Contradictions and institutional convergences

Genre as method

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My purpose here is to put forward a conception of genre as a way to conduct Futures Studies. To demonstrate the method, I present some examples of contemporary political and corporate discourses and contextualise them in broader institutional and historical settings. I elaborate the method further by giving examples of 'genre chaining' and 'genre hybridity' (Fairclough 1992 2000) to show how past, present, and future change can be viewed through the lens of genre.

Keywords: Genre, Critical Discourse Analysis, Political economy of communication, Futures Studies methods, Critical Media Studies

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Introduction

In what follows, I put forward an argument for an analytical method for social science that operates at the level of genre. I argue that generic convergence, generic hybridity, and generic instability provide us with a powerful perspectives on changes in political, cultural, and economic relationships, most specifically at the level of institutions. Such a perspective can help us identify the transitional elements, relationships, and trajectories that define the place of our current system in history, thereby grounding our understanding of possible futures.[1] In historically contextualising our present with this method, my concern is to indicate possibilities for the future. Systemic contradictions indicate possibility spaces within which systemic change must and will emerge. We live in a system currently dominated by many fully-expressed contradictions, and so in the presence of many possible futures.

The contradictions of the current age are expressed most overtly in the public genres of power politics. Contemporary public policy—indeed politics in general-is an excellent focus for any investigation of possible futures, precisely because of its future-oriented function. It is overtly hortatory; it is designed 'to get people to do things' (Muntigl in press: 147). There is no point in trying to get people to do things in the past. Consequently, policy discourse is inherently oriented towards creating some future state of affairs (Graham in press), along with concomitant ways of being, knowing, representing, and acting (Fairclough 2000).

There are, therefore, complications with the temporality of political discourse. Its tense system is a very complex spiral, as it is with social time in general; there is no simple past, present, or future. The discourse firstly seems to be in the future-in-present tense, referring to irrealis (or potential) states of affairs, as if they already existed (Graham in press). To further complicate the analysis of policy, it is ostensibly based on empirical imperatives; namely, on what is "known" about the world, past and present. Political discourse thus tends to transform and translate the "isness" of "expert" knowledge about the world into the "oughtness" of imperatives for future actions, thus operationalising various and ongoing forms of the naturalistic fallacy (Graham and Rooney in press). The paradox of the future-in-presentness of political texts is that they are historically and institutionally situated productions of a very particular kind; their generic and functional ontology, their primary tense is past-in-present-they draw heavily upon the past for their authority in the here-and-now. This latter temporal aspect is the primary focus of my analytical approach.

Mediation, functional convergence, and genre hybridity: some definitions

Political discourse sometimes grasps the character of its socio-historical situatedness. More often it does not. Whichever is the case at present, we can at least be sure that particular discourses only become possible at particular times in history. The character of contemporary western societies' public discourse is unlikely to rate as being of historical

significance, other than to demonstrate once again that extending the mass, speed, and space of our mediations encourages hyperbolic speculation about the future and nature of being human (Graham 2000). A more interesting focus is the hidden convergences from within which contemporary public discourses emerge; within which they are framed; and within which they are articulated.

Much has been said about the changing nature of the political process in the west, including the alleged "transcendence" (or disappearance) of the left-right divide in the "Third Way", and the "marketisation" of politics (cf. Fairclough 2000; Graham 2000; Postman 1985, 1993; Saul 1992, 1997; McKenna & Graham 2000). While such changes may be seen as epiphenomenal, they can also be seen as constitutive and constituted at deeper levels, and thus provide a useful point of departure for understanding the broader changes that are happening. To highlight some of the more paradoxical effects of the current era, I focus our investigation of contemporary political relations at the level of genre, "above" the level of political texts, and "below" the level of political discourses. The differences between these levels or units of analysis are best seen in terms of systemic stability and metastability (Lemke 1995: chapt. 6), or, in terms of duration.

I define discourses as representations of the world according to the 'thematic patterns' (Lemke 1995: 42) peculiar to the historically constituted worldviews of particular communities. Discourses remain relatively stable over longer periods of time than do genres, whereas the textual constituencies of genres (the organisation of which make genres recognisable as such) are far more ephemeral than genres. Genres, in other words, are necessarily more enduring than the texts that constitute them, while (what I am calling) discourses are more enduring than the genres they are expressed through. Rather than reifying these categories (discourse, genres and texts), I want to emphasise that I am putting forward interdependent, relational conceptions of these categories for understanding human meaning-making. Also, it should be noted that people inhabit many discourse communities (work, family, ethno-linguistic and religious groups, and so on), all of which differ in terms of influence and durability; none of which can be seen as a free-standing edifice—each is significant only in relation to others, and forms part of an 'empty set' of 'specification hierarchies', categories designed for analytical convenience (Lemke 1995: 104-106).

I can exemplify categorical differences in terms of relational stability and metastability by taking the front page of a newspaper as one example of what I mean by a genre (or generic form of expression, or rhetorical mode). Each day, over relatively long periods of time, newspaper front pages have remained recognisably "the same". The contents of the page, the texts (including images) that "fill" the space of the genre, change on a daily basis. The discourses that are articulated through the texts and genres of newspaper front pages, though, can be reproduced on for centuries at a time, not only on the front page of a newspaper, but throughout whole societies. But newspaper front pages do

change—sometimes imperceptibly, at other times, with much pomp and ceremony, such as, for instance, when newspapers begin to use colour photographs on their front pages (cf. Kress and van Leeuwen 1998).

Generic forms are not only peculiar to overtly mediated phenomena; once again, from a relational perspective, genres can also be seen as 'operationalised discourses and styles', as 'ways of acting', or 'ways of being' (cf. Fairclough 2000). In historical terms, we need only look back a few decades to see the historically persistent discourse of "heroic leadership" expressed in the generic forms of Mussolini, Hitler, Franco, Mao, Hirohito, Tito, and Stalin, for instance: army uniforms, visions of the future, populist liberation rhetoric—heroic nationalist texts, all of them. Like the newspaper front page, the generic, embodied expression of the "heroic leadership" discourse has changed slowly but surely.

Today the military medal has given way to the MBA. Today's generic leader is an ostensibly risk-oriented, financially fluent <u>business</u>man, an embodiment of the dominant discourse of the day. He will usually wear an Italian suit or chambre shirt and jeans, depending on the gravity of the occasion. He will appear to be unerringly energetic and resolute. He will be (ideally) in his mid- to late-forties, with photogenic, "rugged" good looks, a glib sense of sound-bite humour. He will have no hesitation in operationalising whichever discourse, of whichever orientation, in response to public temperament, as expressed in the latest opinion polls (another invention of the 1930s). Most of all he will be both visionary, practical, and efficient; idealistic, but "not afraid to make the tough decisions" that today's demanding world requires. And so on. Generic forms – genres – <u>solicit and elicit expectations</u>. That is their functional efficiency. That very efficiency is also the product of specific institutions of power (Graham and Hearn 2000).

For the purposes of this paper, day-to-day texts are fairly much irrelevant, if only because they are constitutive of (and constituted by) phenomena that are quite literally as old as history (Graham 2000). My focus here is on the <u>hybridisation</u> of genres by means of institutional (functional) convergences and antagonisms. Genre provides a useful level of analysis for identifying and discussing institutional change, and thus for speculating upon the contradictions and possibilities that such changes express and inevitably prefigure. In the following sections, I compare the method I am presenting here with layered methodologies and show, through the analyses of genre hybridity, the usefulness of this perspective for doing historically contextualised research into possible futures. What I foreground in the analyses is the mutual impacts of mediation and generic convergence; the relationship between the infusion of the everyday through all-pervasive media and the concomitant conflation of institutionally functional genres.

Another layered approach?

Whilst I eschew any categorisation of "post"ness for the method I am proposing and demonstrating here (if only because of my basic assumption about the helical nature of social time), it has clear resonances

with Inayatullah's (1998, in press) Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) approach. CLA sees reality happening at the 'the litany – the most visible'; the 'social, economic and technological'; the 'worldview/discourse'; and the 'myth/metaphor' levels (Inayatullah in press). These levels correspond, in some degree, to categories in critical, systemic-functionally oriented linguistics (specifically, Critical Discourse Analysis, or CDA), from which I derive most aspects of the method presented here (see, eg, Fairclough 1989 1992 2000; Halliday 1993 1994; Lemke 1995 1998 2000; Martin 1998 1999 2000). The critical systemic-functional "school" (it is a far from homogeneous movement in any respect) has its roots in Marxian influenced social anthropology (cf. esp. Bloch 1977; Firth 1953 1954; Malinowski 1921), although this is either not often made explicit, or is otherwise completely forgotten. While I have no time to explicate anything like a comprehensive comparison of the methods, or of the multi- and trans-disciplinary similarities and differences embedded in CDA and CLA, I will briefly examine how each perspective might most overtly and broadly inform, enhance or modify the other.

Both methods are intrinsically historical, and assume that what is said or written or represented is a significant, though epiphenomenal, entry point for understanding social realities. This epiphenomenal level is the 'litany' in CLA and (to artificially separate both terms from the rest of their respective systems to some degree) the 'presentational' in Lemke's (1995: 42) approach to CDA. It is the most overt level of meaning-making, and often the most contentious where 'textual politics' are at issues (cf. Inayatullah in press; Lemke 1995). What Inayatullah calls 'reality' is understood from my own CDA perspective as 'meaning'. CDA tends towards more detailed analyses of meaning-making events, and provides some useful tools for doing so. CLA, on the other hand, is more clearly grounded in macro-historical traditions (Galtung 1997), an aspect often missing (at least in explicit terms) from many CDA analyses (there are exceptions). My own variant of CDA derives from work in systems theory, and a political economy of communication heavily influenced by Marx's writing, though not what is generally called "Marxism" (Graham 1999 2000 in press; Graham and McKenna 2000; McKenna and Graham 2000). I thus tend to emphasise what Maurice Bloch (1977) calls The Past And The Present In The Present, and what Gebser calls (1949/1985) The Ever-Present Origin, when analysing the social production processes of meaning, thus standing somewhere "in between" the detailed (sometimes micro-grammatical) analyses of texts in CDA, and the more macro-historical orientation of CLA.

Differences in the methods are most overt where notions of 'metaphor' and myth are concerned. In CLA metaphor is the 'deepest' and 'least visible' level of analysis (Inayatullah in press). From a CDA perspective, metaphor is analysable at all levels of meaning-making (though it is considered to be no more 'visible' than in CLA): the 'contextual metaphor' peculiar to the level of genre (Martin, 2000); 'grammatical metaphor', which can be seen to happen at the 'presentational' level of meaning-making (how things are expressed

within a particular representational event), ‘displacement metaphors’ (Graham and Rooney in press) most identifiable in the ‘attitudinal’ aspect of meaning (the evaluative or orientational aspects of discourse), and the ‘ideational’ metaphors peculiar to the ‘organisational’ (the forces and relations that provide coherence for the text, including culturally embedded mythical forms) level of meaning (cf. Graham in press, forthcoming; Lemke 1995, 1998; Martin 1998, 1999, 2000; Thibault in press). Myth is, for the most part, seen as being “outside” the realms of analysis in CDA, although my own approach treats this level as ‘sedimentary’, or, as an historically constitutive and ever-present “residue” of oral culture (Graham 2000, in press, forthcoming).

Both methods can clearly analyse ways of meaning ‘typologically’, as taxonomically characterised ways of meaning, and ‘topologically’, as continuously variable possibility spaces within which certain meanings can be expressed (cf. Lemke 1995; Martin, 2000). Both are theories of knowing, relating, representing, and creating social realities. Most importantly, and this is where the methods are most similar, both see ‘meaning’, ‘representing’, or social ‘reality’ as something that is done, as historical work, in which the “work” of history is often rendered invisible at many levels at once. Both see language (or more broadly and actively, representing) as a multi-faceted reality that can be seen to be interdependently happening at many levels, with multiple and complex causal relatedness. As such, an underpinning assumption of both CLA and CDA is that acts of representing ‘cannot be understood outside of their historical contexts; but neither can they be derived from these contexts by any simple relation’; they are ‘at the same time a part of reality, a shaper of reality, and a metaphor for reality’ (Halliday 1993: 8).

In that sense, and many others, what I am putting forward here can unquestionably be characterised as a form of layered analysis. While much more could be said on the various limitations, associations, divergences and complementarities of the two approaches for grasping the human condition, that is not my primary purpose here and so it will have to wait for another day. In what follows, I exemplify the salience of what is, essentially, the foundations for a new method of analysis, whether seen as a form of layered analysis or as CDA. I begin with the primary tense of what Marx and Engels call ‘the language of real life’ ([1844] 1972: 118), the past-in-present.

Seeing the past-in-present

The first move in analysing the present is to “expose” the most overt elements of the past-in-present tense within “globalised” humanity. The most broadly defining features of the contemporary global condition are delineated by the extremes of war and trade. These oldest of intersocietal relations exemplify excessive and (apparently) opposed aspects of the human condition. In the current globalised system, we have these antithetical but complementary discourses being doubly rearticulated in the monologic discourses of hyper-rational managerialism (Armitage and Graham 2001). As a part of this process, politics (perhaps naturally) has become infused with the perverse, totalitarian discourses of

hyper-rational managerialism. Simultaneously, political discourse has become part of the macro-genre of "entertainment", part of a massified industry owned by as few as six men which now spans the globe (Wolf 1999). Generic convergences in the policy process, combined with the "entertainmentisation" of politics, have had the effect of turning policy into a hybridised <u>commodity</u>, as well as commodifying and fetishising policy producers and the policy production process itself (Fairclough 2000). In turn, this has added impetus to the systemic tendency of capital towards commodification of human experience in general (Graham 2000).

Today, few if any aspects of human activity are now beyond the technical, conceptual, or legislative grasp of formal commodification. This appears to be a characteristic of capital. As it progresses as a system of social organisation, increasingly intimate aspects of human experience are subsumed under its formal processes. The very idea of a "knowledge economy" exemplifies the trend (Graham 2000). At the same time, economic decision-making appears to be moving further away from the *oikos*, the household, into the rarefied realms of supranational institutions, bureaucratic and commercial alike. Consequently, the complex of historically derived abstractions we have come to call "the economy" has appeared to move 'closer' to people (cf. Castells 1989: 16-17; Jessop 2000), thoroughly infusing the most fundamental levels of human existence, thought and language, while at the same time appearing to speed rapidly away from the control of human agency, and even from that of national legislatures. Communication technology, free trade, and competition – the secular religion abbreviated in the term "globalisation" – have become <u>sine qua non</u> as the basic logical determinants from which all policy <u>must</u> proceed (McKenna and Graham 2000). A grotesque caricature of liberal individualism appears to have become a <u>totalitarian</u> imperative, and <u>price</u> has become synonymous with <u>value</u>.

Economic "growth", or at least the impression thereof, has become, once again, the holy grail of policy (in distinction to, for example, full employment or quality of life issues). In a putatively globalised system, imperatives for competitively driven growth have led to any number of paradoxes. Various nationalisms and regionalisms, especially in areas such as economic "performance" and sport, are juxtaposed to inter- and supra-nationalist convergences in the form of bloated international bureaucracies and parasitic multinational corporations, most of them allegedly oriented towards "integrating", harmonising, and, in some views, homogenising the nation-states of the world and their political economies (cf. Bauman 1998; Bourdieu 1998; Klein, 2001).

At the level of the nation-state, a perverse imposture of liberal democracy has become the compulsory political system for inclusion in the most exclusive of global organisations. The compulsory liberalism currently being demanded – whether "neo" or otherwise – appears to be not in the least bit liberal, producing increasingly centralised, rigid, and intrusive systems of "globalised" governance and commerce. Unquestionably, there are more than just a few contradictions inherent in

a totalitarian liberalism. One glaring example is the apparent in the notion of "global" organisations (for example, "the international community") with strictly limited membership and access. But that is merely one of the many confusing epiphenomena of a system built on systemic contradictions. How do we define our shifting relationships? What could we possibly define them as? How can we even identify their expression?

Social function, institutions, and hybrid genres

Characteristically, it seems, we turn our meanings into "things" whose existence derives almost entirely from the source of social imagination: making laws produces "the law" and "the rule of law"; painting, drawing, singing, and dancing become "art" or "culture", these days requiring a ministry to oversee "its" progress; debating how best to live together becomes "politics", "policies", and "policy initiatives"; fighting becomes "war" or "sport"; being curious, inquiring, knowing, and inventing become "science" and "technology"; speaking, and more especially writing become "language"; and the products of human spiritual sentiment become "religions" and "gods". We abstract from our meaningful activities to produce "things". Then we give them power over us. "The rule of law", "the word of God", "the party line" all become seemingly exogenous normative forces—sources of values that deeply influence our behaviours towards each other, as do the products of "art", "culture", "science", and so on.

These broadest, most abstract and enduring aspects of human life do not change in their social function, but only in their specific form and content, in their realisation at a specific place and time (Firth 1954). The relationships within which law, art, science, politics, and so on are produced are, like any other, historically specific relations of production. Such relations typically become institutionalised (though not, by definition, fixed or immutable) and develop generic forms of expression through which to carry out their social "work". But our most powerful generic forms appear to stand outside "production", at least as we commonly understand it, precisely because they are our most abstract, and hence our most alien, social products. The appearance of immutable externality that powerful generic forms take on is an illusion, in many cases overtly "regulating" the rest of what is commonly, though perhaps incorrectly, called "production". The people who produce, define, and endorse significant abstractions are – practically by definition – a minority elite. Our elites have always, at least throughout recorded history, operated within institutions of power. Social institutions performing the most powerful social functions are the source of our most revered generic forms. Institutions of power are the engine rooms of sacred genres.

There are many reasons why that is the case. First of all, as I have noted above, the function of genres is to solicit and elicit certain expectations. The expectations placed upon, and generated by, institutions and their generic expressions are a form of ritual reproduction, which is mythical in content (cf. Bourdieu 1991; de Santillana and von Dechend. [1962] 1999). That is as much the case for the front page of a newspaper as it is for the (currently unstable) genre of annual reports, for religious

rituals, or for the latest generic expression of "heroic leadership". The most powerful genres are historically the most contested forms of institutional expression, precisely because they are the literal expression of sanctified and sanctioned power:

> *When language enters history its masters are priests and sorcerers. Whoever harms the symbols is, in the name of the supernatural powers, subject to their earthly counterparts, whose representatives are the chosen organs of society. (Horkheimer and Adorno [1947] 1998: 20)*

Consequently, powerful institutions and their generic forms of expression are also usually attributed with the status of sacred knowledge.[2] The right to perform elaborate and significant social rituals, such as high mass, the development of a policy paper, or the opening of a parliamentary session, are the province of social sanction, of political delegation (Bourdieu 1991: 57-65). Little wonder, then, that institutional ownership over the rites of (and rights to perform) sacred genres is most violently contested.

It is an historical and self-evident fact that genres are profoundly affected by new media and their generic institutional forms (e.g. the generic form of the televised political "debate" is impossible without the existence of the medium itself). That is because new media open up new possibilities for expressing sacred and secular power; they offer new possibilities for generic expression by providing new configurations of modalities for making meaning. Just as Luther and Calvin were historically impossible phenomena without Gutenberg and the Papacy, Reagan, Clinton, and Blair are impossible without global television networks and their associated institutions, most especially in Hollywood. In the process of a new medium gaining predominance, specific institutions thus emerge as their "owners" or "purveyors", and thus as the owners and purveyors of ritual forms of expression. Over time, new generic forms associated with new media and their institutions emerge, develop, fragment, and change. Innis has characterised these trajectories to some extent in the term 'knowledge monopolies', noting that the 'relation of monopolies of knowledge to organized force is evident in the political and military histories of civilization' (1951: 4). This remains the case today, and it is a compelling a reason as any to focus on genre as a primary unit of analysis.

It, for all the above reasons, an historical commonplace that when new media emerge, certain genres become unstable as institutions with a monopoly on the production of powerful meanings adapt to the meaning potentials of new media. New media open new possibility spaces for new textual configurations. That means the possibility of destabilising existing generic forms, which, in turn, means the possibility of certain institutions usurping the power formerly peculiar to other institutions. Today, certain of our genres have become inherently unstable, precisely because of generic convergences within and between antithetical institutional realms. This, in turn, is an expression of institutional convergences and divergences; it is an expression of functional convergences within and

between our institutions. It is also an expression of struggles over the rights to make meaning in certain ways and according to certain discoursal principles.

Following is an example of generic instability being publicly acknowledged. The passage is part of an official annual address to the Radio and Television Correspondents Association annual dinner by former US President Clinton:

> *Well, there has been some real news this week. The DNC [Democratic National Convention PG] announced it will hold the 2000 Democratic Convention in Los Angeles. But what you may not know is that the Los Angeles Planning Committee insisted on some minor changes in the convention format. For example, the Democratic candidate must start his acceptance speech by thanking the Academy, and saying what an honor it is just to be nominated. (Laughter.) In addition to the red-meat rhetoric as usual, there will be a fabulous vegetarian plate prepared by Wolfgang Puck. Tough questions will now be handled by stunt doubles. There'll be a fundraiser at Grauman's Chinese Theater. And, basically -- even after it's over -- in Hollywood, Oscars will still be bigger than the convention. (Clinton 1999a)*

Even though Clinton is being satirical here, he is actively, and actually, blurring the generic borders between the contemporary institutions of entertainment and politics by identifying and acknowledging their functional convergence. While power politics adapts itself to the genres of bad sitcom, global media corporations are adjusting themselves to the power being bestowed upon them by the "sanctification" of their generic forms. Gerald Levin, Time-Warner CEO and co-architect of the world's largest media merger (with America On Line), is also clearly aware of shifting generic, institutional, and functional boundaries between politics and the media. He understands, not just the past-in-presentness of his own inheritance, but also the future-in-present tense of generic power that the inheritance will entail:

> *Levin sees a future where major media corporations take on responsibilities currently administered by governments. "We're going to need to have these corporations redefined as instruments of public service because they have the resources, they have the reach, they have the skill base, and maybe there's a new generation coming up that wants to achieve meaning in that context and have an impact, and that may be a more efficient way to deal with society's problems than governments," predicted Levin. (Solomon 2000)*

One wonders which of society's problems media corporations might be able to solve more efficiently than government. But that is not the point. The point is that generic instabilities give us a window on future social change, or more importantly, on institutional claims to legitimate power.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the vaudeville-cum-soap-opera of a globally entertainmentised politics on the one hand, and the overwhelmingly public-minded sentiments expressed by Gerald Levin on the other.

An historical example of generic instability and its "past-in-present" expression

An historical example of generic instability brought about by institutional antagonisms and (eventual) convergences can be seen in the struggle between the papacy and the Aragonese kings which began in early thirteenth century Europe (Cawsey 1999). Without going into a detailed account, we can usefully refer to the struggle as being centred on the generic form of the sermon (forma sermonis). The genre of the sermon was quite well defined by the thirteenth century, with other official generic forms in art, science, and philosophy (institutionally and functionally indistinguishable at that time), such as the sonnet, dialectic argumentation, and canon law, also being well-established and well-recognised expressions of "divine" knowledge (cf. Cawsey 1999: 444; Haskins 1922: 670; Makdisi 1974: 642-643).

While Pope Innocent III had concerns about the copyists in Paris translating parts of the bible into the vernacular, a more pressing worry was that kings had begun using the sermon for political purposes, such as inciting citizens to participate in crusades, thus challenging the authority of the church by appropriating the institutional generic forms over which it claimed monopolistic right. Cawsey (1999) notes that the absence of detailed records of particular speeches is not as important to understanding the church-crown antagonisms of the time as the fact that the genre of forma sermonis was appropriated by a competing institution, and that this was the object of the antagonism while at the same time being its expression:

> *That the complete text of this and other sermons was not recorded is perhaps less important than that other details were, for the words of the sermons on such occasions were just one aspect of a ceremony which in its entirety conveyed the message that kingship was not only temporal but spiritual and that the king himself was no ordinary layman. (Cawsey 1999: 450)*

In other words, the monarchs were claiming divine right. As the appropriation of the sermon became tradition amongst the Aragonese kings, the institution of parliaments (re)emerged, and 'it seems that the Aragonese tradition of opening each session with a royal speech in the style of a sermon was introduced at the same time' (Cawsey 1999: 451). In effect, the generic usurpation of the forma sermonis rang in, to a significant extent, the dual institutional "revolutions" that manifested themselves in what we now call the Reformation and the Enlightenment.[3] Today, sessions of the Australian Senate are still opened with the speaker reading The Lord's Prayer and asking for divine guidance. Indeed, political science remains, at least in its own opinion, 'the divine science'

(Ranney 1976). Thus the closing line of US President Clinton's public pronouncements was 'God bless you', or 'God bless America', apparently whatever the occasion.[4]

Such ritualistically religious expressions, consisting mostly of an appeal to divine delegation and inspiration, also takes on far more elaborated forms in contemporary political discourse:

> *In my faith tradition, the true prophet of God's message for humankind is the one who comes forth to say: I have been called, as we have all been called, to bring good news to the poor. To bring healing to the sick. To mend the broken-hearted. To speak out clearly on behalf of the oppressed.*
> *Dr. King reminded us that prophetic truth is marching on.*
> *He taught us that there is no such thing as partial freedom. All of our people must be free from economic privation, or none of our people will be fully free. In his last speech, delivered from the pulpit of Mason Temple in Memphis, Tennessee – when he told of his vision from the mountaintop – he reminded us of the urgent need to build "a greater economic base." (Gore 2000)*

That is the vice-President of the United States, not the Pope, compressing at least two millennia of heteroglossic power resources into five sentences and three sentence-fragments to propagate the a dogmatically Marxist outcome.[5] Weber ([1930] 1992) would probably not be all that surprised at Gore's invocation of "the calling". It seems that the generic inculcation of the forma sermonis in parliamentary systems has left an 800-year-deep impression on western societies, whilst apparently turning itself inside-out in functional, logical, and relational terms.

For example, in the following "proclamation", Clinton uses his political position to incite his warlike nation to prayer, rather than to incite the faithful to war:

> *NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim May 6 1999, as a National Day of Prayer. I encourage the citizens of this great Nation to pray, each in his or her own manner, seeking strength from God to face the problems of today, requesting guidance for the uncertainties of tomorrow, and giving thanks for the rich blessings that our country has enjoyed throughout its history. (Clinton 1999b)*

Those ordained for power in entertainmentised, populist democracies are ordained by God through "the will of the people". So, when we look backwards at this one instance of inter-institutional appropriation of a sacred generic form, we can see that the effects are expressed, not in fragmentation as might be expected, although this happens too, but in a sort of generic conflation, collapse, or 'hybridisation' (Fairclough 1992, 2000) of conflicting and contradictory discourses. Such expressions are inseparable from the institutional and functional convergences that they express.

Seeing the future-in-present

We can see what is being claimed for the future by seeing the hybridisation of genres within and between institutions of power. With the widespread diffusion of new media, it is no surprise to see widespread generic instabilities today. For instance, the annual report, once a dry legal requirement for corporations, has become a magazine-like piece of promotional material for almost any organisation larger than a darts club, usually offering very little in the way of financial information. Its function has also become far more expansive. Today, rather than being an annual legislative annoyance for corporate entities, the annual report has become functionally sine qua non for institutions wishing to display affectations and impostures of corporate managerialist "efficiency", economic competency, and productivity in non-commercial entities, including and especially governments. Many government departments and, indeed, many national governments throughout the west, now use the genre of a corporate annual report to show that they are efficient, effective, productive, and, most of all, "professional".[6]

Public relations, propaganda, advertising, entertainment, finance, and politics have become almost indistinguishable in their appearance and function. Here is an example. It comes from the Queensland State Government and explains the rationale for the State's new "logo", which is apparently its new 'corporate identity':

> *Creating an identity for the business of government involves the establishment, management and promotion of a distinct brand that identifies the government to a range of target groups including the population in general, visitors and investors.*
> *Presently the State's Crest, created in the 1800s and amended in the 1970s is used to visually integrate the Queensland Government activities and signage. Unfortunately it does not adapt well to contemporary marketing applications. The Crest will not be discarded, but elevated for use in formal and ceremonial applications and to signify senior levels of government.*
> *The government is presented with an opportunity to identify itself across all its activities with an identity system that will improve recognition and save money through consistent branding and production of stationery, promotional material and livery.*
> *The Crest will be retained and elevated for ceremonial and ministerial use. The government identity system will be set out in a Corporate Identity Manual that establishes rules for the use of the new identity including the symbol, namestyle, colours, department and agency names, Crest and State Badge. (Department of the Premier and Cabinet 2000)*

According to the Queensland government, the business of government requires a distinct brand, an identity system, that will suit contemporary marketing applications, whatever they might be. This is clearly an

instance of corporate marketing discourse enthusiastically recommending its generic forms and functions-a pure self-valorising set of values focused on “the bottom line”-to the people who are the State of Queensland’s “target market”! The last paragraph, with its mention of the ‘Corporate Identity Manual’, is especially significant. It is common practice in corporations that the logo is considered to be formally sacred. People who use a company’s logo incorrectly in promotional material by using the wrong Pantone™ colours, or even by using non-standard typefaces near the logo, risk severe legal sanctions.[7] What is being proposed is the ordination of a sacred, iconic, and therefore mythical generic form to increase the value of the State of Queensland as a concept in itself.

To see the future-in-present in this case, we must identify which institutions are appropriating which others’ generic forms to create the instabilities (and extreme insecurities) being expressed by the legislative assembly of Her Majesty’s State of Queensland. In major historical episodes of institutional power struggles, sacred generic forms have generally been “democratised” (Innis 1951). That is to say, a larger and formerly less powerful group has appropriated the generic forms of the more powerful, prestigious, or universally “valid” institution (Graham and Hearn 2000; cf. also Marx and Engels [1844] 1972). Luther, for instance, set about “democratising” the bible by wresting control from the papacy and propagating it through a new medium, the book. The same happened with the Paris-trained copyists of twelfth century Europe with paper. In the case of the Queensland Government, it would seem at first blush that the more powerful institution is appropriating the generic forms of the weaker; that government is appropriating a less prestigious generic form from a set of institutions – the institutions of commerce – which might be, at another time in history, considered vulgar and functionally unsuitable, if not entirely inappropriate. That is clearly not the case today.

The presence of such generic instabilities is not at all surprising in the presence of our current crop of new media, particularly because of their technical characteristics. That is not a technological deterministic statement. It merely acknowledges that our globalised system of digital media facilitates the convergence of modes and genres of expression. They also create possibilities for entirely new forms. We can listen to the “radio”, watch “television” and films, write letters, read annual reports, advertise and sell almost anything, and, in some cases, even institute legal proceedings via our new media networks (Declan McCullagh, personal correspondence, May 15 2000). But we need, of course, to go beyond technology and technical facts to explain many of the generic convergences we are seeing from an institutional perspective (Graham 2000).

Political power as myth: past-in-present-in-future

As I have noted above, the practice of governance – the exercise of political power – is becoming ‘entertainmentised’ (Postman 1985; Wolf 1999), commercialised, and commodified (Fairclough 2000) to the point at which representatives of the entertainment industries can

conceive of themselves as functionally governmental. That is, in large part, a function of generic chaining:

> *One aspect of texturing as work (social production) in a textual mode is the arrangement of genres in what we can call 'generic chains' as part of the chaining of practices, ie the regular sequential ordering of different genres. We find generic chains of the following general form in the welfare reform process: .... speech <press release> - (media reports) - document <press release> - (media reports) - speech <press release> ... That is, a document such as the Green Paper on welfare reform is likely to be prepared for and followed up by speeches on the part of important ministers, but each of these (like the document itself) comes with its own press release ... and each subsequent move in the chain is responsive to media reactions to earlier moves. Practices such as focus groups may be inserted into such chains through research reports which also come with press releases attached. On occasion press conferences will also figure in such chains. (Fairclough 2000)*

A similar process of generic chaining accompanies the launch of any new product or brand (see, for instance, the rebranding campaign by BP-Amoco 2000): press release → mass mediated "teaser" campaign→ elaborated advertisements→ print, radio, and television appearances→ in-store promotions, and so on. The processes of generic chaining that occur in the promotion and "selling" of local, regional, national, and supranational policies are institutionally and generically almost identical to those involved in the process of selling the idea of an "environmentally friendly" oil company (BP-Amoco 2000), or of "selling" the legitimacy of mass murder.

Contemporary institutions of governance and commerce both deploy the institutional genres of advertising, public relations, market research, media industries, and so forth. Specific future implications of these background convergences in the texturing of hybrid genres suited to public communication are unclear. However, considering that the makers of policy and, for example, soap or banking services deploy practically identical generic forms in selling the idea of their "products" to the public, we ought to expect some sort of widespread attitudinal and institutional confusion to ensue. And this appears to be the case. Our institutions of commerce and governance are converging and merging at an historically unequalled rate. Today, we have a massive supranational legislative system that would intimidate the most seasoned Byzantine bureaucrat. The WTO, IMF, OECD, UN, EU, UNESCO, APEC – the acronymic list of global institutions of power is seemingly endless.

Simultaneously, we also have an even larger expansion in the mass of supranational corporations. These institutions, commercial and legislative, define each other in ways comparable to that of the church and monarchy during "divine right" feudalism, each legitimising the other, each claiming control over different aspects of human experience on a global scale, each dividing the realms of human experience amongst

themselves. But throughout feudal Europe, the church always appears to have had the advantage in the relationship. Religion knows only theological borders, whereas aristocracies are defined in boundaries of the most concrete geographical nature. When the institutional, functional, and generic forms of church and crown finally converged as a result of centuries of struggle, and once the religion of the afterlife was replaced by the religion of war and trade, the seeds of 'hypermodern managerialism' were sown (Armitage and Graham in press). The result was the literal secularisation of sacred power, followed closely by the excesses of the counter-reformation, followed by the excesses of sacred knowledge—the scholastic-revolutionaries of the "enlightenment" (Smith, Locke, Newton, Hume, Bentham, Mill) claimed for themselves the right to define the place of everything, and to put everything in its proper place.

Global contradictions and their systemic expression

In the relationship between supranational corporations and legislative assemblies, the religious element once again has the upper hand. The representatives of "global capital" are united in their simple theology, which is organised solely around the principles that inhere in money (simply power in the last analysis), a well-developed form of expression with (literally speaking) many generic derivatives. Money, the religious aspect of commerce, its divine and transcendental expression, is no longer bothered by geography (if it ever was). In fact a large percentage of the daily trillions that swirl around the globe travels by satellite, leaving the earth as it does its self-valorising rounds. Supranational legislative assemblies, though, currently remain tethered to the muck and tedium of geotechnically defined dirt: national assemblies, nation-states, and, most especially, the "democratic" rituals thereof. These last are the nationally-derived genres from whence supranationals draw their legitimacy. They appear to feel this burden of representative answerability acutely, and are currently working towards separating themselves from accountability at the level of the nation state (Graham 1999). This antagonistic relationship between national and supranational legislatures expresses an important and somewhat embarrassing dynamic.

Nations are in all-out economic competition with each other. War and trade have merged in the generic forms of institutional competition and antagonism (Armitage and Graham in press). All of this, this "globalising" trajectory, is presented in simultaneously articulated and contradictory discourses: a Darwinian struggle for survival, an expression of absolute freedom, as a source of absolute harmony, and as an expression of the fear of death (Weiss and Wodak 2000). Acts of international cooperation appear as accidental expressions of the need for "certainty" on the part of that amorphous but important group known as "international investors". Being "internationally competitive" is the key concern of policy considerations in nations throughout the developed world (Weiss and Wodak in press). That makes the job of reconciling conflicting national concerns at the supranational level a practical necessity. Further, the current dynamic, should it continue, will practically ensure that supranational organisations are completely freed from national

ties, as international bureaucracies – the legislative counterpart of international commerce – find more and more issues that are of "international concern" and which cannot be dealt with at the national level. Presently, a "liberal trading environment"; the "free movement of information" (including currencies and shares); the "increasing mobility of labour"; the "protection of intellectual property"; and "pollution" are the five main thematic elements (textual constituents) that provide organisational coherence for this dynamic driven by supranational-national legislative self-alienation (Miller, Michalski, and Stevens 1998).[8]

The contradiction of corporate socialism: Genres and tenses of ownership

At the same time as democratic alienation is in full flight, transnational businesses are becoming more socially-owned entities. Shareholder capitalism is at an all-time high in the "west". Australia's conservative, neoliberal government prides itself on being the legislative "representative" of the world's largest share-owning population (per capita) in history. And, as shareholding individuals become commonplace—as the generic expression of equity ownership in the means of production gets "democratised"—the power of publicly-listed corporations grows. Inversely, the power of the largest number of individual shareholders diminishes as their shareholdings in these companies are globally dispersed. The possibility of assembling thousands of members dispersed throughout the world at, for instance, an annual meeting, becomes impossible.

Simultaneously, national governments continue to acknowledge that their power is diminishing. Little falls under the purview of the truly neoliberal government other than the control of the means of repression (or protection, depending on the direction in which one is looking): military, police, and other security agencies. The contradictions of neoliberal enthusiasm for socially owned businesses ought to be fairly clear. Social ownership of the means of production has long been the dream of socialisms and communisms of all sorts, scientific and utopian alike. Pure neoliberalism, presumably, would not countenance such a situation. But neoliberal enthusiasm for social ownership of businesses is just another contradictory expression of a relational dynamic which has seemingly caught us by surprise, and for which we have very little analytical equipment.

Again, we need to consider mediation, not "disintermediation". Shareholders are not usually the immediate owners of a company, even though they are often its immediate financiers, at least in the first instance. Share ownership is mediated, not merely by stockbrokers, computer programs, or professional "advice"; it is institutionally and generically mediated in such forms as superannuation fund management systems. Thus systems of ownership also have their generic forms of expression (title deeds, share certificates, superannuation statements, etc). Most working people in developed countries own shares through large superannuation funds. The funds, in turn, often outsource their investment

decisions to other institutions—supranational investment houses and the like—of which there are relatively few.

People who own shares through such structurally mediated arrangements are usually not even aware what they own in specific terms. In fact, they own nothing in a formal sense, other than a share in the future fortunes of their superannuation fund(s). That is always a future-oriented space of value-possibilities. Ownership is represented in this system only by a quantum of money which is not specifically "owned", even though it represents some part of someone's (already-spent) life force. Qualitatively and practically, the mass of share owners have no specific ownership in capital whatsoever. Even the quantity of money that represents an "owner's" share in a superannuation fund's fortune is far from fixed and guaranteed in nature. These sorts of "owners" are also, by definition, producers.

That means they are (at least) doubly alienated: first, from the product of their activity, second by their non-ownership "share" in the future possibilities of an abstract network of business fortunes to which they also sell their activity, their past, present, and future life-energies. We can assume that "day traders" are not so deluded. They have no ambitions to business ownership and labour purchases – in short, they have no pretensions to capitalism and the obligations and risks thereof. Ownership in this mode is a fairly straightforward, albeit abstract, relational link between the fortunes of gambling and the predictive capacity of the gambler in respect of social psychology.

Here we see two extremes: workaday people "trusting" (usually under legislative coercion) their superannuation savings to companies who rely largely on other companies to invest their investors' money in future possibilities of wealth. At the other extreme, we have people who are gambling on shifting moods, rumours, and plain luck on a second-by-second basis. Neither of these extremes convert qualitatively into a general expression of ownership. Yet neoliberalism remains somehow superficially intact. A central tenet of liberalism is the 'natural right' to private property (Hobsbawm 1962: 286-288). If we are to take the widespread acceptance of liberalism's emphasis on private property rights as a "fact" lying at the end of History, then the emergence and continuation of a vigorous global stock market trade, at least in its current form, appears somewhat mysterious. In essence, joint stock companies are 'social capital … in contrast to private capital, and its enterprises appear as social enterprises as opposed to private ones' (Marx 1981: 567). They are qualitatively socialist in terms of ownership.

Summarising the future-in-past-in-present: The contradictions of senile capital

The more significant relationships that characterise the present are: 1) massified, centralised, supranational organisations that apparently represent and "harmonise" the interests of nation states, which, in turn, are in a state of perpetual, out-and-out economic warfare; an equally massified, socially-owned whirlpool of transferring properties rights which take the generic form of the supranational corporation, each of

which is owned socially; and 3) a global media environment – a communication system and generator of global communities of meaning – which is quite exclusive in terms of access and control.

So much for the generically mediated relations of non-ownership in non-production; for the reduction of politics to pure schlock; for the freedoms of totalitarian liberalism; for the re-emergence of a "feudal" dynamic at the end of History; for the anti-sociality of corporate socialism; for the future-in-past-in-present. Let us return to the largest and most generic (barely) functioning "polis" we have today: the nation-state. It is often said today that the nation state is an outdated "concept". That is all the more peculiar when it is said by the representatives of nation-states; that is, by the representatives of national governments. "Globalisation" is the omniscient deity in the discourse of "the dying nation-state". Its co-trinitarian subordinates are "a liberal trading environment" and "information technology" (McKenna and Graham 2000). These three forces, we are told, over and over, are making it harder for governments to govern. All that is left for government, it would seem, is tax, "the rule of law", and "the protection of property rights". That is, the exercise of the means of expropriation and violence in the maintenance of private space.

The current generic instabilities and contradictions in nation-state politics are expressed in a global panorama of nonsensical, "bread and circuses" power politics; a hyped-up, light-speed blur of non-sequitur flotsam cast off by converging and warring institutions of power, each growing larger, each being (ostensibly) more and more "democratic", and each (all the while) fighting for the right to define the meaning of being human. The organisational forces that helps us "make sense" of these rapidly changing genres—these expectation-producing forms of expression—are myth, discourse, and ritual; they are (re)presentations of attitudes; (re)organisations of things, people, and their relationships according to both ancient and contemporary logics at once; they both create, produce, and reproduce the impression of coherent meaning, often where none may be found (McKenna and Graham 2000). The fast-crazing blur of hybrid genres is merely the senile illusions of a system close to death, and sick with old age on the one hand, and enthralled with the possibility of experiencing what has been known since myth first attempted to grasp the wholeness of experience.

Back to the future now

A conclusion is out of place in any focus on possible futures. I have written the following instead. There is nothing in history to suggest that the human species is on an inexorable drive to perfection by way of progress, technical or otherwise. In fact, history suggests the opposite—namely, that 'each civilization has its own means of suicide' (Innis 1951: 141). Many knowledges, technologies, and civilisations have flourished and perished, leaving only hints of their genesis, development, and organising principles. The Darwinian perspective is also rather bleak, even if it is an inappropriate model by which to understand social change. Extinction would appear to be the rule proven by a few extant exceptions.

By some accounts (Graham and Hearn 2000; McMurtry 1999: 6-7), the west is either headed for, or is in, a new dark ages:

> *The last dark age can be seen from a distance. We can discern its culture of imposed silence that brooks no criticism of the ruling order as a kind of collective delirium in which the mind is submerged as in a dream. We may see it around us again today – after the fall of a world empire, after the unravelling of civil fabrics by barbarians overrunning all resisters and looting what is at hand, and in the thrall of a global end-of-history ideology. (McMurtry 1999: 6)*

By other accounts, we have already passed the end of History (Fukuyama 1995). But the advanced state of capital's systemic logic, and the degree of saturation that its self-contradictory logic enjoys, simultaneously implies the most developed state of its contradictions. Having expressed its apotheosis and realising its true nature, capitalism has become something other than itself. It contravenes the law of self-identity, even in terms of self-observation, and so must be something else. But we do not know what that "something else" is yet, or even what it might be. Consequently, words fail us, and we are, by some accounts, in the midst of the 'post-everything' society (Robinson and Richardson 1999):

> *When people face what nothing in their past has prepared them for they grope for words to name the unknown, even when they can neither define nor understand it. Some time in the third quarter of the century we can see this process at work among intellectuals of the West. The key word was the small preposition 'after', generally used in its latinate form 'post' as a prefix to any of the numerous terms which had, for some generations, been used to mark out the mental territory of twentieth-century life. The world, or its relevant aspects, became post-industrial, post-imperial, post-modern, post-structuralist, post-Marxist, post-Gutenberg, or whatever. (Hobsbawm 1994: 288)*

Other post-isms spring easily to mind - post-Fordism, post-colonialism post-materialism, and so on, seemingly ad infinitum. In this intellectual groping for new descriptors, we can also see evidence of civilisations in crisis. It is not merely an "economic" or "political" crisis, it is above all a crisis of understanding. We have ceased to understand ourselves – if we ever have – as a species. In any case, I disagree with Hobsbawm's assessment that we are facing "what nothing in our past has prepared us for". The opposite would appear to be the case. Our past, by definition, and by necessity, has produced our present. We have simply lost touch with our own history by dint of a perverse emphasis on the future-in-present. Our past will also be present in our future, as will our present.

What I have shown here is the efficacy of a textual lens focused at a specific level through which to see our histories—the level of genre. Genres that elicit and solicit specific sets of expectations are expressions of a lot of social work, all of which is, by definition, done within specific

social domains (institutions). Once they are developed, they become available for contestation and appropriation on the basis of their social effectiveness and their very recognisability. When we see genres hybridising, especially the genres of power, we are seeing an expression of institutional convergence. Genres and institutions are mutually constitutive. This is especially evident where institutions of power are concerned. With such an approach, we may well be able to see what has happened and what might well happen when certain institutions converge. That is, perhaps, the most important challenge for those of us who would grasp the currently transitional system, and the one which will emerge from the death throes of this transitional stage.

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Notes

1. I present here what would undoubtedly be called a "western" perspective. That is a function of my social situatedness. I make no pretensions to understanding the largest part of humanity which is not

generally categorised as “western” (although I find any neat distinction dubious to say the least). That said, I am more than mindful of the macro-historical heritage of what now passes for “western thought”.

2. Knowledge is not power. Power is endowed with the assumption and attribution of knowledge because of its status as power, not the reverse.
3. It is a mistake to put a punctuation point at the seventeenth century and call it “the enlightenment”. It merely reflects our tendency to ‘neatly trim the epochs of history’ (Marx, [1846] 1972). If there was such a revolution, it was syncretic and not punctuated (Graham and Hearn 2000).
4. An exhaustive list of instances is not possible here. There are far too many to list. As randomly chosen examples, see Clinton (1999a,b 2000).
5. Although my work is strongly influenced by Marx’s, I have no sympathy for high-structuralist, economic deterministic “Marxisms” that have transformed a pluralistic and flexible body of work into a pseudo-radical dogma which is not much different in its expression than totalitarian neoliberalism.
6. While the British and Australian Governments, for instance, display great enthusiasm for annual reports, the US relies on its State of the Union Address to perform this function. That is a rather interesting reflection on its oral tradition of public discourse (Postman 1985).
7. I am an escapee from the advertising industry and this is a matter of long direct experience with the “corporate identity manual”.
8. The linguistically sensitive reader will notice that I have compressed a massive and literally incomprehensible set of processes and people into a few banal sounding “things”. That is what happens in policy language and it is the basis of resignation.