

Notes on Genre, Comparative Media Studies, and Hypertext

Rhetorical Theory and Practice / Tuesday 3/20

Most significant aspects of “genre” from either Bawarshi or Devitt (I’d say, look late in their articles, when they start to pose their own definitions)

- Devitt (xxx) - genre constructed by both audience and author(s)
- Devitt (577) - “the fact that others have responded to situations in the past in similar ways ...” you’re never the first speaker or realizer of genre / what you speak or write matches someone else’s genre memory
- Devitt (579) - “dynamic genres are built from discourse communities” / whether through discourse communities or social frames, genres respond dynamically to human behaviors / it has links to community norms and definitions / can be heteronormative, but we can also resist the heteronormativity
- Devitt (580) - genres are both product and process that create the product / the final product is the essence of what’s being built
- Devitt (580) - genre an abstraction removed from the concrete? It becomes an abstraction through analysis / it becomes this way when we try to see how the genre addresses an issue / genre is a response to certain abstractions? - does this mean that genre *mediates* between text and context? Between langue and parole? - genre is still a space
- Bawarshi - genres are constitutive rather than regulative / genres can regulate but they often create regulatory behaviors
- Bawarshi (24) - genres are both functional and epistemological / they help us function situationally but also help us make new knowledge of situation
- Bawarshi (41) - exigence is a learned behavior, i.e., a recognition of signifying or signifying behavior / in signifying we are rooting our interpretation or understanding in cultural constructs / so exigence is constructed in what we learn
- Bawarshi (46) - genres are dynamic and inventive / genres can be conforming or resisting or both / genres aren’t static
- Bawarshi - genres sort and generate
- Bawarshi - genres mediate and are mediated
- Bawarshi - genres mediate private intentions with public experiences

Genre as action or a series of actions or a process

- “Genres are typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations” (Carolyn Miller, as qtd. In Bawarshi).

How does (or how could) Rhetorical Genre Theory give us options for doing textual analysis that don’t rely only on structuralism and maybe even help us to practice socialist realism?

[still to answer together]

How can Jackson’s “Patchwork Girl” qualify as a “hybrid” genre, i.e., what precisely gives it its hybridity in a meaningful way? Is it an act of socialist realism?

Hybridity = an active mediation between form and content / there’s a reciprocal deconstruction between the reader (navigator) and the female monster (text) → the hybridity occurs through the multilinear narration because there’s an active reconstruction and deconstruction of the monster whenever anyone reads the text; SO, HYBRIDITY LIVES IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FORM AND CONTENT

Hybridity = an understanding of how thoughts are made (through what processes are they made?) and how thoughts are distinct from their contexts / “Thoughts are the limbs of the composition and must be surgically excised from their context” / SO, HYBRIDITY IS HOW THE GENRE POINTS TO ITSELF AND ITS OWN WORKINGS, kind of like hypermediacy

Hybridity = [this group still thinking on it ...]

How does form function in Jackson’s “Patchwork Girl”?

- It shows us that the genre (experimental hypertext fiction) is a situation, reflects Bawarshi’s and Devitt’s ideas that genres = situations
- Reflects idea that genres create knowledge

- Reflects idea that genres cannot always be determined or evaluated according to what we think are affect or intention (so, this echoes “New Criticism” a bit)
- Reading “Patchwork Girl” is an interaction, not a simple process, and an interaction between what we expect of fiction vs. how the hypertext fiction actually works (it’s Borges-ian because it makes the act of reading metacritical and metatextual)
- Shows “typification” -- where situations or behaviors become “types” or “forms” -- because how we navigate through the hypertext is a result of our behaviors but also creates new reading behaviors for ourselves
- Form + Function = Action (genre)
- Reading through this hypertext (or navigating it) involves an accretion of layers of meaning / you can read at one level and only see one line of text in each node or you can decide to explore the spaces within nodes to find more nodes and more text, and as you’re reading, you’re building memories of the different nodes

Where “hybridity” could differ from “hypertext”

Here is how Landow defines “hypertext”

- not an argument for replacing print text--it is a quality that describes the progression of text
- it puts into practice some qualities of Barthes' ideal text (43-44) by blurring the boundaries between reader/ing and writer/ing. It also blurs boundaries between deep structure and surface structure, i.e., the deep structure isn't necessarily something hidden in the surface that can only be found by doing a close reading of the text.
- As readers move through webs and networks, they continually shift the center of their investigation and experience (36).
- Hypertexts, like Mitchell’s metapictures, show episteme (remember Foucault’s term to describe history?)
- Hypertext may fulfill certain claims of structuralist and poststructuralist criticism, but its most important contribution is in providing a "rich[er] means of testing [those claims]" (36).
- Hypertext does not permit a tyrannical, univocal voice, or imply the death of any voice; rather, its voice is always distilled from combined

experience of momentary focus, present lexia, and continually forming narratives of one's reading path (36).

- While the idea of an intellectual or ideological "center" in a hypertext is not necessarily bad or nonproductive, hypertexts promote interpretive processes that are closer to anarchy than to hierarchy (40).
- Hypertexts cause us to re/define the "network" in critical theory (44) according to their disruptions of "order" and their promotion of "antimemories (or "nomadic thoughts," to use Deleuze and Guattari) (41).

**Why does this even matter for us? In literature, in rhetoric, in life?
Where does this leave us, and/or what does this help us to
understand more (or less) about our “Text/uality” paradox?
[still to answer together]**

PAUSE: define ‘rhetorical theory’ or rhetorical theories’ at this point in the semester