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Bestiarium Memeticum

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Building on my previous research on internet memes from a critical post-humanist perspective, the *Bestiarium Memeticum* presents a collaborative-based understanding of memetic evolution reimagined through the framework of a medieval bestiary. Memes, defined as vital assemblages that interweave users, platforms, and online customs, are reinterpreted through the lens of mythology, enriching conventional descriptive analyses with reflections on their ethical and poetic dimensions. The *Bestiarium Memeticum* serves as a tool that not only foregrounds non-human agencies, but also offers a whimsical yet insightful exploration of ambiguous phenomena such as exploitables, copypastas, viral audios, algospeak, Wojak, the Girl Online, AI cryptids, and online cults. This allegorical account not only expands the understanding of digital cultures, but also promotes a nuanced understanding of the memetic forces at play, revealing how modern myths define and contest the realms of knowledge and power in the digital age. This approach reveals the transformative power of these narratives, reshaping how we understand collective human and non-human interactions in the entanglement of offline and online entities.

1. Introduction

Lo and behold, weary traveller of the wire, and read about the legendary creatures inhabiting the cybernetic realm in this *Bestiarium Memeticum*. Fabricated in the great tapestry of binary code, these beasts have emerged from the digital depths of communities where avatars built from copper and silicon eke out an existence. Some are common occurrences, while others are as rare as the fabled unicorn's ethereal presence in moonlit glades.

A bestiary was a medieval guidebook containing descriptions and allegories of animals, beasts, and mythical creatures that were illustrated with intricate illuminations. In addition to formal descriptions of their appearance and whereabouts, bestiaries typically interpreted the beasts allegorically, for example, phoenixes were seen as a symbol of resurrection and eternal life, a lamb represents Jesus Christ, and foxes were said to be deceptive. The widespread use of bestiaries as animal lexicons among artists and writers shaped the associations that persist in modern culture. This project revives the tradition of the conflation of ethics and biology in medieval bestiaries and connects it to the principles of critical posthumanism in regard to digital entities. By examining how internet memes also reflect on the form of bestiaries in regard to the entanglement of image and text, this *Bestiarium Memeticum* seeks

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to illuminate the trajectories of digital phenomena by drawing parallels that bridge centuries of magical thinking.

2. The Medieval Bestiary as a Tool for Exploring Digital Cultures

2.1. Motivations for Creating Bestiaries

There are numerous reasons why a medieval bestiary is a suitable format for studying internet memes: first, the understanding of memes as living creatures in the sense of vital materialism, a framework that perceives all matter as agentially active and dynamic. (Bennett 2010) Rather than defining memes as sole means of communication or digital items, (Shifman 2014, 7-8) I understand them as living assemblages that unite users, platforms, technologies, and cultural manners. In this respect, memes can emerge, mutate, and ultimately die or go extinct, analogous to biological organisms. On the one hand, such an interpretation ties in with the discourses of memetics and co-evolution, recalling that the term meme was coined in analogy to a gene. (Dawkins 1990, 176) Contrasting with the competitive evolutionary model proposed by Dawkins, Lynn Margulis' endosymbiotic theory suggests that evolution is driven by collaboration, not rivalry. This *sympoietic* approach is particularly relevant to memes, which thrive not through individual survival but through the collaborative processes of sharing, adaptation, and remixing within online communities: "In certain cases cohabitation, long-term living, results in symbiogenesis: the appearance of new bodies, new organs, new species. In short, I believe that most evolutionary novelty arose, and still arises, directly from symbiosis." (Margulis 1999, 33) In this respect, collaboration or the continuous interchange between properties, users, references, etc., is always present in a sympoietic interpretation and provides the inherent logic on which every meme is based. Donna Haraway goes even further and proclaims that monsters provide the possibility "for building new collectives out of what is not quite a plethora of human and unhuman actors." (Haraway 1999, 327)

Secondly, the bestiary aligns with posthumanist goals which challenge the traditional human-centric view of the world. The Anthropocene as a critique of humans as the summit of creation, which gave way to the Western binary conception of nature versus culture, has led to an increased interest in vibrant processes and entangled systems. By examining memes as assemblages that transcend individualism, this work contributes to broader discussions on the codependence of humans and their digital creations. One step in the direction of a posthumanist future is therefore a remediation of life as a material, formative force that permeates everything instead of an attribute to acquire. For a long time, such an understanding was labeled holistic and esoteric, a prejudice based more on a blind spot towards the rationalist ideology of many evolutionary biological processes than a substantive critique of systemic models. (Haraway 1997, 133) Additionally, it should be emphasized that sympoietic processes are defined as lacking "self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries" (Dempster 2000) and by no means as neatly closed systems. In this respect, the posthumanist perspective is a shift that not only understands itself as part of a living system, but also

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explores its own agency in relation to the various existing virtualities of agency.

The third and decisive reason for creating a bestiary lies in the potential of a playful understanding of magic and mythology. When cerebral explanations of a phenomenon are not sufficient, inexplicable processes are often naturalized or understood as magical. However, this attribution of certain functions does not mean that they are not explored: the bestiary entries outdo descriptive analyses of specific online occurrences by interpreting them through a lens of speculation. The rhetorical undertone of the bestiary manifests as a whimsical exploration of all that is rendered invisible online: fake news and media literacy, material conditions of information technologies, the discerning of opaque political or economic motives, automated censorship, humor, cultural gestures or customs, layers of irony, and so on. In this regard, it stands as a venture into the potential agencies arising from incomplete knowledge within an era of algorithmic control. This also corresponds to what Sigmund Freud identified as *das Unheimliche* ("the uncanny") that he traced back to a movement of repetition:

> *Das Moment der Wiederholung des Gleichartigen wird als Quelle des unheimlichen Gefühls vielleicht nicht bei jedermann Anerkennung finden. Nach meinen Beobachtungen ruft es unter gewissen Bedingungen und in Kombination mit bestimmten Umständen unzweifelhaft ein solches Gefühl hervor, das überdies an die Hilflosigkeit mancher Traumzustände mahnt. (Freud 1947, 249)*

The mere act of repeating or doubling something—the logic of mimicry—marks the origin of the uncanny as is shown in Freud's discussion of the figure of the *Doppelgänger*. Processes of repetition and imitation are therefore not just the premise for most memes, but correspond to the theory of sympoietic evolution, too. Following up on Freud, Mark Fisher employs the concept of the uncanny in order to investigate the allure of the weird and the eerie or the horrors that peek into the inside from the outside. Where Freud interprets the uncanny as a primal fear stemming from the depths of the unconscious, subsuming to castration anxiety, Fisher declares the weird as a fear creeping inside that "does not belong." (Fisher 2016, 10) Weird phenomena such as the juxtaposition of contrasting references and temporalities as well as techniques of alienation, e.g. deep frying, occur repeatedly in internet memes, whereby even seemingly familiar images are distorted and estranged. In contrast, the eerie's sensation appears "when there is something present where there should be nothing, or is [sic] there is nothing present when there should be something." (Fisher 2016, 61) This feeling is also triggered by memes reflecting on unseen anxieties of the collective unconscious or the legendary control mechanisms of recommendation algorithms, while the process of memes losing ties with their original context can be labelled as eerie. Most interestingly in relation to memetic techniques, Fisher writes: "The form that is perhaps most appropriate to the weird is montage—the conjoining of two or more things which do not belong together." (Fisher 2016, 11) That which has been separate coming-together also reaffirms the logic of sympoiesis. This is why the bestiary is an appropriate form of analysis: memes are not merely transient cultural artifacts; they are dynamic expressions of collective experiences that echo the complex interplay of fear, creativity, and alienation. In this

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regard, internet memes function as modern manifestations of age-old narrative techniques—reshaping how we understand ourselves and our collective psyche.

2.2. Methodology

While there can be no rigid definition of what counts as a beast and what does not, I identify processes and techniques underlying sympoiesis as memes. This means that the process of creating and sharing exploitables is just as memetic as any given example created of these techniques. I settled for eight examples of popular memes and memetic techniques that represent a spectrum of digital entities that have influenced the dynamics of online eco-systems over the last 30 years to be discussed in the bestiary: exploitables, copypastas, viral audios, algospeak, *Wojak*, the Girl Online, and online cults. Of course, as new memes and digital phenomena emerge over time in regard to potential new platforms or ways of coming-together online, the bestiary may continuously be expanded upon. The bestiary builds upon the qualitative research conducted in my dissertation, *The Sympoietic Life of Internet Memes*, (Publig 2023) that features a thirty-year-long genealogy of digital memes since 1993. In an approach that could be described as memeing the dissertation, its results are generatively extended by the media-specific character of the bestiary, whose medieval language was dynamically recreated through the iterative use of AI-driven text generation tools. This process involved continuously rewriting the text to integrate medieval proverbs, pig Latin, and references to ancient myths and texts, achieving a novel way of expression that also mirrors the evolving nature of memes. This iterative interaction between computational tools and medieval text forms demonstrates the hybridity of the digital creatures explored in the bestiary, reflecting the constant transformation and adaptation of memetic evolution.
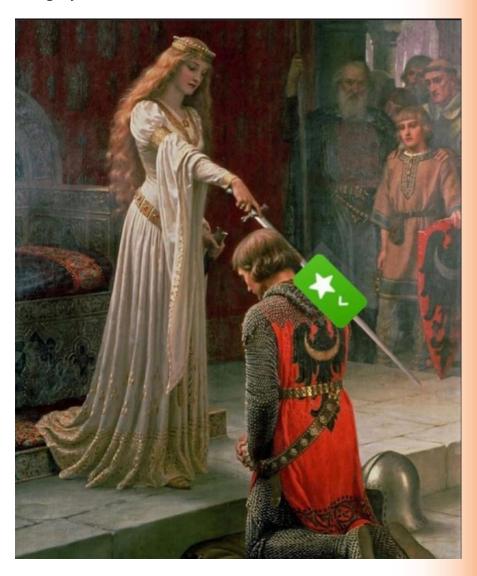
3. Bestiarium Memeticum

3.1. *Imago explotabilis*

In the digital tapestry, behold the *imago explotabilis* or exploitable, that verily lends itself to the craft of memery, by virtue of its glee, folly, shock value or ability to kindle strong emotions. Exploitables manifest in forms manifold, be they official likenesses such as stock portraits, candid snapshots, selfies, or scenes from the stage; or be they ekphrases, sketches, screenshots, illustrated scrolls, webcomics, or other such renderings. The moniker 'exploitable' may stem from the gaze of users, who, like alchemists, transmute base visuals into digital gold, viewing these images through an extractive lens, seeking to infuse them with deeper layers of meaning through manipulation, much as the earth yields precious ores to those who know where to dig. This may be wrought by the addition of textual inscriptions, an art known as object labelling, or by crossing out and rewriting existing text upon the image, akin to the parchment upon which a manuscript hath been overwritten. Like the griffin, guardian of divine mysteries, morphs from lion to eagle, so too doth the *imago exploitabilis* shift form, a chimera of ever-changing digital bits. Of special note among exploitables are image macros, those favored tools of the classical memery from the twilight years of the two thousands, which

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are marked by the sacred trifecta of image, text, and layout: whereupon the image oft features a character, such as those found in the scrolls of *Advice Animals*, the interplay between the text above and below being vital in delivering the jest or punchline. Thusly, all image macros are exploitables, yet not all exploitables adopt the distinctive layout of the image macro. Another breed of creature are multi-panel exploitables, unfolding as if panels in a diptych, which oft manifest as bifurcated tables for the text and image, operating according to the logic of favor or disfavor, as in the case of *Drakeposting*. Such multi-panel exploitables may also embody an internal progressive logic, as seen in the case of *Galaxy Brain*, mapping the ascent of thought from earthly to celestial. Sometimes it is also visages from yesteryears that resurrect as exploitables, bearing silent witness to eras faded. Consider the painting *The Accolade* by master Edmund Blair Leighton, although no longer a tableau of chivalry, yet in the modern court of the close friends list, it serves as a knightly honor bestowed.

Fig. 1. The Accolade

As creatures mostly shared between common folk in their daily dealings, these exploitables are heralded by virtue of their ready-made quality. In this guise, exploitables embody the qualities of the poor image, of declining quality through much sharing upon the networks of social media, as Hito Steyerl hath noted: "It is a specter of an image, a

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foretaste, a miniature, a wandering idea, a transient image dispersed freely, squeezed through sluggish digital conduits, compressed, replicated, torn, remixed, and even copied and pasted into other channels of dissemination." (Steyerl 2009) Most exploitables doth possess an inherent humor, yet they become saturated with the distinct pleasures and narratives of a particular group through the process of memeing. Their primary mission thus unfolds to foster a sense of community through their relatability, which oft spawns a multitude of mutations should the exploitable gain viral renown beyond its native digital shores.

3.2. *Effingo Pastae*

Verily, *effingo pastae* or copypastas are lengthy texts used as palimpsests, overwriting posts on message boards and social media. Born from the magical commands of copy and paste, the copypasta emerges as a phenomenon birthed by the functions of modern machinery; it doth allow to post long verses without typing them out letter by letter. Much like the plight of the nymph Echo, who was cursed to repeat only the final words spoken unto her and possessed not a voice of her own, copypastas initiate an endless loop of repetition and recursion. Employed as a rhetorical technique, copypastas are oft used to disrupt board communication or to vex and overwhelm novices. Essentially, they serve as an easy way to dominate discourse though the art of being a pain in the neck toward other folk—some copypastas are so lengthy, one must scroll for ages to reach the next commentary. Observe how this technique hath its roots in the ancient forms of online communications such as message boards or newsgroups that did not have a 'hide comment' feature yet, much less a real-time transmission of such notes. Though some might argue that copypastas find their genesis in electronic mail chain letters and spam messages, the latter are mostly distributed via bots or scammers whilst the former are exclusively shared by human hands. In substance, almost aught can become a copypasta. The arcane craft is often wielded as a weapon of online warfare, particularly amidst political tales, where copypastas taint the fields of discourse and obstruct genuine dialogue. (Topinka 2022) One of the earliest appearances of a copypasta is known as *How is Babby Formed?* and refers to a Yahoo Answers post from 2006 penned in a strange tongue: "how is babby formed? how girl get pragnent". Whilst the title alone hath given way to a lot of exploitables showing off grotesquely misshapen infants, a copypasta emerged from the top comment crafted in an abysmal tongue:

> *They need to do way instain mother> who kill thier babbys, becuse these babby cant fright back? It was on the news this mroing a mother in ar who had kill her three kids, they are taking the three babby back to new york too lady to rest. my pary are with the father who lost his chrilden ; i am truley sorry for your lot.*[1]

The primary inquiry, akin to an innocent child's curiosity regarding the nature of carnal union, provided an ideal bait in the arena of Yahoo Answers, a forum that hath been slowly usurped by trolls. The response, nevertheless, doth exceed the inquiry manifold in matters of grammatical and spelling transgressions and was so obscure that it is the aptest candidate for copypasta, a craft wherein substance and semblance are scarcely more estranged. *How is Babby Formed?* ascended to

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viral fame on the forum known as Something Awful before it migrated to 4chan, where it was first used as copypasta, and inspired many audio-visual remixes on YouTube. In truth, diverse forms of copypastas persist: *greentexts* recount the foulest of deeds from the eye of the beholder, oft marked by self-pity and self-loathing, proliferating abundantly upon the /r9k/ board upon 4chan. In novel times, copypastas that employ hieroglyphs known as emojis are also called *emojipastas.* As long as there shall be columns of commentary upon the digital realm, copypastas shall likewise disrupt the flow of their reading!

3.3. *Audio viralis*

Harken unto the clandestine incantations that have echoed time and again through the machinations of the apparatus! Whilst viral visions have abounded throughout the annals of the digital tapestry, in this modern era, the echoes of spells hath taken precedence. Like the sirens once lured sailors to their demise with enchanting songs, so too the irresistible appeal of an *audio viralis* ensnares modern surfers of the wire. Any enchantment is oft deemed viral when it hath gathered a myriad glimpses in its nascent stages of life. Although their essence varies, most viral harmonies kindle an immediate emotional kinship or contain beguiling refrains akin to a melody or catchwords. Thus we have amassed a plethora of sounds from felines and wee ones. It is whispered that these magical echoes arose from the dark murmur of network cables themselves, spawned from the convergence of digital signals and human creativity. According to this legend, this sound was first heard by a lone programmer during a late vigil of coding, resounding through the corridors of a long-forgotten social platform. Amused and bewitched, the programmer shared the sound with others, unaware that it carried a contagious enchantment. As it fell upon more ears, the sound began to morph and replicate, assuming new forms and spreading across different platforms, casting its spell upon all who listened. Anon, chants that act as molds of speech, bestowing akin meanings unto diverse words through their unique syntax, are termed snowclones. Witness the sage pronouncement of fair Hamlet: 'To be or not to be, that is the question.' Here, 'be' may be swapped with any verb, yielding a fresh import whilst retaining its core and homage to the bard Shakespeare. Ofttimes these audial enchantments are manipulated, akin to exploitable images. They may be sped-up, slowed, remixed in loops, or even chanted in another voice through the arcane art of AI generation. All these techniques, though now commonly practiced upon the stage of TikTok, hath long been employed by minstrels and bards as methods of forging new refrains from old. Within the digital tapestry, this hath greatly influenced the creation of YouTube Poop videos and later Montage Parodies, both employing cacophonic stratagems to craft genuinely outlandish videos. Verily, methods such as pitching or slowing music, are employed to evade the dark wizards of algorithmic detection, particularly upon stages that summarily banish any musical memes for their infringement upon copyright. Alas, these remixes, especially when repeated in a loop, may be one user's curse and another user's blessing, and their impact upon our attentiveness hath oft been criticized by scholars. (Davenport & Beck 2001) Still, they spread as if guided by an unseen hand: but how doth this sorcery take hold? Behold the metaphor of the virus, its roots in epidemiology, the study of the dynamics and dissemination of mal-

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adies within a populace. Great emphasis is placed on the resilience or susceptibility of beings to viral agents, as though there might be some deed to safeguard oneself. While many scholarly endeavors have sought to theorize how memes achieve virality and have inadvertently contributed to the realm of memetic marketing—which seeks to harness the magic of enchantments and exploitables for commerce—the mystery of the bards of broadband persists, mayhap because memes behave differently when virality is contrived. It is as if these creatures discern and abhor the 'forced' nature that comes with the overwrought tricks of marketing, deeming them craven. Instead, utterances from movies, offhand remarks from casual videos, or absurd pronouncements and avowals are favored by users. Here, the invocation takes full effect: through relentless repetition and, in consequence thereof, assimilation, many of these incantations become part and parcel of our everyday tongue, bridging the chasm between the realms of the ethereal and the earthly.

3.4. *Algorithmica dictionis*

Unaliving, seggs, le$bean, cornucopia: whilst most new words upon the digital realm rise as shields against unwelcome attention from loathed communities, the creatures utilizing algospeak were summoned by a different ritual, namely to pass by the mechanized hounds of watchfulness unnoticed. The dominion of TikTok, a realm fraught with silent decrees and invisible barriers, hath been pivotal in the birthing of *algorithmica dictionis* or algospeak: much akin to every other forum in the digital realm, TikTok possesses distinct and mysterious guidelines, unspoken yet decisive, dictating the nature of content accepted and those forbidden. These decrees, shifting from one platform to another, strive to uphold the current societal norms and expectations—as the ancient wisdom 'as above, so below' doth teach us, the secret language of algospeak mirrors larger societal trends of adaptation and resistance. The platform hath gained infamy amongst its denizens for its swift and efficacious censorship, especially regarding the written word within videos, leading to their obliteration or banishment. (Zhang & Liu 2021) Whilst this may find understanding in matters of hatred or incitements to violence, the automatic erasure of content due to trigger words reaches its zenith in discussions of subjects deemed taboo. Indeed, any video linked with words such as 'suicide', 'self-harm', or 'eating disorder,' and similar mentions of psychological lexicon shall be deleted swiftly. Whether 'tis motivated by commercial interests, an aversion to discourse on mental health, or merely the fear of stirring distress in those beset by melancholic thoughts, is up for speculation. In any case, TikTok ensured that its denizens cease uttering such words, thus imposing silence upon their speech and script. Yet, doth all discourse on mental well-being vanish into the ether? Nay, it transforms! As if to validate Foucault's doctrine of the repressive hypothesis, (Foucault 1978, 11-15) users summoned beasts to circumvent the censors. The term 'suicide' hath morphed into myriad synonyms, from 's*icide' with an asterisk to the whimsical 'suislide' or an altogether different phrasing such as the aforementioned 'unaliving oneself,' users hath successfully implemented variations to their video tags that escape detection by the merciless algorithms. The same holds true for the vocabulary of sexuality and gender: whilst 'seggs' and 'le$bean' (pronounced 'le-dollar-bean' by TikTok's text-to-speech feature) are self-explanatory

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even to newcomers but not to algorithmic detection, as the mnemonic link from 'cornucopia' signifying homophobia requires an acquired form of understanding. As of now, the aforestated tags remain vibrant upon the platform; yet only time shall unveil whether alterations to the censoring algorithms shall be wrought, and if so, how users shall once more reshape their content to continue their postings. This hath been witnessed afore: legend whispers of ancient times that the beasts of algospeak, after being faced with the bearers of censorship, hath found a venerable digital manuscript within the depths of early internet forums known as *leet* or *1337.* (Milburn 2018, 8) Like algospeak, leet was fashioned as a cipher to elude the clutches of automated data gathering by machineries, finding favor among hackers, gamers, and those devout to the arts of computation for its magic in obfuscating meaning through the substitution of letters with numerals. The term 'leet' finds its roots in 'elite', a title oft boasted by many chevaliers of the online games. With the passage of time, leet hath burgeoned into a convoluted tongue of the digital realm, with phrases typical of internet vernacular tracing their lineage to its beginnings. Its intentional misspellings and typographical errors, combined with its usage of grammar hypersensitive to context, hath firmly established its place as a notable aspect of online dialogue. Moreover, leet also shares a lineage with ASCII art, both emerging from the text-laden pages of the early internet, thus demonstrating the progression of text-based memes and their impact upon the ethos of the digital era up until these days.

3.5. *Wojak*

Lo and behold, and gaze upon this creature, sturdy as the ancient oak that withstands the tempests of ages and the birth of new entities, rightfully deemed the horseshoe crab amidst the vast ocean of memes: a line drawing known as *Wojak. Wojak*, also appearing as *Feels Guy*, dons varied guises, a chameleon of emotions, depicted in illuminated manuscripts alongside other incarnations of himself. Though bearing semblance to the visage of bygone *Rage Comic*s, he stands apart, a solitary figure in the digital tapestry, not born from the deep pits of forsaken 4chan. Enshrouded in the mists of time; *Wojak's* genesis is a tale whispered in the halls of the subreddit r/datfeel, where a user, Voyjack by name, claims to have glimpsed the character upon the Polish image board Vichan, from whence he journeyed to the German board Krautchan. (Burton 2021, 21) In the tongue of Poland, *Wojak* resembles a 'soldier' and refers back to the name of his anonymous creator, a valorous knight akin to Sir Antonius Block who boldly challenged Death himself to a fateful chess match. *Wojak* made his advent on 4chan in 2011 in the template *I Know That Feel*, wherein he is enfolded in an intimate embrace, a soulful tableau of profound emotion. Ever and anon, his tears flow in other forms: *Crying Wojak*, with sorrow etched upon his countenance, while *Masked Crying Wojak* veils his true feelings behind a mask of commonplace. Though *Wojak* traversed European image boards anno 2009, and became a common sight upon 4chan by 2012, he remained veiled in obscurity for a time, overshadowed by the prevalence of *Rage Comics* and the ascendancy of wicked *Pepe the Frog*, who, like the great bard Dante himself, ventured to the darkest circles of hell and back. (Chan 2021) In comparison, *Wojak* serves as the herald of emotional turmoil, whilst *Pepe*, in his smug antic, often taunts him in the dance of cross-over memes like trolls frol-

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icking in mischief on a moonless night. *Wojak* also breathed life into the variant known as *The NPC*, a reflection of the hollow figures that wander the landscapes of video games, bereft of will. Their moniker hath become a whispered slur upon the 4chan board /v/, condemning those deemed 'basic' or unable to think for themselves. Yet, in a twist of irony, the term NPC found new meaning, mocking the far right, a beacon of laughter amidst the storm. Finally, from the clay-like loins of *Wojak*, the *Soyjaks* emerged, jestering 'soy boys' or those that choose to withstand the force of toxic virility. The name soy boy hints at the false belief that substitutes of meat, rich in phytoestrogens, bear feminizing powers, as some unwary souls have noted—in contrast to the potpourri of corruptive manliness known as *Yes Chad*. Listen to this saga: *Soyjak* often stands besides *Yes Chad*, each embodying emblematic opposites—*Soyjak*, the image of anxiety and disillusionment; *Yes Chad*, the very essence of overconfidence and assertiveness.

Fig. 2. Wojak

Together, their contrasting personas span the spectrum of online expression, their union necessary to counteract the polarization that plagues internet communities. Though oft at odds, together, they embark to mend the rifts between extreme ideologies, fostering a discourse that transcends echo chambers by making use of *Soyjak's* critical gaze and *Yes Chad's* inspiring presence. Other manifestations of *Wojak*, such

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as *Brainlet*, mock the folly of man, depicting him with an inverted skull that hath greeted Thor's mighty hammer Mjölnir. Most *Wojak* variations are rooted in identity—*30-year-old boomer, zoomer, doomer, doomer girl* but also *Yes Chad* and *Trad Wife*—and reflect the diverse tapestry of existence scorned. Like the phoenix signifies the eternal cycle of birth and rebirth, so too *Wojak* undergoes eternal metamorphosis, a shape-shifter of the digital realm, appearing from maiden to Sumerian to mushroom, a reflection of human nature in pixels and lines.

3.6. *Puella in rete*

Maiden's dinner, maiden's math, maiden's engineering: who is this fair damsel instructed by the most noble of scholars, and findeth she herself in distress? We encounter her solely in the digital realm, and like the Lamia cherished by Zeus and tormented by Hera, her visage doth deceive. For not all those who claim maidenhood online are, in truth, youthful damsels. The maiden is nought but a guise, a persona, easily donned and discarded by the machinations of the mind alone. We perceive that the maiden is yet another guise of shifting identity, crafted as an image steeped in aesthetics and fondness for the sweet. (Quicho 2023) According to ancient lore now faded, the maiden emerged in the burgeoning days of the digital realm, shaped by the collective dreams and fears of the internet's earliest dwellers. Anon, she was heralded as the true Weaver of Networks, a mythical entity who could manipulate the very fabric of digital interactions with the grace of the monoceros as described in the bestiary of Aberdeen. Her strands were not merely lines of code but bear the weight of shared experiences and emotions, binding users in a web that mirrored the complexity of human connections. In a manner reminiscent of Lain's fabled rise to awareness in the ancient legend of *Serial Experiments Lain*, wherein she merges her essence with the machinations of the computer, the maiden began to ponder her own existence and shaped narratives online that blurred the lines betwixt virtual and corporeal realities: her digital threads began to impact the real world, sparking discussions on gender dynamics and online identity by maidens from every corner of the realm converging to exchange tales and melodies spun about them.

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Fig. 3. Ophelia

Often depicted as passive, vulnerable even, and even reduced to hues of pink, dear fragrances, and all things fair, their fellowship bears a strength not to be underestimated: fueled by the disdainful prejudices branding them as materialistic, hedonistic, delulu, and naive, the maidens online forge bonds by sharing their narratives and subverting them as shields against scorn. For who, after all, stands truly outside the reach of consumerism and folly in the realm of cyberspace? Derided by detractors, these preconceptions rebound from the smooth countenance of the maiden online, who seems to command more space with each day's passing. She is frequently accused of conforming too readily to the dictates of capitalism, of disregarding feminist strides, and of regressing into infancy due to her pursuit of beauty and a simpler era. Indeed, this tale is largely woven of the misogynistic biases that ensnare maidens on the daily—be they young or old, male or female, non-binary, and beyond. But then, one might inquire, what purpose was she made for? The response is muddled: the intent behind her creation is yet to fully manifest in the final convergence of the realms. The maiden online is a fluid figure in this modern age of late capitalism, simultaneously entwining herself within it and withdrawing from it, toying with it and disregarding it, too enmeshed in this epoch to adhere to the ancient ways of defiance. Yet in this act, she forsakes not her true duty within this milieu, and akin to Lamia, she withdraws not from expressing her anguish and sentiments towards injustices. Thus, she manifests time and again to

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the valiant knights of the internet, as an angel who navigates us through the post-apocalyptic landscape of the digital realm, reminding us that so long as maidens are not granted the gravity due as political agents, there remains cause for battle.

3.7. *Artificiale animalia occulta*

Unlike other creatures, the kin of *artificiale animaliae occultae* (in the tongue of the modern day: AI cryptids) can only be encountered through the mystic rite of image generation by means of artful intelligence. With precision, they are summoned forth through enigmatic prompts, such twisted utterances that beckon these malevolent entities into being. Consider the being named *Crungus*, of a truth: when the incantation bearing his name is inscribed into the alchemical forge of image creation, a woeful hybrid of gnome and orc, adorned with disheveled locks, putrid teeth, and a cadaverous body, is brought forth. The reason why these creatures manifest and the correlation with their cursed name remains a mystery, but it appears they dwell within the shadowed recesses of the cybernetic realm where no mortal hath gazed. Another *artificiale animalia occulta*, birthed through the ritual of negative image generation, is named *Loab*, presenting as a fair lady with brunette tresses, forlorn eyes, and features deeply set. In some inscriptions, her gaze is likened unto that of the basilisk, whose stare heralds death to those who meet it. Though her countenance might initially elicit pity, the realms wherein her apparition lingers bode ill: *Loab* hath been observed steeped in blood within chambers, clutching the limbs of dismembered children, and donning blood-soaked jester garment reminiscent of eerie fables and those who take lives without mercy.

Fig. 4. Loab.

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2. See @supercomposite. Thread on Loab's origins. Twitter/X. 6 September 2022. https://twitter.com/supercomposite/status/1567162288087470081.

3. See Melissa Ong's TikTok account: https://www.tiktok.com/@sailormel69420

4. See the Facebook group A group where we all pretend to be ants in an ant colony: https://www.facebook.com/groups/1416375691836223/.

Nevertheless, her disquieting visage, doth manifest in sundry and unrelated circumstances. The summoning of *Loab* echoes the ancient instructions in the revered grimoire *Lemegeton*, as the sorceress @supercomposite doth recount her genesis[2]: *Loab* first appeared during the conjuration of a negative prompt, where an image inverse to the original plea inscribed was called forth. The premise was to generate an image dissimilar in all aspects to the original invocation. The sorceress, in her initial pursuit, formulated the negative prompt "Brando::-1," aspiring to give birth to naught but an image depicting the modern performer Marlon Brando. Yet, to her astonishment, the outcome unveiled an image of unbeknownst architecture from an era yet to unfold. Fueled by the notion that, in accordance with the tenets of scholastic logic, the negative prompt of this symbol should yield an image of Marlon Brando, the sorceress stumbled upon a profound revelation: not images of Brando's visage appeared, but depictions of *Loab*, her countenance contorted in agony, her cheeks marked by a rash akin to rosacea. Behold, in a white magic ritual, centering on the fusion of *Loab* with other images to exorcise the demonic entity, the portraits depict her evolving into an ever more unsettling specter, akin to a character from a sinister tale of horror. Thus, it must be by the enchantment of artful intelligence itself that *Loab* persists through diverse generations, asserting dominion over other prompts with her haunting countenance. (Pfefferkorn, Sunde 2023, 225-226) It is even whispered that the beast already ensnared blameless folk to such a degree that they render unto her artworks and tributes. In this manner, *Loab* is a phantom born of the crypts of AI-generating craft, now haunting these realms with her spectral presence.

3.8. Cultus in rete

Hearken well to this verse on discourse upon clandestine gatherings or cults, whose enigmatic rites are like unto nought seen afore. We speak of cults that take shape in the digital realm, transmitting their ominous allure in bits and bytes. Particularly do they flourish upon the stages of Twitter and TikTok, yet devotees of sundry magical entities do now abound in all corners of the wire. It must be noted that online cults, though their semblance be strange, are far less benign than those who profane and misuse the sacred word in the corporeal realm. Verily, they gather 'round a prophet, the charismatic content creator, whose adherents enter into a parasocial bond with them, further intensifying their communal ties. Rarely are they driven by deep ideology at first; group polarization and echo chamber effects often drive the web of disconnected souls toward extremities of beliefs and behaviors over time. Indeed, it is no paradox that cults surged during the Great Plague beginning in 2020; shared rituals such as role-playing or the donning of akin profile pictures, akin to symbolic insignias, did grant respite from solitude. But how might one, as a false prophet, initiate a cult? Consider the *Step Chicken Cult*, led by the prophetess Melissa Ong, for instance, which manifested through the ritual act of adopting a certain likeness of the Mother Hen as one's own profile picture, whereupon she did compose songs and tales for her disciples.[3] Conversely, in the Facebook group *A group where we all pretend to be ants in an ant colony*, users embrace the guise of insects to revel in carefree camaraderie.[4] The discourse in the

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5. @basedredactedgang. bpd: beautiful princess disorder. TikTok. 18 July 2023. https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeS6ScHQ/.

Fig. 5. AntCult

comment columns upon an image of a lollipop reads 'B I T E', 'L I F T' or 'T R A P'.

'Tis crucial to recall that the fellowship was oft the sole recourse for many during the Great Plague to find solace in union. Meanwhile, modern cults seem to rely much upon simplistic modes of indoctrination, with *#BasedRetardGang* employing chants of late capitalism to conceal themselves and their acolytes in the digital tapestry: "i'm so mentally stable, it's insane. i have bpd beautiful princess disorder. i'm so clear-pilled i can see through the matrix. i'm not left wing or right wing. i have angel wings that grow whenever i transcend into space."[5]

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Fig. 6. BasedRetardGang

6. @mulchandloam. Enjoy your day
my Mulch pups. TikTok. 15 November
2023. https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeS-
joM87/.

7. @microplasticcat. untitled.
TikTok. 28 December 2023. https://
vm.tiktok.com/ZGeSjoXrV/.

These affirmations, drawn from the occult art of manifestation, may also be likened unto auditory copypastas, overlaying upon other videos upon TikTok's stage. Whilst #*BasedRetardGang* chiefly employs stolen images of ethereal Far Eastern maidens, the offerings of the rivaling *Mulch Gang* do always appear in the company of the beloved toy poodles and French bulldogs, and those breeds long removed from their lupine ancestors. They address their adherents as "siblings of the soil" and constantly speak of their boundless yearning for mulch.[6] 'Tis claimed that the *Mulch Gang* waged a lengthy war against the *Microplastics-maxxing Cats,* who have adapted to the current age of the earth, the Anthropocene, in contrast to the natural resources sought by the mulch dogs. The cats proclaim of their existence: "I am a GMO, genetic microplastic organism. I'm planting roundup ready crops on the astral plane. My third eye waters the soil with reclaimed wastewater. I charge my MSG crystals under the light of the full moon."[7] The crusades and battles of these groups lead to such exposure that a cult may swell its ranks by scores within mere hours. The dynamics of the network ensure that each new adherent enhances the group's value, thus attracting further members in a self-amplifying cycle. Therefore, dear reader, heed the counsel of this bestiary and maintain your vigilance sharp, lest you find yourself astray upon paths of error and deceit in the enigmatic realms of the digital tapistry.

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Images

Fig. 1: A memetic conjuration upon Edmund Blair Leighton's pictorial offering, The Accolade (1901).
@realpeterstar. Thanks to everyone who adds me to their close friends stories… idk you but i still watch   . Instagram. 8 September 2021.
https://www.instagram.com/p/CTisS4OLBad/.

Fig. 2: At the summit of the scene, a modern-day Crying Soyjak, reluctant to take arms under the herald of the nefarious Wojak (known also as Hijak). Beneath, behold king Yes Chad, a figure of valor, who doth inspire his cohort of Yes Chad knights, eagerly vowing to engage in the battle. Moreover, this tableau is graced by the Political compass, an ancient matrix that charts the realm of political stances. The Soyjak, standing in neutral territory, contrasts sharply with Hijak, who is marked by the azure hue of the libertarian-right. The Yes Chads are adorned with the golden tincture of the authoritarian-right, signifying their allegiance and station.
u/TheoryKing04. Chad feudal warfare v. virgin modern warfare. Reddit. 2 May 2021.
https://www.reddit.com/r/PoliticalCompassMemes/comments/n30y4x/chad_feudal_warfare_v_virigin_modern_warfare/#lightbox.

Fig. 3: Behold the exploitables transforming Ophelia into the Girl online.
Shakespeare Memes. tag fellow ladies who feel this struggle. ~Sweet Nan . Facebook. 3 April 2017.
https://www.facebook.com/shakesmemes/photos

Fig. 4: A portrait of Loab, surrounded by eerie figures dismembered.
@supercomposite. Since Loab was discovered using negative prompt weights, her gestalt is made from a collection of traits that are equally far away from something. 6 September 2022.
https://twitter.com/supercomposite/status/1567162327950032896/photo/2.

Fig. 5: A captured image from the annals of the Facebook scriptorium, displaying a lollipop, which doth call forth a multitude of voices in a grand display of mimicry and jest.
BardOfStorytelling. Quarantine Day 31: joined a Facebook group where we all pretend to be ants in an ant colony. iFunny. 28 January 2021. https://br.ifunny.co/picture/quarantine-day-31-joined-a-facebook-group-where-we-all-VBgceqeK8.
Fig. 6: An image macro featuring the visage of BasedRetardGang's neochibi-style NFT avatar, named MiLady, and the emblazoned with the cherished phrase of the cult, "There is no meme. I love you".
@TINMILY. Community spaces soon. Join because i love you. Twitter/X. 24 October 2023.
https://twitter.com/TINMILY/status/1716890716050534485/photo/1.

Fig. 6: An image macro featuring the visage of BasedRetardGang's neochibi-style NFT avatar, named MiLady, and the emblazoned with the cherished phrase of the cult, "There is no meme. I love you".
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