What Is a Genre? Quiz Shows/ Game Shows

More than any other genre on radio or television, the quiz show genre has been notoriously difficult to define. Radio and television genres routinely form hybrids and cross-fertilize each other, as can be seen in various recent popular comedy-drama hybrids such as *Ally McBeal*, *The Wonder Years*, or *Sports Night*, as well as in failed hybrids such as *Cop Rock* or *Medicine Ball*. In the case of quiz shows and game shows, however, the terms hide a myriad programming forms under these seemingly unifying generic labels. Shows as different as *The Price Is Right*, *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, *Dr. I.Q.*, *Survivor*, *Family Feud*, *Double Dare*, *Supermarket Sweep*, *Jeopardy!*, *Queen for a Day*, *The Newlywed Game*, *Singled Out*, and *Take It or Leave It* are united through a common generic label, yet their similarities are often difficult to discern.

Although we sometimes see all of these shows referred to as game shows, some of them are also categorized with other generic labels, for example, the term *reality show* for *Survivor,* the term *quiz show* for *Take It or Leave It,* or the term *dating show* for *Singled Out*. The variation of such generic labels partly stems from historical changes in terminology, yet it also points to a fundamental instability of generic categories. In this chapter, the term *quiz/game show genre* indicates that the use of generic labels in everyday discourse, industry practice, and scholarly work has consistently failed to address the complexities and shifts in this genre. Specifically, the example of radio in the 1930s and 1940s is used to illustrate some of the inadequacies of current genre theory.

One of the most common problems in writing about this genre is that the terms *quiz show* and *game show* are often applied interchangeably. However,

these terms also correspond to important changes in the history of the genre itself. A differentiation between quiz shows and game shows did not exist prior to the quiz show scandals in 1958. Shows such as *Truth or Consequences* and *People Are Funny*, which rely mainly on physical activity and do not have any significant element of academic or factual knowledge to them were called quiz shows. The same is true for shows such as *The $64,000 Question* that empha-sized factual knowledge. The quiz show scandals were an important turning point because the genre formerly known as *quiz shows* was renamed *game shows* in the years following the scandals. The new name, *game shows*, removes the genre from the realm of serious knowledge and cultural centrality and instead creates associations with play and leisure time, which connect it to less sensitive cultural areas.[1] Although the *quiz* versus *game* distinction is indeed an important strategy for the broadcast industry in the wake of the scandals, it does not necessarily imply a clear, long-term shift in the style or content of quiz/game shows. As the recent popularity of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* illustrates, quiz shows once again incorporate knowledge-based questions and are featured prominently on prime-time television. In the case of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, even the generic label *quiz show* has been recycled. These shifting generic distinctions are an important site for the analysis of the discursive struggles over program control, cultural hierar-chies, and social acceptance in the broadcast industry. Despite the historical conflicts over the use of the terms *quiz* and *game*, the term *quiz shows* is used herein for practical purposes, denoting an overarching, descriptive term for the genre as a whole.

THE CASE OF THE MISSING CORPUS

One of the basic concerns of genre criticism and genre theory has been the identification of a body of texts and the study of its organization according to common characteristics. As Rick Altman points out in *The American Film Musical*, genre theory (for example, Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic*) has often differentiated between historical and theoretical genres.[2] A historical genre describes the cultural practice of encoding and decoding genre texts without any a priori theoretical assumptions about the genre. However, the constitution of a genre requires that certain (theoretical) assumptions about commonalities between texts be made. This observation holds true for media practitioners as well as genre theorists: each group attempts to understand a genre based on an implicitly theoretical understanding of it. Therefore, his-torical genres are always also theoretical ones. In reverse, the observation of a theoretical genre always relates to the reading practices of the audience or the critic, who is also historically situated and who is also part of an audience. Consequently, the history-theory split ultimately only masks the subjectivity of the researcher and the theoretical basis of all historical genres.

Attempting a synthesis of these two views, Rick Altman suggests that the historical definition of the corpus of a genre can be used as a first step in the critical process of genre studies. This first definition will be fairly broad, based on stock elements such as location, sets, and characters, which Altman refers to as the semantic level:

> The fact that a genre has previously been posited, defined, and delimited by Hollywood is taken only as prima facie evidence that generic levels of meaning are operative within or across a group of texts roughly designated by the Hollywood term and its usage.... The broadest possible corpus implied by the industrial/journalistic term is taken as the critic's preliminary corpus.[3]

On the basis of this broad definition, Altman argues, the critic can proceed to limit and modify the body of the genre according to specific critical standards that reflect the requirements of the study. In this second step, the interests, preoccupations, or goals of the critic take precedence over the "historically existing" structures of a genre. "The critic will identify and describe certain traits and systems present and operative within a large number of the texts constituted by the preliminary corpus."[4] This theoretical framework is based on two beliefs: First, Altman assumes that the critic can find a stable genre structure, and second, he assumes that finding, identifying, and reproducing this structure is desirable for the critic. This notion of genre is not focused on the margins of a genre and it does not specifically look for points of instability, contradiction, and breakdown in the seemingly stable structure of a genre. Instead, the methodology that Altman outlines in *The American Film Musical* and his subsequent work *Film/Genre* emphasizes and reinforces those cases where a genre as a classificatory system works and displays relatively stable genre conventions.[5]

If this book simply were to follow Altman's propositions, it would include all shows designated as quiz shows or game shows in popular and industry discourses in the preliminary corpus of the genre. As comprehensive sources to establish a preliminary corpus, one could use books such as David Schwartz, Steve Ryan, and Fred Wostbrock's *Encyclopedia of TV Game Shows,* John Dunning's *Tune in Yesterday: The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio 1925–1976,* and Jon Swartz and Robert Reinehr's *Handbook of Old-Time Radio: A Comprehensive Guide to Golden Age Radio Listening and Collecting.*[6] Written by three representatives of the broadcast industry, all of whom were involved in the production of game shows at some point, the *Encyclopedia of TV Game Shows* provides an inclusive collection of game shows or quiz shows that were aired on U.S. television. Similarly, Jon Swartz and Robert Reinehr and Dunning list many radio programs commonly regarded as quiz shows. Although this strategy would neatly identify a preliminary corpus, the analysis

herein is not confined to a limited number of specific traits present throughout the history of television quiz shows. Although these sources might help to identify a corpus of texts, they are hardly comprehensive and in particular might fail in view of texts that were considered marginal to or outside of the generic corpus. In other words, we have to ask what happens to shows that are outside of standard industry practices or that cannot be clearly placed within accepted genre designations.

Borrowing Foucault's notion of a genealogy,[7] this chapter is particularly concerned with identifying the beginnings of a discursive practice, which imply the emergence of differences and ruptures. This project is positioned in opposition to traditional historiography, which tends to emphasize linearity and a search for historical origins. As historian Patricia O'Brien points out:

> the genealogist/historian looks for beginnings, not origins. This for Foucault was an essential distinction. Origins imply causes; beginnings imply differences. A genealogy, therefore, "will cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning."[8]

Observing the contradictions, struggles, and accidents that accompany all beginnings can render new insights into the development of a discursive form such as a genre.

Following these arguments, the observation of shifting traits within the genre as a whole is more important than the critic's identification of a unified genre system. My method for studying quiz shows, then, relies on the identification of changes and ruptures in the genre. This history of the quiz show genre does not exclusively focus on the solidification of a corpus of texts, but on the changing articulations of quiz shows throughout the history of the genre. The following section investigates the emergence of early quiz shows in U.S. broadcasting in the 1930s. Observing the beginnings of the genre will demonstrate that some of its history is located outside of the consensual generic corpus.

GENERIC CONFUSIONS

As a new type of show emerged in the mid-1930s and started to spread in national networks' and regional stations' programming lineups in the following years, trade publications as well as the popular media were trying to make sense of this new phenomenon by tracing its origins and identifying the first show of its kind. An article in the *New York World Telegram* lamenting the proliferation of quiz shows tries to define the genealogy of the genre:

> Who Started It? The oldest quiz on the networks is the Saturday evening *Vox Pop*, which was brought up from Texas to take over a summer half-hour four years ago. You can't blame the deluge on *Vox Pop*, however. The blame should probably go to Major

Bowes, who made the first resounding success of bringing strangers to the microphone and conversing with them in a more or less bantering tone."[9]

Figure 1.1. Major Edward Bowes, host of Major Bowes' Original Amateur Hour. *Courtesy University of Maryland/Broadcast Pioneers Library.*

The article is referring to *Major Bowes' Original Amateur Hour*, a program that originated as a local broadcast in 1934 on WHN in New York City and became a network show in 1935 on NBC.[10] The show was focused on amateurs coming to New York and hoping to perform musical, dramatic, or other talents and embark on a career in show business. Top winners continued to appear on the program up to a yearly championship round. Other than Frank Sinatra, who appeared on the program in 1937 as part of the Hoboken Four, few amateurs seem to have actually broken into show business. Given the setup of *Major Bowes' Original Amateur Hour*, why the article quoted previously singles out

this particular program as the originator of quiz shows over a variety of other programs is difficult to imagine.[11]

Instead, one could argue that *Uncle Jim's Question Bee* is the legitimate original quiz show.[12] An NBC press release indicates that it was focused on the straightforward asking of knowledge-related questions and on a competition between several contestants:

> *Uncle Jim's Question Bee* to test fan's knowledge: Whose cow kicked over a lantern and started the famous Chicago fire? What is the distance from New York to San Francisco? How many rolls in a baker's dozen? Attempts to answer these and many other questions will be made by members of the studio audience participating in the broadcasts of a new program, *Uncle Jim's Question Bee*, to be inaugurated Saturday, September 26, from 7:30 to 8:00 p.m., E.D.S.T., over the NBC-Blue Network.... During the broadcasts, McWilliams [the master of ceremonies] will call six members of the studio audience to join him before the microphone. Where he will ask each one, alternately, six questions on a wide variety of subjects. An answer, right or wrong, must be made within ten seconds. [Joseph] Bell, as referee, will rule on accuracy and keep score. Members of the radio audience will be asked to send in sets of questions and answers for use on the programs.[13]

As this quote illustrates, *Uncle Jim's Question Bee* exhibits traits one might consider conventional for a quiz show: a competition for money between candidates, the asking of questions on a variety of subjects, the presence of a master of ceremonies, and the integration of the studio audience in the program. Interestingly, however, the press release itself does not include any clear genre designation, even though it refers to "testing fan's knowledge." Labeling this program the first quiz show would entail the retroactive imposition of today's genre conventions onto this program, proving only that *Uncle Jim's Question Bee* is prototypical of the quiz genre because it fulfils our expectations after the fact.

However, instead of *Uncle Jim's Question Bee*, the previously mentioned *Vox Pop* was cited much more frequently in various media accounts as the grandfather of quiz shows or the original quiz show.[14] Its creator, Parks Johnson, and various staff members working on the program extensively described and promoted *Vox Pop*. David K. Grant, the program director for *Vox Pop* at the McCann-Erickson advertising agency, wrote an article for the June 1946 issue of the advertising industry trade magazine *Advertising and Selling* discussing "The Rise of the Audience Participation Program." Trying to position himself as an expert on the genre, he emphasizes *Vox Pop*'s status as the origination point of the genre:

> In Houston, Texas, a little over fourteen years ago, a microphone was lowered out of the windows of KTRH in the Rice Hotel, and in a few minutes, curious bystanders and chance passer[s]by were making radio history. They were taking part in radio's first "Audience Participation" broadcast—*Vox Pop*. Persuaded to participate by a local advertising man, Parks Johnson, they found themselves answering questions that ranged all the way from the personal to the ridiculous.[15]

In a promotional booklet on *Vox Pop*, the narrative of this program is continued and further elaborated:

> There were a lot of gag questions and riddles on *Vox Pop* in those days. And at a dollar a question, the participants entered merrily into the program's slightly zany spirit of fun. But *Vox Pop*, without realizing it, was pioneering a new departure for radio programs. Because out of those sidewalk question bees developed the quiz programs and audience-participation shows which play such a prominent part in present day radio programming.[16]

In promotional materials, the producers of *Vox Pop* also emphasize the program's status as being "the first radio quiz show," "radio's original interview program," and "the first program to pay money on the air to participants who answered questions correctly." Articles in newspapers and popular magazines almost verbatim repeat *Vox Pop*'s claim as the original quiz/audience participation show and of Parks Johnson as the pioneer of quiz shows.[17] This illustrates not so much the truth-value of the claims made for *Vox Pop* or any other program, but the effectiveness of program publicity to support such claims to historical precedence. Gregory Lukow and Steven Ricci introduce the term *intertextual relay* to describe the power of publicity materials to advance certain meanings and apply generic labels in the case of cinema.[18] Such an intertextual relay seems to operate similarly in the case of broadcasting, structuring public discourses on media texts and lending credibility to certain historical claims.

However, ultimately we can only note the variety of competing claims regarding the invention of the quiz show genre. Genre history cannot confirm or authenticate the pioneering status of an individual film, radio program, or television show. Identifying one radio program as the originator of quiz shows would reinforce traditional notions of linear history through which we can identify the exact origination point of specific practices or events. We have to resist the drive to identify Uncle Jim, Major Bowes, Parks Johnson, or anyone else for that matter as the individual genius behind an entire genre. Instead, other documents from the history of quiz shows in the 1930s and 1940s offer an alternative explanation for the beginnings of the quiz show genre.
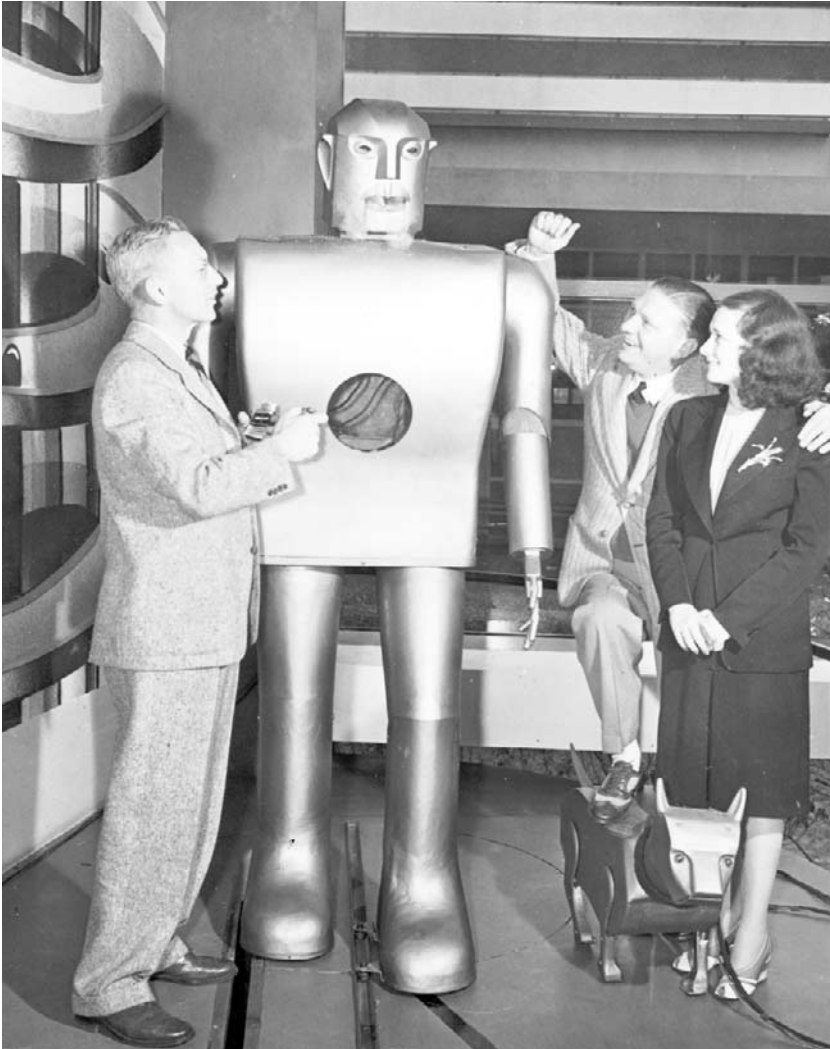
Figure 1.2. Parks Johnson and Wally Butterworth at a publicity shoot for the New York World's Fair. *Courtesy University of Maryland/Broadcast Pioneers Library.*

Whereas the various texts speculating on the origins of quiz shows already displayed a startling multitude of categories and generic labels, this tendency can be observed even more clearly in quotes from magazines targeted to radio listeners in the late 1930s. An article describing *Vox Pop* shortly after its 1935 network debut points to preelection "sidewalk interviews" as the first inspiration for the program and then connects it to amateur hours as an additional possible generic affiliation. The *Radio Mirror*, on

the other hand, labels *Vox Pop* a "parlor game," and *All-Wave Radio* magazine chooses "question and answer" as designation for the same program.[19] In a letter to NBC's sales department, Robert P. Myers, an attorney for Procter and Gamble, points out that the programming idea behind *Truth or Consequences* is not original to radio at all, but dates back to a children's game of the same name. He uses this observation to defend *Truth or Consequences* against allegations that it copied significant parts or ideas from a local program entitled *Can You Do It*, broadcast on KFWB in Hollywood, California.[20] However, Myers's remarks point to a much more profound theoretical point: Quiz shows are not necessarily rooted specifically in broadcasting alone, but relate to everyday practices outside media industries. This point invokes Bakhtin's notion of everyday genres. Such genres, Mikhail Bakhtin points out, are conventionalized and serve to facilitate everyday discourse. Whereas everyday genres require a minimum of shared expectations, they do not have the same classificatory power as literary or media genres.[21] A 1939 article in a popular magazine illustrates the connection of quiz shows to everyday genres even further:

> Quizzes in some form have always been popular, because there is not one of us who doesn't like to parade his knowledge, if any. We remember years back the old *Chatterbox*, an English magazine which used to appear in this country in bound form every Christmas. They had a puzzle department of riddles, acrostics and anagrams that would have stumped Minerva....Then you remember the Ask Me Another craze, and anagrams have been popular from times dim.[22]

The article gives a long list of terms to refer to quiz shows. On the one hand, at least five terms are offered to serve implicitly as genre labels:

- audience participation programs
- sidewalk question bees
- sidewalk interviews
- question and answer
- amateur hours

On the other hand, six additional terms are offered that connect quiz shows back to everyday genres of various kinds:

- parlor games
- children's games
- puzzles
- riddles
- acrostics
- anagrams

The first set of terms reinforces the general sense of instability of these genre designations, offering dramatically different terms for essentially the same shows. Relating quiz shows to a rather diffuse set of everyday genres further underscores this already weakened genre identity. Again we face the impossibility of assigning shows such as *Uncle Jim's Question Bee* or *Vox Pop* to appropriate categories. Instead, the everyday genres listed earlier point to the alternative of theorizing genre as a nonexclusive process of tentative classification. That a quiz show could incorporate elements of parlor games such as puzzles or riddles seems clear. Terms such as these seem to demand none of the classificatory exclusivity that our standard notion of genre demands. Several genre theorists have recently used Jacques Derrida's essay *The Law of Genre* to theorize this point.[23] Derrida argues that a text cannot belong exclusively to one genre, that its affiliations are tentative, multiple, and nonexclusive. He opposes the law of absolute belonging and replaces it with the notion of participation in a genre. We can thus think of texts as productively invoking a genre as a communicative act, but we have to surrender our belief in the absolute rule of the law of genre. Genre cannot be regarded as a universal process that equally or universally speaks to all viewers or listeners. From this perspective, the claim, "even if we cannot provide an essential definition of a genre's core identity, we all still know a sitcom when we see one," is rendered inappropriate. Such a statement does not take the dynamic nature of genre into account and instead only pays lip service to understanding the dynamic nature of genre.[24]

   Applying Derrida's theoretical position to the quiz show genre, we can then replace the question, "Is *Vox Pop* an audience participation program, a sidewalk question bee, a sidewalk interview, a question-and-answer program, or an amateur hour?" with the question, "In what genres does *Vox Pop* participate?" Derrida considers the law of participation as a mode of excess where multiplicity is unavoidable and singularity is unattainable, so that a variety of these categories can simultaneously serve as genre designations. In general, indicators of genre participation can be found in multiple sites: the textual structures of the program itself, the often contradictory classificatory attempts of program creators, program publicity, and the reading practices of various audiences, as far as those are accessible.

GENRE AND HISTORY

Numerous media scholars have noted that genre theory tends to privilege synchronic relationships within a genre. For example, genre theorists working from the framework of structuralism argue that a genre is structured like a language.[25] We assume that the overarching language of the genre structures and determines the production of individual texts within the genre. This language analogy regards a genre as a system that distributes and shares its cul-

tural currency more or less evenly in a culture. It is connected to theories of communication as ritual, which I discuss later.[26] In her article on television genre, Jane Feuer points out that the relationship between text and genre is balanced somewhat differently than language analogies imply; that is, individual texts can elicit change, and rupture and innovation in a genre is more crucial than often assumed.[27] For example, programs such as *The $64,000 Question*, *Let's Make a Deal*, or *Singled Out* introduce an element of innovation that constitutes an important break with existing genre conventions. Approaches based on the language analogy can very easily lead us to privilege the power of genre as a system over individual texts, creators, and the audience. As genre theorists point out, we are running the danger of excluding the history of the genre as well as its relationship to historically specific social and cultural contexts.[28] Genre becomes a stable, transhistorical phenomenon with little room for contradiction or multiplicity.

Altman's semantic/syntactic approach to genre attempts to resolve some of the problems of genre theory's lack of historical consciousness. He claims that a genre comprises semantic elements (for example, stock characters, sets, and standard editing patterns) as well as syntactic elements (the combination of semantic elements into meaningful patterns).[29] Although semantic elements can offer a basis for a genre, a genre does not stabilize until a meaningful syntax develops. Change can then be conceptualized either on the semantic level or on the syntactic level so that a recombination of semantic elements can significantly change the meanings that can be developed out of a genre text: "A genre does not exist fully until a method is found of building its semantics into a stable syntax. In other words—and this notion has rarely been recognized by genre critics—genres are made and not born."[30] Altman provides a theory of genre that opens up the possibility for significant change in a genre and that acknowledges the power of media institutions to create and change the semantic-syntactic structure of genres. However, we still have to consider the role that cultural context and the audience play in the development of a genre. Additionally, Altman also assumes that the strategies of the media industries with regard to a genre represent purposeful behavior and are informed by conscious reflection. However, as the previous section noted, some discourses on genre are far from straightforward or rational.

In the development of the quiz show genre, we can nevertheless notice some efforts toward a consolidation of genre terminology. Going along with the increasing importance of the ratings system and efforts in mass communication research to measure and categorize television programming, several 1950s' publications attempted to speak about the quiz show genre in a more stable terminology.

A study titled "The Television Audience of Today" differentiates between *quiz programs* and *panel-quiz programs* in 1952, but changes these

categories to *quiz* and *panel* for its 1956 version without, however, including significantly different programs in each case. In an attempt at genre defini-tion, the 1952 study provides the following classificatory scheme:

> Quiz programs: Basic theme of program is offering prize for per-formance or answer by contestant. Panel-quiz program: Basic theme of program is reply or solution by panel to problem or question. Contestant participates by providing question or problem.[31]

No similar definition is offered in the 1956 study. The attempt to provide a genre definition solely on the basis of who asks the question and who answers it is, of course, somewhat tedious, but not necessarily less persuasive than any other. One might conclude that the authors of the study assume that the panel-quiz program is actually a subgenre of the quiz program, but they never clearly follow through with any such proposition. A 1953 NBC publicity booklet for *Name that Tune* offers the following appraisal of the show:

> Name that Tune: One of the most popular program types in radio. Audience participation shows are reaching an average of 11% more homes than in the previous season.
>
>   Created by Harry Salter, co-producer of *Stop The Music*— one of radio's most successful quiz programs. . . . A half hour of songs, quiz, and fun . . . with a built-in merchandising hook which guarantees in-store traffic. . . . An audience participation show created by Harry Salter—one of radio's most successful producers of musical quiz programs.[32]

The main generic markers this booklet establishes for *Name that Tune* are audience participation and quiz programs, while using the terms *musical*, *songs*, and *fun* as additional qualifiers. A 1956 NBC press release for master of ceremonies Jack Barry, associated with *Tic Tac Dough* and *Twenty-One*, refers to *Tic Tac Dough* both as a "new audience participation show" and a "new quiz show," implying either that these terms are synonymous or that one is a subgenre of the other.[33] The idea that one of these terms might serve as a general designation for the genre and the other as a subgenre is also implicit in Parks Johnson's notes for a 1947 speech at a radio conference. Johnson seems to consider audience participation as a metagenre with categories such as quiz, musical, information, forum, games, and giveaway as subgenres to audience participation.[34] The interesting point here is that most of the ele-ments that Johnson lists as subcategories did not disappear or lose importance in quiz shows of the 1940s or 1950s. The programs listed in *The Television Audience of Today* as quiz programs include an amazing variety:

- *Strike It Rich*, a show where contestants tried to win prizes and gifts through support from the home audience based on the personal hardships they endured.

- *You Bet Your Life*, a program hosted by Groucho Marx which did not take the quiz aspect of the show too seriously and instead often functioned as a vehicle for Groucho's antics.
- *Stop the Music*, a show where contestants had to guess or recognize the name of a tune played on the show.
- *Winner Take All*, a show that pitted two contestants against each other answering general knowledge questions.[35]

These short examples from the listings in *The Television Audience of Today* indicate that the diversity of forms in the quiz show genre did not change or decrease. Instead, an increasing amount of reflexivity seems to have developed in the media industry regarding the use of genre terminology. The previous examples illustrate the attempts of the industry to fit a variety of programs within one or two unifying labels. I would like to evoke Altman's point that genres are made, not born, and argue that these classificatory attempts denote the exertion of institutional power to define and stabilize genre categories.[36] After obvious generic confusion in the early history of the genre in the 1930s and 1940s, we see an attempt to impose classificatory order, or the law of genre.[37] The developing genre categories not only serve as a unifying descriptive terminology, but also as a potential blueprint for future program development. Parks Johnson's speech mentioned previously, commissioned as a short lesson for broadcast executives in how to understand and design an audience participation program, is especially useful as a guide for the development of future products in this genre. These attempts at defining a genre out of the body of texts labeled giveaways, panel shows, quizzes, games, forums, and so forth seem to imply that the perception of similarities among texts is as important as their actual existence. Perhaps producers and industry observers of the quiz show genre increasingly emphasized the seemingly obvious similarities in a body of texts over the now less-obvious differences between them. The development of semantic and syntactic structures in a genre does not necessarily predate our recognition of these structures. Instead, the discursive act of defining these semantic and syntactic structures might be the very act that actually constitutes them as real. Thus, a revised model of genre history suggests itself that considers the theoretical definition and the empirical observation of genre structures as mutually constitutive. Although this notion of genre development refutes the static and ahistoric model of genre implicit in the language analogy, it leaves open questions regarding the material forces underlying the development of a genre.

GENRE, RITUAL, POWER

Based on the previous discussion of definitional shifts surrounding the quiz show genre, we may reasonably assume that the development of a classificatory system is important in the long-term development of a genre. We may assume further that this genre development takes place in an environment

where shared cultural meanings are evenly circulated among industry, texts, and audiences. Championed by critics such as Thomas Schatz, John Cawelti, and Will Wright, this ritual model of genre describes a *genre* as a contract that structures the relationships between production and reception.[38] Although this concept explains the cultural function of genre to some extent, it does so in terms similar to James Carey's notion of ritual communication; that is, it excludes the analysis of the operation of power or ideology in this communicative process.[39] The ritual model in genre theory assumes an even distribution of power between industry and audiences. Consequently, Vivian Sobchack and numerous of other critics of the ritual model emphasize the operation of ideology in a genre system.[40] Ideological approaches therefore underscore the power of media industries to create messages that support dominant ideologies. Importantly, however, writing from a cultural studies perspective, genre is not just another system to impose a false consciousness on audiences. We cannot readily assume that a quiz show will position spectators so that they automatically succumb to its ideology. However, we must remember that ideological approaches to genre supply an important critique of the limitations of the ritual model. Cultural studies shows that ritual and ideological models of communication can be combined to some extent within a larger analytical framework that complicates the institution-text-audience relationship. To understand the operation of power in relation to genre, we have to go beyond commonplace statements calling for the analysis of power relations in a genre such as Jason Mittell's claim that "linking genre distinctions to other systems of difference can point to the workings of cultural power."[41] Again, making a connection between genre and power is not a novel idea. Instead, we need to investigate how power is exerted in specific terms in the production of genre texts.

Folklore scholar Beverly Stoeltje proposes a model for the study of ritual that instead of marginalizing the issue of ideology, emphasizes on the interconnection of power and ritual.[42] In her analysis of American rodeo, Stoeltje argues that power in ritual has three interdependent sources: form, production, and discourse. Although the form of ritual provides pleasure through repetition and recognition, discourse provides an interpretive framework for the event that frames its interpretation. The organization of production, however, in many ways is at the center of the exertion of power in rituals. It is the place where the actual performance of a ritual in all its aspects is put together. Stoeltje argues, "in this process power is circulated, claimed, displayed, and exercised, and finally, power enables the performance, which further enables the circulation of power."[43] For radio and television, the organization of production is of course rather complex. On one level, it involves the interaction of individual producers, production staff, and performers such as announcers, emcees, and hosts. On another level it also involves the larger scale interaction of producers with representatives of

sponsors and networks, and the oversight of broadcasting in general by regulatory bodies such as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) or the U.S. Department of Justice.

The production of a long-running radio program such as *Vox Pop* provides an interesting case for understanding how many factors influence the organization of production, leading to a divergence of outcomes over its sixteen-year history. Although Parks Johnson maintained ownership and, in general, control of *Vox Pop* throughout its history, programming decisions on the network level, and, in particular, the constant demands by sponsors to structure the program in a particular way, nonetheless heavily influenced him. The changing form of the program is frequently commented on in promotional literature for the show as well as in Johnson's internal notes. One promotional booklet takes particular pleasure in emphasizing *Vox Pop*'s unique and seemingly extrageneric status:

The question before the house . . .

Q.: Is it a Quiz Program?
A.: Well, it used to be, but isn't now. A lot of questions are asked, but no, it's not a Quiz Program. It isn't a matter of what the participants *know*, but rather of who they *are*, what they *do*.
Q.: Is it a program of opinion?
A.: Not exactly. Although the participants always have their full say.
Q.: Is it a man-in-the-street interview?
A.: No, you couldn't call it that. Although, in the long run, participants on the program have certainly been a cross-section of America, which is supposed to be the mark of man-in-the-street interviews.
Q.: Then what is it?
A.: Why, it's *Vox Pop*—and it's in a class by itself. . . .[44]

Similarly, the program director of *Vox Pop* describes the show as an audience participation program, a quiz program, and an interview program.[45] What can be observed in the history of *Vox Pop* are at least two shifts in the structure or form of the program. When NBC picked up *Vox Pop* as a regular network program in 1935, the Ruthrauff and Ryan advertising agency started to exert pressure on both NBC and Parks Johnson to modify their earlier strategy of asking questions of the audience in a very informal format. Johnson was asked to focus more on questions about general knowledge and trivia.[46] A second shift in the form of the program occurred in 1940 when *Vox Pop* began featuring military personnel in a more interview-oriented setup. Promotional materials for the program explained this shift primarily as a patriotic move on the part of Parks Johnson:

Figure 1.3. Vox Pop at a remote broadcast in Winner, South Dakota. *Courtesy University of Maryland/Broadcast Pioneers Library.*

> Parks Johnson felt that the American public should be mobilized
> at once for the preparedness crusade…From 1940, until the last
> shot of World War II was fired in 1945, *Vox Pop* dedicated itself
> to the war effort. For five years it rendered distinguished service,
> traveling the length and breadth of America to bring its millions
> of listeners glimpses into the lives of fellow Americans in Army
> and Navy stations, in hospitals, in war plants, in home front
> activities of every description.…When *Vox Pop* began to direct
> its inexhaustible energies toward the winning of the war, it
> ceased to be a quiz program. Its mark, however, had been left
> indelibly on the numerous quiz programs it had fathered. Now,
> *Vox Pop* was an interview program—its questions still good-
> humored, but pointed to a new purpose. That was to introduce
> the interviewees to the listeners—to tell who they were, what
> they were doing, what they thought.[47]

Although a review of *Vox Pop* programs over various periods indicates that
the amount of interviews and quiz questions was indeed balanced somewhat
differently in each period, the program does not go through the radical trans-
formations the previous quote implied. As Jason Loviglio points out, "the
network version of *Vox Pop* incorporated elements of interview, quiz, and
human interest shows." He continues his description of the development of
Vox Pop by observing that as early as 1937, the quiz format was de-empha-
sized and interviews once again moved to the foreground.[48] These shifting
traits of the program are also discussed in "What Is *Vox Pop*." In this docu-
ment, Parks Johnson outlines the central elements of the program and ulti-
mately argues for the malleability of the format rather than its fixity: "*Vox Pop*
[was] never STATIC. *Vox Pop* adapts itself to changing times and trends. Its
basic technique remains the same, but its applications are quite flexible."[49]
Implicitly, Johnson points to the instability of generic labeling and makes *Vox
Pop*'s fluctuating form and its unstable genre affiliation a key characteristic
and selling point for the program. In one of his notebooks from 1940,
Johnson also points out that he "felt the quiz fading…and began to put spot-
light on personalities."[50]

    The impending military conflict in 1940 was probably only one reason
for the switch in *Vox Pop*'s format. The "fading of the quiz" Johnson expected
might also be rooted in the FCC's increasing scrutiny and criticism of several
"give-away shows," which were accused of constituting illegal lotteries.[51]
Among these giveaway shows was *Pot of Gold*, a program that featured phone
calls to randomly selected radio listeners and awarded cash prizes primarily
for answering the phone. Although no legal action ultimately was taken
against any show at that point and quiz shows continued to feature give-away
elements, we are beginning to see that a variety of forces often outside the
immediate control of its creator overdetermined the production of *Vox Pop*.

As a result, arguments over the appropriate balance of quiz and interview elements for the program continued to plague *Vox Pop*. In a memo on *Vox Pop*, Nate Tufts of the Ruthrauff and Ryan advertising agency argues, "the structure of the program is flexible."[52] Later he specifically acknowledges that he wants to change *Vox Pop*'s genre designation for strategic purposes:

> The important thing is that we want to disassociate the word "interview" from the *Vox Pop* program in line with our agreement that "interviews," as such, are of no interest. "Interview" programs never secure a large audience. Furthermore, *Vox Pop*, strictly speaking, is not an "interview" program. It is a program where we quiz the man-on-the-street.[53]

Further correspondence reveals that the sponsor of *Vox Pop* at that time, the Penn Tobacco Company, manufacturer of Kentucky Club Pipe tobacco, was eager to achieve better ratings than quiz programs competing tobacco manufacturers sponsored, namely Lucky Strike's *Information Please* and Chesterfields' *Professor Quiz*.[54] Similar disputes emerged among Parks Johnson, the Young and Rubicam advertising agency, and *Vox Pop*'s sponsor for 1946, Lipton Tea and Soups.[55]

Interestingly, both Johnson and Tufts argue that the form of *Vox Pop* is flexible to further their own goals. Tufts wants to develop the program similar to other quiz shows and would prefer to categorize it as a quiz show, which he finds most profitable for *Vox Pop* and preferable over categorizing the program as a interview program. On the other hand, Johnson wants to attract new advertisers and uses the flexibility of format as a sales argument for potential sponsors. Assumptions several people controlling different aspects of the production of *Vox Pop* made influenced both the form of the program and the discourses surrounding it substantially. Power is exerted in the debates regarding the genre affiliation and form of *Vox Pop*. Although economic considerations (the maximizing of profit) primarily motivated this exertion of power, it is also of significance on a cultural level because it influences the form and meaning of the program itself. As the previous sections have shown, decisions made in the organization of program production are often fed directly into public outlets such as fan magazines, trade publications, and publicity materials for a program, defining to a large degree the discursive framing of the program as well. The organization of production might be internally disputed, but it is nonetheless the center of power through which both the discourses about a program and the form of a program are at least partially controlled. Of course, many genre conventions preexist an individual program, and therefore the form of a quiz show cannot be determined exclusively in the process of production. The institutional power we can observe in the interplay of form, discourse, and production is nonetheless an important factor to consider in genre theory.

GENRE IN CONTEXT

Although film theory often treats its texts as clearly separate entities, partly because the conditions of production and exhibition encourage this assumption, this tradition also needs to be reassessed for the study of radio and television genres. Radio and television programs should not be isolated in discrete units. As the example of quiz shows demonstrates, each show works as a cumulative text characterized by a high degree of repetitiveness. At the same time, quiz shows are often organized in a sequence that has its own specific meanings. This does not limit analysis to a general notion of "flow."[56] Instead, we need to account for the significance of scheduling practices in radio and television. For example, at the beginning of its network run, *Vox Pop* was scheduled before *Major Bowes' Original Amateur Hour*, coupling two programs focused on "everyday people" that seemed connected by a common generic bond. Some quiz shows are specifically designed to be shown in sequence (for example the *Dating Game–Newlywed Game Hour*), others are arranged in a specific order due to the decisions of individual stations (the *Wheel of Fortune–Jeopardy!* coupling) and occasionally programs are arranged in a meaningful way through a combination of new material and reruns (USA's combination of its dating show, *The Big Date*, with reruns of *Love Connection*).

Additionally, a high degree of intertextuality characterizes television, which complicates the identification of clearly defined generic bodies that are organized synchronically only. Thus, the generic history of quiz shows is always present in reruns as well as in intertextual references to previous texts, complicating a linear genre history and making genre history an active factor in the creation of meaning in an individual show. For example, *Debt*, a now defunct quiz show that aired on the Lifetime cable channel, which quiz show veteran Wink Martindale hosted, mines the history of quiz shows to create a new product that incorporates elements from *Jeopardy!*, *Name that Tune*, *The $20,000 Pyramid*, and *The $64,000 Question* and is therefore in a very close relationship to the history of this genre. *The $64,000 Question* itself is inspired by its radio predecessor *Take It or Leave It*, and it also got its own spin-off in *The $64,000 Challenge*. In the fall 2000 season, NBC tried to capitalize on intertextual references to the quiz show scandals in its short-lived remake of *Twenty-One*, which talk show host Maury Povich emceed. Intertextual connections are thus a constant presence on television and in the quiz show genre in particular. Although their specific meanings can be ascertained only in individual case studies, they certainly complicate the identification of neatly organized genres even further.

As the Maury Povich example demonstrates, a convergence of the style and content of talk shows and quiz shows often can be observed also. *The Richard Bey Show*, a short-lived syndicated talk show, often used small, physical games to humiliate unpopular guests and exhibited strong affinities to

action-oriented quiz shows such as *Family Challenge*. Similarly, many talk shows dealing with personal relationships, especially *INPerson*, have recently adopted specific elements from quiz shows focused on dating to create suspense. They use brightly lit, semitransparent screens behind which the silhouette of a surprise guest is visible. This is a technique, *Bzzz!*, a dating show particularly preoccupied with displaying the physical properties of its contestants, recently made popular. In other words, the history of generic confusion and genre mixing that first defined quiz shows to a large degree, is still present in our current media environment and continues to undermine attempts at clear genre classification. The radical intertextuality of radio and television reminds us that the exclusive focus on individual texts in many genre studies is not adequate for radio and television.

Altman proposes that genre should be studied in a model that considers institutions, text, audience, and interpretive community. Meaning does not reside in any one of these sites exclusively, but is determined by the system in its totality.[57] He at least begins to relate genre to a larger cultural system in that he adds the interpretive community as an additional level of inquiry. Nevertheless, his system is curiously imbalanced in that it proposes the study of larger cultural context primarily in relation to the audience/decoding side, leaving the media industry isolated from outside forces. His model falls short of the propositions of many reception theorists and advocates of historical reception studies in that it does not fully grasp the omnipresence of "extratextual determinations" on the communication process.[58]

Tony Bennett's concept of reading formations argues that text and context should not be split but that both text and reception are structured by the specific properties of a reading formation. A genre is thus both a constitutive part of a reading formation and structured by the extratextual properties of a reading formation.[59] Bennett's concept of reading formations essentially seems to extend the range of Stoeltje's model of power into the realm of reception. The unity of text and reception in a reading formation is not unlike the close relationship of form, production, and discourse proposed in Stoeltje's model of ritual and power.[60] However, poststructuralism also informs Bennett's work because his model of reception introduces the possibility of contradiction within a complexly structured or overdetermined reading formation. He opens up the concept of reading formations to Valentin Vološinov's notion of multiaccentuality of discourse,[61] demonstrating that a moment of absolute ideological closure cannot occur, especially in the sphere of popular culture and the mass media.

CONCLUSION

Following the findings in this chapter, my analysis of quiz shows on radio and television will pay particular attention to the following issues:

1. A genre such as quiz shows cannot be categorized in a univocal, unambiguous manner. Instead, quiz shows participate in multiple genres, many of which are derived from everyday life. The multiple genre classifications that attempt to define quiz shows are constantly shifting and contingent.

2. Looking at the margins of a genre to understand how the cultural logic of a genre operates is particularly important. What are the dynamics of exclusion and inclusion in a genre? How do new or emerging forms enter the "law of genre"? At what moments does the law of genre fail? What ruptures in the genre can be exposed through close analysis?

3. In what ways do the institutions of production exercise their power to define the meaning and structure of a genre? The analysis of *Vox Pop* and other radio programs herein has shown that the act of defining a genre in itself can be seen as part of the constitution of a stable genre structure. Discourses about genre are part of the exertion of power in the production of quiz shows as a ritual form. The instability of the form of a genre in practice is reduced through the organization of production and its surrounding discourses.

4. How is a genre articulated to specific cultural formations? Drawing from the concerns of British cultural studies, this book is also particularly concerned about how dominant and subordinate cultural positions can be expressed within the confines of a highly formulaic genre such as quiz shows. Analyzing radio and television texts in regard to the relationship of the apertures and closures they offer for the production of meaning seems most productive from a historical perspective. By virtue of being located in genres and reading formations, popular texts offer varying possibilities for the formation of historically specific popular reading practices. These possibilities can then be related to social and cultural formations in general, so that the specific involvement of a genre or a text in cultural processes becomes clear.