

## Introduction

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Today's intensified blurring of boundaries between media, and between media and their audiences/users, is challenging our most basic understanding of genre as a principle of structuration and stability. However, it also diverts our attention to the equally basic logic that the blurring of boundaries needs frames in order for something to blur, to play, to question, for example, genre may serve as such a communicative frame. Terms like 'genre hybrids' and 'cross genres' have pointed to generic instabilities and experiments for a couple of decades now; yet, the technological development, the altered modes of media production and distribution, the many practices of remediation on different levels and not least the inventive textual interventions by the co-called *produser* (Bruns, 2008) still renders the question of genre relevant: How should we understand genre today? What does genre mean, and how are genres being used? In which ways might genre be a productive term for conceptualising and comprehending the new digital media landscape, and, for example, help us understand what media are and how different media are guiding the communicative affordances and constraints on different platforms in different ways? And how might we refine our notions of traditional genre expressions, for example, in film and television?

Is *e-mail*, for example, a genre or a medium? And is the *personal blog* like a diary, or is this public-private form so antagonistic to the written diary that it should be conceived in other generic terms (cf. Sørensen, 2008)? Are the short text forms called *memes* spreading and mutating on the Internet (described by Knobel and Lankshear (2007) as "contagious patterns of cultural information that get passed from mind to mind and directly generate

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and shape the mindsets and significant forms of behavior and actions of a social group” (p. 199)) a genre or an abundance of generic fragments submitted to the same travelling and transformation on the same social media platforms; are they a particular mode of interaction, a script for social action, a communicative device, an intertextual play – or all of the above simultaneously?

Derrida (1980) referred more than three decades ago to genre as a kind of “participation without belonging – a taking part in without being part of, without having membership” (p. 59). A few years later, he expanded on this short and perceptive remark about genre claiming that:

A text would not *belong* to any genre. Every text *participates* in one or several genres, there is no genreless text, there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging [...]. In marking itself generically, a text unmarks itself [se demarque]. If remarks of belonging belong without belonging, the *genre designations cannot be simply part of the corpus* (Derrida 1992 [1986]).

His reflections still hold. Genre matters. Genres organise, but are also challenging the principles of organisation.

This issue of *MedieKultur* attests to these statements with discussions of ways to understand how genre matters today. It addresses the questions concerning genre by reminding us of the many different approaches to genre studies within the humanities and social sciences at large, and more specifically within film and media studies, beginning with Steve Neale’s seminal 1980 book *Genre*. Likewise, this collection of articles points to the way in which the understanding of the relationship between media and genre today is to a large extent an interdisciplinary and intermedial effort. While Neale asserts in his later genre book that “genre is a multi-dimensional phenomenon” (1999, p. 25) certainly still rings true, the digital media landscape, more than before, calls forth the need to take as a point of departure that genres *do*, genres *perform* – and genres change. They *are* not. Genres are enacted by producers and users/audiences alike, and in and through this enactment they are recycled in new disguises, deconstructed, condensed and transformed at a speed never seen before. This *Genre* issue contributes to unfolding some of these dimensions, and to reconsidering genre from various perspectives and across a wide range of media offerings, including online social media, television entertainment, music, film and video games.

While the scholarly literature on genre is substantial in film studies, television studies and literary studies, the genre concept remains somewhat underdeveloped theoretically as well as methodologically in discussions of our present era of digital communication. And conversely, both the multiplication of new formats and forms on websites and in social media and the remediation of generic forms (for example from film to computer games (Walther, 2003)) constantly urges us to use the term ‘genre’ in order to make sense of new media and text configurations.

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For some time, it has been commonplace to understand genre not as essentialistic and ahistoric stable textual patterns, but as a dynamic and historically changing repertoire of functional devices. Neale (1980) famously argued that genres are not systems, but *processes of systematization* and negotiation; furthermore, they are a set of expectations, which posit a contractual relationship between audiences and media formats. Torben Grodal (1997) added an important dimension to the conceptualisation of genre by arguing for the connection to specific emotional responses; genre is a “set of dominant features of a given fiction, which shapes the overall viewer expectation and the correlated *emotional* reaction” (p. 163, our italics). Rick Altman (1999) coined the term *genrification* in order to emphasise genre as a constant dialectic and historical process of category-splitting and category-creation. Outside of film and media studies, professor of rhetoric Carolyn Miller (1984) advanced an influential rhetorical, pragmatic and functional notion of *genre as social action* used to accomplish specific tasks in specific communicative situations. Miller underlined the situatedness of genre. She emphasised how, in other words, specific contexts provide, shape and form the meaning of generic expressions and, hence, how texts are exactly not – or, are at least more than – self-referential formal entities defined by their inherent structure, but obtain their meaning in recurrent situations of practical use.

As mentioned, the instability of the stable patterns of repetition inherent in genre as a textual system has been emphasised for many years. Long before our current era of digital media, contextual framing, communicative intention, but also the irreducibility of text to system, and the way in which genre never completely fits, have been at the centre of attention. To name but one example, consider the recurrent discussion in film studies of whether film noir constitutes a genre, style, film historical period or mode, and consequently of whether we should use the term genre at all, or whether the term *family resemblance* would be more suitable (cf. Jerslev, 1999; Lakoff, 1987).

Overall, genre discussions to a large extent have moved away from discussions about texts (for example genres’ syntactic and semantic structures, cf. Altman, 1987; 1999) to discussions about *the workings of texts* and *effects*, how genre “gets a certain kind of work done” (Frow, 2006, p. 14). In the introduction to his book *Genre*, professor of English literature John Frow (2006) claims that:

... far from being merely ‘stylistic’ devices, genres create effects of reality and truth, authority and plausibility, which are central to the different ways the world is understood in the writing of history or of philosophy or of science, or in painting, or in everyday talk. These effects are not, however, fixed and stable, since texts – even the simplest and most formulaic – do not ‘belong’ to genres but are, rather, uses of them; they refer not to ‘a’ genre, but to a field or economy of genres, and their complexity derives from the complexity of their relation (p. 2).

Even though Frow is primarily interested in the ways genre organises discourse and not in medium specificity in particular, and even though his book certainly does not concern tech-

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nology, his emphasis on genre as *doing* and *effects* inspires thinking of genre as co-producer of media ecological systems broadly speaking. It opens for the crucial question in media studies of how media contribute to the evolution of this economy of genres and vice versa, how media and genre interact, and not least how new media technologies make possible the playing with and deconstruction and reassembling of existing genre works to a hitherto unknown extent. Despite the qualities in Frow's book, its lack of an overall medium perspective prevents him from founding his dynamic view upon genre in a historical context. Thus, addressing how genre and media are inseparable, and how it is impossible to understand genre development without at least taking their relation to technology and media development into consideration, could strengthen his argument. This relationship between medium and genre is addressed in most articles in the issue, either theoretically or analytically.

Apart from the work of Orlikowski and Yates (1992), not many scholars have argued for the relevance of highlighting genre in discussions about new media and communication. However, the very idea of genre as not only textual systems but communicative actions within and in response to recurrent contexts may provide a fruitful frame for at least posing the question of whether the dynamic relationships between framing and unframing, generic stabilities and instabilities have changed substantially with the arrival of the ubiquitous *producer* and the abundance of creative digital communities, which deconstruct and transform whatever part of visual media culture makes itself available for cutting and pasting. Most works on genre, despite their underlining of its social, pragmatic and communicative function, regard texts as finite forms, which transform over time due to a great degree of cultural and media institutional change. However, when discussing how genres operate in media culture today, this enhanced textual fluidity should be reflected on.

Many of the genre theoreticians cited in this introduction are addressed in the articles included in this issue of *MedieKultur*, which is the result of a curious questioning of what happens to genres and how we may understand the notion of genre differently in a new digital media environment. Seven writers reflect upon the question in the theme section; they answer it with respect to theoretical reflections and analytical enquiries.

What runs through the collection of articles is the way genre remains at once a contested and productive term. We are still challenged by the genre concept, intrigued by its continuous explanatory reach and pragmatic necessity. At the most general level, the question is how we can conceptualise genre as travelling, dynamic and negotiable and yet also stable communicative frames; creating and confirming horizons of expectations and yet also contesting these very horizons; pragmatic tools for programme development, but also frames to bend and transgress. We struggle, for example, with conceptual differences between media and genre, as Stine Lomborg and Klaus Bruhn Jensen both observe in their articles; consequently, Bruhn Jensen calls attention to the concept meta-genre as a useful term to differentiate between different levels of both use and conceptualisation of new digital media. We try to figure out in which ways genre may be a useful concept for understanding new communicative processes. How are we to make sense of the vast audio-

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visual reservoir of YouTube in which genre as an ordering system appears to be overruled by other logics? Thomas Mosebo Simonsen takes up this subject in his article. No doubt, the Internet has renewed the use of genre as a simple ordering principle, for example on innumerable commercial sites selling all kinds of media commodities from sound effects to DVDs. Kirsten Drotner (1991) illuminatingly showed that when school children were given a camera and invited to make their own films, they most often used well-known genre formulas. The study by Mosebo Simonsen demonstrates the way in which this quotational and intertextual practice is still a frequent pattern today. However, obviously much has also changed in media culture during the past twenty years. On YouTube more anarchistic experiments are carried out and patchworks and deconstructive montages of images and debris from the visual culture are combined into novel forms, which both attest to persistent renegotiations of the relationship between author, audience, media and product, and to ways of thinking in and beyond existing genres at one and the same time. Likewise, Stine Lomborg underlines how the dynamics of social media, for example the appearance of still new services, contribute to the destabilisation of existing genres.

Another approach to genre instabilities is to look into the relationship between developments in technology, media and genre. Andreas Gregersen's analysis addresses the technological advancements in home console video games, in particular the arrival of motion gaming. Gregersen points out that genre is not restricted to textual 'finite forms', as technology allows for greater control interfaces and interactive features in digital game systems. Yet, another crucial question is *what happens to genres*, when they travel across media, are appropriated by another medium or *reenacted* in another medium. Stine Lomborg and Hanne Bruun argue in different ways that genre is *a doing*. Bruun for example broadens the understanding of genre as 'textual contract' to an *integrating genre approach* that includes aspects of production contexts and regards production as genre interpretation. Therefore, as is also underlined in Bruun's article, genre is still a useful ordering and labelling concept. Genre is a multifaceted, contextualised, pragmatic, contestable term for ordering the ways we communicate through media – and for systematising media content across different media and platforms.

Genres are unstable but they were not genres were they not also stable, or were we not at least using the term genre in order to point to some kind of systematisation. Therefore, labelling processes per se are still of interest in genre studies. In his article, Martin Lussier reflects on the way in which labelling processes, in relation to *musiques émergentes* ("emerging musics"), constitute a group or a genre in the very act of naming, of attaching a common denominator, however, this label does not necessarily refer to formal similarities between the members belonging to the group or genre. Moreover, political, social and commercial interests may be drivers of this labelling process. From a more classical genre point of view, Birger Langkjær also discusses labelling. He takes up the much contested term of realism and argues for a reconceptualisation of a common distinction between Hollywood genre films on the one hand and European art cinema on the other. Langkjær's point is that *real-*

*ism* may help to define a third category in European cinema, which is neither art films nor genre films in the traditional film historical use of the term.

Genre is always genre interpretations. Hereby, we mean not just the realisation of an underlying *langue*, but dynamic and situationally determined efforts at sensemaking, at the same time as they are stepping stones for the creation of new communicative situations and meanings. What we are asking today is what happens to genres as a kind of recognisable systematisation of meaning and form in a new media environment, which is among other things characterised by a *blurring of boundaries* between producer and consumer, a *conferring of new creative pressure* on established genres, a *creation of tension*, sometimes even uproar when generic horizons of expectation are not met, and probably *pushing genres* in new directions at a much faster speed than before.

This issue of *MedieKultur* includes two Danish articles in the open section. In her article *Sporløs – Om biologi, identitet og slægten som fjernsyn* (“Find My Family – On biology, identity and kinship on television”), Birgitta Frello discusses the ongoing trend in popular television programming of dealing with issues of kinship and genealogy. She analyses the long-running DR television series *Sporløs* (“Find my family”), in which each episode focuses on (re)uniting participants with long lost family members. From the perspective of cultural sociology, Frello argues that television programmes often constitute biological kinship as the overall key to unlocking information about self and identity. Through interpretations of specific examples, Frello points out that the naturalisation of biological kinship as a means of self-realisation is a narrative construction of the media, which is not always reflected in the participants’ lives.

In his article *Mellem det personlige og det faglige – om forskerblogs* (“Between the personal and the professional – on research blogs”), Christian Dalsgaard concludes, on the background of a thorough analysis of a range of research blogs, that they are characterised by a combination of scholarly and personal elements. The author offers a definition of the research blog and an overview of distinctly different ways of blogging. Some researchers simply post short messages with links to other sites, while others write essayistic texts, and others again use blogs for making longer academic arguments. The author makes the claim that this type of media use supplements other ways of communicating research results.

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