Distilling Abstractions: Genre Redefining Essence versus Context

Lei Zhang and Hope A. Olson

Abstract

The construction of concepts achieved by the apparently incompatible ideas of essence and context is examined through genre. Essence is defined by essential characteristics: innate, immutable, independent of context. Unlike essences, contexts are fluid, changing with time and location. Genre has the stability of the essential characteristics that define essence and the fluidity of differing circumstances that define context, thus making it effective for the exploration of essence and context. Controlled vocabularies reveal diachronically and synchronically the stable/fluid ambivalence of genre classes. The Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC1, DDC13, DDC23) exhibits stability (and modest fluidity) in the Divisions, the primary reflection of academic disciplines one hierarchical step below the main classes and the development of the standard subdivisions as a slow multi-edition evolution. Genre serves as a lens for us to better understand essences, contexts, and concepts and their manifestations, classes. Rather than being incompatible opposites, essences and contexts complement each other in the definition of concepts. How these abstractions relate to classification is a question both theoretical and practical to our efforts to further knowledge organization.

Introduction

What is genre for? To classify what is like? To accommodate situational change? To preserve essence stability? Genre has long been a source of uncertainty and unease in bibliographic control. Can an ontological model enlighten the complexity of genres? Can it elucidate abstractions like essence and context that represent our fundamental understanding of reality? Genre systematically operationalized in the concrete practice of bibliographic control reveals when subject is linked to "aboutness," genre is

linked to "is-ness" or "of-ness." Consider the basic example of periodicals. It seems commonsensical that in a precoordinated controlled vocabulary like the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), subdivisions like "Periodicals" represent what an entity (a manifestation) *is*, not what it is *about.* However, the LCSH main heading "Periodicals" represents what an entity (an expression) is about. Likewise, when applied in cataloging rules, periodicals are serial publications intended to continue indefinitely—until they cease. Even this superficial discussion of the mundane example of a genre illustrates the complexity of genre. Expanded further, this investigation would encounter sets, series, serials, and the nineteenth-century development of publishing and scholarly dissemination.

This paper analyzes the complexities of genre by applying an ontological framework that is itself based on established, conventional, definitional standards (see Olson [2012] for a further discussion of the initial development of this framework). It particularly examines the controlled vocabularies of the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) across three editions, the current edition of the Library of Congress Classification (LCC), and a couple of thesauri to look into the stable/fluid ambivalence of genre classes diachronically and synchronically.

Essence and Context—and Class

The ontological framework used in this analysis focuses on the potential stability of generic essences compared to the flexibility of context. For the purposes of this paper, it will be referred to as the "framework of ontological abstractions" (FOAs). Like most models, FOAs offer breadth rather than depth. Knowledge organization systems (KOSs), such as classification schemes, subject heading lists, and thesauri, take an entity out of its original environment, represent it as a surrogate, and insert it into the very different environment of KOSs. Is there a stable essence that defines a genre regardless of context? In the following, we will introduce the framework, apply it to genre as a concept, and examine the reflection of essence, context, and related abstractions in the muddy pool of genre. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) (2013) is employed in understanding the concepts of the framework because it reflects the relevant intellectual discourses at work in this domain.

Contexts have long been defined by *circumstances* (*circumstantiae*, or "the things that stand around").[1] *Circumstantiae* were used by early Christian scholars in biblical exegesis to create categories of that collectively constituted context (Burke, 2002, p. 154). These *circumstantiae* (such as Sedulius's ninth-century list: person, fact, cause, time, place, mode, and topic) strongly resemble facets like Ranganathan's PMEST (personality, matter, energy, space, time). Circumstances are variables, each having its own values that, in different combinations, define different contexts. For example, in this paper, we use three different editions of DDC published
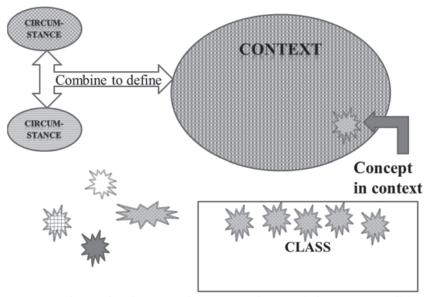
in three different years: 1876, 1932, 2011. Even if all of the other circumstances were the same, each variation in the circumstance of "time" defines a different context.

Context suggests a synthesis, a wholeness built of parts. KOSs are texts; they weave circumstances (or facets) together into particular contexts.[2] *Contexts*, however, should not be confused with *classes*. The circumstances that define contexts are outside of the objects that populate contexts, and the circumstances define the context, not the object. *Classes* are defined by commonalities; that is, the boundaries of a class are determined by the common attributes or commonalities held by the objects within the class.[3] Hence, the definition of a *class* is evident according to what is within the objects. If there are no common traits, there can be no classes.
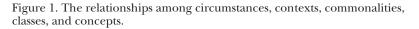
Contexts and circumstances and commonalities and classes are decidedly fluid. Contexts are defined by circumstances; classes are defined by commonalities. Contexts clearly have multiple, dynamic circumstances; classes may be defined by multiple, changing commonalities. The relationships among circumstances, contexts, commonalities, classes, and concepts are shown in figure 1. Essences bear the weight of providing stability; they are different in that they cannot be subdivided. Therefore, essences are innate, natural, and "hard-wired." Essences are immutable; they do not change. Essences are independent and internal and are not affected by context. Is this really the case? The *OED*'s seventh definition of *essence* is perhaps most apt.[4] The language used in this definition is singular (rather than plural), a quality compatible with its unchanging and independent nature. However, the *OED* provides eight different definitions that vary in their claims of independence and immutability. A physical presence is implied when *essence* is described as in 7.b: "Objective character, intrinsic nature as a 'Thing-in-itself'; 'that internal constitution, on which all the sensible properties depend.'" Other definitions limit *essence* to the immaterial: the second and fourth definitions (see endnote 4) have emerged from texts published from the fourteenth through the twentieth centuries. Collectively, they leave an equivocal definition to sort out: "8. *Loosely.* The most important indispensable quality or constituent element of anything; the specific difference, *of the essence (of)*: indispensable (to)."

Genre

According to the *OED* (2013), *genre* is "1.a. Kind; sort; style. 1.b. *spec.* A particular style or category of works of art; esp. a type of literary work characterized by a particular form, style, or purpose." It is "a category of artistic, musical, or literary composition characterized by a particular style, form, or content" (Genre, *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 2013). Although organizing information by genre can be traced back as early as Plato, who categorized literary genres into poetry, drama, and prose, it lacks a full and clear definition toward genre in the field of knowledge organization (KO).

Figure 1. The relationships among circumstances, contexts, commonalities, classes, and concepts.

Genre has been addressed in the KO literature in regard to metadata schemas, description, access, and encoding, where the term *form* is likely to appear as its alternative. *The Library of Congress Genre/Form Terms for Library and Archival Materials (LCGFT)* (Library of Congress, 2011) leaves the distinction between *genre* and *form* equivocal by referring to the former as works characterized by similar plots, themes, settings, situations, and characters, while the latter as a particular format and/or purpose. The only genre definition in *Resource Description and Access* (American Library Association, 2012) states that the form of work is a class or genre to which a work belongs, treating genre as a referent of form in some cases. Nevertheless, the significance of genre in KO is shown through a number of entries included in the *Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science* (Reitz, 2013): genre, subgenre, genre/form terms, form, form subdivision, and so on; in the third edition of the *Encyclopedia of Information and Library Sciences*: genre theory and research (Schryer, 2010) and internet genres (Crowston, 2010); and in *The Epistemological Lifeboat* (Hjørland & Nicolaisen, 2010): genre, domain analysis, writing studies, and so on.

The appearance of a document enables one to be aware of its form, which, in turn, enables one to be aware of its type of content and use, thus the distinctive and salient structural cues can tell the document's identity.

A genre, embodied in a text, image, audio, or video, is recognizable for its conventional structure and content and typical communicative purpose. Genre is characterized by its stability, which makes one genre being distinguishable from another, and generally communicable between the producer and the recipient. The genre is a convention, so the producer conforms to the expectations of that genre, and the recipient knows what to expect from that genre. For example, we usually browse by genre, such as thriller, comedy, action, and so on, to find movies of interest, or by genres like rock, country, jazz, and so on when we download music.

However, genres are "stabilized enough" though "constantly evolving" (Schryer, 2010, p. 1936), although the changes are usually subtle and will only be observable over time. From the three basic categories of literature divided by Plato to over a hundred genres spawned on the Web, some genres have split off from old ones, integrated from old ones, or evolved out of old ones (Crowston, 2010; Schryer, 2010). Undoubtedly, the Web environment spurs the fluidity of genre; the exponential growing of digital genres demonstrates the impact of digitality (Smith, 1996). One representative example is the blog, a hybrid genre that is drawn from both off-line and online sources, among which are journal blogs (derived from diaries) and filter blogs (derived from letters to the editor). Even the academic-journal-article genre has found its counterparts: adapted genres with linking or embedding information in articles or novel genres for reporting research results, such as datasets, software, and so on. Correspondingly, a genre metadata element is needed. In the fifteen basic elements of widely used metadata schema Dublin Core, there is a "type" element to describe the nature or genre of the resource, and a controlled vocabulary set is recommended for use. In addition, there is a "format" element to describe the file format, physical medium, or dimensions of the resource. The top-level elements of another metadata schema, MODS, also include "genre" and "type of Resource" (controlled), mapping onto "type" in Dublin Core.

As "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" (Miller, 1994, p. 31) and "a distinctive type of communicative action, characterized by a socially recognized communicative purpose and common aspects of form" (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994, p. 543), genre can reveal the communicative practices and their changes in a community. Hence, genre is not simply a text but a text in context; it is concerned with the contextuality that shapes the text, and, in turn, that is shaped by text. Any genre-related terms, such as *genre system*, *genre chain*, *genre repertoire*, or *genre ecology*, indicate that a genre can never exist independent of other related genres, its agents who routinely use the genre, the domain where the genre grows and evolves, and the task the genre intends to accomplish. Genre, both traditional and digital, fits in the intersection of the philosophy of information (PI) (Floridi, 2011) and library and information science (LIS); it

offers a broader scope to view an infosphere that humans as social inforgs inhabit, and genre is an important informational entity in the construction and deconstruction of an infosphere.

Although genre has aroused increasing interest in LIS (Andersen, 2002), it lacks sufficient attention to the role of genre in classification and bibliographic control. Nevertheless, genre is popular in organizing information, manifested in shelving in the public libraries and bookstores, in the faceted search of library catalogs online, and in the arrangement of works in library classification schemes, subject heading lists, and thesauri. Genre is fluid as well as stable, thus making it effective for exploration of essence and context.

Stability and Fluidity of Genre Classes

Classification is referred to as gathering materials by shared characteristics—that is, *commonalities*, usually of subject. Library classification numbers used to organize the library materials are assigned in accordance with the primary subject heading, which, in turn, describes the significant content of the material—hence, aboutness. However, a noticeable number of classes and subclasses are nonsubject; for example, "010 Bibliography" in DDC indicates that these *are* bibliographies, *not about* bibliographies. If a concept is beyond subject, beyond aboutness, we need to understand the nonsubject, concept-like genre in classification, and, furthermore, the essence and context that is within and extended from genre classes.

We first tracked the treatment of genre in DDC by examining its three editions: the first edition conceived by Melvil Dewey in 1876 (DDC1), the thirteenth edition published in 1932 (DDC13) (Fellows & Getchell)—the last edition under Dewey's direction (and using Dewey's "simplified spelling")—and the most recent edition, the twenty-third, which came out in 2011 (DDC23) (Mitchell, Beall, Green, Martin, & Panzer). The DDC exhibits stability and modest fluidity in the Divisions, which are one hierarchical step below the main classes, the primary reflection of academic disciplines, and the development of the standard subdivisions as a slow multiedition evolution.

The genre-related divisions are gathered under the main class "000 General Works," and the first nine divisions of the subsequent main classes. As shown in table 1, the divisions in General Works grow from six in DDC1 to nine in DDC13 with the addition of "Library economy," "General collected essays," and "Journalism General newspapers," and shrink to eight in DDC23 with the removal of "General collected essays." Divisions 010, 030, 050, and 070 address genres, and the latter three are further divided by language or geography. Sections of "010 Bibliography" across these three editions reveal the history and evolvement of the bibliography and catalog genre and its subgenres, as shown in table 2.

The bibliographic record, as a genre, is the product of the social-

Table 1. Divisions of the DDC's main-class "000 General Works"

DDC1	DDC13	DDC23
010 Bibliography	010 Bibliography	010 Bibliographies
020 Book rarities	020 Library economy	020 Library & and information sciences
030 General cyclopedias	030 General cyclopedias	030 Encyclopedias & and books of facts
040 Polygraphy	040 General collected essays	050 Magazines, journals, and & serials
050 General periodicals	050 General periodicals Magazines	060 Associations, organizations, and & museums
060 General societies	060 General learned societies	070 News media, journalism, and & publishing
	070 Journalism General newspapers	080 Quotations
	080 Polygrafy Special libraries	090 Manuscripts & and rare books
	090 Book rarities	

Divisions 010, 030, 050, and 070 address genres and the latter three are further divided by language or geography. Sections of 010 Bibliography across these three editions reveal the history and evolvement of the bibliography and catalog genre and its subgenres, as shown in table 2.

communicative activity in organizing knowledge. The various bibliographical data or data elements in the bibliographic record each tell a history, each perform a particular task, and each reveal something about the work they are representing and materializing (Andersen, 2002). The data elements—for example, author, title, subject, and so on—are the essential substance of a bibliographic record, and they construct a genre as bibliographic record. However, the concept of *bibliographic record* as a genre is fluid due to the changes in its context over time. The epistemic existence of various bibliographies and catalogs are intended to serve knowledge-organizing activities at different times. The dictionary catalog was the predominant form of library catalog in North America prior to the conversion of card catalogs into machine-readable form. In table 2, the three editions provide a glimpse of the lifecycle of dictionary catalogs; the "019 Dictionary catalogs" is absent in DDC1 and obsolete in DDC23 (indicated by the square brackets). The "018 Author catalogs" and the "Subject catalogs," the two components of a dictionary catalog, show a decline throughout the years: "017 Subject catalogs" merged into "016 Special subjects" in later editions, while "018 Author catalogs" turned out as obsolete, including author and other entries in DDC23, since multiple access points are available for online catalogs today.

In DDC1, form distinctions were introduced in the first nine divisions of each class with the same set of numbers: "1 Philosophy," "2 Compends," "3 Dictionaries," "4 Essays," "5 Periodicals," "6 Societies," "7 Education," "9 History," and varied forms for number 8. The rationale of this arrangement was stated by Dewey (1876) in the preface to the first edition:

Table 2. Sections of the DDC's "Division 010 Bibliography"

DDC1	DDC13	DDC23
011 General bibliographies	011 General bibliographies	011 Bibliographies and catalogs
012 Special forms	012 Of individuals	012 Bibliographies and catalogs of individuals
013 Manuscripts	013 Of special classes of authors	014 Bibliographies and catalogs of anonymous and pseudonymous works
014 Anonyms, pseudonyms, & c.	014 Of special forms: pseudonyims, etc.	
015 Special countries	015 Of special countries	
016 Special subjects	016 Of special subjects	015 Bibliographies and catalogs of works from specific places
017 Subject catalogues	017 Clast Class catalogs	
018 Authors' catalogues	018 Author catalogs	016 Bibliographies and catalogs of works on specific subjects
019 Library economy and reports	019 Dictionary catalogs	
		017 General bibliographies and catalogs of works held in specific collections or offered for sale
		[018] Catalogs arranged by author, main entry, date, or register number
		[019] Dictionary catalogs

The classification is mainly made by subjects or content regardless of *form*; but it is found practically useful to make an additional distinction in these general treatises, according to the form of treatment adopted. Thus, in Science we have a large number of books treating of Science in general, and so having a 0 for the Division number. These books are then divided into Sections, as are those of the other Classes according to the form they have taken on. We have the Philosophy and History of Science, Scientific Compends, Dictionaries, Essays, Periodicals, Societies, Education, and Travels, — all having the common subject, NATURAL SCIENCE, but treating it in these varied forms. These form distinctions are introduced here because the number of general works is large, and the numerals allow of this division, without extra labor for the numbers from 501 to 509 would otherwise be unused. (pp. 3–4; emphasis in original)

This statement somewhat echoes the only mentioning of genre in an appendix of the US thesaurus-construction standard ANSI/NISO Z39.19-2005, *Guidelines for the Construction, Format, and Management of Monolingual Controlled Vocabularies* (National Information Standards Organization, 2005), which suggests genre as additional criteria to group terms into broad classes for faceted display. Form distinctions were further developed without substantial changes half a century later as in DDC13: "1 Filosofy, theories, etc."; "2 Compends, outlines, etc."; "3 Dictionaries,

cyclopedias, etc.”; “4 Essays, lectures, letters, etc.”; “5 Periodicals, maga-
zines, etc.”; “6 Societies, associations, transactions, reports, etc.”; “7 Edu-
cation, study, teaching, training, etc.”; “8 Poligrafy, collections, etc.”; and
“9 History.”[5] These forms continue throughout the years up to the pres-
ent, although DDC23 does not address form distinctions separately in its
preface. However, moderate changes are observable in DDC23: “Section 2
miscellany,” “Section 4 social activities,” and “Section 6 organizations and
management” have switched away from the focus as in earlier editions.

Furthermore, DDC23 applies more genre terms via the auxiliary tables,
especially table 3, “Standard Subdivisions for the Arts, for Individual Lit-
eratures, and for Specific Literary Forms.” The form distinctions initiated
in DDC1, developed through a specific form-divisions table in DDC13,
appear as table 1, “Standard Subdivisions,” in DDC23: “Philosophy and
theory,” “Miscellany,” “Dictionaries, encyclopedias, concordances,” “Spe-
cial topics,” “Serial publications,” “Organizations and management,”
“Education, research, related topics,” “Groups of people,” and “History,
geographic treatment, biography.” In the first edition, where class stops at
the third place, genres appear more often in the schedules, such as “328
Legislative annals,” “329 Political essays and speeches,” “379 Reports,”
“620 Instruments and field books,” and “658 Business manuals,” which
were dropped in the later editions.

Genres as a product of situated communication vary with domains. Un-
surprisingly, the discipline of literature produces a larger set of genres. In
DDC23, American, English, German, French, Italian, and Spanish litera-
tures each have seven sections for poetry, drama, fiction, essays, speeches,
letters, and satire and humor genres, while Latin and Greek literature
uses four sections associated with poetry: dramatic poetry, epic poetry, lyr-
ic poetry, and poetry in general. The principle of parallel content did not
apply to Latin and Greek literatures in the first edition, where Philosophy
and History sections were included and poetry spanned four sections—
for example, Latin/Greek poetry, Dramatic, Epic, Lyric—but throughout
the years, the schedule evolved to be similar to that of literatures in other
languages. For example, in DDC23, they are: Latin/Classical Greek po-
etry, Latin/Classical Greek dramatic poetry and drama, Latin/Classical
Greek epic poetry and fiction, and Latin/Classical Greek lyric poetry. It
shows the history and tradition of literature in Latin and Greek and the
status of poetry in Latin and Greek literatures, since *dramatic*, *epic*, and
lyric are the three basic categories of poetry first divided by Aristotle. The
evolution of DDC also suggests the fluidity of literary genre as follows: the
rise of American literature, since the Division 810 was “Treatises and col-
lections” in DDC1 and changed to “American literature” in the two later
editions; in the first edition of DDC, satire and humor was distinguished
between Latin satire and Greek humor, and was separate for all other
literatures; and “fiction” was first named “romance,” and “speeches” was

originally titled "oratory." Additionally, music, first broadly classed as dramatic music and church music, now has a rich genre development; and the only "genre"-named class is under painting: for example, "754 Genre Paintings" in DDC23. This corroborates the definitions of *genre* by both the *OED* and the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* in which the word first appears as a category of artistic, musical, or literary work.

Religion, a discipline of perennial significance in Western culture, exhibits a variety of genre classes in DDC: "249 Religious fiction and anecdote," "252–259 Sermons" (DDC1); "244 Miscellany: religious novels, Sunday school books, allegories, satires, etc.", "245 Hymnology Religious poetry," "252 Sermons" (DDC13); "242 Devotional literature," "243 Evangelistic writings for individuals and families," "252 Texts of sermons," and "270 History, geographic treatment, biography of Christianity" (DDC23). The genre-related classes also indicate which genres are most likely used for particular disciplines. For example, the genre "dictionary" plays a more important role in the discipline of language even though it is generally applicable, as does "biography" in the discipline of history; and maps, almanacs, and chronology are more likely associated with the astronomy discipline than others.

Like DDC, LCC divides main classes by academic disciplines, and subclasses by branches of the disciplines. It is largely based on literary warrant and develops form divisions individually under each subject. Broader subjects, which hold a larger amount of library materials, have more form divisions, while narrower subjects do not. There are many form tables in "Class K, Law"; furthermore, two LCC tables were published as separate volumes: "K Tables Form Division Tables for Law" for Class K and "Language and Literature Tables" for Class P-PZ. Although *genre* is not so widely used as *facet* in LCC, the arrangement of works within each class or subclass moves from general to specific, usually starting from the general-form divisions as indicated below:

> Forms
>   Periodicals, Societies, Congresses, Directories, Collections, Dictionaries, etc.
>   Philosophy
>   History
>   Biography
>   General works
>   Study and teaching
>   Subjects and more specific topics within those subjects

Scholarly disciplines offer varying circumstances that define differing contexts. Specialized thesauri are ontological representations of disciplines, meaning that their treatment of genre embodies that of the discipline as a whole. For example, a total of 231 types and forms of materials delimiters are used in *A Women's Thesaurus* (Capek, 1987), and 34 in

the *Thesaurus of Aging Terminology* (Rimkus, Melinchok, McEvoy, & Yeager, 2005). Both contain the following terms, showing the common genres across social science studies dealing with groups of people: *bibliographies, book reviews, commentaries, directories, encyclopedias, filmographies, glossaries, interviews, narratives, photographs, plays, speeches*, and *surveys.*

Essence and Context through the Lens of Genre Classes

We approach the end of our exploration confronting the question "What is the real relationship between contexts and concepts, and classes?" through the lens of genre, and also the question: "Where does genre fit in?" (from Olson, 2012). We are interested in what genre will tell us when we view the framework where commonalities police classes; circumstances define contexts; and concepts complement classes and are generalized from instances in contexts.

A comparison between controlled vocabularies regarding genre both diachronically and synchronically enables us to reflect on the previously proposed framework, particularly the relationships between concepts and contexts, between concepts and classes, and between classes and contexts. But first, what is the relationship between genre and concepts, contexts, or classes? Not all things can be taken or named as genre. When the home page comes as the first unique digital genre, it has formed its characteristics different from other genres. *Genre* is so-called because it creates shared expectations of the form and content of communication; thus, if a document is produced conforming to its genre conventions, a mere mention of the form should inform the reader about its typical content before he or she actually interacts with it, due to the concept the reader has in regard to a particular genre. The concept of genre does not include subject only but instead contains richer information: the form, the content, the purpose, the usual context where it is in use, and even its intended audience.

Genre is, in essence, an integration of aboutness, of-ness, and is-ness for its multidimensions. A fiction, a piece of music, an image, or a film is likely being described as of-ness instead of aboutness, and form and genre are likely being taken as is-ness. Is-ness indicates the nature of genre—it *is* something rather than *about* something. However, it is form, one aspect of genre that is equivalent to is-ness; the other two aspects of genre, content and function, are mapped onto aboutness and of-ness, respectively. Genre can always reveal the context of a work and be best described by of-ness rather than the other two, since *of*, as defined by the *OED*, deals with temporal and spatial aspects and constitutes the situation of an event. It is no surprise that fiction, music, image, and film have the most manifestations of genres.

Svenonius (2004) addresses the following three theories as backbones of knowledge representation: *operationalism*, the *referential or picture theory of meaning*, and the *contextual or instrumental theory of meaning*. The essence of genre relates to the picture theory of meaning, where the extensional meaning of the word *poetry* is the set of all poetry, by different authors, at different times, in different places, in different languages, on paper to read or on a CD to listen to, but they contain the most important indispensable quality or constituent element to make them identifiable as poetry. The referent of the word *poetry* is the concept of *poetry*, with all the typical genre characteristics that poetry must have.

A concept of a different genre usually includes a different context associated with that genre, and therefore a genre class incorporates the context of that genre. The similarities of literary genre are based on four main types of similarities: mental attitudes of authors, the effects on a reader's mind, verbal constructs, and imaginative worlds evoked by verbal constructs (Hernadi, 1972). These similarities are also applicable to genres beyond literary works and therefore real worlds by the verbal evocations. Once a document is labeled as a genre, all of the characteristics essential to that genre, including its contexts, will be attributed to that document. Genre is an important descriptor or delimiter used in knowledge organization, since it facilitates the user's recognition of a document by conveying its characteristics of form, content, and essential function— that is, the context in which it is likely to be used.

The context of genre relates to the instrumental theory of meaning, where a word is defined in terms of its use rather than its referent. We can always expect the use of poetry to be different from that of essay. The consistent use of a genre in its context assigns the meaning of that genre with its unique function, and therefore the meaning of genre class with pragmatism. The instrumental approach is powerful, and likewise the contextual role that genre plays is more important than its referential role. Whether a genre is used to indicate what it is or is mix-used to indicate what it is about, a genre can express what beyond the subject can reveal. A music piece is better described by genre, so also for a painting. When used as a facet, no matter whether in the library classification as a subdivision or in the interface as an option for browsing and searching, genre enhances and extends the expressiveness of meaning.

The entering, obsoleting, and rearranging of genre-related classes in classification systems are a reflection of changes in their contexts, as illustrated by the changes in DDC over time. For example, is the satire and humor in today's DDC an equivalent to the Latin satire and Greek humor in its first edition? A fiction is conceptualized differently from a romance, and a speech differently from an oratory. Furthermore, genre classes inform us of the ontology of a discipline like literature where almost all

classes are of genre, and also the statuses of disciplines like religion and law, which have larger amounts of documents and thus require more genre distinction.

Concept is supposed to be subjective, while class, objective. The essences are innate, immutable, and independent of context; unlike essences, contexts are fluid, changing with time and location. However, when class is in use, the boundary between the concept of a class and a class itself is not so distinct. The concept plays a role in the use of class, especially for the genre class. The concept of genre class may be inclusive of context, and it has been evidenced that the emergence and evolution of genre class can hardly be independent of context. Fundamentally, genre has the nature of context, since a genre always embodies people's action and vision. Genre as class is special: it inherits the essential characteristics of class, but unlike class, involves context as part of its essential characteristics.

Genre serves as a lens for us to better understand essences, contexts, and concepts and their manifestations, classes. Rather than being incompatible opposites, essences and contexts complement each other in the definition of concepts. This echoes Floridi's (2004) claim that there is no unified theory of information, but "a distributed network of connected concepts, linked by mutual and dynamic influences that are not necessarily genetic or genealogical" (p. 660). Nevertheless, how these abstractions relate to classification is a question both theoretical and practical to our endeavoring efforts to further knowledge organization.

Notes

1. *circumstance*: "2. a. pl. The logical surroundings or 'adjuncts' of an action; the time, place, manner, cause, occasion, etc., amid which it takes place" (*OED*, 2013).
2. *context*: "1. The weaving together of words and sentences; construction of speech, literary composition. *Obs.* . . . 4. a. *concr.* The whole structure of a connected passage regarded in its bearing upon any of the parts which constitute it; the parts which immediately precede or follow any particular passage or 'text' and determine its meaning. (Formerly circumstance q.v. 1c.)" (*OED*, 2013).
3. *class*: "2. a. A set or category of things having some related properties or attributes in common, grouped together, and differentiated from others under a general name or description; a kind, a sort" (*OED*, 2013).
4. *essence*: "2. a. *concr.* Something that *is*; an existence, entity. Now restricted to spiritual or immaterial entities. . . . 4. a. 'Substance' in the metaphysical sense; the reality underlying phenomena; absolute being. . . . 7. That which constitutes the being of *a* thing; that 'by which *it* is what *it* is'" [emphasis added]. . . . 7. b. Objective character, intrinsic nature as a 'Thing-in-itself'; 'that internal constitution, on which all the sensible properties depend'" (*OED*, 2013).
5. The texts by Melvil Dewey appear here as they were written; some are expressed in Dewey's simplified spelling.

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Lei Zhang received her PhD in library and information studies from the University of British Columbia and conducted postdoctoral research in the Information Organization Research Group at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. Her research areas include information organization and information interaction, particularly the role of genre in organizing, structuring, presenting, and linking information. She has published articles in academic journals and conference proceedings, including *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* and *Proceedings of the*

Association for Information Science and Technology Annual Meeting. She won an award in the ALISE/Jean Tague-Sutcliffe Doctoral Student Research Poster Competition. She is currently teaching in the School of Information at San José State University.

Hope A. Olson is a professor emeritus in the School of Information Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. Her research addresses classification theory and problems of bias in subject access to information and is grounded in analyses of texts ranging from seminal works to the records in library catalogs. She has published for both scholarly and professional audiences, including "The Power to Name: Representation in Library Catalogues" (2001), and *The Power to Name: Locating the Limits of Subject Representation in Libraries* (2002); coauthored *Subject Analysis in Online Catalogs* (2nd ed., with J. J. Boll) (2001); and edited the volume *Information Resources in Women's Studies and Feminism* (2002). She was editor-in-chief of the international scholarly journal *Knowledge Organization* from 2000 to 2004. In her retirement, she continues to focus on her own research and on projects with colleagues and students.