EMERGENT MOTIVES, SITUATIONS, FORMS

Writing requires extended work over time to create a verbal artifact that can work its effect, often at some physical (temporal and geographic) distance from the site of its creation. Such extended work directed toward distant ends requires we become aware of and understand our motives, so that we attend to them despite distractions and obstacles in our immediate environment. Good writing is aided by locating and nurturing our motivations.

Our motivations in any writing situation occur at the intersection of our long-term concerns and the emergent situation, recognized and given shape by our typifications about how situations are organized and the forms of action available in such situations. That is, our genre and situation shaped perceptions of openings for immediate action serve to crystallize underlying concerns and interests that lie behind our sense of imperfection in that situation.

Sometimes the motive is obvious to us, as familiar and compelling circumstances call on us to adopt a role and take a well-defined action. For example, when we arrive for a medical appointment we are given a form to fill out reporting our medical history. We are already in the role of seeking medical help, and we understand that the medical providers need information from us so that they can do their task well. We know we do not want to wait long for our appointment and we set directly to filling out forms so as not to fall back in the queue waiting for attention. Pressing circumstances cast us into a role. Often, though, our more ambitious and difficult writing tasks occur separated from the circumstances we are responding to and we must write without the immediate pressure of events unfolding around us at the moment. In such cases our motives may only take shape as we start to contemplate and give mental definition to our situation and then begin to plan and carry out actions. In this process the possibilities of action begin to unfold which in turn crystallize our motives for concrete objectives.

TYPIFIED MOTIVES AND FORMS OF ACTION

On one extreme our motive for writing may come from the need for social or legal compliance. Mandatory writing tasks often come to us in regulated

forms on regulated occasions. We then either participate or visibly resist with consequence. If we participate, our influence is only in inscribing our compliance within the regulated forms of participation, within the allowable ranges of freedom. A clerk or other bureaucratic subordinate filling in forms at a computer terminal has only limited influence in what he or she inscribes as detailed information within the form, though there are some decisions to be made about the exact information and the form it is to be presented that might benefit or penalize the client. Electronic systems have increased the use of forms and held them more tightly to narrow standards, to the point of immediately rejecting a response if it does not contain all required elements in the expected form. Electronic systems may even check the accuracy of information by matching it with related forms and databases, so that credit card numbers must match with accounts, and case records must match with already existing case files before the response is accepted and we are allowed to continue. Yet still we do have some choices about the information we include to represent ourselves and our interests—whether which phone number we inscribe or what we list as a cause for complaint and how we elaborate in an available open field.

At the other extreme are self-chosen genres in situations of personal choice. No one except the philosopher him or herself determines what topic and discussion to address at what moment in time, and in which of the professionally acceptable genres. Poets may write when the spirit moves them and in the form that their impulses dictate. Political bloggers can take up topics and develop them when and how they see fit, within the flexible space with generic variety that blogs allow. Little other than personal impulse compels an individual in most cases to take on the role and voice of a poet or a philosopher or political blogger.

Many intermediate cases combine a degree of social compulsion with individual choice making about topic, substance, and genre, as well as the underlying motives that might be served. Assigned work in academic settings often provides substantial room for students to pursue curiosities, resolve personal puzzles, or assert identities and commitments. Journalists or their editors have degrees of freedom to select which stories to develop and columnists to decide on topics, stances, and approaches.

Even when confronted with social compulsion our motives are important to determine whether we will comply rapidly and willingly, whether we will be evasive and minimally compliant, or even deceptive and subversive. Depending on the nature and personal importance of our motives we can decide not to comply with the request, or even to actively resist the requirement. In cases where there are more readily available degrees of freedom our motives can play a much more integral role in how we respond, and thus the kinds of texts we will produce. Sometimes our feelings about the role we are cast into are

complex and mixed; consequently, even though we may consciously believe we are committed to a writing task we act reluctantly. Chapter 12 considers psychological ambivalences, whether real or chimerical, we may have toward writing, so that we can overcome them to write with our whole heart and energy.

EMERGENT MOTIVATIONS IN EMERGENT SITES OF ACTION

Emergent motivations take shape when felt discomfort begins to meet locatable sites for action. The force for action grows as the site takes shape. We may even see an imperfection that we can name and would like to remedy, but until we locate a possible site for remedying it is an unscratched itch. For example, a student's interest in how local governments work may have been whetted by a summer internship in the local parks department which left her wondering about certain seemingly irrational policies. This curiosity then supports a decision to register for a political science course on municipal government. As she is introduced to different theories and examples her experience becomes a touchpoint for thinking about what she is learning. When assigned to write a paper about planning processes, she takes the assignment as an opportunity to look into parks planning and how the policies that troubled her came about. In the course of doing research she then uncovers a long-standing set of conflicts among homeowners, renters, businesses, and real estate interests, which becomes the topic of the paper. As she gets into the project, she realizes she may be deviating from the assigned paper. She then visits the professor to see whether she can renegotiate the assignment.

On the other hand the irrationality of her experience in the parks department could have taken her in very different directions if she started seeing herself as an advocate for people who were hurt by the policies, or if she were taking a creative writing major and were looking for material for a short story, or if she worked at a comedy club and were looking for material about the absurdities of daily work life.

Of course, which way we go to scratch an itch is a mixture of estimates of what else in our life we know about and are doing, how we perceive our established and emergent identities, what kinds of support are around us, and estimates of our ability to successfully carry out work in the corresponding genres. In thinking about the consequences of our actions we may also consider the likelihood of gathering an audience who will understand and be engaged in our meanings created in the genre we work in. Thus our motivations emerge and take shape in a complex world.

Effective writing is aided when we understand a wider repertoire of possible directions and have a wider range of skills to form our emergent motivations into a greater range of potential objects—so that we don't always follow the most obvious, well-worn and least demanding path—though often that may in fact be the best solution. If we want to buy a product, filling in the online order form according to exact instructions, as we have done many times before, will most efficiently meet our needs, even if it is not particularly challenging. We may even be bored by it, especially if we have to fill out twenty forms for twenty different products.

To pursue a bit more complex example, our desire to get to work, get around town, and visit our friends may be facilitated by having a driver's license. Obtaining a license requires filling out forms, passing tests, and registering at the Department of Motor Vehicles. The motives to enter the documentary system of the department of motor vehicles are extremely powerful—as anyone who has observed an adolescent in the United States or other developed country knows only too well. It is easy to follow that path, hard to avoid it, and writing the forms and taking the tests is not all that demanding. It is the obvious solution. Nonetheless, costs of car ownership and insurance, likelihood of traffic congestions, and looming global warming may in the long run may make one think about alternative forms of action and may even lead one to become a motivated environmental activist. These solutions, however, will take much more time and work, and require one to write far more effectively in far more difficult circumstances to much wider, conflicting audiences than filling out a few forms for a clerk whose task it is to facilitate and accept properly filled out forms.

On the other hand, understanding the alternative paths our motives may take us into more fundamental workings of society, can open the doors to greater influence on how we live, provide us deeper forms of engagement, and challenge us to more effective writing to more significant ends. Yet, even though such a path may lead us to take less expected actions and require from us more creative, less anticipated writing for which we must solve many novel problems, we cannot leave typification behind. Typification rules in originality as well as in the most boring and conventionalized task. The further we contest the taken-for-granted, the further we wander from the absolutely conventional, the more we must understand and use typification. For example, the environmental activist might need to deal with genres from science and engineering, governmental regulation and planning, public advocacy and organization, journalism and opinion, litigation, fund raising and NGO administration, as well as the specialized genres of environmental impact assessment and environmental modeling. Further, the environmentalist may need to take standard genres and

invest them with new motives and forces, as when a class action suit is filed in a case arguing not about financial damage (typical for such suits), but an inequitable burden of environmental degradation on one community.

These complexes of genres, hybridization, and multiple choices only come into our view over time. The more we engage in a project and we map the situation and our opportunities, the clearer it becomes to us what we can and want to do. Thus it is inevitable that much of our learning to write occurs "on the job" (or in the community), insofar as we recognize that writing is part of the job and we invest time and energy into advancing our skill to carry out the job. As we get drawn into the motives and opportunities of our sites of engagement, we see how we can go beyond the most typified forms of action that were immediately apparent. This learning coincides with us taking on new identities, presences, and power within these socially organized activities.

While engagement with each new field of action brings learning about the literate opportunities of that field, we bring the experiences, tools, and skills of our prior writing engagements—as we move from one organization to another, as we move from one area of public action to another, as we move from advertising to public relations, as we move from journalism to non-fiction writing. In each case the prior experiences with literacy give us confidence and analytical abilities to frame writing problems and a range of tools and models to draw on. At times the tasks are similar and we can diagnose key issues quickly so we can readjust to modified circumstances, though creative action may still require deeper local analysis. But often the cultures and practices of the new domain of action are substantially different, so we must learn a new way of doing things even before we try anything unusual. When our area of endeavor switches entirely, such as when moving from marketing electronics to organizing famine relief, we must address new values, purposes, systems, relations, and cultures; and we must adopt new stances, genres, and styles to accomplish very different kinds of work. In the course of this the motives attached to writing change—and thus the very nature of the act.

SCHOOL WRITING, SCHOOL SITUATION, AND SCHOOL MOTIVES

The biggest leap most people make in their writing is from schooling to whatever they write outside of school. By that time people have spent so many years in schooling, and so much of their experience in writing has been carried out in school, it is often hard for them to see writing in any other than school terms. The school experience of writing becomes a general characterization of

all writing, and the values and practices of school writing get carried over to non-school situations in ways that are inappropriate. While school provides many tools and facilities that can be of value, unless the transfer is intelligent and thoughtful, the practices of school can be limiting or even misleading. Thus people who do learn to use writing successfully in the world often say they only learned to write once they have left school. Many others say they never really wrote once they left school, or they write only privately. They never have made a real leap from the writing they learned to do in school to the tasks and opportunities the world presents them with. Insofar as they engage with new opportunities, they may discount them as real writing, thereby limiting their ability to think about these new writing situations creatively and to reflectively transfer and reconfigure what they have learned in school for new purposes.

Therefore it is worth spending some time to sort out the relationship between writing in school and writing elsewhere, so we can understand the transition and manage it more effectively. Such thinking can also guide teaching to better to prepare people for the transition. One of the characteristics of learning to write in school is that it is a time apart from the ordinary activities of life in order to enhance our life—through learning skills like the three R's, or engaging in the arts, or contemplating our values, or acquiring specialized forms of knowledge and practice, such as associated with engineering. When we finish schooling we are expected to take on various roles in the world, but while in school our primary engagement is with schooling itself. We learn about how to do school assignments; how to advance and gain rewards in schooling; how to use to advantage the minor institutional genres around the edges—whether excuse and doctor's notes, hall passes, or petitions for exceptions to regulations; and how to participate in the culture of students through note passing, secret peer notebooks, or sponsored activities like newspapers.

The central writing activities in school are framed as assignments set by the curriculum and instructors in fulfillment of the courses, and they are evaluated by the instructors or outside evaluators to see whether we can demonstrate the required knowledge and competence. That is, our writing is evaluated and corrected in relation to the curriculum. Our motives typically are minimally to get school done and maximally to get school done well. Both are usually associated with a grade and avoiding correction—and sometimes with praise for exceptional achievement. Consequentially, some of the most important writing is associated with examinations—local, state, and national. These examinations may then define the taught curriculum which shapes the tasks, attitudes, and skills associated with more daily writing. This basic institutional structure can be supplemented by values of interaction and engagement—the teacher caring about what you are writing and responding to the thoughts you express,

whether about your personal life or subject matters like history in order to mentor you to more sophisticated thought. Yet the personal response is still that of a teacher and not a parent or friend, and even the most engaged dialogue on subject matter, whether of mentor/mentee, or erstwhile colleague to established scholar, is within the frame of academic subject matters within an educational environment—where the primary work is the development of individuals. The student writer is the object of development—whether being regularly evaluated and corrected, or supported, encouraged, and led into rewarding halls of learning. Only when the upper ends of education intersect with actual professions, disciplines, arts, or service activities do educational practices begin to overlap robustly with practices in the world. And even then students always know that the educational reality of teacher assessment based on student display of skills and knowledge makes the school writing different from business where the final test is a profit or a building that does not collapse (Becker, Geer & Hughes, 1968; Dias, Pare, Freedman, & Medway, 1999).

In addition to evaluation with attendant punishments and rewards, several other aspects of schooling limit our ability to engage more deeply in other forms of writing. The practice of teachers setting assignments is essential to challenging the students and keeping them on the learning task; the practice, however, limits students' ability to identify meaningful writing situations which they may want to respond to and thus does not nurture their ability to identify motives to write outside assignments. Writing is thus not seen as an actively invoked tool for personally felt tasks in personally perceived situations. Rather writing is something assigned by others, with the writer searching for a successful way to fulfill the assignment—at best the student can locate a topic or approach he or she is interested in and cares about within the frame of the assignment. Further, writing assignments often are made only to practice writing skills rather than pursuing a substantive interest in the content or action. When a substantive task is assigned, it is frequently a faux action, such as pretending to write a letter of complaint about a product, but not sending it because it is not part of a real situation and need. Further when presumably writing about substantive maters in their various subject courses, students are rarely asked questions that the instructor/examiner doesn't already know the answers to, so even then the writing is about display of knowledge and analytic skills rather than sharing of valued thoughts and information. Finally, assignments are often part of a very short sequence of interactions, so that the student writer is always in the position of starting up a fresh conversation, even initiating it—with all the uncertainties about the audience, the topic, the issue at hand that usually attends first meetings. The student writer rarely gets the sense of being in a long conversation with extensive back and forth—focusing and strengthening

motives, forming a relationship with the interlocutor, and developing issues and content at play in the conversation. Rather the writer is always in the position of warming up, trying to get something going.

As a consequence of these characteristics of school writing, for most people writing is about pursuing correctness, being evaluated, and displaying knowledge and skills. The motives most deeply attached to writing are avoiding embarrassment and gaining approval. No matter how deftly the evaluations are given, students' imaginations of what can be accomplished in writing are limited, and their motivations are often heavily freighted by aversive emotions and fear of being found wanting. The student is not prepared to see writing simply as performing a task successfully, so that it meets the conditions to do what it has to do. Anything of this character in the school context is not counted as writing—just filling out a form—and therefore is not a serious exercise of skill. Even when tasks engage other situations and motives, they are still infused with school situations and dynamics.

School-based standards of writing seem to endure long past the context of school, rather than standards drawn from the tasks of the world. I regularly hear from lawyers or scientists that those who write best are those who use poetic figures, wide vocabularies, and other marks of school approved writing rather than getting the job done—whether explaining the theory and evidence clearly or making a persuasive case for a client. While training in school can provide basic tools, habits, and practice, the situation and motives of school are distinct from those of other activities. Not understanding the differences of school writing and writing elsewhere can be an obstacle to addressing new tasks successfully and may even prevent people from taking on new challenges, as they feel the weight of school experiences too heavy to confront. Consequently, they never develop a long term engagement in a field of writing that is personally meaningful and they never develop motives and commitments that will keep them working at the hard task of writing that will lead to high levels of accomplishment.

GRADUAL EVOLUTION OF SITUATION AND OUR MOTIVES WITHIN IT

Just as we spend many years learning how to be students, it takes a while to learn the landscape of new domains, become familiar with the genres and the associated activities and dynamics, identify our opportunities to intervene by writing, and the repertoire of devices, styles, phrases, and tactics that are effective in the relevant genres. As we develop these skills we may also develop

a higher level of understanding of how the entire system we are participating in works, so we can become more strategic about when and why we write. As we learn these things, we also re-form ourselves, taking on identities, stances, and commitments that give focus and strength to what we do as writers, how we project ourselves as writers, and what we attempt to accomplish through our writing. We move past the awkwardness and uncertainty of beginnings in unfamiliar social situations, to knowing the people we are communicating with, what we want to communicate, what will work, and where next we may take the conversation. We learn this by continually writing within a world where we see the effect or lack of effect of what we do.

Even within a single episode of writing there can be a substantial evolution, as the writing process occurs over time and each step we take in the writing gives more focus and shape to the situation. We get a more refined and directed idea of where we are going with each step we take. We can look on what we have produced so far and reflect on what is coming into being and refine it, as the later chapters of this volume will explore.

An even more significant evolution can occur as an interaction develops over time, so that problems get defined, roles of participants emerge, work to be accomplished becomes clearer, facts of the situation and relevant knowledge become salient—in short we know a lot more of what we are doing in a place we have become more familiar with. Sometimes our motives may in fact change as we come to see what is possible and impossible, or we come to recognize new opportunities in the situation, or we come to understand through the process more about our motives and fundamental concerns. But even when our fundamental motivation is stable, we refine by finding locally relevant expressions of it in the unfolding activity. As opportunities and situations change, so our local motives come into focus to meet the protean social realities we work within.

The importance of writing being part of ongoing interchanges is evident when we join some case after it has developed. To get "up to speed" we need to read the file, which gives the facts of the case, the facts of the participants, the positions each has staked out and elaborated, and the relationship forming among them—and the overall trajectory of the interaction. It often helps to have someone who has been part of the proceedings to this point to explain and interpret what is going on. Only with great and focused work can we attempt to undo any of the social facts and speech acts already accomplished in the file. Further, even with explanations from the prior participants, reading the file, is usually not enough to get fully up to speed, for which we need a couple of further turns in the back and forth. Equally, interlocutors need to see the moves the new person makes so they can evaluate what our intentions and modes of procedure are.

Unless we have some reflective understanding of our motives, the unfolding nature of situations, and our changing participation in a dynamic situation, we are at risk of getting locked into a set of motives and stances that are less productive and may not achieve our ends. A slavish following of what we believe is the right form for the situation or a slavish adherence to our first conception of our motives can lead to an unfortunate trajectory of interaction that leaves participants at an impasse, or caught in an unproductive distracting side-issue. It is worth asking ourselves periodically what we really want from a situation, what will meet our needs and carry forward a productive interaction with our audiences and interlocutors.

With such an understanding we can think about whether a change of footing will create a more favorable ground for reframing the interaction, allowing parties to define new roles and stances, engaging in adjusted projects. This is where motives and genre meet. Each genre has implied motives, implied roles for the readers (what Bakhtin, 1986, called addressivity), and actions which represent the illocutionary force of the genre. Equally, our readers may have developed stances, attitudes, and resistant responses to the genres, roles, and stances we adopt. Accordingly a shift of those genres and understandings surrounding them on both sides may re-center the discussion on more productive grounds. Or combining multiple generic understandings within a single utterance, may invite greater complexity of response and understanding. The strategic understanding of how we may advance our interests and concerns in a situation is the subject of the next chapter.