audience’s expectations; for hip-hop artists, their audience expects them to be aware of the music and traditions that influence the communities they are responding to. Not all that unlike citing a source in a research paper, artists who sample and re-mix pull in the work of previous artists in order to align their composition within a larger conversation in their target community. Furthermore, after exploring the

rhetorical purposes of intertextuality within compositions, students were then assigned the aforementioned intertextual analysis assignment. An important takeaway from this smaller assignment was to examine how compositions are influenced by a composer's influences, and that composers sometimes intentionally (and also unintentionally for that matter) infuse these influences in their own composing. For their unit projects, I asked students to turn this intertextual lens onto themselves and trace implicit influences in their own composing (the actants that connect with them that then make the capital 'C' composer hybrid that they become while composing).

The unit project, a digital literacy narrative, ultimately tasks students with tracing the texts that have influenced their own development as readers and composers and to display these connections in a visual and/or interactive way. Essentially, students were to create an intertextual map of their influences and then reflect the connections they could now see but perhaps had not realized before (rendering the invisible visible). The unit project also sought to push at the boundaries of a narrative as being a largely print-based genre by *requiring* students to engage with a more visual modality, to have students explore the different affordances of various mediums by assigning students to work with these different forms. While students did well reflecting on the affordances that different mediums allow, their analysis/reflection on their chosen content was largely summative: students stated what the objects in their assemblage were and why the visuals they chose represent these objects, however they did not make connections between these influences and their own composing. What I took to be a "wilder" genre that tasks students with reflecting on their intertextual influences had resulted in more of a performative composition (the dreaded mutt genre). There was no intrinsically meaningful insights gained for their own role as the composer but rather a list that, while seemingly different from the print-based narrative because it used visuals, was ultimately put together because it seemed to meet the expectations that they gathered I had for the assignment but was not making explicit. Despite creative control and a deeply personal subject (themselves), the genre functioned as a performance for the instructor all the same.

This account of a misguided wild genre turned mutt genre provides a useful case study for our more complicated, human/non-human conception of genre and the subsequent ways that it can reveal not only the shortcomings of trying to arbitrate genre bending but also ways to improve future iterations of the course that will better help students to develop conceptions of genre that account for human and non-human forces influencing genres' development and, by extension, their own composing. Consulting Miller's diagram (figure 1), my intention for the unit project was to have students manipulate aspects of genre. Ultimately students had very limited knowledge of and control over several factors that constitute a genre: while it seems that students had a degree of agency over the digital literacy narrative genre, in actuality almost all of it was prescribed. In assigning students to use a visual mindmap (the medium) and that the content had to be specific kinds of experiences (content), and considering in the class we did not discuss genre with any complexity, this left very little for the students to explore on their own, and they felt less compelled to explore boundaries. In short, I dictated the medium and form (even if by restricting certain forms) but also the actual substance/content of the composition, for while students choose what moments to encapsulate in their literacy narrative assemblage, I inadvertently added a degree of fixity to the genre. Moreover, the genres themselves were divorced from these complicated interconnections; even provided an exigency and form, the prompts do not account for the various actants that we observe in Miller's diagram (and to which there may be even more that we are still not accounting for). I would therefore posit that without a real world analog to these numerous forces, said factors would all then have to be prescribed, for a genre cannot exist without these factors (it just does not discriminate where they come from). Essentially, a mutt genre is not simply a degraded genre but rather it represents a genre that has not filled out all the complicated relationships that go into a genre on its own; nothing outside of performance is possible because I had to fill in the gaps in the forces that tug to create a genre. Students are not intrinsically motivated because they working through an exigence that I have imagined, it is not tied to anything "real." Despite the literacy narrative being meant for personal reflection, the practiced exigency can be

nothing other than performance toward my assumed expectations. Students' composing was largely for numerous, separate assignments, and there was no obvious connection between these smaller mutt genres and the larger unit project. Essentially, the course was attempting to help students see complexity in genre and its intertextual interconnections but through scaffolding clearly delineated products rather than working through the underlying processes and sociocultural factors (among other non-human actants) that interact and 'tug' thereby prompting the emergence of a genre in the first place. Put more concisely, students were tasked with getting at a composing process without actually working through a process at all. That is not to say that the smaller assignments were pointless, but rather they need to be (re)positioned within a larger, more critical discussion of genre.

As with the smaller assignments, the readings directly concerned declarative information. I had students read through chapters of *Everything's A Text* where they were provided very clear, textbook definitions for medium, mode, genre, audience, purpose and literacy, but there was nothing for students to process, most information was expected to be taken on its own merits (i.e. "medium is the tool that the composer uses within that channel to deliver his or her message..."). The provided information did not truly introduce a means to explore interconnected sociocultural processes or complications with language/discourse. Furthermore, important concepts like intertextuality were introduced and explained largely as "referencing" in one video, but this then had the undesirable side effect of students only seeing it as such. Essentially, students were not provided ways to complicate their understanding of activity systems, the intricacies of their construction were left unattended in the background as they have always been for students. Students may be told that these interconnections happen, but I did not give students opportunities to examine how their role in activity systems are negotiated, let alone where these system's boundaries are located. As Wardle explains of composers' interactions with genres, "...each time an exigence arises, people must be attuned to the specifics of the current situation in order to employ the institutionalized features of the genre effectively – or, in some cases, throw them out" (767). In regards to this course, students were expected to be able to attune to specifics but were not

given any space to practice doing so; their space was used to practice a product, not an attuning process. What this calls for, then, is a refocusing of the assignments themselves that attend to students developing a more critically informed, resilient attuning process. No matter how interesting or aligned to a real social action a genre may seem, if students are not developing an intrinsic sense for genre use, I would expect them to still feel an impetus for performance. Essentially, teaching toward composing as a process asks that we not settle for a process as being revising, drafting, and discussion but also an awareness of the processes that necessitate genres; not only attending to the mundane aspects of our composing but the processes that create these rhetorical situations we attend to.

#### IV

In this final section, I will put forth an approach to first year composition that I believe focuses more on process-oriented thinking and subsequent composing; to theorize a course that requires students develop a sense of attunement to the social situations that necessitate genres. To help with this, I return to Shipka's conception of composing put forth in *Toward a Composition Made Whole*: that we construct a composition classroom that "provides us with ways of attending to the social and individual aspects of composing processes without losing sight of the wide variety of genres, sign systems, and technologies that composers routinely employ while creating text" (40). An important departure then in the previously explored composition course is that we spend as much time guiding students' engagement with the forces that interact to create genre but also the ways that students interact with non-human actants to become capital 'C' composers. While such a course will have genres for students to work through, the following suggestions are focused more on teaching composing and genre as ongoing processes and interactions: the upcoming theorizing is not meant to be a meticulous composition course plan, but rather these suggestions are larger pedagogical frameworks/concepts that I think should be addressed in the composition classroom.

Perhaps the most fundamental change is the sequencing of units. Rather than addressing literacy and then rhetoric and then genre, there should instead be a chaining of literacy, rhetoric, genre, and



multimodality woven throughout the course. The goal of the three units would then be to develop an appropriate rhetorical awareness, or what Reif and Bawarshi describe as “to develop students’ awareness of how rhetorical conventions are meaningfully connected to social practices and how, as a result, genre knowledge can help students recognize and adapt more effectively and critically to new writing contexts” (314). That is not to say that the course would have students work through several genres, for as we saw with the previously explored first year composition course, the knowledge that students need of genre is not so much the end result but rather “how we got there.” The focus would then be shifting students toward becoming “boundary crossers” and “from a reliance on whole genres to reliance on smaller constellations of strategies” (Reif and Bawarshi 326). This would require a course that engages students with the complexity of sociocultural weaving as seen in genre and also their own composing processes. Focusing on intertextuality from the very beginning of the course as an effective bridge to sociocultural complexity requires that I not relegate intertextuality to a specific writing assignment and/or reading; intertextuality would instead be framed as concept that permeates composing in profound ways. As Bawarshi finds in “Beyond the Genre Fixation: A Translingual Perspective on Genre,” we may look at genre as a negotiation of power relations, and we might best serve students by investing in “how we can make genres and genre knowledge effective means of access to forms of power and participation” (244). This framing is completely compatible with what Miller posits, and it suggests that by helping students understand power relations as inter-related, or intertextual for that matter, we can actually help them to understand the complicated interconnections that constitute genres in the first place. That being said, this earlier intertextuality unit would begin by examining the nature of power in language-use and knowledge-construction instead of defining intertextuality more broadly as “referencing.” Setting these theoretical routes would ensure that examining intertextuality through popular culture becomes a tangible example of *one* way intertextuality is exercised rather than the *definitive* case. For example, my previous classroom activity that asked students to explore hip-hop music and the reasons behind artists’ strategic sampling would

be used instead to provide one applicable example of intertextuality's rhetorical affordances (i.e. borrowing authority and/or attuning to an audience) rather than a narrow, specific definition of what intertextuality can be. In this re-imagined unit, it is my hope that students would be better able to ascertain intertextuality's complexity and how it might inform their digital literacy narrative unit project; that there are several ways students are implicitly influenced by other texts and they need only realign their gaze to elucidate this complexity. Moreover, consulting Miller's diagram (figure 1), this unit would be focused on the tensions between intention and exigence (power and relation to power if you will) in addition to the tensions between the individual and the collective (i.e. a composer and their intertextual influences). Exploring these tensions through their readings (Bell Hooks and John McWhorter for instance) and classroom activities (discussion being an important part), students would also write blog response posts that task them with working through these tensions. These blog posts would not be framed (imagined) as a genre other than what they actually are (writing prompts that prompt recollection and thought on the topic at hand), spaces to practice analysis that would then be used as preparation for the classroom discussions now at the forefront of classroom activity. The unit project itself would not be an isolated project, but rather one that students build upon unit to unit. For this first unit, students would create an assemblage (a collection of multimedia objects), but one informed by the critical inquiry that has taken place throughout the unit. The course content is meant to help students navigate sociocultural connections, and in doing so they can identify and choose their project's focus (such as the exigence they want to respond to) rather than having it assigned. Essentially, throughout the course students will be creating/adapting their own genre according to their engagement/analysis of the tensions between forces that cause genres to emerge in the first place.

Moving into the second unit, students will spend time looking at their specific composing processes (transitioning from macro influences to micro influences). Having spent time looking at the non-human actants that influence power relations, students will then explore how other non-human actants contribute to their own composing process, or how students as composer's "attune" their

consciousness for composing. In “Chronotopic Lamination” Prior and Shipka describe this at attunement as largely concerned with “environment-selecting and -structuring practices (ESSP’s), the intentional deployment of external aids and actors to shape, stabilize, and direct consciousness in service of the task at hand” (219). For the purposes of this second unit, these ESSP’s would be the other human and non-human actants that are utilized by composers when they are composing. Students would then work through this unit as a way to examine the subconscious, but ultimately very much intentional, decisions they make in order to position themselves for composing. Returning to Miller’s diagram yet again (figure 1), this portion of the course would address the tensions between material/symbolic, individual/collectivity, and form/substance. In doing so, students begin to look at how human and non-human actants mesh together and influence not only their roles as composers but also the significant ways these actants affect the formation of genres. An important point for students to realize is that much in the same way that genre emerges and is provided relative stability by the tug of human and non-human forces, they too as composers experience similar stability from a similar enmeshment. The unit project would ask students to revisit their unit one assemblage and to expand/create a representation of their “composer assemblage” (to trace out the human and non-human actants that constitute the capital ‘C’ composer assemblage within which they are part). I would ask that students choose the medium/mode (among other genre defining forces) for this assemblage provided that they now possess more thorough genre analysis skills. Essentially, this assignment encourages students to resist semblances of determinism and to push back on the boundaries of their own composing, to explore their agency as an important actant within the capital ‘C’ composer (figure 2). Rather than assigning students a specific writing assignment, they are instead analyzing the work they did with the previous unit’s project, albeit with this newly realized hybridization in mind.

By the last unit, students have already explored forces that influence the emergence of social actions (genres) and they have examined the interplay between their agency and other actants’ agency in activity systems (notably their own composing). In regards to genre, it is my intention for students to

realize at this point that genre is an assemblage of forces, human and non-human actants, that allow composers to participate in complex, interwoven activity systems; an action that they could not effectively engage with on their own. As Bawarshi explains in “Sites of Invention,” genres are important “conceptual realms within which individuals recognize and experience situations as the same time as they are the rhetorical instruments by and through which individuals participate within and enact situations” (113). This is not, however, due to a new loss of agency, but rather an acknowledgment of how the non-human have always been with us and that we have always taken them up to enact action; what has changed is how we pay attention to our hybridization. Moreover, students may begin to see how their roles as composers is shaped by a similar stalemate of forces, that part of what makes a genre relatively stable are boundaries imposed on them as composers. Again, this is not to succumb to notions of determinism but rather for students to see how they can, do, and could exhibit agency within rhetorical situations by taking up genres: they (lowercase ‘c’) hybridize with actants (capital ‘C’) to engage with an activity system (that engagement being genre, the social action itself). This final unit would then ask students to complete a remediation, or what Prior and Shipka define as “re-media-tion” in which students attend to “the ways representations move across media, they for example a book may turn into a screenplay and storyboards into a movie and then a games and so on...old media shaping new media and vice versa and with old media continuing to be used after new media are developed” (215). Students then choose composing they have done or that they have engaged with in their studies and remediate it. Students will have to specifically explain how altering medium/product and structure/action change the relationships between the other actants. It remains an important goal of mine for students to see that changing some aspects of a genre does not destroy the genre but rather changes its expression; that the reason the genre is not destroyed is because there are numerous factors that contribute to its creation. In crossing these genre boundaries, students themselves are exhibiting agency with how the genre is taken up (their actions are changing the expression but not absolutely) and students can better understand the composer’s role in genre and her ability to shape its

features while still fulfilling the social action it represents. While remediating, students need to consider these other factors that influence genre (figure 1): to know of these factors and to manipulate them moves students away from performing perceived instructor expectations and more towards enacting social actions themselves.

More than anything, complicating our understanding of genre is only fruitful if we use these insights to change the way we teach it to students. Provided the insight Activity Theory and Actor-Network-Theory provide, the very construction of genre is a messy process (as is composing for that matter). When teaching composing as a process, it would benefit our instruction to address the multitude of processes that are necessary for us to compose. An important aspect of multimodality is understanding that everything has always been multimodal, we just can be made more aware of what has always been. These same complications extend themselves to genre, a point appropriately addressed in Miller's timely revisiting of her original genre work. Rather than demarcating human agency as supreme or relegating the human to determinism, students would benefit from seeing how their own identity and function as composers in an activity system is an enmeshed relationship between sociocultural forces (the individuals and institutions that function within the activity systems we are caught up in). While this project does not offer any resolute answers – it may even just (re)ingratiate with old(er) problems – what it does open is a larger space within the complexity, a space where we can begin to account for the smaller parts of the interweaving genres, composers, and composing processes.

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