CHAPTER 14.

RETHINKING GENRE AS DIGITAL SOCIAL ACTION: ENGAGING BAZERMAN WITH MEDIUM THEORY AND DIGITAL MEDIA

Jack Andersen

University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Writing from the point of view of a classification researcher located in information studies dealing with matters of classification in light of digital media, I have been struggling for some time with how to conceptualize specific communicative actions such as searching, tagging, or archiving as specific genres in networked media (Andersen, 2017a; 2017b; 2018; 2022); genres that are both revitalized and reinforced with digital media and their fundamental functions as storage, search, and archival media. During this research I realized three things. First, when trying to understand the forms of communication evolving with digital media, we cannot escape paying attention to the medium itself as it sets up possibilities and constraints for communication. Second, recognizing that a medium has a communicative effect on its own is not enough if we are to understand the range of communicative forms deployed by people in digital communication. These two observations together are somewhat trivial as no one would probably disagree. But what surprised me, thirdly, was that the connection between the medium itself and the forms of communication deployed was hard to trace in the literature. I was not able to find comprehensive attempts at updating genre as social action conceptually to accommodate digital media fostering specific forms of communication such as searching, archiving, or tagging. I could not find any attempt at trying to bridge media materiality and genre. Although, JoAnne Yates (1989), JoAnne Yates and Wanda Orlikowski (1992), and Inger Askehave and Anne Ellerup Nielsen (2005) began on this when they investigated the memo, e-mail, and web-mediated documents, they never fulfilled the mission completely.

Likewise, the edited works by Janet Giltrow and Dieter Stein (2009) and Carolyn Miller and Ashley Kelly (2018) are steps in these directions when looking at, respectively, internet genres and emerging genres within new media. But

we cannot detect any sense or treatment of the importance of the medium as the analyses provided in these works have a point of departure in genres and not media. The two first observations may not be so trivial after all.

Charles Bazerman's contributions to writing, genre, and activity theory can be seen as key stepping-stones as to think further about how we may come to understand the communicative forms following from digital media and the habitual uses of these forms. Therefore, in this chapter, the goal is to open a discursive space in which to further think about how to understand digital forms of communication and how to rethink genre both in the light of Bazerman's work and what is broadly known as medium theory in media and communication studies. The thesis guiding this discussion is that with the permeation of digital media in society and culture, they not only become key sites for a whole range of public and private forms of communication, but they also shape our daily communicative actions along their "logics" such as searching, tagging, or archiving (Andersen, 2018). An implication of this thesis, then, is that digital media themselves are also key sites for understanding modern issues of genre and forms of communication afforded or implied by digital media.

So, what is being claimed here is that digital media is not just another kind of new media we (can) use in everyday life. Being a socio-material condition, digital media reconfigures our forms of communication and ways of being together in manners that depart from other media but of course at the same time also inherit (or remediate) aspects of previous media. Much of Bazerman's work (alongside with many other text and literary scholars) is for obvious historical reasons grounded in and tied to the print condition. I acknowledge that some of Bazerman's work is done with a view to digital media (Bazerman, 2001; 2002; 2016). But Bazerman's trajectory here seems to be more of trying to understand writing and genre in (light of) digital media simply because they are there and less the socio-material conditions afforded by digital media. For two reasons, then, it makes sense to couple ideas from medium theory with Bazerman's work. First, Bazerman can be said to be working in a social-phenomenological tradition with a substantial emphasis on activity, people, and their doings in communication, whether in a historical or contemporary setting. Such a kind of position is rarely, and for good reasons, interested in exploring material aspects of communication because of its phenomenological predisposition. Second, medium theory is rarely, and also for good reasons, interested in understanding people's doings in communication. Rather, the tradition seeks to explore a medium, its characteristics, and long-term effects on socio-cognitive aspects of human life and society at a large. I contend in this chapter that we cannot ignore neither side if we are to understand writing and genre as medium-specific and as communicative actions people accomplish due to how digital media offer particular kinds of communicative resources.

I begin with characterizing the medium theory tradition. From here I move on to characterize some of Bazerman's work on genre, writing, and activity to highlight what kind of thinking Bazerman is offering us on these matters of writing and genre. After this, I discuss how they matter to each other and how both are crucial ingredients if we are to understand modern forms of communication enacted by people in a range of situations in light of digital media saturation. I will end this discussion with an example of how search can be considered a typified social action.

MEDIUM MATTERS: A SHORT STORY OF MEDIUM THEORY

As a term symbolizing a school of thought in media and communication studies, medium theory was a term coined by Joshua Meyrowitz (1985; 1993; 1994) as an umbrella term for those kinds of studies focusing on the *medium* (in contrast to media in the plural) and its social and cognitive long-term effects on thinking, communication, and social interaction in general. In that sense, medium theory differs from the more traditional approaches in media and communication research focusing on media content or media grammar (Meyrowitz, 1993). Before being labeled by a single name, scholars as diverse as Eric Havelock, Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, Elisabeth Eisenstein, Jack Goody, and Walter Ong had been engaged with studies of socio-cultural effects of writing, printing, electronic media, and the whole question about orality versus writing. Meyrowitz calls them first-generation medium theorists (Meyrowitz, 1994) and places himself as second-generation medium theorist emphasizing the changing character of roles and social interaction implied by a new medium. Meyrowitz writes thus about medium theory:

> Medium theory focuses on the particular characteristics of each individual medium or of each particular type of media. Broadly speaking, medium theorists ask: What are the relatively fixed features of each means of communicating and how do these features make the medium physically, psychologically, and socially different from other media and from face-to-face interaction? (1994, p. 51)

In that sense, medium theory has a baseline of thinking that says that every medium has a set of characteristics/affordances furthering particular means and modes of communication and social interaction at the expense of others. The famous McLuhan-slogan, "The medium is the message" (McLuhan, 1964) encapsulates this kind of thinking. That is, a particular medium fosters particular forms of communication shaping the very content of that communication in terms of its format and presentation.

As such, medium theory does not pay that much attention to either the production or use side of media. Here is also where some common forms of critiques begin: you cannot estimate social and cognitive effects of media unless you study media and their use in a concrete context populated by a specific group of people. But medium theory invites us to pay particular attention to media as technologies and material configurations shaping particular forms of communication. It offers a particular gaze on media and communication, one that displaces use and users or audiences. A gaze that sensitizes us to focus on what a particular medium itself can do, and not, in terms of communication.

Regarding digital media and medium theory, some recent contributions are offered by, among others, Jay D. Bolter (2001), Lev Manovich (2001), Niels Ole Finnemann (1999, 2014), and John Durham Peters (2015). Individually and together, they update medium theory by paying attention to the specifics of digital media. For that reason, they deserve some attention here as they help us think about what is happening with digital communication and our practices with it.

Writing at a time when the internet was gaining social, cultural, and communicative impact Bolter (2001), for instance, pondered that digital media with its hypertextual bias would create a new writing space. As regards the printed book, Bolter, so far, was not right when claiming that digital media communication is dynamic and fluid in contrast to print as stable and durable. In fact, books of today are still stable and durable either in print or digital form. But books and journals, nonfiction in particular, can be linked to and shared, and its readers, views, and downloads counted, among other statistics. Social media platforms are course an example of a kind of new writing space, Bolter could not envision, yet his speculations points in that direction. Characterizing social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook is the re-birth of the author, not their death, to the extent the author has been declared dead by poststructuralists. Tweets and updates are filled with new forms of writing as an effect of digital media: hypertextual hashtags, links, posting, comments, and likes. In that sense, digital communication is fluid and dynamic as one's postings may easily disappear due to algorithmic moderation of feeds and tweets. But they are also stable and durable to the extent they archived by the platforms and by users. Search engines, too, are writing spaces. They store, circulate, and make items available by means of metadata attached to them in a database, a topical writing space, paraphrasing Bolter (2001, pp. 29-32). Thus, Bolter's idea of digital media as providing a new writing space thanks to their hypertextual and networked nature also points to their specifics.

Also, Danish medium theorist, Finnemann (1999, 2014, 2016) envisioned hypertext as a special characteristic of digital media but with a different take than Bolter. Finnemann (1999) regards digital media as fundamentally textual in that

they are made of text (e.g., code) and they work communicatively by means of hypertext. Finnemann suggested hypertext to denote the change of modality between a reading mode and a browsing and navigation mode (Finnemann, 1999, p. 28) enabled by digital media. Avoiding making a strict dichotomy between printed forms of text and digital texts, Finnemann perceives of the differences between the two modes by pointing to how digital texts act, potentially, more like an archive with its linking, indexing, and search facilities in a single text or across texts (Finnemann, 1999, p. 16). This idea is further underscored by Finnemann when later emphasizing that digital media are always search engines as digital materials must be searched for by users to become visible:

> Digital media always convey some sort of digital material, and they are always also search engines which provide a repertoire of possible methods for analysing and presenting in a perceptible form otherwise invisible, stored digital materials. . . . Digital materials can only be accessed by means of digitally supported search and retrieval methods to establish the re-presentation of the invisible, stored content on a screen or another output device. (2014, pp. 304-306)

Digital content cannot be accessed and be made visible without search. This circumstance contributes to paving the way for perceiving search as a key communicative action in digital media and hence in digital culture.

In his book *The Language of New Media* (Manovich, 2001), Manovich launched the proposition that in digital media the database took center place at the expensive of narrative. He was asking us to pay attention to the databased forms of communication (to look up, to navigate, to search, or to list things in structured collections of items) and the way they would change our (inter)actions with and understandings of the symbolic products offered to us by means of digital media. With this argument, Manovich was trying to locate some specifics of the digital medium and how these specifics would cause changes in communicative actions. This line of thinking is also stressed by John Durham Peters when he claims that new (digital) media resemble ancient media of listing, sorting, structuring, arranging, or coordinating time, people, ideas, or information at large: "Digital media return us to the norm of data-processing devices of diverse size, shape, and format in which many people take part and polished 'content' is rare," and turning digital media into an "endless tagging, tracking, and tracing of our doings" (Peters, 2015, pp. 19, 23). What Peters here alludes to is a notion of digital media as media that primarily process and sort information (or data) at the expense of providing "content," as mass media do. That is, digital media can "contain" mass media (and they do) but fundamentally they operate

on the premises of the computer as a data-processing machine making digital media different in form and function.

In sum, medium theory is a good reminder and a good tool to think with when our understandings of communication and communicative action become too focused on audience, reception, or use. Of course, people do things in and with communication. In fact, in many cases they are pretty good at it. But different media and their affordances shape how and what we can do in communication. For instance, the social and cultural force of liking is an action enacted by many people. But strictly speaking, we are not able to give a like if the particular medium setting does not provide us with that communicative opportunity. So, medium theory makes the simple, but often underestimated yet critical, remark that because individual media rely on particular technologies, they are different regarding the forms of communication they afford and how that impinge on social interaction and the formation of communities. Regarding typified forms of digital communication, the question is how digital media, and their characteristics are involved in communicative typification processes and how our social modes of recognition and expectations are correspondingly formed. With Bolter, Finnemann, Manovich, and Peters from above, we are reminded of how diverse material and technological set-ups like hypertext, the database, and data-processing configure communication in specific ways. This material aspect of communication is necessary to consider when talking about typified communication. Clearly, genres do not emerge out of the blue but out of activity and practice. Yet, they are also medium-specific although their formation and cultural uses are not determined by media only. But particular forms of media offer particular grounds for particular forms of communication to emerge.

BAZERMAN MATTERS: WRITING, GENRE, AND ACTIVITY

Of course, what follows on these pages do not do justice to the whole of Bazerman's work. But I can begin with a concrete event and place from where to get a glimpse of the work and its baseline mode of thinking. Participating in Bazerman's graduate course "History of Literacy and Social Organization" in fall 2001, Bazerman once asked us in the class 'What is it we want people to do better, when we teach them writing?' Given the course topics and readings, it was clear that the answer was not "To be better at grammar!" Writing was and is more than that. Writing does something and learning to write means learning to act in the world, learning to act with others and in particular situations with their own typifications and social and epistemological commitments. "Writing involves other people," as Bazerman wrote in the very first sentence in his textbook about writing, *The Informed Writer* (Bazerman, 1995, p. 2). Thus,

researching and teaching writing is to understand the range of situations writers may be situated in and the range of conceptual tools available to writers. This little story, I think, encapsulates pretty well what kind of thinking Bazerman has been working with to unfold and strengthen during the years. There is a very consistent concern with writing in and through his work. But a concern that sees writing as empowering, shaping realities through and with others, and as a stabilizing factor in human activities where written communication plays a key role (see e.g., Bazerman, 1988; 1999).

In *Shaping Written Knowledge* (SWK) (Bazerman, 1988), comprising a range of pieces dealing with the emergence of the experimental article and its typifying force, we see how this thinking is articulated and given voice. In a footnote we are told how Bazerman distances himself from traditional literary understandings of genre and how he aligns himself with Miller's notion of genre as social action (Miller, 1984). Being dissatisfied with classic (and narrow) conceptions of genre as literary form, Bazerman had been on a hunt for a more socially oriented idea of genre and Miller offered exactly that. Still, at the end of SWK Bazerman elaborated on genre as a social-psychological category meaning a "category which we use to recognize and construct typified actions within typified situations. It is a way of creating order in the ever-fluid symbolic world" (1988, p. 319). However, perceiving genre in this manner both aligns with and differs from Miller. The emphasis on typified actions and typified situations come from Miller while the notion of genre as a social-psychological category must be interpreted as coming from Bazerman's affinity with the thinking of Lev Vygotsky and the cultural-historical school (i.e., activity theory) in psychology.

Bazerman is persistent in his attempts to understand and interrogate writing and writers as situated in "discursively structured activities" (Bazerman, 1997). Activities and contexts are structured in the sense that they are historically developed and as such were present before a concrete writing activity can take place. In that regard, they shape writing, writers, and any genre. In turn, any writing activity, writer and/or genre form the very activities and contexts by drawing on and mobilizing the rhetorical and symbolic resources offered by activities and contexts. That is, the relationship between a subject and object is never unmediated. From a genre and writing point of view, they are the tools mediating between them. This is a kind of thinking about writing, activity, and genre Bazerman is certainly not alone with (see e.g., Russell, 1997; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1993; Spinuzzi, 2003; Winsor, 1999; Geisler, 2001) but it penetrates very consistently his thinking about these matters (for an overview see Bazerman, 2013a; 2013b) and it differentiates him from e.g., Miller (1984) and Amy Devitt (2004). In fact, the persistence with historicizing written communication to be able to explain the emergence of genres and activity contexts is also unique

to Bazerman's mode of approaching topics and developing arguments (e.g., Bazerman, 1989; 1991; 1999; 2016).

It is through this line of reasoning Bazerman succeeds in establishing an understanding of written communication as localized, historical, rhetorical, political, and genred. But whereas Bazerman's focus is on these vital aspects of communication, he is less concerned with their material slants, even though his book on Thomas Alva Edison articulates a material aspect of communication (Bazerman, 1999). He is more interested in the doings of communication than with the participatory role of materiality partly enabling the doings, thereby subscribing more to pragmatic and phenomenological understandings of language and communication.

WHY DOES IT MATTER AT ALL? DISCUSSING MEDIA AS COMMUNICATIVE FORMS WITH GENRE AND ACTIVITY PERSPECTIVES

I will start the examination in this section from a point of departure that accepts the initial premise that digital media (or technologies) nowadays form the fundamental socio-material set-up for all major forms of communication, including writing, and social interaction. But digital media do not preempt what kinds of typified forms of communication people, organizations, and other collectives will enact in human activities. Nevertheless, we can observe in current digital culture forms of communication such as tagging, searching, liking, or tweeting that are promoted as prevailing exactly due to digital media performing as data-processing devices (cf., Peters, 2015). As medium theory insists on understanding the particulars of any medium it makes a good tool to think with in matters of communication and of any creation of new cultural forms and objects. Medium theory is a key to look back from particular genres and see how, and to what extent, they are specific to the medium in which they operate and are put to action by people.

Medium theory reminds us that media as socio-material configurations are communicative forms in and by themselves. They set up limits as to how and what to communicate in what ways. Television has a visual slant while radio has an audio slant. Writing is also visual but is also a storage medium in that writing stores writing (Kittler, 1999, p. 7). Digital media, too, are at one and the same time both archival and communication media that "traffic less in content, programs and opinions than in organization, power, and calculation. Digital media serve more as logistical devices of tracking and orientation than in providing unifying stories to the society at large" (Peters, 2015, p. 7). One consequence of the thinking offered to us by medium theory is that some forms of communication

(i.e., genres) are relatively unique to the medium. This lead, for instance, Lev Manovich to propose that the database was a unique genre in digital media (Manovich, 1999; 2001) because digital media have a bias towards communicating "content" in terms of structured collections of items. Born-digital materials/content must be searched for to become visible for human sense-making meaning they have some form of metadata assigned to them in a database (Finnemann, 2014). This socio-material set-up implies that digital media privilege navigation, searching, and looking up as primary modes of communicative interaction as opposed to reading, viewing, or listening. But it is more than just a set-up or an infrastructural background. Also being automated media (Andrejevic, 2020), digital media collect, and process data continuously based on the actions of users and through this attempt to anticipate actions by providing e.g., recommendations, monitoring, or predictions. In other words, because of users' actions, materiality communicates through feedback, and through this shape typified forms of communication. For instance, we learn what to expect when we use Facebook or Google for locating items of information because what they return to us is determined by what, and how, they algorithmically collect. Thus, when what Miller (1984, p. 156) claimed about recurrence, that it could not be a material configuration of objects and could not be understood on material terms, is challenged with digital media, as recurrence here is part of how they communicate materially.

Bazerman and medium theory do share one thing in common: the de-emphasis on the importance of the single message/text and its socio-cognitive effect in communication. Approaching such a de-emphasis from, respectively, genre and media's technological set-up serve to underscore how we can understand human communication nevertheless without resorting to pure behavioristic explanations. However, while most of Bazerman's conceptualizations of genre, activity, and writing are pretty good at pointing at the localized, historical, and practice aspects, it is less good at providing us with a sense of why some forms of communication are appropriated in the first place. Why has Twitter and tweets succeeded in becoming powerful forms of political communication? Why has tagging suddenly gained such a social and cultural prominence? Why does search seem to be such a dominant communicative action with digital media? Answering these questions from a medium theory point of view, you would point to digital media and their cultural techniques of searching and archiving as being specific to their function as *digital* media. Then Bazerman might ask what kind of resources (symbolic, material, and social) do digital media offer to the writer? How can a writer mobilize their communicative actions through digital media? Here Johnson-Eilola argues that search engines constitute new forms of writing because one makes choices about what to include and exclude and "these choices

involve responsibilities to the reader and to society, just as we do in other, more traditional forms of writing" (2004, p. 220). What Johnson-Eilola here points out is of great importance because he is reminding us that in constructing search engines, we may not write linear prose, but by means of writing, and based on our choices, we produce categories and collections with social and cultural implications.

Today, we are a bit sharper on this point. We are aware that algorithms produce categories and categorizations. But the problem remains the same as algorithms must be coded and written by someone making assumptions about the world in which the algorithm is intended to intervene in. Therefore, when Bazerman in his book, *The Informed Writer*, in the very first sentence makes it clear that "[w]riting involves other people" (1995, p. 2), this statement is still, or even more, pertinent and telling in a world of digital communication.

Of course, one can always counterargue that a one-sided focus on the medium will tell us nothing about the uses to which the medium is put and the communicative practices it fosters; that we are not able to get a sense of how and why some forms of communication become typified through their repeated uses with an emphasis on the medium only. Typification in communication obviously grow out of people's activity-based uses. True. But then again use cannot enter the picture before some means of communication, and what it affords, materializes. The stabilization of formats, titles, and page setup could not happen without printing, for instance. Let us, therefore, look at search as a typified social action as a modern example.

EXAMPLE: SEARCHING AS TYPIFIED DIGITAL ACTION

Online searching happens at the intersection of media materiality and communicative activities of humans. Materially, search engines, apps, social media, and other forms of media acting like structured collections of items turn search into a typified action. What to expect of and how to recognize the situations in which searching is called for is shaped by the role digital media play in our communicative interactions. In digital media, many cultural products, goods, movies, songs, or texts cannot be approached by feeling, touching, watching, listening, or reading them. They must be called upon, so to speak, and search is the key communicative action to be performed here. In that sense, we expect that things are coded for search in digital media. Such codification is part of the material work of digital media. Items (whether shoes, kitchen supplies, clothes) in a digital collection are all binary items and must be described by metadata and arranged in a collection. The items do only exist digitally by means of this description and arrangement activity. Thus, such codification helps to create the

socially and typified forms of expectations and recognitions users, publics, audiences, or customers approach digital media in terms of searching.

Socially, searching is a communicative action in the sense that we search by typing in keywords in a search box or by talking to virtual voice assistants such as Siri. But how do we recognize situations that require of us the action of searching? What prompts us to search, with the words of Bitzer (1968)? In digital culture we constantly find ourselves in a variety of situations where we look up things but for various reasons. Some may look up recipes, some may look up the best flight ticket prices for the coming summer holidays, and some may look up things to resolve an argument (cf. Sundin et al., 2017). Searching is a form of relating to someone, or something, or looking for what is there. Searching is to look for connections and collectives and, in that sense, becomes a social space for accomplishing social action. Again, as many things in digital culture are coded for search it becomes a rather routinized, or typified, activity, we as humans are involved in when struggling with making sense of digital mediated forms of communication and social interaction. So, whereas searching has been around for centuries, the proclivity of digital media turn search into a particular genre because they perform as media of listing, arranging, or organizing items. Due to this condition, our only way of communicating with, making sense of, and using digital materials is through search.

Surely, Bazerman would resort to history and respond to this situation with asking where did search come from and how did search emerge as a particular genre in digital media? Tracing where search as a human activity come from is obviously difficult. We can speculate that hunters and gathers way back in human history would be looking for good places to find and collect food as an everyday activity. Also, rhetoric and its concept of topoi designating the place you go to and look for ideas and arguments when preparing your speech and/or production of written text, can also be understood as an awareness of search as an activity in which someone is looking for something.

The emergence of the written list in human history also occasioned a sense of looking things up and affording specific literacy skills as the content is presented in (e.g., columns and rows) but also providing the possibility of going back to the list as a recall operation (Goody, 1977). To this end, Ong argued that in primary oral cultures words are sounds and have no visual presence, meaning that "the expression 'to look up something' is an empty phrase" (1982, p. 31) as there is no material space to look. Only with writing came material memory devices such as dictionaries, indexes, commonplace books, and other reference works as places (as topoi) to go to look up things. In the library world, search has always been (and still is) considered a distinct way of communicating with materials, whether as a particular professional skill or as an activity in which patrons are

involved with when seeking materials. In the libraries existing at the intersection of oral and writing cultures, it has been argued that singing in the library might have been a mode of retrieving materials (Olesen-Bagneux, 2017). Print library catalogues had three formal access points: title, author, and keyword(s); that is, the materials libraries provided access to have a title, an author, and some controlled keywords. With the online public access catalogues (OPAC's) being launched the 1960s and 70s, these access points were still in place and became defining access points as separate search boxes for each would be provided in an interface. Also, the access points could now be combined in a Boolean search with the addition that the user could also type in their own (uncontrolled) keywords in the keywords box. Although several additional access points would be added over the years (e.g., citation indexing, hypertext, or full text), the formal access points were mostly in place up until Google revolutionized the idea of search and provided only one search bar. Recalling that the first search indexes such as AltaVista, Lycos, or Yahoo provided categories and indexes to be used in search, Google did not have the idea of the book, the single journal article, or any other single item with authors and titles as the material items to be indexed. In fact, Google celebrates that everything it collects, and indexes is searchable by a variety of means (e.g., links, URL, filenames, words in full text, images). On top of that, the proliferation of social media platforms and streaming services have further spurred the idea of search, whether that includes searching for people, events, or cultural products, turning search into an everyday activity (Sundin et al., 2017). Furthermore, the prominence of the verb "to google" in everyday language use suggests an institutionalization of search.

Such a historical emphasis helps explaining how and why we can understand searching as typified digital action. While searching as a human activity has always been with us, digital media are the forms of media where search came to the forefront due to the listlike nature of most digital media forms (see e.g., Young, 2017) and because of the permeation and the domestication of digital media in almost all spheres of society, whether items are appearing as a single born-digital material or as a structured collection of hyperlinks. But contrary to the old Goody-question, "What's in a list?" (Goody, 1977) implying that we can go to a list and see what kind of content it arranges and coordinates and what power it provides to those capable of decoding a list, such a question (e.g., "What's in a search engine?") is almost nonsense in a digital media culture because we are not able to obtain a sense of what kind of content it arranges and collects as it is fairly black-boxed. It is simply not visible to us before searching for it. In that sense we can say that digital media and their materiality give search a typifying force it has not had in earlier media epochs, and with earlier media forms, because we must search in order to get in touch with digital content.

So, paraphrasing Bazerman's question to our graduate class back in 2001, we can now ask, "What is it we want people to do better, when we teach them searching?" As text and information come in various forms by means of a range of systems, platforms, and media acting like structured collections of items, people will want to know the modes of search fitting to their situations and to the particular medium they are employing for search. This is more than knowing the "right" keywords to use as these are dynamic depending on the particular medium we are employing and ours and others' previous actions. Searching involves other people (whether big tech, academia, or ordinary users) and it is a way relating to other people through search. Search is communicative in its desire for contact. Thus, learning to search is to be able to act and how to accomplish action through search.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have tried to add to Bazerman's thoughts about writing, genre, and activity some portion of medium theory gear. My reason for doing that is some form of discomfort with the thinking about genre, in particular, in purely phenomenological or social constructivist terms. However, to be fair, Bazerman does not see himself as a media and communication scholar (I believe), yet he is probably one of the very few, if not the only one, in writing and genre studies who is informed by some form of medium theory thinking, as we can trace references to Havelock, Ong, Eisenstein, and, not least, Goody in his work. In fact, Bazerman contributed with a piece in a book examining the implications of Goody's work (Bazerman, 2006). But what I wanted to stir attention to here is how digital media foster typified forms of communication because of their characteristics, for sure, but also because of the repeated use of these forms. In that sense, I may have made an a priori conceptualization of searching as typified action; that is, one that is not developed as a straight empirical consequence of particular activities and practices enacting search (on this matter see, Sundin et al., 2017). Yet, I have tried to associate this conceptualization as closely as possible with what we know about and can align with practices in everyday life. To this end, I have added what I consider as indispensable when trying to understand search as typified digital action: the characteristics of digital media as acting as media that list, arrange, and organize items as their raison d'être. So, whereas medium theory is good at explaining what forms of communication some media make possible, or afford, genre theory is good at explaining why and how some forms of communication become stabilized and helps accomplishing social action. But we cannot escape either of them when trying to account for the emergence and prominence of certain forms of communication in human culture.

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