



More than Just Remixing: Uptake and New Media Composition

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Abstract

This article turns to genre theory's recent explorations of uptake, broadly defined as the ways genres interact, as a resource for sketching a pedagogy of shuttling between genres. Using uptake, I intend to reconceptualize multimodal compositions as a means of participating in rhetorical ecologies that consist of transactions between genres instead of thinking of remixes as an end in themselves. In this article, I first define the concept of uptake in detail and discuss its use in rhetorical genre studies. After further illustrating uptake through an analysis of transactions between YouTube parodies and the 2005 German language film *Downfall*, I discuss existing scholarship in multimodal composition that draws on genre but not the idea of uptake in order to lay a foundation for a pedagogy that highlights the links, feedbacks, and rules that coordinate genres. My aim in the last section is to sketch possibilities for how teachers and students can deploy the concept of uptake as a rhetorical tool to strengthen their awareness of genre and multimodality. In doing this, I hope to reposition multimodal projects as *beginnings* or *midpoints* that lead to students' emersion into public discourse rather than culminations or end goals in themselves. Integrating studies of uptake into writing curricula in this way will help students to make sophisticated rhetorical decisions in the age of media convergence.

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Scholarship in multimodal composition and digital rhetoric has recently begun to engage work in genre theory. Up to this point, attention has centered on production within discrete digital forms (the blog, the wiki, the video or the podcast) and shifting notions of delivery or circulation (Lunsford, 2006; Porter, 2009). Scholars typically promote teaching practices that mix modes (image, text, and sound) while now paying increasing attention to how digital genres renew or remediate older ones (Basgier, 2011; Bolter & Grusin, 2000; Brooks et al., 2004). Meanwhile, genre theorists have begun to trace the historical evolution of genres like the blog in order to contextualize their contributions to public discourse (Bauman, 1999; Miller, 1994; Miller & Shepherd, 2004). While these approaches often gesture toward the importance of genre interaction, they have yet to emphasize fully the larger rules and conventions that govern the interplay *between* different digital genres. Social conventions indeed determine what we do within a single genre, but they also guide what we do between genres, and how certain genres such as the detective novel, the book review, the blurb, and the sequel work in conjunction with one another in a kind of conversation. Greater attention to these extra-generic conventions can provide more nuance to current work on digital composing, social networking, and media convergence in college writing classrooms at all levels of instruction. This article turns to genre theory's recent explorations of uptake, broadly defined as the ways genres interact, as a resource for sketching a pedagogy of shuttling between genres.

Using uptake, I intend to reconceptualize multimodal compositions as a means of participating in rhetorical ecologies that consist of transactions between genres instead of thinking of remixes as an end in themselves. Steven Fraiberg (2010) briefly proposed uptake as a useful tool for identifying "points of convergence" (p. 117) between different

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genres near the end of his article outlining a multilingual-multimodal framework for composition, a proposal I wish to develop and extend here. A fully elaborated exploration of uptake can generate many possibilities for helping teachers and students engage spaces that are permeated by what Fraiberg described as “genre ecologies” (p. 105), drawing on scholars such as Collin Brooke¹ (2009), Clay Spinuzzi (2003), and Kristie S. Fleckenstein (2009) in order to imagine classrooms as dynamic sites of interaction between laptops, blackboards, document cameras, notebooks, and face-to-face conversations. Additionally, Melinda Turnley (2011) has outlined a “mediological method” to interrogate our assumptions about “orality, video, film, photography, and other media” (p. 127), though this method tends to take for granted how these various media in turn break down into multiple genres. The medium of photography, for example, breaks down into genres such as artistic, amateur, photo-journalistic, portrait, landscape, funerary, and experimental (to name a few), and orality can manifest in genres ranging from the sermon to the folktale.

Articulating the overarching conventions that affect such genres’ transactions in material and digital environments can enrich our discussions of multimodality by pointing our attention to these differences. In this article, I first review the current discourse on multimodality and digital genres and then define the concept of uptake in detail, discussing its use in rhetorical genre studies. After further illustrating uptake through an analysis of transactions between YouTube parodies and Oliver Hirschbiegel’s 2005 German language film *Downfall*,² I lay the foundation for a pedagogy that highlights the links, feedbacks, and rules that coordinate genres. Users replace the original English subtitles with a hypothetical conversation about any number of issues in current events. An online column in *The Telegraph* (2009) estimated the number of these parodies to be in the hundreds. Readers may remember one such parody from the spring 2009 issue of *Kairos*, which satirized the status of digital rhetoric scholars in the academy: “Hitler exclaimed, ‘I thought expressivists were worse than death, but they make these digital people look like kindergarteners!!!’” (Theamishaugur, 2009). Though interesting and perhaps entertaining in their own right, my intention in analyzing parodies of *Downfall* is not necessarily to suggest teachers use this specific film when studying genre uptake. Rather, I intend to provide a vivid illustration of how uptake functions in a rhetorical sense, therefore encouraging teachers to adapt this concept for their own classroom practices, either explicitly during discussions or implicitly as a guide for designing assignment sequences.

My aim in the final section of this article is to outline possibilities for how teachers and students can deploy the concept of uptake as a rhetorical tool to strengthen their awareness of genre and multimodality. In doing this, I hope to reposition multimodal projects as *beginnings* or *midpoints* that lead to students’ emersion into public discourse rather than culminations or end goals in themselves. Integrating studies of uptake into writing curricula will help students to make sophisticated rhetorical decisions in the age of media convergence. Describing how writers and composers “take up” each other’s work across genres can make aspects of rhetorical invention and delivery more visible and open to analysis—aspects that currently escape the explanatory power of the remix paradigm.

Genre theorists have borrowed the term “uptake” from speech act theory, where it refers to the ways that illocutionary acts result in perlocutionary consequences. In other words, someone comments on the temperature in a room and that statement causes someone to turn on the air-conditioning. Anne Freadman, who introduced uptake to rhetorical genre studies, modified the concept to describe how genres interact with one another—how one genre evokes or responds to another within overlapping fields.³ Using tennis as a metaphor, Freadman (1994) defined individual genres as games that are governed by larger ceremonies, or “games that situate other games: they are rules for the setting of a game, for constituting participants as players in that game, for placing and timing it in relation with other places and times” (p. 46–47). A number of factors beyond each individual game (genre) influence how the ceremony (a genre system) develops: trophies, endorsements, media coverage, player rankings. Uptake refers to the impact that the individual

¹ Also drawing on genre theory at times, Brooke (2009) provided a somewhat persuasive critique of the tendency in composition and rhetorical studies to treat rhetorical situations as discrete, isolated occasions or single texts. And yet his alternative model (the ecosystem) and its accompanying redefinition of the five canons also largely treated genres of online writing in isolation from one another. Brooke’s use of genre theory laid in challenging the stability of authors and texts. He cited Bawarshi’s 2003 work *Genre and Invention of the Writer* but he did not reference Bawarshi’s later 2006 piece that explicitly discussed the notion of uptakes.

² I should note that the idea to analyze the uptake of *Downfall* owes to Professor Justin Hodgson’s (2010b) analysis of the parodies as remixes in the University of Texas-Austin’s online, multimedia journal *TheJUMP*. To reiterate my running point: though the remix metaphor does describe the method by which these parodies are made, it can only speculate an answer to Hodgson’s (2009) question, “How could I use Hitler and *Downfall* to express something of value, something of significance, something of importance?”

³ Bawarshi notes that Bakhtin (1986) has also observed the intertextuality of genres within a linguistic context, though his main argument is how “primary genres are altered and assume a special character when they enter into complex ones,” such as the novel, which are sites of dialogic convergence between many different voices and conventions (p. 62).

games and outside factors have on each other as well as the wider ceremony. Drawing on Freedman, [Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff \(2010\)](#) have defined uptakes as the “complex, often unconscious, transactions that mediate meanings and actions between genres” (p. 653). For genre theorists, genres do not exist in isolation from one another. They engage in constant conversation and have material affects on one another.

1. A review of the remix paradigm

Asking students to study uptake introduces a vital supplement to the current discourse on multimodality, which has focused largely on more inclusive definitions of composition (e.g., [Faigley, 1997](#); [Herrington et al., 2009](#); [Rice, 2006](#); [Selber, 2004](#); [Selfe, 2008, 2009](#); [Yancey, 2004](#)). This move has helped define the field, but it has led to a paradigm in which scholars privilege remixes or mash-ups over other models and thus define delivery and circulation in somewhat limited terms of distribution where predictions about audience expectations and rhetorical purpose determine the medium(s) in which students compose ([Yancey, 2009](#)). The idea of remixing ([Yancey, 2009](#)) has come to totalize the discourse surrounding these pedagogies,⁴ envisioning multimodality as “a means of invention and a source of creativity” that draws together various modes “from paper-and-crayon-renderings of various compositions—including music, art, gardens—to the pixilated class blog hosting verbal and visual discussion” (p. 7). Remix plays a central role in [Adam J. Banks’ \(2011\)](#) proposal of the DJ as a model for writing and civic discourse. As he argued, “Through the cut, break, sample, mix, remix, mixtape, and continual, crate-digging search through past, present, and future texts, the DJ maintains the groove that allows narrative, text, and history to continue while allowing for new voices, new arguments” (p. 29). Furthermore, in addition to guiding the selection and presentation of readings in [Catherine G. Latterell’s \(2009\)](#) textbook *Remix: Reading and Composing Culture*, the idea also served as the main theme of the 2010 Conference on College Composition and Communication. Although panels at the conference adopted the theme to discuss or “remix” topics ranging from social justice to interdisciplinary research, a close-reading of the session titles and individual papers shows few presentations on genre aside from its application to “remixes” of the genre of the five-paragraph essay.

Such new media scholarship tends to treat multimedia texts such as blogs (e.g., [Gurak et al., 2004](#); [Liew, 2010](#); [Tougaw, 2009](#)), wikis (e.g., [Barton, 2005](#); [Garza & Hern, 2005](#); [Hunter, 2011](#); [Lundin, 2008](#); [Ray & Graeff, 2008](#)), videos (e.g., [Dubisar & Palmeri, 2010](#)), and podcasts (e.g., [Jones, 2010](#); [Schwartz, 2009](#)) in isolation from one another. Even calls to define writing as “the network” ([Rice, 2006](#)) stress the idea that technologies connect *writers* within systems but not necessarily how systemic conventions and norms influence those writers as they negotiate their way through digital genres. [Rebecca Wilson Lundin \(2008\)](#) positioned wikis as an ideal platform for executing [Sirc’s \(2004\)](#) curriculum that asked students to “post a variety of multimedia items to a website before explaining their connections and juxtapositions” (p. 437) in a manner that forwarded the remix model. As a further example, [Leigh A. Jones \(2010\)](#) explored “how [podcasting] would work as a prelude to drafting rather than a presentation of. . . finished work” with the result being that her students “ultimately produced more authoritative, sophisticated writing, taking ownership over their academic voices and earning higher grades” (p. 76). These strategies situate a single digital genre as the center of pedagogical attention, and while they recognize writers as fluid, they inadvertently imply genres are fixed. In the remix model, a genre only acts on a writer when the writer chooses to compose within that genre.

Attention to media convergence ([Jenkins, 2006](#)) has been gravitating toward a conception of digital rhetoric and public discourse more in line with the idea of uptake. [Stephanie Vie \(2008\)](#) has asserted that “what is more important about social networking sites’ place in convergence culture is the ways they can encourage user participation” and help foster “a participatory culture” (p. 11). This call forms a digital imperative that encourages teachers to use social media in their classrooms to foster agency ([Alexander, 2008](#); [Ball, 2004](#); [Clark, 2010](#); [Maranto & Barton, 2010](#)). [Jonathan Alexander’s \(2008\)](#) introduction to a special issue of *Computers and Composition* on media convergence provided a

⁴ For further evidence of the remix model’s potency, readers should see [Anderson et al.’s \(2006\)](#) survey report of multimodality in 72 universities, in which “the primary instructional focus for such assignments in 2005 was the inclusion of visual images and photographs” (p. 78) in student compositions. The authors contrasted this with their own stated bias of wishing for more diversity in the types of sources, including “video, animation, [and] sound” (p. 79). While I agree the results showed “the definition and practices of multimodal composing may still be emerging,” (p. 79), I see this evolution of multimodal composition as dependent on pedagogical innovation as much as or more than institutional support and professional development. Teachers and students can do a great deal simply by rethinking their uses of wikis, social media sites, and freeware programs that do not require much professional training or institutional support.

case in point when he addressed the rapid circulation of information made possible by social networking. Alexander observed how “[p]ictures, sound clips, and video clips captured with cell phones are nearly instantaneously uploaded to blogs” and “IM chats are scooped up for dissemination on listservs and websites” (p. 2). Applying Jenkins’ concept of media convergence to civic discourse, Alexander speculated:

The rapid dissemination of such texts and their accompanying ideological visions through popular sites such as YouTube, where participants can share content quickly and spread a popular video text to thousands upon thousands of other “users,” means that we may be witnessing a changing public sphere—one in which participation in the creation and discussion of media convergent texts becomes an important way for people to understand, and critique, current political systems, situations, and trends. (p. 5)

Alexander’s observation echoed a view of digital publics that necessitated what [Sheridan, Ridolfo, & Michel \(2005\)](#) termed “multi-course portfolios” in which students integrate work in their major fields of study with composition courses, producing for instance “a flyer, a tri-fold brochure, and a website—a coordinated series of deliverables that are linked by a coherent visual approach. . . .that reflect[s] kairotic assessments of modes and media,” as well as reflective essays that discuss their rhetorical decisions (p. 831). This recent work on the intersections between civic discourse and new media has also stressed the need to educate students in the use of digital mediums for intervention, in particular enabling them to decide “What modes and media are best suited to the kinds of change [they] are trying to effect and to [their] intended audience and purpose” ([Sheridan et al., 2005](#), p. 818). But in order to grapple with the contingent nature of digital rhetoric and to deploy an appropriate mode or mix of media for a particular occasion ([Sheridan et al., 2005](#), p. 823), students must do more than become familiar with writing in multiple genres, even when courses scaffold these assignments. Assignment sequences of this nature have become commonplace in technical and professional writing, but their emphasis is still on how larger rhetorical constraints determine a writer’s decision to use one genre or blend of one genre over another.

Adding uptake to the repertoire of multimodal terminology pushes teachers and students to examine what such remixes say about the larger rules governing the relations between genres. No doubt this knowledge is already innate or implicit to some extent, but its theoretical discussion through uptake renders the process more conscious and thus available for critique and adjustment. It also encourages students to view the stages of circulation and reception as integral to their process, rather than something that occurs afterward. The uploading of a video or its presentation to a class does not have to signal the finale to a student’s work. Tracking comments from peers, finding other websites and Facebook pages on which to post the video, and emailing the video to other media artists or encouraging them to embed it on their blogs all qualify as events that continue to shape the meaning of the work and, therefore, invite that student’s active participation. These actions also situate the student to produce other texts on the same theme, taking up his or her own work through additional genres and recycling it through overlapping ecologies.

For instance, a student might produce a sophisticated film trailer that “remixes” the 1964 Disney film *Mary Poppins* by using different rhetorical moves such as “jump cut, digital anaphora, juxtaposition, and so on” ([Hodgson, 2010a](#), p. 7), and the student might also be able to clearly articulate how he or she “borrowed stylistically from one media realm. . . .and turned the film into just another element to be mixed” (p. 7). And while this rhetorical framework accounts for a significant portion of the student’s creativity and agency and shows how he or she performs the role of the producer-consumer, the notion of uptake adds a vital layer to our discussion of such student agency. The most familiar remix of this Disney film into a horror movie, for example, gains its strength because it realizes that *Mary Poppins* interacts within a larger system of Hollywood film culture as a family-oriented musical. The remix itself—the integration of clips with dark, brooding music along with a new voiceover—means little as a product or process without the makers’ knowledge of how film trailers (themselves arguably a genre) are supposed to take up and represent their respective films. Film trailers, in fact, perform crucial functions, helping audiences choose between hundreds of films released each year. Each trailer forecasts a given film’s genre as well as the cast and crew, and it often makes implied or even explicit references to other films, sometimes across genres (e.g., “From the director of *Casino Royale*. . .”). This is not to mention that trailers first appear in theaters before the showing of other films in similar genres. A trailer for any new film starring Daniel Craig will generally play before other serious action-dramas while it banks on and plays off all of his previous performances compared to other actors in the industry. Film critics even express surprise when an actor successfully transitions from one genre to another, and this often accompanies a certain rise in status.

Taking up trailers for contrary purposes both calls on awareness of and calls attention to these larger dynamics. By taking up *Mary Poppins* as a horror film rather than a musical, or taking up *Casino Royale* as a buddy comedy,

the makers of these parody trailers subvert the larger conventions that help determine how film trailers relate to every stakeholder in the culture including audiences, producers and directors, actors, and marketers. Parody trailers do not simply “remix” their targeted films; they comment on the entire film industry and its often unspoken ideologies. Addressing a deluge of parody trailers inspired by the 2005 film *Brokeback Mountain*, Virginia Heffernan (2008) reflected:

Taken together, the anthology of “Brokeback” spoofs made a larger point about American mythmaking and Hollywood clichés. It turns out you could play make-out music, show slow-mo clips of any two male actors interacting, throw up suggestive title cards (“a truth they couldn’t deny”) and—presto—any American blockbuster could be shown to chronicle love between two men. (para. 13)

Such subversive parodies utilize knowledge of how genres function through different semiotic channels and point our attention toward larger structures and rules that shape our rhetorical behavior. By viewing genres like comedies and romances repeatedly, we have been conditioned to equate certain types of music and certain types of cinematic techniques with certain emotions. Learning the uptake between these coexisting genres enables us to take control over them and use the relationships to produce meanings that either confirm or disrupt these systems. In order to produce effective parody trailers of films, students rely on more than their rhetorical knowledge of how different mediums connect with rhetorical decisions within a single rhetorical act. The production of meaning in these cases depends on students either having or developing sophisticated knowledge of how the different genres of film have created audience expectations that can be subverted.

2. Taking up Hitler: *Downfall* parodies

Studying uptake can lead to new insights about how new media genres interact. To illustrate this potential, I analyze the recent phenomenon of *Downfall* parodies that have flooded YouTube. Several parodies harnessed the excessive anger and emotion portrayed in the clip to critique socio-political issues, like *Hitler reacts to the sub-prime mortgage crisis* or *Hitler plans to heckle Barack Obama*, a video which ridiculed SC Representative Joe Wilson’s eruption of “You Lie” during a presidential speech to congress. The *Downfall* parodies show how uptake in media convergence differs radically from uptake in print genres in several ways. First, dynamic web environments enable texts and videos to spread virally, with exponential increases in audience over a period of hours. Whereas uptake between print genres a decade ago might have taken weeks or months to unfold, it can now occur almost instantaneously as users spread various texts through social media. Second, digital uptake vastly increases the number of authors and so blurs the boundaries between reader, viewer, and composer, turning them into producer-consumers (Hodgson, 2010a; Jenkins, 2006). Finally, my analysis of two particular parodies of *Downfall*, one made by a multilingual YouTube user in Britain and the other by a social media activist in Colorado Springs, uses uptake to give a concrete example of the feedbacks and interactions between many genres in global ecologies.

It is hard to image a film like *Downfall* not inviting parody and becoming part of a larger ecology. Each viewer of one or more *Downfall* parodies can quickly become tempted to produce his or her own parody on a suitable subject. A column in *The New York Times* (Boutin, 2010) even guided readers through the steps of using Windows Movie Maker to produce their own parodies, going so far as to point them in the direction of websites where they can find the “Original bunker scene.” New features offered by YouTube, such as the online editing tool YouTube Remixer, renders the process of producing these types of parodies even more user-friendly. YouTube Video Annotations also enables users to integrate a range of materials from the Internet into a single video, including embedded links to other videos (Thus someone could conceivably create and tie together several *Downfall* parodies to create a comical “choose your own adventure” version of the film). In turn, the YouTube parodies invite each other, just as they also invite response and commentary from journalists, bloggers, film critics, and academics.⁵ *Downfall* parodies now exist in which Hitler rants about *Downfall* parodies, and so on.

⁵ Although many potential candidates exist for the discussion of uptake of film through YouTube videos, no work has invited more parody than those of *Downfall*, for several possible reasons. Don DeLillo (1988) long ago noted the bizarre iconicity of Hitler and the Nazi party, and YouTube users seem to revel in the easy opportunities this film presents for turning such an ominous historical figure into a puppet for various issues ranging from significant (the killing of Osama bin Laden) to banal (lack of features on the iPad). Comedians since Charlie Chaplin have used the image of Hitler for ulterior motives.

Studying the uptake of *Downfall* raises numerous questions about the rules and conventions that govern relations between these genres. For starters, the uptake has broached debate about copyright law, artistic license, and advertising. In response to the parodies, Constantin Film, the producers of *Downfall*, has tried to issue several copyright infringement notices to remove them from YouTube. While YouTube moderators complied to remove the videos initially, YouTube posted a blog entry encouraging individual users to dispute the copyright claims under a Federal Statute that allows the use of copyrighted material for satire and parody. The YouTube site actually allows videos whose content is in dispute to remain viewable until a final decision. To add further complexity to the debate, the film's director himself has expressed approval of the parodies and considers them a kind of free publicity. As Hirschbiegel said, "I think it's only fair if now it's taken as part of our history, and used for whatever purposes people like" (Rosenblum, 2010). Hirschbiegel himself has watched more than 100 of these parodies. Indeed, it is ironic to consider that more people have perhaps watched *Downfall* parodies than the film itself, which enjoyed only limited release and until recently has been known as an artistically accomplished but obscure film. After nearly six months in U.S. theaters, it had barely grossed \$5 million ("[Downfall \(2004\)](#)"). Thus, the parodies themselves slide between different genres depending on one's perspective. We might see them as parodies, a director might see them as filling some of the roles of commercials, and still others might see them or use them as biting socio-political commentaries.

In another column in *The New York Times*, Virginia Heffernan (2008) considered more serious implications of the *Downfall* parodies in a manner that nicely points to the larger milieu that envelops remixes and mashups. Namely, the uptake of a drama through parody doubles back on the original source and reshapes its meaning. In the case of *Downfall*, a change occurs to a dark and provocative film that originally scandalized European critics, who "charged that it humanized Hitler beyond recognition and sapped the historical horror by . . . transforming [his] undoing into an ordinary human tragedy" (Heffernan, 2008). If the film made it possible for viewers to treat historical accounts of World War II—themselves a genre—as a tragedy, then the YouTube parodies have also altered the original film beyond recognition. As Heffernan reflected, "I find it virtually impossible now to watch the film with a straight face," and she mused that the parodies have re-made the film into "a closeted Hitler *comedy*." What we can take from Heffernan's piece is that no work of literature, film, or art can exist within the confines of its genre but is always taken up within a larger ceremony or system of genres and remade.

Certain uptakes of *Downfall* demonstrate a high degree of insight and acumen, conducting critiques of larger ideologies operant within ceremonials. Thus, they not only reshape the film itself, but also use [Hitler's image and historical infamy to shape political discourse](#). One parody, uploaded on October 9, 2009, responded to news of Obama's Nobel Peace Prize. The announcement generated a cacophony of praise and criticism across the world as everyone from world leaders and prominent columnists to the average blogger shared opinions about what the U.S. president had done to deserve the award. Joining the debate, the user anitabajwa composed a script in which Hitler's advisers informed him of Obama's Nobel Prize and proceeded to discuss how they were "trying to locate the place where he actually created peace" (anitabajwa, 2009) as their fingers trace points on a map. They went on to proclaim, "Sir, we searched all over on Earth and [are] now searching on Mars" (anitabajwa, 2009). Showing his rage, Hitler declared, "I did the same they [the U.S.] are doing to create world peace. . . I attacked more countries than they did. . . I attacked more countries and initiated wars to promote Peace. I killed more people just for peace" (anitabajwa, 2009). Responding to a rebuttal from one of his staff, he retorted that although Obama did not initiate the wars, "isn't he the president of the USA?" The rant concluded with impassioned orders to "Send large numbers of troops now and attack more countries so I win the Peace Prize" (anitabajwa, 2009).

Anitabajwa stands apart from many of the users who have composed *Downfall* parodies. According to her profile, she is a 26-year-old video director and sales executive from Birmingham, India, who now resides in Britain, and her YouTube channel currently has nearly 2,000 followers across Europe, Asia, and the U.S. Combined, her video uploads (representing several languages) have received more than 13 million views. Regardless of whether teachers and students agree with this parody's opinions, the video potently condemned the narrative of U.S. exceptionalism and interventionism by comparing it to Nazi Germany's own endeavors to bring about a "Third Reich" of prosperity contingent upon global warfare and genocide. Anitabajwa's uptake leveled accusations against the U.S. as well as the ideology supporting the Nobel's selection process, which were made all the more powerful by using a figure whose very name is anathema to the prize's mission. Moreover, it pointed to an even larger paradoxical truth in world peace and global human rights situations that repressive and genocidal dictators often couch their policies in the language of virtues and ethics.

The 47 pages of user comments indicate this particular parody has provoked a lengthy discussion on these topics, helping shape a counterpublic for those disagreeing with the Nobel Committee's decision. For instance, discussions among users in the comments section critique the nature of the Nobel prize itself, observing that Hitler was in fact nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1938, and received Time Magazine's "Man of the Year" in 1936. Thus this parody does more than simply reach for laughs, taking up both the film genre and the parody to promote global public discourse. Although this online discussion was not likely at all to have a direct impact on Obama's acceptance of the prize, it nonetheless provided an important venue of civic discourse that certainly has an indirect influence on such issues.

The notion of uptake also turns our attention to another important effect of this video, regarding how anitabajwa's parody itself is taken up by other social media activists. Thousands of miles away in Colorado Springs, Colorado, a man named Ed Billings saw her parody of *Downfall* and took it up to lampoon a local community leader running for city council. Billings' uptake of *Downfall*, which appears as one of three video responses to anitabajwa, criticizes now-city councilwoman [Lisa Czelatdko, who defriended him on Facebook in 2011](#) after he posted a video ridiculing a comment she made about a church providing free food to the homeless at a local park. As Czelatdko wrote on her Facebook page, "I know many homeless people are inflicted with mental illness or drug addiction. I was present when families began packing up their things and leaving the Wilbur fountain [at the park]—a fountain that many people in this community fought hard to support and turn on for families to enjoy each summer" ([PikesPeakOcean 2011](#)). Billings uploaded his first video critique of this comment on his YouTube channel PikesPeakOcean, derived from the mountain Pike's Peak that overlooks Colorado Springs, which currently has 931 subscribers and a total of 42,000 views. Created in 2007, Billings has used the channel to upload numerous videos bringing attention to social injustice in the city.

Following the first video, an animated short in which Czelatdko interrogates a man arrested for feeding the homeless, *The Gazette* posted a story that portrayed the city council candidate as the "target of unflattering blog, YouTube videos" ("[Czelatdko Target,](#)" 2011). The story identified two instances of "sexist" language in which Billings referred to Czelatdko as "hot." Billings' *Downfall* parody responded to the newspaper's blog, using the clip in which Hitler's advisers alert him to a developing situation. In Billings' version, Hitler's staff announced that "Lisa Czelatdko, Mayor Rivera, the Broadmoor and the developers are getting pissed and they asked us to call [Billings] out" for the sexist remarks. Billings' Hitler initially dismissed their concerns, muttering, "I read in the Gazette Blog that Pikes Peak Ocean [Billings] could get called out for his choice of words." The advisers nervously reported, "Pikes Peak Ocean and JCP1801 [another activist on YouTube] said that they will keep making those videos and that they have freedom of speech." Hitler's subsequent rant declared, "Lisa wants us to stop free speech before she gets on the Colorado Springs City Council!!! She will make The Independent [another local newspaper] never put a cartoon of her in their paper." The advisers offered to solicit support from other city council members, though Hitler rejected the notion—adding insults and inside jokes about Colorado Springs' local politics, namely one council member's involvement in a medical marijuana task force.

Billings' video response or uptake appears to share little with anitabajwa's regarding content, though her video clearly inspired his decision to use *Downfall* as a means of expressing political dissent. Anitabajwa's critique of Obama and American interventionism becomes mirrored at a local level, perhaps, in the critique of Czelatdko's narrative about the wholesome, hardworking people of Colorado Springs who deserve to enjoy a public fountain without the nuisance of homeless people. In this sense, the second video not only takes up the German-language film but also the first parody, recasting its emphasis on global politics to address civic issues in a particular community. Uptake allows students and teachers to analyze such multimodal compositions as more than remixes; appreciating the complex and unpredictable ways they circulate and interact through social media as part of a global-local chain of public discourse.

YouTube operates within a larger ceremonial of online discourse in which users communicate by posting comments, uploading video responses, subscribing to channels, liking or disliking certain videos, adding others to their own channels as "favorites," meanwhile tweeting or posting others to their own Facebook accounts. The convergent media involved in the transaction between these two users, one from Britain and the other from Colorado Springs, requires students and teachers to consider all of these different venues, in addition to the blogs, newspapers, and histories these users reference in their mixed media productions. The analysis of these two *Downfall* parodies alone requires navigation and negotiation of several online genres. Exploring the relationship between PikesPeakOcean and anitabajwa sent me to several different websites that each deploy different conventions, reach different audiences, and fulfill different rhetorical purposes. The result of my research is a deeper, richer understanding of how these parodies function within the transnational, extra-generic ceremonials of digital public discourse.

Although anitabajwa certainly has not influenced official decisions about the Nobel Prize at the global level, she has fueled debate and also inadvertently inspired social action in another area of the world that is likely to play a more prominent role in its own local ecology by shaping the Colorado Springs city council's stance toward its homeless population. It is also important to note that both users have continued to participate in the discourse their multimedia works have begun. They contribute to discussion threads accompanying their videos, and their active management of their YouTube channels shows an ongoing engagement of which these particular parodies are but a component.

The *Downfall* parodies phenomenon surely provokes a great deal of thought about increasingly commonplace topics in new media studies—authorship, intertextuality, fair use and copyright law, participatory culture, and of course remixing. Studying particular instances of uptake reveals the larger ceremony at work and helps us understand the significance of a little-known foreign film becoming a nearly household name, not to mention a potent avenue of political discourse, through unexpected developments. Likewise, it helps students and teachers see concrete examples of how media convergence facilitates a very different, fluid, and dynamic global discourse from that of prior generations.

3. Uptake and dissimilar genres

The idea of uptake is especially useful for pushing the current discourse on genre and multimodality toward an awareness of how dissimilar genres can still interact within ceremonials. Recent studies still tend to focus on interactions between similar genres, a fact that limits rhetorical possibilities. For example, [Basgier \(2011\)](#) drew on [Bawarshi \(2000, 2008\)](#) and [Rick Carpenter \(2009\)](#) in order to mobilize genre as a way of categorizing and valuing webtexts. Although Basgier attended to “generic relations,” he did so largely in regard to relations between texts within the same genre, their ability to construct identities in particular, and he relied on remediation, the process by which new genres “establish relations with antecedent genres,” including “the print-based scholarly article. . . as the newer genre remediates the older one” (p. 154).⁶ In Basgier’s model, genre helps us understand how webtexts still bear organizational traces of traditional scholarly articles even if they incorporate hypertext and other features, as well as to situate texts as “meaningful as they relate to other texts that we construct as generically similar through their own nodal structures” (p. 155).⁷

However, uptake enables more attention to how *dissimilar* genres are related and how they can interact to produce new rhetorical contexts. Genres can possess little in common regarding their features and yet still influence one another. As a brief example: novels and text messages (arguably a genre now) differ on fundamental levels in terms of their rhetorical constraints, and yet Finnish author Hannu Luntiala composed a novel via text messages that has since been published as a 332-page novel under the title *The Last Messages* (see [Associated Press, 2007](#)). This would be a case of the text message taking up the novel, which in turn has re-taken up the text message. Such novels both use and defy conventions and challenge our semiotic systems, even though they only ostensibly incorporate a single mode (text). It is through genre, not mode by itself, that we must approach these new forms.

A number of contemporary artists have experimented with visuals by taking up dissimilar genres. Influenced by the work of Wee Gee and Diane Arbus, photographer [Melanie Pullen \(2005\)](#) has taken up crime scene documents as fashion photography in a number of exhibitions compiled into the book *High Fashion Crime Scenes*. Most of the photographs in the collection are re-imaginings of actual crime scenes photographed by “crime-scene shutterburgs who worked for the New York police from 1914 to 1918,” gathered in [Luc Sante’s \(1992\)](#) book *Evidence* ([Smith, 2004](#)). The inspiration came to Pullen when she “envisioned the Weegee-esque photos in living color and with better clothes,” such as one original photograph of a man’s body half-hidden in a barrel, legs sticking out. As she said, “I immediately pictured it [as a female] with these pristine shoes” (as cited in [Smith, 2004](#)). Pullen’s work does not remix these crime scene photographs so much as it takes them up, dresses them up, redirects their original purpose to document evidence

⁶ Additionally, [Carpenter \(2009\)](#) has characterized genre as a way “to define texts by what they *do* and how they are *used* rather than by what they are” (p. 142). But by this, Carpenter referred only to how a single genre’s conventions, like the Facebook page or the podcast, determine form and regulate how users interact with one another. Carpenter’s use of genre never questioned what conventions or rules govern how texts and composers move between genres—as my earlier, brief example shows how the ceremonial of U.S. publishing discourages any significant hybridization of nonfiction and fiction.

⁷ [Basgier \(2011\)](#) did define uptake in a footnote, though its implications to his argument are quite small. Regarding genre and uptake in the main body of the article, he stated, “subsequent responses [to a given scholarly text] may take up the rhetorical conventions—and hence the actions—he uses to structure his argument” (p. 153). This interpretation of uptake, as merely one writer taking up another’s conventions, differs from [Bawarshi’s \(2008\)](#) use of the term, which opens it to a wider array of situations.

for a forensic audience, and re-delivers them to an audience of gallery goers. Pullen's photography in turn is taken up by Meredith Cole (2009) in the novel *Posed for Murder*, about a young and struggling female photographer whose big break is an exhibition of photographs that restage a number of women's violent murders. Crime scene photographs and artistic photography appear to share little in terms of genre, even less so with novels, and yet they catalyze one another.

Studying these works through the concept of uptake allows us to trace paths between dissimilar genres and provide students with a clear sense of how ideas can circulate across them within larger ecologies or ceremonials. Such studies provide endless and fascinating questions regarding the structures, conventions, ideologies, and rules presiding over these exchanges. Attending to the larger regulations not only points us to audience awareness but also to the material conditions that effect genre-crossing. Because Pullen never worked for the New York police like the original photographers did, she had to violate trespassing laws in order to gain access to many of the original crime scenes. During one particular shooting session, Pullen and her small crew were chased along the L.A. River by police helicopters (Smith, 2004). Such moments are more than simply entertaining stories from behind the scenes. They highlight that work in different genres, even within the same medium as in Pullen's case, also entails varying levels of power, privilege, and authority. Pullen might enjoy an elevated social status and more money compared to the crime scene photographs of the early twentieth century, but she must skillfully navigate obstacles and boundaries they crossed without a second thought.

This does not mean students will encounter the same issues or negotiate them the same way, but using these examples during class discussions encourages them to begin examining what rules and conventions *do* govern their movement between different genres, both opening and foreclosing rhetorical possibilities. While we may not need to worry about being chased by police, we often do worry about copyright infringement and legal action, which the makers of the *Downfall* parodies have encountered. Additionally, we need to develop greater awareness of how corporations are drawing evermore on transmedia⁸ and integrated marketing campaigns that permeate our lives as consumers. Such marketers have become adept at spreading product promotion across several platforms and genres. In some cases, as two of my students have written, savvy social media personalities such as Jenna Marbles have amassed huge audiences (and free merchandise) through YouTube and Facebook by using their personal lives to promote hygiene products and bathing suits. This perhaps troublesome blurring of boundaries between private, public, and commercial realms is worth educating students about.

4. Toward praxis: Taking up multimodal composition and media convergence

Informed by the theory of uptake, digital portfolios and assignment sequences will go even further in their analysis of how genres interact in the public sphere and highlight larger ideological paradigms that influence their use. Here I outline such a sequence that culminates in students taking up other genres in their production and execution of multimodal campaigns that synthesize semester-long research agendas. I illustrate this sequence by exploring how a single student's work on rape as a campus problem would evolve over the course of a semester. The sequence begins with a mix of conventional and multimodal assignments through which students gather their initial research materials and shape their arguments about a particular issue of interest to them. Although students would ultimately produce multi-genre portfolios similar to the multi-course sequences described by other scholars, the middle and final stages of the sequence I envision foregrounds uptake as a tool that widens the array of rhetorical possibilities. Regardless of whether uptake becomes a dominant theme in a composition course, the concept itself can guide the analysis of rhetorical ecologies as well as active participation within them.

As I propose, students initially choose a topic of social-political significance and compose a small number of assignments within different genres, including a conventional research paper. After this initial stage, subsequent assignments prompt students to share these compositions, whether they are videos or podcasts or posters, with members of online communities through postings on discussion boards, organizations' Facebook pages, blogs, and the Twitterverse. Because it is extremely difficult to predict the level of feedback they may solicit from the wider public spheres, this stage of the sequence should require students to respond to each other's work through these various forums. Students would monitor and write critical reflections about their own interactions between genres and how they have taken up

⁸ For more information on transmedia, see Henry Jenkins' (2010) discussion on using digital storytelling in his own teaching and research.

their own arguments and those of others. Additionally, they would need to monitor how their multi-genre works are taken up and re-visioned or repurposed by other individuals or groups inside and outside the class in manners that both align with and depart from the students' original rhetorical goals. This constitutes the middle stage of the assignment sequence.

In the final stages of this sequence, in-class discussions and activities need to focus explicitly on the idea of uptake. Although teachers would have ideally introduced this concept of uptake and ecologies early on along with other rhetorical terminology including conventional notions of the appeals, audience, and rhetorical situation, the second half of the semester is an opportune period to explicitly analyze and illustrate how uptake drives rhetorical systems. In my own classes, I have shown a number of short clips, such as the *Downfall* parodies, to frame discussions of these terms. Short assignments and in-class activities have also asked students to do light research on popular Internet memes, such as the philosoraptor macro series, to discuss how they take advantage of the spaces between genres in order to convey messages. We observed how the *Downfall* parodies take up genres of film in order to respond to different *topoi* in different public spheres, and we observed how the philosoraptor macro takes up film, iconic image, and the conditional statement “If p, then q” for similar rhetorical purposes. By understanding how rhetorical actors combine these dissimilar genres, students develop a more sophisticated awareness of how to manipulate generic conventions within larger ceremonials.

The analysis of uptake in these activities lays a foundation for later assignments in which students choose a particular genre and take it up in their own production through another genre or combination of genres to forward their research agenda. To illustrate this crucial stage in the sequence, I propose how a student might use uptake as a way of advancing a semester-long project on the issue of rape on college campuses. In past courses, a few of my students have written on this topic. One student in particular pursued this topic during an assignment that asked students to research and write on a local issue. In the sequence I envision, this student would work through the early stages by producing a conventional research-based paper in addition to uptakes of that paper through other forms such as podcasts, blogs, PSAs, or other types of videos. At this point, the student would then need to circulate these projects on the physical campus and or through social media while monitoring and reflecting on the responses they receive.

Later assignments would then ask the student to choose one or more genres to take up as a further incarnation of her work regarding rape on college campuses, including our own campus. She might decide to take up the Surgeon General's Warning, arguably a genre, in order to raise awareness of such an issue affecting campus life. Several good reasons exist for taking up this particular genre, given its recognizable visual design, its distinctive font (Universe 57 Condensed), and its stark black-and-white color scheme. The unmistakable, iconic quality of the Surgeon General's Warning tends to command attention, notably because audiences have come to expect important information about their health over the course of years of seeing and reading the warning. By taking up this textual-visual genre, the student would be tapping into a typified relationship with unique expectations, and she would be using them to mobilize her own agenda to raise awareness about an issue that no doubt pertains to the health and well-being of college students. The student could read several of these warnings for different products such as alcohol and tobacco, imitating their language as she re-purposes the genre to address her topic. Once she has composed a series of warnings, then she might post them as flyers on campus (another uptake), as well as on social media sites. Such visually stimulating arguments have a high likelihood of being embedded on multiple blogs—not to mention attracting the attention of local advocacy groups on campus, student organizations, and campus newspaper editors.

The only limit to this stage in the sequence involves the number of such explicit uptake assignments one can complete in a given semester. Two or three such projects seems reasonable, which would mean the student in this hypothetical case would need to feed her argument through another genre. Meanwhile, she would also need to remain aware and monitor to the best of her ability how the warnings themselves participate in the ecology of the college campus in which they are available for uptake by others. On the one hand, the student could become the subject of a story or column in the campus newspaper, or be asked to give talks for other classes or student organization meetings. On the other, individuals or organizations may decide to use the student's uptake of the Surgeon General's Warning to promote other important issues on campus such as gay rights, alcohol and drug abuse, campus security in general, or unfair tuition increases. Alternatively, the student herself might decide to produce other projects based on her prior uptake, including a photo-essay in which she captions pictures of herself posting the flyers, or even a mockumentary in which she pretends to be a reporter in search of the author of the mysterious warnings. Doing this, the student would be taking up yet another genre in support of her semester-long project. Thus the assignments come to comprise a complex rhetorical knot all revolving around her central agenda to research and promote awareness of rape on college campuses.

By the end of such a sequence, this student would have produced much more than a multi-genre or multi-course portfolio. She would have created a living rhetorical ecosystem that not only involves herself but also multiple genres and rhetorical actors on campus. Although she could summarize and reflect on her experiences in a final reflective paper, the cumulative accomplishment would extend beyond the sum of their parts and likely follow her beyond the course itself.

Understandably, some teachers may be skeptical of this example, given that soliciting a large audience, even online, is rare and difficult to achieve. For every YouTube video or blog post that goes viral, hundreds if not thousands more go unnoticed. Thus, this last and arguably most important component of the assignment sequence would work best if several instructors collaborated so students in several sections of a writing course could take up each other's projects and build a critical mass of interactive audience members. Structuring the sequence this way would help address the initial obstacle that students, like anyone, always face in generating a context for their work beyond a few peers, friends, and family members. Writing program administrators could coordinate these initiatives at the institutional level, organizing instructors into teaching pods and creating a central digital space in the form of a linked Facebook page, blog, YouTube channel, and Twitter account to facilitate interaction between all students enrolled in the course in a given semester.

Once created, this social media space would serve as an initial hub for students, quickly becoming rhizomatic as they take up each other's projects and work their way through assignment sequences. One student's uptake of a popular cartoon to produce a video on animal rights could be taken up by another student who has decided to write a series of blog posts on the issue of copyright law. By embedding the student's video on a blog, the second student would initiate a dialogue that could progress further should they decide to exchange tweets, become Facebook friends, or meet in-person to discuss each other's semester-long projects. These interactions would in turn provide material for their critical reflections, not to mention that it would generate ideas for other projects. In this sense, students would engage in meaningful transactions across genres, modes, and institutional boundaries within the broader ceremonial of the college campus governing their interactions. This tracing and tracking of the various uptakes of multimodal projects would serve as a valuable corollary to education in digital discourse.

Some teachers may react critically to my proposals here on the grounds that their institutions do not provide the support, funding, training, or opportunities for professional development necessary in order to enact this kind of pedagogy or curriculum. Indeed, [Anderson et al. \(2006\)](#) addressed these concerns when summarizing the survey responses they collected from universities throughout the U.S. on the teaching and institutional implementation of multimodality. Specifically, they identified a need among faculty not only for access to technology but also "help in conceptualizing multimodal assignments, assessing student responses, or securing the hardware needed to undertake such assignments" (p. 79). I agree that improvements in all of these areas will forward the agendas of multimodal composition. But rather than attempting to layout a comprehensive plan to address such material conditions, I will merely point out that I have accomplished every agenda proposed here in my own classes, including the production of YouTube videos, with technology purchased for less than five hundred dollars and a few hours of trial and error with programs like Windows Movie Maker. Even relatively inexpensive netbooks can make at least some elements of this curriculum a possibility, such as the creative use of blogs and wikis to take up other print and digital genres. Finally, I interpret the need for improvements in material conditions as an impetus rather than an impediment.

Endless possibilities exist for the use of these platforms to research, compose, and network. Ultimately, a single research paper or podcast can slowly evolve over the course of a semester into a complex organism as students take up their own work through various mediums and genres in addition to observing and reflecting on how their peers and members of the wider public sphere take up and respond to their projects. Questions that would remain at the forefront of the course as students compose each assignment would include how each new genre's format and conventions prompt them to convey and, therefore, re-vision their topics and their sources, what specifically about the local and global aspects of their previous projects they decide to change between genres and why, how the transition between genres affects their research methods, and what configurations of audience each new genre presents.

Most importantly, teachers should ask their students near the end of the semester how shuttling between genres has (or has not) helped them to create a rich, sophisticated, and living ecosystem around an area that interests them that exceeds the potential of composing in any single or small number of genres. These discussions of uptake are flexible

enough to apply to any writing course and would vary in depth and intensity depending on the level of instruction. In other words, how is the whole ceremonial they have uncovered greater than the sum of its individual genres? Uptake can become a way of linking projects in a first-year writing course through reflection pieces, or it can serve as a central topic of discussion in upper-level undergraduate courses in which students read essays by Bawarshi, Miller, Freadman, and other genre theorists in order to theorize about how uptake affects discourses within their major fields of study. Ideally, by the end of any writing course they have come to know more than simply how the conventions of various genres compare or how one remediates another. They have learned how various genres are positioned to use one another. Explicit integration of uptake into assignment sequences enables this kind of pedagogy.

The remix model has served composition studies well to this point, expanding the possibilities of writing instruction and strengthening our relevance to the myriad shifts occurring in cultures that affect students' ways of knowing and institutions' ways of valuing. No doubt that we should continue to explore new approaches to composing in digital environments and providing access to teachers and students in all types of institutions and from all social backgrounds. Part of exploring new approaches requires an openly interrogative attitude to basic assumptions and values. By interrogating the idea of remix through the alternative idea of uptake, I have endeavored to construct a pedagogy and theoretical foundation that does not think *against* multimodal composing as single projects but thinks *in addition to* such work.

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