

Editor's Note: Trespassing Genre

We are pleased to present the second issue of *Trespassing Journal*, which is composed of articles that investigate the concept of genre. Frederic Jameson, among others, might have proclaimed genre to be discredited by modern literary theory and practice, but the articles in this issue demonstrate how discussions of genre remain vibrant. As a category of classification and totalization, genre invites serious criticism: The concept is rooted in the history of biological classification and inherently connotes a hierarchical division. It is a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion that perpetuates existing hierarchies and distinctions. It is a marketing ploy that is geared towards the mass production of “lowbrow” art forms. It is no longer useful as an analytical tool.

Yet, despite all of this apt criticism, the concept of genre still remains one of the chief ways in which aisles in bookstores are set, movies are listed in databases, and museums are curated. In other words, genres persist. As Ralph Cohen argued in response to the dismissal of genre as a categorical tool: “genre concepts in theory and practice arise, change, and decline for historical reasons,” and that “genres are open categories” (204). Once understood in their historicity and as indeterminate systems, genres can offer ways of thinking about not only the texts themselves, but also the social and political contexts in which they operate.

There is also a consensus among the authors included in this volume that genres are not fixed categories. The contributors of the present issue criticize the assumptions inherent in the assignment of genres. However, they also point out how generic categories also contain the possibility of subversion. Manuel Yang investigates the operation of power behind generic classification and the process by which they come to be accepted as “objective”. Yet, he opens up the question whether genre can provide politically revolutionary tensions. In their respective articles on Martin Amis and Shakespeare, Patrick Gill & Florian Kläger and Anna Mackenzie discuss how texts break the frame of their genres. The authors argue that these texts defy their generic categorizations through playing or subverting precisely the forms that are supposed to limit them. Similarly, Laura Tansley locates creative potentialities of genre in “short-short story,” which lies at the border of poetry and prose.

All of the authors in this issue touch upon the politics of genre through analyzing the ways in which the concept functions as a tool of classification. While Yang traces the

biological roots of the concept and its complicity in modern imperialist and capitalist expansion, Martina Allen questions whether “hybridity,” another concept rooted in biology, can be useful in understanding how genres relate to one another. Gill and Kläger analyze the specific genre of mystery and offer fruitful grounds to think about politics of writing. Michelle Moravec’s analysis of feminist manifestoes also invites us to consider whether certain forms of writing can create social and political ruptures. On the other hand, Noel Brown questions the discrepancy between popular and academic assignments and receptions of the “family film” genre, revealing how the former are not always taken into account.

From short-shorts to manifestoes, family films to drama, the second issue of *Trespassing* is filled with critical analyses of the concept of genre. The authors seek ways to understand and to challenge the process whereby literary forms are created, limited and delimited. Jacques Derrida defines law of genre as “a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy,” (59) in which the law is open for transgression. The following articles underline such transgressions by demonstrating how genre-related impositions should be rethought, and ultimately trespassed.

Works Cited

Cohen, Ralph. “History and Genre.” *New Literary History* 17. 2 (1986): 203-218. Print.

Derrida, Jacques. “The Law of Genre.” *Critical Inquiry* 7.1 (1980): 55-81. Print.

Suggested Citation

Ertuna-Howison, Irmak. “Editor’s Note: Trespassing Genre. *Trespassing Journal: an online journal of trespassing art, science, and philosophy* 2 (Winter 2013). Web. ISSN: 2147-2134