

Life after Genre? Television in the New Millennium

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Introduction

References to an impending post-genre epoch have become increasingly frequent in recent academic (perhaps even post-academic?) writing. Brancato (2007: 146) provides a concise example:

the very *raison d'être* of genre, in other words the implementation of a strategy for identifying the cultural product within a complex universe of goods, is breaking down because of the changing contours of postindustrial society which is perfecting other and more sophisticated communication techniques of an ever more personalised nature. At base, the recent history of television fiction constantly revolves around the dynamics of the residual survival of genre at a moment in which we are witnessing the waning of genre itself in its dimension as a system.

This chapter offers a brief history of what we might call the academic classification of cultural products – a rather different process, as we shall see, from their classification by producers or consumers – and examines where the impetus for such classifications comes from, what their life-cycle is, and the extent to which it makes any real sense to talk of them now in terms of “postness”.

A term such as “post-genre” in fact suggests a thorough-going reification of such processes, and if cultural taxonomies have a long history, the history of their reification is just as durable: the Renaissance, for example, long took its – in many ways flawed (Kenny, 2013: xxxvi) – understanding of Aristotle's classification as read, while Romantic genre theory built on a “surreptitious betrayal of Aristotle” (Genette, 1992: 33) by reassigning categories of the same taxonomy. Perhaps we academics, as we shift uneasily into the status of post-academics – for Genette we

already occupy the somewhat less disillusioned status of “post-romantics” (1992: 59) – are now doing the same with television genre. Foucault (2002: 80) argues that taxonomies imply “a certain power of the imagination that renders apparent what is not”: perhaps the loss or weakening of that power at moments of crisis obfuscates what is, blinding us to the metamorphosis of genre into something else as opposed to its simple disappearance.

Life before genre?

The desire to classify different types of cultural output has a very long history indeed in western culture. Both Plato (427-347 BCE) and Aristotle (384-322 BCE) developed taxonomies of literary output in Ancient Greece, suggesting three – drama, narrative and epic – and four – tragedy, epic, comedy and satire – divisions respectively. They were of course classifying already existing products some of which predated them by some considerable distance: in his *Poetics* Aristotle could not give any tangible example of, for instance, satire before the time of Homer (8th century BCE), but he was in little doubt that such a style had existed even then:

We cannot identify a poem of that kind [satire] by any poet earlier than Homer, though there are likely to have been many such; but from Homer onwards we can do so, beginning with his own *Margites* and similar poems (2013: 20-21).

There is therefore excellent evidence of the long-standing existence of post-hoc academic classifying activities which the term *genre* implies – something akin to Schutz’s concept of “second-order constructs” (1962: 59) – even if the specific terminology used has varied over time.¹ An important initial point to make regarding Plato and Aristotle, however, is that both their taxonomies were part of larger philosophical and ethical systems (Kenny, 2013) which determined what was included and what was left out: neither, for example, mentions lyric poetry, though the love verses of Sappho (?630-?570 BCE) preceded both by over two centuries.² In other words, there is no guarantee that any taxonomy, then or now, necessarily reflects what is actually there. As Genette argues:

The whole history of the theory of genres is imprinted with these fascinating patterns that inform and deform the often irregular reality of the literary field – patterns whose

¹ In his recent modernising translation of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, Kenny renders the original Greek “τέχναι” as “literary genres” (2013: 17), whereas earlier translations had given this as “arts”.

² See Elam (2012) for an intriguing analysis of the construction of the “Classical ‘I’” in the works of Sappho.

designers claim to have discovered a natural “system” precisely where they are constructing a factitious symmetry with the help of a copious supply false windows (1992: 45).

What becomes clear from even a cursory study of the concept behind *genre* is that the meaning of the various taxonomies has not only changed over time, but is also always the product of its own period. For Aristotle, for example, the different categories of output covered by his terms, far from reflecting a broader social consensus regarding what particular kind of product might reasonably comply with them, or being in any way connected to the relationship between dramatist and audience, were an expression of their author’s inner nature:

Representation, then, comes naturally to us, as do melody and rhythm ... and so it was that, from the beginning, those with the greatest natural gift for such things by a gradual process of improvement developed poetry out of improvisation.

This, however, took two different forms according to the characters of the authors: the more serious among them represented noble people and noble actions, and the more frivolous represented the actions of ignoble people (2013: 20).

Even allowing for the very significant differences in both production and consumption between Ancient Greece and the early twenty-first century (see Arnott, 1989), surely no-one would accept this now as a satisfactory explanation of the phenomenon in question. As regards what might classify as belonging to each genre identified in Ancient Greece, we might usefully quote the opening words of Corrigan’s Introduction to the English translation of Aeschylus’s *Oresteia Trilogy* (first performed in 458 BCE) and *Prometheus Bound*:

Aeschylus is usually referred to as that grand titan who was “the father of tragedy”. In the sense that for the Greeks of the fifth century B.C. a tragedy was, as Norman J. DeWitt put it, “any play based upon the legends of the historical aristocracy” performed at the festivals of Dionysus, this title is deserved. He was indeed chiefly responsible for taking the protean forms of the early ritualistic choral dances and making them into a play with definite and more or less fixed characteristics. But Aeschylus was not, at least as we use the term today, a writer of tragedies (1965: 9).

He adds a little later:

The conditions necessary for the existence of tragedy do not obtain in the world of Aeschylean drama. Most of his extant plays reveal the Greek world to be in a state of transition from a more or less primitive mythic dispensation to the stability of a state-oriented social order (*ibid.*: 10).

Conditions of possibility/necessity, transition, stability – these are notions which will recur later in our analysis.

Life with (television) genre

Following a long period of relative to significant neglect – in the High Middle Ages Aristotle’s ideas would circulate only in very restricted circles in Latin and Arabic translation (Jordan, 2002: 121-2) – his taxonomy would reemerge in the early sixteenth century³ to drive much of the literary output of the following two centuries with an absolutism – particularly as regards the so-called “three unities” – which he himself would scarcely have recognised (Arnott, 1989: 132). *Genre*, a French term still meaning “kind” or “type”, apparently acquired its more specialised function of indicating different styles of literary or artistic output in the eighteenth century, towards the end of the (using French terminology) “Classical Age”. Thus Diderot and D’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie* (1751-72), referring to such Aristotelian concepts as “serious style”, “pleasant style” and so on, describes them as “genres de style”, and Diderot would give the first chapter of his 1758 essay *De la poésie dramatique* the title “Des genres dramatiques” (2005: 165).⁴ The term was subsequently adopted into the English language in the late-eighteenth-early-nineteenth-century as part of the ferment of the broader Romantic movement and it has enjoyed a colourful existence ever since (see Neale (2000), in particular Chapter 1, “Definitions of Genre”).

Roughly one hundred years after the term entered the English language, the commercial practice (rather than the academic theory) of genre would prove central to the emergence of cinema in the early twentieth century, particularly in its Hollywood version. This is a key moment in the history of the concept: it is the point in time when academics clearly – and apparently definitively – lose control of the concept, ownership of which moves from the intellectual/literary to the

³ The first printed version of the original text of the *Poetics* appeared in 1507.

⁴ Even so the transition from everyday to specialised term seems incomplete. The first sentence of this chapter reads: “Si un peuple n’avait jamais eu qu’un genre de spectacle, plaisant et gai, et qu’on lui en proposait un autre, sérieux et touchant, sauriez-vous, mon ami, ce qu’il en penserait ?”. *Genre* here could be translated just as easily as either “kind” or “genre”.

commercial/marketing sphere. Far from being seen as a mere categorisation of products expressing some element of their author's nature, or of signaling conformity (or otherwise) to Classical precepts, high-culture definitions of genre were ousted from their hegemonic position by low/popular culture understandings and – following a process already in train for the popular novel – it became a key element in a film industry strategy bringing producers, distributors, advertisers, critics and consumers together around a set of shared expectations. As Neale (2000: 39-40) puts it:

The indication and circulation of what the industry considers to be the generic framework – of frameworks – most appropriate to the viewing of a film is therefore one of the most important functions performed by advertising copy, and by posters stills and trailers ... Cinemas, cinema programming and cinema specialization could also be considered components in the relay.

Much of the academic frenzy surrounding genre ever since – Genette gives some sense of the extraordinary lengths this would reach in the twentieth century in his *The Architext: An Introduction* (1992): see for example Petersen's dizziness-inducing "genre circle"⁵ – must be seen at least to some extent as part of an ongoing (now apparently doomed) struggle to wrest some measure of control back, or at least to claim some degree of joint ownership (it shows, alas, no signs of slowing down). At least one positive outcome of this change, however, is that academic film genre theory, unable to ignore the power of Hollywood, has in the main avoided the astonishing extravagances of genre theory in the literary field, an almost free-floating profusion which engenders a fleeting sympathy with Croce's nominalist view that genres are mere abstractions produced by critics – he goes so far as to call them "empty phantoms" (1902: 43) – and have nothing to do with the actual materiality of cultural production.

Cinema – along with radio and theatre – would inevitably be one of the major sources of inspiration for television when it first emerged in the late 1940s in the USA and in the 1950s in Europe, eventually becoming a true mass medium in the 1960s, and although cinema and television "have generated forms of production of representations that preserve, develop and promote their particular aesthetics" (Ellis, 1982: 171), television's indebtedness to cinema is in many respects obvious. As Brancato (2007: 20) puts it:

⁵The image also appears in *The Architext: An Introduction* (p. 54), but Genette references it as coming from Petersen's contribution, entitled "Zur Lehre von den Dichtungsgattungen", published in the *Festschrift August Sauer* in 1925. However, the image appearing in the latter publication differs from the referred image in several respects (and is also in Fraktur).

From cinema and the other audiovisual media which preceded it television inherited a legacy of technical knowhow regarding mass communication strategies, a knowledge base which determined the origin and the subsequent direction of the relationship between the medium and its spectators.

One of these strategies was very clearly genre, which appeared to offer significant dividends in relation to many visible strategies: communication strategies, economic/ marketing strategies, and also artistic/aesthetic strategies.

Considerable academic groundwork had to be done to prepare the marriage of television production and genre at an academic level. When this chapter is published, forty years will have passed since John Fiske and John Hartley (jointly) and Raymond Williams (on his own) wrote two of the books which would revolutionise television studies and media studies in general. We are referring to *Reading Television* and *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, both published in 1974. On the basis of these and later contributions, television studies began its entrée into the Arts and Humanities, as film studies had done before it. The academy opened its doors to television not just as an object of sociological, but also of economic and above all of artistic study, putting it on the same plane as film or music, both fields already structured around genres. Media and television studies would stress above all the aesthetic dimension of the products and programmes would be approached as cultural productions, as “texts”. Television could even be placed side by side with great literature: as Fiske and Hartley pointed out, “We have the example of Shakespeare to remind us that non-literate entertainment can be as demanding, and satisfying, as the most profound works of literature” (1974: 17).

As a result “television texts” were presented as being differentiated by a series of inherent features which, like literary products, made it possible to bundle them into generic categories. As Fiske himself explained over a decade later, television can be understood – or at least could at that moment in time be understood – as a highly “generic” medium (1987: 109) with each programme fitting into one of the categories (cop-shows, sitcom, soap-opera, etc.) as defined in terms of both production and consumption. Fiske also related genre with the concept of intertextuality, likewise taken from literary studies, in the sense that the reading of any television programme interpellates other already existing texts in terms of both form and content.

It was perhaps Jane Feuer (1992: 139) who first argued most clearly that film and television genres required an approach which acknowledged their differences from, rather than simply similarities with, their literary counterparts: far from expressing universal features of ideal programme types, she argued, they have both cultural

and temporal specificities. Literary texts may be labelled as drama, comedy or poetry, but television, for Feuer, needs more focused conventions (sitcom, hospital drama or quiz show) to refer to specific outputs. More recently Jason Mittell (2004: 15) nuanced the concept even further when he insisted that although television genres can be used to classify texts, they are also “sites of interpretative consistency” and above all “systems of cultural value”. Using Michel Foucault’s ideas in relation to the concepts of authorship and discourse, Mittell argues that genre does not depend on intrinsic features of the text: what should be analysed is how the industry works with them, how critics refer to the programmes, what interpretations and uses audiences generate.

Ironically, perhaps, just as such questions began to arise regarding the continuing explanatory (or even suggestive) power of the concept, edited collections and textbooks on television genre began to emerge in many countries – see for example Barroso García (1996) in Spain, Creeber (2001) in the UK, Gehrau (2001) in Germany, Grignaffini (2012) in Italy – some of these more willing to acknowledge the limits of the concept than others. On the other hand academic studies attempting to categorise programmes afresh in the new “post-television” era are few and far between and those that do exist are of relatively fleeting use: attempting to define a televisual or audiovisual genre becomes self-defeating when by the time a definition – a second-order construct – is elaborated and published other texts – first-order constructs – will almost certainly have transformed the genre, taken it forward, transgressed it or even negated it. Television genres have begun to fragment into ever smaller categories (rural crime drama, high school sitcom, docussoap) and even form new mosaics which use and re-use a medley of elements, conventions, themes and audiences. For Brancato (2007: 50) some American sitcoms and series of the nineties were already pushing the concept to breaking point, talking even of its “massive destruction”:

The transformation of the traditional televisual models is evident well beyond the eccentricity of the basic *situations* of [these] series. Think of the extreme cross-over between comedy and drama which we find in *Ally McBeal* ... or *Six Feet Under*. These are serial texts which practise the hybridisation of genres taken to its ultimate consequences, thanks to a form of writing which today, in TV serials, represents the most advanced stage of scripting techniques and strategies.

And the phenomenon is not, of course, simply American. Researchers at the Centro di Ricerca sulla Televisione e gli Audiovisivi at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan describe how in the Italian series *Tutti pazzi per amore* (2008-12), “the family series is now established as an ‘omnivorous’ genre capable of

including elements from sit-com, teen drama, workplace comedy” (Ce.R.T.A, 2013: 454).

But the disintegration of genres is not limited to this micro level, it even affects what is in principle the most “obvious” (which it isn’t) and “primitive” (nor this either) macro distinction between television texts: fiction and non-fiction. If as little as fifteen or twenty years ago Abercrombie (1996: 42) established this as key differentiation or Corner (1991: 276) spoke of these categories as “distinctive communicative realms”, the truth is that the images which structure the narrative of a documentary or even of television news bulletins are presented in increasingly fictionalised ways (Hartley, 1982; O’Donnell, 2007: 35-36), sometimes bringing fiction and non-fiction together in an inextricable amalgam. In addition the classical categories of editorial and advertising are also breaking down within a media marketization context which, as Murdock (2010: 165) points out, has reinforced three different trends with serious implications for televisual products: “accelerating commercialization, extended scope for corporate speech and increased concentration of control”.

Life after television?

In his book on Italian television fiction Brancato ponders the role of fiction “on the threshold of the post-television age” (2007: 7), using a term to which Scaglione (2011) dedicates an entire book. Must post-television lead ineluctably to a “post-genre era”? Changes in television in what is more correctly termed the post-broadcast age are of course clear. They fall into three broad categories. These are, moving from the micro to the macro level (1) the fragmentation of supply with the exponential growth of channels and platforms (2) the increasing internationalisation of products and formats and (3) the much touted end of ideology, or even of history (Fukuyama, 1992). All of these have clear implications for the concept of genre.

As regards the fragmentation of supply, the increasing complexities of technology have clouded the issue of genre and its operationalisation even further. Television programming today is far removed from the flow which Williams defined to describe the continuous stream of content to which viewers were exposed in the sixties. We agree here with Milly Buonanno when she argues that “flow” may no longer be the best word or expression to describe the experience of television and highlights a number of problems which the concept faces in relation to the television of the twenty-first century which now seems freed once and for all from the “uninterrupted flow of images” (2008: 34). Many series are now designed to be consumed on DVD rather than television, others release episodes in advance on the web, users consume them on their computers while they share their

impressions on social networks, YouTube and other online “televisions” are platforms very much on the rise. As Ce.R.T.A. put it (2013: 449-50):

The spectators, their practices, the diffuse sense of what television might be, are changing ... It may seem surprising, but the centrality of TV in the media system is confirmed by the exorbitant presence of television on the web: TV is watched on the web (think of the contexts offered by YouTube or other aggregators), tv is discussed on the web (think of the discussions about tv on forums, blogs and social networks). The viewer is no longer, if he ever was, passively stretched out on his couch: he continually uses TV as a resource, whether material or symbolic, in order to orient himself, to discuss, to interact, both online and offline.

As Kroker and Cook put it almost thirty years, somewhat prophetically if rather more negatively (1986: 268):

the disappearing locus of power has probably already slipped away from TV as the real world, and taken up residence now in that digital paradise, that perfectly postmodern world, of the computer.

In such a world it is no longer sufficient to pitch, say, a reality show to a channel, since the latter will now be looking for all the details of the micro-genre being proposed: number of contestants, profile, theme of the show, whether there will be location shooting, or re-enactment, whether there will be cash prizes, whether the contestants will live together in some confined space and a host of other details which end up defining a specific programme, but not necessarily a category of programmes. The little use made of the concept of genre in the industry has been highlighted by a number of authors (e.g. Turner, 2008: 7; Mikos, 2008: 268) who point out that it is more common to talk now in terms of formats and formulas in order to specify production details, audiences and even business models. Many recent books written by industry insiders stress these changes and the ways in which they affect the continuing operability of a concept such as genres. For example, Carlo Freccero, currently Head of RAI4 in Italy, describes as follows what is for him one of the key elements of the new American series:

The hybridisation of genres ... arises from the need to spike the product, to speed it up, to leave no empty spaces in the script, to keep the viewer constantly under pressure ... the classic genres [become hybridised]: medical, detective, noir, soap. By mixing together, scientific reports, investigative

features and love stores saturate the available space, leaving no blanks (2013: 160).

In a recent text Toby Miller (2010: 177) explained how, following the many prophecies regarding the “death of television”, the decision was taken to change the title of one of the most important academic journals in the field (the title changed from *Television* to *Television and New Media*). Miller eventually decided to start working on what he called Television Studies 3.0, which includes in its vision all the implications which the internet and the new platforms for the consumption of television have for production, aesthetics and audience definitions. As Pearson puts it, the differences between the new situation – she terms it TVIII – and its predecessors “rest broadly on notions of channel scarcity versus channel abundance and of broadcasting to a mass audience versus narrowcasting to niche audiences” (2011: 107). In this way Miller called for a renewal of the field of television studies along the same lines as John Hartley who believes that academics should now see their object of study as one in continual movement, without any concrete form or established channels of distribution:

the problem is now to take the risk of releasing television studies itself into the evolving system of networked productivity using the affordances of Web 2.0 in ways that were not available in the broadcast environment (Hartley, 2009: 30)

In terms of internationalisation, our colleague Lothar Mikos wrote a key article – published in a book co-edited by the authors of this chapter – in a volume dedicated to the question of national identity and television in which he offered ideas of great interest in terms of the transfer of formats and genres at an international level. Lothar has long been interested in the transnationality of television, in the medium as a global phenomenon. He showed how a range of programmes, from *Big Brother* to *Yo soy Betty, la fea* had been adapted dozens of times – and in fact in order to survive in their new surroundings they *had* to adapt (McCabe and Akass, 2013) – to differing national contexts since genre is also understood as a cultural category at a national level: when we talk, for example, of the “Brazilian *telenovela*” or the “western”, we cannot disconnect these categories from their national environment. However genre is conceptualised, then, it cannot be done so in universalistic terms. In the words of Martín-Barbero:

In each country the system of genres responds to the cultural configuration, to a set of juridical demands placed on television, to the level of development of the national television industry, and to different modes of articulation to the transnational system (1993: 224).

Finally, as Todd Gitlin has clearly shown (2004), genres also constitute an “ideological way” of giving expression to a discourse. That is to say, the extreme intertextuality, the generic refinement of the products – made up now of malleable sandstone rather than of sturdy rocks given shape by concrete characteristic of the text – or of the continual toing and froing of genres – not in a single programme but in a single phrase uttered by one of the characters – takes away nothing from the fact that, alongside any cultural function genre also makes possible an ideological reading of what is being represented. If indeed we have moved into a post-ideological epoch where, as Johnson argued (1980), the critic will, at the end of the day, evaluate the difference of the text itself without reference to anything beyond it, analysing its meaning through deconstructive readings – a curious return to the Crocean position – must not genre automatically dissolve as result?

Conclusion: life after genre?

Even in the brief overview which we offer here of the appearance and disappearance of cultural taxonomies, a clear pattern emerges. Classifications – new ways of categorising already existing cultural products – arise, mostly in academic environments, after periods of significant social change, perhaps even moments of “epistemic rupture”, when a sufficient degree of stability is eventually achieved in order to make such classifications viable. Thus Plato and Aristotle’s taxonomies arise following Greek society’s restructuring around the city-state, weakening the strength of religion as an epistemic ground. The reappropriation (even misappropriation) of their taxonomies at the time of the Renaissance signalled a break with the episteme of the Middle Ages. The reconfiguration of genre by Romanticism – analysed at great length by Genette (1992) – a movement rooted in Kantian epistemology (Eldridge, 2001: 13), marked their break with the rules of the immediately preceding Classical Age. The genre systems of film and television, both the children of mature monopoly capitalism, characterised the industrial (rather than the academic) maturity of both, with everything that meant for the relationship between producer and consumer. For Jameson (1992: 250) talk of the “end of genre” in the nineteen-sixties was “something like a ‘legitimation crisis’ in the Hollywood aesthetic triggered by “the emergence of new kinds of films both modern and postmodern [and] somehow at one with all the new sixties technologies” (*ibid.*: 249-250).

What appears to academics now as the death of genre is likewise the result of very significant changes – economic, social and cultural – clearly taking shape since the nineteen-eighties, which Freccero, in his book on Italian television, identifies as an “epistemic fracture” bringing with it “a radical change in mentality” in all spheres

of life (2013: 97). These changes are still in process today, and are now routinely summed up by the term “postmodernity”. Applying a more exclusively economic frame, the life-cycle of the specific term “genre” can be seen to coincide broadly with the emergence and consolidation of industrial capitalism (birth, the Romantics), monopoly capitalism (maturity, cinema and broadcast television) and globalising capitalism – or to use Jameson’s (1991) term “late capitalism” – its dissolution into the world of multi-channel multi-platform narrowcasting and Web 3.0, no doubt awaiting a rebirth.

All such changes produce metaphors of instability: for Berman (1982) the experience of modernity has as its result that “all that is solid melts into air”, for Bauman (2000) the changes that others characterise as “postmodernity” he identifies as “liquid modernity”. Once stable structures and relationships (include academia) lose their consistency and relevance, and genre joins a long list of disappearances – the passing of television, the end of history and ideology, the vanishing newspaper (Meyer, 2004), the death of the novel (Fitzpatrick, 2006), the waning of the nation state (Rodrik, 2013), the disappearance of childhood (Postman, 1982), the occlusion of thought (Sartori, 2007) itself the victim of the tyranny of the instant (Hylland Erikson, 2001) and the need for quick thinking (Bourdieu, 1996), farewell to the University (and presumably to the academic) and the eclipse of the Humanities (Llovet, 2011), even – forty years after Barthes’ death of the author (Barthes, 1977) – the death of the reader (Belsey 2009), all this as academics – now post-academics – struggle to come to terms with, and in some cases lament, irreversible structural change in an environment which they once found familiar. But reports of such deaths – like Mark Twain’s – are almost certainly exaggerated. Stability may be a more fragile political and cultural condition than before, but its return, however limited, will provide the conditions of possibility for new taxonomies in which genre will no doubt reappear, even if in a somewhat different guise, as a result of what Moretti (in an avowedly Darwinian analysis) calls the “social selection” process at work and its “impatience with morphological irresolution, its ‘hurrying’ towards stable results” (1988: 269). As Jameson likewise puts it (in a passage where he refers to genres as “reified narrative forms”):

as the history of nominalism testifies, new universals always begin to form around the wreckage of the old ones, and what had deservedly been revealed to be unnamable inevitably gets named and generalized in its turn (2013: 145).

Nor are such processes in and of themselves solely negative, since they can also function as a form of quasi-Schumpeterian “creative destruction”. As Reckwitz (2013: 125) argues in relation to the “enormously expanded reservoir of [cultural]

activity” made available by the postmodern blending of older high culture and contemporary popular culture:

The dissolution of genre and media boundaries ... and the acceptance of the simultaneous presence of different artistic styles has a similar effect. The structural unbounding of the components of the artistic field has as its result that the regime of the aesthetically new as producer of the surprising – beyond all the limitations of bourgeois art – can now appear in a pure, unshackled form.

If we agree that the broadcasting era is over, if we accept that the concept of television genre needs to be reviewed and rethought within this new scenario, what can we propose from within television studies to improve our understanding of a cultural form (television) apparently increasingly without form? Should we simply abandon the notion of television genre and neglect its academic interest? Our answer is in principle no, for three reasons.

1. Firstly, even a superficial survey of both the European and North American television landscapes shows clearly not only the survival of certain genres but indeed the rude health which some of them continue to enjoy: the detective genre in its distinct national variations (*Krimi* in Germany, *polar* in France, *giallo* in Italy...) is a good example, and if anything it may be even more rampant now than before. As Danesi puts it (2002: 142) puts it somewhat caustically (we agree more with the thrust of his statement than with his causticity):

Today, TV genres have diversified significantly, as TV networks are forced to compete with smaller private channels that offer speciality programming. Still, the traditional genres seem to have much life left in them, despite their apparent inanity.

2. Fragmentation is in itself nothing new, and is in fact a long-standing feature of literary genres which have been much more demand-driven than supply-driven than television was in its broadcast form. As Genette puts it:

We all know, for example, that the species *detective novel* may in turn be divided into several varieties (police procedural, thriller, “realistic” detective story à la Simenon, etc.), that with a little ingenuity one can always multiply the positions between the species and the individual, and that on one can set a limit on this proliferation of species ... In short, any genre can contain several genres (1992: 65).

3. The so-called “law of genre” (“no mixing”) has never been followed to the letter, neither in high culture nor – indeed far less so – in popular culture. Ellis reminds us (1982: 146) that both “documentary drama” and “drama documentary” were already in existence on British television in the nineteen-fifties. Nor has film been any stranger to such processes, as Jameson’s analysis of *After the Thin Man* (1936, dir. Van Dyke) – a movie which he rightly describes (1992: 242) as an “omnibus text [where] virtually all the other genres co-present in the specific genre system of the period stage at least a fleeting appearance” – clearly shows. In his article on this subject Derrida even describes “the law of genre [as] precisely a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy” (1980: 55).

Real-life genre has brushed aside such theoretical challenges as these, and can be expected to continue to do so.

The (only apparently) amorphous television of the new millennium is the product of new forms of media marketisation (Murdock, 2010): that television which we consume on our mobile on the train, which we produce as citizens when we post a video on YouTube, which we enjoy when we rent a series on an on-line pay-per-view platform, continues elaborating discourses – not to mention ideologies: as Žižek argues, “ideology is alive and kicking in our post-ideological world” (2010: 66) – and offering forms which refer back, however fragmentarily, to the television genres of the broadcast era, at times in the form of micro-sequences, at others through simple visual allusions, on many other occasions simply to transgress the established rules of broadcast television. Even in those (still relatively few) cases where it appears to have disappeared from view, far from dying out, genre has become a kind of ever-present but invisible component, a kind of (recombinant) textual DNA which will go on mutating and transforming production by production.

To conclude we return to Colombian theorist Jesús Martín-Barbero and his suggestions for a different way of conceptualising genre:

The genres are the mediation between the logic of the productive system and the logics of use. The rules of the genres establish the basic pattern of the formats and anchor the cultural recognition of the different groups. Admittedly, the notion of genre we are using here has little to do with the literary notion of genre as a ‘property of the text’ or with functionalism’s [sic] reduction of the genre to a taxonomy. Our use of the term genre is not something that happens *to* a text but something that happens *through* and *because of* a text (1993: 223).

Genres express, therefore, first and foremost a “strategy of communicability” (*ibid.*) and are defined, as Bourdieu argues in relation to photographic genres, “primarily with reference to their use and their users” (1990: 89). Irrespective of the changes in television as a system – and the changes are indeed profound – strategies of communicability cannot possibly disappear as a result: they will develop to adapt to the new circumstances and genre, far from joining a long list of “posts”, will likewise adapt to its changing environment.

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