 Genre Studies Network (GSN)

an interdisciplinary network funded by AHRC and organised by Dr Natasha Rulyova (University of Birmingham) in cooperation with Dr Garin Dowd (University of West London)

Workshop five

Genre and Canons of Representation

29 April 2013

Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham

Organised by the University of Birmingham

in cooperation with the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham

**Speakers’ Bios and Abstracts**

**Peter Buse, University of Salford, UK, ‘Polaroid after Analogue’**

Prof. Buse did my first degree at the University of Alberta in Canada, spending an exchange year at the University of Leeds. His MA and PhD are from the Centre for Critical and Cultural Theory at the University of Wales, Cardiff. He is currently Director of English in the School of Humanities, Languages and Social Sciences, University of Salford. In his research he is especially interested in questions of culture and technology, particularly as they relate to the history and theory of photography, and in the role of popular photography periodicals in the shaping of photographic cultures. This work ties in closely with his work with the Periodicals research cluster, a research grouping which he leads.  In 2007 he received grants from the AHRC and the British Academy to work on a cultural history of Polaroid, a project which is gradually turning into a book. I have also published a number of pieces engaging in one way or another with psychoanalysis. Collaboration with others has led him to write on Walter Benjamin and on the Spanish filmmaker Alex de la Iglesia.

The paper can be accessed at <http://as-coursecast-1.adf.bham.ac.uk/Panopto/Pages/Viewer/Default.aspx?id=b735aa05-a937-4a4f-bef0-689d43ed74eb>

**Isabel Corona, Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain, ‘New Modes for Old Genres: The multimedia obituary as a (hyper)link to life’**

Isabel Corona is currently a senior lecturer in the Department of English Philology (Faculty of Arts) at the Universidad de Zaragoza (Spain), where she teaches undergraduate and postgraduate courses in English Grammar and Translation. However, her professional career has not always been linked to the University. For more than a decade she worked as a TV journalist for the state-run Spanish Television (TVE) and as PR for the regional and local governments. Her professional involvement with media communication was ‘transferred’ to the Academia. She obtained her PhD with a thesis on a multimodal analysis of printed obituaries in British and Spanish newspapers. Her current research focuses on a number of themes (interdiscursivity, multimodality, interpersonality) related to professional genres, including media, academic and legal genres.

With respect to legal genres, she has been fully involved in the International Research Project "International Commercial Arbitration Practices: A Discourse Analytical Study", (<http://www1.english.cityu.edu.hk/arbitration/arbitration/people.html>), working with Prof. Vijay Bhatia (City University of Hong Kong).  Her most recent publications in this area include “Arbitration Recontextualized” (*World Englishes* 30/1 2011); “Confidentiality at Risk: The Interdiscursive Construction of International Commercial Arbitration”(*Discourse & Communication*, 5/4 2011); “Confidentiality vs Publicity: The Impact of International Arbitration in the Media” in V. K Bhatia/ C.N., Candlin/M. Gotti (eds.) *Discourse and Practice in International Commercial Arbitration: Issues, Challenges and Prospects* (Ashgate 2012), and “Arbitration across genres: from ‘private resolution’ to ‘public war”, in G.Tessuto/ C. Williams (eds.) *Language in the Negotiation of Justice: Contexts, Issues and Applications* (Ashgate 2013).

She is a member of the research group InterLAE ([www.interlae.com](http://www.interlae.com)), based at the University of Zaragoza, which has been working on the national project “Generic Integrity in Academic and Professional Communication”, and which is about to embark on another national research project funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy, “English as a lingua franca across specialised discourses: a critical genre analysis of alternative spaces of linguistic and cultural production”.

Abstract: This talk takes as a point of departure the general assumption that genres evolve and change constantly, even more so in our days, when we tend to consider the recent technological innovations as determining factors in genre evolution and behaviour. By taking both a brief diachronic perspective and a more detailed exploration of synchronic variation of a traditional journalistic genre, the obituary, this paper aims to shed some light on the actual struggle between stability and change. Obituaries can be considered as canonical examples of typified rhetorical actions carried out by newspapers in a recurrent social situation, the death of a person with some kind of public relevance. My analysis explores the semiotic resources put to use in obituaries in this specific institutional setting, the newspaper, in both its printed and online versions. It will describe the process of ‘adaptation’ of obituaries to the digital platform and the extent to which the new material affordances have actually ‘affected’ the genre of obituary as a socio-cultural construct. It will argue that the interactive factor in the social ritual of remembering is moving obituaries from their multimodal version to other multimedial ‘gravesites’.

The paper can be accessed at <http://as-coursecast-1.adf.bham.ac.uk/Panopto/Pages/Viewer/Default.aspx?id=2e7479e0-d84e-4181-aef9-e39f59ba9197>

**Anna Sloan, Department of Film and Television Studies, University of Warwick, UK, ‘Film noir and colonial spatialities’**

Anna has recently completed her PhD in [Film and Television Studies](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/film/), University of Warwick. Anna's thesis is titled ***Imperial Hollywood: American Cinematic Representations of Europe, 1947-1964***. It examines postwar Hollywood 'tourist films', in which Americans travel abroad to Europe. Anna's thesis examines 'tourist films' of the post-war period: Hollywood films about Americans travelling abroad in Europe. These films offer a vicarious experience of tourism, displaying Europe as a fantasy holiday locale which functions as an 'other' to postwar American society: a space for the expression of desires and fears repressed from American domesticity. She explores these tourist films as an American imperial cinema, showing the way Hollywood envisioned Europe as an economic, military and cultural colony, dependent on America for stability and development yet simultaneously imagined as either a utopian or a dystopian 'other' space. In doing so, she aims to bring the film text into the discussion of American imperialism since 1945, understanding Hollywood's representations of distant locations as imperial cinema rather than, as previous authors have done, focusing on the political and economic arguments for Hollywood's involvement in American imperialism.

Abstract: This paper argues that colonial representational tropes are pervasive in many corners of classical Hollywood cinema in ways that are closely intertwined with genre. Although I find this to be true of many Hollywood genres and cycles including the women’s film and the musical as well as the more obvious western and travelogue, the present paper will focus on film noir as a case in point. Recent work (Auerbach, 2011; Dimendberg, 2004) has been concerned with understanding noir’s spatialities, yet this work is typically concerned with either the genre’s mapping of American cities or its expression of Cold War political anxieties. I wish to highlight more generally how noir’s depictions of otherness rest on a topos of Orientalist representation; examining this topos can, I argue, tell us much about the American self-image in the late 1940s and 1950s.

The paper will give a close reading of *Confidential Report* (Orson Welles, 1955) – a film in which a noir plot is transposed outside of American borders, to European space. Through an analysis of its tropes of surveillance and control of European space and its mobilisation of a centre-to-periphery logic organised around the white American male, I will argue that this film’s ambivalent and anxious mode of representation rests on a foundation of age-old colonial visual aesthetics. The sublime will play a key role here, for its Kantian logic of a split masculine subject who struggles for control of the unknowable half of the self bears striking resemblance to many classic theorisations of the film noir hero. I will argue that the racial difference central to film noir, usually theorised as symbolic of psychoanalytic or sexual dynamics, must be acknowledged in its own right; it tells of how classical Hollywood cinema is permeated by colonialist logic which identifies the white American male as the hegemonic centre.

(Unfortunately, the speaker did not deliver the paper on the day. The paper was replaced with N. Rulyova’s paper.)

**Michael Stewart, Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, UK, ‘Melodramatic Film Studies: The enduring reach of melodrama in contemporary film and culture’**

Dr Stewart became a lecturer in Media, film and cultural studies at QMU in 2000. Prior to this he was a lecturer and tutor at Liverpool John Moores University and Glasgow University. His PhD is on popular television and its teenage audiences. His main teaching commitments are: Introduction to Film Studies, and Narrative and Representation in Film and Media (level 1); Film Genre (level 2); Contemporary Hollywood Cinema (level 3); Film and the Family (level 4). Michael’s main research interest is film melodrama, in particular films which focus on families and individuals – what some theorists refer to as pathetic melodrama. He is currently editing an international collection of essays entitled Melodrama in Contemporary Film and Television which is due for publication by Palgrave Macmillan in 2014.

Abstract**:** In this paper I will argue that melodrama remains a dominant mode of representation in contemporary film culture. Its enduring influence is clear in various established film genres, for example war films, thrillers, westerns, action-adventures and biopics. My primary interest, however, is the family melodrama – a staple of film which from some perspectives is not a genre at all. It remains nonetheless a predominant and usually pejorative way of conceiving of melodrama, so that when melodrama is theorized as genre, frequently it is the family melodrama which is the focus of discussion. The paper will outline why this conflation of melodrama and family melodrama is in some ways inaccurate and problematic. In so doing, it will provide a brief and selective historical and theoretical definition of melodrama, drawing in particular on the work of Colin Mercer (1988), Christine Gledhill (1987), Steve Neale (2000) and Ben Singer (2001). These scholars examine melodrama from different perspectives. However, broadly speaking, their work shares: a genealogical method; an emphasis on historical contingency in understanding both how melodrama has been defined, as well as the specific forms it takes; a focus on historical change and cultural specificity; a strong desire to move beyond entrenched oppositions; and an emphasis on melodrama’s symbiotic and complex relation to realism. The paper will then examine a small number of recent pathetic film melodramas – that is, films high on pathos and focusing on intimate and family relationships – in order to illustrate the enduring reach of melodrama and its relationship to specific genres. It will argue that films such as *Brokeback Mountain* (2003)*, Red Road* (2006) and *The Edge of Heaven* (2007) can be defined variously from the perspective of genre; are also examples of pathetic melodrama; and can also be theorized as part of the renewal of the melodramatic mode. *The Edge of Heaven*, for example, is an accented, globalized art film; has strong elements of pathos, suffering, entrapment and rescue; and also, the paper will argue, reconfigures melodrama’s relationship to home, history and oedipal relations.

The paper can be accessed at:  <http://as-coursecast-1.adf.bham.ac.uk/Panopto/Pages/Viewer/Default.aspx?id=a7cbb007-0af7-46a9-b68a-0fbddf51b195>

**Lesley Stevenson, University of West London, University of West London, UK, ‘Seduced by Art: The Problem Of Photogtaphy’**

Dr Stevenson is Principal Lecturer at the University of West London. Her research focuses on nineteenth-century French painting and consumer culture and she has published a number of books and articles in these areas.

Abstract: This paper will consider the shift from a formalised, hierarchical theory of genre established in painting in the seventeenth century to the way in which it has been grafted on to photography theory and practice in the twenty-first century.

Specifically, it will examine the recent exhibition at London’s National Gallery, Seduced by Art, the first proper attempt to represent photography at that gallery. In setting photographs and paintings side by side and by retaining the institutional strictures of the hierarchy of the genres in imposing a museological narrative on to the exhibition, it will be argued that little has changed and the seductive powers of high art continue to be hegemonic. Those genres which might be considered uniquely photographic, and which serve more commercial purposes, failed to find a place in the hierarchical, aestheticised structure imposed by the gallery.

By focusing on the case of still life, traditionally the lowest of the genres in painting theory and practice, the paper will consider the ways in which the shift from painting to photography was represented at the exhibition as part of seamless trajectory in which the criteria for inclusion were set largely by aesthetic considerations. An attempt to recontextualise the wider uses of photographic still lifes, particularly in the nineteenth century, will offer a history that was overlooked at the exhibition.

The paper can be accessed at <http://as-coursecast-1.adf.bham.ac.uk/Panopto/Pages/Viewer/Default.aspx?id=62353d35-9c31-45db-83be-32031b11d874>

**Dirk Uffelmann, University of Passau, Germany, ‘The Issue of Genre in Digital Memory Studies’**

Prof. Uffelmann is Chair of Slavic Literatures and Cultures at the University of Passau, Germany. He studied Russian, Polish, Czech and German literature in Tübingen, Vienna, Warsaw and Constance, worked as Assistant Professor at the Universities of Erfurt and Bremen, and as Lecturer at the University of Edinburgh. From 1999 to 2000 he was a member of the foundation senate of Erfurt University. He holds a PhD degree from the University of Constance (1999) and finished his postdoctoral thesis (Habilitation) at Bremen University in 2005. His main fields of interest are theory of literature and the interconnection between literature and religion, philosophy, architecture and economics. He is especially interested in problems of cross-cultural relations and migration. He is co-editor of Zeitschrift für Slavische Philologie.

Abstract: This paper relies on findings from a research seminar conducted jointly by the Universities of Munich (Prof Martin Schulze Wessel) and Passau (myself) in 2011/12. The participants, PhD students and postgraduates from the Honours Master’s Programme in East European Studies (Osteuropastudien), explored competing memories of communism in East European and Eurasian internet communities (Russia, Ukraine, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia and Kyrgyzstan).

In my presentation for the workshop “Genre and canons of representation”, I intend to elaborate upon the underlying question of interactive online genres and their differing impacts on the construction of historical memories. I will explore the different communication genres of the internet (Social Network Sites, Blogs such as LiveJournal, comments on YouTube or news portals), especially the form of communication they require, the way this form of communication interferes with memory culture and how it influences its various representations.

The main focus of this paper is on the triadic constellation of technology, interactive genre and memory. It proposes a generative approach to online memories and a nuanced answer to the dichotomy of media determinism and media marginality.

The paper can be accessed at <http://as-coursecast-1.adf.bham.ac.uk/Panopto/Pages/Viewer/Default.aspx?id=900a0c01-be18-4613-a927-8210618984cb>

**Dr Natasha Rulyova, ‘Tough Russian Guys on YoutubeVersus Geeks and Jokers on Twitter: Russian New Media Users’ Reaction to the Chelyabinsk Meteor’ (replacement paper)**

Natasha Rulyova has research interests in Russian media studies, post-Soviet television and Russian-language new media, Russian poetry and translation studies, and genre studies. She is currently leading an AHRC-funded Genre Studies Network project (over £30,000). Further details about the project can be found here: <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/lcahm/departments/russian/research/genre-studies-network.aspx> . Prior to this project, she lead a CEELBAS-funded project entitled New Media in New Europe-Asia, which resulted in a co-edited special issue on new media of the peer-refereed Europe-Asia Studies journal ([Volume 64](http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ceas20?open=64#vol_64), Issue 8, 2012). She is also co-author (with Stephen Hutchings) of  Television and Culture in Putin's Russia: Remote Control (London: Routledge, 2009). In addition, she is co-editor of  The Post-Soviet Russian Media: Conflicting Signals  (London: Routledge, 2009) and Globalisation, Freedom and the Media after Communism: The past as future (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

Abstract: This article will analyse how Russian-language new media users communicate their reaction to a meteor shower, which occurred in Russia on 15 February 2013. The three most popular new media technologies used for recording the event and broadcasting people’s reaction to it were dashboard cameras, cellar phones and Twitter. The article presents a multi-modal analysis of tweets, dashcam videos and cellar phone videos subsequently uploaded on the internet by users.

My approach to analysis primarily draws on Bakhtin’s understanding of primary and secondary speech genres (Bakhtin 1996). A comparative study of visual, spoken, and written responses recorded on a variety of technological devices advances our understanding of primary and secondary genres in that dashcam videos present multiple examples of ‘primary speech genres’: in Bakhtin’s terms, they can be described as ‘direct reaction to realty’. On the other hand, tweets, contrary to the recent theorising of Twitter as immediate response to reality (Zappavigna 2011, 2012), mostly represent examples of secondary speech genres. The purpose of tweets is more complex than primary or ‘direct’ response to a natural phenomenon; they aim, among other things, to ethically and aesthetically reflect on reality.

In addition, the analysis of new media users’ responses to the meteor shower is also underpinned by genre studies (Shryer 1995, 2002) and identity theories (Butler 1990). The article demonstrates how new media users employ familiar genres to shape their reaction to the event. In doing so, they construct their identities framed by particular genres. Dashboard cam users tend to contribute the so-called ‘fail’ genre while twitterers surprisingly embrace the genre of the ‘joke’. Dashboard cam users perform exclusively macho masculine identities while twitterers’ identities are not so evidently gendered.

The paper can be accessed at <http://as-coursecast-1.adf.bham.ac.uk/Panopto/Pages/Viewer/Default.aspx?id=6c041a6c-4083-4c48-bfc0-f746c8d762a7> .