What Can the Study of Information Do to Genre Studies?

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Abstract

Genre theory has in recent years entered the study of information (Andersen, 2008). The question remains whether we in the information field have made our own independent contributions to genre theory, not only 'applying' genre theory. From 6 different positions, this workshop will discuss the role and potential of genre studies in the study of information and what the study of information can contribute with to the study of genre. Coming from universities in North America and Denmark, the panelists will each present a perspective or argument. Each perspective or argument is developed around the question what the study of information can contribute with to the study of genre.

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1   Introduction

Genre theory has in recent years entered the study of information (Andersen, 2008). The question remains whether we in the information field have made our own independent contributions to genre theory, not only 'applying' genre theory. From 6 different positions, this workshop will discuss the role and potential of genre studies in the study of information and what the study of information can contribute with to the study of genre. Coming from universities in North America and Denmark, the panelists will each present a perspective or argument. Each perspective or argument is developed around the question what the study of information can contribute with to the study of genre. In no particular order, the 6 talks will be:

1. This talk will explore why RGS is powerful and what it might mean to the study of information. But what is it that makes RGS such a powerful approach to the study of genre and genred communication and how can the study of information contribute or challenge RGS with new or different insights? Where do RGS and the study of information have common concerns and where are they different?

2. This talk will offer insight into the locally situated ways in which information creators, seekers, and providers negotiate what counts as "information" in given contexts, and how generic forms are taken up as informative (or not). Examples of written genres of "keeping track" in everyday life" and oral genres of information provision in a clinical institutional setting will be provided.

3. Rhetorical genre studies (RGS) has not adequately addressed the ideology of genres – the values and power relationships they embody and perpetuate and the forms of knowledge they enable and constrain – This limitation constitutes a weakness in the theoretical framework of RGS. This talk will consider how empirical and historical studies exploring the ideology of archival genres have the

potential to strengthen the theoretical framework of RGS and to deepen and extend our understanding of the historical evolution of genres.

4. A generation after the advent of new media, the relationship between digital forms of information and the conventional genres of print still remains unclear. This continued unsettledness has prompted a reconsideration of traditional genres of information as well as the use of genre theory itself. This talk will explore digital books through the lens of different genres in order to come to grips with some of the complicated practices of meaning-making in the 21st century.

5. This talk will show the benefits that rhetorical genre studies may derive from an alliance with the archival discipline. In particular, the concern will be the method of inquiry involved in diplomatics as a rigorous way to analyze documentary forms and business processes (or actions), which are central aspects of genre theory. The archival understanding of 'intertextuality' will be discussed with the aim of providing genre scholars with new insights into the notion of genre system and the relationship between organizational genres of communication and evidence.

6. Information history and genre theory share the understanding of seeing information as situated in specific contexts and being rhetorically framed. Together they challenge the current mainstream notion of information as neutral, objective, transcendent. Though my studies of the conceptions of information in late 18th century Denmark point to the situatedness of information, other parts of my research point to information as being able to transcend contexts and thus genres. From the standpoint in genre theory, Bazerman claims that in particular the database blurs and destroys the chains between the information context and its appearance on the screen (Bazerman, 2012). How is this to affect genre theory?

2   Conclusion

These perspectives contribute not only to discuss and provide critical insights regarding the study of information from the position of rhetorical genre theory. They furthermore encourage and increase theoretical reflections within information studies.

3   References

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