Chapter 9: Genre structure

The model of typographic communication proposed in Chapter 5 suggested that actual texts reflect three underlying structural imperatives, each corresponding to one part of the writer-text-reader relationship. The analysis of pages from The handbook of sailing demonstrated some of its assumptions about the needs of reader, the communicational intention of the writer and the way that the technology of printing is used. That analysis might reasonably be generalized to other instances of the genre 'home reference manual' (the term used by its publisher). Other genres differ because of their different combination of topic, artefact and access structures: genres as different as posters, brochures, textbooks, journals, conference programmes or bus tickets could be analysed in a similar way.

In this concluding chapter I shall explore the concept of genre as a contribution to typographic criticism and training, although, for reasons that should become clear, I do not attempt a comprehensive classification of genres. Indeed, de Beaugrande (1980: 196) introduces his discussion of the related concept of 'text types' with the warning that they are best left as 'fuzzy classifications':

> 'Unduly stringent criteria, like the rigorous borderline between sentences and non-sentences, can either (1) open up endless disputes over the admissibility of unusual or creative texts to a type, or (2) lead to so many detailed types that any gains in heuristic usefulness are lost.'[203]

Genre is an ancient literary concept that, like so much else, goes back to Aristotle (the Poetics). In that context, Conley (1979) has sounded a

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[203] A similar comment is made by Graesser & Goodman (1985: 114) about the analysis of text structures: 'Many representational systems are so complex that they have alienated virtually all researchers except for the one who invented the theory'

similar warning:

> 'If the history of ancient rhetoric teaches us anything, it is that the degree to which a discipline or method atrophies or declines is directly proportional to the complexity of the taxonomies it generates.' (p. 52–3)[204]

Although in the present context we are interested primarily in genres, or varieties, of typography, it seems that there are substantial connections between typographic and literary forms. The most thorough theoretical treatment of literary genres is by the Canadian critic Northrop Frye (1957), whose account of the origin of genres makes an interesting reference to what I have called artefact structure—the means by which text is delivered to its addressees:

> 'The origin of the words drama, epic and lyric suggests that the central principle of genre is simple enough. The basis for generic distinctions in literature appears to be the radical of presentation. Words may be acted in front of a spectator; they may be spoken in front of a listener; they may be sung or chanted…The basis of generic criticism in any case is rhetorical, in the sense that the genre is determined by the conditions established between the poet and his public.' (Frye 1957: 246–7)

Such technical aspects of the artefact are still an important determinant of the normal literary use of the term 'genre' at the broadest level. In particular the writing-system rules employed by a writer—rules concerning the status of the line, in particular—determine whether a work will be received as a poem or a novel. Hawkes (1977: 137) comments:

> 'the two distinctive genres of language in its written form, poetry and prose, emit iconic messages about their nature through the visual means of typography over and above (or under and beneath) the symbolic messages of their content.'

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[204] In view of current interest in the 'generic coding' of documents for electronic publishing, these are warnings that should be taken seriously. While I have not managed to find evidence that the concept of genre has been seriously addressed by those developing such systems, any classification scheme that claimed to identify the characteristics of all types of document would undoubtedly be received with great interest.

However, Hawkes moves immediately to an example that complicates this simple distinction between poetry and prose. He 'quotes' a passage from Ulysses[205] where Joyce switches from what we might term novel-prose to newspaper-prose, complete with a bold centred headline. (It is a moot point to what extent one can 'quote' typography without actually reproducing it in facsimile[206]—his version differs typographically from my own copy of Ulysses, which itself almost certainly differs from earlier editions.) Even in the literary context, then, it seems that a wider range of typographically-distinct genres—wider than just poetry and prose—must be recognized.

Brewer (1985: 189), comparing oral and written story-telling traditions, regards the printing press as largely responsible for the extensive divergence of genres in literate societies:

> 'Many oral narratives appear to be carrying out a wide range of functions at the same time. Thus, a single oral narrative may be doing what Western literature would do through a novel, a dirty joke, a history text, a scientific journal article, a religious text and a philosophical essay…Literacy, the printing press, and specialization of function in Western society have allowed the development of highly specialized genres. Along with the specialization of discourse force (e.g., to inform, or to entertain, or to persuade) has gone specialization of discourse form.'

Whereas these authors (Frye, Hawkes and Brewer) use the concept of genre to link the way texts are produced with their rhetorical intention, Miller (1984) has moved the emphasis further toward the writer-reader relationship. She suggests that although Frye links genre with situation, his actual criticism is still based on formal characteristics of language: 'For [him], situation serves primarily to locate a genre; it does not contribute to

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[205] Hawkes gives the reference as pp.107–108, but does not say which edition. The relevant passage, which is headed 'IN THE HEART OF THE HIBERNIAN METROPOLIS' appears on page 118 of the 1971 Penguin edition. The headlines continue for a number of pages.

[206] In my own experience, even when one submits facsimile illustrations of typography, publishers are sometimes tempted to treat them as quotations and reset them.

its character as rhetorical action' (p. 153). Her definition of genre as 'social action' implies that 'a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centered not on the substance or the form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish' (p. 151).

Werlich's theory of text types

Werlich (1976), whose text grammar places the analysis of genre in a central position, also regards typography as a significant marker of what he terms 'text type'. He establishes a hierarchy of what are effectively genres, although he does not use that term. Werlich's work does not appear to be widely cited (in the English language literature, at least), but since, firstly, it is an unusually thorough treatment of text types, and, secondly, he is particularly sensitive to the role of typography, it deserves attention in the present context.

At the highest level of Werlich's scheme is text type, of which there are five kinds: description, narration, exposition, argumentation and instruction. The first three of these stem from the topic of the text—spatial, temporal and systematic relations between concepts; the last two seem to be related more to the need to effect a change in the addressee (to persuade or instruct). De Beaugrande (1980) uses almost identical categories:[207] descriptive, narrative, argumentative, scientific (ie, exposition), didactic (ie, instruction); he adds literary and poetic. However, having recognized these categories, de Beaugrande goes on to refer to such things as advertisements, newspapers and recipes, without making it clear which text types they correspond to.

Werlich overcomes this problem by making a further distinction between text groups (fictional and non-fictional) and text forms, variants of which

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[207] Both Werlich and de Beaugrande probably draw their categories from German text linguistics, where, to judge from their citations, there seems to be a long tradition of text classification. In particular, both cite work by Gülich & Raible (eg, 1972).

correspond rather more closely to ordinary language categories such as those mentioned by de Beaugrande. I have already noted Werlich's relatively faithful reproduction of the typography of his examples (Chapter 1), and he evidently regards typography as a particularly important determinant of the addressee's critical stance. Depending whether the text is fictional or non-fictional, the reader must connect textual references to people, places or events—either to real phenomena or only to the text's internal frame of reference. According to Werlich:

> 'Non-fictional texts (e.g. news stories, reports, comments, regulations, etc.) are marked by signals (e.g. types of title and headline, including references to the text form, and dates, place-names, kind of publication, typography, layout)…' (p. 42)

He uses an almost identical formulation when he comes to discuss 'fictional texts (e.g. short stories, novels, sonnets, plays)' (p. 43).

Text forms, in Werlich's scheme, are rather broad categories that correspond to his five text types, but which are broken down into further sub-categories: argumentative text forms, for example, include comment and scientific argumentation. Text forms are often realized in practice as text form variants which are 'composed in accordance with a conventionally fixed compositional plan (e.g. the leading article and the review are variants of the comment)' (p. 46). His examples of fictional and non-fictional texts would thus appear to be text form variants.

Werlich's scheme appears to offer an attractive theoretical framework which assigns a linguistic role to typography (although not a role which is defined in any detail) and copes with typographically distinct text form variants such as advertisements, newspapers and so on. His detailed descriptions of examples are perceptive and draw on a wide range of linguistic concepts. However, the rather dogmatic classification into five text types is not very satisfactory when actual texts are examined. It is not clear, for example, whether a particular text is expected to fall into only one category—it is not hard to find a single prose passage containing a combination of, say, narration, description and exposition. Werlich does at

one point recognize that his text types are ideal structures which might be combined in practice, but his selection of examples gives the opposite impression. A further problem is that many texts employ one apparent structure in order to achieve another covert goal. Advertisements, in particular, are placed awkwardly into the category of instruction; most do indeed try to influence behaviour, but often indirectly. And many advertisements require no direct action of the reader but are published for general public relations purposes; they might better be classed as exposition or argumentation. Werlich is therefore vulnerable when he suggests a single compositional plan for advertisements:

> '(1) headline (with an optional subhead and an optional illustration)
> (2) body copy
> (3) signature line' (p. 126)

The five text types stem from Werlich's notion of the 'cognitive matrix of the communicant's mind' in which he identifies five corresponding kinds of cognitive perception (of time, space, etc). The communicant (or writer) is thus assigned the dominant role in Werlich's communication model; indeed, he presents a diagram of the encoding-decoding variety discussed in Chapter 5. While the 'cognitive matrix' adds an apparent theoretical depth to his scheme, it results in the practical difficulties just noted. De Beaugrande, by way of contrast, makes very little of his text type definitions, which he tosses in as something that 'might prove useful for further research' (p. 197). He repeats the warning, quoted earlier, that they are 'fuzzy sets of texts among which there will be mutual overlap'.[208]

Genres as ordinary-language categories

By treating genres (text form variants, in Werlich's terms) as basic

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[208] It is also interesting to note that de Beaugrande defines text type in a similar manner to the model of genres presented here, although referring to a different set of underlying structures:
  'A text type is a distinctive configuration of relational dominances obtaining between or among elements of: (1) the surface text; (2) the textual world; (3) stored knowledge patterns; and (4) a situation of occurrence' (de Beaugrande 1980: 197).

categories, we may avoid the intellectual gymnastics that result from Werlich's attempt to apply cognitive categories, which apply to individuals, to texts, which are social phenomena. Ordinary-language genre labels are generated in response to real needs felt by communities of text producers and users; they thus have an empirical, perhaps an evolutionary, basis as social realities.

This is precisely the view of the 'ordinary language philosophers', whose founding figure, JL Austin, justified it thus:

> 'Our common stock of words embodies all the distinctions men have found worth making, in the lifetimes of many generations: these surely are likely to be more numerous, more sound, since they have stood up to the long test of the survival of the fittest, and more subtle, at least in all ordinary and reasonably practical matters, than any you or I are likely to think up in our arm-chairs of an afternoon—the most favoured alternative method.'
> (Austin 1961: 182)

Among professional philosophers there seems to be considerable scepticism about Austin's faith in the survival of the fittest (Graham 1977), but his ideas are widely cited by linguists and others interested in language and communication.

Journalism can supply a simple example of the evolution of new descriptive terms to fit everyday linguistic categories. While book editors are usually content to see headings in terms of simple hierarchies (chapter heading, sub-heading, sub-sub-heading; or A heading, B heading, C heading), journalists have coined words that reflect the way headings are used in newspapers: some terms are based on the location of headings (skyliner, double-decker), others on their purpose (kicker, screamer, teaser). Journalism textbooks such as Evans (1974) usually supply their own variations on such terminology.

The ordinary-language status of typographic genres may also contribute to

the quest for the extension of literacy to include typographical factors. Within their own cultures, readers can develop a tacit knowledge of genres, even if they do not initially have the explicit technical knowledge needed to produce accurate examples themselves. In contrast, specialist linguistic or psychological terminology fits awkwardly into the context of typographic training—theoretical concepts like 'schema' and 'macrostructure' are hard to understand, and especially hard to apply to practical tasks, even by experts.

On the other hand, their ordinary-language status means that descriptions of genres reflect the full complexity of human interaction rather than the symmetry of a theoretical model. It also means that new genres are constantly being developed as topic, artefact and access structures change, or new combinations are required. Genres are therefore easier to instantiate than classify—easier to recognize in retrospect than to specify in advance. The study of ordinary-language or 'de facto' genres, as they are termed by Miller (1984), is essentially ethnomethodological; in her words, 'it seeks to explicate the knowledge that practice creates' (p. 155). New genres are probably recognized, and therefore named, by specialists before they percolate through to ordinary language use.

A further note of relativism and fuzziness is added when we recognize, firstly, that actual texts may belong to more than one genre, and, secondly, may contain components that belong to different genres. These problems were recognized by the sociologist Dell Hymes (1972, 1974) whose application of the concept of genre to spoken discourse has been influential among discourse analysts (cf Brown & Yule 1983, Coulthard 1985). He tackles the first problem by distinguishing between a genre and its performance, suggesting the use of the term 'speech act' to denote the latter. Actual speech acts need not necessarily fall neatly into a single genre category. He deals with the second problem by recognizing different levels of genres: elementary or minimal genres which in practice may be typically found grouped together into complex genres. Thus a religious service might constitute a complex genre, consisting of elementary genres

such as hymns, prayers, sermon and so on. Speech acts are instances of elementary genres, and Hymes uses the term speech eventto describe instances of complex genres.

Although Basso (1974) suggests the application of Hymes' approach to written communication, he is vague about the details. Certain problems might be anticipated (indeed, Coulthard, 1985, has noted problems with Hymes' system in relation to its intended context of spoken discourse). Although it is reasonable enough to see speech acts and events as hierarchical, it is hard to know where to stop. Hymes only suggests two levels, but we have to decide whether to add further ones. A church service might itself be a sub-component of a larger event—a feast-day, for example, which might, further, be part of Lent or some other sub-section of the church year.

Rather than propose a detailed hierarchy of genres in parallel to a hierarchy of speech acts (or text acts, documents or whatever equivalent term one might choose), it would seem more realistic to recognize that any class of objects—not only linguistic ones—can be seen in terms of genres, kinds, types or varieties, and that judgement about genre membership cannot be restricted to a single dimension. That is, we need not expect to find an exactly parallel relationship between categories of abstract entities (genres) and categories of real objects (texts). Campbell & Jamieson (1979) distinguish between a generic perspectiveand 'a crusading search to find genres'. They remark that

> 'The generic perspective recognizes that while there may be few clearly distinguishable genres, all rhetoric is influenced by prior rhetoric, all rhetorical acts resemble other rhetorical acts.' (p. 26)

Genre markers and genre rules

Genres are proposed as a basis for typographic conventions because, as ordinary language categories, they are intuitively and holistically

understood. But although I have proposed a model in which they are accounted for by three underlying sources of structure, each corresponding to an aspect of the writer-text-reader relationship, these are abstract categories that are not usually immediately apparent from looking at a typographic display.

In practice, it is more likely that genres are recognized by their more obvious and typical physical characteristics. These might be described or grouped in a number of ways. A full list might be as comprehensive as van Dijk's list of relevance cues (Chapter 8), but concentrating on the most readily apparent graphic features we might organize the typical features of typographic genres into four simple categories:

1. Typical context of use:situations (industrial, domestic, educational, bureaucratic etc); products (books, periodicals, objects, packs and containers etc); in the case of historical examples, date of origination.

2. Typical format and configuration: page (or field) size and shape, binding (where appropriate), paper or other surface material, frequency and use of colour, grid, boundary (line, box, column, page, book, container etc); extrinsic information structures (Twyman 1982) might be included under this heading

3. Typical treatment of verbal language:composition system (letter fit, image quality, etc), typographic style (atmosphere, associations), range of signalling (underlining, bold, italic, etc), additional features (rules, tints, borders, etc); intrinsic information structures (Twyman 1982) would be placed here.

4. Typical treatment of visual elements:pictorial syntax or style,[209] proportion of visual to verbal language, how visual and verbal language are integrated.

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[209] Ashwin (1979) has addressed the problem of characterizing illustrative style.

	Instructions for domestic appliance	Holiday brochure	Traffic sign
1. Typical context of use	Delivered with product	In travel agencies or sent by post	On posts or scaffolds near roads.
2. Typical format and configuration	Size may be restricted by container size; usually one or two colours; major division by language; minor division by operational task. Short examples may be on single sheets or concertina-folded, longer ones stitched.	Mostly A4 to fit standard racks and envelopes. Some slimmer for timetable racks. Bright colour; cheap shiny paper; Mostly saddle-stitched; short ones may be concertina-folded; long ones may have square backs	Standard shapes; metal or backlit plastic; standard colours; Multiple signs stacked vertically.
3. Typical treatment of verbal language	Sans-serif type, multi-column grid; blocked paragraphs; tables for technical info.; boxed or bold sections for warnings etc.	Display type may have special atmosphere; tables, boxes etc; small print at back; booking form on back page.	Standard Dt of Transport bold sans-serif type (upper & lower case)
4. Typical treatment of visual language	Schematized diagram of product with parts identified on diagram; in multi-lingual examples, diagram folds out with parts identified by numbers: separate keys for each language.	Colour photographs; some of hotels, some symbolic of destination (Eiffel tower, etc); May include drawings and decorative or atmospheric illustrations. Hotel illustrations are closely integrated with relevant prose and tabular info.	Heavy use of arrows & standard symbols, often used unaccompanied by words. Symbols & maps refer to immediate environment.

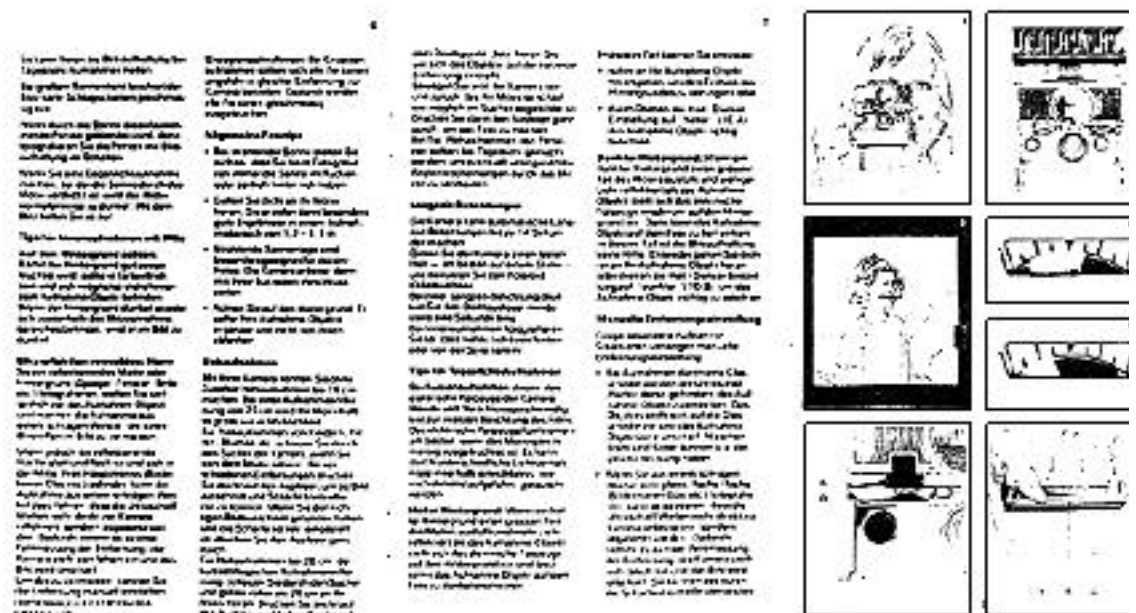Table 9.1 Typical surface features of some typographic genres

Figure 9.1 Typical multi-lingual instruction leaflet for a domestic product (right hand page folds out)

Figure 9.2 Typical travel brochure

Figure 9.3 Road traffic signs

Table 9.1 illustrates how three particular genres might embody typical combinations of such graphic features. Figures 9.1–9.3 illustrate some examples. In attempting even this limited exercise it becomes clear that one must discriminate between those features which a text must have to qualify for membership of a particular genre, and those features which are completely irrelevant to genre. But as well as such essential and accidental features, we may identify an intermediate category of typical features. For example, an essential feature of a match-box label is that it is small enough to fit on a match-box. It is also essential that it is actually on a match-box (or, properly captioned, in a collection or illustrated book). It will display typical formulations such as 'Safety matches', 'Made in

Sweden' or 'approx. contents 50', but other visual and verbal elements will be mostly accidental (as far as genre assignment is concerned).

Those genres with a high proportion of essential features are obviously more coherent, more easily recognized and more strictly rule-bound than those with few such features. The traffic signs considered in Table 9.1 must obviously be unambiguous for reasons of safety and law enforcement—not only ambiguous in their meaning but also in their genre, since drivers need to distinguish them from a host of competing visual information. Bank-notes are another kind of 'text' in which every graphic detail, including the paper, is rule-bound, while various other kinds of documents contain just some parts which are circumscribed by law—credit agreements, legal documents and company registration documents, for example. These may be contrasted with other genres which, although identifiable, are only similar by virtue of typical features. The other two examples in Table 9.1 exhibit no purely graphic features which are essential (although the A4 format of the travel brochures is consistent, it is shared by too many other genres to be a primary recognition feature). It is because most genres are similarly identified by clusters of typical features—which may be constantly changing as new fashions and innovations are absorbed—that any general classification scheme must remain fuzzy and tentative.

It is, of course, possible—in fact, common—for otherwise fuzzy genres to be regulated in particular contexts, if not with the force of law then through institutional rules or authoritative recommendation—house styles, for example. Other genres may be similarly articulated, but retrospectively rather than prescriptively—although newspaper design has been described in some detail, few journalists would treat such descriptions as instructions. Other genres still—the more avant-garde magazines, perhaps—may be similarly stereotyped but as yet unarticulated. Table 9.2 suggests a tentative structure for these varying degrees of rule-boundedness.

Basis of genre membership	Examples	Where the 'rules' are articulated
Similar because highly rule-bound		
Legally enforced	Certain aspects of credit agreements, traffic signs, product labelling, etc	Legislation
Institutionally enforced	Scientific journals Technical manuals	APA style (and similar) Military contracts[210]
Recommended by authorities	Book publishing Letter-writing	Butcher (1975), Williamson (1966) Etiquette manuals (Walker 1983)[211]
Ritualized but loosely articulated	newspapers/magazines	Evans (1973; 1974), Sellers (1968)
Stereotyped through intertextual reference and imitation	advertising, style and fashion magazines	Criticism (Thomson & Davenport 1980), Semiological analysis (Barthes 1977)
Similar only through coincidence of constraints	amateur advertisements on office notice-board	Similar examples analysed by Walker (1983)
Similar but not explicitly rule-bound		

Table 9.2 Some typographic genres on a 'scale of rule-boundedness'. Note that instances of the genres at all points on the scale exhibit similarity to one another—there is no implication that genres at the top of the scale are closer-knit than those lower down. The table simply aims to describe the extent to which similarities among members of a genre can be attributed to explicit rules.

Table 9.2 is meant to focus attention on the relative rigidity of various kinds of genre conventions, rather than the classification of particular genres. On a closer look it becomes clear that different aspects of the same genre may be rule-bound to different degrees and in different ways. Certain advertisements have to conform to legal requirements (in

[210] It is usual for military contracts to include a specification for the technical manual that is to accompany the equipment to be supplied. The specification may include details of format, illustration and typography. Kern (1985) discusses technical manuals for the US armed forces and provides numerous references to sources of procedures and standards.

[211] Letter-writing formats are institutionally enforced by school examinations. My wife, who is a teacher of English, tells me that students must remember to use different conventions for each exam—many students take both 'O' level and CSE English

particular, cigarette and political advertising), they voluntarily conform to recommended standards (although it is not clear whether 'legal, decent, honest and truthful' applies to graphic aspects of advertisements), they are likely conform to stereotypes,[212] and they may share the same practical constraints.

Genre rules and error detection

In cases of less well articulated genres, the identification of underlying 'rules' or slots (or, at least, the basis for similarity) can be something of a problem. The Danish linguist Hjelmslev (1959) suggested a commutation test. If the substitution of an element of a text significantly changes the meaning of the whole then it is clearly essential not accidental. This notion is taken up by Barthes (1964/67: 65) as a means of detecting semiological codes in imagery, and Eco (1976) similarly refuses to accept that an unsegmented work of art is 'a magic spell that is radically impermeable to all semiotic approach.' He explains the commutation test thus:

> 'If one changes one contextual element, all the others lose their primitive function and are usually unable to acquire another; they remain unbalanced, as on a chessboard where a bishop has been replaced by a third castle. If there is such contextual solidarity, then there must be a systematic rule.' (p. 271)

The commutation test deliberately tries to introduce 'error' into a text in order to tease out the underlying relationship of its elements. Some artistic works use what are effectively commutation tests when they challenge the conventions of their medium—painters may extend the image beyond the frame, composers may employ noises made by objects other than musical instruments and writers may invent new words.

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[212] Variations of the concept of stereotype—schemata (Gombrich 1960) and 'cultural codes' (Barthes 1967, 1977)—were discussed in Chapter 3 as ways of attributing systematicity to analogue images.

A published example of a typographic commutation test may be found in Jones (1976), who demonstrates Stanley Morison's appropriate use of typographic ornament by printing samples of Garamond and Baskerville type with contemporary and non-contemporary decoration (Figure 9.4).
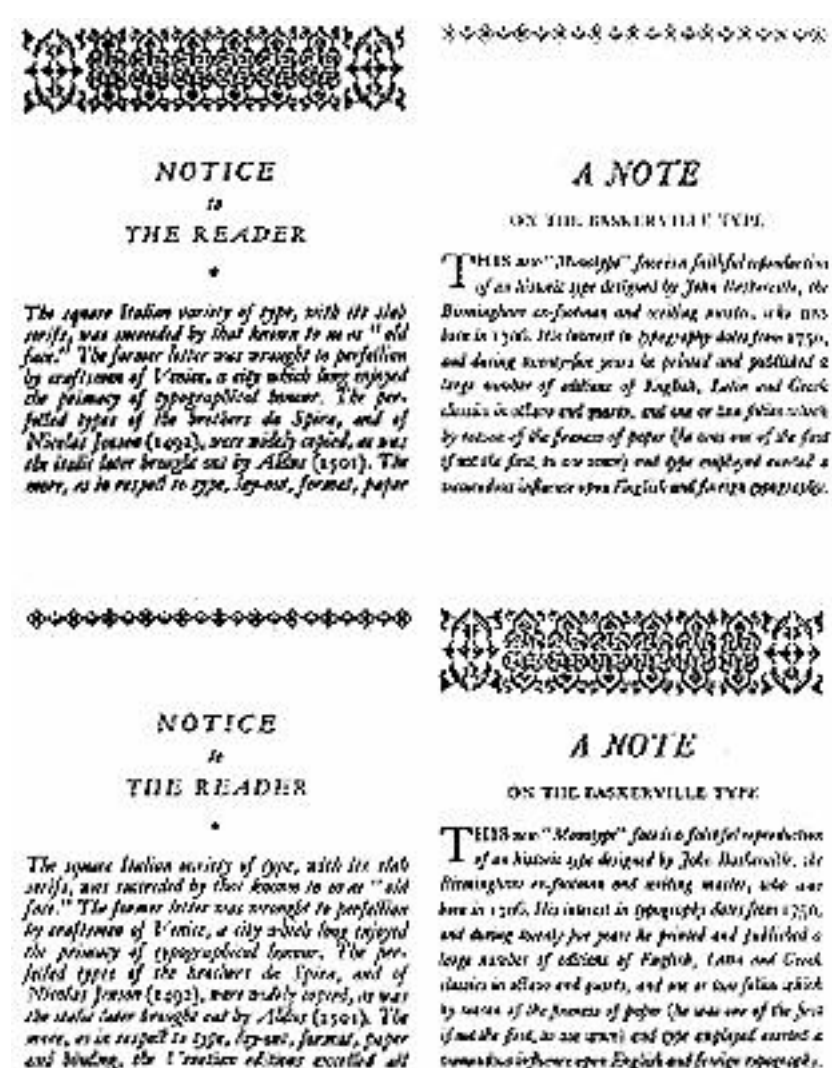

Figure 9.4 The top row is correct. From Jones (1976: 40).

Although it is more usual to speak of error 'analysis' (cf Lewis 1981), the resulting imbalance envisaged by Eco provokes a judgement that is more synthetic than analytic. It is a holistic or aesthetic apprehension of error that may only be expressed as puzzlement or dislike; its converse—a problem well solved—may be represented by feelings of pleasure, triumph and balance. For all their inability to articulate the problem (until it is

solved and order is restored, at least), the aesthetic judgement relied upon by most designers, although termed 'irrational' by some, can have real validity in the hands of skilled typographers (although the questions still remain: how can such skilled performers be identified? how can this skill be passed on to others?).

Whereas semiologists thus appeal to error detection as a means of revealing underlying codes, in terms of the model presented in this study, such contextual (or genre) imbalance may be seen as a failure to reconcile the requirements of topic, artefact and access structures.

Since topic, artefact and access structures represent participants in the communication process (and recalling Miller's [1984] definition of genre as social action), it is interesting to note that the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary's definition of 'solecism' links the grammatical and social notions of error. While the major definition is 'using incorrect syntax', a further definition refers to 'a breach or violation of good manners or etiquette'. The converse of this idiomatic recognition that manners are a 'grammar' of social behaviour is that grammar is a matter of good manners—considerateness—towards the reader. 'Considerateness' has in fact been suggested as the main criterion for good textbook design by some educational researchers (Jones et al 1984; Anderson & Armbruster 1985). This criterion also calls to mind Otto Neurath's vision of the transformer[213] as the 'trustee of the public'.

Genre and design method

Although the model presented in Chapter 5 proposes that conventional or genre structures represent the holistic configuration of the three basic

[213] 'Transformer' describes a role developed by the Isotype Institute as an intermediary between subject-matter specialists (who may lack graphic skills) and graphic artists (who may lack statistical expertise). The transformer is a communication expert acting on behalf of the audience. Twyman (1975) describes the original concept, and a modern application of the idea to instructional design was proposed by Macdonald-Ross & Waller (1976).

structures (topic, artefact and access), the relationship is not purely hierarchical. Because genres are stereotyped and conventional, they may take on a life of their own and provide a rival source of design constraints—a fourth structure to be considered in parallel to the others.
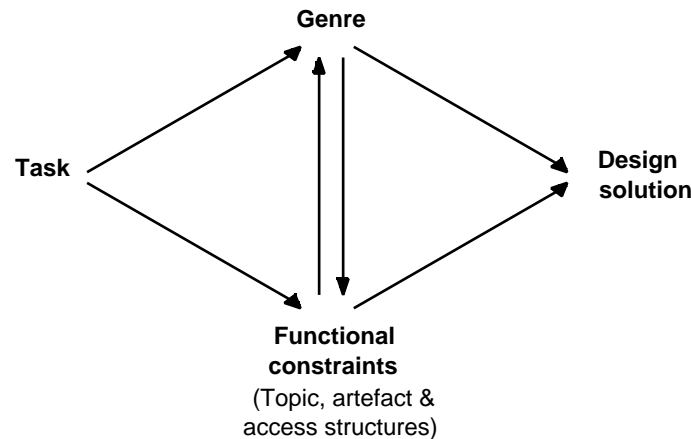
Figure 9.5 An ideal relationship between genre conventions and functional constraints, in which they are considered in parallel before fixing on a design solution.

The practical working of this relationship may be better expressed in terms of a simple diagram of the design process. In Figure 9.5, the design process is represented as the linking of a design task and a design solution through the four structures of the present model. Topic, artefact and access structures are here conflated under the term 'functional constraints', for economy of expression.

Although an ideal situation might be represented by a careful coordination of genre and functional constraints, by identifying four distinct routes from problem to solution we may tease out some aspects of the role of genres in design method. These are shown in Figures 9.6–9.9.

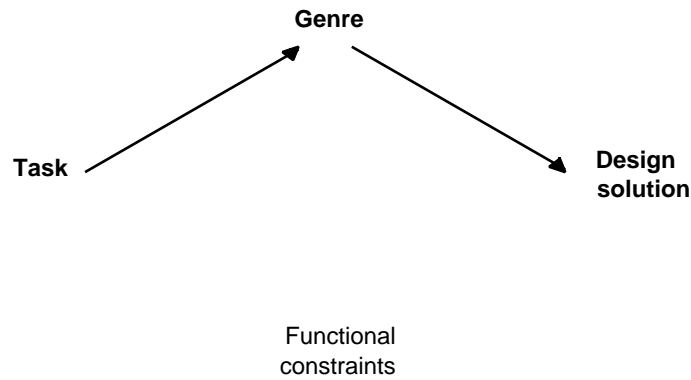Genre

Task

Design
solution

Functional
constraints

Figure 9.6

Figure 9.6 represents a design method totally reliant on genre, in which a conventional solution is proposed instinctively, and possibly correctly, but never tested against an analysis of the relevant functional constraints. In effect, the functional constraints analysis can only be achieved in such cases through feedback from users—something that may be inconvenient and expensive to obtain. In practice, it is unlikely to be a priority in situations where so little attention has been paid to the design process in the first instance. In any case, unless related to a functional analysis, it may not be possible to use feedback to make detailed modifications, although cumulative and overwhelming negative feedback may lead to a radical redesign—which, if still uninformed by a functional approach, may simply result in a new set of problems.

Genre

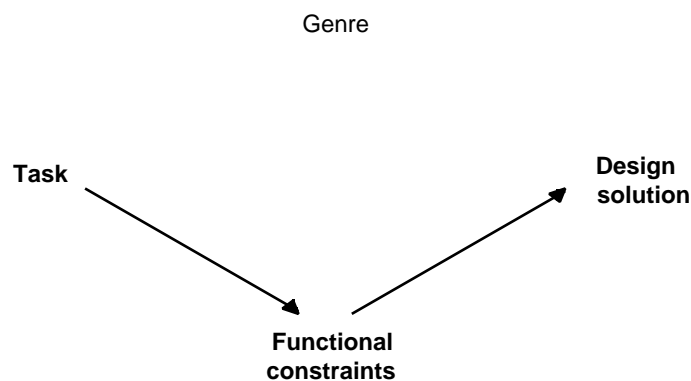Task

Design
solution

Functional
constraints

Figure 9.7

The converse of design solely by genre is diagrammed in Figure 9.7. Here an apparently sound and carefully researched technical solution is found, but, since it lacks the characteristics of a recognized convention, readers may not know what sort of style, strategy or critical stance is appropriate. They may take some time to deduce the 'rules of the game'. In certain unusual or innovatory situations, this may actually be the only option—but readers are likely to need special help. Genre-free technical solutions may in time lead to the development of new conventional structures—for example, the extremely 'unfriendly' user interface to the CP/M operating system for personal computers became well enough known by users for the writers of the rival MSDOS system to imitate it.
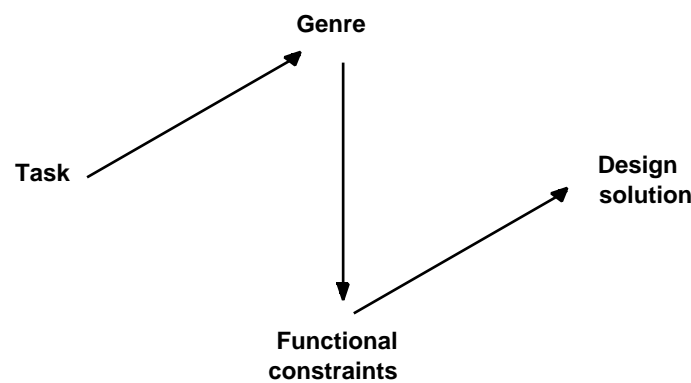
Figure 9.8

The next two alternative routes represent rather healthier design methods in which functional and genre considerations are considered in parallel. Figure 9.8 represents the reaching of a solution intuitively by identifying the appropriate genre; the solution is then validated against the functional constraints. This cycle of design and criticism was discussed in relation to typographic research by Macdonald-Ross & Waller (1976).

Genre

Task

Design
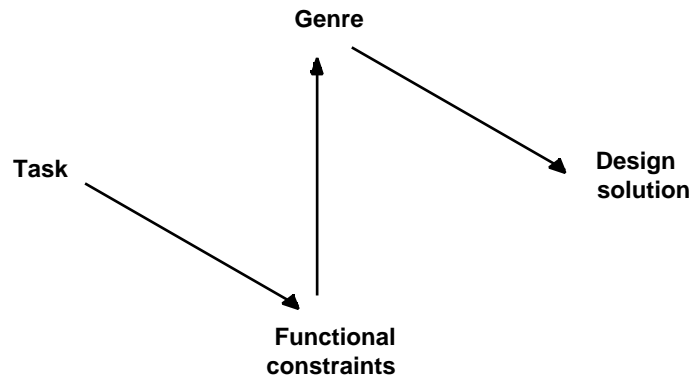solution

Functional
constraints

Figure 9.9

In Figure 9.9 the critical cycle goes the other way: a solution achieved through an analysis of functional constraints is then checked against genre-related expectations that might be anticipated among readers. In practice, the critical cycle may often be informal and evolutionary—small modifications being introduced in subsequent editions of a particular text, and minor functional improvements becoming incorporated into other instance of the genre.

Conclusion

Reading the products of typography's neighbouring disciplines, it is possible to gain an impression of typography as a distant cousin whose existence is recognized on certain special occasions, but who is not really part of the interdisciplinary family of discourse studies whose core members are linguistics, sociology, psychology and literary studies. Yet there is a sense, too, in which typography may be something of a missing link whose recognition may be long overdue. Although there seems to be a consensus that situational context is a vital consideration in any theoretical treatment of discourse, with very few exceptions (Bernhardt, 1985, is a notable one) the typographic contribution to that context is ignored, poorly understood or simply pointed to but not investigated further.

A recurring theme in studies of communication and discourse is the contrast between spoken and written language, conversation and prose, or oral and literate culture, characterized by Olson's (1980) distinction between archival (topic-oriented, autonomous) and communicational (audience-oriented, context-bound) forms of language. But although extended prose argument is claimed to replace the mnemonic archival techniques of oral cultures, the requirements of quick access via headings, classification schemes, and regular spatial arrangements suggest close parallels between the requirements of memory in oral cultures and typographic access in literate ones that suffer from information overload. Typographic systems, like oral ones, emphasize rhythms, parallelisms, schematizations and similarly unsubtle but visible (and therefore usable) structures. For example, pages (such as the one shown in Figure 7.6) consisting of evenly shaped paragraphs reflect the need for all lines to contain the correct number of syllables in verse forms. The practical need served is not memory but clear topicalization (Chapter 6) and accessibility (Chapter 8).

In recent years there has been something of a revival in the fortunes of the word 'rhetoric' which for many years had, and for some still has, pejorative overtones of flowery or demagogic language.[214] Rhetoric has many affinities with typographic design—it can be superficial, merely decorative and insincere, or it can represent the marshalling of practical techniques of clear communication. Indeed, a number of teachers of graphic design have applied rhetorical ideas to their subject (Bonsiepe 1965; Ehses 1984. Kinross 1986 also discusses the application of rhetoric to graphic design, but from a less committed standpoint).

Ehses concentrates largely on the use of rhetorical figures in the design of posters. However, his selection of that part of rhetoric that has to do with persuasion, and its application to posters—a persuasive medium—may

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[214] Dixon (1971) gives a good account of the history of rhetoric, and attitudes to it; accounts of recent thinking on rhetoric may be found in EEWhite (1980) and, with particular reference to genre criticism, in Campbell & Jamieson (1979).

just serve to reinforce old prejudices about the superficiality of graphic design and does not suggest how the rehabilitated rhetoric might be applied to typography. Ehses' rhetoric, as he explains, is an application of just one part of what was originally a five-part system in classical rhetoric—elocutio, or style. Leaving aside the two minor stages, memoria (memory) and pronunciato (delivery), the three main stages were inventio (invention), dispositio (arrangement) and elocutio (style) (the translated terms are from Dixon, 1971).

The story of twentieth-century typographic theory might be seen as some sort of a progression through these stages. Starting with a limited conception of typography as the simple recording and delivery to the reader of words (memoria and pronunciato), through a growing awareness of the stylistic and associative properties of type (elocutio, exemplified by Bruce Rogers' theatrical metaphor), and the Modern Typographers' use of type to display the structure of text (dispositio), we reach the opportunity afforded by electronic publishing to incorporate typography into the process of writing (inventio).

Whatever basis is used to incorporate typography into discourse studies, it is important that it does not become as technical as linguistics, semiology, and even rhetoric, with their multifarious abstract categories. A highly specialized theoretical system may satisfy scholarly criteria but it is unlikely to succeed in the practical context, where, as was noted in Chapter 2, simple guidelines and slogan language are generally better welcomed than theoretical constructs which few will make the effort to understand. It is hoped that, by treating ordinary language genres as real categories, some of these problems can be met halfway. Tacit familiarity with genres can be taught in the traditional manner of design education—through imitation, pastiche and criticism—but a more controlled and explicit understanding may also be reached by analysing genres into their three underlying structures—or some alternative system that others might propose.

Eco (1976) cites an illuminating analogy used by Lotman (1969):

> 'Adults are usually introduced to an unknown language by means of rules; they receive a set of units along with their combinatorial laws and they learn to combine these units in order to speak; a child, on the other hand, is trained through constant exposure to a continual textual performance of pre-fabricated strings of that language, and he is expected to absorb his competence even though not completely conscious of the underlying rules.' (Eco 1976: 138)

The trend in modern foreign-language teaching is to merge these two approaches. Even for adults, conversational practice is displacing grammatical rules. Textual genres might be taught similarly—by exposure to a continuous textual performance. This calls to mind Körner's (1970) description of common-sense classifications—for that is what everyday terms such as 'brochure', 'manual', or 'magazine' are—as resting on 'similarities of objects to standard examples and to standard counterexamples' (see Chapter 2).

Typographers and graphic designers do indeed learn their trade by such a method—by apprenticeship rather than formal teaching. But, applying the analogy of language teaching, many could do with some basic rules and strategies to accompany their conversational practice. Recalling Partridge's analogy of logic as king and grammar as Parliament, it might be suggested that genre rules relate to rhetorical and linguistic rules in the way that Anglo-Saxon common law relates to the Napoleonic code: they rely largely on precedent, rather than prescribing the range of legal possibilities.