YouTube Video Parodies and the Video Ideograph

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Introduction

As the electronic revolution continues to alter the cultural landscape with more widespread access to the Internet and the accompanying mass participation in Internet culture, new rhetorically laden genres often arise in digital media, many times without catching the immediate attention of rhetoricians.[1] One digital media genre that has become increasingly popular in the past few years is the YouTube video parody.

Parodies have been with us for centuries, and even video parodies have arguably been around since the film *Mud and Sand* parodied *Blood and Sand* in 1922. Film scholar Wes Gehring argues that "parody has been a mainstream part of American film comedy since the beginning" (2). Scholars from a variety of disciplines have accordingly investigated parodies over the years, and some have even explored YouTube and YouTube video parodies in a fair amount of depth, such as Burgess and Green's cultural studies approach, Hilderbrand's intellectual property concerns from a film studies perspective, and Lim and Golan's investigation of social media activism through a journalism lens. Parody has also been explored through a rhetorical lens over the centuries since Aristotle; however, little rhetorical scholarship currently exists on YouTube video parodies. One article of note from the field of rhetoric and composition is Dubisar and Palmeri's pedagogically focused 2010 article on using political parody and remix in the classroom. Much of this YouTube scholarship discusses the participatory nature of YouTube and the political activism of YouTube users as they remix videos and create their own parodies.

However, certain video parodies posted to YouTube during the early 2010s caused me to consider another avenue of rhetorical investigation and analysis of this popular entertainment form. Several of these parodies do not fit the typical primary rhetorical purpose of a parody, which is usually to mock that which is being imitated. After investigation, I have found that many of these videos qualify as ideographs. Ideographs, better defined below, are basically texts "that are 'pregnant' with ideological commitment," to use Timothy Borchers's definition (203). In this article, I propose the label of video ideograph for video parodies that re-appropriate ideological elements of the original artifact to communicate a distinct rhetorical message via the medium of video. This new label would indicate that certain video parodies represent a fairly new brand of cultural commentary, one that creates new messages from popular videos without directly mocking or contradicting the messages of the originals. In essence, the video ideograph may serve as a sort of subgenre within the larger genre of parody.

First, I will establish an understanding of the concept of the ideograph and its history thus far. Next, I will examine the nature of these video parodies and how a video ideograph could be defined. Then, I will discuss the nature of YouTube and why it has become an ideal venue for this flourishing parodic subgenre. Finally, I will suggest some implications of the video ideograph for the cultural landscape and contemporary rhetorical theory. This exploration of the video ideograph will advance the definitions provided by McGee and Edwards and Winkler, and should further our current understanding of video parody within a participatory Internet culture.

Defining the Ideograph

Michael C. McGee created the ideograph concept. His scholarship was centered in the political sphere, and much of his work revolved around the concept of ideology and its implications for rhetoric. Widely considered his seminal work, his 1980 article, "The 'Ideograph': A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology," lays the foundation for the ideograph as a rhetorical device and bears some examination here.

McGee begins by discussing the problematic concept of "ideology" (1). Not agreeing totally with either the symbolist or materialist definitions, he concedes that "ideology" has plenty of "intellectual baggage," but asserts, "Human beings in collectivity behave and think differently than human beings in isolation" (2), and that we still need a system for investigating collective behaviors. Rather than using Kenneth Burke's philosophy of myth as a contrary paradigm to Marxist conceptions of ideology, McGee suggests that the philosophy of myth, or symbolism, should aid our understanding of ideology as a "supplemental description of political consciousness" (3). Also, instead of focusing on the exploitation involved with Marxist or materialist views on ideology, such as in Althusser's ideological state apparatuses, McGee proposes using symbolism as a method to explore how "ideology in practice is a political language" (5).

Ideology is not simply crafted through language but is inherent in language for McGee: "Further, the political language which manifests ideology seems characterized by slogans, a vocabulary of 'ideographs' easily mistaken for the technical terminology of political philosophy" (5). He then explores how certain phrases, or ideographs, used in political speech are ideological in nature and function as concrete terms to ground abstract ideological concepts that are defined differently by various cultures, his favorite example being "rule of law" (6-7). This multiplicity of meanings for certain ideographs agrees with Foucault's estimation that political power relations "are not univocal; they define innumerable points of confrontation" (174). As McGee puts it, "[I]n the United States, we claim a common belief in 'equality,' as do citizens of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; but 'equality' is not the same word in its meaning or its usage" (8). Ideographs do not inherently hold equal value or meaning for all people.

The term "ideograph" is more commonly used to describe characters in the Chinese language, and McGee justifies the borrowed usage by suggesting that "like Chinese symbols, [ideographs] signify and 'contain' a unique ideological commitment; further, they presumptuously suggest that each member of a community will see as a gestalt every complex nuance in them" (7). This, then, is the real difference between ideographs and other "God terms" or commonplaces; they are ideologically laden. Ideographs are "used to symbolize the line of argument the meanest sort of individual *would* pursue, if that individual had the dialectical skills of philosophers, as a defense of a personal stake in and commitment to the society" (7). Etymologically, the word is a portmanteau of the terms ideology and graph; the word's roots accordingly mean "a record of ideology." So, the ideograph by definition calls upon the discourse that has preceded it, according to Foucault's conception of "discourse" as the "never-said" and occasionally misunderstood accumulated knowledge on a given topic (27).

Phrases such as "liberty," "freedom," and "the rule of law" qualify as ideographs under McGee's definition. They hold different meanings for different people, yet in general they create positive feelings with most of the American public, hence their common usage in political speeches. However, because these phrases have such variety in definitions and represent abstract ideological values, they are often prime material for parody and satire, precisely because they are open to reinterpretation.

Seventeen years after McGee's original article, Janice. L Edwards and Carol K. Winkler investigated whether the ideograph was necessarily confined to verbal expressions. In their explanation of the visual ideograph, Edwards and Winkler "articulate a concept of *representative form* to more fully account for the rhetorical experience and function" (290, emphasis in original) of ideographs. The visual ideograph, they assert, is a type of ideograph that relies upon widely recognizable images, such as the famous photograph *Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima* taken by Joe Rosenthal, not exactly through metaphor but rather by re-appropriating the ideology of an iconic image through parody. *Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima* is in every sense an ideograph according to Edwards and Winkler. The leaders of the land promoted it as political discourse, it held intrinsic ideological values, and it symbolized different values for different people (289-91). They also "explore how the context of cultural parodies functions to express ideographic forms" (290). *Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima* represents such a high level of abstract ideologies that it has been parodied by dozens of political cartoonists and has taken on an endless variety of appropriations through parody, from commentaries on baseball to political discussions (see Fig. 1).
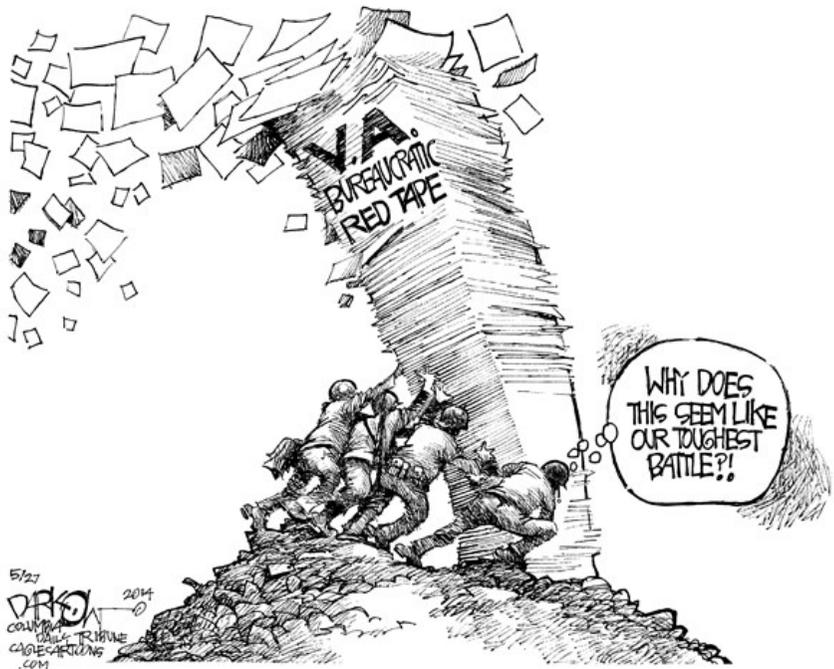
Fig. 1. This political cartoon repurposes the ideology of the famous Iwo Jima photograph to comment on the V.A. healthcare debate. Source: Columbia Daily Tribune, "VA Red Tape."

Relying on Michael Osborn's work on depictive rhetoric, Edwards and Winkler describe the icon of *Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima* as a "shared, communal symbol" that serves in the "depictive function of reaffirmation of identity" (292). Deanna Sellnow more simplistically defined an icon as "when something or someone is a symbol of the thing it represents" (262). Icons, then, have the potential to function much as ideographic phrases do. The main difference between visual ideographs and other icons, according to Edwards and Winkler,

is that, "Appropriation and recontextualization appear to be central features" of how visual ideographs function. Visual ideographs "garner their meaning through the description they provide to situations" (305). For instance, in the cartoon depicted in Fig. 1, the WWII-era ideologies of community and honoring veterans are re-appropriated to a more recent debate. Visual ideographs contain ideological features that can be repurposed by other rhetors.

This original definition of the ideograph created by McGee and supported by Edwards and Winkler and Condit and Lucaites, among other scholars, largely addresses political speech and rhetoric. More recently, Borchers helped to further define the ideograph and stated, "Ideographs suggest to their audience a vast set of meanings about what is valuable or appropriate within a culture" (203). Barry Brummett discussed the complicated history of the concept of ideology, from Marx's view of ideology "as a set of false ideas that hide reality" (63) that should be eliminated to Brummett's more contemporary view of ideology as "an interrelated system of meanings that is generated by the system of meanings linked to a system of artifacts that is a culture" (65). Sellnow also couched ideology in cultural rather than political terms: "An ideology is a cultural group's perceptions about the way things are and assumptions about the way they ought to be" (6). The ideograph's position in rhetoric is still somewhat unclear, then, since culture (even popular culture) can create and influence ideographs as easily as political discourse can. Cultural ideologies that do not carry weight in political contexts can nevertheless be culturally significant (e.g. a super hero movie can have immense cultural impact while maintaining political irrelevancy). Limiting ideographs to the political sphere therefore seems to me an unnecessary restriction. Indeed, many contemporary digital media artifacts are both cultural and political in nature; they will state a political view in a culturally ideological manner. If the original definition of the ideograph is expanded to include cultural ideologies and their accompanying artifacts, as Borchers, Brummett, and Sellnow seem to suggest, then multiple media forms begin to manifest as artifacts that are ideographic by nature.

The current modern American ideology by this expanded, culturally focused definition would include all sorts of entertainment-focused media found on the Internet. Due to several factors, such as free color and no printing costs, the Internet has already been home to many visual ideographs, as defined by Edwards and Winkler, for years. A Google Images search of "Iwo Jima cartoon" reveals as much. Moving along the multimedia chain, then, from McGee's political phrases and the cartoons of Edwards and Winkler, the next logical step is to ask the question: What does a video ideograph look and sound like?

Defining the Video Ideograph

Just as Edwards and Winkler consider *Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima* to be a visual ideograph because of its powerful symbolism that is transferable across multiple cartoon variations, so ideographs in the video medium can be expected to imitate a video with established cultural significance. To use a verbal example from pop culture, it would make no sense to suppose that the term Twihard, defined as devout fans of the popular *Twilight* book and movie series ("Twihard"), had any significance to any culture during the 1990s (before the books were even written), nor would the term be as catchy or popular if it did not call up the *Diehard* movies. Yet now it has become somewhat of a cultural ideograph, a term "which *stands for* something" (Edwards and Winkler 304, emphasis in original) and holds multiple meanings for different people. Ideographs, as stated above, rely upon prior discourse for their meaning, and can never be considered truly independent from all other media. Video ideographs are subject to this same rule: They by necessity will use already existing footage, choreography, music, imagery,

and/or dialogue from a video to call upon the prior artifact. A video based upon a still image alone, for instance, would not qualify because it would be too dissimilar to the original to function as an ideograph. Video ideographs therefore tend to take the form of video parodies, though again the video ideograph is a sub-category or subgenre of video parody; not all parodies are ideographs. To be a genuine ideograph, a video parody must rely upon an already existing video, and it must imitate that video precisely in at least some ways in order to invoke the themes and ideology of the original.

The video ideograph uses the original video to help establish its own ethos and/or pathos, which it then uses to express its own rhetorical purpose. Given that ethos and pathos and the other rhetorical appeals are themselves "pregnant" terms, much like ideographs, this article is no place to delve into the highly contextualized rhetorical scholarship that has worked at defining these concepts. For the purpose of investigating how these videos function ideographically, I will use the Greek terms interchangeably with the more abridged and simplistic terms "popularity," which is related to ethos, and "emotion," related to pathos, to show how certain cultural themes and ideologies are repurposed.

Before moving on to the case studies and attempting to further define the video ideograph, it is worth noting that the contemporary phenomenon that I analyze and define here departs from the status of icon that has accompanied previously defined ideographs. Few, if any, of the videos discussed herein have existed long enough to become cultural icons. Many have, however, achieved millions of views (and beyond) on YouTube. Number of views is not necessarily a guarantee of cultural significance, and indeed since I started writing this article some of these videos have waned in popularity. Nevertheless, chances are that many of them will serve as valuable artifacts for future cultural scholars of this decade, which in modern terms represents long ideological staying power. These videos are therefore worthy of being treated in the iconic role ascribed to other ideographs for the sake of attempting to better define the cultural landscape, even if their iconic nature might be questionable.

Analyzing YouTube Video Parodies as Video Ideographs

In their parody of Lady Gaga's *Bad Romance* music video, the group Soomo Learning borrows and re-appropriates the provocative images of Lady Gaga's video to elicit emotions surrounding the women's suffrage debate that occurred in the early 20th Century. For instance, when Lady Gaga is forced to drink vodka in the original video, this is imitated in the parody when the main singer (playing as Alice Paul) is force-fed medication to calm her down. Victor Corona has commented on Lady Gaga's hypermodern persona and the incorporation of unnatural and monster imagery in *Bad Romance* (735).

The disturbing imagery of the sex slave trade portrayed in *Bad Romance* is mimicked in *Bad Romance: Women's Suffrage* to create a similar appeal to emotions regarding the subjugation and humiliation of women. The actresses playing Alice Paul and her cohorts imitate the monster-like women à la Michael Jackson's *Thriller* in Lady Gaga's original video, thereby applying the modern cultural ideology of Lady Gaga that Corona describes to a historical topic (see Fig. 2).

In effect, the video appropriates Lady Gaga's themes in the opposite chronological direction from that of the cartoonists who have used the historical icon of the Iwo Jima photograph to comment on modern events. Because Alice Paul and other suffragists were considered by many as radical monsters in their time, the replicated imagery brings a century-old scenario back into cultural relevance. The women's rights messages intrinsic in Lady Gaga's music video have been effectively used as an ideograph by Soomo Learning, much in the same

Fig. 2. The suffragists in Soomo Learning's video mimic the dance moves in Lady Gaga's original, suggesting that many men at the time considered the suffragists to be disturbed. Source: YouTube, "Bad Romance: Women's Suffrage."

way that political cartoonists have borrowed and altered the themes of the Iwo Jima photograph for decades.

If videos of this nature are defined as video ideographs, they appear to be videos where the rhetor (i.e. the producer) capitalizes on an already widely recognized video, repurposes that video either through slight alteration or by filming an entirely new yet closely resembled video, and broadcasts this video to the public at large for a rhetorical purpose. The video ideograph contains concrete images and themes that invoke ill-defined ideological concepts (e.g. women's rights). Because cultural rhetoric on the Internet is not always political in nature, though it can touch on political themes, the rhetorical purpose would not be constrained to political goals only but might include cultural or countercultural directives.

For a video parody to qualify as a video ideograph, it must imitate elements of the original precisely. One video ideograph that exemplifies this principle is *The Star Wars that I Used to Know* (Teddie Films). The video follows the original, *Somebody that I Used to Know* by Gotye, almost exactly, with the few and obvious exceptions of the characters portrayed, the lyrics used, the Death Star motif, and the green screen background (see Fig. 3). By executing such a precise imitation, the video illustrates Edwards and Winkler's idea that "For an audience to respond to an image manifested in an array of forms, they must have a prior memory or recognition of the original" (305). The creators of video ideographs should be able to assume that most people have seen the original video, are familiar with it, or have at least heard the song being imitated. By then imitating the popular video, they are able to call upon the audience's "prior memory."

Forrest Wickman describes this video ideograph as "not technically a parody" ("Is This the Best Gotye Parody Yet?").

What The *Star Wars that I Used to Know* really does is commandeer the heartache of Gotye's megahit breakup anthem and make it about a different kind of heartbreak altogether—this time the sadness over the loss of the original *Star Wars* films.

Though Wickman falls short of defining this rhetorical device, he does recognize that this particular video achieves a different effect from other parodies. That is, unlike most parodies

which take aim at the original and mock it, ideographs are about communicating a separate message by re-appropriating material from the original.

As mentioned earlier, video parodies rely upon the video being parodied to use a previously established familiarity in order to strike at the audience through the original video's popular and emotional appeals. The link to the original's popularity is achieved inasmuch as the video being parodied has a reputation with many viewers. Al Yankovic, known as Weird Al, was one of the first musicians to take advantage of this source of ethos, as evidenced in his parody of Michael Jackson's music video *Bad*. Weird Al's version, *Fat,* imitates the music video *Bad* so precisely that the wide-spread popularity of *Bad* is claimed partially by the video *Fat*. As it happens, Jackson actually allowed Yankovic to film the music video parody at a set where a self-parody, *Badder,* was filmed. The easily recognized stage used in the video contributes to the effectiveness of *Fat* as parody. In essence, viewers can tell that Yankovic managed to capture the essence of Jackson's original music video, creating ethos for Weird Al by borrowing the limelight, as it were, from Michael Jackson.

Emotional appeals, or what might be considered pathos, can also be achieved, or borrowed, through the video ideograph. Marina Shifrin gained viral popularity within weeks through her video, *An Interpretive Dance for My Boss Set to Kanye West's Gone*, that she posted on YouTube in which she announces that she is quitting her job. As super-imposed text states the rhetorical purpose of the video, Shifrin dances in various areas of her workplace to the Kanye West song "Gone." The emotions inherent in the not-so-kind tribute to a workplace that she is leaving creates an appeal to labor ideology (in an almost Marxist tone, to call up Althusser and other early ideology scholars). Next Media Animation, the company with which Shifrin so elaborately parted ways, retorted with an ideographic parody, *An Interpretive Dance from Next Media Animation Set to Kanye West's Gone*, within three days. This video ideograph imitates Shifrin with different employees mimicking her dance moves. The message of the video counters, but does not directly contradict, Shifrin's original message by stating: "We're Hiring." Employee pride and company loyalty or a lack thereof are usually filled with emotions, and the pathos of this back and forth ideographic exchange is clear.

Although video ideographs rely heavily upon the videos that they parody for rhetorical effect, they carry their own rhetorical purposes, similar to the cartoons reviewed by Edwards and Winkler. Video ideographs thus follow the "compounding phenomenon" of parody that Gehring described: "Although parody has a focus genre or auteur under comic attack, it frequently is peppered with eclectic references to other structures or texts" (13). In *Fat,* Weird Al's purpose is mainly to entertain, but the rhetorical message of anti-obesity lies just beneath the surface of the façade of entertainment. In *Bad Romance: Women's Suffrage,* the rhetorical message is a bit more pronounced. Although the video's message shares similarities to Lady Gaga's original, the message offers a completely separate idea regarding honoring the women who fought for women's suffrage. In *The Star Wars that I Used to Know,* the creators are mostly having fun by pointing out characteristics of the debate between George Lucas and the fans of the Star Wars movies. Common among these video ideographs is their effort to present a rhetorical message with similarities to the original video but applied to a completely different subject.

These criteria can provide an initial point of departure for discussing the characteristics of this cultural phenomenon. Now that I have established a basic understanding of the video ideograph, its various forms and where it tends to reside and take effect deserve some examination.

YouTube: An Ideal Venue for the Video Ideograph

The rise of YouTube in recent years has been attributed to many things. Matthew Ricketson gave as one of the causes of its quick rise to popularity the fact that it is controlled largely by viewers rather than by mainstream media ("The Meaning of Popularity on YouTube"). In other words, the site is controlled by the audience rather than the rhetor. This gives rhetors outside of the mainstream incredible power to create videos that can still become popular. Burgess and Green also explore how YouTube serves as "a site of participatory culture" (vii). Because the video ideograph is inherently an imitation of a more popular original, YouTube has thus become the perfect medium to broadcast video ideographs.

A good example of this relationship is the unprecedented viral popularity of Korean pop-star Psy's *Gangnam Style*, which other culturists have watched closely (Gruger). As of this writing, the YouTube video has passed two billion views. Dozens of parodies have ridden on top of the popularity of *Gangnam Style*. Of note are Greg, Nathan, and Kendal Peterson's video

ideograph *Farmer Style (Gangnam Style Parody)*. *Farmer Style* manages to use its glaringly smaller budget compared to the original to its advantage in promoting a basic farm boys' message: Agriculture is important. As of this writing the video has just over 16 million views, a modest number compared to *Gangnam Style*, but still deserving of the title "popular."

One meme[2] of video ideographs that relies upon this aspect of YouTube is the series of "literal" videos circulating around the website. These videos specialize in repurposing the music and images of videos already posted to YouTube by altering the lyrics (in the case of music videos) or creating a narration to coincide with the video. YouTube provides the perfect venue for these video ideographs because one can watch the original and then immediately watch the parody afterward. Incidentally, some of these videos have links to the parodies on their sidebar. The first of these videos was A-ha's *Take On Me Official Music Video,* with its parody *Take On Me: Literal Video Version* (DustoMcNeato). These video ideographs resemble classic parody more closely by critiquing the artistry of the original videos. However, they seldom if ever contradict the rhetorical messages of the originals.

A similar meme-like video ideograph series is the so-called "Hitler finds out that…" video series on YouTube. They are taken from an excerpt of the movie *Downfall,* released in 2004, about the fall of Berlin to the Soviets at the end of World War II. The videos rely upon the original excerpt for both the audio and video. This level of imitation causes them to be among the most precise. The only difference between these video ideographs from the original is the use of English subtitles (which is obviously not as effective for German viewers). In the original, Hitler learns that his general Felix Steiner has failed to repel the Soviet invasion. He invites most of his staff out of the room so he can rant at his top generals. In the video ideographs, this serious topic is replaced in the subtitles with subjects ranging from Hitler getting kicked off of Xbox Live to Hillary Clinton failing to secure the Democratic Party's nomination in 2008. Because several of these YouTube videos are linked together, the benefit of using the website for them is apparent. A rhetor need simply decide upon a subject to make into a Hitler parody, change the subtitles, post the video, and watch the views accumulate.

Probably the most obvious reason for YouTube's popularity, and thus why video ideographs are able to rise out of obscurity through the website, is that it's free. It's free for the audience, a major incentive for them to look up their favorite video ideographs and share them. It's also not only free for rhetors, but there is an economic incentive for creating them. YouTube's current policy financially rewards video creators whose videos have a high volume of advertising traffic and/or views. Most of the artifacts investigated here have reached enough views that the creators have likely been rewarded a modest stipend. So, as is the case with so many artifacts of rhetoric, economics help drive video ideographs into the media market, and YouTube is a natural primary locus for their dissemination.

Other Venues

There is no inherent reason why video ideographs *need* to be posted to YouTube. They exist on many websites and other media outlets to be sure. YouTube simply offers an ideal venue for the nature of the relationship between originals and parodies. In fact, many are removed from YouTube because they are, by nature, parodying a previously existing video that someone owns the rights to. As could be expected, the website has received thousands of complaints from creators of original videos, not least among them the makers of *Downfall* (Rohrer).

Saturday Night Live (SNL) is a popular example of a television show that specializes in video ideographs, given that it has excelled in satire for decades. Some of the videos imitated

by SNL are not quite widely known enough for the parodies to function in the iconic role of video ideographs, but certainly there is an occasional segment on the show that merits the title. SNL's widely popular parodies of the U.S. presidential debates, which date back to the 1970s, are among the most celebrated video ideographs in existence. SNL imitates the original debates precisely in several ways. Phrases, exchanges, and tones are among the elements most likely to be parodied by SNL, though oftentimes the show uses hyperbole to communicate their own rhetorical message. Due to their political nature, these video ideographs also more closely match prior definitions of the ideograph.

Less widely known video ideographs appear on many television shows and movies that feature segments that parody other shows or movies. The key to recognizing them is to differentiate between a segment that might merely refer to or "make fun of" another show or movie and a true video ideograph that re-appropriates the original material in order to convey a rhetorical message of political or cultural significance.

It should also be noted that many viral GIFs (compressed, silent video clips that play with little loading time required) that operate ideographically now pervade the Internet. A noteworthy example is a GIF that re-appropriates the original footage of embattled Toronto mayor Rob Ford pushing a woman down in a city council meeting by adding the iconic hat, nose, and moustache of video game villain Wario of the Super Mario franchise (Divers). The rhetorical message behind this ideographic usage of the infamous footage is clear (at least to those familiar with Wario)—Rob Ford is an overweight, fun-to-despise laughing stock. GIFs offer rhetors a unique tool for propagating rapidly disseminated and viewed video ideographs that in turn can be spread virally via websites such as Tumblr or Memebase. Video-ideograph GIFs are easy to make because their quality standard is lower than that of, for instance, a YouTube video. GIFs are by nature low-quality footage, so adding cartoonish or poorly edited images will not necessarily hinder their reception. This creates a potential avenue for rhetors to create satirical footage similar to the visual ideographs that political cartoonists have created for decades.

Implications of the Video Ideograph

Although the video ideograph admittedly plays a fringe role in our constantly evolving cultural discourse, this relatively recent rhetorical form suggests a larger technologically driven evolution in comedic entertainment. In the world of parody and satire, it appears to be a mere byproduct of the global transition from older media (speeches, mailers, newspapers) to an information age approach (Internet memes, television show segments, chain emails). The evolutionary step of the "musical" ideograph, which has not been covered in any depth here but could be defined as a song parody that meets the same requirements, also indicates the evolution of parody as a simple explanation for the emergence of the video ideograph. But perhaps there is a more culturally significant reason why they have caught on as a popular rhetorical tool.

Satire and parody by their nature take the implied subject position, as discussed by Brummett and Bowers (118-19). Video ideographs do not accept the ideological message of the video that they parody, but do not present a directly contrary message either. For instance, the *Downfall* parodies do not attempt to deny the message of *Downfall* or question whether Berlin really did fall to the Soviets during World War II. Instead, the parodies turn the message completely on its head, twisting it into a joke by replacing the serious subtitles with comical ones. The parodies neither support nor reject the idea that Hitler lost control of his military toward the end of the war. Rather, they figuratively laugh at current cultural and political topics by

comparing Hitler's tantrum to the melodramatic reactions of those affected by modern-day disappointments.

This alteration of videos via parody serves as an outlet for Internet users to chide and tease mainstream rhetors with an audience of millions. By creating a video that imitates Lady Gaga's *Bad Romance,* the makers of *Bad Romance: Women's Suffrage* seem to be mocking the popular artist's wild costumes, props, and stage artistry. Although this is not the parody's main message, an element of mockery exists in the dance moves performed in turn-of-the-century era dresses. In *Total Eclipse of the Heart: Literal Version,* the creators are clearly mocking the nonsensical original music video. Does this mockery represent a sort of counterculture movement? Is the intent merely to entertain? Or do both entertainment and counter-mainstream messaging serve as exigencies?

If their intent were simply to mock the original videos for entertainment's sake, they would more closely resemble parodies of *We Can't Stop* by Miley Cyrus, which do point out flaws with the artist's original video, but without any particular rhetorical message attached other than satire. Because the other videos explored in this article invoke cultural ideologies and communicate culturally significant messages, they are operating under a different rhetorical tactic by re-appropriating the original material ideographically. Driven by an ideological commitment to inform as well as entertain, these message-laden videos must therefore be pursuing objectives beyond the common goal of reaching millions of views on YouTube.

This is not to discount the reasonable explanation of the video ideograph as yet another indication of progress in multimedia development. As technologies make video creation and circulation easier, they will likely become more developed and ubiquitous. Political cartoons, which frequently use the visual ideograph as a rhetorical device (as seen in Edwards and Winkler), may eventually be replaced in large part by video ideographs as more and more cartoonists take to the Internet. We have already seen this with ideographic GIFs such as Nick Divers's Wario/Rob Ford mash-up. Satire has been with us since ancient times, and it seems that the modern version will only continue to expand the use and meanings of ideographs into the future.

Conclusion

The video ideograph as a cultural phenomenon has taken hold of the Internet. Their meme-like nature causes them to take on the reproducible qualities of the Iwo Jima ideograph examined by Edwards and Winkler. Some of these videos may not be politically iconic, but many that range in the hundreds of millions of views on YouTube can certainly be classified as iconic via popularity. If the definition of the ideograph is expanded to include cultural ideologies and topoi, or discussion points, then these video parodies would qualify as a new type of ideograph. Regardless of its standing as a rhetorical tool, the video ideograph has already proven to be a powerful medium that even amateur video creators can exploit to draw upon already existent cultural ideologies and to promote their own rhetorical message and purpose.

These videos operate under the principles of perspective as defined by Kenneth Burke (422). To better appreciate women's suffrage, Soomo Learning offers us a new perspective on this important historical period through the lens of *Bad Romance.* The same can be said for the other video ideographs explored herein; each relates a topic important to the rhetor through a culturally significant video, thereby helping the audience to understand the topic more fully. Culture thus becomes a tool for learning by engaging our thirst for culturally relevant entertainment, and as Burke suggests, the rhetorical message becomes more familiar than it otherwise could be.

Although the future of video ideographs is unclear, they will likely continue to influence the cultural landscape and serve as both countercultural rhetorical devices and as conveyors of political messages. Video parodies and satires have already long served in these capacities, but the popularity of re-appropriating material to communicate a new message without contradicting the original video is a relatively recent phenomenon, one that cultural watchdogs may do well to keep tabs on. The video ideograph will likely help video creators to redefine cultural ideologies for years to come.

Notes

[1] The term "rhetorician" is used here as a scholar who studies rhetoric, as opposed to rhetors who are users of rhetoric.

[2] Memes are essentially ideas that are copied and replicated with slight variations. For a more in-depth discussion of the meme concept, see "Memes as genre" by Wiggins and Bowers (2014).

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