Book Review

Reiff, M. & Bawarshi, A. (Eds.). (2016). Genre and the Performance of Publics. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press.

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Mary Jo Reiff and Anis Bawarshi's edited volume, *Genre and the Performance of Publics*, was released during a time when I felt that Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) had started to stabilize in terms of advances within the field. Decades of quality research into the different genres found in various socio-institutional settings (e.g., academic, professional and community contexts) had developed many useful and insightful concepts; RGS scholars had found their "normal science", to borrow Thomas Kuhn's phrase. One such "normalized" concept is Anne Freadman's notion of "uptake". As Reiff and Bawarshi explain, uptake has been used to examine the ways that genres shape rhetorical responses and how broader discursively-constructed ideas filter into our daily lives and re-appear in unique ways, such as by shaping our behaviour.

Extending Freadman's notion of uptake into the public sphere, Reiff and Bawarshi's edited collection brings together quality scholarship connecting RGS with public sphere scholarship, a focus that takes genre theory beyond the now-traditional focus of various socio-institutional genres. The volume sets out to turn RGS scholars' attention to public genres, create a dialogue between RGS and public sphere scholarship, and "enrich an understanding of public genres as dynamic performances" (p. 5). Moving into (the) public domain(s) arguably broadens the significance of genre theory to successfully demonstrate that "a focus on the multiplicity of publics and on marginalized or oppositional publics within public sphere scholarship can inform critical approaches to genre [and] RGS's focus on generic sites of articulation...can inform public sphere scholarship by focusing attention on the ideological discursive sites where multiple publics are enacted and potentially transformed" (p. 9). The collection does this through a series of four sections, each with three chapters grouped thematically: Part 1 considers the interdiscursivity of public genres and theorizes the dynamics of uptake; Part 2 looks at historical public genres; Part 3 examines intermediary public genres; and Part 4 examines digital public genres, a focus that brings to light the various ways that public engagement and public participation is mediated and expanding through digital media.

The most theoretically-driven of the four sections, Part 1 groups chapters written by Vijay Bhatia, Anis Bawarshi, and Dylan Dryer to look at the dynamics of uptake, agency, and the performances of public life. Bhatia's chapter extends his theory of interdiscursivity in professional settings into public discourses/contexts. Specifically, he elaborates his notion of interdiscursivity as an appropriation and management of discursive resources in genre theory. Bhatia argues that scholars require a multi-perspective framework to analyse interdiscursive performances in the public sphere. Using his "Three Space Model for Genre Analysis" (for which he provides a useful graphic [p. 27]), he intro-duces the example of media discourse – a BBC online news article, ""No Country for Single Women" – to provide an example of how to use this complex, multi-layered model for analysing interdiscursive public genres. Bhatia considers such online news sources as hybrid genres that combine news re-ports, editorials, letters to the editor, and other commentary with electronic, visual, and private dis-course in the public sphere. The "No Country for Single Women" article highlights the diverse tenden-cies of hybrid genres in public discourse. Using this example, Bhatia highlights that such an interdis-cursive moment demonstrates how marriage is perceived in the public, how the personal is projected as an example of social/cultural issues, and how identity is constructed interdiscursively. In doing so, he makes a convincing case for extending his notion of interdiscursivity into the public sphere.

Anis Bawarshi examines the US public discourse on Israel-Palestine, specifically the uptake of per-ceptions surrounding the ongoing issue. Seeing uptake as traditionally focused on general ac-tions/community where genres condition uptakes in defined activity systems, Bawarshi suggests that there are less clearly defined activity systems or meta-genres to condition uptake in the public sphere. He identifies some entrenched rhetorical patterns and the "normalized" uptakes within the US public Israel-Palestine discourse, including the challenges faced by RGS and public sphere schol-ars looking to intervene in uptakes by encouraging a more productive inquiry. Using two examples (the Mearsheimer and Walts 2006 report, *The Israeli Lobby*, and Jimmy Carter's 2006 book, *Palestine: Peace, Not Apartheid*), Bawarshi effectively demonstrates that such uptakes in the public sphere trump context and genre distinctions. He suggests that it is possible for scholars to intervene in such disrupted uptakes by brokering the knowledge exchange. Such brokering requires insight into how knowledge crosses intergeneric boundaries. An individual involved in such brokering would be an "uptake sponsor", a term Bawarshi uses to identify "individuals or institutions working to condition, secure, and distribute certain uptakes" (p. 56).

Of these three chapters, I found Dylan Dryer's paper the most interesting. In it, he attempts to clarify the multiple, competing definitions of uptake found in the literature by creating a "tactical research agenda", a task that sees him create what I would like to call an "uptake typology" that seeks

to clarify definitions of uptake and "not to isolate a correct definition of the term" (p. 62). The confusion in the literature is a result of the multiple interpretations of uptake developed in various empirical studies that have developed various aspects of the concept of uptake and various extensions of the concept. Attempting to develop more focused research methods, he introduces five key concepts — uptake affordances, uptake artifacts, uptake enactment, uptake capture, and uptake residues (for definitions, see p. 64-65) – and convincingly applies it to an example case study on citizen's writing in the public sphere of urban planning. Interestingly, there is a good amount of "uptake" of Dryer's typology throughout *Genre and the Performance of Publics* (e.g., Applegrath, Tachino, and Nish), something that highlights the usefulness of Dryer's intended clarity of defining each type of uptake.

Part 2 shifts focus from broader theoretical concerns to exploring specific historical public genres. These three papers, written by Linda Rose Russell, Mary Jo Reiff, and Risa Applegrath, explore the public genres and provide insight into how genre invention and evolution occur, as well as the ways various public genres embody public performances. In her chapter, Russell examines the English-language dictionary with the goal of further explaining genre invention in order to understand how stabilized structures are formed to do our "rhetorical thinking" for us, a focus that she sees as being under-explored. Exploring the rhetorical work of creating a genre, she develops two supporting arguments: one involves theoretical concepts and the other uses the example of the English-language dictionary's beginnings. Theoretically, she finds that the evolution of the genre of the dictionary, between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, saw the scope of intention develop from a personal, small-scale form to a holistic, universal form (p. 91). As the dictionary developed, dictionary makers "perceived themselves to be inventors, not just of individual dictionaries, but of the dictionary genre" (p. 95). That is, the dictionary makers attempted to build societal expectations of a dictionary by structuring rhetorical means commonly used in the genre.

Mary Jo Reiff's chapter continues the historical genre analysis and adopts a complimentary historical-materialist lens to consider the petition, a distinct public genre that she sees as functioning both rhetorically and historically. Addressing the research gap in RGS scholars' focus on bounded academic and/or organizational genres, Reiff convincingly claims that the public petition exemplifies how a consideration of the material conditions surrounding the uptake of a public genre "produces a more critical understanding of the exclusionary nature of publics and the complex and inter-agentive nature of public participation" (p. 114). Understood in this way, looking at the public genres as a performance suggests that individuals "perform genres in space, place, and time". Looking at historical petitions and the material conditions in which these petitions arose (e.g., nineteenth-century American, women-led anti-slavery petitions) and how the prevailing ideological and political systems

limited the role of (gendered) actors, who in turn found a way to express their (political) agency. Comparing historical and contemporary petitions, Reiff found that the historical-material conditions define contemporary petitions as a genre; however, there are some notable shifts in the use of digital technologies that affect the role of the public, government, and citizens, especially related to temporal and geographic boundaries.

Next, Risa Applegrath uses the genre of American vocational guides from the 1920s and 1930s to examine the ways that such advice was taken up by women. Applegrath argues that the body-focused advice provided in the 1920s-30s vocational guides, which advised women on posture, clothing, movements, etc., embodied behaviours surrounding the public anxiety of female bodies entering pro-fessional workplaces, something that they (i.e., women) were required control if they wanted to se-cure their future in the workplace. Applegrath sees "the guarded bodily dispositions of the profes-sional women as *uptake residues* – that is, as formidable social formations enacted and maintained in part through the uptake affordances of vocational guides" (p. 120-121). That women took-up the ad-vice provided in these vocational guides meant women embodied "diffuse public anxieties". My un-derstanding of Applegrath's work is that such uptake-focused analysis enables a researcher to un-derstand how the social structures a genre to mirror the ways that genre structures the social.

Focusing on contemporary examples of intermediary public genres, Part 3, which features papers by Amy Devitt, Graham Smart, and Tosh Tachino, asks us to consider the manner in which knowledge moves across (generic) boundaries. Devitt's chapter exemplifies how "genre analysis can reveal hid-den situations and open those situations to critique" (p. 140), thus providing another example of us-ing genres to uncover hidden aspects of the social situation in which a specific text is responding. She looks at two key "occluded genres" – jury instructions and juror interviews – from behind the scenes of a controversial 2013 murder trial where defendant George Zimmerman was found guilty. Devitt found hidden genres in the public sphere to be potentially dangerous because these occluded genres hide what goes on during such key public decisions as a verdict. She presents a two-fold argument to suggest that, methodologically, RGS can be used to access occluded genres by examining neutral evi-dence surrounding a genre. Theoretically, she argues that, informed by public-sphere scholarship, rhetorical genre analysis is able to explain the "difficulties genres have dealing with tangled technical, public, and personal spheres and consider how sets of intermediary genres might be necessary to unravel those tangled threads and preserve public participation" (p. 141).

Shifting focus to the ongoing public debate over human-caused climate change, Graham Smart ex-tends earlier research by looking at the discourse coalitions involved in the climate change debate,

the role that science blogs may be playing in the ongoing debate, and the public roles played by various social actors. Originally identifying two discourse coalitions (the advocates and the skeptics), he adds a third coalition, the "Eco-optimists" (i.e., individuals (unknowingly) share the view that human activities have had a significant impact on the planet's climate and we need to develop a progressive manner to re-balance the Earth's climate), in this chapter. Smart suggests that these three discourse coalitions are incommensurate and are locked in an ongoing struggle to achieve discursive hegemony. Turning his focus onto the role of science blogs in the climate change debate, Smart identifies six ways that scientists use their blogs to communicate their research, such as, for example, engaging with the public about one's discipline or trying to influence various "opinion leaders" (e.g., journalists). The blogs themselves, he argues, are speaking as "expert" scientists and serve to fill the public deficit of knowledge whereby each camp adopts a top-down model of "filling" the gap in public knowledge of science related to climate change in their quest for discursive hegemony. Smart concludes on his own optimistic note with a study of one scientist's blog, glaciologist Bethan Davies, who uses her blog to overcome the incommensurability of the discourse coalitions by actively engaging with new ideas through her blog. Davies' standing outside the discursive hegemony of the top-down model requires her appealing to multiple audiences (e.g., the general public and undergraduate students) by actively engage in a dialogue with her readers through deliberative, interactive approaches that provide particular communicative affordances. Such communicative affordances involve her use of reader-interest surveys, audience analysis, and "a synergy within a genre set comprising the blog, the website in which the blog is embedded, Twitter YouTube and an Ask the Scientist feature" (p. 174). Through looking at Davies blog, Smart concludes that "climate scientists and other social actors possess sufficient agency to create a space for themselves in public discussions of climate change outside of narrow adversarial exchanges [between discourse coalitions]" (p. 174).

Tosh Tachino's chapter considers the cyclical nature of how research informed the Sophonow Inquiry and how the resulting report informs future research. The Sophonow Inquiry examined a 1983 case in which Thomas Sophonow was wrongfully convicted of the 1981 murder of a young Winnipeg woman. He spent four years in prison and was not acquitted of his conviction until 2000. Tachino takes a "network approach" to investigate the uptake of multiple (competing) intertextual threads and rhetorical expectations, a trend he sees as an intertextual network with diverse genres (e.g., academic, professional, public) crossing traditional boundaries. Persuasively, Tachino claims that the uptake of research in policy/legal contexts depends on two main factors: 1) expected uptake enactment may be influenced by the intertextual network, by which Tachino explains that adding a new text to a network is transformative as a potential influence on future uptakes, as in the Sophonow

Inquiry (p. 191); and 2) in both synchronic and diachronic contexts, rhetorical resistance to rhetorical expectations may serve a mediational capacity, such as in the case of previous public inquiries having stabilized the rhetorical expectations of the Sophonow Inquiry in terms of what evidence was gathered and how that evidence was used. Tachino sees that researchers have some agency in how their research is taken up within such discursive events in that they can "return the serve" with their own research responding to specific policy/legal genres.

Part 4 gathers papers by Monica Brown, Jaclyn Rea and Michelle Riedlinger, and Jennifer Nish, to explore digital public genres and examine the roles such genres play in mediating public engagement and in expanding public participation. Taking the web-based public health campaign by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to address obesity, Brown's focus is on the rhetorical work of digital genre systems in public discourse. In looking at the CDC's obesity campaign, she suggests that genre appropriation and "slacktivism" – an online-based phenomenon where an individual acts on "behalf of an issue or cause [and has] little to no impact on its advancement" (p. 203) – play key roles. Specifically, Brown claims that "the appropriation of features of an emerging digital system, the web-based public health campaign, lends private interest the authority to direct public engagement and social activism" (p. 215). Analysing rhetorical, discursive, visual, and formal features, she observes that the CDC.gov/obesity website uses multiple, interrelated genres to share information across pages in a manner that makes it easy for users to locate. She notes that "interactivity…features prominently in efforts to reshape the very meaning of social action in favour of private interests" (p. 210), which is a genre appropriation Brown suggests "derives its persuasive force from the digital genre system" (p. 210). She then focuses on "The Weight of the Nation" campaign, a US-government led, privately-sponsored initiative to raise awareness of health-related issues associated with obesity. That the ad campaign was privately-sponsored by HBO had a significant effect on the campaign in that the genre appropriation served to "redirect the mostly non-promotional aims of CDC.gov/obesity toward promotional ends" (p. 210). Such redirection promotes slacktivism as a legitimate strategy and redefines "media consumption as an expression of public engagement" (p. 216).

Looking at the reaction to the post-Fukushima risk of radiation, Jaclyn Rea and Michelle Riedlinger explore the digital genre of the YouTube Geiger-counter video and its role in challenging traditional risk communication strategies. To explore the significance of such "street science", Rea and Riedlinger seek to understand the exigence of these videos and the role such a genre plays in challenging public perceptions of the expertise of scientific knowledge. These Geiger-counter videos were made by individuals in various parts of the world affected by or concerned with the risk of radiation (Japan, west-coast North America, the Philippines, etc.). They were posted to YouTube and feature a

Geiger meter, a scientific tool used to measure radiation. Considering the discursive boundaries at play, Rea and Riedlinger suggest a focus on a discourse ecology – the "complex interactions of discourse interacting with other discourses" (p. 235) – to understand the ways that "official discourses and the participatory roles they afford are recognized, challenged, and transformed, then redistributed in and through emerging alternative genres" (p. 226). Regarding the discourse ecology in which the Geiger-counter video is situated, Rea and Riedlinger convincingly argue that genres that the "public producers operating in public domains do not completely reject official risk-communication discourses and related genres; instead, they adopt the features of scientific discourse in their own genres, a move that recognises and challenges the power of scientific discourses of expertise" (p. 223).

Another example of the "uptake" of Dryer's uptake typology, Jennifer Nish's paper considers digital genres to be publically enabled by affordances of digital media. As dialogue is central to research on the public, the recent increase in the use of digital media has meant an increase in the uptake affordance of digital genres, which in turn creates multiple and diffuse uptake enactments. Specifically, she focuses on the rhetorical function of "spreadable genres" – a term I believe Nish uses to refer to a genre that circulates content within social networks linking people through digital media – in shaping and coordinating publics around activist issues. Such spreadability occurs through the uptake of a digital genre. Nish's case study of the Pixel Project's digital activist campaign to "unite a public in order to end violence against women" (p. 246) provides a helpful example. The Pixel Project has a strong social media presence (LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube) that serve to connect genres that target various individuals with different goals in mind related to spreading information for women and men of all ages. Nish uses two spreadable genres – the helpline tweet and the "30 for 30" Father's Day campaign interviews – to show how the Pixel Project "attempts to construct a diverse public...and to organize and coordinate social actions that help their cause" (p. 247). These two examples show a "glimpse of the ways in which spreadable genres allow activists to use the affordances of digital platforms...to enact specific rhetorical strategies" (p.252-253). Nish concludes that the Pixel Project case study suggests that "spreadable genres and their uptakes offer ways for everyday social action to involve meaningful public engagement" (p. 254), a point that, for me, solidifies Reiff and Bawarshi's aim with the edited volume.

In my opinion, the biggest contribution of *Genre and the Performance of Publics* is the manner in which theories of publics, genre, and uptake are consolidated. Such consolidation does not necessarily mean a paradigm shift; however, it does indicate an ongoing interest in extending normalized concepts, such as uptake, into other domains. Overall, I feel that Reiff and Bawarshi's book offers a deep level of insight into the many ways that different theoretical resources can be applied to better

understand a genre's uptake. The authors of each chapter use a variety of concepts — for example, interdiscursivity (Bhatia), an uptake typology (Dryer), occluded genres (Devitt), discourse coalitions (Smart), discourse ecology (Rea and Riedlinger), and spreadable genres (Nish) — to highlight the ways that different public genres – dictionaries, petitions, vocational guides, jury deliberations, government-led public inquiries, and various digital genres – are taken up. In using these various concepts, each of the twelve chapters offers a unique contribution to what we know about a wide range of public genres under the umbrella of uptake, which left me wondering why the editors chose to leave such a central term out of the volume's title. That said, I believe that *Genre and the Performance of Publics* demonstrates the contribution that RGS scholars can add to public sphere scholarship. The book would be very useful reading for those interested in uptake and/or public genres. I could easily imagine effectively using *Genre and the Performance of Publics* for graduate seminars exploring the concept of uptake in and/or of public genres because of its breadth, the quality of each chapter, and the affordability of the book.