**Comparative Study—A Genealogy of Genre**

A Genealogy of Genre

*"It is often easier to discover a truth than to assign it to its correct place."*

Ferdinand de Saussure

The word 'genre' is a common one, encountered in the disciplines of art, literature, music, theatre and film.

At its most basic, genre means grouping similar kinds of styles and expressions together.

Genres can change over time, evolve, mutate into sub-genres or join with other genres to establish hybrid forms or even completely new styles and modes of expression. Film scholars and theorists sometimes even contest the idea that genres even exist. The Film guide does not, however, go that far.

Genre is a useful term that can help students understand how the internal components of a film (such as its mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, sound, and so on), the kinds of stories they convey, as well as the types of effects they seek to provoke, can provide an opportunity to organise our exploration of global film.

As another film focus, the study of genre relies on students to research and construct supported arguments that justify why we might consider two or more films as related to one another.

These films could come from radically different time periods or geographical regions but the power of genre can link them together.

Film scholars have developed many tools to help in this process of association

Let's now consider how best to assign 'a fact' (or, in this case, a film) to its 'correct place'.

Genre DNA

Let's look at how sub-genres and/or hybrid genres emerge from, and often alter, some of an original genre’s conventions and codes.

First, take a look at Tim Dirk’s list of genres, sub-genres and hybrids.

**Download -**[List of film genres and sub-genres](https://pj-s3-attachments.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/editor_attachment/file/11191/9_film_genres_and_sub-genres_e.pdf)

From this list alone, we can see how all the 'basic' genres have given birth to a fantastic array of sub-genres and hybrids, and how some of these sub-genres and hybrids were also the result of a marriage between two completely different genres!

To anyone seriously interested in film, it is really fascinating to understand just how these transformations have come about.

To do so, let’s use Christian Metz’s idea that there can be 4 basic stages to a genre:

**Experimental**

* first stage, where foundations are built, generic codes and conventions are established.
* For example, *The Great Train Robbery*

**Classic**

* second stage, where genre is solidified, codes and conventions become iconic and idealized as the guidelines for the genre.
* For example, *Stagecoach*

**Parodic**

* with codes and conventions established and widely recognized, genre’s codes and conventions are mocked.
* For example, *Blazing Saddles*

**Deconstructive**

* genre can begin to evolve and merge with others becoming a sub-genre, revisionist genre and/or hybrid genre.
* For example,*Blade Runner*

These stages provide us a way of defining the major changes of a given genre.

But if we want to examine how a given genre can change from experimental to classic to parodic and to deconstructive, we will need to look at the conventions of the genre and see how they were first established in the experimental stage, solidified in the classic stage, satirized in the parodic stage, and transformed into a sub-genre or hybrid in the deconstructive stage.

To do this, we will use the following five conventions of the genre as suggested by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson in their book *Film Art.*

1. Plot elements
2. Characters
3. Themes
4. Iconography (Objects, Setting, Images, Tropes)
5. Film Techniques

For instance, in an early experimental American Western, where the conventions are just being established, plotlines might revolve around a conflict between law and order and crime, and feature “outlaws” and “lawmen” and a bank or train robbery.

Themes would begin to explore the conflict between civilization and the lawless, wild frontier, or the idea of a survival in a harsh, unforgiving environment. Iconography would include everything from the wide open spaces and isolated towns and farms of the landscape to the cowboy’s hat, the sheriff’s star and the town saloon. It would also include tropes like the gunfight or the cavalry rescue.

And finally, film techniques would involve extreme wide shots to take in the enormous landscape, and close-ups to help us identify the characters, as well as moving camera shots to capture the action.

So let’s see you give it a try. Follow the directions below to see how a genre of your choice can change!

Genre DNA Chart

Choose one of the genres from Tim Dirk’s list of genres, sub-genres and hybrids.

Then, pick a film that you think best exemplifies the genre at each stage described by Christian Metz.

To support your choice, describe the ways in which the film’s genre can be identified through its use of plot elements, characters, themes, iconography, and film techniques.

When appropriate, include film images, screenshots, publicity photos, and so on.

Use the template below to sort your responses.

**Download -** [Genre DNA Chart (MS Word format)](https://pj-s3-attachments.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/editor_attachment/file/11192/Genre_DNA_Chart.docx)

**Download -**[Genre DNA Chart (PDF format)](https://pj-s3-attachments.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/editor_attachment/file/11193/Genre_DNA_Chart.pdf)

GENRE: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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| **STAGES** | **FILM** | **PLOT ELEMENTS** | **CHARACTERS** | **THEMES** | **ICONOGRAPHY** | **FILM****TECHNIQUES** |
| **EXPERIMENTAL** |   |   |   |   |   |         |
| **CLASSIC** |   |   |   |   |   |         |
| **PARODIC** |   |   |   |   |   |         |
| **DECONSTRUCTIVE** |   |   |   |   |   |        |

# Genre DNA Chart Submission

Compile your responses to the Genre DNA Chart in a PDF document for submission.

Note: For all assignments, title your document in the following way -

(Title of assignment) (First name) (Initial of your second name)

For example, if your name is Sanjay Kumar, and you are submitting this assignment, Genre DNA Chart, the file will be titled -

Genre DNA Chart Sanjay K.