Call for Papers
PhD course at Sandbjerg Estate
May 13-16 2024

The Politics of Genre

"Genres," cultural theorist Lauren Berlant wrote in *Cruel Optimism*, "provide an affective expectation of watching something unfold, whether that thing is in life or in art" (2011, 20). In life, Berlant showed, social and aesthetic genres such as femininity, the conversation, and the situation mediate our sense of social belonging. Testifying to a certain drive to decouple the methodologies of aesthetic formalism from the fields of art and literature proper, in favor, perhaps, of less indirect ways of engaging analytically with the social field, Berlant's innovative work on the genre of genre builds on, among others, that of cultural studies scholar Raymond Williams and literary historian Fredric Jameson, and their shared interest in the ideological functions of literary genres. For instance, in works like *The Political Unconscious* (1981) and *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), emphasizing in several instances "the privileged relationship between historical materialism and genre study," Jameson paid much attention to the ways in which concrete historical situations do not exactly cause, in any crude sense, specific aesthetic forms, but rather provide the conditions of possibility for their coming into existence. "[T]he historical moment blocks off a certain number of formal possibilities which had been available in earlier situations," Jameson wrote already in a 1975 essay on the genre of romance, "all the while opening up certain determinate new ones which may or may not come into being" (Jameson 1975, 158-160). This attention to how historical changes engender transformations in aesthetic genres and modes is a water mark also of *Cruel Optimism*. Here, Berlant suggests, for instance, that the transformation of the genre of the "sit com" into the genre of "situation tragedy" is an index of the present moment of "crisis ordinariness" in liberal-capitalist societies.

       The fact that etymologically the term genre "always includes within its reach the gender," as Jacques Derrida reminded us in his seminal text "The Law of Genre" (2008), has been fruitfully exploited, theoretically and analytically so, by a range of feminist cultural studies scholars such as Christine Gledhill, Beverly Skeggs, Angela McRobbie, and Katherine Sender. In *The Makeover* (2012), by displaying how the generic conventions of make over-shows reproduce gendered norms, Sender incidentally confirmed Berlant's argument in *The Female Complaint* that "femininity is a genre with deep affinities to the genres associated with femininity" (Berlant 2008, 3). While current make over-shows such as *The Biggest Loser*, *What Not to Wear*, and *Queer Eye* demonstrate that gendered strategies of self-improvement have now been "democratized" beyond women to include men, Sender outlines how they nonetheless "prioritize historically feminine concerns, including self-presentation, consumerism, and an intimate relationship with the self produced through interiority, affect, authenticity, and the everyday" (Sender, 28).

Bearing in mind such currents in the theory and analysis of culture, the PhD course *The Politics of Genre* invites reflections on the relations of genre to a given historical moment. We welcome all discussions regarding genres in both historical and contemporary contexts, and we also wish to encourage reflections on the relationships between genres and media.

While the interplay between genres and media affordances is a feature of cultural phenomena throughout history, and a sustained interest of most studies of art, this interplay is, perhaps, renegotiated by developments in digital and social media formats? Contemporary cultural artefacts and practices are, in terms of the digital, travelling across genres and media. Here, some examples are in order: When Jennifer Egan uses twitter, e-mail, and powerpoint text formats in her literary narratives about a dystopian mindscape of the not-too-distant future; or when boundaries between fiction, podcast, and oral history are reworked into new genres such as the audiowalk, whether it is Janet Cardiff's seductive auditory formats curated as museum installation art, museums' informative audio guides for different types of spaces, or audiowalks curated around specific places: cities, neighborhoods, parks, or landscapes.

For *The Politics of Genre* we invite papers on genre broadly conceived, whether in literary studies, film and media studies, cultural studies, musicology, gender studies, and more. In this, we ask: "What is genre, positively speaking? What is it that selects which differences matter?" (Cisco 2021, 1). Genre can be open, transgressive, promiscuous, an ongoing crosspollination of other genera, resulting in sometimes surprising and novel assemblages: eco-gothic, biopunk, Afrofuturism, Nordic noir, New Weird; Korean fusion, New Nordic, pegan and flexitarian cuisine; garage punk, trap, nu metal; docudrama, dramedy, ethnofiction; artificial intelligence, alternative facts, transhuman. Yet if genre is a means to construct advanced and expanding arrangements around a set of shared core patterns, it is also canonic, classical, typical. Drama, poetry, the novel; classical music, jazz, rock; naturalism, impressionism, surrealism; Tudor, Victorian, International; crime, science fiction, and fantasy.

The annual joint venture PhD course at Sandbjerg Estate is a great opportunity to develop a network among PhD colleagues across Denmark in a supportive environment, in which PhD fellows try out ideas among their peers.

The Politics of Genre is co-organized by the graduate schools in literature, art and cultural studies at the University of Southern Denmark, the University of Copenhagen, and Aarhus University.

Keynote speakers
Celia Lury, Warwick University
Helge Jordheim, Oslo University
Anders Engberg (tbc)

Paper proposals (abstracts) of approx. 300 words should be emailed no later than February 15 2024 to Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen (birgittestougaard@cc.au.dk), Devika Sharma (sharma@hum.ku.dk), and Peter Simonsen (petsim@sdu.dk). Please make sure to write your name and institutional affiliation in the abstract, thanks.