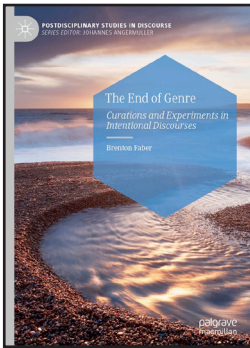


Book Review Editor

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The End of Genre: Curations and Experiments in Intentional Discourses

Brenton Faber, Author

Cham, Switzerland

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Reviewed by Nicole St. Germaine

Angelo State University

T*he End of Genre: Curations and Experiments in Intentional Discourse* challenges the notion that the humanities cannot, or should not, consider intentionality when interpreting discourse. In this text, Brenton Faber attempts “to address the relative inability of textual studies (and the humanities more broadly) to engage with and constructively participate in crucial problems of the twenty-first century” (p. 3). Because technical communication is a dynamic field in which the rules of genre are often superseded by the needs of the user, academics and program administrators will find much that is useful in this text for their teaching and for aligning their programs with industry trends. For example, this volume would be helpful for technical communication instructors to inform their teaching in introductory-level technical communication courses, many of which are genre-driven. Undergraduate students should understand that genres are not rigid systems, and *The End of Genre* will be useful for instructors seeking to introduce the concept of genre and the ways in which genres can be circumvented or adapted

to their students. Graduate instructors would do well to adopt this text for an instructional methods course for graduate students who will go on to teach, or for a graduate-level foundations in technical communication course.

As a linguist and an emergency medical technician (EMT), Faber is uniquely positioned to explore the differences between the ways in which the humanities and the STEM fields view and utilize intention. In Chapter Two, he details many of the differences in how intention is used in rhetorical and textual studies, linguistics and discourse studies, and the technological fields, making a well-reasoned case against ignoring the role of intention in the interpretation of discourse. In many real-world situations, such as “courtrooms, policy forums, and news accounts,” (p. 52) intention shapes the outcome in ways that have serious consequences. From these scenarios, it is not a big leap to envision how intention makes a profound impact in technical writing.

Faber would like to see a “more intentional humanities” in which the humanities are “more practical, engaged, and applied” (p. 61). This version of humanities would be more readily applicable to complex problems that affect society because it would have a greater range of tools to do so. The author does acknowledge that this applied, intentional humanities would not be appropriate for all academic fields. For example, in literary studies, the intentions of many authors cannot be known and therefore the text lies open to interpretation (p. 61). Instead, Faber is more concerned with “the potential for a type of humanities that is better aligned with and relevant to the projects of contemporary science” (p.62). This new way of thinking about humanities has the potential to open the door to a richer collaboration between humanities and the STEM fields, and could work to legitimize the humanities in a science-centered job market. These possibilities are tantalizing for technical communication administrators in an era in which the humanities have been devalued by society and in which many programs have lost students.

In Chapter Three of *The End of Genre*, Faber traces the troubled history intentionality has had in rhetoric. Intention has not always been viewed as extraneous to the humanities. Before the mid-twentieth century, he argues, intention was seen as an essential element of rhetoric. Scholars such as Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels asserted that “what a text means and what its author intends it to mean are identical” (qtd. p. 71). In 1946, the role of intention was marginalized as a consequence of a highly influential essay, “The Intentional Fallacy,” by W. K. Winsatt and Monroe Beardsley (p. 75). In this essay, the authors argued that “the design or intention of the author is neither available

nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art, and it seems to us that this is a principle which goes deep into some differences in the history of critical attitudes: (qtd, p. 75).

According to Faber, "the intentional fallacy" has since become a standard which rhetoricians employ to "dismiss serious investigation into textual and authorial intention as unknowable and uninteresting" (p. 3). After Winsatt and Beardsley's essay was published, "truth, (or empiricism) was exchanged for meaning, a slippery term that eventually and problematically became measured as significance" (p. 70). The devaluation of intentionality marginalized the voices of authors and the "average reader" and elevated the voices of the academics and the critics, which was a boon to literary studies but a loss to humanities and rhetoric as a whole (p. 71). Other critical works followed which argued that texts must be interpreted apart from their author's intentions in other fields. This line of thinking subsequently affected fields as disparate as linguistics, psychology, and philosophy (p. 78). Eventually, the dismissal of intention in academic circles led to the rise of genre theory in which "rhetoricians endorsed aggregations of form and action that used kairotic moments to influence persuasion while simultaneously obscuring intention" (p. 74).

More pressing for academics in the composition fields, the intentional fallacy has changed the ways in which we teach writing and the ways in which students learn to write academic essays. Instead of writing essays that can consider the topic in the light of the author's intention, students learn to write formulaic essays in which they have no firm ground for making claims about the text, and therefore they learn to hedge to avoid having their argument deconstructed by the "critic," or instructor in a process that Jasper Neel called "anti-writing" (p. 82). Students learn to "mimic an academic purpose and become an expert in articulating a false intention" (qtd. In Faber, p. 83). This is truly an uncomfortable thought for those of us engaged in the teaching of writing.

Faber utilizes the chapters following the discussion of the intentional fallacy to consider situations in which intention is an integral part of understanding the discourse. Chapter Four discusses nanotechnology and the dangers of eliding intention when introducing a new technology to society; Chapter Five considers the role of intentionality in medicine and how good intentions sometimes lead to poor outcomes, and Chapter Six covers the role in intention in data science.

In the final chapter before the postscript, Faber arrives at his solution for reintroducing intention into humanities: curation. Genres, according to Faber, "work best in relatively stable, conventional situ-

ations" (p. 200). These genres provide guidance when the exigence is known and the way forward is clear. The problems arise when the situation is atypical, or when there is a pressing need to violate the rules of the genre. Here Faber offers a comparison of genre to the protocols that EMTs follow: there are protocols for dealing with patients who are relatively stable and refuse hospitalization, but when the patient is in crisis and refuses to go to the hospital, there may be no clear answer provided by the protocols, and professional judgement and novel solutions come into play (p. 200). Curations provide a solution when genre is no longer useful. Curations are "strategic, temporary, and situation-specific aggregations of discourse, structure, and intention" (p. 204). While genres have been created before the exigence of the situation, curations are constructed temporarily in response to a specific context and situation. The resulting communication, or decision, may be unique to the situation rather than pre-defined (p. 205).

The concept of curations aligns with the ways in which technical communicators work. While pre-defined genres exist, such as the genre of instructions, we often create unique solutions tailored to the specific context. For example, the advent of the personal computer led to the creation of help files, which were a novel way to provide instruction for specific circumstances as needs arise. This innovative way of thinking about intention and exigence provides technical communication instructors and program administrators with a more flexible and realistic way of helping students create documents that truly fit the audience and the context for which the deliverable is written.

Author Information

Nicole St. Germaine is a Professor of English and Coordinator of Technical and Business Writing at Angelo State University. She teaches courses in beginning and advanced technical writing, web publishing, intercultural and international technical writing, medical rhetoric, and the rhetoric of disability. Her research interests include medical writing, intercultural technical writing, and accessibility. Dr. St. Germaine has published in a variety of academic journals as well as many edited collections, one of which went on to win the Society for Technical Communication Award of Excellence in the STC International Summit Competition in 2016.