

# A Report on Genre

## A Theoretical Update

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**Résumé:** *Un regard rapide jeté sur la liste des hits conceptuels des sciences du langages, fédérés par l'institution de la Théorie, révèle un puzzle difficile à reconstituer. Pour une meilleure gestion de la liste, nous avons revisité deux instruments épistémologiques essentiels: le paradigme et le concept. En s'interrogeant sur la mode d'emploi du paradigme et sur sa faculté de problématisation et d'articuler les concepts, notre travail remet en question les cristallisations du concept de genre dans les deux paradigmes envisagés (identifiés, selon les étiquettes conventionnelles, comme « formaliste » et « cognitive »).*

**Keywords:** *paradigm, Thomas Kuhn, concept, Gilles Deleuze, fiction, diction; literary / discursive genre, formalism, structuralism, textual linguistics, cognitivism*

The present theoretical sciences resemble a *puzzle* that tests our ability to understand. First, the ensemble that the reconstitution is based on cannot be perceived at a first glance. If we reduce it to scale, the objects appear schematic. At a higher resolution, the eye is able to focus only spatial sequences, and thus the significance of the whole is lost. But managing the pieces in space is not simple either, given their number and the space-related contours. In order to get guidance, researchers have zealously applied labels on sets of forms: some labels flatter us, as part of a discourse in love, while others are sour or rewrite themselves with that scepticism previously written on a set of forms. The explanations applied to heterogenous theoretical programmes – some obvious in their being generic, others deeply encrypted, others snobbish and strident, other discreet and meant to be paradoxical – cannot recompose a “story”; but there is no wonder: on the one hand, this is because some people detest *Theoria*, on the other, this is because we are witnessing so many cases of malpraxis even from those who show high consideration for the institution of Theory.

The theoretical energies were used in a different way throughout the XX<sup>th</sup> century. The first years were revolutionary: new sciences were inaugurated, new research fields were introduced and essential questions were raised again. After repeated searches, inconsistencies, errors, the theoretical knowledge entered a new age, that of mature, distinct, self-conscious comprehension. The years of ecumenical postmodernism included two paradoxical “movements”: on the one hand, once refused, abandoned, insulted, these concepts entered a state of clinical death; on the other hand, academies

created departments and research centres that celebrate Theory and deal with intellectual operations of dissection and processing.

The list of conceptual hits – accumulated in more than one hundred years of self-conscious social studies and humanities – includes cross-section concepts of high semantic amplitude like *sign*, *signifier / signified*, *text*, *structure*, *discourse*, *identity*, *ideology*; the list could continue on hundreds of pages, showing great confidence in the ordering rationality.

Managing the list that includes fundamental landmarks of knowledge in the large field of epistemology is achieved through a tool called theoretical *paradigm*. The term under discussion requires attention, given the incredible resentment it arouses, perhaps owing to the structuralist echoes still to be heard when uttering its name. Some scholars might think of Thomas Kuhn, and they might be right, for he is the starting point, but the process of granting new meanings to this innovating concept is long and difficult. When reading dedicated literature, it is amusing to see that elites consider Kuhn *so yesterday*, but only few put something in place or move on. Many confront Kuhn with Bachelard and Foucault, often unnecessarily, because their ideas do not contradict one another, but just tone down dialogically. Those who have read and understood the essence of Kuhn (who, we must not forget, is a major inter~/ multidisciplinary epistemologist) quote and place him as the starting point in their endeavour (a note must be said here about David Deutsch), recognizing the founding value of the first formulations.

Published in 1962, the book entitled *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* changed the “face” of contemporary sciences and imposed the concept of paradigm and “paradigm shift” on the intellectual agenda of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Kuhn introduces a different perspective from that of Popper’s, stating that the scientific development is not driven by a linear vector, but develops intermittently. For Kuhn, the paradigm is a theoretical model that includes ideas, beliefs and assumptions arising from organizing knowledge and scientific practice. Without a rebound to his own words, Kuhn sees scientific developing as taking place in stages: a “normal” science and a “revolutionary” science or, differently put, an establishment and a number of heresies. However, the question is: what is the manner of distinguishing a “normal, official science” which imposes the rules of a given time and the marginal forms of a science? A look back tells us that humanity may be wrong in the criteria to decide what is scientific and what is not. Certainly, the question of power arises, be it the power of a subject on other fields of knowledge, be it the ability to redefine and disseminate social, cultural and economic practices. There is no individual power of scientists, as Kuhn says, that is, it is not as if some *intelligentsia* would decide which phenomena “fall” in the field of science. Yet, there are still some supra individual power mechanisms that regulate this inextricable process of negotiating paradigmatic content. A paradigm is active as long as the number of solutions it offers exceeds that of aporia. When a dissident counter discourse promises more, new scientific conventions are born.

The choir of criticism that followed this type of definition cannot be ignored. One complaint was that a paradigm meant complicit acceptance of the illusion of a supreme

point of view, was able to unify all the others, that in a world inherently plural and multiple the “great vision” of the whole came from simple not emancipated minds, that the idea of history as linear becoming had disappeared, that the grand narratives had vanished, that in science we could not find only regularities to be enlisted as a mainstream trend, with no the value test (see all the epigones who wear a post-Saussure, post-Foucault masque).

Feyerabend went as far as comparing the work of the scientist with astrology, with voodoo or even Mafia, denouncing the claims of objectivity and the exemplar quality of their construction. Practicing a kind of critical “Dadaism”, the epistemological anarchist Feyerabend rejects the so-called methodological universals, which are nothing but frauds or delusions. Scientists, he believes, do not operate with a single method, but try to harmonize different and often contradictory methods, speculate and are guided by common sense. Moreover, Feyerabend introduces a point of view that may seem exotic when you question the way the consistency of theories is validated; it seems that the decision is rather aesthetic not rational, that the taste and affinity of a community dominate the judgement with a scientific value. The power of a theory is rather social than epistemological and science is actually judged with criteria that are not part of it. Human activity can survive without the cancer of philosophy and the philosophy of science – the common sense and the anarchist science are enough.

But not all scientists have seen paradigms as a concentration camp for their ideas. In Kuhn’s defence, they explained that the concept of *paradigm* makes their work intelligible, protects the autonomy of scientific communities against the social and economic environment, that, ultimately, there is a criterion which makes possible the separation of the scientific from the unscientific. They added with malice that adopting a perspective inevitably reduced the field of knowledge, that the lack of perspective was the expression of illegitimacy in science. Briefly, they required the term “paradigm” its rational value.

The note that a paradigm leaves out what does not go under the hat of its own ideology, that these divergent theories are not always negligible is still valid, but, again, it is obvious that you cannot ask a single theoretical description to dissolve all controversies and negotiations between disciplines. Concepts carry within themselves their own limitations and their own risk of sophisticated falsification (Popper would say), and the solution is not to take distance, but to choose a fair proximity correctly measured. The epistemological buzz around the concept of *paradigm* was therefore justified, because it drew attention to the need for a new agenda, in which the concept had to take over meanings closer to the scientific use. It was not about counter-interpreting canonical definitions and imposing concurrent definitions, but about adding semantic features, verified in several fields of knowledge, able to carry of a new type of intelligibility.

“How does a paradigm *function*?” is the next question. We start from the idea that a theoretical paradigm includes a set of concepts belonging to the same class. In an ideal representation, things do not seem problematic. However, Deleuze and Guattari teach us that there are no simple concepts, and there are several reasons to support this

assertion. First, any concept (*Janus bifrons*) has components and is defined by them. Far from being a simple sum, the concept is a coincidence, the condensation and accumulation of their components, a set of multiplicities enciphered. An excerpt appears significant in this respect: “The concept is (...), at the same time, absolute and relative; relative to its own components, to other concepts, to the plane which it is delimited from, to the problems they are trying to solve; but absolute by the condensation it operates, by the place it occupies at this level, by the conditions associated to the problem”.

Secondly, the concept as super-ordered entity may not to be confused with the state of things it is made of; the concept crosses events, borrows meanings from them and, at the same time, guarantees their significance. In its zig-zag cultural route, any concept has its own becoming, takes over new meanings, and puts a mask on the irrelevant ones, in a game of transformation, which changes its subject *ad infinitum*. Last, but not least, any concept has its own problem with the way it is articulated, cut and intersected, defining itself in relation to concepts belonging to a different plan. The history of a concept calls the contexts in which it is exercised, the contexts populated by other concepts with which it interacts dialogically: the becoming of a concept is a shared birth, a co-birth.

The situation is even more complicated in today’s circumstances, when knowledge fundamentally changes its condition: contents are getting multiplied exponentially, methodologies are working in an inter~/ multi~/ transdisciplinary way, and digital media, global network are enabling knowledge visibility and a power of dissemination without precedence. It is obvious that the blast of the digital age gives priority to information theory. Despite the fear that this science, without “metaphysical” and difficult to decipher, triggers, it is silly not to accept that information theory has changed the world, that it has made revolutionary discoveries in neuroscience, genetics, psychology, linguistics possible, and we owe it for all these; if only a few of us have had access to a quantum computer or attended a Voyager mission, it is certain that most of us run a CD or ZIP compression algorithm on a computer.

A knowledge contract with two *Gurus* of information theory, Michael Wooldridge and Nicholas Jennings (see, for example, *Intelligent Agents: Theory and Practice*), guarantees that paradigms can be reconsidered as cognitive architecture able to group “intelligent” agents: concepts. These agents have their own application and execution medium, where they seem consistent and infallible; the intelligence of agents becomes obvious in that they prove to be carrying “convictions”, which are simplified representations of the execution medium.

Invested as an intelligent agent, the concept acquires a structure of intentions organized in hierarchies according to importance. We have ways to check the efficiency of a concept by giving it a list of tasks – to check for extension, that is, the range of the execution field. If the agent has “strong” beliefs, it will become active in other implementation areas, which it will add. The ability of a concept / set of concepts to work in another area will not look like “local border traffic” as the interdisciplinary exchange sometimes appears, but will be checked by clear criteria. The history of a concept will be drawn according to the way it is crossing multiple media, according to

the way it changes them, alters their rules, remodels the behaviour of other agents it interacts with, and also according to what it “learns” from the journey in foreign media.

The belief that a relatively small research (like this) could exhaust the complexity of the issue under consideration would be an illusion hard to accept. This paper only raises questions, starting from the field of language sciences. The answers given here, with the ambition of putting a few key terms of theoretical paradigms in the field of human sciences in critical perspective are inevitably partial, and not everlasting in any way. Their semantic redefinition, the symbolic status they receive socially speaking must be under constant renegotiation. Certainly, an exhaustive approach is out of the question; that is why, the option of discussing one concept or another is subjective: out of the many theoretical and critical dominants of different “ages”, I have chosen what seemed relevant to me. It is a journey of discovery, meant to restore the way concepts have covered to far in order to gain the significance they have today, and the journey has been guided by great thinkers. Because it is not a nostalgic journey, I have quickly exhausted the moments that precede the twentieth century and have come closer to the current theoretical landscape.

From the wide field of human language, we have “cut out” a piece I called “literature” (which is a null gesture for obvious reasons to the connoisseurs, a decision which was later denied). The identification of several concepts that cannot be omitted in any way in this investigation of literary phenomena was a good excuse for the literary contemplation of some theoretical crystallization, like the Russian formalism, structuralism, semiotics, discourse analysis, cognitivism. The ultimate stake was the ability to understand the complex concept of genre (shall we call it a *cloud* type?) where it is placed. As previously mentioned, the concept cannot be reduced to simple definitions, but it calls for other terms, whose explanation is required, which in turn are related to other terms, imposing their own exigency. *Genre* cannot be approached without making a plethora of notions clear: literature, literarity, text, intertext, hypertext, author, narrative, discourse, etc. The infinite size of the network which includes this concept and the cultural plurisemantism of each network “node” render the job of “cutting out” the literary field superfluous, a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*. The semantic extension of the concept of genre includes vast areas of knowledge, from language sciences to natural sciences, which is also stated by epistemology and common sense.

The concept of genre is one of the oldest taxonomies in humanities – constantly invoked and equally repudiated. The system of genres, in various metamorphoses, is an invariant that crosses the history of reflections on literature, from its origins to the present day. I suppose we can agree that one cannot write about literature without uttering the word *genre*. By virtue of tradition, textbooks treasure it and place it at the head of any critical evaluation. Against the grain of tradition, the great adventurers of literature hold it in contempt, considering it an atavism. Many take it for granted, without raising questions; it seems that literature reaches many readers with an instruction guidebook, in which the simplest operation, almost instinctive, is a genre classification. If the reader must convert instinct into reason, often in a correct way, and argue the choice of a genre pattern, arguments often seem axiomatic, of a rigid and

consistent dogmatism. Especially the definitions granted in literature textbooks seem to imagine nothing else but texts that scrupulously follow genre prescriptions.

Thus, if a critical investigation begins by considering the genre a text belongs to, then we are very likely to think that: 1. The author is part of the “old” guard of literary theory; 2. The work has mediocre aspirations. But we detest when the investigator of any text circumvents the concept of genre, because – isn’t it true? – we consider it a necessary evil, a kind of zero degree of intelligibility. It is not easy to talk about genre in terms other than those reified definitions, as it is equally not easy to get rid of this concept. Therefore, no wonder that the most important theorists have made an endeavor to elucidate this concept.

The focal concept of this theoretical debate is that of *genre*, which apparently seems to denote only literature; nevertheless, philosophers of science and language know its relevance in many fields of knowledge. For theoreticians in humanities, the concept of genre is integrated in that of literature, and it is true that one of the first conditioned reflexes is to think of genre when we utter the word ‘literature’: we recognize a certain genre, if the text gives sufficient signals which a reader who is knowledgeable enough of its conventions in use will recognize, or we may assign a certain text to a specific genre, although it might be poorly marked or ambiguous, once it was born in interstitial areas.

As hilarious as it may seem, we therefore turn to the question “What is literature?”, which exhausted many theoretical energies over time but without success. Literature is (and it is not to the same extent) written letter, “grand” writings, an art of the imagination, the art of language. The 20<sup>th</sup> century brings along a theoretical epiphany mediated by Roman Jakobson, the one who taught us to replace the question “What is literature?” with a more focused one: “What is literarity”?; in other words, “Under what circumstances does an act of language actually become literature?”; or, in a later formulation of Nelson Goodman taken as such: “When is literature?”. But deciding on the circumstances which confer some texts the dignity of literarity, while denying it to others is not a simple job, either. The aesthetic mentalities of every age resemble an intricate ceremonial, and rules that seem to be constantly changing depending on the claims of the audience; the more we move away from them the more we lose the chance to understand them.

The history of theoretical ideas distinguishes two ways of understanding literarity. In mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Genette talked about these in two essential meta-theoretical critical textbooks: *Fiction and diction* and *Introduction into Architext*.

The first way of understanding is the *essentialist* one, which claims that certain texts have a sort of literary aura that accompanies them in all circumstances, for all ages and communities of readers. This type of thinking gives birth to a work of art / literature as an object cut off from nature (*framed apart*), with the function of not having any function at all, perceived by disinterest and detachment. These works that become legitimized through an essentialist criterion use their imagination to the distillation of common language, enter literature by cancelling the usual functions of language based on a paradoxical agreement of mutual irresponsibility (that *willing suspension of*

*disbelief*), on whose behalf speakers accept that statements that change are neither true nor false, or rather they are both true and false at the same time. These sublimations of discourse are intransitive, which means that they can mould into a form from which they have become inseparable; closing in final form, *sine qua non*, means separating from the world and establishing a pseudo-reference or a denotation without denotata. These works with a spiritual coat of arms always assert themselves as altère autarchic worlds, constructed by the laws of fiction.

This paradigm of thinking has dominated literature in various avatars for more than twenty centuries of reflection on literature. In the system of Aristotle's poetics, what the poet does is fiction, not diction. In the fictional space there are two modes of representation, the narrative and the dramatic one, and two modes of dignity of representation: the 'high' noble register and the vulgar one. According to Aristotle, who is always cited, the essentialist perspective has generated useless taxonomies, each one integrating the criteria by which, for a given period, a work was accepted or not in the city of literature.

For centuries, genres – from Horace, Diomede, the Renaissance poets, continuing with Boileau and abbot Batteux to the German Romantics – meant a number of representative prescriptions filtered through re-interpretation, substitutions, theoretical dislocations some assumed, some unacknowledged others improperly presented as loyal to an Aristotelian tradition. In this archeology of the concept of genre, there is an important moment: the end of the 4th century, when Diomede rebooted the 'genre' (*genera*) the three Plato modes: *genus imitativum* (dramatic), *genus enarrativum* (narrative), *genus commune* (mixt). This is the model that has brought many benefits, but also has many side effects not unbearable, which persisted, sometimes without any nuances, until early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately, what is difficult to understand is the persistence of this triad in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the teaching practice which is often blind to the theoretical distinctions –more and more elaborate- delivered in turn by the Russian formalism, structuralism, semiotics, textual linguistics, neo-rhetoric. Despite many theoretical sites open within the concept of genre, it seems that the triad epic / lyric / dramatic will live long.

The second way to define literarity is the *conditionalist* one, which is dominated by a formal criterion (or *rematic*, a term that Genette finds more appropriate). Becoming a sign prevails over the laws of imagination. It is the merit of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to break away with the resistant Aristotelian tradition whereby the quality of literary was equated with sets of themes and privileged image content for centuries, all wrapped in 'transparent' language. The conditionalist works are those 'literary' entities which assert their existence in language and as language, which draw their meaning from the exhibition of the mechanisms of semiotic generation and operation. These are the works whose degradation Walter Benjamin lamented, which have lost their aura.

Roman Jakobson is the one who projected the coordinates of literarity from the perspective of language in a model of linguistic communication that distinguishes communication poles and six function, respectively; aesthetics is achieved through the fundamental principles of selection and combination. This opens a wide area of research

operated by different theorists. Within the formalist paradigm, ideas are modulated, are put into a dialogic perspective, and thus earn significance. If in the 1920s, the formalist Jakobson approached literarity only in its syntactic dimension, fifty years later the neo-rhetorician Heinrich Plett added a semantic and pragmatic dimension, recognizing, however, that discussing them in relation to the issue of literarity would deserve a separate study each.

It would be truly wise to give up catching the dispute between an essentialist definition and a conditionalist one, for it is an error to credit one point of view or another to the end. No essentialist theories are able to accept that literature can be more than a list of canonical texts that face the test of time, no conditionalist theories can exonerate themselves at being 'blind' to the lack of any aesthetic quality of a text which asks to be granted permission into the citadel of literature. The most effective theoretical position, one in which we stand and is an intermediate one (let's call it, *constructivist*), is not that of a compromise, but a balanced one.

This *détour* dedicated to the notion of literarity mentioned that the concept of genre follow two routes of semantic completion. Along its history, genre is defined, on the one hand, as essence with its own nature, an internal finality, thus capable of autopoiesis; on the other hand, it is defined as a name, as a blind label to be stuck to similar forms. To separate the semantism of this notion through the old dispute between realism and nominalism is counterproductive, and what I want to say from the outset is that no subtle theorist has ever separated these theoretical perspectives, because, in the absence of the modulations required, to define the genre only from a formal perspective is nothing else than a form of authoritarianism of the many that have plagued the fields of social sciences and humanities.

In a virtual museum exhibiting the history of the concept of genre we have exhibits from earlier centuries which represent the formalist and essentialist manner, but which receive a different treatment. Take, for example, *post festum*: nobody mocks at the formalization such as *Virgil's wheel*; but instead, Brunetiere's evolutionism, which, by the way, no one ever reads any longer, is reduced to coarse phrases such as "genres are born, develop and die" and is met with broad irony. Incidentally, if we silent Brunetiere's formulation we are bound to recognize that these ideas have influenced theorists more than they would be ready to admit. Even opponents to this, the Russian formalists, though they had built their theories on other scientific grounds, have admitted the effectiveness of the evolutionary model for they have the ability to tell value from non-value, making room to works of great aesthetic value in the canon while repudiating mediocre literary works. Moreover, it seems that the present and the future will avenge Brunetiere because evolutionism is one of the theoretical models.

In the process reopened to the concept of genre, the evidence we are interested in belongs to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in a line which connects formalism with the current climate of ideas, essentially a multidisciplinary one.

The formal definitions are dominant in terms of number because they are fed by the substance of linguistics, and seem to have a guaranteed rationality. Their usefulness is obvious since, at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these are weapons of attack on the triad

epic / lyric / dramatic, a theoretical trinomial which manages, with some obstinacy worthy of a better cause, to ascend to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Genette showed that the persistence of this triad results either in an erroneous interpretation and misuse extension of the ‘modal’ categories identified by Aristotle, or in intellectual laziness.

It is the merit of the Russian formalists who have declared war on this taxonomy. For the formalists, genre is related to methods, understood as a kind of building blocks, linguistic prefabricated patterns which can lead to (or better said, can counterfeit) a literary object. In order to circumvent the obvious limitations of their theory in a period of critical and theoretical maturity, formalists worked mainly on narratives.

The research of the Russian formalists were sublimated and reworked in scientist structuralism. Narratology in particular, a science which analyzes the narrative text in its narrativity, relates its discoveries to the formalist discoveries.

Understanding narrative is a type of narrative text and the scientist direction of narratology will exalt constructive processes; we are talking about enunciation, perspective, forms of representation, etc, strategies able to build narrativity. Here definitions should be taken *cum grano salis* because they suffer from an obvious mechanistic pattern and have a glitch: they do not discriminate aesthetic value. But the narratological model, even in its versions of simpler imagination, is still extremely useful today to the teaching practice, at least to undermine some definitions of some school approaches. The narrative semiotics opening to pragmatics take the narratological grid and raise to another theoretical quality. Their joint efforts lead to the current knowledge as what to do with a narrative sequence, we know how to decompose it on levels, to follow the enunciation scenographies, the changes of voice and perspective, to update the narrative structures, to propose actantial structures which will be transformed into ideological ones, etc .

Somewhere along this triumphant route, unfortunately for the illusions of conditionalist theories, theorists say it louder and louder that no method specifically builds literarity. In other words, there is no necessary connection between the choice of strategies, techniques, representation methods and the quality of being literary. For example, in the very the case of narrative which seemed the best ‘tamed’, Gérard Genette has shown that there is no exclusively narrative content, because the only specificity of narrative is its unique mode of organization (identifiable, it is well known, in representation exogenous to literature).

This aporetic moment is solved by resizing the concept of genre in the vast field of discourse. For Bakhtin (that Bakhtin that the 1950s separated from formalism), literary genres are only a particular secondary case of *discourse genres*. The discursive productions are themselves caught in a network which Bakhtin calls *interdiscourse*, a dialogic space regulated by norms. The conviction that the text is produced under a system of rules which build the unity of a whole enunciation sociolinguistically circumscribed, first asserted by Bakhtin, comes to us today mainly via Foucault. The Bakhtin solution is perpetuated in the 1970s. Thus, Todorov, who reads the formalists and Bakhtin, and launches it on the French market of ideas, distinguishes between the ‘genre theory’ (or the ‘genre model’) and the ‘empiric genre’. Subsequently, generations

of theoreticians like K. Viëtor, K. W. Hempfer, A. Fowler, A. Kibédi Varga, J. M. Schaeffer, J. Fontanille, J. M. Adam, F. Rastier, D. Maingueneau, P. Meijer, J.-M. Caluwe, A. Petitjean *et alii* illuminate the different nuances of the concept of genre. Thus, A. Kibédi Varga suggest that we should speak of *generic categories* – provisions of the human spirit itself, then of *actual genres* – the short story, the novel, the novella, etc. and of *subgenres*, presented as historical and thematic subdivisions: the Italian or the English sonnet etc. J. M. Schaeffer talks about *genere schemes*, required both by the authorial voice and by the reader alike. Returning to Aristotle, Genette proposes to distinguish *modes*, pragmatic transhistorical and relatively constant categories, three in number: fictional (the Aristotle diegesis), the dramatic mode (mimesis), and the lyric or poetic mode. The concept of *genre* is reserved to empirical categories of texts, set after observing historical data according to certain criteria. The relations with the modes are complex, but cannot be reduced to a simple inclusion / as to subgenres, they from the thematic or historical specifications of genres.

But this kind of theoretical understanding, intrinsically correct, can generate ambiguities. The genres of literature are secondary to the genres of discourse, but this does not mean that all their properties are the result of derivation operations that are understandable and measurable. If ‘literature’ does not exist as an essence, the literary field, at least, has an undeniable existence with agencies, institutions, property, interests and values of its own, it designates certain texts as ‘literary’, and equip them with a certain aesthetic value. The literary texts are differently endowed with a symbolic status and a specific linguistic and semiotic functioning; the category of genre, with its coercive system, is part of the cultural ceremony of investiture.

Therefore, we cannot separate the genre issue which frames a literary text only after recognizing the generic discourse norms which they update, because the literary texts will create meanings by transgressing rules, not by obeying them.

What was clear in the 1980s – when, let me remind you, the triad lyric / epic / dramatic was not dislocated yet – is that any attempt to formalize the genre of a text cannot be attempted without repositioning a text in cultural, social, historical, political, mentality contexts that determine it. The identification of genre norms and constituents will not remain just an approach inside the text, but may take into account the relationship of a text with its age, and can measure the degree of conformity to the aesthetic conventions in use.

The final assault on classical theories is given on the field of discourse analysis, a school of thought that discards the concept of immanent illusions of the concept of *text*, replacing it with a star-concept like *discourse*. School leaders like J.-M. Adam, F. Rastier or D. Maingueneau replace the notion of *genre* with that of *textual type*. For the linguists of text, types are forms of global and abstract textual organization, therefore stable and unchanging, grounded according to levels of depth on some universal cognitive thinking, and brought to the surface depending on the historical and cultural circumstances. J.-M. Adam identifies five types: narrative, descriptive, argumentative, dialogic, explicative. The discrimination of constituents of a type is based on certain criteria. At this point begins a fierce controversy between various researchers. P. Meijer

proposes four types of constituents: enunciatory, formal, semantic and functional. J.-M. Caluwe (1987) distinguishes six: formal, discursive, modal, thematic, ideological. J. M. Schaeffer, in his turn, speaks of five: enunciatory, receptive, functional, thematic and formal. If we extend the discussion to the discursive genres in general, A. Petitjean discriminates seven components: the socio-institutional basis, the production situation, the achievement material, the communicative intention, the enunciation mode, the formal organization and the thematic content. D. Maingueneau finds six components: the status of enunciators and coenunciators, the support and the mode of time and local circumstance of expression, of support and distribution, the themes, the length and the organization mode. F. Rastier groups the constituent on two levels: those which reveal the discursive context that determines the text as communicative act, and which determine the discourse context which reveals the text as a message achieved. Ascribing a text to a type is based on a checklist containing the following criteria: the historical and institutional anchorage, which also concerns and social and symbolic ways that constrain the production of texts; the enunciation mode, which refers to the status (real / imaginary / simulated) of the enunciator, the intended effect of the texts, its formal organization, which refers to what J.M. Adam called 'text levels' or, according to J. Fontanille's term 'canonical schemes'; the thematic content which relates to semantic features of texts, which Rastier called 'semantic molecules'.

Following these investigations of high scientific texture are revealed the functions of the concept of genre in the cultural and literary canon, reaffirming its enormous importance. The genre (or the type or the prototype nucleus) gives identity to a text, affirms its duration, sets the pact with the reader, builds reading expectations, schedules semiosis, adjusts the reading process, and conditions memorization, etc.. The genre is both in the upstream part of the authorial intentions, and downstream, conditioning the interpretative negotiations.

In the 1990s, the genre & co. made a paradigmatic leap, redefining itself in the terms of cognitivism. Kuhn had asserted that the terms of a given paradigm could be understood from 'inside' another paradigm. This idea, widely criticized, is true up to a point. The 'classical' image of the notion of *paradigm* got us used to the image of competing discourses and phrases, as I have shown, and syntagms such as *rupture in the paradigm*, *epistemological obstacle* did not help change this prejudice. Zealots of a theoretical direction resemble members of PR teams who fight each other in order to conquer a new market segment. Each has developed promotional strategies of their products, some of which are counterfeit, in bad faith, each picks up hole in the products of the competition or takes advantage of any mistake of the opponent in order to undermine their image. Yet, in this battlefield, truces and happy endings may occur. Researchers who have multi-/trans-disciplinary ambitions dream of a theoretical *no man's land*, revealing paradigmatic isomorphism. In the history of scientific thought, a singular place is taken by those who understand that they cannot ask subjects to whom they devote to define the scene where they are created all by themselves.

The cognitivists are also interested in the concept of genre. When revisiting Darwin, they also reread Brunetière and Wittgenstein, the latter retaining the idea of family

resemblance. They keep the presumption of the living in imagining the relationships that a text has with a genre, with the difference that they rewrite them under the form of the ratio between genotype and phenotype. The familiar air or the shared DNA means, in their own form, separating some general- anthropological structures that update typology such as lyric, epic, dramatic, fantastic, etc. Texts resemble one another; some glorify their kinship, others behave like irreverent children or even kill their father.

For the cognitivists, genre is a cognitive architecture that groups sets of procedures. The genre ‘falls’ into a text as a structure of intentions organized in hierarchies depending on the importance, or in other words, like the steps of an algorithm or a list of tasks. Each procedure becomes self-representational, which means that it carries in itself its own instructions for deciphering and use, and it is an intelligent agent, because it carries over cultural beliefs. But the cognitivists are facing another problem, which has a strange formulation for classical philologists. Which are the active cognitive processes while reading a text? Can we attach different conceptual maps to different types of texts? If so, how does this happen? How can we map the territories of fiction in order to provide guidance to previous generations? Can we teach a robot to automatically recognize which genre a text belongs to? We may just shrug our shoulders in the face of these questions or we can seriously consider them if we feel that this is the theoretical direction we are heading for. Those who find it hilarious to measure the chemistry involved in the aesthetic juissance or to draw maps of fictional worlds (layered semantically like the Google Maps) can be assured: the fascination of art and literature does not disappear, but is intensified. This revolutionary science merely pays homage, in a language that we do not always understand, to the complexity of the human mind.

The end of the research – always forced by circumstances – brings only a partial inventory of surveys, because, in spite of attempting to capture as many shades as possible, the representation stays far from its object. That is why, hardly marked, the circle of concept interpretation has to increase its radius, in a movement unable to come to an end.

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