

UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

Classical Art Memes as an Affinity Space

A Faceted Classification of an Online Entertainment Page

Oskari Raivio

Pro Gradu Thesis

English Philology

Department of Modern Languages

University of Helsinki

August 2016



Tiedekunta/Osasto – Fakultet/Sektion – Faculty	Laitos – Institution – Department	
Humanistinen tiedekunta	Nykykielten laitos	
Tekijä – Författare - Author		
Oskari Raivio		
Työn nimi – Arbetets titel – Title		
Classical Art Memes as an Affinity Space – A Faceted Classification of an Entertainment Page		
Oppiaine – Läroämne – Subject		
Englantilainen filologia		
Työn laji – Arbetets art – Level	Aika – Datum – Month and year	Sivumäärä – Sidoantal – Number of pages
Pro gradu -tutkielma	Elokuu 2016	83 + 1 liite
Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract		
<p>Tutkin pro gradussani Classical Art Memes -Facebook-sivuston internet-meemien diskursiivisia ominaisuuksia selvittääkseni, mistä sivuston suosio syntyy, ja muodostaakseni siitä kuvan digitaalisena tilana James Paul Geen määrittelemän affinity space (mieltymystila) -käsitteen kautta. Mieltymystilan käsiteessä yhdistyvät sosiaaliseen yhteisöön kuuluminen merkitys sekä itse sisältö, jonka ympärille yhteisö rakentuu. Internet-meemi vuorostaan käsitetään populaarikulttuurin yksiköksi, joka levää ja muovautuu internettiin käyttäjien välityksellä synnyttäen jaettuja kulttuuria kokemuksia. Classical Art Memes on Facebookiin elokuussa 2014 perustettu viihdesivusto, jolla ylläpitäjä ja käyttäjät jakavat multimodaalisia kuvia humorisesti tulkituista klassisista taideteksteistä. Classical Art Memes ilmentää osallistumiselle avointa digitaalista kulttuuria, johon sisältyy olennaisesti se, että käyttäjät ovat yhtä aikaa kuluttajia ja tuottajia. Sivusto ylitti kahden miljoonan Facebook-tykkäyksen rajan keväällä 2016.</p>		
<p>Tutkimusaineistoni koostui 140 Classical Art Memes -sivuston aikajanalla ilmestyneestä meemistä, joista ensimmäiset 70 ovat peräisin syksyltä 2014 ja toiset 70 keväältä 2016. Laadullisessa tutkimuksessani käyn läpi jokaisen yksittäisen meemin aineistossani soveltaen Susan Herringin vaiheittaista luokitteluskeemaa, joka on hahmoteltu nimenomaan digitaalisia diskursseja silmällä pitäen (faceted classification scheme for computer-mediated discourses). Tarkastelun keskiössä ovat erityisesti meemien aihe/teema, sävy, kienelliset piirteet ja intertekstuaalisuus.</p>		
<p>Meemien pohjana käytetyt taidekoiset ovat usein arvohenkilöiden muotokuvia, tilannekuvausia, uskonnollisia töitä tai kuvamanipuloituja teoksia. Meemien aihepiiri on kirjava, mutta selkeästi useimmin aiheet liittyvät seksiin, rakkauteen ja tunteisiin sekä digitaalisen kulttuurin ilmiöihin. Sävy on suurimmaksi osaksi leikkisä, mutta kyynisyys ja pisteliäs sarkasmi näyttelevät myös huomattavaa osaa. Monipuolinen intertekstuaalisuus näyttää sivuston keskeisenä teholeinona. Erityisesti viittaukset populaarikulttuuriin, taideosten taustatietoon sekä internet-ilmiöihin ovat yleisiä. Kieleltään meemit ovat enimmäkseen sujuvaa ja sanavarastoltaan kattavaa standardenglantia, mutta mukana on runsaasti mm. internet-slangille ominaisia piirteitä sekä alattylyisiä ilmauksia.</p>		
<p>Aineiston kautta muodostuu kuva digitaalista tilasta, jonka keskeinen tarkoitus on viihdyttää sen käyttäjiä nokkelilla taideosten uudelleenkontekstualisoinneilla. Sivuston meemeissä laaja taustatieto yhdistyy oivaltavuuteen ja kieelliseen monipuolisuteen. Analyysini perusteella totean lisäksi, että humorisivustoilla kuten Classical Art Memes, on sosiaalisena tilana potentiaalia edistää epämuodollista yleistiedollista ja kieellistä oppimista, mikä kuuluu olennaisesti affinity space -käsitteeseen.</p>		
Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords		
Classical Art Memes, internet-meemi, affinity space, participatory digital culture, faceted classification		
Säilytyspaikka – Förvaringsställe – Where deposited		
Keskustakampuksen kirjasto		
Muita tietoja – Övriga uppgifter – Additional information		

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
2	THEORETICAL BACKGROUND.....	4
2.1	Classical Art Memes.....	4
2.2	The meme as a concept.....	6
2.3	Internet meme.....	8
2.3.1	<i>Internet meme as a genre.....</i>	11
2.3.2	<i>Online humor and memes.....</i>	11
2.3.3	<i>Intertextuality.....</i>	14
2.3.4	<i>Linguistic features of internet memes.....</i>	15
2.4	Participatory digital culture.....	17
2.4.1	<i>Affinity spaces.....</i>	18
2.5	Online memes as a new literacy practice.....	20
2.6	Classifying discourses in digital environments.....	22
2.7	Faceted classification scheme for computer-mediated discourses.....	24
2.7.1	<i>Medium factors.....</i>	24
2.7.2	<i>Situation factors.....</i>	26
2.8	The aim of the study and research questions.....	30
3	RESEARCH STRUCTURE.....	31
3.1	Material.....	31
3.2	Methods.....	32
4	ANALYSIS AND RESULTS.....	37
4.1	Medium factors.....	37
4.2	Situation factors.....	38
4.2.1	<i>Participation structure.....</i>	39
4.2.2	<i>Topic/theme.....</i>	39
4.2.3	Tone.....	54

4.2.4	<i>Code</i>	62
4.2.5	<i>Intertextuality</i>	68
4.2.6	<i>Norms, Activity and Purpose</i>	75
4.3	Summary of the main findings.....	77
4.3.1	<i>Prominent features in the sampling</i>	77
4.3.2	<i>Classical Art Memes as an affinity space</i>	79
4.3.3	<i>Evaluation of the method</i>	81
5 CONCLUSIONS		82
REFERENCES		84
Appendix		90

List of tables

Table 1. <i>Medium factors</i>	25
Table 2. <i>Situation factors</i>	27
Table 3. <i>Facets used in the analysis</i>	34
Table 4. <i>Topics of the meme templates</i>	40
Table 5. <i>Miscellaneous templates</i>	45
Table 6. <i>Topics of exchange/meme</i>	46
Table 7. <i>Miscellaneous topics of memes</i>	53
Table 8. <i>Tones of the memes</i>	54
Table 9. <i>Other tones</i>	61
Table 10. <i>Types of intertextuality</i>	69

List of figures

Figure 1. <i>A meme and its comment section</i>	6
Figure 2. <i>The Dancing Baby</i>	9
Figure 3. <i>Image macro from Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring</i>	10
Figure 4. <i>A Bayeux Tapestry meme</i>	17
Figure 5. <i>A Ducreaux meme</i>	17
Figure 6. <i>An original painting with captions</i>	32
Figure 7. <i>A manipulated painting with captions</i>	32
Figure 8. <i>An intertextual meme</i>	34
Figure 9. <i>Word cloud illustration</i>	63
Figure 10. <i>Matt Taylor's shirt</i>	75

List of Abbreviations

CMC	Computer-mediated communication
CMD	Computer-mediated discourse
DMC	Digitally mediated communication
EMC	Electronically mediated communication
IRC	Internet relay chat
UGC	user-generated content

1 INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of the internet, sharing humorous content has been one of its salient purposes, and for many people, taking pleasure in the entertainment supplies of the Web is an essential activity of their everyday lives. Content sharing sites such as *Imgur*, *4Chan* and *9GAG* are part of the participatory digital culture of the online era, within which people create, share and receive content of numerous different affinities, amusement being one of the major objectives. A central unit through which the entertainment is currently being distributed online is the internet meme – a small piece of digital popular culture that is used to convey a variety of purposes ranging from harmless joking to political messaging. A meme is generally comprehended as an humorous internet borne static image paired with matching superimposed captions, but the form and function is by no means restricted. What counts as an online meme is mostly determined by the perception and usage of certain material in online environments.

The digital entertainment communities of online popular culture are often discarded as trivial playgrounds and the nature of these content sharing pages and the online meme is notoriously volatile and difficult to grasp in academic terms. After having studied language and communication in its different manifestations for some time, my personal appreciation for the linguistic and visual creativity of these online communities has not diminished. On the contrary, being aware of the dynamics behind a certain linguistic phenomenon has often enhanced the experience of these pages. Being familiar with many of these contemporary digital entertainment spaces myself, I wanted to have a closer and more systematic look at the content shared on these often peculiar sites.

One such quiddity-driven page that produces daily doses of humorous content is *Classical Art Memes*, a Facebook site established in 2014 that concentrates solely on sharing whimsically reworked pieces of fine art from the Classical period. Since its establishment, the page has become an internet phenomenon with over two million followers and thousands of user comments every day. In this paper, I will concentrate on the linguistic and visual elements of the memes on *Classical Art Memes*, focusing on a sample of memes that consist of static images with embedded textual elements. The purpose of this paper is to give an overview of *Classical Art Memes* as a digital space

within the participatory digital culture, by concentrating on prominent discursive features of the memes on the page. As a framework for my analysis I have used the concept of *affinity spaces* outlined by the linguist James Paul Gee (2005). The concept brings together the importance of the content shared among the users of a certain group and the social significance of belonging to it.

The social dimension of digital participatory culture and the meme is essential. Frequently cited scholars of digital culture, Colin Lankshear and Michele Knobel (2007) consider internet memes as an integral part of new literacy practices, and they acknowledge that these practices should not be observed in isolation from social contexts. Scholarly interest in internet memes has increased during the last ten years and according to, for example, Bowers and Wiggins (2015) it is because of their significance as an activity and genre in social networks. Wartofsky (1979) hardly had Internet memes in mind when he wrote *Models: Representation and Scientific Understanding*, but his statement that social artifacts inform us about the social behavior of the individuals that produce them, seems like an adequate recommendation for the study of memes.

One of the motivators for this study was David Crystal with his statement in Internet linguistics (2011), that it is worth making synchronic dives into all types of different outputs of online communication to promote the description and classification of various internet texts, thus contributing to the understanding of digital communities and their discursive elements. He points out, that in addition to studying the formal properties of online language, it is important to assess its communicative purposes and effects as well.

I have taken as my starting point the assumption that an internet meme is a discursive unit that affects its recipients and instigates interlocution as much as any traditional discourse unit and can thus be studied with similar methods as for instance a clause in a conversation. To classify the discursive characteristics of the memes' elements, I will apply Susan Herring's (2007) *faceted classification scheme for computer-mediated discourse*. Herring's classification scheme helps in formulating an organized overview on a wide range of communicational and linguistic features in the data, especially the topics, tones, norms and linguistic choices of the memes. Using the scheme, I aim to

outline the most salient facets in the context of Classical Art Memes and observe them individually against previous literature on internet culture and memes. After having classified the discursive characteristics of the memes, I will use them to define the nature of Classical Art Memes as a digital space of shared affinities. Finally, I want to evaluate the applicability of the faceted classification scheme to a content sharing page such as my target page.

This paper is structured in the following manner: in the background and literature section, I will explain the gist of Classical Art Memes, present relevant concepts, and introduce the theoretical background that works as the framework for this paper. The focus will be on internet memes, humor in digital environments, participatory digital culture, affinity spaces, and memes as an example of a new literacy practice. I will also have a look at the development of classifying digital discourses and present the faceted classification scheme. At the end of the literature chapter, the detailed research questions are presented. In chapter 3, I will present the data and the methodology of this paper. Chapter 4 consists of the analysis and summary of the results. The analysis is divided into two main sections under which I present each relevant discursive feature individually. In the third section of the chapter, I will summarize the results and answer the research questions. In the final chapter, the study is concluded with a discussion that includes suggestions for further studies.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

I am rather sure that the target of my study, Classical Art Memes, has not been analyzed in any consistent manner before. Previous research on content sharing sites and online memes has concentrated on the emergence of the internet meme (e.g. Börzei, 2013), outlined general characteristics of successful memes (e.g. Knobel & Lankshear, 2007), and discussed their significance to practices of communication in the digital era (e.g. Procházka, 2014). The earlier studies have focused on individual successful memes, meme series and on particular sites that have originated them. For example, Kate Miltner (2014) has examined the hugely popular cat memes called LOLcats and Kim Wilkins (2014) has looked at memes that draw on medievalist themes. Chan (2012) in turn has focused on the creation and meaning of internet memes on the imageboard website 4chan.

In this chapter a more detailed account of Classical Art Memes is given, and the central concepts of *meme*, *internet meme*, *participatory digital culture* and *affinity spaces* will be introduced along with the concept of internet memes as a new literacy practice. Towards the end of the chapter I will present the *faceted classification scheme for computer-mediated discourse*, upon which the methodology of the analysis is based on.

2.1 Classical Art Memes

Classical Art Memes is a Facebook page that describes itself as an entertainment website. The page was founded in the fall of 2014 and since then, it has become an internet phenomenon with over two million¹ likes and thousands of shares daily. The page even has its own fan merchandise.

The anonymous administrator of the page and its followers post pictures of various pieces of art that have been captioned and often also edited for humorous effect. The anonymity of the admin is not a surprise since anonymity is a common practice within the memescape (Davison, 2012). A quick look at the memes on the page shows that the pieces of art are mostly taken from a certain period, but the “classical” in the name does not refer accurately to the content of the page, seeing as there are occasional pieces that

¹ The first post on the page is dated 8/31/2014. On 7/20/2016, the number of total likes was 2,314,446.

do not fit the definition of Classicism in the spirit of western tradition.² From the viewpoint of this paper though, the art historical accuracy of the page is of little importance, even though the theme does have some implications on the nature of the page.

All the posts on the timeline of the page are added by the administrator, but as the site has gained in popularity, more and more memes created by the visitors have been withdrawn from the visitor posts -section onto the timeline. The content on the page is presumably original, in that it has not been taken from other content sharing sites, but created by the administrator or the visitors of the page.

Because Classical Art Memes is a Facebook page, commenting the posts and using the like-button (recently changed to reaction button) are central to the site's dynamic. Currently, funniest individual memes reach tens of thousands of likes and receive thousands of comments. In the comment section, the users can react to the original meme and post their own interpretations of it (see fig 5. below). The user comments constitute a huge repository of data for an analysis of the inner dynamics of the page and the memescape in general, but in this paper I will not consider the contents of the comments or the demography of the commenters, simply because of the time and effort their perusal would require. The focus of this study will be on the substance of the memes themselves.

² In Classicism the themes are usually drawn from the classical period. In the Western tradition, classical antiquity set standards for taste which the classicists pursued (<https://global.britannica.com/art/Classicism>).



Figure 1. A meme and its comment section.

2.2 The meme as a concept

It should be noted that the similarities between the traditional memetic theories and the popular online memes are by no means one-to-one, but there are some broad parallels that are utilized in the literature on internet memes. A usual starting point is the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins and his seminal work *The Selfish Gene* (1976), explaining the workings of the gene for the popular audience.

The meme as a term has undergone significant changes since its coinage by Dawkins. Until then, the discussion about evolution had mainly concentrated on the biological gene. Dawkins brought onto the table the concept of evolution as a cultural phenomenon. In the same way as genes self-servingly work to further biological evolution, memes contribute to the cultural evolution, affecting mindsets and behavior

of social groups. For Dawkins, the meme was a selfish cultural unit that replicates using people's minds as vehicles in order to survive. According to Dawkins' original idea, memes can be more or less any cultural product, idea or behavioral norm such as a work of art, linguistic expression, style, gesture or religion. The focus is on the imitation and transference of cultural, non-genetic behavior of individuals. By Dawkins, the gene was originally considered a metaphor for the meme, but during the following decade gene and meme became more or less synonymous.

Douglas Hofstadter (1983) advanced from Dawkins' metaphorical approach and saw the meme more literally. In Hofstadter's analogy, the meme, similarly to the gene, is prone to mutation, and the different mutations are in competition for human attention with each other, and with other memes. The gene wants to ensure its survival and continuity in the biological structure of organisms, whereas the meme competes for coverage in the media and communicational spaces. Hofstadter mentioned radio and television time, billboard space, newspaper and magazine column-inches and library shelf-space (1983: 18). Doubtless the internet has now become the most important such medium.

Concerning the development of the meme as a concept, Jeremy Burman comments that by the middle of the 1990s, the meme had attained a status of a truism and lost its original metaphorical meaning. The meme was now seen as a concrete concept, an infectious unit of culture that has actual effects on individuals' language and thought (Burman, 2012). The meme as a concept has been used extensively within different branches of science, but the contemporary notion of the meme that has originated outside of academic circles, most notably within the digital online spaces, is far from coherent.

Dawkins rather recently claimed that the notion of the meme has itself gone through mutation and evolved. The internet meme has taken over the original conception. This has not taken place randomly, but by deliberate human action, where the individuals are fully aware of the process. In a sense, the mutations are intentionally designed (Dawkins & Marshmallow Laser Feast, 2013). Limor Shifman describes the contemporary popular meme as a prism that sheds light on certain aspects of contemporary digital culture (2013: 190). Assuming this point of view as the basis, digital scholars give the meme its original, metaphorical character.

2.3 Internet meme

One might perhaps say that the term *meme* has been hogged by the internet and it has turned it into an indefinable colloquialism. The academic world has had no choice but to try and deal with it. Within and outside the academic circles, there has been an ongoing debate on what is considered a meme and what is not, but attempts at setting any definitive boundaries to the concept has proven almost impossible.³ However, the question of what can be regarded as a meme seems to be of little importance. As Knobel and Lankshear state, what is significant is the fact that there is particular content on the internet that people explicitly perceive as memes and associate certain practices with them. What is emphasized are the roles memes play within specific cultural spaces (2007: 205-206). The cultural and social aspect of memes is addressed by many other digital scholars as well, such as Limor Shifman, who describes internet memes as “*units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated and transformed by internet users, creating a shared cultural experience*” (2013: 367). Kate Miltner, in turn, regards LOLCats – hugely popular memes about funny cats - as the type of content that is “*changing the way people engage in cultural participation, creative engagement, community interaction, and identity construction*” (2014: 2). Patrick Davison (2009) condenses online meme as “*a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission*” (quoted in Mandiberg 2012: 122). These are very concise definitions, but address key aspects of the internet meme; it is a product of the online culture, it is a social phenomenon, its common purpose is to entertain, and the environment where the meme operates, or is operated, is the internet.

The common emoticons, the progeny of the early online discussion groups on *Usenet*⁴ in the 1980’s, can probably be considered the first online memes (Davison, 2012). Usenet was published over a decade before the World Wide Web, so digital smiley faces effectively precede the internet era. During the first years of the public Internet, memes spread mostly through e-mails. After this era of “proto-internet memes”, during

³ Especially *Journal of Memetics* (jom-emit.org/past.html) has concentrated on the topic of meme definition.

See also, Butts and Hilgeman 2003; Chattoe 1998 and Gatherer 2003.

⁴ **Usenet** is a worldwide distributed discussion system available on computers. It is the precursor to internet forums.

the 1990's and early 2000's, the online meme subculture developed further and different kinds of message and imageboards, as well as blogs became the natural habitat of online memes (Marino, 2015). One of the most popular message image boards has been, to this day, *4chan* which was created in 2003 by a 15-year old American Christopher Pool. Other examples of popular content sharing platforms established during the first years of the 21th century include Reddit (2005) and Youtube (2005).



Figure 2. *The Dancing Baby* (a 3D-rendered animation meme from 1996).

The latest stage in the evolution of the memescape⁵ has been affected by the birth and expansion of social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. This expansion that emphasizes user-generated content and usability is frequently referred to as Web 2.0. Social networks have furthered the propagation of memes tremendously and there has been a boom in the popularity of thematic websites such as my target page Classical Art Memes. There is now hardly an internet user who has not stumbled on an internet meme of some type. Countless new memes are generated on a myriad of social networks and content sharing communities every day. There are even simple tools available online for creating memes, such as *Memegenerator* (2009) and *Quickmeme* (2010) that have furthered the diffusion of simple memes over the internet. Additionally, an exhaustive

⁵ “Memes are viewed, shared, imitated, remixed, iterated, and distributed as a response to their appearance on the **memescape**, a portmanteau of meme and landscape to imply the virtual, mental, and physical realms that produce, reproduce, and consume Internet memes” (Bowers and Wiggins 2015:1893).

and constantly updated encyclopedia of memes called *Know Your Meme* has been around since 2008. The page concentrates on all things meme with admirable piety.

As Knobel and Lankshear put it, some memes have, in a way, become part of the “internet lore” (2007: 203). One of the most obvious reasons for the vast popularity of memes is the simplicity with which they can be produced and shared (Börzsei, 2013). The form of a meme is usually very straightforward and requires little technical expertise. A typical manifestation of an internet meme is the *image macro* (Fig. 3. below), an original or manipulated still image, usually from popular culture, equipped with superimposed captions. However, memes can consist completely or partially of animation and sound as well (Knowyourmeme.com). Knobel and Lankshear have observed that multimodality is an integral aspect of online memes, usually enhanced by remixing techniques such as “*modifying, bricolaging, splicing, reordering, superimposing, etc., original and other images, sounds, films, music, talk, and so on*” (2007: 232). For practical reasons, this paper concentrates only on static memes that combine image and text.

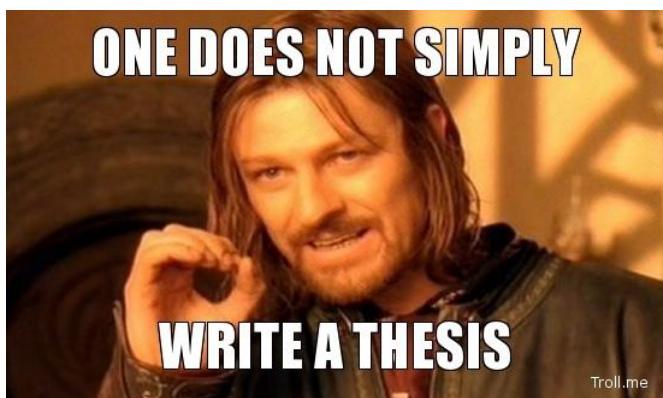


Figure 3. Image macro from *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*.

The influence of internet memes has been so eminent that Cole Stryker (2011: 29) speaks of the “language of memes” and “visual vernacular” with which people can convey their emotions and opinions in a compact manner. Jean Burgess, in turn, describes meme-making as “vernacular creativity” where traditional folk activities such as storytelling and making scrapbooks have blended with the digital knowledge and

practices of the present day. At the root of these new creative practices, such as meming, are very specific and mundane social contexts and communicative traditions (2008: 6). Most memes are also highly transient in nature (Bauckhage, 2011), which echoes the new everyday aesthetics that Susan Murray (2008: 157) describes as “ *fleeting, “malleable” and “immediate”* - an image lasts only until the next one replaces it.

2.3.1 Internet meme as a genre

Miller (1984) states that a type of discourse or communicative action can be considered a genre when it takes on a common name within a given context or community.

According to Yates et al. (1997), genres are usually identified on the grounds of certain combination of form and agreed-upon function. As mentioned above, the most common form of a meme is an image with embedded text and its most usual function is to entertain and amuse. A practice of making and sharing units that have certain, albeit implicitly stated forms and functions has thus been established online and these units have acquired the common name *internet meme*.

Wiggins & Bowers (2014) argue that memes as a genre are not simply repeated forms and literary moves, but a system of social motivations and cultural activity that is created by communicative actions, at the same time being the very motivator for those communicative actions. In other words, social actions (making memes) create social structures (memes) and these social structures, in turn, initiate new social actions.

The concept of genre has traditionally been used in researching audiovisual media and literature, but as Miltner (2014: 3) notes, applying genre to the study of digital environments can prove to be fruitful, especially because identifying the characteristics and purpose of different internet outputs helps users to manage online documents more effectively.

2.3.2 Online humor and memes

Humor is considered one of the most generic elements of internet memes. Knobel and Lankshear have studied the characteristics of popular memes and describe the humor in them as “ *quirky ”, “offbeat ”, “bizarrely funny ” and “acerbically ironic ”*. They mention toilet humor and parody as commonly employed varieties of the humor (2007: 232). This

inclination towards absurdity and heavy irony is further supported by Ryan Milner (2013b) who has studied 4chan, the digital participatory environment that made LOLCats a subculturally noteworthy format. Milner states that before going mainstream, the cat memes were governed by a “logic of lulz”- a position held by the original users of the page that regard earnestness and emotionality as undesirable features in memes.

Limor Shifman (2007) has observed humor in the age of digital reproduction. She does not address memes explicitly in her paper, but the conclusions she makes do have direct relevance to online memes and the platforms they are distributed in. Shifman calls popular sites that produce and share humorous content “humor hubs” that are simultaneously carriers of old humor types, and generators of new humor types and topics. According to Shifman, the features that characterize the generation of new types of humor online are interactivity, multimedia and global reach (2007: 204).

The most notable universal topics for joking listed by Driessen (2001) are sex, gender, age, language, politics, ethnicity, and religion. An additional topic by Shifman is animals, which has become a prominent source of humor during the digital era (2007: 201-202). These are not definite topics substantiated by empirical methods, but they do seem to agree with the previous research on humor quite extensively (p. 189). Shifman has divided Driessen’s topics into “globally oriented” and “locally oriented” categories. This division is based on the notion that while humor is a universal phenomenon, it also depends on culture specific symbols, stereotypes and codes. Sex, gender, age and animals are the most fitting to the category of “globally oriented”, whereas language, ethnicity and politics have usually their basis in more locally structured patterns (Shifman 2007: 189).

In Shifman’s analysis, visual humor is the dominant type, or at least most of the instances are image-based – a feature that applies to internet memes in particular. Visual language in general is considered universal as it travels more easily across different cultures (Snyder, 2001). Shifman concludes, that while the visual seems to triumph over verbal humor on the internet, the images and the comic techniques used are heavily affected by the values of the Western, consumer oriented cultures that idealize youth. Additionally, when written elements are present, they are predominantly in English (2007: 204).

Shifman mostly concentrates on the visual aspect of internet humor, including sound and animation. However, her emphasis on three features common to new types of online humor *highlighted incongruity, the mixture of fiction and reality, and comic commodification of celebrities* (2007: 205), have been associated with static and text-centered memes as well (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007).

Shifman suggests that the *underlined incongruity*, that is often used to ridicule powerful institutions, may be a type of “subversive deconstruction”, a way of exposing the artificiality of strong symbols such as political leaders and religious practices. At the same time, incongruous texts can however exhibit a play with genres with no conscious critical edge to them (2007: 205).

The *mixture of fiction and reality* is based on the incongruity between real people and fictional elements. Sounds, images, animation etc. from fictional movies can be embedded in real life contexts or vice versa. Shifman proposes that the effectiveness of incongruity lies in the perception of the boundary between the real and fictional while this boundary is simultaneously being blurred (2007: 205).

Comic commodification of celebrities is the third feature of new humor types that Shifman deals with in her study. Images and audio bits of people with celebrity status are manipulated for humorous effects. According to Shifman, this practice might be seen as ordinary people’s way of gaining “symbolic power” over celebrities by making them the target of scornful laughter. There is also the possibility that poking fun at celebrities acts as an indicator of their importance to the public (2007: 205).

Kim Wilkins (2014) has approached humor on the internet with her study on memes that draw on medieval themes and templates, such as The Bayeux Tapestry and Norse mythology. Also Wilkins states that incongruity is a significant constituent in the humor of memes. In the case of medievalist memes, modern technology and pop culture are used to make fun of a pre-industrial era thus creating an incongruous juxtaposition of the “*knowing present*” and the “*unknowing past*” (2014: 206). Anomalous juxtapositions in general are part of the “*hooks*” of memes that enhance their fecundity (Knobel & Lankshear 2007: 215).

In addition to the incongruity between the past and present, Wilkins addresses the contrast between high and low culture. For example, the Bayeux Tapestry is regarded as a significant cultural artefact which is on the UNESCO *Memory of the World*-list, but on the internet it is shamelessly harnessed to serve the humor hungry digital audiences (Wilkins, 2014: 208). Robert Stam points out that it is usually the advocates of high culture that disdain low culture texts and look down on low cultural forms attempting to employ elements of high culture (2005: 54). In the case of online memes, it seems to be the other way round; Wilkins argues that the vulgarization of high culture artefacts that takes place in certain instances, such as the Bayeux Tapestry –memes, can be a deliberate move to approach high culture from the bottom, juxtaposing the enduring and the shallow, the specialist and the populist (2005: 208).

Humor has been found to be an important element in the establishment of social affinities off- and online. Hancock (2004: 58) claims that in the absence of physical means for expressing the unity of a group, shared interests, mutual sense of humor and specialized knowledge can help to create social bonds in digital environments. According to Kuipers (2009), sharing humorous content is an expression of similarity, and similarity brings people closer together.

In spite of the predominance of humorous purposes within the memescape, internet memes are often harnessed for political debates and for pointing out topical issues as well. For instance, Milner (2013) explored the significance of online memes in the Occupy Wall Street Movement of 2011⁶. The simplicity and fast spread of memes makes them a convenient genre to convey opinions and increase awareness of issues on a global scale (Börzei, 2013: 23).

2.3.3 Intertextuality

A meme can be completely self-contained, but behind a major share of memes, there is an intricate nexus of obscure cross-references. A meme may simultaneously refer to topics like history, art, popular culture and the meme culture itself, leaving an inexperienced digital reader confused. The esoteric nature of memes constitutes a

⁶ Gathered in New York's Zucotti Park in September 2011, Occupy Wall Street Movement (OWS) protested against prevalent social and economic injustices, including income inequality and unregulated business practices.

considerable part of their appeal, and the pleasure often comes from the feeling of belonging to an in-group that shares the knowledge on the references. Cole Stryker (2011: 29) speaks of those who are “*in the know*”. These are the users that grasp the insider jokes and references embedded in memes, thus getting the full memetic experience. According to Baym (1995: n. pag.), shared references consolidate the foundations of a group’s unity, and recurring references develop meanings of their own within a group, constituting “*codified forms of group-specific meanings*”. In addition, Wilkins (2014: 203) argues that intertextuality allows memes to extend their relevance and adds to their life-span in the digital era of extremely transient phenomena.

Already nearly twenty years ago, Rushkoff (1997: 49) stated that “*dislocated imagery*” has risen to the mainstream and become conventionalized. The digital era makes us members of a “*chaotic mediaspace*”, where everyone will have to adjust to the massive amounts of information and decipher the “*postlinear grammar*” used to create it. Rushkoff’s terms appropriately condense the ubiquitous and complex nature of the memescape where anything can be taken from anywhere, and merged with whatever happens to suit the purpose. Consequently, Lévi-Strauss’ concept of *bricolage* has been used to describe the memetic creativity (cf. Marino, 2015). Especially psychological bricolage is relevant with regard to online memes, as it deals with the ability of individuals to retrieve and recombine information and knowledge in novel ways (Sanchez-Burks et al. 2015).

2.3.4 Linguistic features of internet memes

Alongside the technical simplicity with which memes are created, another significant factor in their popularity and global reach is the English language, which with a good reason can be called the lingua franca of internet memes (Börzei, 2013). It is thus not surprising that the majority of the previous studies have predominantly concentrated on English memes. In addition to the traditional varieties such as standard (spoken and written) social, regional and ethnic dialects of English, memes exhibit varieties that have originated in the electronically mediated platforms.

Netspeak (or internet slang) is a general term for the different manifestations of language on the internet. It is challenging to give a comprehensive standard definition for the term due to the incessantly changing nature and vastness of internet language but

concentrating on subvarieties that have been observed to appear in memes can shed light on certain aspects of the concept (Crystal, 2011).

Txtspeak is one of the subvarieties of Netspeak often used in memes. Txtspeak developed through short message services (sms) used in cell phone text messaging, where the technical affordances such as the limited number of characters prompted the development of linguistic strategies like clippings (“*bro*”), acronyms (“*BRB*”), contractions (“*pls*”) and letter homophones (“*u*”, “*r*”) (Procházka 2014: 67). Textspeak has been widely criticized for corrupting the language of especially young people. However, David Crystal argues that the moral panic surrounding the new digitally originated language varieties is overproportioned, and that actually, using strategies such as shortening requires a developed set of language skills (Crystal, 2011).

Another hugely popular online subvariety utilized in memes is *Lolspeak* that became popular especially through the *I Can Has Cheezburger* -weblog and its use by the LOLCat community. Lolspeak is famous for its childlike tone and extensive use of incorrect grammar (Miltner, 2014). A sentence like “*Littl dus she no – Iz jus pooped*” (Little does she know - I just pooped) is a prime example of this special variety (Lolcats.com). Apté (1985) defines this kind of exaggerated use of incorrect vocabulary and grammar as accent humor.

Wordplay is a common lure in the memetic toolbox. Wilkins (2014), who has studied online memes with medieval themes, noted that mock archaic language is an important ingredient in making certain kind of memes. Archaic words are used to simulate a sort of medieval English without any serious attention to authenticity. In her study, Wilkins concentrates especially on *The Bayeux Tapestry* –memes. The Bayeux Tapestry meme series features parts of the famous embroidered cloth depicting the events leading up to the Norman conquest of England. The visual elements in the Bayeux Tapestry are usually rearranged to create humorous situations and the effect is enhanced by superimposed captions that imitate archaic varieties of English. This is exemplified by figure 3 below, in which the superimposed text “*Myn milkshake bringeth all ye gentlefolk to the yard*” is a remodeled version of Kelis’ chart topping song *Milkshake* (2003) whose original lyrics say: “My milkshake brings all the boys to the yard”.

Another famous subtype of memes that plays with language is the Ducreaux-meme series, in which the expressive self-portraits of the French painter Joseph Ducreaux are equipped with overly eloquent and archaic versions of famous quotes and lyrics (Procházka, 2014; Wiggins&Bowers, 2014). “*Thou cannot lay thy hands upon this*” in figure 4 is an adaptation of “*U Can’t Touch This*”, a famous hip-hop song by MC Hammer (1990).

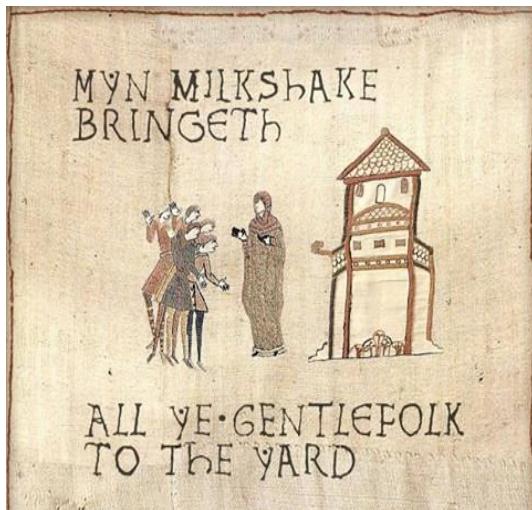


Figure 4. A Bayeux Tapestry meme.

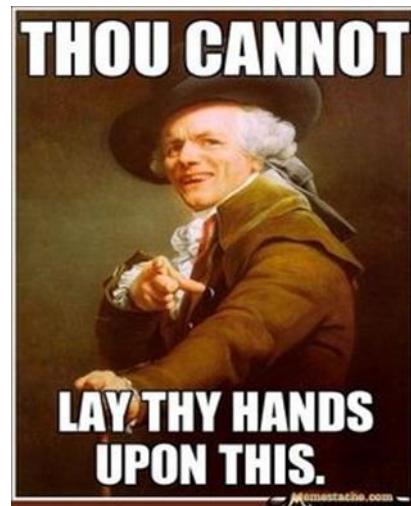


Figure 5. A Ducreaux meme.

2.4 Participatory digital culture

Knobel and Lankshear (2007: 219) characterize memes as “thoroughly social”, because in order to survive they need networked individuals that function as their hosts.

Dawkins’ perception of the internet meme as a target of active mutation by human individuals (Dawkins & Marshmallow Laser Feast, 2013) places the social and cultural constituents in the center of our understanding of the meme. Also Shifman (2007: 190) emphasizes the role of human agency in people’s conceptualization of memes. She sees memes as active entities whose spread is due to social, cultural and technological choices people make.

Jenkins (2009a) describes participatory culture as a culture with a rather low threshold to express oneself artistically and engage in civic activities. Jenkins’ view is further supported by the concept of *generative network* described by Jonathan Zittrain (2008). A generative network is a fertile system for creative production, due to features such as

leverage, adaptability, ease of mastery, accessibility, and transferability. Bruns (2007) states that by promoting the creation of this participatory culture where people can simultaneously consume and produce user-generated content (UGC), the internet has caused the breakdown of the traditional producer-consumer barrier and turned people into “produsers”.

2.4.1 Affinity spaces

As outlined above, the social aspect of meme making is essential. The collective experiences and activities are of the essence in the creation and enjoyment of online memes within the participatory digital culture. McArthur (2008: 59) notes that the internet has made it possible for specialized subcultures to create their own digital social spaces without the restricting elements of time and space. Knobel and Lankshear (2007) refer to these specialized social spaces as *affinity spaces*. The term was originally coined by James Paul Gee (2004) according to whom:

“an affinity space is a place or set of places where people affiliate with others based primarily on shared activities, interests, and goals, not shared race, class culture, ethnicity, or gender” (Gee 2004: 67).

Affinity spaces are usually affiliated with online activities, but can occur in physical spaces as well. According to Gee, these affinity spaces concentrate on sharing knowledge and encouraging involvement in specific areas, which often results in informal learning. Gee uses the term *space* because it allows for a more flexible description of environments where involvement and participation are not as steady and coherent as in a community. In Gee’s view, “community” is too restrictive a term in that it is associated with membership and belongingness whereas “space” produces a more open and allowing impression. This is important, because affinity space is not meant to be a labeling term, but a concept that refers to interactive spaces where people can share a great deal with each other without being segregated by social factors or the previous, more experienced users (Gee, 2005: 214).

Affinity spaces encourage interactional content organization, which means that creation of content is not restricted to the page designers alone, but users are on an equal footing

with them. Designers are open to user suggestions and often use them to shape the content of the site (Gee, 2005: 226). This aspect is especially relevant in regard to Classical Art Memes, where the creator and administrator uploads also visitor memes to the timeline of the page.

Another important facet that defines affinity spaces, concerns knowledge. Within these spaces, different types of knowledge are gained and dispersed. The people who frequent an affinity space share a lot of *extensive knowledge* that is widely shared and concerns for example the general rules of a page. *Intensive knowledge* on the other hand concentrates on specialized areas that some users become experts in (Gee, 2005: 226).

Affinity spaces encourage the acquisition of *individual knowledge* that can be used to contribute to the content of the page. Thus, the knowledge that exists in people's heads becomes *distributed knowledge*. In this way, the users establish a network that consists of a collection of their individual knowledge. This network can possibly constitute a bigger and more sophisticated network of people in turn (Gee, 2005: 226-227).

Gee mentions also *dispersed knowledge* as a separate entity. This is knowledge that is not actually at the site itself but must be gathered elsewhere. An affinity space can encourage its users to gather and disperse certain kinds of knowledge, depending on the theme of the site in question, but on the whole, there are no strict rules as to the kind of knowledge that can be drawn on (Gee, 2005: 227).

Knobel and Lankshear (2007) acknowledge the significance of affinity spaces to informal learning as well, but use the term on a more general level, to refer to the ability of participatory digital culture to gather people of different interests together for social and creative purposes. As Gee (2004: 71) has observed, participating in affinities is often just as much about relatedness and feeling connected to other people, as it is about the content itself. He suggests that a variety of people creating affinity spaces is a kind of leitmotif of the postmodern world.

The discursive features that memes entail tap into shared popular culture experiences and practices. Using particular effects and references is giving “semiotic nods and winks” to the people who are familiar with them. These nods and winks help in establishing and maintaining affinity spaces (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007: 17). The most

prominent discursive features of Classical Art Memes the analysis of this paper is set out to reveal will be the nods and winks of this particular digital space.

2.5 Online memes as a new literacy practice

In Knobel and Lankshear's conception, literacy is not understood as reading and writing alone, but as a set of skills that different types of texts require in order to be understood. (2007). Literacy entails being able to read and write certain types of texts in specific ways. Mastering a specific literacy presumes profound familiarization with the social practices associated with a particular text type (Gee, Hull and Lankshear, 1996: 3). In addition to the expansion of literacy as a concept, the notion of *text* itself has become blurred under the weight of new expressive media (Knobel&Lankshear 2007: 11).

Knobel and Lankshear (2007) consider the internet meme as a paradigm case of a new literacy that contains a radically different set of technical and social elements than conventional literacies such as the print. They define new literacies as:

“New socially recognized ways of generating, communicating and negotiating meaningful content through the medium of encoded texts within contexts of participation in Discourses” (Knobel & Lankshear 2007: 4).

As discussed above, under participatory culture and affinity spaces, making memes and sharing them in digital environments is recognized as a social and established generative practice. What Knobel and Lankshear refer to with *encoded texts* are texts that do not require the physical presence of other people in order to be accessed, processed and transferred. Encoded texts are free from the immediate contexts of production that are presupposed, for instance, in the case of speech and gestures. Discourse with a capital D refers to Gee's (1996) definition of discourses as socially recognized practices, such as certain kind of language use, that make individuals identifiable and tie them to recognizable social groups and roles. Discourses are, as Gee puts it, “*ways of being together in the world*” (Gee 1997: xv). Memes can be readily seen as encoded texts since making them is a recognized practice within the non-physical online culture and their habitation in the participatory social media spaces advocates the Discourse aspect.

What makes a literacy new is the “new technical stuff” and “new ethos stuff”. The new technical stuff refers to the enabling nature of modern digital technology, which makes it possible for an individual with a fairly limited set of technical skills to create numerous different “meaningful artifacts” (such as memes) by using simple tools and techniques. Things people have already known can now be done in new ways with the help of new technology (Knobel & Lankshear 2007: 7).

The new ethos stuff has a lot to do with Gee’s (2004) concept of affinity spaces, where individuals connect with each other on an unprecedented scale. It is about a whole new mindset characterized by elements such as inclusiveness, collaboration, distribution and exploration, while the previous mindset was built more on the individual, centralized expertise, scarcity and stability. In the new media spaces displaying the new ethos, content is less published and authorities less visible (Knobel & Lankshear 2007: 14).

New literacies are created and shaped by a digital culture that considers the practices of the previous industrial era as a hindrance to the creative forces the new technologies have unleashed. For instance, copyright laws and restrictions on information flow may potentially prevent creative juices from flowing. As Lessig (2004) claims, further cultural creation presupposes the freedom to make use of previous cultural products. Lessig bases his claim on the assumption that, generally taken, nothing in culture is original and everything in culture depends on information being available. Knobel and Lankshear (2007: 12) claim that the contemporary phenomenon of remixing and modifying original images, sounds, films, music etc. is a conscious expression of the will to be free to use cultural pieces of information for creative purposes. This practice also reflects the transformation of the passive consumer of culture to the active *produser* outlined by Bruns (2007). These aspects are especially relevant with respect to the intertextuality of memes, that often necessitates the exploitation of copyrighted material.

New technologies can be used to replicate traditional literacy practices such as printed books, which is why Knobel and Lankshear do not regard a literacy that has only “new technical stuff” but no “new ethos stuff” as a new literacy. In the case of internet memes, both these aspects are present; the technological affordances have made it possible to create content like memes effortlessly, and participating in meme-ing entails

active participation and collaboration through social media spaces where remixing cultural information is an essential practice.

Knobel and Lankshear (2007: 225) suggest that understanding new digital practices such as meme-ing can be especially fruitful in literacy and media education. Memes have the power to infect the minds of young people in particular. It is thus important to take the social contexts of online memes into account, instead of concentrating on conventional text centered approaches alone. Educators can provision students with strategies for identifying the meaning of a phenomenon as wide and popular as the internet meme and give tools for the understanding of its implications on ethical decision-making, social actions and relations with other people.

2.6 Classifying discourses in digital environments

In the following sections I will give a brief overview of the study of digital discourses, present the theory behind my method (*the faceted classification scheme for computer-mediated discourses*) and introduce the research questions of this paper.

Different terms for language use in digital environments have been suggested.

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Herring, 1996) has been a widely used term since the 1990s, but its adequacy from a linguistic point of view is somewhat questionable. Firstly, because communication is such a broad concept (entailing image, video, music and language) and secondly, because nowadays there are many other platforms than just traditional computers used for computational processing.

Electronically mediated communication (EMC) and *digitally mediated communication* (DMC) are other commonly used terms that take into consideration the range of different platforms. Crystal considers *Internet linguistics* the most suitable term, since it can be used to address the whole spectrum of language manifestations in the digital realm (2011: 2). Since multimodal memes cannot be studied without taking extralinguistic elements such as images into account, I have used the terms digitally mediated communication (DMC) and digitally mediated discourse (DMD) in this paper.

The nature of digitally mediated communication as a merger of digital platforms and practices of social contact has questioned the traditional division of language into the two modalities, speech and writing. The implication is that traditional approaches to

discourse environments through definite modes and hierarchical categories are not sufficient anymore (Herring, 2007). Especially in the case of internet memes that combine various modes, extralinguistic aspects should be taken into account.

Herring states that traditional methods for analyzing discourses are too rigid or too imprecise for the diverse and fluid digital discourses. For example, genres have been traditionally analyzed on various levels of generality, which has resulted in categorizing types of very different specificity such as speech, monologue, conversation and casual chat, all as genres (2007: 5).

Various methods for classifying different outputs of digitally mediated communication have been suggested. Herring criticizes some of the earlier shots at classification for basing assumptions⁷ on a limited data and overgeneralizing the multilayered and fragmented online language (2007: 7). As the internet expanded, the complexity and variability of its discourses, brought about by various technological and situational factors, became obvious (Baym, 1995; Cherny, 1999; Herring, 1996). The research started to concentrate on the linguistic description of individual genres of computer-mediated discourse such as email discussion lists, Usenet newsgroups and Internet Relay Chat (IRC). Herring has termed these genres *socio-technical modes* (Herring, 2002).

Despite the disagreements on the different classification criteria within the field of discourse analysis, there seems to be a consensus that classification makes analysis easier by making explicit the similarities in instances that constitute different types of discourse. This, in turn, simplifies comparison between different discourse types (Herring, 2007: 6).

The methods of discourse analysis have had to be adapted to the varying nature of the digital era, but as Herring states, the needs are the same as in traditional analysis of spoken and written discourses; the qualities of a medium that potentially affect language variation have to be recognized, the modes of a medium call for characterization and the social behavior behind communicational situations must be described (Herring, 2007:7).

⁷ CMD as an "emergent register" by Ferrara et al. (1991).

E.g. Werry (1996) and Yates (1996) considered only a single form of CMD.

2.7 Faceted classification scheme for computer-mediated discourse

One such method that attempts to take the diversity of the digital age into account is the *faceted classification scheme for computer-mediated discourse*, outlined by Susan Herring (2007). Herring's scheme approaches the classification of DMC through the concept of facets. Facets are multiple categories originally employed in the theories of library and information science for information storage and retrieval purposes. The scheme consists of several facets, each of which may have multiple possible values. The facets in the scheme are based on various traditional discourse analysis practices and on elements that have been found to affect variation in digital discourses.

The purpose of the CMD scheme is to draw attention to a cluster of technical and social features that might have an effect on the language use in the outputs of DMC. This facilitates further analysis by bringing forward aspects in the discourse that might otherwise go unnoticed (Herring, 2007: 7). The facets of the scheme are not in any specific hierarchical order, because only after a deeper, empirical analysis of the individual facets, can one assign precedence to specific aspects with respect to the larger context of computer-mediated discourse. However, Herring notes that the facets should be clearly defined and mutually exclusive (2007: 10).

The categories in the scheme are open ended, so if evidence shows that an additional factor is needed, it can be added. This paper will mainly concentrate on the social factors, but as Herring notes, there is a chance that the technical factors and situation factors correspond with each other (2007: 11). Herring states that the faceted classification is a flexible method, since it can describe a large amount of items within the subject domain through a comparatively economical, pre-defined set of facets and terms. Additionally, also novel items can be easily included (2007: 10).

2.7.1 Medium Factors

Table 1 presents the *medium factors* (Herring, 2007: 13-15) of the faceted classification scheme, that deal with the technical considerations of a given DMC context. Herring bases the categories on technical factors that, according to previous empirical studies, seem to govern digitally mediated contexts on some level. Herring does not suggest that the digital medium has a determining impact on all aspects of communication, but it is

important to determine how the technical features affect DMC, in what conditions and what exactly is affected (2007: 11).

M1 Synchronicity
M2 Message transmission (1-way vs. 2-way)
M3 Persistence of transcript
M4 Size of message buffer
M5 Channels of communication
M6 Anonymous messaging
M7 Private messaging
M8 Filtering
M9 Quoting
M10 Message format

Table 1. *Medium factors* (as presented in Herring, 2007: 13-15).

(M1) If the system is synchronous, the sender and receiver have to be logged in at the same time to be able to send and receive messages. Synchronous systems include certain chat systems. In an asynchronous system, such as e-mail, the messages are stored and can be read anytime.

(M2) A message can be delivered one entire message at a time, or the participants of a conversation can see the message being typed character by character. The former is termed “one-way transmission” and the latter “two-way transmission”.

(M3) Persistence of transcript refers to the amount of time a message remains in the system after it is posted. Email is an example of a persistent platform whereas in some chat-systems the messages disappear as new ones replace them. Herring has stated that a DMC platform of persistent transcript enhances metalinguistic awareness in that users are able to contemplate the language they use and play with it in ways different from speech.

(M4) The number of characters allowed by the system in a single message is referred to as *size of message buffer*. The buffer size can in principle be limitless, but many systems such as Twitter have a very limited message buffer of 140 characters. Small buffers have been observed to affect the message structure in discourse. For example, the use of abbreviations increases as the buffer gets smaller.

(M5) *Channels of communication* are the different modes available in a particular DMC system. These include static or animated pictures, video and audio channels.

(M6) *Anonymous* messaging is an optional medium feature for a user of a DMC system. If a platform doesn't require a user to verify their identity and allows the use of a pseudonym or a nickname for interaction, the user typically opts for anonymity. Anonymity has been observed to have significant implications for online discourse behavior including antisocial behavior and identity play. Also *private messaging* (**M7**), *filtering* (**M8**) and *quoting* (**M9**) are technological, built in affordances of DMC platforms that a user may opt to use. A DMC platform can enable private conversation in addition to public conversations, allow a user to filter messages from certain users and quote a previous message in its entirety or just a portion of it for response purposes.

The final medium factor, *message format* (**M10**), defines the order of appearance and organization of messages, what information is automatically attached to each message and how is it realized.

The factors concerning technical aspects are not in the center of this study, but to give an informative overview of Classical Art Memes, these aspects will be briefly dealt with as well.

2.7.2 Situation Factors

The *situation factors* presented in table 2 below, constitute the core of the analysis in this paper. These factors address the social and structural dimensions of the digital communication situation, including the type, purpose and subject matter of individual discursive units. As with the medium factors presented above, Herring bases the situation factors on categories that have been validated by previous studies on variation

in CMD contexts (2007: 11). The below descriptions are presented according to Herring (2007: 17-22).

S1	Participation structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-many • Public/private • Degree of anonymity/pseudonymity • Group size; number of active participants • Amount, rate, and balance of participation
S2	Participant characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographics: gender, age, occupation, etc. • Proficiency: with language/computers/CMC • Experience: with addressee/group/topic • Role/status: in “real life”; of online personae • Pre-existing sociocultural knowledge and interactional norms • Attitudes, beliefs, ideologies, and motivations
S3	Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of group, e.g., professional, social, fantasy/roleplaying, aesthetic, experimental • Goal of interaction, e.g., get information, negotiate consensus, develop professional/social relationships, impress/entertain others, have fun
S4	Topic or Theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of group, e.g., politics, linguistics, feminism, soap operas, sex, science fiction, South Asian culture, medieval times, pub • Of exchanges, e.g., the war in Iraq, pro-drop languages, the project budget, gay sex, vacation plans, personal information about participants, meta-discourse about CMC
S5	Tone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serious/playful • Formal/casual • Contentious/friendly • Cooperative/sarcastic, etc.
S6	Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> E.g., debate, job announcement, information exchange, phatic exchange, problem solving, exchange of insults, joking exchange, game, theatrical performance, flirtation, virtual sex
S7	Norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of organization • Of social appropriateness • Of language
S8	Code	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language, language variety • Font/writing system

Table 2. *Situation factors* (As presented in Herring, 2007: 17-22).

The first situation factor, **participation structure** entails the dynamics of a DMC situation. How many active or potential participants there are in a particular DMC situation and what is the rate and amount of participation? Is the communication public or private or something in between, and can the users choose to communicate anonymously or with an identity different from their real one? The factor also addresses whether there is an even or imbalanced distribution of participation among individuals. The structures of participation affect, for instance, politeness; public online conversations are often less polite than private discussions. Anonymity, in turn, has been observed to increase the use of offensive language in DMC.

Participant characteristics describe, among other things, the backgrounds, skills, experiences, ideologies and interactional patterns of the participants. For example, participant gender has been found to affect behavior related to politeness and contentiousness in some DMC contexts and participants with contrasting ideological views may be more susceptible to conflicting discourses.

Purpose can be divided into “group purpose” and “goals of interaction”. The former refers to the explicitly announced or implied idea of an online discourse community, whereas the latter addresses the interactional aims of individual users. The aims within a given group can naturally vary between individuals.

Activity refers to the types of discourse used to achieve interactional aims. For instance, flirting as an activity is often used to develop a relationship and the goal of debating is to outsmart other people. These different activities have their own specific conventionalized linguistic features that reveal when a certain activity is taking place.

Topic can be perceived on the group level and at the exchange level of individual participants. Group level topic is, generally speaking, the appropriate content of discussion in a given context, defined by the group. At the exchange level on the other hand, the focus is on the participants’ actual topics of discussion, which can differ from the stated topic of the group. Some DMC environments can have **themes** rather than topics that adhere, for instance, to certain places or epochs.

The manner and ethos in which communication is carried out in digital discourses is referred to in the scheme as **tone**. The degree of seriousness, formality, contentiousness

and cooperation are examples of continuous scalar dimensions that are worth acknowledging in the description of tone in a given DMC situation.

Norms are the conventions of DMC environments and they are divided into three types: *norms of organization*, *norms of social appropriateness* and *norms of language*. The *organizational rules* are the formal or informal administrative protocols that govern the structure of an online community or group. The structure entails aspects such as group formation, admittance of new members, maintenance, storage and distribution of messages and penalization of misbehaving participants. *Norms of social appropriateness* address the code of conduct that are applied in a DMC context. These behavioral standards can be unwritten and implicit or explicitly expressed general or page specific rules. *Norms of language* contain the linguistic practices of an internet community or users. These conventions include, for instance, acronyms, insider jokes, abbreviations and specific discourse genres.

The final situation factor is **code**, which refers to the language or language variety of the digital community. *Language variety* entails the dialect and the register used. The standard, educated, written variety of a language is usually the default, but there are instances where regional, social class or ethnic dialects are used. Register contains the specialized sub-languages connected with social roles and contexts such as academic or medical discourses, but unmarked registers and ordinary everyday conversation can also be identified. Lastly, *writing system* refers to the font applied and how it relates to the writing system of the language. Is the system using a font that is based on Roman alphabet or is there a transliteration of non-roman system, like Arabic or Greek, into Roman letters? There may also be special fonts such as Japanese or Chinese used to represent a non-Roman writing system.

For completeness sake, I presented the situation factors in their entirety, but in the analysis, I will apply an adaptation of the scheme, that only touches aspects deducible from the data. My version of the scheme will be introduced in the next chapter.

To my knowledge, the faceted classification scheme as such has not been used in defining the discursive characteristics of content sharing pages such as Classical Art Memes. David Crystal's promotion of the importance of mapping different outlets of online communication in his Internet Linguistics (2011) and Herring's (2007)

description of her method as a valuable tool for describing DMC environments, prompted me to test the validity of the scheme in analyzing memes in digital communities. The application of the scheme helped bring forward aspects in the data I would not have taken into account without it.

2.8 The aim of the study and research questions

The purpose of the theoretical overviews presented above has been to prepare the ground for the following research questions:

1. On the grounds of the sampling, what are the most prominent discursive features of Classical Art Memes?
2. In light of these prominent discursive features, what kind of an affinity space does Classical Art Memes constitute?
3. How readily applicable Herring's faceted classification scheme for computer-mediated discourse is for analyzing online memes?

To reiterate, my goal is to give an overview of Classical Art Memes as a digital affinity space within the contemporary participatory digital culture by concentrating on the discursive effects of the memes in my sampling. As a method for determining these effects, I will use Susan Herring's faceted classification scheme for computer-mediated discourses.

My initial assumptions are based on previous knowledge on the page and on internet culture at large. I expect sexually oriented and absurd humor expressed through sarcastically toned language that features non-standard features and obscenities.

3 RESEARCH STRUCTURE

In this chapter I will present the material used as data in the analysis, and give a detailed description of the research process I have gone through. Additional illustrations are provided to exemplify the data and the analysis process.

3.1 Material

My raw data consisted of 140 memes from the timeline of Classical Art memes. The 70 first memes posted on the timeline comprise half of the sample and the other half encompasses 70 most recent memes. The 70 first memes have been posted between 31.8.2014 - 16.12.2014 and the 70 most recent ones between 25.1.2016 - 19.2.2016. Despite the temporal distance between the first and most recent group of memes, there will be no diachronic comparison between the two groups. The purpose of the selection method was simply to compile a relatively unbiased sampling of memes. The memes were not selected based on their popularity, because there was no way of assessing the relative popularity of a specific meme. As the amount of followers has constantly risen, an old meme somewhere down the timeline has gathered far less reactions than a recent post.

Shifman (2007) concluded that visual humor is the dominant type of humor in the contemporary digital realm and that when language *is* present, it usually rests on images. Memes do occasionally appear as stand-alone images – often as manipulated versions, but the great majority of memes seems to incorporate language to a significant extent. Out of the total of 140 memes in my sample, only nine memes did not exhibit any linguistic elements. Because my focus is on the relationship of the visual and linguistic, instances in the sampling that did not contain linguistic elements were discarded. Another five memes were discarded because they were videos or contained animation and could thus not be presented in printed form. Additionally, one meme was discarded because it was behind a hyperlink and not situated on the target page. Altogether 15 memes were discarded from the sampling.

The remaining 125 memes are all static, original or manipulated pictures of paintings, drawings or sculptures, equipped with written English text. Below are two examples

from the sampling. Figure 5 is a non-manipulated portrait whereas figure 6 has been slightly tampered with (headphones on the boy).



Figure 7. A manipulated painting with captions.

Figure 6. An original painting with captions.

3.2 Methods

The methods used in this paper are mostly qualitative, but to support the conclusions, there will also be tables illustrating the relative shares of different discursive features in the data.

The faceted classification scheme for computer-mediated discourses presented in the literature section was the central method of this study. First, each individual meme in the sample was observed several times against the categories from the classification scheme. Second, the relevant categories were assigned appropriate values taking into consideration the background information on the artwork and utterances the memes employed. Finally, the relative portions and frequencies of the topics, tones, linguistic

features and types of intertextuality were counted and tabulated to provide illustration and to justify the conclusions.

As Herring (2007: 10) points out, some facets might not apply at all in a given context, or new facets might be needed if they seem relevant. In this paper, the factor **participant characteristics (S2)** was left out from the scheme, because such information could not be drawn from the data. In addition, the aspect of *font/writing system* in **Code (S8)** was not taken into account, since it did not play any role in the memes. I added the **topic/theme of template** to **S4** in order to deal with the visual element present in the memes. Additionally, a new factor **intertextuality (S9)** was added to the scheme to address the heavy cross-referentiality that previous literature on memes has observed (e.g. Knobel&Lankshear, 2007; Stryker, 2011).

Herring (2007: 11) also remarks that the facets of the classification scheme are not in any specific hierarchical order, because only after a deeper analysis, the relevance and interaction of the different facets can be properly valued. For my analysis, this meant that the factors **purpose (S3)**, **activity (S6)** and **norms (S7)** were better answered based on the values for **topic/theme (S4)**, **tone (S5)**, **code (S8)** and the added **intertextuality (S9)**. These latter four facets proved to be the most relevant for my purposes and became the core of the analysis.

Participation structure (S1) addresses the dynamics of the page as a whole and is not concerned with the memes as such. I have however included it in my adaptation of the scheme to provide some information on the workings of the site.

My adaptation of the classification scheme is presented in table 3 below. Following the facets is an illustration of the analysis process.

S1	Participation structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-many • Public/private • Degree of anonymity/pseudonymity • Group size; number of active participants • Amount, rate, and balance of participation
S3	Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of group • Goal of interaction
S4	Topic or Theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of group • Of template • Of exchanges (individual memes)
S5	Tone	E.g., serious/playful, formal/casual, contentious/friendly, cooperative/sarcastic, etc.
S6	Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> E.g., debate, job announcement, information exchange, phatic exchange, problem solving, exchange of insults, joking exchange, game, theatrical performance, flirtation, virtual sex
S7	Norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of organization • Of social appropriateness • Of language
S8	Code	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language, language variety
S9	Intertextuality	E.g., reference to popular culture, reference to digital culture, reference to history/religion etc.

Table 3. Facets used in the analysis.



Topic of the template: Religion (Gustave Dore: *Lucifer cast away from heaven*)

Topic of meme: Religion

Tone: Playful

Language variety: Non-standard features “gonna” and “hookers”

Figure 8. An intertextual meme.

Intertextuality:	Reference to Lucifer's expulsion from Heaven (Isaiah 14).
	Reference to popular culture: “I'm going to build my own theme park with blackjack and hookers”, from the animated show <i>Futurama</i> (David X. Cohen & Matt Groening 1999).
Activity:	Joking
Purpose (goal of interaction):	Amusement, pleasure

The pieces of art used as templates on Classical Art Memes were not credited, so the information on the artwork had to be found out separately. The comment sections of the memes provided some hints, but most of the information was retrieved with Google image search, which turned out to be a very successful method; only eight works from the total of 125 were not identified.

The topic of the template in figure 6 is *religion* since the artwork depicts Lucifer being cast away from Heaven. The topic of the *meme* remains the same as that of the painting. The meme's creator has combined it with a slightly modified quote from popular culture for an effect. For those who immediately recognize the references to the fall of Lucifer and to the debauched robot Bender from the animated show *Futurama*, the meme will probably go down well - for the clueless, the experience will appear somewhat blander. This is a good example of the cross-referentiality memes often exhibit. In figuring out the intertextual references of the memes, I mostly relied on internet search engines and *Knowyourmeme.com*, a site that provides meticulous and up-to-date information on internet borne phenomena, such as the origins of memes and online catchphrases. The page is not an academic source of knowledge on internet culture, but it is probably the largest and most exhaustive source of information on individual online memes there is. Additionally, in figuring out unfamiliar expressions used in the memes, I resorted to *Urban dictionary* (founded in 1999), a crowdsourced online dictionary of slang words and phrases.

In defining the tone of a given meme, I concentrated on the immediate mood it conveyed and compared it to definitions of different tones. The descriptions of memes from previous literature were also taken into consideration. For example, if a meme contained ironic and mocking features and had a clear target it was considered sarcastic. If there was no apparent intention to be overly nasty, a meme was usually qualified as playful. Many memes could have been described with more than one tone, but to simplify the typology of the data I assessed only the single most marked tone for every meme. In the above example I have defined the tone as playful, because in spite of the colloquial “*hookers*” and the religious theme, there is no specific aim to insult anyone specific. And after all, what else could one expect from a fallen angel than vices?

The language variety of a meme was considered non-standard if it contained vulgar expressions or any features that are explicitly marked as informal, colloquial or non-standard in the literature. In assessing the standardness of a feature, I mainly relied on the *Longman Student Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (2002) and *Cambridge Dictionaries Online* (dictionary.cambridge.org). For example, according to the Cambridge dictionary, the expressions “gonna” and “*hookers*” in the above example are informal expressions.

In figure 6 the incongruous juxtaposition of a religious theme with a reference from popular culture clearly signifies the activity of joking and the goal of joking is usually, and in this particular instance most definitely, to amuse.

4 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In this chapter I will present the findings the application of the faceted classification scheme outlined in table 3 provided, discussing each medium and situation factor in their respective subsections. Illustrations are given in the case of *topic*, *tone*, *norms*, *code* and *intertextuality* to demonstrate the findings. At the end of the chapter, I will summarize the findings of the analysis and answer the research questions presented in chapter 2.

4.1 Medium Factors

As Classical Art Memes is a Facebook page, its medium characteristics are the same as those of Facebook. It is nonetheless worth listing these factors for the sake of completeness.

The page is an *asynchronous system* (**M1**), which means that the users don't have to be logged in at the same time to be able to see the content posted on the page - the memes will wait for the users. *Message transmission* (**M2**) is one-way, because the receiver does not know when the sender is preparing a meme to post on the page.

The *persistence of the transcript* (**M3**) on the page is basically limitless as the memes remain and are visible to everyone as long as the administrator of the site doesn't delete them. The *size of message buffer* (**M4**) on Facebook certainly allows a lot more room for expression than for example Twitter's 140 characters.

The *channels of communication* (**M5**), in addition to the textual elements, include static and animated graphics with occasional sound elements. As I have discarded animated and video-memes, these cannot be taken into the equation. The tendency to utilize these different modalities is in line with the already apparent observation that memes are highly multimodal (Knobel&Lankshear, 2007).

The administrator of the Classical Art Memes is anonymous, but the people who comment on the memes are Facebook users that generally use their own profiles with their own names. (**M6**). Seeing that the page is a Facebook website and not a profile of a private person, the visitors of the page cannot engage in private conversation with the administrator. Questions and other comments addressed to Classical Art Memes must

be posted publicly in the comment sections of the posts, and they are answered by the administrator in public (**M7**).

Filtering individual user comments or altogether banning a user from a site are functions provided by Facebook. I have no information of the extent to which these functions are used by the administrator of the page (**M8**). There is no specific feature for quoting messages, so the users have to use copy and paste functions manually (**M9**).

The *message format* of the page makes the memes appear on the timeline in the order they are posted, with the most recent posts on top of the timeline. However, in the comment sections, the user can choose whether most recent or most relevant comments are shown (**M10**).

If the user comments had been taken into consideration, the relevance of medium factors could have been assessed more extensively. Within the scope of this paper, the most relevant insight the medium factors provided is perhaps *persistence of the transcript* (**M3**). A persistent transcript on a DMC platform enhances metalinguistic awareness in that users are able to contemplate the language they use, and play with it in ways different from speech (Herring, 2007: 15). As the memes are not deleted from Classical Art Memes, but are stored on the timeline and in the site's folders, the visitors have the possibility to observe the previous material and use it to create new memes that acknowledge the accumulated discursive knowhow of the page. This may potentially lower the threshold to participate and also increase the quality of the content as people are aware of what has already been done before.

4.2 Situation factors

As already mentioned, the situational factors are in the center of this study because they provided the most relevant information on various discursive elements of the memes on Classical Art Memes. In the following subsections, I will present the most prominent values the application of the classification scheme resulted in. At first, I will briefly discuss the participation structure (**S1**) to give some perspective to the dynamics of the page. After that, I will concentrate on the facets topic/theme (**S4**), tone (**S5**), code (**S8**) and intertextuality (**S9**), which constitute the core of this analysis. Activity (**S6**),

Purpose (**S3**) and norms (**S7**) drew on the previous facets, so they will be dealt with last in their respective chapter.

4.2.1 Participation structure

The administrator of Classical Art Memes posts the memes on the timeline for all the visitors to see, using the page name as a user name. However, the visitors can post their own creations which can be seen in the “Visitor posts” –sidebar on the front page. Memes posted by visitors are regularly posted on the timeline with credit to the maker. The site is hence many-to-many, public environment, where the administrator communicates from behind a pseudonym and the visitors use their own Facebook-profiles. Quantifying the exact number of active participants is not a plausible task, but the number of visitors commenting on memes daily can be counted in thousands, and reactions per day in tens of thousands. The amounts have steadily risen as the number of followers has increased (from a million likes on 1/19/2016 to 2,314,446 likes on 7/20/2016).

4.2.2 Topic/Theme

The topic or theme of the group depends on the level of generality with which we want to look at the page. On a very general level, the theme is fine art, but if we assess the theme according to the topics of the individual memes, the case is not so straightforward. In order for the analysis to be comprehensive, the topics of the templates and the topics of the memes had to be assessed separately. The topics of the templates were identified using Google image search on every individual piece of art in the sample. Out of the total of 125 templates only eight instances could not be credited.

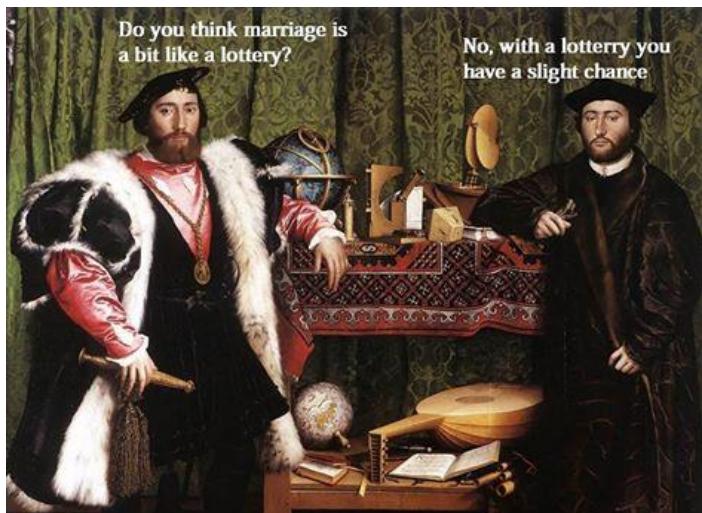
A total of 19 different topics for the meme templates were identified. Only topics that stood out from the sample are taken into account in the detailed discussion. The four most common individual topics and the share of miscellaneous topics are presented in table 4 below. For a topic to stand out it needed to have at least a ten percent incidence in the sampling. A total of four topics qualified, **27** instances being the highest and **16** instances the lowest. The templates under the heading *miscellaneous* had all relative shares lower than 10 percent and will be examined briefly in their respective section.

Topic of template	Number of instances	Relative share
Portraits	27	21.6%
Manipulated images	26	20.8%
Religion	22	17.6%
Situations	16	12.8%
(Miscellaneous)	34	27.2%
Total	125	100%

Table 4. Topics of the meme templates.

Portraits

The most common templates used in the sample were portraits, covering a total of 27 instances (21.6%). These were non-manipulated images of paintings, mostly depicting royalty, clergy and historical figures. For the most part, there seems to be nothing specific in the portraits that invites funny captions; they are just paintings of upper-class people posing for the painter, as is the case with examples **1** and **2** below.



Example 1. *The Ambassadors*, Hans Holbein the Younger (1533).



"I've had bad luck with both my wives. The first one left me and the second one didn't" - James Stuart

Example 2. *James II when Duke of York*, Peter Lely (1665-70).

It is perhaps the static dignity emanating from portraits like these that invites the placement of an incongruous element, like a joke. Additionally, a wry comment combined with a solemn expression brings a sort of “deadpan” feel to the humor - an air of indifference and listlessness that might also be described with the popular term

“passive-aggressive”. Then there are instances like examples 3 and 4 below, that don’t need much speculation as to why the temptation could not be resisted.



Catherine II the Great, Empress of Russia looks a lot like David Cameron

Example 3. *Catherine II of Russia*, Johann Baptist von Lampi the Elder (c.1791).



Example 4. *The Infanta Isabella*, Studio of Peter Paul Rubens (c.1615).

Shifman (2007) has observed that comic commodification of celebrities is one of the features of new humor types emerged during the digital era. This type of humor is based on the humorous manipulation of images, videos and audio bits of people with celebrity status. Shifman suggests that using this strategy may be a way of gaining symbolic power over celebrities by poking fun at them.

The prominent people depicted in the artwork on Classical Art Memes are hardly the kind of stars that could be followed on Twitter or Instagram, but it seems that they have got their share of the comic commodification as well. If someone needs the feel to gain symbolic power over dead kings and queens, it is perfectly alright, but I believe that this is not the case with these particular instances.

Manipulated images

Manipulated images were the second most used template in the sample, covering 26 memes (20.8%). Image manipulation entails many other topics such as portraits of the nobility and other people, but since the manipulated element in a template usually

functions as the nucleus of the meme, I decided to place these instances under a single topic.

In most of the manipulated templates, there is usually some element of modern culture or technology incorporated into the original piece of art. In example 5, there is a monopoly board added to the table, and in example 6 pope Clement XIII is holding a microphone while singing a slightly modified version of the hip-hop song *Lose Yourself* by Eminem (2002).

**When you're halfway through a game
of Monopoly and somebody insists on
reading the rule book**



Example 5. *The Price of Blood*,
Thomas Satterwhite Noble (1868).



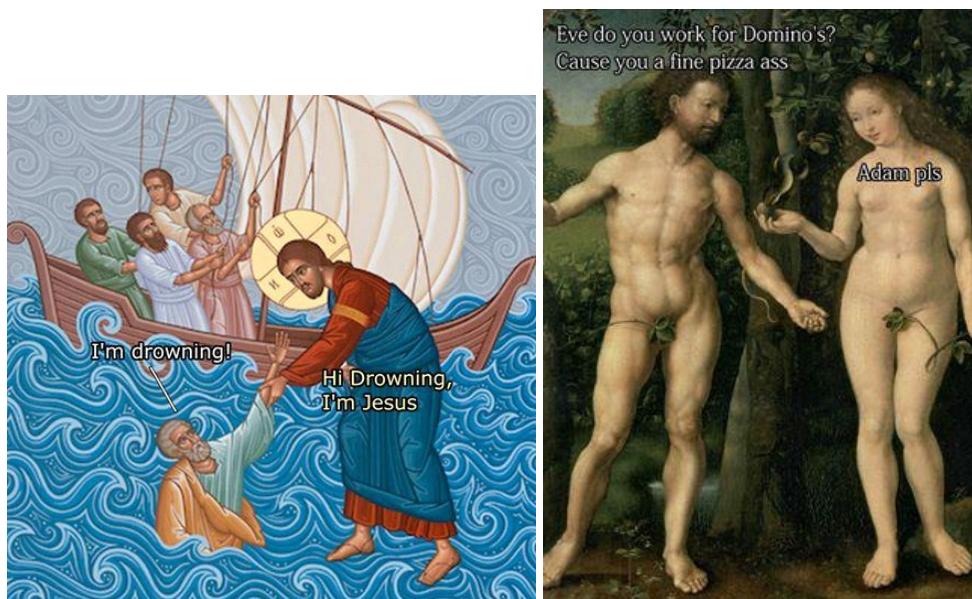
Example 6. *Pope Clement XIII*,
Anton Raphael Mengs, (1759).

The addition of modern equipment or cultural elements onto the original paintings is an effective means of inducing anachronistic incongruity that is enhanced by the textual ingredients. This addition of modern elements to paintings from previous eras could be considered an example of the incongruous juxtaposition of the “*knowing present*” and the “*unknowing past*” that Kim Wilkins (2014: 206) talks about. Wilkins states that vulgarization of high culture artefacts may be a deliberate way of juxtaposing the enduring and the shallow, the specialist and the populist (2014: 208). Shifman is in step with Wilkins by suggesting that the underlined incongruity is a kind of subversive deconstruction with a view to expose the artificiality of strong symbols. The above may have some bearing on Classical Art Memes as well, but based on my analysis, I am

more inclined towards Shifman's other suggestion that the incongruity of texts may as well exhibit a mere play with genres with no conscious critical edge to it (Shifman, 2007: 205).

Religion

Paintings with a religious theme covered 22 memes (17.6%) of the sample. These pieces of art mostly depict stories from the Bible, but there are also paintings portraying Christian themes in general. Example 7 portrays Jesus walking on water (Matthew 14: 22-3), example 8 depicts Adam and Eve by the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3) and in example 9 demons are haunting a member of the clergy.



Example 7. *Christ walking on water.*

Example 8. *'Adam and Eve'*, Mabuse (1510).

**When you're a substitute teacher
and you can't control the class**



Example 9. An illustration in *La Cité de Dieu* (14th century).

Religion is one of the universal sources of humor listed by Driessen (2001). Taking into consideration that Classical Art Memes is dedicated to memes that draw on Western art from historical periods when Christian spirituality was rather ubiquitous in Europe, it is no wonder that religious templates are notably represented in the data. Using religion as a target or source of humor may also be a manifestation of subversive deconstruction that was referred to in connection with manipulated images above. Beyond dispute, religions are powerful institutions and calling them into question may well be one of the aims of the users on Classical Art Memes, but again, it may just as well be about play with different genres.

Situations

The category ‘situations’ encompasses 16 memes (12.8%) of the total sample. This topic of template consists of pieces of art that portray mostly ordinary people in different, often unusual situations. A distinctive feature of this template type is that in most of the cases, the depicted situations are somehow out of the ordinary. In example 10, the men are playing instruments in the middle of the American Civil War and example 11 portrays a medieval practice of trying to remove madness with brain surgery.



Example 10. *The Spirit of '76* (aka *Yankee Doodle*), Archibald MacNeal Willard (c.1875).



Josh was beginning to think that Marcus wasn't a fully qualified hairdresser

Example 11. *The cure of Folly (Extraction of the stone of Madness)*, Hieronymus Bosch (1475-80).

The peculiarity of the paintings seems to work as a catalyst for memetic creativity. A weird image is like a complex poem that cries out for comic interpretation.

Miscellaneous

Despite the dominance of a few types of templates, the dispersion was notable. The group *miscellaneous* contains 34 instances that are divided into 14 different topics. The most common topics that were left out of the detailed examination were *mythology*, *war/violence* and *combined pictures*, all of which appeared five times. Table 5 presents all of the miscellaneous template topics that appeared in the sample.

Topic of template	Number of instances	Relative share
Mythology	5	4.0%
Combined images	5	4.0%
War/violence	5	4.0%
Sculpture	4	3.2%
Animals	3	2.4.%
Absurd	3	2.4.%
Cultures	2	1.6.%
Landscape	1	0.8%
Celebration/parties	1	0.8%
Inanimate objects	1	0.8%
Modern technology	1	0.8%
Death	1	0.8%
Historical event	1	0.8%
Comical	1	0.8%
Total	34	27.2%

Table 5. *Miscellaneous templates.*

According to the data, there seems to be a couple of subject matters that are favored when choosing the template for a classical art meme, but all in all, the template can be just about any piece of art, as long as the captions are fitting. In the case of the portraits, the appeal seems to lie in their solemnity and dignity, but in many cases there are inviting visual lures in the templates that function as instigators of memetic creativity.

Some of Wilkins' (2014) considerations on internet memes that draw on medieval imagery seem rather fitting in the case of Classical Art Memes. As Wilkins suggests, in medievalist memes, modern technology and popular culture are used to make fun of a

pre-industrial era, thus creating an incongruous juxtaposition of the knowing present and the unknowing past. In the sample, the unsuspecting artwork has been completely recontextualized by witty captions and quirky lines that often refer to things only present in the post-modern world. The strong presence of anomalous incongruity was expected, since it has been detected by previous scholars of online humor as well (e.g. Shifman, 2007; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007).

Topics of exchange/meme

The topics of the memes were even more varied and dispersed than the topics of the meme templates. This is no wonder, since the topics of the pieces of art were rather limited during the classical period, revolving mainly around religious themes and portraits of the nobility. One image on the other hand can work as a source for countless different interpretations.

A total of 29 topics were separated out of the final sample of 125 memes. In table 6, the four most prominent topics with a relative share of at least eight percent or more are listed. These four categories will be examined in detail, and the rest of the topics under the category *miscellaneous* will be given a cursory treatment at the end of this section.

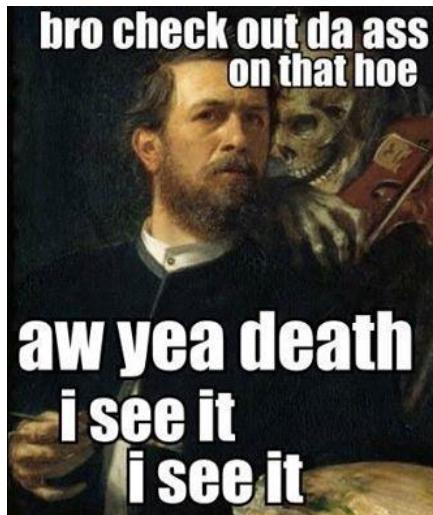
Topic of exchange/meme	Number of instances	Relative share
Sex/sexuality	20	16.0%
Love/relationships	12	9.6%
Feelings/reactions	11	8.8%
Meta-discourse on DMC	10	8.0%
(Miscellaneous)	72	57.6%
Total	125	100%

Table 6. *Topics of exchange/meme.*

Sex/sexuality

Based on my sample set, sex is by far the most dominant topic on Classical Art Memes. A total of 20 memes (16.0%) exhibited explicit or implicit sexual elements. This result was in line with my initial assumption that sexually oriented themes would be prominently present. In most of the cases, sexuality is not present in the template itself,

but is brought to it by the language. Applying a sexual theme to innocent templates seems to be an essential strategy through which humor is created.



Example 12. *Self-portrait*,
Arnold Böcklin (1872).

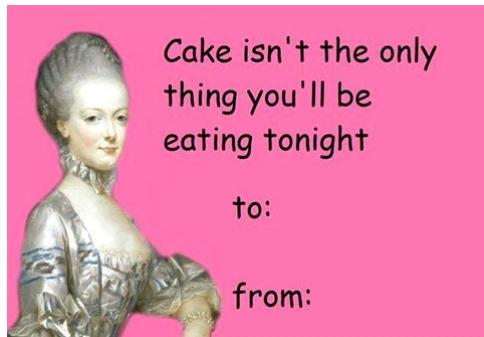


Example 13. *A Man With a Pink Carnation*, Solario (c.1495).

In examples 12 and 13 above, there is nothing sexual as such in the paintings or the backgrounds of their characters, but the superimposed texts work as total contextual game changers with their lewd style. However, in example 14 that features a portrait of Marie Antoinette, there is most likely a reference to the alleged promiscuous lifestyle of the famous monarch⁸. Example 15, in turn, is an instance of a meme where the template is already overtly sexual and the caption is just used to up the ante, albeit to a rather excessive extent.

⁸ When told that starving French peasants lacked any bread to eat, Marie Antoinette allegedly declared, “Let them eat cake!” She was also accused of promiscuity and incestuous relations with her son Louis-Charles. However, the authenticity of these allegations has been questioned (<http://www.history.com/news/10-things-you-may-not-know-about-marie-antoinette>).

When you're going down on her and she queefs



Example 14. Archduchess Maria Antonia of Austria, Joseph Ducreux (1769).



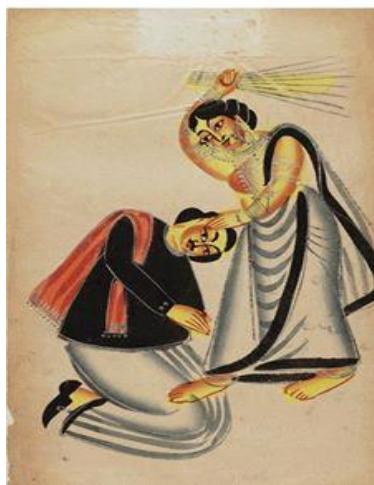
Example 15. Joseph and Potiphar's wife (1703).

I initially expected the relative share of sexually motivated memes to be even bigger, but the result still confirms my hypothesis, and is in line with Driessen's (2001) list of universal topics of humor, where sex is the most common one.

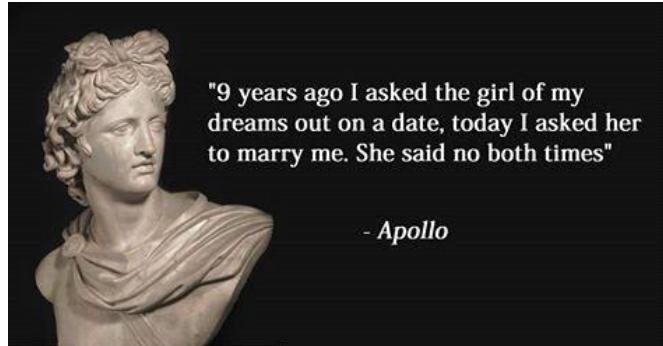
Love/relationships

Memes that address issues with love and relationships covered 12 instances (9.6%) of the data set. These memes deal with rejection, marriage, and the convolutions of relationships. In example 16 below, the humor comes from the exaggerated consequences of forgetting to get a present for Valentine's day. In example 17, the bitter fake quote is put into the mouth of Apollo, the Greek god who, according to the mythology, had an unlucky love life (*The Gods of the Greeks*, 1951: 140).

**When he forgets to get you
anything for Valentines day**



Example 16. *Woman Striking Man with Broom*, Calcutta, India, (1875).



Example 17. *Apollo Belvedere*, (C.120-140).

The examples below address marriage in a very sardonic manner. The fake quote attributed to James II in Example 18 is obviously a joke referring to the perceived paradoxes of marriage. Example 19 might even be considered male chauvinistic in its approach to its subject. Upon closer inspection of the dialogue, the lines uttered by the monarchs Henry VIII and Charles II in the meme are one-liners borrowed from the famous American comedian Henny Youngman (1906-1998). However, the matter of who has originally uttered the words does not make a difference, should someone find this type of humor offensive.



"I've had bad luck with both my wives. The first one left me and the second one didn't" - James Stuart

Example 18. James II when Duke of York, Peter Lely (1665-70).



Take my wife... no
please, take her



She once got a mudpack
and looked great for two
days. Then the mud fell off

I appreciate your attempt
at 1950s humour but how
can I take your wife when
you chopped her head off
yesterday?



My wife is on a
new diet.
Coconuts and
bananas. She
hasn't lost
weight, but can
she climb a tree



Example 19. King Henry VIII and King Charles II of England.

None of the 11 instances dealing with love and relationships addressed positive feelings. Personally, the lack of positivity was not a big surprise since my previous experience on memes and humor sites is in line with it. The finding is also supported by Milner's "logic of lulz" that frowns upon positivity within the memescape (Milner, 2013b).

Feelings/reactions

Feelings and reactions covered 11 instances altogether (8.8%). The memes in this category describe emotional states from indifference to sadness. Again, there are no positive feelings addressed. In the examples below, it is obviously the characters' facial expressions in the paintings that have got the creative juices flowing.



Example 20. Unidentified.



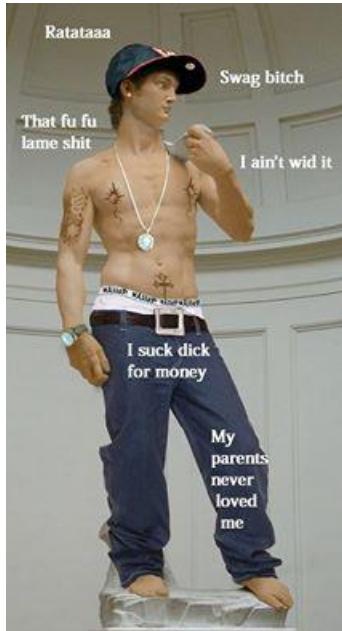
Example 21. *St. Peter Martyr of Verona*, Vittore Carpaccio (c. 1505–1514).

In example 20 the facial expression of the man depicts quite accurately the horror of the situation when you suddenly make the realization that one of your most fundamental pieces of modern technology might have gone missing. Example 21 on the other hand is a kind of hyperbole expressing deep indifference or apathy.

Expressing feelings and reactions with memes is a common practice on the internet at large, and even a quick look at the comment sections of Classical Art memes shows that reaction memes are part of the discourse, often used as responses to other people's comments.

Meta-discourse on DMC

Meta discourse on digitally mediated communication with 10 instances (8.0%) was the fourth most common topic in the data set. These memes address famous (and notorious) aspects or certain instances of digital culture that have been spawned on content sharing sites and in social media spaces. These memes are almost exclusively intertextual, since they need to refer outside their templates.



Example 22. *David*,
Michelangelo (1501-04).



Example 23. *The Cunning thief*, Paul-Charles Chocarne Moreau (c.1931).

Example 22 is an image manipulation portraying Michaelangelo's David statue wearing a pair of saggy jeans, a cap and a big necklace. The superimposed lines "Ratataaa" "That fu fu lame shit" and "I ain't wid it" are taken from a vine video posted by Bryan Silva in 2014. Silva has gained questionable reputation in online sets with his video, as well as with his personal life involving an arrest in 2016. (Knowyourmeme.com).

"Swag" is a contemporary expression for a specific habitus that in some circles is perceived as desirable. Swag is a contentious term that is commonly frowned upon for being a trait of a trifling and shallow culture. "I suck dick for money" is a possible reference to Silva's alleged association with gay porn (Knowyourmeme.com), and "My parents never loved me" is probably an allusion to the social conditions that generate behavior displayed by Silva. This meme is an instance of internet parody that addresses its subject with very overt sarcasm.

Example 23 refers to two other content sharing sites UNILAD and LADbible that the administrator of Classical Art Memes accused of having used his/her original memes without credit to their source page. Despite the tendency of the memescape to generally disregard attribution (e.g. Davison, 2012; Miltner, 2014), Classical Art Memes seems to demand credit where credit is due.

Miscellaneous topics

All the rest of the topics in the sample were placed under the category ‘miscellaneous’. The most common topics in this group were jokes that would work independently without the template as well, as in: “*I’m not really a fan of archery to be honest...it has too many drawbacks*”. *Intoxicants* (mostly cannabis-related) and *style/appearances* which focused mainly on clothing and facial expressions were other noteworthy topics. All of the miscellaneous topics are listed in table 7 below.

Topic of exchange/meme	Number of instances	Relative share
Joke	7	5.6%
Intoxicants	7	5.6%
Style/appearances	6	4.8%
Popular culture	5	4.0%
Resemblance	5	4.0%
Situational	4	3.2%
Social	4	3.2%
Comparison	4	3.2%
Linguistic	3	2.4%
School/studying	3	2.4%
Food	3	2.4%
Religion	3	2.4%
Absurd situation	3	2.4%
Celebration/parties	2	1.6%
Music	2	1.6%
War/violence	2	1.6%
Mundane practices	1	0.8%
Subcultures	1	0.8%
Topical issues	1	0.8%
Presenting a fact	1	0.8%
Modern technology	1	0.8%
Racial issues	1	0.8%
Celebrities	1	0.8%
Internet behavior	1	0.8%
Historical event	1	0.8%
Total	72	57.6%

Table 7. *Miscellaneous topics of memes.*

All in all, the themes that revolve around sexuality seem to be the hardy perennials of Classical Art Memes, which was my initial assumption as well. This finding is very much in line with Driessen's (2001) list of the most common topics of humor. The frequency of lewd memes doubtless affects the perception of an occasional visitor and many might readily condemn the page as garbage. However, a systematic analysis of the content showed that the memes touch upon a diverse spectrum of human experience with their quirkiness. Online memes are often even macabre in their treatment of certain subjects, and also Classical Art Memes seems to feed off the harshness at times. Nevertheless, many of the instances exhibit a brutal kind of honesty that, employing a contemporary expression used by the internet communities, hits you "right in the feels" (<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/feels>).

4.2.3 Tone

Tone is the manner and ethos in which communication is carried out in a given communicational context (Herring, 2007: 21). In this paper I concentrated on the tone of the individual memes in the sample. The tone categories in this section are based on my intuitive personal impressions backed up by definitions from *Cambridge Dictionaries Online* (dictionary.cambridge.org). Additionally, previous literature on memes was taken into consideration in the determination of the tone categories.

In my data-set of 125 memes, 10 different tones were specified. In table 8 below, three most prevalent individual tones and the category *other* are listed with their relative shares. In the analysis, only tones that have a relative share of 10.0% or higher will be discussed in detail, that is, *playful*, *sarcastic* and *bitter*.

Tone of meme	Number of instances	Relative share
Playful	70	56.0%
Sarcastic	22	17.6%
Bitter	13	10.4%
Other	20	16.0%
Total	125	100 %

Table 8. *Tones of the memes.*

Playful

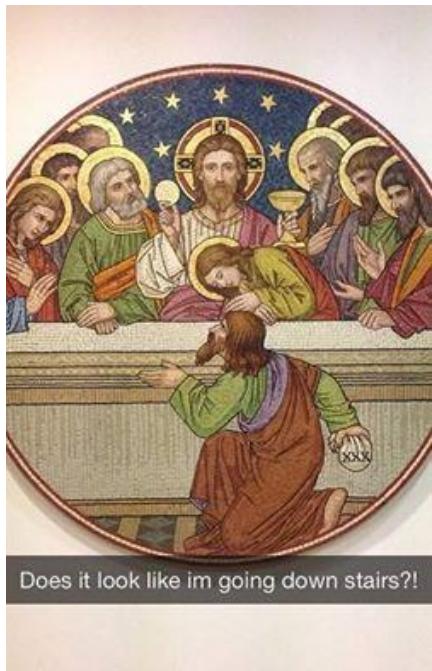
Playfulness is mentioned by various scholars (cf. Knobel&Lankshear, 2007; Marino, 2015) when the nature of internet memes is discussed. Cambridge Dictionary defines playful as “funny and not serious” as in “*a playful exchange of insults*”.

“(<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/playful>). In my analysis, the criteria for playfulness was that a meme could not contain overly derogatory or offensive language. Some profanities were allowed, but only as neutral expletives without excessive offensiveness.

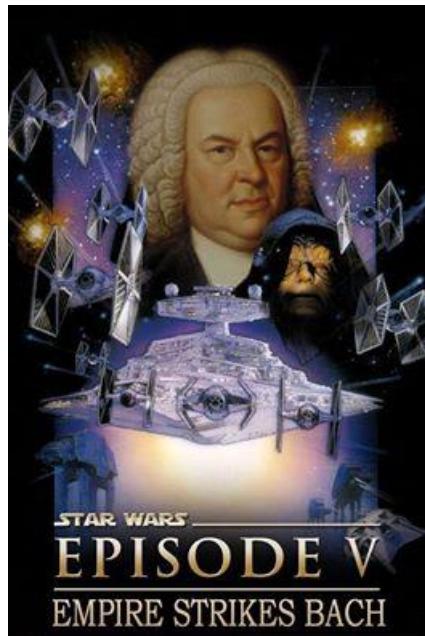
Playful memes were, without a question, the most common memes in the data set with 70 instances (56.0%). These memes included, for instance, clever observations and puns, as well as paintings of people who bear a resemblance to prominent figures of today.

Example 24 is a typical instance of a meme where some detail in the template calls for a new interpretation of the situation. In this case, the crouching Judas has been turned into a joker who performs mimicry to the rest of the disciples. Some might even consider this slight play with religious themes as blasphemy, but I would argue that many people find this meme fairly harmless.

Example 25 puns with Johan Sebastian Bach’s last name and has incorporated the famous composer’s portrait into a Star Wars movie poster.



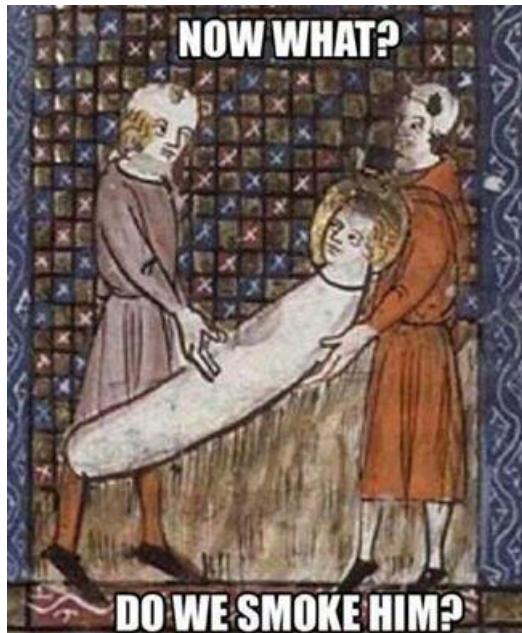
Example 24. *The Last Supper*,
Venice and Murano
Glass and Mosaic Company (c.1880).



Example 25. J.S.Bach, Elias Gottlob Haussmann (1746).

Example 26 depicts Saint Vitalis being buried alive. The resemblance of the shrouded saint to a marijuana joint has clearly not gone unnoticed by the creator of this meme.

Example 27 pretty much speaks for itself. Finding resemblance between historical figures and contemporary figures is a common phenomenon on the internet, since the availability of art, and visibility of famous people have vastly increased during the digital era.



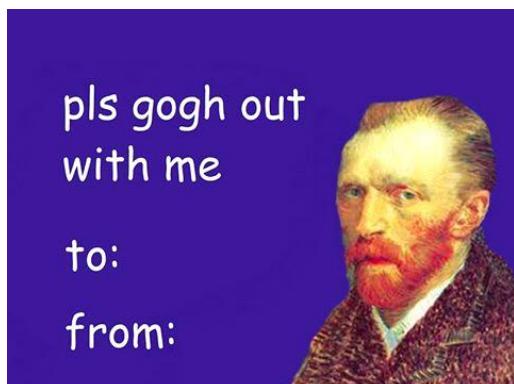
Example 26. *The martyrdom of Saint Vitalis*, a 14th-century French manuscript.



Catherine II the Great, Empress of Russia looks a lot like David Cameron

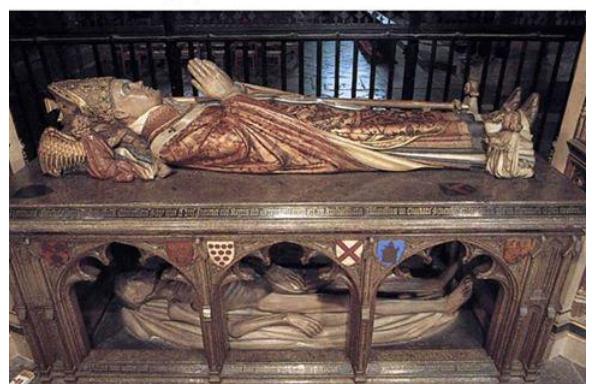
Example 27. *Catherine II of Russia*, Johann Baptist von Lampi the Elder (c.1791).

I had not expected such a large proportion of the memes to be so innocent in style, as my initial assumption was that overtly sarcastic and malicious tones would dominate. The playfulness of these memes notwithstanding, many of these memes also exhibited desperation and gruesomeness that is demonstrated by examples 28 and 29 below.



Example 28. *Self-Portrait*, Van Gogh (1887).

When you claim the top bunk without much fuss because the guy on the bottom bunk is dead



Example 29. *The Cadaver tomb of Archbishop Henry Chichele*, (c.1443).

Sarcastic

“Acerbically ironic” is one of the central characteristics Knobel and Lankshear (2007) associate with memes. After having gone through all the memes in my sample, it was clear that this description agreed well with Classical Art Memes as well. However, when I looked more closely at the definitions of irony, I decided to separate sarcasm from it, since sarcasm is often considered a special form of irony. The difference is that irony arises usually from situations, whereas sarcasm is overt and intentional, used by the speaker as a form of verbal aggression against another person or entity (Haiman, 1998). I have considered a meme sarcastic in tone if it involves intentional mockery that has a clear target. The mockery may be aimed at a person in the piece of art itself or at certain phenomena or people outside the meme. Sarcasm proved to be the second most common tone in the dataset, but with 22 instances (17.6%) it comes far behind the playful memes. Sarcasm is still a prominent feature of many memes in the sample, but not the dominant one as I had initially assumed.

Example 30 most likely jeers at sexual promiscuity by juxtaposing a painting of the symbol of pureness, Virgin Mary, with a snide and even derogatory comment.

Example 31 clearly ridicules the common practice among the monarchs of the past to marry close relatives, especially within the Habsburg branch of royals. The template portrays Charles II of Spain and his wife, Maria Anna of Neuburg⁹.

⁹ They were in fact not related but Charles II was riddled with health issues resulting from generations of inbreeding between the Habsburgs (<https://global.britannica.com/topic/House-of-Habsburg>).

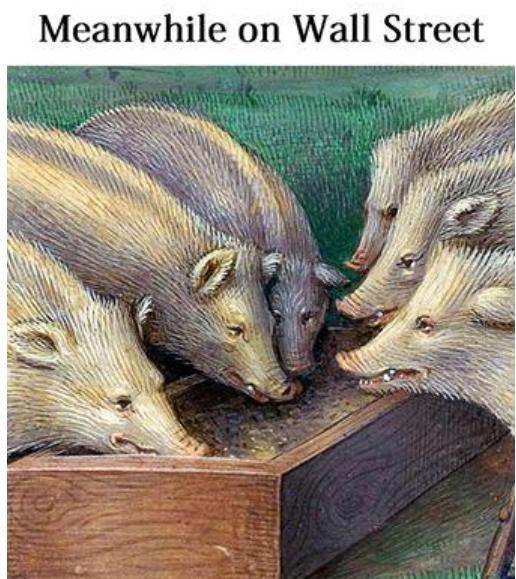


Example 30. *The Grand Duke's Madonna*, Raphael (c.1504-05).



I now pronounce you
husband and wife, you
may kiss your niece

Example 31. *Charles II of Spain and Wife Maria Anna of Neuburg* (1690).



Example 32. *Lunchtime*, Jean Bourdichon, (1503-1508).



"My next door neighbour is
really loud and obnoxious...
at least now I know how
Canada feels"
- Anna Friedleberg

Example 33. *Lucrezia Panciatichi*, Agnolo di Cosimo (1545).

Example 32 parallels hungry pigs at a trough with the famous center of financial life in New York. This meme is an obvious satire of the avarice often associated with market economy.

Example 33 is a snide joke about Canada's neighboring super state. The comment is put into the mouth of *Lucrezia Panciatichi*, the wife of Bartolomeo Panciatichi, a Florentine humanist and politician (Anna Friedleberg is a made-up name).

Examples 30-33 all address issues that are generally, or from certain points of view, considered flaws and thus worth the criticism. It is no wonder that sarcastic memes in particular have a critical edge to them, since sarcasm is considered an integral feature of satire (Claridge, 2010), in which “*vices, follies, abuses, and shortcomings are held up to ridicule ideally with the intent of shaming individuals, corporations, government or society itself, into improvement*” (*Encyclopædia Britannica*).

Bitter

Many of the memes I have classified as bitter by nature could have been put under sarcastic memes as well. These memes nevertheless had a certain quality to them that separated them from the simply sarcastic ones. Bitter seemed like a convenient option and the dictionary definition supported it. According to Cambridge Dictionary, a bitter person is “someone who is bitter, is angry and unhappy because they cannot forget bad things that happened in the past”. For instance, “I feel very bitter about my childhood and all that I went through” (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/bitter>).

Memes with a bitter tone covered 13 instances in total, with a relative share of 10.4%. These memes deal with misfortunes in love, relationships and dating, as well as in life in general.

Example 34 below is an instance of a type of creativeness that requires a sharp sense of nuance and subtlety from the creator. The bleak color palette and the expressions on the figures' faces suit the caption with respectable adequacy.

Example 35 involves a painting depicting the severed head of Saint John the Baptist, accompanied with a reference to an episode of the popular sitcom Friends. The macabre image works as an enhancer of the feeling described in the caption.



Daddy lives with a whore now.

Example 34. *Lady Mary, Duchess of Lennox with her son Esmé and daughter Mary*, John Michael Wright (1661).

"My whole life is like that one episode of Friends where Ross drinks all those margaritas and keeps telling everyone that he's fine when he clearly isn't"



Example 35. *Head of Saint John the Baptist*, anonymous Spanish painter.

Other tones

The tones that were not discussed in detail are listed in table 9 below. Derogatory and offensive tones were the most common ones among these memes. These instances were overtly mean or tactless without the biting inventiveness that makes sarcastic memes stand out.

Tone of meme	Number of instances	Relative share
Derogatory/offensive	7	5.6%
Indifferent	4	3.2%
Sexual	4	3.2%
Absurd	3	2.4%
Ironic	1	0.8%
Educational	1	0.8%
Total	20	16.0%

Table 9. Other tones.

All in all, the scale of tones was rather narrow, without much dispersion. Harmlessly playful memes clearly dominated, sarcastic memes grabbing a notable share of the total as well. Despite the playfulness of the content, many of the memes exhibited a cynical undertone and the absence of positivity and optimism was conspicuous. This phenomenon has also been observed in previous studies on digital culture (cf. Milner, 2013b).

4.2.4 Code

In my data set, only a handful of memes - 9 out of 140, did not incorporate linguistic elements, which is a strong indication of the importance of the linguistic element within the memescape. In Herring's classification scheme, the facet that addresses the language and language variety of the target context is *code*. Language variety entails the dialect and the register used (Herring, 2007: 22). In the following subsections I will concentrate on these aspects of the memes.

The language of a meme was regarded as standard when there were no considerable deviations from the educated varieties of English. The language variety of a meme was considered non-standard if it contained vulgar expressions or any features that are not present in a standard dictionary of English. In assessing the standardness of a feature I mainly relied on *Longman Student Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (2002) and *Cambridge Dictionary* online.

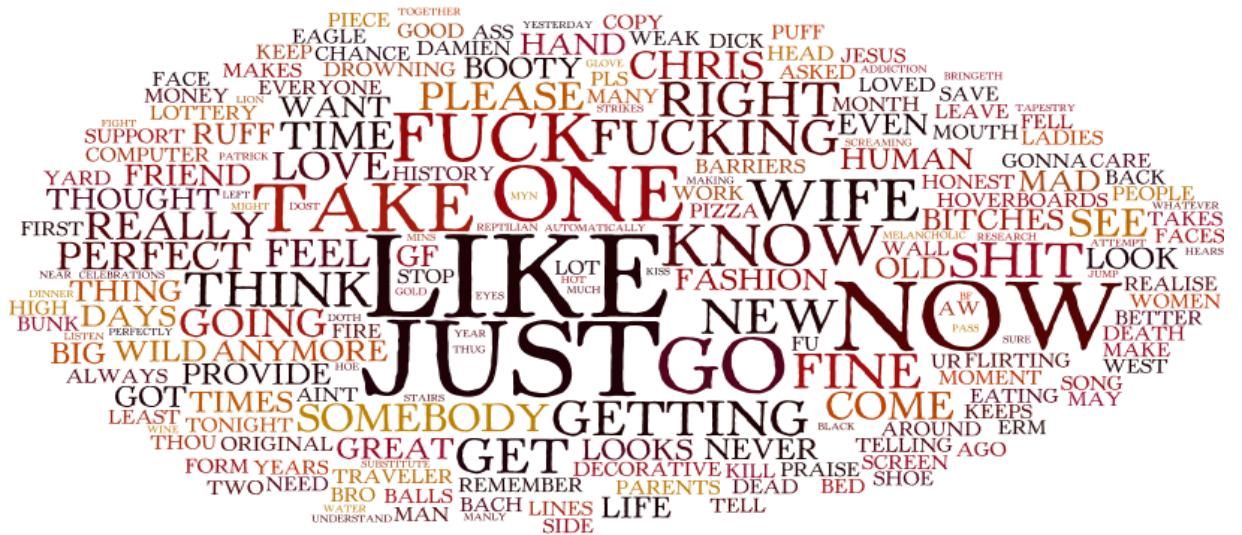


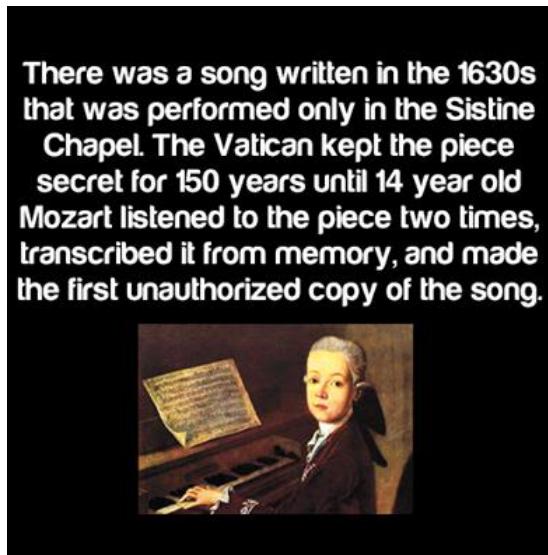
Figure 9. Word cloud illustration

Standard English

All the memes in the sample were in English and a total of 75 memes (60.0%) proved to be Standard English. My initial perception and hypothesis was that non-standard elements would hold the field, so it was somewhat surprising that the language of the memes in the dataset was predominantly standard. There were occasional issues with punctuation, but on the whole, the language of the standard variety used in the memes was fluent, which is exemplified by examples 36 and 37.



Example 36. *Hannah Hill (Mrs. Samuel Quincy)*, John Singleton Copley (1761).



Example 37. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart at age 13, Thadaus Helbling.

Non-standard varieties and features

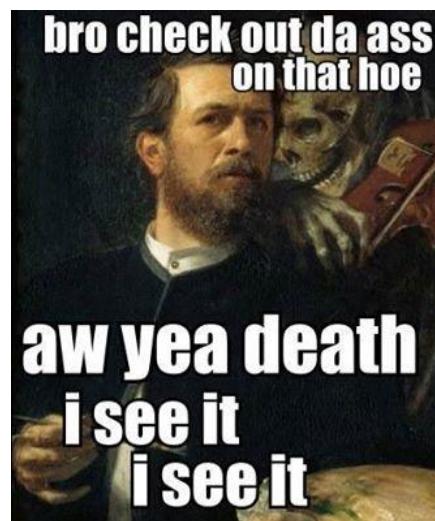
A total of 50 memes (40%) exhibited non-standard features. The varieties included ethnic and social dialects covering a total of 18 memes. Other notable varieties were types of Netspeak (13 instances) and mock archaic English (5 instances).

Examples 38-40 below exhibit features usually associated with African American Vernacular English (AAVE), such as the lack of copula verb (Rickford, 1999).

Examples of this feature are “*You lookin fine..*” in example 38 and “*you a fine pizza ass*” in example 40. Other markers of dialect are the deviant spellings “*Dayum*” for damn, “*gurl*” for girl (38), “*aw yea*” for ‘oh yes’ and “*da*” for ‘that’ in example 39. An additional observation was that many of the memes incorporating features of AAVE were sexually oriented. It seems that racial stereotypes are used for an effect here.



Example 38. *Peasant Wedding Dance*, Pieter Brueghel the Younger (1623).



Example 39. *Self-portrait*, Arnold Böcklin (1872).

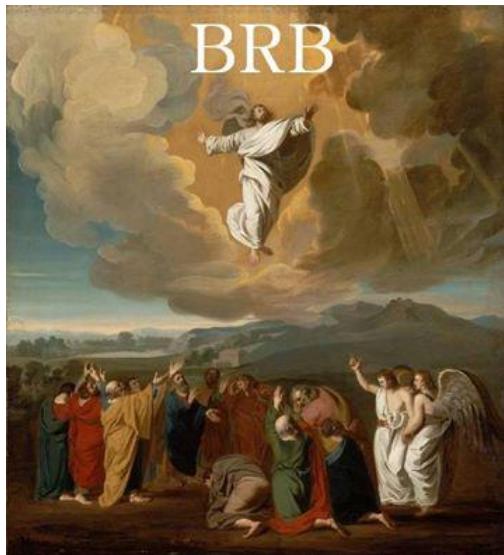


Example 40. *Adam and Eve*, Mabuse (1510).

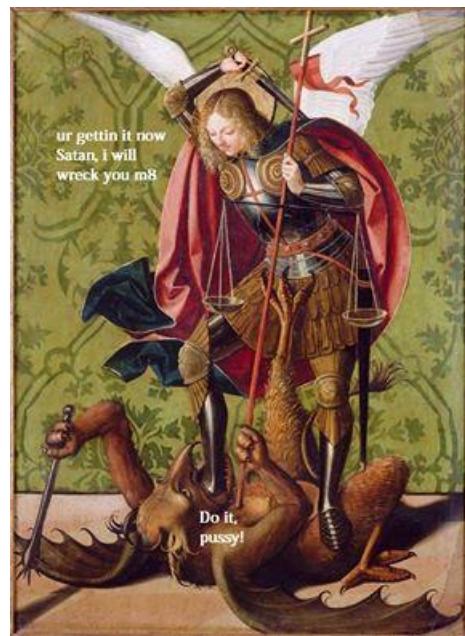
Netspeak was another notable variety with 13 instances in the sample. As was noted in the literature section, Netspeak is a hypernym for a variety of slangs that have mainly

originated in digital platforms such as mobile phones and online chat rooms (Crystal, 2011).

Most of the language categorized as Netspeak contained elements of the subvariety Txtspeak that is known for its extensive use of clippings, acronyms, contractions and letter homophones (Procházka, 2014). In example 41, the ascending Jesus bids farewell to the apostles with BRB – an acronym for “*Be right back*” commonly used in online chat discussions. In example 42, St. Michael is slaying the beast and uttering to it “*Ur gettin it now Satan, I will wreck you m8*”. The “ur” is a letter homophone and “m8” is an example of Leetspeak (or 1337), a digital writing practice characterized by the replacement of Latinate letters with combinations of ASCII characters. The juxtaposition of prestigious templates and postmodern language varieties is again an example of the incongruity through which memetic humor is created.



Example 41. *The Ascension*, John Singleton Copley (1775).



Example 42. *St. Michael Killing the Dragon*, Josse Lieferinxe (c.1500).

Profanities were not included in any variety as such, but most of the memes containing curse words such as *fuck* or its variations were considered non-standard since they are marked as offensive or informal in most dictionaries. The amount of instances featuring profanities was surprisingly low, only 15 instances in the total sample. It seems that, despite the page’s inclination towards lewd themes, the language is more resourceful than at first glance seemed.

Register

Register is a rather contested term within linguistics, since there is no consensus on what it should entail. In general, a register is a language variety used for a particular purpose or in a particular social setting (Crystal, 1991). In the faceted classification scheme, Herring gives as examples specialized discourses such as academic and medical discourses, but mentions that unmarked registers and ordinary everyday conversation can also be identified (Herring, 2007: 21).

There were no discernible specialized registers in the sample, most of the language being fairly conversational and casual in tone. However, something that seems typical of memes, at least on Classical Art Memes, is the use of the conjunction *when* at the beginning of a caption. This feature is illustrated by examples 43 and 44 below.

When you forget to contour



When somebody tries to copy your work at school

Example 43. *Disputation of the Holy Sacrament*, Raphael (1509-10).



Example 44. *The Study* of Vermeer, Fernando Botero (1964).

A total of 26 memes contained this “when”-structure, which is 20.8% share of the total sample.

As stated above in the section that dealt with the manipulated templates, the humor of the memes is often enhanced by anachronistic incongruity induced by colliding the knowing present with the unknowing past (Wilkins, 2014: 206). Even though the majority of the memes was Standard English, and the incongruous effect was often

created through the *content* of the utterance, the linguistic choices reflected this inclination towards incongruity as well. The friction generated by putting internet slang and potty exclamations into the mouths of bygone clergymen and nobility seems to create a particularly strong appeal.

All things considered, the language used in the memes was varied, consisting of fluent Standard English as well as ethnic slang, internet slang and creative varieties such as fake Old English. The diverse language use of the site consolidates the position held by linguists such as David Crystal (2011), that the digital age has not ruined the language skills of the young, but on the contrary, engaging and creative content sharing platforms such as Classical Art Memes can potentially even encourage internet users' linguistic creativity.

4.2.5 Intertextuality

As the previous research has observed, intertextuality is an integral element of memes and an important part of their appeal. Various references were strongly present in my sample as well. The textual elements in all the memes of the sample were fed to Google and *Knowyourmeme.com*, but there remains a slight possibility that some subtle references have gone undetected.

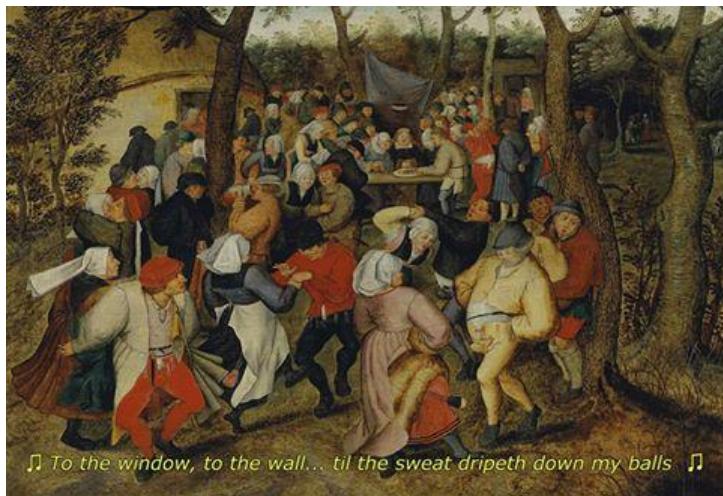
As can be seen from table 10 below, a total of 42 memes contained intertextuality of some type, which is a little over a third (33.6%) of the total sample. The most common types of intertextuality involved popular culture (13 instances), digital culture (12 instances), and history/mythology/religion (11 instances). Other types being subcultures (four instances) and topical themes (two instances). I will now deal with the first three types in more detail.

References to	
Popular culture	13
Digital culture	12
History/Mythology/Religion	11
Subcultures	4
Topical themes	2
Total number of references	42

Table 10. *Types of intertextuality.*

References to popular culture

The 13 references to popular culture in the sample tap into movies and pieces of popular music. Example 45 combines *Peasant Wedding Dance* by Pieter Brueghel the Younger (1623) with a bit of chorus from the song *Get Low* by Lil Jon & The East Side Boyz (2002). The superimposed lyrics say: “*To the window, to the wall... til sweat dripeth down my balls*”. The original *drop* has been turned into *dripeth* for an archaic effect.



Example 45. *Peasant Wedding Dance*, Pieter Brueghel the Younger (1623).

Example 46 is a piece of modified Bayeux Tapestry. The situation portrayed in the template is an adaptation of the famous scene in *Star Wars: Empire Strikes Back* (1980),

where Darth Vader's paternity to Luke Skywalker is revealed. The mock-archaic English is once again an effect that increases the appeal of the meme.



Example 46. *The Bayeux Tapestry.*

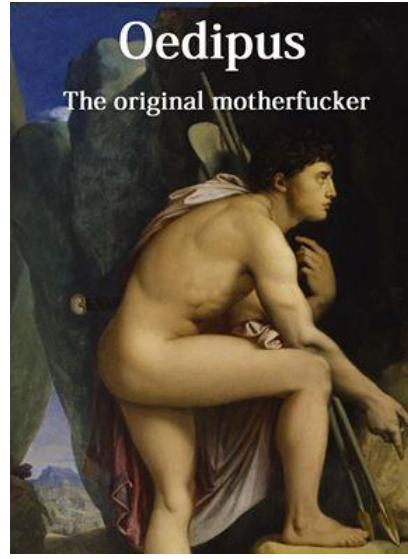
Popular culture is a ubiquitous phenomenon in the Occident and its visibility on the internet is immense. McRobbie (1994) states that much media output devotes itself to referring to other images and other narratives and, in a way, the self-referentiality of popular culture is all-encompassing. Recalling Shifman's definition, memes are units of popular culture themselves (2013a: 367), and it came as no surprise that the content on Classical Art Memes includes various references to popular works as well.

References to history/religion/mythology

There were 12 instances in this category altogether. The reason why I have put history, religion and mythology under the same category is because they are, in a way, parts of a package that constitutes humanistic general knowledge. Classical Art Memes seems to display this kind of knowledgeability to a considerable extent, being well aware of the backgrounds of the pieces of art it is exploiting.



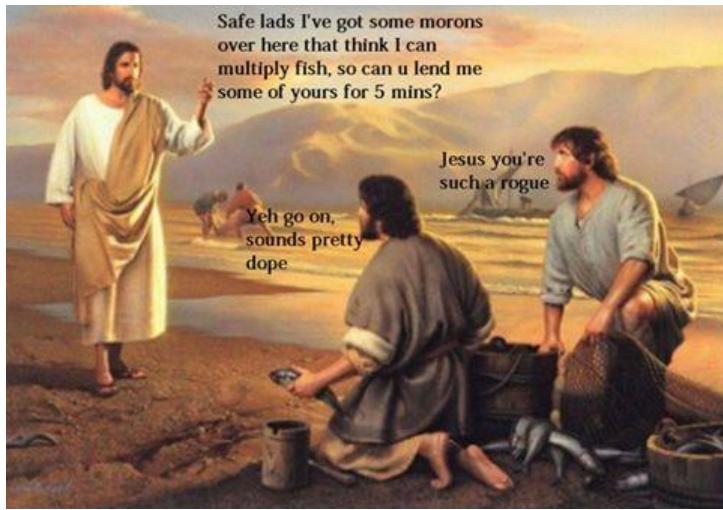
Example 47. *King Henry VIII*, Hans Holbein the Younger (c.1536).



Example 48. *Oedipus and the Sphinx*, Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1864).

Example 47 refers to the historical fact that king Henry VIII divorced from his first wife and executed the second one, because they could not sire him a male heir. This instance contains a reference to popular culture as well, since “*I don’t want none unless you birth sons, hun*” is an adaptation of “*my anaconda don’t want none, unless you’ve got buns, hun*” from the hip-hop song *Baby Got Back* by Sir Mix-a-Lot (1992).

Example 48 is a reference to the tragic hero Oedipus in Greek mythology, who by accident, fulfilled a prophecy where he would end up killing his father and marrying his mother. Example 49, in turn, is an adaptation of the New Testament’s story where Jesus feeds five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish (Matthew 14: 13-21).



Example 49. *Jesus and the anglers.*

Building intertextuality on the backgrounds of the paintings and on factual knowledge is a clever strategy, and goes to show that despite the salience of quirky humor, informal platforms like Classical Art Memes can be founded and maintained by resourceful internet users with wide knowledge on a variety of subjects. Consequently, frequenting these pages and partaking in the meme-making may even be educational by instigating people to make up new references for each other to untangle.

References to digital culture

Referring to digital culture was also a common type of intertextuality with 11 instances altogether. These memes deal with phenomena that have originated in different online environments, such as content sharing sites and social media spaces. Example 50 consists of a manipulated piece of The Bayeux Tapestry, where a man is lifting a horse with one hand. The image is superimposed with the text “*Brethren – Dost thou even hoist*”- a mock archaic modification of “*Do You Even Lift?*” (often simply DYEL) which is a condescending expression used on body building and fitness forums to question the legitimacy of someone’s fitness expertise or weight lifting routine. The phrase is also widely used in other contexts than sports, often with an intent to mock the original usage (*Knowyourmeme.com*).

Example 51 combines two references. The figure in the template is The *Ecce Homo* (Behold the Man), a fresco painted in about 1930 by the Spanish painter Elías García Martínez, depicting Jesus crowned with thorns. The fresco arose to world fame

in 2012, when the attempt to restore it by an untrained amateur resulted in a complete botch-up. The hand feeding the Ecce homo cereal, and the text “*I don’t want it*” refer to *Ryan Gosling Won’t Eat His Cereal*, a series of Vine videos combining on-screen projections of Ryan Gosling’s acting scenes with a slowly approaching spoon full of cereal held by the videographer.



Example 50. *The Bayeux Tapestry.*



Example 51. *Ecce homo* (“restored”), original by Elías García Martínez, (c.1930).

Referring to internet culture in memes is a common practice, and goes to show that content sharing sites such as Classical Art Memes are very well informed about the intricacies of the digital realm. They are, as Stryker (2011: 29) phrased it, “in the know”.

Other types of intertextuality

References to subcultures and topical themes were notably less frequent in the sample, but nevertheless these included clever and interesting instances that are worth mentioning. Example 52 refers to a sign (figure 9) associated with the so-called West Coast state of mind originated in the hip-hop -scenes of Los Angeles urban regions.



Example 52. *Portrait of a Young Man*,
Sandro Botticelli (1482-83).

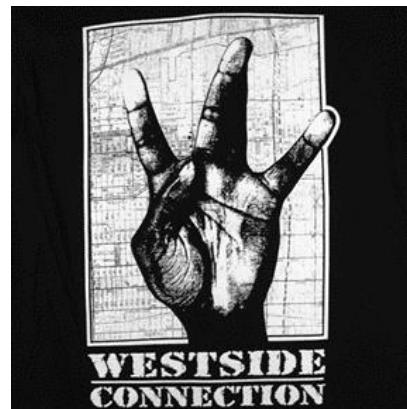
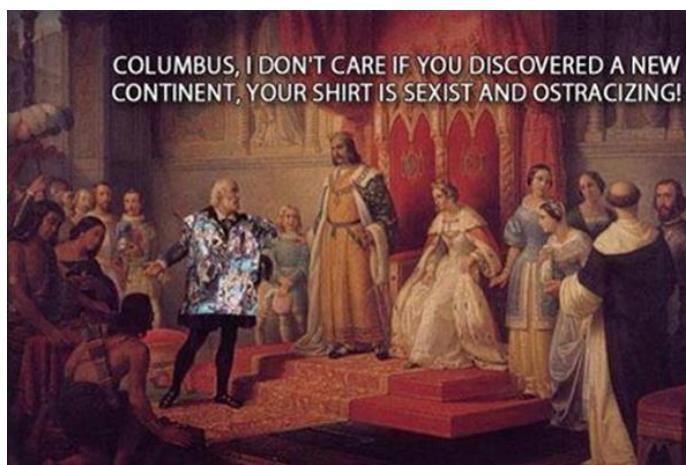


Figure 9. Original Westside sign.

The intertextuality in example 53 almost went undetected but I noticed it when going through the data one more time. While being interviewed upon the successful landing of Rosetta space probe on Comet67P/Churyumov–Gerasimenko, British physicist Matt Taylor wore a Hawaiian shirt depicting half-naked women with guns (fig.10). The shirt was considered sexist by some and resulted in an outburst from a collection of feminist writers. In the online magazine *Verge*, one headline said: “I don’t care if you landed a spacecraft on a comet, your shirt is sexist and ostracizing!” Matt Taylor consequently apologized for wearing the shirt on the interview (<http://time.com/3589392/comet-shirt-storm/>).



Example 53 *Columbus at the Court of the Catholic Monarchs*,
Juan Cordero (1850).



Figure 10. Matt Taylor's shirt.

Without taking a stand on the incident itself, finding the story behind this meme was particularly satisfying, because of its cleverness and rather recent background story. To me personally, this is exactly the kind of example that condenses the resourcefulness that Classical Art Memes exhibits.

4.2.6 Norms, Activity and Purpose

As I explained in the methodology section, the norms, activity type and the purpose of the page are mostly answered according to the core factors dealt with in the above sections. The topics, tones, linguistic features and intertextuality in the data largely speak for themselves, but there are some conclusive remarks I want to make.

Norms

The organizational rules of the site are informal and not explicitly stated. For the most part, the technical affordances dictate the organization of the page. Classical Art Memes is an open Facebook-page available to every Facebook user. There are no official admittance protocols or restrictions on who can post content and no explicitly stated code of conduct governing the social behavior on the site. As I have not studied the

dialogues in the comments sections, I have no knowledge of possible excesses and how they might have been dealt with.

The topics and the language of the memes reveal that obscenities and questionable topics are part of the gist. The same goes for the linguistic features of the page. There are certain types of memes such as the Bayeux Tapestry series that would not work without its fake archaic English, but in the absence of an official codebook for memes, tendencies are the next best thing. On Classical Art Memes, there is, for example, a strong tendency to use the conjunction *when* in the captions (p. 66 above) and make characters from the Bible communicate in Txtspeak.

Activity

The activity is concerned with the type of discourse a context is. As the literature presented above has indicated, the most common activity of memes is joking exchange, though they may be used as reactions and comments as well. In the case of Classical Art Memes, the main activity is joking through the distribution of humorous content in the form of memes built on various pieces of art. The above treated factors revealed that the strategies used on the site to create a humorous discourse are very much in line with the previous studies on internet memes. These strategies include particularly incongruous juxtapositions and absurd parallelism (e.g. Knobel&Lankshear, 2007) as well as insider jokes (e.g. Wilkins, 2014) and language play (e.g. Miltner, 2014; Wiggins&Bowers, 2014).

Purpose

The analysis clearly shows that the main purpose of Classical Art Memes as a group is entertainment and having fun around an established topic of classical art. Despite the potential of memes to be used as consciousness raisers and critical tools (e.g. Milner, 2013: Occupy Wall Street -movement), my data set shows that this site is all about the laughs. Out of the total of 125 memes, only a handful of instances had a critical edge to them that might be considered social commentary of a sort. Humor was nevertheless the apparent vehicle in these instances as well. As Knobel and Lankshear (2007: 217) conclude, even when a meme is *meant* to have a critical edge, playfulness is expected.

4.3 Summary of the main findings

In this section I will answer the research questions by summing up the main findings the application of the faceted classification analysis provided. The following research questions were presented in chapter 2:

1. On the grounds of the sampling, what are the most prominent discursive features of Classical Art Memes?
2. In light of these prominent discursive features, what kind of an affinity space does Classical Art Memes constitute?
3. How readily applicable Herring's faceted classification scheme for computer-mediated discourse is for analyzing online memes?

4.3.1 Prominent features in the sampling

Medium factors

The technical considerations of Classical Art Memes were not the central focus of the analysis, but some of the features of the user interface may have an influence on the dynamics of the page. Particularly a persistent transcript, or how long the memes are preserved on the page, can enhance metalinguistic awareness by allowing users to look back at the material and see what has already been done. This can potentially encourage participation and reduce the amount of repetitive content.

Situation factors

The situational factors were the core of this study, as they touched the structure of the memes themselves. Topics of the memes, the artwork behind them, their tones, linguistic features as well as intertextuality were the main aspects my analysis concentrated on. The participation structure of Classical Art Memes was determined by observing the page in general and the norms of the page, its discourse type and overall purpose were based on the analysis of the core values.

The topic or theme of the page as a whole is artwork that mostly, but not exclusively, concentrates on classical pieces of art. The pieces of art used as templates on the page

are usually portraits of prestigious historical people, manipulated images of art, religious paintings or depictions of common people. The unsuspecting artwork is often completely recontextualized by contrasting it with contemporary phenomena and objects, to create a clever incongruity that seems to be essentially behind the appeal of the Classical Art Memes.

Based on the sample, sex and sexuality seem to be the most common topics of exchange on the page. This was expected since sex is also on Driessen's (2001) list of universal topics for joking. Sexually oriented memes were clearly in the majority. The ribaldry of the page is undeniably conspicuous and can be a deal-breaker for some. I had initially expected even more sex related content but the analysis showed that the dispersion of the topics is notable. Other salient subjects included love, relationships, feelings, reactions and meta-discourse on digitally mediated communication.

The tone of the memes was predominantly playful and harmless, which was surprising, as I had initially assumed that excessively snide and sarcastic hues would dominate. The assumption was based on my own observations on memes, reinforced by scholars such as Milner (2013b) who has argued that the memescape is governed by the "logic of lulz" that emphasizes cynicism over positivity. Milner's observation was not completely overturned, since cynical and bitter memes were represented in the sample to a notable degree, and even many of the playful instances were tinged with pessimism and desperation. The verbalization of difficult emotions and hardships of life through black humor is not an unusual strategy and taking into consideration the amount of followers, Classical Art Memes seems to apply it rather successfully.

A considerable amount of the memes was built on various types of intertextuality. The most common types of references in the sample were based on popular culture, history, religion, mythology and digital culture. Taking into consideration the previous studies on internet memes, the reliance on heavy intertextuality was not a surprise. What was interesting though, was the large amount of factual references, which is an indication of a digital space where knowledge on its content is valued.

I had expected the amount of internet slang and other non-standard varieties to be in the majority, but clearly over half of the memes featured fluent Standard English. Nevertheless, there was a significant representation of non-standard elements, such as

profanities, features of African American Vernacular English and Txtspeak. All in all, the language exhibited a more varied and resourceful use of the English language than my presupposition allowed for.

The code of conduct of the page regarding social behavior or language use is not explicitly expressed anywhere on the site. The data shows that there are no strict rules as to what kind of memes can be posted, and the kind of language used in them is pretty much governed by implicit and intuitive knowledge on the workings of the memescape.

Despite a handful of memes that touched contemporary issues such as sexism and greed, the main activity of the page is without doubt joking exchange, with the purpose of entertaining others and having fun at the expense of fine art.

4.3.2 Classical Art Memes as an affinity space

The overall dynamics of Classical Art memes converge with Gee's description of affinity spaces to a considerable extent. Firstly, the site is established around a specific theme that brings people together. In this case, classical art. Secondly, the page is based on interactional content organization, as it welcomes and encourages the participation and contributions of visitors by allowing people to post their own creations to the page. Thirdly, the dispersion of different types of knowledge was a notable element in the memes. The background information on the art and the figures they depict, as well as knowledge on various topics that are exploited in the memes are examples of the *intensive, individual, distributed and dispersed knowledge* that Gee (2005) associates with affinity spaces.

As a reminder, intensive knowledge concentrates on specialized areas. Individual knowledge is the information inside people's heads, that is turned into distributed knowledge through sharing it to others and thus promoting the sophistication of the network in question. Dispersed knowledge, in turn, denotes the information that comes from outside the page. According to Gee's theory, an affinity space can encourage its users to concentrate on certain kind of knowledge.

Taking into consideration the broad background information exploited on Classical Art Memes, as well as the other types of intertextuality, the knowledge aspect of affinity spaces seems quite relevant. The administrator and the users of the page possess

individual and intensive specialized knowledge regarding the pieces of art and the subjects they portray. This knowledge is then turned into dispersed knowledge by spreading the memes and thus contributing to the knowledge pool of the page. The audience deciphers the references embedded into the memes and possibly learns in the process. This process can in turn encourage the users to acquire new knowledge concerning the topics and themes that the site revolves around, such as art history and history in general. Additionally, as Baym (1995) suggests, sharing references can consolidate the unity of a group, and with Classical Art Memes, the reference game is strong. Hancock (2004: 58) further consolidates this aspect with his claim that in the absence of physical means for expressing the unity of a group, shared interests and specialized knowledge can help to create social bonds in digital environments.

The significance of these sites to learning as such should not be exaggerated, but neither can it be altogether dismissed. Without doubt, most of the nearly 2.5 million followers of Classical Art Memes do not engage in active meme making, and the legitimacy of the knowledge can often be called into question. Yet, knowledge and realization seem to constitute a considerable part of the site's appeal and I personally believe that a humor page like Classical Art Memes truly has the potential to stir up internet users interest, if not as a learning ground per se, but as an instigator of certain types of information. A study that involves followers of the page would probably give more insight into this matter.

The prominent discursive features this paper has concentrated on constitute the “nods and winks” of Classical Art Memes, that tap into the shared interests and values of its visitors and frequenters, making it a digital space with nearly 2.5 million followers. Cross-referential knowledge combined with anomalous linguistic and visual juxtapositions of the bygone and postmodern world seems to be the stuff of this particular affinity space. Spice it up with witty observations about everyday life, a bit of absurdity and a generous sprinkle of internet cynicism and the dish is served.

4.3.3 Evaluation of the method

Herring has developed the faceted classification scheme for computer-mediated discourses specifically for the analysis of digital discourse communities, which prompted me to apply it on my sample of memes.

According to Herring, the facets used in the classification scheme are based on aspects that previous studies on digital discourses have found relevant. My application of the method was a little different from previous studies that have used it on more text centered pages such as blogs. Herring herself points out that the scheme is primarily based on research findings from text-centered DMC, and that it is important to note that multimedia DMC makes use of multiple channels of communication. This is especially true in the case of online memes. However, with a little modification, the scheme offered a versatile framework for the analysis of memes, taking a large number of elements into account, thus providing the study with an array of relevant information. The addition of intertextuality to the scheme was well-grounded and the overview of the page would not have been very comprehensive without it.

However, concentrating solely on individual memes without taking into account the user comments and participant characteristics, was an obvious limitation of this study. The memes posted on the timeline of Classical Art Memes are mere fire starters of long discourse chains that take place in the comment sections. These chains contain new memes, discussions about the subject matters of the memes, questions to the administrator, and numerous other elements that should be taken into consideration in further studies.

5 CONCLUSIONS

My starting point was that online memes and the digital spaces they are generated and enjoyed in constitute a relevant part of the contemporary digital culture that may exhibit more sophistication than at first glance might seem. To find out if this is the case with Classical Art Memes, I surveyed the features of a collection of memes on the page. To put the study in a more academic context I applied James Paul Gee's concept of affinity spaces to the page.

The page proved to be a relevant example of an affinity space within the participatory digital culture, where active online users share the passion for creating and sharing specific content such as memes that draw on classical art. By observing the features of the memes through a systematic classification scheme this paper has hopefully managed to show that media spaces like Classical Art Memes can be socially important environments, often exhibiting linguistic versatility and general knowledgeability that may even promote informal learning. Due to the huge popularity of the page, I venture to suggest that affinity spaces like Classical Art Memes might even make knowing cool for the young, in a way.

As was outlined by Knobel and Lankshear (2007), the comprehension and interpretation of contemporary texts, like online memes, requires a whole new set of literacy practices. Especially the heavy intertextuality of memes shows that being literate in the digital realm is much more than knowing how to read and write. An apparent implication of this is that understanding how memes and the participatory internet culture work should be properly taken into account in literacy and media education. Keeping up with the chaotic and fluid digital culture is, however, not a simple task. Detecting various types of intertextuality and being "in the know" require constant attention. For the present, the knowledge embedded in online memes and the images and comic techniques they employ are heavily affected by the values of the Western, English speaking culture, but the plot of digital spaces will only thicken as the internet keeps on expanding, bringing other cultures and languages into the arena.

As David Crystal acknowledges, systematic and up-to-date description of the diverse internet texts is a real challenge, also from an academic point of view (Crystal 2011).

Understanding the contemporary digital culture necessitates a whole new mindset. The internet meme in particular has infamously blurry edges and is difficult to grasp with any definite descriptions. This paper provided an exhaustive overview on the kind of content an entertainment page can offer, but the omission of user comments and demographics from the equation was a clear limitation. Already a single meme on Classical Art Memes can receive thousands of comments, and thus provide an enormous set of data for research purposes.

Further studies could take into consideration the discursive features of the comment sections, focusing for instance, on how the subject matter of a given meme is dealt with, how memes are used as reactions and responses in the discourse and how the discussion sprawls into different topics under one single meme. Since sarcasm is a substantial part of meme-ing, further research could also concentrate on face-threatening acts among the users. Furthermore, trends seem to affect the types and topics of memes tremendously, and a diachronic study would probably show substantial variation. Additionally, it might be very fruitful to carry out a focus group study where active followers could tell how they experience affinity spaces like Classical Art Memes.

In conclusion, different outputs of the participatory digital culture can encompass more advanced sets of skills and bodies of knowledge than is generally presumed. These media spaces are social and generative networks that offer hundreds of millions of users their daily bread of laughs. In addition to taming the hunger for entertainment, they have the potential to nourish cognitive and linguistic faculties as well. Even if one did not agree with this claim about learning, the significance of online memes and spaces to popular culture and online communication can hardly be ignored. The contribution of a single site such as Classical Art Memes is likely to remain low, and in a few years, the page may be gone and buried under the ephemerality of the digital era. The aggregate influence of these pages however is and will be significant.

REFERENCES

- Apte, Mahadev L. (1985) *Humor and laughter: an anthropological approach*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Bauckhage, Christian (2011) ‘Insights into Internet Memes’, *Proceedings of the Fifth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*. 17-21 July Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence, Barcelona, Available from: <http://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/ICWSM/ICWSM11/paper/view/2757>. [30 January 2016].
- Baym, Nancy K. (1995) ‘The Performance of Humor in Computer-Mediated Communication’, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 1, no. 2, n. pag. Available from: https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/bitstream/handle/1808/8710/Baym_1995_Humor-Computer-Mediated.pdf?sequence=3. [30 January 2016].
- Biber, D., Conrad, S., Leech, G. (2002) *Longman Student Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. Pearson Education ESL.
- Bowers, G. Brett & Wiggins, Bradley E. (2014) ‘Memes as genre: A structuration analysis of the memescape’, *New Media and Society*, vol. 17, no. 11, pp. 1886-1906. Available from: <http://nms.sagepub.com/content/17/11/1886.full.pdf+html>. [30 January 2016].
- Bruns, Axel (2007) ‘Produsage: Towards a Broader Framework for User-Led Content

- Creation’, *Proceedings of the 6th ACM SIGCHI conference on Creativity & Cognition*. Available from: <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/6623/>. [30 January 2016].
- Burgess, Jean (2008) ‘All Your Chocolate Rain Are Belong to Us? Viral Video, YouTube and the Dynamics of Participatory Culture’, in *UNSPECIFIED*, (ed) *Video Vortex Reader: Responses to YouTube*. Institute of Network Cultures, Amsterdam, pp. 101-109. Available from: <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/18431/1/18431.pdf>. [30 January 2016].
- Burman, Jeremy (2012) ‘The misunderstanding of memes: Biography of an unscientific object, 1976–1999’, *Perspectives on Science*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 75-104. Available from: <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/toc/posc/20/1>. [30 January 2016].
- Börzsei, Linda K. (2013) ‘Makes a Meme Instead: A Concise History of Internet Memes’, *New Media Studies Magazine*, no. 7, pp. 155-183. Available from: https://works.bepress.com/linda_borzsei/2/. [30 January 2016].
- Cherny, Lynn (1999) *Conversation and community: Chat in a virtual world*, Stanford, CA: Center for the Study of Language and Information.
- Claridge, Claudia (2010) *Hyperbole in English: A Corpus-based Study of Exaggeration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal, David (2011) *Internet Linguistics: A Student Guide*. London: Routledge.
- Davison, Patrick (2012) ‘The Language of Internet Memes’, in Michael Mandiberg (ed.) *The Social Media Reader*, pp. 120-134., New York University Press, New York. Available from: <http://www.veryinteractive.net/content/4-library/21-the-language-of-internet-memes/davison-the-languageofinternetmemes.pdf>. [30 January 2016].
- Dawkins, Richard (Performer) and Marshmallow Laser Feast (Director) (2013) *Just for Hits*. Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFn-ixX9edg>.
- Dawkins, Richard (1976) *The Selfish Gene*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Driessen, Henk (2001) ‘Jokes and joking’, in N. J. B. Smeler, P.B. Baltes (eds), *International encyclopedia of the social and behavioral sciences*, pp. 7992-7995., Elsevier Science Ltd, New York. Available from: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/>. [30 January 2016].
- Ferrara, Kathleen; Brunner, Hans; Whittemore, Greg (1991) ‘Interactive written Discourse as an emergent register’, in *Written Communication*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 8-34.

- Gee, James P. (2005) ‘Semiotic social spaces and affinity spaces: from The Age of Mythology to today’s schools’, in David Barton and Karin Tusting (eds) *Beyond Communities of Practice*, pp. 214-232., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. Available from: <http://ebooks.cambridge.org/chapter.jsf?bid=CBO9780511610554&cid=CB09780511610554A018>. [30.January 2016].
- Gee, James P. (2004) *Situated Language and Learning: A Critique of Traditional Schooling*. New York: Routledge.
- Haiman, John (1998) *Talk is Cheap: sarcasm, alienation, and the evolution of language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hancock, Jeffrey T. (2004) ‘LOL: Humor Online’, *Interactions*, vol. 11, no. 5, pp. 57-58. Available from: <http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=1015557>. [30 January 2016].
- Herring, Susan (2002) ‘Computer-mediated communication on the Internet’, *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology*, vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 109-168. Available from: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002aris.1440360104/abstract>. [30 January 2016].
- Herring, Susan (2007) ‘A Faceted Classification Scheme for Computer-Mediated Discourse’, *LANGUAGE@INTERNET*, vol. 4, n. pag., Available from: <http://www.languageatinternet.org/articles/2007/761>. [30 January 2016].
- Hofstadter, Douglas (1983) ‘Metamagical themes: virus-like sentences and self-replicating structures’, *Scientific American*, vol. 248, no. 1, pp. 14-22.
- Jenkins, Henry (2009a) *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*. Cambridge: The MIT Press. Available from: <https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/confronting-challenges-participatory-culture>. [30 January 2016].
- Kerenyi, Karl (1951) *The Gods of the Greeks*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Knobel, Michele & Lankshear, Colin (2007) *A New Literacies Sampler*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Kuipers, Giselinde (2009) ‘Humor styles and symbolic boundaries’, *Journal of Literary Theory*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 219-239. Available from: <http://www.degruyter.com/view/j/jlt.2009.3.issue-2/jlt.2009.013/jlt.2009.013.xml>. [30 January 2016].
- Lessig, Lawrence (2004) *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity*. New York: Penguin.

- Marino, Gabriele (2015) ‘Semiotics of spreadability: A systematic approach to Internet memes and virality’, *Punctum*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 43-66. Available from: http://punctum.gr/?page_id=194. [30 January 2016].
- McArthur, John A. (2008) ‘Digital Subculture: A Geek Meaning of Style’, *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 33-58. Available from: <http://jci.sagepub.com/content/33/1/58.full.pdf+html>. [30 January 2016].
- McRobbie, Angela (1994) *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*, London: Routledge.
- Murray, Susan (2008) ‘Digital Images, Photo-Sharing, and Our Shifting Notions of Everyday Aesthetics’, *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 147-163. Available from: <http://vcu.sagepub.com/content/7/2/147.full.pdf+html>. [30 January 2016].
- Miller, Carolyn R. (1984) ‘Genre as social action’, *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 70, no. 2, pp. 151-167.
- Milner, Ryan M. (2013b) ‘Pop polyvocality: Internet memes, public participation, and the Occupy Wall Street movement’, *International Journal of Communication*, vol. 7, pp. 2357-2390. Available from: <http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/1949/1015>. [30 January 2016].
- Miltner, Kate M. (2014) ‘There’s no place for lulz on LOLCats: The role of genre, gender, and group identity in the interpretation and enjoyment of an Internet meme’, *First Monday*, vol. 19, no. 8, n. pag. Available from: <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/5391/4103>. [30 January 2016].
- Procházka, Ondřej (2014) ‘Internet Memes – A New Literacy’, *Ostrava Journal of English Philology*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 53-74.
- Rickford, John R. (1999) *African American Vernacular English: Features, Evolution, Educational implications*. Malden: Blackwell Publishers.
- Rushkoff, Douglas (1997) *Children of Chaos: Surviving the End of the World As We Know It*. London: Flamingo.
- Sanchez-Burks, Jeffrey; Karlesky, Matthew. J; Lee, Fiona. (2015) ‘Psychological Bricolage: Integrating Social Identities to Produce Creative Solutions’, in Shalley, C., Hitt, M. A., Zhou, J.,(eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Creativity, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Shifman, Limor (2007) ‘Humor in the Age of Digital Reproduction: Continuity and

- Change in Internet-Based Comic Texts', *International Journal of Communication*, vol. 1, pp. 187-209. Available from:
<http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/11/34>. [30 January 2016].
- Shifman, Limor (2013) 'Memes in a Digital World: Reconciling with a Conceptual Troublemaker', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 362-377. Available from:
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jcc4.12013/epdf>. [30 January 2016].
- Snyder, Ilana (2001) 'A New communication order: Research literacy practices in the Network society', *Language and Education*, vol. 15, no. 2-3, pp. 117-131. Available from:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/09500780108666805>. [30 January 2016].
- Stam, Robert (2005) 'Introduction: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation', in Stam, R., Raengo, A., (eds), *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, pp. 1-52. Malden: Blackwell.
- Stryker, Cole (2011) *Epic win for Anonymous: How 4chan's Army Conquered the Web*. New York: Overlook Duckworth.
- Wartofsky, Marx, W. (1979) *Models: Representation and Scientific Understanding*. Dordrecht: Reidel.
- Werry, Christopher C. (1996) 'Linguistic and interactional features of Internet Relay Chat', in Herring, Susan (ed.), pp. 47-63.
- Wilkins, Kim. (2014) 'Valhallolz: Medievalist Humour on the Internet', *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 199-21. Available from: <http://anothersample.net/valhallolz-medievalist-humor-on-the-internet>. [30 January 2016].
- Yates, Simeon J. (1996) 'Oral and written linguistic aspects of computer conferencing', in Herring, Susan, (ed.), pp. 29-46.
- Zittrain, L. Jonathan (2008) *The Future of the Internet – And How to Stop It*. Yale University Press.

Websites consulted:

- <http://www.britannica.com/>
<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>

<https://global.britannica.com/art/>

<http://knowyourmeme.com/>

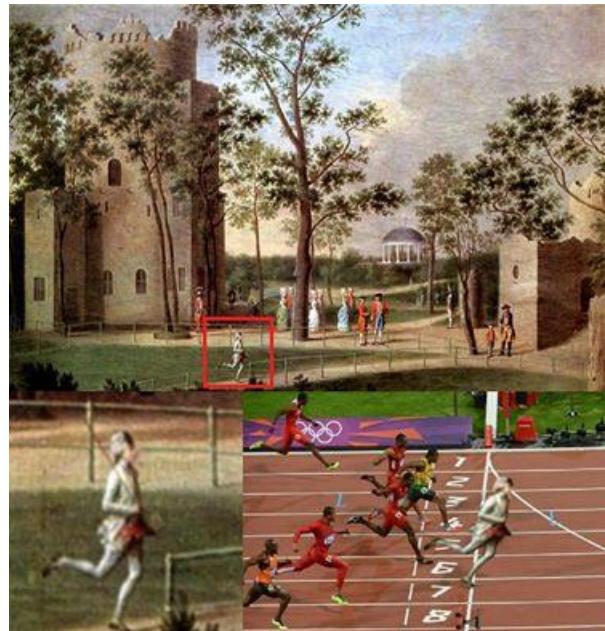
<http://time.com/>

<http://www.urbandictionary.com>

Appendix – The sampling of memes

70 first memes (31.8.2014 - 16.12.2014)

1.



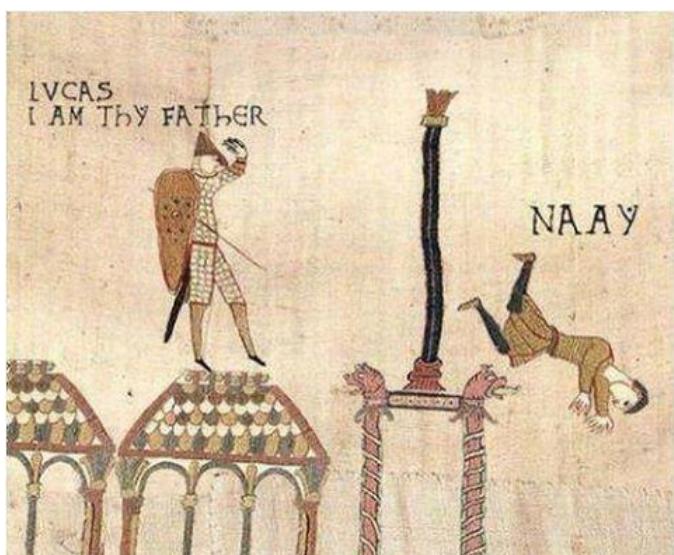
2.



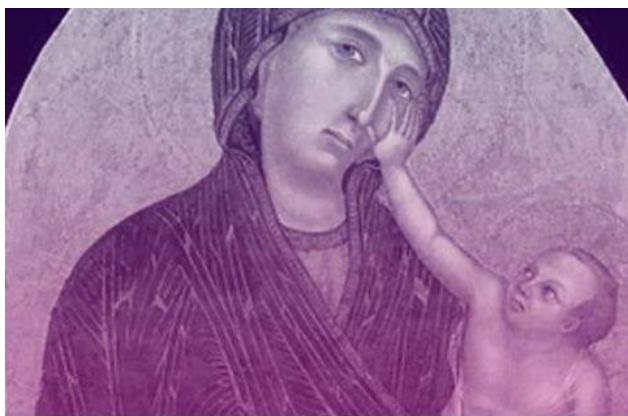
3.



4.



5.



7.

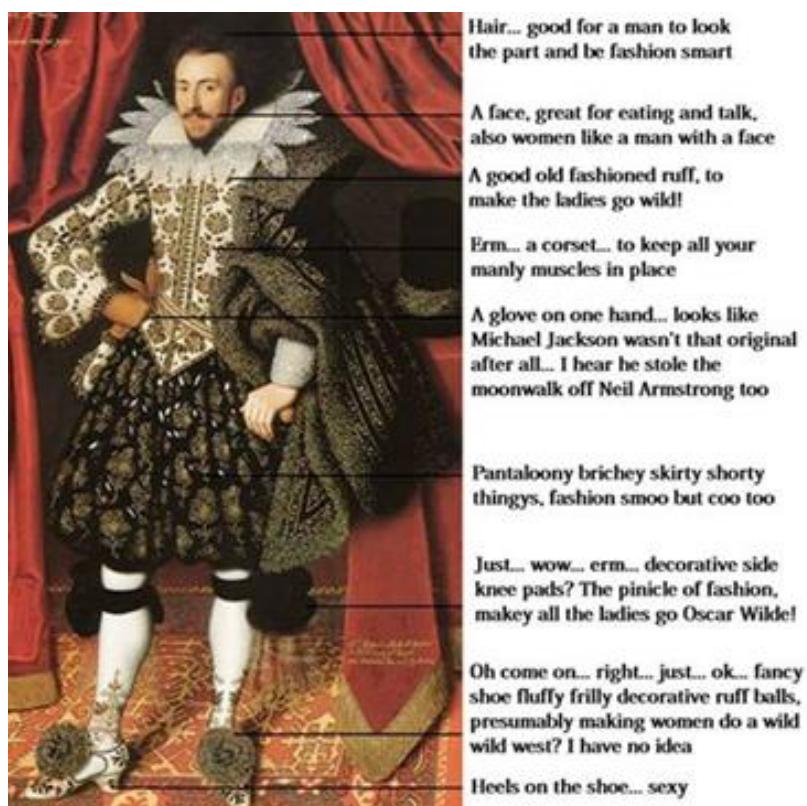


"These courtesans know
nothing of honor"
- Emperor Augustus

6.



8.



9.

When somebody takes a photo and you don't know whether to smile with teeth or keep your mouth closed



10.

Take my wife... no please, take her



I appreciate your attempt at 1950s humour but how can I take your wife when you chopped her head off yesterday?



She once got a mudpack and looked great for two days. Then the mud fell off



My wife is on a new diet. Coconuts and bananas. She hasn't lost weight, but can she climb a tree



11.



"My next door neighbour is really loud and obnoxious... at least now I know how Canada feels"
- Anna Friedleberg

12.

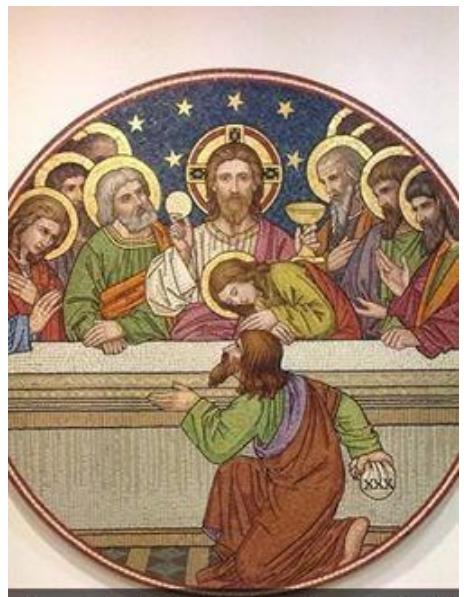


13.



Mark knew his meth addiction
was getting out of hand but the
shit was so moreish...

14.

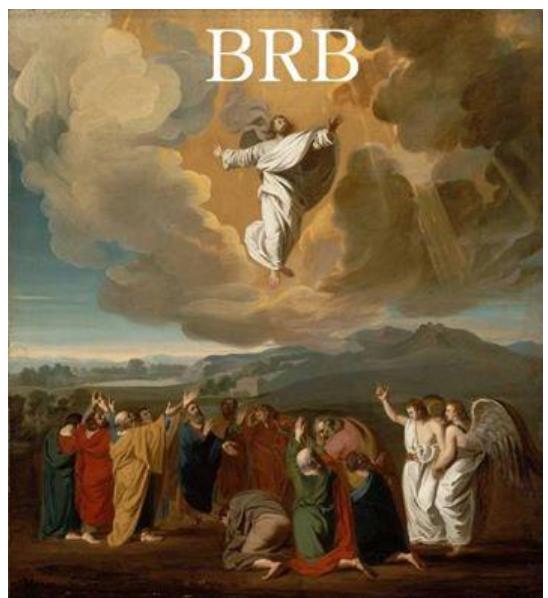


Does it look like im going down stairs?!

15.



16.



17.



18.



When somebody tries to
copy your work at school

20.



19.



21.



My therapist says I have
a preoccupation with
vengeance... we'll see
about that...

22.



I now pronounce you
husband and wife, you
may kiss your niece

23.



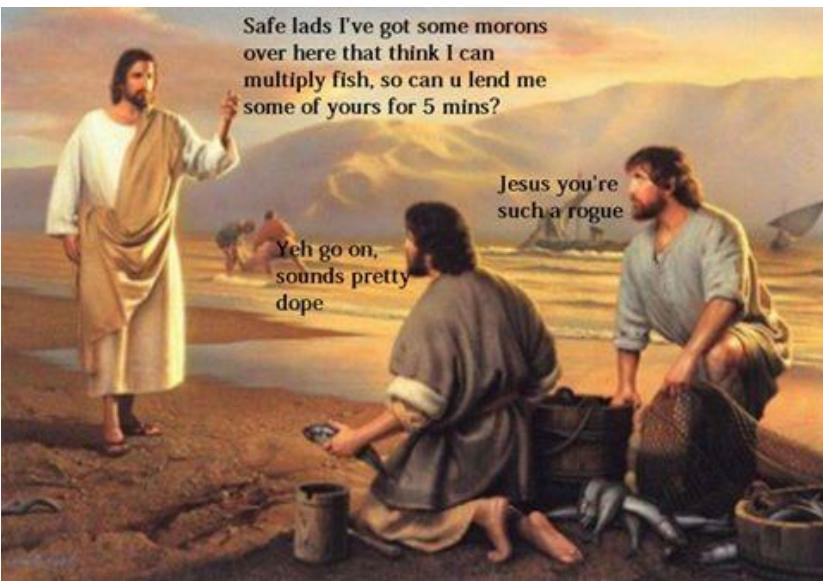
"You know when you've got low
battery and the screen automatically
dims to save power? Well that screen
is still brighter than your future"
- Phillip Earl of Hardwicke

24. Video

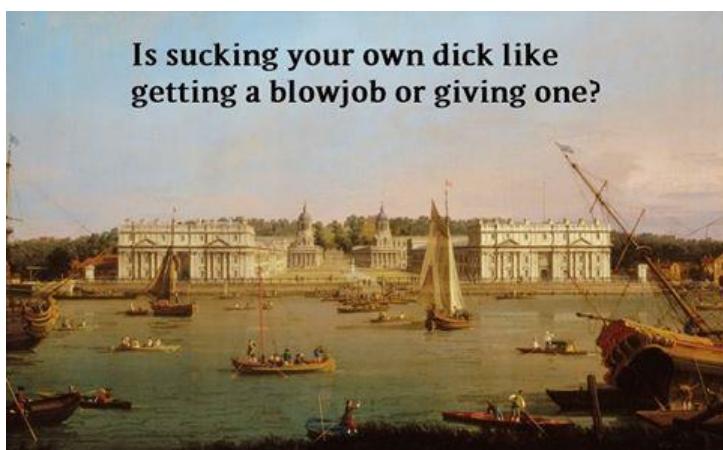
25.



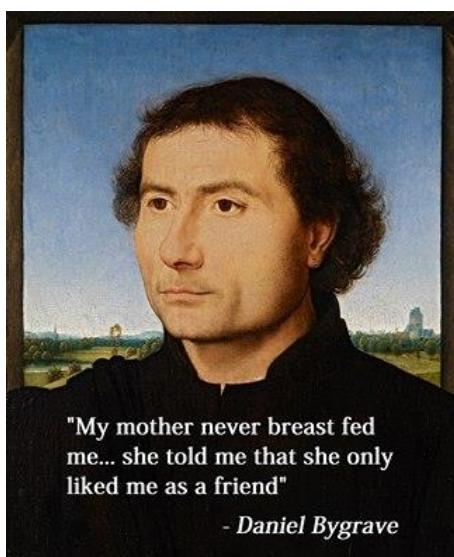
26.



27.



28.



29.



PUFF PUFF PASS 420 PRAISE
IT PHAGGOT ONE LOVE

30.



Josh was beginning to think
that Marcus wasn't a fully
qualified hairdresser

31.



"Angel Delight for dessert
after a main meal of pork
chops and creamy mash, get
the fuck in lad"
- Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor

32.



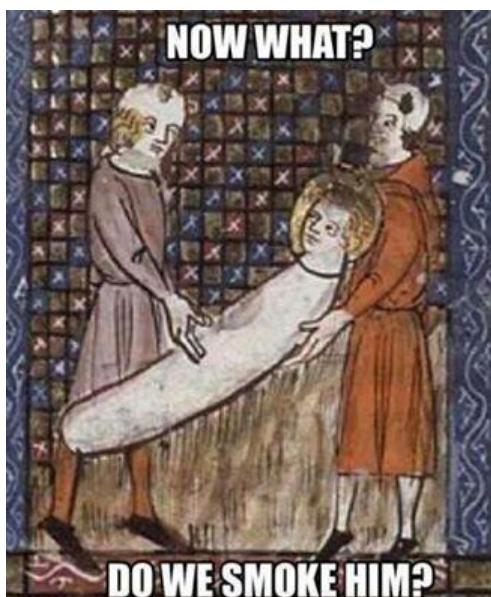
33.



34.



35.

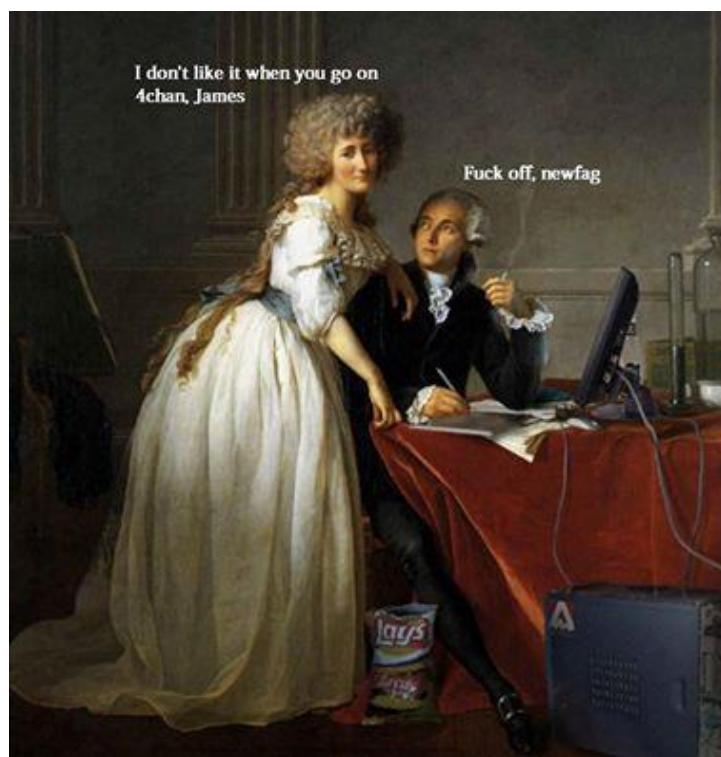


36.

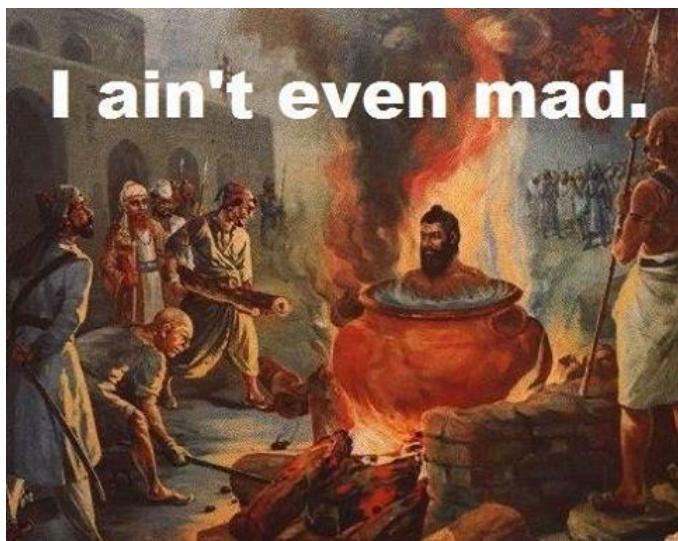
Perfect wedding celebrations don't exi-



37.



38.



39.



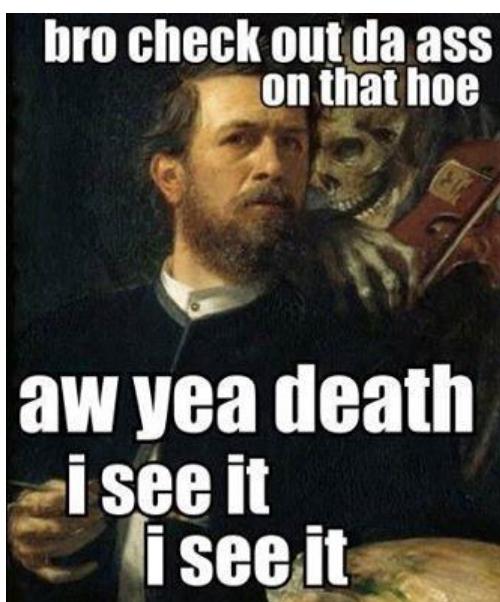
40. Video

41.



Catherine II the Great, Empress of Russia
looks a lot like David Cameron

42.



43.



Please just one time in the butt Barbara

44.



"I love the pizzas from
Pizza Hut but let's be
honest, the dips leave
a lot to be desired"

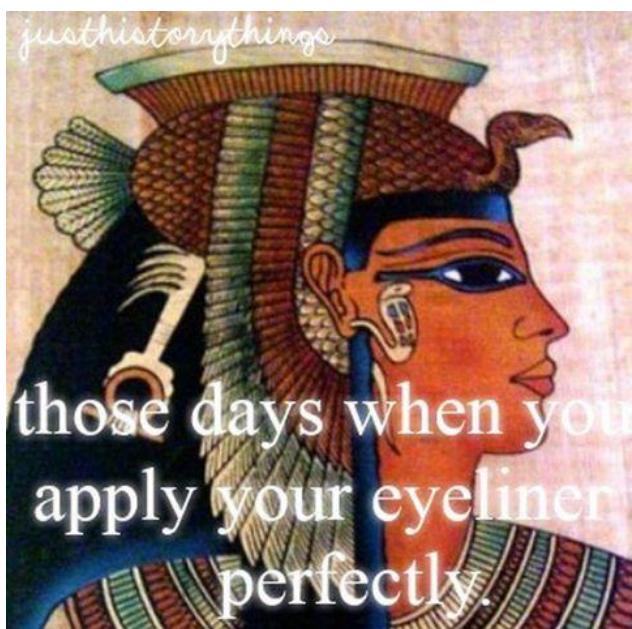
- Hannah Hill, Head of
Marketing at Domino's Pizza

45.



Vladimir Putin is a time traveler

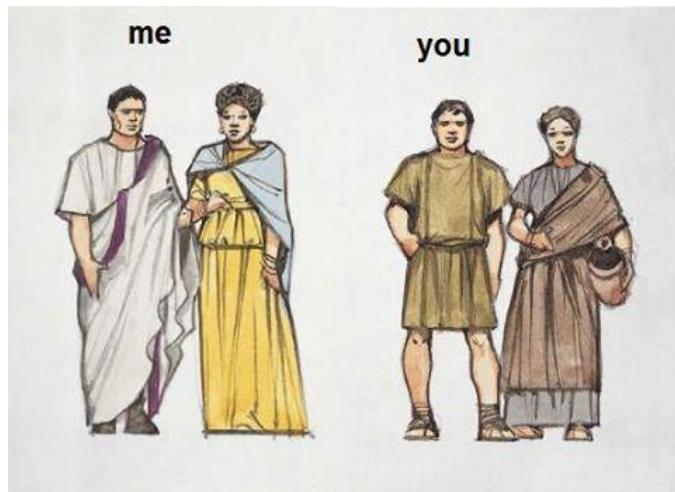
46.



48.



47.



49.



When yo jam come on in the club

50.



51.



"I've had bad luck with both my wives. The first one left me and the second one didn't" - James Stuart

52.



FRIEND ZONED AGAIN

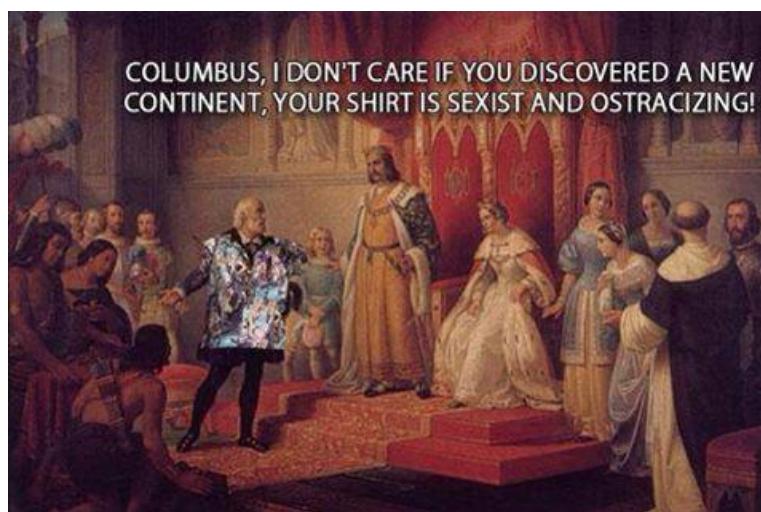
53. Video

54.

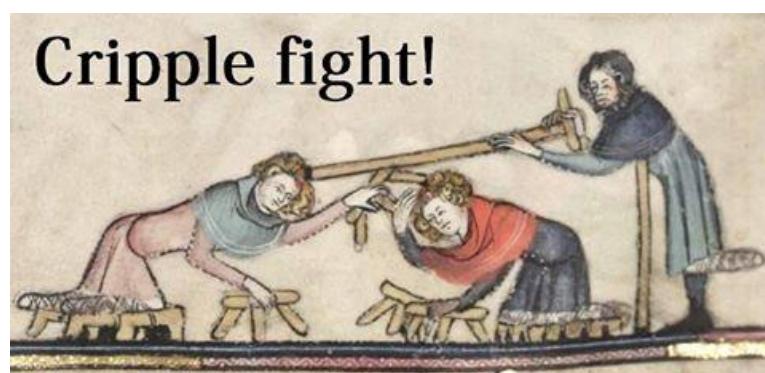
I'll be Bach



55.



56.



57.



58.



59.



"My bedtime is 7.30 but I go to bed at 7:35, thug life"
- *Charles III, future Bourbon King of Spain*

60.



61. Video

62.

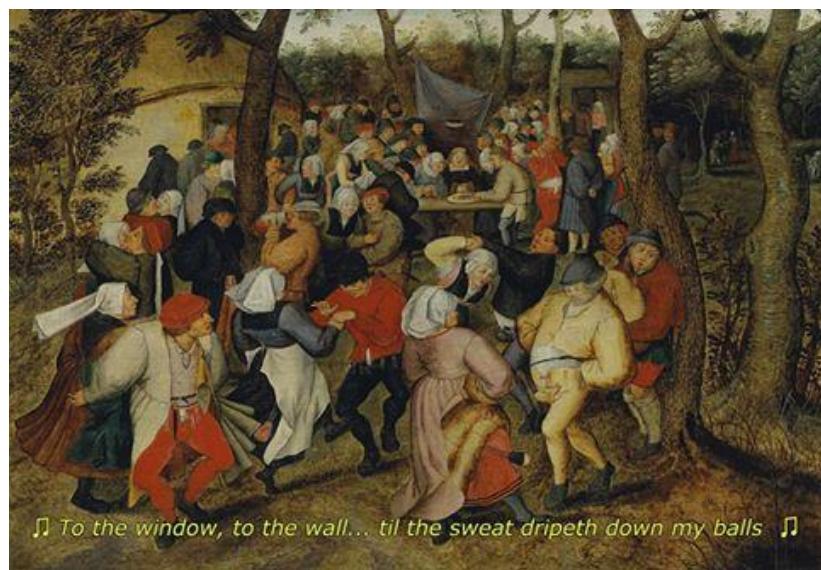


63.



"Big booty bitches, big,
big booty bitches"
- James Francois

64.



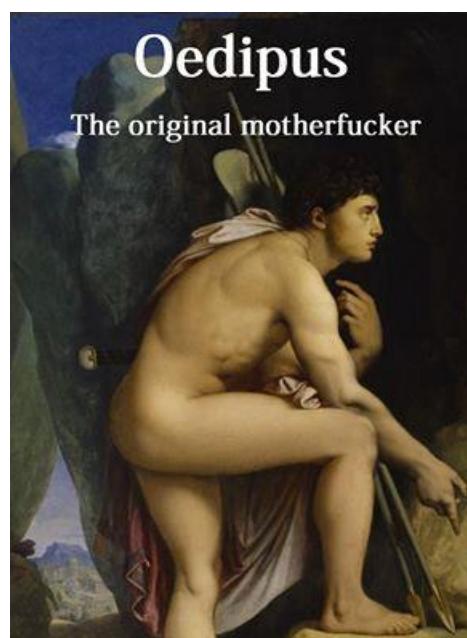
65.



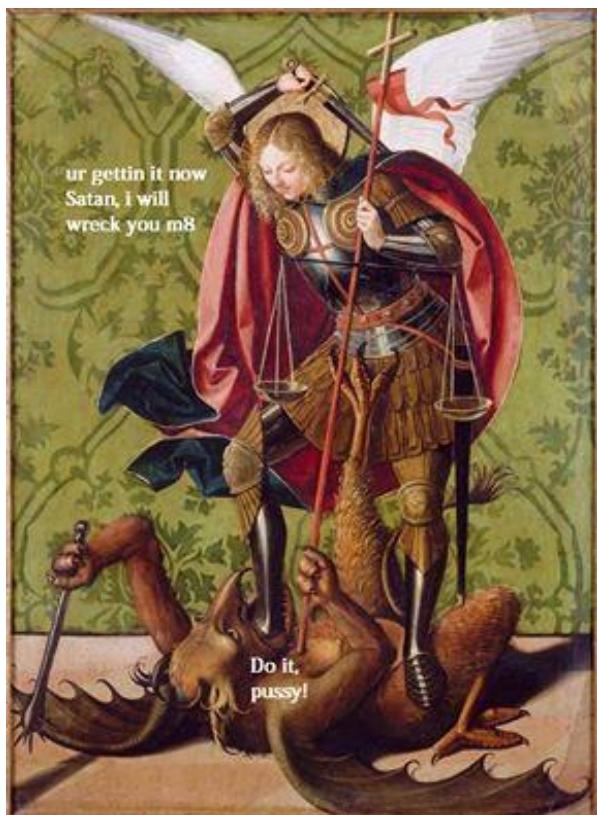
66.



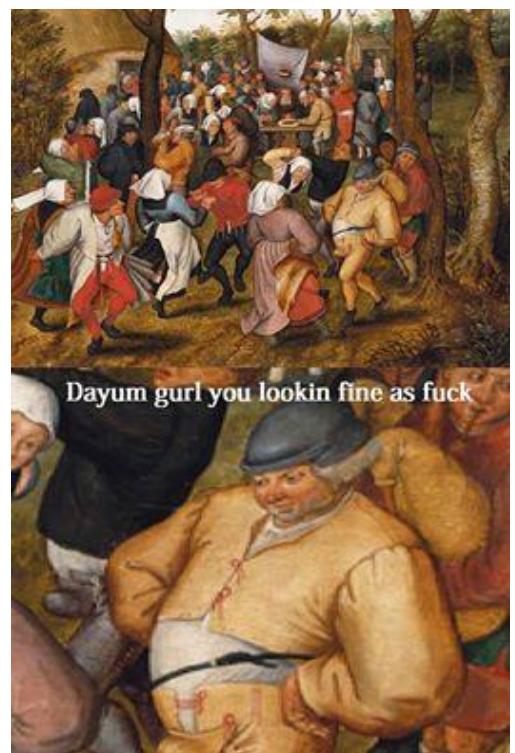
67.



68.



69.



70.



70 most recent memes (25.1.2016 - 19.2.2016)

71.

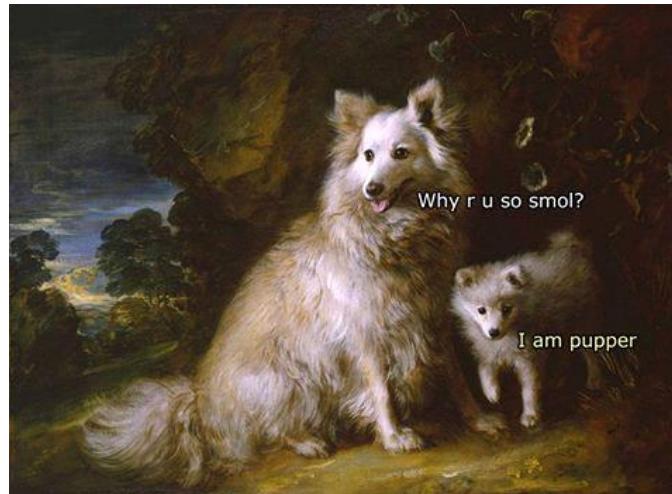
When your leggings are on point



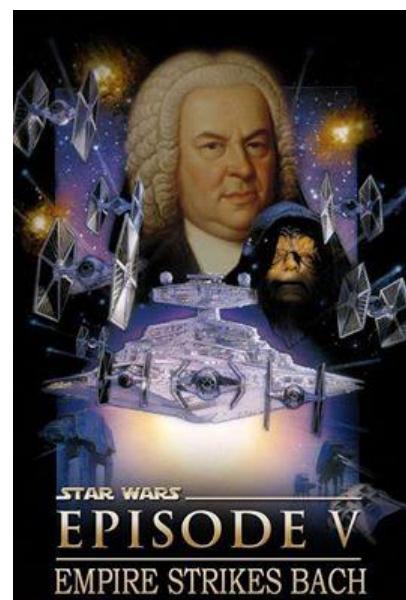
72.



73.



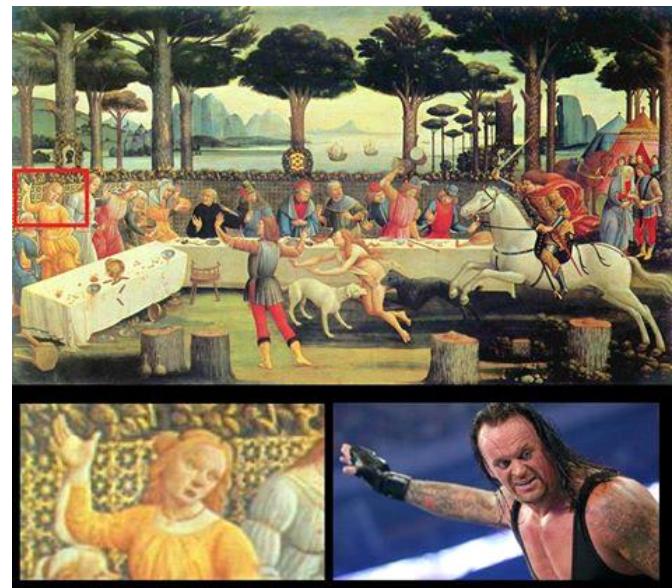
74.



75.



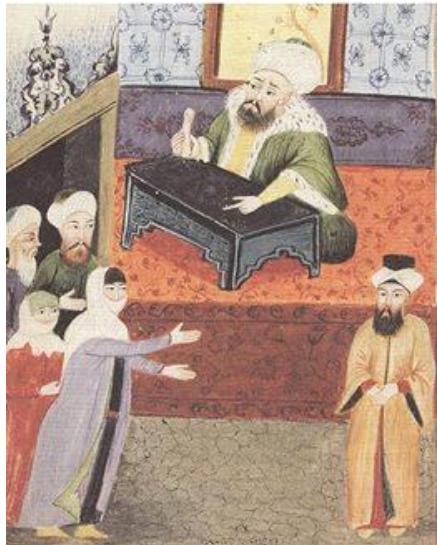
76.



77. A link to another page

78.

"An unhappy wife is complaining to the Kaddi about her husband's impotence. Her evidence is a zibik (dildo)"



79.



Here we can see UNILAD and the LADbible working together to steal my freshly baked memes

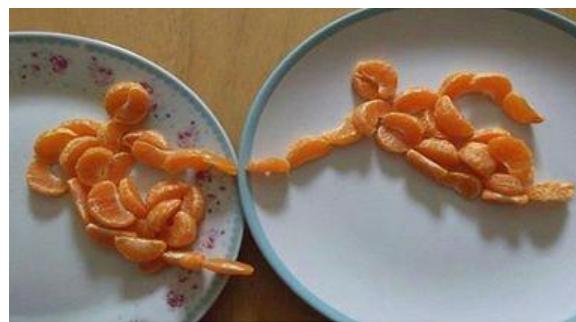
80.



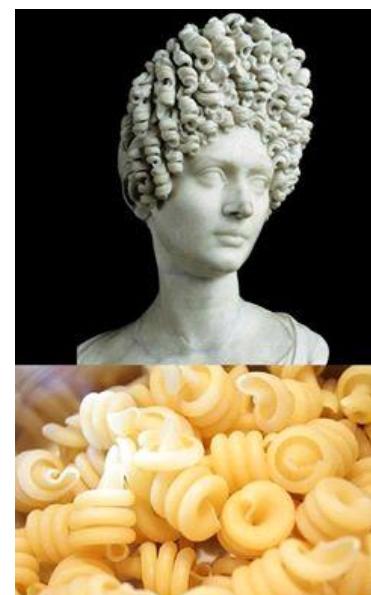
81.



82.



83.



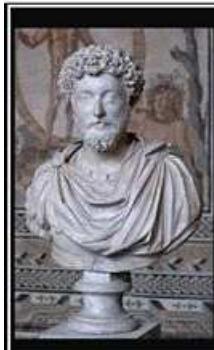
84.

The human body is 60% water so really
we are just cucumbers with anxiety



85.

When your gf gets upset that you haven't complimented her new dress but you've been saving a quote just for this moment

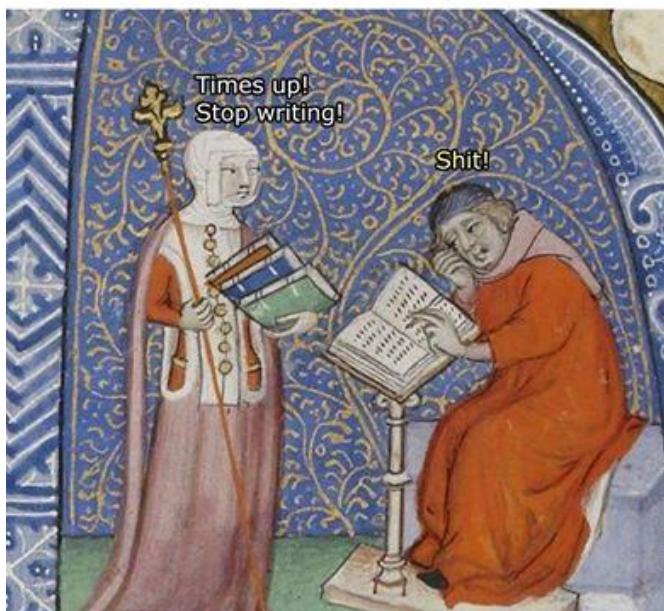


Doth perfect beauty stand in need of praise at all?
Nay; no more than law, no more than truth, no
more than loving kindness, nor than modesty.

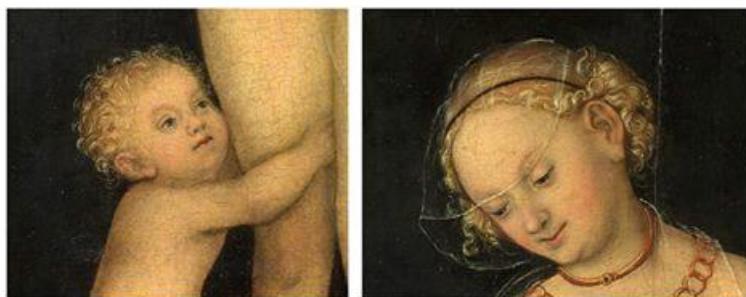
(Marcus Aurelius)

86.

When the time runs out in the exam but you're not finished



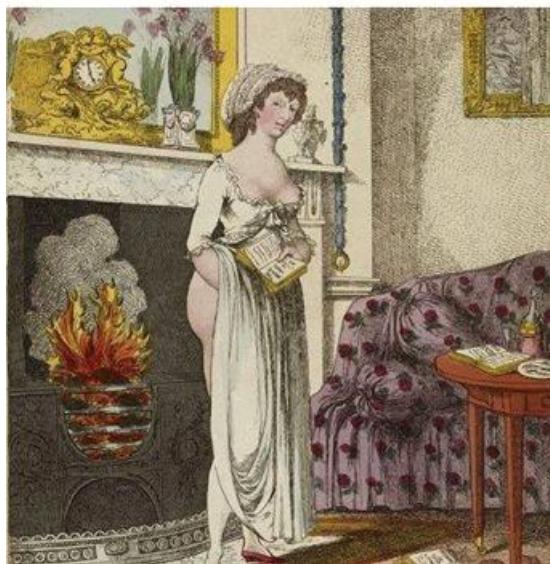
87.



"Son I understand Laquisha has a big booty but she keeps stealing my jewelry, she can't come over anymore"

88.

Heating up dinner for your bf



89.

When you forget to contour

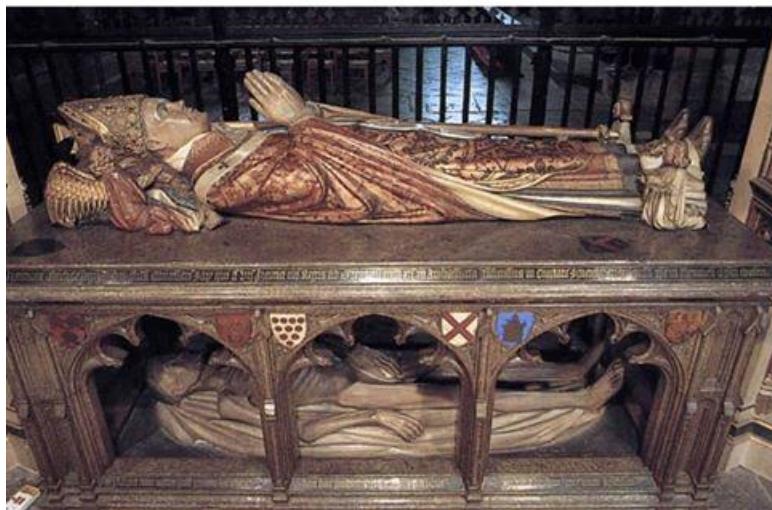


90.

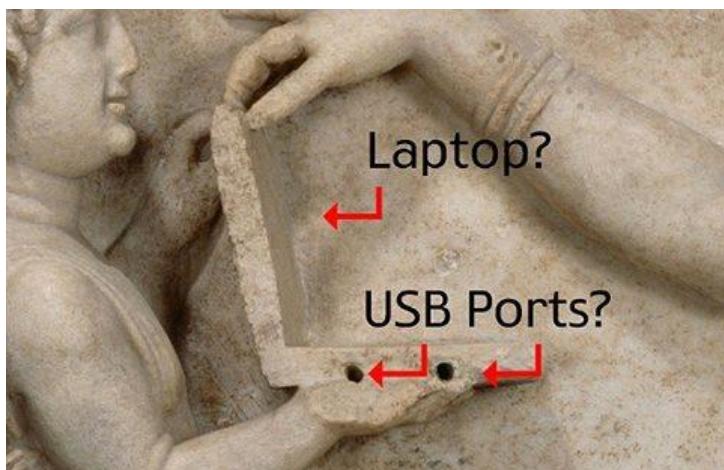


91.

When you claim the top bunk without much fuss
because the guy on the bottom bunk is dead



92.



93.



94.



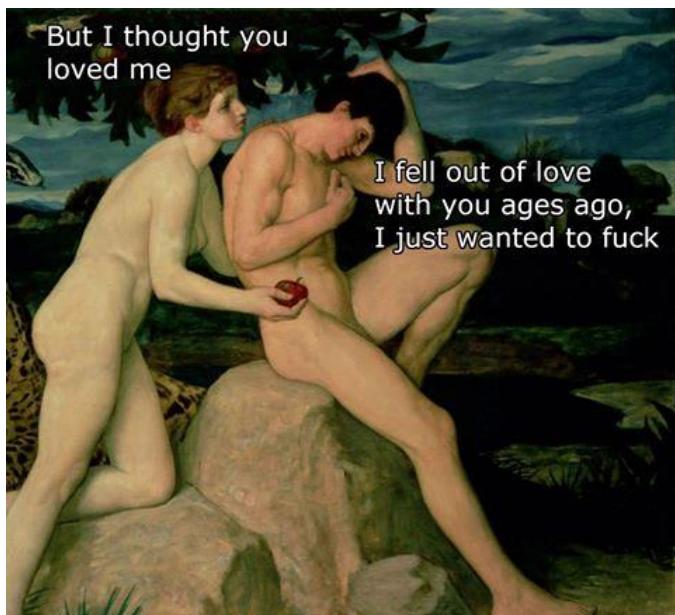
When you realise that Black History Month is the month with the least amount of days

95.

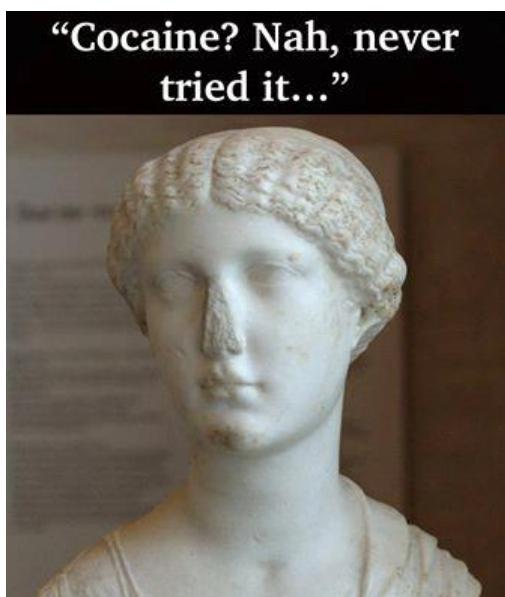
That moment when you're about to join the Revolution and you realise you'd promised to take the kids to the park.



96.



97.



98.

"My whole life is like that one episode of Friends where Ross drinks all those margaritas and keeps telling everyone that he's fine when he clearly isn't"

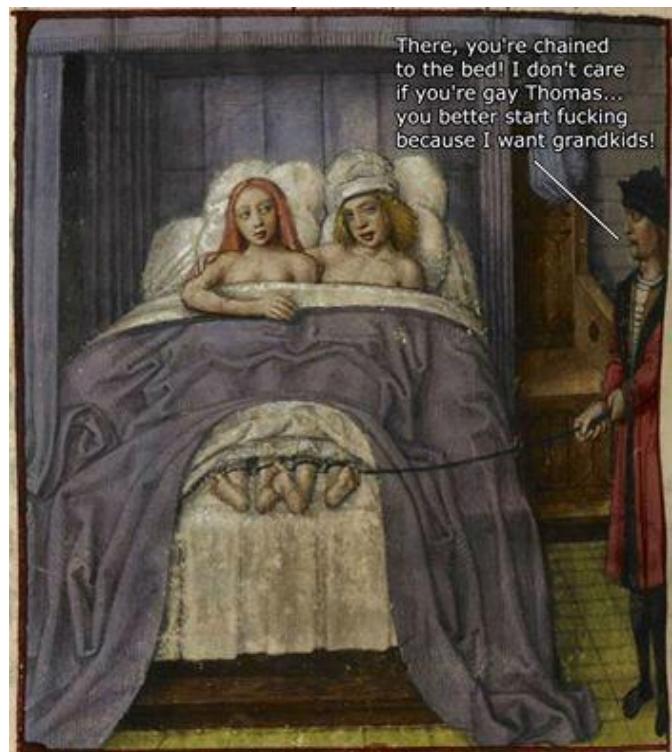


99.

When somebody takes your picture and you suddenly feel self-conscious



100.



101.



"I don't let my gf eat Fruit
Gushers... the only thing
busting in her mouth is me"

- Duke Agostino of Turin

102. Animated image

103.



104.



105.

When your neighbour Damien is being really annoying and running around naked in your front yard screaming because he's overdosed on bathsalts again so you strap a satellite tv dish to your back and stab Damien through the hand and then choke him while telling him you think of him while you masturbate



106.



Amber Rose @DaRealAmberRose



Follow

Awww @kanyewest are u mad I'm not around to play in ur asshole medieval-style anymore?

#ArrowsInTheBootyAssBitch

RETWEETS

LIKES

295,713 359,418

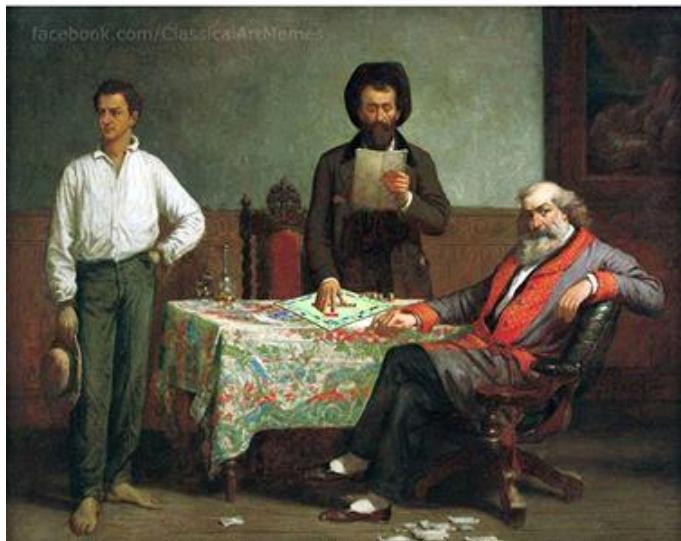


11:34 AM - 27 Jan 2016 · facebook.com/ClassicalArtMemes



107.

When you're halfway through a game
of Monopoly and somebody insists on
reading the rule book



108.

When you wanna make sure everyone hears you talking shit



109.

When he forgets to get you
anything for Valentines day

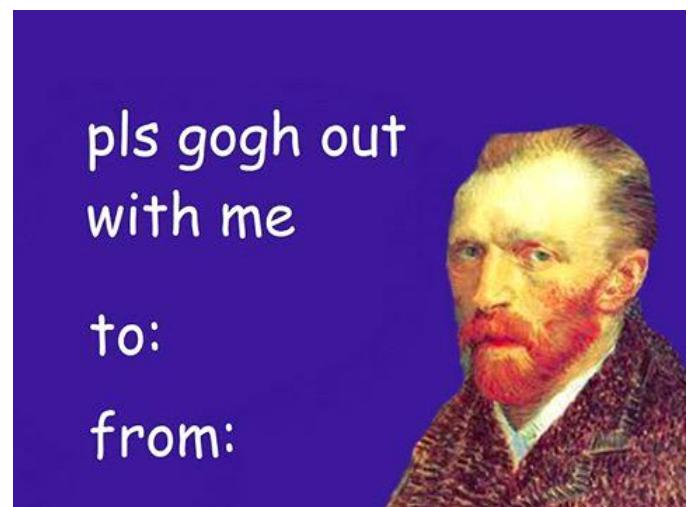


110.

When mad shit is happening on the bus so you just
close your eyes and listen to your music



111.



112.

My sperm count may be weak
but my love for you isn't

to:

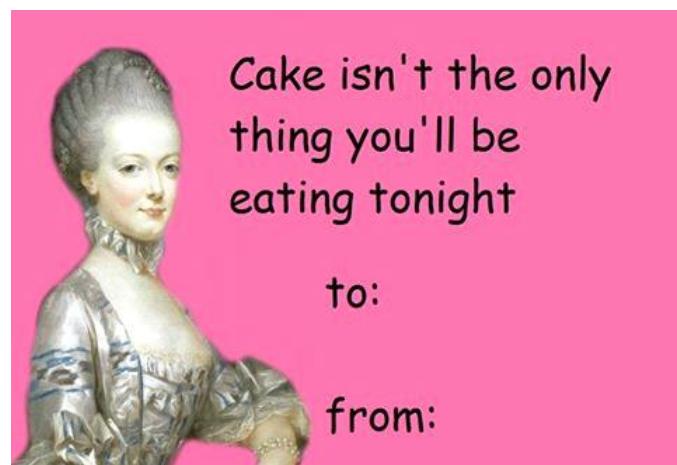
from:



113.



114.



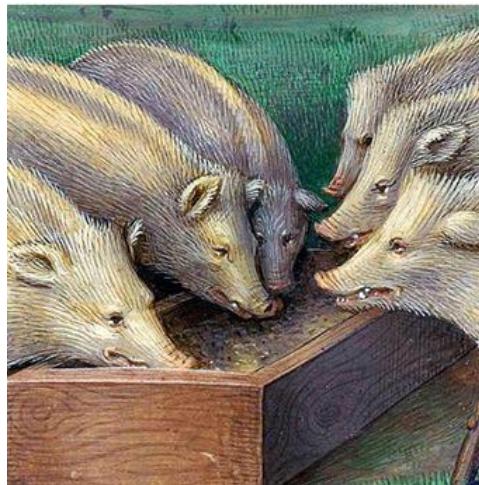
115.

When you run out of hot sauce so
you've gotta take drastic measures



116.

Meanwhile on Wall Street



117.

Hoverboards then

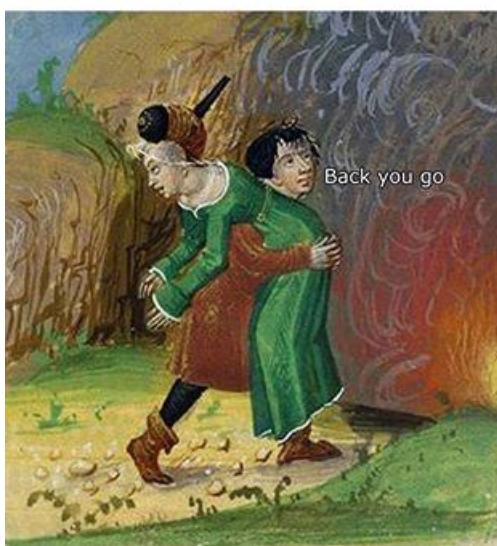


Hoverboards now



118.

When you save her from a fire
but she says "I have a boyfriend"

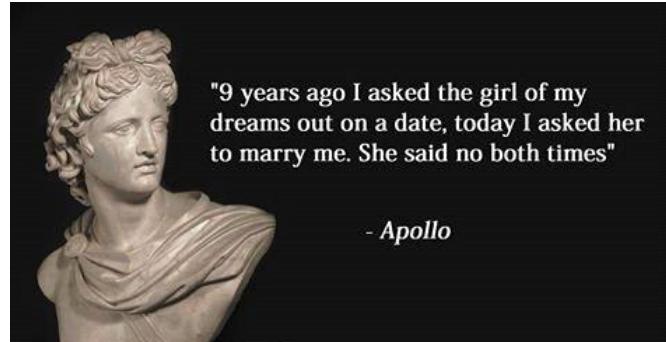


119.

When you tap your pockets
but don't feel your phone



120.



121.

When you get a text from your friend Chris saying that he's acquired a crazy new research chemical from the deep web and that you should come over for a sample and naturally you're keen to further erode your fragile mental state so you jump at the chance to get absolutely battered off a funky new mind-altering substance. So you head round Chris' house and he's laid out a few gargantuan lines on his coffee table, "Fucking hell Chris, you don't mess about do you?" so you get right into the action and honk a couple lines right up into your sinuses and 5 minutes later you've morphed into a distressed eagle comprised of melancholic human faces.
"What the fuck Chris!? I'm an eagle mate"



122.

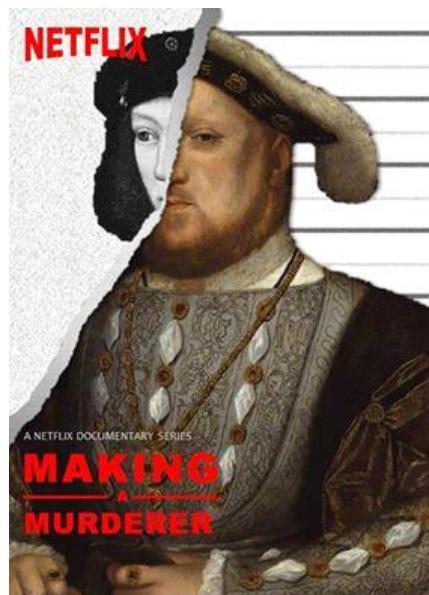
When you're a substitute teacher
and you can't control the class



124.

123.

Flirting then



Flirting now



125.



I feel therefore I am

126.



"I thought getting a vasectomy would stop my wife getting pregnant but all it does is change the color of the baby"

- Francis Beakstreet

127.

Relationship vs



Conquering Gaul



- Will provide you with affection
- Will give you support
- Makes other people think you're not a loser
- Creates emotional barriers
- Will cost money to take on dates
- Not always perfect
- Will leave you

- Will provide you with political capital and gold
- Will support your bid for Consulship
- Makes other people fear your military might
- Destroys Gallic barriers and civilizes barbarians
- Will fill Rome's coffers and provide many slaves
- Will be remembered for all time as perfect
- Can always be re-conquered

YOU DECIDE

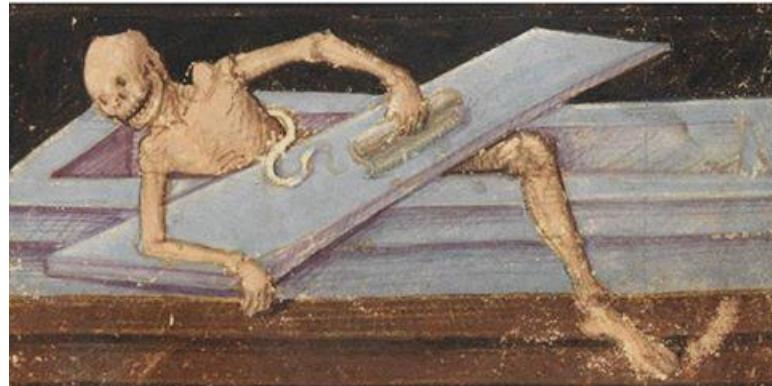
128.

When you're going down on her and she queefs

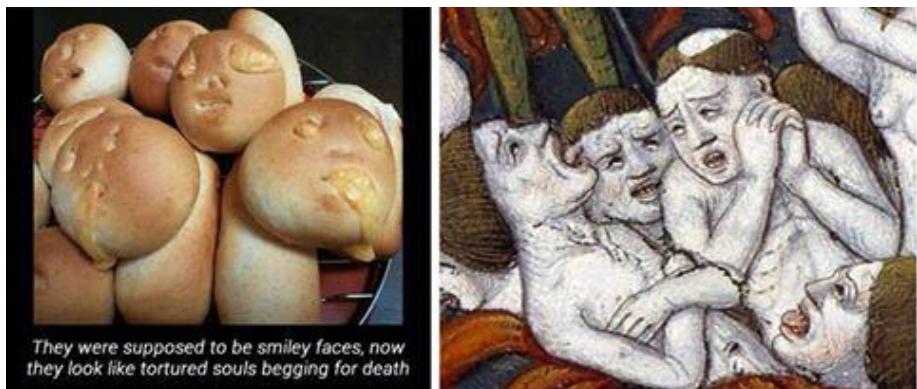


129.

When you're dead but you remember that
you forgot to delete your browser history



130.

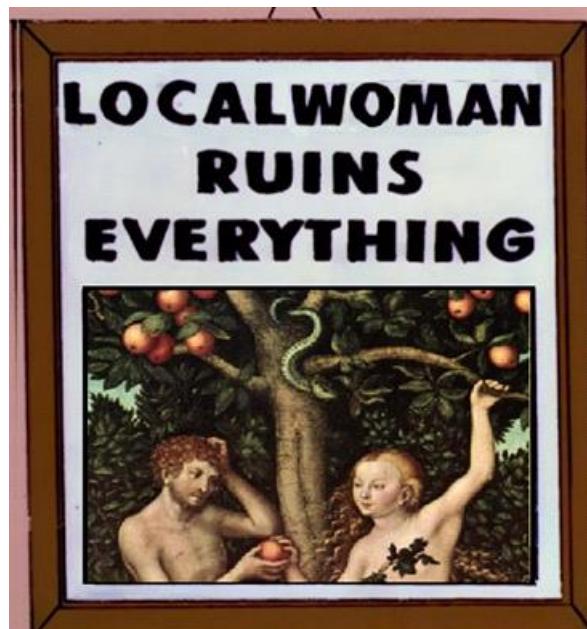


131.

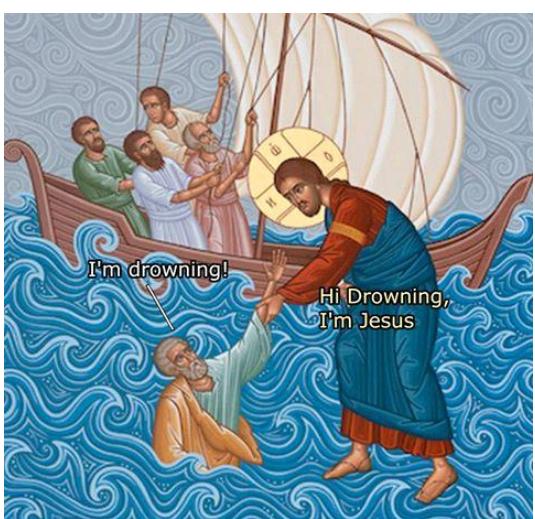
If you ever feel down just hug a lion...
and all your worries will fade away



132.



133.



134.

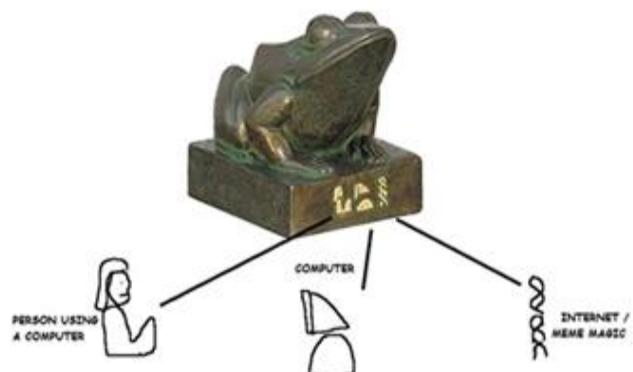
Parents: Are you high?

Me: No



facebook.com/CesareanArtMemes

135.

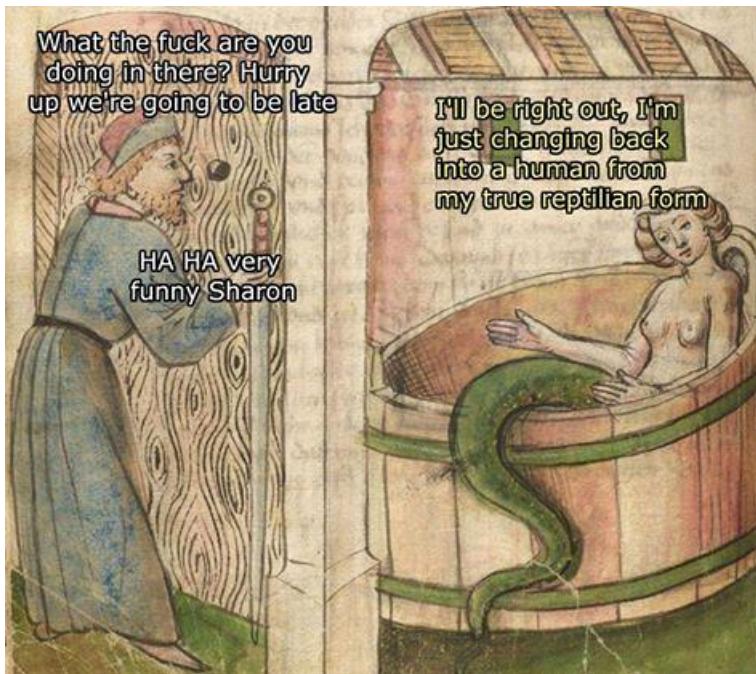


136.

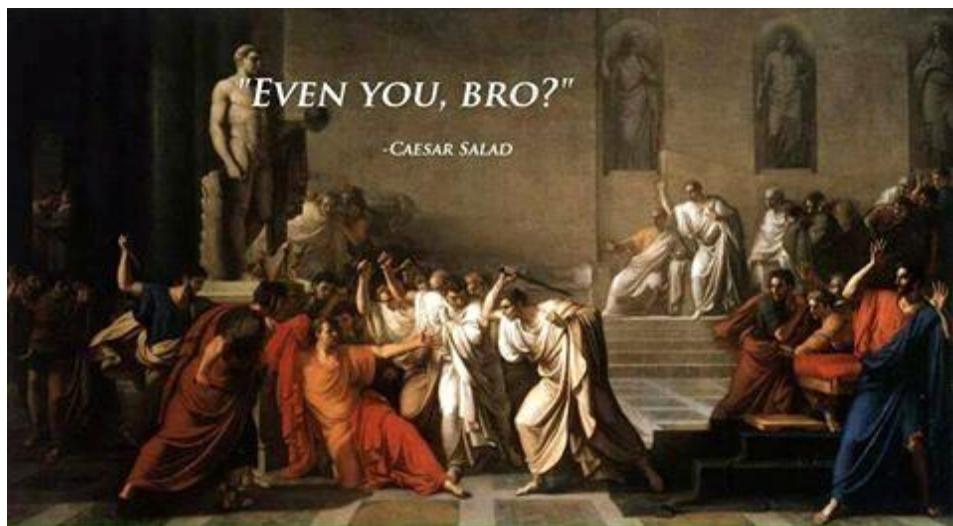
When you're depressed about the world but then you remember that you will die eventually



137.



138.



139.

When a slim person says they are fat
and you're just standing there like



140.

When you're in the middle of a
civil war but the beat is pure fire

