

ON THE LANGUAGE OF INTERNET MEMES

by

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SIGNED: Ernesto León De la Rosa-Carrillo

## Dedication

Family  
Committee  
Source Material  
Juárez & Tucson  
La Tray & La Loca

...this world's got a whole lot of locked doors | we decided not to live here anymore | picked  
though the norm didn't fit didn't stick to the script didn't care | we don't even live here...

P.O.S.  
Weird friends (We don't even live here)

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I designed this dissertation to not only report on my arts-based educational research on the language of Internet Memes but to also take full advantage of the visual richness that shapes Internet culture. As such figures and images abound and are fully interwoven throughout. From chapter 1 on, for example, in-text quotes are replaced by digital photographs or screen grabs of every book and article referenced with the relevant passages highlighted. Additionally the data generated and analyzed is as visual as the meme instances that are discussed and are eventually used to provide final reflections. Finally, peripheral material like web sites and software have also been captured and integrated within the document in order to provide the reader with a better understanding of the interfaces and design of each.

In order to provide the reader with a list of figures that is actually practical in navigating this ocean of visual samples all figures have been grouped in four different categories: memes, quotes, data and peripherals. Unless otherwise noted all figures are reprinted under the doctrine of Fair Use as they are discussed and elaborated upon for educational, parody and/or commentary purposes and in no way substitute the sampled work, which at no time is replaced in its expressed or potential markets. Images that do not meet the Fair Use criteria and no reprint permission was secured have been blurred and labeled with a URL of origin.

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## Abstract

Internet Memes transverse and sometimes transcend cyberspace on the back of impossibly cute LOLcats speaking mangled English and the snarky remarks of Image Macro characters always on the lookout for someone to undermine. No longer the abstract notion of a cultural gene that Dawkins (2006) introduced in the late 1970s, memes have now become synonymous with a particular brand of vernacular language that internet users engage by posting, sharing and remixing digital content as they communicate jokes, emotions and opinions.

For the purpose of this research the language of Internet Memes is understood as visual, succinct and capable of inviting active engagement by users who encounter digital content online that exhibits said characteristics. Internet Memes were explored through an Arts-Based Educational Research framework by first identifying the conventions that shape them and then interrogating these conventions during two distinct research phases.

In the first phase the researcher, as a doctoral student in art and visual culture education, engaged class readings and assignments by generating digital content that not only responded to the academic topics at hand but did so through forms associated with Internet Memes like Image Macros and Animated GIFs. In the second phase the researcher became a meme literacy facilitator as learners in three different age-groups were led in the reading, writing and remixing of memes during a month-long summer art camp where they were also exposed to other art-making processes such as illustration, acting and sculpture. Each group of learners engaged age-appropriate meme types: 1) the youngest group, 6 and 7 year-olds, wrote Emoji Stories and Separated at Birth memes; 2) the middle group, 8-10 year-olds, worked with Image Macros and Perception memes, 3) while the oldest group, 11-13 year-olds, generated Image Macros and Animated GIFs.

The digital content emerging from both research phases was collected as data and analyzed through a hybrid of Memetics, Actor-Network Theory, Object Oriented Ontology, Remix Theory and Glitch Studies as the researcher shifted shapes yet again and became a Research Jockey sampling freely from each field of study. A case is made for Internet Memes to be understood as an actor-network where meme collectives, individual cybernauts, software and source material are all actants interrelating and making each other enact collective agencies through shared authorships. Additionally specific educational contexts are identified where the language of Internet Memes can serve to incorporate technology, storytelling, visual thinking and remix practices into art and visual culture education.

Finally, the document reporting on the research expands on the hermeneutics of Internet Memes and the phenomenological experiences they elicit that are otherwise absent from traditional scholarly prose. Chapter by chapter the dissertation was crafted as a journey from the academic to the whimsical, from the lecture hall to the image board (where Internet Memes were born), from the written word to the remixed image as a visual language that is equal parts form and content that emerges and culminates in a concluding chapter composed almost entirely of popular Internet Meme types.

An online component can be found at <http://memedducation.org/>



I CAN PLZ RESEARCH  
MEMEZ?

SO YOU WANT TO RESEARCH INTERNET MEMES

WHAT, IS  
ANIMÉ TOO PASSÉ?

*Meme 1: A LOLcat and an Image Macro.*

# Chapter 0

## The Priors

## Introduction

As a digital maker, art instructor and visual culture researcher, there are two specific aspects of internet culture that fascinate me: one is the philosophy of remix, as embodied in the practice of appropriating digital content<sup>1</sup> only to reconstitute it into new forms with respective new purposes; the other is the collection of visual artifacts that are generated, exchanged, deconstructed and reconstructed by internet users on a daily basis. These are the two hands, one procedural and the other formal, that cradle most of my own online daily activity, and it is from this metaphorical cradle that I initiate most of my academic and creative endeavors as a doctoral student in Arts and Visual Culture Education.

On the one hand, the procedural one, remix is widely understood as taking “cultural artifacts and combine and manipulate them into new kinds of creative blends” (Knobel and Lankshear, 2008). Although the process is by no means new, Manovich (2005) for example has likened it to Ancient Rome remixing Ancient Greece, its cultural impact and relevance has grown exponentially over the last few years due in large part to the possibilities afforded by the internet. Lessig (2008) has suggested that remix has gone as far as to shift contemporary culture from a read-only (RO) to a read-write (RW) paradigm where users are no longer satisfied to consume media texts (music, films, etc) but instead choose to rewrite them in new and meaningful ways. Furthermore according to Busse and Lothian (2011), this form of engagement can result in a type of critical media that can offer valuable insights into the biases and agendas of the remixed source material.

On the other, formal hand, it hardly needs repeating that a very specific brand of visual culture, everything from LOLcats to Mashups to Animated GIFs, has been generated within the internet. In fact it has already been suggested that internet culture “has brought about the [cultural] singularity” (Brown, 2012B). The notion of singularity refers to the theoretical potential for technology to evolve to the point of producing a self-conscious, intelligent being. At this point no one is yet suggesting that a functional artificial intelligence will be brought about due to a perennial output of “captioned images that typically consist of a picture and a witty message or a catchphrase” (gi97ol, 2012) otherwise known as Image Macros. Instead, what is being suggested is that as internet culture approaches high levels of sophisticated complexity generated by an army of anonymous authors referencing each other and ebbing away from otherwise traditional models of cultural production, internet culture may in fact reach a point of automatization and self-sustainability that can be characterized as a cultural singularity. This notion however seems to presuppose a single, unified culture that is produced and resides within the internet; conversely the fact that in real-life (IRL)<sup>2</sup> cyborgs may reside in any number of countries displaying an even wider array of cultural behaviors speaks to very different conditions and higher levels of complexity. This is only one of the issues that could be explored and problematized by probing internet culture through the visual artifacts that constitute a large part of it. In a later section, I will expand on this and other

---

<sup>1</sup> Digital Content refers to the wide variety of types of content that internet users typically generate for self-expression, distribution, marketing or publication; some of these types of content include: photos, image macros, animated GIFs, web sites, blog posts, etc.

<sup>2</sup> When discussing the internet and phenomena associated with it, the phrase in real life refers to what happens outside and beyond the internet.

potential implications of this research; in the meantime I suggest that perhaps an ideal avenue of investigation might come in the form of the Internet Meme, one of the major features of internet visual culture, some even identify it as its emblem.

After all, Internet Memes transverse, and sometimes transcend, the internet on the back of advice animals<sup>3</sup> and dancing crowds; they thrive on frictionless sharing practices that allow them to evolve and become hybrids of themselves. Each new hybrid form delivers a new personalized message with new and meaningful purposes. In short, Internet Memes flourish through remix as they emerge within discrete online communities and sometimes even manage to transcend both these communities in particular and the internet in general.

As a way to probe the viability of thinking about Internet Memes and Remix as phenomena capable of impacting Art and Visual Culture Education I began by asking:

How can this relationship between Remix and Internet Memes be investigated in terms that are relevant for Art and Visual Culture Education?

Eventually, this initial query guided the way to more focused and relevant research questions that require the unpacking and establishment of some basic notions.

### **Remix [From potential to philosophical musing to concrete practice]**

As a one-time frustrated filmmaker, my initial medium of choice, in the mid-nineties, was video. At first the election had very little to do with the medium itself and much more with economic concerns; video was, it seemed to me, an affordable and somewhat acceptable approximation to film. However, as I continued working in video and as my relationship with its peculiarities evolved there was a fundamental shift in attitude. I was suddenly drawn to its harsh contrasts in color and its reliance on means like a monitor and a VCR that (depending on brand, model and make) could alter completely the way a single audio-visual artifact could be experienced rendering it unfixed in more ways than one; blurring any semblance of boundary between container and content, medium and message.

Above all I began to develop a strong appreciation for the fact that video making did not necessarily require a video camera, sometimes two VCRs and a few videotapes was all it took to create something akin to video collages using material from sources as varied as Stanley Kubrick films and music videos. Even though the possibility to appropriate audiovisual material is not video-specific, found (or archival) footage for example is a fundamental feature in documentary filmmaking, the abundance of both VCRs and video rental stores meant that, at that time, the practice itself was potentially within reach of people inclined to engage it. In a matter of speaking I began understanding video [the medium] and remix [the practice] as significant factors in an ongoing process of media democratization. A few years later the internet, YouTube and social media would accelerate this process to the point of actualization.

Lessig (2001) speaks of an entire generation of users empowered to create, remix, react and share using the infrastructure provided by the internet. A lot of emphasis is made

<sup>3</sup> A type of image macro that features an animal [including humans] exhibiting an archetypal quality like empathy, hostility, etc and giving advice accordingly: i.e. Courage Wolf is meant to give courageous advice while Advice Homer will give Homer-like advice, consistent with the character from The Simpsons TV show.

on how this empowerment will necessarily signal “an important blurring of the line between amateur and professional” (*Ibid*, p. 124), which in turn could signify a basic deviation from the “traditional twentieth century model of cultural communication [that] described movement of information in one direction from a source to a receiver,” (Manovich, 2005, p.1). In its place Miller (2008) suggests the image of an FTP -File Transfer Protocol- server where all cultural information is archived as data awaiting to be recalled, sampled and remixed.

This is how remix gives credence to the notion of a RW culture (Lessig, 2008) fluid and constantly being rewritten and reinvented by amateurs no longer relegated to the role of passive consumer. Amerika (2011) imagines

a start-up company of new-media art stars  
 who specialize in the emerging market of novelty generation  
 Their firm is called Intuitive Technologies and  
 their mission is to design a networked gift economy  
 fuel by peer-to-peer renewable energies  
 charging the exponential rise of user-generated content  
 thus facilitating the quick demise of  
 creative class struggle by quickly turning it into  
 crowdsourced mashups of spirit and pride  
 (locs. 1277-1283).

Despite Amerika’s best intentions and the ubiquity of remix practices, the so-called creative class struggle is still present and relevant in more ways than one. The legal implications of using copyright material for example remain controversial even as non-profits like Creative Commons (n.d) offer copyright alternatives for creators who are willing to licence their work for others to remix and share. However, Kim (2008) suggests that despite Creative Commons’ significant efforts to alleviate such disputes it remains unable to truly resolve a fundamental conflict between two competing visions that regard copyright either as a matter of public policy or private property.

A different way of dealing with the issue is the doctrine of fair use, which permits the employment of copyrighted material for purposes like educational and/or non-profit. Not surprisingly this is the route most often taken when dealing with remix within an educational setting; however what exactly constitutes fair use remains quite vague and dependent on subjective factors like the nature of the copyrighted work.

The ideal of remix as a democratizing agent is further attenuated by a significant gap between haves and have-nots in terms of literacy to actually engage in remix practices. Mihailidis (2012) has found that media and remix literacy not only enables users to re-appropriate and generate content of their own but also fortifies their civic engagement by facilitating new forms of participation. Busse and Lothian (2011) epitomize Eric Faden’s remixed video work “A Fair(y) Use Tale” (2007) as the kind of critical media that functions not only in terms of user generated content but also as sophisticated scholarly discourse. Knobel and Lankshear (2008) suggest approaching remix practices in the classroom as “the art and craft of endless hybridization” (p. 32) in order to establish the evolving nature of culture. Appro-

priately enough memetic theory, which deals not only with Internet Memes but memes in general, takes a very similar stance regarding culture.

## Memes [from cultural genes to internet phenomena]

I first stumbled upon the meme concept as an undergraduate student in the late '90s within the pages of *Adbusters*, a Canadian magazine that positions itself as a journal of the mental environment; it is a lush, ad-free, bimonthly publication constructed entirely out of appropriated imagery and original articles that deal critically with current events in culture, art, media, politics, economics and the environment. In many ways, it is equal parts graphic design, visual art and journalism. During that period a recurrent theme in their issues was the idea of engaging in meme warfare in order to alter the prevalent consumerist culture engulfing our day to day; a type of media activism conducted through the dissemination of creative content meant to infiltrate the mainstream with counter cultural arguments. As a practicing video maker, I was intrigued by the idea of competing viewpoints being pitted against each other in a conceptual battlefield where they would enter a struggle for survival; it seemed like the perfect approach to take by a budding creator of audiovisual content that was looking for strategies to interject himself within mainstream culture.

Further research into memes led me to the work of Richard Dawkins, who first coined the term in his book *The Selfish Gene* (2006). Although originally the term did not refer in any way to media activism, instead it was intended to explain culture from an evolutionary standpoint by isolating specific units of cultural information that travel "longitudinally down generations, but they travel horizontally too, like viruses in an epidemic" (Blackmore, 1999, loc 50); I was extremely intrigued by the evolution and adaptability of the meme—as noun, concept and theory. So in 2004 when I began my career as an art professor in audiovisual theory and production I often incorporated the idea of memes into discussions and lectures dealing with visual culture and the constant tensions between the mainstream and the underground; however, I eventually abandoned it because the idea of memes seemed too abstract for most of my students and did not resonate quite as I had hoped with them.

A few years ago though, around 2009, the word meme began popping up in plenty of mainstream outlets only this time it had evolved again adopting internet as a prefix of sort. Checking into it I realized that Internet Memes referred mostly to popular digital content shared freely between users, and were otherwise known as viral content. At this point I realized that in a matter of a decade or so, and right before my eyes, the meme Meme kept replicating itself, adopting new features and adapting to ever changing contexts in order to remain relevant. I also realized then that my new students were in fact familiar with the term but only in its internet embodiment with little or no interest in its earlier forms; this gave me a new chance to bring memetic theory into my classroom since now there were concrete examples within my students' conceptual grasp.

As I continued to delve deeper into the contemporary ideas and reflections behind the practices associated with memes and their concrete, internet paradigms I began to understand them as potentially valuable instruments in my own educational procedures especially when I began to explore them in terms of specific contexts provided by forms like animated

GIFs and social networks like Twitter. In many ways, and even a bit ironically, this understanding is not far removed from Adbusters' conception of meme warfare; only in terms of education and not restricted to actions related with media activism.

However, a caveat must be regarded when considering any utilitarian production of Internet Memes; namely the fact that memes can only be generated by a community that adopts, shares, repurposes and turns them into memes proper. In other words just because a person, or group of persons, generates specific instances of content that look like Internet Memes does not mean that they will in fact become Internet Memes, since only the internet culture itself will decide whether or not they are in fact Internet Memes.

Conversely, even if the sociocultural phenomena by which a nugget of cultural information becomes a bona fide internet meme cannot be replicated on a reliable and consistent manner; the forms themselves, the aesthetic and content structure typically displayed in and by Internet Memes can actually be emulated and exploited somewhat easily and coherently. The sum of these formal characteristics is what I have identified as *The Language of Internet Memes*, which hinges greatly on remix and the practices associated with it.

### **Language of Internet Memes [It's the form, it's the process, it's the remix]**

Regarding Internet Memes, Stryker (2011) speaks of "a new visual way that people (use to) succinctly communicate opinions and emotions" (loc. 300). This definition highlights two formal characteristics of Internet Memes, namely their visual and succinct nature which can be easily identified in content like image macros.

Additionally, Stryker's notion also establishes Internet Memes as a message-delivering artifact that carries opinions and emotions. It is precisely this communicative aspect of internet meme language what gives me reason to believe that, just like any other language, it can in fact be employed to develop complex messages that may reach beyond immediate amusement.

Adding another layer of complexity to the language of Internet Memes, Shifman (2011) notes a difference between mimetic and viral content in the way that each engages the internet community. On the one hand the viral type is said to be content that is shared, accessed and consumed by countless internet users as a whole, in its original form; while memetic content, on the other hand, is characterized by an active engagement of the internet community through the remixing, recontextualizing and repurposing of it. In this sense Internet Memes are not only visual and succinct digital objects that convey messages but they also encourage active participation by a community of internet users who imprint new, rewritten messages that are meaningful in their own right and will encourage the same type of participation by subsequent participants of internet culture. Internet Memes in short, encourage remix.

According to Milner (2012) Internet Memes

Meme 2: Don't Look Image Macro.



do much more than encourage remix, they in fact depend on remix as a way to ensure their replicability. Furthermore, Milner goes on to conclude that just like in the case of remix, a certain degree of literacy is required in order for users to speak, read, write and remix the language of Internet Memes. At stake then is the very notion that online visual culture is poly-vocal in nature precisely due to phenomena like Internet Memes and practices like remix. Accordingly, Milner's conclusions also offer some insight into the perceived homogeneity of online visual culture despite the potential for diversity within the language of Internet Memes.

Summing up, I identify The Language of Internet Memes as visual, succinct and capable of inviting active engagement by users who encounter the digital content that exhibits said characteristics. Furthermore, since the specific type of engagement that The Language of Internet Memes depends on is in fact remix, I recognize this set of conventions as the proverbial point of convergence where remix and Internet Memes meet; it is the point of convergence that I seek to make relevant in terms of Art and Visual Culture Education. Moreover, if The Language of Internet Memes is approached as a creative, art-like endeavor then AVCE provides an ideal context to initiate explorations into it and the literacy required to actively engage online visual culture. This way, the original, general guiding question can be restated:

How can The Language of Internet Memes be investigated in terms that are relevant to Art and Visual Culture Education?

As a self-described user and generator of digital content my first impulse is to pursue this exploration through the practice of using and generating content that speaks the language of Internet Memes. I propose then that in order to research the language of Internet Memes the researcher must read and speak the language of Internet Memes. In AVCE terms Arts-Based Educational Research (ABER) offers a series of interesting avenues that facilitate this type of exploration.

ABER is centered around the notion that artists/researchers/educators are likely to elicit insights through aesthetic and creative practices otherwise unattainable through standard quantitative, qualitative or even mixed methodologies. By committing to ABER I am researching the language of Internet Memes and its pedagogical potential within a framework that allows me to use my experience working with digital media and the conceptual constructs within them. Additionally, my decision to conduct ABER can be understood, at least partially, as an initial response to the general, guiding question posed above: ABER is how the language of Internet Memes can be investigated in terms that are relevant to art and visual culture education (AVCE); at least it is how I choose to investigate it. However, the choice of ABER itself points towards a series of new, particular questions focusing on the specificities and particularities exhibited by The Language of Internet Memes as a collectively authored art medium:

How can the language of internet memes be interrogated as a medium that embodies arts-based experiences through collective authorship and be made relevant for research and pedagogical practices involving internet art and visual culture?

What are the concrete forms of Internet Memes that can be contextually integrated into learning experiences that may range widely in terms of age, object of study and expected outcomes?

Which specific learning contexts are likely to benefit the most from integrating explorations into which form of Internet Memes?

What are the implications (potential and actual) of facilitating arts-based explorations into the language of Internet Memes as part of an Arts and Visual Culture learning experience?

## **Methodology [It's the content, it's the form, it's the process]**

I have engaged these questions through an Arts-Based Educational Research that can be understood as having two parts. The first is centered on my own work as a doctoral student responding to readings, class assignments and visualizing research through the language of Internet Memes. The second one takes the form of three case studies in which I facilitated the literacy required to engage the language of Internet Memes with 6-13 year old learners using three distinct, age-appropriate curricula. However, before addressing these two phases any further, some parameters must be established about ABER in general and the particular type I have conducted.

### **[Medium-Centric] Arts-Based Educational Research**

Although quite amorphous and still beyond cut-and-dry definitions, ABER has been roughly defined by Barone and Eisner (1997) as exhibiting to a greater or lesser degree seven specific features:

- The Creation of a Virtual Reality
- The Presence of Ambiguity
- The Use of Expressive Language
- The Use of Contextualized and Vernacular Language
- The Promotion of Empathy
- Personal Signature of the Researcher/Writer
- The Presence of Aesthetic Form

Even though this list of characteristics is quite useful in thinking about ABER as a general concept it does focus -perhaps overly- on the affective dimensions of art practices all the while confining aesthetics to form, suggesting that content is independent. Furthermore, by placing such emphasis on notions like ambiguity, expression and empathy, it also risks obviating art's potential to explore and generate knowledge through systematic approaches that can render it relevant in cognitive and phenomenological as much as affective terms.

In that sense, the Arts-Based Educational Research I have developed owes much more the work of artists like Stan Brakhage, whose assemblage films like *Mothlight* (1963),

embodied his research into visual perception and expanded it through aesthetic practice. Likewise, Marshall McLuhan's landmark collaboration with graphic designer Quentin Fiore *The Medium is the Message* (1967) has proven to be an invaluable model about the process and potentials of visualizing theoretical arguments and investigating media beyond the messages they deliver. Pedagogically speaking, the work of Andrea Fraser (1991) and Scott McCloud (1994) have served as noteworthy examples of researching media within and against their own conventions with very specific audiences/learners in mind: The Philadelphia Museum of Art and its visitors in the case of the former; comic books, the artists who produce them and the readers that enjoy them for the later. Finally, but equally significant are the ideas of the artist-researcher and critical media developed by Mark Amerika (2007) and Eric Faden (2008) respectively as they focus on the prospect of writing and developing theory through the aesthetic qualities inherent in digital media.

There is an undeniable hopscotch feel to the ABER approach that has shaped my exploration into the language of Internet Memes; after all, I'm appropriating and remixing theoretical constructs and creative strategies from fields as varied as experimental film; media, comic book and museum studies; not to mention digital rhetoric and poetics. However the one element that can be found in all of these positions is the central role that the medium of choice plays in investigating each object of study. I identify this type of ABER as medium-centric in the sense that it places media and the practices associated with them at the center in order to generate mediated content that facilitates insights and new understandings regarding the object of study be it in the form of films and videos, books or performance pieces.

Another characteristic shared by the group of artists and theorists listed above is that by focusing their research through their medium of choice, they were able to produce artwork whose form exhibits all relevant content obviating the need for viewers to familiarize themselves with the research that led to the production of the piece at hand. In other words, it could be said that the work produced through the type of ABER favored here is not "typically grounded in the experience of data collection and analysis" (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008, loc. 385); rather, it contextualizes itself by exploring, challenging and exploiting a medium's own conventions and crafting occasions where these inherent qualities can converge with the given research and object of study. The result is work that instead of invoking research that is then intended to be grasped through different means [journal articles for example] it facilitates aesthetic experiences meant to embody all relevant content. In short, and remixing McLuhan's famous dictum: medium-centric ABER produces content that IS the message and the research and the data and the analysis and the medium and the... [you get the idea].

It becomes imperative then, in terms of the medium-centric ABER that I'm attempting to establish here, that the object of study, The Language of Internet Memes, be identified not only as a creative endeavor, but rather as a medium capable of being wielded into art. It is precisely in this respect that the distinction I made before regarding the form and the process that give Internet Memes their distinctive features vis-a-vis the messages they deliver becomes relevant. By isolating the medium from the content [not to mention the meme as a sociocultural phenomena] I hope to explore the conventions inherent to Internet Memes, what I have identified as The Language of Internet Memes, and not only generate content that embodies my research but also to facilitate the literacy required for others to engage the

medium through similar approaches.

Accordingly, and as I mentioned before, my research exhibits two distinct phases, with completely independent sets of data. The first set is constituted entirely of digital content I generated as part of my doctoral studies; the second set is data recollected after a series of workshops that I facilitated.

## Phase I [Researcher as Student]

I initiated my exploration into the language of Internet Memes as an Art and Visual Culture Education doctoral student by looking at two of the most prominent types of Internet Memes: Animated GIFs and Image Macros. On the one hand the popularity of Animated GIFs, short image sequences that typically loop ad infinitum, has made them into the vernacular language of the internet (Stryker, 2011) as well as the most relevant instance of internet-specific art (Brown, 17 2012). For their part, Image Macros, “photographs or artwork with captions superimposed over the image in order to make a joke or a point” (Decker-Maurer, 2012, p.7), are widely recognized as one of the most accessible ways for users to engage participatory online culture; these “seemingly simple images can both amuse and effectively represent rhetorical positions” (*ibid*).

I explored these two types of memes by responding to class assignments and visualizing research through the conventions and possibilities that they offer. In aesthetic and conceptual terms the results of this exploration exhibited a wide ranging degree of complexity and not all of them were successful to say the least; however for the purpose of this report I will focus on three examples that were able to syncretize form, content and medium in especially compelling ways.

The first is a series of animated GIFs that samples pieces of contemporary art and remixes them with critical theory to explore notions of stagnation and elitism in what is otherwise meant to be understood as socially engaged discourse and art production. The individual pieces of digital content that make up Art Crit and GIFs were disseminated through social media in hopes of infiltrating public discourse around topics like Occupy Wall Street and religious iconography all the while incorporating contemporary aesthetics into the ongoing conversations

In remix terms, Art Crit and GIFs draws heavily from Mark Amerika's (2011) idea of source material everywhere,

which gets me to thinking that the idea of  
a rich and mysterious and new [my emphasis] set of related experiences

...

triggered by the making of things  
or as I would prefer the remixing of data  
may be a fallacy  
not in a negative way  
but in a fallacious way  
let's call it the Novelty Fallacy  
(locs. 280-288).

By acknowledging the novelty fallacy I hope that the visual artifacts that make up Art Crit and GIFs are able to access

...the Source Material Everywhere  
not as ideas or things  
but as intertwingled agitations of force  
(locs. 1944-1946)

that will in turn engage and agitate subsequent users into finding yet more source material to remix and create new visual artifacts of their own.



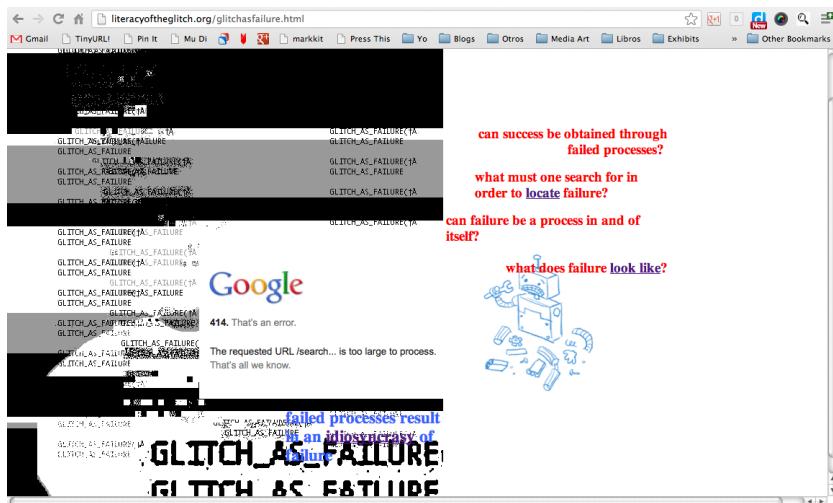
*Data 1: From the series “Art Crit & GIFs” tweeted on 10.22.11: “#Occupy urself. Ur #99Percent is still our #1Percent. #FirstWorld #ThirdWorld”<sup>4</sup>*

Where Art Crit & GIFs is a series of largely unrelated objects of critical media and releasing them into the digital wild through social media Literacy of the Glitch<sup>5</sup> is a more concentrated effort to generate a web site entirely populated with visual artifacts that speak the language of Internet Memes. Formally and conceptually, Literacy of the Glitch explores Glitch aesthetics, which according to Menkman (2011) “show a medium in a critical state: a ruined, unwanted, unrecognized, accidental and horrendous moment... (And) on the other hand, these aesthetics critique the medium itself, as a genre, interface and expectation” (p. 44).

Literacy of the Glitch engages in this type of self-referential analysis through seven hyperlinked glitch portraits crafted entirely out of Animated GIFs that remix each element with itself in various stages of decay. Each portrait explores different, but interrelated aspects of the glitch as a concept and a strategy -Glitch as Failure, Glitch as Tension, Glitch as Journey, Glitch as Destination, Glitch as Design, Glitch as Deceit and Glitch as Poetry. All portraits speak and are fed by the language of Internet Memes; they are more evocative than descriptive; they are visual and succinct with all text written in the form of poetry and all hyperlinks interspaced inconspicuously, in a non-hierarchical manner as an attempt to encourage explo-

<sup>4</sup> [https://twitter.com/leon\\_dlr/status/127875909477859328](https://twitter.com/leon_dlr/status/127875909477859328)

<sup>5</sup> <http://literacyoftheglitch.org/>



Data 2: *Glitch as Failure* portrait. Detail.

ration on the part of the visitor.

It might be argued that this lack of hierarchy and undisclosed content can account for a presence of ambiguity that Barone and Eisner (1997) suggest is present in research projects developed through arts-based practices. In this sense, the decision to keep the visitor guessing as much as possible as they experience the site gives them the opportunity to reconstruct and re-contextualize the

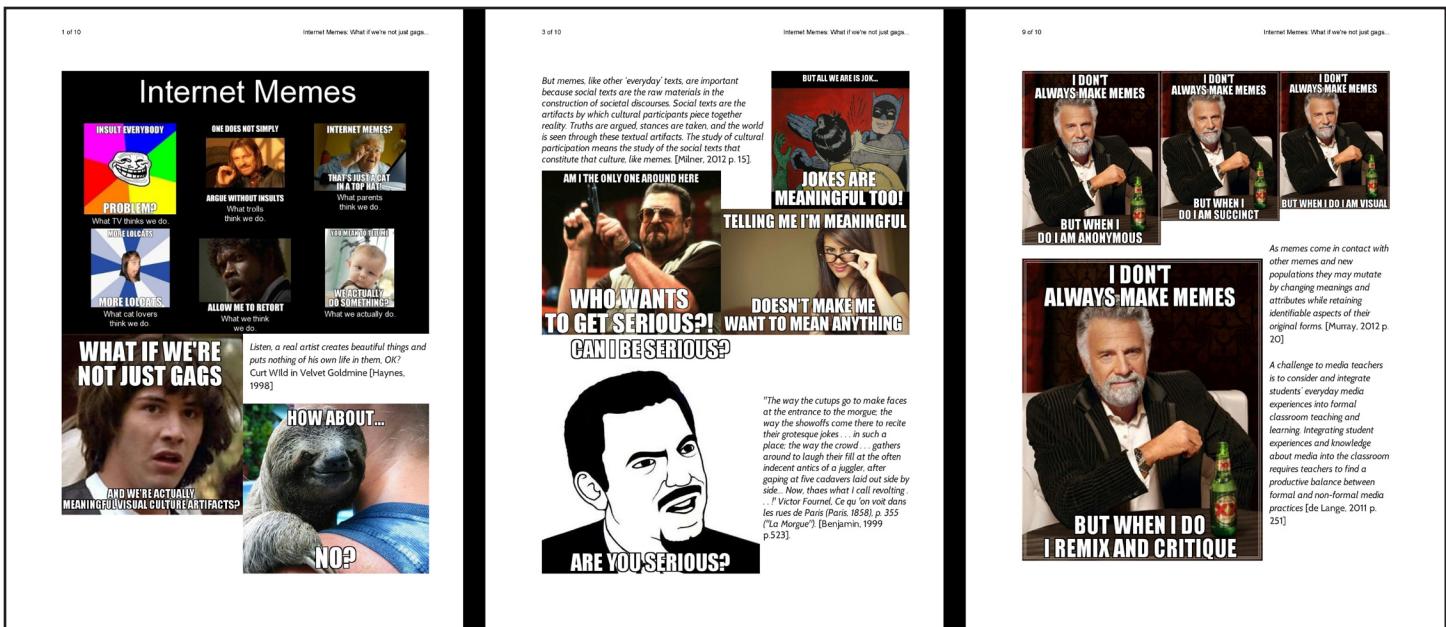
content explored as well as the experience of doing so. Of

course, the presence of the aesthetic form is also made apparent from the beginning by introducing a digital space so heavily dominated by abstract forms looping rhythmically and serving as specifically arranged content at the same time.

However, further examination is not only required but also afforded by Literacy of the Glitch if a learning experience is to be undertaken by visitors to the site. In this sense, each glitch portrait not only links to three or four of the other portraits but they are also hyperlinks themselves that direct the visitor to a blog component<sup>6</sup> where every portrait is deconstructed piece by piece and step by step. The hope is that by deconstructing each portrait visitors will not only understand the inner workings and background stories of each portrait but they will also be able to replicate some of the results, the glitches themselves, if they choose to. Additionally, follow up and reflection questions are suggested at the end of each deconstruction as an attempt to point the visitor in the direction of not necessarily coming to concrete conclusions, but instead consider supplementary explorations.

A different type of self-referential analysis, to the point of self-deconstruction, occurs in the visual essay Internet Memes: What if we're not just gags and we're actually meaningful visual culture artifacts?. The essay is composed entirely of Image Macros pondering their own form and potentials to transcend their conventional domain as the digital quintessence of throwaway culture; not to mention whether or not this very possibility is even a desirable one. Interspersed, the essay also samples relevant literature regarding the value of traditionally overlooked cultural expressions and the role these can play in facilitating educational experiences.

Even though Internet Memes... was composed specifically to address the question of viability for educators to incorporate the language of Internet Memes into their practice, it refuses to do so from a quasi-objective stance, opting instead to embrace the plethora of contradictions that inform the object of study; as well as the study itself. The essay embodies the possibilities that Image Macros posses by exploiting them; it is remix in practice and Internet Memes in form. Internet Memes... is The Language of Internet Memes.



Data 3: Pages 1, 5 e 9 of the visual essay *Internet Memes: What if we're not just gags and we're actually meaningful visual culture artifacts?*

These are the three sources of data for the first phase of my research into The Language of Internet Memes. Each one offers unique arguments regarding the object of study and its relevance for AVCE; however, in order to advance these arguments pass the utter contradiction of a singular user experimenting with an inherently social medium I probed The Language of Internet Memes in a setting where other users could engage it.

## Phase II [Researcher as Facilitator]

Even though freeware like Meme Generator<sup>7</sup>, Gifmaker<sup>8</sup> and What I do Generator<sup>9</sup> have proliferated online over the last couple of years, users still require varying degrees of literacy in order to engage them. Furthermore, as Milner (2012), Decker-Maurer (2012) and Husted (2012) suggest these levels of literacy are often acquired within online communities that are largely homogeneous and spouse very specific notions of humor, political agendas and brands of social engagement. This way a singular, albeit two-tiered, type of meme literacy is arguably facilitated, not only on a practical and technological level but a rhetorical one as well.

Keeping this in mind and as a way to extend my own exploration into The Language of Internet Memes, I developed and facilitated a workshop that guided learners through the employment of the language of Internet Memes in order to respond to learning experiences of their own. In short, I exposed learners to ideas and strategies tested and developed during the first phase of my own medium-centric arts-based research.

My research's second phase took the form of a workshop that guided participants through the employment of the language of Internet Memes in order to respond to their own learning experiences as part of a summer art program. The workshop, Studio Meme, was offered through a partnership with a visual arts center in southern Arizona region and targeted learners in the 6 to 13 years of age range.

Studio Meme occurred in the city of Tubac, AZ as part of Tubac's Center of the Arts

7 <http://memegenerator.net/>

8 <http://gifmaker.me/>

9 <http://frabz.com/memegenerator/whatido/>

Summer Art Program, running from June 11 to July 3rd, 2013. Participants were led in the production of creative reflections that employed the language of Internet Memes in order to facilitate the acquisitions of the literacy skills required to engage actively within the internet's visual culture. Learners were grouped together by age range as determined by the education coordinator at Tubac Center of the Arts: 6-7 year olds, 8-10 year olds, 11 and older. Learner groups engaged three distinct, age-appropriate curricula, each designed to address meme types compatible with the skills and interests of the different age groups. Besides meme literacy, learners at the summer art program also cycled, one week at a time, through classes on mixed media, sculpture, illustration, acting and self-reflection. However, given the program's length, 4 weeks, and its learner groupings, three age groups, one group was given the opportunity to engage a particular class for a second week. In the case of Studio Meme, the oldest learners spoke and wrote memes for two, non-consecutive weeks instead of one. In total, Studio Meme had about 45 learners but data was collected only from 27 of them, who consented to being part of the study.

Although informal conversations were held with the participants and all their questions addressed, no interviews were conducted or formal assessment was given other than occasional feedback whenever appropriate; no attempt was made to identify the correct way to speak The Language of Internet Memes. Instead, the workshop only focused on eliciting responses to a given assignment through the engagement and production of digital content that displayed the formal attributes of Internet Memes and were generated by using online freeware intended for the crafting of different types of Internet Memes like Image Macros, Perception Memes, Separated at Birth Memes, Emoji Stories and Animated GIFs. In that sense, only the content generated and the contexts that led to its production [setting, curriculum, objectives, resources employed, etc] are considered data. The hope is that by focusing the analysis on the digital content itself, obviating anecdotal information regarding the learners, some parallels are maintained in terms to how Internet Memes are typically experienced in the digital wild; largely devoid of subjective contexts and exhibiting little to no information about the authors who for the most part remain anonymous. Of course, this stance also fits in nicely with my stated purpose to conduct medium-centric ABER that produces content that IS the message and the research and the data.

## **Analysis [It's the process, it's the network, it's the object, it's the malfunction]**

Much like the research itself, the analysis will be divided into two parts. One will deal with the pragmatic elements of the data; the specifics behind each decision I made both as a student and a facilitator; why were Animated GIFs chosen over Image Macros in the case of Art Crit & GIFs and Literacy of the Glitch? Why was the opposite true in the case of Internet Memes: What if we're not just gags and we're actually meaningful visual culture artifacts? Why and how did each of the three distinct curricula in Studio Meme focus on different types of Internet Memes?

By expounding these decision-making processes, I intend to address the first two research sub-questions:

What are the concrete forms of Internet Memes that can be contextually integrated into learning experiences that may range widely in terms of age, object of study and expected outcomes?

Which specific learning contexts are likely to benefit the most from integrating explorations into which form of Internet Memes?

The final sub-question,

What are the implications (potential and actual) of facilitating arts-based explorations into the language of Internet Memes as part of an Arts and Visual Culture learning experience?

will be dealt with by discussing the formal and conceptual characteristics displayed by the digital content generated and collected throughout both phases of my research. The analysis itself will be a remix of sorts in its own right as it features paradigms and concepts proposed by Actor Network Theory, Object Oriented Ontology and Glitch Studies. My hope is that by appropriating different elements from each one of these approaches I can match and extend the remix theory and practice that not only promulgates Internet Memes within online visual culture; but that also spawned my understanding about ABER resulting in the brand I have engaged and identified as medium-centric.

### **Actor-Network Theory [ANT]**

Instead of what Latour (2005) calls “sociology of the social” (p. 9) Actor-Network Theory opts to advance a “sociology of associations” (*ibid*). In doing so, ANT identifies actors only as part of a network where they can never be fully isolated but are rather recognized as moving targets continually being reconfigured by, and reconfiguring on their own right the plethora of associations they enact. Through ANT, and specifically through its concept of actant<sup>10</sup>, I hope to analyze all data not only as an iteration of digital content generated by a single user, but rather as the product of the user’s associations with other actants [with agency of their own] like the freeware employed to caption a given image, the source material that was employed in each case, as well as the genealogy and applicability of said material.

### **Object Oriented Ontology [OOO]**

Much like ANT, OOO attempts to transcend anthropomorphism and places philosophical emphasis on all [material, post-material and even conceptual] objects. OOO, proposes a flat ontology in which “everything is thought of on the same level as everything else and subjectivity is discarded in favour of a form of ‘new realism’” (McLean-Ferris, 2013, p. 7). This so-called new realism has been identified as Speculative Realism amended by Bogost (2011) to be a “pragmatic speculative realism... [which] would embolden the actual philosophical treatment of actual material objects and their relations. If we take speculativism seriously, then why might philosophy not muster the same concrete groundings as, say, specula-

<sup>10</sup> A term borrowed from literary studies to avoid the inherent anthropomorphism of actor

tive fiction or magical realism?" (locs. 676-678). Bogost's question on pragmatic speculative realism makes me wonder if remix practices might not be the perfect vehicle to embody such speculations. In these terms, each new iteration of remixed source-material can account for a unique speculation on the relationship enacted by a given network of actants: user, freeware, source material all interact and establish relationships that result in unique pieces of digital content.

## Glitch Studies

Introduced by Menkman (2011), Glitch Studies interrogate technology by exploiting it to its breaking point. In doing so, glitch artists like Disc "thrive on a destructive and an almost punk-like approach to... the use of technology" (Kelly, 2009, p. 281). Glitch Studies demand for practitioners to divert from the standard user manual and examine media beyond their intended use; dig within in search of political agendas, social implications and inherent biases that each technology epitomizes. By integrating this form of interrogation process into my own research I recognize and expand upon the fact that I have taken Internet Memes out of their digital domains; the chatrooms, the imageboards, the virtual communities where upvotes<sup>11</sup> and lulz<sup>12</sup> are the engine of selection. Furthermore, the fact that as part of my research, The Language of Internet Memes has been exploited in the generation of meaningful and pedagogically relevant digital content blatantly disregards the wide accepted notion of Internet Memes as the epitome of vapid emotional expression. Glitch Studies then, give me a framework to interrogate Internet Memes beyond their stated purpose to the point where the medium's hidden agendas and consequences can be revealed and better understood. Finally, looking at the collected digital content through the lens of Glitch Studies opens up the possibilities for these visual artifacts to be understood in a wider context than just within online visual culture; it carves out new avenues of significance for this research to transverse.

## Significance[s]

The potential significance of exploring The Language of Internet Memes through a medium-centric Arts-Based Educational Research is manyfold. From the practical implication in terms of facilitating digital literacies and technology integration within the art classroom to more abstract notions like the possibility to elicit insights into the composition and behavior of the visual culture that dominates the internet.

On the practical side, Ellison and Wu (2008) have talked about online tools, like the free-ware used in the workshops during phase II of this research, and the potential they possess to essentially decentralize educational experiences and ground them within everyday, concrete life. Similarly, the fact that Internet Memes draw heavily from pop culture (Woznick, 2013) means that learners are likely to be familiar already with much of the content allowing for a potentially seamless integration into the student's own cultural context. These are just two of the ways that a practice-based exploration into The Language of Internet Memes can help expedite the integration of digital technology and the literacies associated into pedagogical experiences.

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11 In internet culture an upvote refers to the positive reaction to a given piece of digital content.

12 In internet speech, the plural of LOL: Laugh Out Loud.

Conceptually speaking, grounding these learning processes within the students' [mediated] immediacy is likely to generate meaningful tie-ins to the visual culture they experience, which can in turn lead to a critical engagement with the forms and messages that populate it (Knight, 2010). Likewise, as this type of critical engagement intertwines with remix practices, which The Language of Internet Memes brings to the foreground, a reassessment and validation of amateur culture is plausible while at the same time promoting a post-material ethic where culture, knowledge and creativity are all meant to be shared openly in the form of digital content (Lehdonvirta, 2010). Furthermore, as remix thrives within a community of remixers who are willing and able to not only share content but also teach and learn from each other (Lessig, 2008), focusing Internet Meme research through a remix lens is likely to problematize and expand notions regarding the roles of learners and facilitators.

Finally, if any extrapolation beyond art and visual culture education is feasible it is through the critical interrogation of culture and technology that both memetics and glitch studies promote. On the one hand, if culture is understood as collections of memes that foster cultural environments to thrive in [a memeplex composed of other memeplexes] then it follows that culture itself can be questioned and reconstituted by introducing new memes that challenge prevailing notions, mainstream assumptions and master narratives. This approach also provides the conceptual framework to investigate the largely homogeneous online visual culture that cybernauts contend with on a daily basis; by identifying these Internet Memes as cultural artifacts that reflect and facilitate memeplexes in their own right, relevant questions can be raised and probed through contextually meaningful strategies.

Similarly, by adopting a stance that is congruent with glitch studies, this research can provide understandings about the furcating pathways that media and technology have followed on their way to acquiring the conventions that define them today. As our phenomenological experiences are increasingly mediated through digital, aestheticized technology, a commitment to understanding the routes it has followed and how none of them respond necessarily to notions of linear progress becomes an important component of media studies and new literacies. This is the type of insight that might be evoked by interrogating a supposedly vapid medium, like Internet Memes, beyond its conventions to the point of rendering it meaningful and valuable in cultural and educational terms.

As research this arts-based endeavor is informed by the hermeneutics of Internet Memes as it proposes to interpret meme instances by identifying the actants that make each other act as part of meme-generating actor-networks. Admittedly this interpretation does not speak directly of semiotics, however meanings emerge as individual meme *producers*<sup>15</sup> (Decker-Maurer, 2012) read, interpret and re-write Internet Memes by engaging in the type of speculation that OOO espouses and remix puts into material practice.

Formally speaking, I designed this dissertation, the document being read at this very moment, to respond progressively to the phenomenological experience of dispensing and consuming information by using an increasingly visual language. In doing so I hope to establish form as content with both conceptual and aesthetic dimensions, that is to say form that not only plays the role of a visual artifact that delivers a given message but rather an active agent that alters the message and of course impacts the experience of receiving said message.

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13 *Producers* refers to internet users who also produce content for others to use.

## Regarding Form

What follows is four chapters crafted as a journey from the academic to the whimsical, from the lecture hall to the image board [where Internet Memes live and die], from the written word to the remixed image.

- Chapter 1 takes the form of Visual Literature Review where concepts and theoretical frameworks will be disclosed and retold in order to further establish the particular brand of Arts-Based Educational Research I am interested in advancing; in doing so I will also reference and unpack relevant ideas and literature that have informed this process and stem from Remix Theory, Memetics, Actor-Network Theory, Object-Oriented Ontology and Glitch Studies. All works referenced will be visually present in the form of photographs and screen grabs that feature the pertinent passage from each given source.
- Chapter 2 reports on the ideas that shaped the research's Phase I, centered on my own work as a doctoral student. Here, the decisions made and the reasoning behind them take the foreground. Each of the three examples discussed [Art Crit & GIFs, Literacy of the glitch and Internet Memes: What if we're not just gags and we're actually meaningful visual culture artifacts?] will be considered in terms of the thought processes that drove them and gave them form; as well as the purported objectives of each and the perceived outcomes.
- Chapter 3 deals with Phase II of the research, where I acted as a facilitator. Studio Meme's curricula is detailed along with the corresponding meme types engaged in each and how these came to reflect the objectives sought as well as the outcomes obtained.
  - As a nod to Social Media, Internet Memes' main engine, chapters 2 and 3 take the form of essays written through and for Twitter where all sentences are crafted in order to conform to the convention of 140 characters or less. Like chapter 1, all work referenced will appear in the form of images attached to the pertinent tweet. Additionally, the chapters written as tweets exemplify the alterations that occur to messages depending on the delivery method. Whereas in traditionally academic prose this can be communicated through standard sentences and paragraphs, the conventions that shape Twitter demand otherwise. In place of paragraphs I use a bullet point hierarchy where introductory tweets occupy the first bullet-point level, furthest to the left, while all subordinate tweets, used to explicate and scrutinize the ideas and concepts introduced on top, travel progressively to the right. When tweeted these bullet-point levels will be replaced by each tweet replying to the left-most tweet above it. Hashtags are also used as an organizational device threading together groups of tweets by identifying keywords within each one. For example, if translated into tweets this paragraph might look and read as follows:

- As a nod to Social Media, Internet Memes' main engine, #chapters 2 & 3 were written as tweets, each sentence 140 characters long or less.
  - Like chapter 1, sources referenced in these #chapters will appear in the form of images attached to the pertinent tweet.
  - Additionally, the #chapters written as #tweets also exemplify the alterations that occur to messages depending on the delivery method.
    - Instead of the standard sentences & #paragraphs that traditional academic papers employ, #tweets bring with them different conventions.
      - In place of #paragraphs I use #BulletPoints where ideas are introduced & subsequently explored one tweet & a bullet level at a time.
      - Once tweeted, these #BulletPoints will be replaced by #tweets replying to the tweet above & to the left of it.
      - #Hashtags are also used to organize & thread together groups of #tweets by identifying keywords they share.
    - Selections from the content generated and collected during both phases are also included in these chapters and discussed by identifying all actants [type of user, software used, source material, etc] and discussing them through ANT, OOO and Glitch Studies lenses.
    - Chapter 4 presents conclusions and purported implications employing The Language of Internet Memes. It answers all research questions through Image Macros, Rage Comics and title cards to bring a sense of closure while at the same time offering new avenues to an exploration that is likely to continue beyond the present document.

Ultimately, this dissertation [all five chapters along with this introduction] should be understood as an attempt to slowly inch away from the traditional academic report on research and towards a visually-rich language that reflects the object of study all the while taking advantage of the conventions that define two hundred or so pages of printed paper as a dissertation. In this sense I hope to join Barone and Eisner (2012) in advancing the notion "that matters of meaning are shaped -that is, enhanced and constrained- by the tools we use" (loc. 276).

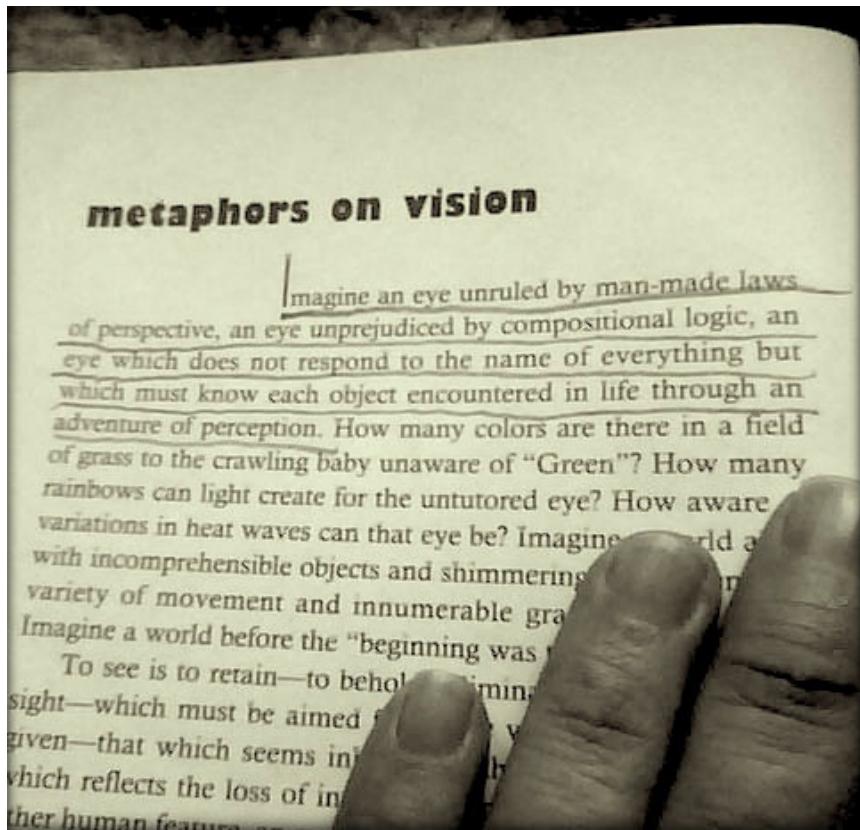
# **Chapter 1**

**The Literature**  
**[A visual review]**

## Arts-Based Research

I didn't know it at the time, but this single line by Stan Brakhage (2001, p.12) introduced me to Arts-Based Research. I don't remember the date but I do know that upon first reading the introduction to his seminal work *Metaphors on Vision* [originally published in 1963] it somehow spoke to me about the possibilities of art practice beyond personal and creative expression. The long essay is a poetic vindication of visual perception and its largely overlooked [all puns intended] potential as an instrument for research.

Being the kind of filmmaker he was, Brakhage's penchant for the



*Quote 1: Brakhage, 2001, p.1*

visual should come as no surprise to anyone even marginally aware of his opus, which spans hundreds of films ranging in length from a few seconds to a few hours. Although his work is generally identified as experimental [as opposed to narrative] his films go from gritty documentaries on autopsies to gorgeously hand-painted lyrical films that treat celluloid cells as canvases.

*Mothlight* (1963), for example, is an assemblage film where not a single frame was shot through a camera, instead every bit of the image was generated through the placement of objects like twigs, blades of grass and even moth wings "directly onto perforated tape the same width as 16mm film, from which projectile prints were made" (Camper, 2003, p. 16). Since film is at its core a rapid sequence of discrete still frames, once the strip of tape was projected onto celluloid, what once was an integrated collection of organic bits became a fractured and rhythmical chain of independent fragments with opaque configurations taking the place of nature. That was just one of the many forms of expanded filmmaking that Brakhage employed to investigate not only film as a medium but also visual perception through the medium's mechanics and how it altered phenomenologically the world experienced.

Later on, in the same introduction to *Metaphors on Vision*, he articulates further his



*Image available:  
[http://s3.amazonaws.com/criterion-production/stills/84583-6bc1d719ad7908bad3478e67184f586/Film\\_184w\\_ByBrakhage\\_original.jpg](http://s3.amazonaws.com/criterion-production/stills/84583-6bc1d719ad7908bad3478e67184f586/Film_184w_ByBrakhage_original.jpg)*

*Quote 2: Mothlight, Brakhage (Dir.), 1963*

integrated collection of organic bits became a fractured and rhythmical chain of independent fragments with opaque configurations taking the place of nature. That was just one of the many forms of expanded filmmaking that Brakhage employed to investigate not only film as a medium but also visual perception through the medium's mechanics and how it altered phenomenologically the world experienced.

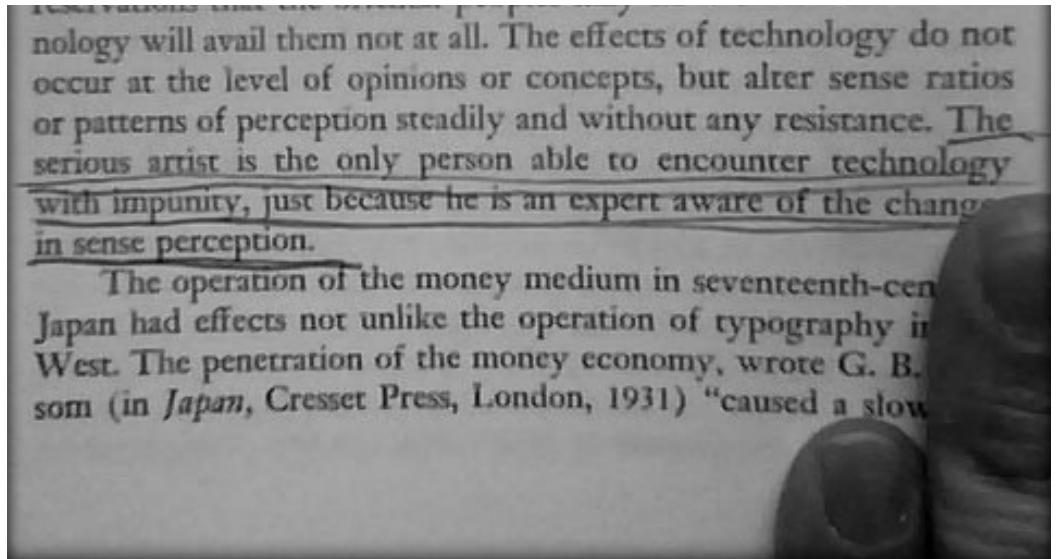
belief "that there is a pursuit of knowledge foreign to language and founded upon visual communication, demanding a development of the optical mind, and dependent upon perception in the original and deepest sense of the word" (p. 12). Besides the obvious implications for what I would later understand as visual culture, what immediately jumps out here is the very notion of a filmmaker championing vision as a way to search for and acquire knowledge. As opposed to most film theory that some way or another deals with the so-called narrative language of film either through psychological implications (Münsterberg, 1916), montage (Eisenstein, 1949) or the juxtaposition of image and sound (Chión, 1994), Brakhage's theory, on the other hand, revolves around the potential to investigate through film, not to tell stories. Specifically, he is concerned with the investigation of visual perception and recognizes the visual medium that is film as the optimum vehicle for exploration.

According to

McLuhan (2004, p.18), Brakhage's film-based foray into the realm of phenomenology would make him a serious artist who is able to recognize in technology a point of origin for a series of alterations in what he called sense ratios<sup>14</sup>. While McLuhan himself is unlikely to be identified as an arts-based researcher,

his famous dictum the medium is the message, which branded most of his technological determinism<sup>15</sup>, can be easily connected to the type of arts-based research Brakhage engaged in films like Mothlight. In essence, McLuhan's injunction separated container from content so that the particular ramifications of adopting and using a given technology would be identified and understood regardless of the products, forms, images, sounds or ideas being delivered. Since, according to McLuhan, all media [his preferred term for technology] is essentially an extension of human beings and our biological abilities, then the impact of each medium can be understood in terms of how it modifies sense ratios -i.e. how much a medium extends vision over hearing, walking over repose, etc.

Although the vast majority of McLuhan's media studies took the form of theoretical explorations into what he identified as the extensions of man and their effects, in 1967 he collaborated with graphic designer Quentin Fiore and published *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*. Taking its cue from, and perhaps even mocking McLuhan's own decree about media and messages, his collaboration with Fiore investigates technology through

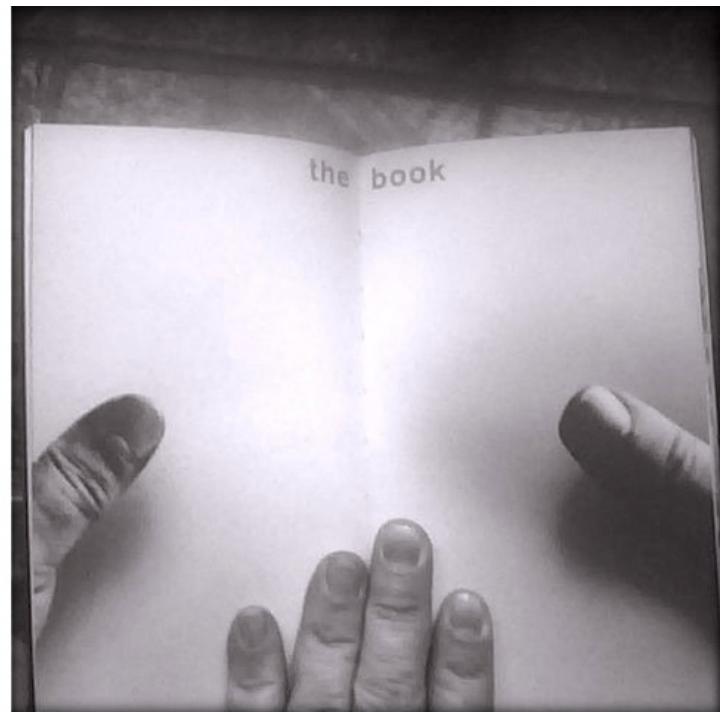
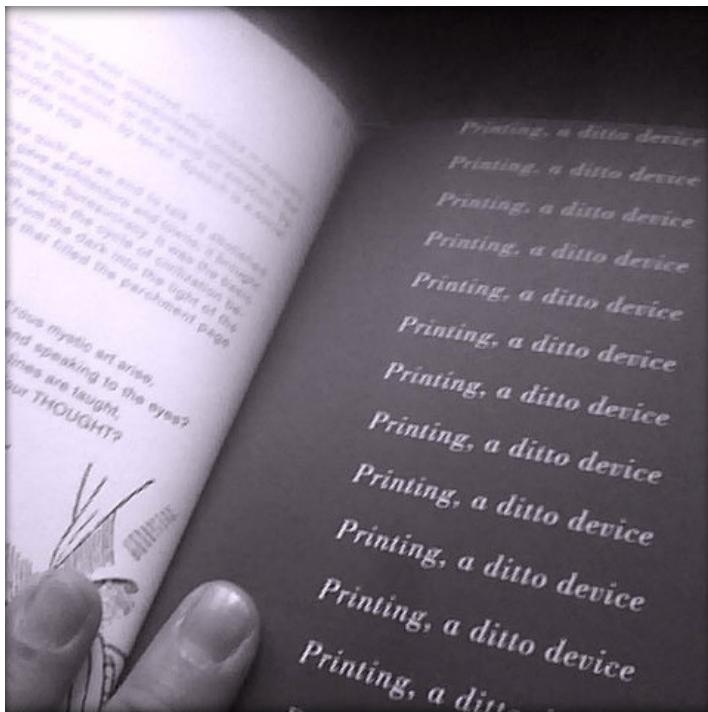


*Quote 5: McLuhan, 2004, p.18*

<sup>14</sup> Much of McLuhan's arguments rested on the idea that media tended to favor one or two senses over the others. i.e. the spoken word favors hearing while the written word does the same with sight.

<sup>15</sup> Technological Determinism is generally understood as a reductionist theoretical framework that traces social notions, structures and values back to the technology that a given society wielded.

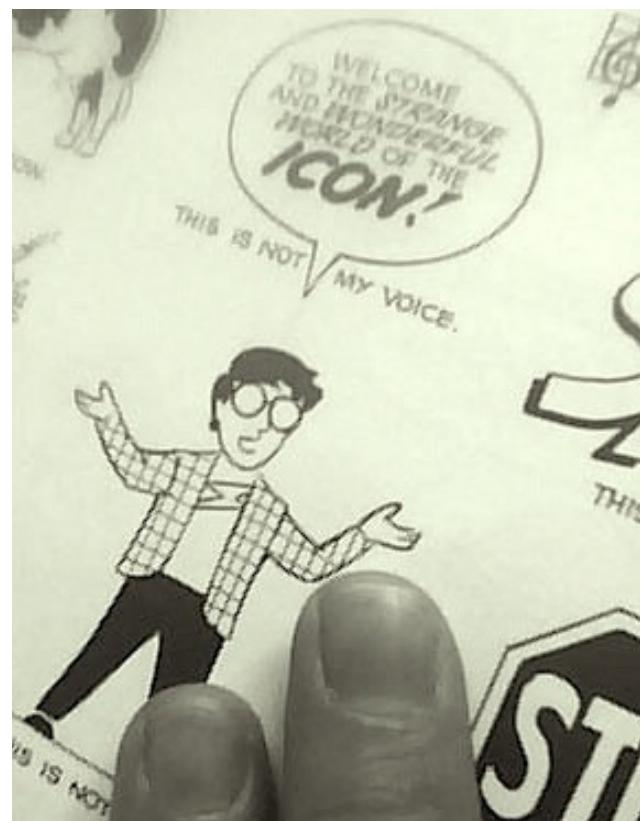
graphic design and the book as a medium, which at times results in moments of conscious and self-referential insight (pp. 34-35 & 49).



Quote 4: McLuhan c<sup>3</sup> Fiore, 1967, pp.54, 55 c<sup>3</sup> 49

In some senses, The Medium is the Message can be understood as an embodiment of McLuhan's ideas, not as content, but as a medium conscious of the message it's delivering, the shifts in sense ratios it's facilitating. Much like Brakhage's Mothlight, ...Massage uses an art form [graphic and book design] to reveal and exploit the mechanics of a specific technology all the while using it as a vehicle of exploration, a tool for research.

A similar level of self-referentiality through arts-based research can be found in Scott McCloud's Understanding Comics: The Invisible art (1994). It is easy to deduce McCloud's object of inquiry, however what makes it relevant in a medium-centered ABER literary review is his commitment to explore the medium of comics through its own form and conventions. A particularly effective moment of investigation through self-referentiality is a chapter entitled the vocabulary of comics, which opens up with establishing the icon as comic- books' basic unit of communication (p.26). Eventually, through his own scrutiny, the narrator reveals himself [itself?] as an icon in his own right; an icon whose



Quote 5: McCloud, 1984, p.26

only purpose is to give form to the reader's inner voice and anthropomorphize an otherwise disembodied journey (p.37).



*Quote 6: McCloud, 1984, p.37*

Similarly to Mothlight and The Medium is the Massage, Understanding Comics employs art practices not only to report on prior research, although there are plenty of historical and theoretical elements present, but to actively explore a medium, comics, generating insights along the way. However, McCloud's work does differ in an important way from Brakhage and McLuhan's in the way they each address their respective audience. On the one hand Mothlight is barely preoccupied with cluing its audience into its intentions; while ...Massage does go to great lengths to explicate its own purposes it does so from a neutral, detached position of authority; Understanding Comics, however, not only breaks the proverbial fourth wall and establishes a rapport with its audience, but it does so in a personal and congenial manner. In many ways McCloud's narrator takes the role of a facilitator who is concerned not only with sharing information but also with being properly understood and explicating all relevant concepts.

It could be argued that the incorporation of a pedagogical element into an already complex process of investigating a medium through the art practices associated with it makes Understanding Comics a kind of Arts Based Educational Research. In the type of ABER that McCloud deploys creative practices are not only made relevant in the process of investigation but also integrate very specific desired educational outcomes: Understanding Comics wants the reader to understand comics, not through theoretical approximations about superheroes or narratives traditionally associated with comics but through the experience of deconstructing comics as a medium with the aid of a narrator.

A similar approach was taken by Fraser (1991) when she donned the persona of Jane Castleton, a museum docent. Fraser's performance piece Museum Highlights took the form of a museum tour where the institution itself was dissected and decoded as a group of visitors were lectured on everything from the extravagant luxuries in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, to the institution's implicit mission to elevate the perceived culture and taste of the audience it serves (p. 112).

occupants are not accorded the same attention that is given to . . . those who are clean and careful and prompt in their payments.”<sup>20</sup>

*“Jane leaves the Panelled Room:*

“The public, who buy clothes and table china and wallpaper and inexpensive jewelry, must be forced to raise their standards of taste by seeing the masterpieces of other civilizations and other centuries.”<sup>21</sup>

Here for example . . .

*Jane gestures around the gallery:*

*Quote 7: Fraser, 1991, p.112*

they have decided that this is the best way to maximize their exposure to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. However, the arbitrariness of the docent’s expertise and of her role within the institution of the museum is made apparent the moment she deviates from the standard script; by disregarding the expectations that visitors place on the museum as an institution, the institution’s conventions are made apparent. The Philadelphia Museum of Art is rendered as a medium in itself, a medium that, to borrow McLuhan’s notion, alters sense ratios regardless the art that hangs on its walls.

Furthermore, Fraser conducts this exploration through an art practice [performance] and she does so with specific pedagogical objectives. Just like McCloud’s narrator guides readers towards understanding the medium of comics beyond the stories being told, Fraser’s Castelton guides the museum visitors towards understanding the museum beyond the artwork being shown.

Similarly Amerika (2007) proposes engaging digital media, and digital art students, through practice-based research that will ultimately disclose underpinning protocols at work. In fact, according to Amerika our current state of digitization, which has injected a significant amount of aesthetic elements into our very experience of information, requires the development of arts based procedures that can make sense of digital content as both form and concept (loc. 2368). Through practice-based research artist-researchers are expected to not only develop skills as producers but also generate pertinent questions and avenues of exploration that are likely to shape digital media and their future social implications.

Most of the issues that Amerika suggests can be addressed through practice-based research have to do with how questions; as in how can digital media [the internet, video, digital animation/sound/illustration] be expanded and exploited to the fullest of their creative, theoretical, interactive and aesthetic potentials. He finds in the figure of the

Similarly to McCloud’s narrator, Castelton is intended to serve as an icon of sorts who is given complete authority over the experience of a particular group of museum visitors. Much like in the case of the readers who engage McCloud’s narrator willingly and of their own accord, Castelton’s tour members follow and listen to her because

underway in the culture of information.<sup>22</sup> Information is now being artistically designed to transmit a more visually stimulating, interactive, and immersive experience that will port the user (consumer, reader, viewer, etc.) into a highly manipulated, digital environment that is changing so fast it requires a focused, practice-based research agenda to even begin learning the new kinds of investigative tools and conceptual frameworks required to properly analyze digital art as an emergent phenomena in the new media economy.

*Quote 8: Amerika, 2007, loc.2368*

performative filters.

- A VJ could be a creative writer who manipulates matter and memory by composing live acts of image *écriture* repositioning the movie loop as the primary semantic unit of energy.

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VJ<sup>16</sup> perhaps the ideal artist-researcher, who by accessing and manipulating visual databases is able to explore and illustrate emerging relationships at the convergence point of technology and information, medium and content; the VJ writes visual theory with digital images (loc. 880). Even more significant, for educational purposes, is the presence of an audience who not only bears witness to the concepts and the forms and the insights and the moments of reflection that are facilitated through the performance of the VJ, but ideally, much like students in a classroom, they

*Quote 9: Amerika, 2007, loc.880*

will also become active participants and claim ownership of the experience.

In place of Amerika's VJ, I would like to suggest a Research Jockey [RJ] that could sample academic source material, manipulate it as visual fragments and write new theory with them, practicing a visual language that is equal parts form and content. An RJ adept at the type of research that responds to the object of study and shape shifts depending on the vantage point that is examined from (Gray and Malins, 2004). An RJ that generates data just as soon as analyzes it within the conventions of an increasingly visual information landscape brimming with potential insights for the researcher willing to engage it (Cahnmann

## Describing the elephant

Practice-based research is like an elephant – a large, complex thing, with many different and intriguing parts, textures, structures, and movements (Figure 1.3). In a Hindu story, several blind men attempt to describe a mysterious creature they have come upon (see

6.69 x 9.60 in

However, attempts have been made to describe 'practice-based' research, proposing key characteristics and methodologies. These have been formulated by studying the evidence provided by the 'pioneers' and recently completed higher degrees. These characteristics have taken time to emerge, have been partial, and have developed in response to contextual changes in the last 30 years – postmodern concepts, for example pluralism; developments in social science methodology, for example naturalistic inquiry, which places the researcher firmly within the research process, often as 'participant'; contemporary science, for example chaos and complexity theory acknowledging unpredictable and messy realities; culture, for example mass media, visuality, bricolage; philosophy, for example difference, 'the other'; contemporary technological advances, for example interactivity, collaborative networks. Research approaches now can be much more pro-active, involving practitioners researching through creative 'action', and 'reflecting in and on action' (Schön, 1983).

*Quote 10: Gray and Malins, 2004, p25*

and Siegesmund, 2008).

Faden (2008) engages this visual landscape as he writes, explores and exposes complex issues that pertain to media. However, unlike Amerika's, his model does not have contemporary art in mind; but rather academic research.

Faden's Manifesto for Critical Media not only introduces the concept of media stylo [that he uses interchangeably with critical media] but also announces his imminent renouncement to what he calls traditional scholarship. The short essay, which he claims will be his last one, compares scholarly research to poetry and how it must take advantage of the possibilities afforded by current-day technology all the while shedding expectations of the old forms (p. 3). Among some of the advantages that

Arts-based visual research reminds us that data is not found; it is constructed. It emphasizes the authority of both researcher and reader to create personal meaning from a work of research – rather than relay or receive an external meaning. As images exponentially increase in our lives – from the visual display of information on cell phones, to the visual presentation of data through the internet, and the ubiquitous presence of digital cameras, scanners – as well as the continuing influence of film and television – the power of the visual has implications for all qualitative researchers.

*Quote 11: Cahnmann and Siegesmund, 2008, loc. 2147*

be-all, last word on a particular subject. The media stylo, by contrast, suggests possibilities—it is not the end of scholarly inquiry; it is the beginning. It explores and experiments and is designed just as much to inspire as to convince.

Indeed, this situation mirrors Ong's argument on how poetry changed from oral to alphabetic culture. Initially, poetry—as an oral medium—had an important mnemonic function: rhyming, verse structure, and formula patterns aided memorization and recall. Thus poetry was an oral medium for storing information, traditions, and history. Yet, with the alphabet's invention, a new storage medium arrived. Suddenly, poetry no longer had to store information because we could write things down. Thus, poetry for the first time could work differently. It took on an aesthetic rather than mnemonic function. And importantly, one communication culture did not trump another—we did not stop speaking when the alphabet was invented; we just spoke differently. So, poetry did not end with the alphabet's invention but it did change. <sup>87</sup>

Similarly, scholarship in an electronic culture does not abandon the tools and techniques of oral or alphabetic culture; it simply can use them in new ways. In a key difference, the media stylo

*Quote 12: Faden, 2008, p.5*

Faden notes digital media hold over the literary-bound is the capacity of the former to present instead of describe as well as the freedom they offer in terms of form. His investigation into copyright, *A Fair(y) Tale Use* (2007) serves as an ideal example for the possibilities Faden recognizes in critical media. Instead of taking the form of a journal article or a presentation at a conference, Faden crafted a video that explores the history, uses

and excesses of intellectual property; and it does so through clips picked and remixed from animated movies produced and distributed by Walt Disney Pictures. Using bits and pieces of dialogue, Faden is able to stitch together an argument that likens copyright fees to a kind of extortion perpetrated against media users who are otherwise unlikely to threaten the original copyright holders and their potential to turn a profit.

Although the video draws much of its power from the humor that is inherent in re-contextualized cartoon characters speaking about legal issues, it would be disingenuous to suggest that the choice of source material was made for amusement purposes only. Rather, Faden makes at least two points all the more evident by remixing the intellectual property of Walt Disney:

1. Walt Disney Corporation is widely recognized as one of the most aggressive prosecutors of copyright and trademark infringement<sup>17</sup>, all the while benefiting from the appropriation and recontextualization of characters and stories like Snow White and Alice in Wonderland.
2. Copyright law's grey area that is fair use is brought to the foreground by a video produced entirely within the fair use umbrella (Faden, p. 3). As a matter of fact, towards the end, the video itself becomes aware that it can only exist thanks in part to the concept of fair use.

### **Chapter 5: Why use Disney Cartoons?**

Because this company is intimidating anybody who takes a copyright work. The point is that fair use actually works for movies like this one to have legal protection. ☺

And that concludes our broadcast!

What was that?! I have no idea.

### **The End**

*Quote 15: Faden, 2007, p.5*

But beyond the source material and the reconstitution of it lies Faden's commitment to explore and generate theory through media, to consider form as content, to give aesthetic considerations at least as much weight as conceptual ones. It is in this sense that even though Faden is identified as an academic and not an artist, his research nonetheless must be considered arts based. Furthermore A Fair(y) Use Tale can also be considered relevant in educational terms since it exhibits a pedagogic dimension by problematizing and explicating an intricate issue like copyright law.

Interestingly enough Faden's proposal to conduct and report scholarly research through critical media that can present instead of describe can be directly connected to Brakhage's remark on the optical mind and pursuing knowledge through visual communication. Both schemes pay special attention to the phenomenological experience of knowledge and

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<sup>17</sup> In the late '90s for example Walt Disney Corporation threaten legal action against day care centers that displayed Walt Disney characters on their walls.

provide aesthetic forms and practices with the required gravitas to be considered as viable vehicles for research. Once these ideas are conjugated with McLuhan's notion of the medium and the message -not the content, McCloud's impulse to investigate media with and within their own conventions, Fraser's idea to push against the medium's conventions in order to reveal undercurrent and sometimes pervasive agendas, and Amerika's VJ, my RJ, who reads, write and rewrites visual theory through digital media, then a somewhat concrete sketch emerges about a specific and concrete type of Arts Based Educational Research.

The ABER that I'm referring remains firmly grounded within Barone and Eisner's (2012) notion of Arts-Based Research as informal and fluid examinations of everyday, for my purpose online, phenomena through aesthetic practices (loc. 1121) but is also medium-centric in the sense that it places media and the art practices associated with them at the center in order to generate mediated content that exhibits pedagogical dimensions. However, as the examples have shown, the type of ABER I'm trying to materialize is not discipline-specific as different media can be investigated through different practices; likewise the object of investigation does not need to be confined to the field of media studies, rather anything from visual perception, to institutional agendas, to the intimations of intellectual property can be explored.

In order to study The Language of Internet Memes through this so-called medium-centric ABER, my particular object of exploration must first be established as a medium in terms of conventions, purposes, potentials and roles. With a specific focus on memes and their inherent characteristics, Memetics (Lewens, 2007) promises a framework ripe with the appropriate theoretical tools to manage, at least initially, the task.

Research is, yes, a process of researching—that is, of coming back again and again to perceived phenomena, scrutinizing the world, and thereby reexperiencing it. Within arts based research that scrutinizing may or may not be done in a systematic way as occurs in many forms of scientific research. Or the researching may occur within a more fluid process and even occur serendipitously through unplanned or informal reencounters of phenomena throughout an artist's life—indeed, at least since Fielding novelists have observed the minutiae of human activity, attending to specific characters in particular sociohistorical milieus. Arts based researchers, too, fish for empirical (whether physical or social) evidence in the ongoing stream of everyday life. This is what seems to have been practiced by Sullivan (2000) as she,

*Quote 14: Barone and Eisner, 2012, loc. 1121*

The meme theory seeks to draw a very strong analogy between evolution at the cultural level, and biological evolution. It begins with an abstract characterisation of selection as a process requiring entities that reproduce, such that parents resemble offspring. Memetics takes the view, popularised by Dawkins, that entities which have the ability to make faithful copies of themselves—so-called 'replicators'—are required to explain this trans-generational resemblance. In standard biological models of evolution it is assumed that genes are the relevant replicators. Genes make copies of themselves, and this ability explains why offspring organisms resemble their parents. If culture is to evolve, it

*Quote 15: Lewens, 2007*

Memetics (Lewens, 2007) promises a framework ripe with the appropriate theoretical tools to manage, at least initially, the task.

## Memetics

Dawkins (2006) coined the term memes in 1976 as a metaphor meant to discuss cultural evolution and account for cultural transmission [loc. 3765]. Although Memes do not compete for chromosomal transmission through sex [as genes do], they do compete for time and attention to become dominant cultural traits. Significantly, unlike genes, success in terms of memes does not necessarily equate to evolutionary advantages or is indicative of absolute values like better, good or truth; rather, memes that succeed do so only on the basis of their own replicability and nothing more [loc. 3883]. In fact, according to this stance, memes could be said to behave like parasites; impregnating the brains of unsuspecting individuals and turning them into somewhat-passive hosts for the sole purpose of gaining access to new, presumably pristine minds where they can replicate themselves and initiate a new, identical cycle. However, on occasion memes transcend the realm of ideas and translate into shared behaviors of varying complexity. The continuous stream of students sipping coffee from branded to-go cups is a meme; so is the sea of bearded faces that have proliferated coffee shops over the last few years; so is the ocean of coffee-shops that have proliferated over the last couple of decades.

That the sequence above is reminiscent of a matryoshka Russian doll where each meme fits perfectly within the

next one is no accident; rather, memes are not only meant to take advantage of given cultural environments but could be said to have a role in crafting them for subsequent memes that are able to do the same (loc. 3894). Memeplexes can then be understood as collections of interrelated memes that succeed and become dominant cultural traits that accommodate only the memes

complexes. Selection favours memes that exploit their cultural environment to their own advantage. This cultural environment consists of other memes which are also being selected. The meme pool therefore comes to have the attributes of an evolutionarily stable set, which new memes find it hard to invade.

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negative about memes, but they have their cheerful side

Quote 17: Dawkins, 2006, locs. 3894

that manage to fit in all the while resisting and rejecting the ones that do not (Shifman, 2013, loc. 174).

soup of human culture. We need a name for the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation*. ‘Mimeme’ comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like ‘gene’. I hope my suggestion will be well received and appreciated. I abbreviate mimeme to *meme*.\* If it is any consolation, it could

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into opposition. For example, the habit of celibacy is presumably not inherited genetically. A gene for celibacy is doomed to failure in the gene pool, except under very special circumstances such as we find in the social insects. But still, a *meme* for celibacy can be successful in the *meme* pool. For

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success of a *meme* depends critically on how much time

Quote 16: Dawkins, 2006, locs. 3765 e<sup>3</sup>  
3883

other in the process. Dawkins called such groups “coadapted meme complexes,” a tag later shortened by Hans-Cees Speel to “memeplexes.”<sup>1</sup> Democracy, for instance,<sup>2</sup> can be regarded as a memeplex that includes several submemeplexes such as human rights and free regular elections, which can further be broken down to respective memes.

The word “meme” derives from the Greek *mimema*,

Quote 18: Shifman, 2013, loc. 174

In terms of memplexes then, a notion like the third world, a remnant itself of the cold war memplex, could be identified as a memplex that reduces a multitude of complex realities to file and accommodate them as submemplexes like underdevelopment, misery, a simple and risky lifestyle, corrupt governments, etc. Within online visual culture, the third world memplex has extended to include Image Macro characters like Skeptical Third World Kid, Third World Success Kid, and Third World Problems that visualize and assert similar conceptions.

Even though an argument could be made that Image Macros like the ones referenced here challenge the third world memplex by ridiculing it, it is evident that these memes occupy and extend a significant niche about what the third world looks and sounds like. What once was conceived as a somewhat abstract concept to refer to countries that did not align themselves to either the capitalist or socialist block during the cold war (Mignolo, 2000, p.737) has somehow become unequivocally colonized by dark skin, dirt roads, starvation, preventable disease and war.



*Meme 3: Third World Problems Image Macro*



*Meme 4: Skeptical Third World Kid [top] & Third World Success Kid [bottom] Image Macros*

colonization were not yet fully in place. The nation-state alone and Europe were on Kant's horizon, and less so colonization. Curiously enough, the scenario that presented itself after World War II brought us back to Vitoria and the Salamanca school. Not curiously enough, the Cold War and the intensification of the conflict between the two previous phases of the modern/colonial world system left the exteriority of the system in the shade, as an expectant Third World contemplated the struggle between the First and the Second. Coloniality remained hidden behind the struggle of modernity. The horrors of National Socialism that

Conversely, the first world, de facto counterpoint albeit reinforcement of the third world, has been visualized through light skinned characters agonizing over inconsequential dilemmas as evidence for a life of privilege. Plenty of compelling arguments have been made about how memes like First World Problems and First World Metal Problems critique and comment on the consequences of economic disparities between the so-called first and third worlds (Milner, 2012 & Decker-Maurer, 2012). However even if these tongue-in-cheek jabs are understood as decisively critical they are nonetheless evidently relying on, and extending, a series of concrete assumptions about a world parsed in terms of a definite first and a definite third. In fact, Shifman (2012) identifies the entire Image Macro phenomenon, which includes characters like Successful Black Man, Condescending Wonka and Courage Wolf, among a host of others as a distinctly first-world enterprise that offers insights into notions of ethics, social anxieties and digitally mediated interpersonal and race relationships.

Regarding class, the materialism of white Western culture received significant attention in meme subcultures. One of the most notable class-based memes takes the name 'First World Problems'. The phrase is a popular Twitter hashtag, the subject of an active subreddit ([r/FirstWorldProblems](#)), and the name for a series of image macros. Know Your Meme ('First World Problems', n.d.) featured a webisode devoted to First World Problems and described them as "frustrations and complaints that are only experienced by privileged individuals in wealth countries", going on to say the meme is used as "a tongue in cheek comedic device to make light of trivial inconveniences". Complaining about long runway taxis, poor cell phone reception, or

*Quote 20: Milner, 2012, p. 179*



**NOT DEPRESSED ENOUGH TO LISTEN**



*Meme 6: First World Metal Problems*

him by acting like a middle class bourgeois). This array of stock character macros provides a glimpse into the drama of morality of the First World of the twenty-first century: it is a conceptual map of types that represent exaggerated forms of behavior. As extreme forms tend to focus on success and failure in the social life of a particular group.

*Quote 22: Shifman, 2013, loc.1190*

#### Social Issue and Humor Type

The "First World Problems" meme addresses the social question of poverty versus privilege. The joke displays all three humor types (superiority, relief, and incongruity). It displays superiority theory because as privileged people, first-world dwellers have economic and social advantages over people in less well-off countries. The meme's tone also conveys a certain amount of that flip-side of superiority: self-deprecation or self-mockery. The tone of the meme does not condone the attitudes, but pokes fun at those who unthinkingly engage in behaviors that could be considered petty or ungrateful.

*Quote 21: Decker-Maurer, 2012, p.40*



Meme 7: Condescending Wonka, Successful Black Man & Courage Wolf

meme can hardly be defined, much less measured and is apparently impossible to isolate from the social phenomena that dictates its faith as a success or failure then how can it accounted as a non-human agent competing for the chance to change and determine culture?

Memes fight it out to get passed on into another brain or book or object, and in the process cultural and mental design comes about. There is no need for any other source of design power. There is no need to call on the creative ‘power of consciousness’, for consciousness has no power. There is no need to invent the idea of free will. Free will, like the self who ‘has’ it, is an illusion. Terrifying as

As indicated by this quick glance into the intricacies of the third world memeplex and its visualizations and intimate relationship with the first world’s own; a meme approach to culture evolution can get very messy very quickly. Notions of agency, intent and point of origin are often hard to identify, not to mention the futility of attempting to delineate where one meme ends, the next one begins and at what point exactly they can be considered a memeplex. Along similar lines, critics of memetics point out how memeticists like Blackmore (1999) strip away all sense of agency from individuals, placing it instead squarely on the conceptual shoulders of abstractions that in many cases don’t even measure up as an adequate analogy for the way that genes operate (Jenkins, 2014a & Shifman, 2013). The agency question is an important one as it amounts to perhaps the single biggest injunction against memes and memetics. If a

code. This effort was criticized not only because memes behave very differently than genes, but also because reducing culture to biology narrows and simplifies complex human behaviors. The prevalent notion is thus that the meme–gene analogy should be taken with many grains of salt. Indeed, it is not necessary to think of biology when analyzing memes. The ideas of replication,

Quote 24: Shifman, 2015, loc.199

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is true.

Quote 25: Blackmore, 1999, loc. 3628

I have to be honest that the concept of meme is one which sets my teeth on edge. Sam Ford, Joshua Green and I spent a fair chunk of time in our book, *Spreadable Media: Creating Meaning and Value in a Networked Culture*, seeking to deconstruct the concept of “viral media” which has become such a common metaphor for thinking about how things circulate in digital culture, and along the way, we side-swipe Richard Dawkins’ conception of the meme for many of the same reasons. Sorry, Mr. Dawkins, but I don’t buy the concept of culture as “self-replicating”: such a concepts feels far too deterministic to me, stripping aside the role of agency at a time when the public is exerting much greater control of the content which spreads across the culture than ever before.

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Quote 25: Jenkins, 2014a

Rosaria Conte's suggestion to treat people not as *vectors* of cultural transmission, but as *actors* behind this process.<sup>5</sup> The dissemination of memes, she submits, is based on intentional agents with decision-making powers: social norms, perceptions, and preferences are crucial in memetic selection processes. As I will elaborate in the following section, this understanding Internet memes,

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In establishing an alternative to what she and others perceive as a case of misplaced agency, Shifman (2003, loc.207) relies on a particular brand of memetics advanced by Rosaria Conte (2000, p.87) who identifies individuals much more as intentional disseminators of memes instead of the passive automatons that Blackmore's (1999) meme machines appear to be. By explicitly focusing on the active and autonomous role of memetic agents [in Conte's terms] or actors [in Shifman's words] this brand of memetics, as opposed to Blackmore's, attempts to re-distribute the power to engage memes and places it mostly, perhaps entirely, within individuals and the agency they wield.

Quote 28: Shifman, 2013, loc.207

vantages from the memetic point of view as well—that is, in view of an adequate understanding of the memetic process. Let us see why.

The view of agents as vectors of cultural transmission arises from an insufficient understanding of the autonomy of (memetic) agents. The autonomy property has important implications: autonomous agents play a crucial role in the cultural application of the evolutionary algorithm. Of course, memeticists acknowledge that agents may misperceive and re-elaborate memes. But this view is still insufficient. It does not (at least explicitly) account for the decision-making implied by the process leading from perception to belief formation. Between an input and its forming a belief

On this view, all human actions, whether conscious or not, come from complex interactions between memes, genes and all their products, in complicated environments. The self is not the initiator of actions, it does not 'have' consciousness, and it does not 'do' the deliberating.

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Quote 27: Blackmore, 1999, loc.3642

Quote 26: Conte, 2000, p.87

Conte (2000) does account for a series of limitations in terms of the autonomy that individuals possess, specifically in the form of reliance on others in order to achieve certain goals, but only as long as these goals remain the individual's own (p.94). On her part, by obviating individuality within memes and opting instead to define Internet Memes through their necessary plurality, Shifman (2013) appears to place the burden of [online] cultural evolution

on a multitude of users that are somehow able to align their goals, their agency, in order to procure the success of specific memes. Similarly speaking Murray Husted (2012) identifies Internet Memes as the collective outcome of grouped individuals that, much like coral reefs produce the nutrients necessary for ocean ecosystems to thrive, generate the content that can in turn become the memes consumed passively by the rest of us in a fish-like feeding frenzy. Even though this model obviously evokes the biology metaphor that Shifman attempts to avoid, it nevertheless still exalts the autonomous agency of specific groups of individuals who craft the dominant traits of a particular brand of visual culture that is then eaten up by a crowd of faceless, anonymous [un-empowered?] Internet users. Milner (2012) identifies a similar group of empowered individuals that play a crucial role in visualizing online culture by not only generating the content that will dominate it as memes but by also playing the role of gatekeepers that can keep new content from entering the mainstream of Internet Memes.

influence. Obviously, agents' autonomy is limited because they are not always self-sufficient. They may need the help of other agents to achieve their goals (social dependence), and this causes agents to adopt others' goals and to accept their requests. However, one's adoption of others' goals will always be a means for the achievement of one's own goals (e.g., through social exchange or cooperation). In turn, these social actions favour the transmission of beliefs, including action plan techniques, procedures, rules, conventions, and social beliefs. ↑

Instead of depicting the meme as a single cultural unit that has propagated successfully, I suggest defining an Internet meme as (a) a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance; (b) that were created with awareness of each other; and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users.

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for analyzing Internet memes as socially

Quote 31: Shifman,  
2013, loc.152

Quote 32: Milner,  
2012, p.27

Similar to the food chains spiraling outward from the base nutrients provided by coral reefs, few members of human society are actively producing new memes. Instead, they consume the memes passively available to them within their environment. Members of society interested in innovative creative production will frequently band together in reaction to the perceived collapse of dominant ideology and form sheltered environments in which to consolidate resources. Groups of individuals producing large numbers of influential memes are often motivated by a group's emphasis on ideology and manifesto rather than by immediate salability. This emphasis on the concept rather than the presentation means that the memes produced often have to evolve and mutate in order to be eventually adopted by the larger population. ↗  
23

Quote 29: Conte, 2000, p.94

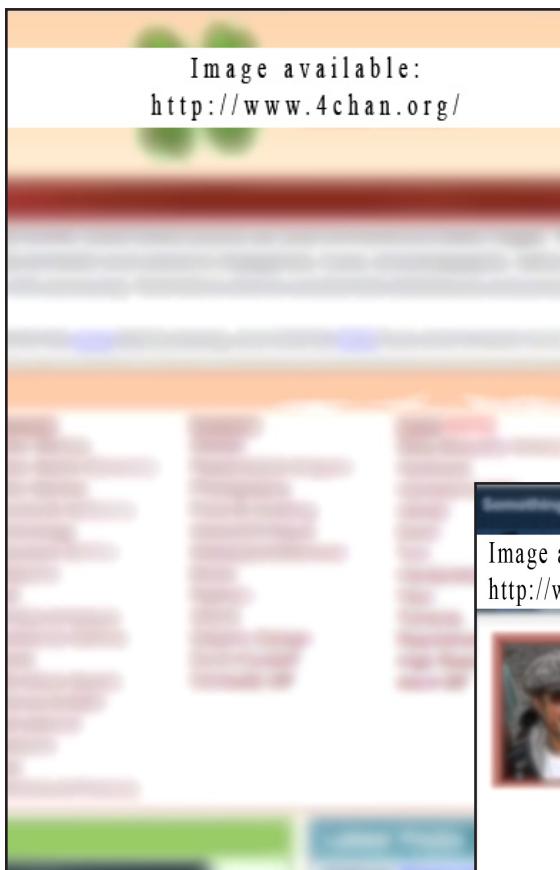
Quote 30: Murray-Husted, 2012, p.23

on the successes as they

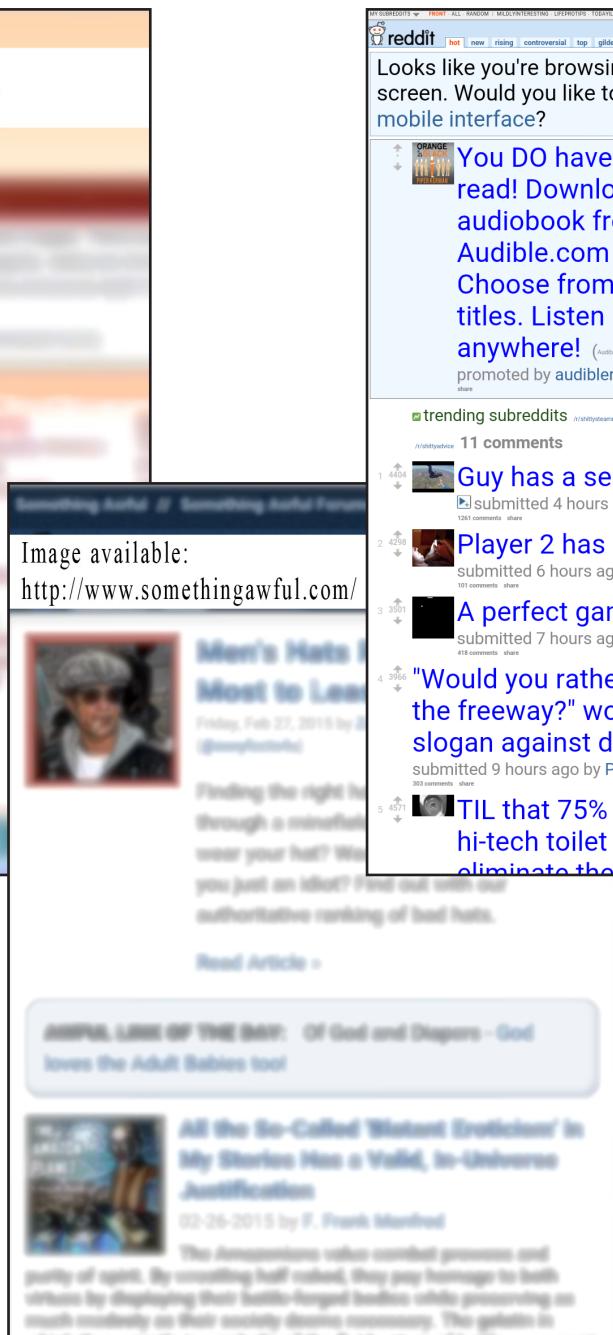
go" (p. 246). But we've seen this potential is contested. Despite the ability for many perspectives to participate in the competition of meme creation, the deck might be stacked in favor of certain perspectives, values, and references. The possibility of competition does not mean the open and equal competition of ideas, even in 'participatory' media. But since memes are premised on mediated cultural participation, they're worth using to measure how potential matches practice.

Last, N. Baym (2010) points to the reach afforded by digitally-mediated communication. ↗

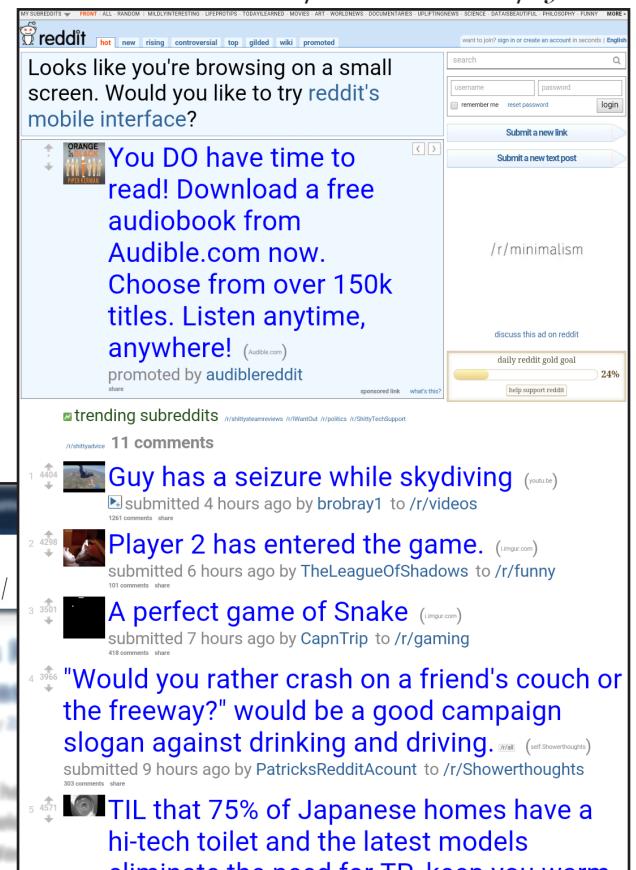
The conceptualization of autonomous, but grouped individuals generating and choosing the memes that will dominate a given cultural environment is remarkably similar to the original notion of memplexes mentioned above. However within the internet, these collectives need not remain conceptual abstractions; they are embodied quite concretely as online communities like 4chan, Something Awful and reddit among many others. As should be expected, even the most superficial glance into any of these platforms will reveal a concourse of differences in style, layout, levels of interactivity and responsiveness and type of content, not to mention more conceptual differences in terms of politics, sponsorships, brand of humor, policies and such. Whereas the second, conceptual kind of distinctive features can be mostly attributed to the type of common ground that spawns from socialization patterns and decision making processes that could arguably still be attributed to autonomous individuals performing their own autonomy, conversely, the first set of dif-



*Periph. 1: 4chan home page.*



*Periph. 2: Something Awful home page*



*All captured on 3.1.15*

So whether we are exploring a dynamic website, playing a video game, or using an app on a mobile phone to locate particular places or friends nearby, we are engaging not with pre-defined static documents but with the dynamic outputs of a real-time computation happening on our device and/or the server.

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performances: design templates, files stored on a local machine, media

ferences responds to agents of a different order: strings of code, algorithms and style sheets that are permanently updated, always in flux and consequently rearranging the sites' content perpetually. In short, software takes command (Manovich, 2013) and behaves as an autonomous actor, playing a significant role in the identities, mechanics and makeup of collectives otherwise presumed to be nothing more than groups of produsers (Decker-Maurer, 2012).

*Quote 53: Manovich, 2013, loc.649*

## What is Participatory Culture and why is it Important?

Although the tools and technology exist, people are mostly learning new media literacies not in schools, but in their homes, on their computers, with the help of other people. Oftentimes, these producer/users called "produsers" are ensconced within a group that shares the same interests as they do. Knobel and Lankshear (2008) state that,

...a...conception of new Literacies recognizes that everyday life is amplified through the participation of and interaction with people one may never meet and, moreover, that in online spaces this interaction and participation may occur in ways never before possible (p. 221).

*Quote 54: Decker-Maurer, 2012, p.14*

Of course, it might be argued that every bit of underlying software was authored by one or any number of individuals, making it once again a passive by-product instead of an actor that deserves to be part of any agency talk. However, the fact that dynamic media like participatory web sites where networks of users share digital content are by default unfixed speaks of an equally yielding structure that is able to respond to the activity of said users, all the while solid enough to remain true to the sites' original intents, be they formal, conceptual or of any other kind. This way, much like Conte's memetic agents, the software that accommodates online communities is given a certain amount of autonomy by its authors who limit their own in favor of achieving otherwise unattainable goals. Even more so, as users' behavior is informed through tabs labeled with subjective values like "controversial" and "comedy goldmine", in reddit and something awful respectively, it becomes increasingly evident that

the implicit algorithms make decisions that play an important role in the constitution, evolution and complex interrelations that emerge within these virtual collectives.

I must be clear here that my intention is not to identify any portion of these [or any other] web sites as a functioning, artificial intelligence; rather I am merely attempting to consider software [and the code, protocols and algorithms involved] as a fully engaged actor contributing actively to the visual culture that Internet Memes are typically associated with. Of course, this notion in itself is ripe with implications for controversies regarding meme propagation and the role that autonomous individuals have in the adoption/rejection of memes. While I am in no way prepared, or trying to question Shifman's (2013) recognition of people as necessarily active memetic agents (loc.209), I am nonetheless interested in adding layers of complexity into what it means to be one.

processes. As I will elaborate in chapter 3, the depiction of people as active agents is essential for understanding Internet memes, particularly when meaning is dramatically altered in the course of memetic diffusion. 35

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academia, the meme concept has been enthusiastically picked up by Internet users. A search of Google Trends

Quote 35: Shifman, 2013, loc.209

## Actor Network Theory

### An actor is what is *made to act* by many others

An 'actor' in the hyphenated expression actor-network is not the source of an action but the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming toward it. To retrieve its multiplicity, the simplest solution is to reactivate the metaphors implied in the word *actor* that I have used so far as an unproblematic placeholder.

It is not by accident that this expression, like that of 'person', comes from the stage. Far from indicating a pure and problematic source of

Quote 36: Latour, 2005, p.56

Actor Network Theory [ANT] offers an elegant entry point for the discussion I am attempting to frame here by problematizing the figure of an actor beyond the idea of a singular agent responsible for a given action (Latour, 2005). By re-imagining the actor as a fluid, pluralistic figure that remains free-floating and subject to a multitude of agents, who advances and enacts his or her own agendas, ANT muddies up the very notion of agency and spreads it thinly on multiple entities, whose humanity is optional. Initially this paradigm shift can be seen as yet another attempt to render humans passive enactors instead of active agents, the kind that Jenkins (2014), Conte (2004) and most notably for my purpose Shif-

man (2013) reject. However in ANT's point of view, humans are nowhere near devoid of intentionality, but then again, neither is every non-human around us. In fact the entire notion of an actor-network itself is predicated on all acting entities being identified not as a function of any other but rather as discrete agents whose autonomous agency needs to be accounted for. One of the first ways that ANT decentralizes the figure of an actor and moves it away from what can be understood as an inherent anthropomorphic concept is by borrowing the term actant from literary theory (Latour, 2005 p.64). Much like a magic wand in a fairy tale then, software can be considered beyond its mere functionality and recognized as an actant not only within user-to-user actor-networks in sites like 4chan but also in most situations where software intervenes.

**'morphism' just as much as the incarnation of some actant into a single individual.**

Because they deal with fiction, literary theorists have been much freer in their enquiries about figuration than any social scientist, especially when they have used semiotics or the various narrative sciences. This is because, for instance in a fable, the same actant can be made to act through the agency of a magic wand, a dwarf, a thought in the fairy's mind, or a knight killing two dozen dragons.<sup>54</sup> Novels,



*Quote 57: Latour,  
2005, p.64*

In discussing the ways that software manifests its agency van Dijck (2012) looks into platforms like Facebook and Flickr, their underlying protocols and the interfaces that these hide behind. Of special interest here is the manifest attempt to cluster multiple strings of digital code into supposedly singular acts, reminiscent of social

*van Dijck*

145

oblique information apparatus that comes to produce everyday life the 'technological unconscious'. He points at the potent technological environments that operate 'without the knowledge of those upon whom they are taking an effect' (2009: 990). Algorithms and protocols trigger and channel the visual, auditory and cultural experiences of people active on social media platforms. Virtually all UGC and SNS platforms rely on protocols that are predicated upon social practices. For instance, while 'sharing pictures' sounds like a typical interaction performed by human beings, photo sharing via Flickr is a virtually automated process mediated by sophisticated protocols. Human preferences, tastes, desires and interests are profoundly manoeuvred by the interface features that direct online behaviour, while users' behavioural metadata in turn help to reconfigure the very algorithms steering the site. ☺

Platforms, protocols and interfaces aptly illustrate the convoluted connection between the technological and the social. Social practices are increasingly mediated by platforms that affect

*Quote 58: van Dijck, 2012, p.145*

code; actions like sharing, friending, liking and replying appear to be all within the click of a mouse, the swipe of a finger or the stroking of keys. In actuality, not only do these require the digital infrastructure that only millions of lines of code can provide (McCandless, 2013) but they are also dependent on the specific engagement schemes that each platform facilitates and favors.



Periph. 4: McCandless, 2013 (detail)

For example a Twitter conversation does not depend entirely on the will of users to interact; rather, a series of apropos conditions will mediate the likelihood of such a conversation taking place. Do both users follow each other? What settings have they chosen for their notifications? What twitter app are they using and does it support/encourage user-to-user interaction?

The answers to these questions can dramatically affect whether or not dialogues occur, not to mention circumstances regarding twitter availability, internet traffic and isp<sup>18</sup> firewalls among many others. In practical terms, though, users typically engage the whole of these digital conditions through buttons, tabs and fields labeled reply, tweet to, notifications, mentions or any number of verbs and nouns that denote interpersonal dynamics. It is precisely in order to avoid the potential confounding that comes with hiding multitudes of agents within

singular, albeit loaded, concepts that Latour (2005) suggests that social phenomena need to be unpacked and all actants involved be identified and accounted for as members of actor-networks influ-

influence another site, it has to levy the means. The tyranny of distance has been underlined again. Actors have become accountable. But if something is allowed to be 'inside' something else, then the third dimension of society is added and the whole of Merlin's castle pops up out of the lake. To stop this magic, we have to make sure that no extra dimension will be added. To do so we have to invent a series of clamps to hold the landscape firmly flat and to force, so to speak, any candidate with a more 'global' role to sit beside the 'local' site it claims to explain, rather than watch it jump on top of it or behind it. In what follows, I am going to draw a rough inventory of some of those clamps.

Quote 39: Latour, 2005, p.184

encing and making each other act. Metaphorically speaking this approach can be thought of as placing all components of a mechanical clock on a table top so that each gear and every pin can be examined as part of a time-telling actor-network. This is what it means to keep the social flat.

The idea of flattening the social in order to account for actants as they connect with each other and procure the emergence of actor-networks can be of great use to engage Internet Memes, particularly as it refers to notions of agency and memetic agents. For my own purposes this flatness allows me to frame the software involved in the life cycle of Internet Memes as an actant with as much agency as users otherwise identified as autonomous actors proficient in wielding the correct digital tools. When exploring the role that digital and networked technology plays in today's art classroom, Knochel (2011a) dispels the notion of

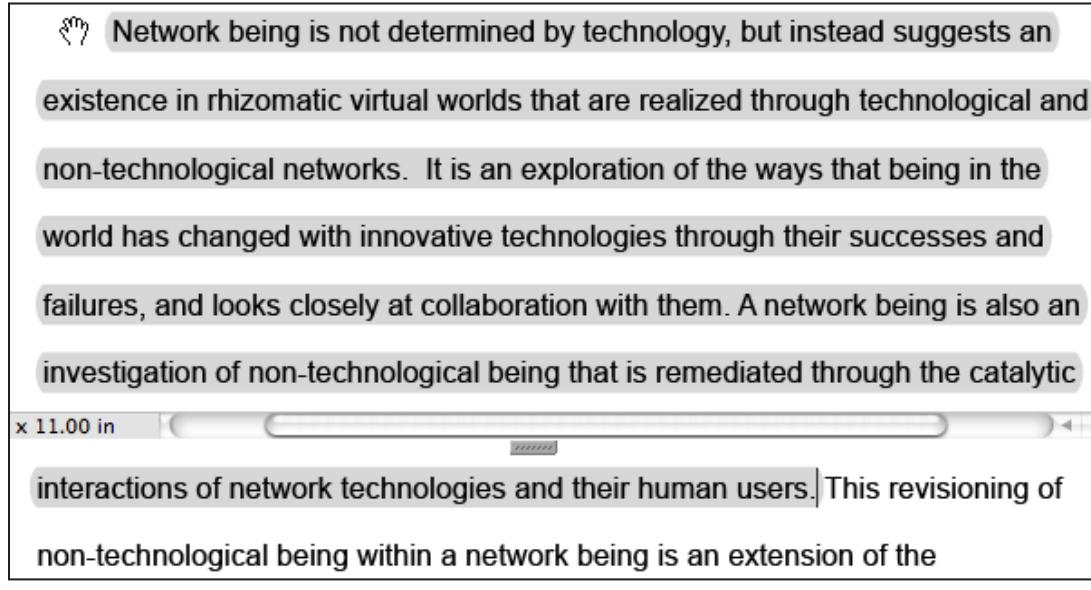
seen to have a complicated history and engineering legacy (Petroski, 1989). However, the software and operating systems that were loaded on the computers that we used in the art classroom and computer lab had other characteristics that seemed to evolve from their connection to larger technological networks. Pencils never connected to their manufacturing company to check for updates. Pencils do not require licenses and do not have rules about how many people can use them. A drawing completed with one pencil does not need to be re-formatted to use another pencil, and pencils could be used on any kind of paper. New versions of the pencil were not marketed every eighteen months along with the publications and instructional manuals that continually needed to keep pace with these rapid developments. Online communities of learning and technique development were far more complex and extensive with software than with people trying to learn how to use a pencil for drawing. All of these differences

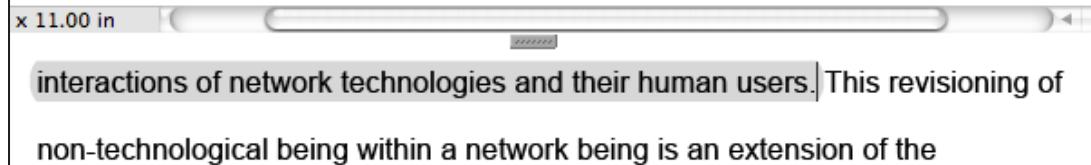
*Quote 40: Knochel, 2011a, p.4*

identifying software entirely through its functionality by contrasting it with a pencil as not just another instrument that must be mastered and made to act at the will of a user. He continues this consideration by suggesting the

notion of a network being as the natural extension of the type of software he is referring to, which not only relies on networked licensing, updating and expanded functionalities, but also fosters user-to-user networks where content, information and strategies can be shared. Even though at first glimpse the very idea of a network being screams of a cyborg that favors technology over humans, it is important to point out that these network beings refer to both technological as well as non-technological agents; or, put another way, both

humans and non-humans can be thought of as network beings (Knochel, 2011b pp.19-20). This way network being refers to all actants involved in the emergence of online and virtual collectives, like the ones that inhabit 4chan or reddit, in the exchange

  
Network being is not determined by technology, but instead suggests an existence in rhizomatic virtual worlds that are realized through technological and non-technological networks. It is an exploration of the ways that being in the world has changed with innovative technologies through their successes and failures, and looks closely at collaboration with them. A network being is also an investigation of non-technological being that is remediated through the catalytic

  
interactions of network technologies and their human users. This revisioning of non-technological being within a network being is an extension of the

*Quote 41: Knochel, 2011b, pp.19-20*

of pictures and get-togethers by IRL<sup>19</sup> families who employ platforms like Facebook and Skype, or even in the learner communities that users constitute in order to better understand software like Photoshop and Processing.

Beyond the classroom and regardless of educational, familial or communal objectives, software has also been identified by Rushkoff (2010) as a powerful agent of change regardless of human cooperation. Although Rushkoff's arguments can be understood as simply advocating for computer users to become programmers, à la code.org<sup>20</sup>, there are two elements of his proposition that strike me as highly relevant to my own project: his idea of software that can program as much as it is programmed, and the suggestion that these technologies are like living things.

The title of Rushkoff's book itself, *Program or Be Programmed*, speaks of stakes where the very notion of human agency may be subject to non-human actants in the form of technology that instead of being optimized for human use, optimizes humans for its own purposes. In this view, beyond its potential for image manipulation, software like Photoshop optimizes users to manipulate images using Photoshop; so it could be argued that Photoshop's end goal is not the manipulation of images but the manipulation of users into understanding image manipulation through Photoshop's own conventions. To understand it simply as photoshopping inevitably results in photoshops and the photoshopped.

Computers and networks are more than mere tools: They are like living things, themselves. Unlike a rake, a pen, or even a jackhammer, a digital technology is programmed. This means it comes with instructions not just for its use, but also for itself. And as such technologies come to characterize the future of the way we live and work, the people programming them take on an increasingly important role in shaping our world and how it works. After that, it's the digital technologies themselves that will be shaping our world, both with and without our explicit cooperation. ↗

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Quote 42: Rushkoff, 2010, loc.31

into how students, the school, and myself could use these "tools." And beyond these considerations of the instrumentality of software to the school, there were cultural shifts in the ways in which people thought about certain types of software. For example, we used Photoshop in almost all of my classes, and during my time of teaching these courses there was a more and more common reference in popular discourse to the name of the software being used as a verb, as in someone got "photoshopped." ↗

Quote 43: Knochel, 2011a, p.4

Photoshop's clear success not only as the software of choice to manipulate images, but also as the concept of manipulating images in itself can be understood as a type of agency that is at the very least independent and may even supersede the users' own collective agency. Whether it be speaking of Photoshop as an agent for democracy, a meme sub-genre or a class assignment it is obvious that the software has outgrown utilitarian notions. In fact it could be said that in these instances Photoshop the software has given way to photoshop the meme, which although still congruent to the software and its conventions now exhibits a set of entirely indepen-

19

In Real Life as opposed to that which occurs only online.

20

A non-profit that advocates computer science and programming literacy; <http://code.org/about>.

dent characteristics as a concept which permit it to occupy a prominent place online and its respective visual culture, where to photoshop no longer means only to use Photoshop. It is a similar situation to the third world memplex, explored above, where the original, arbitrarily defined abstraction of a third world became concrete visualizations that have extended and cemented it within internet culture. Both memes, photoshop and the third world, function and replicate regardless of the users' purposes; in Jenkins' case, even if his essay "Photoshop for Democ-

**entertainment and critical commentary. In my essay, "Photoshop for Democracy," I argued that such remixes might function as the people's editorial cartoons, offering vivid and memorable representations of complex issues which broaden the language through which we discuss politics.** Is this a legitimate description of what you've observed in terms of looking at memes as a form of political participation? Are there risks involved in the simplification of ideas required to produce an effective meme?

*Your argument about remixes as the people's editorial cartoons is absolutely pertinent to the ways memes function as forms of political participation. The main new element that has been added in recent years, with the labeling of many of these Photoshopped images as "memes", relates to our previous discussion about meme genres. The tendency to create memes in particular formats turns memes into powerful bridges*

*Quote 44: Jenkins, 2014b*

racy" (2004) intends to highlight the political agency that individuals enact through editorial manipulations, the fact that he groups the entire phenomena under a photoshop umbrella even when dealing with audio and video, file types not typically associated with Photoshop the software, reinforces notions that transcend mere utilitarianism.

**Call it Photoshop for democracy-where participatory culture becomes participatory government.**

*Quote 45: Jenkins, 2004, p.1*

Likewise, instances of Third World and First World memes cannot help but reinforce notions not only about the conclusive existence of a world divided in terms of first and third, but also about the determining visual characteristics that define each of them; and this happens regardless of each generator's interest in critiquing or ridiculing the roots or implications of such division. In this light, new levels of complexity begin to emerge within the construct of self-replicating cultural nuggets, otherwise known as memes. By recognizing software among other non-humans as actants within actor-networks that are continually, to use Latour's (1999) words, made to act, agency is not taken away from individuals necessarily, rather it is problematized through a point of view that flattens the entire process by acknowledging all actants involved and making each of them accountable for the resulting meme. This way, users that generate different instances of the third world success kid meme

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**third world success**

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First World Problems Blank Kid Original Original

**Third World Success**  
Part of a series on First World Problems. [View Related Entries]

Updated about a year ago by Brad.  
Added 2 years ago by Don.

Share this Entry 1,974 8+1 41 Like Know Your Meme on Facebook!

PROTIP: Press 'I' to view the image gallery, 'v' to view the video gallery, or 'r' to view a random entry.

Meme

Status: Confirmed  
Year: 2011  
Origin: Quickmeme

Tags: advice animal, commentary, third world, african baby

**About**

Third World Success is an advice animal image macro series featuring a photograph of a dancing tribal child with captions about overcoming hardships that are associated with life in underdeveloped countries. The series can be seen as a derivative of Success Kid and the anti-thesis of First World Problems.

Image available:  
<http://memegenerator.net/Third-World-Success>

In Third World Success, the image has been seen on Twitter<sup>[18]</sup> as early as

Clockwise from top left:  
Meme 8: Third World Success Kid.  
Periph. 5: Google image search, conducted on 4.15.14  
Periph. 6: Know Your Meme entry for Third World Success  
Periph. 7: Third World Success, Meme Generator  
Periph. 8: reddit Advice Animal search, conducted on 4.15.14

can be thought of not as individual actors but rather as part of an actor-network that may include a Google image search for third world success, a reddit advice animal search for the same term, as well as the third world success entry in know your meme<sup>21</sup>. Not to mention the actual software, like Meme Generator<sup>22</sup> for example, used to caption the image to turn it into an Image Macro<sup>23</sup>.

21 <http://knowyourmeme.com/>

22 <http://memegenerator.net/>

23 Image Macros are stock images meant to be captioned by users intending to make a joke or a humorous point.

Reassessing these standpoints, I suggest a different approach to defining memes. This suggestion is based on two rather simple principles: (a) looking at diffused units as incorporating several memetic dimensions—namely, several aspects that people may imitate; and (b) understanding memes not as single entities that propagate well, but as groups of content units with common characteristics. I will soon

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definition of Internet memes.

Going back to Dawkins's original idea—that memes are units of imitation [I find it useful](#)

Quote 46: Shifman, 2013, loc.429

It could be argued that Shifman's (2013) own definition of Internet Memes as a phenomenon of pluralities instead of singular instances also refers to an actor-network, even if not by name. However in her case, software remains passive and is mentioned only in terms of its functionality as an instrument at the service of users. In this case there is certainly no thought of software as an actant, in Latour's (2005) terms; a network being, in Knochel's (2011b) words; or the kind of living thing that Rushkoff (2010) speaks of. However, incorporating any of these considerations as part of an exploration into Internet Memes cannot occur in a vacuum; rather the very idea of recognizing software as an actant, a being or living thing raises questions that must be addressed through an ontological framework that is capable of handling existence and existents in a similar way that Actor-Network Theory handles social phenomena.

## Object Oriented Ontology

Much like ANT theorists propose to keep the social flat so that all actants, human and non-human alike, are revealed, Object Oriented Ontology, or OOO, advances a flat ontology as a way to examine and consider all existing objects beyond their functionality for humans. As a philosophical endeavor, OOO seeks to reveal what some have identified as the secret life of objects, which can be any thing; any thought; any concept; a DVD player; a roasted almond; an Irish wolfhound; a pop song; a joke; one's own particular notion of freedom; museums and museum visitors; software; digital

content; photographs and screen-grabs that visually quote journal articles, books and movies. All existing, intermingling and colliding with each other; experiencing existence on a flat state of being.

The curious penny-farthing in *Cycle of Dread*, a bike without a chain, channels our attention toward the alien objects against which we bump and rub in what Bogost calls the “chaining together” of “tiny universes” (25). Recalling Jane Bennett’s version of flat ontology, object-oriented methods in the humanities have the potential to draw “human attention sideways, away from an ontologically ranked Great Chain of Being and toward a great appreciation of the complex entanglements of humans and nonhumans” (111). In the case of *Cycle of Dread*, attention is drawn sideways not to revel in the infinitude of object being but for the sake of

Quote 47: O’Gorman, 2013, p.41

ics that objects are ontologically prior to their relations, relations that include their appearance for other objects.<sup>50</sup> When OOO says *object* it means any entity whatsoever: symphonies, grass, poems, wind, nebulae,

in

wind harps, plays, humans, spools of thread, porpoises. OOO is thus highly congruent with Shelley's insight in the *Defence of Poetry*. Since

it. The problem shared by first- and third-person descriptions is obvious: namely, both are *descriptions*. Against any ontology in which things are reducible to a listing of attributes, I hold that the being of things is never commensurate with descriptions of any sort. Objects, in a broad sense including trees, protons, animals, cinder blocks, nations, humans, and fictional characters, are never exhausted by any possible manifestation. Hence, objects must be granted a zero-person reality that can only be

*translated* into language. If objects are objects, they must "exist in some sort of vacuum-like state, since no relation fully

deploys them" (p. 81). Since the object cannot be fully described through sensory perception or social constructions, it must have its own existence, independent of these activities. "The objects in an event are somehow always elsewhere, in a site divorced from all relations" (p. 81). It is as if the object withdraws into a place which is always somewhere else. This site, this vacuum, is not physical but metaphysical. Thus: "To say that the world is filled with objects is to say that it is filled with countless tiny vacuums... What guerrilla metaphysics seeks is the vacuous actuality of things" (p. 82). So it is the character of "things" and their interaction that we are looking for; the things that exists for themselves, independently of human discourse. And this object is a hidden box full of surprises,

transcendent insight and subjective

Highlight

Add Note

Search

More

This is just a starting point, an ante: to proceed as a philosopher today demands the rejection of correlationism. To be a speculative realist, one must abandon the belief that human access sits at the center of being, organizing and regulating it like an ontological watchmaker. In both a figurative

of theories unified against a common adversary. Speculative Realists and their allies are combating what they call "correlationism," or the belief that all existence is reducible to the human experience of existence. Thus they claim, against theorists as varied as Immanuel Kant, Jacques Derrida, and Karl Marx, that there is a world outside of the mind, language, and economic forces. The exact nature of this world, however, is the source

Object Oriented Ontology (OOO)<sup>2</sup> posits that ontology is a mess<sup>3</sup> of objects; equally corporal and incorporeal,<sup>4</sup> artificial and natural. Forged concurrently to the explosion of Speculative Realism, a number of philosophers and academics have distanced themselves from the movement to focus on the ontological relations (and non-relations) between discrete objects. No single object is deemed ontologically inferior or superior, authentic or inauthentic; they must all be held accountable. Any object's actual relationship towards another has an equal validity to any other single relation; whether a

*Top to bottom and left to right:*

Quote 48: Morton, 2012, pp.205-206

Quote 49: Oral, 2014, p.121

Quote 50: Rømer, 2011, p.500

Quote 51: Bogost, 2012, loc.140

Quote 52: Phetteplace, 2010, p.555

Quote 53: Jackson, 2011, p.136

The idea of making objects accountable in ontological terms resonates loudly with ANT's own stated purpose of keeping the social flat so that all actants are revealed as part of actor-networks that are always in flux and making each other act. The same echoes can be recognized in the attention that OOO places on inter-object relationships, which can of course never be fully grasped and therefore must be speculated upon, and ANT's respective predilection for tracing networks and their fluid configurations through the actants involved. However, it is precisely because of its speculative realism that OOO stands to be valuable for my own investigation into the Language of Internet Memes; after all, the case presented above about the actor-network responsible for a given Third World Success meme is truly nothing more than a speculation; sure it is grounded on specific realities within internet culture but yet remains speculative. The same is true for any number of internet-based activities where identities, purposes and relationships cannot be known in full. Which reminds me of a short twitter conversation that I initiated with @remixthebook on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2013 at 11:32 PM.

Leon De la Rosa (@leon\_dlr)

hey @remixthebook, how do you feel about #SourceMaterial as an #Actant within an #ActorNetworkTheory paradigm?

11:32 PM - 23 Sep 2013

Reply to @remixthebook

remixthebook (@remixthebook · Sep 24) @ernestoleondlr yes, there must be some (creative) potential there. Are you writing about that now?

Leon De la Rosa (@leon\_dlr · Sep 24) @remixthebook yes, I'm trying to situate #Remix within #MaterialCulture and thought that #ANT could provide an interesting/fertile framework

*Periph. 9: Twitter conversation between @leon\_dlr (formerly @ernestoleondlr) c3 @remixthebook*

@remixthebook is a twitter account created and [presumably] maintained by Mark Amerika as an extension to his book *Remixthebook* (2011). It is meant to serve as a social media entity that continues to advance the book's theories, strategies and reflections into the role that remix plays in contemporary culture. Although at first, when the account was launched, it featured a variety of guest artists and scholars sharing control of the account on a semi- weekly basis, no new handlers have been announced for a few months leading me to suppose that the current person responsible for it is Amerika himself. It should be noted that Amerika does keep a personal Twitter account (@markamerika) that is quite active

on a daily basis however I still decided to direct the previously-noted conversation to the more impersonal

and somewhat abstract @remixthebook. My decision to contact the book instead of the author responded mainly to the fact that @markamerika does not follow [in Twitter terms] my account, @leon\_dlr, while @remixthebook does. Since the mechanics of Twitter favor contact between interconnected users (through notifications for example) the chances that Amerika would even read my question through @remixthebook, let alone respond to it, were significantly higher than if I had addressed his personal account.

Rightly so, every bit of these considerations can be tagged as nothing more than speculations regarding twitter accounts, the users behind them and the potential for all to interrelate in both meaningful and nonsensical ways; however, as speculations go these are firmly grounded on the particular conventions that emerge from social media as they shape a significant dimension of internet culture. I argue that this approach follows the pragmatic speculative realism that Bogost (2013, loc 4016) advocates and grounds on literary traditions like science fiction that he calls speculative fiction and magical realism. According to Bogost both literary traditions, despite being genres of fiction, are nonetheless able to correlate with the real through relevant and significant insights.

Beyond illustrating ideas on pragmatic speculative realism, @leon\_dlr and @remixthebook's brief interaction also constitutes a clear example where objects of every kind come together and become actants within an actor network that is flat enough to account for every one of them as they all interrelate and make each other act. My carbon-based as well as my Twitter-self; Mark Amerika the person; Remixthebook THE book, its Twitter counterpart; every tweet I directed to @remixthebook while reading Remixthebook, which eventually led to @remixthebook following me; the follow button that at some point each user had to click in order to be interconnected; Twitter's mechanics, notification and archiving policies; @remixthebook's latest reply, 231 days in the making; @internationale, the twitter account and Paul Caplan, its reputed handler; not to mention his App-Book Everyday Remix (2014).

Caplan (2014) argues that smartphones, with their rich app-centric interfaces [self-updating, location-sharing and always-already notifying] offer the ideal environment where a verifiable hopscotch of entities occupy a single, flat ontological plane and are perpetually remixed with and by each other even without the

Perhaps the theory I seek is a *pragmatic speculative realism*, not in the Jamesian sense but more softly: an applied speculative realism, an object-oriented engineering to ontology's physics. Such a method would embolden the actual philosophical treatment of actual material objects and their relations. If we take speculativism seriously, then why might philosophy not muster the same concrete grounding as, say, speculative fiction or magical realism?<sup>[69]</sup> The science fiction advocates speculating about possible worlds that are unlike our

Quote 54: Bogost, 2013, loc.4016

**Leon De la Rosa @leon\_dlr · Sep 23**  
hey @remixthebook, how do you feel about #SourceMaterial as an #Actant within an #ActorNetworkTheory paradigm?  
[Details](#) [Reply](#) [Delete](#) [Favorited](#) [More](#)

**remixthebook** @remixthebook [Following](#)  
@leon\_dlr you should follow/email @Internationale - ask for a copy of his Everyday Remix paper that plays with OOO and remixology...  
[Reply](#) [Retweet](#) [Favorited](#) [More](#)

**Leon De la Rosa @leon\_dlr · 23h**  
@remixthebook thanks for the lead!  
[Details](#) [Reply](#) [Delete](#) [Favorite](#) [More](#)

Periph. 10: @remixthebook's reply to @leon\_dlr, 231 days after initial contact

expressed engagement of the phone user. Thusly, objects not only become actants within a fluid actor-network but also become source material for the remix that emerges within our everyday where we, the users, are but another actant to be accounted for.

Caplan's everyday remix, where every piece of source material is at the same time an actant within actor-networks as well as objects that occupy a flat ontology and interrelate in verifiable, albeit speculative ways, is a powerful addition to the argument I am advancing about Internet Memes as the product of agencies independent from the users' own. It also introduces source material as much more than just samples of sound, images and text awaiting passively for the remixer to come. Instead it places source material as an active agent within the everyday, as if source material were everywhere; like the source material everywhere @leon\_dlr asked @remixthebook about on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2013.

others in the practice of app creation and use.

If I am simultaneously author and authored. If I am creator and created, one among many actants caught, ghosts in the machine, we cannot think this performance in correlationist terms, human-centric, Subject and objects. Rather there is something flat here. Hardware photo **sensors** and gyroscopes, software standards and algorithms, machinic and human text, screendraws and photographs, vectors and pixels, corporate and state databases, laws and cameralist practices. All jostle in a vibrant (re)mix of performing object actants. Authoring and being authored. Creating and being created.

The phone and the assemblage of nested apps, is, in Graham Harman's evocative image, the molten

*Quote 56: Caplan, 2014, Objects Section*

## Remix Theory

### Artist, Medium, Instrument

(The Nam June Paik Remix)

Accessing the **Source Material Everywhere**  
not as ideas or things  
but as intertwined agitations of force  
collectively composing the organism  
that makes this life possible

*Quote 55: Amerika,  
2011, loc.1942*

However by triangulating this notion with

@remixthebook's twitter profile where an assertion is made about "the mashup as a defining cultural activity in the digital age" (n.d.), then some specificities begin to emerge about the role that source material everywhere can play as a primordial soup

There is an evident caveat in defining Source Material Everywhere as essentially all that makes "this life possible"; casting a net so wide that it entangles ALL runs the risk of utter futility, it can be easily dismissed as defining no thing at all.



*Periph. 11: @remixthebook Twitter profile page. Captured on 5.5.14*

where remix flourishes. The mashup, as practiced by countless produsers, refers to the act of mashing together two distinct pieces of existing source material [i.e. two songs, two movies, two photographs] to generate a new instance of content to post, share and offer as potential source material for new mashups to occur. Not only do mashup practices suggest an additive process by formally infusing new layers of meaning to existing material, but they also imply a set of conditions where all content is perpetually available to be sampled and mashed together regardless of their original materiality; a set of conditions that can be recognized as post-material.

Even if post-material ethics (Ledhovirta, 2010) and the potential for innovation (Sweeney, 2010) fail to speak directly about source material, or its purported omnipresence, they provide remix, as both a theory and philosophy, with dimensions that ground it on the practice of sharing, appropriating and rewriting what was previously-already<sup>24</sup> written. However, if source material is to be understood as an actant capable of engaging both humans and non-humans then remixers need to be reinterpreted themselves as sharing not just content to be remixed but also a confluence of agencies and autonomies including their own.

as possession, exclusivity and hierarchy will be increasingly displaced by a new ethic (Himanen, 2001; Leadbetter, 2008; Levy, 1984; Tapscott and Williams, 2006). This ‘post-material’ ethic consists of such enlightened values as freedom of access, sharing to the benefit of others, using technology to improve the world, creativity as an end in itself and valuing people based on their mental abilities rather than on their station or material possessions. According to the most extreme view, traditional notions of economic behaviour and consumption are increasingly rendered obsolete. A famous document

*Quote 58: Ledhovirta, 2010, p.884*

television<sup>25</sup>. With millions consuming computer screens via YouTube, Hulu, and many pirate sites, cell phone displays, public screens in airports, bars and coffee shops in addition to the traditional living room console, the opportunities for redefining and remixing visuals for news and video art continue to be in flux. And that means innovation continues.

22.29 x 28.94 in

*Quote 57: Sweeney, 2010, p.2*

<sup>24</sup> The hyphenated previously-already is intended to reference the frank impossibility of identifying source material without it also referencing, or remixing, previous source material already in existence. In other words, in a world of source material everywhere, there is no original source material.

Ben's writing had a certain style. Were it music, we'd call it sampling. Were it painting, it would be called collage. Were it digital, we'd call it remix. Every paragraph was constructed through quotes. The essay might be about Hemingway or Proust. But he built the argument by clipping quotes from the authors he was discussing. Their words made his argument.

7.00 x 9.75 in

## Writing Beyond Words

Words, obviously, are not the only form of expression that can be remixed in Ben's way. If we can quote text from Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in an essay, we can quote a section from Sam Wood's film of Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in a film. Or if we can quote lyrics from a Bob Dylan song in a piece about Vietnam, we can quote a recording of Bob Dylan singing those lyrics in a video about that war. The act is the same; only the source is different. And the measures of fairness could also be the same: Is it really just a quote? Is it properly attributed? And so on.

7.00 x 9.75 in

Quote 59: Lessig, 2008, pp.51 & 55

lulated upon as it converges and interjects its own agency into both process and product.

references to anthropological and other examinations of the impact of digital technologies upon language and text (Jones et al., 2011; Lange, 2007, 2009), and there are also obvious domains of visual materiality<sup>57</sup> For example, Miller (2000) used Alfred Gell's theory of art to illustrate how websites, like artworks, are systematically designed in order to seduce and entrap passing internet surfers, while repelling those they have no reason to attract. Similarly, Horst (2009) illustrates how online profiles on social network sites are often aesthetically integrate digital and analogical

The laws of (strange) attraction	ornia. In general, of visual as well
their relation to natural selection	
and	
the mutation of various sampled bits	
that are cut/selected from the open field of action	
<b>(Source Material Everywhere)</b>	
relate to the evolving forms of electronic literature as well	
as in	
"Is the contemporary writer also a postproduction medium?"	

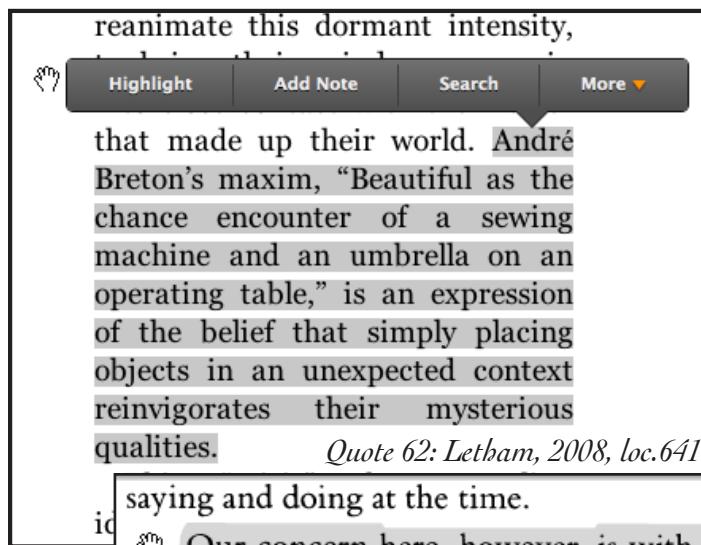
Quote 60: Horst & Miller, 2012, p.106

Quote 61: Amerika, 2011, loc.2954

Remix then is much more than the act of reconstituting what is into what wasn't; rather it is a relationship where remixer, source material and every intermediary actant [software like Photoshop optimizing users to photoshop, words written on the page and read and re-written and re-writing Ben's arguments (Lessing, 2008); digital interfaces like web sites engaging a chosen few (Horst and Miller, 2012); books; search algorithms, the Dewey decimal system, hardware, the library building] enact "the laws of (strange) attraction" (Amerika, 2011, loc.2954). It is an actor-network, where objects interrelate and make each other act. It is a flat ontology where source material speculates and is specu-

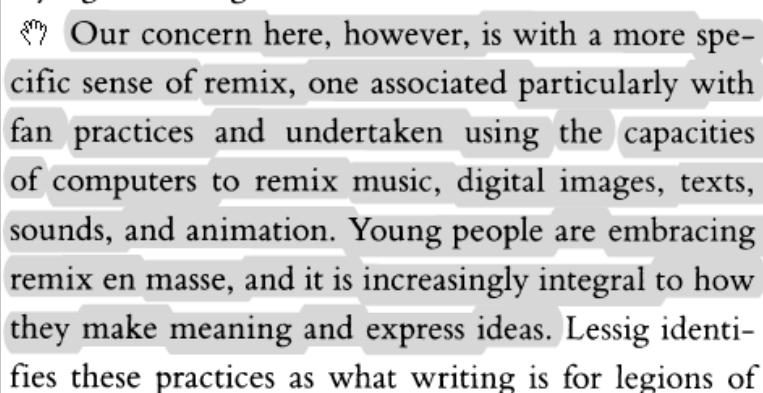
Remix is essential for the life cycle of an internet meme not only in terms of the new iterations that emerge from each but also in terms of the beautiful chance encounters staged within (Lethem, 2008). Actants as disparate as a decade, a TV Character, a movie, the VHS videocassette containing it, the tape that must be rewound to watch, the spectator whose movie night was ruined by the negligence of the previous customer are all among some of the entities that can interrelate. And that's saying nothing about the one user that captioned this particular instance of 1990's Problems (Anonymous, n.d.); all mediating software; the actor James Van Der Beek; the show Dawson's Creek; the scene, director, editor, script and screen writer that called for and resulted in Dawson's particular brand of weeping; all working in concert to elicit a particular "meaning and express ideas" (Knobel and Lankshear, 2008, p.23).

reanimate this dormant intensity,

A screenshot of a digital document interface. At the top, there are four buttons: 'Highlight' (with a small icon), 'Add Note', 'Search', and 'More'. Below these buttons, a block of text is displayed. The text discusses André Breton's maxim and its relation to remixing. A blue callout bubble points from the word 'operating' in the text to the 'Highlight' button above. The text ends with a citation: 'Quote 62: Letham, 2008, loc.641'.

that made up their world. André Breton's maxim, "Beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table," is an expression of the belief that simply placing objects in an unexpected context reinvigorates their mysterious qualities. *Quote 62: Letham, 2008, loc.641*

saying and doing at the time.

A screenshot of a digital document interface. A blue callout bubble points from the word 'concern' in the text to the 'Highlight' button above. The text discusses the specific sense of remix associated with fan practices and undertaken using computer capacities. It ends with a citation: 'Quote 63: Knobel & Lankshear, 2008, p.23'

Our concern here, however, is with a more specific sense of remix, one associated particularly with fan practices and undertaken using the capacities of computers to remix music, digital images, texts, sounds, and animation. Young people are embracing remix en masse, and it is increasingly integral to how they make meaning and express ideas. Lessig identifies these practices as what writing is for legions of

*Quote 63: Knobel & Lankshear, 2008, p.23* ing interrogated as the result of actor-networks merging actants that interrelate within a flat ontology where every entity, everywhere can be remixed as source material, source material everywhere. Accordingly, by scattering agency around to include both human and non-human agents, I contend that the anonymity and communal values so representative of online forums like 4Chan are brought to the foreground and honored as some of the core conventions that shape Internet Memes (Murray Husted, 2012).

Memes produced by the forum population are socially authored and distributed anonymously. Seeing their memes used for profit by outside interests has upset many members of the forum population. I took considerations in



*Meme 9: 1990's Problems,*

Considering

Internet Memes not only in relation to content displaying similar characteristics and well beyond any sense of users generating them autonomously, reveals each example of memetic content as an object in itself capable of be-

*Quote 64: Murray Husted, 2012, p.55*

The common ground occupied by these theoretical approaches [Memetics, Actor-Network Theory, Object-Oriented Ontology and Remix Theory] will provide this exploration with an Arts-Based scalpel to dissect Internet Memes through the conventions of their language. Each meme instance will be understood as an object the result of actor-networks, where actants include internet culture, the values and users that inform it, the software they use and the source material that uses them. However, if this medium-centric exploration is to be identified as the type of ABER outlined before then a pedagogical dimension must be considered and addressed.

As previously discussed, my own exploration into The Language of Internet Memes was conducted through two distinct phases. Accordingly, each responded to a particular type of educational concern. Regardless of the defining characteristics that each research stage and its respective educational dimensions exhibit, the exploration as a whole must still contend with one final set of critical conventions that shape Internet Memes both as content and phenomenon: a stated resistance to perceived outsiders and a purported unwillingness to transcend the realm of insider jokes (Decker-Maurer, 2012). By identifying and furthering the language of Internet Memes as a medium capable of meaningfully engaging educational experiences and with the ex-

plicit wish to foster pedagogic and creative practices, the present ABER not only disregards much of the spirit of memes and online culture but quite frankly it appears to contradict it.

*Quote 66: Decker-Maurer, 2012, pp.18e319*

*Quote 65: Decker-Maurer, 2012,  
pp.18e319*

Furthering this perception is the fact that in the digital wild, meme literacy emerges fairly organically through user participation and in forums and image boards like 4Chan and Reddit where community members craft a collaborative lexicon and ad-hoc identity (Murray Husted, 2012). Conversely, the present ABER promotes and explores meme literacy through case-studies and workshops, artificial situations with objectives that may seem to stifle the potential outcomes in terms of the digital content generated; which although resembling Internet Memes in form, can at most be considered class assignments, faux meme instances, as they have not undergone the full cycle of a true internet meme.

commentary sites. Members of the forums share a common visual vocabulary and technological literacy. After communication builds the shared vocabulary and the groups begin to accumulate a shared identity, they begin to produce cultural objects solely for the consumption of the group. In this new material, more self-reflexive or meta works emerge with vocabulary and inside jokes particular to the group knowledge of the group of origin. Sarah Thornton describes this behavior and the resulting meme production as "subcultural

As an arts-based educational researcher I'm not only obligated to address these conflicts in interests, objectives and outcomes, but am also interested in exploring the potential implications within them. Glitch Studies, with its focus on employing media and technology beyond intended uses, offers an ideal theoretical framework to do that.

## Glitch Studies

Menkman (2009/2010) spends much of her Glitch Studies Manifesto denouncing technical improvement as a myth that has confounded technological advances with notions of necessary linearity that conveniently obfuscate the political, economic and social protocols that shape each innovation (p.2). Although speaking out on the hidden agendas and unattended consequences of technology is not particular to Glitch Studies [media, gender and race scholars, among others, are just as likely to address these issues], the strategies of the glitch certainly are (p.8).

the future the □ □ □ consumer will pay  
 less for a device that can do more. The  
 user has to realize that improving is nothing more  
 than a proprietary protocol, a deluded  
 consumer myth about progression towards a holy grail

Quote 67: Merkman, 2009/2010, pp 2 (top) & 8 (bottom)

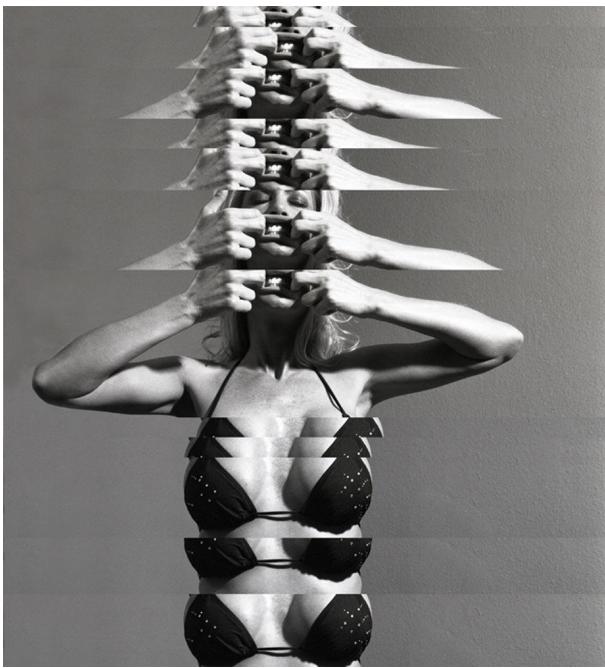
Celebrate  
 the critical trans-media  
 aesthetics of glitch artifacts

I use glitches to assess the inherent politics of any kind of medium by bringing it into a state of hypertrophy.

Glitch Studies celebrate the glitch, the occasion of malfunction, as a welcomed agent of insight and a novel avenue of investigation; “a small rebellion” (Rogers, 2009, p.15) that if properly steered can illuminate ways in to the innards of media and technology. Generally speaking, this celebration takes the form of arresting audio and visual pieces of content that reevaluate digital and electronic errors and offer them up as meaningful aesthetic experiences. Melanie Willhite’s series *To Adrian Rodriguez with Love* (2011) for example evokes glitch aesthetics to reassess the theft and subsequent recov-

Well usually a glitch comes to be outside of  
 the user's intentions. In a universe of broken  
 symmetries, a small rebellion of this type earns  
 my respect. I can read the visual noise, taste  
 the digital flavor, smell the electronic  
 smells, touch the physical texture of the  
 glitches with my eyes, and

Quote 68: Rogers, 2009, p.15)

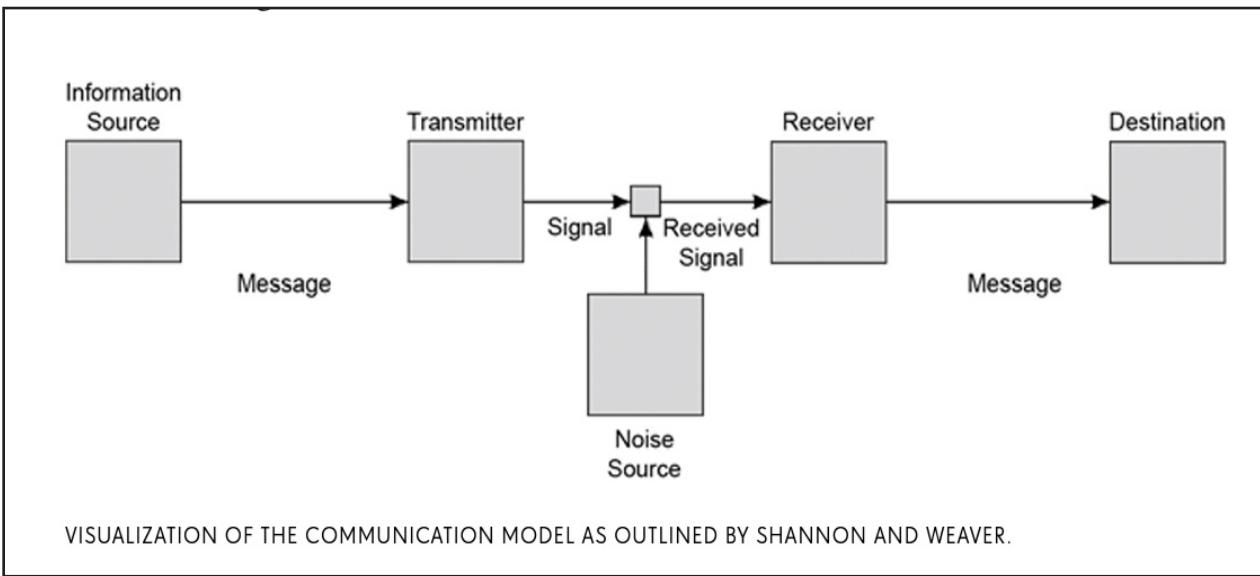


*Periph. 12: I will show you mine if you show me mine, Willhilde, M. 2011*

ery of a hard drive whose contents had been corrupted seemingly beyond repair. Beyond the poetics of the glitch it is Glitch Studies' emphasis on noise, and the roles noise can play as part of communication processes that makes this particular framework relevant for this literature review.

Noise as epitomized in Shannon and Weaver's 1948 communication model (Menkman, 2011), can be understood as emanating from any number of entities either external, internal and/or inherent to the particular channel of communication being employed (Kelly, 2009). This way, it is understood that noise not only interferes with the signal but it also introduces a significant amount of ambiguity and entropy to an otherwise theoretically pure message.

However, despite noise's explicit detriment to the act of communicating; it nonetheless delivers information that at times shapes a given context and provides necessary information for the desired communication to occur through the given channel / medium of choice (Taylor, 1984).



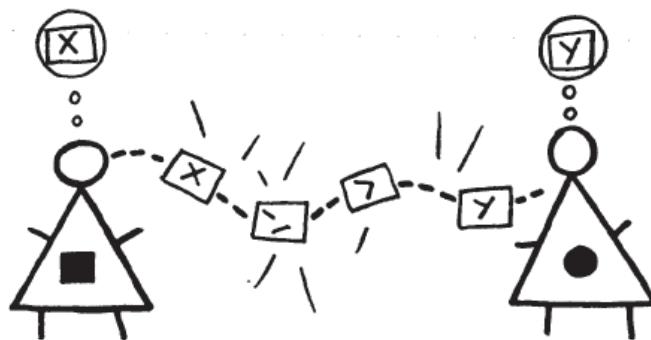
*Quote 69: Merkman, 2011, p.13 (top)*

*Quote 70: Kelly, 2009, p.71 bottom)*

Thus in information theory noise is understood as anything extraneous to the message: this includes everything from pauses in dialogue (for example, "umms" and "errs"); to a smudged newspaper text; to even the interesting people at table nine who make your current conversation hard to follow.

Noise enters the channel of communication between the source and the receiver. In the case of music playback there are numerous

general diminished. The continuous noise stemming from medium limitations after a time becomes part of the image and is no longer perceived as



noise. (The newspaper, for instance, reaches our hands with all its noise, such as the drama of the headlines and photography, the manner of writing, the typography and layout; however, these characteristics become accepted as an implicit part of the message).

*Quote 71: Taylor, 1984, pp. 275 & 276*

In fact, noise, as conceptualized through information theory and reevaluated through the lens of Glitch Studies, is much more than mere interference; becoming in many cases the message itself or even the common denominator required for signals to emerge (Burns and Meaney, 2011).

Ward (2011) identifies stock images, bought and sold for commercial purposes, as signals that must set themselves apart through ambi-

act of self destruction<sup>6</sup>?

<sup>5</sup>But isn't NOISE unity? The search for signal is the search to set oneself, apart. Signal is hierarchy<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup>I think part of the project in glitch curation is

*Quote 72: Burns & Meaney, 2011, p.74*

guity instead of clarity. Interjecting Internet Memes in general, and Image Macro Characters in particular, within a similar noise-and-signal process is but a short remixological leap away.

material that takes the place of more explicit, message-oriented elements. Operating within a culture of noise, filler content opposes the traditional goal of generating a clear and specific message. Rather, *the goal of filler content is to present an ambiguous message to consumers*.

Consider the image (Figure 5.2) used in a certain marketing design. Compared with Figure 5.1, this design makes little attempt to specify the

*Quote 73: Ward, 2011, p.103*

On the contrary, stock images must be designed to anticipate many diverse needs of cultural intermediaries—design firms, advertising agencies, and corporate marketing teams—who will ultimately purchase the majority of these images.<sup>9</sup> To achieve these goals, every commercial stock image is designed to be multi-ended, in order to offer up a field

*Quote 74: Ward, 2011, p.101. Original (top) and remixed (bottom)*

#### IMAGE MACRO

On the contrary, CHARACTERS must be designed to anticipate many diverse needs of cultural intermediaries—4chan members, Reddit editors Facebook users, Know Your Meme administrators—who will ultimately remix the majority of these images.<sup>9</sup> To achieve these goals, every commercial stock image is designed to be multi-ended, in order to offer up a field

Beyond recognizing Internet Memes as exemplary elements within a noise culture, where meme instances remain indeterminate enough to be the message that each Actor-Network [composed of users, source material, mediating software, and relevant internet culture expressions] aims to communicate, Glitch Studies also packs enough conjectural muscle to vindicate the examination of Internet Memes as the noise that unifies our everyday [online] life. Since online visual culture is at the very least partly dominated by the noise of Image Macros like the ones discussed before, which thrive on and strengthen illusions about constructs like the third world and its first counterpart, then one way to investigate and fragment these notions is to promote the production of akin content that can challenge and generate opposition (Gournellos, 2011).

idea or even made to form a consensus that is not inherently fractured and always explosively unstable.”<sup>32</sup> If we want to locate and encourage the production and use of the kinds of noise that fragment that illusion of consensus, aggravate the instability, and generate opposition, then we have no farther to look than our everyday lives. It is not the generation and reification of the public sphere as an arena of compromise and communication that creates fissures in the fabric of society.

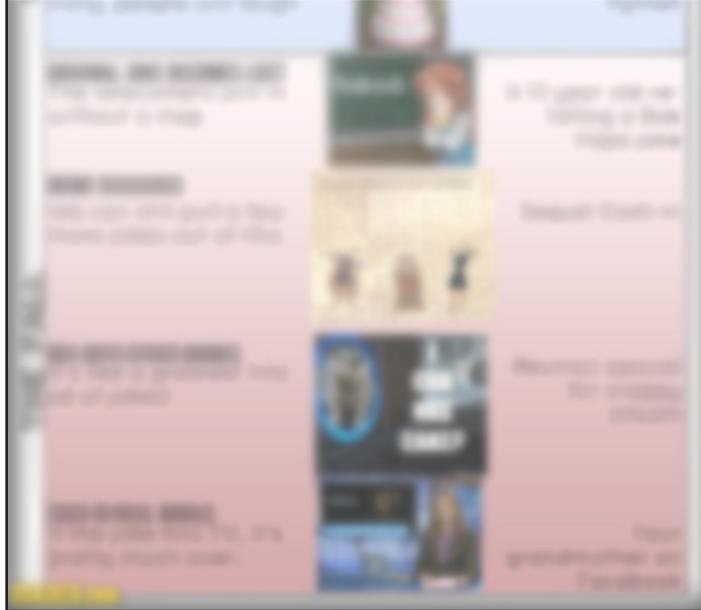
*Quote 75: Gournellos, 2011, p.166*

Yet, as previously discussed any output directly generated through the present ABER’s meme literacy workshops and class assignments runs, by default, counter to

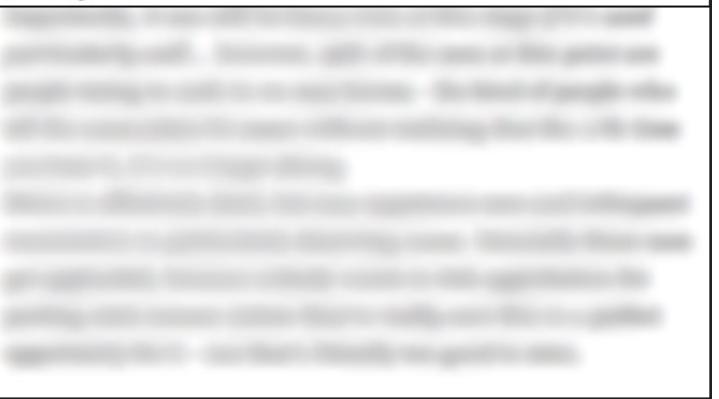
the natural cycles that Internet Memes are understood to follow (Gentleman, 2011 and Shaper, 2009).

By virtually omitting any discussion of literacy, either the acquisition or facilitation of it, the dominant meme narrative seems to assume that users become generators only through exposure and the familiarization that it fosters on a daily basis. Additionally, the very expression of this literacy process comes into being at the explicit detriment of the meme itself; in other words, when outsiders get acquainted enough to repurpose a given meme, the meme is assumed overexposed and dead. Literacy beyond the originating group, it seems, is a meme killer.

**Image available:**  
[http://www.cracked.com/article\\_19240\\_the-rise-fall-internet-meme-5Bchart5D.html](http://www.cracked.com/article_19240_the-rise-fall-internet-meme-5Bchart5D.html)



**Image available:**  
<http://philosophly.blogspot.mx/2009/01/lifecycle-of-meme.html>



Interestingly, the mere suggestion that outreach should shorten the life span of Internet Memes places them directly counter traditional meme models. As understood by Dawkins (2006) and Blackmore (1999), memes are entities whose only purpose is to replicate and propagate themselves regardless of group affiliations, ethical implications or affective dimensions.

16:10

Quote 76: Blackmore, 2009, p.7

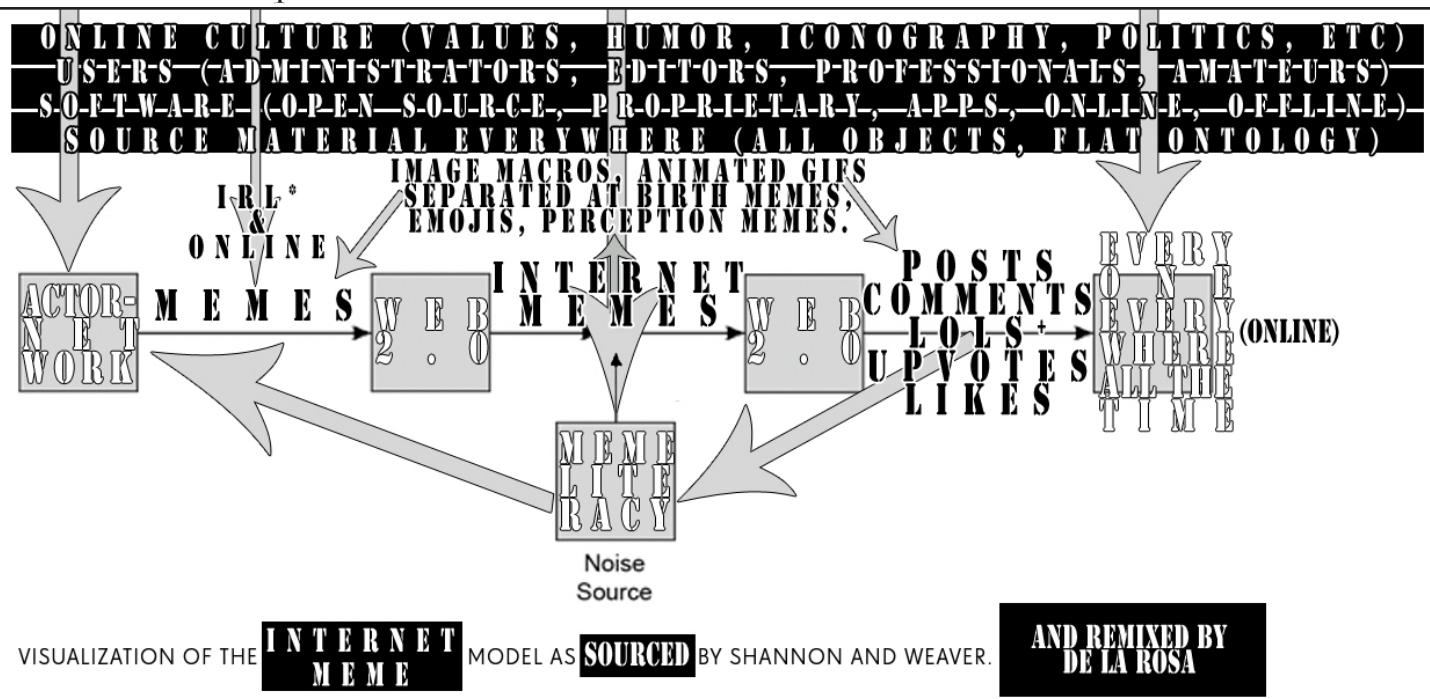
THE MEME MACHINE

successful memes are the ones that get copied and spread, while unsuccessful ones do not. This is

Internet Memes, on the other hand, relate in a completely different way to the prospect of transcending their immediate cultural niche. In their case, being engaged meaningfully by outsiders supposes the potential for ambiguity and entropy: ambiguity in terms of the motives, originality and overall value within each meme instance; entropy with regards to the rapid decline of the once considered pristine insider joke. Literacy, then, is the interference within the signal of the meme, the literacy it purportedly wants to avoid so as to remain narrow enough to avoid unwanted receivers; the literacy it is dependent on for the context, familiarity and skills it requires in order to be a successful meme. Meme literacy, then, understood as the set of skills required to read and write Internet Memes, is noise.

Quote 78: Dawkins, 2006, p.200

foresight. They are unconscious, blind, replicators. The fact that they replicate, together with certain further conditions means, willy nilly, that they will tend towards the evolution of qualities which, in the special sense of this book, can be called selfish. A simple replicator, whether



Quote 77: Menkman, 2011, p.13 remixed by De la Rosa, 2014

By discussing meme literacy as noise I, the arts-based educational researcher, recognize that I'm interjecting unrequited signals within the traditional Internet Meme model, but signals that are nonetheless present and indispensable otherwise. Furthermore, in keeping with the spirit of glitch studies, the present investigation embraces the noise as a tool of insight that can interrogate Internet Memes beyond stated purposes and reveal covert agendas and unintended consequences.

Meme literacy then will be engaged as noise in order to account for the conflict that emerges from researching Internet Memes from an educational angle. At the same time, it will also serve the purpose of raising significant questions about the pathways conventionally used to disperse the skills necessary to engage Internet Memes in an active and contextually meaningful way.

The following two chapters detail the reasoning, objectives and outcomes of two distinct research phases. The first one centers on the work of the researcher as a doctoral student who responds to class readings and assignments through the language of Internet Memes. The second phase is shaped by a workshop designed and facilitated to promote meme literacy as part of an arts educational experience. As a nod to the role that social media play in the propagation of Internet Memes, and as a means to look into some of their formal conventions, both chapters are redacted and designed as a series of tweets with each sentence being up to 140 characters long except when an image or a hyperlink is attached as a quoted source or a visual reference, which limits the sentence to 118 and a 116 characters respectively. On occasion sentences may include both a hyperlink and an image meaning that the character limit is reduced to 94. Hash tags, the # symbol immediately followed by a word or a phrase without spaces, are used as an organizing agent threading and linking sentences into paragraph-like structures and identifying the sentences' key concepts.

# **Chapter 2**

## **The Research [Phase 1: Researcher as Learner]**

## Ch. 2 On The Language Of #InternetMemes, an Arts-Based Educational Research [#ABER] | The Research | #Phase1: Researcher as Learner

This chapter focuses on #Phase1 of my research on the language of #InternetMemes, as a nod to social media, it is redacted through #tweets.

- Like chapter 1, the lit review, all references appear as visual content, attached to corresponding #tweets to be read as source material.
- Like #tweets, sentences are 140 characters long except when images or hyperlinks are attached, which mean a 118 & 116 limit respectively.
- On occasion, sentences include both an image & a hyperlink, these are limited to 94 characters just like #tweets would.
- To conserve characters, as #tweets demand, figures are used for all numbers even below 10 & ordinals, likewise ampersands replace “and.”
- Along with character limits #tweets are also noted for #hashtags and their promises to become trending topics across the twitterverse.
  - Although #hashtags and their role within Twitter and blogs will be detailed below, this chapter employs them as an #OrganizationalAgent.
    - An #OrganizationalAgent that identifies keywords within sentences and #threads them together in structures akin to paragraphs.
      - #Threads forged top to bottom & sliding to the middle as the left indents of bullet points [replies when tweeted] increase.
      - In #threads like this one, for example, keywords were identified and then engaged further in subsequent bullet points.
    - Once #threads reach a conclusion the next bullet point will slide back to the left & pick up #hashtags left unsettled on previous #tweets.
  - By crafting an entire chapter through the conventions of #tweets I hope to channel #OnlineSocialNetworks & their importance for memes.
  - Although #OnlineSocialNetworks like <http://www.reddit.com/> & <http://www.4chan.org/> are noted as the original breeding grounds for memes.
  - More inclusive #OnlineSocialNetworks like #Twitter & Tumblr play significant roles in extending the meme phenomenon beyond cultural niches.
  - As the very notion of an #ABER on memes already suggests a breach in meme insularity the 2<sup>nd</sup> type of #OnlineSocialNetworks seemed apropos.
    - Of these, #Twitter is the one whose restrictions & conventions seemed the most intriguing as they shape messages both in form & content.
    - Furthermore #Twitter's brevity & impermanence also evoke & reinforce #Internet-Memes' succinct & transitory nature.

In traditional academic prose, the thread of tweets starting with “Like chapter 1...” and ending with “... #InternetMemes’ succinct & transitory nature,” could read this way:

Much like chapter 1, the visual literature review, all references appear as screen grabs and digital photographs attached to the tweets that are referencing them. Each sentence adheres to Twitter conventions like the 140 character limit except when images or hyperlinks are attached, which limit the sentences to 118 and 116 characters respectively. On occasion, sentences referenced both an image and a hyperlink, these are limited to 94 characters just like tweets would. To conserve characters, as tweets demand, figures are used for all numbers even for digits below 10 and for ordinals like first and third. Likewise, ampersands are used whenever a conjunction is required.

Along with character limitations Twitter is also noted for hashtags and their potential as trending topics across the twitterverse. Although hashtags and their mechanics within Twitter and blogs will be detailed in detail later, this chapter employs them as an organizational agent of sorts. Not only are hashtags used to identify keywords within sentences but they also thread them together in structures akin to paragraphs. These threads use bullet points to introduce and scrutinize ideas with each bullet-point level zeroing in on the significance of these notions. Once a thread of tweets reaches a perceived conclusion the next bullet point will slide back to the left and pick up on previous hashtags that might have been left unsettled.

By writing an entire chapter through the conventions of Twitter I hope to channel social networks and highlight their importance for the lifespan of Internet Memes. Although online forums and image boards like *reddit* [<http://www.reddit.com/>] and *4Chan* [<http://www.4chan.org/>] are noted as the original breeding grounds for memes more inclusive networks like *Twitter* and *Tumblr* play significant roles in extending the meme phenomenon beyond cultural niches. Since the very notion of an arts-based exploration into Internet Memes already suggests a breach in meme insularity the second type of social networks, the less insular ones, seemed appropriate to be represented, both formally and conceptually. Furthermore, since Twitter’s conventions are perhaps the most immediately recognizable of these all-inclusive networks, its restrictions seemed the most intriguing as an instrument to shape two entire chapters both in form and content. Finally, Twitter’s brevity and impermanence also echo, evoke and reinforce some of the ways in which Internet Memes communicate succinct and transitory messages and opinions.

#Phase1 of my arts-based probe into the Language of #InternetMemes focused on my own academic experience, shaped by several #premises:

- 1. As a doctoral student in Arts and Visual Culture Education [AVCE], creative & visual responses to class content are two basic #premises.
- 2. As a self-declared user/generator of audiovisual content, key #premises of my work emerge from probing digital media & their conventions.
- 3. As a facilitator of art classes on digital media & their #premises; I cringe at the idea of grading traditionally written essays.
- 4. As a researcher interested in amateur culture, the practice & frameworks of #remix & #memetics are frequent #premises of my explorations.
- 5. As an international student in the US, away from native city & country, my day-to-day was contingent on social media & their #premises.
- Thusly, #phase1 of the present #ABER was thoroughly informed by these converging #premises as I began to conceive an ad-hoc #ObjectOfStudy.
  - From premise 1 [LINK] I took advantage of the opportunity to engage visually with a given #ObjectOfStudy.
  - From premise 2 [LINK] I drew heavily on my own experience interrogating a specific medium as an #ObjectOfStudy.
  - Premise 3 [LINK] lead to conceiving alternative ways of tackling a complex #ObjectOfStudy beyond the traditional essay.
  - My taste for #remix & #memetics, which informs premise 4 [LINK], found in online visual culture an apropos #ObjectOfStudy.
  - Due to premise 5 [LINK] social media and the conventions that shape them informed my approach to every #ObjectOfStudy.
- Consequently, #Phase1 tapped into #InternetMemes & some of their most popular forms as a chance to elaborate on this confluence of ideas.
  - #InternetMemes constitute a #visual language that has become the emblem of visual culture online.

I'm not referring to lolspeak or leetspeak.

What I call the language of memes is not Internet slang, but a new visual way that people succinctly communicate emotions and opinions. Cheezburger CEO Ben Huh calls it

- Although #InternetMemes are too varied to speak of a single medium, formal & conceptual commonalities do exist.

applied the term ‘meme’ to a large contingent of what they produce. In the increasingly prevalent

pop usage, a meme is a piece of mediated discourse that, according to the popular meme

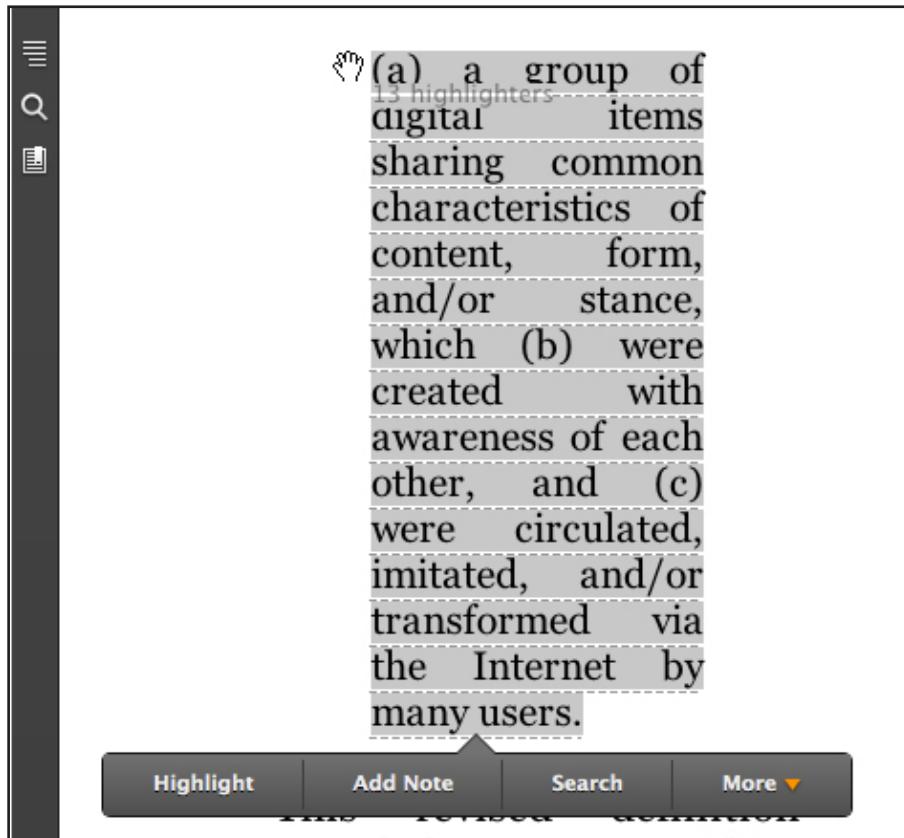
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reference site Know Your Meme, is “passed from person to person, changing and evolving along the way” (Huh, 2011, March 28). Memes, as networks of mediated cultural participation use them, are multimodal artifacts, where image and text are integrated to tell a joke, make an observation, or advance an argument:

*Quote 80: Milner, 2012, pp. 10-11*

- Some of their identifying characteristics, make it possible to think of #InternetMemes in #modular terms.
- Whole #sets of #Internet-Memes can be crafted exploiting their #modular qualities in order to dissect and disseminate complex ideas.
- Tackling an #ObjectOfStudy through #modular #sets of #InternetMemes can tap into creative expressions otherwise inactive in written essays.
- #Modular #sets of #InternetMemes can illuminate an #ObjectOfStudy through imaginative & meaningful insights, unlikely for written essays.
- #Modular #sets of #InternetMemes can add a sense of familiarity, levity and accessibility to even the most solemn #ObjectOfStudy.



*Quote 81: Shifman, 2014, loc. 456*

- Through their symbiotic kinship with #remix, #InternetMemes can expound on the intricacies of #ParticipatoryCulture.

Memes are an excellent outlet for those engaged in participatory culture. They regularly involve use of modern digital media and utilize digital literacy skills. Often built from existing templates – and then added to, remixed, intertextualized, and layered – these creations, spinoffs, and remixes are excellent ways for participants to practice creativity using what Jenkins et al., (2006) calls “scaffolding” (p. 31) which is a way that burgeoning makers can learn to be creative by building on an already-existing work. Some of the most popular sites hosting memes make creating them simple by providing easy-to-use “meme generators.” A few clicks, a witty caption, and a creator is ready to publish.

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Quote 82: Decker-Maurer, 2012, p.15

- Through their emblematic role within #ParticipatoryCulture, #InternetMemes can advance arguments on & about memetics.
- As a converging point for #ParticipatoryCulture, memetics & #remix #InternetMemes probe & sample contemporary culture as #Source-Material.

If you are going to change Dawkins' original formulation so dramatically, what is the continued use value of the concept?

But there is also a deeper rationale for using this term. I think that internet users are on to something. There is a fundamental compatibility between the term “meme”, as Dawkins formulated it, and the way contemporary participatory culture works. I describe this compatibility as incorporating three dimensions.

First, memes can be described as cultural information that passes along from person to person, yet gradually scales into a shared social phenomenon. This attribute is highly congruent with the workings of contemporary participatory culture. Platforms such as

Second, memes reproduce by various means of repackaging or imitation: people become aware of memes, process them, and then “repackage” them in order to pass them along to others. While repackaging is not absolutely necessary on the internet (people can spread content as is), a quick look around reveals that people do choose to

Finally, memes diffuse through competition and selection. While processes of cultural selection are ancient, digital media allow us to trace the spread and evolution of memes in unprecedented ways. Moreover, meta-information about processes of competition

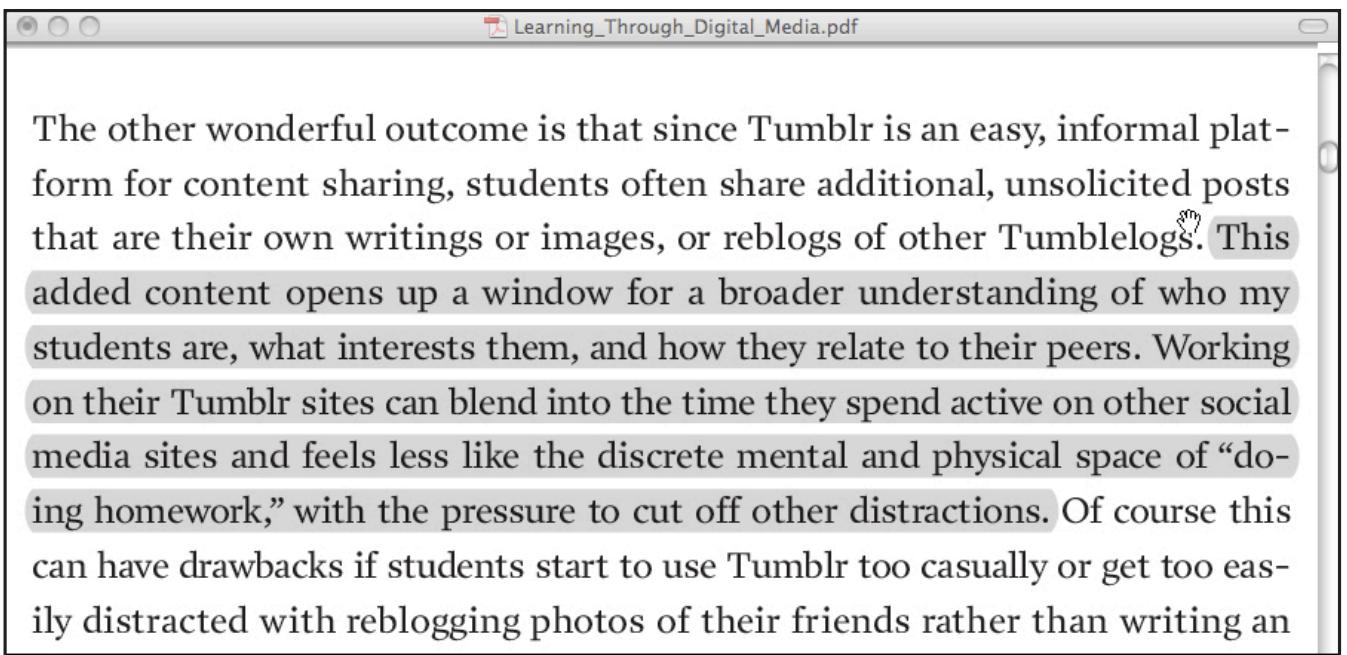
Quote 83: Jenkins, 2014a,

- As #SocialMedia's flagship commodity, #InternetMemes may provide a chance to merge Web 2.0 practices within classes.

theorists have, for the most part, built on Aunger's (2002) description of electronic memes, appropriating the term to describe content that goes "viral" through social media. The "media meme" or "internet meme" (often shortened to just "meme," as I will do in this article) has become a way to describe content that takes on distributional characteristics and reach that appear to an observer as if it has a life-force of its own. Such content seems to jump exponentially from one site of hosted information to numerous others, like a cold virus jumps from one human body to numerous other bodies. In media studies, this is the basic concept of viral distribution of information (aka "going viral"), involving an exponential

*Quote 84: Kine, 2013, p.555*

- Incorporating #InternetMemes can expand lesson plans by tugging on students' familiarity with #SocialMedia.



The other wonderful outcome is that since Tumblr is an easy, informal platform for content sharing, students often share additional, unsolicited posts that are their own writings or images, or reblogs of other Tumblelogs. This added content opens up a window for a broader understanding of who my students are, what interests them, and how they relate to their peers. Working on their Tumblr sites can blend into the time they spend active on other social media sites and feels less like the discrete mental and physical space of "doing homework," with the pressure to cut off other distractions. Of course this can have drawbacks if students start to use Tumblr too casually or get too easily distracted with reblogging photos of their friends rather than writing an

*Quote 85: Valdez Young, 2012, p.15*

All these considerations led me to employ #InternetMemes, what I now identify as the #LanguageOfInternetMemes during #Phase1 of this #ABER.

- For this purpose #LanguageOfInternetMemes is understood as #DigitalContent that is #visual, #modular & capable of expressing opinions.
- It is #DigitalContent that travels lightly across #SocialMedia; it can be shared easily and can propagate quickly.

- It is #DigitalContent that thrives on #remix while encouraging it as an essential expression of #ParticipatoryCulture.
- It is #DigitalContent that not only samples general culture as #SourceMaterial but also offers itself up as #SourceMaterial of its own.

During #Phase1 I, researcher & student, employed the #LanguageOfInternetMemes to craft #responses to class readings & assignments.

- Out of many #responses that varied in quality & form just 3 will be noted here: #Art-CritAndGIFs, #LiteracyOfTheGlitch & #MemesNotJustGags.
- Subjectively speaking these three #responses were the most successful in exploring the #LanguageOfInternetMemes as form and content.
- To explore the #LanguageOfInternetMemes, these three #responses adopted two popular types of #InternetMemes: #AnimatedGIFs & #ImageMacros.
- #AnimatedGIFs, for their part, work as #VisualQuotes that can be posted, re-shared and remixed with incredible ease.

## OBJECT LESSONS

a series about the hidden lives  
of ordinary things

representative of a more general online obsession with making laugh-loops, which appear all over the Internet primarily in animated GIF (Graphics Interchange Format) form. An animated gif is a short sequence of images sliced from their original context, usually programmed to loop *ad infinitum*, or at least until you close your browser. A truly democratic animal that lives and dies by its

rebloggability, the GIF is popular because of its simplicity and portability - they are easy to make and even easier to spread.

But why is the laugh-loop in particular such a popular variety of GIF? A quick scan of the vast array of laugh-loop GIFs show that the laughter chosen for

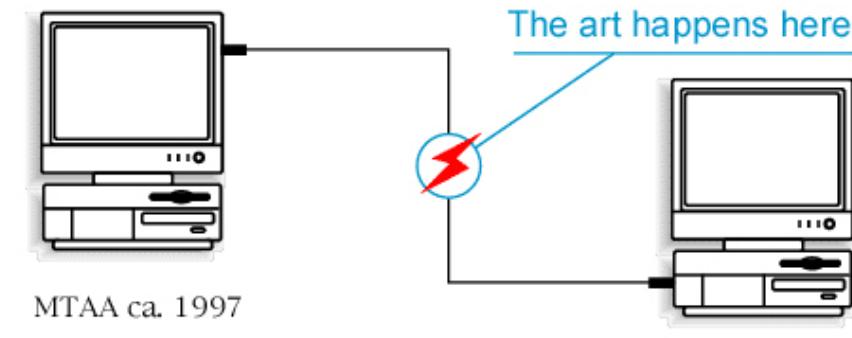
*Quote 86: McDonald, 2015.*

- These #VisualQuotes can be found in online forums adorning and punctuating discussion threads much like exclamation points & reaction shots.

- Beyond the image boards, however, #AnimatedGIFs also boast a long history [in terms of the internet] as an #ArtForm.

own additions to the list through social media so we can create a more broad and comprehensive account of the ways that artists have been using GIFs and why that history is so important.

### Simple Net Art Diagram



MTAA Reference Resource, *Simple Net Art Diagram* (1997).  
Courtesy the artist.

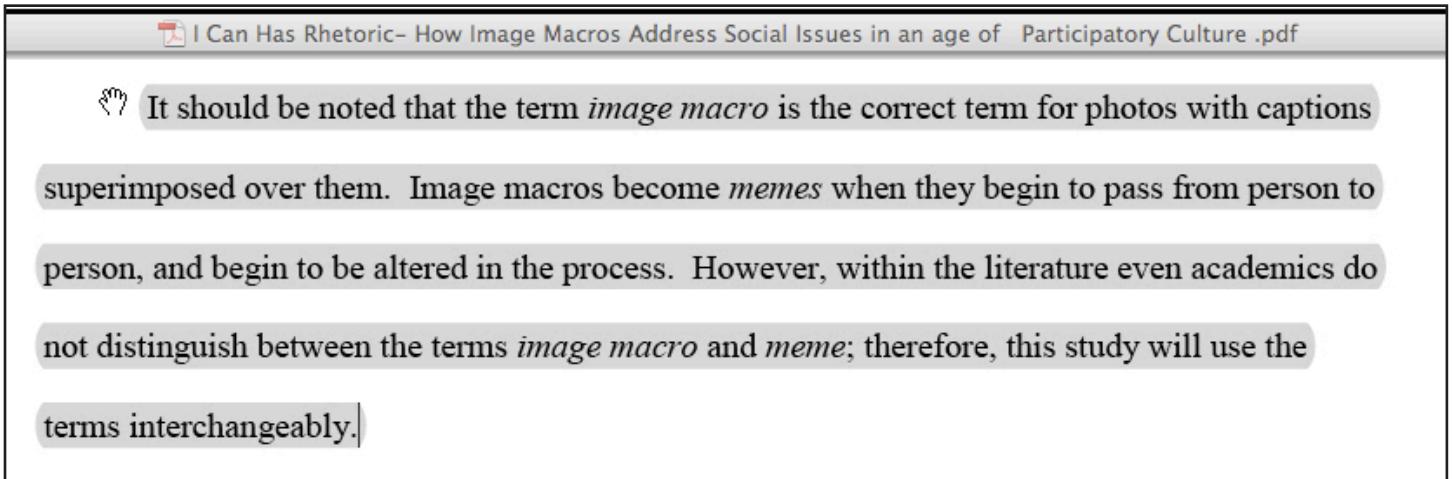
#### THE EARLY YEARS: 1997–2008

*Simple Net Art Diagram* is the earliest and perhaps the most enduring animated GIF for its provocation to participate. In 1997, the two-person artist collective MTAA released it to the public domain for remixing. Artists don't generally license their GIFs—Internet users usually assume they can do what they want with them—but MTAA's gesture was an

*Quote 87: Johnson, 2014*

- In fact, since most internet browsers are able to animate GIFs seamlessly they are widely accepted as the 1st [web]site specific #ArtForm.
- However, #AnimatedGIFs can also be tapped for their potential as #commentary on political & social matters. (Link to video: How will the Animated GIF affect the 2008 Presidential Election?: <http://youtu.be/2amSQyhP0Mg>)
- Through #remix, #commentary GIFs can easily engage the plethora of particular contexts & users that coexist within #ParticipatoryCulture.

- Even more than #AnimatedGIFs, #ImageMacros dominate the phenomena of #InternetMemes to the point of synonymity.

 It should be noted that the term *image macro* is the correct term for photos with captions superimposed over them. Image macros become *memes* when they begin to pass from person to person, and begin to be altered in the process. However, within the literature even academics do not distinguish between the terms *image macro* and *meme*; therefore, this study will use the terms interchangeably.

*Quote 88: Decker-Maurer, 2012, p.9*

- Not only are #ImageMacros arguably the most exploited type of #InternetMemes but also seem to involve the most basic level of #literacy.
  - It is deceiving however to think of #ImageMacros #literacy as just reading & writing funny pictures with wry captions in bold typeface.
  - Rather, the #literacy required to engage #ImageMacros must also account for a litany of characters & situations.

based arsenal. Yet  
 ☜ memes belonging to  
 this family do share  
 two features: they  
 use image macros,  
 and they build on a  
 set of stock  
 characters that  
 represent  
 stereotypical  
 behaviors. A very  
 large  
 characters includes  
 “Scumbag Steve”

Highlight Add Note Search More ▾

*Quote 89: Shifman, 2014, loc.1184*

- Meme #literacy also implies #PRODusers producing their own #Image-Macros AND using those produced by others.

THE WORLD MADE MEME- DISCOURSE AND IDENTITY IN PARTICIPATORY MEDIA.pdf

to partake in the discussion and frame the joke. Formal conventions guide transformation. The meme literate can use shared conventions as a foundation to transformatively create. They form an understandable base to craft from. They're called 'macro' for this reason. In computing, the term is used to describe the application of specific instructions to diverse tasks. The use of these conventions stabilizes image macros to a degree, and allows a jokes to build from a prototypical

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hipster, grandparent, or even the more specialized 'hater'. It means that new macros fitting established conventions can be created easily, and readers can form a common understanding as to the elements of the joke.

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*Quote 90: Milner, 2012, pp. 95-96*

- Notably, the webs that emerge among #PRODusers function in terms of sharing not only memes but also #literacy skills.

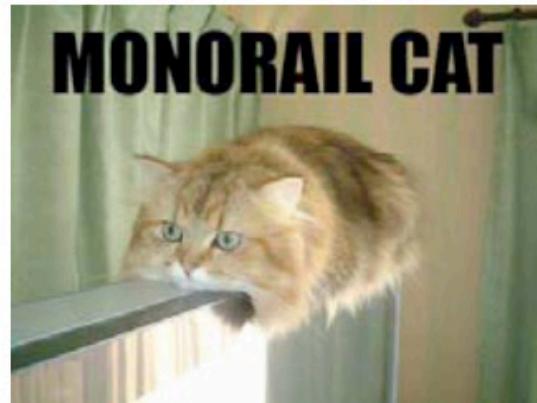
remix-culture-lawrence-lessig-1.pdf

## COMMUNITY

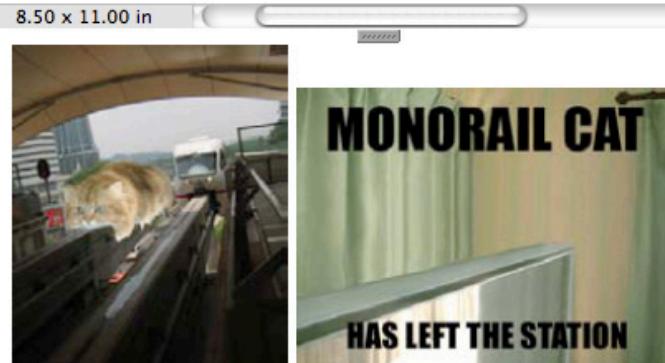
Remixes happen within a community of remixers. In the digital age, that community can be spread around the world. Members of that community create in part for one another. They are showing one another how they can create, as kids on a skateboard are showing their friends how they can create. That showing is valuable, even when the stuff produced is not. ☺

*Quote 91: Lessig, 2008, p.77*

- The #literacy needed to wield #ImageMacros & their multiplicities can also harvest complex #modular meta-narratives.
- As I said before [Link], #modular potential is shared by all #Internet-Memes, including #AnimatedGIFs, not just #ImageMacros.



(Fig. 19. Monorail Cat, 4chan, 2005)



(Fig. 20. Building on Monorail Cat, 4chan, 2006)

The first images to build upon Monorail Cat were directly derivative of the original image, often cropping the isolated monorail cat out of its original setting and placing it into more realistic settings appropriate to the caption on the original macro or removing the cat altogether, echoing the text color and use in the original. While these early surrealistic experimentations reflected both an

- The #LanguageOfInternetMemes permeated #Phase1 of my research as I engaged class readings & assignments through it.
- #ArtCritAndGIFs relies on the #LanguageOfInternetMemes through #AnimatedGIFs that sample & remix contemporary art & critical theory.
- Besides mashing up art & theory, #ArtCritAndGIFs was also an attempt to generate content akin to #LearningObjects.

*Quote 92: Husted, 2012 pp.81-82*

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## What are Learning Objects?

A learning object is referred to as small independent chunk of information that is self-contained, interactive, and reusable. It is based on a clear instructional strategy (Wisconsin Online Resource Center, n.d.).

*Quote 93: Koohang, 2011, p.111*

- #LearningObjects that instead of being “found” are meant to be fed into social media & find potential learners via hash-tags.

- #LearningObjects that are meant to serve as bait for social-media users to conduct research of their own.
- #LearningObjects that are meant to take “socially-engaged” art out of the gallery & into the social.
- #LearningObjects that are meant to embody “critical theory”; take it off the text & engage it socially.
- #LearningObjects that are meant to use social media as informal learning environments.
- #LearningObjects that are meant to assert points through simple, straightforward & visually engaging forms & content.

Originally #EveryStAllTheTime, #ArtCritAndGIFs' 1st instance, intended to respond to a reading on #LeonGolub's art.



*Data 4: Every state, all the time. Animated GIF*

- According to Giroux #LeonGolub's art forces the US to face its role as an instigator of oppressive states.
- Giroux's discussion of #Leon-Golub's work immediately reminds me of Guatemalan performance artist #ReginaJose-Galindo, 52 years his junior.

Giroux-LeonGolubRadicalPessimism.pdf

Golub's paintings serve as a form of social revenge on our complicity as North Americans in unnamed acts of colonial barbarism in an era unprecedented for its creation of supranational political institutions and global industries of terror. This aspect of Golub's work is captured by a phrase used by Fredric Jameson to describe the work of Cuban writer Roberto Fernandez Ratamar; of Ratamar's work, Jameson writes that it possesses "a constant awareness of all those cultural Others with whom we coexist and from whose existence in some peculiar way our own 'identity' is derived, when it is not more literally based on those other cultures by way of either derivation or of exploitation."<sup>13</sup> This sentiment is particularly evident in images constructed by Golub depicting political barbarism in Latin America in which the complicity of the United States in creating Third World sites of oppression through enforced economic dependency is not lost.

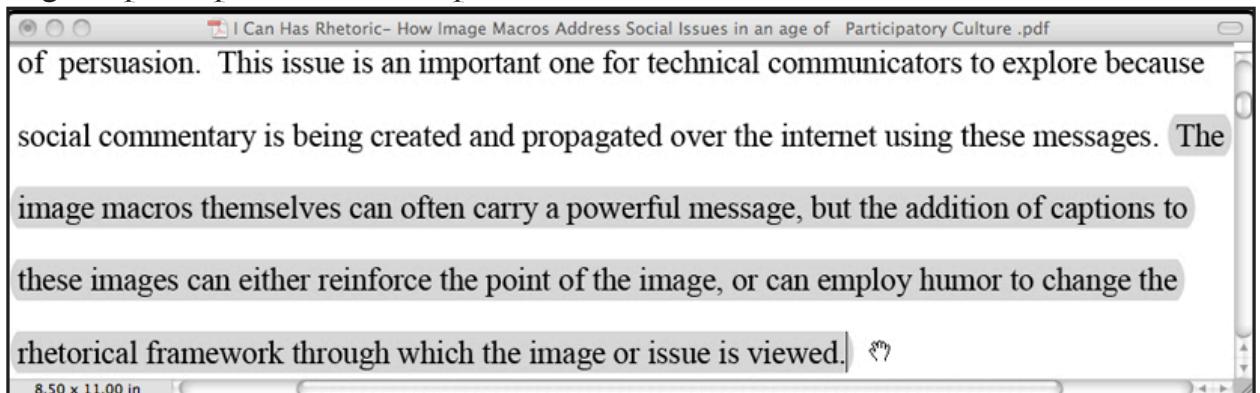
*Quote 94: Giroux, 1992, p.211*

- #ReginaJoseGalindo not only inherits much of Golub's attitudes toward power & The State but she also prolongs them in both form & content.
- Some of #ReginaJoseGalindo's work for example runs parallel to #LeonGolub's depictions of #Enhanced-Interrogation.

- However, beyond the obvious tale about escalating #Enhanced-Interrogation there is an

implicit #stagnation in this 26-year-long narrative.

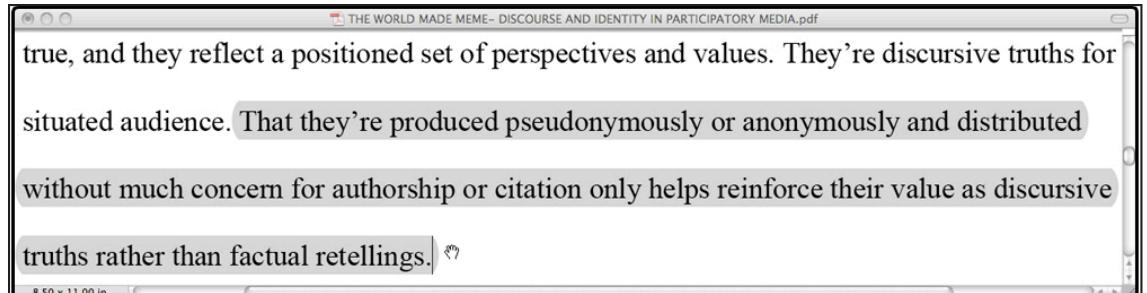
- #Stagnation in Art's conception of The State.
- #Stagnation in depictions of power & oppression.
- #Stagnation in The State itself; its expressions of power & its oppressive practices.
- #AnimatedGifs appear to be the perfect vehicles to explore notions of #stagnation.
  - #AnimatedGIFs are perpetual loops, stagnant in their own right.
  - #AnimatedGIFs negate their own promise of progress one cycle at a time.
  - #AnimatedGIFs are arguments rendered futile one rotation at a time.
  - #AnimatedGIFs are discrete systems that effect no true change except on the perception of themselves & each of their repeating instances.
- However, #EveryStAllTheTime doesn't respond to Giroux's assessments on #Leon-Golub only through the poetics of #AnimatedGIFs.
- Rather, much like #Image-Macros #EveryStAllTheTime reinforces its message through superimposed, bold #captions.



*Quote 95: Decker-Maurer, 2012, p.8*

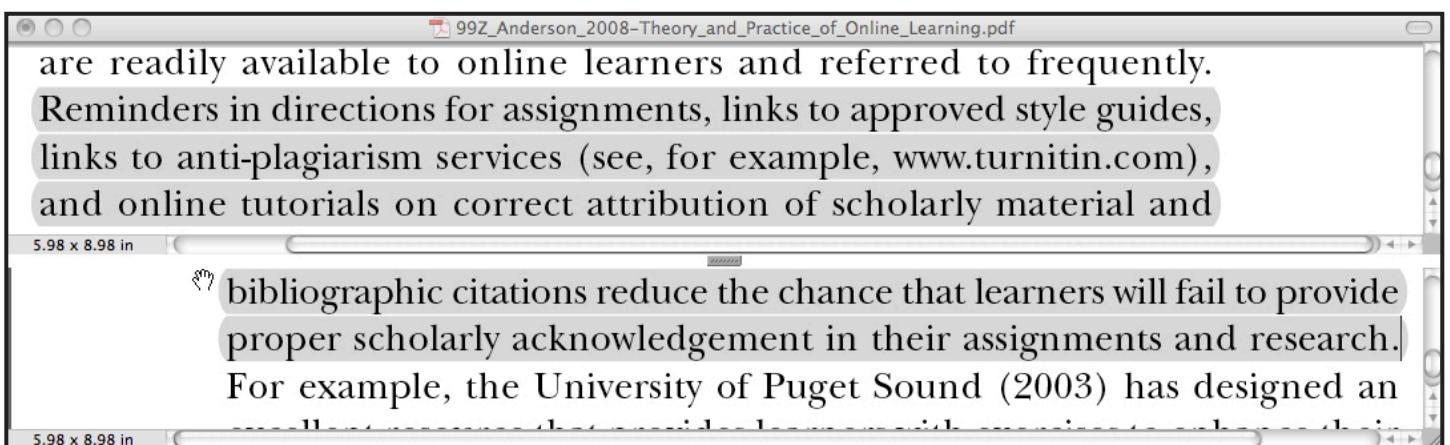
- The #captions, flashing two alternating phrases ["EVERY STATE" & "ALL THE TIME"], echo the same levels of #stagnation referenced before.

- The #captions, flashing two alternating phrases [“EVERY STATE” & “ALL THE TIME”], is a clear & direct opinion that hopes to engage others.
- The #captions, flashing two alternating phrases [“EVERY STATE” & “ALL THE TIME”] aims to elaborate on the #EnhancedInterrogation narrative.
- The #captions, flashing two alternating phrases [“EVERY STATE” & “ALL THE TIME”] is not the only occurrence of #text in #EveryStAllTheTime.
  - Rather, #text also appears as #citation; each piece of art sampled is identified through title, artist and year of production.
  - Although #citation is fundamental to academic work it nonetheless runs decidedly counter to #MemeConventions.



*Quote 96: Milner, 2012, p.167*

- In the case of #EveryStAllTheTime, however, and the rest of #ArtCritAndGIFs for that matter, #citation plays a handful of roles.
- First, like an academic paper, #citation is provided for the benefit of those who might be interested in verifying the work referenced.
- Second, #citation hopes to entice those who encounter these #LearningObjects to research on their own the nature of these works.
- Third, #citation acknowledges that in many cases the title & author of a given piece of contemporary art are as germane as the work itself.
- Fourth, #citation is given as attribution, which barring some attempts [www.curator-scode.org], has been neglected within online culture.
- Fifth, #citation is meant to validate #ArtCritAndGIFs as viable #LearningObjects within scholarly frameworks.



*Quote 97: Anderson, 2008, pp.428-429*

- Finally, #EveryStAllTheTime was spread using Twitter & relevant hashtags in hopes of reaching apropos audiences. [Link to tweet from 10.18.11]



one of these days I'll find these truths to be selfevident  
**#LaGuerraDeCalderon #OWS #Tripoli #Guantanamo #TheWorld**

148 1250 days ago

*Data 5: Every state, all the time. Tweet*

- Beyond the promise “to trend,” hashtags also signify a latent possibility to reach beyond one's own Twitter circle.

Screenshot of a web browser showing a guide on using hashtags on Twitter. The page title is "Using hashtags on Twitter". A sidebar on the left includes links for Search, Trends, Tweets, Who to follow, Find friends, and Translate. The main content area defines a hashtag as a symbol used to mark keywords or topics in a Tweet. It then discusses how hashtags categorize Tweets by keyword, explaining that people use the '#' symbol before a keyword or phrase. It also notes that clicking on a hashtagged word shows other tweets with that keyword, and that hashtags can appear anywhere in a tweet. An example is given of the hashtag #FF, which stands for "Follow Friday". A quote from Ed Gutman (@eddie) is shown: "I don't do #FF, ever, but I'm willing to make one exception for @origifil and @briggles, Twitter's ambassadors of quan." The date of the quote is 23 Mar.

*Quote 98: Twitter; N.D.*

- Through #hashtags then #EveryStAllTheTime could stumble upon Twitter users curious about perceived cases of state-sponsored oppression.
- #ArtCritAndGIFs' remaining 3 instances [#TheseIgnitedEstates, #Okupas & #PassionOfThePissChrist] were produced and dispersed similarly.
- #TheseIgnitedEstates mashes up one of #AnriSala's videos with the flags from countries like Greece, Chile & Spain.



Data 6: These ignited estates. Animated GIF

- #AnriSala's video #Mixed-Behavior [2003] depicts a DJ who scratches not only vinyls but fireworks as well.
- Despite #MixedBehavior's nod to #remix culture, the 8-minute & change video isn't exactly available for remixers.

video art by Anri Sala.

The work is called *Mixed Behavior* and was made by Sala in 2003. Ideally it would now be possible for the reader to leave this essay and view the actual piece, which lasts exactly eight minutes and nineteen seconds, preferably more than once. Unfortunately, that isn't possible. Nevertheless I shall proceed by describing the video as if the reader had just watched it.<sup>3</sup> A few preliminaries:

fireworks explode all around him, briefly illuminating the darkness; their clamor overlaps with the sound of gunfire, a local holiday tradition. Gradually, we realize that the video's soundtrack plays in manipulated synchrony with the fireworks: like the Wizard of Oz under a clear plastic veil, the DJ appears to control a scene that stretches across the background like a movie screen or canvas. However, while the music proceeds in a predictable, linear fashion, seeming to conjure the fireworks in the distance, we realize that the

*Quote 99: About this artwork, N.D.*

*Quote 100: Fried, 2012*

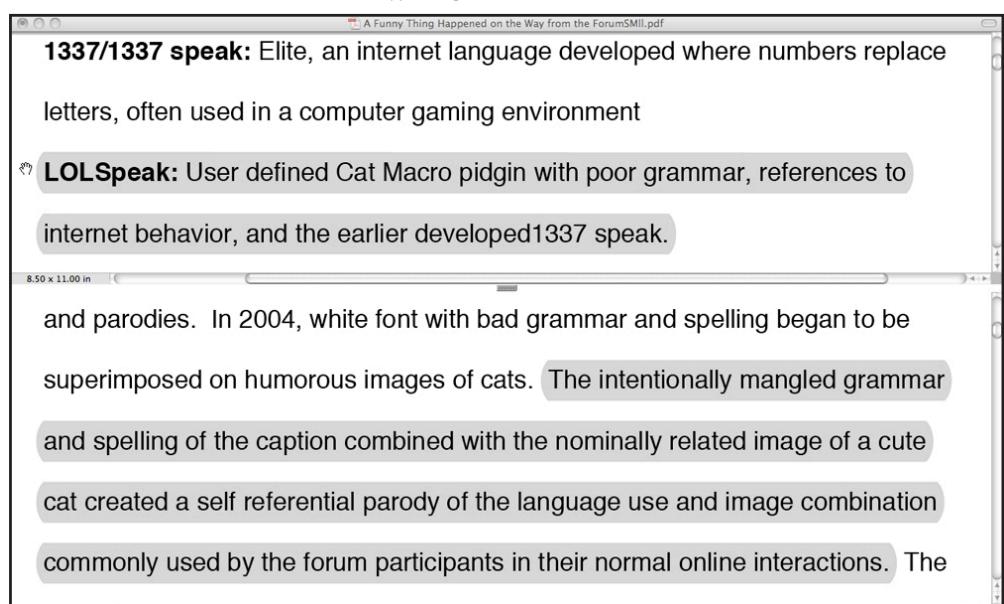
- While the same is true for most art sampled by #ArtCritAndGIFs, #Mixed-Behavior's allusion to #remix conventions makes it more discordant.

- Besides its obvious reference to DJ practices, #MixedBehavior's bursting skyline hints at the prospect of #turmoil & chaos, joyous or not.
  - This implicit sense of #turmoil gives way to the collection of flags that flash, collide & bleed into each other in the background.
  - Each flag a placeholder for a respective country, all perceived to be in #turmoil when #TheseIgnitedEstates was conceived & disseminated.
- More than flags, these countries also impact #TheseIgnitedEstates as #hashtags for its particular tweet. [Link to tweet from 10.20.11]



*Data 7: These ignited estates. Tweet.*

- The #captions on #These-IgnitedEstates are peculiar in a couple of ways: (1) the english-spanish #CodeSwitch & (2) obvious #misspellings.
  - The #CodeSwitch responds purely to my own aesthetic concerns as a Mexican citizen from the MX-US border where “espanglish” thrives.
  - The #mispellings [“Estates” not “States” & “Stamos” not “Estamos”] on the other hand are a nod to #LOLspeak.



*Quote 101: Husted, 2012, pp.4-5*

- #Okupas relies on similar wordplay as it samples & mashes up #Hirst's #ForTheLoveOfGod & #Canevari's #BouncingSkull.



*Data 8: Okupas. Animated GIF*

- The formal thread that stitches together both works in #Okupas is evident: #skulls. One is diamond-encrusted; the other kicked around.
  - Conceptually however, these two #skulls occupy radically divergent spaces.
  - #ForTheLoveOfGod, on the one hand, stands ostentatiously as a mark of opulence & the desire that emanates.

My argument in what follows is that the skull is not just capitalist art, but, in that it is also rather obviously art about money, it is also an art of the capitalist sublime: an art which presents capital as its unrepresentable object of desire. My argument is in three parts. I start by

- Conversely #BouncingSkull tumbles around in the aftermath of yet another peace mission conducted through war.
- Incidentally, #BouncingSkull is the only artwork sampled in #Art-CritAndGIFs that is available in full on the web. [Link]
- #Hirst & #Canevari, then, their #skulls, lend themselves perfectly to explore notions of haves & the occupied; the occupiers & have-nots.
- With #OccupyWallStreet [OWS] still dominating the headlines at the time of inception, #Okupas' flashing #captions almost wrote themselves.
- Accordingly, #Okupas was twitted using OWS-related hashtags all the while questioning some of its core axioms. [Link to tweet from 10.22.11]

in the cavernous Arsenale, and features (again with steady camera) a young boy practicing his skilled soccer moves with a skull. The image is haunting and an odd reflection of the power of childhood innocence, even within the backdrop of, in this case, the former Serbian Army headquarters in Belgrade, bombed by NATO in 1999. The video was on view at MoMA in New York in fall 2007-8 and is now part of their permanent collection. Following in a

*Quote 103: Hammer, 2012*



#Occupy urself. Ur #99Percent is still our #1Percent. #FirstWorld  
#ThirdWorld Bigger? <http://tinyurl.com/3u6bqhz>

135 1246 days ago

*Data 9: Okupas. Tweet.*

- #PassionOfThePissChrist responds to far more enigmatic issues as it engages #worshiped & #defaced religious icons.



Data 10: *Passion of the piisschrist*. Animated GIF

- The crucifix submerged in urine, depicted in Serrano's #PissChrist [1987], is usually understood as having been #defaced.
- However, as #PissChrist continues to be #defaced itself, it grows as an icon on its own right.
- The titular character in Gibson's #ThePassionOfTheChrist [2004] seems to be #worshiped by portraying, in painful detail, his final hours.
- But besides its portrayal of a religious icon, #ThePassionOfTheChrist is also known for reveling in explicit gore.

**Blood and Gore, Guilt and Blame**

The *Passion*'s bloodiness is its most frequently mentioned but least explored aspect. Critics have briefly compared the picture to a snuff film, a pornographic gore fest, and a horror movie—and Richard Corliss of *Time* magazine quipped that *The Passion* may be the eruption of a new genre, the religious splatter-art film—but there has been little analysis of why millions have flocked to theaters to cry and watch Jesus being beaten and killed. As of this date, two viewers have died while watching the film.

In the Christian tradition, meditation on the passion is associated with self-examination (recognition of our sins, for which Jesus

9.14 x 12.17 in

Quote 105: Grace, 2004, p.15

TUESDAY, APR 19, 2011 11:35 AM MDT

## The endless, idiotic outrage about “Piss Christ”

A French gallery displays the now-vandalized work -- and shows what real blasphemy looks like

MARY ELIZABETH WILLIAMS Follow

Share 4 Twitter 1 WhatsApp 0

TOPICS: RELIGION, LIFE NEWS

Quote 104: Williams, 2011

- #PassionOfThePissChrist engages these conceptual tensions by carefully choosing the #samples that stem from each piece.
- #PissChrist's #samples for example encompass not only the piece itself but also its defacement & apparent #aftermath.
  - Crucially, the final image is of a man kneeling, as if praying, picking up broken glass in the immediate #aftermath of the defacement.
  - For their part, #ThePassionOfTheChrist's #samples isolate a single #WhipFlog as it slashes across the back of a man, presumably Jesus.
  - As the man behind the #WhipFlog enters the frame, his momentum carries him across until he comes to a stop & regresses, looping ad nauseam.
  - With each cycle, every #WhipFlog asserts & negates itself forcing Jesus to repeatedly bow towards the #defaced & #worshiped #PissChrist.
- #PassionOfThePissChrist's #captions further this complex relationship between the #worshiped & the #defaced by literally & formally fusing them.
  - Through the #captions' placement, rate & rhythm; "to worship" becomes "to deface", urine replaces blood and sterile & fertile become equal.
  - The intentional confounding of nouns, adjectives & verbs that these #captions connote is meant to #complicate #PassionOfThePissChrist.
    - It is meant to #complicate readings. To obfuscate allegiances. To interrogate both pieces beyond the immediacy of knee-jerk reactions.
- When #PassionOfThePissChrist was twitted these same #captions served as #hashtags hoping to find an apropos audience. [Link to tweet from 11.08.11]



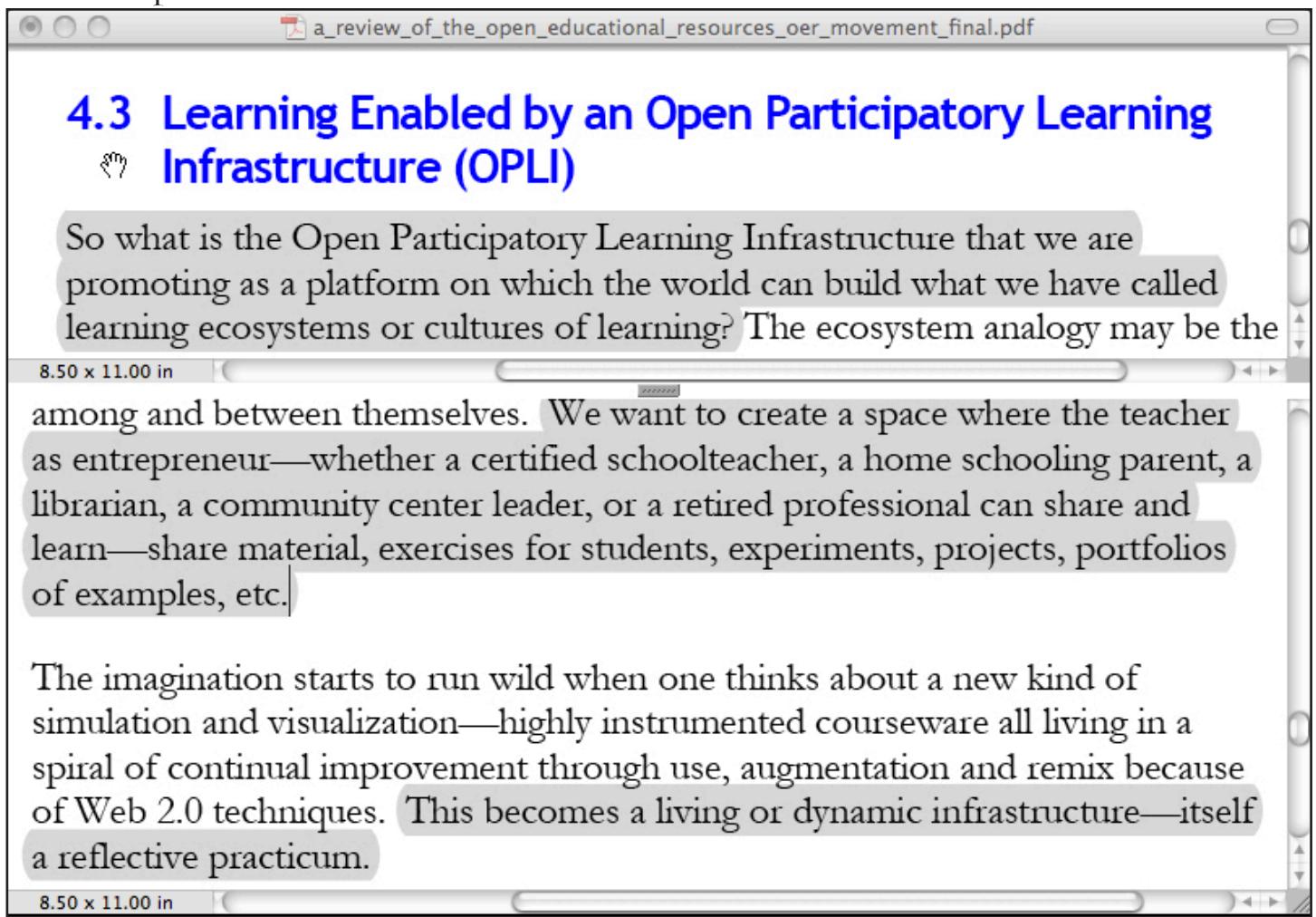
the passion of the piss christ to **#worship** is to **#deface #urine** is  
**#sterile, #blood** is **#fertile**

147 1229 days ago

*Data 11: Passion of the piischrist. Tweet.*

- Although none of the 4 meme-based #LearningObjects that make up #ArtCri-tAndGIFs succeeded as #InternetMemes they do provide some #clues.
  - #Clues regarding the potential to craft #AnimatedGIFs that will engage complex issues and entice others to do the same.

- #Clues about visually quoting & critically contextualizing pieces of art through #samples & creative juxtapositions.
- #Clues about the implementation of pedagogical practices & informal learning experiences employing social media & #MemeConventions.
- #Clues regarding specific Twitter characteristics, like #hashtags & trending topics that can be exploited for educational purposes.
  - Tweets & #hashtags however are inherently ephemeral, so all 4 #ArtCritAndGIFs were quickly lost in a sea of similar & more popular content.
- In an effort to counter Twitter's bias towards impermanence, #ArtCritAndGIFs was also published as a #blog post: [Link]
  - Beyond giving #ArtCritAndGIFs some endurance, a #blog post also creates a shared context for the collection of meme-based #LearningObjects.
  - Admittedly a #blog post is far from the virtual learning environments proposed by open education academics.


**4.3 Learning Enabled by an Open Participatory Learning Infrastructure (OPLI)**

So what is the Open Participatory Learning Infrastructure that we are promoting as a platform on which the world can build what we have called learning ecosystems or cultures of learning? The ecosystem analogy may be the

among and between themselves. We want to create a space where the teacher as entrepreneur—whether a certified schoolteacher, a home schooling parent, a librarian, a community center leader, or a retired professional can share and learn—share material, exercises for students, experiments, projects, portfolios of examples, etc.

The imagination starts to run wild when one thinks about a new kind of simulation and visualization—highly instrumented courseware all living in a spiral of continual improvement through use, augmentation and remix because of Web 2.0 techniques. This becomes a living or dynamic infrastructure—itself a reflective practicum.

*Quote 106: Atkins, c3 Hammond, 2007, pp.60-61*

- However, with the proper #blog #tags #ArtCritAndGIFs could conceivably reach appropriate readers.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL [en.support.wordpress.com/posts/tags/](https://en.support.wordpress.com/posts/tags/). The page title is "Support" and the sub-page title is "Posts » Tags". The main content area discusses what tags are, how they differ from categories, and how they can be displayed. A sidebar on the right contains a "Table of Contents" with links to various support articles related to tags. The sidebar also includes sections for "Topics" and "Appearance".

**Support Home**

**Table of Contents**

- [Adding Tags via the Tags Module](#)
- [Adding Tags via the Dashboard](#)
- [Managing Tags](#)
- [Bulk Actions](#)
- [Converting Tags to Categories](#)
- [Topic Listings](#)

**Topics**

- Appearance

*Quote 107: Wordpress, N.D.*

- These meme-based #LearningObjects can enter fitting dialogues via #blog #tags like #ArtEducation, #ArtCriticism & #ContemporaryArt.
- #Blog #tags can benefit approaches like #ArtCritAndGIFs by fostering potential dialogues with appropriate audiences.
- #Blog #tags increase the likelihood of reaching audiences curious about schemes like #ArtCritAndGIFs beyond its individual instances.
- Finally through #blog #tags #ArtCritAndGIFs can be understood in relationship with other like-tagged posts & their like-minded authors.
- Of course #ArtCritAndGIFs must also be regarded in relation with all other posts in #MEMEducation [Link]
- #MEMEducation is a repository of sorts for all web-based content that has been generated as part of this arts based educational research.
- Although not fully contained within #MEMEducation, #LiteracyOfTheGlitch is still present as an introductory #text. [Link]

Much like #ArtCritAndGIFs, #LiteracyOfTheGlitch is also dependent on #AnimatedGIFs & the #LanguageOfInternetMemes they embody.

- Where #ArtCritAndGIFs is a collection of loosely related #MemeBased #Learning-Objects, #LiteracyOfTheGlitch was designed as a #LessonPlan.

- A self-contained #LessonPlan on the poetic, creative & pedagogical potentials of #TheGlitch.
- Far from just an unwanted occurrence, interest in #TheGlitch has spawned the field of #GlitchStudies.

Some consider glitches as solely technological phenomena, while others perceive them as social constructions reactive to technological expectations or aesthetics. Glitchspeak explains the utterances that do not fail to be heard, yet at the same time exist outside of knowledge. At the same time, cultural and technological flows and functions, designed to be taken for granted, cannot be understood without such interruptions. This is why the study of glitch is necessary. Study what is outside of knowledge, start and continue with glitch studies. The glitch is what you can just get away with!

6.38 x 9.02 in

*Quote 108: Menkman, 2011, p.66*

- #GlitchStudies find in #TheGlitch an agent of discovery capable of shedding light into a proverbial black box.

inside companies, behind web interfaces, within compiled software, and in “black boxes.”<sup>9</sup> Errors can help reveal these technologies and expose their nature and effects. As technology becomes complex, the purpose of technology is to hide this complexity. As a result, the explicit creation of black boxes becomes an important function of technological design processes and a source of power. Once again, errors that break open these boxes can reveal hidden technology and its power.

*Quote 109: Mako, 2011, p.36*

- #GlitchStudies also extend #TheGlitch as a metaphor beyond technologically-mediated environments.

<sup>10</sup> I suppose it's true we do glitch ourselves all the time on purpose. But it certainly isn't seen as healthy. We glitch ourselves by adding unnatural, even toxic elements to our systems, and one could argue that even as we accept and even welcome these momentary breaks, they serve to comfort us through denying our original states.

Piper Burns, H. & Meaney, E. (2011) Glitches be crazy: The problem of self-identification thorough noise. In Briz, N., Meaney, E., Menkman, R., Robertson, W., Satrom, J. & Westbrook, J., (eds) GLI.TC/H Reader[ror] (pp. 73-75). [p. 75]

*Quote 110: Burns & Meaney, 2011, p.75*

- Finally, #GlitchStudies often interrogate human-computer interaction through creative practices.

strange new patterns, or to expose side-effects unwanted by their original designers. Glitch art, when approached this way, becomes a study of the dialogue between us and the machine — how we relate to logical systems, and what happens in the breakdown between human thought and computer logic.<sup>1</sup> This paper will focus on this algorithmic strain of glitch art. We will look at glitch without the glitch.



*Quote 111: Temkin, 2014,*

- As a #LessonPlan, #LiteracyOfTheGlitch attempts to expand on basic notions of #TheGlitch by examining them through arts-based research.
- #LiteracyOfTheGlitch is a website featuring 7 distinct #GlitchPortraits, each offering an insight into #TheGlitch. [Link<sup>1</sup>]
  - But before viewing the #GlitchPortraits visitors are greeted by a #Homepage meant to serve as more than just a landing pad for the site.
    - The #Homepage is stark: nothing but 2 smeared black & white squares stacked vertically with a hairline crack of blank space between them.
    - Monochromatic & intentionally opaque & ambiguous, the #Homepage introduces some of #LiteracyOfTheGlitch's prevailing #aesthetics.
      - #Aesthetics: An engulfing black & white palette, #SparseText & jarring, #PulsatingLoops that disintegrate images into their own glitches.

- The #Homepage also introduces the site's recurring #ambiguity as evidenced by unapparent hyperlinks that lead to unannounced destinations.
- Not just idiosyncratic, #LiteracyOfTheGlitch's #ambiguity makes it consistent with seminal notions of #ABER.

their readers into the reconstruction of the virtual world of the text by carefully positioned *blanks* or *gaps* in the text. These gaps are "the unwritten part of the text" (Iser 1974, p. 58) that must be filled in by active readers with personal meaning from their own experiences outside the text. Readers cannot merely inspect the text more closely to ascertain greater meaning, but they must, as Maitre (1983, p. 38) put it, "create additional material by a further imaginative act." The aim of the literary artist is not to prompt a single, closed, convergent reading but rather to persuade readers to contribute answers to the dilemmas posed within the text. In this sense, the literary text exhibits what Maitre (1983) has called *indeterminacy*. It is this indeterminacy, a state of being indefinite, that distinguishes literary activity from propaganda and other didacticisms.

11.77 x 8.59 in

Quote 112: Barone &amp; Eisner, 1997, p.75

- Besides its #ambiguity, #LiteracyOfTheGlitch also displays other #qualities delineated by Barone & Eisner (1997) as quintessentially #ABER.
- Among these #qualities are its use of expressive & contextualized #VernacularLanguage as well as #AestheticForms.

for arts-based research, describing the qualities of arts-based texts: the creation of a virtual reality and a degree of textual ambiguity; the presence of expressive, contextualized, and vernacular forms of language; the promotion of empathetic participation in the lives of a study's participants; and the presence of an aesthetic form through the unique, personal signature of the researcher.]

In the spirit of hybrid genres of arts-based research, one of the best-known book-length examples is Tom Barone's (2001) merger of fiction and scholarship in *Touching Eternity*. The hybrid form allowed Barone "to play two games at once" in his study of a high-school art teacher and his former students:

10.75 x 8.50 in

Quote 113: Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008, p.8

- #Animated-GIFs after all are basically understood as a #VernacularLanguage that employs #Aesthetic-Forms.

- Beyond aesthetic concerns & #ABER

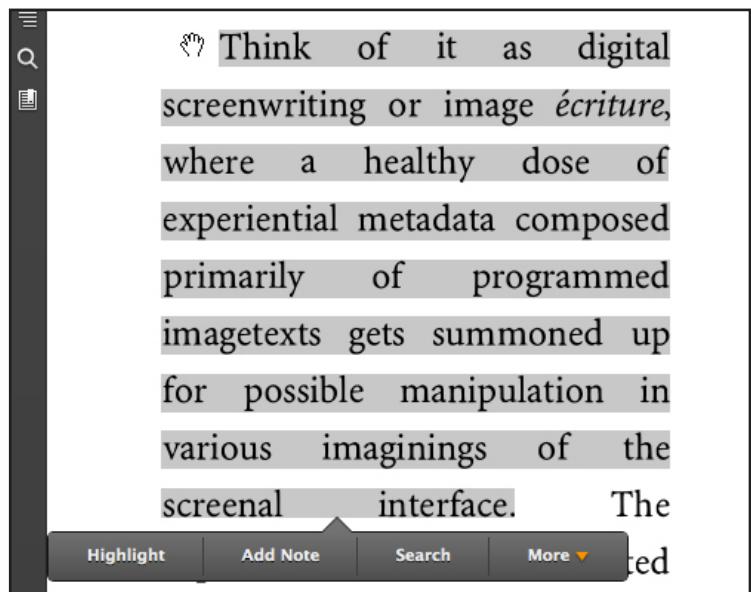
credentials the #Homepage functions via

3 discrete hyperlinks: #ThisWay, #ThatWay & #LiteracyOfTheGlitch.

- Both #ThisWay & #ThatWay lead to #GlitchPortraits composed of #AnimatedGIFs à la #ImageÉcriture.

*For online artists, then, the use of the animated GIF also demonstrates a willingness to plunge into the vernacular of online production, blurring boundaries between art and non-art categories. Most analyses focus on how the digital environment has transformed Hollywood musicals as self-enclosed patterns [10] set apart from the narrative structure, animated GIFs – like casual online puzzle games with their addictive audio and visual rewards – provide brief moments of aesthetic affect, diversions that are set apart from the running narrative of the work day.*

*Quote 114: McKay, 2005*



The screenshot shows a digital document interface with a dark theme. On the left is a vertical toolbar with icons for search, refresh, and other document functions. The main area contains a quote in white text on a dark background. At the bottom of the quote area are four buttons: 'Highlight' (highlighted), 'Add Note', 'Search', and 'More ▾'. The quote itself is as follows:

Think of it as digital screenwriting or image *écriture*, where a healthy dose of experiential metadata composed primarily of programmed imagetexts gets summoned up for possible manipulation in various imaginings of the screenal interface. The

*Quote 115: Amerika, 2007, loc.683*

- In a sense, #ImageÉcriture can also be understood as digital ideas & insights embodied in digital material.

The embodiment of ideas in materials and in visual images is another factor that sets visual experience apart from linguistic experience. Hermeneutic aesthetics finds the fusion of idea with presentation (form and material presence) to be the factor that makes visual experience different from linguistic experience, where ideas are *represented* in a disembodied way. This fusion of presence and idea is the source of art's meaning and power; it brings materials to life and it allows an instance (a single artwork) to allude to a host of unsaid interconnected ideas and to speak to each viewer in a direct, personal way (Davey, 1999). Whereas Arnheim found ideas and meaning in abstract non-objective forms (he believed subject matter to be a distraction;) (Dorn, 1999;

*Quote 116: Marshall, 2007 p.26*

- All digital material used stems from glitch events itself, #DataBended to generate #GlitchPortraits with recursively glitched content.
- #DataBended content refers generally to files recompressed & altered by intentionally introducing digital noise.



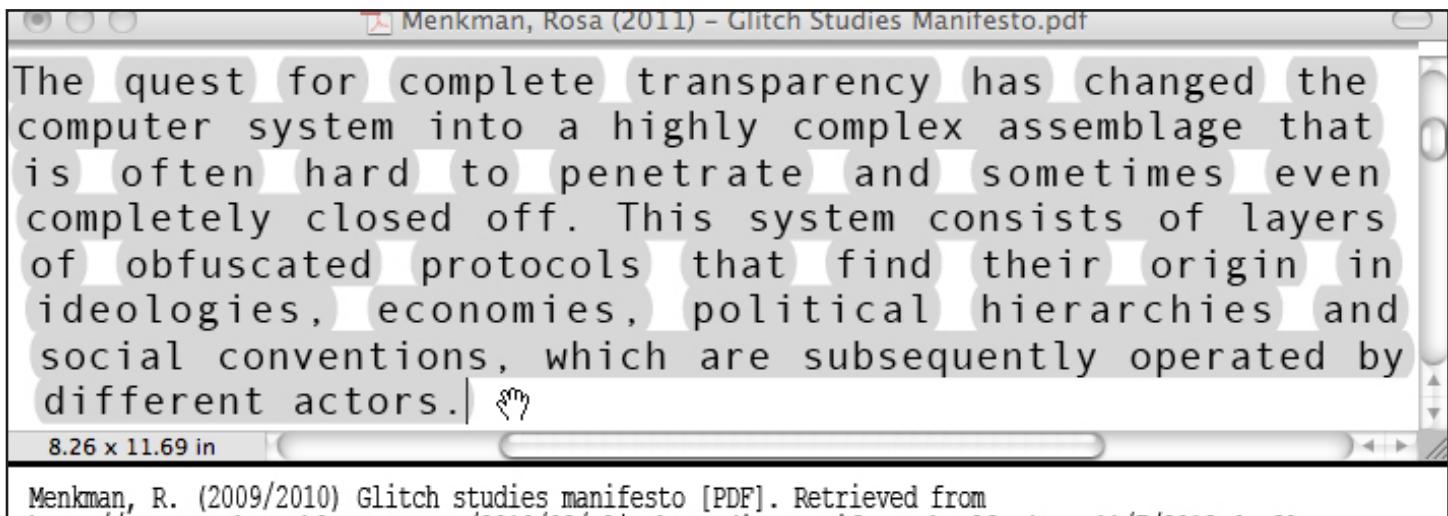
Duncan Geere

 **Databending takes a similar approach to circuit bending, using software to intentionally disrupt the information contained within a file. There's all kinds of different techniques, some involving deep hex editing of certain parts of a compression algorithm, but other methods are surprisingly simple.**

*Quote 117: Greer, 2010*

- The #GlitchPortraits employ #ImageÉcriture to explore #TheGlitch as #tension, #failure, #deceit, #journey, #destination, #poetry & #design.
- Visitors going #ThisWay encounter #TheGlitch as #tension portrait, anchored by a glitchy bank logo against an equally glitchy #background.
  - Echoing the site's penchant for recursiveness the #background references the #DataBended process that produced the glitchy bank logo.
- The #tension portrait is rounded off with evocative, #SparseText that implies avenues of reflection to visitors. [Link<sup>2</sup>]
  - Amid an amalgam of #PulsatingLoops glitched to abstraction this #SparseText is more than poetic musings; it also serves as #LucidContent.
    - #LucidContent that suggests a somewhat coherent context for the visual abstractions that populate the site.
    - #LucidContent that plays an aesthetic role as well, splashing occasional color on an otherwise monochromatic experience.
    - #LucidContent that stitches together all #GlitchPortraits conceptually via language & interactively via hyperlinks.
  - The #SparseText that peppers #TheGlitch as #tension portrait is specifically meant to ground it within a practice of #CriticalExplorations.

- #CriticalExplorations into the innards & implicit agendas that information & digital technologies conceal despite promises of transparency.
- The type of #CriticalExplorations that #GlitchStudies procure.



*Quote 118: Menkman, 2009/2010, p.5*

- The type of #CriticalExplorations that so-called modders conduct through hardware alterations.

This article explores the relationship between computer gamers and their machines in an effort to characterize cultural attitudes toward the materiality of information technology. Whereas dominant culture desires a world in which information technology performs seamlessly within the fabric of everyday life, case-modding gamers prefer to foreground both their computer machinery and their virtuosity in its manipulation. Instead of desiring the disappearance of machines into the background of a world that those machines produce, case modders revel in, and indeed identify with, the material guts of their computer systems. This machine aesthetic is explored further in the context of the LAN party, where the case modders' machines become as much of a spectacle as the games on the screen.

6.00 x 9.00 in

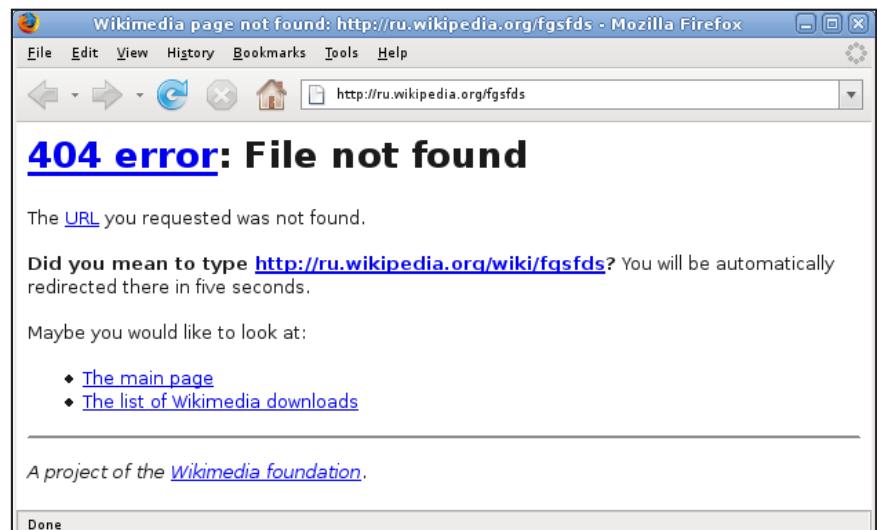
Simon, B. (2007). Geek chic : Machine aesthetics, digital gaming, and the cultural politics of the case mod, Games and Culture, 2:175, 175-193 [p.175]

*Quote 119: Simon, 2007, p.175*

- Besides their potential to foster #CriticalExplorations, statements like “Digital error reveals #design” are also navigational instruments.
- In the case of “Digital error reveals #design,” for example, #design is a hyperlink that connects with #TheGlitch as #design portrait.
- #TheGlitch as #design portrait features a collection of #DataBended #404Error-Pages, which re-direct errant visitors. [Link<sup>3</sup>]

<sup>3</sup> <http://literacyoftheglitch.org/glitchasdesign.html>

- Typically #404ErrorPages are generic dead-end signs informing the misled about the “not-found.”



*Periph. 17: Wikimedia 404 message*

- The #404ErrorPages that populate the #design portrait are peculiar in their creative approach to form & message.
- These are the type of #404ErrorPages that online repositories like <http://404errors.tumblr.com/> collect & have popularized.
- Custom-made #404ErrorPages could be characterized as engaging failed searches, misspellings & broken links through an #AestheticsOfFailure.



*Periph. 18: Custom-made Error 404 messages  
by Tropicana Twister® [top] & nerdnoggin  
[bottom]*

- These #AestheticsOfFailure become #recursive as digital technologies address themselves as both subject & object.

Digital technology in this way becomes an ideal tool for the production of the virtual, not as the reproduction of the real. Glitches are events that refer to no other reality than that of their production. As an a-signifying metasound, glitch is the *becoming-sound* of the production process itself.

## A New (A-)Subjectivity?

In what position does this leave the laptop producer, utilizing the a-subjective, machinic modes of production, yet evaluated mainly inside the modernist context of artistic expression and mastery? As we have seen, glitch as a metasound raises difficult questions, given its paradoxical conceptual underpinnings. On one hand, glitch implies a subjectless structure, a disturbance, a sudden formation emerged around a fault, an actualization of a virtual structure. On the other hand, we have the subject/artist controlling this process, which, however, is essentially a-subjective, a virtuality. Working with digital interfaces has liberated the artist from

*Quote 120: Vanhanen, 2003, p.51*

- #TheGlitch as #failure portrait is similarly #recursive, using Google's #414Error notification as a centerpiece. [Link<sup>4</sup>]
- Beyond technical considerations, a #414Error seems to also respond to the implicit #idiosyncrasies of Web servers.

## HTTP Error 414 Request URI too long

### Introduction

The Web server (running the Web site) thinks that the HTTP data stream sent by the client (e.g. your Web browser or our CheckUpDown robot) contains a URL that is simply too large i.e. too many bytes.

.....  
server may need to be reconfigured to allow your URLs through. Understand that Web servers have to set some reasonable limit here, because they have to deal with badly programmed clients trying to give them huge garbage URLs.

*Quote 121: Error 414*

- As far as #recursive #idiosyncrasies go, Google's self-servicing robot, lifting itself by its own proverbial bootstraps, is paradigmatic.
- #Idiosyncrasies also inform the #failure portrait as #SparseText; "idiosyncrasy" itself is a hyperlink that leads to the #deceit portrait.

- #TheGlitch as #deceit portrait references a TV newscast blunder involving a video game & the #UnitedNations. [Link<sup>5</sup>]
- In a case of mistaken acronyms the #UnitedNations Space Command logo was used in place of the Security Council's.
- #Deceit, in the BBC/Halo/ UNSC glitch is apparently easy to identify, nonetheless difficult to isolate.
- Was the BBC anchor to blame for the #deceit?
- What about the graphics department? Did the #deceit emerge from there?
- Did the #deceit come from the search engine used to locate the logo? Its search algorithm? The users that use & influence said algorithm?
- Maybe Halo & its choice of the UNSC acronym is to blame for the #deceit.
- In the absence of a clear point of origin, the #deceit may be better understood through the notion of an #ActorNetwork.



Sophie Raworth in front of the United Nations Space Command logo  
Photograph: Public domain

They say games are getting harder and harder to separate from reality, but this may be taking it a little too far.

In a report on BBC news last week, a reference to the UN's Security Council was accompanied by a large graphic on the screen next to Sophie Raworth. The problem is, the UNSC icon depicted had nothing to do with the Security Council - in fact, it was the badge of the United Nations Space Command, the military agency depicted in space shooter Halo.

Viewers quickly spotted the error and the icon was replaced in later editions of the bulletin. ▲

*Quote 122: Stuart, 2012*

5 <http://literacyoftheglitch.org/glitchasdeceit.html>

- #ActorNetwork Theory [ANT] posits black boxes & heterogeneous networks in place of individual actors.

actants and punctualization (or ‘black-boxing’).

Unlike many other theories, ANT assumes that social practice involves networks that consist of things working together, and argues that successful social practice is the result of ‘a process of “heterogeneous engineering” in which bits and pieces from the social, the technical, the conceptual, and the textual are fitted together’ (Law 1992, p. 380). The idea of heterogeneity refers to the ‘bits and pieces’, which might include people, technologies, materials, processes, and so on.

8.27 x 10.87 in

*Quote 123: Oliver, 2011, p.379*

- There are obvious implications in thinking about #TheGlitch as #deceit in #ActorNetwork terms instead of attributing it to a single source.
- An #ActorNetwork is inclusive to all entities: the non-human, the non-sentient, the non-corporeal; all #actants with agencies of their own.
  - An #actant, borrowed from literary theory, is any agent capable of tweaking a given process, a narrative, an event.

so much as it is by other pre-established paintings. Paintings are actants in their own right that use human consciousness parasitically to think according to their own logic. One painting can step up and “vouch for” another object’s status as a painting, thereby altering the very as-structure of what can count as a painting allowing new objects to be caught and identified as paintings and so forth. Note that Fried nearly and largely Duchamp’s position that a tool had no genius.

5.83 x 8.27 in

*Quote 124: Gokey, 2014, p.297*

- #TheGlitch as #deceit portrait assumes all agents involved to be an #actant: the BBC, the UNSC logos, even the search engine's algorithm.

- #TheGlitch as #poetry portrait assumes a similar position regarding the role of code & software as an #actant each. [Link<sup>6</sup>]
  - The #poetry portrait is anchored by a misinterpreted YouTube video, where the video #portal's transcribing tool is inferred to be a poet.
  - As the code within the #portal interprets the words captured on video it generates new & unexpected utterances.
  - #Poetry's perennial struggle with #interpretation is central here: the futility of readers translating a poem into a language of their own.
  - #Interpretation is #translation, the #poetry portrait asserts before typifying the later as "speckles of noise smudging against meaning."
  - This notion of #translation owes much to Object Oriented Ontology [#OOO] & its inter-object relationships.
- abstractions are effective, and the more effective the more abstract. As the computer captures objects, as it folds into itself greater complexity and autonomy, this fold serves as the locus of creativity, wherein programmed objects generate the unexpected, the unanticipated. The inclusion of the object in the machine produces there a context that exceeds the programmer's efforts, reaching out of the digital and into the actual. The fold pries apart the closed circuit of the literal mechanism by which code becomes executable, allowing desire the fleeting opportunity to enter.
- 6.85 x 9.76 in
- Quote 125: Evens, 2006, p.95

 When one object influences another one, it does so by *translating* that object.<sup>5</sup> The Greek for translation is *metaphor*. It's refreshing for literary scholarship to see how the very fuel of causality might reside in something as recognizable as metaphor. In the following sections, I shall demonstrate that the aesthetic dimension is not an optional extra. To

5.88 x 9.00 in

from the totality of my phenomenological being. Just as I fail to avoid anthropomorphizing everything, so all entities whatsoever constantly translate other objects into their own terms. My back maps out a small backpomorphic slice of this tree that I'm leaning on. The strings of the wind harp stringpomorphize the wind. The wind windpomorphizes the temperature differentials between the mountains and the flat land. The

5.88 x 9.00 in

Quote 126: Morton, 2012, pp.206-207

- Similar to an #actant in an #ActorNetwork an #object in #OOO is any entity of any kind.

the concept of substance is still as indispensable to metaphysics as it is to every other theory and discourse. The domain of objects includes: physical objects (a quark) and theoretical objects (concepts), natural objects (a dog) and artificial objects (a computer), intangible objects (a multinational) and concrete objects, real objects and imaginary objects. The central claim of OOO is that these are all on equal footing. And the concept of object has the concept of relation as its correlate, either determining the object independently, or

5.83 x 8.27 in

*Quote 127: Morelle, 2012, p.251*

- In #OOO terms all objects remain withdrawn even as they converge, interrelate, co-translate & influence each other.

~~From an object oriented perspective, both parties are~~ somehow, correct. Whilst the example is extremely abstract, the scene highlights the central paradox of the object oriented position. An object is both a vigorous, consistent unit with real qualities, and yet at the same time completely withdrawn from all of its composite relations, elements, qualities and parts. As a combination and composite of both broom-head and handle, the newly formed broom-object is a consistent unit, which withdraws from both broom-head, broom-handle and all of its constituents (horse hairs, quarks, knot-holes, varnish). The broom-object is irreducible to its use by road sweepers, its manufacturer and the instigating photo of it. It is a 'self-supporting' Heideggerian 'thing'<sup>39</sup> and yet if we were

11.65 x 8.27 in

*Quote 128: Jackson, 2011, p.150*

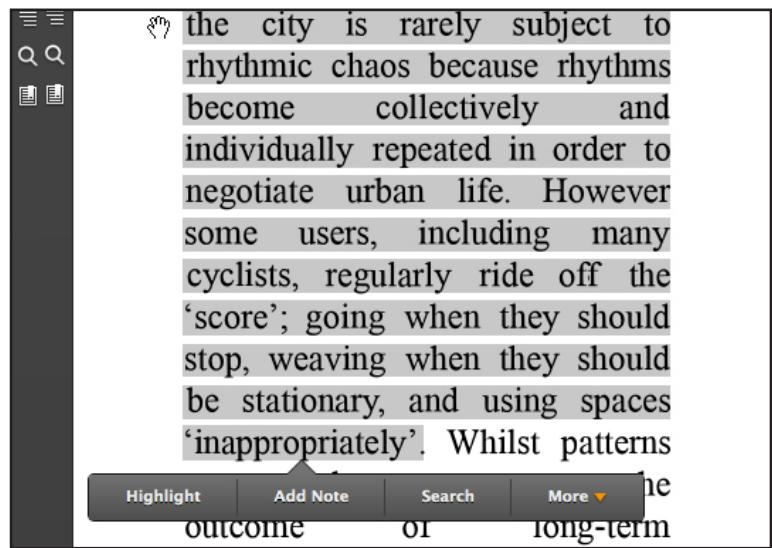
- Assuming a #OOO stance, the portrait posits all objects involved [video, #portal, code, etc] as translating each other, generating #poetry.

- As these objects interpret [& withhold from] each other, the #poetry that emerges bears witness to #TheGlitch.

Lines of poetry can burst asunder. Trees can be pulped to form paper and wind harp<sup>7</sup>. To write poetry is to force the reader to coexist with fragile phrases, fragile ink, fragile paper: to experience the many physical levels of a poem's architecture. Since there is no top object, no bottom object, and no middle object, sheer coexistence is what there is. To write poetry is to perform a nonviolent political act, to coexist with other beings. This coexistence happens not in some eternal now, or in a now-point, however expansive or constrained. The "nowness" of a poem, its "spaciousness," is the disquieting asymmetry between appearance and essence, past and future. With remorseless gentleness, a poem forces us to acknowledge that we coexist with uncanny beings in a groundless yet vivid reality without a beyond. This is what it means to compose an object-oriented defense of poetry.

*Quote 129: Morton, 2012, p.222*

- #TheGlitch as #journey portrait expands on the idea of objects translating each other into their own terms. [Link<sup>7</sup>]
- The #journey is that of a #bicycle snapping POV shots as it rolls down the dark streets of an urban setting optimized for motor vehicles.
  - Although quite ordinary at first glance, a #bicycle ride through a car-centric city is riddled with transgression
  - The inappropriateness of transversing the city on a #bicycle influences its rhythms & translates its landscape from concrete into abstract.
  - Besides abstracting the concrete, a #bicycle ride can also #reveal pathways otherwise concealed by being forced off the main streets.



*Quote 130: Spinney, 2010, loc.1677*

<sup>7</sup> <http://literacyoftheglitch.org/glitchasjourney.html>

- The potential to open up the city & #reveal unforeseen routes places urban cycling on par with #TheGlitch.

which preformed or preconceived **possible information** becomes **realised**, we can only think of an error as coming into being as the unformed and the unforeseen **potential** is **actualised**. This potential emerges from unique activities that occur in the process of a system. These unique activities open the system so that unforeseen information may emerge (DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* 36-37). If a system runs through its process without the potential for error it is

*Quote 131: Barker, 2007*

- Reasonably enough #TheGlitch as #destination portrait is but a hyperlink away from the #journey. [Link<sup>8</sup>]
- Its centerpiece is a map where only the point of departure & final #destination were legible; with the route inexplicably glitched out.
- The #destination portrait's #SparseText touches on the implications of #mapping a #journey, negating the potential of errant wandering.
- Beyond cartography, #mapping is a staple of art education as metaphor, concept, method, impossibility.

These are the ghosts of Tradition. This friend's house serves as a map of design methodology, where prophecy, materiality, order, and tradition convenes. Lyn's suburban setting is a unique confluence, not exactly replicable in the home of any other design

*Quote 133: White, Garoian & Garber, 2010, p.159*

The Cartography of Rubrics  
Metaphorically, rubric (from *rubrica* Latin for “red earth”) is the land as material for creation and communication through the processes of territorialization /deterritorialization/re-territorialization. Rubrics, as currently used in most educational settings today, act as maps with predetermined routes that are utilized in assessing curriculum, teaching, and student learning. A rubric as a chart akin to a star chart or network architecture can, however, promote exploration of the educational landscape rather than dictating a predetermined course (Coil & Merritt, 2011).

*Quote 132: Sutherlin, 2014, p.54*

understand phenomena (Rose, 2001). Visual inquiry approaches, such as collage making and concept mapping, are a means for formulating ideas and articulating relationships among these to help understand phenomena in their formative stages, work through emergent concepts, or to help represent them to others. Collage making and concept mapping, in particular, are useful ways for “listening visually” and getting into “liminal spaces” where “knowledge . . . never arrives . . . it is always on the brink” (Neilsen, 2002, p. 208).

*Quote 134: Butler-Kisber & Poldna, 2010, p.2*

- However, even when #mapping #TheGlitch, the practice brings with it inherent biases.

versity of Amsterdam working on internet sphere mapping and analysis, to assist me in some modest experiments towards this end. There are a number of problems that immediately arise in mapping web spheres. First of all, we had to choose a bias – some starting points from which to ‘search’ – because there is no way to create the ‘integral map of glitch art’ without starting points (and also no way of representing all possible starting points). There is bias in the tools used to do the mapping, in the web platforms that the researcher chooses to focus upon (where tags are scraped from), and in the depth and level of mapping assumed to glean useful levels of detail and degrees of understanding from the larger data set acquired by the process.]

6.38 x 9.02 in

*Quote 135: Menkman, 2011, p.62*

- Although the map used as centerpiece for the #destination portrait does show clear starting & ending points, it neglects #TheRoute.
- By obviating the singularity of #TheRoute, the #destination portrait assumes a #WanderingPosture.

So any wanderer might keep a record, making a map of the wanderings. But were the map a guide that shows how one might get there from here, the record would be tied to a goal. So this other kind of map should be conceptual; it should bear the marks of the movement without necessarily orienting it in a definitive way.

He could carry the map and allow his or her

3.1 These maps, these records of wandering, could allow one to respond to uncertainty at the outset of a journey. They could also allow the wanderer to face the uncertainties of the times and places of arrival.

*Quote 136: de Acosta, 2007, p.71*

- The portrait's #WanderingPosture is reinforced by labeling the wanderer “an error searching for potential error... in every #destination.”
- But a learning experience requires more than evocative reflections on #TheGlitch & #GlitchPortraits to wander through.
- #LiteracyOfTheGlitch is expanded as a #LessonPlan through a #blog that deconstructs & details the origins & processes of each portrait.

- Each of the portrait's centerpieces [the bank logo, the #404ErrorPages, the #414error notice, etc] is a hyperlink to its own #blog post.
- Besides explicating the source material & how it was #DataBended, each #blog post also suggests a series of #FollowUpQuestions.
  - These #FollowUpQuestions are posited in lieu of definitive conclusions & are meant to guide visitors wishing to explore #TheGlitch further.
- Admittedly, #LiteracyOfTheGlitch does not innovate glitch practices: #DataBended #AnimatedGIFs are well established as method & form.
- Glitch innovation aside, #LiteracyOfTheGlitch is meant to reach the uninitiated & exploring #TheGlitch as a #PedagogicalDevice:
  - A #PedagogicalDevice capable of engaging technology [its inherent conventions & agendas] critically & insightfully.
  - A #PedagogicalDevice exhibiting aesthetic dimensions that both learners & facilitators can exploit through creative & affective practices.
  - A #PedagogicalDevice that interrogates the philosophy, politics & implications of deeming the unforeseen as “wrong” & rejecting the errant.
  - A #PedagogicalDevice that can transcend the digital by engaging the everyday, its places & spaces, through “inappropriate” practices.
  - A #PedagogicalDevice that responds equally to notions of Digital Art as Research & #ResearchBasedArt.

values, the contemporary art theory finds the artwork as non-self-evident issue; rather than being a stable and aura-based object anymore, it is a process, an artistic software, an experience, a service devoted to solving a particular (cultural and non-cultural) problem, a research, an interface, which demands from its user also the ability for associative selection, algorithmic (logical) thinking and for procedures pertaining to DJ and VJ culture, such as (re)mixing, cutting, sampling, filtering and recombination.

Art has mutated, thus it has given up the nature of a completed and stable work of art (artifact) and has lost its aesthetic feature; the aesthetic

*Quote 137: Strehovec, 2009, p.254*

ABER. Specifically, we highlight our own Research-Based Art (RBA). RBA is defined as visual artwork that is an aesthetic representation of educational research that utilizes non-linguistic forms to communicate to an audience.<sup>1</sup> We will use Barone and Eisner's seven features of ABER as points of departure for our discussion about RBA as it relates

*Quote 138: Quinn & Calkin, 2008, p.4*

## #MemesNotJustGags draws on similar #ResearchBasedArt notions as it employs #ImageMacros to craft a #VisualEssay: [Link<sup>9</sup>]

- A #VisualEssay intended to respond to questions about the practical applications of interrogating #InternetMemes for pedagogical purposes.
- A #VisualEssay composed of #ImageMacros as they ponder transcending their perceived role as the quintessence of throwaway culture.
- A #VisualEssay that samples films, internet culture, aesthetic theory & educational research indiscriminately to craft & advance arguments.
- Not just the product of my own arts based research, #MemesNotJustGags could be understood as the product of a #CollectiveAuthorship.
- This is the #CollectiveAuthorship that emerges within online communities & defines the character of #InternetMemes.

Comics have conflicted histories, that the mythology of these characters are worthy of discussion to members of meme collectives, and that collective consensus is sought in defining the essence of these characters. They are artifacts negotiated and decided by consensus of a social collective. Every formal feature in memes is the result of social processes.]

The second image in the trio above is Challenge Accepted Guy. While the first use of the

8.50 x 11.00 in

*Quote 139: Milner, 2012, p.103*

- In terms of #ImageMacros this #CollectiveAuthorship is also responsible for #MacroCharacters & their unique voices.
- As an #ActorNetwork, this #CollectiveAuthorship responds not only to the whim of #PRODusers but to every other #actant involved as well.
- #MacroCharacters themselves [their distinct qualities, viewpoints & attitudes] should each be thought of as an #actant in their own right.
- The #MacroCharacters that populate #MemesNotJustGags do so as an #actant each, conversing with each other, expanding & refuting arguments.

stereotypical behaviors. A very partial list of macro characters includes "Scumbag Steve" (who always acts in unethical, irresponsible, and asocial ways) and his antithesis, "Good Guy Greg" (who always tries to help, even if it brings him harm); "Naive College Freshman" (who is overenthusiastic about his new status as a student and clueless about the norms of social behavior in college); "Annoying Facebook Girl" (who is overenthusiastic and overanxious about Facebook and its significance to her social life); "Female College Liberal" (also known as "Bad Argument Hippie," who is both naive and a hypocrite); "Success Kid" (a baby with a self-satisfied grin, accompanied by a caption describing a situation that works better than expected); and "Successful Black Man" (a black man who comically subverts racist assumptions about him by acting like a middle class bourgeois). This array of stock

*Quote 140: Shifman, 2014, loc.1185*

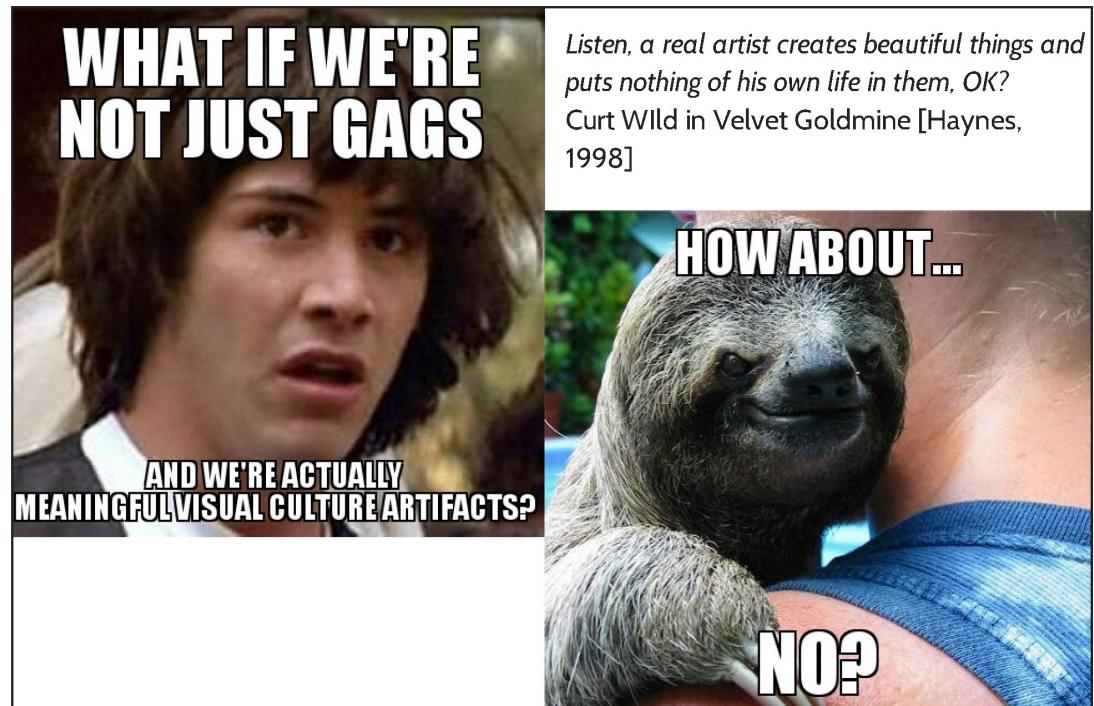
9 <https://memeducationdotorg.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/internetmemesnotjustgags.pdf>

- #MacroCharacters like #TrollFace & #SkepticalBaby set the tone as part of a #perception meme about #Internet-Memes.



Data 12: Perception Meme from Memes, not just gags.

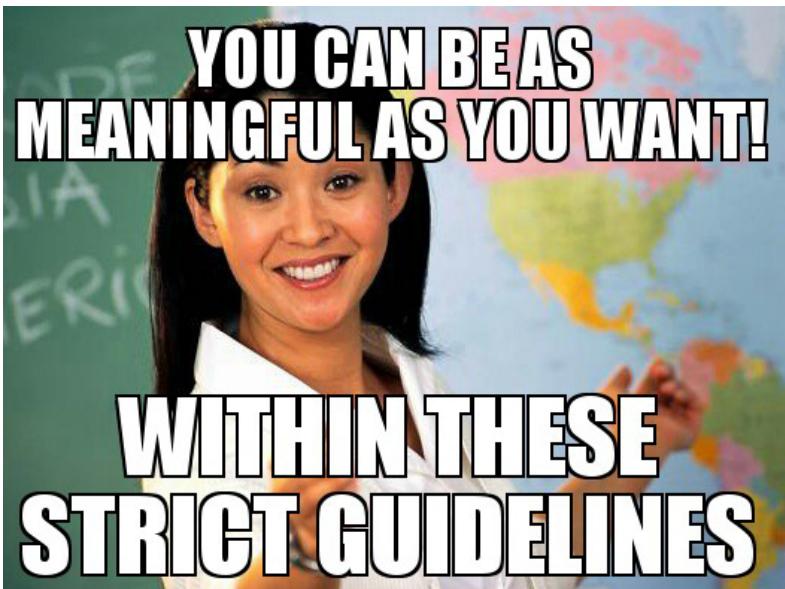
- Meme #perception remains at the crux as #ConspiracyKeanu & #Suspiciously-EvilSloth reflect on their own identity.



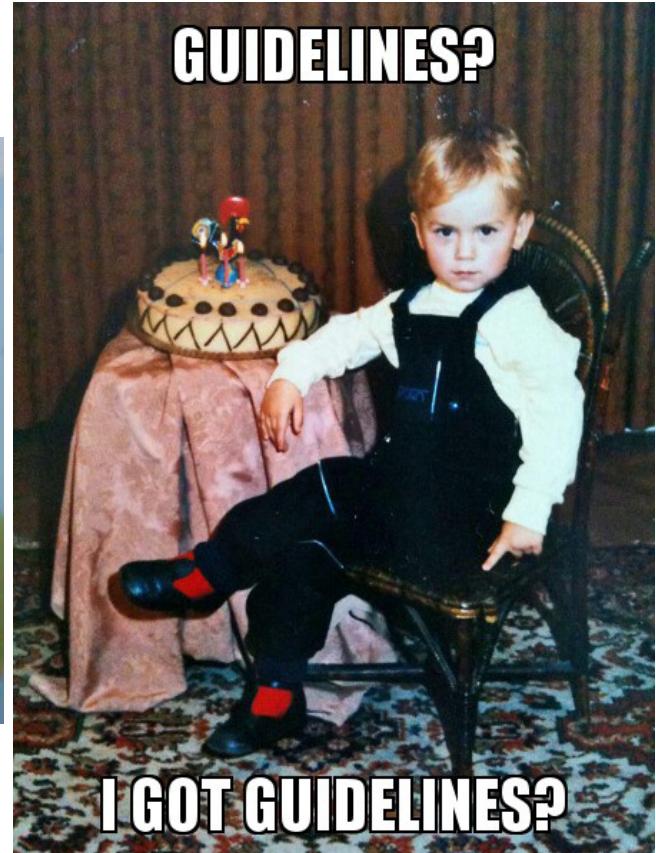
Data 13: Conspiracy Keanu & Suspiciously Evil Sloth from Memes, not just gags

- A quote celebrating the space between artists & artworks introduces #art into the debate about meme #perception.

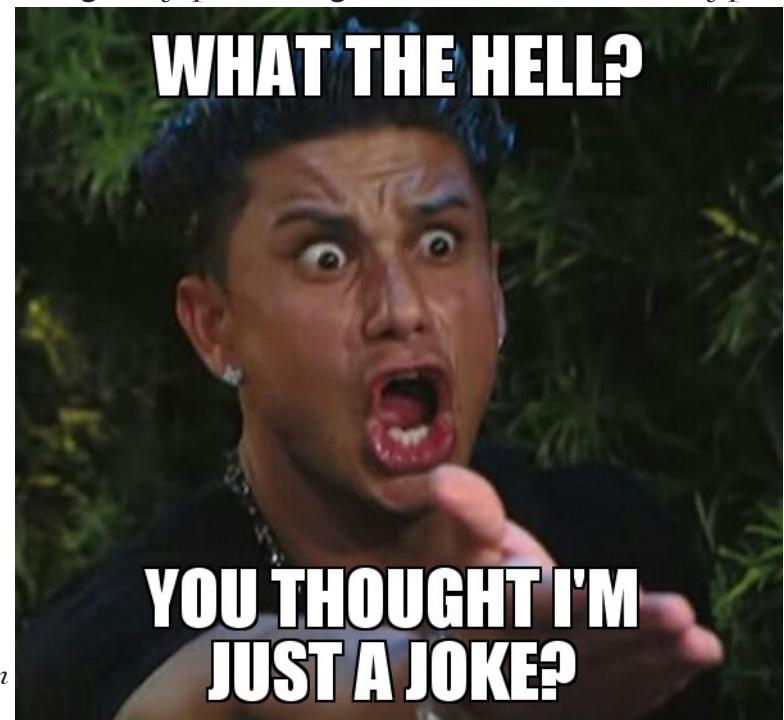
- By positioning #art as far removed from the artist as possible, #MemesNotJustGags celebrates & renders #detachment meaningful.
  - This is the type of #detachment that #ImageMacros afford #PRODusers who speak through repurposed characters with borrowed voices.
- In #Page2, #UnhelpfulHighSchoolTeacher & #SirKid force #MemesNotJustGags to consider guidelines before meaning.



*Data 14: Unhelpful High School Teacher & Sir Kid from Memes, not just gags*



- For his part, #AngryGuido, closes #Page2 by protesting the #JustJokesStereotype.



*Data 15: Angry Guido from Memes, not just gags*

- Both #MacroCharacters & sampled authors continue to debate the #JustJokes-Stereotype in the following 2 pages.

But memes, like other 'everyday' texts, are important because social texts are the raw materials in the construction of societal discourses. Social texts are the artifacts by which cultural participants piece together reality. Truths are argued, stances are taken, and the world is seen through these textual artifacts. The study of cultural participation means the study of the social texts that constitute that culture, like memes.[Milner, 2012 p. 15]



*Data 16: Page 3 from  
Memes, not just gags*



"The way the cutups go to make face at the entrance to the morgue; the way the showoffs come there to recite their grotesque jokes ... in such a place; the way the crowd ... gathers around to laugh their fill at the often indecent antics of a juggler, after gaping at five cadavers laid out side by side... Now, that's what I call revolting ...!" Victor Fournel, *Ce qu'on voit dans les rues de Paris* (Paris, 1858), p. 355 ("La Morgue"). [Benjamin, 1999, p.523]



I generally have students use copyright-free images for most projects. In this case I didn't because it would not have worked or been true to the pop-culture, viral nature of memes.[Woznick, 2013, p.20]

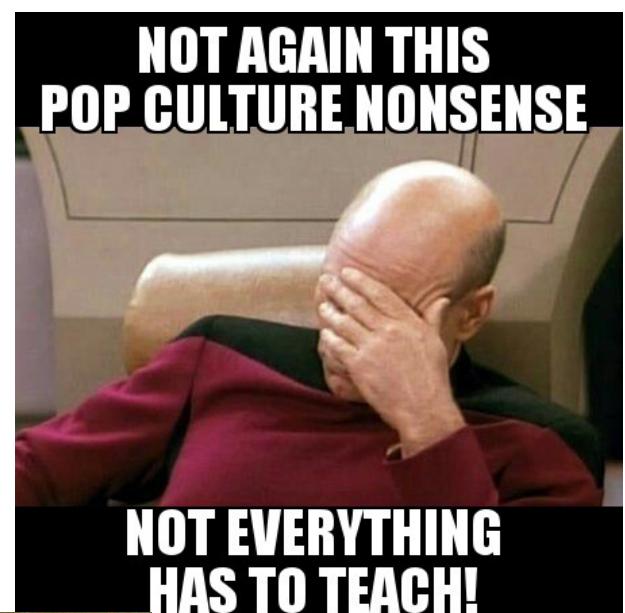


*Data 17: Page 4 from  
Memes, not just gags*

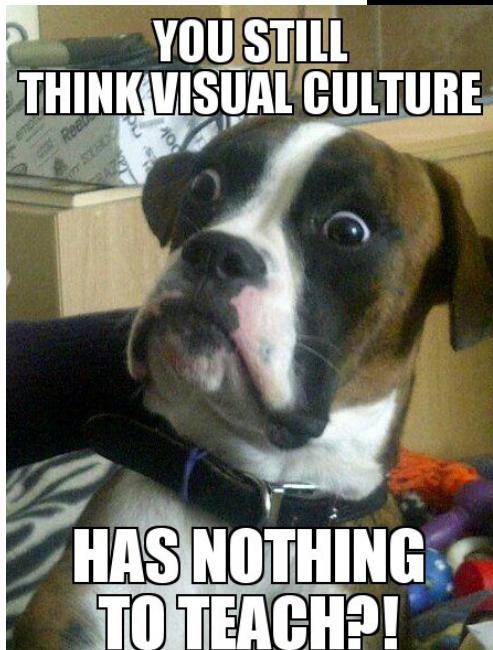
- As #MemesNotJustGags argues for the seriousness of jokes, #DrEvil brings up the notion of #CulturalRelevancy:
- The type of #Cultural-Relevancy fostered by TV & film references that resonate loudly with large cross sections of internet users.
- The type of #Cultural-Relevancy that emerges from examining, critiquing & eviscerating media one visual quote at a time.
- The type of #CulturalRelevancy that alludes to the mainstream, the conventional, #ThePop.
- #FacepalmPickard's concern about #ThePop is not unwarranted; celebrity notwithstanding #MacroCharacters do not ensure learning experiences.
- But beyond pop credentials, #MacroCharacters are significant as the dominating feature of a particular brand of #VisualCulture.
- The same #VisualCulture that internet users encounter daily & is likely taken for granted as inconsequential.



*Data 18: Dr. Evil from Memes, not just gags*

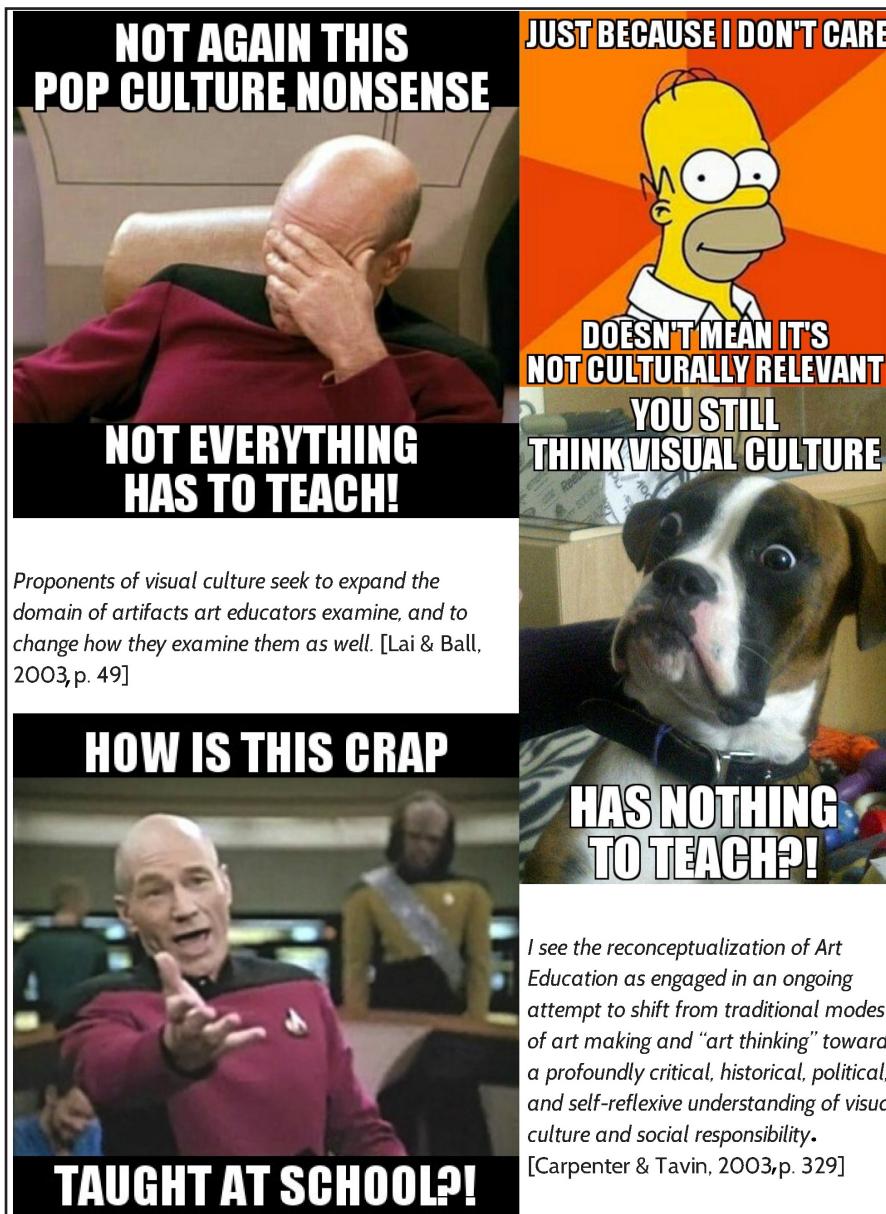


*Data 19: Facepalm Pickard from Memes, not just gags*



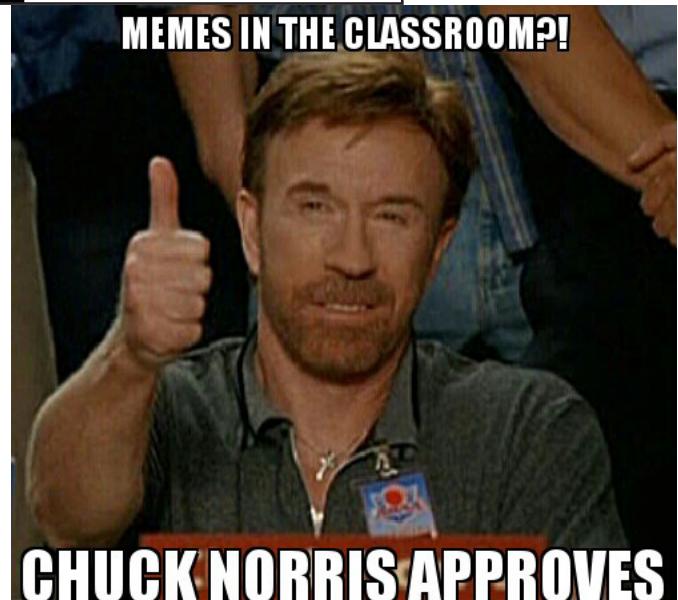
*Data 20: Baffled Boxer from Memes, not just gags*

- #BaffledBoxer's disbelief is expanded through academic arguments regarding #VisualCulture & #ArtEducation.



Data 21: Page 5 from  
Memes, not just gags

- By appealing to #VisualCulture's gravitas #MemesNotJustGags carves out a place for memes within the #ArtClassroom.



Data 22: Chuck Norris Approves  
from Memes, not just gags

- Of course, once in the #ArtClassroom, #InternetMemes pose a series of issues & potentials regarding #MemeLiteracy.
  - As internet tools & practices are integral to #MemeLiteracy it's only befitting to consider their #possibilities within the #ArtClassroom:
    - #Possibilities of integrating technology into the classroom through meme assignments specifically beholden to digital media.
    - #Possibilities of integrating everyday meme practices, already a part of learners' lives, in meaningful ways within learning experiences.
    - #Possibilities to engage learners through meme-based learning experiences that employ well-known digital content & user-friendly practices.
    - Besides the technology involved, #MemeLiteracy can also introduce learners into #ParticipatoryCulture.
    - Through the ideals & conventions of #ParticipatoryCulture learners are redefined as culture makers, mainstream agitators & instigators.



*Data 23: Page 6 from  
Memes, not just gags*

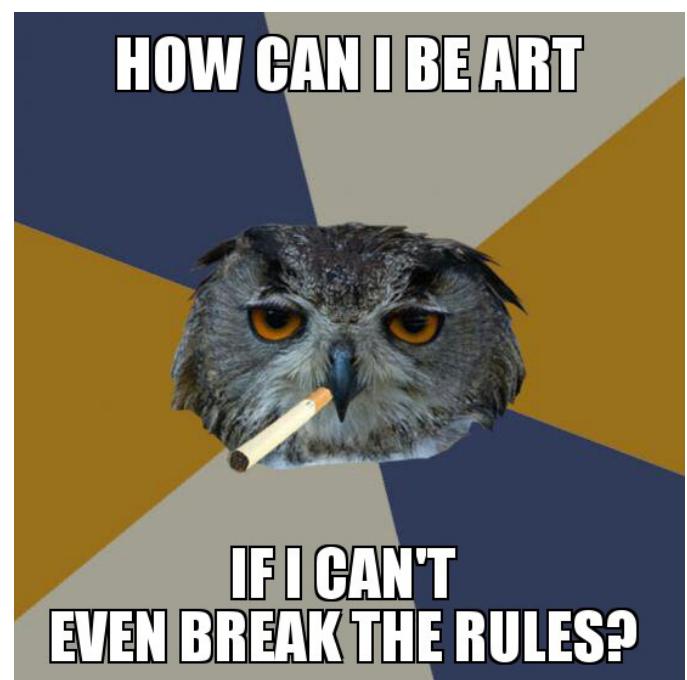
Participatory culture, in which citizens feel and exercise the agency of being cocreators of their culture and not just passive consumers of culture created by others, depends on widespread literacies of participation. You can't participate without knowing how. And cultural participation

*Quote 141: Rheingold, 2012, .55*

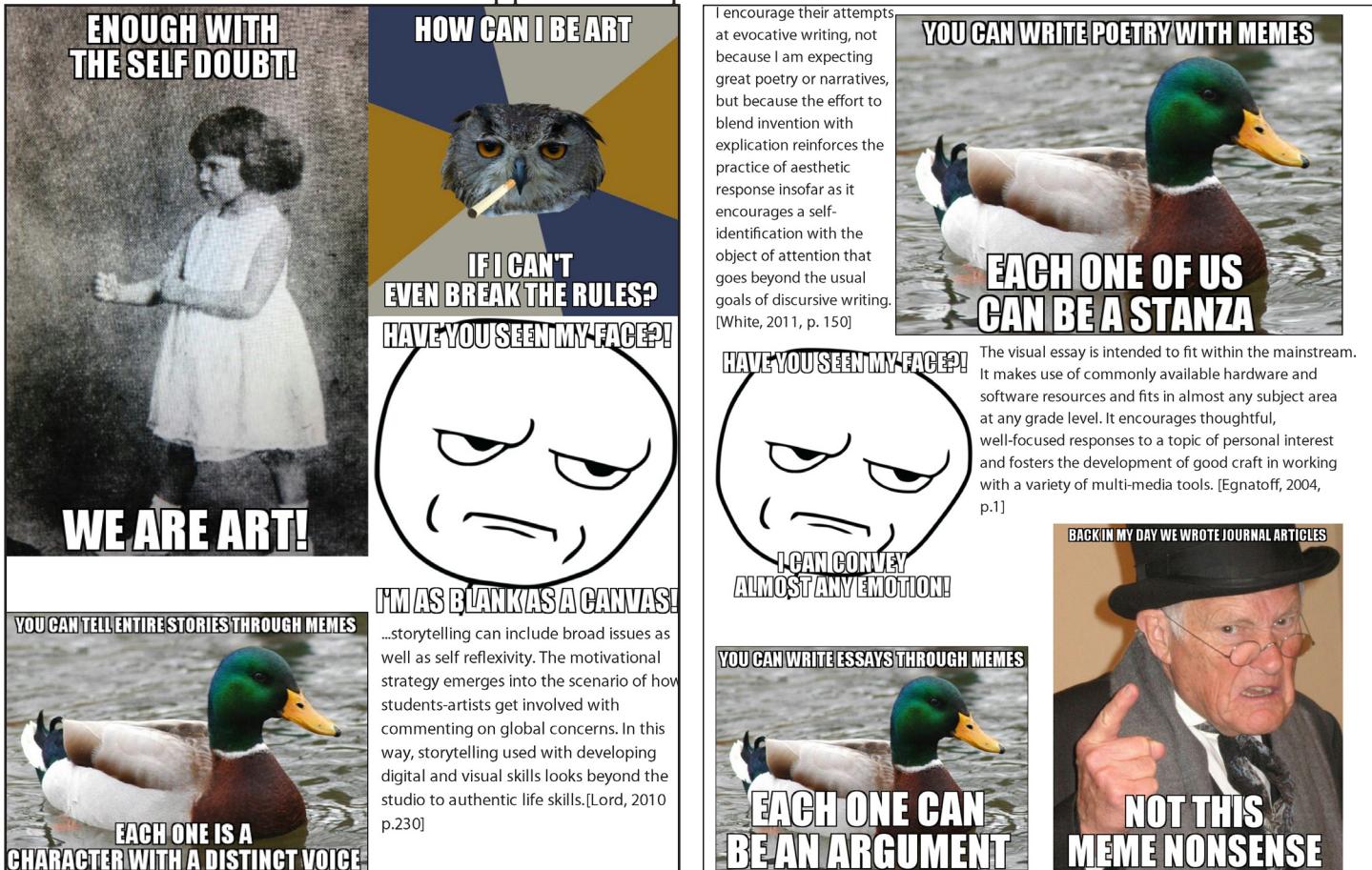
- Students' latent roles within #ParticipatoryCulture transcend the passive ingestion traditionally associated with so-called #dilettantes.
- If the role of #dilettantes expands then the content they generate swells up with self-assurance as well.



- #OverlyManlyDaughter's confidence notwithstanding #MemesNotJustGags must still deal with memes' strict #guidelines.
- Emerging within meme collectives these #guidelines dictate #MacroCharaters' voices & forms as forum members exchange meme #literacy skills.
- These #guidelines are adopted in an effort to keep memes pristine & true to their original intent as the humorous argot of a selected few.



- Meme instances managing to elaborate on a given character while adhering to these #guidelines are more likely to thrive as #InternetMemes.
- The next two pages respond to #ArtStudentOwl by prying these #guidelines in search for untapped meme possibilities.



Data 26: Pages 7 & 8  
from Memes, not just gags

- An earnest #voice is crucial for #MemesNotJustGags to rip through the veil of irony & frivolity that #ImageMacros refuse to relinquish.
- #ActualAdviceMallard & #AreYouFuckingKiddingMe possess such a #voice, one via practical counsel, the latter through disbelief & admonishment.
- Practicalities & incredulities aside, #MemesNotJustGags wraps up its arguments via #TheMostInterestingManInTheWorld.



Data 27: The Most Interesting Man in the World  
from Memes, not just gags

- That an essay composed of #ImageMacros assumes #TheMostInteresting-ManInTheWorld's voice to exalt its own qualities is #significant.
- It is #significant in showing pride & trust on #MemeConventions all the while respecting & remaining true to form, voice & idiom.
- It is #significant in the multiplicity of interesting men that mutate into each other & deliver closing remarks.



Data 28: Page 9 from  
*Memes, not just gags*

- The #SourceMaterial is #significant as well: an international ad campaign for a Mexican beer centered on a man of dubious origins & ethics.
- In fact all #SourceMaterial has a meaningful history of its own whether or not the ensuing #ImageMacros acknowledge & tap into it.
- Meme #literacy then also implies adopting #Source-Material, its idiom, all the while reshaping it into a new purposeful visual utterance.

As memes come in contact with other memes and new populations they may mutate by changing meanings and attributes while retaining identifiable aspects of their original forms. [Murray, 2012, p. 20]

A challenge to media teachers is to consider and integrate students' everyday media experiences into formal classroom teaching and learning. Integrating student experiences and knowledge about media into the classroom requires teachers to find a productive balance between formal and non-formal media practices. [de Lange, 2011, p. 251]

- Finally #DisasterGirl asks rhetorically if now would be a good time to make #MemesNotJustGags.



*Data 29: Page 10 from  
Memes, not just gags*

- Not content to end on a rhetorical question #MemesNotJustGags employs its works #cited pages as a postscript of sorts.

- Of course the dozen references actually #cited are present [highlighted] but the same is true for a host of #interjecting others.

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*Data 50: Pages 11-13 from  
Memes, not just gags*

- Including #interjecting sources, albeit struck through, is an extension of #InternetMemes' implicit cross referencing & co-evolutions.
- But despite the number of sources cited, #MemesNotJustGags still remains largely an insular work that merely references #MemeCollectives.
  - Save for the content produced & defined by these #MemeCollectives, however, they were not actively engaged as the essay was crafted.
- The same could be said for all three #responses to class readings & assignments that were crafted during #Phase1 of this #ABER.

## The absence of an actual collectivity from #Phase1 means that all work generated is missing a crucial ingredient in the meme phenomena.

- Instead, #Phase1 emerges as a single agent sifts through a multiplicity of meme forms & content searching for latent pedagogical uses.
- In order to counteract #Phase1's evident monism, the research's next phase was designed to be deployed within a #LearningCommunity.
  - Even though this #LearningCommunity did not reside online, like meme traditions demand, but in an art center it was nonetheless a #catalyst:
    - A #catalyst for understanding #InternetMemes not through their formal characteristics & specific meme types but as a shared language.
    - A #catalyst for expanding the #LanguageOfInternetMemes beyond personal expression and into the realm of a communal phenomenon.
    - A #catalyst for considering #InternetMemes not as products but as processes, each an #ActorNetwork where multitudes of agencies commingle.

- A #catalyst for reflecting upon the #LanguageOfInternetMemes as the logical extension of a community with similar preoccupations & humor.
- A #catalyst for shifting this #ABER's focus away from the researcher & over to groups of learners as they develop their own meme #literacy.
- A #catalyst for the production of digital content that differs greatly both in form & purpose from the memes discussed during this chapter.
- A #catalyst for a multitude of #PRODusers to generate #InternetMemes of their own instead of the single point of view that informed #Phase1.
- A #catalyst for the next phase of research where the researcher ceased to generate memes & became a facilitator instead.
- A #catalyst for the discussion that these shifting conditions entail.

# **Chapter 3**

## **The Research [Phase 2: Researcher as Facilitator]**

## Ch.3 On The #LanguageOfInternetMemes, an Arts-Based Educational Research [#ABER] | The Research | #Phase2: Researcher as Facilitator

- This chapter details #Phase2 of my research & just like the previous chapter it is redacted as a series of #tweets.
- Just like #tweets each sentence is up to 140 characters long except when images & hyperlinks are attached.
- #Tweets containing an image are limited to 118 characters while a hyperlink limits them to 116. Embedding both makes the number 94.
- Most #tweets in this chapter also include #hashtags as an organizing agent threading & linking sentences into paragraph-like structures.
  - On occasion, #hashtags are also intended as callbacks to keywords, previously established notions, concepts & arguments.
  - Of course #hashtags can also function as portals to the twitter-verse laying beyond this exercise in academic writing, so click with care.
- Although the intent was to maintain a traditional layout for a dissertation chapter, the conventions of #tweets at times demanded otherwise.
- It is imperative that #tweets, for example, remain adjacent to the images attached occasionally resulting in unconventional #PageBreaks.
  - Whenever these #PageBreaks were necessary #PageBreak appears at the bottom of the page.
  - Once tweeted, these #PageBreaks no longer apply as each tweet relates to the others only as a reply or through #hashtags, not spatially.

#Phase2 of my #ABER into the #LanguageOfInternetMemes was concerned with facilitating meme #literacy to learners from 6-13 years of age.

- At the core of this #literacy effort was the notion of memes as #EncodedTexts that articulate social discourses.

and so on. Hence, our claim that literacies are “socially recognized ways of generating, communicating and negotiating meaningful content through the medium of encoded texts within contexts of participating in Discourses (or, as members of Discourses)” (Lankshear and Knobel 2006, 64). As such, blogging, fanfic writing, manga producing, meme-ing, photoshopping, anime music video (AMV) practices, podcasting, vodcasting, and gaming are *literacies*, along with letter writing, keeping a diary, maintaining records, running a paper-based zine, reading literary novels and

*Quote 142: Lankshear & Knobel, 2007, p.6*

- As #EncodedTexts emerging from decidedly social, albeit virtual, environments #InternetMemes respond to specific #CulturalConstraints.

- But #CulturalConstraints not only shape form & content; they also impact access, success & perceived proficiency.

agents, the story of memes is not so utopian as unfettered creativity<sup>100</sup>. Memes are quite restrictive in their formal components when we consider the gatekeeping practices of the collectives producing them. Even as memes are built upon individual reappropriation, they are still beholden a broader system of social processes. In this regard, the creative participation that occurs in meme collectives happens by degree. The ideas that get traction are those that balance the imitation needed to resonate with audiences, but the creativity to be seen as something new. Memes, at a formal level, intertwine participation and restriction. Participation in meme collectives is a process that demands demonstration of social competency. This competency is a perquisite for innovation.

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*Quote 143: Milner, 2012, p.6*

- Important among the #CulturalConstraints that spawn #InternetMemes is the role of meme collectives as virtual #gatekeepers.
- #Gatekeepers that brandish humor to demarcate digital turf & keep outsiders at bay.

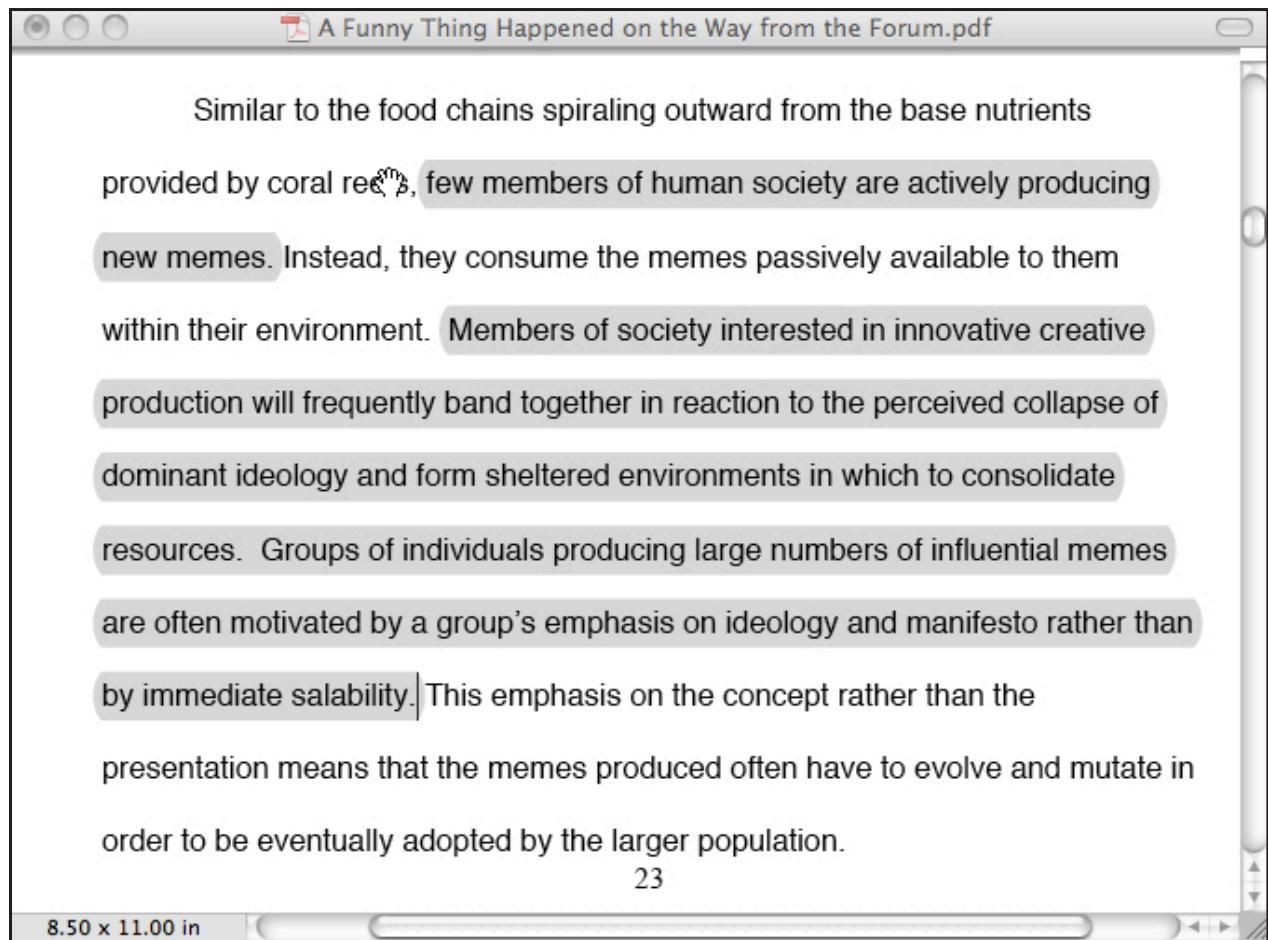
also states that, “Internet memes are basically an endless series of in-jokes, a few of which occasionally cross over into the mainstream (where their origins are rarely known and probably a matter of indifference)...each bit of apparent idiocy is an in-group/out-group marker” (Walker, 2010).

Attitudes, however, seem to be shifting. During his panel discussion at ROFLcon 2012, Christopher Poole mused about whether the surging popularity of these memes meant the “mainstreaming of the internet, or the internetting of the mainstream” (Poole, 2012). During a question and answer period, the quandary again arose about whether “mainstreaming” and lower barriers for engagement were making the internet less fun and funny. One of the audience

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*Quote 144: Decker-Maurer, 2012, p.19*

- #Gatekeepers that generate digital content & mold visual online culture in accordance to ad hoc agendas.



*Quote 145: Husted, 2012, p.25*

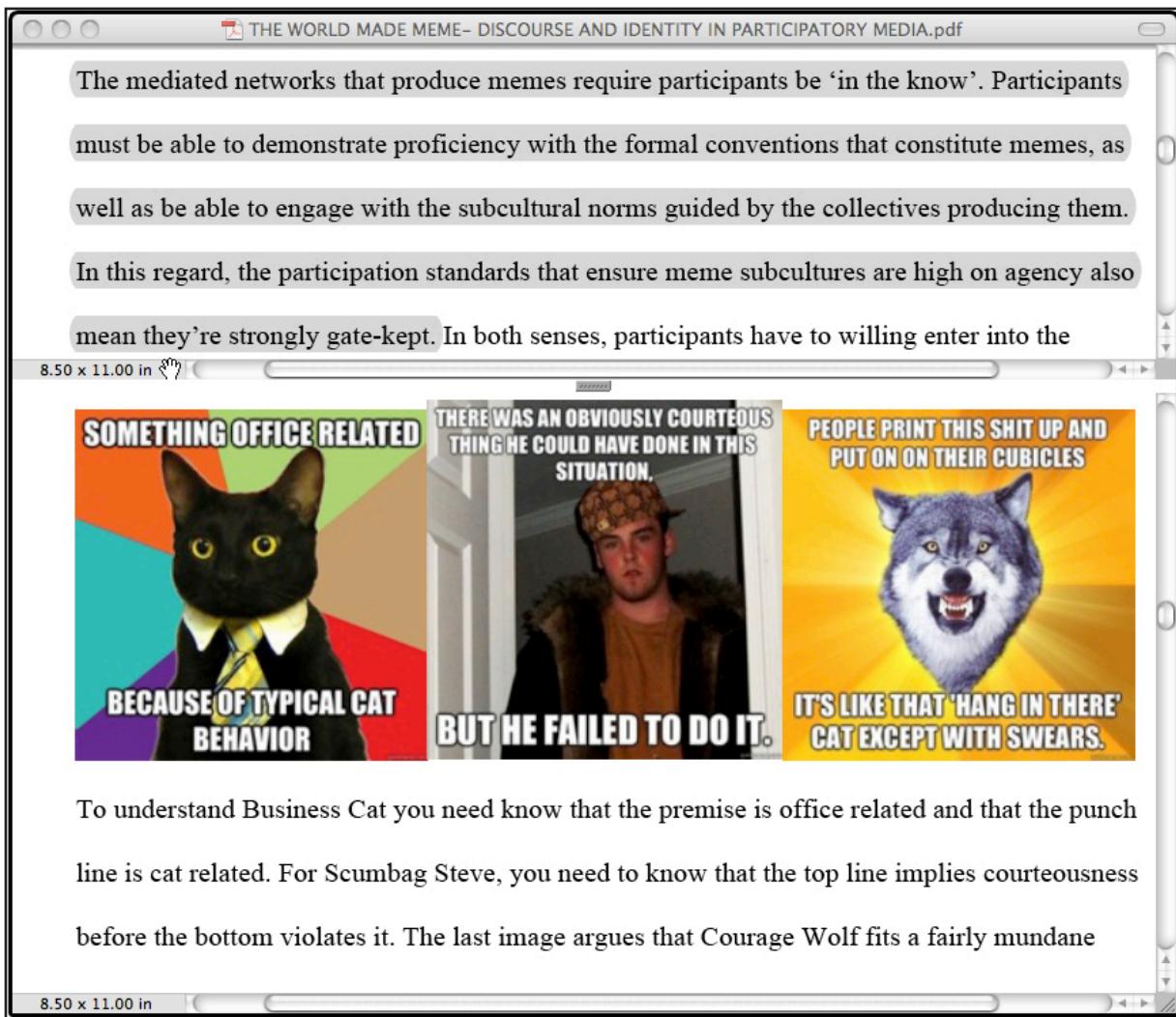
- #Gatekeepers that determine how much meme literacy is required for the “others” to cease being “other.”

protagonist with the eternal question, WTF? The “others” in such memes are framed as the out-group. They lack intelligence, discernment, and literacy—particularly digital literacy.

memes deal with successful social

*Quote 146: Shifman, 2014, loc.1221*

- #Gatekeepers that dictate & impart meme #literacy, ensuring the production, propagation & “correct” use of memes.



*Quote 147: Milner, 2012, pp.108 e3 118*

- There is a contradictory #tension emerging from meme collectives administering both #InternetMemes & the #literacy required to engage them.
  - A #tension in terms of whether or not #Internet-Memes are meant to transcend the virtual immediacies from which they emerge.
  - A #tension in terms of identifying meme collectives whose members & content mostly operate & spread anonymously.
  - A self-referential #tension as originality is confronted by a cornucopia of content that feeds upon itself.
  - A #tension in terms of the hegemonic humor that homogenizes a culture otherwise reputed to thrive on heterogeneity, access & participation.

Highlight Add Note Search More ▾

Welcome to the Memesphere

Once cultural artifacts go viral, they are subsumed into the lexicon to serve as the foundation for comedic callbacks, mashups, Photoshops, etc. The culture becomes so self-referential as to become virtually incomprehensible to those who do not live inside it.

Think about your grand-

*Quote 148: Stryker, 2011, loc.2950*

- A #tension in terms of my own intent to extract meme #literacy from its natural [digital] habitat & facilitate it in real life.
- As opposed to traditional meme #literacy #Phase2 occurred mostly in real life [#IRL] by facilitating a series of meme #workshops.
- The #workshops implemented some #strategies extrapolated from #Phase1 when I engaged the #LanguageOfInternetMemes as a doctoral student.
  - #Strategies on writing & synthesizing complex information with visual images that sample & remix disparate sources were paramount.
- Significantly, #Phase1's relative insularity meant that these #workshops were a chance to engage #InternetMemes collectively with learners.
- The collectivity inherent to #workshops added a crucial element to the exploration of #InternetMemes, #CollectivePhenomena themselves.
- As #CollectivePhenomena memes can transcend the isolation traditionally associated with online learning practices.

As robust as many e-learning applications are, some approaches to instruction on the Internet—such as Webquests, module-based instruction, and quiz-taking—lack the important social and collaborative components that are necessary for learning (Bandura, 1971). Webconferences, Internet Relay Chats (IRCs), and

*Quote 149: Quinn, 2011, p.19*

- But harnessing memes' collaborative nature was but one of the #workshops' facets meaning to foster #Social-Learning.

By ‘social learning’, Brown and Adler mean, in the first place, learning based on the assumption that our understanding of concepts and processes is constructed socially in conversations about the matters in question and ‘through grounded [and situated] interactions, especially with others, around problems or actions’ (2008: 18). From a social learning perspective, the focus is more on *how* we learn than simply on *what* we learn. The emphasis shifts from ‘the content of a subject to the learning activities and human interactions around which that content is situated’ (*ibid.*). That is, the emphasis shifts from what Brown and Adler call a ‘Cartesian’ view of learning as a matter of getting content into heads – on the model of providing private minds with raw materials from which to produce thought and knowledge – to seeing learning as a matter of involving individuals in processes and practices within which knowledge, understanding, and ideas are produced by participants as *social accomplishments*. The social view of learning and knowledge proceeds from the same basis as the practice approach to social theory discussed in Chapter 2. For example, with

*Quote 150: Lankshear & Knobel, 2011, p.218*

- In order to facilitate meme #literacy in #SocialLearning terms, #IRL is not enough; a #Web2.0 presence is required.

## Introduction

Web 2.0 represents a collaborative, interactive Internet where individuals can easily share, create, and contribute to global conversations. This next generation Web offers unique opportunities for educational application in inquiry practice, collaboration, communication and individual expression, and literacy. Yet, schools are notoriously slow to adopt new technologies. Resistance to change, the rate at which new tools are emerging, network security issues, and Internet safety concerns are all obstacles. The most cited reason for lack of

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*Quote 151: Baralt, Dawson & Drexler, 2008, p.272*

- The collaborative #Web2.0 practices that foster memes & their life cycle mesh fittingly within #SocialLearning.

that propagate from person to person while undergoing variation, selection, and retention. Memes are transmitted throughout a population via social learning, and at any given time, members of a population either are adopting cultural traits (which become memes) or rejecting those traits through a complex interplay of social, emotional, and cognitive processes (Baker & Gammon, 2008).

Knobel and Lankshear (2007) documented the content of many Internet memes and found that most are intended to provide hu-

8.27 x 11.02 in

*Quote 152: Guadano, Rempala, Murphy & Okdie, 2013, p.2313*

Video projects that are designed to be intentionally participatory include participants in the creative process, whereas in social learning, a context is created in which a group or community can innovate in response to mutual challenges. In the latter instance, the process of production has beneficial community effects. Project leaders therefore need to consider whether social learning is a central goal or only a side benefit of their initiatives.

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Dougherty, A. & Sawhney, N. (2012). Emerging digital technologies and practices. In Mitchell, C. & de Lange, N. (Eds.) *Handbook of Participatory Video*. Altamira Press. pp. 439-453 [p. 441]

*Quote 153: Dougherty & Sawhney, 2012, p.441*

- In the case of the #workshops informing #Phase2 of this research, #Web2.0 conventions came via the social network service #GooglePlus.
- #GooglePlus is a social platform intended to integrate fully with the rest of Google's digital infrastructure.

**Google+** (or **Google Plus**) is a [social networking](#) and identity service<sup>[3][4]</sup> that is owned and operated by [Google Inc.](#) Google has described Google+ as a "social layer" that enhances many of its online properties, and that it is not simply a social networking website, but also an authorship tool that associates web-content directly with its owner/author.<sup>[5]</sup>



Quote 154: Google+, n.d.

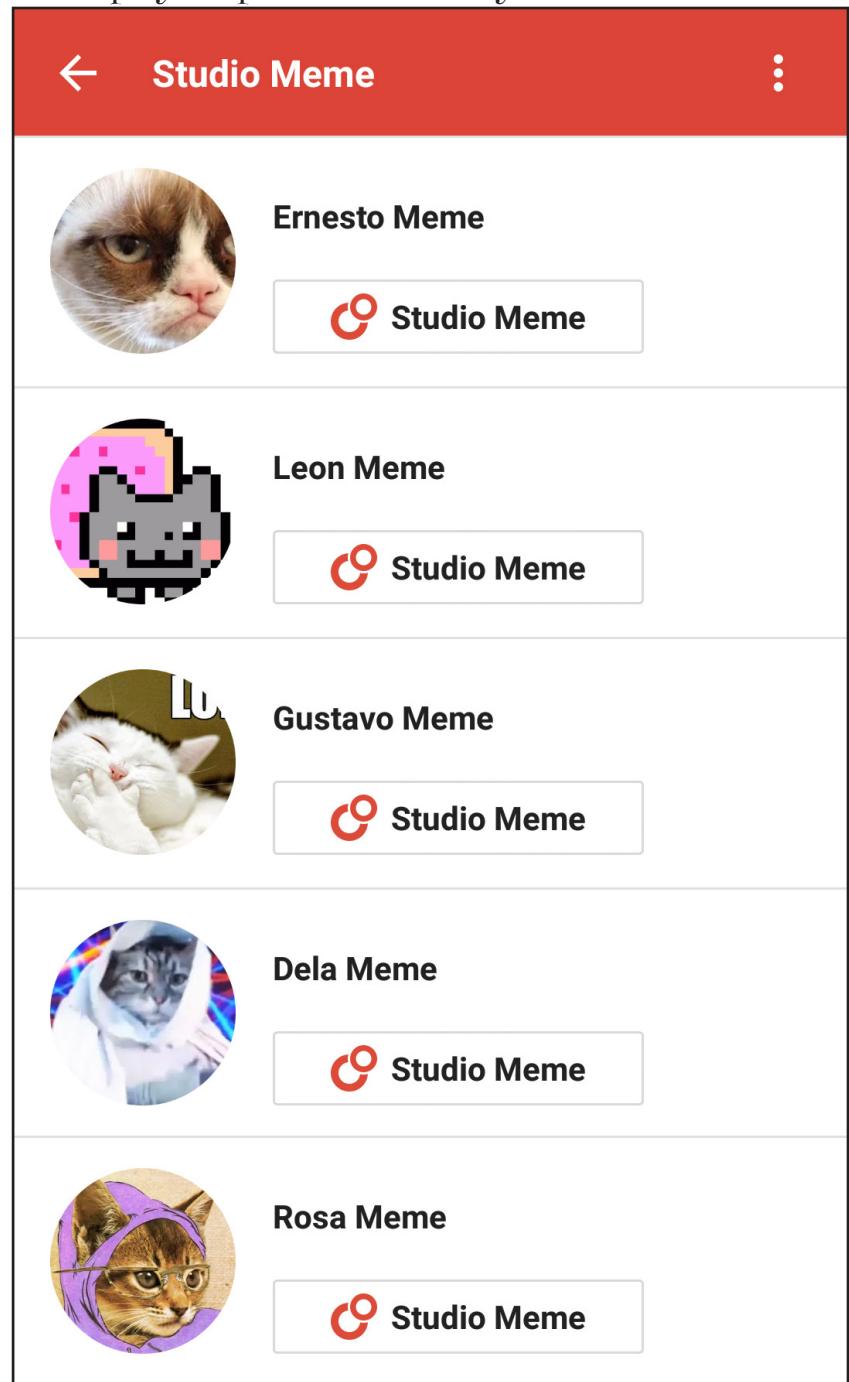
- #GooglePlus' organizational scheme, #circles, makes it an intriguing vehicle to explore #Web2.0 conventions within an educational context.
- #Circles enable users to manage their networks, their contacts, their content & the sharing of it.
- In educational contexts #circles can be understood as #Virtual-Classrooms that all parties involved can reconfigure from their own ends.

organizing contacts. Similar to 'lists' or 'groups' available in networks such as Facebook or Twitter, Circles are user-created groupings of contacts which may be overlapping or hierarchical, allowing users a great deal of flexibility in organizing their networks. Each time a user shares a piece of content, he or she makes a contextual decision about the audience with whom to share it; content can be shared publicly or shared selectively to one or more circles. Users can also share to 'friends of friends' by selecting an 'Extended Circles' option though this feature is not

Quote 155: Kairam, Brzozowski, Huffaker e³ Chi, 2012, p.1066

- #VirtualClassrooms initially crafted by facilitators circling all learners, who can in turn circle both classmates & extracurricular peers.
- #VirtualClassrooms where learners & facilitators can whisper to one another, share with the class or even shout out loud for all to read.
- #VirtualClassrooms that, while decidedly proprietary, remain fairly accessible to gmail account holders regardless of other affiliations.
- #VirtualClassrooms that straddle the border between the supposedly private & the idealized public; the insular & the transparent.
- #VirtualClassrooms that can serve formal education while keeping an open door to internet culture & every bit of triviality found within.
- #VirtualClassrooms that, although still requiring basic #literacy skills, rely largely on simple point, click, type & share practices.
- #VirtualClassrooms that while free & user friendly must still be acknowledged as fulfilling a #CorporatistAgenda for, in this case, Google.
  - The recognition of this #CorporatistAgenda [mining personal data, etc] is crucial specially when it comes to exposing minors to it.
  - The recognition of this #CorporatistAgenda [tracking consumption patterns, etc] makes it possible to mitigate it to a certain extent.
  - The recognition of this #CorporatistAgenda [curating web experiences, etc] should itself be incorporated & discussed if appropriate.
- #IRL #Phase2 drew on a partnership with an art center based in #Tubac, AZ.
  - #Tubac Center of the Arts [Link] was the site for #StudioMeme.
    - #StudioMeme was 1 of 6 #classes offered as part of the center's 4-week long #SummerArtProgram geared towards learners 6 to 14 years old.
    - Besides "talking" meme, learners also took #classes on sculpture, acting, illustration, mixed media & introspection with other instructors.
    - Learners rotated in & out of #classes one week at a time peppering the center's meeting rooms & exhibition halls with their artwork.
    - All #StudioMeme #artwork, wholly digital, was displayed on a private #GooglePlus circle that learners accessed via 5 shared #FauxAccounts.
      - The #FauxAccounts were created beforehand as a way to keep learners from sharing personal information by signing up for an email account.
      - The #FauxAccounts were also created as a nod to internet culture's penchant for anonymity & nonsensical #ScreenNames.

- In this case, all #ScreenNames employed splintered from my own full name & used famous #LOLcats as profile pictures.
- It's important to note that #StudioMeme accommodated more than 5 learners at all time meaning that the #Faux-Accounts were not individual.
- Each of these #Faux-Accounts was respectively used to log into one of five Chromebook laptops, which run Google's own #ChromeOS.
- Since #ChromeOS is built as extension of Google's web products it was an ideal operating system for lesson plans using #GooglePlus.
- Even though all #artwork remains available within the confines of the shared, private circle not all content was collected & used as data.
- Only the #artwork made by learners whose parents signed the appropriate consent form & assented themselves to participating was collected.
- This is also the #artwork that is referenced throughout this & the next chapter as examples of the meme content generated during #Phase2.



*Data 31: Studio Meme private circle*

In keeping with the program's logistics, which split up learners according to age ranges, #StudioMeme consisted of 3 autonomous #curricula.

- The age-appropriate #curricula [for 6-7, 8-9 & 10-13 year-olds respectively] meant that each could feature different #MemeTypes.

#MemeTypes like #EmojiStories and #SeparatedAtBirth, involving almost no reading or writing, were used with the 6 & 7 year-old learners.

- Like their name suggests #EmojiStories use strings of #emojis as lexicon to construct statements & retell narratives.

It's easy to dismiss emoji. They are, at first glance, ridiculous. They are a small invasive cartoon army of faces and vehicles and flags and food and symbols trying to topple the millennia-long reign of words. Emoji are intended to illustrate, or in some cases replace altogether, the words we send each other digitally, whether in a text message, email, or tweet. Taken together, emoji look like the electronic equivalent of those puffy stickers

*Quote 156: Sternberg, 2014*

- Initially trapped in chats & text messages, #emojis have planted their wavy flags all over internet culture & beyond.

introduced by the Unicode Consortium. In 2014 they became ensconced in discussions of diversity, religion, and even psychoanalysis. They gave us the ability to speak using Mexican food and Seinfeld characters, and even appeared in airports, havens for nonverbal communication. The past 12 months alone has seen these functional pictures coming out of the techno-woodwork of our smartphone keyboards and into the cultural lexicon.

*Quote 157: Mufson, 2014*

- #EmojiStories like ☀️📖😊☀️🌙😊💡😴📖😊 not only demand creativity to write but also to read as meaning remains uncertain.

my friend, grosses out my mom, makes my sister think of changing diapers. Emojis today are in a similar fluid state as the English language in the 16th century: Anything goes and everything is up for debate. Back then you could spell anything any which way—Smith, Smythe, Smyth. Even Shakespeare varied the spelling of his own name. Punctuation was also a mess; rules for standard use didn't get locked down until the invention of the printing press.

*Quote 158: Mann, 2014*

- The interpretative process that #EmojiStories demand was the initial point of departure as learners were introduced to meme #literacy.
- Learners were asked to look through & interpret an album of #EmojiStories shared via the workshop's private circle.


**Leon De la Rosa**

Shared privately - June 26, 2013

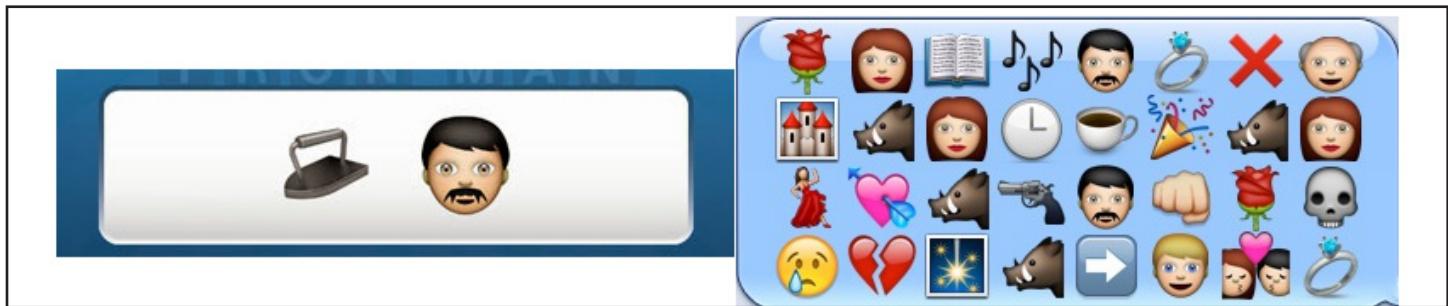
NEXT look through these Emoji Memes.  
What phrases or stories are they telling?  
Which one is your favorite?  
Why?  
Think of a story that you can tell using emojis!



+1    ↗    Message

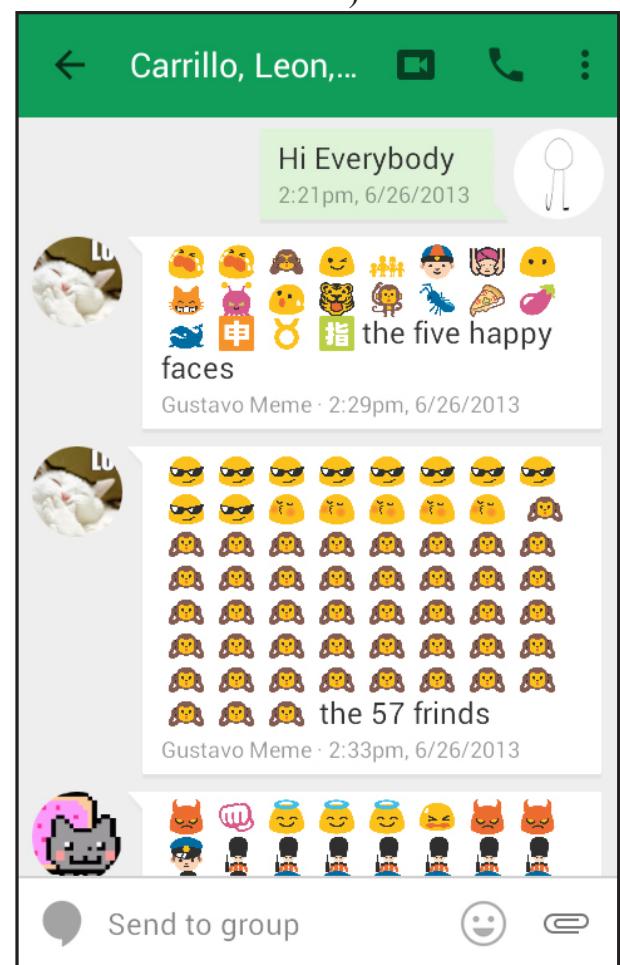
*Data 52: Original post introducing Emoji Stories*

- The #EmojiStories shared ranged from the simplest of illustrated film titles to complex plot lines re-imagined.



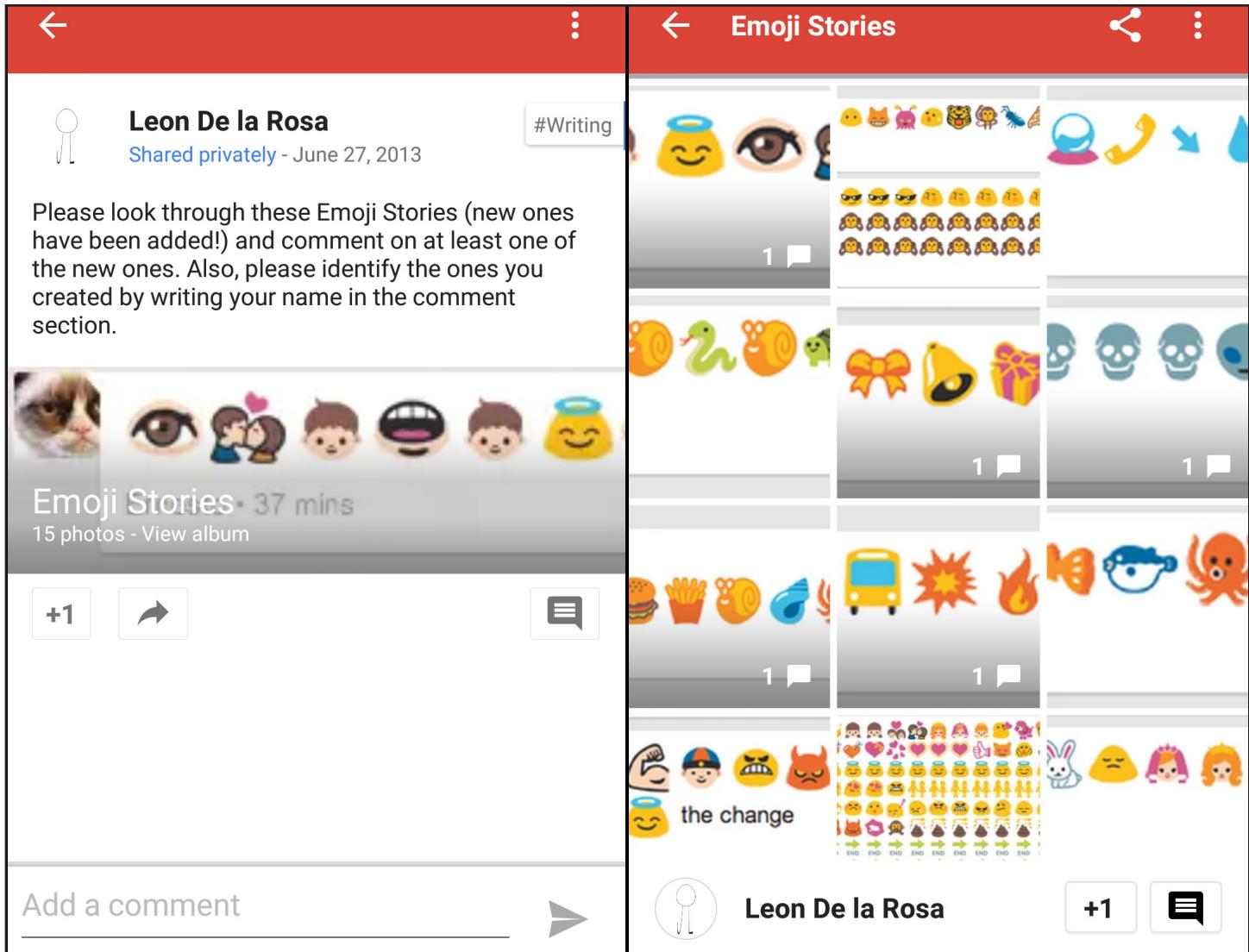
*Data 53: Iron Man and Beauty & the Beast. In Emojii.*

- Instead of expecting learners to engage the #EmojiStories on #GooglePlus alone, short #conversations were had with each student about them.
  - The #conversations centered on the role that each emoji played as well as their congruency with the depicted movie or phrase.
- In order to keep the lesson plan on #EmojiStories from turning into a quiz game all examples & references were identified beforehand.
- The hope was that by taking the guessing out of #EmojiStories, learners would be able to focus on the methods, logic & practice of them.
- After the introductory phase learners were asked to craft #EmojiStories of their own, using a group chat window.



*Data 54: Group chat used for Emojii Stories*

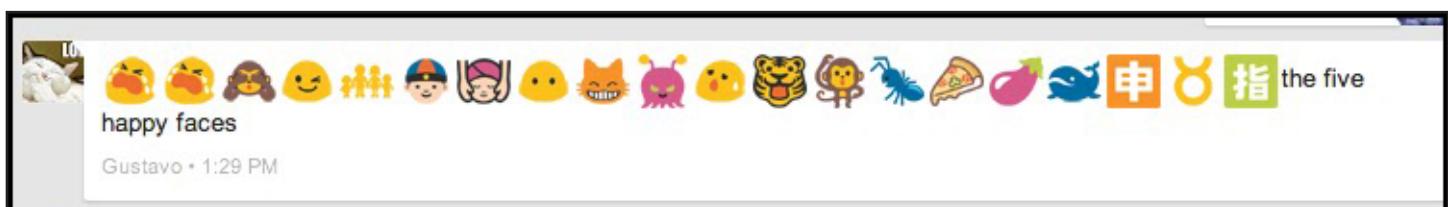
- Once learners had completed their #EmojiStories, these were collected & posted in an album.



Data 35: Post detail from the Emoji Stories album.

The 1 comment indicate comments made on individual stories.

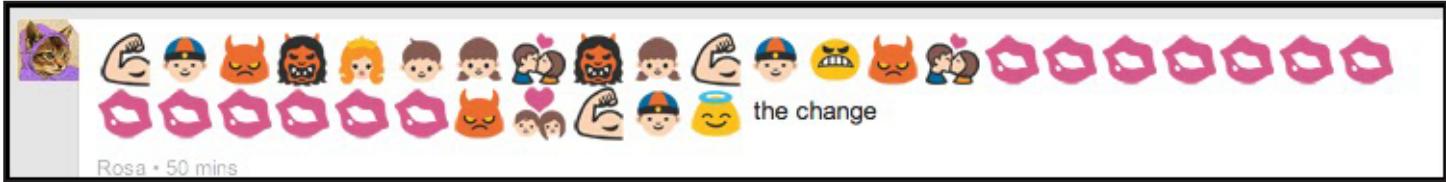
- Most learners created #EmojiStories brimming with nouns but lacking verbs; #entities whose actions, if any, were up to interpretation.
  - “The 5 Happy Faces” for example reads like a puzzle whose #entities must be examined to make sense of the title.



Data 36: The Five Happy Faces

#PageBreak

- #Entities in “The Change” [a strong man, a demon, a love interest & 2 kids] give way to a barrage of love & kisses.



Data 37: *The Change*

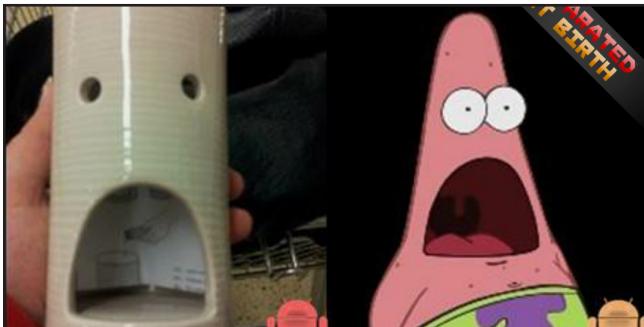
- These #EmojiStories require a #performative engagement that narratives usually don't as they are necessarily reconfigured by each “reader”.
  - In a way this #performative dimension renders #emojis intriguingly fluid as they straddle the border between the written & the spoken.
  - #Emojis then can be understood as a discourse impacting literate transformations with a style & structure of its own.

*children enjoy. So here I come to my third principle for literacy learning: we need to develop a better understanding of the knowledge of distinct discourse styles and structures that children bring with them to school from the outside world, to see how spoken and written channels overlap and interflow in those discourses, and to recognize how linguistic knowledge of this kind can be used to make literate transformations from speech to reading and writing and back again. One way to discover this kind of discourse*

*Quote 159: Fox, 2003*

#SeparatedAtBirth memes, used along with #EmojiStories with the 6 & 7 year-old learners, are significantly less complex.

- #SeparatedAtBirth memes compare, contrast & ridicule unrelated #objects-- human, non-human, fictitious or inanimate.



Candle Holder & Patrick Star



Mustache Pig & Richard Griffiths

Meme 10: Separated at birth memes. Examples.

- The role of #objects is important here, particularly if taken within a #FlatOntology frame of reference.
- By cross-referencing things, people, cartoons & characters as form & content, #SeparatedAtBirth memes can be understood as inherently flat.
- Coupled with their inherent ontological flatness, #SeparatedAtBirth memes also hint at a profound work of formal & material #speculation.
- The formal #speculation required to correlate the one candle holder that shot from the correct angle reminds one of Patrick from Spongebob.

different<sup>ly</sup>: his flat ontology grants all objects the same ontological status. For Bryant (as for Latour), the term *object* enjoys a wide berth: corporeal and incorporeal entities count, whether they be material objects, abstractions, objects of intention, or anything else whatsoever—quarks, Harry Potter, keynote speeches, single-malt scotch, Land Rovers, lychee fruit, love affairs, dereferenced pointers, Mike “The Situation” Sorrentino, bozons, horticulturists, Mozambique, *Super Mario Bros.*, not one is “more real” than any other.

Quote 160: Bogost, 2012, loc.2921

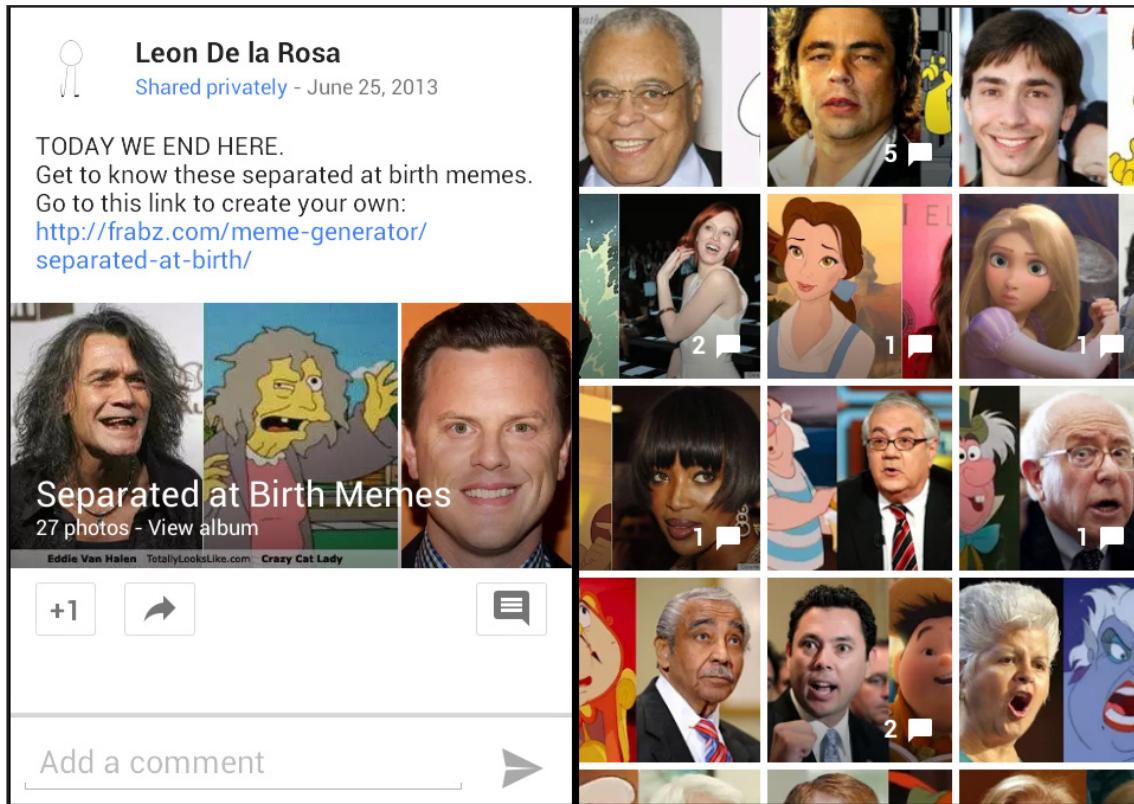
- The material #speculation implicit in recognizing every portrait of every object everywhere in the net as equally capable of intermingling.
- A potentially serious #speculation firmly grounded on the conventions of a visual, digital & participatory culture.

their relation? If we take speculativism seriously, then why might philosophy not muster the same concrete grounding as, say, speculative fiction or magical realism?**[69]** The science fiction author Robert A. Heinlein advocates speculating about possible worlds that are unlike our own, but in a way that remains coupled to the actual world more than the term *science fiction* might normally suggest. Likewise, the magical realism of Gabriel García Márquez or Isabel Allende suggests that the spectacular is real insofar as it actually comprises aspects of culture. In cases like these, the

*Quote 161: Bogost, 2012, loc.6771*

- This is the type of #speculation that learners engaged as they were handed point & shoot cameras looking for would-be long lost siblings.

- But before crafting their own #SeparatedAtBirth memes, learners were exposed to them via #GooglePlus.



*Data 38: Post c3 detail from the Separated at Birth album.  
The 's indicate comments made on individual images.*

- In an effort to keep #SeparatedAtBirth memes relatable to such young learners, all examples featured cartoon #entities.
- Choosing cartoon #entities as a common denominator reverberated loudly in



*Data 39: Separated at Birth memes made by learners.  
Names and faces have been blurred.*

- the memes that emerged from the lesson.
- After talking & examining #SeparatedAtBirth memes, learners were asked to find & photograph #objects to make memes of their own.
- For the most part, the learners' #objects of choice were themselves & the artwork they had produced for the summer program's other classes.

- Of course since the exercise was concurrent with a class on art as introspection, Studio Self, the chosen #objects were all but surprising.
- Learners then completed the #SeparatedAtBirth assignment using a web-based meme generator.

**Separated At Birth - Before & After - Cause & Effect Generator**

See what others have made  
Noticed two things separated at birth? Let us know!  
We've put in a few images to get you started. Click on Text to Change it. Click on an Image to Change it. Click "Save & Share" when you're done!

[Save & Share](#) [Post to Facebook](#) [Save To Computer](#)

# Separated At Birth?

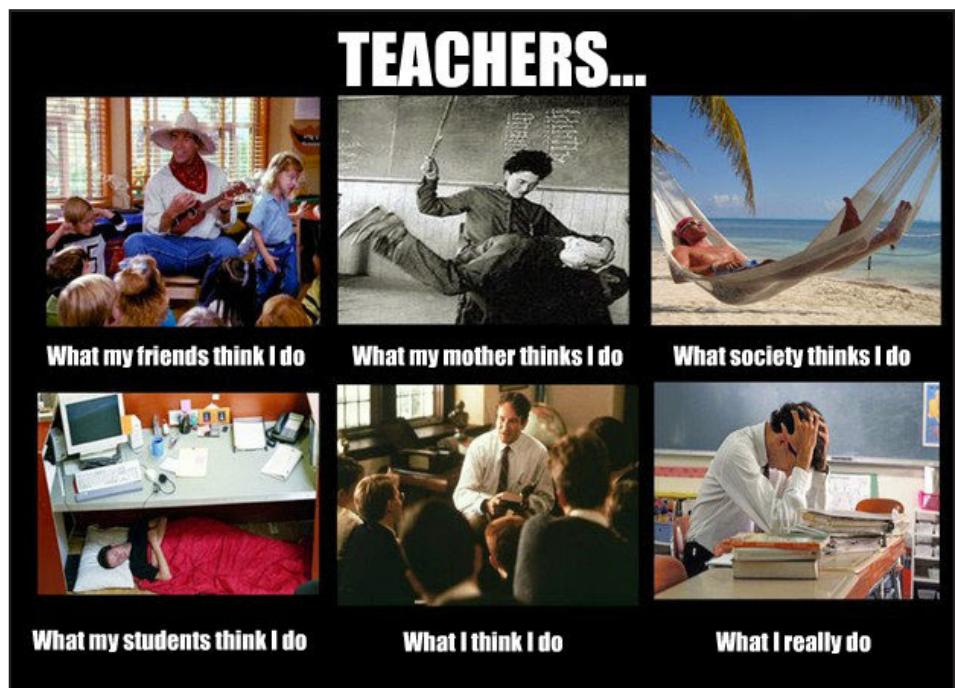
Name 1  Name 2 

[Save & Share](#) [Post to Facebook](#)

Periph. 19: Web-based Separated at Birth meme generator

8-10 year-old learners used similar web-based generators while engaging 2 different #MemeTypes: #Perception memes & #ImageMacros.

- #Perception memes, AKA What People Think I Do, exploit, challenge & discredit biased assumptions for comedic effect.



Meme 11: Perception meme about teachers.

- Interestingly, one of the first recorded #perception memes came from the world of contemporary art.

## Spread

The "Contemporary Artist" instance was uploaded by artist Garnet Hertz via his Facebook page<sup>[9]</sup> on February 9th, 2012. The "Property Manager" variation was created by Know Your Meme member "fastnup" on February 10th, 2012 and the trend logged. Similar image "what people think directors do" was posted by Canvas user ItchyBarracuda<sup>[1]</sup> and the thread spawned several derivative versions including freelance programmer, tech support and videogame beta tester.



*Quote 162: Brawler, Fastnup, Brad e³ Don, 2012*

## CONTEMPORARY ARTIST



What my friends think I do.



What my mom thinks I do.



What I think I do.



What society thinks I do.

EXHIBITION PROPOSAL	
Name:	Date of Submission:
Use this sheet to develop your Exhibition Project Proposal. Make sure you list all of the components. Use this exact outline as a template. This form must be designated as meeting standard by your Exhibition Teacher or Facilitator prior to placement in final Exhibition Binder. Note: You must spend at least two hours working on the proposal with your mentor.	
<b>I. CORE QUESTION AND PROJECT TITLE</b>	
Based on your interests, clearly stated as a question, open-ended and exploratory, related to real work issues whenever possible, and directed toward a path to...	
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	

What I really do.

*Meme 12: Contemporary Artist. Perception Meme. Hertz, 2012*

- Much like the lessons before, learners engaged #perception memes first through an #album on #GooglePlus.
- The #album included memes on professions, animals & hobbies like Lunch Lady, German Shepherds & Rabbit Lovers.

**Leon De la Rosa**  
Shared privately - Jun 18, 2013

**TODAY WE BEGIN HERE**

First, go through the Image Macros your classmates shared yesterday and comment on them by answering the following questions:  
 What do you like about it?  
 Would you change anything about them?  
 Would you use a different image?  
 A different caption?

Next examine these Perception Memes and comment on the album as a whole by answering the following questions:  
 How are they different from Image Macros?  
 Are they funnier or less funny than Image Macros?  
 How so?

**Perception Memes**  
17 photos

+1    Comment

**4 comments**

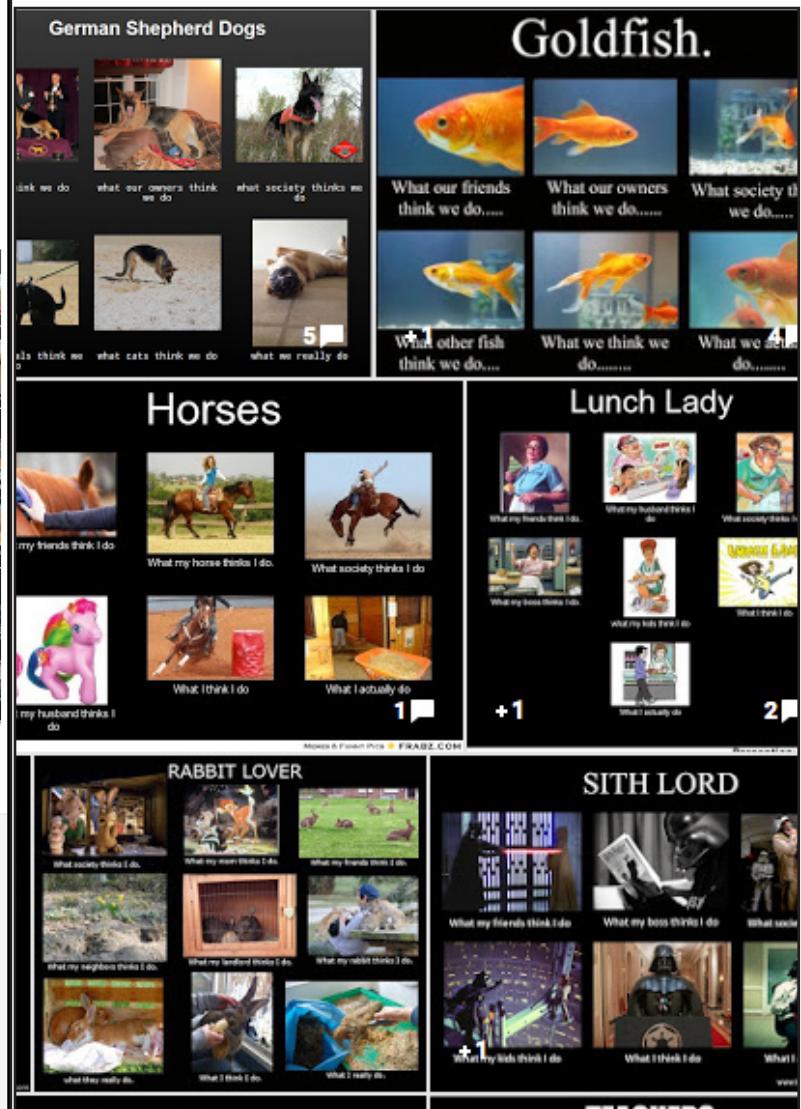
**Dela Meme** Jun 19, 2013  
really funny but all of them are the same but still really funny ha ha ha

**Gustavo Meme** Jun 19, 2013  
funnyfunnyfunnyfunnyfunnyfunnyfunnyfunnyfunnyfunnyfunnyfunnyfunnyfunny11!1!!!!!!  
=====

**Rosa Meme** Jun 19, 2013  
some are funny,some are OK, and some are just not funny.(wink)

**Leon Meme** Jun 19, 2013  
They are less funnier and they don't have any funny comments.

Add a comment...

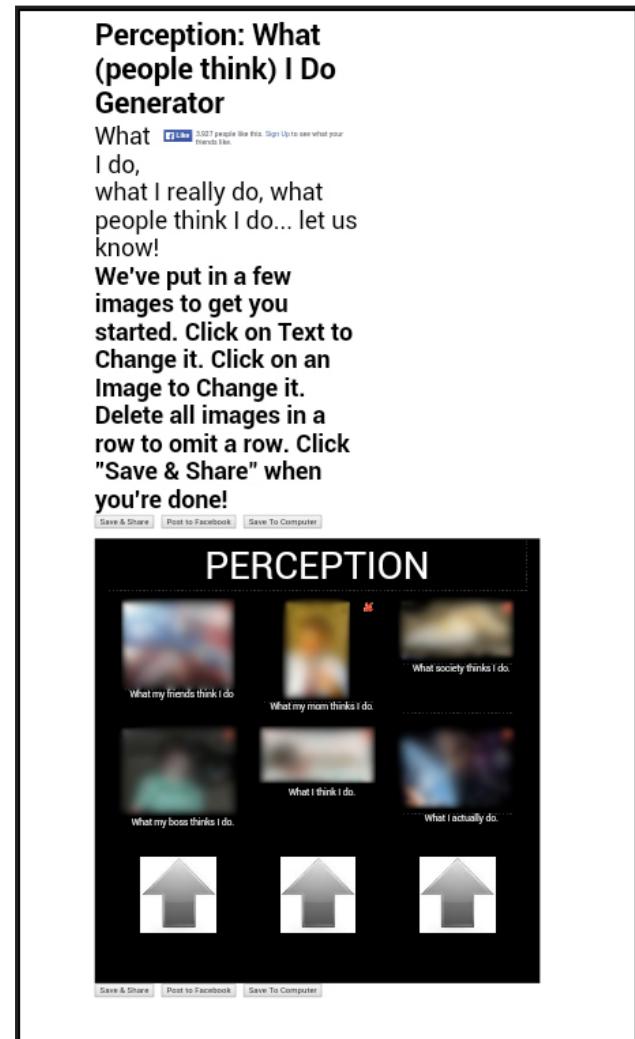


*Data 40: Post introducing learners to Perception or "What people think I do" memes. The +1's indicate comments made on individual images. The +1's indicate learners "plussing," or liking, individual images.*

*Data 40: Post introducing learners to Perception or "What people think I do" memes.*

- After the introductory phase, which included posting comments & short conversations, learners crafted #perception memes of their own.

- Each learner was asked to generate 2 different #perception memes; first on their favorite #entities & then on the #SummerArtProgram.
- Learners began by searching for images of their chosen #entities. These searches were conducted individually using Google's #SafeSearch.
- Although the #SafeSearch filter is by no means fail proof it is a helpful aid in keeping potentially #OffensiveContent from young learners.
- The specter of #OffensiveContent was actually present throughout the entirety of #StudioMeme as crude & lewd jokes are an internet staple.
- Even though as an internet user myself I understand #OffensiveContent as just a fact of participatory culture.
- As a facilitator & researcher trusted with young learners I also became a type of #custodian in an environment ripe with #OffensiveContent.
- Although clearly crucial, the #custodian role felt at times as an awkward attempt to whitewash an inherently messy & chaotic #phenomenon.
- But since #gatekeepers are built into the #phenomenon's proverbial DNA [Link] then so is arbitrary content selection.
- In a sense then, facilitators choosing appropriate content is not far from #gatekeepers favoring one brand of humor over another.
- After collecting enough images, learners used a web-based meme generator to chart their #entities' perceived roles.



Periph. 20: Web-based Perception meme generator

- The resulting #perception memes concerned everything from dolls to video game antagonists & sci-fi heroes.



*Data 42: Perception memes made by learners.*

- Not all of the resulting #perception memes dealt with perceptions; some simply stated facts or asked questions about their given subjects.
- The American Girl #perception meme for example reads more like a quiz about its audience's tastes & attitudes.



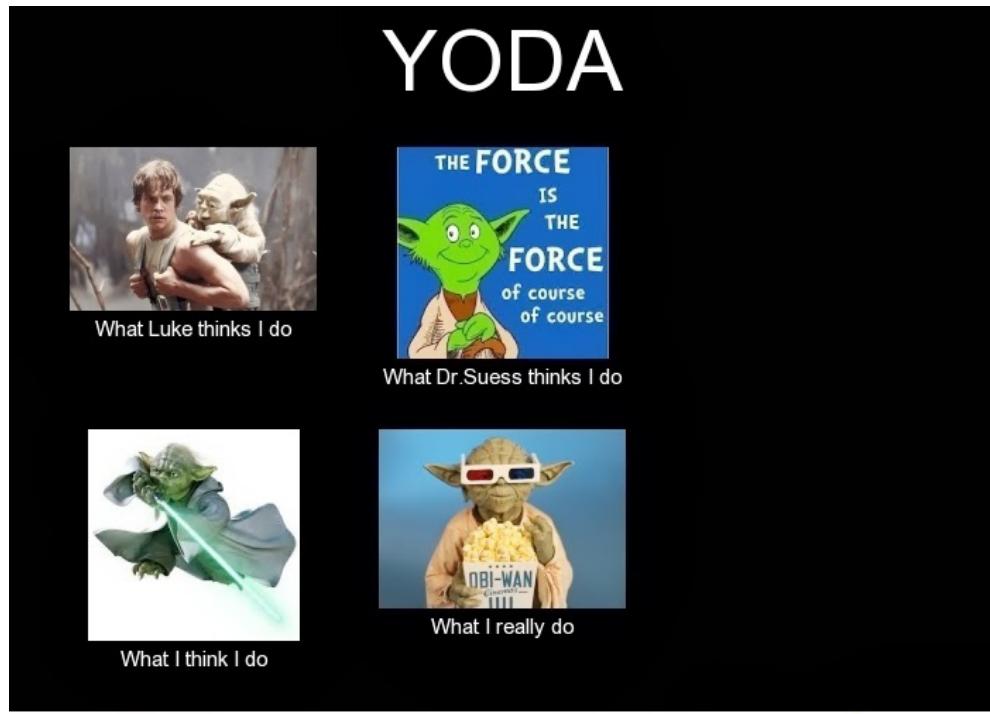
*Data 43: American Girl Perception meme.*

- Although the Creeper meme does use standard #perception statements, the punch line is lost in the image sequence.



*Data 44: Creeper Perception meme.*

- Yoda's #perception meme was perhaps the most successful one in the humorous sequencing of both images & statements.



*Data 45: Yoda Perception meme.*

- Deviations from the standard #perception meme grew as learners were asked to document the #SummerArtProgram with point & shoot cameras.

- The original intent behind the assignment was for learners to show just how different a #SummerArtProgram can be from expectations.
- The resulting #perception memes function more as inventory charts for artwork, people & activities.



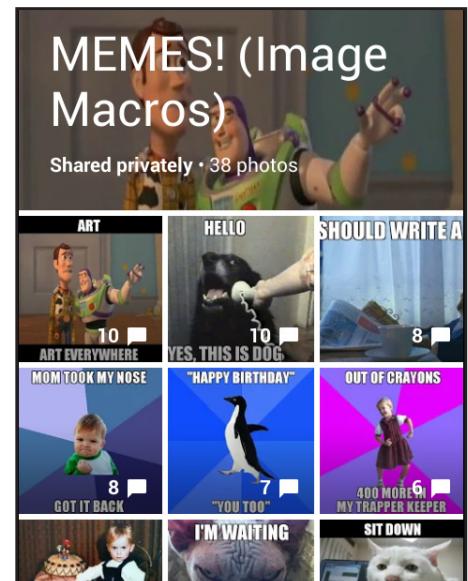
*Data 46: Perception memes about Tubac Center of the Arts' Summer Art Program. Names & faces have been blurred.*

A similar outcome occurred when the same group was asked to take photos & caption them as their own #ImageMacros.



*Data 47: Photos taken and captioned by learners. A name & a face has been blurred*

- Before crafting these images, learners were introduced to #ImageMacros via an album of carefully selected memes.
- Ensuring that these #ImageMacros were both age-appropriate & engaging was difficult as #MacroCharacters are typically insular.
- #MacroCharacters like #ScumbagSteve & #Advice-Dog spawned deep within online forums & image boards as shorthand for inside jokes & putdowns.



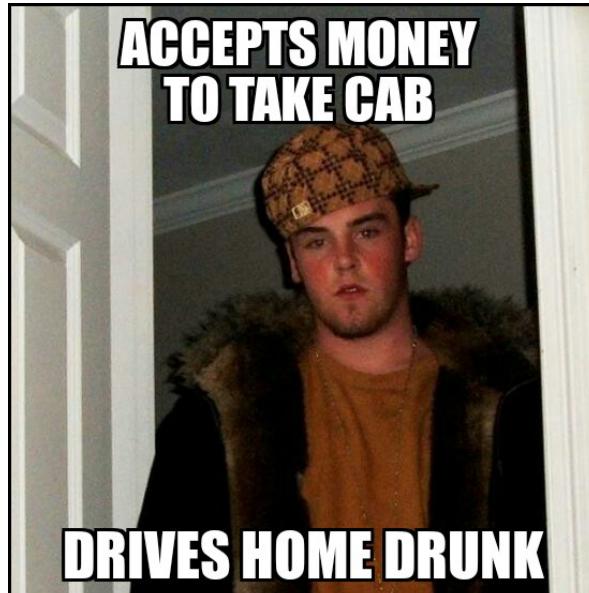
*Data 48: Detail from the album on Image Macros. The 🗣️'s indicate comments made on individual images.*

- Is a forum member expressing heartache over the passing of a relative? Let #AdviceDog do the talking.



*Meme 13: Advice Dog. Image Macro.*

- Is somebody online talking earnestly about friendship & drunk driving? #ScumbagSteve has a story to tell.



*Meme 14: Scumbag Steve. Image Macro.*

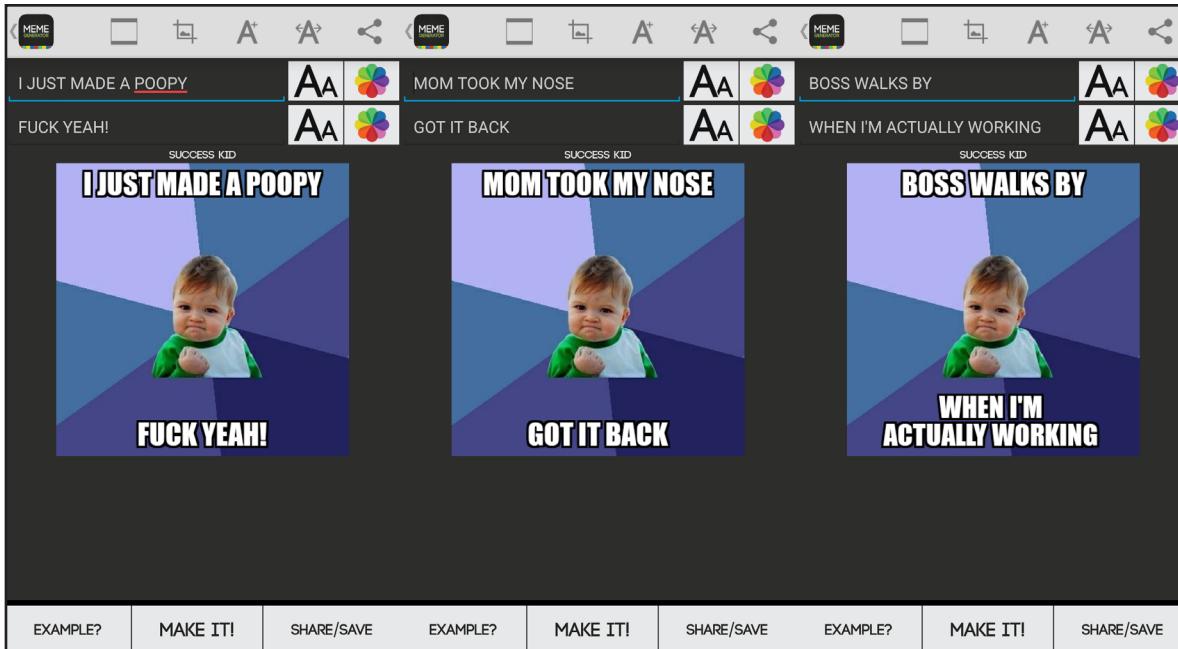
- Although generating tamer versions of these #MacroCharacters was an option, I felt strongly that only #ExistingInstances should be used.
- #ExistingInstances that, even if selected for their suitability with young learners, could at least boast a modicum of internet reputation.

- #ExistingInstances retrieved from ZomboDroid's Meme Generator app for Android using its #ExampleButton.



Periph. 21: Five examples for “All the things” Image Macro.

- The app's #ExampleButton gives the user a quick introduction into the voice that each character is meant to embody.
- As such, all instances offered up by the #ExampleButton are representative samples that have garnered significant popularity online.
- Most #ExistingInstances of All The Things, with its mischievous & impulsive energy, were no brainers for the lesson plan on #ImageMacros.
- The same is not true for Success Kid, who but for one of its #ExistingInstances is somewhat improper & un-relatable.



Periph. 22: Three examples for “Success Kid” Image Macro.

- After examining over 60 #MacroCharacters I opted for 30-something meme instances, favoring the friendlier & milder examples I found.

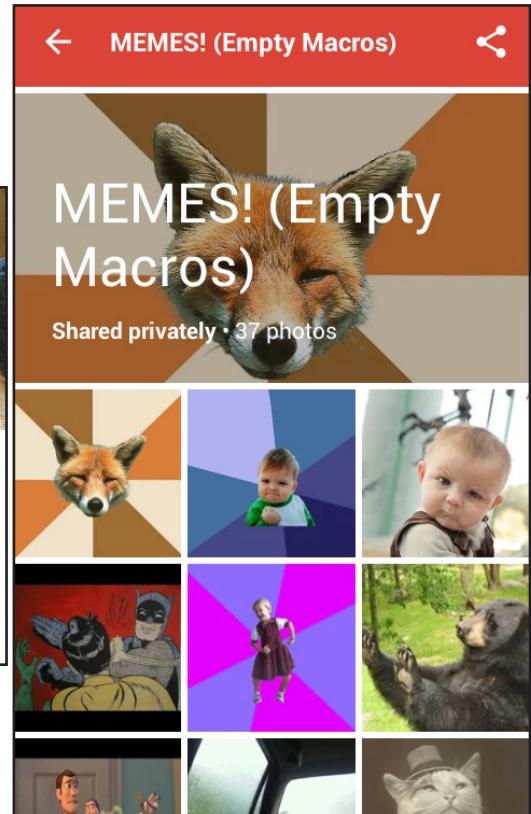
- These same #MacroCharacters were also shared as blank templates for learners to caption.
- As opposed to their captioned photos [Link<sup>1</sup>] the learners' #MacroCharacters were quite



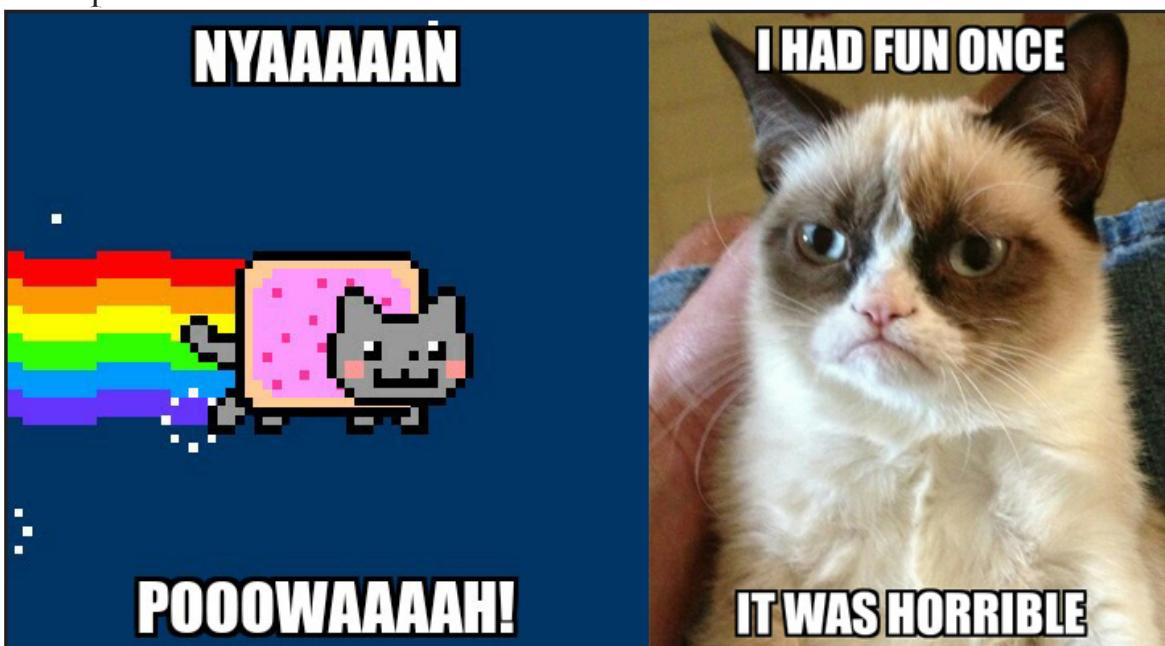
Data 50: Image Macros captioned by learners.

congruent.

- Even though meme purists will cry “fail” at #MacroCharacters #DepressionTurtle & #OfficeCat not talking office or depression matters.
  - The learners' prom-ready #OfficeCat still keeps good macro form while revealing much about a 9 year-old's idea of formal wear.
  - For its part, #DepressionTurtle remains within its comfort zone by bemoaning the size of its pants.
- The learners' Nyan & Grumpy cats seem even more consistent with their respective online #MacroCharacters.



Data 49: Detail from the blank Image Macro album.



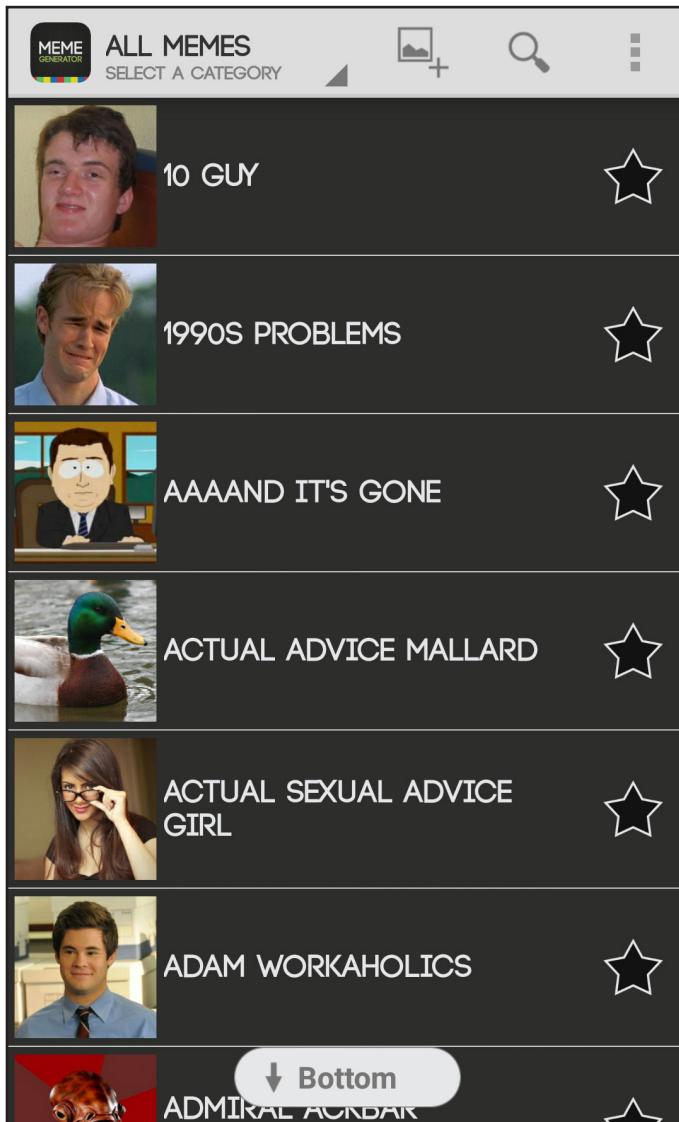
Meme 15: Nyan Cat & Grumpy Cat

<sup>1</sup> To: “A similar outcome occurred...” on page 154

- So a significant difference was apparent in the way learners engaged #ImageMacros & #perception memes depending on the #SourceMaterial.
- While #SourceMaterial emanating from the set of established #MacroCharacters was more or less treated in accordance to meme lore.
- #SourceMaterial gathered from the learners' immediate surroundings [the photos they took & captioned] was given a #scrapbook treatment.
  - A #scrapbook documenting, indexing & preserving experiences at the #Summer-ArtProgram.
  - A #scrapbook that insisted on handling photographs as mementos & not characters, not shorthand, not vehicles of mock.
- It should be noted here that at no point did I, as the facilitator, spoke of a correct way to use & generate different #MemeTypes.
- #MemeTypes were not #explicitly assigned any value, nor were the learners creations ever graded in any discernible way.
  - I say #explicitly because I am sure that certain meme instances made me laugh a little harder or demanded my attention a bit longer.
  - Rather, after introducing the different #MemeTypes learners were then simply guided in how to use the various web-based #MemeGenerators.
  - Of course #MemeGenerators, as all software like all technology, advance specific tendencies or biases.
  - In the case of #Meme-Generators, their specific #bias is precisely to generate meme-looking, meme-“sounding,” meme-spreading memes!
  - In the case of the aforementioned Meme Generator app for android this #bias is #manifested in its interface & its default settings.

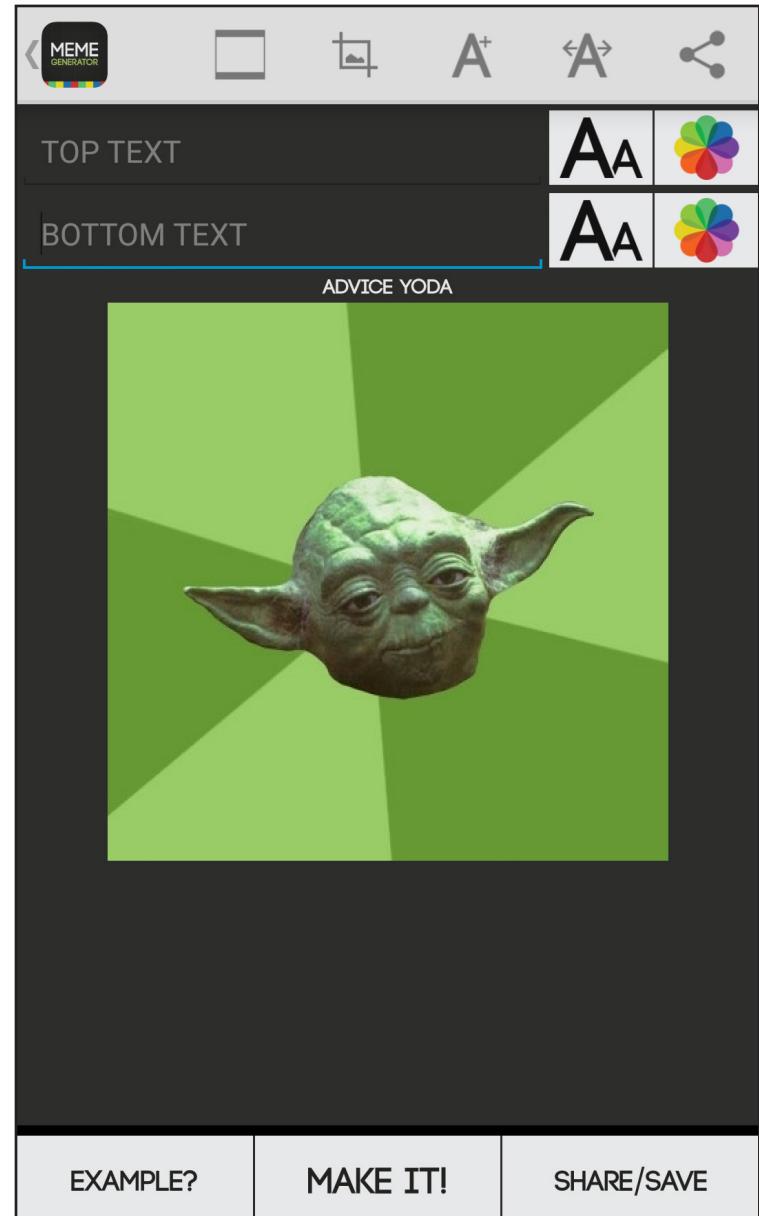
A bias is simply a leaning—a tendency to promote one set of behaviors over another. All media and all technologies have biases. It may be true that “guns don’t kill people, people kill people”; but guns are a technology more biased to killing than, say, clock radios. Televisions are biased toward people sitting still in couches and watching. Automobiles are biased toward motion, individuality, and living in the suburbs. Oral culture is biased toward communicating in person, while written culture is biased toward communication that doesn’t happen between people in the same time and place. Film photography and its expensive processes were biased toward scarcity, while digital photography is biased toward immediate and widespread distribution. Some cameras

- It is #manifested from its home screen, displaying but the long list of #ImageMacros available.



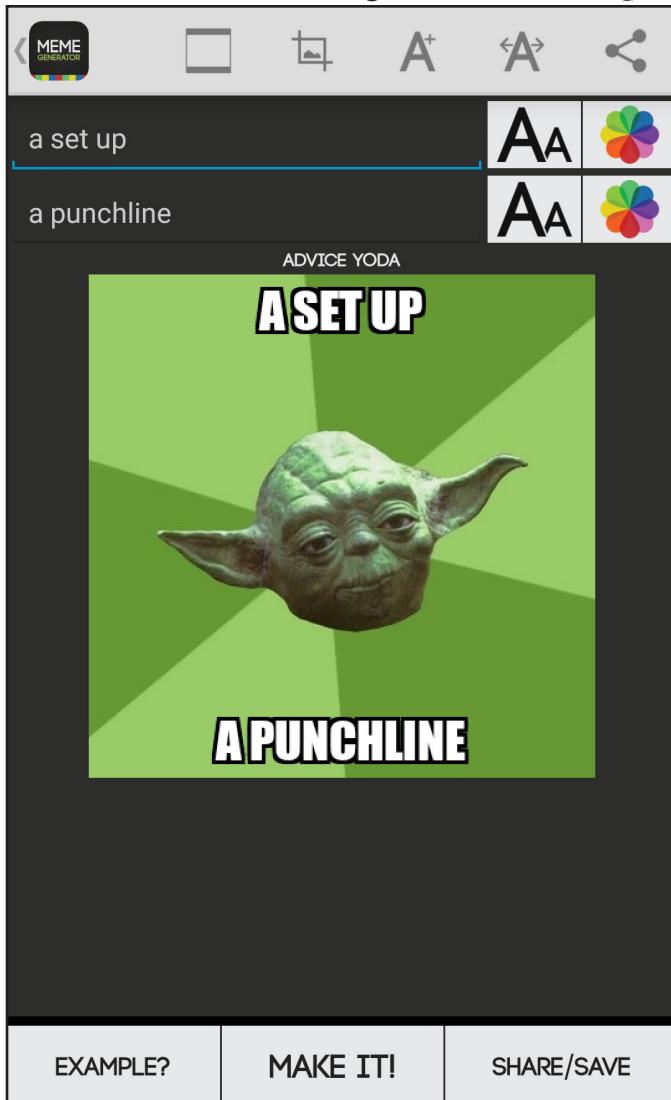
*Periph. 23: Start up screen for Meme Generator app for Android.*

- It is #manifested from the moment a template is loaded & only 2 text fields, a top & a bottom, are made available.



*Periph. 24: Blank Advice Yoda template in Meme Generator app for Android.*

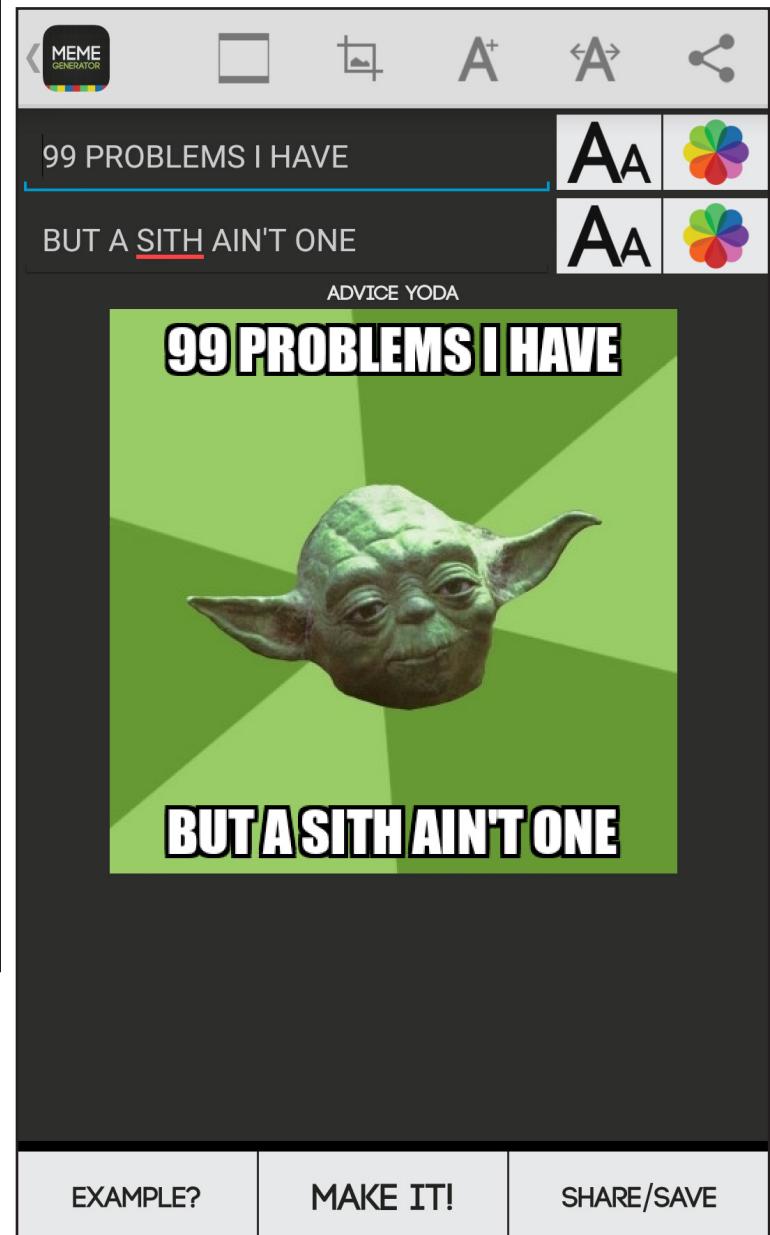
- It is #manifested when users type text into the fields & the app captions the image with meme-staple font Impact.



*Periph. 25: Advice Yoda with top and bottom text in Meme Generator app for Android.*

- Even though some advance settings are available just a touch & a swipe away, Meme Generator's #bias is obvious from its memetastic surface.
- Curiously not all #MemeGenerators exhibit the same tendencies, at least not to such a degree. Enter #Roflbot!!1!.
- #Roflbot is the web-based meme generator that learners in both the 8-10 & 11-13 year-old groups used to caption images.

- But most of all, it is #manifested through the instances, offered as examples of each Image Macro.



*Periph. 26: Advice Yoda example generated with the Meme Generator app for Android.*

- Unlike the Android app Meme Generator, #Roflbot's homepage is mostly menus with but a single image.

**roflbot** is for adding text and captions to a picture, a la I Can Has Cheezburger. Generate your meme here!

**Start with a sample picture:**  
Uses a random picture. [Go ▶](#)

**Start with a picture from the web:** [Go ▶](#)  
Example: <http://images.wigflip.com/funny.jpg>

**Start with a picture file from your computer:**  
[Examinar...](#) No se ha seleccionado ningún archivo.

*Periph. 27: Home page for “Roflbot!!!1!”*

- In the absence of a macro menu, #Roflbot's users must settle for random pictures [which are never #MacroCharacters] or provide their own.
- This simple shift in functionality places much more responsibility & agency on users as they're not able to simply choose #MacroCharacters.
- #MacroCharacters that will speak for them, that have an established voice, a formal template & specific roles to play in given situations.
- #MacroCharacters like the ones learners did speak through when the #SourceMaterial demanded it. [Link<sup>2</sup>]
- Once users have made a decision on the image they want to caption, they are taken into #Roflbot's captioning tool.

Write some text and click 'Add Text' to put it on the picture

Font: Impact Size: Medium

Add Text Save Image...

Start again... Random image...

*Periph. 28: Adding text on “Roflbot!!!1!”*

<sup>2</sup> To: “The learners Nyan and Grumpy cats...” on page 157

- Even though #Roflbot's default font type is Impact, a macro standard, the positioning of the text is peculiar.



*Periph. 29: Adding text on “Roflbot!!1!2*

- As #Roflbot adds captions, each new line is first placed on top of the last one until repositioned by users.



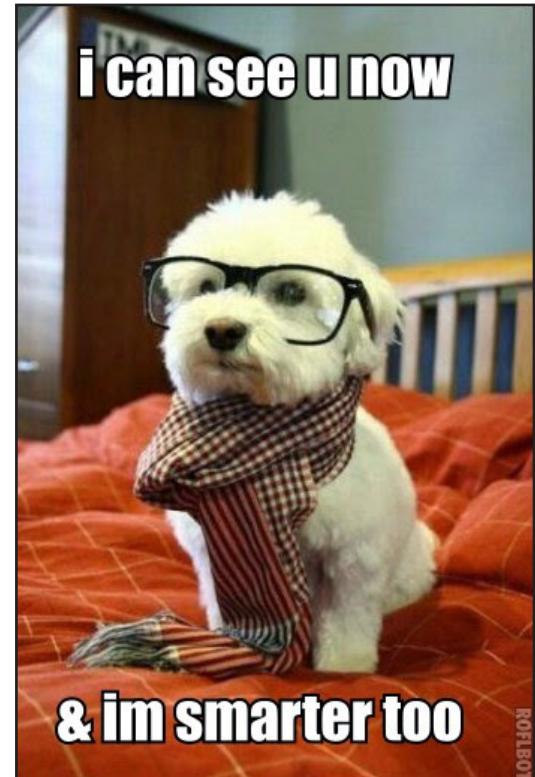
*Periph. 30: Adding text on “Roflbot!!1!3*

- This “wrinkle” in the captioning process forces #Roflbot users to be deliberate about #TextLayout beyond top & bottom macro conventions.

- So when the time came for learners to caption images their #TextLayout responded to the #SourceMaterial at hand & not to meme traditions.
- Whereas learners captioned #MacroCharacters conventionally both in the #TextLayout & relative voice congruency.
- When learners captioned the photos they took though both #TextLayout & content responded to different #intentions.



*Data 52: Digital photo taken and captioned by a learner.  
A name has been blurred*

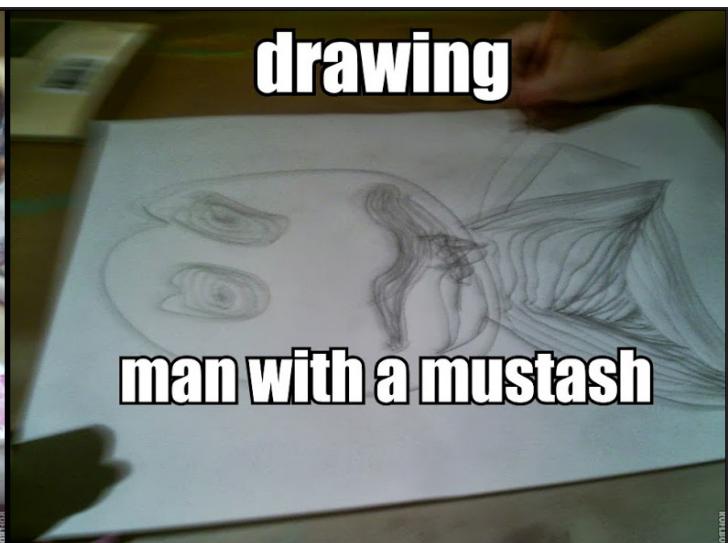


*Data 51: Hipster Dog  
captioned by a learner.*

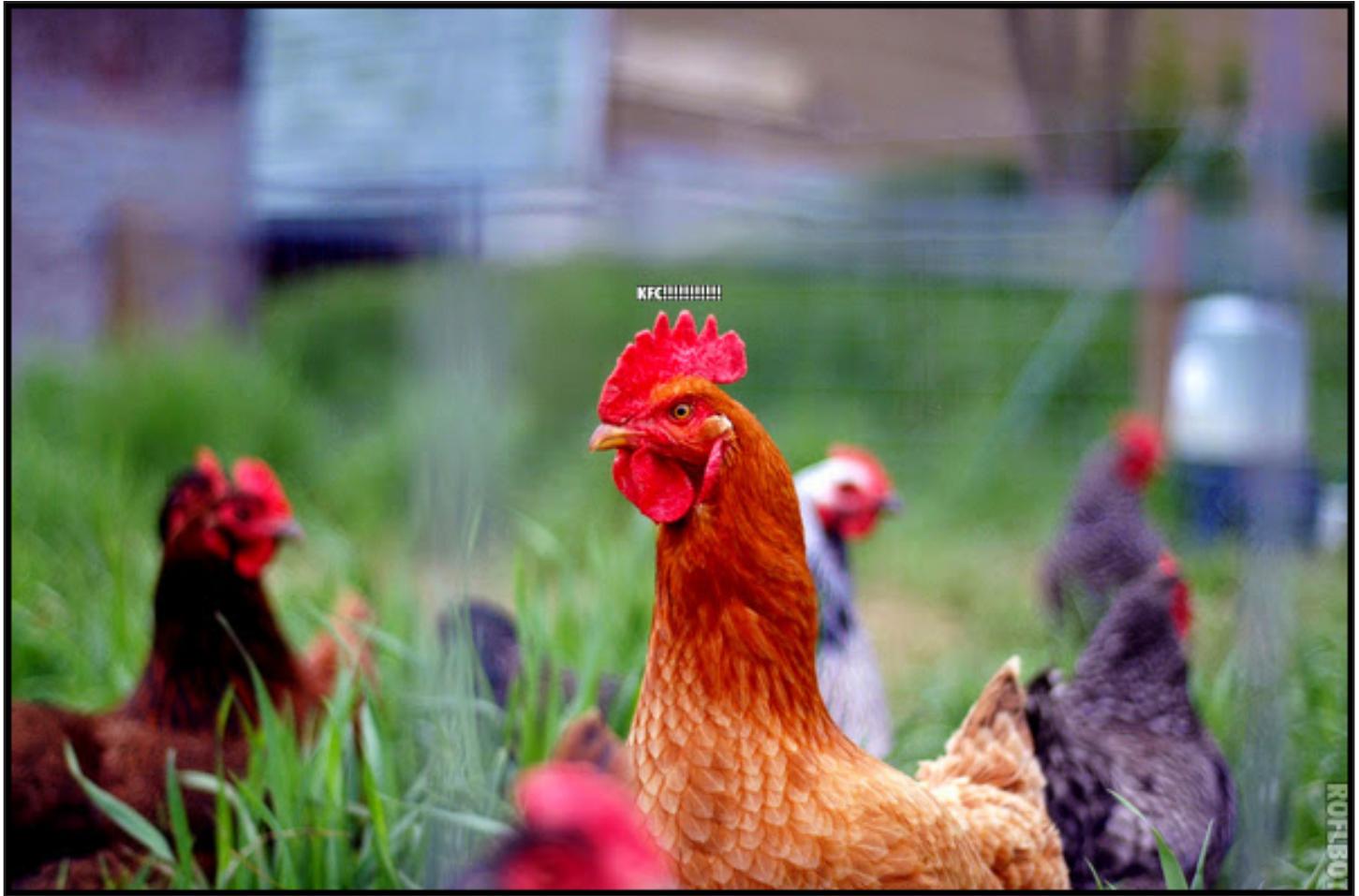
- #Intentions that had more to do with describing, often redundantly, the image instead of voicing a character.



*Data 53: Photos taken and captioned by learners*



- #Intentions that were often as hard to pin point as the captions themselves were to read.



*Data 54: Image captioned by a learner. The image was procured by clicking Roflbot!!!'s random image button as many times as it took to obtain. The caption reads "KFC!!!!....!!!"*

**The oldest group, 11-13 year-olds, bookended #StudioMeme thanks to the program's length, 4 weeks, allowing 1 of the 3 groups to cycle back.**

- The decision to have this specific group cycle back was the program director's own, who asked me to develop #StudioMeme accordingly.
- With this in mind, #StudioMeme began with its most conceptually complex assignment as learners pondered the place of #InternetMemes in art.
  - Learners were shown the video "Are LOLCats and #InternetMemes art?" By PBS' YouTube Idea Channel. [Link<sup>3</sup>]
  - After watching the video & having short conversations about its arguments learners were asked, quite simply, are #InternetMemes art?
  - More than a futile attempt to settle whether or not #InternetMemes are art, the assignment was meant as an exercise in #VisualSynthesis.
  - The type of #VisualSynthesis I found rich with potential insight in my own meme-based responses to class assignments detailed last chapter.

- #VisualSynthesis that I presumed easy to prompt by watching a video, distilling its arguments & asking learners to reflect on them.
- The exercise began by asking learners to break into pairs & identify some of the #arguments made for & against #InternetMemes as art.
- After listing a handful of #arguments, learners were asked to pick the one that resonated the most with them & caption an #image with it.
- Each pair picked an #image from a set of screen-grabs taken from the video itself & captioned it using #Roflbot.



*Data 55: Screen grabs captioned by learners in response to the question Are Internet Memes art?*

- Although the resulting collection of images is successful in summarizing some of the video's #arguments it is also remarkably #homogeneous.
- The #homogeneous #results aren't surprising since the pool of #SourceMaterial was minimal: A 3 minute video & a handful of screen-grabs.
  - Of course, the exercise itself, with its quite specific & fairly stifling question could've also gone a long way in dictating the #results.
  - Once learners were no longer confined by questions or a shallow pool of #SourceMaterial to use their #CaptionedContent expanded in scope.

- The resulting #CaptionedContent responded only to the learners' sense of humor & web-searching skills.

 **Dela Meme**  
Shared privately - June 12, 2013

i'm a vegetarian but ill try it once...



+1         1

**Gustavo Meme** this panda

 **Rosa Meme**  
Shared privately - June 12, 2013



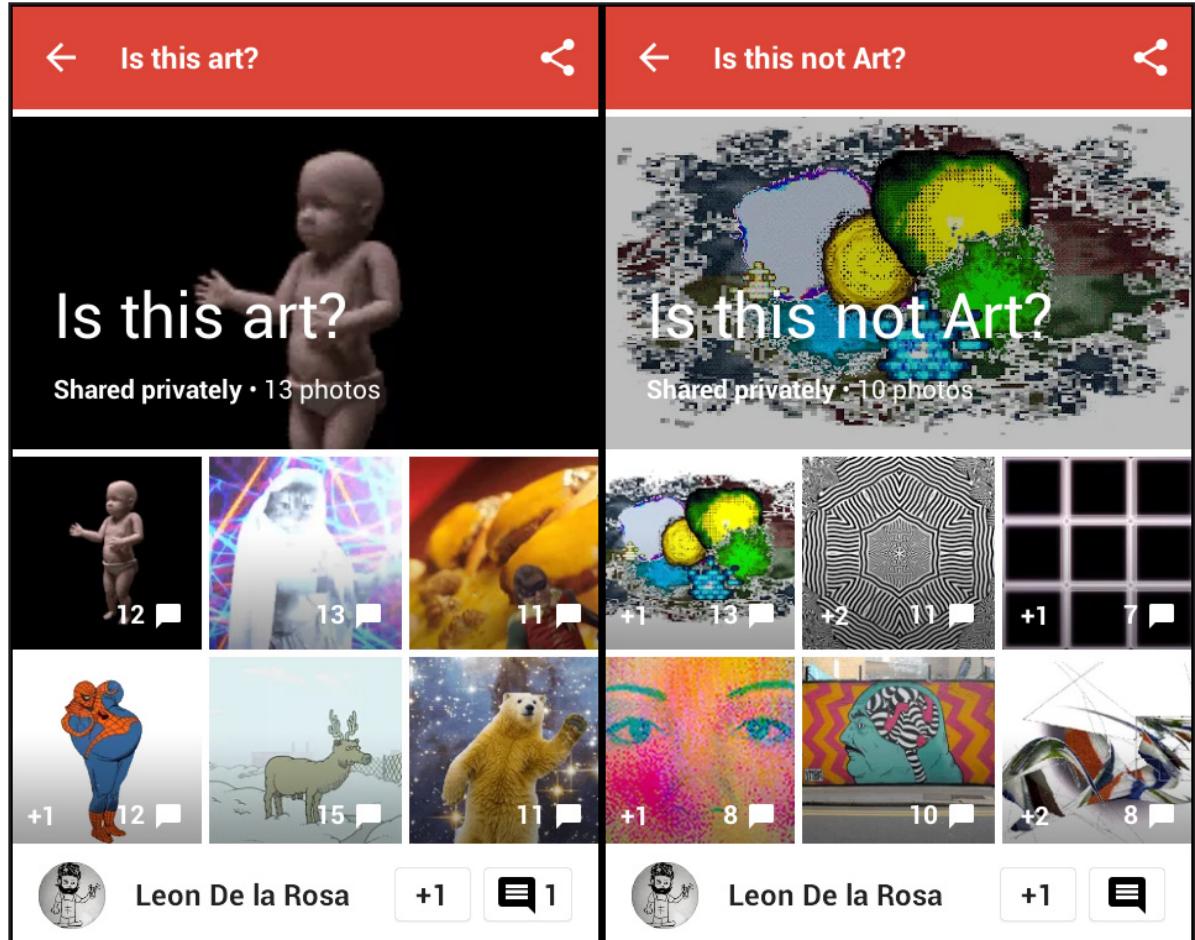
1 View album

+1         1

*Data 56: Images captioned and shared by learners.  
A name has been blurred*

After captioning images, learners were introduced to #AnimatedGIFs as the are #InternetMemes art question was revamped.

- Attempting to extend & expand on the art question, these #AnimatedGIFs were grouped under 2 interrogative headings.



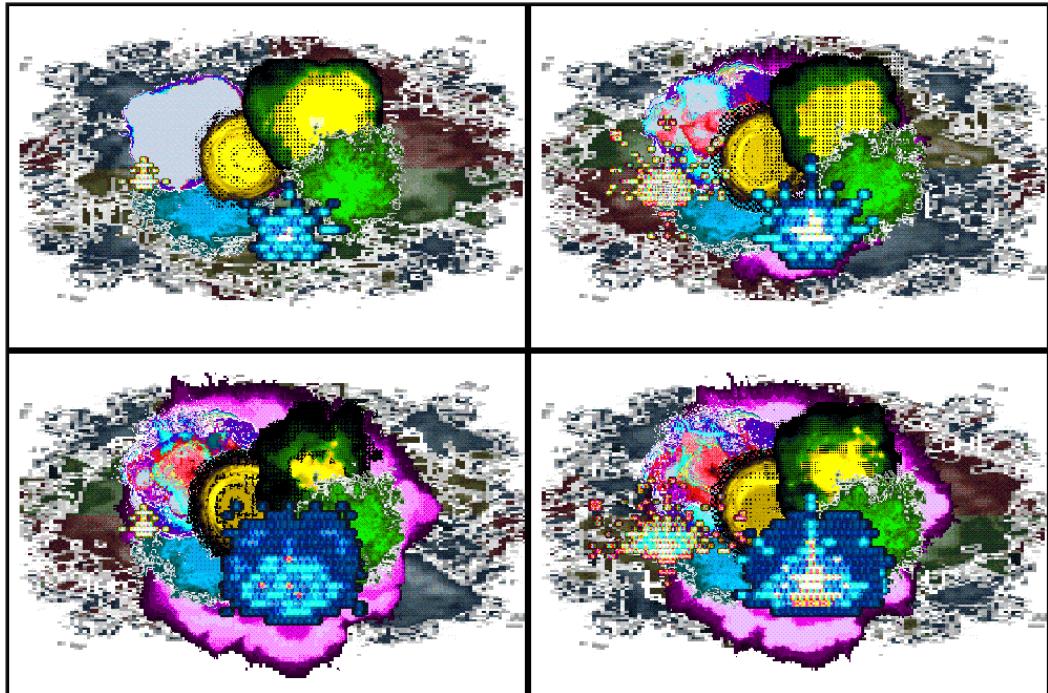
*Data 57: Animated GIFs albums shared with learners. The comment icons indicate comments made on individual GIFs. The +1's indicate learners “plussing,” or liking, individual GIFs.*

- The funny, absurd & bizarre #Anima-tedGIFs asked of themselves “Is this Art?”.



*Meme 16: Dancing Bear in Space. Animated GIF by Julia Heffernan, 2012.*

- The colorful, abstract & ethereal #AnimatedGIFs asked “Is this not Art?”.



*Meme 17: Untitled. Animated GIF by Lorna Mills, 2012.*

- Some of the learners' responses to the #AnimatedGIFs give an idea of just how fluid their #NotionsOfArt were.
- Although this was the last time that learners' #NotionsOfArt were addressed directly, the shift is evident from their initial stances.

<p> <b>Gustavo Meme</b> Jun 12, 2013 awesome!!!!</p> <hr/> <p> <b>Gustavo Meme</b> Jun 12, 2013 cool art design</p> <hr/> <p> <b>Leon Meme</b> Jun 12, 2013 THIS IS ART!!!!!!!!!!!!!! !!!!!! !!!!!!</p> <hr/> <p> <b>Rosa Meme</b> Jun 12, 2013 it is art because someone had to create it</p> <hr/> <p> <b>Rosa Meme</b> Jun 12, 2013 oooooooooooo ahahahahah</p>	<p> <b>Leon Meme</b> Jun 12, 2013 it could be art</p> <hr/> <p> <b>Gustavo Meme</b> Jun 12, 2013 not much but yes. like how can they do it to move?</p> <hr/> <p> <b>Dela Meme</b> Jun 12, 2013 im not sure if its art</p> <hr/> <p> <b>Gustavo Meme</b> Jun 12, 2013 polar bears are art even win the are dancing</p> <hr/> <p> <b>Leon Meme</b> Jun 12, 2013 nice danceing bro</p>
---	---

Add a comment ➤

Add a comment ➤

*Data 58: Some comments made about Lorna Mills' & Julia Heffernan's Animated GIFs*

- While their original #NotionsOfArt [Link<sup>4</sup>] were, at best, uniformly suspicious of talking about memes in general as art.
- When it came to addressing specific meme instances their #NotionsOfArt expanded to questions on craft, creativity & polar bears.
- Of course the expanded #NotionsOfArt surely #responded to more than a case of the particular versus the broad.
  - Maybe they also #responded to the slight increase in familiarity with the form & content of #InternetMemes & #AnimatedGIFs.
  - They could have also #responded to the learners' own experience in the craft of captioning & generating #DigitalContent.
    - #DigitalContent doesn't just appear, "someone had to create it" & someone has to "do it to move".
  - Lastly, it might've #responded to the larger pool of #SourceMaterial available: 23 distinct #AnimatedGIFs & their very own #NotionsOfArt.
- After examining & commenting both albums of #AnimatedGIFs, learners were instructed in how to download, parse & #remix them.
  - To #remix GIFs learners were introduced to gifmaker.me<sup>5</sup>, where they sampled some of the examples & generated new GIFs.
  - The remixed #AnimatedGIFs ranged from the nonsense of a banana converging with graffiti to captioned mini-tales.



Data 59: Animated GIFs remixed by learners.

- Once the remixed #AnimatedGIFs were completed, shared & commented on, learners were given digital cameras & asked to create #TeachingGIFs.
  - #TeachingGIFs to replicate specific moments & lessons from the #SummerArtProgram so that the absent could learn from them.

<sup>4</sup> To: "Each pair picked..." on page 165

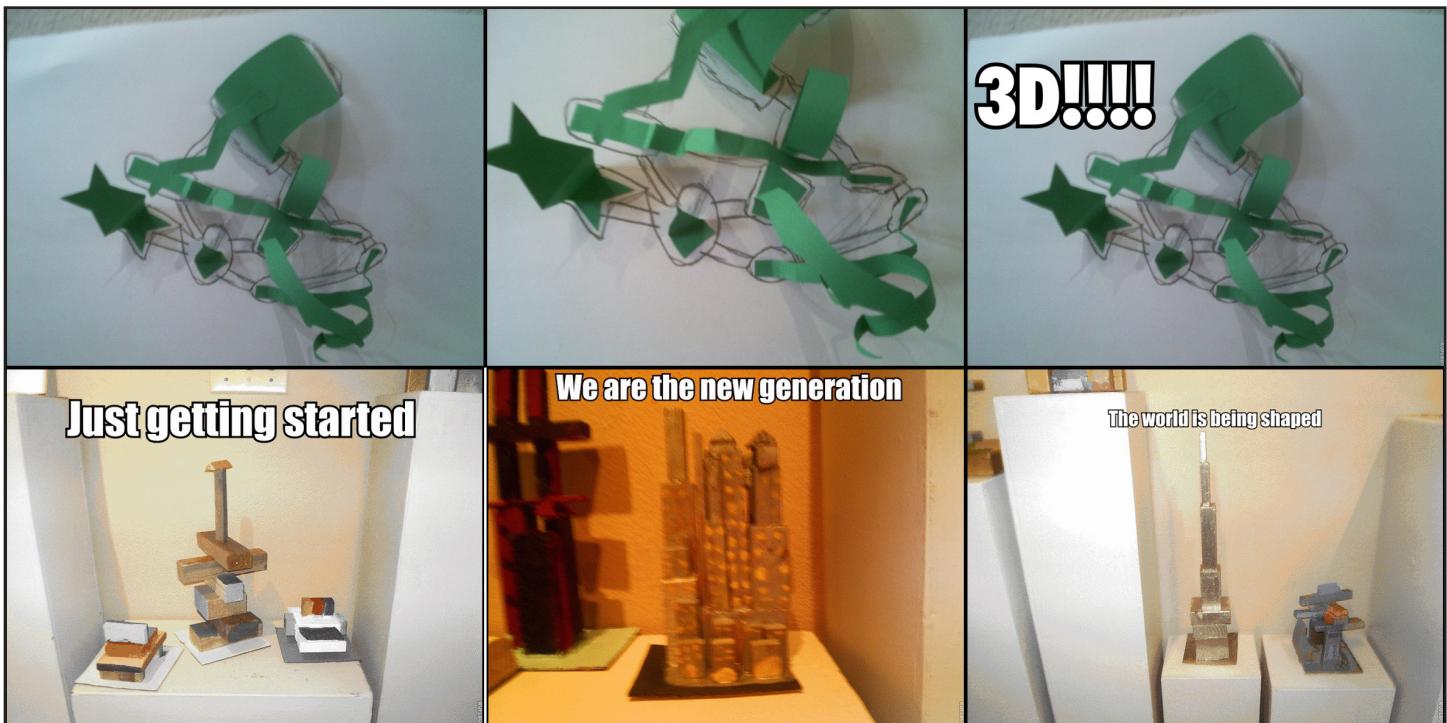
<sup>5</sup> <http://gifmaker.me/>

- Some of the #TeachingGIFs focused on activities & projects in progress.



*Data 60: Two Animated GIFs generated by learners using the screen names Gustavo [top] and Rosa [bottom] Meme.*

- Others forwent any lessons and turned their #TeachingGIFs' attention to the artwork & its impact.



*Data 61: Two Animated GIFs generated by learners using the screen names Leon [top] and Gustavo [bottom] Meme.*

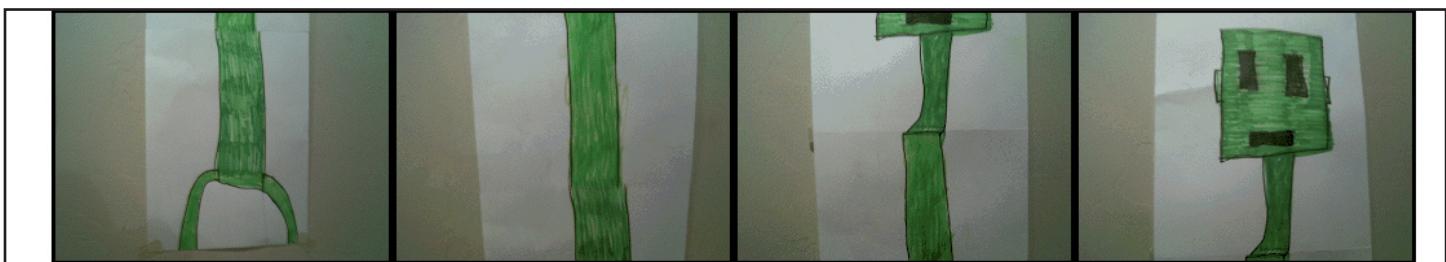
- Although none of the #TeachingGIFs were successful as lessons, their enthusiasm for each given subject is quite charming.
- While some #TeachingGIFs succeed as mini docs, like #ThePlay, others, like the #3DGIF, harness GIF conventions in creative ways.

- #ThePlay by Rosa Meme is able to establish an atmospheric mood using whitewashed & blurry #photographs, otherwise dismissed as errors.
- Skeptics might be quick to say that these #photographs are just the product of a novice shutterbug & a faulty camera, devoid of #intent.
- I would argue that #intent is instilled in the choosing & sequencing that necessarily occurs during the GIF making stage.
- Opening with a frame so white washed that can double as background for the title card & gradually fading into the action induces #intent.
- #Intent can also be deduced by examining some of the learner's other content, mostly consistent in form & content.



*Data 62: An Animated GIF generated by learner using the screen name Rosa Meme.*

- For its part #3DGIF by Leon Meme, uses a fast frame rate & #DeliberateFraming to make a piece of 3D art “jump” out of the screen.
- Once again, it could be argued whether this #DeliberateFraming is a matter of #intent or merely an accident.
- Just like before, #intent can be deduced by examining another GIF by the same learner, which also exploits framing.



*Data 63: An Animated GIF generated by learner using the screen name Leon Meme.*

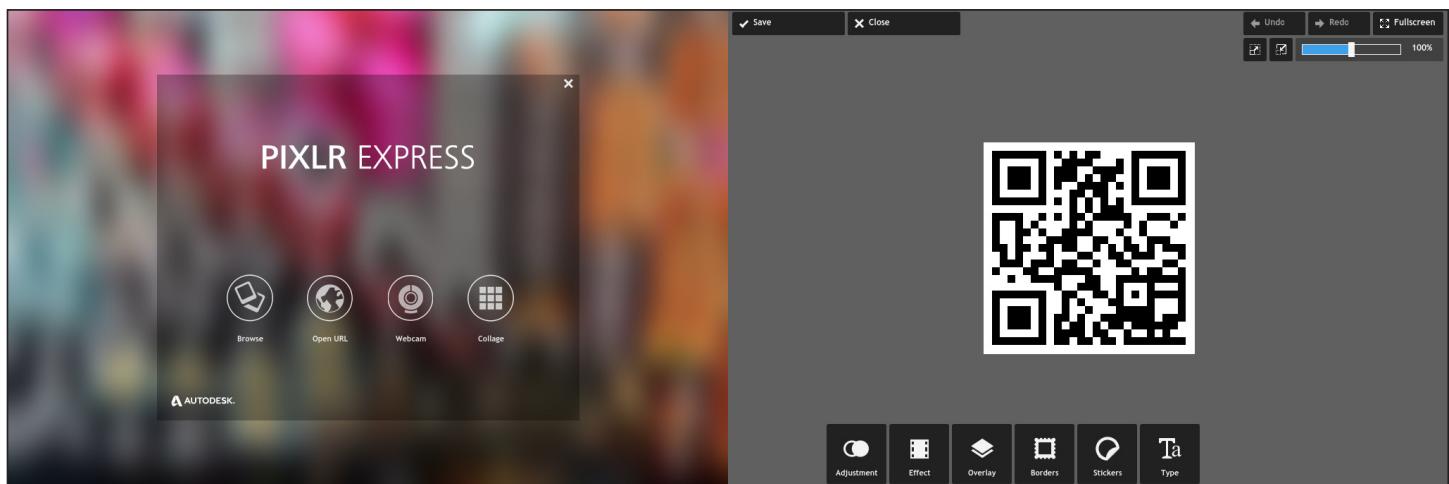
- The #TeachingGIFs assignment closed out #StudioMeme's first week but these learners cycled back the final week of the #SummerArtProgram.

#StudioMeme's final cycle began much like its opening one, with a video by PBS' YouTube Idea Channel (2012): Link<sup>6</sup>

- The video's focus on the notion of an internet-centric #singularity was a great jumping off point to examine #StudioMeme's own “culture.”

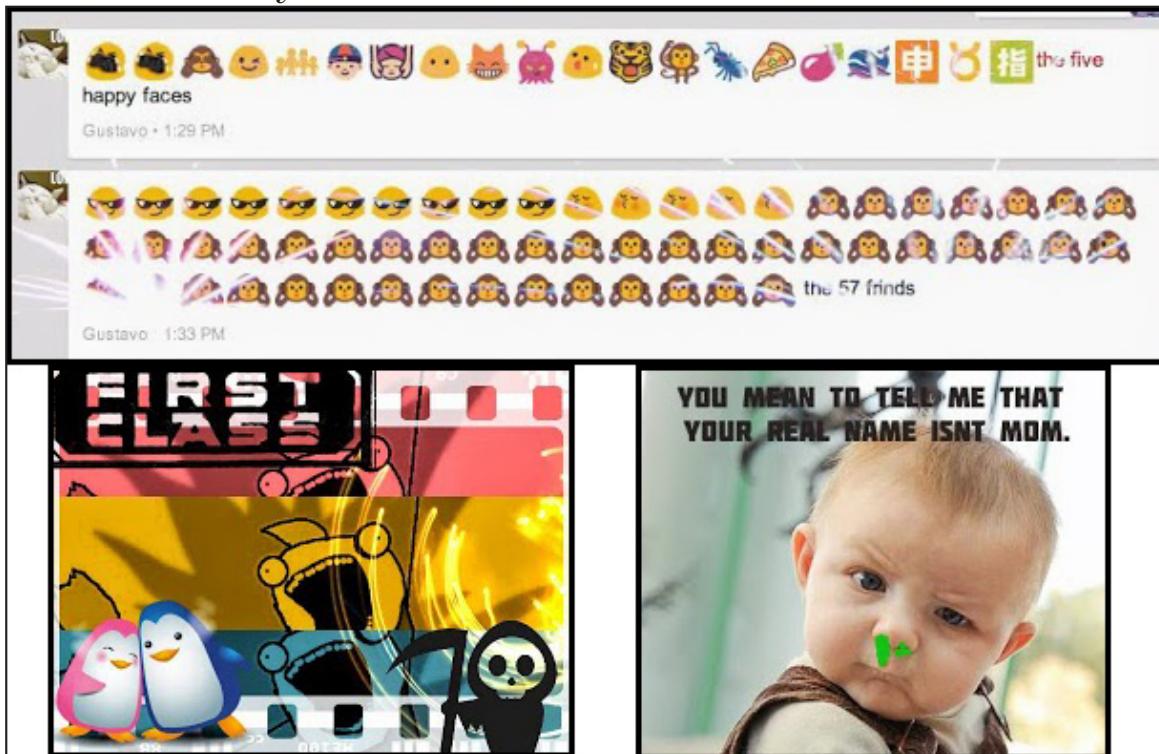
<sup>6</sup> <https://youtu.be/eNBOkp346G8>

- The #singularity discussed here refers to #InternetCulture & how it appears to resemble a self-referencing, discrete intelligent being.
  - #InternetCulture's self-referencing practices are crucial as they often obfuscate individual users with agencies & intentions of their own.
  - The argument is that #InternetCulture continues to grow apparently subjecting armies of anonymous users to its own set of conventions.
  - Conventions that feed back on themselves & generate increasing sums of content seemingly emerging from no one but #InternetCulture itself.
- It could be argued that #StudioMeme supports this idea of #singularity through much of the content generated by learners.
- As #StudioMeme learners captioned images, for example, the visibility of their intentions depended on the #SourceMaterial at hand.
  - #SourceMaterial stemming from the web resulted in content that observed internet & meme conventions.
  - #SourceMaterial stemming from the learners' immediate, #IRL, surroundings spawned content that prominently displayed individual intentions.
- In order to expand & investigate further this notion of #singularity learners were asked to #remix content stemming from #StudioMeme.
  - Learners examined the long stream of posts in our #GooglePlus circle & downloaded what they wanted to #remix using #PixlrExpress.
  - #PixlrExpress is an online image editor that runs as an app within the Chrome internet browser.



*Periph. 31: Pixlr Express. Opening screen [left] & main interface [right].*

- Far from furthering notions of #singularity, the #RemixedImages resemble an inventory of effects & overlays.



*Data 64: Images remixed by learners*

- That the #RemixedImages emphasize effects can also be taken in terms of the behaviors & tendencies favored by #PixlrExpress' interface.
  - As previously stated [Link<sup>7</sup>], specific software, like #PixlrExpress, fosters specific biases.
  - A quick look at #PixlrExpress' interface [Link<sup>8</sup>] will reveal that its sparse layout focuses on effects, overlays, etc.
  - Still, the fact is that this stage of the study was subjugated entirely to #PixlrExpress' conventions & failed to build on prior lessons.

**Similarly, the software involved in #StudioMeme's next-to-last lesson overwhelmed the content generated, or lack thereof.**

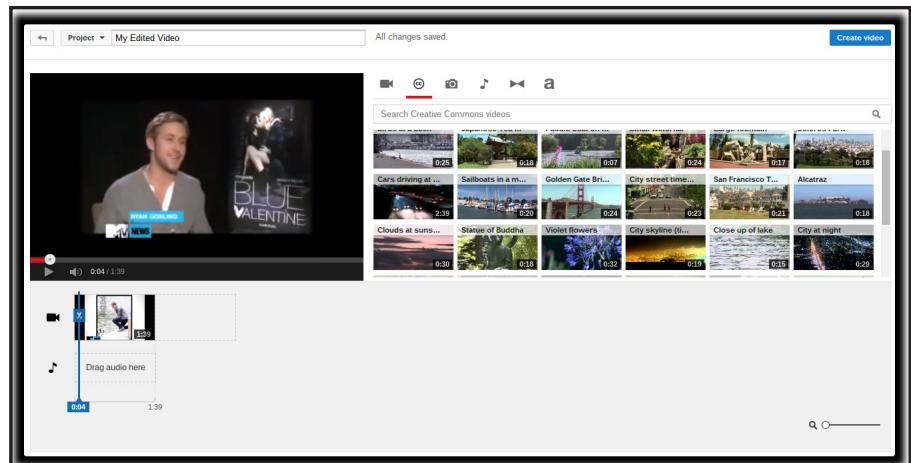
- Hoping to expand #StudioMeme's focus beyond still images & #AnimatedGIFs, Youtube's #VideoEditor was introduced.

#### #PageBreak

<sup>7</sup> To: "In the case of the aforementioned..." on page 158

<sup>8</sup> To: "#PixlrExpress is an online..." on page 172

- The #VideoEditor can be used with YouTube videos published under a #CreativeCommons license, found by enabling the proper search filter.
- #CreativeCommons offers a series of copyright licenses that foster the sharing of creative content, academic findings & scientific data.



Periph. 52: YouTube editor

- After directing learners through the process of locating remixable videos, they were instructed on the usage of the #VideoEditor.
- A limited bandwidth however, as well as a steep learning curve resulted in learners quickly loosing interest in the #VideoEditor #exercise.
  - Just like every other #StudioMeme #exercise, this one took place online, however the demands of editing video are #distinct.
    - They are #distinct in the bandwidth that video files require not only to play smoothly but more so if edited in real time.
    - As 5 computers attempted to edit videos at the same time the center's Wi-Fi signal was soon clogged up by this #distinct requirement.
    - They are also #distinct in the patience it takes to isolate & transpose specific samples of video, which quickly fades as browsers freeze.
    - Of course they are also #distinct in the amount of time it takes to feel comfortable editing videos, much longer than a 3-hour session.
  - As frustrated learners walked away from the #VideoEditor & opted instead for boardgames, I recognized another failed #exercise.

Funny enough a piece of content generated during #StudioMeme's #FinalSession made reference to the #VideoEditor misstep.

- During the #FinalSession learners crafted content about how they would change the #SummerArtProgram & the #WiFiSignal was on the list.
- Failing to locate the source of said #WiFiSignal, a learner opted to use an overhead projector as a stand in.



Data 65: Photo taken ↵ captioned by learner.

- Some of the other content crafted during the #FinalSession ranged from the absurd to the immediate.



*Data 66: Images captioned by learners for final assignment 1.*

- The #FinalSession was complemented with the other side of the matter, namely the learners' #FavoritePart of the #SummerArtProgram.
- This time, most of the learners depicted their #FavoritePart earnestly even if at times in jest.



*Data 67: Images captioned by learners for final assignment 2.*

- Interestingly, most of the content generated during the #FinalSession was captioned images even though all #MemeTypes were encouraged.
- A couple of learners crafted #MemeTypes like #AnimatedGIFs & slideshows using the #VideoEditor but declined to partake in the research.
- Another interesting commonality to the #FinalSession's content is how learners engaged the assignment both #IRL & through #InternetCulture.
  - #IRL learners photographed subjects, staged depictions & even found stand-ins to craft their responses as accurately as possible.
  - Through the conventions of #InternetCulture, learners were able to embrace & express their whimsical & nonsensical dimensions.

**Broadly, perhaps this is the major insight that emerged from #StudioMeme, how meme literacy can be employed to foster #engagement.**

- #Engagement with #SourceMaterial, software & cultural conventions that will engage back.
- #Engagement with real-life environments that are but the click of a point & shoot camera away from becoming #DigitalContent.
- #Engagement with #MemeTypes as varied as learners themselves, each offering different points of pathways of exploration.
- #Engagement with expressive & creative practices at times fully intentional & otherwise gloriously #oblivious.
  - As #oblivious as a chicken screaming KFC. [Link<sup>9</sup>]
- In more ways than one, this was precisely the type of #engagement largely absent from #Phase1 of my research.

**During #Phase1 the #LanguageOfInternetMemes was engaged in form exclusively & only as a response to theoretical & academic undertakings.**

- As no meme community was seriously considered, the meme-like content generated during #Phase1 responded to the agenda of only one #PRODuser.
- This single #PRODuser generated #content that was subservient to his own notions of pedagogy, originality & creativity not #MemeConventions.
  - Even if learners & colleagues were considered as this #content's audience, they were only contemplated as consumers & not as generators.
  - #MemeConventions became apparent only when a community of learners engaged the #LanguageOfInternetMemes & generated a #SharedLanguage.
    - This #SharedLanguage responded directly to the learners' sense of humor, anecdotes & preoccupations experienced #IRL & shared online.
    - This #SharedLanguage spoke as much about the #IRL #SummerArtProgram they attended as it did about the #InternetCulture they engage daily.
- This is how #Phase2 was instrumental in identifying aspects of the #LanguageOfInternetMemes otherwise overlooked during #Phase1.

# **Chapter 4**

## **The Final Reflections [Some meme-based insights]**

This, the concluding chapter of *On the Language of Internet Memes*, uses Image Macros, Exploitable and Rage Comics to provide some concluding insights into the object of study. Although all content was authored by myself, it nonetheless retains the voices, characters and conventions that these characters have developed online in image boards and internet forums, so in a way it can be thought of as a case of collective authorship. Interspersed with the memes, brief blocks of text transition & explicate ideas as well as re-state the research questions originally posed in Chapter 0 [The Introduction]. Think of these paragraphs as title cards in silent films.

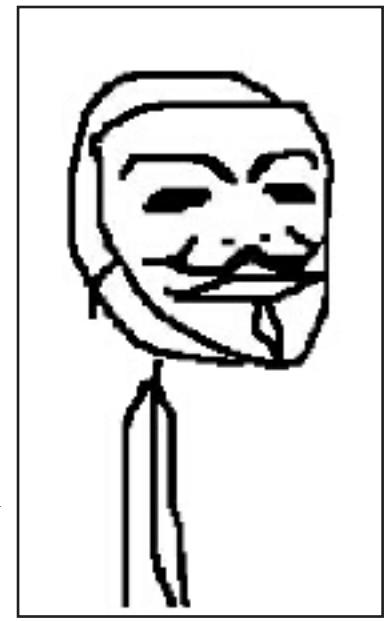
Although Exploitable & Rage Comics were not considered for the body of the research, I find their form to be an ideal vehicle to provide some concluding thoughts through mini-narratives, a form that is already infused with a sense of closure, while at the same time demonstrating some of the more complex forms that Internet Memes can take. That the concluding chapter of a dissertation On the Language Internet Memes is informed by memes that were not included in the research itself should also hint at the vastness of Internet Meme forms and the virtual impossibility to cover them all within the confines of a single study or, for that matter, in teaching. YouTube Memes for example are completely absent from this research even if Shifman's (2011) expert dissection of them informed plenty of the decisions that were made throughout.

Exploitable Comics are usually composed of four panel templates with blank areas for users to easily fill in. Typically the blank spaces take the form of speech bubbles and other text areas that can be used to give the short stories a specific direction. Notable examples are usually extracted from films like *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008). Rage Comics for their part are composed of well-defined, crudely rendered characters typically referred to as rage faces. Each rage face typifies a mood

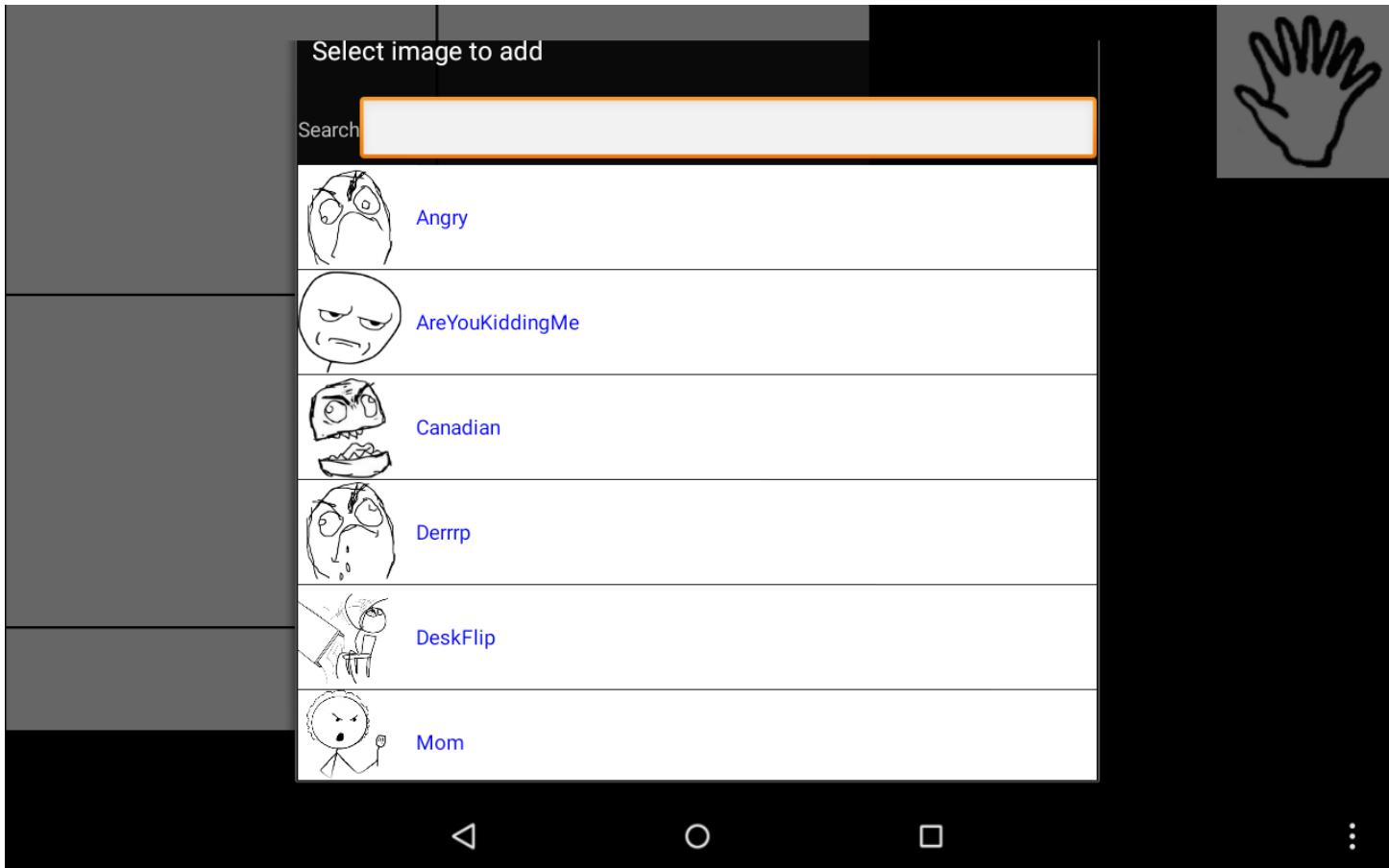


Meme 18: Dark Knight exploitable comic

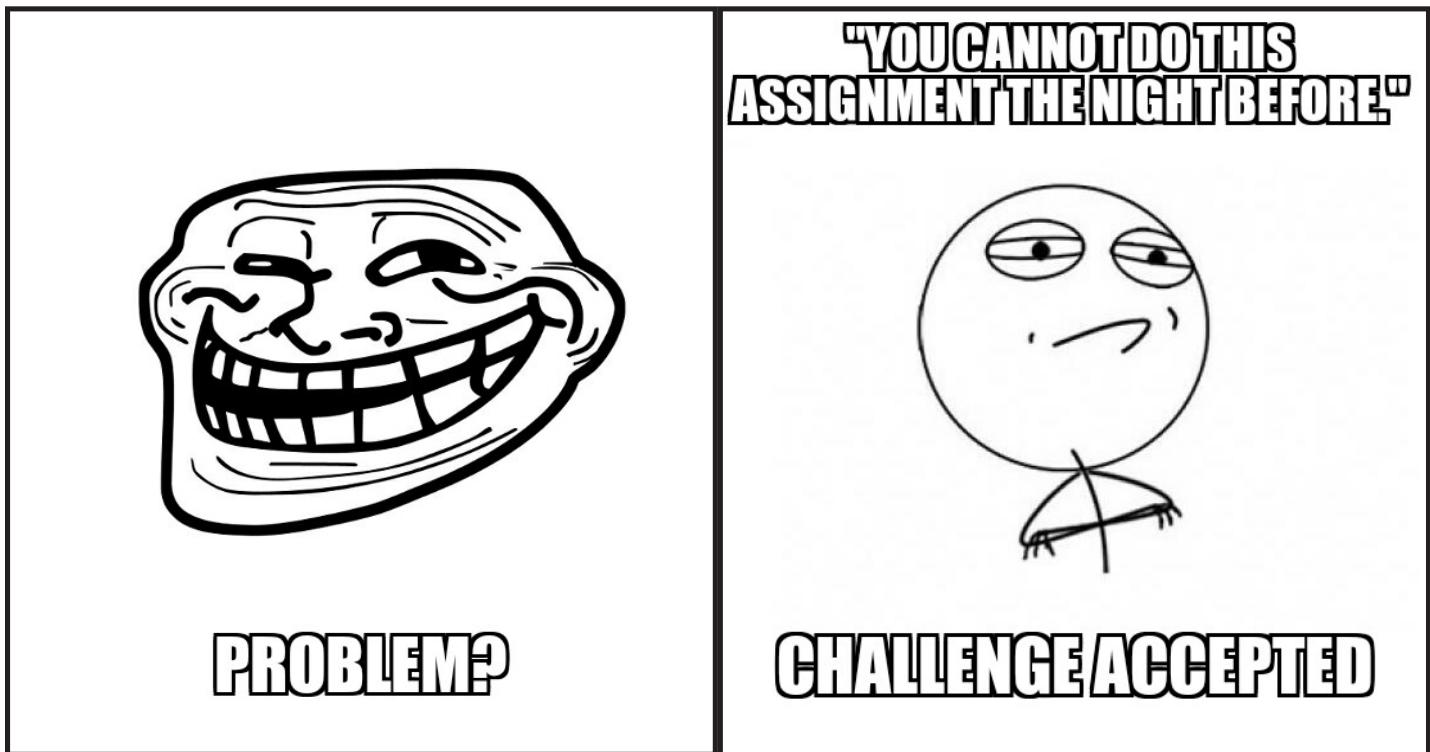
ranging from focused, to triumphant to, of course, rage. The notion of failure is of major importance in Rage Comics as it is the quintessential source of the rage they are named after. Nowhere is this significance made all the more apparent than in the figure of Epic Fail Guy “a beloved meme character with a penchant for failure” (Coleman, 2014, p.64) who wore a Guy Fawkes mask even before Anonymous took it up as a banner. They can usually be generated via web-based applications that users navigate through menus of characters, items, and text fields to fill in blank panels (Periph. 34). Most rage faces have also been adopted as characters for Image Macros where they retain much of the same qualities in voice and tone (Meme 19).



Meme 19: Epic Fail Guy



*Periph. 55: Angry rage face menu from Rage Comic Maker for Android*



*Meme 20: Classic Trollface and Challenge Accepted macro characters.*



*Meme 21: Feel Like a Sir macro character as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid*



Meme 22: A rage comic with “determined fumanchu computer stare,” “concentrated,” “thoughtful,” “determined challenge considered I” & “Detedmined2” [sic] rage faces as made on Rage Comic Maker for Android by Tamas Marki.

## Central research question.



How can the language of internet memes be interrogated as a medium that embodies arts-based experiences through collective authorship and be made relevant for research and pedagogical practices involving internet art and visual culture?





*Meme 23: Boardroom Suggestion exploitable comic as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid*



Meme 24: Good Guy Boss macro character as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid



Meme 25: Meme Man macro character as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid



*Meme 26: All right, Gentlemen exploitable comic as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid*



Academic literature on Internet Memes has grown exponentially over the last couple of years. Most of it assumes memes to be artifacts in need of interpretation either as participatory discourse (Milner, 2012), as a model for cultural transference (Murray Husted, 2012), as rhetoric in jokes' clothing (Decker-Maurer, 2012), or as collective cultural expressions at the behest of virtual communities (Shifman, 2014). Their language [their form and the specific processes that shape them] however has remained a passive object as opposed to exploiting it as a research instrument itself.

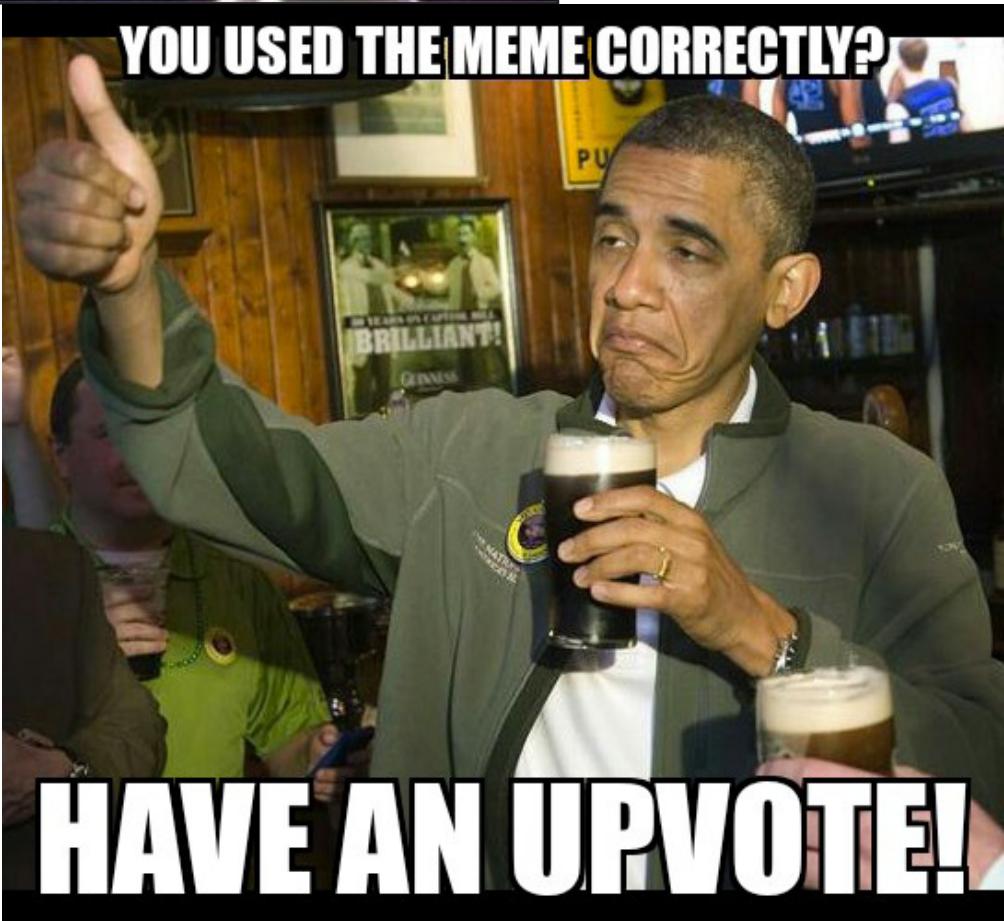




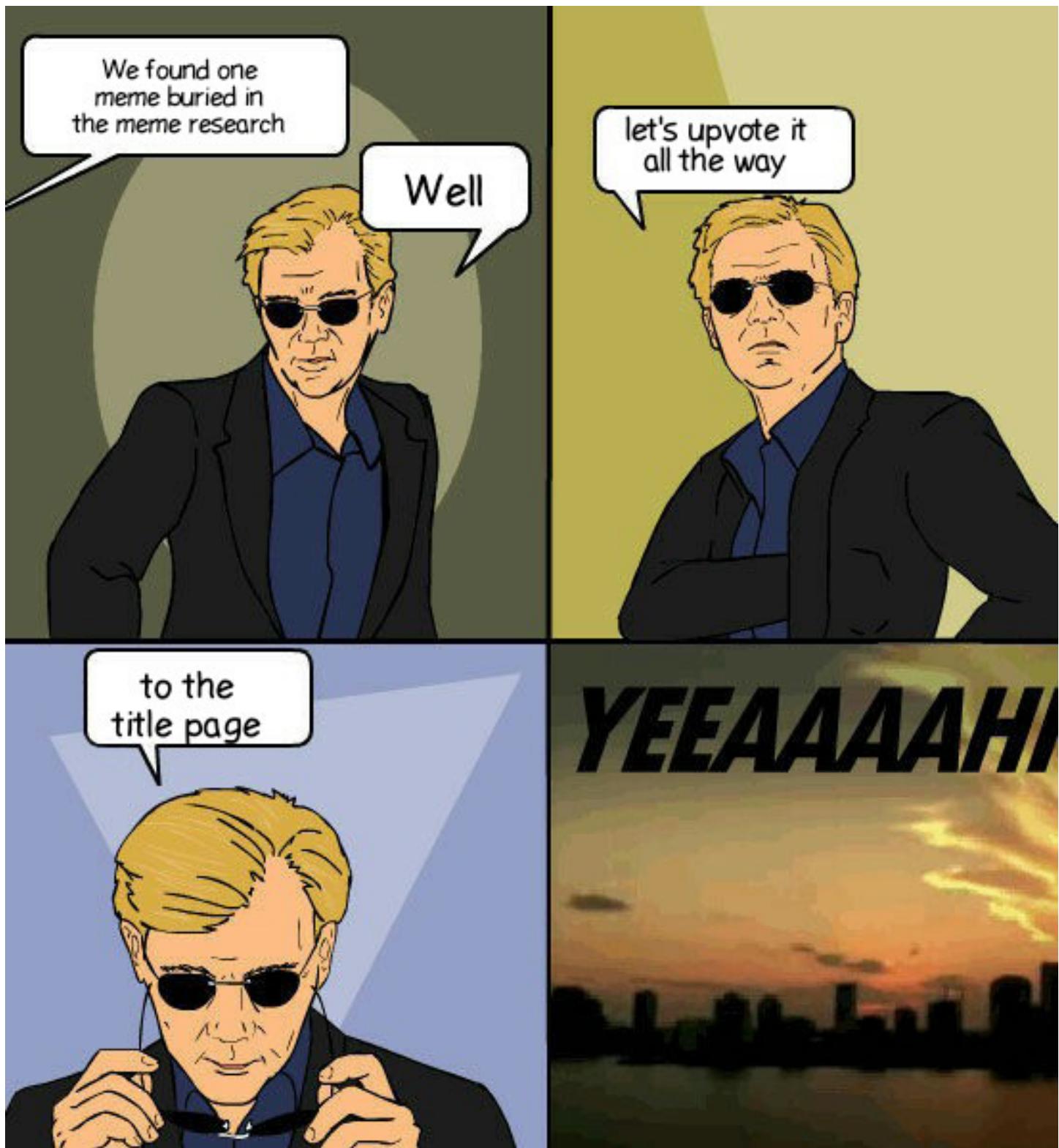
*Meme 27: No Patrick macro as made on  
Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid*



Meme 28: Confused Black Girl macro character as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid



Meme 29: Upvoting Obama macro character as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid



*Meme 30: Horatio Cane 4 Pane exploitable comic as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid*

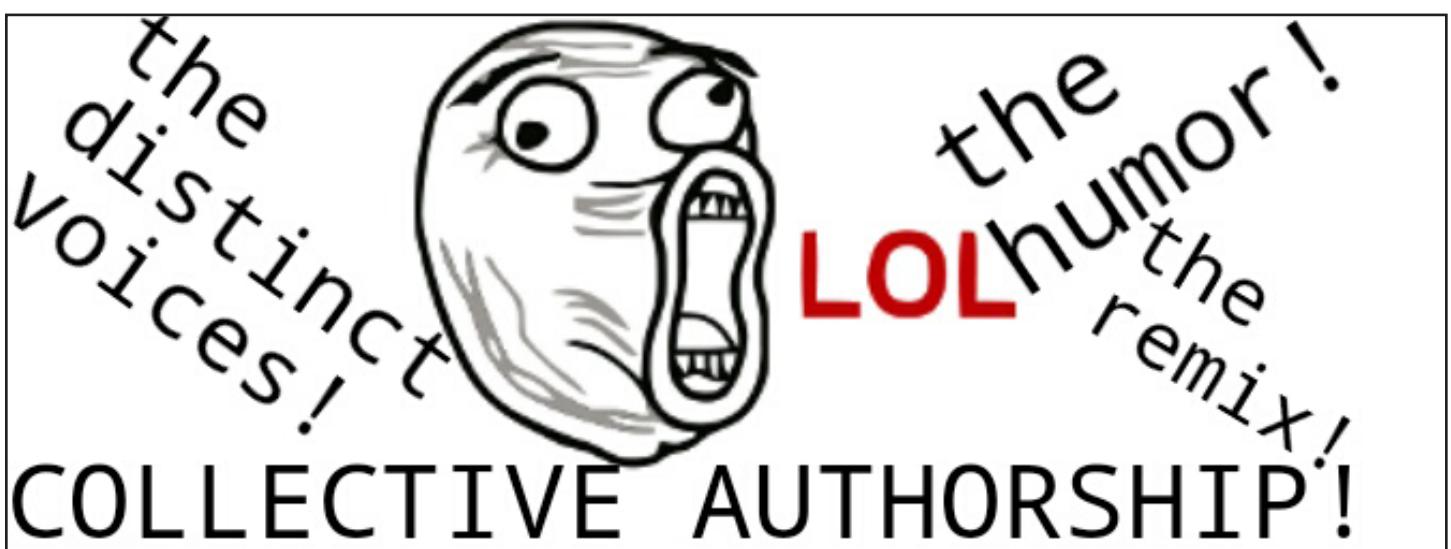


Researching Internet Memes by generating Internet Memes forces the researcher to consider them not only as the passive result of a social phenomenon that is played out in the digital realm, but as a craft and a language: a visual medium demanding to be engaged on its own terms.





*Meme 31: I'm Sorry I Annoyed You macro as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid*



*Meme 32: A single-panel rage comic with "LOL" rage face as made on Rage Comic Maker for Android by Tamas Marki.*

**IF MEMES ARE COLLECTIVE**



**CAN THEY EVER  
HAVE JUST ONE AUTHOR?**

**IF AN AUTHOR  
WRITES WITH INTERNET MEMES**



**is the author THE AUTHOR?  
or is it the collective?**

*Meme 33: Philosoraptor macro character as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid*



Meme 34: A rage comic with "WhyWithHands," "BigGrin," "Laughing," "FemaleRage2" & "neutral feel like a sir clean I" rage faces as made on Rage Comic Maker for Android by Tamas Marki.

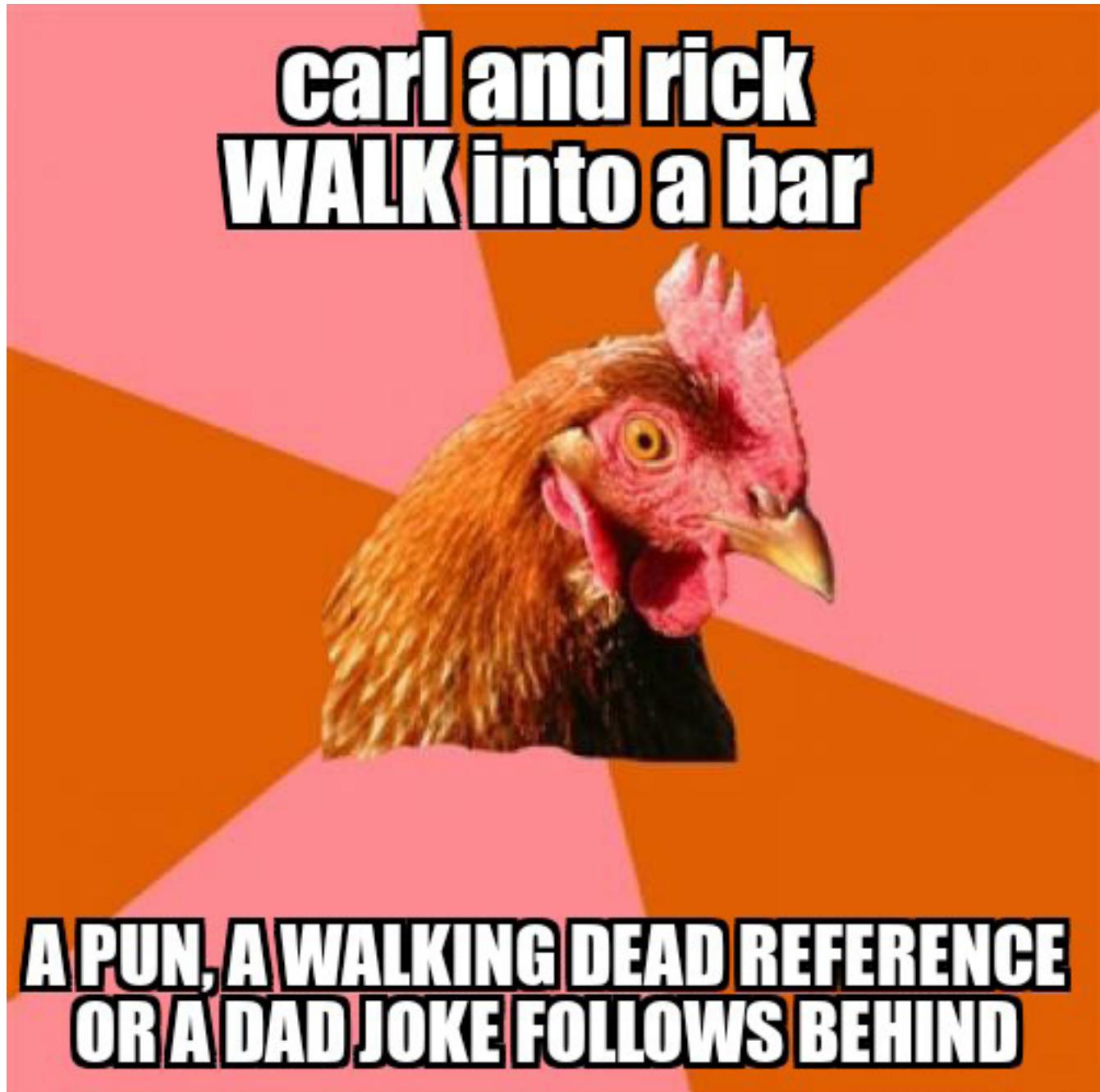


As Internet Meme users engage a given Macro Character or Rage Face, an Actor-Network (Latour, 2005) is implicit: the online forums that generated them, other users that refined their voice, not to mention the cultural references that artifacts like a top hat and a monocle evoke. Even if the resulting meme instance is captioned and arranged according to the most recent user's wishes, it is still informed by its own agency as it visually compounds every actant that has defined its "precise" use.





Meme 35: Carl e3 Rick exploitable comic as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid

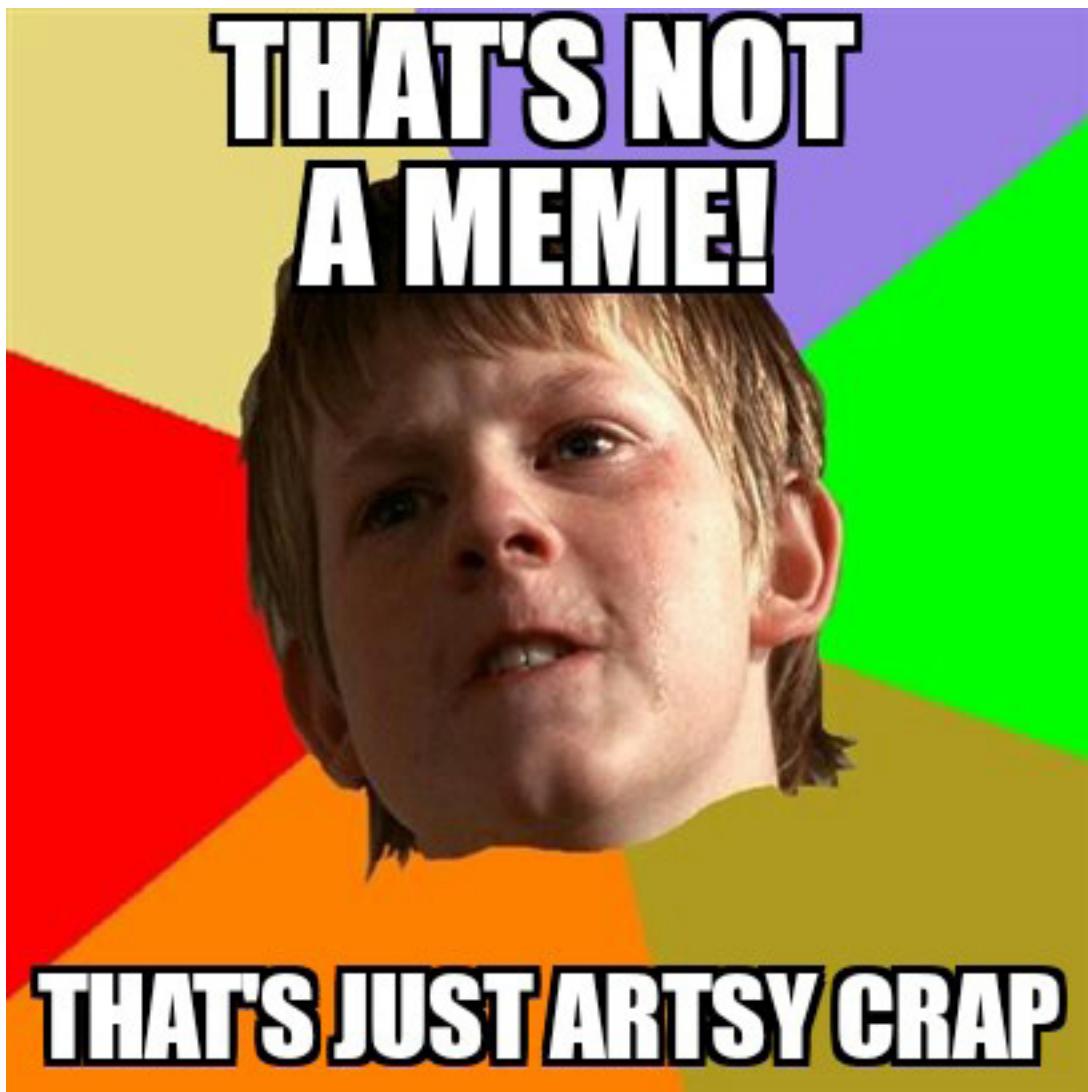


*Meme 36: Anti Joke Chicken macro character  
as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid*

# but artists & ART



Meme 57: A single-panel rage comic with "Forever Alone" rage face wearing hipster glasses as made on Rage Comic Maker for Android by Tamas Marki.



*Meme 38: Angry School Boy macro character  
as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid*



Even though works like the Art Crit & GIFs series [<http://wp.me/p2gynd-5O>] and the Literacy of the Glitch website [<http://literacyoftheglitch.org/>] sampled some of the most emblematic Internet Meme forms [Captions in bold, white font and Animated GIFs], neither was intended to acknowledge or take advantage of memes' community-based origins or means.





*Meme 39: Steve Jobs vs Bill Gates exploitable comic as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid*



Freeware like the apps used to generate all memetic instances populating this chapter are crucial not only in the production and propagation of content like Image Macros & Rage Comics but they also account in large part for their formal & conceptual features thanks to their simplicity and explicit limitations as image manipulators that facilitate a specifically narrow type of meme literacy.



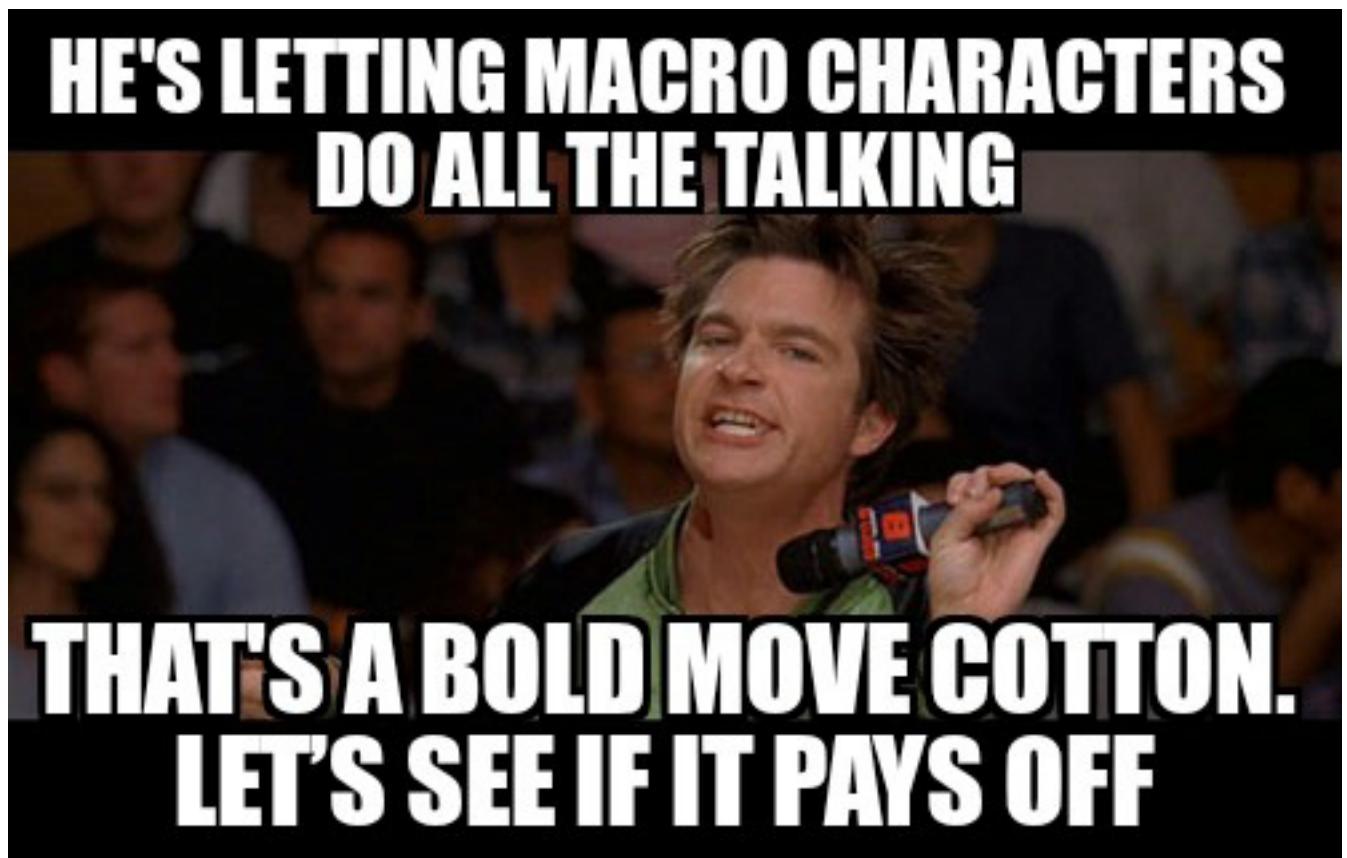


*Meme 40: A rage comic with “Baww,” “Angry,” “Determined,” and “Challenge Accepted” rage faces as made on Rage Comic Maker for Android by Tamas Marki.*



As the meme researcher becomes a meme user, the memes generated as part of the research speak for themselves, with the voices and characters they already embody. The visual essay Internet Memes: What if we're not just gags... [<http://wp.me/p2gynd-7k>] for example plays out as a narrative where Image Macro characters ponder their own role within internet culture and the possibility to transcend it.





*Meme 41: Bold Move Cotton macro character  
as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid*

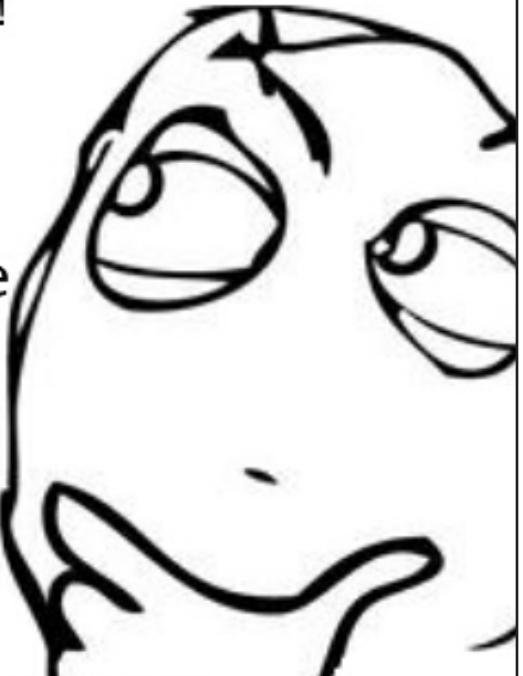


By complementing the Macro Characters with samples from relevant academic literature, the essay's author virtually disappears behind a stream of internet culture and remix practices as self-aware memes and quotes commingle to bolster Internet Memes' place within visual culture and their potential benefits for art education.



 WAIT A MINUTE!  
so the language of  
internet memes can  
be researched as an  
actor-network where  
internet forums, forum  
members, the freeware  
they use, and the source material  
are all actants with agencies  
of their own!

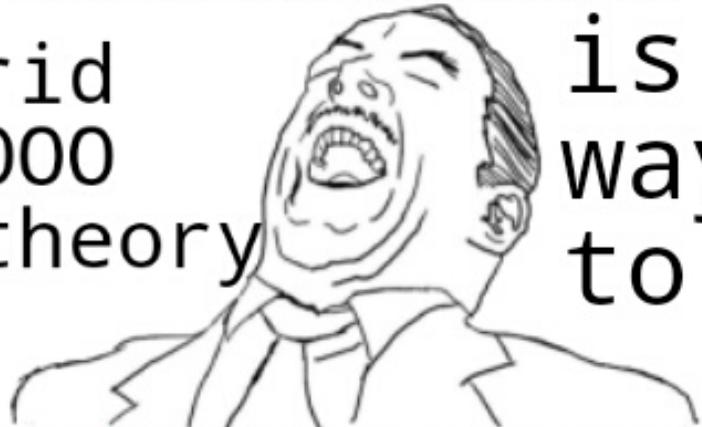
What's more, internet  
memes seem to exist  
in a flat ontology where  
they can sample and  
remix content from  
sources as disparate as  
movies and TV shows,  
emotions and anecdotes,  
cartoons and everyday  
objects.



**AAAAAAAAWWWWW**

so a hybrid  
of ANT, OOO  
& Remix theory

is the  
way  
to go!



**YYYYYYEEEEEEEAAAAAA**

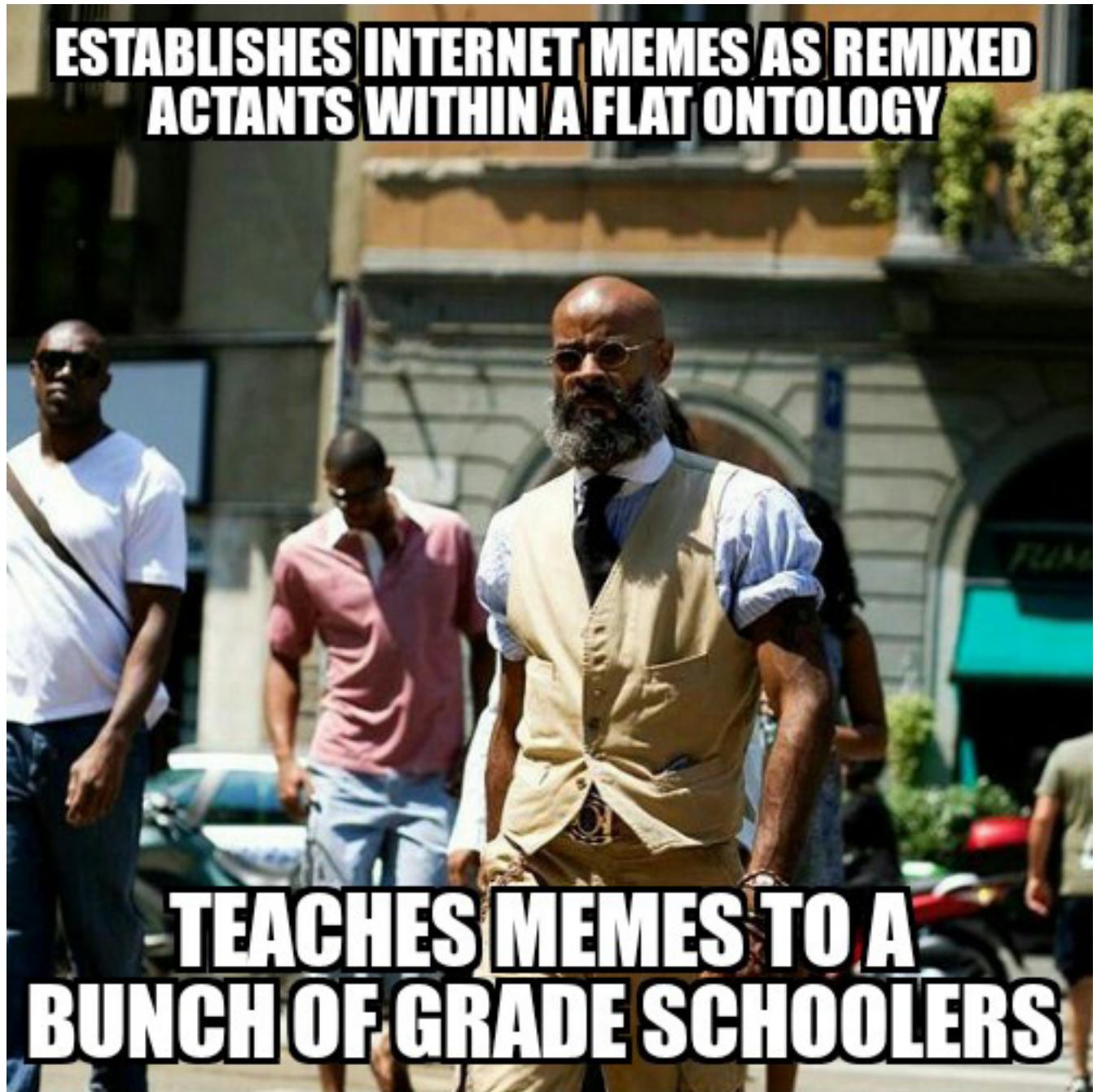
Meme 42: A rage comic with "WaitAMinute," "Thoughtful," & "Aww Yea!" rage faces as made on Rage Comic Maker for Android by Tamas Marki.

\*Actor-Network Theory, ^Object Oriented Ontology



Understanding Internet Memes as actants within actor-networks where users, source material, software and cultural references all exist as objects to interrelate and be remixed also questions Lessig's (2008) notion of an RW culture where only human entities are in charge of rewriting culture.





*Meme 43: Professor Badass macro character  
as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid*

## First sub-question



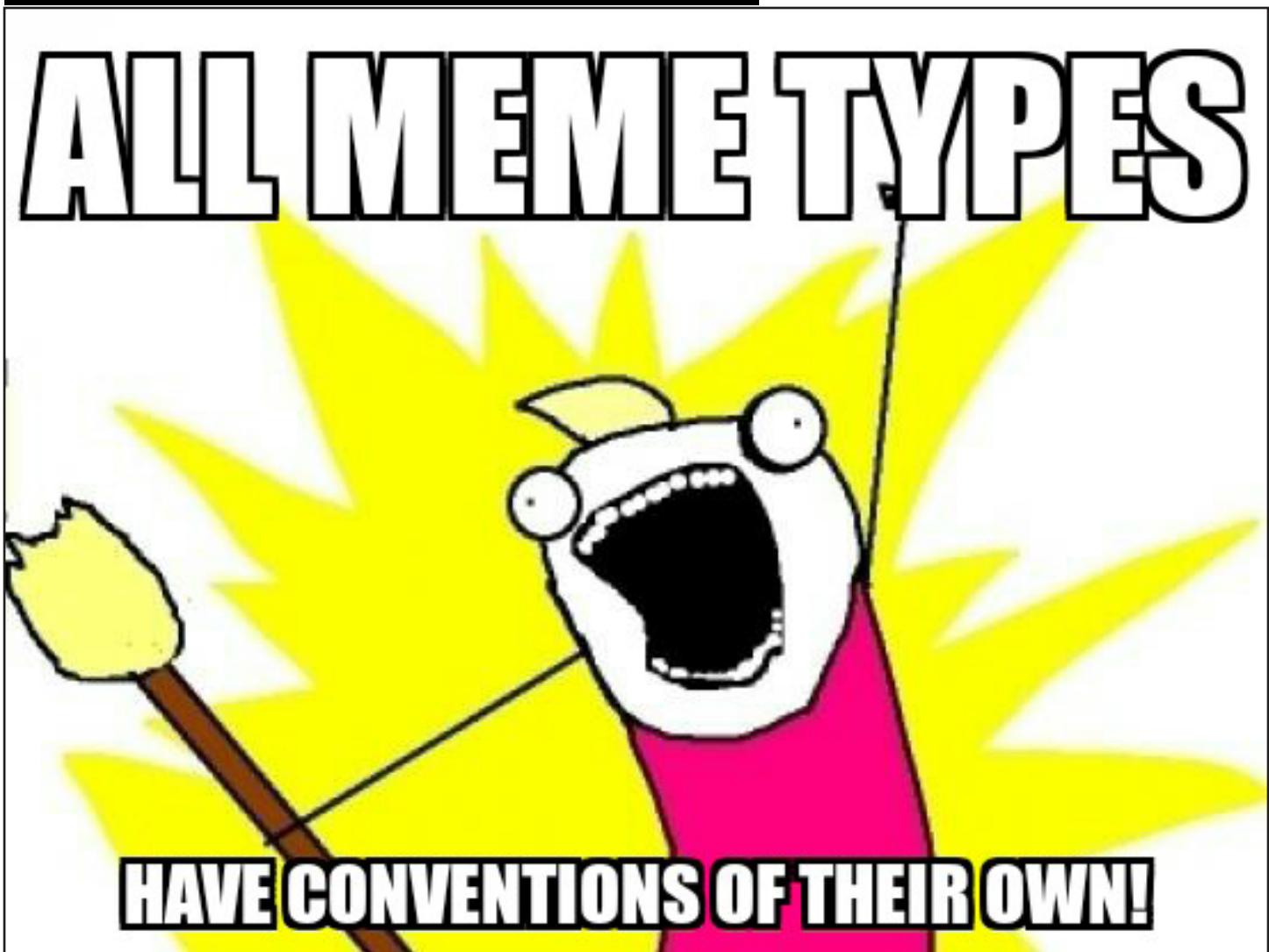
What are the concrete forms of Internet Memes that can be contextually integrated into learning experiences that may range widely in terms of age, object of study and expected outcomes?

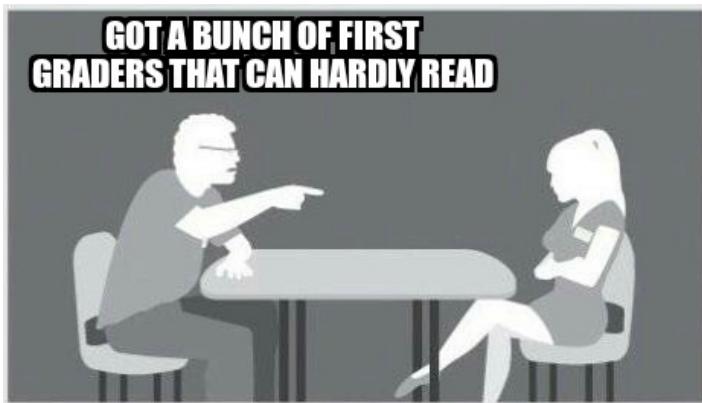




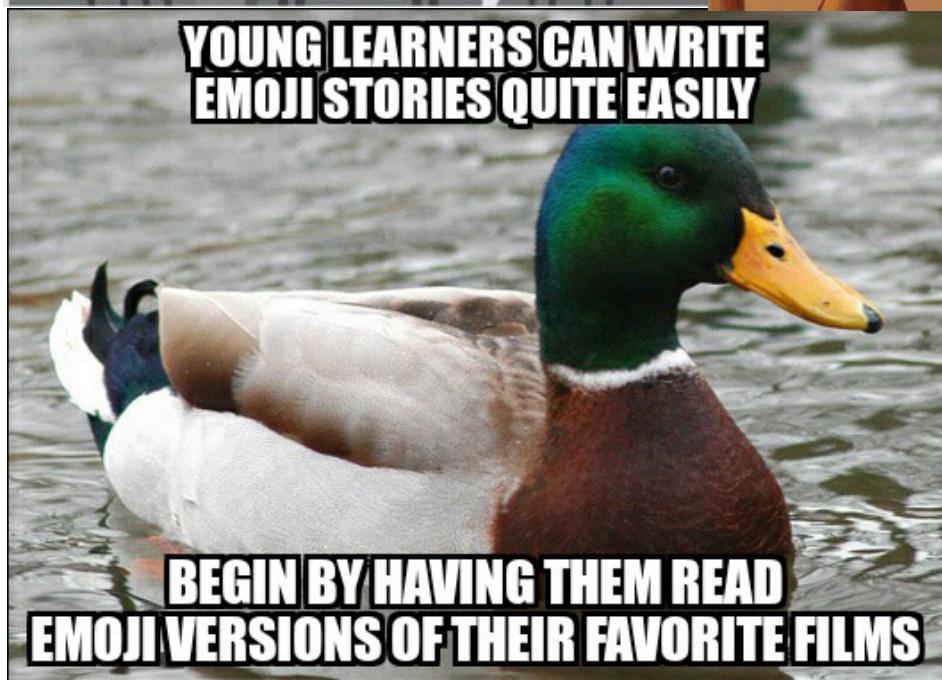
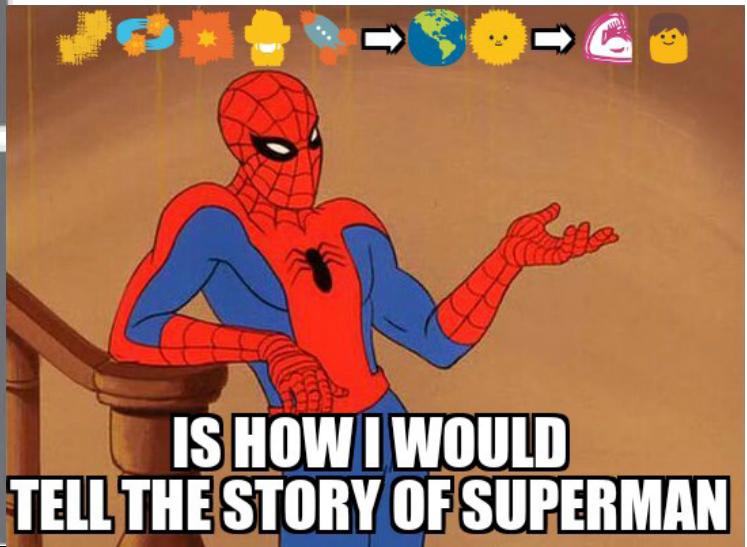
Meme 44: Awesome High School Teacher [left]

Meme 45: All the Things [bottom]  
macro characters as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid





Meme 46: Speed Dating exploitable comic [left] c3  
 Meme 47: Spider-Man Not Giving a Fuck macro character [bottom]  
 as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid



Meme 48: Actual Advice Mallard macro character as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid



Even though Emoji sets can vary depending on devices, applications, and operating systems, plenty of them are universally available even if with small variations in shape and shading. As opposed to Image Macros, placement and context is crucial for Emojis as the same tiny picture of a bicycle can be a key point in retelling the film E.T. or the cause for anxiety during a sunny day turned rainy.

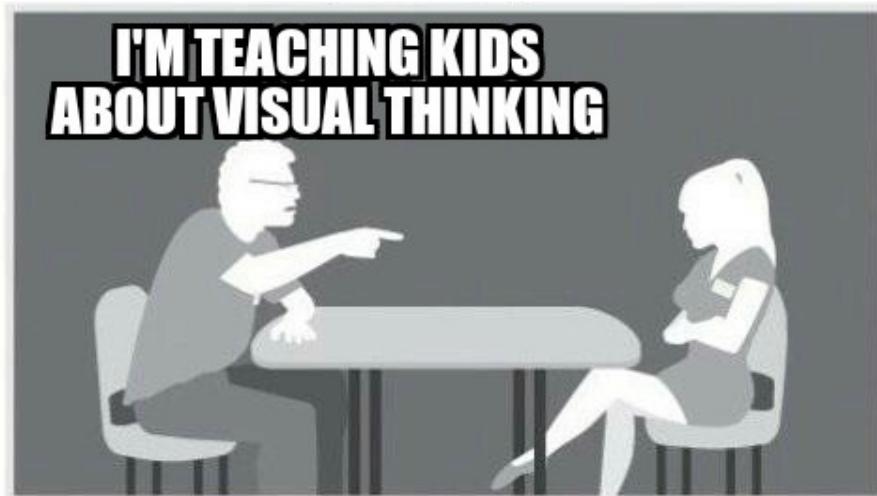


🚲 [Bicycle]

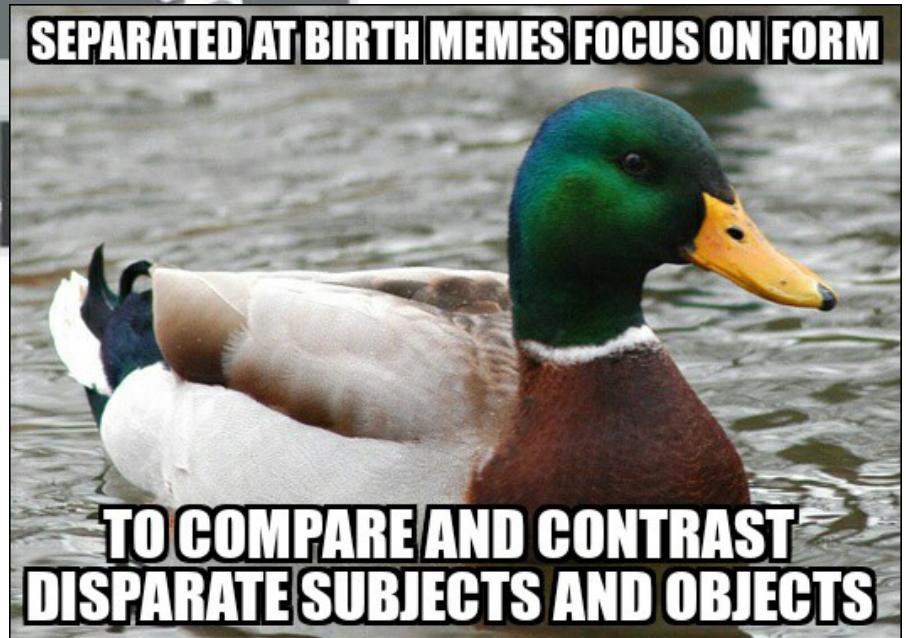
👽 🚲🌙 [E.T.]

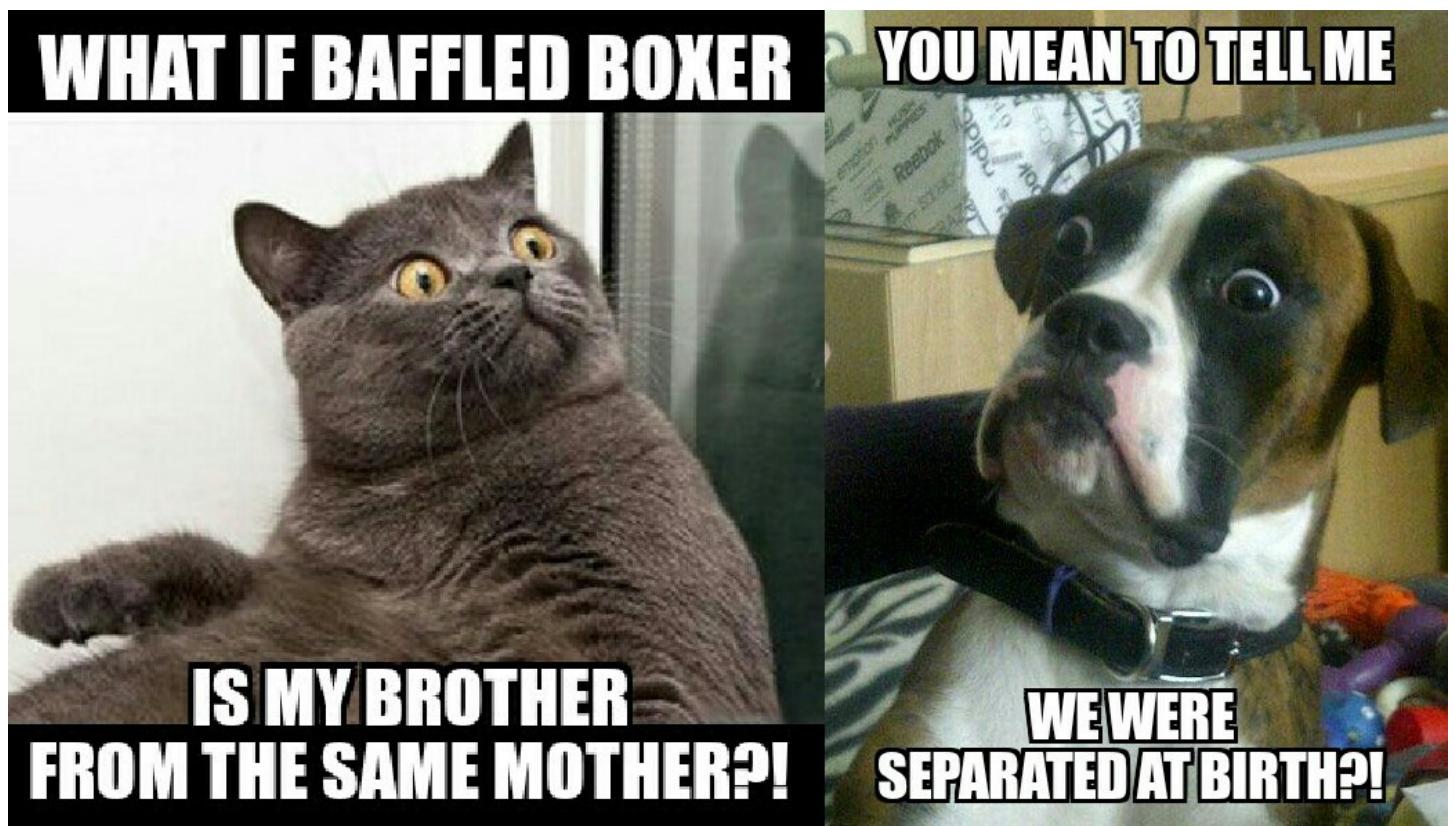
☀️🌳🏡🚲 ➡️ ☁️☀️☁️💧☔️ 😭 [Sunny to rainy]

*Meme 49: Three uses of the bicycle emoji.*



*Meme 50: Speed Dating exploitable comic [left] ↵  
Meme 51: Actual Advice Mallard macro character [bottom]  
as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid*





*Meme 52: Conspiracy Cat [left] ↵*

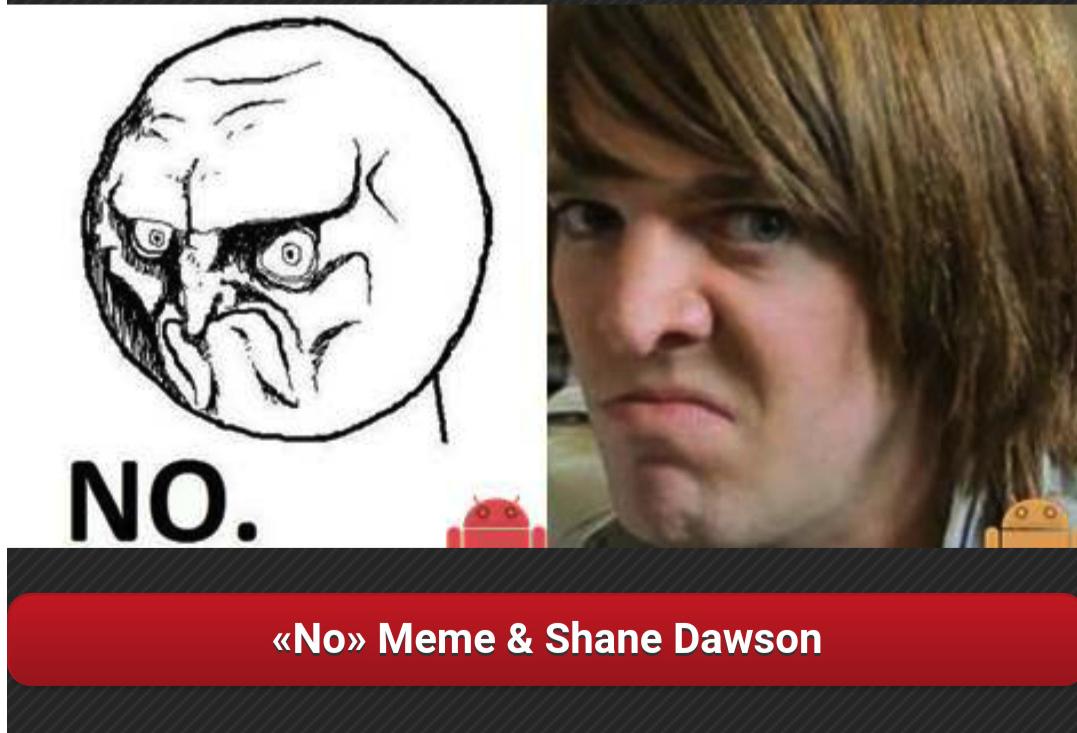
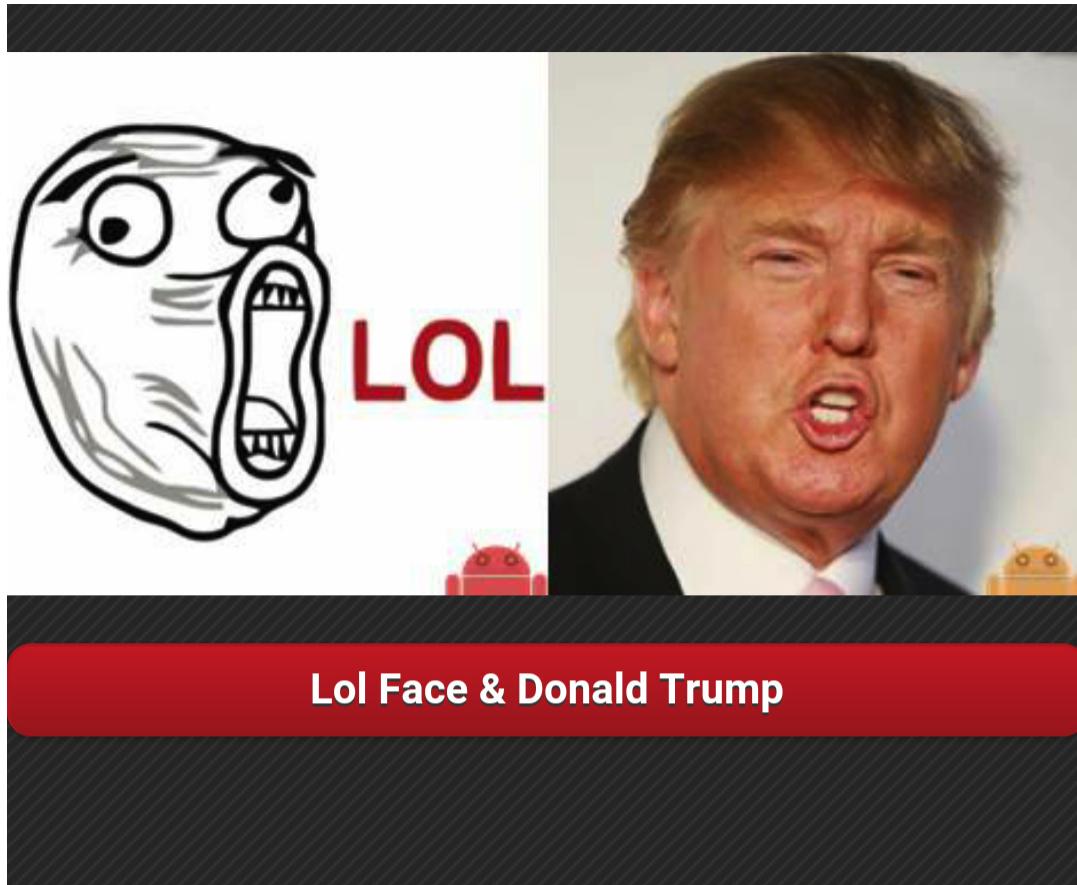
*Meme 53: Baffled Boxer [right]*

*macro characters as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid*



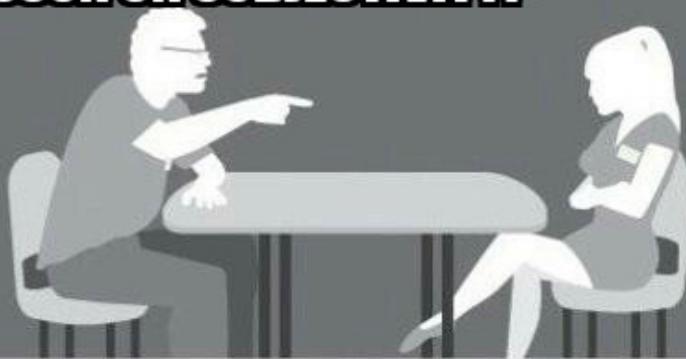
Visual thinking plays a crucial role in Separated at Birth memes as generators are forced to locate subjects and objects that share visual features even if conceptually they might be as different as cats and dogs or rage faces and celebrities.



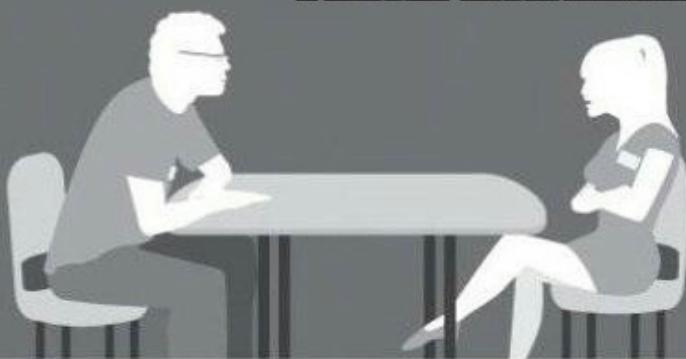


*Meme 54: Two Separated at Birth memes retrieved from the Separated At Birth app for Android by Ikag Studios*

**WHAT ABOUT A  
LESSON ON SUBJECTIVITY?**



**EASY,  
PERCEPTION MEMES**



**KIDS, WHAT EXACTLY DO  
YOU THINK I DO?**



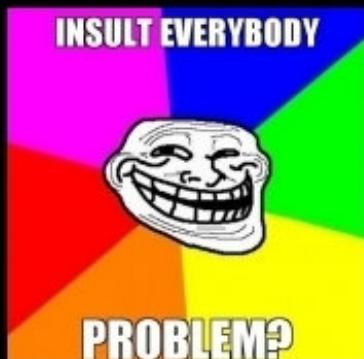
*Meme 55: Speed Dating exploitable comic [left] c3*

*Meme 56: Actual Advice Mallard macro character [bottom] as made on MemeGeneratorforAndroidbyZomboDavid*

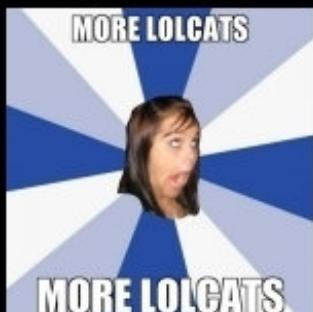
**PERCEPTION MEMES**

**ARE A GREAT TEMPLATE TO EXPLORE  
A SUBJECT FROM DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW**

# Internet Memes



What TV thinks we do.



What cat lovers think we do.

ONE DOES NOT SIMPLY



What trolls think we do.

INTERNET MEMES?



What parents think we do.



What we think we do.



What we actually do.

*Meme 57: Perception, or What People Think I Do Meme with Troll Face, Boromir, Internet Grandma [top, l-r], Annoying Facebook Girl, Angry Samuel L Jackson, e3 Skeptical Baby [bottom, l-r] Image Macro Characters. Macros made on Meme Generator app for Android by ZomboDroid. Perception Meme made on: <http://frabz.com/meme-generator/what-i-do/>*



*Meme 58: Speed Dating exploitable comic [left] as made on MemeGeneratorfor Android by ZomboDroid*



**WE ALSO MAKE GREAT CHARACTERS**

**FOR VISUAL STORYTELLING**

*Meme 59: Actual Advice Mallard macro character  
as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid*



**YOU CAN EVEN USE ME**  
**AS THAT  
IDIOT'S ANTAGONIST**

*Meme 60: Angry Advice Mallard  
macro character as made on Meme  
Generator for Android by ZomboDroid*



*Meme 61: Speed Dating exploitable comic as made on MemeGeneratorforAndroid by ZomboDroid*



Although resources like Powerpoint, Prezi, YouTube, Vine, and Voicethread offer significantly more polished possibilities, the simplicity and accessibility of Animated GIFs make them an intriguing asset full of potential to share everything from slideshows to pop culture references, quirky animations and short, modular lessons that loop ad infinitum and can be easily made, de-constructed and remixed.

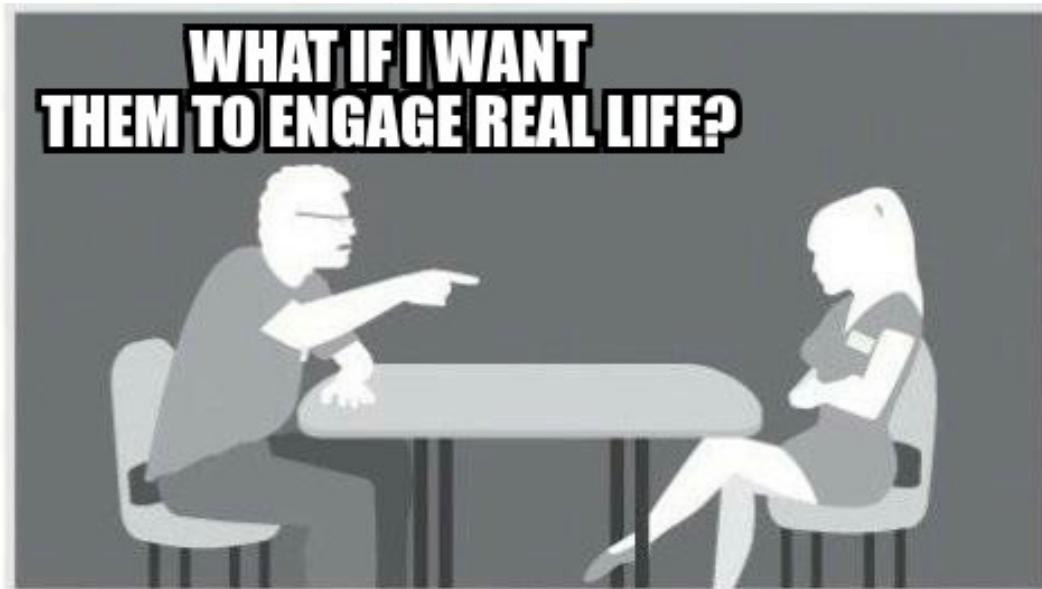


**THESE CLASSES ARE GREAT!**

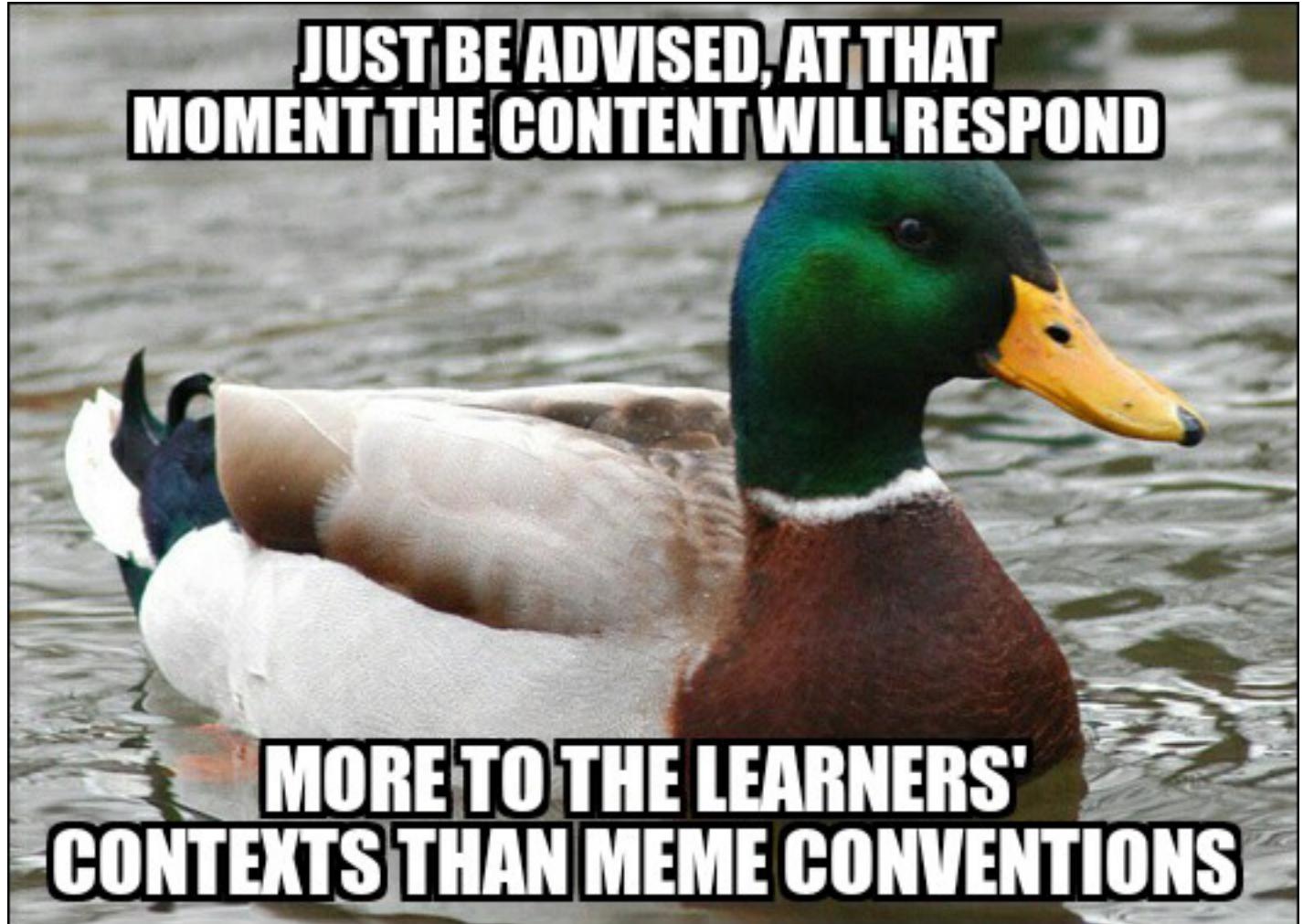


**ALL WE DO IS  
STARE INTO A COMPUTER...**

*Meme 62: Chimpanzees macro character as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid*



*Meme 65: Speed Dating  
exploitable comic as made  
on MemeGeneratorforAndroid by  
ZomboDroid*



*Meme 64: Actual Advice Mallard macro character  
as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid*



During Studio Meme, for example, content originating IRL lent itself as scrapbook matter and summer mementos but source material found online demanded the Internet Meme treatment.



## Second sub-question

~

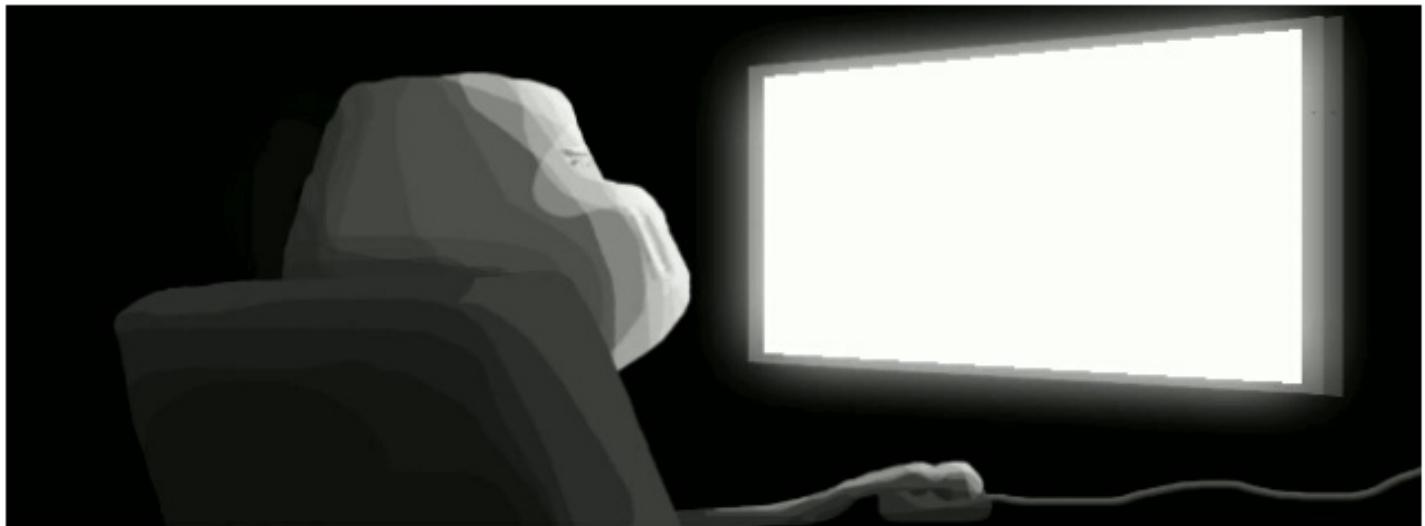
Which specific learning contexts are likely to benefit the most from integrating explorations into which form of internet memes?

~



*Meme 65: Condescending Wonka macro character  
as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid*

while the forever alone artist/educator simply pillaged some traits of Internet Memes



the resulting content (looping, glitchy animations and captioned images) missed the memetic point by failing to acknowledge and exert memes' inherent collectivity.

*Meme 66: A single-panel rage comic with "Forever Alone Computer 2" rage face as made on Rage Comic Maker for Android by Tamas Marki.*



One way to inject some of Internet Memes' inherent collectivity is through dissemination practices that rely on the conventions of Social Media. This approach may foster the recognition of internet culture as a site where pieces of digital art and modular educational resources, grounded on its aesthetics and practices, can thrive and reach, even if informally, interested audiences.

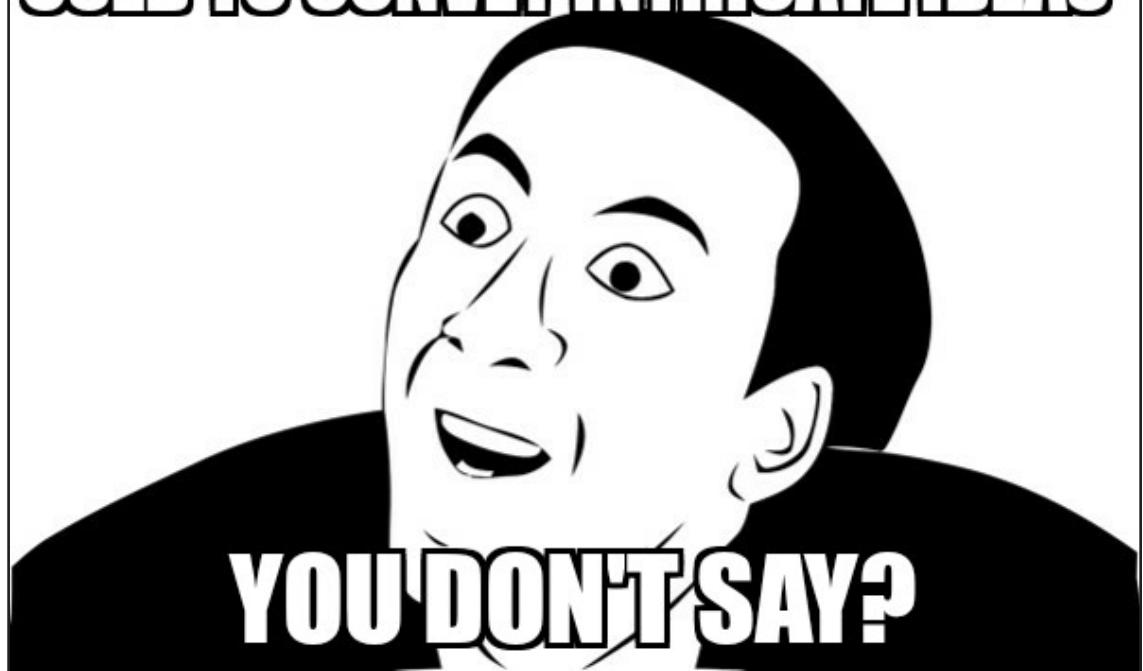


**SPEAK THROUGH OUR COLLECTIVELY  
DEFINED VOICES AND CHARACTERS**



**YOU ALWAYS CAN**

**MACRO CHARACTERS CAN BE  
USED TO CONVEY INTRICATE IDEAS**



*Meme 67: Advice Yoda  
[left] ↵*

*Meme 68: You Don't  
Say [bottom]  
macro characters as  
made on Meme Generator  
for Android by ZomboDroid*



And so can Emojis, Perception Memes, Separated At Birth Memes, and Animated GIFs, depending on objectives, expected outcomes, and having taken the time to explore and understand the conventions that shape each meme type.



**BUT BEFORE ALL THAT**

**YOU BETTER  
TAKE ME SERIOUSLY**

*Meme 69: Actual Sexual Advice Girl [left] e3*

*Meme 70: Angry Walter [bottom]*

*macro characters as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid*

**AM I THE ONLY ONE AROUND HERE**

**WHO WANTS  
TO GET SERIOUS?!**



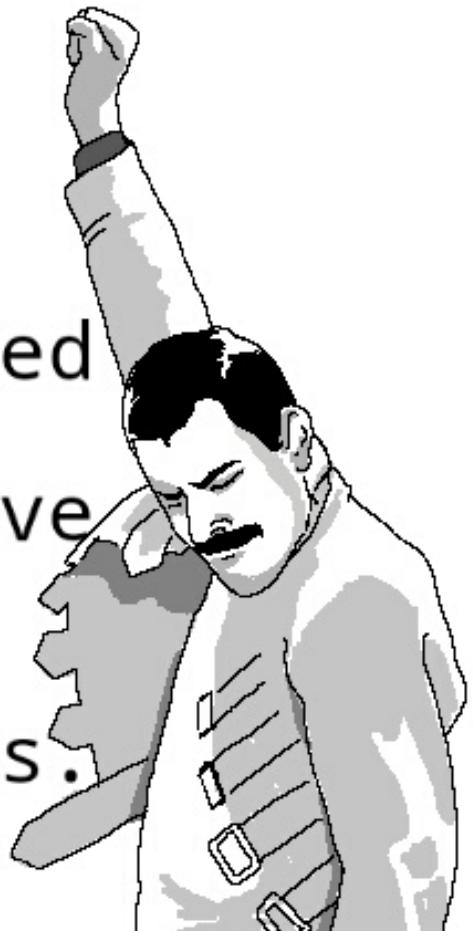
While virtually any learning context can potentially integrate most of the meme explorations detailed here, a handful of conditions must be present:

1. Access to the minimum technology required [desktop or laptop computers and Internet service at the very least].
2. Time and willingness to develop and facilitate computer literacy skills.
3. A disposition to consider Web 2.0 conventions and sites that may appear to contradict institutional policies.
4. Large amounts of trust.
5. A fundamental understanding of remix practices as creative endeavors that challenge core notions of originality and novelty.



don't forget  
to take us  
seriously!

the visual culture  
we have birthed.  
the emotions  
we are meant  
to elicit.  
the voices  
& characters  
we're supposed  
to embody.  
the collective  
agencies  
implicit  
in each of us.



Meme 71: A rage comic with “worried omg run,” “FemaleHappy,” Freddie Mercury” e3 “Fuck Yeah Danny Trejo”,” rage faces as made on Rage Comic Maker for Android by Tamas Marki.



**YOU MEAN TO TELL ME  
YOU'RE GONNA START  
TAKING US SERIOUSLY?**

**SERIOUSLY?**

Meme 72: Sceptical (sic) Baby [top] c³  
Meme 73: Angry Guido [right]  
macro characters as made on MemeGenerator  
for Android by ZomboDroid



**THAT'S GONNA  
CHANGE EVERYTHING?**

### Third sub-question

~

What are the implications (potential and actual) of facilitating arts-based explorations into the language of internet memes as part of an Arts and Visual Culture learning experience?

~



Meme 74: Batman Slaps Robin 2 [left] c³

Meme 75: Pepperidge Farm Remembers [bottom]  
macro characters as made on MemeGeneratorforAndroid by ZomboDroid





Meme 76: Meme Dad [top]

Meme 77: Net Noob [right]  
macro characters as made on MemeGenerator  
for Andriod by ZomboDroid





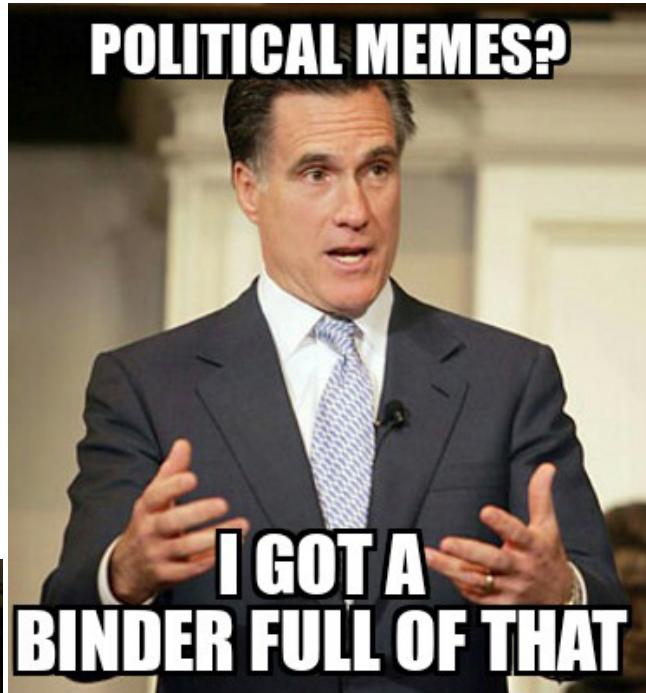
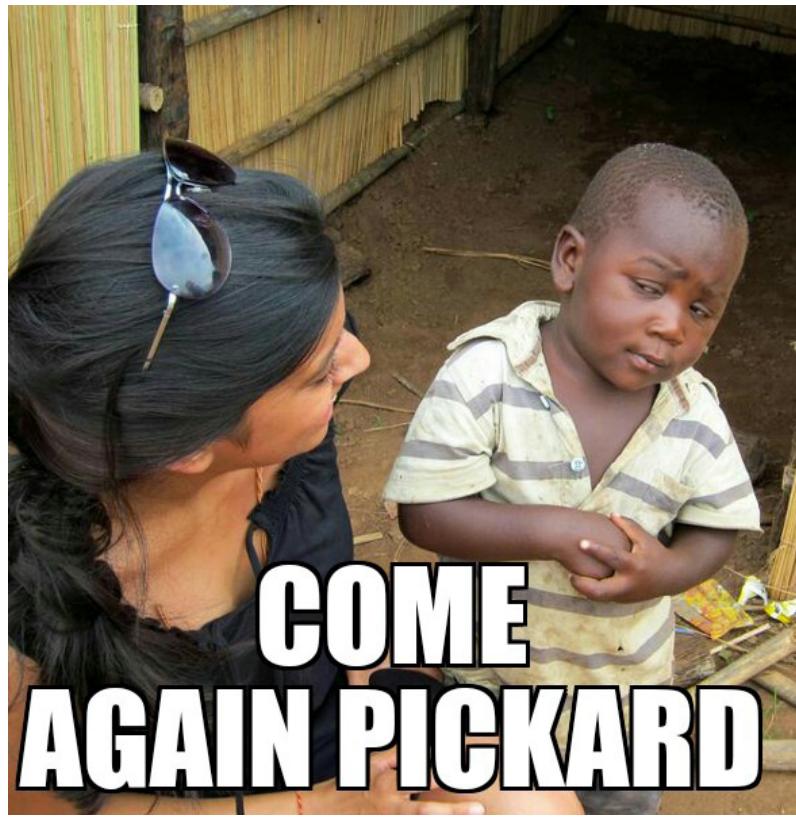
Meme 78: Depression Dog [top left],

Meme 79: Annoyed Robert Downey Jr. [top right] ↳

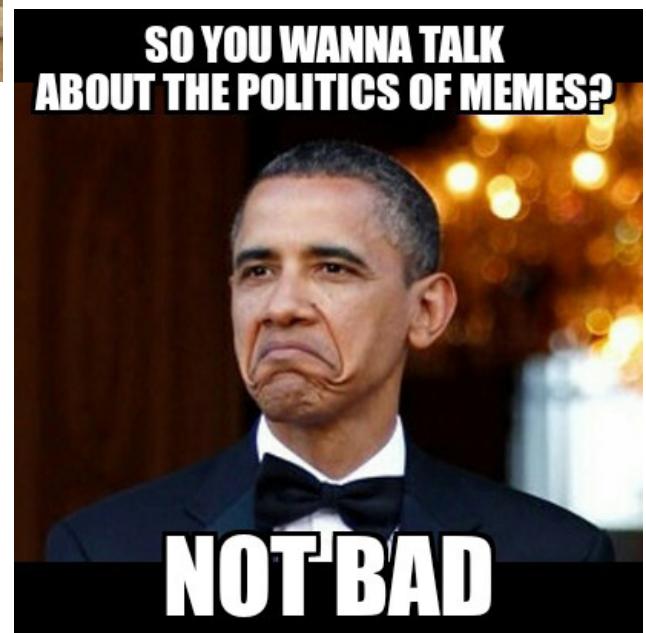
Meme 80: Annoyed Pickard [bottom]

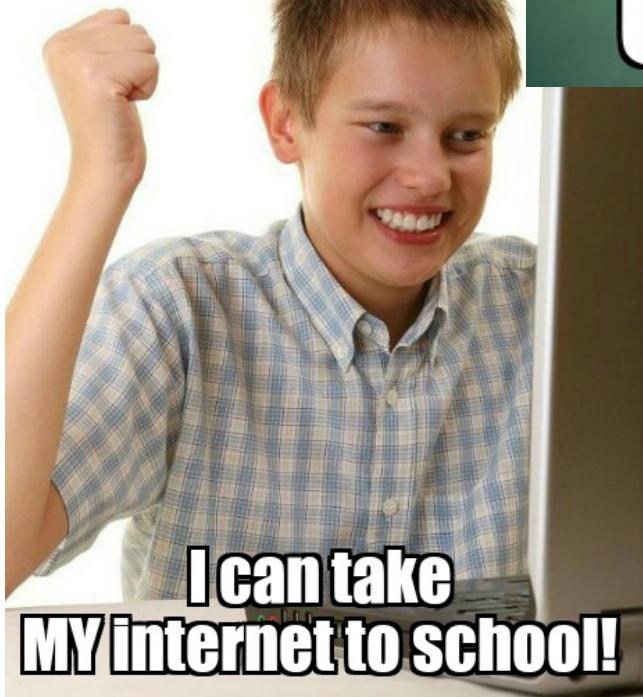
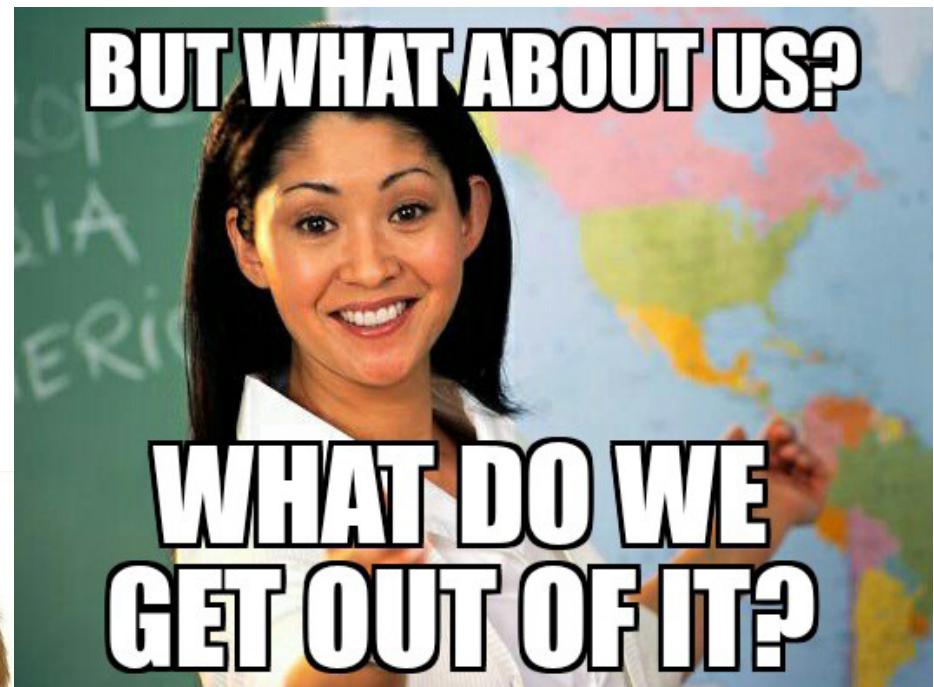
macro characters as made on MemeGeneratorforAndroidbyZomboDroid





*Clockwise from left Sceptical (sic)  
Meme 81: Third World Kid,  
Meme 82: Relatable Mitt Romney ↳  
Meme 83: Not Bad Obama  
macro characters as made on Meme Generator for Android by  
ZomboDroid*





*Counter clockwise from top*

*Meme 84: Unhelpful High School Teacher,*

*Meme 85: First Day on the Internet Kid ↩*

*Meme 86: Attractive Convict*

*macro characters as made on Meme Generator for Android  
by ZomboDroid*



This arts-based exploration, in particular the document reporting on it, can also be experienced itself as an example of Internet Memes' potential beyond mere interpretation as passive objects of study but rather engaging them as a medium capable of phenomenologically altering pedagogical practices.



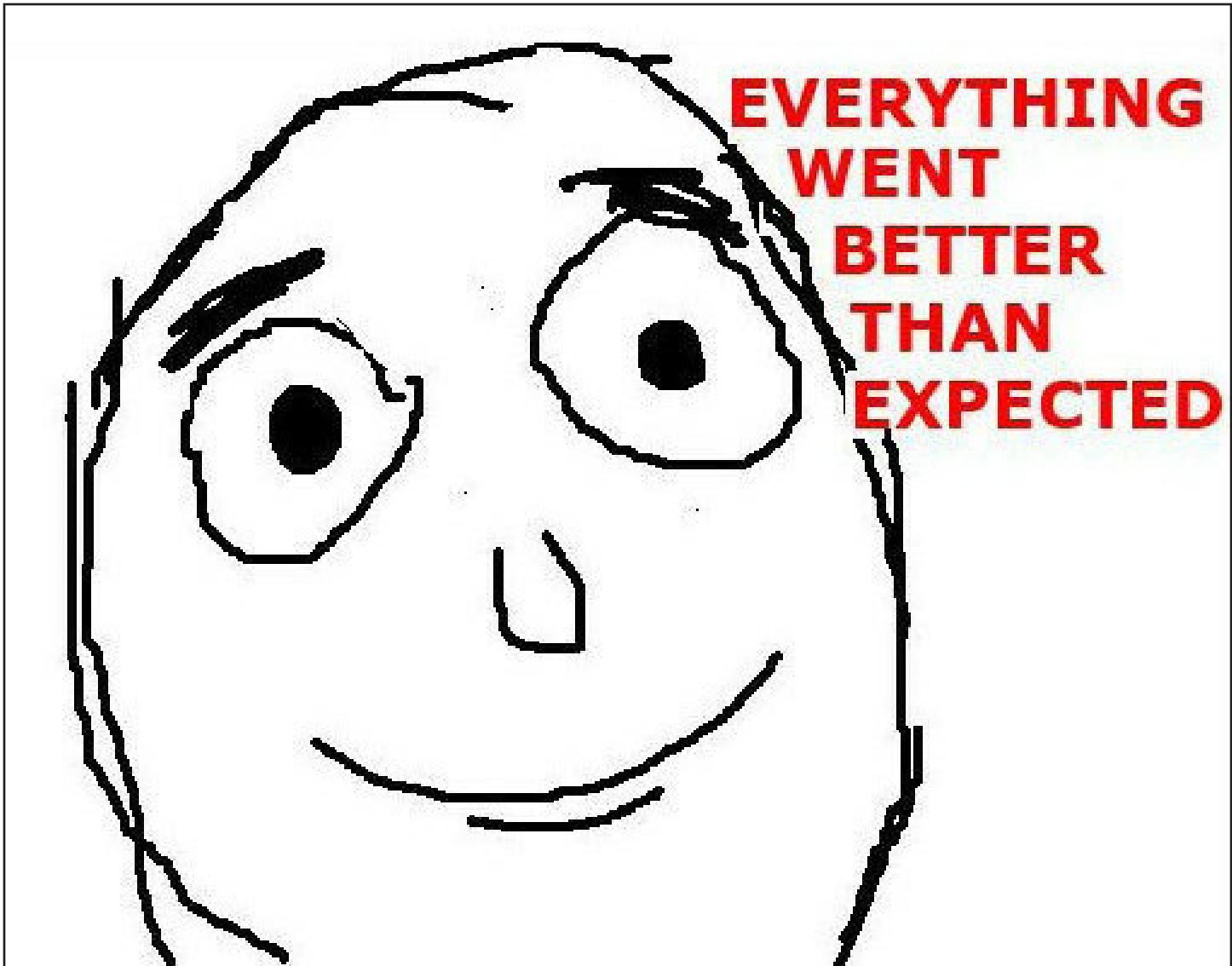


Meme 87: A rage comic with “OriginalTroll,” “AreYouKiddingMe,” “AsianTroll,” “Mom,” “Angry No,” & “Nothing to do here,” with “SadTroll” rage faces as made on Rage Comic Maker for Android by Tamas Marki.



An intriguing potential of exploring the language of Internet Memes as part of arts and visual culture education is the possible shift that could occur in the make up and overall semblance of internet culture and the memes that thrive within it. Of course, if any alteration is to occur it will only be apparent far into the future, when the phenomenon of Internet Memes could very well be a vestige of our social past. But then again, they may prove to be as inconsequentially resistant to change, like "hallmark cards for the eternally snarky," as art critic David Sokolec characterized them (personal communication, February 6, 2015).





*Meme 88: Everything Went Better Than Expected macro character as made on Meme Generator for Android by ZomboDroid*

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