 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 six

**Communicating Genre: the author, the text and the audience**

10 June 2013

Torrington Room, Senate House, London

**Speakers’ Bios and Abstracts**

**Prof. Charles Bazerman, University of California Santa Barbara, USA, ‘The Places and Activities Genres Make: Sense-making in the Built Symbolic Environment’**

Charles Bazerman, Professor of Education at the University of California Santa Barbara, is Chair of the International Society for the Advancement of Writing Research. His books include *The Languages of Edison's Light*, *Shaping Written Knowledge: The Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article in Science*, and *The Informed Writer*. He has edited the *Handbook of Research on Writing*, *Traditions of Writing Research*, *International Advances in Writing Research*, *Genre in a Changing World*, *What Writing Does and How It Does It*, and many other volumes. He has published over a 100 chapters and articles.

Abstract: For the last 5000 years texts have been increasingly getting our attention, removing us from the world immediately in front of us, taking our minds to distant places—sometimes to the material places the writer writes from, as in the postcard written from our friend’s holiday, but often to a place that exists only in the world of symbolic interchange—the place of a philosophic discussion transacted by texts or the government file where our records are kept, or Auden’s valley of poetry where he claims nothing happens. Using the technologies of the transcribed words and of recorded sound and images, humans have been building an increasingly complex symbolic environment grounded in and drawing on daily life, but increasingly removed from it. This is a world of meanings, relationships, organizations, and imagined places. These are places we go to for knowledge, understanding, ideals, plans, sharing, and pleasures. Yet it is a challenge for us to make sense of the many places created in our texts and to locate ourselves as thinkers, actors, and speakers in the literate worlds, whether mediated by ink and paper or electrons and digital displays. Our practical knowledge of genres and the activity systems they are part of provide us compasses and horizons to navigate the built symbolic world. Theories of genres and activity systems then give us a more fundamental understanding of how the built symbolic environment is put together and functions—and how it might be reconfigured to serve current needs better and expanded to realize new human possibilities.

**Prof. Rolf Hellebust, University of Nottingham, UK, ‘The Unfulfillable Contract: Bakhtin**

**and the 19th-Century Russian Novel’**

After completing his doctoral studies in Toronto in 1993, Rolf Hellebust took up a post at the University of Calgary. In 2007 he came to Nottingham. His research covers a wide range of topics in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian literature and culture, as well as comparative literature. His current major project is a book on the construction of the 19th-century Russian literary canon as a cultural narrative. Publications related to this theme include an article on Turgenev for Russian Literature, one for the Slavic and East European Journal on Bakhtin and the Russian canon, and an essay on the myth of St. Petersburg for the Russian[*Review*](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/slavonic/staff/rolf.hellebust). He is also continuing to work on contemporary Russian culture, literary and otherwise. Upon completion of his monograph on the 19th century, he would like to focus on the theory and practice of Russian modernism and postmodernism in its international contexts, building on previous work on such figures as Belyi and Joyce, Nabokov, Bitov, and Aksenov.

Abstract: The origins of the essentialist/historicist clash in Bakhtin’s concept of the novel are sought in the influence of nineteenth-century Russian cultural ideology, which uses German romantic aesthetics to support its vision of literature’s social function. Bakhtin’s stress on unfinishedness in the genre of the novel corresponds to the unrealizability of this mythic function – as an inherently unfulfillable term in the generic contract. This unrealizability is manifested in the “virtual sequels” of the classics of the realist Canon from Pushkin to Dostoevsky. These unwritten texts, invoked fictionally or by explicit authorial intention, become loci for literature’s projected bridging of art and actuality, to the extent that the existing novel becomes but a prologue to a future masterpiece envisioning the resolution of Russian culture’s eternal dualities.

**Ms José de Esteban, British Film Institute (BFI), UK, and Ms Natasha Fairbairn, BFI, UK, ‘When My Gangster Movie is Your Thriller: Genres in Motion at the BFI’**

Since 2010, as part of the BFI's information specialists team, **Jóse de Esteban**'s been working on the update of the classification systems used at the BFI. In 2002, she was awarded a master’s degree at Birkbeck College for her study of the films of Julio Medem. In 2008, she obtained a master’s degree in information management at London Metropolitan University for her analysis of subject indexing of the moving image at the BFI's National Archive.

**Natasha Fairbairn** has worked at the BFI since 1986, as library assistant, indexer, cataloguer and, since 2011, as an information specialist. She has a BA Hons. Degree in English Language from the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and Post-graduate Diploma in Library and Information Studies from Ealing College of Higher Education. She is also currently part of the FIAF (Fédération Internationale des Archives du Film) Cataloguing Rules Revision Workgroup.

Abstract: The British Film Institute was founded in 1933 and its vast funds include 111,308 fiction films, 115, 446 non-fiction films and 382,026 television programmes. Genres have traditionally been employed as a basic way of improving access to collections, but their use is not without its challenges. In 2010 we began work on updating a list of 263 terms with the main aim of preserving semantic richness, avoiding confusion and ambiguity and allowing wider use of the list across the BFI. This presentation will give an account of the lessons learnt.

**Prof. Greg Myers, Lancaster University, UK, ‘Tweet and Audience in Science Twitter’**

Prof. Myers' best-known work focused on the social context of written academic texts, especially in science, treating such issues as politeness, cohesion, narrative structure, commonplaces, and illustration, drawing on frameworks from the sociology of scientific knowledge. More recent work has studied expression of opinions in talk, particularly in focus groups and consultation processes; the approach is largely through conversation analysis. He has written five books: *Writing Biology: Texts in the Social Construction of Science* (Wisconsin, 1990), *Words in Ads* (Arnold, 1994), *Ad Worlds: Brands, Media, Audiences* (Arnold, 1998), *Matters of Opinion: Talking about Public Issues* (Cambridge, 2004, and *Discourse of Blogs and Wikis* (Continuum, 2010). His current research, with Sofia Lampropoulou, draws on an ESRC-funded project on 'The Construction of Stance in Social Research Interviews'; articles have appeared in *Forum Qualitative Research*, *Journal of Pragmatics*, and *Discourse Studies*. He edits the *Elsevier journal Discourse Context & Media*. He is also on the Editorial Boards of the journals *Applied Linguistics, Discourse & Society, ESPecialist, Language in Society, Language Teaching Research, Science as Culture, Text & Talk, and Written Communication*. With Ruth Wodak, he edits the John Benjamins book series *Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society, and Culture*. In 2011 he was elected as a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences. He has been active in the Ross Priory seminars on Broadcast Talk since 1995. He is Chair (2012-15) of BAAL, the British Association for Applied Linguistics.

Abstract**:** The conventional problems of relating textual structure to readers’ responses have changed in on-line genres. In Web 2.0, the reader is potentially involved in commenting on and disseminating the text (as in Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, or blogs), or the text itself might be thought of as a collective product (as in Wiikipedia). In this presentation, I will consider the relation of text and audience on Twitter. I draw on a corpus 2000 tweets by ten scientists (and a reference corpus of 2000 tweets by ten nonscientists). I consider the relation between tweet, retweet, and comment. I also consider the kind of audience construction done through the creative and playful use of hashtags, either to create a collective text on a topic, or to comment wittily on one’s own text. While some of my findings are specific to Twitter, the wider implications challenge traditional ideas of authorial control in a range of genres.

**Ms Kate Nolan, independent artist, *Neither* Photobook (narratives of Kaliningrad women)**

Kate Nolan is an Irish photographer based in Dublin, Ireland. She graduated with a BA (Hons) in Documentary Photography from the University of Wales, Newport, 2010. Kate combines her art practice with commissions, workshops and is the director of Slideluck Potshow Dublin. Her long-term project *Neither* was recently shortlisted for the Alliance Francaise Photography Prize and has been exhibited in London, Cardiff, Dublin, Minneapolis and Kaliningrad, Russia. This work has been reviewed in several international magazines and a selection was chosen to be included in the book 'Context and Narrative in Photography' by Maria Short.

Abstract: *Neither* photobook works to use the diary style of writing and historical accounts, combined with my images to give women of Kaliningrad a personalized voice within this project. Being able to effectively give them a voice has always been difficult to realize within the gallery space but needed to be completed within the book form. This work became a collaboration as I built close relationships with, among others, Natasha, Olga, Jenya and Anastasyia. I have worked continuously with the women to edit the work and contribute their texts and ideas to help establish their power within the project. Having tried interviewing and audio recordings I felt like I was always leading the conversation. I wanted rather to give the women the choice to how they would represent themselves. After conversations and viewing other works that used individuals texts, I decided to ask the women to write 'diary' entries with little guidance from myself but rather as personal texts that they would write for themselves. With this I received very different entries speaking of dreams, love, disappointments and fears. These entries then became something outside of the diary but thoughts and comments on their own own identity within Kaliningrad that they have written to present to the outside world. These texts are handwritten and presented as an in-bound booklet at the end of the book with one entry sliced into small parts and printed on tabs between my images to guide the viewer through the book. The second set of texts, presented at the beginning of the book, are eyewitness accounts taken from the Oral History Archive of Kant University, Kaliningrad, of women's experiences of first arriving in Kaliningrad in 1945 from 'Big Russia'. Juxtaposing these texts – both historical and contemporary – with my images, the book seeks not to answer any questions, but rather to give a voice to the experiences of the women of Kaliningrad.

**Mr Antonio M. Sánchez, University of Birmingham, UK, ‘Roberto Bolaño’s Nazi Literature in the Americas: Genre as Possibility or the Novel as Dictionary’**

Antonio M. Sánchez teaches Latin American Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham. His main interests lie in the field of Latin American cultural and intellectual history and modern Latin American narrative and poetry. His interested in genre studies comes from his research on the link between the exilic condition and narrative experimentation in the works of Spanish Republican exile writers in Latin America.

Abstract: The publication of *Nazi Literature in the Americas* in 1996 turned Chilean novelist Roberto Bolaño into a household name in the Spanish speaking literary world and opened the path that eventually led to international recognition. Yet the book has not received as much criticalattention as some of his other later works. One possible reason for this lack is arguably the marked challenge to genre conventions it presents and the way it defies generic classification. Arranged as a literary or biograhical dictionary, Bolaño insisted in all seriousness that the book was and ought to be considered a novel. This papers explores the implications of Bolaño’s subversion and parody of generic conventions with regard to Latin American literary tradition, the generic contract between author and readers and to ideas about both fiction and history.

**Dr Anne Smedegaard, University of Copenhagen, Denmark, ‘Student and Teacher Constructions of the ‘Generic Contract’ in High School Essays’**

Anne Smedegaard is PhD fellow at the Department of Scandinavian Studies and Linguistics at the University of Copenhagen. Her research concerns pragmatic genre theory (i.e. RGS, ESP and the Sydney school); specifically, she investigates and suggests new examination genres in Danish high school.

Abstract: In Danish high school there are three fundamental written examination genres in the subject of Danish: *literary article*, *feature article* and *essay*. I have elsewhere (Smedegaard 2013, Smedegaard in progress) questioned the genre construction as represented in the official documents, in particular for the fact that they are ignorant of a pragmatic understanding of genre found in the three major international genre schools, RGS (Miller 1984, Devitt 2004, Devitt 2009) the Sydney school (Martin & Rose 2008, Martin 1999) and ESP (Swales 2008, Swales 2004).

In this paper I examine one of the genres from the students’ and teachers’ perspective. Over a period of three years I have followed four classes at different schools and collected some 600 papers from 42 students together with teaching materials, teachers’ individual comments to each paper and interviews with both students and teachers. For the analysis in this paper, I have chosen 24 essays. The study concerns students’ and teachers’ understandings of the ‘generic contract’ on the basis of the following rhetorical devices and genre values: use of personal pronouns that haves the author or the recipient as referee; use of rhetorical questions; sensuous descriptions; narratives and chains of reasoning.[[1]](#footnote-1) These components all have to do with the students’ textual constructions of both themselves and the recipients, and they are all branded as genre specific ingredients in the official descriptions and teaching materials.

My study shows that even though these effects are consequently used differently in high and low evaluated papers, teachers address the matter only sparsely and merely as ‘loose directions’ in class and in comments to the individual papers. My investigation, moreover, demonstrates the implications of author and receiver constructions for student progress. These findings support the argument that new explicit genre descriptions, based on a well-defined meta-language, are needed – especially some students need a much more detailed guide to the subject’s genres, discourses and ideologies before they are able to progress their skills.

**Dr Belén Vidal, King’s College London, UK, ‘The Biopic as a Contemporary Film Genre’**

Belén Vidal is Lecturer in Film Studies at King’s College London. She is the author of *Figuring the Past: Period Film and the Mannerist Aesthetic* (Amsterdam UP, 2012) and *Heritage Film: Nation, Genre and Representation* (Wallflower/Columbia UP, 2012) and co-editor of Cinema at the Periphery (Wayne State UP, 2010). She is currently co-editing (with Tom Brown) a collection entitled *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture,* forthcoming from the Routledge AFI Readers series in 2013.

Abstract: Belén’s presentation will look at some of the methodological challenges arising from the critical consideration of the biopic. Despite its ubiquitousness in contemporary cinema, the biopic has received little attention in terms of its generic classification and hybrid textual strategies. Looking in particular at the connection between biopic and docudrama in the British context, she will explore the modes of spectatorship elicited by biopics that focus on figures from the recent past.

1. Inspired by Bhatia (2004) I use the term ’genre values’ about rhetorical actions such as arguments, narratives, and descriptions. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)