

SANAS Biannual Conference
The Genres of Genre: A Conference on Form, Format, and Cultural Formations

Nov. 2 and 3, 2018, Lausanne

North American Studies have always had an intense but ambivalent relationship to genre, as these narrative patterns have participated in nationalist processes as well as in narratives of resistance. Emerging at the beginning of the twentieth century from concerns about naturalism and realism, American literary scholarship after WWII avoided the politicized post-war atmosphere by making the 'romance' the quintessential American novel genre, while cinematic genres such as the musical or the Western contributed to amplifying the mythic dimension of American self-definition. Since then, American Studies scholars have pioneered influential work on melodrama, the American Gothic, the jeremiad and other genres. Concurrently, Canadian literature's prominent nation-building narratives were framed as documentary tales of regionalism, historical novels and social realism before evolving into dystopian and postmodern fiction, most famously by Margaret Atwood. Thus, among the recurring questions posed by genre is the conflicted relationship between literature/art and its social, historical, and cultural context. Terms such as 'the political unconscious' (Jameson), 'cultural work' (Tompkins), 'narrative mode' (Williams) and 'performative' (Austin, Turner) have been centrally determining, over the years, to help us understand how genres work and what they do. This conference therefore seeks to explore what roles genre plays in American and Canadian nation-building and counter-narratives, and how it evolves nowadays.

While the cultural concept of genre has been crucial in creating North American national literatures and identities, it shows equal potential for resistance, subversion and transformation of these constructed national characters. Thus, how does genre reconcile this seemingly contradictory potential for creating narratives of nation-building as well as counter-culture? How do feminist, queer, Indigenous, Latino/a, African-American/Canadian and Asian-American/Canadian writers use, appropriate, and subvert specific genres to resist and protest social injustices. How do they use genre to imagine alternative models or redeem social injustice? With Prof. Linda Williams (UC Berkeley) and Prof. Ronald Schleifer (University of Oklahoma), both experts on the role of genre in North American studies as our keynote speakers, this conference proposes to be a space for a renewed discussion about what genre has meant for North American studies as well as American and Canadian culture, and what its future might be.

Possible topics could include, but are not restricted to:

- How specific genres (e.g. the Western, social melodrama, crime fiction, rap, inaugural speech, jeremiad, combat film) have changed or been renewed
- New genres that have emerged in recent years (e.g. the series, video games, cli-fi, petro-fiction)
- The critical viability of the term 'genre' as opposed to 'mode' or narrative 'form' or other
- Theme-oriented vs. form-oriented genres (e.g. asylum fiction vs. found-footage films) – are these 'really' genres?
- Assessment of recent scholarly work on form (e.g. Caroline Levine)
- Revisiting of older scholarly work and its influence (e.g. Fredric Jameson)
- Narrative/poetic forms and national identity
- Hybridity and intersectionality of form
- Genre and gender
- Genre and race
- Genre and imperialism (e.g. adventure, imperial gothic)
- Genre and environmentalism/ecology (e.g. cli-fi, petro-fiction, eco-gothic, the naturalist essay, nature poetry, etc.)
- Genre and resistance or subversion
- The continuous revival and repurposing of the fairy tale
- New developments in the North American short story

Please send panel or paper abstracts of 200-300 words and a short biographical note of 100-150 words by **April 30, 2018** to sanas.conference2018@gmail.com.