
Intention in the Invention of Genres
(On Freadman on Chambers and Cavell)

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My decision to discuss some of the questions raised by Freadman¹ brings questions of its own. Questions of how best to secure this commentary as a response to a discussion which is a response, etc. And concomitant concerns about the *personalizing* of this piece, of finding a sounding device, a (programmatic) speaking point. Such issues of articulation and address, of intention in the context of uptake, might be talked of in relation to invention, are readily framed in terms of rhetoric and can certainly be heard in terms of genre.

(1)

1 "Freadman" stands for Freadman's article, "The Invention of Genres," in the present issue. The interest of the synecdoche lies in its attribution of agency, whose figures will exercise us here. All references to Freadman are to this text.

Freadman gives the Shorter Oxford English dictionary's entry for *genre* as: "*a style or category of painting, novel, film, etc. characterised by a particular form or purpose*" (345). She usefully notes in this definition the "disjunction, 'form or purpose'" which, she asserts, "corresponds broadly to the assumptions underpinning the distinction between the poetic and the rhetorical" (345) postulates of genre.² I intend to talk briefly to the purposive component of this form/purpose disjunction: as a problematic point of convergence, it signals some ways in which figures of intention subtend the poetics/rhetoric binary and inform our construals of (subjects of) genre.

An intentional focus on disjunction is critical in Freadman's mapping tales of poetics and rhetoric onto a definition of genre (and vice versa). Without pretending to tidy the field of the discursive, however (without positing poetics and rhetoric as unproblematic correlates or determining a unified system of genres),³ we might focus on some parallel stories this definition of genre both enables and constrains.

"Style or category," "form or purpose:" Freadman rightly points to the disjunction, but we might equally recall the conjunctive force of *or*-articulation, after all, is the condition of disjunction's possibility. Albeit disjunctive, a functional assimilation occurs, a paradigmatic parity: "style or category," "form or purpose:" this is equally telling as part of the way in which we are left with "a single field of genres" (Freadman 345). However, as Freadman makes plain, part of this field's untidiness lies in its being internally rent, the subject of a markedly uneven levelling. In short, poetics has primed in the theorising of genre. This story involves the excision of poetics' correlate — and this repression of rhetoric, this forgetting or, at least, this "inclination" to forget involves me here, in that one of this story's threads is the figure of intention. My concern, then, is with this "relation" of the traditions of rhetoric and poetics⁴: *relation* in both its diegetic and differential aspects,⁵ the ways in which *narratives* of the two traditions might *have to do with each other*. Here, I intend to propose that one of these ways might be (via) the (human) figure of intention.

2 Other mappings of this form/purpose disjunction deployed in describing genre might include talk of historical/theoretical genres, concerns with regulative/constitutive rules and questions of tokens/types, for instance. Aside from articulating tensions within inductive and deductive moves, the interest of such analogies lies, of course, as much in their differences as in any similitudes.

3 Cf. Freadman (346). On a strategic readerly tendency to *tidy up* the textually disorderly, see Chambers 1998, 112.

4 This is what Freadman (344) identifies as "the interesting problem."

5 Where *differential* has to do with the relational, with *differentiae*'s denoting derivation from the same and from the other.

It is the work of intention which ensures rhetoric/poetics' *occasional* indivisibility: while theory may at times (like the present) find it operatively useful to distinguish a "history of acts and practices with their effects" from a "history of representations and interpretations of the world" (Freadman 346), their mutual entailment is evident in practice. Similarly, in relation to the kinds of rhetoric, discourse generally, in its talking from context and to the occasion, might be described as epideictic. However, it could equally be taken as forensic in its agonistics, deliberative in its concerns with engaged suasion, etc. Indeed, the *genera demonstrativum, deliberativum* and *judicale* and their temporal predicates, as with poetics and rhetoric — as, too, with form and purpose — are collapsible divisions, the folds, like the kinds of genres, being countless and the interest residing in determining their operative utility.

One such useful deployment of the poetics/rhetoric distinction would be to assert (with an eye to intention) rhetoric's primacy. If poetics can be characterized as concerned with the mimetic and rhetoric with commanding an audience or convincing a readership of something — the existence, say, of a new genre —, then a concern with uptake equally invests poetics' practice: how, otherwise, to ensure that a particular discourse be read in terms of *imitatio*? A turn to a mimetic account of genre could hardly afford an erasure of its rhetoric.

As Freadman observes, "[t]he rhetorical dimension of genres identified under a regime of poetic description cannot be denied, and the same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, for those identified under a rhetorical regime" (347). (Without wishing to talk of a metasytem of genre, we might construe the figure of intention as always already investing this distinction, both emerging from and informing the very process of the *identification* of genres.) *Mutatis mutandis*: it is perhaps in this movement of alteration and alternation that intention's trace might be inferred.

(2)

Talk of discursive intention invites mention of rhetoric; its suppression is equally worth attending to. In some sense, my — our — interest here is with what is at stake when talk turns to (or from) the purposive and the chiasmic coupling of the intentions of rhetoric with the rhetorics of intention.

Until recently, as mentioned, we have tended to relegate the role of rhetoric,⁶ more or less

6 Talk of roles quickly turns to talk of functions and instrumentalities — and stories of functions are *occasionally* premised on topics of intentionality.

Another approach to this tale of intention would be via talk of tools and technologies. *Inventio* involves intention on the one hand

subsuming it under versions of poetics. However, this tropical restriction points, in its elisions, to a site of suppressed anxiety about how to talk (of) intention (and its attendant construals of agency) in a context of discursive iterability. The way in which a reductive privileging of *elocutio* is consonant with structuralist moves to silence a certain “humanist” construal of the subject⁷ is rather telling in this respect. Chambers explicitly works these concerns in his *responsible*⁸ problematizing of the “death of the author” topos. As Freadman (1) notes, practices of subjectivity are a topic of his book. More than a local concern, however, I would contend that such considerations and rhetorical questions of genre critically presuppose each other. I hope to point, too, to the manner in which Cavell’s (1992) concern with the philosophical problematic of “other minds” is equally germane to talk of intention in the context of (theorising) genre.

(3)

Aside from their isocolonic aspect, invention and intention are related in other respects. Invention taken broadly is what Aristotle defines as rhetoric: in a suasive context (redundant, perhaps, in that to talk of an absolutely non-suasive context is to posit a place radically outside of genre), finding something to say with a view to swaying others is read as motivated, teleological talk. The *attributions* of motivation are what is at stake — the authorator’s⁹ concern with being read and heard rightly is a recognition of iterability and is the very stuff of rhetoric, of uptake. As Freadman (344, *passim*.) neatly signals, some speech act theory as rhetoric is germane to questions of genre — Austin’s issue with the securing of uptake and attendant perlocutionary panic is instructive in this respect.

and topological tools on the other — the role of the rhetoric manual is instructive in this respect. One issue with tools, however — an exit for this story, perhaps —, has to do not so much with a tool’s design as with its *détournement*.

7 For my purposes, *subject* and *agent*, *subjectivity* and *agency*, are used more or less synonymously.

8 For a useful reminder of the the work done by *spondere* and its derivations, see Chambers (1998, 118). It is precisely this drift that deserves tracing here: *spondere*, as it travels, connotes questions of responsivity, responsibility, a particular ethos in (the face of) alterity: a nonessentialist subject that matters and a problematic, processual configuring of intentionality.

9 A portmanteau might signal that, as with ethos, figures of intention emerge, albeit differently, with equal insistence in differing discursive regimes of the spoken and the written, the heard and the read.

For all its radical self-erasing, *How to do Things with Words* yet evinces a focus on the illocutionary (and its attendant first person singular indicative active speaking place). Although concern with the securing of uptake is expressed, and certain infelicities in this regard adduced, the focus on the illocutionary is at the expense of addressing (more problematic) perlocution (and its third person place). Briefly — and problematically, in that intention here seems posited as anteceding its ascription as discourse-effect — illocution reads as the domain of intention, and perlocution as that of uptake. Their indivisibility is of the order of the poetics/rhetoric (dis)junction, and it is precisely this entailment which allows Austin to annex to illocution portions of the perlocutionary as when he says “Admittedly, we can use ‘meaning’ also with reference to illocutionary force — ‘he meant it as an order’, &c.” (100). (All this is in line with prescriptive, programmatic versions of (disciplined) rhetoric, where rhetoric aligns itself with strategy rather than the tactical.)¹⁰

Interestingly, Freadman points to an analogous omission in the practice of Beebee’s postulate of genre as the “use-value” of a text. She notes that he “does not elaborate on the kind of thing uses might be, and hence avoids theorising the relationship between the text’s use of its features and the reader’s. In his readings of particular texts, however, the text’s uses of its features are paramount, and it would seem that the reader has no particular role except to note them” (354).

Let us say, then, that invention metonymically stands for rhetoric. The ends of rhetoric, as inscribed in its suasive program, are its meaning to say and the central concern that thereby emerges of (determining) uptake. (Uptake’s suppressed centrality here is to be inferred through speech act theory’s moves to position it on the periphery.) Issues of uptake circularly entail figures of intention: these considerations are critical to Chambers’ elaboration of an ethics of what we might call “responsivity.” This node of ethos, responsivity/ responsibility and a concern for the responsibly responsive reader (Chambers 1998, 118, *passim*.) or reading “at its most faithful” (Cavell 1992, 67, *passim*.) is critical to any account of rhetoric and central in considering the (rhetorical) role of the critic and (rhetorical) construals of subjectivity.

10 On strategy and tactics, see Certeau (1984).

Chambers and Cavell as assembled by Freadman might be read, if somewhat purposefully, as addressing the topos of intention and its coterminous concerns of uptake and subjectivity. Freadman notes some “suggestive points of convergence” between the books of Chambers and Cavell, one such point being the fact that both authors “describe the modes of action of their texts in terms which require acknowledgement of informing intentions and consequences or effects” (346). She later signals one exemplary deployment of such interventions in relation to tales of reader-response theory. Reader-response stories are haunted by, and are a haunting of, the spectre of (in)secure uptake and the vexed figure of purposivity which informs such attempts to *apprehend* the reader and attribute (degrees of) intentionality to texts — witness in this regard the proliferation of *reader* predicates.¹¹

11 Viz. the idealized reader, the virtual reader, the implied model reader, etc. This logic applies equally (problematically) to the figure of the author. Note, too, that talk of idealized readers works partially to obviate empirical ones, allowing reader-response theory (virtually) to neglect differing interpretive examples and thus accede to a high ground of prescription.

Such a comment, however, risks opposing speculative theory to close reading. In agreement with Freadman, I would maintain that Chambers (1998, ix, *passim*.) and Cavell (1992, 221, *passim*.) work hard to complicate this dichotomy, communicating therein continuities. It is in the work of empirical readings that we find instantiated uptake.

Deconstruction's pointing to iterability, discursive dissemination and the nonsaturable nature of contexts (briefly, Derridean grammarology) shows up the tensions inherent in phenomenological reader-oriented criticism in its positing (un)problematic authorial intention and a self-present reader who fills the gaps, performing the text and its epistemology. However, all talk of intention and subjectivity is not thereby elided, as intention need not be construed as purely an effect of a "present" discursivity. It is precisely in addressing the question of what types of intention, what configurations of subjectivity may usefully be talked of now that a rhetorical take on genre theorising finds its place. This is the space of Chambers's intervention regarding "'transitive' or functional (communicative) *uses* of language"¹² and of some of the implications of Cavell's speculation on the problematic of "other minds."¹³ Taking up Freadman, then, at cross purposes (if by *cross* we read chiasmic complementarity, and by *purpose*, motivated positionality), we might say that Chambers and Cavell enable subjectivity and intention to be read off one another, allowing for an obligated subject to emerge through a (coextensive) construal of subjection and alterity.¹⁴

(4)

Alterity is a locus of rhetorical investment and a focus for figures of intentionality. The persistence, for rhetoric, of the problematic of intention is evident in the figure of the audience (of the other). Briefly, from Aristotle to structuralist psychoanalysis a persistently negative configuring of the audience (masses/recipient/reader/analysand) can be heard and might be read as indicative of the insistence of this issue of intention, an ongoing return, albeit differently, of a particular, continually repressed. This construal of the audience is that of a (male) first person singular speaking subject, an autarchic orator with a masterful handle on *logos*, a grip on discourse. Derogatory descriptions, a pathologization of the public

12 That is, discourse (Chambers 1998, 116).

13 Worth noting in this regard is the way in which Miller ("Writing ...") identifies inductive/analogical inferencing as the processes articulating this question with the figure of *ethopoeia*.

14 "Reading off" (Freadman 356) and the inferential are critical in the attribution of intention and subjectivity. Critical, that is, from the perlocutionary perspective of sociality, of alterity, of uptake.

and its overdetermined gendering, may be the site of an instability, a (para)practical pointing to an anxiety about the securing of uptake.

A response to this anxiety (or another site of its emergence) is a tone sometimes employed in theorising rhetoric and genre, where description turns to prescription and talk to modals of *must* and *should*. Chambers identifies an instance of the anxiogenic conditions surrounding uptake when he characterises the problem of witnessing as “an epidemic of rhetorical anxiety: anxiety about being read, anxiety about reading” (79). In relation, too, to the double bind placed on readers, Chambers points out that it “also suggests that the anxiety of reading is a function, in the long run, of the essential paradox of culture, which is that human beings are its agents in a double sense: without our agency, as persons, there is no transmission or production of culture, yet culture works through us, as its agents, in ways we can neither fathom nor control, to produce a history that makes a mockery of all individual claims to the privilege of agency” (84).

The problematics of agency and (in)secure uptake, in turn, provide the conditions of possibility for a reading responsibility which exercises Chambers when he affirms the existence of “an ethics of criticism that forbids treating texts in cavalier or disrespectful fashion, as certain readers, for example, might take pleasure, or assert themselves, in “poaching” as Certeau puts it, on a text, appropriating it purely and simply for purposes of their own” (129). Nevertheless, it is precisely the prospect of the “irresponsible critic” whose “alterior” motives result in uptake’s occurring otherwise (than intended) and differently — a change, perhaps, in the function of a text (cf. Lotman in Freadman 352) — that engages Chambers here and rightly motivates this type of talk.

(5)

Herein, perhaps, lies part of the appeal of gaming figures in theorising genre, intention and subjectivity — the gaming topos affords the promise of a delimiting of agency. Circumscribable contexts and knowable rules are a fairly common feature of ludic/agonistic analogies — talk of a language game, for instance, is premised on its determinable discreteness and proper, particular protocolarity — rhetoric, too, as strategic discipline depends on circumscribable contexts and delimitable discursivity. Identifiable instructions (where an instruction is “. . . precisely an indication of what it is appropriate to do in a specific pragmatic context,” Lyotard and Thebaud 1985, 55), particular protocols and knowable rules, in turn, help to construe

and constrain (to define) a gaming subject and delimit the range of intentional moves available (for attribution) to such an agency.

One such application of a gaming figure in relation to genre and construals of subjectivity is in Freadman when she finds in Cavell material “suggest[ing] an account of intention in terms of genre” (358). She illustrates this strategically: “I might, say, have the intentions of a chess-player when I know how to play chess and am presently engaged in doing so, but not otherwise” (358). Freadman then points to an apparent contradiction in Cavell, finding it odd that elsewhere he “should draw a distinction precisely between ‘genre’ and ‘intention’” (358).

A comment, then, *en passant* regarding this purported contradiction and the chess analogy. Mention of a hermeneutic circle in positing intention and genre (358) is most apposite, as, in the same way that a question might at best receive the answer it deserves, so too interpretive moves presuppose their criteria even as they infer these last from their object-text. The issue here is one of hermeneutic functions, the “use-value” of the gaming figure and its extensivity — a question, maybe, of degrees of (in)determinability.

This strategic application of the chess analogy in Freadman has the viewers as participant subjects in the material production of the game, whereas Cavell’s problematic of the figure of directorial intention (Cavell 1992, 95) is a question of attribution (of inferral of intention) operating at another remove. The participatory role of the film viewer thus works otherwise and differently. The appeal of — to — the chess analogy operates almost ethopoetically, deploying an authoritative first person singular voice to illustrate a given subject’s genre-bound intentionality. The interpretive double bind (cf. Chambers 1998, 84) of the reader, however, is proleptically precluded in a sleight of readerly transparency: an account of intention as entirely a “function of the purposes of any given genre and the means available to achieve them” (358) is thus made all the easier by a conflating of “im-mediate” participant subject and reader — dispute as to the generic location(s) of participant agents is thus foreclosed. This first person singular functions metonymically — isomorphic identity of reader and participant¹⁵ effects a rhetorical reduction of the (contingent, processual) discursive subject to gaming agent with a coterminous restriction of figures of intentionality.

15 And me, as the reader turned writer’s reader in this chain of discursivity. The force of this first person assertion (“I might, say, have the intentions of a chess-player...”), then, is not unlike that of Turing’s affirmation (quoted in Miller, C., *op. cit.*) that “[i]t is usual to have the polite convention that everyone thinks” — this *everyone* here, presumably, is you, is me, is a concern with rational discourse, uptake and (procedures of, processual) subjectivity.

The same sort of claim in the third person, though, quickly points to our hermeneutic circularity: “one might, say, have the intentions of a chess-player when one knows how to play chess and is presently engaged in doing so, but not otherwise.” The third person here, in its pronominal generality,¹⁶ also connotes, if somewhat quietly, a concern about the other, about the posit(ion)ing of audience and perlocution — and the prospect of “alterior” motives (t)herein. Again, then, this circularity: on the one hand, we might have a subject whose intention is fully a function of the purposes of any given genre (358). Here, from the place of reception, a point of descriptive uptake, the reader identifies a “chess game” genre and effects an *a posteriori* attribution of intention(s) to the subject. The initial generic determination, then, entirely governs predication(s) of the subject and any inferring of intentionality. Gaming analogies are most expedient in this regard, offering a figure with a (more or less) fixed — a prescribed¹⁷ — identity and particular material supports (chess board and pieces, etc.) — such, however, is not necessarily the case in other, less evidently game-like discursive genres.

On the other hand, we might posit a subject, an other mind, constrained and enabled by an “im-mediate” generic context, but at the same time with degrees of intention which need not necessarily be construed as purely an effect of a “present” discursivity. In the course of playing a chess game (and knowing its rules),¹⁸ could not “one/I” conceivably have the (tactical, occasional) intentions of a draughts player at some particular point (or even those of a player of a less generically germane game)? And could not this intention (its inferral) equally be the work of a certain metaphoricity, in that an intention emergent in the course of playing chess might, in a technical transference, be translated to another “game”? A subject’s intentions (their attribution) might equally be read as emergent from generic places other than

16 What a representative *one* does illustrates assimilation’s pre- and pro-scriptivity.

17 Cf. what Freedman identifies as the immobilizing tendency of a narrowly realist take on genre. The rules — the regulations — and conventions of chess are well established and not readily contested. (Moreover, there are recognized institutional instances in place to preside over potential disputes.) The nomological drive to delimit contexts is evident not only in rhetoric, some genre and speech act theory’s deployment of gaming figures, but equally in their recourse to juridical analogies. (It is precisely prescription and the jurisdictionary which form part of the domain of forensic oratory.)

18 This (prior) knowledge of the rules is not in question.

those in question.¹⁹ Tradition most certainly informs invention and convention, intention but these needn't be construed as an exclusively determinant governing force.

¹⁹ In question, in that these loci are always already multiple and subject to dispute.

Here we might talk of a somewhat enabled agency, a (constrainedly) autonomous subject within a regime of heteronomy. In the same way that the structure of iteration problematizes, but in important ways does not erase, a (responsible, operative) positing of (contingently emerging) intentionality,²⁰ so too, then, might talk occur of “a distinction between ‘genre’ and ‘intention’” without its entailing a transcendent, self-present “individual mind” (Freadman, 358) or some such entity. Intention is most certainly a function of the purposes of any given genre and its means (358); these last, however, are subject to cooption and *détournement*.²¹ The distinction between “genre” and “intention” is maybe the space of the tactical, the locus of (some) intention(s) aligned with generic mixity — a type of gaming, if the analogy must persist, consisting of playing with, as much as by the rules.

In discursive contexts, then, it is the very law of genre, and not some transcendent self-present subject, which enables talk of the tactical and of the (contingent) intervention of intention. A temporary occupation of the place of the other, a purposive positioning, while predicated on an instance of intention, need not for all that entail an entirely self-present, transcendent mind. The topos of intention, then, is critical in theorising generic mixity, in that it is in part the positing of “alterior” motives which enables talk of the tactical or the emergence of cooptive activity. Which motives from which places, however, is the stuff of indeterminability — or the work of a critical containment, occurring *post hoc* and differently.²² Gaming analogies in this respect, in their predication on prescription and predictability, work to constrict the potential of the figure of intention and contain the construal of subjectivity.

(6)

This topos of the “irresponsible critic” is sutured to, and a (potential) function of unruly iterability, the option of cooption, of degrees of discursive autonomy. As mentioned, it is the prospect of disrespectful

20 The structure of iteration’s entailing that “the intention animating the utterance will never be through and through present to itself and to its content” (Derrida 1990, 18) in no way evacuates (operatively) positing this intention, quite the contrary. On the importance of this ethopoetical postulate to “communicative” discourse, see Miller.

21 Another version of this story might be the coopting of the tool, the instrument provisionally put to other(’s) ends.

22 Cf. Cavell (1994, 4): “New circumstances or clauses . . . are not limitable in advance of critical analysis.” The (necessary) intrication of the prospective and the retrospective is another way to approach the topos of intention and critical responsibility.

reading which exercises Chambers in his elaboration of an ethics of responsivity. This concern with (in)secure uptake on occasion results in the prescription of good intentions and directives for reading responsibly. One early site of this concern (in terms of discursive ethos) might be the place accorded the *vir bonus* in Quintilian oratory. Another might be the moralizing tone investing certain speech act theory with its cataloguing of bad faith, the pathological, procedural abuses and infelicities.

The anthropomorphic, we could further speculate, might be yet another site for this concern with intentionality. Having rehearsed the “death of the author” in theory and explained how the question asked of rhetoric ought to be not what it is, but what it does, Freadman mentions that “[w]e might ask, then, if Chambers’ position is an anthropomorphic transference of intentions from author to text,” to which she replies, “I think not” (355). But how might such a question matter, in that it appears to respond to, or at least not to escape, this very same logic of ontology? The issue perhaps has to do with the discomfort around talk of intention given its historical associations with essentialist subjectivities.²³ If maybe repressed here, however, the topos of the anthropomorphic returns in the guise of metaphoricity — hence the talk of texts as “endowed with desires and needs, with intentions and purposes, with tactics — means [...]” (Freadman 355) and of the authors/books’ — the conflation being happy here — “‘believing in’ ” textual features (346).

The theorising of rhetoric and genre could be characterized as concerned with contexts of communicability. Talk of the communicative entails, for all intents and purposes, talk of the anthropomorphic, talk of the human — and of ethopoetic subjectivity.²⁴ Invention in genre, then, has intention as its correlate — a postulate of ethos and coterminous intention subtends talk of the subject, rhetoric and genre.

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23 Witness in this respect the foregoing talk of poetics’ primacy in theorising genre.

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