

1. If genre is both a “static and a dynamic system,” as Thomas Schatz and many others have observed in various ways, how has genre studies changed in the academy in the past decade or so? What aspects, if any, have remained the same?

Mittell: I think approaches to genre have moved toward more fluidity and dynamism. Focusing on genre mixture rather than purity, considering how fan-created works rearticulate genre, imagining how genres travel across media—all of these issues demand a move away from structuralist stability and more toward historicized and contextualized analysis of categories in flux.

Shary: Always keep in mind that the academy is a business like any other—it exists to make profits. The same is true of academic publishing. And of course the film industry is focused on profits even more. So, the notion of genre studies changes in relation to what sells accordingly. Schatz—ever the great pioneer in this field—was right in that genre remains static, since humans have loved comedy and drama over thousands of years. At the same time, the Western could only emerge after the “Wild West” in the 1800s, and film noir could only be apparent after WWII, which has made these variations of drama so dynamic. I argue in my own work that while teenagers have appeared in films since the 1890s, nothing like a teen genre was evident until the 1930s, and it did not become a significant (i.e., socially visible and profitable) genre until the 1950s—as Thomas Doherty already argued. Yet again, if scholars do not publish their work on such evolving and emerging genres, especially because academic presses want to sell books, we may miss out on important research regarding genre studies over time.

Shetley: If I can rephrase the question to focus on the future rather than the past, I’d like to see more attention going forward to the interrelations of genres. For instance, my understanding of film noir has been enriched by the realization that femme fatale noir is in a sense the inverse of romantic comedy, that the two share a set of premises and questions, and can illuminate one another in important ways. Likewise, Linda Williams has suggested intriguing connections between male-oriented melodramas like Rambo and Schindler’s List and women’s pictures; those connections deserve further exploration.