

Scholars on the subject of Genre in contemporary Cinema and Media Studies

Scholar Rick Altman in [Film/Genre](#) has observed that the concept of genre in visual media studies operates as an industry blueprint, as a formal structure, as a marketplace label, and as an audience contract, but genre also serves in a fifth capacity as a mode of media studies and academic scholarship. Indeed, genre studies has become a mainstay of course offerings in cinema studies, offering a productive pedagogy for students who are developing an aptitude for and an appreciation of film and other visual media.

Yet genre remains an elusive and evolving concept for scholarship, especially as it intersects with various media forms (television, digital/Internet) that have joined cinema studies in the academy. The implications of these changes for genre studies raised a number of questions for the editors of [Mediascape](#), so we invited a group of scholars to respond to whichever of those questions they found compelling. Professors Jason Mittell, Scott Ruston, Timothy Shary, and Vernon Shetley graciously selected from among the following questions to formulate some of their thoughts about genre. Their comments offer a concise and insightful examination of the practice of genre scholarship past and present, and provide a glimpse of what the future may hold for genre studies.

Ten Questions About Genre:

1. If genre is both a "static and a dynamic system," as Thomas Schatz and many others have observed in various ways, how has genre studies changed in the academy in the past decade or so? What aspects, if any, have remained the same?
2. Have we seen the emergence of what could be categorized as a new genre (or genres) in the last decade or so? If so, how would you describe it or delineate it?
3. Have any genres significantly atrophied or disappeared in recent history (e.g., the romantic comedy with strong leads for both sexes)?
4. How have television and new media (e.g., Internet, video games) affected our understanding of genre? Should we think of genre in terms of media specificity, or should genre categories be unified across all moving-image media? Or both?
5. Related to question 4, how has the proliferation of a "single" text in different media—e.g., graphic novel as film, as interactive web site, as video game, as television spin-off, as fan re-enactment, etc.—affected genre studies? Does this proliferation place a higher value on specific genre attributes, such as characters and motifs, or on certain industrial practices (such as marketing or product tie-ins)? Do certain genres lend themselves more favorably to proliferation across various media outlets?
6. How have genre and genre studies been influenced and shaped by intersections of gender, race, and sexual orientation? How have minority and women filmmakers contributed to shifting definitions of genre?
7. As mainstream film production, distribution, and exhibition increasingly reflect a more global orientation, what implications does this have for genre and genre conventions? How does globalization affect the relationship between national cinemas and genre?
8. How do media practices on the periphery of mainstream production, such as low-budget filmmaking and user-generated content on the web, alter our understanding of how genres are produced, sustained, modified, or revived?
9. Has student understanding of genre changed as a result of increased film and media availability (e.g., DVD rentals, web access, TCM)? Has your approach to teaching genre in the classroom changed as a result? If so, how?
10. If you had to pick a favorite genre, which one would it be? Why

Respondents



Jason Mittell is Associate Professor of American Studies and Film & Media Culture at Middlebury



College. He is the author of [Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture](#) (Routledge, 2004), and [Television and American Culture](#) (Oxford University Press, 2009), numerous articles and book chapters on American television, and the blog [Just TV](#). He is currently writing about narrative complexity in contemporary American television.



Scott Ruston received his Ph.D. from the Critical Studies Division in the School of Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California. His research interests include narrative form and style of film/television/digital media in entertainment and education contexts. Through a combination of theory and practice, his research explores how the cinematic legacy of the telephone and the unique characteristics of mobile media combine to create immersive and interactive narrative entertainment.



Timothy Shary is a professor in the Film and Video Studies program at the University of Oklahoma. He has published three books on the topic of youth film genres, and is currently editing an anthology on masculinity in American movies.



Vernon Shetley is Professor of English at Wellesley College. He is the author of [After the Death of Poetry: Poet and Audience in Contemporary America](#). He is currently at work on a study of neo-noir filmmaking, (tentatively) titled [Dark Film, Black Market: The Economics of Neo-Noir](#).