

Genericity Elasticity

changing boundaries of genres

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Introduction – The Lonesome Genre

In the western *THE OVERLAND STAGE RAIDERS* (Sherman 1936) John Wayne is chasing criminals on his horse. These criminals however have stolen an airplane. In *DESTROY RIDES AGAIN* (Marshall 1939) Marlene Dietrich sings like she's in a musical. *COWBOYS AND ALIENS* (Favreau 2011); the title says it all. These examples, though all are credited as westerns, show convergence of genre characteristics. Conventions, themes and props from other genres intrude on the western causing hybridisation. However, despite the additions, these films are still predominantly westerns. Instead of seeing genres as strictly demarcated categories following formulas, these anomalies argue for a perspective on genre boundaries as borderlands, allowing intergenerational border crossing. Due to its perseverance and many forms the western seems particularly flexible in adopting different genre characteristics whilst still clearly presenting itself as a western. In order to understand this change of genres due to hybridisation and assess the definition of genres when borders seem so permeable this research shall look what framework is applicable for studying flexible genres.

This notion of genre border fluidity is based on a preconception about boundaries. In her account on borders between media in 'Border Talks', Irina Rajewsky argues that boundaries are social constructs (2010, 54). By viewing borders as constructs, one takes into account historical changes in their position and the subjective reception, whether it be uniform or individual. When discussing the genre fluidity, the borders shall be regarded as social constructs that are able to change in order to fit to certain circumstances and contexts.

By embedding this research into the critical discourse on genres to both expand on current notions and criticize other theories, a new framework can be provided to analyse genres with. Most of all, this research is a continuation of the trend started by Rick Altman and his model (1999). This research will however expand on Altman's model by seeing how it can account for intergenerational elements and flexibility instead of focussing on how to define specific genres, like Altman does.

By following Altman's model, this research will update genre theory to accommodate change and flexibility. Thereby it criticises strict boundaries as exemplified in Will Wright's *Sixguns and Society* (1975). This model of the western is exemplary for early genre theory that stresses pure synchronic and theoretical definitions of the western that propagate a certain set of films over the general corpus. Instead, by researching the flexibility of genre borders and the adaptation of genre characteristics a relation-based framework to look at genres shall be suggested, that accounts for internal genre changes, cyclical recurrences of themes and subjective reception; matters which are not or

marginally addressed in the discourse. Practically, in an era of multimedia marketing and convergence, the intergenerational and intertextual relations between genres can be useful to understand the synergistic workings of products.

In order to grasp the diversity of the genre discourse this research shall use the western as a stepping stone. This means that genre hybrids of western films shall be discussed and genre definition models shall be appropriated to the western. The western has known many forms, as indicated before. Not only has it changed internally, it has also stepped beyond its own corpus and formed hybrids. It is one of the oldest genres, proving resilient to many changes, therefore making it a rich and useful case in studying changes in genres and possible intergenerational relations.

This paper has been divided into four parts. The first part deals with what characteristics of genres themselves allow change. Inherent or ontological traits and origins can shed light on a nascent flexibility of genres themselves. A genre model shall be discussed to understand this inherent possibility of change. Despite inherent traits, genres change due to other reasons. This external incentive shall be dealt with in chapter two by looking into why genres change. This topic shall deal with productional motivations and societal relations that complement the internal characteristics.

Chapter three deals with how the genre films allow for stretching of generic boundaries. Manifestations of transgressions in western films shall be used as illustration of the possibility of fluid but encompassing boundaries. This shall be done by textual analyses of westerns ranging from B-westerns from the 30s to A-westerns from the 90s to encompass several periods of the western and different critical perspectives.

Extragerational agents can enforce or ignore this genre flexibility. The last chapter will address whether transgressions are accepted by specific agents, or whether genres are consciously kept apart. Association works as a guiding principle and gives insight into subjective reception of genres. But first we shall see how lonesome genres allow themselves to be via ontological characteristics.

Chapter one: A Flexible Concept

Genre theory has existed since Aristotle's *Poetica*. However, a universally accepted definition of a genre has not been decided upon, due to the discursive nature of the concept (Altman 1999, 215). Therefore, a genre model must be found that allows flexible boundaries. This rules out early genre theories, as illustrated by Tag Gallagher (2003, 262), and exemplified by Will Wright (1975).¹ Rick Altman's Semantic-Syntactic model

¹ This discussion will focus on how genres are defined and delimited. This means analysing only a segment of the entire discourse. Film scientist Raphaëlle Moine illustrates this by stating that

shall instead work as a theoretical operator since this model allows viewing borders as social constructs (1989). Salient aspects from this model shall form a new framework that shows the intergenerational basis of genres.

Central to Altman's model, as first presented in 'A Semantic and Syntactic Approach to Film Genre' is the combination of genre semantics and syntax in one model (1989, 11). Both had previously been addressed separately creating exclusive categories or snapshots of genre. By both analysing the semantics (props, setting, characters or general look of the genre), and the syntax (relationship between the semantic elements or structure of the genre), Altman's model integrates the genres back into history and thereby encompasses several previous theories (Altman 1989, 10). Genres are constructed from both semantics and syntax from which some elements are stable throughout the genre while others can be exchanged. This explains, for instance, the difference between the silent *Savage westerns*, that are based on the Great Plain Indian Wars and feature honourable cowboys and savage Native Americans (Simmon 2003, 4), and anti-westerns of the sixties and seventies that use a more realistic and complex but cynical and violent version of the west, such as *THE WILD BUNCH* (Peckinpah 1969) (Willett 1970, 460-461). Both qualify as westerns due to their use of similar semantic elements such as horses, Stetsons and sixguns. But they differ through the use of different syntax – instead of savagery versus civilisation, anti-westerns relate several semantics in such a way that no real protagonist can be discerned due to the general degradation of society– thereby creating different films.

This dual nature allows for insight in the origin of genres. Firstly an already existing syntax can be filled using different semantic elements. Secondly, after experimentation with syntaxes, the most fitting semantics and syntax solidify into a stable genre (Altman 1989, 12). The latter indicates that there are no exclusive semantics or syntax. This is relevant for genre change because every genre is based on characteristics that are shared throughout all genres and that at their inception, genres accommodated lots of variations. Every element was able to be incorporated, some forming a genre eventually, but the inherent familiarity persevered. Genres allow change due to the originally familiar nature of many semantic and syntactic elements.

This exchangeability makes Altman's model particularly useful in discussing genre hybrids. A similar syntax, using different semantic elements, can give a completely different experience. The changing of semantics and syntax accounts for internal genre change since a genre can adopt elements. Altman states that 'genres that have proven the

genre definitions are based on agreements between four separate domains, namely producers, audiences, films and wider communication practices (2008, 28). This variability problematizes genre definitions. This chapter shall not deal with this variable interpretation of genres, instead focussing on models that deal with flexible boundaries.

most durable are precisely those that have established the most coherent syntax (1989, 16).’ Though syntax may be necessary for durable genres, semantics, which exchange easier, are necessary to evoke a specific genre, in hybrids.

This role of the semantics is shown in the ‘syntactic expectation, set up by a semantic signal, that is matched by a parallel tendency to expect specific syntactic signals to lead to pre-determined semantic fields (1989, 17).’ These expectations are built up by continuous repetition in different films so as to build up referents. Though not necessarily intergenerational, these expectations make genres intertextual and dependent on familiar conventions. In genre hybrids, this would mean that, although semantic elements might be out of place, if they are intermingled with familiar elements, then a genre specific syntax will be expected. Next to that, expectations can change if hybrid signs evoke a genre specific syntax. Associated syntax with semantics can help adopting foreign elements into a new, but specific genre format.

According to Altman, syntax and semantics are related to each other via a negotiation between the audience and the production companies (1989, 13). This idea of a negotiation over semantics and syntax shows that films can be appropriated to a genre due to different reasons. Raphaëlle Moine illustrates this by stating that ‘some actively contribute to the development of a syntax for the genre, others pick up in a less systematic way the traditional elements associated with a genre (2003, 57).’ This means that genre hybrids might be attributed to a particular genre for different reasons than do ‘classical’ genre texts and that their ties to other genre films are different. This aspect argues both for a fluid understanding of boundaries and the existence of certain key characteristics hybrids can relate to.

These key characteristics can be explained by looking at an often made criticism against Altman: his model is only applicable on categories that have previously been designated as genres (Moine 2003, 60). This point can be used as an advantage by taking a model described by Moine into account. Moine at one point describes genres as intertextual phenomena, meaning they only exist due to their internal relations. She refers to Christian Metz’ claim that films -and therefore genres- involve a play of codes (Moine 2003, 43). This means that genres contain several elements that have an attributed meaning. There are three types of meaning: general meanings, which are culturally defined, cinematic meanings, which are shared in all films, and specific cinematic meanings, which are specific to a film or group of films (Moine 2003, 43). This means that genres are formed mainly due to the existence of specific cinematic codes that are maintained. In addition to Altman’s model this means that some semantics or syntax function as these specific cinematic codes.

These elements are therefore paramount in the formation of the genre at that point in time. Though these codes can change, they are necessary in evoking the idea of a specific genre, via the principle of syntactic expectation. The presence of Stetsons and horses immediately evokes the idea of a western film. Some elements therefore can be seen as being pivotal in constituting a genre because they are the main bearers of specific cinematic codes.² Their presence can evoke expectations, as Altman described. The presence of intergenerational elements can thus evoke expectations of multiple genres within one genre. To construe these, a preconception of a genre is necessary for familiar elements to be recognised. The strength of the semantics in genres then becomes the ability to be strongly coded and evoking a specific genre, which allows for the adoption of intergenerational elements while still feeling like a specific genre.³

So, when following Altman's model and several additional theories from the genre discourse, a genre framework to understand inherent change capabilities relies on the exchangeable nature, shared source material, evoked expectations, fluid connections to genres and key semantics that evoke specific genres. These characteristics of genres shall later be put into practice when shown how genre films accommodate change. But first, why genres change in general shall be regarded from Tag Gallagher's notion that genres do not evolve due to sophistication but that they change via society related cycles (2003, 268).

Chapter two: The Societal Cycle of a Sixgun

Why do genres change on a textual level? An answer to this requires looking into the production context of genres to see the motivation behind altering a proven formula. However, there are many kinds of change, so what passes as genre change must also be decided upon. Change should allow flexible borders in order to gain further insight into how intergenericity is possible. This precondition rules out early genre theorists, as shown in Tag Gallagher's critique (2003, 262) for these theorists saw change as a linear

² These key semantics act in a similar manner as famous landmarks, such as the Eiffel Tower, in city trips films, as David Bass has made clear (1997). Bass claims that city trip films often exist of a string of landmarks which immediately evoke (a partial) image of a city (Bass 1997, 85). The Eiffel Tower immediately evokes Paris and the entire atmosphere present. These key semantics in genres immediately evoke a specific genre in much the same way.

³ An example of this principle can be seen in the television series *JUSTIFIED* (Yost 2010-present). This is a police drama featuring US Marshall Raylan Givens. Givens wears a Stetson and often winds up in a classic gun draw. These semantic elements immediately evoke the conventions of a western, despite this series taking place in 21st century Kentucky. Further analysis showed that the series uses several syntactic elements that occur in western films such as the power of authority, the justification of violence and the thin line between savagery and justice. The key semantic elements in this series provide the main link with the western, turning the series into a modern update of an older genre by evoking genre specific syntax and updating other genre semantics with modern variants.

evolution.

Will Wright and his structural study of the western illustrate this change (1975). Wright divides several westerns into four categories based on how they relate to the economy, maintaining a strict theoretical notion of the western. Instead of looking at how the genre changes, Wright focusses on how the genre was put to use, as if evolving together with the economy, thereby ignoring the aesthetic dimension. This approach leads Wright to conclude that the western serves as a means for the people to deal with the struggle between traditional values in a changing economic world (1975, 131).

Though the pragmatic dimension has effect on the flexibility of genres (Altman 1999, 209), this specificity in genre pragmatics is unsuited to study hybrids and genre change. As Gallagher illustrated, Wright's (and several other theorists) theoretical selection of core western films, force genre change into societal decided and maturing categories (2003, 264). However, genres, in their diversity have changed for different reasons, possibly independent of society. Wright's genre boundaries are too strict and linear to research changes, good or bad, that go beyond his categories, for instance re-used plots or events in a different context, therefore ignoring linear evolution (Gallagher 2003, 266).

Instead genres allow change due to evoked expectations and varying connections to genres. This associative power makes a cyclical approach more appropriate. Cycles mean repetitions of historical patterns (Gallagher 2003, 268). For the western this means that topics addressed in the silent westerns resurface now and then to appeal to specific period in time. Genre flexibility is then assured by making genres able to accommodate all of their historical forms at all times as their originally intergeneric and exchangeable nature allows. But with hybridisation, cycles exceed historical recurrence.

Amanda Ann Klein in *Film Cycles* states that ' Film cycles are cultural ephemera cranked out to capitalize on current events, trends, fads and the success of other films (2012, 6).'⁷ In order to capitalise, these films need to quickly raise attention to themselves. This is achieved by positioning themselves in public discourse (Klein 2012, 4). In order to become part of a discussion, these films adapt to current events or follow other successful films that have adapted to these recent events. Genre change could be explained as the cyclical appropriation of current discourse to quickly garner attention and an audience.

Adaptation to current discourse or context can be seen in several genres and might be the result of direct adaptation or following another set of films. The gangster genre that rose in the thirties is a clear example because it followed the rise of organised crime following the Great Depression. The revival of the science fiction genre in the seventies was a direct resonance to the manned moon landing in 1969. Several of these social

relation cycles can be discerned in the western. Thirties B-Westerns such as *THE OVERLAND STAGE RAIDERS* often feature radical time jumps between the old west and the future (read: 1930s). According to Simmon, this discrepancy offered a simple and enjoyable way to cope with the problems caused by the Great Depression by promoting classical values, as presented in the old west (2003, 153). This time-jump western cycle took the topic of social problems and dealt with them in an comprehensive manner. Conversely, the sixties saw the 'Vietnamisation' of the Western (Coyne 1998, 124) resulting in the aforementioned anti-westerns that dealt with the disillusion of the ideal of American society, a more realistic approach and the drastic increase in violence and sadism. The societal relation thus is an important instigator of change, but more topical than Wright's evolution (1975, 131).

Klein points out that these cycles aim to please the audience (to easily earn money) instead of satisfying an artistic urge (2012, 10). To do this, they must follow the ever changing discourse. So cycles are also discernible by their high degree of topicality (Klein 2012, 13). When the public discourse change topic, the current cycle dominating a genre must change as well, explaining the many forms a genre can assume. To quickly garner attention, genre films can adapt but also follow successful films that have already placed themselves within the discourse, as if hitching a ride.

Klein mostly describes intragenerational cycles of one genre borrowing characteristics from another genre, but cycles can span multiple genres. The success of a specific genre film is followed by different genres via references or hybrids. Genres' ability to exchange and evoke expectations allow for a genre to adopt elements from successful films, thereby adding to a cinematic cycle, but changing themselves.

The success of one genre and its adaptation to current events, can be channelled into another genre with hybrids. *COWBOYS AND ALIENS* came out in a time when science fiction films were amply represented in cinemas with films such as *TRANSFORMERS*; *DARK SIDE OF THE MOON* (Bay 2011) and *CAPTAIN AMERICA* (Johnston 2011). As Altman points out, genre mixing occurs to appeal to the largest possible audience, therefore getting maximal gain from a film if it ties in to established successes (1999, 142). Cycles explain the occurrence of hybrids because following intergeneric cycles means sharing semantic and syntactic elements from different genres. Also, genre films can borrow methods from each other to relate the social topic or stretch their own boundaries, thus gaining discursive attention.

Successful cycle starters from a different genre can thus cause intergeneric cycles. Scott Simmon explains how postwar westerns such as *MY DARLING CLEMENTINE* (Ford 1946) exhibit film noir characteristics (2003, 198). This noir cycle continued thanks to successes of the western films but was caused by successful noir films such as *THE BIG*

SLEEP (Hawks 1946) and the post-war climate where the film noir styles expressed a 'maze of threats' to family and community (Simmon 2003, 1999). Cycles force genres to exchange elements and change to remain relevant in specific cinematic circumstances.

To answer why genres change is best explained using cycles. By following successful films, inter- or intragenerational, or current events, genres can adapt to appeal to a larger audience and can take a number of forms because of their topicality. This chapter has only focused on how production circumstances change genres. Chapter four will deal with how genres can change due to different uses of genres. Now the question arises how films accommodate these intergenerational additions as if belonging to their own genre.

Chapter three: The Film, the Genre and the Hybrid

Genres have the inherent capability to accommodate change through cycles resulting in intergenerational exchange. To see how films incorporate these foreign elements and whether genre specificity is maintained requires an idea of delimited genre borders. But how do we assess boundaries that are being crossed?

Rajewsky sees borders between media as social constructs, but the same can be said about genre borders (2010, 54).⁴ Rajewsky claims that these constructs can be assessed and experienced by looking at how genre borders are transgressed (2010, 55). Films on a textual level depict their genre boundary constructs, which shows how foreign elements are incorporated within one genre. This concept of constructed boundaries within the film itself helps understand how genre films get attributed to one genre, whilst exhibiting multiple genre characteristics. Seeing how genre borders are crossed can also shed light on why the western is so flexible. Therefore several western hybrids or western stretching films were analysed in this way which provided five different types of border transgression, stated in order of growing hybridity:

Intergenerational Reference

This type of genre border transgression takes place when a semantic element of one genre occurs into another to evoke a certain association. They do not accompany an expectation of syntax or are too sporadic to be clearly noted. In the OVERLAND STAGE RAIDERS for instance, in a clear western setting, one of the villains is dressed in gangster attire (fedora, black suit) referencing the gangster genre. In this B-western, this reference is used to

⁴ Both media and genres can't be clearly defined. Usually general categories can be provided but encompassing definitions cannot be supplied. Both monikers often serve as *a pars pro toto*, like 'Television' indicating the television set but meaning the whole dispositif and programming, or the 'western' encompassing only a specific version of the western genre. How this specific part of the whole is selected shall be discussed in chapter four. For now the similarities in delimitation matter.

quickly evoke the connotation of a villain. This film takes a little under an hour, so quick recognition tricks are efficient.

Extrageric semantics

The reference as a transgression type won't result in many hybrids or genre change due to its sporadic character. But in this category genre boundaries are crossed by semantics which are not related to any genre in particular. Often these extrageric semantics are anachronistic items or items from daily life. In the *OVERLAND STAGE RAIDERS*, the western setting, with ranches, cowboys and even John Wayne, is enriched with cars, busses and airplanes. These elements stretch the conventions that govern the western, but are integrated into the syntax. This syntax deals with integration of foreign agents into the society. The extrageric elements are just as out of place for the characters as they are for the audience. However, during the film and via its syntax, the foreign elements are integrated into society and thereby, the western itself, keeping the film, with all its extrageric additions, connoted as a western. The syntax helps integrate foreign elements, but the strongly codified semantics such as cowboys and horses immediately evoke the idea of a western.

This kind of transgression can be used to reconcile past with present, as Simmon notes (2003, 152). During the thirties, rapid technological development made cars and airplanes a more important part of everyday life. By dealing with this subject, the three mesquiteers cycle, to which the *OVERLAND STAGE RAIDERS* belongs, follows the current discourse on technological progress. As Simmon illustrates, it holds a conservative position in this reconciliation by seeing 'going modern' as a bad thing and showing that traditional western semantics, such as horses, dominate modern ones, such as trains (2003, 152), thereby forefronting western genericity. By using foreign elements, genres can directly position themselves in current discourse.

Intergeneric Semantics

Instead of adopting elements that do not belong to a genre, this type of transgression places semantics (and some syntax) from one genre into another. This integration of foreign factors is interwoven in the semantics of the original genre, often combined with strongly codified semantics from the genre its embedded in. In the musical western *DESTINY RIDES AGAIN* the western semantic of the saloon is enriched with lavish decorations, Marlene Dietrich in fancy dresses as bar singer Frenchy and songs with elaborate choreography through an overcrowded saloon. Also, Frenchy gets several

'backstage scenes.' Semantics from the western are substituted and enriched by semantics from the musical.⁵

These intergeneric elements don't integrate completely with the adopting genre. The foreign elements are treated differently from the rest of the 'normal' western community. In *DESTROY RIDES AGAIN* the saloon with its musical decorations is a place filled with criminals, which has to be cleared in order to make the town peaceful again. The western boundaries are stretched to accommodate this substitution but in the end the western remains dominant by removing nearly everything that reminded of this foreign incursion. The embedding and purification explains the flexibility of the western, but the intergenerational additions can also stretch the western by influencing the syntax of the western. In *DESTROY* new actors such as James Stewart and Dietrich are cast which give a new performance and the presence of a strong woman such as Frenchy allows the climactic battle to be mostly won by the town's women.⁶ This stretching of boundaries is however 'set straight' in the end when the male dominance is reset, together with the rest of the western conventions. So this transgression dresses a genre differently which allows a *temporary* stretching of genre conventions.

Intergeneric integration

This type of transgression borders on hybridisation due to constant influence of intergeneric elements on the syntax. A genre in this transgression category adopts the style or semantics of another genre and instead of merely substituting them for other semantics, these elements gain their own influence on the syntax. Next to that, the new semantics bring with them expectations of the syntax which influences how the original genre is seen. It differs from a hybrid because one genre is still dominant in syntax, but another genre gives a certain colour to this syntax.

This transgression is shown in *MY DARLING CLEMENTINE*. This film's use of lightning closely resembles that of film noir. The dark in this film is used to show the pessimism and danger that is inherent in the town of Tombstone, a pessimism present in postwar years.⁷ The stylisation of this film due to lighting effect has effects on the

⁵ This musical addition in this film can be accredited to the success of the musical in the thirties. Not only did the musical in and on itself become oversaturated in the thirties (Kenrick, *Musicals in the Thirties*, 2004), the 'Singing Cowboy' films were also highly popular (Logsdon 1995, 316). By constantly relying on elements from this musical genre, *DESTROY RIDES AGAIN* can join in on the success of the musical cycle.

⁶ Dietrich as a foreign element in the genre mirrors her foreign nationality. An interesting piece of trivia states that Dietrich was coaxed into the role because it would make her 'more American'. So next to generic integration, Dietrich's Frenchy also aided in her own integration (IMDB trivia).

⁷ Instead of being an evolved version of the western, as several critics have claimed (Gallagher 2003, 263), this film fits into a new cycle which governed the western in the postwar years, namely the noir cycle. According to Simmon, this film uses current events, such as the war, and

development. Especially the way Doc Holiday is lighted brings forth the expectation of the noir syntactic of questionable morality. Doc's morally grey nature and the lighting also place Chihuahua in a questionable light, evoking the image of a femme fatale. But as with the other transgression types, the western semantics dominate. No matter how stylised the image may be or how morally grey the characters may turn, their getup and the setting instantly reminds of the western. Also, the final shootout and its aftermath are completely rid of noir lighting indicating the vindication of the genre, and in a broader context, the society itself. Since western syntax deals with borders and who to accept in them, borderline cases such as noir characters can be adopted by stretching the boundaries. This type of transgression therefore allows for genre flexibility due to its embedding and strengthening of the original syntax using corresponding intergenerational elements.

The Full Hybrid

As opposed to the *Intergenerational Semantics* this transgression does not get embedded into one genre's syntax. Genres bring their own syntax and stand completely apart from other genres which influences the syntax they're embedded in. It is also treated as such whereas in the *Intergenerational Semantics* the adopted genre elements are absorbed in the syntax as if they belong there. A prime example in this case is COWBOYS AND ALIENS which deals with a clash between cowboys and aliens. The cowboys have to overcome this alien incursion using elements from both genres. The direct relation between genres characterises the hybrid and displays the flexibility of genres by the appeal to shared elements that interrelate on common ground, such as functionally similar semantics.

These transgressions illustrate how genre films allow change by integrating elements. The categories should however not be seen as exclusive as shown in Jim Jarmusch's DEAD MAN (1995). Though dressed in western semantics this film uses intergenerational semantics by being black and white, questionable morality and heavy shadows as reminiscent from film noir. These characteristics don't influence the syntax but instead make the western semantics seem somehow different. It uses intergenerational integration by using a non-western character who enters an unfamiliar area. This fish-out-of-the-water-motif influences how the western semantics are interpreted, because everything seems new. It also uses extragenerational usage of space and time, changing how the western works. Rapid jumps in space in space and types of space are used when travelling that take away any

films like IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE (Capra 1946) to capitalise on the discourse. Like the musical cycles in the thirties, this noir cycle can be seen as another phase or cycle in the history of the western which exploits a specific time, instead of a more mature version of it (2003, 199).

coherent idea of the Wild West. Together with the repeated and fragmented course of time, the experience of the West is turned into a surreal episode not unlike the protagonist's experience. These transgressions forefront the western's syntax and semantics and critically assesses them, stressing and stretching western genericity.

Genre films accommodate change and foreign elements by their ability to integrate. Substituting intergenerational elements next to strongly codified semantics maintains the connotation of specific genre. Because these dominant semantics carry syntactical expectation, these codified semantics embed intergenerational elements in a genre specific syntax. Syntax is responsible for the generic stability, and the utilisation of foreign elements. Semantics serve as the anchor of a specific genre. Though the influence on syntax may differ, specific genres maintain dominance due to their stretched boundaries being anchored and stressed by their own syntax and semantics. The western is extremely flexible in this respect due to its strongly codified semantics gathered through a long history, and repeated syntax of integration of foreign agents into the ideal of the west or society. The special attention paid to differences and similarities to aspects that are different from the norm, such as musical stars or airplanes, provides the audience with a guide to accept intergeneric elements.

Genre films thus allow change by integrating foreign elements into familiar contexts. But Altman stresses that genre monikers are applied by paratextual sources (1999, 124). This external appropriation of genres is the final but a major factor in the flexibility of genres.

Chapter four: Fistful of Uses

External agents can change what a genre is by changing how a genre is used in a discourse. Altman explained this influence of paratextual factors in 1999 when he extended his dual model with a pragmatic dimension (1999, 209). This means that specific uses, or meanings attributed to genres, are taken in to account. This results in differing definitions of genres (and thus different borders) per social actor. Though offering a more complete image of genres, this discursive nature undermines its own efficiency. The multiplicity of definitions makes clear claims about genres merely one possibility.⁸

⁸ Altman goes as far as comparing genre discourse as a new form of communication (1999, 214). Communication's subjective nature undermines the possibility of crossable borders and will therefore be nuanced.

To see how paratextual sources change genres, the three groups that play a role in genre appropriation according to Altman (1999, 46) and Klein (2012, 10) shall be discussed. All three have different impact on delimiting genres. What concerns motivate each faction to maintain a specific genre image shall be used to illustrate how these factions' uses of genres influence ideas on genre flexibility.

Studios

The first institution responsible for shaping the borders of genres are the studios, and especially the marketing department. As shown in chapter two, producers attempt to market their film to the largest possible audience by appealing to successful films and current events via film cycles. How these cycles are marketed can influence whether the genres they belong to, appear flexible. This flexibility of genres may not be promoted by the industry but it can be the direct result of their actions. Altman shows that producers often mix several genres into a film (1999, 142). This mixture allows for a wide appeal but also for several possibilities for different marketing campaigns. This genre mixing is often done by integrating multigeneric semantics or syntax into the film, therefore providing several ways the film can be viewed (Altman 1999, 135-136). This mixture embeds films with intergenerational semantics and intergenerational integration, thereby immediately appealing to the internal structuring of a film to convolute a specific genre identification but providing various inroads for audiences.

Despite this multiplicity of genres in one film, according to Altman, studios hardly market films with specific genre labels (1999, 142). These labels are added later in wider discourses and exploiting cycle films. This way films are not associated with a single genre and thereby maximize possible audiences. Together with the mixed form, this practice indirectly stretches borders of individual genres. Genres have certain key semantic elements that are strongly coded to immediately evoke a specific genre. Even with a film that has a mixture of genre elements, a dominance of such key semantics, though not marketed but still present, will label a film as a specific genre. But this specific genre is then imbued with a genre mix, as the original 'label-less intended' film was. This film as a whole then encompasses intergeneric semantics and intergeneric integrations within one specific genre. So by creating *a priori* flexible genre films which are interpreted in specific genre contexts, studios exploit the flexibility of genre boundaries. Every genre mix that becomes specific then stretches previously accepted borders by including different intergeneric semantics.

This shows that association is the structuring factor in the pragmatics of genres. Associations can result in genres being marketed differently or deviating from standards. James Russell explains that *DANCES WITH WOLVES* (Costner 1990) was envisioned by

Kevin Costner as a return to the western genre (2008, 143). The studio executives however marketed it as an 'epic' to prevent the association with the western, which since the failure of HEAVEN'S GATE (Cimino 1980) had been regarded as box office poison. Still, the success of Costner's film led to a resurgence of western films and shows. The specific genre marketing to avoid associations turned the film into a hybrid due to its unintentionally dual marketed nature which stretched genre-specific boundaries to encompass both.

Association is a powerful agent in the labelling of genres and thereby in the possibility of flexibility. As far as studios go, the reluctance to label or associate films to specific genres often increases flexibility of specific genres due to intergenerational elements that get interpreted within a specific genre, evoked by key semantics.⁹

Critics

According to Altman, critics are the provider of major genre terms (1999, 124). Critics use films to sell their own writings via a distinctive style to stand out from others. A critic whose claims often appear true is more credible than his peers and therefore in stronger a position to sell his writings. A standout style often uses a specific categorisation of genres. Thus critics deal with films according to their terms, which will then be used in broader discourse. When encountering films that do not fit in their singular specific categories then, according to Altman, 'the same critics that bring us genre are the source of our tendency to identify each film with a single genre (Altman 1999, 127). This use of genres by critics complicates the acceptance of genre fluidity and hybrids. Still, although strict categories may be maintained, this can still lead to acceptance of genre changes. If a film clearly transgresses genre boundaries but the critic deems it only singular in genre, the transgressions can be accepted as characteristics of one genre. Also, the clear categories of the critics can act as standards to deviate from.

However, this normative attitude of critics can also prevent the acceptance of hybrids and change. Harry M. Benshoff shows this in his account on the 'Loathsome film' (2008). These were films from the 1960s that followed foreign, avant garde and exploitation film form. These films were rather absurd, but critics started to label them as loathsome and belonging to 'hippies, homosexuals, perverts (...)' (Benshoff 2008, 106). One of the reasons the critics were against these films, next to the extreme content, was the generic hybridity. The Hollywood film industry was in crisis and these new films

⁹ This flexibility in genres problematises the ideal of prepackaged audiences. Since every genre can appeal to different people due to its mixed character and specific genres get enriched with intergenerational elements, traditional audiences disperse and diversify. Older western fans might stick to core western syntax and semantics, but newer fans get used to intergenerational elements.

didn't fit any category the critics had known before. It was a step in the wrong direction, both aesthetically and morally (Benshoff 2008, 99). This incident shows the ideological reasons critics can have to ignore genre hybridity. These ideal visions of cinema influence the acceptance of the flexibility of genres. Wright's view of the western shows such an ideal via economic relations, prohibiting flexibility to fit his categories (1975, 131). What this incident also shows is that the context genre films are made in is just as important as the critics labelling them. The changes in film production and the ideal new associations influenced the rejection of the loathsome film. One wonders what the current context of the western, which brings forth a surprisingly small amount of western films, will do for the acceptance of drastic changes in the western.

But besides refusing hybridisation, critics can also aid the process. Constantine Verevis notes when discussing remakes that due to growing film literacy intertextual references and relations are illustrated by extratextual institutions (1999, 11). With remakes, critics relate the original to its adaptation. In the case of genres, the intergenerational referentiality can be addressed by these extratextual institutions such as critics. Using their extensive film knowledge, critics can show the intergenerational relations and incorporate them in specific genres, thereby raising awareness of genre flexibility and helping to acknowledge the changes but at the same time they can ignore intergenerational relations to fit their own categories for their own gain.

Audience

Audience is perhaps too big a moniker to use as one category because it isn't a unified body. Instead, there are multiple audiences, each with its own use of a genre. This multiplicity of different audiences is shown by Brigid Cherry when discussing the horror genre (2008). Cherry, and Altman too, show that audiences, and especially fans, who have a more extensive knowledge of a particular genre, construct a personal image of a genre to associate with a specific group and can therefore differ per person (Cherry 2008, 210, Altman 1999, 165). One might veer more to spaghetti westerns for instance whilst others prefer John Ford westerns. But, since association and identity is an important aspect of fans' genre usage, their genre image can change. Cherry shows that fans 'knowingly stretch their idea (...) to include *such* (borderline genre cases) films (2008, 209). In order to stay in touch with the identified group, fans therefore accept the possibility of genre change and flexibility. Hybrids, if related to their genre image, can be seen as belonging to a specific genre because the fans use flexible categories themselves. In this light, fans are a similar extratextual category as Verevis described (1999, 11). But contrary to critics, fans do not necessarily need to distinguish themselves from their

colleagues to promote their distinctive style, therefore have less motivation to strictly obey categories.

Fans therefore seem as the most flexible category when discussing genre change and genre flexibility. However, the principle of personal memory, as illustrated by Henry Jenkins and Lynn Spigel when looking at the interpretation of the return of Batman in the context of the 1960s television show (Dozier 1966-1968), can make fans as normative as critics (1991). As with the repeated format of the Batman show, the repeated elements of a genre create a prototypical image of a genre based on repeated occurrences (Spigel and Jenkins 1999, 135). This is illustrated by David Desser who states that multiple adaptations beget adaptability due to the negation of specific elements (2008, 35). This prototype of a formula is part of popular memory and is based solely on recurring semantics and syntax (Spigel and Jenkins 1999, 133). Changes in this archetype, such as extragenerational semantics, can then be noted more quickly. Whether these genre changes are accepted however depends on personal memory.

Spigel and Jenkins show that fans who have in the past seen a previous incarnation of a film, be it Batman or a genre, relate new incarnations to this old memory. Often these viewers use their old memories and the ways they used a genre or show in that time, which is often their youth or a more countercultural period in their life (Altman 1999, 165), to ascertain their superiority over new forms (Spigel and Jenkins 1999, 141). By doing so they adhere to their own categories of genres they have created in the past and which they remember as pleasant due to the association with a less complex time (Spigel and Jenkins 1999, 133). Instead of accepting flexibility of genres and thereby genre changes or hybrids, they obey their own categories, like normative critics (Spigel and Jenkins 1999, 130-131).

Conclusion: For a Few Genres More

Genres are tricky to discuss. The differing pragmatics and the discursive nature of boundaries make them hard to pin down with exact definitions. This research has suggested a framework to analyse the flexibility of genres consisting of four parts. Firstly, on an internal level, genres have ontological¹⁰ traits that allow for flexibility, mostly illustrated by Altman's model. These traits are the syntactic expectations, shared elements and codified key semantics. Secondly, these traits allow genre films to accommodate different genres via a fivesome of categories. By integrating elements using their ontological traits, genre films adopt intergenerational elements while forefronting their own genericity. Thirdly, on an external level, genres change in a cyclical manner for this

¹⁰ If one can all it that when discussing discursive categories.

stresses the flexibility in adaptation to current events and successes. Finally the discursivity of genres can be addressed by focussing on association. The uses genres are put to and the degree of flexibility can be grouped around what the users want to be associated with.

Consciousness of this new model and genre flexibility allows critising genre boundaries in general. This research has shown that all genres might come from 'primordial ooze' and are therefore ontologically linked. Whether genres are completely designated extratextually or still hold inherent anchors remains to be seen, but this train of thought might get rid of unclarifying monikers such as 'Weird Westerns' such as *DJANGO UNCHAINED* (Tarantino 2013).

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