 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 three

Genre and New Technologies

10 December 2012

University of Birmingham

**Speakers’ bios and abstracts with weblinks to access papers online**

**Dr Ranjana Das, University of Leicester, UK, ‘Prospecting, in Retrospect** **Three Concepts from Wolfgang Iser’s Reception Aesthetics in the Networked Age**

Ranjana Das is Lecturer in Media and Communication at the University of Leicester. Her research focuses on audience reception in a networked age, with a focus on youthful engagement with the media, media literacies and media genres. She received her PhD at the London School of Economics (2008-2011) where she researched the conceptual relevance of literary reception aesthetics for theorizing interpretive work with ‘new media’, and has done post-doctoral work at the University of Luneburg, Germany (2011-2012) where she worked with children’s engagement with fantasy. Her work has been published in various places including The European Journal of Communication, Communication Review and Popular Communication.

Abstract: This paper critically reviews three concepts from the German literary theorist Wolfgang Iser’s work, focusing on his book ‘Prospecting: From reader-response to literary anthropology’ to interrogate the relevance of these concepts in the age of the internet. If the text represents a moment of encoding specific norms, giving rise to genres – specific to socio-historical contexts, the ‘work’ we are told by Wolfgang Iser (1978), is different from the text, for it brings to the moment of encoding, the possibilities opened up by the interpretative act. In this paper I select three concepts from Iser’s book Prospecting – *gap filling, work and indeterminacy* - and review their relevance to the ways in which we might begin to theorise interpretive work with new genres emerging with the rise of new interactive technologies. While *gap-filling*, the broader concept refers to any space in the text left for the reader to fill up, it also brings us close to flaws, inconsistencies, intricacies and complexities in the interactive text, which in order to be made sense of must have these gaps ‘filled’ by the user. In terms of Iser’s conceptualisation of the ‘*work’* as different from the text, the paper asks how far and in what ways is an interactive user-generated text different from work or to what extent can interpretation (use) extend and alter the text restrained by the possibilities made available by pre-existing structures? While the work might take the text into territories quite different from those intended by the author - textual conventions, technological affordances of the text shape the work to a great extent. And finally, this paper looks at Iser’s concept of *indeterminacy*, where he claims that the more texts lose their determinacy, the more the reader is pushed into the range of possible interpretations they can make. Gaps that are opened up with increasing indeterminacy permit the reader to build their own bridges and make their own connections. If, however, indeterminacy exceeds the reader’s expectations, they feel overburdened. Using illustrative instances from research with children engaging with the interface of social networking sites, this paper points out significant ways in which these ideas need refreshing and revision but that at their core they have value which deserves extension into the age of the internet.

The paper can be accessed at the following address: <http://as-coursecast-1.adf.bham.ac.uk/Panopto/Pages/Viewer/Default.aspx?id=2dafe7f7-20c0-4a6a-9623-388c6c2acbf3>

**Prof. Janet Giltrow, University of British Columbia, Canada, ‘Perspectives on Genre: Motive, Form, and Medial Change’**

Janet Giltrow is Senior Associate Dean of Arts at the University of British Columbia and internationally renowned expert on academic writing. She is the author of *Academic Writing: Writing and Reading in the Disciplines* (Broadview Press, 3rd ed., 2002)and *Academic Writing: How to Read and Write Scholarly Prose* (Broadview Press, 1990). Among other publications, she has co-edited *Genres in the Internet: Issues in the Theory of Genre* (John Benjamins Publishing, 2009).

Abstract: This presentation takes a rhetorical and phenomenological view of genre as motivated by people’s experience amongst others, in social scenes – their participation in what Bakhtin (1981) called ‘spheres of activity’ – and, in addition, multiply articulated across these scenes, rather than simply and efficiently answering a ‘communicative purpose.’ Thus overdetermined, genres are robust, and also precarious, for no rules or dictates could guarantee or manage these multiple, contingent motives (Giltrow 2012).

While this view of genre can account for both genre change and the variability of instances, it has not so far answered the problem of form: its persistence across changing scenes, or its overturning in apparently stable scenes. Medial change in particular offers a challenging site of inquiry. This presentation will review recent research into digitally mediated genres for indications of form’s survival, its perishing, or its ushering in by technology. As Miller and Shepherd (2009) have suggested, technological affordances may be themselves rhetorical motives.

How do affordances articulate with genres’ overdetermination? Do they constitute in themselves a new sphere of activity? How does motive survive the transfer of form from traditional to digital media? Where form is changed by technology – often by software developers’ imagining of spheres of activity – how is motive affected? These questions will be addressed with an eye to historical context: digital media are not the first to formalise motive.

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**Prof. Garry Hall, Coventry University, UK, ‘#MySubjectivation: How our Agency and Consciousness is Subordinated to the Calculable, Standardised, Ready-made Forms and Genres of the Cultural Industries’**

Gary Hall is Professor of Media and Performing Arts and Director of the Centre for Disruptive Media at Coventry University, UK. He is author of Culture in Bits (Continuum, 2002) and Digitize This Book!: The Politics of New Media, or Why We Need Open Access Now (Minnesota UP, 2008), and co-editor of New Cultural Studies: Adventures in Theory (Edinburgh UP, 2006), and Experimenting: Essays with Samuel Weber (Fordham UP, 2007). His work has appeared in numerous journals, including Angelaki, Cultural Studies, The Oxford Literary Review, Parallax and Radical Philosophy.

In 1999 he co-founded the open access journal Culture Machine, which was early champion of OA in the humanities. In 2006 he co-founded Open Humanities Press (OHP), the first OA press dedicated to contemporary critical and cultural theory, which currently has 14 journals in its collective. An OHP monograph project, run in collaboration with the University of Michigan Library’s MPublishing, was launched in 2009. More details are available on his website <http://www.garyhall.info>.

Abstract: Over the last few years a number of radical philosophers and critical theorists, including Bernard Stiegler, Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi, Jodi Dean and Sherry Turkle, have positioned networked media technologies as contributing to the formation of a new kind of human subjectivity. It is a subjectivity that is supposedly suffering from attention deficit disorders, and rendered anxious, panicked and deeply depressed by the accelerated, over-stimulated, over-connected nature of life and work in 21st century capitalism. Meanwhile others, such as Felix Stadler, David Harvey and Manuel Castells, have been keen to portray the Arab spring, anti-austerity and student protests as enabling new ways of being human that are markedly different to those generated by neoliberalism. Yet in the era of phenomenon such as Anonymous and Occupy, with their explicit rejection of the drive toward individual fame that constitutes an inherent part of modern capitalist society, and emphasis on non-hierarchical forms of organization instead, do we not need to critically explore new *ways of being radical philosophers and theorists too*? Ways that are *unlike us*, at least as we currently live, work and think, in that they are not quite so tightly bound up with the logic of neoliberalism?

It’s this question my presentation will address. It will do so by arguing that when it comes to understanding new media, we need to open ourselves to forms and genres of analysis that do not simply privilege writing and the associated acting out of the self as somehow separate from those technologies that provide it with a means of expression: paper, the book, film, photography, the Web, smart phone, tablet. Instead, it requires us to open ourselves to forms and genres of analysis that welcome the new by helping to generate different kinds of subjectivities that are *unlike us* as we currently live, work and think. This includes ways of being philosophers and theorists that depart from the distracted and depressed neoliberal model of the self-disciplining entrepreneurial academic that is currently being generated with the assistance of Apple, Facebook and Twitter. But it also includes ways of being that are *unlike* the traditional, Romantic, humanist, liberal model, with its enactment of clichéd, ready-made ideas of authorship, originality, the book, intellectual property and copyright. For in their different ways *both* of these models can be seen to be involved in the subordination of our agency and consciousness to the calculable, standardised, pre-programmed, ready-made forms and genres of the contemporary cultural industries.

The paper can be accessed at the following address: <http://as-coursecast-1.adf.bham.ac.uk/Panopto/Pages/Viewer/Default.aspx?id=e4df6ef1-86a2-4a57-85fe-f906892c026a>

**Prof. Gunther Kress, Institute of Education, University of London, UK, ‘Generating genre’**

Gunther Kress is Professor of Semiotics and Education at the Institute of Education, University of London. His interests are in the ongoing development of Social Semiotic theory so as to understand principles of representation, meaning-making and communication in contemporary social environments. The frame of application is multimodal representation and communication, with its focus on resources and forms of communication in all modes, including those of speech and writing. Conditions and environments for ‘learning’ in the contemporary period is one special focus of application.

Some of his publications in this area are *Learning to write* (1982/1994); *Linguistic processes in sociocultural practices* (1984/1989); *Social Semiotics* (1988, with R Hodge); *Before Writing: rethinking the paths to literacy* (1996); *Reading Images: the grammar of graphic design* (1996/2006, with T van Leeuwen); Multimodal Discourse: the modes and media of contemporary communication (2002, with T van Leeuwen); *Literacy in the new media age* (2003); *English in Urban Classrooms* (2005, with C. Jewitt, J. Bourne, A. Franks, J. Hardcastle, K. Jones, E. Reid), and *Multimodality. A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication* (2010). Recent research projects are ‘Museums, exhibitions and the visitor’ (funded by the Swedish National Research Foundation) and “Gains and Losses: changes in teaching materials 1935 – 2005” (funded by the Economic and Social Science Research Council, UK)

Abstract: The contemporary interest in genre dates back, broadly, to the period when the category as a stable social / semiotic / textual entity began to fray. There is, as one marker, Derrida’s “La loi du genre” ("The Law of Genre," Critical Inquiry 7 (1980)); another, in a much more modest way, was my *Learning to Write,* (1982), and its chapter 5, “Genre”, (with subsections: Genre and reality; Factual genres; Narratives; The mastery of genre and its cognitive and social effects).

In other words, academic interest in the stable door started after the horse had bolted. This serves as a useful indicator of what genre ‘is’ and what it is that generates genre. Social changes during the 1970ties had begun to lead to a fraying of social - and with that of semiotic - boundaries and framings. Without that factor either being much noted or part of the debate, it was this crisis that drew the attention of academics to the category and to its characteristics and functions. The processes of social ‘fraying’, of fragmenting, have, in the meantime, carried on apace, with the result that the questions around genre now have a quite different character and direction. The digital technologies have amplified the social changes and their semiotic effects. Equally significant and part of the same social changes – if differently - is the intensifying trend to the multimodal characteristics of texts. This is important, as much theorizing around genre had been speech- and writing-based.

In the talk I want to point to some of these changes and ask how we might think about this genre now, in the light of continuing and intensifying social fragmentation, of the increasing presence of multimodal texts and their interaction with digital technologies.

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**Dr Natasha Rulyova, University of Birmingham, UK, ‘Online Identities and Genre in the Russian-Language Blogosphere’**

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: The paper explores how Russian-language bloggers apply literary genres in their blogging posts by focusing on two genres: apocalyptic fiction and magic tales. Why do bloggers resort to fictional genres? Could genre studies help understand the reasons behind the appearance of magic tale characters and apocalyptic narratives in bloggers’ posts? Are there social motives, exigencies, which, according to Miller, Bazerman and other genre theorists, should be able to help explain the reasons why bloggers start writing fictional or semi-fictional tales about themselves and the world around them? The paper will also briefly review a discussion of the blog as a genre and as identity. By providing frames for social action, genres participate in identity construction. Fictional genres shape particular interpretive frames which tend to universalise personal experience based on mythic and popular folk characters and binary oppositions. Bloggers apply narrative devices associated with a particular genre to render their personal experience anonymous, to diffuse anxiety and fear in the form back humour and other literary devices.

The paper can be accessed at the following address: <http://as-coursecast-1.adf.bham.ac.uk/Panopto/Pages/Viewer/Default.aspx?id=72de832e-47bf-4e7b-a6d9-56d7dc5b982c>

**Dr Vlad Strukov, University of Leeds, UK ‚ ‘Configurations of Space in Computer Games: Towards a Genre Typology’**

Vlad Strukov is Senior Lecturer in Russian Cultural Studies and World Cinemas. He is the Director of the [Centre for World Cinemas](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/arts/info/125052/centre_for_world_cinemas), and co-director of the [Leeds Russian Centre](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/arts/info/125106/leeds_russian_centre). He is also the leader of the School research group in Film and Visual Culture as well as the International Coordinator.

Previously he worked and conducted research in the [the](http://www.ssees.ucl.ac.uk/index.htm)[Aleksanteri Institute](http://www.helsinki.fi/aleksanteri/english/) of the University of Helsinki; [School of Slavonic and East European Studies](http://www.ssees.ucl.ac.uk/index.htm), University College London; [Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures](http://www.pitt.edu/~slavic/) of the University of Pittsburgh, USA; Universities of Moscow, Ekaterinburg and Voronezh, Russia. His **research interests** include contemporary film, animation, digital media, especially the internet, and popular culture; digital and web-induced arts, especially the issues of medium; digital television, computer gaming; issues of space and authorship, and national identity in literature, cinema and art. He is also the founding and principal editor of [Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media](http://www.digitalicons.org/). The journal is a multi-media platform that explores new media as a variety of information flows, varied communication systems, and networked communities. More information can be found on my personal website http://www.vladstrukov.com

Abstract: Ludology, an emerging discipline, develops a function-oriented approach to computer games, and by extension, to any other form of play. Ludologists explore what they call ‘ergodic texts’, without confining their study to any specific type of medium. In this regard, ludology develops its own system of texts and practices, one that complements the narratological system. The latter extrapolates ‘analogue’ principles onto computer games by applying such familiar categories as character, development, ending, and so forth. Both narratology and ludology operate within the structuralist paradigm, aiming to produce classifications and analyse structures. The poststructuralist approach concerns itself with deconstructing computer games as systems of representation, cultural encoding and power configurations. Across the field of computer games studies, genre is used as a fluctuating and elusive term. It often defines different types of games and very rarely types of play. In my paper, I would like to explore the critical possibilities of game-play by examining computer games as sets of practices. I would like to analyse how computer games enable players to construct a different sense of space whereby space is no longer a locus, or a setting, but rather a system of production. I will use a case study to demonstrate how the notion of genre relates to production of space in computer games.

The paper cab accessed at the following address: <http://as-coursecast-1.adf.bham.ac.uk/Panopto/Pages/Viewer/Default.aspx?id=206576f7-4e67-4b14-a58e-52ff573b8452>

**Simone Schroth, Newcastle University/Aston University, UK, ‘More than a Modern Novel in Letters – The Email Novel as a New Genre’**

Simone Schroth studied Comparative Literature at the Universities of Mainz and Bonn. Her Dr phil thesis on translations of Anne Frank's Het Achterhuis was published in 2006. She has taught in the German Departments at University College Dublin and Newcastle University and is currently teaching at Aston University. Among her research interests are translation quality assessment and autobiographical writing.  At present, she is working on the email novel as a new genre that has its origin in the literarisation of ego documents.

Abstract:There are various features the email novel shares with the epistolary novel, for example the use of point-of-view technique and the high degree of dramatic immediacy. At the same time, simply describing the email novel as a successor of the novel in letters would not do it justice. Rather, the email novel can be said to constitute a genre of its own, with characteristics that link it with classic texts such as Richardson’s *Pamela* or De Laclos‘ *Dangerous Liaisons* as well as others that establish its closeness to other genres inspired by the new media such as the Twitter novel.In this paper, these characteristics will be examined, and representative works will be put into context in order to outline the development of the email novel since the late nineties.

The paper can be accessed at the following address: <http://as-coursecast-1.adf.bham.ac.uk/Panopto/Pages/Viewer/Default.aspx?id=a9285951-c419-4466-a457-80b02a4bd829>