# Mimetic Sameness Grant Bollmer

## A New Replicator, A New Exterior to Rationality

The concept of the meme came into being with a chapter near the end of Richard Dawkins’ book *The Selfish Gene*. While these ‘origins’ are common knowledge, the *reasons* Dawkins gives for describing memes, in a book otherwise about evolution and genetics, are not so widely acknowledged. Dawkins lamented that he knew of no explanation of human behavior acceptable to his particular Darwinian sensibilities. Hence the need for a ‘new replicator’, the meme, a ‘thing’ analogous to a gene which obeys many of the same genetic principles Dawkins sketches elsewhere. The meme is ‘a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation*’,

[[1]](#footnote-1) one that follows a rationalistic logic of evolution. The meme is that which gives us ‘culture’: culture as an accumulation of discrete, competing practices, trends, and statements—‘tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches’[[2]](#footnote-2)—which swirl around and evolve according to Darwinian reasoning.

If evolution is true, then culture, Dawkins assumes, must likewise follow the same biological principles. But this is begging the question. Why did Dawkins think we need an evolutionary understanding of ‘culture’, anyway? It’s obvious Dawkins has never paid attention to cultural anthropology, cultural studies, anything that has worked to theorize or understand what ‘culture’ might even be.[[3]](#footnote-3) His reasoning becomes a bit clearer if we note that his examples of memes are *religious*. While he begins with what I reference above—ideas, fashions, artistic techniques—what Dawkins focuses most on are the belief in god, religious laws, faith, and celibacy. Given his notorious atheism, the point of a meme seems mostly about explaining why ideas and behavior Dawkins believes *irrational*—those at odds with beliefs and acts that confer some biological, competitive advantage—persist.[[4]](#footnote-4) Dawkins even ends his chapter with a call to reject the mimetic nature of culture: ‘We, alone on earth, can revel against the tyranny of the selfish replicators’.[[5]](#footnote-5) Rather than an extension of an evolutionary logic to describe culture alone, the initial proposal of the meme is a call to reject religion, and further to reject any nonscientific cultural formation reliant on repetition rather than rationality. Dawkins does not seem to place ‘science’ in any space occupied by ‘culture’. Scientific reasoning is not subject to mimetic repetition, is not linked with ‘ideas’ that merely repeat. That which is not scientific continues to exist because of repetition rather than rationality. Consequently, *the meme is the irrational*. It impedes the revelation of the true that is empirical, positivistic thought.

Why should we assume culture to be based on a mindless, irrational replication and imitation, a definition that would make ‘science’, which is not based in this mindless repetition, something divorced from ‘culture’? This supposes not only an analogy between culture and genetics, but also an equivalence between humans and machines that reduces the capacities of community, sociality, and the body to little more than the generation and maintenance of flows (of information, of capital, of biological matter).[[6]](#footnote-6) Reproduction—both sexual and informational—becomes an act to perpetuate both selfish genes and irrational ideas. Even if we do not accept Dawkins’ definition of the meme as ‘genetic’, any argument about memes remains haunted by his implicit binary opposition between ‘rational’ science and ‘irrational’ culture, between ‘reason’ and ‘unreason’, between ‘invention’ and ‘imitation’.

Culture, when reduced to repetition, becomes something to be dismissed as a barrier to knowledge. This binary does not originate with Dawkins and can be traced back to Platonic and Aristotelian debates about *mimesis* and art, at least. But it probably achieves its most modern formulation (in ways that directly precede Dawkins and, for that matter, most theories of communication) in the work of the *fin de siècle* French sociologist Gabriel Tarde. I think Tarde provides one of the better understandings of cultural repetition but, as I’ll return to at the end of this chapter, he assumes similar things to Dawkins about rationality and repetition. The point of this chapter is to highlight how discussions of memes and mimesis regularly presume rationality to be opposed to cultural automatism: an opposition between *poiesis* and *mimesis*, a repetition and mirroring that remains both “illegitimate” but also necessary for cultural and social relation. The lesson of memes Dawkins seems to want to teach is as follows: culture is stupid; it exists to prevent science from achieving its place as rational master.

Memes, in other words, are a negative form proposed as an exterior to the truth of rationality. Rationality finds its coherence by positing a ‘thing’ essential for the perpetuation of the irrationality of culture, the mindlessness of the crowd, and fascism of the group; a ‘thing’ to be resisted and excluded for evolutionary rationalism to claim authority; a ‘thing’ invented as the barrier to rationalism’s own self-realization. Until a radically different theory of memes is proposed—one that not only differs from Dawkins’ but actively repudiates the meme as a name for the persistence of public, unthinking irrationality undermining the logic of positivistic truth—then we remain in a space that assumes memes to be little more than a mode of mindless repetition, accepting positivism as the only alternative to the unthinking mass that is ‘culture’.

Let’s consider a specific work that engages directly with these themes: the livestreamed play *Circle Jerk*, which was written by Michael Breslin and Patrick Foley and performed by their theater company, Fake Friends, in late 2020.[[7]](#footnote-7) *Circle Jerk*, a satire of both contemporary digital culture as well as (white) gay male sexuality, links the mindless, irrational repetitiveness of the meme to emergent fears of fascistic disinformation spread over social media. It does so through the creation of a ‘meme machine’, a technology that generates a fascistic sameness through unthinking imitation. With the meme machine, *Circle Jerk* provides a way of thinking about the (in)commensurability of rationality, repetition, and sameness, especially as articulated by social media and streaming video on platforms such as TikTok. In addition, *Circle Jerk* engages with how these themes of repetition and sameness were addressed in 1990’s queer theory, updating them for a conjuncture defined by social media. I want to elaborate how the link between memes and mindless repetition of the same is tacitly assumed in how we understand and imagine the politics of social media. But, at the same time, this assumption provokes questions about relation and reproduction. These questions have different implications when ‘evolutionary’ arguments about reproduction are positioned against a critique of a (heteronormative) injunction to reproduce (in this case, reproductions both sexual and ideal, relating to Dawkins’ understanding of both genetics and mimetics). The alternative to Dawkins’ fear of mimesis is to revel in the failure of repetition, the failure of communication, the generation of memes that cannot be but nonmimetic.

## The Meme Machine

*Circle Jerk* is one of the most successful examples of the many livestreamed digital theatre productions of 2020, when the dangers of coronavirus contagion required a reinvention of theatrical liveness for online, distanced streaming. Most examples of theatre from this time can be summed up with the phrase ‘Zoom Play’. This includes plays that used videostreaming platforms nondiegetically, with actors speaking lines in individualized boxes on a screen (so, the audience is viewing a performance as if they’re viewing yet another example of the Zoom meetings that many of us are were dealing with every day). ’Zoom Play’ also includes a number of examples which used technology in a diegetic fashion, such as Richard Nelson’s *What Do We Need to Talk About* (2020), which was both performed over Zoom and had a plot that took place over Zoom, or Doug Liman’s terrible film *Locked Down* (2021), which used communication over Zoom and Skype as major parts of the plot.

*Circle Jerk*, instead of following this ‘Zoom Play’ style, incorporated an inventive staging setup with twelve programmable cameras and a video design that appropriated memes from TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. It also created its own variants of notable genres of videos from these platforms, such as those of the mukbang and ASMR varieties.[[8]](#footnote-8) *Circle Jerk* was livestreamed, though not over a videoconferencing platform, and used its setup to comment directly on the model of sociality implicit in social media video—sequences of the play involved facetuning different characters’ appearances, and the play incorporated characters mimetically copying popular dances from TikTok. *Circle Jerk* used the possibility of a livestreamed play to directly reproduce and comment on various internet practices associated with social media platforms that use livestreamed video.

Taking its name from both the ‘homoerotic ritual’ and the subreddit ‘/r/circlejerk’,[[9]](#footnote-9) the play begins with the cancelling and deplatforming of Jurgen Yionoullis, a not-exactly-subtle riff on Milo Yiannopoulos. Jurgen is a ‘gay self help guru’ who has secretly funneled his ‘millennial fans’ into an ‘alt-right artificial intelligence propaganda scam’. But his plans are halted as his ‘meme machine’, an ‘artificially intelligent database of the world’s socio-political, sexual-libidinal perversions’, has become ‘indecently exposed’. While initially Jurgen’s goal was simply to gain fame and money, after his cancellation he reframes the meme machine as a method of enacting *sameness*, a sameness that would undo his cancellation and enable him to feel ‘safe’ by making everyone like him. Memes, at the beginning of *Circle Jerk*, are a machinic form of repetition that not only act as propaganda, entrancing Jurgen’s ostensibly liberal-leaning fans towards alt-right causes, but also can be harnessed to create a world of uniformity, in which everyone becomes, as Jurgen claims, ‘a mirror me, a me-me’. We can see, then, both a perpetuation of Dawkins’ understanding of memes—as an irrational replication that generates groupthink—and a connection of this replication and sameness to a narcissistic desire to make the rest of the world equivalent to oneself.

Memes—both as a means of repetition and a means to create mirrorings of oneself—thus serve to chart what we might frame as an opposition between homophily and heterophily, terms which, in their use today, articulate both social networks and sexuality. Homophily, as Wendy Hui Kyong Chun has noted, is the belief that social relations are formed out of similarity, an argument essential for mathematical models of network science. ‘If we are inside-out, it is because homophily, love as love of the same, closes the world it pretends to open; it makes cyberspace a series of echo chambers’.[[10]](#footnote-10) Network science begins and ends with a necessary and intractable attraction of the same. Like attracts like, and it does so everywhere when we extend social networks beyond social media. The very foundation of social existence, if we presume networks and connection, is homophilic. Society is made up of links of sameness, presuming sameness, repeating the same information, transmitting the same thing, over and over and over again.[[11]](#footnote-11) If memes assume replication, replication, replication (leading—for Dawkins at least—towards a mass mind of bad, religious ideas), *Circle Jerk* links these concerns of sameness and difference (homophily and heterophily, homosociality and heterosociality) to concerns long held for a radical queer politics.

## The Same and the Other

As Leo Bersani (whose famous essay ‘Is the Rectum a Grave?’[[12]](#footnote-12) is directly referenced in *Circle Jerk*) put it in 1995:

Although there are valid grounds for questioning the assumption that desire between men, or between women, is desire for ‘the same’, it is also true that because our apprenticeship in desiring takes place within that assumption, homosexuality can become a privileged model of sameness—one that makes manifest not the limits but the inestimable value of relations of sameness, of homo-relations. Perhaps inherent in gay desire is a revolutionary inaptitude for heteroized sociality. This of course means sociality as we know it…[[13]](#footnote-13)

Sociality ‘as we know it’ is, in Bersani’s argument, about sexual difference and an attraction to the other. This idea has been further extended by Lee Edelman, and also resonates with arguments from materialist feminists who see the reproduction of society (of capital, of labor) as built on sexual reproduction and thus, heterosexual desire and procreation.[[14]](#footnote-14) And while it may point towards a weird historical irony (that social media has completely rewritten assumed social heterophily to a technically enforced homophily), Bersani’s understanding of ‘the same’ here isn’t something so crude as a fascism of mimetics, but rather has much in common with Monique Wittig’s attacks on gender differentiation.[[15]](#footnote-15) But, what I’m suggesting is that social media and the internet have rewritten desire in a way that normalizes a form of attraction that once was understood as an oppositional form against compulsory heterosexuality. Heterophily is sociality fundamentally underwritten by desire for the other, for difference—a desire which is today bizarrely alien to the models presumed by social networks.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Of course, things are not quite that simple. Social media has seemingly concretized and stabilized identity so one can be known and predicted as a target market,[[17]](#footnote-17) which, in its presumption of an identity that remains the same over time, is a different sameness than the sameness Bersani advocates. Additionally, Bersani’s sameness is not equivalence; it is instead a space in which differentiation cannot be successfully completed. His sameness is an attempt to remove capacities of differentiation that serve to reproduce homophobia, misogyny, patriarchy, and so on. It points towards a removal of (binary) difference, which would permit a more radical form of (multiple, undefined) difference to flourish. True sameness inevitably fails—repetition is always an ‘inaccurate self-replication’.[[18]](#footnote-18) Equivalence of the copy is always flawed.

This desire for the same nonetheless speaks to the desire expressed in *Circle Jerk*—a desire for me-mes produced through memes. And *Circle Jerk* points to how this political suggestion of Bersani’s—in an age of an internet that *presumes* homophily, that begins from the assumption that *all* attraction, and not just queer attraction, is attraction to the same—has been rendered unworkable. And yet, this reversal does not mean that *difference* is a way to resist the hegemony of the internet’s homophily, a difference that would ‘heteroize’ the sameness assumed by networked mimesis. Rather, a sense of sameness that was implicit in Bersani’s work has become subsumed by the digital, and the solution to this subsumption may be to further embrace Bersani’s arguments—to follow sameness through to its eventual failure, degradation, and collapse.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Jurgen (with his conspirator, Lord Bussy) eventually upgrades his meme machine post-cancellation, reinventing it as a vague, indistinct, artificially intelligent avatar which appears to mirror left-wing causes and interests. This persona is designed to disseminate a message that presumes complete sameness, a sameness that sounds like belonging and identification but also carries with it the fascism that emerges from these desires. The new meme machine Jurgen and Bussy invent is a point of erotic identification with oneself, an influencer ‘meme’ and ‘contagion queen’, named Eva María, who is ‘Black but not-Black’ and ‘infinitely diverse’, with a voice module taken from an ‘Alexia’ voice assistant (*alexia* being both a nod to Amazon’s voice assistant and a disorder where one who was once able to read loses the ability to do so). Jurgen and Bussy program Eva María to appeal to ‘every libtard in New York City’ through a ‘heterogenous’ method of micro-targeting individuals to generate a homogenous, white-supremacist sameness.

Drawing on the language of Emmanuel Levinas, Byung-Chul Han has argued that the internet and social media are machines for producing the endless repetition of the *same*. This is how we should understand Eva María: as a machine that appears as different, as other, only in order to perpetuate the same, over and over. In the work of Levinas, the ‘same’ (or, in French, *le même*) is self-identity, the ‘I’, which Levinas opposes with the ‘other’, or the metaphysical infinitude hidden behind the face of another.[[20]](#footnote-20) For Levinas, the essence of ethics is the refusal to reduce the other to the same, to admit the infinite openness of otherness that cannot and should not be reduced to one’s ‘I’, to one’s ‘sameness’. Han equates these terms to ‘positivity’ and ‘negativity’, suggesting that the negativity of the other has been completely eliminated with contemporary technology. The same is the positive, the visible, the smooth and narcissistic surface inherent in the digital, the other is the negative, a metaphysical irruption of nonknowledge and uncertainty:

Seamless *liking* produces a realm of positivity. Experience as irruption of the *other*—because of its negativity—interrupts imaginary self-mirroring. But the positivity that is inherent in digital technology minimizes the possibility of having any such experience. It prolongs only the *same*.[[21]](#footnote-21)

What we see in *Circle Jerk* is how the sameness of what Bersani calls ‘homo-ness’, which does not do away with difference *as such* but embraces difference *without category*, is subsumed into the homophily of hyper-specific target marketing, not allowing a sameness of category and permitting only a sameness of *individuality*. What we see in *Circle Jerk* is, instead of Bersani’s sameness, the reduction of the world to Han’s *same*, in which I substitute myself for all others, a fascism of me-mes rather than a diversity without category.[[22]](#footnote-22) What *Circle Jerk* presents is, in many ways, the end result of Dawkins’ opposition between rationality and irrationality—the replication of memes permits the generation of an unthinking, fascistic mass.

## Mimetic Individuality

This sameness of individuality is best illustrated in *Circle Jerk* when Eva María generates a number of (ostensibly) infinite video variants, all of which carry with them the same message about the desirability of sameness. Each video is crafted for a particular person/target, and they take the form of, among other things, conspiracies about the suppression of a transgender American history, global warming and children, and an ASMR video designed for a ‘curator’ with no professional credits. In this last video, Eva María says (conflating ‘socially constructed’ with ‘fake’), ‘We are not damaged. Damage and trauma are social constructions… Imagine being in a world in which we are the majority. Not just a majority, the vast majority. Ninety percent of the people. A place where we are not the minority. A place where people understand who you are, naturally—you don’t have to explain yourself’. The play then incorporates images of celebrities (including drag queens from *RuPaul’s Drag Race* and Mike Pence), all now with faces morphed into or combined with Eva María’s face. We eventually see a video of a man walking on a beach (also with Eva María’s face), repeating her ASMR monologue. Sameness has taken hold, one in which everyone thinks they have their own ideas but are merely repeating the videos made for them by the meme machine. *Circle Jerk* effectively inverts Bersani—it begins with individuality to generate a sameness that never fails, but only repeats ad nauseum.

Mimetic similitude as a foundation for social relations is perhaps best elaborated in the work of Gabriel Tarde. Around 1900, Tarde elaborated a foundational ‘law’ for all social relations—for a universal sociology—relations are always ‘*individual initiative followed by imitation*’.[[23]](#footnote-23) Ideas and trends emerge from particular ‘geniuses’ or ‘elites’ who are then copied by followers.[[24]](#footnote-24) This is directly what we see in *Circle Jerk*—Jurgen, who notes how he belongs to the ‘1%’, uses the ‘genius’ of his meme machine to generate a universal, fascist repetition to make the rest of the world equivalent to himself. This ‘genius’ is a problem for our present understanding of memes and mimesis. Tony Sampson has reinvented Tarde’s sociology as a ‘dystopian media theory’ to describe how masses of people are subsumed into a ‘collective nonconscious, caught in the shockwaves of the event’.[[25]](#footnote-25) Sampson explicitly denies the source of imitation in a ‘genius’ individual,[[26]](#footnote-26) but the presence or absence of a genetic origin—or the ability to locate this origin—does not really matter. In *Circle Jerk*, the trick of the meme is to induce sameness at an individual level, with each person believing themselves to be the origin of the meme through which they become united as a fascist mass.

## The Uncanny and the Dream-Meme

The eeriness of the double is essential for any Freudian notion of the uncanny. The doppelgänger is a failed copy, a duplicate that is partial, limited, and thus strange. But after social media, data analytics, and digital doubles, Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli has suggested that the ‘digital uncanny’ be thought not in terms of doubling or even failure. Rather, it is the fear that ‘we are machines and that our behavior may be predictable precisely because we are machinic’.[[27]](#footnote-27) The digital uncanny emerges because the double is more me than myself, more known than myself, more powerful than myself. *Circle Jerk*, at multiple times, references the song ‘Who R U’ by JUFU, a song popularized because of its repetitive use on TikTok. JUFU’s video for this song[[28]](#footnote-28) takes a typical representation of the Freudian uncanny as its theme, with JUFU encountering a copy of himself. ‘Who are you?’ JUFU asks his doppelgänger. ‘I am you!’ it replies. ‘I am me.’ ‘No sir, you are you.’ Typical TikTok videos using this song play with the doubling of someone, the impossibility to distinguish between self and other, the reduction of other to the same. Instead of a feeling of uncanniness, an amusement at the repetition of mimetic copying. Rather than becoming creeped out at our failed copies, *we* are the copies to begin with.[[29]](#footnote-29)

Memes—if we understand memes to be a simple form of repetitive transmission—are a means for producing the same. What would it mean for memes to fail at repetition? To effectively cease to be memes? The uncanny is one way to embrace the failure of the same, a disquiet that emerges from the inability of identity to maintain itself. The final act of *Circle Jerk* embraces this failure in another way. The seemingly unified sameness produced by the meme machine begins to collapse as the relation between different characters, their limited self-identities, the memes they repeat, are all mixed together in a cacophony that openly appropriates from TikTok and reduces the possibility of a mimetic similarity to rubble.

Both the Freudian uncanny and *Circle Jerk*’s chaos are particular ways the same fails to remain the same. Alongside these, I want to end by gesturing towards a radically different kind of meme, those of ‘Thomas the Plank Engine’,[[30]](#footnote-30) a subreddit devoted to representing memes people see in their dreams. The ‘meme’ that gives this subreddit its name was one posted to another subreddit, r/me\_irl. It was captioned, ‘i saw this meme in a dream and remade it as best as i could’. This dream meme is made up of twelve faces of Thomas the Tank Engine and a wooden plank. While most of Thomas’s faces are happy and smiling, one is ambivalent and one is angry.[[31]](#footnote-31) The nonsensical nature of r/thomastheplankengine can be seen in its countless dream memes, which—to provide a random but representative selection—include ‘an image of a microfibre mop’ with the captions (in Impact Bold, of course) ‘ACTIVE DRY YEAST’ and ‘YOU’RE 3rd’.[[32]](#footnote-32) Another example is described as the result of a dream in which a redditor ‘was hitting a tennis ball with a ruler’. This dream meme depicts, on the left side of the image, a silhouette of a cricketer swinging a ruler. On the right side, there’s a black and white gradient with a tennis ball poorly photoshopped in the middle. At the top of the gradient is a circled number 1 next to ‘TOP TEXT’, a circled number 2 is in the middle, and at the bottom, ‘BOTTOM TEXT’.[[33]](#footnote-33) With these weird condensations and displacements, mimetic repetition fails when mediated by the unconscious. These examples *try* to be memes. They draw on formal elements that seem ‘meme-like’. And yet, in mediating dreams these memes become unrepeatable. The memes of Thomas the Plank Engine do not produce copies—they are memes that halt and stupefy the ability of a meme to become me-mes.

Instead of repetition, instead of sameness, we have misrecognition and self-alienation, perpetual failures in the compulsion to repeat: a mimetics that can only remain other even if it seems guided by a desire for the same.

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1. Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006),192. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Dawkins, *Selfish Gene*, 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. At the beginning of the chapter, Dawkins reports that he uses the word culture ‘not in its snobbish sense, but as a scientist uses it’ (Dawkins, *Selfish Gene*, 189). This suggests that he has no familiarity with any of the debates about culture that have occurred since Raymond Williams, at least, wrote *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This is most explicit with ideas about celibacy and monogamy, so often linked with religion as they are. Any belief that restricts sexual reproduction, for instance, is difficult for an evolutionary psychological perspective to explain. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Dawkins, *Selfish Gene*, 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. An equivalence between communication, biology, and technology (and finance) is central for the convoluted history of the idea of ‘networked connectivity’. See the first part of my book, *Inhuman Networks: Social Media and the Archaeology of Connection* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Circle Jerk*, script by Michael Breslin and Patrick Foley in collaboration with Cat Rodríguez and Ariel Sibert, dir. Rory Pelsue, Theater Mitu, MITU580, Brooklyn, NY, live performance streamed online at http://circlejerk.live, 20 October 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Helen Shaw, “Best New Remote Performance Paradigm: *Circle Jerk,*” *Vulture*, December 7, 2020, https://www.vulture.com/article/best-quarantine-culture-quarries-2020.html [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. I’m using the language the website of the play uses to describe itself (Fake Friends, ‘*Circle Jerk*: About’, https://circlejerk.live/about). On Reddit, a ‘circlejerk’ refers to a form of self-congratulatory groupthink, and the subreddit r/circlejerk is used to call these moments out. At the same time, as one Reddit user has put it, r/circlejerk is an ‘anti-circlejerk circlejerk where circlejerk-aware redditors pat one another on the back for being smarter than the average circlejerking redditor’ (apopheniac1989, Reddit comment, 3 November 2013, https://www.reddit.com/r/OutOfTheLoop/comments/1pt5uk/what\_is\_rcirclejerk/cd5rrvm/). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, “Queering Homophily,” in Clemens Apprich, et al., *Pattern Discrimination* (Lüneburg: meson press, 2018), 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Which is particularly evident in studies of ‘social contagion’, which have been the most powerful example of how network models—at the height of the popularity of network science—moved beyond the internet to describe anything ‘social’. I’ve discussed this in *Inhuman Networks*, and Chun has discussed this in *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave?: And Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Bantam, 1970); Endnotes Collective, ‘The Logic of Gender’, *Endnotes* 3 (2013): 56-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Bersani, *Homos*, 41-47. Cf. Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Katherine Guinness, *Schizogenesis: The Art of Rosemarie Trockel* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 29-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Contrast Chun’s “Queering Homophily” with Bersani’s arguments. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See Grant Bollmer, *Theorizing Digital Cultures* (London: SAGE, 2018), 121-134. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. This is a regular theme of the essays collected in Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave?* [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The opposition of sameness to digitality, I think, is also what guides Alexander Galloway’s *Laruelle: Against the Digital* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Byung-Chul Han, *In the Swarm: Digital Prospects*, trans. Erik Butler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. This is a theme Katherine Guinness has been developing in her articles “The Coloniser and Corpus Nullius,” *parallax* 26, no. 1 (2020): 76-88, and “Self-Portraiture and Self-Performance,” in *Visual Culture Approaches to the Selfie*, ed. Derek Conrad Murray (New York: Routledge, forthcoming), and it also has significant parallels with how Guinness defines ‘the neutral’ in *Schizogenesis*. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Gabriel Tarde, *The Laws of Imitation*, trans. Elsie Clews Parsons (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1903), 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Gabriel Tarde, “The Origins and Functions of Elites,” in *Gabriel Tarde: On Communication and Social Influence*, ed. Terry N. Clark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 245–251. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Tony D. Sampson, *A Sleepwalker’s Guide to Social Media* (Cambridge: Polity, 2020), 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Interestingly, Sampson suggests the foregrounding of an individual as a “source” turns Tarde into Dawkins. Sampson, *Sleepwalker’s Guide*, 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli, *Digital Uncanny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. JUFU, “Who R U,”s YouTube, August 30, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=szajRMpLcL8. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Cf. Bollmer, *Inhuman Networks*. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Thomas the Plank Engine, https://www.reddit.com/r/thomastheplankengine/. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. TA10S, “me😴irl,” Reddit post, October 27, 2018, https://www.reddit.com/r/me\_irl/comments/9rwtxf/meirl/. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. JackTheCookie, “an image of a microfibre mop with this caption,” Reddit post, 21 April 2021, https://www.reddit.com/r/thomastheplankengine/comments/mvsb5b/an\_image\_of\_a\_microfibre\_mop\_with\_this\_caption/. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. UwU-Lemon, “I was hitting a tennis ball with a ruler,” Reddit post, 21 April 2021, https://www.reddit.com/r/thomastheplankengine/comments/mvk263/i\_was\_hitting\_a\_tennis\_ball\_with\_a\_ruler\_in\_my/. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)