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ENCHANTING MEMES: MEMETIC POLITICS IN THE FACE OF TECHNOCRATIC CONTROL

Jonathan Carter

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Jonathan.s.carter@gmail.com

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by

Jonathan S. Carter

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ENCHANTING MEMES:

MEMETIC POLITICS IN THE FACE OF TECHNOCRATIC CONTROL

Jonathan Stephen Carter, Ph.D.

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Advisor: Damien S. Pfister

This dissertation examines emerging trends in networked politics through an analysis of the rhetorical forms and functions of internet memes as a unique response to the increasing force of technocratic rhetorics. Frequently dismissed as mere trivialities of networked discourses, memes have increasingly been mobilized to articulate new positions and structures of feeling around the significant issues of the day. As new iterations of memes are rapidly developed and circulated across networked public spheres, these rhetorical technologies provide new opportunities for amateur participation in the development of symbolic content. Such participation is particularly important as the intensification of control society has enabled technocrats to increasingly govern and narrow the domains of more traditional political rhetorics.

Drawing a synthesis between Bernard Stiegler's focus on the importance of technics and the rhetorical concepts, methods, and orientations of Kenneth Burke, I argue that digital memes – particularly the image macro – are an exemplar of the rhetorical affordances and constraints that define the politics of subjectification that drive networked publicity. Through the analysis of three controversies where technocratic and memetic rhetoric developed in tension with one another, I argue that through their sophistic politics of play memes promote a multitudinous mode of individuation that makes them particularly apt resources for the uncoiling and resistance of control. Specifically, these amateur dominated technics built meta-narratives that disrupt

bureaucratization, remediate terms to destabilize anti-rhetorics, and disrupt national memories through their cosmopolitan tendencies. Combined these features lead to the conclusion that memes themselves to function as a rhetorical critic *par excellence* in networked rhetorics, fostering a politics of care particularly suited to disrupting the proletarianizing force of technocratic rhetorics.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Memes and The Rhetorical Tradition

"Hey girl…" While this colloquial phrase might sound like a simple youthful greeting, it is at the center of a networked phenomenon that helped to redefine the career of an actor, networked communication, and, most surprisingly, men's perceptions of feminism. Specifically, the phrase is the defining textual feature of a series of memes built around actor Ryan Gosling (figure 1.1). The image in the meme often appears to be proclaiming its love/desire for the female viewers of the meme – the "girl" addressed by the "hey."[1] The power of these memes draws from Gosling's reputation as a leading figure in romantic films, and, ironically, the social caché of the meme is such that "hey girl" emerged as a catch phrase for Gosling despite the fact that Gosling never uttered it on screen.[2]
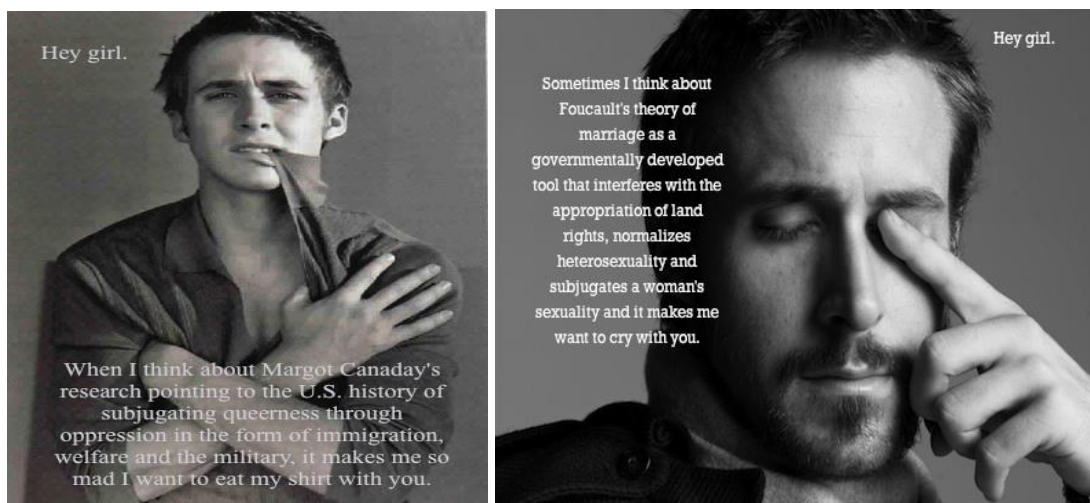
Figure 1.1: First iteration of Feminist Ryan Gosling (left), Foucault example (right).

1. The initial iterations of the meme were made popular on the Tumblr "Fuck Yeah! Ryan Gosling." This site now hosts a range of Ryan Gosling memes.

2. Joanna Robinson, "How Ryan Gosling Tried, and Failed, to Escape the 'Hey Girl' Meme," *Vanity Fair* (March 14, 2015), http://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2015/03/ryan-gosling-guillermo-del-toro-sxsw.

Although the meme enhances Gosling's image as a Don Juan, the greatest impact

of the meme may be how it contributes to feminist critique. Feminist iterations of the

meme came into being when a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin used the

"hey girl" style of the meme to create a series of flashcards to study the central ideas of

different gender theorists.[3] Early posts featured a summary of particular theorists' key

thoughts reinterpreted into the textual form of the meme. The meme framed these ideas

as responding to the particular image of Gosling the text is imposed over. For example,

the oldest post features an image of Gosling wiping away a tear under the text

> Hey girl, sometimes I think about Foucault's theory of marriage as a
> governmentally developed tool that interferes with the appropriation of
> land rights, normalizes heterosexuality and subjugates a woman's
> sexuality and it makes me want to cry with you. (Figure 1.1)[4]

After feminist web magazine *Jezebel* posted an article about the Tumblr the flashcards

were posted on, it quickly gained the attention of media outlets, ranging from online press

giants like *The Huffington Post* and *BuzzFeed* to more conventional media outlets like

CBS, *TIME*, and *The Guardian*.[5] As the meme grew in popularity, it expanded beyond

theory flashcards, proving an outlet for participants across networked publics to express

their views on feminism. The memes range from expressing broad feminist themes "hey

girl… I mean woman"[6] to commenting on specific issues related to women like "Hey

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3. "Feminist Ryan Gosling," *Know Your Meme,* accessed December, 23, 2015, http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/feminist-ryan-gosling.

4. An iteration of the meme with image can be found at: http://feministryangosling.tumblr.com/post/11171215605.

5. "Feminist Ryan Gosling," *Know Your Meme.*

6. The meme can be found at: http://feministryangosling.tumblr.com/post/11171488856.

girl, yes means yes."[7] This ability to place a humorous lens on feminist theory aided in

their rapid circulation across internetworked sites of communication. In this way, the

memes became a prominent way in which participants in networked forums thematized

controversies about gender.

Certainly, these memes are entertaining; the Jezebel article proclaims they will

"cure what ails you."[8] However, the rhetorical force of these memes is more significant

than simply being able to elicit a smile. Indeed, social scientific research suggests that

these seemingly trivial networked texts have the capacity to change the ways that

participants – both producers and viewers –relate to feminism. In 2015, Researchers at

the University of Saskatchewan found that when they confronted participants in the study

with the meme, their pro-feminist sympathies increased upwards of ten percent.[9] These

findings suggest that the feminist Ryan Gosling meme not only provides a platform for

the increased circulation of feminist thought which have the ability to directly change

attitudes in participants.[10] The impact of this politically focused meme highlights the

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7. The meme can be found at: http://feministryangosling.tumblr.com/post/14469966929.

8. Lane Moore, "Feminist Ryan Gosling Flashcards Will Cure What Ails You," *Jezebel* (October 8, 2011), http://jezebel.com/5847935/feminist-ryan-gosling-flashcards-will-cure-what-ails-you-girl.

9. Tristin Hopper, "Men More Open To Feminism When It's Paired With A Photo Of Canadian Actor Ryan Gosling: Study," *The National Post* (January 27, 2015), http://news.nationalpost.com/news/canada/men-more-open-to-feminism-when-its-paired-with-a-photo-of-canadian-actor-ryan-gosling-study. The researchers presented groups with either the feminist Ryan Gosling memes or images of Gosling without text. While they did not study the effects of simply presenting readers with feminist messages, they argued this variation was not important to their study because such messages do not gain wide circulation in networked participants without the meme.

10. Throughout this dissertation, I generally try to avoid the use of the term audience. This terms implies a passive group either reacting to or constituted by a rhetor. However, in recognizing that all rhetorical production is collectively constituted, a trend that is both highlighted by and intensified in networked rhetorics, I instead use terms like users and participants. These terms position both the speaker and audience as co-constituting the rhetoric. Even passive users play into the relationality that defines the force of memes. Moreover, as the processes of intertextual reference, remix, and circulation make rhetors and audiences ambiguous and at times one in the same in networked media ecologies, this term is also simply a more accurate description of the rhetorical environment I seek to explore. When I do use the term

larger rhetorical potential of memes. If Ryan Gosling memes can teach about feminism, memes as a genre – while often dismissed as trivialities of networked communication – have the potential to be profound persuasive tools.

This dissertation takes memes seriously as a site of rhetorical production, arguing that memes ought to be critically interpreted as texts significantly shaping public deliberation in networked publics. However, taking the rhetorical potential of memes seriously is difficult in a discipline firmly rooted in oral communication, the primacy of the solo rhetor, and a focus on overtly "civic" discourse. Therefore, before I delve into a study of the unique rhetorical force of memes in contemporary political struggles, I must first answer a more basic question: are memes a form of public address? More specifically, are memes a mode by which publics address one another? As part of this question, I must also address if memes have the capability to shape and direct public deliberation. Feminist Ryan Gosling's capacity to prompt discussion and change minds about feminism suggests they can, in addressing publics, stimulate deliberation. This chapter charts memes' relationship with the rhetorical tradition, identifying points of convergence and divergence between traditional models of oral rhetoric and the digitally networked rhetorics that now populate political discourse. To outline these contact points between rhetoric old and new, I will first elaborate on the history and evolution of the concept of meme and its migration to digital rhetorics. Then, to demonstrate their rhetorical features, this chapter will situate memes within classical rhetorical concepts. Next, to establish the ideological potency of this networked rhetorical form, I locate

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audience it is an effort to remain felicitous to a particular author or theoretical tradition. I similarly avoid the term individual because it obfuscates the complex relation between singular actors and the collectivities to which they are related and from which they emerge. For more on this later tension see, Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004).

memes within theories of myth, narrative, and genre. Finally, to address their ability to function units of political discourse, I will consider the relationship between memes, public opinion, and the networked public sphere.

Memes: From Dawkins to Networked Rhetorics

The vernacular use of the term "meme" coalesces around assorted genres of networked rhetoric. However, the concept of meme originates not in particular forms of networked technics but rather as a conceptual heuristic, coined by the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, to explain the spread and evolution of cultural phenomena. This conception, which still has wide traction in a range of academic fields, does not necessarily encompass or define the types of memes in which I am interested in this dissertation. That being said, as the root of contemporary understandings of memetics, the original sense of the meme provides etymological and historical context relevant to understanding internet memes. Moreover, many of the concepts rooted in Dawkins' evolutionary standpoint continue to inform scholarly understandings and debates surrounding internet memes.

While writing the 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*, which argues that the gene is the central actor in biological evolution, Dawkins ran into a problem – how to explain those human behaviors that seem to operate in direct opposition to the survival of genes. A notable example of this concern is the presence of voluntary celibacy in human societies, which prevents the reproduction of genes.[11] To explain phenomena such as this, Dawkins argues that culture is a force that competes with and can overcome genetic interests. Yet

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11. Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 198.

just as life does not perpetuate itself without the replicatory functions of genes, Dawkins needed a concept to explain the way that culture circulated and reproduced.

Seeking to explain the replication of culture, Dawkins posited the existence of the "meme" as the cultural analog to genes, as both memes and genes enable informational transmission through a process of evolutionary imitation.[12] Dawkins derived the word meme from the Greek word *mimema*, meaning "to imitate." Dawkins then truncated the term to "meme" so that it would rhyme with gene, bolstering the parallelism of the two concepts.[13] While genes carry the instructions for the reproduction of particular biological traits, Dawkins contends memes carry the instructions for the reproduction of culture. Under this definition, memes take a variety of forms ranging from specific cultural artifacts such as songs and fashion to broader cultural phenomena including ideologies and religion.[14]

Because memes can exert force on such a grand scale, Dawkins contends that they have the potential to be more powerful than genes.[15] Their reproduction can influence a much larger population more quickly than genes, which take generations to exert new force. Moreover, because of their quick spread and ethereal nature they are much less likely to be extinguished by the death of a few members of the species. Three characteristics, all rooted in evolutionary logics, enable the proliferation of memes:

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12. Ibid., 192.

13. Ibid. Dawkins also notes that meme is also the French word for memory, further justifying the truncation.

14. Leslie Hahner, "The Riot Kiss: Framing Memes as Visual Argument," *Argumentation and Advocacy,* 49 (Winter, 2013): 153.

15. Richard Dawkins, "Just for Hits" *Satchi and Satchi New Directors Showcase* (June 22, 2012), on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=305&v=GFn-ixX9edg.

gradual movement from individual to society, reproduction via imitation, and diffusion

through competition and selection.[16] For followers of Dawkins, memes operate

independent of human agency, "jumping from brain to brain."[17] As ideas spread and

mutate, they fight to ensure their continued survival, adapting to new cultural forms that

best allow their reproduction. Just like genes and viruses, some memes will spread widely

and have a long influence, some will fail to spread beyond a few hosts, some will explode

and quickly contract (e.g. fads), and others will fail to gain any social traction.[18] As part

of this logic, memes may relate to one another to help ensure their survival, creating

"'memeplexes,' or interdependent families of memes" that work together to exert similar

social force.[19] Given the vast power of this concept to explain the evolution of culture,

memetic studies gained popularity in a range of academic fields, even getting its own

journal in 1997.[20]

Despite this growing popularity, the concept of the meme is not without its critics.

Its opponents argue that in its applicability to both concrete phenomena and broad

cultural concepts, the meme is difficult to define with exactitude, essentializes the

complexity of human behaviors, and removes the centrality of human agency.[21] If every

concept can be theorized as a meme, what is the analytical utility of the term? Further, if

memes are so powerful, does any consequential sense of human agency get consigned to

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16. Limor Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014), 29.

17. Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine* (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), 6.

18. Hahner, "Riot Kiss," 153.

19. Davi Johnson, "Mapping the Meme: A Geographical Approach to Materialist Rhetorical Criticism," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies,* 4 no. 1 (2007): 38.

20. Ibid., 29.

21. Limor Shifman, "Memes in a Digital World: Reconciling with a Conceptual Troublemaker," *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* 18 (2013): 364.

the dustbin of history? While these criticisms have merit, they do not necessarily apply to the variant of networked memes. Under Dawkins' logic, the very concept of the meme is a meme itself – a verbal configuration that both carries social understanding of phenomena and is capable of adapting and evolving. As such, it comes as no surprise the term is evolving with the development of networked culture, adopting a new, more widely circulated form. As Dawkins asserts:

> An internet meme is a hijacking of the original idea. Instead of mutating by random chance, before spreading by a form of Darwinian selection, internet memes are altered deliberately by human creativity. In the hijacked version, mutations are designed, not random, with the full knowledge of the person doing the mutating.[22]

This vernacular use of the term meme challenges many of the criticisms of Dawkins original conception.[23] To explicate this point, I will next outline the ways networked culture changed the very concept of the meme.

Memes Go Digital

A wide range of networked phenomena fall under the category of networked memes, including reaction photos, misheard lyrics, rage comics, LOLcats, and stock character macros.[24] In the face of this wide range of phenomenon, scholars have attempted to find a unifying definition of networked memes. Amongst the most popular is Limor Shifman's, which defines memes as "a group of digital content units sharing a common content, form, and/or stance."[25] Ryan Milner's definition, focuses more on

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22. Richard Dawkins, "Just for Hits."

23. Limor Shifman, "Memes in a Digital World," 364.

24. Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture,* 184.

25. Ibid,, 188. As part of clarifying the definition of memes, Shifman delineates between memes and virals. Memes circulate through a process of imitation, transmitting the cultural information through

process and outcome rather than content. Milner argues "memes [are] multimodal artifacts remixed by countless participants, employing popular culture for public commentary."[26] Contrary to Dawkins' theory of the meme, which invests agency in the meme at the expense of the human, these definitions focus on the capacity of participants to mobilize formal expectations to participate in existing memeplexes. Shifman stresses that "human agency should be an integral part of our conceptualization of memes by describing them as dynamic entities that spread in response to technological, cultural, and social *choices* made by people."[27] Because human rhetorical activity leads to the production, reinterpretation, and circulation of memes, they are not independent agents. If memes are a communicative *techne,* they are amenable to rhetorical analysis.[28]

With this rhetorical understanding of memes, an internet meme forms when participants take any piece of spreadable media (media that is networked and remixable) and modify it in such a way that it is participatory, is remixed, and diffuses quickly.[29] However, this does not mean that memes exist independently; as Shifman notes, memes should not be treated as "isolated, discreet units, but as the building blocks of complex

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the reproduction and alteration of the original unit. Conversely, users circulate virals in their original form. A viral can, and often does, become a meme, but not all memes originate as virals.

26. Ryan Milner, "Pop Polyvocality: Internet Memes, Public Participation and the Occupy Wall Street Movement'. *International Journal of Communication,* 7 (2013): 2357

27. Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture,* 184.

28. Once considered as *techne*, memes are inexorably linked to the rhetorical canons. Processes of invention help explain their creation and circulation, arrangement helps explain formal concerns, and the visual nature of memes highlights issues of delivery and style. Finally, as Dawkins highlights, the very nature of memes as cultural replicators ties them to memory.

29. Bradley E Wiggins and G Brett Bowers, "Memes as Genre: A Structurational Analysis of the Memescape," *New Media & Society* 17 no. 11 (2015): 1896.

cultures, intertwining and interacting with each other."[30] Beyond sharing circulatory

features, memes tend to embrace an aesthetic of amateurism or ugliness. The material

limitations of early image and video editing software created the expectation that

authentic internet culture lacked the polish of professional image manipulation.[31]

The cultural norms of networked ecologies created the conditions under which

memes circulate. This led Shifman to conclude, "only memes suited to their socio-

cultural environment will spread successfully."[32] However, the question of what exactly

makes a networked meme situated to a particular rhetorical environment ranges widely;

explanations include that which drives participation and attention of particular

audiences,[33] ambiguity and memetic agency,[34] multivocal coverage of controversy,[35]

appealing to shared social function,[36] or humor, rich intertextuality, and juxtapositions.[37]

These explanations of the circulatory power of memes all rely on the force created by the

interplay of varied textual performances by memetic participants. The performances are

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30. Limor Shifman, "An Anatomy of a YouTube Meme," *New Media & Society* 14 no. 2 (2011): 189.

31. Nick Douglas "It's Supposed to Look Like Shit: The Internet Ugly Aesthetic" *Journal of Visual Culture* 13 no. 3 (2014): 337

32. Shifman "Anatomy," 188.

33. Ibid., 199.

34. Johnson, "Mapping," 42.

35. Hahner "Riot Kiss," 164.

36. Jan Blommaert, "Meaning as Nonlinear Effect: The Birth of Cool," *AILA Review* 28 (2015): 19.

37. Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear, "Online Memes, Affinities, And Cultural Production," In *A New Literacies Sampler,* ed. Michele. Knobel and Colin. Lankshear (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 200.

grounded in particular cultural and political contexts and are built around a particular rhetorical form.

Memetic performances take place on a wide array of networked platforms, ranging from participatory social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr, to more static sites including blogs and news media. The popularity of memes is such that users even print them to comment on events happening in "real life."[38] Although memes circulate anywhere a picture or video can be posted, the most prolific sites of memetic creation and circulation are 4chan and Reddit. 4chan is "a[n] imageboard website on which users upload and discuss visual images."[39] As a site dedicated to the discussion of images, its focus on memes is perhaps inevitable. Specifically, the /b/ sub-board – which is dedicated to random, unmoderated conversation – emerged as a location where memes are created through a logic of competition and where awareness of the proper usage of memes is a form of cultural capital.[40] For those users who find 4chan too unruly, with its *ethos* of radically free expression and excessive vulgarity, Reddit is a more mainstream social media site where users participate in comment threads built around themes. Popular comments, including the particularly impactful use of memes, can be voted to the top of the page, increasing their circulation.[41] The competitive logic of these sites allows for the social negotiation of the "proper" form of particular memes and enhances their circulation across the larger networked public sphere.

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38. Alan White and Sebastian Fiebrig, "A Door In Germany Broke Down and The Most Memetacular Thing Happened," *Buzzfeed* (March 13, 2015), http://www.buzzfeed.com/alanwhite/this-sage-of-a-broken-german-door-that-became-a-wall-of-meme?utm_term=.gsnj0Mr9va.

39. Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture,* 178.

40. Ibid., 184.

41. Ibid.*,* 189.

The Stock Character Macro

Figure 1.2: Initial iteration of Advice Dog (left), example of other popular iteration (right).

There are a range of genres of networked memes, each with their own unique functions and formal expectations. While some are mundane, such as Lip-sync Videos and Misheard Lyrics, others have more overtly civic oriented forms. For example, the Photo Fad genre, which centers on the form of participants re-creating existing photographs, led to the "I am the 99%" meme.[42] This meme let networked participants around the world to show their solidarity with the Occupy movement. Because of this diverse range of possibilities, Shifman argues, scholars must evaluate specific genres of memes to best understand their function and circulation.[43] Consequently, for this dissertation, I choose to focus primarily on stock character macros. Certainly, these memes have idiosyncratic elements; however, their wide circulation, popularity, and roots in established internet aesthetics mean that they function as a representative anecdote for memes writ large. In fact, the reach of this particular genre of meme is so

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42. Ibid., 143.

43. Ibid., 184.

significant that vernacular uses of the term meme usually refer specifically to stock

character macros.[44]

So what exactly is a stock character macro? This genre of memes finds their roots

in the culture and technological affordances of the internet. Kate Brideau and Charles

Berret note that the term itself originates in programming culture:

> Image macros are named after macro instructions, scripts that save time
> and effort for a programmer by replacing a lengthy or repetitive task with
> a set of defined procedures. For instance, you might write a macro
> instruction to automatically rename a batch of files. Indeed, many time-
> saving features like cut and paste are forms of macro instruction.
> Likewise, rather than opening an image and placing text by hand, meme
> generators take the chosen text and set it automatically. The image itself
> and the style of text are largely fixed within the code of these meme-
> generating macro instructions. [45]

These memes take a variety of forms. The most famous include Socially Awkward

Penguin, Condescending Willy Wonka, and Scumbag Steve.[46] While not all stock

character macros follow identical layouts, the majority abide by the template established

by the first stock character macro, Advice Dog (Figure 1.2).[47] Advice Dog features a

picture of a puppy who seems to be smiling imposed over a rainbow background with

lines of text above and below the face. This text is almost universally in the Impact font,

a font chosen both because it was native to most early computer platforms and because it

was easy to read over images.[48] In networked vernacular, participants labeled this text

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44. Ibid., 123.

45. Kate Brideau and Charles Berret "A Brief Introduction to Impact: 'The Meme Font'," *Journal of Visual Culture* 13 no. 3 (2014): 309.

46. The website "Know Your Meme" is useful for finding typical examples and histories of each of these memes.

47. Lee Knuttila, "User Unknown: 4chan, Anonymity and Contingency," *First Monday* 10 no. 3(2011): http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/viewArticle/3665/3055.

48. Brideau and Berret "Impact": 308-10.

"top line" and "bottom line." In each stock character macro, these lines have a unique function. In Advice Dog, the top line typically offers a reasonable piece of advice and the bottom line twists in a humorous, lewd, or disturbing fashion – e.g. "live wires // are delicious" or "suck helium // defy gravity."[49] Due to its popularity, users imitated Advice Dog through a variety of other so-called "Advice Animals" including Courage Wolf and Philosoraptor (Figure 1.3).[50]

Figure 1.3: Examples of Courage Wolf (left) and Philosoraptor (right).

While beginning with animals dispensing advice, the genre of stock character macros has since expanded to include all sorts of characters, not all of whom give advice. Each macro performs unique behaviors, attitudes, and affects. Despite this range of forms and functions, the genre of stock character macros centers around two formal features: the use of an image of a stock character with a particular personality and the use of the top-line/set-up bottom-line/punch line textual format. Although these stock character

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49. For the sake of clarity, I chose to use "//" to denote the break between the topline and the bottom line on a stock character macro.

50. Examples of current advice animals, as well as the ways that memetic participants use comments to police/negotiate form can be found on the advice animals Reddit: https://www.reddit.com/r/AdviceAnimals/.

macros began with users editing images on their computers with programs like Paint or Photoshop, these memes diffused to more general use with the rise of websites such as Meme Generator, Quick Meme, and Reddit. These sites provided a database of stock images and software that enabled participants to easily caption pictures in the conventional format. These memes have become more than just humorous pictures: they serve as a way to connect participants to communities and politics. Such circulation leads Shifman to conclude that although memes "spread on the micro basis [their] impact is on the macro."[51] If memes are a genre of symbolic action that influences others, then they are amenable to a rhetorical hermeneutic; thus, in the next section, I detail contact points between memes and the rhetorical tradition.

Invention and Topoi: Memes and the Classical Tradition

Given its roots in Athenian Democracy and the Roman Republic, it is no surprise that inheritors of the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition have – on balance – historically privileged public speeches delivered on policy issues. The concepts we turn to as originating points often reify this orientation. The Aristotelian definition of rhetoric as "the available means of persuasion," Quintilian's "a good man speaking well," as well as the focus on civic affairs that spans from the sophists through Cicero all orient rhetoric towards questions of the civic good as developed through public deliberation. Certainly, the insights of scholars of cultural studies and feminisms with their focus on the personal and everyday, the proliferation of internetworked communication technologies, and the theorization of alternative modes of subjectivity and social relation all put pressure on these classical concepts. However, since 2500 years of influence suggest profound insight

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51. Shifman, "Memes in a Digital World," 365.

into communication, the rhetorical terms of antiquity continue to have explanatory power.

Thus, it is not surprising that one of the tasks of contemporary rhetoric is to examine how concepts from classical traditions may inform but also be expanded by application outside the realms of the tradition. Such a move is particularly apt considering the fact that the norms afforded by networked technologies and culture foster a communicative environment that in many ways is closer to the norms of antiquity than modernity.[52] The recognition of the parallels between pre-modern and contemporary rhetorical norms not only makes ancient concepts germane to contemporary civic life but also helps to legitimate the field of networked rhetoric as its practices are rooted in a rhetorical – rather than literary or technical – tradition. As part of the call to update rhetoric to the conditions of networked communication, Damien Smith Pfister notes that the native terms and concepts emerging from networked media ecologies provide a useful way to understand the unique qualities of this new mode/era of communication. Moreover, Pfister calls upon critics to explore the new forms of expressiveness that are uniquely enabled by digital technology.[53] It is in the spirit of this call that I have chosen to focus this study on internet memes. Digital memes, which are almost exclusively networked texts, function as a recurring form of networked discourses that influence individual and collective attitudes. This claim can be parsed by exploring how digital memes connect to the general tradition of invention and in particular the *topoi*.

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52. Thomas Pettit, "Bracketing the Gutenberg Parenthesis," *Explorations in Media Ecology* 11 no 2. (2012): 101.

53. For more on the rationale for these calls see, Damien Smith Pfister, *Networked Media, Networked Rhetorics: Attention and Deliberation in the Early Blogosphere* (University Park, PA; The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014); and Colin Gifford Brooke, *Lingua Fracta: Towards a Rhetoric of New Media* (Cresskill, NJ; Hampton Press Inc., 2009).

Inventive Memes

Central to Cicero's rhetorical pedagogy, the rhetorical canons remain one of the most influential attempts to offer a comprehensive and systematic accounting for the issues central to rhetorical production. These canons emerged in a rhetorical environment primarily focused on democratic discourse and as such are particularly suited to public orations delivered to a civic audience. Traditional rhetorical scholarship often gives invention primacy amongst the canons. Some of this is no doubt because it is the canon most suited to modernist glorification of the rational, liberal, unified subject. However, it is also a necessary precondition for the other canons within a rhetorical context. Certainly, delivery, memory, style, and arrangement all inform invention. However, rhetors cannot activate these canons without some process of invention. Consequently, I devote my attention to the ways that memes call for a refiguring of this canon in order to argue that while they may seem like small-scale personal musings, memes are part of a rich network of public address that is central to contemporary rhetorical life. Specifically, I argue that although concepts relating to the content of invention remain useful – stasis can be used to diagnose networked controversy as easily as ancient orations and digital texts still employ a range of artistic and inartistic proofs – networked rhetorics challenge two assumptions that emerged in modern interpretations of invention: the role of a unitary author and the novelty of the text.

First, any theory of networked rhetoric must decenter the role of a unitary rhetor as the primary force of invention. Modern usages of the word invention evoke images of scientists in a lab shouting "eureka!" as they make their discovery. Under this conception, invention focuses on the means available to an individual rhetor to invent the argument

most suited to a particular occasion. Such an approach is consistent both with modern conceptions of human agency, as well as contemporary vernacular understandings of communication and persuasion. However, the proliferation of networked communication technologies suggests that such a conception is no longer tenable, if it ever was. In a call to update the canons, Pfister asserts that networked technologies afford increased intertextuality, remix, and interactivity, making it nearly impossible to consider any one participant as the inventor of a rhetorical text.[54] Therefore, the question of who (or what) is the rhetor is central to understanding invention in networked rhetoric.

On the most basic level, while human action drives internetworked communication, the technologies behind this ecology destabilize the possibility of a single unified rhetor at the heart of communicative action. This is not to say that the rhetor disappears. Linguistic and cultural markers embedded within particular iterations gesture to the subjectivity of a particular rhetor.[55] However, the focus on the anonymity of the internet is largely a product of antiquated understandings of the web, when the majority of content was the textual production from a single keyboard. Even in these cases, the unity of the rhetor is a fantasy. These message board posts or blogs are, at best, the distillation of a range of historical and textual forces focused through a particular rhetor functioning as a point of articulation. However, newer networked rhetorical phenomena complicate this already questionable unity of the rhetor. As networked technologies increase the range of information available and connect participants to wider networks of symbolic exchange, networked modes of invention becomes increasingly

54. Pfister, *Networked Media,* 189-91.

55. Alice Crawford, "The Myth of the Unmarked Net Speaker," in *Critical Perspectives on the Internet* ed. Gary Elmer (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 100.

intertextual and socially generated.[56] Participants hyperlink arguments, add GIFs, re-edit

videos, and create new iterations of memes. Under these conditions, pinpointing a lone

rhetor as the genesis of invention seems impossible. Individual participants deploy

particular iterations of a meme, but the process of invention expands well beyond their

individual capacities.

Yet the loss of a definitive rhetor is not a loss for rhetoric; indeed, freeing

memetic composition from the mythologies of a specific author "enables generative

practices and renders the form highly malleable."[57] In their capacity as remixed

intertextual texts, much of networked invention takes the form of what Roland Barthes

would call a writerly text. They are "incomplete, plural, indeterminate. As open texts,

they call upon the reader to supply or fill in meaning. …texts that are dispersed and

designed to be experienced rather than to provide closure."[58] Following this observation,

Collin Brooke notes that networked invention is proairetic rather than hermeneutic.

Brooke critiques hermeneutic understandings of invention because their focus on

meaning and resolution prevents participants from attending to other functions and

processes enabled by a text.[59] Conversely, a proairetic focus not only draws attention to

the collective nature of networked (and really all) invention but also suggests invention is

an ongoing, rather than static process. Brooke notes proairetic invention focuses on the

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56. Eric S Jenkins, "The Modes of Visual Rhetoric: Circulating Memes as Expressions," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 100 no. 4 (2014): 443.

57. Patrick Davison, "The Language of Internet Memes". In Michael Mandiberg (Ed.), *The Social Media Reader* (pp. 120–136). (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 132.

58. Barbara Warnick, "Looking to the Future: Electronic Texts and the Deepening Interface," *Technical Communication Quarterly* 14 no. 3 (2005): 328.

59. Brooke, *Lingua Fracta,* 76.

generation of possibilities, rather than their elimination until all but one are gone and closure has been achieved. Closure is no less important now than it ever has been, but with the advent of new media and interfaces that resist closure, proairesis provides an important corrective to the hermeneutically oriented inventional theory that has prevailed in our field to date.[60]

Because of the "openness" of the text, networked rhetorical spaces resemble or enable Kenneth Burke's unending conversation.[61] For example, the history of a meme informs any particular iteration of a meme and shape future iterations. No one participant can locate the genesis of the conversation, but they can modify its flow via their participation in the perpetual process of invention afforded by digital media ecologies.

While Brooke's proairetic stance suggests that any rhetorical iteration is always already part of a larger inventional process, the role circulation plays in contemporary processes of invention also disrupts the novelty of a particular rhetorical text. On the most basic level, the increase of circulation afforded by networked technologies makes remix and other intertextual maneuvering proliferate. The more a particular meme circulates, the easier it is for networked participants to call on that meme and assume other participants will understand its rhetorical trajectory.[62] The very act of circulation by itself is an impactful rhetorical act. Zizi Paracharissi notes that circulation, even without

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60. Ibid., 86.

61. Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1941): 110-11.

62. When I speak of participants understanding memes, I am not referring solely to the inference of particular meaning. Instead the meaning/understanding of memes is an effect of their circulation. However, this effect, once created as a product of memes exerts its own force – which would be colloquially understood as meaning. These common "understandings" of memes afford publics the resources to police proper usage and infer memetic force.

the addition of content, intensifies the affective force of digital texts.[63] Every user who (re)circulates a meme subtly alters its rhetorical force.

The internetworked nature of memes makes authorship a complicated question, as a meme may have hundreds, or even thousands, of participants who added to its rhetorical force. However, tracing the constitution of this rhetorical force by pursuing questions related to authorship is useful, orienting the critic towards the social collectivities that come together to imbue particular meaning/force into a meme or other networked text. It is only through multiple users playing with the form of the meme that a larger narrative and socially constructed narrative emerges, translating it from a single image to a cultural phenomenon capable of political commentary and organizing force. Thus, it is the collective invention of memes, an invention that relies entirely on the possibility of public conversation, which allows them to function as invented public address. Once we move toward a proairetic understanding of invention demanded by memes, we can explore the practical implications of this shift through memes' relationship to *topoi*.

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63. Zizi Papacharissi *Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 116. As there are many different understandings of affect, Papacharissi grounds her conception of concept in the writings of Spinoza. Papacharissi argues Spinoza defined affects as "states of mind and body that included, but also extend beyond, just emotions and feelings to describe driving forces that are suggestive of tendencies to act in a variety of ways, or not to act at all." This conception allows affect to function as more than simple emotion or precognitive reactions. Instead it opens space for reason, ideology, emotion, and other forces to function as part of an affective public; Ibid.*,* 12. To this I add Deleuze's interpretation of affect in Spinoza. Deleuze defines affect in the following manner: "Affectus is thus the continuous variation of someone's force of existing." Moreover, Deleuze defines force as the changing of intensities. Therefore, to speak of affect is to speak of those things that modulate the intensities of particular relations. Affect is what things do. Gilles Deleuze, "Spinoza" (lecture, Cours Vincennes, Paris, January 24, 1978), http://deleuzelectures.blogspot.com/2007/02/on-spinoza.html. While I draw heavily from this tradition, as it provides a useful vocabulary and orientation to forces beyond the rational, I move away from any conception of affect as fully preindividual. Rather because I also draw from theories of individuation, I am operating from the assumption that the individual — even if it is only an effect of pre-individual forces – has the capacity to mobilize and redirect the flow of affects.

Memes as Networked *Topoi*

While the question of proairesis has profound ramifications for considerations of the evolving nature of invention and agency in networked rhetorics, the most direct way that scholars connected memes to the tradition of rhetoric is through the concept of *topoi*. Ben Wetherbee highlights how memes are instructional in understanding the contemporary function of the concept:

> We might begin to reconcile rhetoric and memetics by considering how some memes function as rhetorical *topoi*. Scholars of rhetoric, thanks in part to disagreement among ancient rhetoricians, disagree over the exact definition of *topoi*, though the term typically denotes the 'locations' or 'places' where rhetors can go to invent arguments. Generally, *topoi* are regarded as either heuristic patterns one can follow to generate arguments in the right circumstances – a la Aristotle's twenty-eight 'common' topics – or stock 'commonplaces' the rhetor commits to memory, seen most notably in early Roman rhetorical handbooks.[64]

Combining the memetic and rhetorical traditions, Wetherbee expands the definition of *topoi* to include any "appropriate set of conceptual and emotional associations for a given audience within a given cultural context."[65] When understood within this framework, memes exhibit the capacity to function as rhetorical resources for the generation of more traditional rhetorical texts.

To help explain the generative potential implied in understanding memes as *topoi*, scholars turned to the success of pre-digital memetic technologies. Specifically, examining political pinback buttons as a historical precursor to memes, Madsen and Fritch note that while memetic buttons likely have not changed the outcome of any one election, they have functioned to identify community members and distill arguments that

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64. Ben Wetherbee, "Picking Up Fragments of the 2012 Election: Memes, Topoi, and Political Rhetoric," *Present Tense* 5 no. 1 (2015): 2.

65. Ibid., 3.

were central to campaigns.[66] In this way, the buttons function as a material reminder of the arguments that were available. As a circulating form of argument, they certainly served as a resource for the proairetic invention of other forms of political argument. Interlocutors can easily expand a distilled slogan into a larger conversation, the likes of which can sway elections.
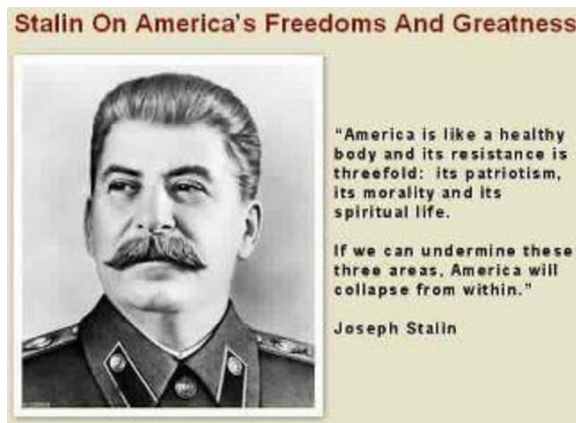
Figure 1.4: Meme referenced by Ben Carson in a presidential primary debate.

Focusing on this relational function, Hahner argues that memes, through their provision of alternative *topoi* to established narratives, spur contestation and thus advance public argument.[67] Memes enable this opening of deliberative space because they have the potential to both condense argument and make their own arguments through their functioning as political *topoi*. A 2016 South Carolina Republican presidential primary debate demonstrates this potential. During the debate, Republican presidential candidate Ben Carson used a quotation, incorrectly attributed to Stalin, which came from a meme that had been circulating across Republican-dominated networked ecologies (Figure

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66. Arnie Madsen and John Fritch, "100 Million Buttons Can't Be Wrong: Argument in Political Pinback Buttons" *Disturbing Argument: Selected Works from the 18th NCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation,* ed. Catherine Palczeski (New York: Routledge, 2014), 199.

67. Hahner, "Riot Kiss," 163.

1.4).[68] While the information gleaned from the meme was factually incorrect, the meme

consolidated certain anti-leftist attitudes. The focusing of this sentiment into usable *topoi*

inspired Carson to draw directly from the meme, allowing the meme to shape electoral

discourse and open new topics for public deliberation.

The Stories Memes Tell: Genre, Narrative, and Myth

Proairetic invention and the connection to *topoi* begin to explain the ways that

memes function as arguments and thus contribute to deliberation between publics.

However, memes also have the ability to operate independently of other modes of address

while still fitting within the rhetorical tradition. To evaluate this larger rhetorical

potential, I will now turn to an evaluation of how memes independently work within

three concepts central to post-classical conceptions of rhetorical criticism: genre,

narrative, and myth.

Rhetorics of Form: Genre and Memes

The explosion of memes across networked forums led to a proliferation of the

variety of memes circulated by participants, thousands of memes emerged taking myriad

forms. To manage this diversity, both popular media – most notably *Know Your Meme* –

and academics led by Shifman, devoted great effort to the categorization of different

families of memes.[69] Yet, websites and academics do not simply create these categories

of memes top-down. Participants in networked rhetorical spaces police the norms of

particular memes from the bottom-up. Specifically, participants often refuse to circulate

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68. Ashley Feinberg, "Ben Carson's Fake Stalin Quote Came from a Right-Wing Facebook Meme," *Gawker* (February 13, 2016), http://gawker.com/ben-carsons-fake-stalin-quote-came-from-a-ring-wing-fac-1759025587.

69. Shifman's *Memes in Digital Culture* provides a detailed categorization of the most influential genres of memes.

memes that violate generic norms. Further, they chastise usages of those memes that do not meet the normative standards established through communal participation in a particular meme.[70] For example, in evaluating the meme Confession Bear, which often is used to narrate "something shitty you did that you regret," users chastised those iterations that participants used to issue more boastful confessions (Figure 1.5).[71] As users both create and consume not only memes but also the norms that drive those memes, Wiggins and Bowers note "Memes are a genre, not a medium, of online communication and are artifacts of participatory digital culture characterized specifically by an agency of consumption-production."[72] Memes are not just a tool networked participants can use but also a unique genre of communication formed through social deliberation. Once created, these genres then place constraints on the conditions for deliberation. This orientation towards memes highlights their capacity to uniquely enable cross public exchanges.

Figure 1.5: Standard example of Confession Bear (left), criticized version (right).

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70. Jacqueline Ryan Vickery, "The Curious Case of Confession Bear: The Reappropriation of Online Macro-Image Memes, Information," *Communication & Society* 17 no. 3 (2014), 313.

71. Ibid., 323.

72. Wiggins and Bowers, "Memes as Genre*,"* 1896.

Genre has long been a central concept in understanding rhetorical production. In his field re-defining book on rhetorical criticism, Edwin Black notes that genre is central to understanding the historically created expectations and functions of families of texts.[73] When a rhetor or critic knows the expectations of a genre, they can evaluate if a particular text contains the potential to flourish within these norms. In understanding its capability to enable particular rhetorical effect, theorists of genre imply that the power of genre goes beyond simple categorization. Genre functions as a historically produced series of relations, which help define the ways that particular rhetorical iterations can act within contingent rhetorical relationships.[74] From this perspective, Campbell and Jaimison argue that form is central to genre. As they note, "formal similarities establish genres."[75] For example, the genre of the eulogy not only demands a rhetor define their relationship to the deceased and confront mortality but also uses the qualities of the deceased to establish community values and set future goals.[76] The form shapes not only the content but also the political function of the rhetoric.

Yet, deciphering the power of form does not simply involve the identification of similar structural characteristics. As opposed to this formalist approach, I use form in the Burkean sense. Burke defines form as "the creation of an appetite in the mind of the auditor, and the adequate satisfying of that appetite."[77] Thus for Burke, form is predicated

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73. Edwin Black, *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 133-34.

74. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, "Form and Genre in Rhetorical Criticism: An Introduction," in *Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action* (Falls Church, VA: The Speech Communication Association, 1978), 17.

75. Ibid., 18.

76. Ibid., 20.

77. Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement,* 2nd ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968), 143.

upon negotiation and identification between participants in a rhetorical exchange. Such a

relation implies that form has persuasive impact because "forms can induce participation

by others."[78] This is not to say that a singular form defines any particular genre; rather,

generes emerge as a "constellation of forms" that develop across related texts.[79] Arguing

genre exerts persuasive force beyond particular iterations, Miller asserts that the action

that participants use form to accomplish is central to the character of a genre.[80] While

seeking to deemphasize form, Miller does not abandon it, noting that genre is a particular

type of form focused on the creation of action. For Miller, although critics still use genre

as an "index to cultural patterns and as tools for exploring the achievements of particular

speakers and writers," genre has a different function for consumers of rhetorical acts: it

teaches participants how to engage in the community for whom the genre exists.[81] Simply

put, it is only in understanding the way that a genre is both constituted by and constitutive

of community that a single user begins to operate within and influence that community.

Consequently, form – following the Burkean definition – is key to understanding

how rhetorical actors engage in action. Barry Brummett notes that for Burke, literature is

only able to function as "'equipment for living' because it connects to our lives formally,

and is thus able to offer advice as to how to live." [82] Rhetorical forms establish the

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78. Campbell and Jaimieson, "Genre," 19.

79. Ibid., 20.

80. Carolyn R. Miller, "Genre as Social Action," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984)*:* 151.

81. Ibid., 165.

82. Barry Brummett "Form, Experience and the Centrality of Rhetoric to Pedagogy," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 34 (2015), 378.

patterns that order the world and shape participants' thought. Brummett notes that in this capacity, form is eminently rhetorical:

> [Form] becomes the template for how we organize wide swathes of experience, text, and media. Our own subjectivity, the world, and our experiences in the world body forth from form. The seed planted by repeated exposure to single texts is internalized and grows into the kudzu vine of form hooking wide ranges of life into itself through its formal tendrils.[83]

Brummett's focus on form underlines Miller's claim that to understand the social force of genre requires a focus on form. This relation is particularly important as form functions as a persuasive force that underlies the production of rhetorical texts. While the specific content of an individual text does matter, it can neither be interpreted nor exert force without the generic forms that come to define it. For example, the text, "one does not simply // ignore the political economy of memes," suggests the importance of attending to larger political/economic conditions that allow for the creation of memes (Figure 1.6).

Figure 1.6: Example of the "One Does Not" meme.

However, when read within the formal expectations of the meme, which dictate that the bottom line is an action taken at grave peril (such as walking into Mordor in the *Lord of the Rings* universe – the inspiring line of the meme), the meme suggests an intensity of this warning not possible in the words alone.

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83. Ibid., 381.

Because networked spaces bring together diverse participants, often without

previous connection, genre is particularly salient in the creation of networked

communities. Specifically, particular technologies, such as computer programs including

meme-generating software, play a key role in the development and proliferation of

genres.[84] By creating constraints on the structure, length, and form of networked

communication, these technologies often define the relationships and functions of

networked participants and texts. Through this ability, they are central to the function of

genre in networked spaces. Consequently, Shifman contends that the study of genre is

particularly useful in the networked public sphere:

> digital culture seems to represent a new amalgamation between top-down
> mass-mediated genres and bottom-up mundane types of rhetorical actions.
> Thus if, previously, acts of 'vernacular creativity' – everyday innovative
> and artistic practices that can be carried out by simple means of production
> – were 'hidden' in domestic settings, in the digital era they were re-
> formulated as highly visible public culture.[85]

The unique relations between rhetorical producers in network space make genre more

fluid and, I think, more democratic. Within networked media ecologies, the thematization

of genre is a public process where all participants engage in defining the norms of

rhetorical culture. For example, the Scumbag Steve meme, used to criticize particular

actions, attitudes, or policies as undesirable, is a locus for the negotiation of social values

(Figure 1.7). Each iteration of the meme offers judgment on a new action or affect. The

community decides if the iteration is an acceptable fit within the form of the meme,

effectively judging the social desirability of the action and offering metacommentary

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84. Justin Lewis, "Content Management Systems, Bittorrent Trackers, and Large-Scale Rhetorical Genres: Analyzing Collective Activity in Participatory Digital Spaces," *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* 2016, Vol. 46, no. 1: 4–26.

85. Limor Shifman, "The Cultural Logic of Photo-Based Meme Genres," *Journal of Visual Culture* 13 no. 3 (2014): 342.

about the generic fit. As users make new memes, circulate popular ones, and condemn

those they think do not fit a particular meme, the form emerges as not simply the use of a

picture and a specific textual format. Instead, formal expectations are negotiated through

affective and narrative judgment. In the case of Scumbag Steve, social negotiations of

what it means to be a scumbag emerge as central to the form.

Figure 1.7: Examples of the Scumbag Steve meme

Narratives from Fragments

Beyond the rhetorical force exerted through the construction and deployment of

memetic genres, memes also exert rhetorical force through their creation of, and

commentary on, varied social narratives. The rhetorical influence of narratives has long

been established: not only are narratives experientially central to communication

processes, but the rhetorical negotiation of symbols within narrative structures is key to

how participants make sense of them.[86] On face, as minute textual/visual fragments, it

would be easy to dismiss the role memes play regarding larger narratives. However,

rhetorical texts are not just the amalgamation of traditional texts and the contextual

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86. Walter R. Fisher, "Narrative as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument," *Communication Monographs* 51 (1984), 2.

fragments that surround them. Instead, following Michael McGee's claims about how contemporary public culture offers fragments of texts rather than "finished" discourses, textual fragments may also be constructed by participants and critics into a larger, more consequential rhetorical text/narrative.[87] From this perspective, memetic fragments engage narratives in three ways: they may construct "new" narratives, they affectively recast existing narratives, or they perform narrative metacommentary.

First, memes have the capacity to coalesce diffuse public sentiment or affects into a concrete narrative. Specifically, with their focus on an embodied subject in a particular context, image macros often function as a dramatized version of the morality of digital cultures.[88] For example, Scumbag Steve serves as a sort of metonym for scumbaggery. A disdain for overly self-interested individuals is not a new phenomenon. However, through the implied and embodied presence of Scumbag Steve, the personification of a certain variety of young male egotism, this feeling of disdain gets a body to focus upon.[89] Moreover, the framing of the photo in a doorway gives this body a story (Figure 1.8). The scumbag-ness of Steve comes from not just Steve's attitude but also the figure's imposition on your space – entering the door towards the viewer of the meme. This common story (especially among younger meme producers and circulators) of a scumbag crashing a party enables identification between participants. This identification creates conditions that enable a specific affective response that comes to life in the narrative it

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87. Michael Calvin McGee, "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture," *Western Journal of Communication* 54 (1990): 280. McGee attributes this fragmentation to the explosion of media. Consequently, the rise of networked ecologies in the 90's and the subsequent networking of moist conditions of life suggests this condition intensified since McGee offered it in 1990.

88. Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture,* 124.

89.Billy Baker, "Millis Man Savors His Time As An Internet (Punching) Bag," *The Boston Globe* ,(November 12, 2012, https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2012/11/24/the-internet-favorite-punching-bag/ijnRiZeT502KmClwC8orDO/story.html.

constructs. Specifically, this enthymematic narrative creates identification around the sense of empathy between the varied participants in the meme.[90] Each iteration extends this narrative, as each meme demonstrates Steve engaging in a new action, adding more detail to the narrative of Steve's assorted scummy exploits.

Yet the rhetorical force of a meme is not just in the public enjoyment of a recognizable narration of social understandings of affects. Instead, memes also function to incorporate existing actors and narratives; doing so enables participants to deploy memetic action to comment on and affectively recast existing narratives and events. Specifically, in their ability to mimic existing social narratives, memes create spaces to promote particular "affective resonances."[91] Participants can then use these resonances to judge events. Textually commenting on an event over the image of scumbag Steve equates the event with scumbag-ness.[92] Similarly, the creation of a meme around the infamous image of a Californian police officer pepper spraying college protesters recast the events. Andrew Peck argues that as participants in the production of Casually Pepper Spray Everything Cop memes were able to impose the officer onto different social struggles, they were able to propagate

> a sense of marginalization by institutional forces, framing themselves as
> victims of everyday coercion, force, and obfuscation. Similarly, the
> practice of sharing these photoshops was framed by users as an alternative
> discourse that represented freedom of expression, civic engagement, and

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90. D. Travers Scott, "The Empathetic Meme: Situating Chris Crocker Within the Media History of LGBT Equality Struggles," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 38, no. 4 (2014): 308-09.

91. Ibid., 316.

92. Burke's understanding of cluster analysis is useful for understanding the interplay of memes with each other and the contexts in which they are deployed. Questions of what goes with what and what equates to what are useful in relating the forms of memes with their contingent usage. For a more complete understanding of cluster analysis see: Kenneth Burke, *Essays Towards a Symbolic of Motives,* ed. William H Ruckert (West Lafayette: Parlor Press, 2007), 49-73.

exposing abuses of power in a flawed system of institutions. In effect, photoshopping came to represent a fight against these institutions and the marginalization they represented.[93]

Memes thus function as a tool for assorted networked participants to circulate their affective response to already existing narratives. While some of these memes may support dominant narratives, these affective expressions often circulate a remediation of events. This proliferation of competing narratives then opens deliberative space, as citizens debate the disparities between these differing evaluations of events.[94] When the Obama administration announced the killing of Osama bin Laden, they released a photo of the situation room watching the raid. Meme users repurposed this image by recasting the image, inserting other figures and repositioning the participants (Figure 1.8). For example, one iteration of the meme recast the viewers in the situation room as members of the Justice League, recasting them as cartoon heroes rather than serious American leaders. These reframings of the image serve to question the seriousness of the event as well as appeals to American values, creating a space for debate over the killing of bin Laden.

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93. Andrew M Peck, "A Laugh Riot: Photoshopping as Vernacular Discursive Practice," *International Journal of Communication* 8 (2014): 1657.

94. Lars Tønder, "Comic Power: Another Road Not Taken?," *Theory and Event* 17 no. 4 (2014): accessed August 29, 2015, Project Muse Database.

Figure 1.8: Original Situation Room photo (left), a memetic recast (right).

Beyond constructing and commenting on social narratives, memes also engage narrativity by highlighting the implicit norms of existing narratives. As condensations of complex social relations into a single image, memes undeniably rely on stereotype. Moreover, as many meme creators (and subjects) are white privileged men, these stereotypes are often those that reinforce dominant social relations.[95] However, this does not mean that memes are uncritically reinforcing stereotypes, although many users circulate them in this manner. Instead, Shifman argues that memes can function as a form of hypersignification, a state where "the *code itself* [is] no longer concealed, but [is] turned into a sign."[96] Hypersignification then turns the stereotypes of memes into a productive force. For many memes, because the stereotype is central to understanding the meme, it turns these unspoken social codes into the subject of discussion. The highlighting of these assumptions demands critical reflection. For example, the meme Successful Black Man relies heavily on the differing economic power of different racial groups in the US. As part of this, the image behind the meme highlights what presentations of the black body social stereotypes assume most likely lead to success

95. Shifman, "Cultural Logic," 348.

96. Ibid., 344.

(Figure 1.9). Moreover, the meme's textual form relies heavily on negative stereotypes of the black community. The top line typically contains stereotype such as "I left my wife and kids" or "I got arrested." However, the bottom line turns these stereotypes into "successful behaviors" such as "a healthy breakfast before I went to the gym" or "development on DVD."[97] Certainly, this meme reinforces the success of black men as atypical and reinforces the top lines as normative. However, in making these assumptions explicit, the meme also demands that participants interrogate the stereotypes, asking why they may exist and if they are productive or problematic.

Figure 1.9: Examples of the Successful Black Man meme.

Mythic Memes

While all varieties of narratives are potentially politically significant, one of their most impactful forms is that of myth. As is cliché, albeit necessary when discussing myth, I refer not to the colloquial usage of myth as some sort of untrue narrative but rather to a particular type of narrative with a corresponding function. Although many myths may indeed be untrue by empirical standards, they contain some kernel of social truth that helps participants make sense of reality. Specifically, Burke notes that a narrative gains a mythic character when it purports to identify some sort of first principles

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97. Examples of the meme can be found at http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/successful-black-man.

or essential characteristics of the culture that uses the narrative.[98] Under Burke's

conception, myths are tools for the production and organization of reality.[99]

Consequently, in a political context, myths manifest as "ideologically marked narratives"

that are held to have some degree of truth within the public that accepts them.[100] Most

often, participants mobilize these myths in the service of dominant politics because their

narrative cohesion and focus on essential causes serves to naturalize the complex and

contingent realities of history.[101]

Because of their strong narrative components, memes have potential to engage

citizens on a mythic level. As a mode of hypersignification, they often draw attention to

the unnatural underpinnings of dominant myths. For example, Condescending Wonka, a

meme that mobilizes a condescending attitude to highlight the simplicity of other's

opinions, often questions the stability of the American dream myth: "Oh so you believe

in the American dream // I'm sure thousands of unemployed Americans do too" (Figure

1.10).[102] Here the meme suggests that the myth may not be an essential truth but rather

serves a political function by placating those whom the rising tide of economic growth

leaves behind.

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98. Kenneth Burke, "Ideology and Myth," in *On Symbols and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 308-09.

99. Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1935), 267.

100. Christopher Flood, *Political Myth* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 44.

101. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Paladin, 1973), 11.

102. The visual form of the meme, as well as other examples, can be found at: http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/condescending-wonka-creepy-wonka.
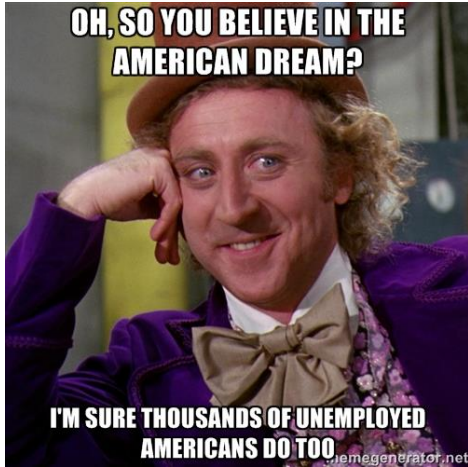
Figure 1.10: Condescending Wonka comments on the American Dream.

Memes are particularly suited to engaging with mythic narratives because of their fragmented and visual nature. Flood notes that while political myths may stem from particular texts participants' exposure to varied fragments that corroborate the myth facilitate their internalization into the social fabric.[103] In this capacity, memes, with their wide and rapid circulation, have the potential to either reinforce or disrupt this internalization process. Further, Flood notes that because of their flexibility and polysemy, visual presentations of myth allow for particularly diverse and complex understandings of myths.[104] Images may invoke a myth directly, or they might place a non-mythic character into a mythic context – disrupting social understandings of both. Similarly, because visuals condense narratives, a single image can draw from multiple myths, juxtaposing them against one another. Memes may not always be the source of myth itself, but they contain the "capacity to evoke a political myth or even entire mythology."[105] Moreover, because these evocations can both reify and remediate political

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103. Flood, *Political Myth*, 86.

104. Ibid., 174-79.

105. Ibid., *166*

ideologies, they both address publics and create the conditions under which these publics must deliberate varied mythic narratives.

Fragments of Publics: Memes and Public Opinion

If a central assertion of this dissertation is that memes are a form of public address, the question becomes what is a public and how might it be addressed? As fragmented, mass produced, and visual texts, memes seemingly have little in common with the political speeches that are central objects of analysis within traditional conceptions of public address. This difference is particularly pronounced in digital media ecologies, as communication through networked media is more fragmented, personal, and (often) ironically grounded than traditional political discourse. However, in an era where not only is the personal political, but traditional modes of public politics are viewed as under corporate control, these non-traditional features make networked native communication phenomena such as memes central to understanding the kinds of civic address that populate the networked public sphere.[106] Simply put, in an era where mainstream politics are subject to the influence of unlimited campaign financing, those outside the orbit of conventional electoral politics seek—and need—new rhetorical avenues to exert political force.

As political communication outside traditional political contexts, memes are particularly suited to political expression because participants construct them within the vernacular experiences and communicative practices of networked communities.[107] As

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106. Ronald Walter Greene, "Rhetorical Capital, Communicative Labor, Money/Speech, And Neo-Liberal Governance," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 4, no. 3 (2007), 328.

107. Ryan M. Milner, "Media Lingua Franca: Fixity, Novelty, and Vernacular Creativity in Internet Memes," *Selected Papers of Internet Research* 3 (2013), http://spir.aoir.org/index.php/spir/article/view/806..

part of this vernacularization, memes become a sort of language onto themselves, with individual meme forms operating as *topoi* for participating in public deliberation.[108] For example, the meme "#ThanksObama" emerged as a powerful lens for explaining how those with different political leanings experience the Obama presidency.[109] Right-leaning Americans often use the hashtag sarcastically, in an effort to blame the president for what they see as political failures. Conversely, left-leaning Americans use the hashtag either to genuinely praise the president or ironically apply it to non-political contexts to argue that right-leaning uses of the hashtag are absurd. Because of its reach, Obama even used the meme as part of an effort to promote the rollout of the Affordable Care Act.[110] Since memes are clearly influencing politics (in both a macro and micro political sense), which is a traditional function of public address, I will now expand on this potential by exploring the ways in which memes are constitutive of new publics. To do so I will briefly explicate my positions on publics and publicity, next look at the ways these concepts change in a networked rhetorical ecology, and finally explore the ways in which memes function within this ecology to create and alter public opinion.

<div align="center">Publics and Publicity</div>

Rooted in Habermas' theorizations of the bourgeois public sphere, the idea of "publics" is a useful heuristic for understanding the ways that collectivities form and how

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108. Susan A. Sci and David R. Dewberry, "Something Funny?: The *Laughing Joe Biden* Meme as Digital *Topoi* within Political Argumentation," in *Disturbing Argument: Selected Works from the 18th NCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation,* ed. Catherine Palczewski (New York: Routledge, 2014), 233.

109. Hunter Schwarz, "'Thanks Obama.' The Evolution of a Meme that Defined a Presidency," *Washington Post* (February 13, 2015): http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2015/02/13/thanks-obama-the-evolution-of-a-meme-that-defined-a-presidency/.

110. Byron Tau, "Obama Embraces Meme Clichés in Healthcare.gov Pitch," *Wall Street Journal* (February 12, 2014): http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2015/02/12/obama-embraces-meme-cliches-in-healthcare-gov-pitch/.

their participants mobilize them for engagement in political action. Habermas focused on

the dominant mode of bourgeois publicity, either as a normative or idealistic vision of

politics. However, the problematic implications of this conception of the public sphere

led most theorists to either turn away from or complicate this concept. Specifically, some

scholars argue by focusing on this dominant modality of publicity, Habermas' conception

reduces all political action outside this sphere to the private and in doing so affords non-

public rhetorical activity less legitimacy.[111] This historically privileges the rhetoric of

white wealthy men as political, relegating all other rhetorics as either counter to or

outside of politics.[112] Consequently, many scholars found the need to speak of neither *a*

public sphere nor publics and counterpublics but, rather, to theorize a *multiplicity* of

publics with permeable boundaries that encompass all ranges of political action from the

private lives to state action (both excluded by Habermas' original conception of the

public sphere).[113] In this tradition, I turn to Michael Warner's understanding of publics as

the entities built around particular instances of discourse.[114] For Warner, the circulation

of every text – even memes – creates a public, which in turn operates as a force to shape

and direct rhetorical action.[115]

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111. Robert Asen, "Seeking the 'Counter' in Counterpublics," *Communication Theory* 10 no. 4 (2000): 431.

112. Catherine R. Squires, "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Spheres," *Communication Theory* 12 no. 4 (2002): 449.

113. Kendal R. Phillips, "A Rhetoric of Controversy," *Western Journal of Communication* 63 no. 4 (1999): 506.

114. Michael Warner, *Publics and Counter Publics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 67.

115. In dealing with this diversity of publics, I also reject a conception of counterpublics as such, as identifying any public to such a label reduces it to its relationship with some sort of dominant public. However, recognizing the need for a demarcation of non-dominant publicity, I follow the call of Erik Doxtader to move from understanding counterpublics as a noun to focusing on counterpublicity as a verb. Erik Doxtater, "In the Name of Reconciliation: The Faith and Works of Counterpublicity," in

The Networked Public Sphere

When theorizing the bourgeois public sphere, Habermas was examining a culture largely defined by print media. Although many theories of publics and publicity sought to correct the varied oversights of Habermas, a focus on print-based politics remains central to many extensions and complications of his work. Warner's emphasis on the text as the center of a public evidences this continued focus on print. Consequently, most conceptions of publics rooted in modern technologies tend to remain invested in discourses related, or reacting, to large-scale economy and government, elite nations and individuals, and dominant ideologies.[116] However, the emergence of a networked society destabilizes this historical tendency of publicity and public formation. A major part of this shift can be credited to new digital media technologies. These media are particularly influential because they do not necessarily compete with older media – as television might have competed with books and newspapers – but rather subsume them. Internetworked media incorporate older forms of media into their networked processes, remixing and redeploying their potential.[117]

Counterpublics and the State ed. Robert Asen and Daniel C. Brouwer (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 65-66. This move allows counter-ness to exist as a process. However, it also recognizes this is but one of the many ways in which an excluded public might engage dominant processes of publicity and the publics that inhabit them. This breaks a binary understanding of publicity, as it no longer claims a monopoly on excluded publics. This break opens also allows attention the fact that counterpublicity is but one mode in which a marginalized public, or group of marginalized publics, can engage dominant publics. Thus some memes may engage in processes of counterpublicity. For examples of some other modes of oppositional publics see Squires, "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere," 448. Aside from the oppositional logic of counterpublics, non-dominant publics can also enclave, excluding themselves from dominant publics (this is still a mode of publicity as it defines the relation between publics) or by satellite publics, which separate from dominant public for non-oppositional reasons while maintaining a relationship with the dominant public. I contend that memes allow for the formation of a range of publics, which may then engage in a range of relations to other publics.

116. Papacharissi, *Affective Publics,* 39.

117. Manuel Castells, "Informationalism, Networks, and the Network Society: A Theoretical Blueprint," in *The Network Society: A Cross-cultural Perspective* ed. Manuel Castells (Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2004), 22.

Yet the networking of public life involves more than simply a shift in technologies. Castells notes that networked society is defined by a range of social factors including the expansion of globalization, the rise of immaterial labor, ideological pluralism, and constant archiving.[118] These sensibilities create a rhetorical environment that is defined by increased participation and many-to-many communication. This is not a system that replaces the norms of modernity but rather one that remixes and hybridizes it.[119] The "networked public sphere" is not an appeal to a Habermasian deliberative ideal, nor does it encompass the entirety of networked rhetorical action. Rather, the term highlights the affordances and constraints of deliberation within a networked media ecology, particularly how they create social conditions that shape the ways that different publics form, operate, and interact.

Major features of the networked public sphere include a decentralization of national politics, increased encounters with diversity, and the internetworking of media.[120] The result of this is a vastly different experience of publicity. Writing in the early years of networked media, Thompson noted these shifts – which have only since intensified:

> The development of communication media has created a new kind of publicness which is very different from the traditional conception of public life. This new kind of mediated publicness does not involve individuals coming together in a shared locale to discuss issues of common concern. Rather, it is a publicness of openness and visibility, of making available and making visible, and this visibility

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118. Ibid., 22-41.

119. Pfister, *Networked Media,* 47.

120. Ibid., 19.

no longer involves the sharing of a common locale.[121]

This destabilization is furthered because the texts that define publics are mutually constituted by participants through many-to-many communication.[122] Under this process, a wide range of actors influences the formation and alteration of publics, as any participant can "shift, re-form, circulate, or consolidate ties with any act of communication."[123] Furthermore, much of life in the modern era could go undocumented by modern media – this is not to say that this life existed independent of the public, but rather that it was not explicitly publicized.[124] Conversely, internetworked media, with their easy translation onto mobile applications, make all parts of life potentially public.[125] These changes increase the potential for participation in publics; however, it is important to note that emergence of the networked public sphere does not guarantee democracy, freedom, or dignity; instead, it intensifies and networks a plurality of spheres of existence.[126]

This plurality of spheres of existence, while not inherently democratic, does open up the range of rhetorical actions available to publics. Most notably, the networked public sphere allows more publics to be accessible to a greater range of participants. This is not solely because these new public texts circulate on the internet but also because they drive

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121. John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1995), 236.

122. Papacharissi, *Affective Publics,* 119.

123. Pfister, *Networked Media,* 178.

124. The ability to be excluded from active publicity is what Iris Young theorizes as the most productive contemporary conception of private/privacy. Iris Marion Young, *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 338.

125. Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (New York: Verso, 2013), 89.

126. Papacharissi, *Affective Publics,* 72.

other media production. In many cases, conversations started in the networked public sphere migrate to traditional media, helping to set and drive the agenda of more traditional politics.[127] Not only have blogs forced responses from traditional politicians and mainstream media, but, more recently, memes have shaped political debate. The meme "Texts from Hillary" gained such cache in portraying Hillary Clinton as a cool and "bad ass" candidate that the Clinton campaign submitted their own iterations to the blog that popularized the meme (Figure 1.11).[128] This move highlights the power of memes to drive other media. In this sense, memes are engaging other publics and shaping their relations to political events. In practice, they seem to be influencing public opinion.[129]

Figure 1.11: The original "Text from Hillary Meme" (left), the campaign's response (right).

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127. Pfister, *Networked Media,* 4.

128. Megan Garber, "Hilary Clinton Responds to Her Meme…With a Meme," *The Atlantic* (April 10, 2012), http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2012/04/hillary-clinton-responds-to-her-meme-with-a-meme/255698/.

129. I engage public opinion recognizing that it is traditionally rooted in a representational logic that is oppositional to the concept of more radical democracy (such as the multitude). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Time of Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 263. However, as public opinion is central to understandings of the force of rhetoric and publics, it is a concept I must engage. Consequently, when engaging the concept, I am not referring to the public opinion that reduces singularities to a singular people. Rather, I am interested in opinions of publics. As publics are fluid and multiple, they do not confine their participants to singular representative subjectivities. Any singular participant can engage a multiplicity of public opinions, via different publics, at any given time. Rather these opinions are simply a manifestation of the collective production of singularities engaged around a particular text.

Memes and Public Opinion

As part of the vernacular expression of participants in the networked public sphere, memes provide an avenue for publics to form that directly comment on and direct public opinion. Specifically, the flexibility of memes allows for easy yet profound political commentary because they open incongruous readings of events and ideologies that allow political commentary and beg deliberation.[130] The aforementioned meme referenced by Carson used a quotation, misattributed to Stalin, which sought to link the Democratic Party's rhetoric with cold-war anti-American rhetoric (Figure 1.4). In this case, the form of the meme allowed it to produce an exaggeration of a political party that seemed antagonistic to patriotic Americans. Carson's repetition of the meme's text highlights that as a meme's circulation expands it enfolds evermore participants into their constituted public. Further, circulation increases a meme's chances of intertextually linking to other public discourse. Carson's invoking of the meme allowed it to jump contexts, from a closed audience of conservative social media to the debate stage and mainstream news media. Once connected to larger political institutions, memes can serve to "connect and critique."[131] Specifically, because they often focus on micropolitical issues, memes are able to disrupt dominant narratives by turning attention to ways that identity, relationships, and consumptive practices exist outside these dominant logics.[132] For example, within the highly censored media atmosphere of China, memes are often able to sneak by censors. This ability to evade censorship allows these seemingly trivial

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130. Knobel and Lankshear, *New Literacies,* 218.

131. Benjamin Burroughs and Gavin Fuller, "Religious Memetics: Institutional Authority in Digital/Lived Religion," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 39 no. 4 (2015): 359.

132. Johnson, "Mapping," 38.

texts to voice perspectives with the potential to rupture the hegemonic voice of dominant media.[133] While many western nations lack the overt censorship of China, the seeming banality of memes still allows them to offer alternative viewpoints that may not gain traction in more traditional media environments.

This constitution of political identities also extends beyond the commentary offered by a particular meme. While emerging within a particular election cycle as a commentary on the sexual politics of the Romney campaign and the Republican Party, the Binders Full of Women meme lives beyond the 2012 elections. The meme itself is no longer specifically germane to electoral politics, yet the public created around it remains politically active. Rentschler and Thrift note that as of 2015 the Facebook page built around this meme

> has become a place to post news stories and discuss current US politics, Hillary Clinton's candidacy for the US presidency, state passage of gay marriage laws, and gender issues on the Internet, among other topics. In the first day of posts, a contributor shared a link to an 11 April 2012 report from the National Women's Law Center on the racialization and regionalization of the wage gap between women and men.[134]

Certainly, this public is larger than the meme that inspired it, and that is exactly the point. Memes encourage participants to form publics around particular shared interests following the form, content, and stance of the meme.[135] Much as a traditional public

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133. An Xiao Mina, "Batman, Pandaman, And The Blind Man: A Case Study in Social Change Memes and Internet Censorship in China," *Journal of Visual Culture* 13 no. 3 (2014): 362.

134. Carrie A. Rentschler and Samantha C. Thrift, "Doing Feminism in The Network: Networked Laughter and The 'Binders Full of Women' Meme," *Feminist Theory* 16 (2015): 22.

135. Shifman clarifies that content refers to the ideational and ideological content of the meme, form to the physical iteration (although I use this term even here in a more Burkean sense), and stance referrers to the "information memes convey about their own communication" which "depict the ways in which addressors position themselves in relation to the [meme]." Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture,* 51. Therefore, when I refer to stance I am drawing attention to the ways a particular memes orient participants to participate in the form and content. Stance lets us know if a meme should be read literally or ironically,

speech turns the crowd into an audience; the meme's constituted public unifies

participants who otherwise may never connect in networked spaces, creating a public that

is capable of engaging in larger political action. Moreover, memes such as Binders Full

of Women have the potential to sustain political interest because they are never complete.

Rather, their very nature as proairetic texts demands further dialogue and participation in

the political conversations enacted through the meme.[136] The political potential arising

from seemingly trivial texts leads Shifman to conclude, "Bad texts make good memes in

contemporary participatory culture."[137]

Finding Bad Texts: On Method and the Scope of This Project

If bad texts do indeed make good memes, the following questions emerge: How

does one analyze memes, and, what makes a meme particularly "good" for academic

analysis? Consequently, the remainder of this chapter is dedicated to an elucidation of the

methods of my analysis, principles of selection for determining case studies, and a

preview of those case studies.

Following the observations of Barry Brummett, I eschew the application of a

methodology independent of my theoretical framework.[138] Brummett argues that this

divide, indicative of social scientific research, is neither possible nor practical in the

realm of rhetorical studies. Instead, Brummett posits that theory contains method; for

example, when using the artistic proofs or Burkean dramatism, the theoretical concepts

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and in doing so directs the relationship between a public and the ideological content of both a meme's form and particular iterations.

136. Shifman "Anatomy," 198.

137. Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture*, 86.

138. Barry Brummett, "Rhetorical Theory as Heuristic and Moral: A Pedagogical Justification," *Communication Education* 33 (1984), 99.

that drive the inquiry also provide concepts (*ethos,* scapegoating, etc.) to unpack the forces that drive the rhetorical artifact.[139] Thus, I turn to the theoretical insights of Bernard Stiegler to evaluate memes. Stiegler's focus on the ways that communicative technologies – such as memes – are central to the creation of subjects and publics makes it a useful framework for evaluating the ways that memes reposition participants in relation to political issues. Specifically, Stiegler's concept of transindividuation explains the co-constitutive relationship between individuals, collectives, and technologies. This theory can thus explain both how and why memes circulate, as well as the force that circulation exerts. However, since Stiegler does not have a fully rhetorical sensibility, I will supplement this theory with rhetorical concepts such as perspective by incongruity, narrative, and myth, which can help explain how rhetorical forces drive transindividuation. The second chapter of this dissertation is therefore dedicated to outlining these theoretical concepts and their relationship to memes.

However, just because the focus on rhetorical theory does not explicitly foreground methodology does not mean it is without method or rigor. Brummett notes that rhetorical "method uses ordinary skills of research such as reading, library techniques, etc., as guided by the extraordinary sensibilities given to one by the theory."[140] Similarly, Burke argues good criticism always begins with a close read of a text, focusing on prominent themes and the relationships and antagonisms between these themes. [141] Once these relationships are established, I use theoretical concepts to establish the force and nature of these relationships. Therefore, I begin my analysis with close

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139. Ibid., 100.

140. Ibid., 99.

141. Burke, *Philosophy*, 19-35.

reads of the generic form and various iterations of particular memes, as well as their circulation within particular controversies. I turn to internet archives, such as *Know Your Meme*, to establish the history of particular memes, and use Google Analytics and press coverage to determine their circulation in relation to particular times and controversies. These initial readings then provide the foundations to utilize a rhetorically-inflected reading of Stiegler to explain these phenomena.

The concept of individuation – explicated in the following chapter – has implications for the analysis of memes. Because memes are iterations emerging out of a preindividual formal state, the criticism of memes cannot simply focus on their particular iterations. To do so would ignore both their individuating potential as well as their larger social force. Paolo Virno notes that when dealing with processes of individuation, the individual should never be the center of the investigation, both because they emerge from the preindividual and because they never exhaust the preindividual.[142] In this context, no single iteration of a meme can illustrate the full capacity of a meme. Instead, the critic must turn to the meme itself as the beginning of the analysis, before then using the individuating iterations to understand contextually based changes and manifestations.

In a practical sense, this focus on pre-individual modes means a foregrounding of form.[143] However, a critic must be careful to not suggest that form is rigid, nor that it fully determines the force of a particular iteration. First of all, transindividuation assures that the form changes in each individuation as much as the form dictates the individual iteration. Second, a single formal appetite may not be the only force driving a particular

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142. Paolo Virno, "Angels and The General Intellect: Individuation in Duns Scotus and Gilbert Simondon," *Parrhesia* 7 (2009): 60.

143. Jenkins, "The Modes of Visual Rhetoric," 448.

process of individuation. Any given meme may exist at the intersection of multiple

forms. Therefore, an awareness of an iteration existing at the interplay of multiple modes

enables a fuller understanding of the individuating potential of any meme and its

iterations. This does not mean that any one study must focus exclusively on a singular

meme but rather that a critic should not explore iterations of memes without prior

consideration of how their form enabled their particular individuation.

In the process of trying to explore the capacity of memes to demonstrate the

potential of networked media as a democratic counter to technocratic control, I plan to

turn to three case studies. I chose these case studies because they highlight the

individuating capacities of memes in political contexts. Specifically, I identified three

instances where memetic publics were explicitly responding to technocratic rhetorics and

their drive towards what Stiegler calls "proletarianization," the transformation of

individuals from political actors to passive consuming subjects.[144] The first case study

focuses on the genesis and evolution of Old Economy Steve. This affords an analysis of

the changing individuations of a particular meme while responding to the ways that the

rhetorics of economic used by technocrats frame consumption as the only relation

between consumers and the economic. Conversely, in the other case studies, participants

redeploy popular memes to respond to political controversies – the NSA leak scandal and

the Russian ban on memes. Not only do these cases help to demonstrate how the forms of

memes may be reindividuated to comment on new political forces – creating new publics

– but in doing so they demonstrate how memes exist as repositories of common

knowledge, ready to be deployed in new rhetorical contexts.

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144. Bernard Stiegler, "Suffocated Desire, or How the Cultural Industry Destroys the Individual:
Contribution to A Theory of Mass Consumption," *Parrhesia* 13 (2011): 54-5.

The first case study focuses on the ways that the meme "Old Economy Steve" responds to the bureaucratization of economic messages during the aftermath of the "Great Recession."[145] In an effort to manage the economy, technocrats, such as the officials of the Federal Reserve, promoted a rhetoric that dehumanizes individuals by rhetorically repositioning them as tools in the service of the economy. The "Old Economy Steve" meme challenges this orientation. By enthymememematically creating a narrative that challenges the myth of the American dream, the iterations of the meme combine to offer a narrative that the economy failed younger generations. This conclusion is created by juxtaposing conditions of life under a late industrial economy with those under the control economy that prompted the recession. This juxtaposition is a potent illustration of Stiegler's politics of care because it searches for a more caring industrial economy by relating of individual stories of economic woe to a larger social struggle. In this sense, it demonstrates the capability of memes to re-politicize proletarianized subjectivities. Beyond this potential, this particular case study is useful for elaborating on the rhetorical importance of form in the process of individuation. Because this study focuses on the evolution of a single meme, not only does it focus on the individuation of the particular iteration studied, but it also focuses on transindividuation that occurs across iterations of the memes. This case study shows both how form acts and is acted upon.

The second case focuses on memes circulating in reaction to Edward Snowden's leak regarding NSA domestic spying programs. Here, the technocratic rhetoric of the

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145. Although the "great recession" only technically lasted from 2007-2009 under technical definitions of recession, even officials from the Federal Reserve recognize that its effects lasted well into the following decade. John Weinberg, "The Great Recession and Its Aftermath," *Federal Reserve History* (December 3, 2013), http://www.federalreservehistory.org/Period/Essay/15.

NSA provides a narrative of security and accusations of Snowden's treason designed to foreclose alternative rhetorical individuations. However, networked rhetorics responded with a variety of memes that included parodies of the Verizon "can you hear me now" slogan, as well as memes reframing the alleged treason of Snowden. Further, a range of popular memes like Overly Attached Girlfriend and Annoyed Picard were used to comment on the controversy. As each of these memes provides a different affective casting of the controversy, this case provides an opportunity to expand explorations of the role the ironic plays in individuation, especially irony's potential to create a range of potentialities that subjectivities must then negotiate. Such a case expands understandings of the democratic potential of memes as they create the space for multiple perspectives by incongruities. This not only allows for the democratic transindividuation of a particular preindividual state, but the creation of multiple individuations related to a particular controversy that then must be democratically reconciled.

The final case study focuses on Russian efforts to limit the political use of memes. Specifically, after a range of negative memetic reactions to Russian foreign and domestic policy, memes were denied the status of protected speech through a Roskomnadzor social media post clarifying existing defamation laws. Not surprisingly, digitally networked participants responded to this effort at curtailing communication with even more memes. Aside from being a demonstration of the inability of technocrats to control the production and force of memes, these memes highlight the particular power of the amateur creation of narratives. While each of these cases feature amateur meme production, these Russian memes are the re-articulation of a specific and focused control-based narrative regarding the authority of Vladimir Putin. In this context, they are not simply memes that emerge

from collective (rather than technical) expertise, but rather the direct transformation of what Stiegler calls a grammatizing *hypomnemata* into a participatory amateur form. Moreover, despite the Russian political context, many of the memes around this controversy were in English. This chapter then has the potential to answer questions such as: what does memeing about control one does not experience, and may not be replicable in one's own culture, do to the individuating process in each context? And how does American memeing about Russian politics change the movements of individuation within that culture?

From these case studies, this dissertation concludes by considering what unique affordances memetic technics provide for contemporary rhetorical culture. Specifically, their reliance on rhetorical forms grounded in irony uniquely empowers modes of individuation that are particularly suited to resisting the proletarianizing forces that drive contemporary control. Moreover, this accelerated individuation enabled by digital technics suggests that digital politics are driven by a multitudinous subjectivity. As every participant in a meme can democratically alter the form, these memes become the common manifestation of these participants. They are the argumentative and affective product of the collective negotiated structures of feelings of networked publics. Combined, these features enable memes to function as critics who offer a new vision of politics. A politics where digital participants can reshape politics and participate in technics, revitalizing the potential of democracy that is stifled by control.

Chapter 2

Individuation, Identification, and Imitation: Toward a Theory of Memes

As is common to the life of the doctoral student, one of the most frequent

questions I am asked is "what is your dissertation about?" Not wanting to bog down my

interlocutors in complex orations about the changing nature of rhetoric in networked

media ecologies and the potential of politics in an era of control, I often simply reply

"memes."[146] In such conversations, two responses are the most common: "that sounds

fun" and "they will let you study that?" While both are (usually) well-meaning jabs built

around stereotypes about esoteric research subjects, they also hint at a cultural skepticism

about the seriousness of memes. Rather than forms of consequential political discourse,

many view memes as a trivial and juvenile fad of online banter.

This view of memes as a fad of digital culture led to arguments that their

popularity is waning. Specifically, Nick Douglas proclaimed the specific genre of the

Advice Animal dead.[147] Douglas argues that these memes originated as part of a "cool"

web native culture but that they have been supplanted by a "post-meme" that is

reminiscent of pre-networked cartoon merchandize. These memes, which appeal to

participants that are not embedded in native network discourses, have taken over

Facebook and large social media venues. These memes lack the adaptability and required

social knowledge of traditional image macros. Instead they rely on popular figures such as

Garfield (Figure 2.1), Calvin (from Calvin and Hobbes), and Minions. For Douglas, post-

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146. When speaking of control society, I draw primarily from Gilles Deleuze's writings on the subject of the intensification of biopower under conditions of contemporary politics. Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations: 1972-1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995). The emergence and nature of control society will be further explored later in this chapter.

147. Nick Douglas, "Facebook Moms Run the Meme Game," *The Message* (July 7, 2015), https://medium.com/message/god-tier-facebook-moms-run-the-meme-game-1e56ef0d31ec#.b41trdl80.

memes are the consumer friendly and content light version of the meme, reminiscent of pre-digital window decals and bumper stickers sold as kitsch. They facilitate participation by older, more conservative, and religious, participants in networked media ecologies. In this way, they serve as a foil to the traditional Advice Animal, which is rooted in the irreverence of places like 4chan and Reddit where they originated.

Figure 2.1.: Example of a post-meme.

Although Douglas does identify a rising trend within meme usage, his concerns regarding the future creativity and impact of memes are not warranted. Initially, while Douglas' theory of "post-memes" gained traction across social media, these variants are neither banal nor without impact. The meme that inspired Ben Carson to wrongly quote Joseph Stalin in a presidential debate is one kind of rhetorically impactful post-meme. Moreover, the Advice Animal is certainly not dead. Instead, they have become a sort of *lingua franca* of networked rhetorical production. Never immensely popular on the highly corporatized platform of Facebook, this family of memes continues to circulate on venues like 4Chan, Reddit, and Tumblr – sites populated by younger participants. The social influence of these memes is such that the form based logic of communicating with text over pictures of bodies in some kind of affective state dominates many emerging media

forms. For example, Snapchat, currently one of the most popular modes of networked communication, allows participants to quickly transform their daily experiences into images akin to Advice Animals.[148]

However, this tension between the Advice Animal and the post-meme is more than simply a generational difference; it is representative of a larger political struggle facing contemporary rhetorical ecologies. While networked media have the ability to evoke the political potential within the creative individuation of networked publics, the program industry – Bernard Stiegler's updating of the culture industry for hyper-industrial times – constantly works to re-territorialize these technologies into mass consumable texts that reify individuals into "herd-like" consumers.[149] Viewed in this light, memes are far more than an outdated or trivial web discourse – although as this chapter seeks to prove, their comic nature is part of their political potential. Moreover, if memes seem juvenile, it is because they do not fit within more so-called mature genres of political discourse dominated by political elites and corporate interests. Consequently, memes work to oppose more traditional rhetorical genres, which many dissatisfied participants criticize as out of touch or even anathema to the political values of participants in the networked public sphere.

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148. Logan Hill, "The New Media is Made of Memes," *Backchannel,* (March 7, 2016), https://backchannel.com/the-new-media-is-made-of-memes-572216e71716#.zcnpseiaa.

149. Stiegler, "Suffocated Desire," 57. Stiegler borrows these ideas heavily from Horkheimer and Adorno. However, he does so with the explicit goal to "revise and strengthen their work in the light of the technical and economic developments that have taken place since they wrote." Johann Rossouw "Translator's Introduction," in Bernard Stiegler, "Suffocated Desire, or How the Cultural Industry Destroys the Individual: Contribution to A Theory of Mass Consumption," *Parrhesia* 13 (2011): 53. To see the basis of the culture industry thesis see Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2007), 94-136.

By no means are memes the only technology, symbolic or otherwise, contributing to this realignment of political discourses. However, they are a representative anecdote for how amateurs generate participatory, vernacular symbolic activities to create a subversive political subjectivity under the conditions of control society. Recognizing the significance of this struggle, this chapter is dedicated to articulating the social and political significance of memes under contemporary political conditions. This chapter proceeds in four parts. First, rather than viewing memes as a historical idiosyncrasy, I position memes as a networked manifestation in a longer tradition of participatory vernacular politics. Next, I examine how the emergence of control society has moved political struggle from questions of candidates and speeches to a struggle between bureaucrats and networked publics. Third, I explore how Bernard Stiegler's commentaries on control, particularly their focus on technics, individuation, and care, open a space for memes as politically productive. Finally, as Stiegler lacks a fully rhetorical sensibility, I turn to the conceptual vocabulary of rhetoric – particularly that of Kenneth Burke – as a complement to these more contemporary critical theories.

The Tradition of Visual Participatory Politics

The residue of the bourgeois public sphere is apparent in the long valorization of traditional oratorical public address and mass news media as the avenues for consequential political discourse. However, the rational argumentation of these forms has never been the sole contribution to political rhetoric. Rather, visual participatory rhetoric serves as an alternative to traditional political discourse. For example, through an analysis of the political nature of art, Murray Edelman posits that while aesthetic compositions may contain less specific political warrants than traditional political discourse. This

vagueness has the potential to help deliberation move beyond disputes of policy. Instead, the aesthetic shifts focus towards more fundamental questions of social politics. Specifically, for Edelman, art "excites minds and provokes attention. It creates new realities and this promotes reflection."[150] Aesthetically focused rhetoric prompts participants to reflect on larger social issues. Specifically, the aesthetic can frame participants' evaluations of the worth and morality of particular political projects by commenting on the underlying perceptions and beliefs that motivate political action.[151]

Beyond engaging in meta-politics, art attunes participants to the consequences of politics as a socially, rather than individually, driven phenomenon. Edelman notes:

> That art is always a social product, never an individual fabrication, also means that it can both buttress democratic institutions and serve as a potent weapon for elites. The ideas that issue from works of art reflect group interests, as do the particular channels through which art becomes available to a susceptible public.[152]

Although aesthetic politics are a product of social negotiation, much like memes, it is important to recall that they are easily coopted because this sociality is comprised of fragmented texts. Aesthetic political struggles often focus on the legitimacy of and control over participants' expression, rather than simple contestation of particular argumentative premises. As a form of communication firmly rooted in aesthetic production, memes' political functions tend towards meta-commentary and social evaluation.

The Varied Forms and Forces of Proto-Memes

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150. Murray Edelman, *From Art to Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1995), 143.

151. Ibid., 9

152. Ibid., 144

While memes may be one of the newest and most intense forms of visual participatory rhetoric, they are not an entirely new phenomenon. Instead, they emerged as an extension of varied participatory visual rhetorics. This history reaches all the way back to cave paintings and pictograms; however, I focus on a few of their prominent 20th century precursors, as these offer the most direct link to the contemporary form and force of memes.

Although aesthetic rhetorics are traditionally juxtaposed against more rational forms, political cartoons represent a long memetic tradition. Within the newspapers that Habermas argues fueled the public sphere, political cartoons rely more on intertextual understanding, aesthetic and formal qualities, and affective force than the expected rationality of the public sphere.[153] In this capacity, these cartoons function as a sort of proto-meme. For example, despite the term "Fat Cat" originating in an editorial, its translation into visual form allowed it to serve as a memetic distillation of the populist distrust of the wealthy.[154] In this case, the ability to visualize the concept increased its capability to function as a site of social negotiation of values. Although memes circulate more easily because of their digital form, popular iterations of cartoons were (and still are) clipped out of newspapers, shared with friends and colleagues, and posted on cubicle walls and office doors. This ability to circulate outside of the context of their initial iteration suggests a longer prehistory of memetic forms with distinct social uses.

The ability to recirculate reproductions of these images demonstrates the participatory element of pictorial political art, yet other historical analogues highlight the

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153. Dann L Pierce, "Cultural Molding of a Provocative Rhetor: Thomas Nast and Graphic Persuasion," *Journal of the Northwest Communication Association* 26 no 1 (1998): 56.

154. David G. Farber, *Sloan Rules: Alfred P. Sloan and the Triumph of General Motors* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 117.

power of increased aesthetic participation within politics. For example, beyond

functioning as *topoi* within the context of traditional electoral politics, the previously

referenced pinback button functions as a proto-meme. These buttons, which distill broad

campaigns to fragmented visual and textual slogans, provide political participants a way

to externalize their identifications with individual policies and political affiliations.[155]

Moreover, pins often feature pictures of candidates, expanding their discursive force

beyond words. Thus, they more explicitly open electoral politics to the force of

representation of bodies and their affects. Further, the variety of available pins allows

participants to express a range of identifications, moving between political communities.

Consequently, the success of particular buttons may best be explained memetically. The

strength of an identification directly relates to the willingness of a larger community to

circulate and identify with the distilled message.[156] The pins served as memes, albeit ones

created by political elites to foster political identification with participants who posted

them on their bodies.

Bumper stickers provide another example of political fragments circulating

memetically. Usually a combination of images and slogans, bumper stickers often distill

politics into slogans that are easy to understand via their vernacular roots and use of

intertextual references.[157] Like internet memes, these messages are easy for participants

to circulate because of the low cost of replication. They make political rhetoric mobile,

transforming cars, laptops, dorm room doors, and other objects by rendering these

155. Madsen and Fritch, "100 Million," 196

156. Ibid., 198

157. Linda Renee Bloch, "Setting the Public Sphere in Motion: The Rhetoric of Political Bumper Stickers in Israel," *Political Communication* 17 (2000): 436.

ostensibly non-political locations political.[158] While their memetic potential can define

their success, much like pinbacks, they are still products of political parties and

companies. Although participants can reinterpret and redirect this force, this institutional

grounding denies them the full participatory potential of contemporary internet memes.

Traditional visual art such as political cartoons and mass produced texts such as

stickers and buttons represent more established (read: bourgeois) manifestations of

participatory visual political rhetoric. These forms highlight the power of circulating

simple fragments; however, more anti-establishment forms of aesthetic political rhetoric

demonstrate the tradition of participation and irreverence that manifests in contemporary

internet memes. Forums like Reddit and Tumblr provide locations where participants can

directly compare and discuss memes; however, much of the mobilization of memes is as

posts in comment threads across the internet. One of the defining rhetorical

characteristics of memes is their ability to impose themselves onto established rhetorical

texts. This imposing nature of memes also stems from a pre-digital rhetorical tradition.

As mobile sources of communally negotiated meaning posted onto other

rhetorics, graffiti may be one of the most natural predecessors to the logic of

contemporary internet memes. Although similarly denigrated as juvenile, graffiti has an

undeniable history as a politically important mode of communication. Graffiti tags not

only function to negotiate social and spatial identity throughout urban areas but also

played important roles in negotiating political struggles in such locations including

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158. Ibid., 433.

Bosnia, the West Bank Wall, and Northern Ireland.[159] Adrienne de Ruiter argues that the

appeal of street art lies

> in its ability to function simultaneously as a medium of communication
> and a contentious performance, combined with the particular power of the
> aesthetic to change conceptions of social reality of the audience through
> what Rancière has called the '(re)distribution of the sensible.' Graffiti and
> street art thus present artists with singular possibilities to express their
> political ideas and appeal to the public because street art combines the
> power of framing, the power of performance and the power of
> imagination.[160]

As both resistive performance (defacing public space) and articulation of particular

ideological views, graffiti allows for a wide range of political expressions. Much like

memes, this range of expressions led to a wide range of graffiti genres, including art

graffiti, slogans, gang, and private graffiti.[161] The implementation and integration of

varied generic norms changes the ways that participants attend to particular iterations of

graffiti. The same piece of street art will have vastly different understandings based on

community relations. Moreover, as the process of graffiti often obfuscates the identity of

authors, much like memes, the publics built around graffiti exist as an "affiliation

between strangers with temporary bonds."[162] By mobilizing these community

connections to express social values and unexpressed political concerns, graffiti provides

159. Adrienne de Ruiter, "Imagining Egypt's Political Transition in (Post-) Revolutionary Street Art: On The Interrelations Between Social Media and Graffiti as Media of Communication," *Media, Culture & Society* 37 no. 4 (2015): 582.

160. Ibid., 581.

161. Nick Lynn and Susan J Lea, "'Racist' Graffiti: Text, Context and Social Comment," *Visual Communication* 4 no. 1 (2005): 41.

162. Caitlin Bruce, "Public Surfaces beyond the Great Wall: Communication and Graffiti Culture in China," *Invisible Culture* 15 (2010): http://ivc.lib.rochester.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Public-Surfaces-Beyond-the-Great-Wall_-Communication-and-Graffiti-Culture-in-China-_-InVisible-Culture.pdf.

an avenue for a "vernacular creativity" that directly translates into the social logic of memes.[163]

As technological improvements allowed the internet to surface as *the* site for the rapid circulation of varied textual, visual, and video materials, it has served to unify the methods of proto-memetic technologies. Specifically, as technological developments made it easier for participants to not only post images and video but also edit and remix them, networked rhetorics have centered on "replication, repetition, and reiteration."[164] With this focus, varied digital memes have become platforms for aesthetic production rooted in an *ethos* of participation and play. For example, the *Downfall* videos – a series of parodic videos all based on a single scene in the Nazi era war drama *Downfall*[165] – offered participants the capacity to parody not only specific controversies but also a larger culture of seriousness.[166] Participants placed their own subtitles over the video of an outraged Hitler to express their frustration with FIFA, gamer culture, politics, and even the *Downfall* parodies themselves. One of the first YouTube videos to receive the full memetic treatment, the circulation of these videos is emblematic of the larger rhetorical shift enabled by networked technologies. Like pins and bumper stickers, these videos allow participants to proclaim ideological affiliations and to impose outside messages on official rhetorics through graffiti-esque posts on message boards and

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163. Ben Light, Marie Griffiths and Sian Lincoln, "'Connect and Create': Young People, YouTube and Graffiti Communities," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 26, no. 3 (2012), 343.

164. Christopher J Gilbert, "Playing with Hitler: Downfall and its Ludic uptake," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 30 no. 5 (2013): 409.

165. *Downfall,* directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel (2004, Munich, Constantin Film Produktion, 2004), DVD.

166. Gilbert, "Playing with Hitler," 413.

comment threads. While internet memes are certainly a new genre, they are the product of a range of previous rhetorical traditions and technologies.

<div align="center">A Note on Triviality and Play</div>

Beyond being precursors to the digital meme, these proto-memes share another common characteristic: the ease of their dismissal within discussions of "serious" politics. For many, buttons, cartoons, stickers, graffiti, and memes are simple, irreverent, and lacking in deeper meaning. Combined, these traits make it easy to frame them as a poor substitute for formal public debate: popular frames position play, graffiti, guerrilla theatre, and online performance as native to youth, criminals, or artistic weirdos, not respectable public citizens. In short, the popular imagination dismisses this entire tradition as childish and idle curiosities.

However, in an exploration of the nature of politics in a post-Fordist era, Paolo Virno claims that neither of these are liabilities. Virno argues that childishness has important political utility in struggling against the political exploitation and stagnation inherent to state driven representational politics. Virno questions the deprecatory tone used with the dismissal of childish rhetorical genres, noting, "it might be worth it to ask ourselves if there is something of consistency (in short, a kernel of truth) in the connection between metropolitan life and childhood."[167] Specifically, Virno argues that for children, "Repetition is understood as a protective strategy in the face of the shock caused by new and unexpected experiences."[168] However, Virno notes this repetition can be equally useful for adults. Furthermore, playing childish (rhetorical) games creates common symbolic spaces within which participants form larger social connections. In

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167. Virno, *Grammar,* 39.

168. Ibid.

this way, to play with communication might just be key to Deleuze's call to "hijack

speech" as these games break the universializing drive of communication, instead

individuating participants within localized, less controlling collectivities.[169] Just as the

childish repetition of a word helps a baby understand itself within a particular linguistic

milieu, the childish recirculation of buttons or graffiti enables participants to understand

themselves as part of a community. Thus to paraphrase Virno, memes may have

"something childish in [them]: but this something is as serious as can be."[170]

Virno similarly argues for the valorization of the idleness of communication.

When the classical and modern rhetorical traditions valorize "meaningful" speeches and

so called substantive discourse, they reduce idle fragments to mere chatter. Martin

Heidegger, in theorizing the problems of "idle talk," admonishes such speech, claiming

its fleeting and potentially vacuous nature detaches itself from deeper investigation.[171]

However it is precisely in this divorce from substantive speech that idle talk has profound

power. Virno notes,

> Communication, instead of reflecting and transmitting that which exists,
> itself produces the states of things, unedited experiences, new facts. I am
> tempted to say that idle talk resembles *background noise*: insufficient in
> and of itself (as opposed to noises linked to particular phenomena, such as
> running a motorbike or a drill), yet it offers a sketch from which the
> significant variances, unusual modulations, sudden articulations can be
> derived.[172]

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169. Gilles Deleuze, "Control and Becoming," in *Negotiations: 1972-1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 175.

170. Virno, *Grammar*, 40.

171. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 212.

172. Virno, *Grammar,* 90,

The seeming banality of memes, graffiti, etc. is precisely what makes them of political

consequence. As Kenneth Burke notes, the power of community negotiation is unlikely to

come from "one particular address;" rather, it resides in "trivial repetition and dull daily

reinforcement."[173] Consequently, the ubiquity of memes not only establishes the

normative conditions of symbolic behavior but in doing so also creates a backdrop

against which changes in the symbolic landscape become apparent. Such idleness may

seem oppositional to modes of "intellectual learning," yet Virno argues that this

distracted idleness empowers "sensory learning."[174] It creates spaces where participants

may both feel and experience politics, rather than only thinking them through. Memes, in

being both childish and idle, are demonstrative of alternative modes of politics enabled

by participatory vernacular aesthetic production. Thus as products of the tradition of

participatory visual rhetorics, the political force of memes is emblematic of a

fundamental shift in the nature of politics where elections and deliberation are no longer

central.[175] Instead the alternative politics of subjectification through performance and

symbolic renegotiation have emerged as central in contemporary life. To fully understand

this shift, I now turn to an explanation of the shift in modes of power that predicated this

change – the emergence of control society and the resultant politics of individuation.

Technocrats and the Emergence of Control Society

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173. Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 26

174. Virno, *Grammar*, 93.

175. The performative politics of 60's era groups like the Yippies as well as increasing use of culture jamming are indicative of this shift.

Drawing on Foucault's genealogy of the shifts from sovereign, to disciplinary, to biopolitical regimes of power, Gilles Deleuze famously posited the rise of control society in 1990. While Deleuze's comments on control are seen to be enigmatic and sometimes conflicting with the theorist's prior writings, the central claim is that contemporary modes of capitalistic production have intensified the biopolitical regime of power to the point that its very nature has changed. Under control society power is increasingly diffuse and mobile, no longer bearing down on populations but rather on modulating each subjectivity through their relation to consumption.[176] Control society emerges as a consequence of the real subsumption of labor: capitalism has found ways to valorize almost every waking and even many sleeping moments.[177] Under the logic of control, where capitalism works to manage subjectivities across interactions, the very nature of subjectivity then becomes the location of political struggle.[178]

My interest in control society stems from the fact that memes in general, and stock character macros specifically, are both native to, and operate under, the logics of control society. However, this does not mean that they are without subversive potential. Specifically, memes often operate in opposition to the technocratic rhetorics that are central to biopower. Therefore, before further detailing the regime of power that is control, I first turn to the conditions of biopower from which it emerged.

Biopolitical Technocrats

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176. Deleuze, "Control and Becoming,", 174-5.

177. Crary, *24/7,* 14. Although Crary notes that the trend of neoliberalism is to diminish sleep and similar restful moments, mobile apps that track sleep patterns and other health data are examples of how even these moments are transformed into data that may be valorized and traded as a commodity.

178. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2009), 172.

Understanding biopower is not only useful because it created the conditions for control but also because discourses and institutions of the biopolitical regime of power – such as bureaucratic agencies – continue to exert considerable rhetorical sway.[179] As a regime of power, biopower is not interested in placing boundaries on particular lives, but rather regulating the production of life itself. Focused on the conditions of the continued production of life, biopower is no longer interested in containing the individual, but rather maintaining the life of the population as a whole.[180] Biopower extends power beyond particular spatial conditions, as discursive regimes manipulate populations across localities. These discourses are "discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable."[181] Instead, they function through a series of collective relations that can be mobilized to define the conditions under which life may exist, may be reproduced, and who deserves access to life itself.

As biopower is primarily concerned with the regulation of life, bureaucracies managing that life emerge as dominant rhetorical agents in the production of biopolitical

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179. Bernard Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery Volume 1: The Hyper-Industrial Era* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2014), 47. When speaking of the shift from one regime of power to another, I am not suggesting that all vestiges of the prior regime of power disappear. In explaining the rise of biopower, Foucault does not suggest that disciplinary power simply ceases to function. Rather, vestiges of older regimes of power remain both as independent forces and as forces that merge with biopolitical discourses. Raymond Williams explains process with the vocabulary of dominant, emergent, and residual forces. Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," *New Left Review* 83 (1973):10. Within any cultural production, Williams argues that while the dominant form is most evident, considerations of rising and falling forces offer a more complete picture. For example, while industrial labor remains the quantitatively dominant mode of capitalist production, information economics have emerged not only as independent locations of valorization but also as altering the productive foci of factories. Factories can no longer simply focus on commodity output. Instead, following the logic of informational economics, they must also on capitalizing on the knowledge base of their workers through processes like suggestion boxes and bonuses for ideas that increase efficiency. Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 65. Also see Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," in *Negotiations: 1972-1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 179.

180. Michael Foucault, *History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 102.

181. Ibid., 100.

discourses. More specifically, technocrats – the political figureheads of the bureaucracies that regulate human behavior via their deployment of expertise – are central to the construction and circulation of restrictive rhetorics.[182] Murray Edelman notes that while the entirety of the state apparatus is vested in the exercise of power, executive agencies and the bureaucrats who run them make the decisions that directly influence individuals.[183] Consequently, their leaders – appointed technocrats, rather than elected officials – have an influential political voice. They not only marshal their expertise to influence policy making but also engage larger publics to justify their vision for the maintenance of the economy, environment, security apparatus, etc. In their position as the creators and curators of the knowledges that define political life, these technocrats wield expansive force in outlining the average political subject, bureaucratizing them as agents in motion to support the administered apparatus.[184] Further, because biopower focuses on the regulation of populations, it is also reliant on the politics of publics to organize subjectivities into collective populations.

While contemporary biopower empowers technocrats as the rhetorical managers of many dominant publics, contemporary questions about the efficacy of collective civic action enhance the power of technocrats. Across the postindustrial world, critics assert

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182. G. Thomas Goodnight, "The Personal, Technical, and Public Spheres of Argument: A Speculative Inquiry into the Art of Public Deliberation," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 48 (2012): 206.

183. Murray Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 55

184. Burke, *Permanence,* 60. When I use the term subject, I am not referring to the enlightenment notion of a unified, independent human being. Rather the subject is simply a convenient term for the effect of the process of subjectification. Under this view, there are still subjects who engage in particular acts, but these entire conditions must also be understood as a result of larger regimes of power and knowledge.

that civil society has begun to wither under the influence of finance democracy.[185] For example, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell argues that in the United States, "public discourse about issues and candidates financed chiefly by major corporations and fostered by the norms and conventions of commercialized, corporate owned outlets drives other kinds of public discourse out of circulation." [186] Lamenting this increased role of money in American politics, Ronald Green argues that the political economy of political rhetoric provides a barrier to the efficacy of the citizen as a traditional political actor.[187] Electoral politics are increasingly under control of financial elites, all the while government has become increasingly polarized and stagnant. Combined, these factors have emboldened many publics to question traditional politics. For example, citizens looking for politicians outside of this government structure dominated the 2016 political primaries in the United States.[188] In the face of dissatisfaction and polarization, technocrats – with their seemingly non-partisan credentials and technical expertise – are able to exert rhetorical influence above that of traditional politicians.[189] These technocratic actors, although part of a residual regime of power, are some of the only subjectivities that exist at the intersection of social expectations of legitimate and visible power. Thus, even as control moves power to diffuse, non-state, capitalistic forces, many technocrats retain influence

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185. Michael Hardt, "The Withering of Civil Society," *Social Text* 45 (1995): 27.

186. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, ''Marketing Public Discourse,'' *Hedgehog Review* 6 (2004): 48.

187. Greene, "Rhetorical Capital," 328.

188. Matt Herring, "Outsiders' Chance," *The Economist* (January 30, 2016): http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21689539-primary-contest-about-get-serious-it-has-rarely-been-so-ugly-uncertain-or.

189. Goodnight, "Spheres of Argument," 206.

not only through their support of this neoliberal power but also as the only seemingly

functional vestige of governance.[190]

<center>The Emergence of Control Society</center>

As capital faced the limits of expansion under biopolitical regimes, power shifted

away from the state to more elusive and all-encompassing forms – which Deleuze termed

control.[191] Foucault's comments on neoliberalism suggested that the dominant regime of

power was already moving beyond biopower in 1979.[192] In 1990, as neoliberalism began

to settle into the normative mode of power, Deleuze argued that as the primary agents of

neoliberalism, "marketing is now the instrument of social control and produces the

arrogant breed who are our masters. Control is short-term and rapidly shifting, but at the

same time continuous and unbounded."[193] Because they are continuous and market

driven, control societies are not interested in regulating life at the level of population but

rather in reconstructing each subject through their personal consumptive practices. While

biopower used technologies such as the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental

Disorders* to define norms capable of regulating mental states of populations, in control

society, capital now creates books, programs, and products that turn this difference into

pure consumption – masking the larger systematic, social, and capitalistic forces that

exploit this difference.

While the celebration of such diversity seems (and to a certain degree is)

empowering, one of the great capabilities of control society is precisely that it has

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190. Greene, "Rhetorical Capital," 328.

191. Deleuze, "Control and Becoming," 171.

192. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College De France 1978-1979* (New York: Picadore, 2008),259-60.

193. Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," 181.

managed to mask its operation as a regime of power. Bernard Stiegler argues that control

has seemingly de-politicized life despite its intensification of power. Stiegler asserts that,

> A fable has dominated the last decades, and to a large extent deluded
> political and philosophical thought. Told after 1968, it wanted to make us
> believe that we have entered the age of "free time," "permissiveness" and
> the "flexibility" of social structures, in short, the society of leisure and
> individualism. Theorized under the name of the post-industrial society,
> this tale notably influenced and weakened "postmodern" philosophy. It
> inspired the social democrats, claiming that we have passed from an epoch
> of laborious, consumptive masses, which was the industrial age, to the
> time of the middle classes, while the proletariat was supposedly
> disappearing.[194]

This fable is particularly problematic because although the western world embraces this

"free time" – which is often converted into unpaid labor for corporate interests – for

many around the world Deleuze notes, "one thing, it's true, hasn't changed – capitalism

still keeps three quarters of humanity in extreme poverty, too poor to have debts and too

numerous to be confined."[195]

As part of the explanation of the changing nature of power under control society,

Deleuze turns to the language of molds and modulation. Deleuze argues, "confinements

are *molds,* different moldings, while controls are a *modulation,* like a self-transmuting

molding continually changing from one moment to the next, or like a sieve whose mesh

varies from one point to another."[196] The logics of disciplinary society, and even the

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194. Stiegler, "Suffocated Desire," 54.

195. Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," 181. While control is intensifying some capacities of biopower, Deleuze notes that this regime of power is not intrinsically better or worse than biopower. Deleuze argues, "It's not a question of asking whether the old or new system is harsher or more bearable, because there's a conflict in each between the ways they free and enslave us." Ibid. 178. For example, although control increases capital's influence on the time of the consumer, Deleuze argues that the mobility of control challenges the efforts of "technocrats" to establish "uniform administration and rules." Deleuze, "Control and Becoming," 172 The difficulty in confining production and expression under control leads Deleuze to posit that there is potential for resistance in control society. According to him, it is simply a matter of finding new tools. Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," 178.

196. Ibid., 178-79

discourses of biopower, seek to confine individuals into molds, subjectivities that set the

boundaries on normative behavior. Conversely, control society instead refigures

subjectivity within modes. A concept borrowed from Spinoza, Deleuze notes that modes

are "bodies in relational assemblages, in engagement with one another."[197] As

assemblages, modes create the conditions of potential for the directions of particular

affect – the ways that bodies relate to one another, which establishes the ways that they

may affect and be affected.[198] While molds rigidly limit bodies at the level of discursive

population, modes function as the very pre-subjective potentiality that enable a particular

body – as an assemblage of relations – to engage in action.

    Eric Jenkins' conception of memes as modal texts is grounded in an assumption

that memes *can* participate in the logics of control society. Drawing from Deleuze,

Jenkins notes,

> Modes circulate across media platforms, producing a recognizable
> structure that enables the emergence of an open set of images subject to
> continual remaking. The set remains open to further adaptation and
> addition because the virtual mode constitutes a manner of engagement or
> interfacing with images shared by rhetor and audience, a seeing as that
> circulates and thereby shapes both image production and reception. In
> brief, modes will be defined as manners or ways of engaging (image-)
> texts or, alternatively, as relational assemblages, such as the assemblage of
> image, medium, and viewer constituted in the processes of constructing
> and perceiving.[199]

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197. Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco, CA: City Light Books, 1988), 125–26. In this case, Deleuze and Spinoza are not referring to bodies only in the sense of the embodied form of the human or other animals. Rather, they use body in a more expansive sense, referring instead to the varied entities that might relate within a mode.

198. Jenkins, "The Modes of Visual Rhetoric," 443.

199. Ibid.

Under this modal logic, individual iterations of memes exist as parts of a larger modal

assemblage of texts, contexts, and participants. These varied forces work in tandem to

negotiate the form of the meme.

The form created by these larger assemblages centers around modal poles, which

Jenkins describes as essential to the functioning of the memetic assemblage. Poles are the

socially invented formal elements of an assemblage "that limit what is and is not

selected."[200] For example, the meme PTSD Clarinet Kid forms around the pole of the

intense juxtaposition of affective expressions of his two faces as well as the pole of a top

line that sets up an innocent action and the bottom line that takes a dark turn (Figure 2.2).

However, these poles, while reliant on a logic of form, do not refer to rigid boundaries;

rather, they draw on a modified sense of Burkean form. If form for Burke, as I mentioned

before, is "the creation of an appetite in the mind of the auditor, and the adequate

satisfying of that appetite," then memetic forms provide the appetite that the individual

iteration of the meme fulfill.[201] Those iterations of memes, the modal poles of which

actualize a particular affection, meets a particular appetite and will "circulate more

widely thanks to an affected viewer-become-rhetor."[202] Iterations of PTSD Kid whose

text satisfies the affective appetite of participants are the ones that get circulated as

exemplars of the meme.

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200. Ibid., 450.

201. Burke, *Counter-Statement*, 143.

202. Jenkins, "The Modes of Visual Rhetoric," 452. Jenkins argues the focus on modal poles outweighs attention to particular iterations of the meme: Ibid., 445. However, this assertion suggests that the modal poles overdetermine the individual iterations, turning the poles into molds, which denies the broader relationally of the memetic modal assemblage. Instead, working within Deleuze's ontology of becoming, an assemblage exerts force based on the interactions of all of its parts. With each new relation added the assemblage is always already becoming anew. Deleuze, "Control and Becoming," 171-172. Modal poles are but the summation of the relations between individual iterations of a meme and the contexts in which they circulate.

Figure 2.2: The first iteration of PTSD Clarinet Kit (left), a later iteration (right).

Further, both the circulation of existing memes and development of new iterations of a meme alter the assemblage. When participants recirculate the same form of a meme, the repetition of the iteration intensifies its force, driving the particular affective stance of the assemblage.[203] Similarly, the deployment of new iterations, and the subsequent debate over their validity, alters a mode and its poles in their entirety, redefining the force of the meme. Early iterations of PTSD Kid focused almost exclusively on commenting on the horrors of the Vietnam war – suggesting its most profound outcome was PTSD. However, as the meme iterated, bullying, neglect, and general *ennui* all became topics. In this way, subsequent iterations move the modal pole, suggesting that the affect of the photo relates to conditions beyond war.

Although Deleuze theorized control before the so-called internet revolution, the relations afforded by these technologies have only accelerated the rise of control as the dominant regime of power. Specifically, networked technologies increase the reach and speed of the subsumption of human relations into informational capitalism.[204] Put simply:

203. Papacharissi *Affective Publics*, 54.

204. Bernard Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery Volume 2: The Katastrophe of the Sensible* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2015), 48.

it is easier to capitalize a conversation over Facebook messenger than a conversation had while walking down the street. Deleuze notes that new technologies influence the functioning of control; however this theorization avoids technological determinism, arguing, "the machines don't explain anything, you have to analyze the collective apparatuses of which the machines are just one component."[205] Consequently, it is in the face of such technically-enhanced control that the project of resistance becomes the paramount concern of the critic.[206]

Bernard Stiegler and the Evolution of Control

Although influential, Deleuze's theorization of control is remarkably brief and lacks a clear articulation of the forces that empower control as well as the specific techniques of resistance. While colorful, concepts such as hijacking speech[207] or uncoiling the snake of control[208] offer little in the way of a comprehensive political program. Moreover, Deleuze theorized control prior to the emergence of internetworked technologies, which have certainly intensified and altered the functioning of control. In this capacity, I recognize that certainly memes operate within the logics of control; however, Deleuze's theorization fails to provide the theoretical tools needed to explain the rhetorical force of memes. Moreover, while a modal orientation attunes critics to the formal forces that define memes, it does not provide a clear explanation for the relationship between individuated iterations and form and how this interplay shapes memes, drives their circulation, and defines their cultural force.

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205. Deleuze, "Control and Becoming," 175.

206. Pfister, *Networked Media*, 194

207. Deleuze, "Control and Becoming," 175.

208. Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," 182.

Therefore, to better understand not only the way memes function in control society but also how they react to technocratic biopower, I turn to Bernard Stiegler. This turn is apt because Stiegler positions the *Symbolic Misery* series as an explicit commentary on Deleuze's control thesis. While Deleuze was suspicious of communication, Stiegler's focus on the role that technics play in the establishment and maintenance of control is especially suited to opening theoretical space for the rhetorical force of networked communication technologies – such as memes.[209] Further, Stiegler's focus on individuation as an explanation of the interrelation between the individual, social, and technical provides not only a more robust theoretical apparatus for explaining how memes gain their rhetorical force but also greater insight into their capability to impact and drive social evolution. Finally, although Stiegler's concept of the program industry shades towards deterministic readings of media, the interplay between this controlling media environment and the subversive potential of amateur participatory forms serves to illustrate the political struggle between programming technocrats and memetic individuated politics.

In extending Deleuze's control thesis, Stiegler is interested in the ways that the marketing logic of control changes the political capacity of subjectivities. Specifically, Stiegler contends that control created new aesthetics, which "functionalized the affective and aesthetic dimension of the individual so as to produce a consumer."[210] Stiegler warns that control is predicated around the "program industry" – the technologies of mass

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209. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery Vol. 1,* vii.

210. Ibid., 4.

media that work to synchronize consumption to fuel contemporary capitalism.[211] The

drive for synchronicity is particularly problematic for Stiegler because it threatens the

very nature of the political subject. In constructing participants as consumers, they are no

longer an individuating 'I' in relation to a 'we' but rather a "one" dissociated from the

political.[212]

Borrowing from Deleuze's observation that the primary products of capitalism are

"wealth and misery,"[213] Stiegler posits that a sense of "symbolic misery" defines

subjectivities produced by control. Symbolic misery refers to the singularity's inability to

participate in the development of the technics that define contemporary life.[214] Without

collective participation in the individuation of technics, it is easier for dominant

institutions to control bodies and affects, directing them towards consumption.[215]

Consequently, Stiegler not only replicates Deleuze's call to find new weapons but also

expands it to include a range of new technics to challenge control.[216] For Stiegler, the

critical project is the development of concepts that empower the creation of political

subjectivities that are capable of a politics of care, undermining the hyper-individualism

that feeds neoliberalism and control.[217]

While critical of the mass mediated environments of television and popular music

because their bureaucratizing force fuels biopolitical power, Stiegler argues the

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211. Stiegler, "Suffocated Desire," 53.

212. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery Vol. 1.* 6.

213. Deleuze, "Control and Becoming," 172.

214. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery Vol. 2,* 23.

215. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery Vol. 1,* 8.

216. Ibid., 10.

217. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery Vol. 2,* 2.

participatory nature of digital technologies breaks the distance between producer and consumer present in older media.[218] This mobile and ever present mediation certainly has the potential to intensify control; however, writing about the disruptive nature of new technologies, Stiegler insists,

> This rupture is not a rejection of new technical possibilities. On the contrary: it aims to socialize these possibilities, that is, to put them in the service of society, rather than in the service of a destructive 'innovation' founded on disposability, and on the social regression that is its inevitable result; in the services of a social innovation that cultivates that which, in the evolution of the technologies and society that it socializes and concretizes, allows it to take care of the world of its future.[219]

Central to this call for new modes of participation, Stiegler argues that there is potential to restore the individuation that is key to contemporary liberatory politics.[220] Recognizing this potential, Stiegler argues that as contemporary control disrupts individuation, it destabilizes the very potential of a productive political future landscape.[221] However, because they are central to the process of individuation and its political ramifications, I first explore Stiegler's focus on technics.[222]

The Forgotten Importance of Technics

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218. Bernard Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment of the World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 37.

219. Ibid., 24.

220. Following Gilbert Simondon, Virno argues that the power of individuation, the negotiation between a pre-individual milieu and the constant re-emergence of individuated subjects, is the ontological condition of control. Virno, "Angels," 63.

221. Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment,* 96.

222. Although I focus primarily on Stiegler's work, in a sense this project is more deeply indebted to Simondon. Although Simondon's work is just now being translated into and interpreted in English, Simondon was deeply influential on not only Stiegler but also Virno and Deleuze. Although not widely cited in Deleuze, Simondon's influence bears heavily influence. For a thorough analysis of both Simondon's influence on Deleuze as well as the reasons Simondon is not cited in Deleuze see: Andrew Iliadis, "A New Individuation: Deleuze's Simondon Connection," *MediaTropes* 4 (2013): 83-100.

Central to Stiegler's theoretical project is an emphasis on the importance of technics. Stiegler uses the term technology to refer to any externalization of human physical, cognitive, or mnemonic function into an "organized inorganic material form."[223] These technologies are not limited to a vulgar sense of material. While an axe or a computer is a technic – as they externalize physical and mental capacities – so too are language and culture, which are the materials through which memory is externalized, collectivized, and passed on.[224] This concept of technics is particularly suited to memes, as they represent not only digital technology but also an influential form of contemporary communicative and cultural technics.

Stiegler asserts that western thought from Plato to Heidegger largely ignores the role technics play in understanding and creating the world. Stiegler argues these philosophies instead sought to understand the world by focusing primarily on the consciousness of the being.[225] However, Stiegler asserts that a focus on being is short sighted because technics are "ontogenetic." That is, "the identity of an individual emerges from his or her relationship with technics, it does not precede this relationship."[226] In positioning technics as prior to identity and being, every technic is both a connection to "a past that we have never lived" as well as an orientation towards the future. [227]

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223. Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 49.

224. Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment,* 65.

225. Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 3: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 31.

226. Sophie Fuggle, "Stiegler and Foucault: The Politics of Care and Self-writing," in *Stiegler and Technics*, ed. Christina Howells and Gerald Moore (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 204.

227. Christina Howells and Gerald Moore, "Introduction", in *Stiegler and Technics*, ed. Christina Howells and Gerald Moore (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 4.

Technics' connection to the past creates the very possibility of social memory, which

Stiegler argues are tools that we use to adapt to a future as part of an effort to "anticipate

and stave off death."[228] In short, technics situate humans in time.

Through this ability to connect participants to their pasts and futures, technics

give rise to the concept of the human.[229] They serve as an externalized *mnemonic* organ,

providing the enhanced command of memory that Stiegler argues constitutes what we

take to be human.[230] To explain the role of technics in creating humanity, Stiegler turns to

fire as an example of the first technic. Not only did Prometheus' gift separate humans

from other animals, but in the process, it externalized the functionalities of survival

outside the human body.[231] Prior to fire, each human survived only through instinct and

embodied action. However, once given this technic, participants instilled social memories

in the tool – memories of how to make and use fire. Because technics are part of the

nature of humanity, understandings of the human animal are always "constituted in

historical, contingent combinations."[232] If the tools that we use produce our identities, the

historical epoch capable of creating those technics define our very humanness.

Because technics are inherently related to the processes that generate

subjectivities, Stiegler contends that technics are inherently political and aesthetic (which

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228. Ibid.

229. Ibid.

230. This is why Stiegler's conception of human can be said to apply to not only the human animal but also anything with the capacity to create and pass on a sense of collectivity via technics. Gerald Moore, "Adapt and Smile or Die! Stiegler among the Darwinists," in *Stiegler and Technics*, ed. Christina Howells and Gerald Moore (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 22.

231. Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1,* 201.

232. Patrick Crogan, "Experience of the Industrial Temporal Object," in *Stiegler and Technics*, ed. Christina Howells and Gerald Moore (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 117.

Stiegler sees as intimately related).[233] By aesthetics, Stiegler is not referring simply to

"the regional science of 'works of art'," but rather to the range of processes engaged in

the production of the "modalities of sensation."[234] It is at this level of sensation that

aesthetics become political. By attuning participants to particular rhythms of existence,

technics create the capacity to experience the aesthetic.[235] Moreover, the ways that these

rhythms of sensation repeat through difference defines particular modalities of time.[236]

Consequently, aesthetic attunement is political because identifications with this

attunement are the foundation of community: "The extent of our adoption of technics,

namely our access to the technologies through which society operates, is what determines

our ability to participate in the constitution of the institutions and values on which our

artificial environment consists."[237] In short, technics are how participants "make sense"

of the world.

As they fashion the possibility of human action (without placing concrete

boundaries upon it), technics function modally. As modes, technics serve as connecting

nodes that combine individuals into the assemblages that we call communities.[238] This

technical constitution of communities is political because it sets the conditions of

constituting social identity. Beyond this, because particular technics afford certain actions

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233. Serge Trottein, "Technics or the Fading Away of Aesthetics: The Sensible and the Question of Kant," in *Stiegler and Technics*, ed. Christina Howells and Gerald Moore (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 92.

234. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery vol. 2,* 20.

235. Trottein, "Fading Away," 89.

236. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery vol. 2,* 20.

237. Moore, "Adapt," 25.

238. Crogan, "Experience," 103.

while discouraging others, they shape the ways that individuals affect judgment.[239]

However, under control the politicization of the sensible has intensified, turning these

modes towards the service of capitalism. As capitalism subsumes all forms of technology,

including communication itself, the drives and flow of capital increasingly define the

sensible – both in terms of our capability to sense things and to judge what makes sense.

Consequently, Stiegler's conception of technics enables an understanding of memes that

focuses not on what they mean but rather on what memories are invested in them, what

these memories make sensible, and the communities produced by this sensibility.

Recognizing the social force of technical memory, Stiegler is most interested in

the capacity of technics to function as "mnemotechnics." A focus on mnemotechnics

draws attention to the "objects and techniques able to preserve and make accessible

experiences that I have not myself lived."[240] Traditional communicative media are the

most obvious examples of mnemotechnics; however, this potential exists in any technic,

e.g. memes allow participants to experience the narrative and affects of diverse

networked participants. Distinguishing the inherent memory within all technics with

those that are explicitly engaged in mnemotechnic practices, Stiegler turns to the term

hypomnemata. Hypomnemata are the mechanically created modes of symbolic

production that enter most aspects of social interaction.[241] Because of this, Stiegler argues

hypomnemata are central to the contemporary functioning of control society. For

example, Facebook encourages participants to commit their free time to generating

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239. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery vol. 2,* 63.

240. Crogan, "Experience" 104.

241. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery Vol. 2,* 48.

marketing information and viewing advertisements. *Hypomnemata* are not necessarily

tools of control, but that is the dominant mode of their contemporary usage. However, it

is only in recognizing this linkage between technics and political control that, Stiegler

concludes, "the struggle can begin."[242]

<div align="center">The Process of Individuation</div>

For *hypomnemata* such as memes to engage in this struggle, it is not enough to

recognize the relation between technics and control. Rather, we must understand the ways

that technics function to reproduce control through their constitution of the contemporary

political subject. To explain this phenomenon, Stiegler draws on Simondon's concept of

individuation. Since technics individuate in much the same manner as subjects,

understanding this process is key to understanding the emergence, circulation, and force

of memes.

While not subscribing to enlightenment notions of the unitary individual,

Simondon notes that the individual is part of humans' experienced reality and thus has

force. However, if the individual is not a *prima facie* being but a relational effect, then

the question becomes where does this individual come from?[243] To answer this question,

Simondon argues that if individuals are an effect, they must emerge (individuate) out of

some preexisting condition:

> In order to think individuation, it is necessary to consider being neither as
> substance, nor as matter, nor as form, but as a tight, supersaturated system,
> above the level of unity, inconsistent solely in itself and not adequately
> thinkable by means of the excluded middle; the concrete and complete
> being – that is, the preindividual being – is a being that is more than a

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242. Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment,* 6.

243. Gilbert Simondon, "The Genesis of the Individual," in *Incorporations* ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 297.

> unity. Unity, characteristic of the individuated being, and identity, which authorizes the use of the principle of the excluded middle, do not apply to preindividual being [...]; unity and identity apply only to one of the phases of the being, posterior to the operation of individuation.[244]

For Simondon, the individual is not a static state but is, rather, always engaged in the process of individuation. Similarly, the preindividual does not overdetermine the process of individuation, but is the condition of possibility from which the orthogenesis of individuation can emerge.[245] Because neither the individual nor preindividual takes primacy; this preindividual state does not initiate individuation. Rather, some entity embraces those conditions of possibility to begin the process of individuation.[246]

However, as the preindividual is the condition from which individuation can begin, it is also necessarily the starting point of understanding individuation as a process – to begin analysis with the individual is to enter far too late in the game.[247] Stiegler argues, "if you want to understand the individual, you need to inscribe the individual in a process of which he (sic) is only a phase. As such, the individual has no interests. The individual is only an aspect, or phase of a process, but the process is what is important."[248] The individual is neither completed nor exhausted in the process of individuation. Each act by an individual, as it draws upon the preindividual, begins the process anew. This cyclical nature leads Virno to conclude that individuation "makes a

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244. Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation psychique et collective* (Paris: Aubier, 2007), 13-14; in Virno, "Angels," 63.

245. Because I am wary of the term individual, when I use the term, I am referring to the specific product of individuation. The individual is a singularity in a constantly renegotiating relation with both technics and a preindividual condition.

246. Simondon, "Genesis," 305.

247. Ibid., 311.

248. Bernard Stiegler and Irit Rogoff, "Transindividuation," *E-flux* 14 (2010): http://www.e-flux.com/journal/14/61314/transindividuation/.

human animal an unrepeatable singularity, [it] is always circumscribed and partial –

indeed, unfinishable by definition."[249]

Noting that it is a process whereby individual utterances uniquely emerge from

the conditions of a larger sense of language, the process of individuation both explains –

and is a concrete example of – the human use of language. Virno expands the relationship

between individuation and language, noting,

> The capacity for articulating signifying sounds – biological prerequisite of
> the species *Homo sapiens* – cannot manifest itself other than by being
> individuated in a plurality of speakers; inversely, such a plurality of
> speakers would be inconceivable without the preliminary participation of
> each and every one of them in that preindividual reality which is,
> precisely, the capacity for articulating signifying sounds.[250]

For an individual to make an utterance, they must already exist within the preindividual

state of language. This is not language in an actualized form; the toddler does not

command any specific language before they first speak. Rather, they exist within the

capacity for language. The process of individuation occurs when the toddler engages in

the act of uttering a specific word or phrase. In this moment, language ceases to be a

preindividual possibility. Instead, that utterance is entirely singular to the toddler and the

situation in which it is uttered. The toddler has begun to individuate in language.

However, that toddler's individual command of language does not stop with that first

utterance, rather each successive utterance draws once again from the potentiality of

language. Each time it speaks, the child makes anew itself and its relationship to the

language.

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249. Virno, "Angels": 64.

250. Ibid., 58.

However, our understanding of individuation would be vastly incomplete if we only attuned ourselves to the ways in which the preindividual acts on the individual. Wary of this focus, Simondon warns,

> It is therefore incorrect to speak of the group's influence over the individual; in fact, the group is not composed of individuals joined together by certain ties, but of grouped individuals: *group individuals*. Individuals are group individuals, just as the group is a group of individuals. […] the group is no longer an inter-individual reality, but a complement of individuation on a vast scale joining together a plurality of individuals.[251]

In uttering the word for the first time, the toddler not only draws from the potentiality of language, connecting itself to the community of individuating individuals that engages in that language, but also changes both the community and the language itself. The unique features of the utterance open new possibilities for future utterances, functionally changing the potential force of the words and the community that forms around them. This interrelation between user, tool, and community leads Stiegler to argue that individuation is always triple in nature: psychic, collective, and technical.[252] As I write these words for you to read, I am redefining myself (psychic), changing the community of English speakers and academics (collective), and redefining the potential of the English language and printed text as tools (technical). Each of these individuations acts upon the others in a "three pronged transductive relationship."[253] Stiegler unifies this interrelation of coinciding processes of individuation under the term "transindividuation."

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251. Simondon, *Le principe d'individuation*, 172.

252. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery vol. 1,* 70.

253. Ibid.

In doing so, Stiegler argues that one can never individuate an "I" without also individuating a "we" through the mediation of individuating technics.[254]

Not only do memes function as a technic that enables the individuation of participants within the communities of networked publics, but memes themselves (as is true of all other technics) also individuate as humans deploy them. Individuated iterations of memes emerge from the preindividual form of the meme. Any one iteration of PTSD Kid only makes sense as an iteration because it emerges from the preindividual form of the meme. However, that iteration also redefines the form of the meme, changing the conditions by which each future iteration of the meme can individuate. Thus, as PTSD Kid is deployed, the poster of the meme positions themselves within the community of all participants of the meme, while simultaneously redefining the conditions by which both participants in the meme and future iterations of the meme might individuate.

Because technics both enable individuation and function as the externalization of memory, there is a significant link between mnemotechnics and individuation. Stiegler clarifies this relationship through the concept of retentions.[255] Stiegler offers three retentions, with each referring to different potential temporal states of memory. A primary retention is that which consciousness holds in the now. It is this very word you are reading, related to but independent of the rest of the context. A secondary retention is a primary retention held as the memory of experience. It is the memory of reading, the

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254. Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment,* 82. It is this ability of words themselves to individuate that is also recognized by Derrida in the theorization of iterability. Derrida notes that language only functions because of the capacity of a word to be repeated in the absence of its very referent. There is no single meaning of words, but rather each iteration individuates the larger contextual meaning. This iterable logic has applied to symbol systems across languages, times, and even media (including the visual). Jacques Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context," *Margins of Philosophy,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago; University of Chicago Press 1982), 315-21.

255. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery Vol. 1,* 52.

memory of the word you just read. Finally, a tertiary retention is a technical apparatus

that stores memories external to the individual. It is the word processor, computer,

database, or digital archive that allows these words to exist beyond my utterances or our

personal memories.[256]

These tertiary retentions, with the ability to exist outside of the individual, enable

transindividuation as collectivization of secondary retentions.[257] However, it is also the

centrality of these tertiary retentions that undergirds the power of control. Stiegler argues,

> Tertiary retentions such as the alphabet are those things that undergird
> every collective and psychic individuation's access to pre-individual
> funds. They exist in all human societies. They condition individuation as
> symbolic sharing, which is made possible by the externalization of the
> individual experience in traces. When they become industrial, tertiary
> retentions constitute the technologies of control that alter symbolic
> exchange fundamentally. Resting on the opposing of producers to
> consumers, they allow for the hyper-synchronization of the time of
> consciousness.[258]

Tertiary retentions establish the potential for collective social coordination. However, it is

important to note that each of these retentions are selections, with no single one retaining

everything they engage.[259] Therefore, what is included within the retention establishes the

possibilities of individuation. The memories retained in memes are the conditions of their

participants' individuation. Conversely, the technocratic control of retentions by capital

not only allows for the reconstitution of the self in the service of capital but also gives

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256. While tertiary retentions often exist in the form of media, Stiegler notes that, "Tertiary retention is not mediation because it does not come afterwards: it is not what gives mediated access to the immediate, by that which constitutes its very possibility;" Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery Vol. 2,* 114.

257. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery Vol. 1,* 88.

258. Stiegler, "Suffocated Desire," 57.

259. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery Vol. 1,* 52.

capital the ability to manage the very possibility of collective action.[260] Memes in service of capital frame memories only in service of capital, not individuation.

In functioning through the redeployment of tertiary retentions, individuation works through a logic of repetition and difference. As Stiegler notes, "in order to see, you have to see again."[261] Not only is the individuational process carried out through repetition – the toddler says the word as a repetition of a previously heard iteration – but comparison of the similarities and differences of its past uses are necessary for understanding the word. In operating through a logic of repetition, individuation functions as a sort of apprenticeship: we learn to do by repeating the externalized retentions of others.[262] Conversely, if we are always encountering the new and the novel, there is little capacity to form consequential retentions. [263] There is no collective individuation that the novel can be tied to; a single iteration of a photo with top and bottom lines cannot function as a meme. It is only through the repetition of different iterations of a meme that the larger condition of possibility that is a meme emerges. As long as individuation happens, transformation is inevitable. If a word is always

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260. On the question of tertiary retentions, it is important to draw a distinction between Virno's and Stiegler's conceptions of individuation. For Virno, it is the "general intellect" of Marx that is the preindividual grounds of individuation, as well as the target for informational production. Virno, "Angels," 60-61. The general intellect is an ideational potential created by the relations of singularities. When the preindividual is placed within industrial capacities, the possibility of action by an individuated collection of singularities ceases to be possible. However, for Stiegler the general intellect cannot exist but within technics. This relationality only can come into being and exert force in tandem with the individuation of particular technics. While this difference is minute, for Stiegler, without including technics in an understanding of the general intellect, Virno is already selling short the process of individuation and missing the location of struggle

261. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery Vol. 2,* 82.

262. Ibid., 86.

263. Ibid.

individuating, can it have stable or binding force?[264] However, as this transformation is a threat to forces of domination, particularly as the fluidity of subjectivities, words, and technics wield ever more potential power, efforts to bind or stop individuation lie at the heart of control.

<div align="center">Grammatization, Proletarianization, and the Loss of Spirit</div>

In the *Phaedrus,* Plato famously warns of the dangers of the externalization of memory. Stiegler re-interprets this warning, arguing that as *hypomnemata* emerge, the individuating potential of internalized organs is lost to external ones.[265] While this does not preclude the productive force of individuation, it does create a tension between the potential rigidity of the technic and the subjectivity's need for flexibility in individuation.[266] This technical rigidity is characterized by a process Stiegler calls grammatization, which speaks to the process whereby the continuous flux of individuation "becomes broken down into a system of discrete elements."[267] Any process of individuation can grammatize; however, Stiegler is most interested in the codification of symbolic exchange.[268] Although this process begins with the alphabet itself (codifying the very sound of language), the communicative revolution engendered by control has intensified this practice.[269] Through the force of technocratic rhetorics, globalizing economies have worked to level symbolic idioms across the globe – the iPhone is

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264. Ibid., 165.

265. Ibid., 136.

266. Ibid., 116.

267. John Tinnell, "Grammatization: Bernard Stiegler's Theory of Writing and Technology," *Computers and Composition* 37 (2015), 136.

268. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery vol. 1,* 57.

269. Ibid., 54.

internationally recognizable, and English is increasingly the language of international

business, tourism, and the internet. Because of this symbolic homogenization, Stiegler

contends that grammatization has emerged as the "technical infrastructure of control

society."[270]

As grammatization intensifies, Stiegler warns of the loss of individuation—a

process Stiegler calls proletarianization. Within proletarianization, grammatization

repositions the participant – not as a worker but as a consumer, "now accessible and

mobilized twenty-four hours a day, and whose memory, habits and preferences are

entirely retained and stored forever in the digital traces he (sic) leaves at every stage of

the consumption process."[271] Although ubiquitous under control, Stiegler notes that the

loss of individuation is not new:

> The concept of the loss of individuation introduced by Gilbert Simondon
> describes what happened in the nineteenth century to the worker subjected
> to the service of the machine tool: he lost his (sic) know-how and thus his
> very individuality, eventually finding himself reduced to the condition of a
> proletarian. These days it is the consumer whose behavior is standardized
> through the formatting and artificial manufacturing of his desires. Here he
> loses his life knowledge (*savoir-vivre*), that is, his possibilities of living.
> Norms are substituted by the latest fashionable brands as considered by
> Mallarmé in *La Dernière Mode* ("The Latest Fashion"). "Rationally"
> promoted through marketing, these brands are like those "bibles" that
> govern the functioning of fast-food franchises, which the franchisee must
> follow to the letter under the threat of contract breach or even a lawsuit.[272]

Proletarianization occurs because the "worker" is divorced from any technical

participation in production. Under control, participants are not simply divorced from the

product of their labor, their very existence is both the labor and the product.

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270. Ibid., viii.

271. Miguel de Beustegui, "The New Critique of Political Economy," in *Stiegler and Technics*, ed. Christina Howells and Gerald Moore (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 183.

272. Stiegler, "Suffocated Desire," 54-5.

Consequently, proletarianization divorces participants from participation in symbolic construction and instead asks them only to passively consume symbols. Stiegler turns to the example of music to explain this process. Prior to technologies of mass musical circulation, the gramophone, record, MP3 etc., to enjoy music more than once an individual had to be able to reproduce it themselves. Participating in this personal reproduction enabled individuation for the music, as well as participants and the listening collective.[273] Conversely, when music can be purchased and consumed, each user has the capacity to consume the melody without reproduction or individuation. Although there is a lesser possibility for individuation by redeploying the music in new times and spaces, the symbolic content is now only industrially, rather than socially produced, limiting the space for the invention of new communicative possibilities.[274] This is not to say that individuation cannot happen within particular media forms, but when technocratic bureaucratization promotes consumption over participation, these media lose their individuating function – denying the creation of active subjects and politically affective publics.

The Politics of Spirit

Theorizing control, Deleuze implies there is a potential of political agency in the human actor, asserting "Men's (sic) only hope lies in a revolutionary becoming: the only way of casting off their shame or responding to what is intolerable."[275] In recognizing the

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273. Stiegler and Rogoff, "Transindividuation," 4.\

274. Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment,* 96.

275. Deleuze, "Control and Becoming," 171. The use of the word becoming undermines the use of the human actor in a traditional sense. While Deleuze's conception of man is a far cry from liberal unified subject, passages such as these suggest that humans – as but a part of an ongoing process of becoming – are capable of influencing flows of power in such a way that disrupts the logics of control.

conditions of proletarianization enabled by control as the root of this intolerability,

Stiegler turns to questions of spirit and care as the model of future politics.

For Stiegler, resistance to control must align with questions of spirit, as this is the

capacity denied by proletarianization. Stiegler defines spirit as the capability of the mind

to freely individuate. Specifically, Stiegler argues that

> the 'life of spirit (the mind),' to speak in the words of Hannah Arendt, has
> become entirely subjected to the imperatives of the market economy and
> to the imperatives of returns upon the investments of enterprises that
> promote the technologies of what is called the culture industry, the
> program industry, media, telecommunications, and finally technologies of
> knowledge, or cognitive technologies.[276]

Recognizing that there is not an outside to capitalism, Stiegler does not call for a

wholesale abandonment or destruction of current modes of production. Instead, Stiegler

argues for the adoption of an economic system that does not focus on profit but rather for

the care of the collective and its spirit.[277] Stiegler argues,

> These systems must be grounded in the representation of differing
> perspectives, polemics and controversies, as well as convergences of
> interest or perspective enabling re-groupings, that is, ultimately,
> transindividuations that recognize themselves in meanings, thereby
> constituting collective individuations, and establishing, at the heart of
> digitalized public life, argued and analyzable critique that counters the
> murmurings that abound in a falsely consensual digital world lacking
> instruments for enhancing collective singularities.[278]

Through participation in digital technologies that allow a variety of individuations – such

as memes – "we are [able] to love things together" and in the process both love ourselves

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276. Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment,* 11.

277. Bernard Stiegler, *What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 97. Stiegler argues that care of the collective "is the only worthwhile definition of genuine political action" as it is the only condition under which we might reduce the damaging effects of current capitalism.

278. Ibid., 95.

and engage in collective action.[279] In this call to love things together, the very relations

denied by technocratic synchronization create this new spirit. Specifically, Stiegler calls

for a capitalism that creates a space for individuation and spirit under the auspices of

care, a byproduct of individuation. Specifically, care is a process "whereby knowledge

and skills are imparted from an older to a younger generation" in a way that allows

individuation.[280] In order to engage in care, participants must mobilize the third degree

retentions created by past individuations in the present and in a way that they may be

used for the future. If the economy places care at its heart, Stiegler argues, education,

science, and industry will all gain a more productive capacity.[281]

Because the loss of spirit is directly tied to the industrialization of the symbolic,

the *ethos* of a society of care is built around amateurism. For Stiegler, an amateur is more

than a person without professional credentials, although that is central. Amateurs must

also engage in production not out of a monetary motive, but for the love of the art.[282] The

amateur sings the song to learn its nuance, enjoy it, and share with friends, not to record

the perfect track and sell it. However, Stiegler argues that the focus on synchronization of

mass production discourages the amateur.[283] Stiegler therefore argues for a revitalization

of amateurism because it encourages the repetition through difference that allows

individuation. Networked media ecologies are particularly suited to this amateurism,

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279. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery Vol. 1,* 2.

280. Fuggle, "Stiegler and Foucault," 199.

281. Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment,* 18.

282. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery vol. 2,* 13.

283. Martin Crowley, "The Artist and The Amateur, From Misery to Invention," in *Stiegler and Technics*, ed. Christina Howells and Gerald Moore (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 128.

because while they certainly have the ability to function as tools of the programming industry (Netflix lets us synchronize binge watching at a level beyond that of network TV), the contributive logic of networked ecologies invites participation, creation, and recirculation, on the amateur scale.[284] In this capacity, memes have the potential to function as technics of amateur production *par excellence.* Not only do their aesthetics derive from amateur modes of production, but their creation of participatory narratives and publics enables them to function as modes of amateur cultural and rhetorical critics.

Despite the potential of networked media to simply drive consumption, Stiegler's veneration of digital technologies emerges from the capability of these technics to enable a return of spirit. Recognizing a return of spirit as key to productive human action, Stiegler views contemporary *hypomnemata* as *pharmakon* – both a poison and a cure.[285] The curative functions of networked technologies begin with their capacities as parts of an economy of contribution. In inviting all participants within networked ecologies to participate, networked technologies invite each participant to contribute to the construction of the modes that define these digital environments.[286] This curative potential has manifested in technologies like freeware and open source software, both of which drive the production of memes and break the cycle of synchronization.

However, participants should not embrace the potential of networked ecologies without caution. Stiegler notes that all too often control turns this contributive nature

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284. Ibid., 133.

285. For Stiegler it is important to note that this relation between poison and care is not "a dialogical struggle between opposites." Instead, it is "a composition of tendencies" whose concrete expression is the arrangement of psychic, technical and collective individuations. Bernard Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy* (Malden: Polity, 2010), 43-44.

286. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery Vol. 1,* 2.

back towards synchronizing consumptive practices. Crowdsourcing, while potentially

mobilizing the common for the creation of the social good, is also frequently used by

corporations to make products more desirable for popular consumption.[287] Similarly,

control can re-mobilize many memes to reify dominant ideologies and promote

consumptive drives in networked publics. Because of this dual nature, Stiegler warns that

pharmaka are indifferent towards participants; it is up to us to ensure they work in the

service of care.[288] Consequently, resisting control centers on turning technologies towards

the manufacture of spirit. Participants must utilize networked technologies in ways that

help them struggle against proletarianization, which means embracing the individuating

processes built around the symbolic capacities of the new, networked media ecology.

Because control functions primarily through the synchronization of individuals,

political struggle exists at the intersection of technics, subjectivities, and collectivities.

However, as collectives are preindividual, and technics are exteriorizations of the

collective, the political space of the struggle becomes subjectivity itself. In quashing

individuation, control prevents the process of subjectification.[289] Following this concern

with the politics of subjectification, Stiegler asserts that "to trans-form oneself, or to

make of oneself, is just as much the theatre as the forge of the struggle."[290] This is not a

battle over the nature of some sort of unified subject – this notion is something Deleuze

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287. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery Vol. 2,* 49.

288. Stephen Barker, "Techno-pharmaco-genealogy," in *Stiegler and Technics*, ed. Christina Howells and Gerald Moore (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 271.

289. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery Vol. 1,* 50.

290. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery Vol. 2,* 4.

and Stiegler explicitly reject. Rather a struggle over subjectification seeks to establish the conditions under which the human animal may act.[291]

Rhetoric in the Regime of Control

As *hypomnemata* have the potential to both foster the most intense modes of control as well as enable resistance, any contemporary political project is undoubtedly tied to communication. However, it is not enough to simply attend to generic communication-oriented technics. Rather, I contend a rhetorical orientation can best foster the return of spirit via restored individuation. Therefore, I dedicate the remainder of this chapter towards explicating how the rhetorical tradition can offer illuminating insights into resisting proletarianization.

Considering Deleuze's admonishment of an abundance of communication as the foundation of control – he claims that "speech and communication have been corrupted" and calls for "vacuoles of noncommunication" – it would be easy to dismiss the rhetorical in the efforts to resist the dominant forces of control.[292] This dismissal would seem particularly appropriate for networked rhetorical technics as they expand the opportunities for communication. Critics like Jodi Dean argue that these technologies encourage participation in control at the cost of the more consequential politics that operate on the level of money and collective "real world" action.[293] However, if, as Damien Smith Pfister notes, control society is communicatively "justified, extended, and maintained" – particularly through networked rhetorical processes – then "networked

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291. Deleuze, "Control and Becoming," 175.

292. Ibid., 171. It is worth noting that in referring to communication, Deleuze seems to be targeting the constant and instant force of marketing and other consumption based modes of communication, rather than all forms of symbolic exchange.

293. Jodi Dean, "Why the Net is not a Public Sphere," *Constellations* 10 (2003), 96.

rhetorical theory must focus its critical edge on [control society]."[294] This rhetorical focus is particularly useful because, as Stiegler notes, symbolic resources – as the grounds for individuation – "are both theatre and weapon" in the current struggle over power.[295]

Moreover, a rhetorical focus is the necessary antidote to philosophy's poisonous dismissal of technics. Stiegler asserts that in ignoring technics, Platonism and its resultant philosophies are the grounds from which the oppressions of contemporary control stem. Consequently, according to Stiegler, the resurgence of technics must be the project of contemporary philosophy.[296] If that is the case, the meta-technic that is rhetoric may be the future of philosophical thought. Specifically, as an architectonic art, rhetoric is a technic through which all other *techne* may be understood.[297] A participant cannot simply build an axe, it must be rhetorically framed as having utility to operate as a retentional apparatus. Similarly, the alphabet is nothing more than a series of sounds without rhetorical formation. In this sense, the rhetorical is the very condition of possibility from which other technics individuate.

In the context of Stiegler, as soon as rhetoric is more than a simple tool for creating action, it is already on the road to being a technic of individuation. In this sense it demands a rethinking of the dominant tradition of rhetoric. Blumenberg famously notes that rather than being a tool only for mono-directional persuasion, rhetoric centers around

294. Pfister, *Networked Media,* 193.

295. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery vol. 1,* vii.

296. Ibid., 97.

297. Richard McKeon, "The Uses of Rhetoric in a Technological Age: Architectonic Productive Arts," in *The Prospect of Rhetori,c* ed. Lloyd F. Bitzer and Edwin Black (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 63.

fostering agreement.[298] However, in the milieu of Stiegler, this is not traditional

agreement. Instead, agreement is found in using tertiary retentions to recreate the

collective secondary retentions that constitute the "we." Further, Blumenberg argues that

because it is interested in agreement, rhetoric must delay other forms of action to make

time for this process.[299] In the language of individuation, this delay is the renegotiation of

the preindividual. In seeking agreement through unifying individuations, the rhetorical

seeks to reshape the very individualities that constitute the we, taking the time to

constitute a different field of potential from which individuals may act (individuate).

If rhetoric is the negotiation of the conditions for individuation, it does so

particularly through its focus on form.[300] While individual rhetorical iterations have

force, the form behind these iterations organizes "our beings, our perceptions, and our

social realities."[301] The individuating capacity of form relates to long-standing concepts

within the rhetorical tradition. Indeed, the Sophists argued that a flexible notion of form

creates the conditions of rhetorical possibility in a manner akin to what Simondon

envisions as the preindividual state. Nathan Crick praises this Sophistic legacy because,

> Despite the attention paid to the Sophists' epistemology, their greatest
> legacy is really their artistic commitment to form, or what Kenneth Burke
> calls the ''creation of an appetite in the mind of the auditor, and the
> adequate satisfying of that appetite.'' The Sophists understood that *logos*
> is a means of giving form to collective human experience by bringing

298. Hans Blumenberg, "An Anthropological Approach to the Contemporary Significance of Rhetoric," in *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?,* ed. Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman, and Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1987), 442.

299. Ibid., 447.

300. While Simondon has spoken against the linking of form and individuation, this reluctance stems from the rigidity of the Platonic concept of form. Simondon, "Genesis," 371. Once form is removed from questions of "True Form" and being and is instead conceived of as rhetorically, I believe it is a useful tool for explaining the rhetorical processes that drive individuation.

301. Brummet, "Form," 378.

forth outstanding qualities in their common situation and narrating possibilities by which emotional tensions can be brought to consummation.[302]

Crick's description of *logos* bringing forth human qualities through rhetorical form reads as a paraphrase of Simondon explaining individuation. Rhetorical form shapes the potential of symbolic action, and symbolic action shapes reality. Yet the analogs to individuation in rhetorical studies extend beyond the centrality of form.

The same year that Deleuze wrote on control societies (1990), Michael Calvin McGee wrote "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture," an essay that serves as a rhetorical parallel to Deleuze's theorization of control by opening rhetorical studies to the question of individuation through three moves. First, in theorizing interpretation as the task of the audience, rather than the critic, McGee conceives of rhetoric not as a simple conveyer of static meaning but as a technic that individuates in each context.[303] If every act of rhetoric must be consumed in new contexts that draw attention to different fragmented components and flows, these acts necessarily transindividuate through their circulation and analysis. It individuates a new force of the words, the interpreter is re-individuated, and it constitutes new social relations between those who interpreted it. McGee's second tie to individuation is recognizing that "rhetoric is what rhetoricians do," suggesting that "focus is more on the performance of discourse than the archeology of discourse."[304] If rhetoric is a process of performance, it is never complete. Rather, it is a moving force that re-individuates as it moves across contexts and

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302. Nathan Crick, "The Sophistical Attitude and The Invention of Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 96, no. 1 (2010): 40.

303. McGee, "Fragmentation," 274.

304. Ibid., 275.

through individuals. Finally, reconceiving texts as formations of fragments, McGee

disconnects the rhetorical performance from a particular rhetor.[305] Instead, fragments,

both mobilized and excluded from the assembled performance, must preexist the text in

potentiality (form) but not in iteration. It is the combining of the fragments into an

assembled force that actualizes and individuates the rhetorical performance and its related

components. Consequently, both McGee and Deleuze recognize a fundamental shift in

the very nature of communication. They both argue that the conditions of contemporary

communication and politics demand a move away from understanding texts and forms

exclusively as boundaries/bounded. For Deleuze, this is the move away from molds, for

McGee it is the rejection of the discrete text. Instead, these concepts must be replaced

with more fluid understandings of communicative force/individuation – Deleuze's

modulation and McGee's fragments.[306] It is only in embracing these shifts that critics can

understand the ways that rhetoric – as a technic of power – functions in the conditions of

control.

<div align="center">Memes as the Entelechial Individuating Text</div>

Because McGee's fragmentation thesis is an effort to understand rhetoric at the

birth of control, it is not surprising that digital technologies have intensified the features

of McGee's arguments in the same way that they have Deleuze's. Memes operate almost

exclusively through a logic of form, as they are exceedingly fragmented and are symbolic

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305. Ibid., 287.

306. Although fragmentation seems to imply a certain unity, in McGee's conception this unity would only be possible in the coverage of all things – impossible for a critic to attend to. Therefore, the composing of fragments for McGee is not about creating unity, but rather about highlighting important relations to the force a critic is attending to. Because of this it is apt to compare to Deleuze's modulation.

technics in a state of constant individuation.[307] Because of this fragmented and

participatory nature, memes are not simply another *hypomnemata,* but rather they are

representative of the potential of the capacities of rhetoric as *pharmakon* of control in a

networked rhetorical era.

Virno, while explaining the individuation of the multitude and the resultant

political capacities, also articulates the relation of rhetoric and control. Specifically,

Virno argues that the preindividual state known as the "the general intellect" can also be

called "common places." Virno notes,

> in today's world, the "special places" of discourse and of argumentation
> are perishing and dissolving, while immediate visibility is being gained by
> the "common places," or by generic logical-linguistic forms which
> establish the pattern for all forms of discourse. This means that in order to
> get a sense of orientation in the world and to protect ourselves from its
> dangers, we cannot rely on those forms of thought, of reasoning, or of
> discourse which have their niche in one particular context or another.[308]

This use of commonplaces is a pun referring to both the classical concept of culturally

specific stories and the common as the place where publics are both produced and reside.

A wide range of human relations may share a variety of technics, and the common forms

of the symbolic are both the engine of capitalism and individuation of publics.

However, beyond saying that both usages of the pun are literal, this dual

movement also speaks to the fact that a language of commonplaces is the discourse of

post-Fordism. As the networked logic of control places ever more diverse subjectivities

into relation, symbols, such as memes, that distil the commonality between subjectivities

into a manner that is easy to deploy are the rhetorical resources that connect the widest

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307. Jenkins "The Modes of Visual Rhetoric," 454.

308. Virno, *Grammar,* 36.

range of participants. Virno argues that this shift is a result of the loss of home afforded

by control, noting,

> the cognitive-linguistic habits of the species do not come to the forefront
> because someone decides to make them come to the forefront; they do so
> out of necessity, or because they constitute a form of protection in a
> society devoid of substantial communities (or of "special places").[309]

As control erodes spatial community, the form based logic of commonplaces and *topoi,*

which resonate across contexts, become the crux of rhetoric and the production of

collectivities. This loss of home and general language is the very basis of networked

media ecologies. As networked participants turn to the de-spatialized web for rhetorical

production and consumption, they must speak in the generalized language of the internet

– notably memes and emojis – to be intelligible. Joshua Gunn earlier recognized a similar

phenomenon, observing that the logics of late capitalism frequently reduce books and

movies to stock footage and other fragments, transforming their specialized knowledge

into generalized *topoi*/commonplaces.[310] Under the logic of control, as well as that of

networked spaces, it is those rhetorical technics that are most open to the common that

have the greatest potential for use.

While a loss of specialized language does create a more shallow conception of

language, that shallowness may be a political resource. Specifically, shallow language

may also function under the logic of *pharmakon.* Certainly, if symbols are shallow they

are more easily synchronized and consumed. Hours spent reading memes, all the while

also being subjected to advertisements and producing metadata, certainly plays into the

hands of capitalistic control. However, this shallowness also affords a certain realistic

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309. Ibid., 42.

310. Joshua Gunn, "Prime-Time Satanism: Rumor-Panic and the Work of Iconic *Topoi*," *Visual Communication* 4, no. 1 (2005): 114.

power. Drawing from Foucault, theorists such as Deleuze, Negri, and Virno all argue that surface is all that there is. Technics are not impactful because of some deep or innate nature but rather because of what they do and how they relate to individuation. In attuning all participants to this surface nature, commonplaces function as tools of social criticism. Virno notes,

> Those who do not feel at home, in order to get a sense of orientation and to protect themselves, must turn to the "common places," or to the most general categories of the linguistic intellect; in this sense, strangers are always thinkers. As you see, I am inverting the direction of the analogy: it is not the thinkers who become strangers in the eyes of the community to which the thinkers belong, but the strangers, the multitude of those "with no home," who are absolutely obliged to attain the status of thinkers. Those "without a home" have no choice but to behave like thinkers: not in order for them to learn something about biology or advanced mathematics, but because they turn to the most essential categories of the abstract intellect in order to protect themselves from the blows of random chance, in order to take refuge from contingency and from the unforeseen.[311]

While memes and other fragmented digital texts may seem inane, their very lack of deeper or specialized meaning allows them to become a reflection of contemporary humanity. Memes are created and individuate out of the shared social context of internet participants; they are the languages by which this collective knowledge individuates. It is in this capacity, as the product of collective networked individuation, that memes emerge as key to understanding the potential of contemporary rhetorical production.

Furthermore, as technics that are eminently individuational, memes demonstrate the democratic potential of networked *hypomnemata*. Although this democratization may have impacts on representative democracies, memes' central impact is in the enabling of a more radical form of democracy – the constitution of the potential of humanity through multitude itself. The ability to engage in this more radical democracy is key to resistance.

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311. Virno, *Grammar,* 38.

Under control, representative democracy more often than not functions as an institution of bureaucratized biopower.[312] However, just because traditional politics increasingly operates in the interests of control does not imply that organized politics are not possible. We must simply rethink what and how organizations are used.[313]

Because participants create and renegotiate memes through processes of social invention, they are representative of this organized possibility of radical democracy. Their participatory nature gives them the potential to work against proletarianization. Davi Johnson notes

> If, as Nietzsche famously suggests, so much of our thought is the product of grammatical habit, then memetics offers a way to disrupt these traditions of thought by providing a defamiliarizing theoretical vocabulary capable of offering at least temporary reprieve from the causal assumptions borne of grammatical necessity.[314]

The commonness of memes allows every participant the potential to break the symbolic logic of a particular meme, as well as the other grammatical structures in relation to which the memes individuate. When iterations of PTSD Kid moved the poles from focusing on the horrors of Vietnam to the horrors of childhood, it is the grammatical resistance of this new interpretation that allowed for a refiguring of the grammar of the meme.

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312. Speaking on the tradition of governance, Hardt and Negri note, "Public space has been privatized to such an extent that it no longer makes sense to understand social organization in terms of a dialectic between private and public spaces, between inside and outside. The place of modern liberal politics has disappeared, and from this perspective our postmodern and imperial society is characterized by a deficit of the political." Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000)*,* 188.

313. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth,* 356.

314. Johnson, "Mapping": 28.

Moreover, as the memes operate on a common level, they allow the amateur production that Stiegler sees as the key to re-individuation. Because memes are simple and universal in content, any participant can deploy them. In the process, they also participate in the active renegotiation of modes that drive the meme. Each deployment of Scumbag Steve changes the form of the mode of "scumbag," redefining the potential of a range of social individuations. Such memes, and other forms of cognitive labor, function as non-representative democracy. The changes of the scumbag mode set the potentialities of decorum because each new iteration helps to democratically renegotiate the boundaries of decorum. Memes are democratically created symbol systems, and their relations to other social modes allow for those modes to be democratically negotiated as well. Technics like memes radicalize the process of individuation, challenging proletarianization.[315]

In providing the rhetorical resources to challenge proletarianization, memes and similar rhetorical technics also have the potential to help reshape traditional politics towards care. Theorists of control are suspicious of representational democracy, not only for its ties to capital but also because the very nature of representation is to reduce individuating singularities to grammaticized representational classes.[316] However, Zizi Papacharissi, in studying participatory digital technics, notes that while expressive technologies may not motivate individuals towards traditional political action, the creation of particular structures of feelings reorient these individuals towards the civic by

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315. Virno, *Grammar,* 79-80.

316. Hardt and Negri, *Multitude,* 263-64.

providing connections that allow people to "feel" their way into politics.[317] Tweets about the Arab spring may have had little impact on global policy, but they disrupted the synchronic isolated media consumption of web participants, prompting them to exist in relation to politically engaged others around the world. It is these modes of relations that Stiegler argues is the essence of care. The rhetorical creation of affective publics – that is, modes of affectivity that connect people to one another – creates the potentiality for an industrial political economy predicated on care rather than control.

<div align="center">Using Burke to Combat Symbolic Misery</div>

The politics of control and individuation, particularly in a networked era, are central to rhetorical processes. However, even as the rhetorical link to individuation has been explicated, the specific rhetorical technics and processes entangled within these politics remain unclear. To provide a rhetorical vocabulary for exploring the individuating potential of networked technics against technocratic modes of control, I turn to Kenneth Burke. This relationship has the potential to be fruitful because Burke provides a more robust vocabulary to explore the role of the symbolic in individuation but also because Stiegler provides the opportunity to update Burke both in terms of technics and current technology.

At first, this pairing would seem unusual. Burke is often characterized as a total Luddite, whereas Stiegler cautiously praises technology. Certainly, Burke was suspicious of new technologies; however, this suspicion focused on technology's association with a psychology of information.[318] Burke's psychology of information parallels Stiegler's

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317. Papacharissi, *Affective Publics*, 118.

318. Ian Hill, "'The Human Barnyard' and Kenneth Burke's Philosophy of Technology," *KBJournal* 5, no. 2 (2009): http://www.kbjournal.org/ian_hill.

account of contemporary symbolic misery. Each focuses on the ways that the capitalistic

production of rigid symbolic systems limits the capacity for human action. In this way,

Stiegler and Burke share similar suspicions of technology. When unchecked, technology

stifles the capability of action and the spirit by reducing individuals to creatures of

motion/consumption. Yet, both also saw the potential cure in technology. The late

writings of Burke observe that the interplay between the principle of personality (akin to

psychic individuation) and the principle of technology (akin to technical individuation)

create subjectivity.[319] Finally, to avoid the perils of technology, both Burke and Stiegler

turn to poetics. Stiegler argues that it is the nature of the poetic to be sensible, creating

spaces to play and manipulate with language.[320] Burke again parallels Stiegler, framing

the poetic orientation – an orientation towards incongruity and play – as the solution to

the informationism that is driven by capitalist production.

The final ideational parallel between Burke and Stiegler is a commitment to a

return of the pre-Platonic. These corresponding sophistic returns are symptomatic of the

parallels between contemporary rhetorical conditions and those of pre-literate society.

Stiegler's theory is explicitly tied to the pre-Platonic Greeks, arguing that they were the

most recent prior philosophical movement interested in technics.[321] Crick similarly

argues that Burke's focus on form, attitudes, and play all place Burkean rhetorical

theorization within the same sophistic tradition.[322] As they share similar philosophical

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319. Kenneth Burke, "In Haste," *Pre/Text* 3-4 (1985): 340.

320. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery vol. 2,* 31.

321. Stiegler, *Technics vol. 1,* 205.

322. Crick, "The Sophistical Attitude," 41.

roots, their philosophies unsurprisingly mirror one another. This overlapping of a sophistic orientation is particularly useful for unpacking the rhetorical affectivity of memes. Indeed, their reliance on *imitatio* provides a rhetorical explanation for the creation and function of repetition and difference central to Stiegler's concept of individuation.[323]

However, if Burke and Stiegler demonstrate so many philosophical parallels, what does Burke provide to understandings of the questions of technics and individuation? Foremost, as iterated multiple times already, the Burkean notion of form is central to unpacking modes and transindividuation. The negotiation of form is how these fields of potentiality emerge and are recreated. Similarly, identification helps explain the potential of collective secondary retentions; it is those rhetorics that create identification that allow the sharing of experience across subjectivities. Moreover, if according to Stiegler "retentions are selections,"[324] Burke asks us to also consider how they are reflections and deflections, broadening our understanding of the force of these retentions. Therefore, I now turn to examining memes situated in contemporary political controversies to demonstrate the utility of this Burke-Stiegler hybridization. Ultimately, understanding the rhetorical dimensions of technics provides the potential for restoring their individuating capacities, and in the process the prospects of productive democratic politics.

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323. Ibid., 35.

324. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery vol. 2,* 144.

Chapter 3

Old Economies and New Memes:

Enthymeme and Enchantment in Old Economy Steve

Signs of economic slowdown had begun to emerge across the United States as early as 2006. However, two years later when Lehman Brothers, the then fourth largest investment bank in the United States, collapsed many Americans were shocked.[325] For these Americans, the "Great Recession" that followed Lehman's collapse seemed to come out of nowhere.[326] Although the bank's failure was the result of systematic lapses in regulation and accountability that could be traced back as far as the seventies, dominant economic rhetorics had largely convinced Americans that continued prosperity and growth were the inevitable outcome of the neoliberal economy that had brought the affluence of the 1990s. So great was the public shock at this seemingly unpredicted disaster that both academics and the popular press proclaimed that the entire system of global capitalism was under threat.[327] However, this threat was never realized, and four years later economists and politicians proclaimed that the US economy was well on the path to recovery. Despite these messages of recovery, many Americans – particularly Millennials – were not feeling any more economically secure.[328]

[325.] Joshua S. Hanan, Indradeep Ghosh & Kaleb W. Brooks, "Banking on the Present: The Ontological Rhetoric of Neo-Classical Economics and Its Relation to the 2008 Financial Crisis," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 100 no. 2 (2014): 140.

[326.] Although the "Great Recession" only technically lasted from 2007-2009 under technical definitions of recession – two or more quarters of consecutive negative growth as measured by GDP, even officials from the Federal Reserve recognize that its effects lasted well into the following decade. Weinberg, "The Great Recession."

[327.] David M. Kotz, "The Financial and Economic Crisis of 2008: A Systemic Crisis of Neoliberal Capitalism," *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 41 no. 3 (2009): 306.

[328.] There is no clear demarcation of what makes one a Millennial, however definitions tend to center around those individuals born in between 1982 and 2004 – give or take a few years. Philip Bump,

In opposition to this angst, the Federal Reserve Bank (The Fed), led by Ben Bernanke, promoted a rhetoric of market recovery that proletarianized individuals as consumers in service of these markets. Drawing on rhetorical tropes traditional to the Fed, namely protecting agentic markets and distrusting the irrational urges of consumers, this rhetoric framed consumption as not only the key to recovery, but as the only rational action for American consumers. Such a rhetoric demonstrates the profound proletarianizing force of technocratic rhetorics, because it dissuades the amateur participation key to productive individuations. Although larger populations are the most impacted by economic shifts, and therefore could offer meaningful insight into the diagnosis of economic concerns, individuating economic rhetorics would allow economic policy to be built around common understandings of the issues and goals of economics. However, in this case the proletarianizing force is all the more pronounced, as it literally valorizes the politics of personal consumption that Stiegler sees as dis-enchanting individuals and empowering contemporary politics of control.

In 2012, an unlikely symbol emerged to provide an individuating voice seeking to challenge the official rhetorics of market recovery and prosperity: Old Economy Steve. A stock image macro built around a seventies-era yearbook photo, this meme articulates the emotional and ideological frustrations of a generation beset by economic anxiety. By enthymematically creating a narrative that challenges the myth of the American dream, the iterations of the meme combine to offer a narrative that the economy simply failed younger generations. This narrative is less invested in conventional political divides

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"Here is When Each Generation Begins and Ends, According to Facts," *The Atlantic* (March 25, 2014), http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/03/here-is-when-each-generation-begins-and-ends-according-to-facts/359589/.

between conservatives and liberals, instead focusing on diagnosing problems with the contemporary economy and building a coalition of the disaffected. Such a coalition has the potential to resist proletarianizing rhetorics that seek to prioritize consumption over collectivity.

Therefore, in this chapter I outline how technocratic rhetorics such as Bernanke's work to proletarianize individuals in relation to economics. I then explore the ways that Old Economy Steve generates breakages in these communicative structures of control. Specifically, this meme provides unique insight into the ways that stock image macros intersect with both dominant ideological discourses (neoliberal economics) as well as particular social identities (Millennials).[329] In this capacity, the Old Economy Steve meme is demonstrative of Stiegler's vision of a positive political future. As I will argue, the meme's networked practices show how the rhetorical forms of narrative, myth and identification provide resources for individuational rhetorics which serve to unwind control and promote a politic of care.

The Fed and the Infantilization of America

Political economy and economics have long had a turbulent relationship with rhetoric. Adam Smith's academic career began with a focus on rhetoric; therefore, it should not be surprising that Smith's framing of capitalism – which is largely responsible for contemporary economic understandings – has both rhetorical and moralistic elements within it.[330] Additionally, as Deirdre McCloskey reminds us, the technical language and

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[329.] Hunter Schwarz, "Old Economy Steve is a New Meme That Will Enrage All Millennials Everywhere," *BuzzFeed* (May 25, 2013), http://www.buzzfeed.com/hunterschwarz/old-economy-steve-is-a-new-meme-that-will-enrage-all-millenn.

[330.] Lisa Herzog, "The Community of Commerce: Smith's Rhetoric of Sympathy in the Opening of the Wealth of Nations," *Philosophy &Rhetoric* 46 no. 1 (2013): 66.

mathematics of economics have a persuasive purpose and function, largely rooted in metaphor.[331] However, contemporary economic theory and politics have largely denied this rhetorical element. Instead they frame economics as a hard science, with predictable and rational results. James Aune argues this is but one way the realist style manifests itself in economics; these discourses – particularly free market economics – simplify human nature and define efficiency as a norm.[332] By adopting a realist style, economic discourses shut down opposing viewpoints by dismissing them as lacking substance, which maintains the privilege of economic elites through the prevention of alternative individuations.

Existing at the nexus of objective and rhetorical understandings of economic policy, the Chair of the US Federal Reserve Bank is one of the most influential actors in shaping both the direction of the economy and public understandings of economics and their impact. Although unelected, bureaucrats such as the Fed Chair have immense power to influence national politics through their ability to enact their broad mission of preventing economic and banking instability. Lowi argues such "broad discretion makes a politician out of a bureaucrat."[333] Even as chairs of the Fed argue that they base their decisions on numbers and models, they also recognize that their words are carefully

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[331.] Deirdre McCloskey, *The Rhetoric of Economics,* 2nd ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), xiii.

[332.] James Arnt Aune, *Selling the Free Market: The Rhetoric of Economic Correctness* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2001), 40.

[333.] Theodore J. Lowi, *The End of Liberalism: The Second Republic of the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 304.

dissected and interpreted – creating conditions where they carefully craft their messages to try to promote the stability and growth of markets.[334]

The Fed's focus on markets and trade highlights their commitment to the neoliberal ideologies that underpin control society. Specifically, the Fed's commitment to market objectivity and market freedom aligns its political influence with the broader marketization frequently identified with neoliberalism.[335] These rhetorical moves further politics of control and proletarianization because they transform the individual from a citizen to a consumer. Nicholas Gane draws the link between consumer society and control by arguing that consumer society "passes 'freedoms' down to individuals but at the same time depoliticizes and disempowers them by closing down the *agora* as an active space for political engagement, and by leaving consumers (who are not citizens) to their own devices."[336] When consumption becomes the primary action of publics, politics is left to technocratic elites. To better understand the specific ways that the rhetoric of the Fed enacts such political control, I examine their justifications of their response to the 2008 housing collapse and subsequent "Great Recession." Many saw the tumult of the Great Recession as a moment where neoliberal capitalism was on the brink of failure.[337] When a series of Fed-led interventions assisted in a recovery that was framed as preventing this collapse, chair Ben Bernanke was able to use the crisis to justify the

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[334.] Michael Kaplan, "Iconomics: The Rhetoric of Speculation," *Public Culture* 15 no. 3(2003): 483.

[335.] Joshua S Hanan, "Home is Where the Capital is: The Culture of Real Estate in an Era of Control Societies," *Communication and Cultural/Critical Studies* 7 no. 2 (2010): 193.

[336.] Nicholas Gane, *"*The Governmentalities of Neoliberalism: Panopticism, Post-Panopticism and Beyond," *The Sociological Review* 60 no. 4 (2014): 624.

[337.] Andrew Clark, "How the Collapse of Lehman Brothers Pushed Capitalism to the Brink," *The Guardian* (September 4, 2009), https://www.theguardian.com/business/2009/sep/04/lehman-brothers-aftershocks-28-days.

validity and importance of the Fed's vision of economics – reifying the consumerist model of economics that prevents individuation.

To evaluate the proletarianizing rhetoric of the Fed, I examine a series of four lectures delivered by Ben Bernanke at George Washington University in the spring of 2012. While these lectures were delivered to a class of graduate students, they were viewed live by an online audience of over 40,000 and were watched an equal number of times in the following week alone.[338] In part, a response to the increasingly virulent anti-Fed rhetoric circulating across the 2012 election cycle, these lectures sought to justify the Fed's response to the great recession. They established them as an actor key in preventing economic collapse and thus legitimating the Fed as a necessary and visionary force in American politics.[339] My analysis primarily focuses on the third and fourth of Bernanke's lectures because they specifically detailed the Fed's response to the crisis and outline their vision for American economics.[340] The rhetorical features of Bernanke's lectures exemplify American political rhetorics that promote proletarianization as it relates to economic discourses by creating an ordered hierarchy which valorizes the action of markets, the rationality of banks, and the irrationality of the masses. Combined, these

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[338.] Kristina Peterson, "Bernanke Gives College Lecture Series High Marks," *The Wall Street Journal* (April 20, 2012), http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2012/04/10/bernanke-gives-college-lecture-series-high-marks/.

[339.] Joshua Zumbrun, "Bernanke Says Fed Crisis Response Prevented Global Meltdown," *Bloomberg* (March 27, 2012), http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2012-03-27/bernanke-says-forceful-response-prevented-worse-recession.

[340.] The first and second lectures cover the broad mission and history of the Fed. They are frequently referenced in the later lectures, particularly ideas central to the recession and its aftermath. Consequently, little understanding of the proletarianizing force of the Fed is lost in their exclusion, as they do little to address the contemporary nature of American economics and the American public's relation to economic structures and policies.

factors reduce the masses to consumers, negating amateur participation in politics and promoting rhetorical and market action around consumption.

Before I delve into the specifics of Bernanke's framing of the Fed response to the great recession, I will briefly outline the popular narratives explaining this economic slowdown. Officially referring to the economic recession lasting from December 2007 to June 2009, the Great Recession colloquially refers to the collapse of the US housing market in 2007 and the economic slowdown that lasted well into the second decade of the twenty first century.[341] The most popular narrative explaining the causes of this recession was that irresponsible mortgage practices created a bubble in housing prices and the subsequent popping of that bubble triggered the recession.[342] Specifically, in an effort to expand the availability of mortgage backed securities, which had become a profitable alternative to government bonds as a premier safe investment, American financiers offered increasingly risky mortgages to US consumers. However, as consumers of particularly risky mortgages were unable to make their payments, a series of banks – including large firms such as AIG, Lehman Brothers, Bear Sterns, all of whom were heavily invested in mortgage markets – lost a major revenue stream. The collapse of Lehman under these pressures led to a rapid and profound reticence for future lending across the financial industry. This quickly expanding liquidity crisis sent ripples across the economy, expanding the impact of the housing collapse across economic sectors.

[341.]David Morgan, "Most Americans Say U.S. In Recession Despite Data," *Reuters* (April 28, 2011), http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-economy-gallup-idUSTRE73R3WW20110428?feedType=RSS&feedName=domesticNews.

[342.] Alex Bloomberg, "The Giant Pool of Money," *This American Life* (May 9, 2008), http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/355/the-giant-pool-of-money. This podcast offers a clear explanation of this crisis in lay terms. The central details of the narrative are largely the same as those offered by Bernanke across the lectures. Consequently, my accounting of the crisis in the remainder of this paragraph is drawn from the commonality between these two sources

While the recession officially ended in 2009, it would be over five years before

unemployment, wages, markets, and other economic indicators would begin to approach

pre-2008 levels. Undoubtedly this narrative of the collapse is overly simplistic. Ryan

Avent notes that the growing gap between the rich and other Americans, deregulation,

governmental commitment to boom and bust cycles, and other structural factors all

contributed to the collapse.[343] However, as the following section will make apparent, the

exclusion of these systematic factors in favor of blaming individual failings is part of the

larger proletarianizing force offered by Bernanke's rhetoric.

<div align="center">Agentic Markets and Proletarianized Masses</div>

While Bernanke's lecture series focuses on the Fed's response to the great

recession, it emerges out of a larger framework of financial rhetoric built around

neoliberal discourses predicated on the centrality of market logics and growth.

Specifically, Christian Angelich argues that "The prime directive of financial speak is to

protect the status quo image of capitalism as an economic system with infinite growth

potential."[344] This focus on growth means that the movements of markets, rather than the

actions of individuals, is the driving force of economics. This stance is replicated in

Bernanke's lectures. Across the lectures, Bernanke explains the economy in terms that

focus on it as a system of liquidity and economic flows that is measured by total output,

rather than a system that is the product of amalgamated actions of individuals.[345]

[343.] Ryan Avent, "The Great Recession: Grasping at an Understanding of the Crisis," *The Economist* (January 8, 2011), http://www.economist.com/blogs/freeexchange/2011/01/great_recession.

[344.] Christian D. Angelich, "Financial Speak: A Method to Unmask Neoliberal Capitalism and the Ideology of Perpetual Growth," *Global Media Journal* (2014): 2.

[345.] Ben Bernanke, "The Federal Reserve's Response to the Financial Crisis, Lecture 3" (lecture, George Washington School of Business, Washington, March 27, 2012), http://www.federalreserve.gov/newsevents/files/chairman-bernanke-lecture3-20120327.pdf, 15.

Bernanke's focus on markets all but erases the human cost of economic crisis. For example, although much of the content of the lectures are dedicated to the impacts of the recession on markets and industry, the third lecture only has a single paragraph on unemployment and the topic is discussed only in two brief sections of the fourth. In these rare cases where the economy might be measured in human cost, Bernanke pivots this discussion back to the impact these factors have on markets. This focus is apparent in the fourth lecture when Bernanke explicitly lays out the goals that motivate Fed action, noting:

> Now of course, always, we have a dual mandate. We always have two objectives. One of them is maximum employment, which we interpret to mean is trying to keep the economy growing and using its full capacity, and low interest rates are a way of stimulating growth and trying to get people back to work. But the other part of our mandate is price stability, low inflation…And as a result, markets have been confident that the Fed will keep inflation low.[346]

Although unemployment and prices both have profound impacts on all Americans, Bernanke pivots each issue back to their effect on markets, employment only matters in that it facilitates market growth and inflation is key to market – rather than consumer – confidence. Because even the most human costs of the economy are reframed to focus on their impact on markets, Bernanke's rhetoric clearly frames the strength and growth of markets as the central concern of the Fed.

Markets can be understood as one of the most concise ways to reflect the combined human action that drives economic movement.[347] However, Bernanke's

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[346.] Ben Bernanke, "The Federal Reserve's Response to the Financial Crisis, Lecture 4" (lecture, George Washington School of Business, Washington, March 29, 2012), http://www.federalreserve.gov/newsevents/files/chairman-bernanke-lecture3-20120327.pdf, 15.10-11.

[347.] G. Thomas Goodnight and Sandy Green, "Rhetoric, Risk, and Markets: The Dot-Com Bubble," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 96 no. 2 (2010): 116.

rhetoric instead frames markets as independent agents. Benjamin Lee and Edward

LiPuma argue that popular frames tend to think of the public sphere and the state as

containing both first and third person elements, however the market is usually understood

as a third-person collective agent to which first-person agents respond. They note "'the

market' can act, indicate, warn, hesitate, climb, and fall," and human regulators and

consumers can only react to these moves.[348] Across Bernanke's lectures, markets are

attributed with this agency as they not only grow (healthily), but are frequently

"uncertain," "vulnerable, "and "stressed." In the face of these basic actions the Fed is

positioned as a responsive actor.

> So given how we currently see the economy, we tell the market something
> about where we think the rates are going to go. To the extent that they--
> market is--better understands our plans, that's going to help reduce
> uncertainty in financial markets. And to the extent that our plans are, in
> some sense, more aggressive than the market anticipated, we'll also tend to
> ease policy conditions. OK, so again, monetary policy has been used to try
> to help get the economy back on its feet.[349]

For Bernanke, Fed policy can only function effectively insofar as it is understandable to

markets. Consequently, both the lectures – and Federal reserve rhetoric more largely –

rely heavily on economic jargon.[350] This jargon laden explanation of economics suggest

that the actions of agentic markets can only be understood through technical expertise.

Because of this, Bernanke frames Fed rhetoric and policy as needing to respond to the

technical needs and demands of markets rather than be intelligible to larger publics.

[348.] Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma, "Cultures of Circulation: The Imaginations of Modernity," *Public Culture* 14 no. 2 (2002): 196.

[349.] Bernanke, "Lecture 4," 13.

[350.] Joe Deaux, "Why Janet Yellen Will Craft The Greatest Fedspeak Ever," *The Street* (October 10, 2013), http://www.thestreet.com/story/12064500/1/why-janet-yellen-will-craft-the-greatest-fedspeak-ever.html.

In framing human action as a response to markets as agentic actors, Bernanke's rhetoric prevents most individuals from participating in the individuation of economic rhetorics. Lee and LiPuma argue that by constructing markets as independent agents to which investors and other individuals respond, non-experts are prevented from identifying with markets.[351] Furthermore, while banks and regulators respond to markets, larger publics are simply consumed by them. When explaining how mortgages are turned into investments, Bernanke mentions individual borrowers only insofar as they are transformed into securities which may flow across markets.[352] In the realm of Fed rhetoric, most individuals are only related to markets through their consumptive practices. Bernanke's rhetoric follows Aristotle's delineation between economics and politics: "For Aristotle, the administration of the *oikos* aimed toward the preservation of natural life, while the activity of the *polis* aimed for the promotion of the good life."[353] For Bernanke, people matter as those natural lives whose consumption fuels markets – it is a non-political space. However in focusing only on markets, Bernanke's rhetoric is proletarianizing as it prevents most individuals from participating in the identifications that create politics and publics; the market is an agent that is fundamentally different than "we the people" and thus people cannot individuate with it.[354] Without this individuation, markets are framed as outside of rhetorical space, and thus not subject to the democratic will of the people.

[351.] Lee and LiPuma, "Cultures of Circulation," 196.

[352.] Bernanke, "Lecture 3," 7.

[353.] Megan Foley, "From Infantile Citizens to Infantile Institutions: The Metaphoric Transformation of Political Economy in the 2008 Housing Market Crisis," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98 no. 4 (2012): 388.

[354.] Kaplan, "Iconomics," 491.

Even though the Fed's rhetoric frames markets as independent agents, for Bernanke these agents are not responsible for the housing collapse and subsequent recession. Instead, human actors are framed as a mass whose irrational panics created the crash. This massification of the larger public begins with reducing individuals to faceless aggregates. Outside of banking and financial elites, individuals are only referenced as part of statistics or referencing a panic. Such rhetoric frames larger collectivities as masses, which Hardt and Negri note is a frame that removes collective agency because these irrational mobs are instead led by others.[355] This view of non-agentic masses is replicated in Bernanke's implication that consumers function through a Pavlovian-style response to Fed policies and rhetoric. Commenting on the influence of Fed policies, Bernanke argues:

> By raising and lowering the short-term interest rate, the Fed can influence a broader range of interest rates. That in turn affects consumer spending, purchases of homes, capital investment by firms and the like, and that provides demand for the output of the economy and can help stimulate a return to growth.[356]

By suggesting the consuming masses uncritically respond to Fed policy, Bernanke's rhetoric positions them as participating in what Goodnight and Green call "mimetic isomorphism."[357] Goodnight and Green argue that economic rhetorics frequently ask participants to simply imitate past successful behaviors. As a mass, the collective "we" is asked to consume a Bureaucrat's definitions of economic success, rather than politically negotiate (individuate with) these rhetorical technics. In making mass economic action an imitation without difference, this rhetoric forecloses individuations.

[355.] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude,* 99-100.

[356.] Bernanke, "Lecture 4," 4-5.

[357.] Goodnight and Green, "Rhetoric, Risk, and Markets," 117.

Beyond limiting individuation, the massification of larger publics also functions to create a scapegoat for the financial collapses that spurred the recession. The belief that markets are objective and rational is central to the neoliberal rhetorics that justify control – if markets are rational they are politically neutral and ethical.[358] Yet if markets always operate ethically, how could such a disastrous crash occur? The answer offered by Bernanke is that the panic of the masses forced the market down a harmful path. Although Bernanke argues that subprime mortgage lending was a catalyst of the collapse, the lectures focus on mass panic as the mechanism that transformed a localized bubble into a system wide failure. In addressing public responses to the earliest bank failures, Bernanke explains,

> A depositor would pull their money out of a bank that was *thought to be* having trouble. So there was a whole series of runs which generated huge pressures on key financial firms as they lost their funding and were forced to sell their assets quickly and many important financial markets were badly disrupted.[359]

In using the phrase "thought to be," Bernanke suggests that the troubles facing banks existed in the irrational mind of the masses rather than in financial realities. This irrationality then created a cascade that "disrupted" the otherwise orderly and rational operation of markets. Even after the crisis, Bernanke asserts that mass irrationality continued to hamper markets. In the fourth lecture, Bernanke addresses the slow recovery of the economy. Despite the fact that banks had been stabilized and liquidity restored, Bernanke argues that the irrational perceptions held by consumers are preventing a full recovery.

[358.] Hanan, "Home is Where," 193.

[359.] Bernanke, "Lecture 3," 8, emphasis added.

> And more broadly, existing home owners, when they see their house prices down, it may mean they can't get a home equity line of credit. It may mean that they just feel poorer. And so that affects not just their housing behavior, but also their willingness and ability to buy other business services. So that's one of the reasons, the declines in housing prices, and to some extent also stock prices, are part of the reason why consumers have been cautious and less willing to spend.[360]

In attributing the inability of stocks, housing prices, and consumer spending to recover to masses "*just* feeling poorer," Bernanke pegs responsibility for the entirety of the continued economic hardship on mass irrationality. It is "just" a feeling, and thus not in line with the factual rationality of economic conditions which Bernake would argue create growth if freed from these fetters of human irrationality. By framing the masses as irrationally harming markets, Bernanke argues that in those cases where larger publics are allowed to participate in shaping economic rhetorical technics, the result is disaster. This rhetorical frame implies that the exclusion of the masses from participation in these economic technics is both necessary and desirable.

Across Bernanke's rhetoric, the masses are a threat to the rational operation of markets. This irrationality justifies the imposition of increased control. Specifically, Bernanke rationalizes this control by positioning the Fed as a benevolent parent who must constrain the masses when they threaten the operation of markets. Megan Foley argues that such family metaphors are central to the way that contemporary society understands economics. Foley notes this metaphor places larger publics as children in the familial relationship.

> Although nowadays the word 'economics' only rarely connotes parent-child relationships, a family metaphor nevertheless underwrites the history of political economy. The term 'economy,' once *oeconomy*, derives from

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[360.] Bernanke, "Lecture 4," 16.

the Greek roots *oikos* (household, home, or family) and nomos (law, convention, or ordinance). While classical Greek thought maintained a division between the economic management of the family and the political government of citizens, the modern emergence of ''political economy'' appropriated the domestic administration of the *oikos* as a set of techniques for governing civic life. Discourses of political economy mapped the art of governing children onto the art of governing citizens, ultimately resulting in the rhetorical infantilization of citizenship today.[361]

Bernanke's rhetoric follows this familial pattern. Bernake establishes the paternal wisdom of the Fed by noting that they had warned the irrational public that their actions would lead to a crisis. Demonstrating this passing on of paternal wisdom, Bernanke argues

going back for at least a decade before the crisis, the Fed and many other people, you know, said that the--Fannie and Freddie just didn't have enough capital and that they were in fact a danger to the stability of the financial system.[362]

By arguing that the Fed warned politicians that government programs like Fannie May and Freddie Mac were putting markets at risk, Bernanke suggests that if the masses had been rational (adult) – or at least listened to rational advice – they could have avoided triggering the crisis. Despite this caution, the public acted as juveniles and ignored the warnings of more mature minds, succumbing to panic that created the crisis.

Once the public failed to listen to the wisdom of the Fed, Bernanke argues that the Central Bank was forced to step in and save the public from itself. Speaking about the first meeting of heads of central banks after Lehman failed, Bernanke explains,

We essentially tore up the agenda and we sat down and we talked about what are we going to do? How are we going to work together to stop this crisis which was threatening the global financial system? And in the end, we came up with a statement that was written from scratch based actually

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[361.] Foley, "Infantile Institutions," 387.

[362.] Bernanke, "Lecture 3," 3.

on some Fed proposals and was circulated, and there were a number of
principles and statements involved in that. But among those were first, that
we were going to work together to prevent the failure of anymore
systemically important financial institutions.[363]

Framed against the usual banality of such meetings, Bernanke's words position the

response of the Fed as a creative intervention in the face of a failing system. In the

familial metaphor, they are the parent who has to step in to save an unruly child. That is

not to say the Fed is without fault in the crisis. On repeated occasions Bernanke notes that

in allowing unregulated mortgages, the Fed "did not do as good a job as it should have in

protecting consumers."[364] However, the failure of the Fed is not one of ignorance about

markets or economics, but rather that it did not treat the masses as the juveniles that they

were within this proletarianizing frame. Had the Fed protected people from their

irrational impulses, the crisis could have been adverted.

Bernanke's framing of the masses as unruly children justifies both the expansion

of state power as well as a symbolic politics of proletarianizing control.[365] Concluding the

lecture series, Bernanke contends that, "financial crises will always be with us. That is

probably unavoidable."[366] Implicitly, Bernanke's rhetoric argues this cycle of crisis exists

because the panics of irrational masses will continue to disrupt markets. Consequently,

Bernanke asserts that the Fed and other similar regulators must have the authority to

regulate (control) the masses as completely as possible. Bernanke posits, "The only

solution in the end is for us regulators and our successors to continue to monitor the

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[363] Ibid., 11.

[364] Bernanke, "Lecture 4," 23.

[365] Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 27.

[366] Bernanke, "Lecture 4," 24.

entire financial system and to try to identify problems and to respond to them using the tools that we have."[367] If the masses cannot be expected to listen to reason, the Fed must have the full resources of control to impose that reason onto them. It is only under these conditions that the Fed can "put out the fire" that is the childish irrationality of the masses.[368]

Combined, these rhetorical moves by Bernanke create a clear hierarchy of economic actors, justifying the proletarianization of the masses. On the top of this hierarchy is markets, who are positioned as necessary for creating the growth that leads to prosperity. However, in equating markets with rationality, Bernanke's rhetoric negatively implies that the irrationality of the masses must be symbolically excluded from markets. In this order, Fed interventions (through the mediation of banks and other financial institutions) are necessary for the market to reach its entelechial form. Specifically, the Fed's role is to insulate markets from the inefficiencies of people and their unpredictability. Moreover, because markets can function as a metonym for the economically elite, the interest of the public – the majority of global citizens – are the last concern of market capitalism.[369] The technical language of these economic addresses further relegates amateurs as hierarchically bellow these discourses.[370] Because any public action besides consumption is a potential threat to the continued growth of markets, neoliberal economics must be conducted through technics that make alternative

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[367.] Ibid.

[368.] Ibid., 2.

[369.] Aune, *Selling the Free Market,* 49.

[370.] Catherine Resche, "Investigating 'Greenspanese': From Hedging to 'Fuzzy Transparency'," *Discourse &Society* 15 no. 6 (2004): 725.

economic individuations as difficult as possible. If the public cannot understand the discourse of experts, they may as well accept it.

Ultimately, this entire discourse works to foreclose mass participation, preventing individuation. This lack of individuation precludes the economic sphere from being regulated by collective politics. This lack of accountability to politics is clear in the lectures. Only once does Bernanke suggest that the Fed is answerable to more than just the stability of markets. Addressing the money spent on bailing out AIG, Bernanke notes "we weren't taking chances with tax payer money." [371] Although this does suggest some public accountability, this responsibility exist only so far as the Fed is an ethical steward of the interests of the public, which is defined as "getting credit flows moving again." Even when the Fed is accountable to the public, it is as a parent whose greatest interest is the freedom of markets – the tax payer is never the Fed's primary concern. Moreover, because the tax payer is only useful in terms of their input of money into the system; the Fed not only validates itself as justified in ignoring the 45 percent of Americans who functionally pay zero income tax[372] – completely removing them from economic rhetorics, but it also justifies the act of taxation as an investment in markets, rather than collective interests. Each tax payer has an individual relation with their investment, rather than a collective interest in the outcome of tax policy. By foreclosing a collective relation to these economic rhetorics, Bernanke forecloses upon the possibility of collective individuations, preventing non-consumptive economic practices from being valid amateur action within this rhetorical grammar.

[371.] Bernanke, "Lecture 3," 14.

[372.] "Tax Units with Zero or Negative Income Tax," *Tax Policy Center* (October 2, 2015), http://www.taxpolicycenter.org/model-estimates/tax-units-zero-or-negative-income-tax/tax-units-zero-or-negative-income-tax.

Old Economy Steve as a Mode of Individuation

The rhetorical environment created by rhetorics like that of the Fed worked to proletarianize any subjectivity that was not part of the financial elite. However, as a collective that felt particularly excluded from economic discourses, Millennials were particularly alienated from narratives of returning economic prosperity. Economic data both suggests that Millennials were disproportionally left behind in the recovery,[373] and that the prospects for economic prosperity for the middle and working classes of America have been declining for the better part of four decades.[374] Beyond the harsh economic reality facing this generation, rhetorical frames further excluded them from participation. For example, when Bernanke established that the Fed was nominally accountable to taxpayers, this accountability largely excluded Millennials because most lack the income required to pay into the federal income tax system.[375] Combined, these economic and rhetorical factors led many Millennials to feel excluded from the possibility of participation in the politics of political economy. In the face of this alienation and frustration, the meme Old Economy Steve emerged as a technic that afforded increased opportunities for individuation in relation to issues of contemporary political economy

[373] Nina Glinski, "Four Ways Millennials Are Still Scarred From the Recession," *Bloomberg* (February 23, 2015), http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-02-23/four-ways-millennials-are-still-scarred-from-the-recession.

[374] David M. Kotz, "The Final Conflict: What Can Cause a System-Threatening Crisis of Capitalism?," *Science & Society* 74 no. 3 (2010): 368. Kotz states that "In the period 1979-2007 average real hourly earnings of nonsupervisory workers actually declined slightly, by 1.1%, while output per hour grew by 69.8%, indicating that all of the productivity gain over the period went to capital."

[375] Scott Greenberg, "Millennials Pay Very Little in Income Taxes," *The Tax Foundation* (December 3, 2015), http://taxfoundation.org/blog/millennials-pay-very-little-income-taxes#_ftn1.

Characterized as a meme for frustrated Millennials, Old Economy Steve (also called Steven) emerged as a web phenomenon in 2012.[376] Although the picture circulated around the internet as early as 2010 as a stock photo in anti-acne articles, it developed into the Old Economy Steve image macro in a Reddit thread in May of 2012.[377] The image is a high school yearbook photo of Kenneth Kiser, which was available on the web because Kiser uploaded it to a free use photo repository.[378] The popularity of the meme spiked when *BuzzFeed* posted an article in May 2013 proclaiming it "a new meme that will enrage Millennials."[379] A Google trends search of the phrase "Old Economy Steve" reveals that after this initial burst of activity, a steady stream of web attention has continued in the years since, with spikes appearing when new web outlets report on the meme.[380] The ability to generate thousands of views and sustain a consistent web presence suggests that Steve offers a unique opportunity for participants to transindividuate with the meme.[381] Through an analysis of the corpus of the meme available on the *Quick Meme* and *Know Your Meme* websites, I explore the defining

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[376.] Daryl Parandada, "Old Economy Steve: A Meme for Frustrated Millennials," *Marketplace* (May 28, 2013), http://www.marketplace.org/topics/economy/numbers/old-economy-steve-meme-frustrated-millennials.

[377.] Don, "Old Economy Steven," *Know Your Meme* (June, 2013), http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/old-economy-steven.

[378.] Kevin Roose and Stefan Becket, "Meet the Real-Life 'Old Economy Steve'," *New York Magazine* (May 30, 2013), http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2013/05/meet-the-real-life-old-economy-steve.html.

[379.] Mary Noble, "'Old Economy Steve' Meme Turns Millennials against Boomers," *Politix* (December 22, 2013), http://politix.topix.com/story/6258-old-economy-steve-meme-turns-millennials-against-boomers.

[380.] "Old Economy Steve," *Google Trends:* https://www.google.com/trends/explore#q=Old%20Economy%20Steve.

[381.] When referring to the meme as "Old Economy Steve" or simply "Steve," I am not arguing for the independent agency of the meme. Rather I am using the name of the meme as shorthand for the entire modal assemblage, including those human participants who have helped develop and circulate it.

features and forces of the Old Economy Steve meme. Aside from outlining the ways that participants mobilize the meme for political purposes, in focusing on this one meme, this chapter also seeks to illustrate how the process of transindividuation shapes and redirects the form of memes.
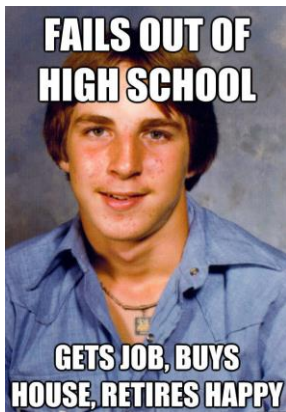
Figure 3.1: Original iteration of the meme

The Individuating Form of Steve

As the most consistent element of Old Economy Steve, the visual form of the meme is an ideal location to begin evaluation.[382] Since the Reddit post that introduced the meme included the phrase of "old economy" in the title, one clear function of the visual is to create a sense of opposition between Steve as a representative of the "old economy" and Millennials as members of the "new economy." Aesthetically, the picture distances itself from contemporary America (Figure 3.1). Both Steve's shirt and the background are a shade of blue reminiscent of the "powder blue" tuxedo stereotypically associated with the sixties and seventies. Moreover, the faded contrast of the photo suggests that the image is genuinely old, rather than a contemporary reiteration of a past aesthetic. The

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[382.] My schema for reading visual texts is drawn from the front end of the methods offered by Valerie Peterson. Specifically beginning with compositional ellements and then moving into contextual factors. Valerie V. Peterson, "The Rhetorical Criticism of Visual Elements: An Alternative to Foss's Schema," *Southern Communication Journal* 67 no. 1 (2001): 19-32.

embodied presentation of Steve himself further dates the photo. The feathered haircut and wide-collared shirt place the image firmly within the fashion of the 1970s. These aesthetic features position Steve as a member of the Baby Boomer generation, as even the oldest members of Generation X would not have been old enough to be in high school when these fashions were popular. Combined, these elements create an affect akin to that of a yearbook or similar window into the past, setting the conditions where any individuation of the meme will already be connected to this frame of temporal opposition.

As Colin Brooke argues, participants in digital rhetorics not only develop the visual form of technics to look a particular way, but also to be looked at from a particular vantage point.[383] When mediated through a screen, with its bright contrast and contemporary aesthetics, the image of Steve – with its soft focus and faded elements – is positioned as an old and out of touch other. This faded past must be contrasted with the vivid, lived experience of participants in digital culture. Additionally, Steve is looking directly into the camera, maintaining a direct gaze with viewers. This perspective further situates Steve and memetic participants oppositionally. Participants cannot assume the perspective of Steve because they are directly engaging his visage.[384] By positioning the Boomers as oppositional to memetic participants, the components of the meme situate members of Gen X and Y as ideal participants. They are the members of American culture who stand apart and therefore across, from Steve's generation.

[383.] Brooke, *Lingua Fracta*, 140.

[384.] The masculinity of Steve is central to the nostalgic read of the meme. Therefore, my choice to use gendered pronouns to describe the meme refer to the maleness meme as a technic that has individuated within social understandings of gender rather than making any comment on Keiser as the subject of the originating photo.

While the aesthetics and perspective of the meme create temporal distance and opposition, the image of Steve himself bolsters the force of the photo. Close-up shots on the face cut out mediating factors such as body and context, allowing the disembodied face to become a focal point for affect.[385] This focus is particularly salient in the case of Steve, where the photo-session background obfuscates context beyond powder blue – making temporal distance the only scenic context. This encourages participants to focus on Steve's face. With his youth, light tan, and easy-going smirk, Steve embodies an attitude suggesting the ease and happiness of youth in the seventies. Intertextually, he reads analogously to Matthew McConaughey's character in the film *Dazed and Confused*, replete with a "dazed" facial expression.[386] Steve's life is not only easy, he enjoys the excess and leisure – unavailable to contemporary youth – often nostalgically romanticized onto reminiscences of the seventies. Moreover, because the photo features what is likely interpreted by participants as a white male body, it evokes this nostalgia in regards to the subject position that most enjoyed the prosperity of the old economy. Akin to a visual ideograph, these images serve to concretize and anchor text.[387] Therefore, by positioning this image at the center of the meme, Old Economy Steve invites participants to read the meme through a frame of generational difference that romanticizes the past.

These visual associations dictate the formal functions of the topline and bottomline. While the tone of textual elements varies across stock character macros, participants that create Old Economy Steve memes create ironic affect through the

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385. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* (London: The Althone Press, 1986), 88-89.

386. *Dazed and Confused,* directed by Richard Linklater (1993; Grammercy Pictures), DVD.

387. Dana L. Cloud, "'To Veil the Threat of Terror': Afghan Women and the <Clash of Civilizations> in the Imagery of the U.S. War on Terrorism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90 no. 3 (2004), 287.

juxtaposition of the two lines of text with the visual form. Once juxtaposed, these two lines create a perspective by incongruity whereby the bottomline calls on participants to reevaluate the assumptions written on the topline.[388] In the earliest iterations of the meme, the topline continues the gesture of the visual, reifying the easy life embodied by Steve. These toplines imbue him with traits that would be unacceptable for contemporary economic success – e.g. "fails out of high school." The bottomlines then provide information that complicates efforts to read these failings through contemporary standards, instead telling of his success, e.g."gets job, buys house, retires happy." This contrast draws upon the nostalgia evoked by the visual style of the image, suggesting that Steve's life under conditions of the "old economy" was easier than that faced by younger generations in the new.

However, as technics individuate along with the individuals who participate in their circulation, an alternative modality of Steve emerged through transindividuation. Later iterations of the meme flip the form of relation between the toplines and bottomlines, drawing force from the class division created by the photo's perspective. In this second individuated strain of the meme, the topline displays a viewpoint – usually conservative – that demonstrates participants' interpretations of Baby Boomer's current economic views or their criticism of contemporary youth: e.g. "I didn't have a computer at my desk like you kids." The bottom line then repositions Steve's generation as socially antiquated, "had scotch and an ashtray instead." This bifurcation of the poles demonstrates how the individuation of textual elements constantly repositions modal poles of a meme. While this inversion stays within the larger form of generational

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388. Burke, *Permanence,* 119. Burke notes that incongruity is opportunity for cracking assumptions within language by breaking traditional associations between words and ideas.

contrast, it expands the scope of the meme beyond nostalgia for the past, allowing more explicit criticism of contemporary economics.

<div align="center">Finding Ourselves in Steve's Past</div>

Bernanke's rhetoric framed the entelechial goal of economic action as the growth of markets. As this rhetoric positioned agentic markets as hierarchically superior to human actors, it foreclosed identification between individuals and the economy. At best, people – particularly Millennials – could only respond to the actions of markets, ideally by consuming as homogenous singularities (Stiegler's very definition of proletarianization). Although blaming generational difference for this difficulties could be dismissed as simple youthful discontent, Stiegler points out that reconsidering the nature of economics is fundamentally the task of these younger generations. Speaking on the loss of care in contemporary economics, Stiegler argues:

> The great question of the twenty-first century will be finding the way to abandon [contemporary economics] and to invent new modalities of non-inhuman existence within societies that have become thoroughly technological-modalities that are less toxic, more useful to a non-inhumanity that has become a global community in which isolation is impossible…, and more desirable for the world's population as a whole (particularly younger generations who will *themselves* have to invent and solidify these new ways of life: this will be *their* work since we, having left them such a heavy heritage, will have to discover both how to have confidence in them and give way to them).[389]

If it is up to younger generations to invent the conditions that create care, a frame of generational opposition creates the conditions that allow this innovation. Millennials need rhetorical distance from the Baby Boomers and their proletarianizing rhetorics if they wish to develop alternative economic orders predicated on care.

[389.] Bernard Stiegler, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 183, emphasis in original.

As a technic grounded in such opposition, Steve provides the conditions for collective individuation that set the foundations for Millennials to promote care. Specifically, the formal expectations of Old Economy Steve afford increased opportunities for individuals to identify with the stance of the meme – creating a focal point for the establishment of collective unity. Each iteration of an image macro is the enactment of a particular individual's identification with the meme – often taking the form of a textual reference to particular struggles.[390] However, beyond their connection to the frustrations constructed by the meme's formal elements, little unifies the participants that individuate via particular iterations. In this way, the meme allows for collectivization through the constitution of an identifiable "we", without the eradication of the "I" into a mass subjectivity. Consequently, the way that participants identify with the narratives and structures of feeling that organize a text helps to determine the way they use the text to engage in a process of individuation. In the case of Steve, this individuation translates the proletarianizing discourses of markets into a participatory space for the discussion of the human side of contemporary economics.

[390.] Jenkins' conception of the mode rejects the suggestion that memes can represent particular viewpoints noting, "Deleuze consistently critiques the view of rhetoric as representation precisely because such accounts presuppose actual subjects who do the representing." Jenkins, "The Modes of Visual Rhetoric," 457. However, as established earlier, I do not contend that while memes should not be considered exact representations of static subjects, Deleuze notes it is still necessary to consider the processes of subjectification. The memes create a space whereby alternative, individuating, subjectivities may emerge
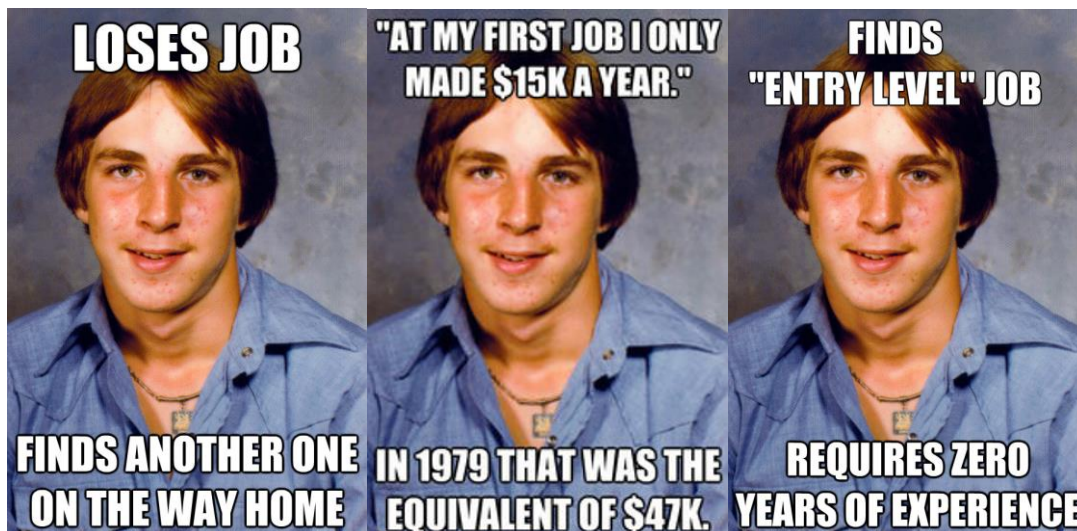
Figure 3.2: Steve on the job market.

While the form of Old Economy Steve suggests a crisis in contemporary

American capitalism, individual iterations convey varied experiences of the crisis. For

many participants, the meme allows the ability to express the that fact that younger

Americans are experiencing unemployment in ways unknown to Steve's generation.

Multiple iterations suggest that finding employment in Steve's era was easy – "Loses job

// finds another one on the way home" and "finds 'entry level' job // requires zero years

experience" (Figure 3.2). These iterations highlight the difficulty of Millennials in

finding employment after the great recession. Other iterations of the meme tackle issues

ranging from outsourcing and the decline of industrial labor, to political issues like the

minimum wage, unions, and social security (Figure 3.3).
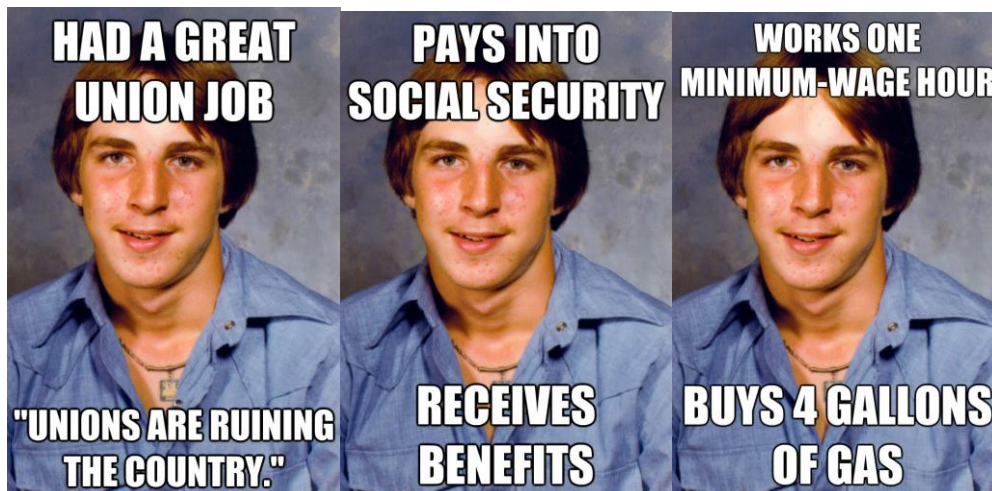
Figure 3.3: Steve comments on political issues

However, the ability of users to place their personal narrative within the larger

form of the meme is most apparent in the plethora of iterations criticizing the current

state of higher education, thus aligning the meme with Millennials for whom this is a

particularly salient concern. Some instances highlight the problems of employment that

face particular fields of study in the new economy, such as "got journalism degree //

works at daily newspaper" or "liberal arts degree // gets job." Others indict the

contemporary failure of college to live up to its past promise more generally, "when I was

in college my summer job paid the tuition // Tuition was $400," "graduated college // saw

difference in his paycheck," and "graduates college // doesn't move back in with his

parents." Each of these iterations allows Millennials to express and identify their

individual struggles within a larger sense of generational unity. The ability to express a

feeling of collective identification in the face of economic uncertainty encourages

participation in, and reproduction of, the meme.

Yet it is not only the ability to write oneself into the meme that encourages

identification. Old Economy Steve also allows participants to evoke nostalgic memories

that situate them within the economic crisis. Greg Dickenson posits that the construction of memory is a performative act used to constitute a particular sense of identity.[391] This identity work is particularly prominent in times of crisis, where nostalgic recreations of the past are used to judge contemporary events in light of a reconstructed historical view of community identity.[392] Steve's evocation of a nostalgic frame is empowered by the juxtaposition of generations created between the visual and the textual. Many iterations of the meme use Steve's construction as a slacker to further nostalgize the past. One popular iteration starts with the topline "2.0 GPA, abuses alcohol and cocaine, can't hold a job," all believable life outcomes for Steve within the form of the meme. This litany of poor life choices is then contrasted with the bottomline, "elected president of the United States." Aside from serving as an unflattering commentary on the complicity of George W. Bush in the failures of the new economy as well as the president's personal character flaws, this text suggests that the old economy offered more opportunities, as well as a greater capacity for second chances, for all types of individuals, not just the exceptional.

The Old Economy Steve meme, with its romantic reimagining of the seventies, allows users to pass judgment on the failings of the contemporary economy. Yet, this is not a simple disparagement of the status quo; rather the meme uses a narrative built through transindividuation to use the past as proof that a preferable alternative to the ills of the present is possible. On face, the construction of a nostalgic memory is a conservative act, implicitly calling for a return to the late industrial economics of the 1970s that allowed Old Economy Steve to flourish. However, when juxtaposed with the

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391. Greg Dickenson, "Memories for Sale: Nostalgia and the Construction of Identity in Old Pasadena," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83 no. 1 (February, 1997): 21.

392. Ron Von Burg and Paul E. Johnson, "Yearning for the Past that Never Was: Baseball, Steroids, and the Anxiety of the American Dream," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 26 (2009): 365.

undesirability of the present, the meme opens up alternative narrative spaces. While this

narrative may come in the form of a return to the past, it is not limited to this logic of

return. Stiegler notes that such juxtaposition of current ills with a better future is the only

mode of individuation that can combat those who in the face of proletarianization do not

"give a damn": the possibility of an alternative preferable to the present creates an

impetus to challenge the structures creating contemporary dissatisfaction.[393] Moreover,

because the lines of text speak as a contemporary voice commenting on past events, they

create a juxtapositional logic that reorients memory. This reorientation allows users to

embrace a nostalgia that functions as a roadmap to the future, suggesting the possibility

of a political alternative that is both materially and affectively preferable to the present.[394]

Such a focus on alternative temporalities imbues the Steve meme with resistive potential.

Deleuze notes that while disruptive surprises are a primary mode of unsettling power in

control society, the creation of new "space-times," such as a hyperbolically idealized

1970s, creates opportunities to resist inclusion into the narratives that justify control.[395]

Ultimately, these varied narratives which allow identification between

participants and with economic politics allows these memes to afford participants

opportunities for individuation. This individuation is enabled not simply through the form

of this meme, but also through the larger proairetic logics of networked media. Because

of their social construction, memes encourage the revitalization of invention built around

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[393.] Stiegler, *Taking Care,* 178-79.

[394.] Jason Kalin, "Remembering with Rephotography: A Social Practice for the Inventions of Memories," *Visual Communication Quarterly* 20 no. 3 (2013): 174.

[395.] Deleuze, "Control and Becoming," 172.

imitatio, furthering the proliferation of their underlying communicative force.[396]

Participants use the intersections of their unique experiences to create common force

across the network. Under this interpretation, a meme that allows identification will better

induce proairesis, creating an evolving democratic narrative that can provide spaces

where memetic expressions articulate a collective individuation in opposition to dominant

structures of power. Stock character macros are particularly suited to enabling

participants to identify with the formal constraints of the meme. The narrative and

affective content of visual elements allow participants to share common experiences or

social positions, although the textual overlays enable the participants to articulate their

particular subject position within this common community.[397]

<div align="center">Modular Construction of an Enthymematic Meta-narrative</div>

While each instance of the meme functions as its own enthymeme, they are

textual fragments that invite participants to critically construct a broader message when

combined.[398] Such reconstructions, with as many permutations as fragments, foster

rhetorical technics particularly suited to individuation. As evidenced in discussions of the

ways that participants can articulate their personal struggles within the meme, each

iteration of Old Economy Steve enthymematically tells a singular story about the

economy and the political/economic differences and divisions between generations.

However, as the meme proairetically expanded, a larger enthymematic meta-narrative

emerged across iterations of the meme. As repetitions of the meme with unique content,

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[396.] Brooke, *Lingua Fracta,* 77.

[397.] Robert Hariman and John L. Lucaties, *No Caption Needed*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 14-16.

[398.] McGee, "Fragmentation," 279.

these iterations coalesce into a larger enthymeme built around the form of the meme. This enthymeme gestures towards a meta-narrative that participants may adopt. Stiegler argues that the provision of such narratives is politically potent, as individuals do not decide their identity, but rather adopt it through the technics they transindividuate with.[399] Consequently, the construction of alternative identities within the technics of Steve allows alternative individuations through which individuals may enter into political life.

Across the two primary threads of the meme, particular iterations highlight specific ideological inconsistencies of Steve's generation, or specific ways that capitalism has failed the millennial generation. More broadly, the collective construction of the Old Economy Steve enthymematically argues that contemporary articulations and practices of capitalism preclude the American Dream – challenging the virtue of Bernanke's hierarchical valorization of markets. As Aaron Duncan argues, the myth of the American Dream is central to Americans' understandings of their social and economic character.[400] Duncan posits that the most basic form of the myth centers on the trope of the "self-made man."[401] The narrative of this man is as follows: work hard, follow basic social expectations, and be rewarded with moderate success in the form of a suburban home, 2.4 kids, and financial security. In the language of Bernanke, be a good consumer who does not panic in a way that will disturb markets. The myth further posits that anyone with enough grit and good fortune has the potential to realize the dream. The myth frames individuals as having total economic agency and self-determination but not to question

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[399.] Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment,* 31.

[400.] Aaron Duncan, "Reimagining the Self-Made Man: Myth, Risk, and the Pokerization of America," *Western Journal of Communication* 78 no. 1 (2014): 44

[401.] Duncan notes that the gendering of this phrase is instructive, as it has traditionally empowered men at the cost of women.

capitalism; if the system allows prosperity, what incentive is there to question it – let alone push for change? This myth has played a central role in the justification of American capitalism,[402] making Steve appealing to those that capitalism has failed. This latter part of the myth disrupts the hierarchy of Bernanke, by suggesting that individuals need to be more than passive consumers regulated by parental technocrats.

Although this myth is central to American cultural character, the meta-narrative constructed across Old Economy Steve offers a counter-narrative by arguing the current impossibility of the myth – and by extension Bernanke's hierarchy. To begin, the embodied presence of Steve uses modes of hypersignification to draw attention to the fact that non-white, non-male bodies have been traditionally – and continue to be – excluded from the dream. Beyond this, iterations indict the myth in a general sense. The iteration "receives entry level position after high school // works up the ladder to CEO" – uses the expected comic form of the meme to suggest that while Boomers lived the dream to achieve high paying white color positions, that type of advancement is now impossible for Millennials. Other iterations deconstruct specific elements of the dream's vision of the idyllic American life – "didn't graduate high school // still made enough money to support a family of four." Across the meme, participants suggest that for Millennials home ownership is unlikely, pay is lower, benefits are disappearing, possibilities for advancement are dim, and generally, they will be less well off than their parents.

Combined, these enthymematically argue that while banks may have recovered from the Great Recession, for everyone unable to fit the mold of Steve, the Fed's claims of economic recovery are far from true. A form of the meme featuring no topline and the

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[402.] Richard Weiss, *The American Myth of Success: From Horatio Alger to Normal Vincent Peale* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 1.

bottomline "retires" summarizes the meme's vision of the prospects for Millennials. By breaking the form of the meme, this iteration suggests that regardless of the content of the topline, for non-Boomers the hope of retirement – and by extension the American Dream – is a punchline. By suggesting the incongruity between any expression of contemporary life and the American dream, this iteration argues the two are incommensurate. Moreover, by expressly linking the prospects of the American dream to the faded image of Steve, the meme enthymematically asserts that the idea of achieving the dream is as outdated as the picture of Steve, long lasting consumer products, and other bottomlines of the meme. The American dream is living through reminiscences of the past in the same way that a Baby Boomer may use a high school photo to relive their glory days. In this way, the meme uses identifications with the American dream to disrupt the order of the hierarchy presented by Bernanke, disrupting its proletarianizing force. If the rationality of markets supported by citizens as consumers cannot provide the dream, then the control advocated by Bernanke's rhetoric may not be as productive as individuations which foreground the human cost of the economy.

This rejection of contemporary capitalism also serves to indict the neoliberal economics that underlie much of Bernanke's rhetoric. Neoliberal ideology frames contemporary economics as part of the natural development of capitalism;[403] however, Old Economy Steve rejects this evolutionary model. The combined force of the iterations of the meme argue that the current economy is the direct result of the choices of Steve's generation. This charge reframes Bernanke's wise paternalism as parental neglect. While many iterations allude to these changes by blaming Boomers for economic trends such as

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[403.] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 64.

outsourcing or the decline of industrial labor, the attitude is best summarized in one

iteration – "grows up in one of the world's best economies // creates the worst global

economy the world has ever seen." Subsequent iterations frame this wholesale

destruction of the economy as the result of the ignorance of the Boomers, "'at my first

job I only made $15k a year' // in 1979 that was the equivalent of $47k," as well as active

generational conflict: "says get a job // refuses to hire recent graduates." These iterations

of the meme construct Steve's generation as initiating the economic shifts that deny

Millennials the American Dream and assert that they are *actively* maintaining an

economic status quo that is detrimental to Millennials.

Through this, the meta-narrative of the entire meme shifts the target for victimage

related to the economic crisis.[404] The meme transfers blame for the great recession away

from concerns of mass panic, instead constructing Steve's generation as a scapegoat who

has undermined the economy that gave them prosperity. Across iterations, the meme

suggests that if the Baby Boomers –the generation of which most Fed officials are

members – were removed from economic power, an act of symbolic and material

sacrifice, the Millennial generation could use their alternative values to restore the virtues

of the old economy and by extension American prosperity. In this capacity, the meme

allows younger generations to reaffirm the myths of the American Dream and American

Exceptionalism despite their death in contemporary America.

The meme also frames Millennials as the upholders of these mythic virtues, as

their identification with the ideal (nostalgic) vision of the past allows them to

"understand" the potential for a humane vision of capitalism. Because the meme allows

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[404.] For explicit definitions of the form and function of victimage see: Burke, *Permanence,* 195-96.

users to expunge personal culpability for the current state of capitalism, and offers a more positive vision of the future, the meta-narrative uses identifiable narratives and myths to further enhance the individuating force of the meme, further increasing its appeal with Millennials and increasing its political potential. Moreover, through its ability to unify participants without the traditional articulations of "left" or "right," but rather through their alienation from contemporary modes of political economy, the meme helps to foster a political subjectivity with the possibility to consider care, rather than argue over policies that – while defining of contemporary political debates – often are secondary to the questions that are most defining of current political and economic struggle.[405]

Memes as *Pharmakon* for Control

Through its enthymematic meta-narrative, the modal assemblage constructed around Old Economy Steve advances a stern criticism of contemporary capitalism by romanticizing a particular memory of late-industrial capitalism. Although steeped in this romantic nostalgia, by enabling a transindividuation with economic rhetorics, the meme opens the potential for alternative economic rhetorics. Anglich argues for the importance of such new rhetorics, positing:

> An informed citizenry, empowered with a new understanding of language, has the ability to shape political will toward sustainable reforms. Our collective consciousness can find a path of wisdom where all economies can grow freely and sustainably— beyond the shadows.[406]

By offering ways for individuals to move out of the proletarianizing rhetoric of paternalism and markets, Old Economy Steve becomes a conduit through which an alternative vocabulary – focused on the human cost of economics – can begin to emerge.

[405.] Stiegler, *Taking Care,* 189-90.

[406.] Angelich, "Financial Speak," 12.

This new vocabulary, developing from the participatory individuations of the meme is demonstrative of Stiegler's observations that digital *hypomnemata* have the potential to function as *pharmakon.* Specifically, as Steve draws attention to an economy that is no longer predicated simply on "stimulating consumption" but instead is built upon economic growth that assumes that "'to economize' means 'to take care,'" it can work towards the revitalization of human spirit and interrelatedness that creates a capitalism focused on human development rather than market growth.[407]

Certainly, capitalist institutions have subsumed the physical content of memes, the bits and bytes. However, these structures cannot fully contain their affective dimensions. Stiegler notes that the pharmacological force of *hypomnemata* does not come from the opposition of poison and cure, but rather in the composition of the two in such a way that allows the technic to individuate. Such technical individuation is necessary for alternative politics because "individuation at the pharmacological level (technical individuation) transductively intensifies the individuation of the other two levels (psychic individuation and collective individuation)."[408] Across the textual variations of the meme, participants in Old Economy Steve provide a comprehensive indictment of contemporary neoliberal economics. The sustained attention of this criticism across the life of the meme is particularly impressive, as neoliberal ideologies have embedded themselves within American discourses of morality, individuation in the Old Economy Steve meme fulfills *pharmakon*'s potential as remedy and not just poison. Participants of the meme rupture

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[407.] Stiegler, *New Critique,* 108.

[408.] Ibid., 43-44.

forces of control through three primary tactics: uncoiling the logics of neoliberalism,

fighting disenchantment, and overtly promoting a politics of care.

Uncoiling Neoliberalism

Demystifying the workings of capitalism is often dismissed as a holdover of

vulgar Marxism. However, under the ubiquitous and multilayered forces that define

control, unraveling the machinations of dominant processes is imperative. Exploring

youth politics in France, Deleuze notes,

> Many young people have a strange craving to be 'motivated,' they're
> always asking for special courses and continuing education; it's their job to
> discover whose ends these serve, just as older people discovered, with
> considerable difficulty, who was benefiting from discipline. A snake's
> coils are even more intricate than a mole's burrow.[409]

The power in Steve is not to reveal that we are all cogs in the service of capitalism –

Bernanke's rhetoric proudly asserts as much while reifying individuals as consumers.

Instead, the modal assemblage surrounding Steve allows the articulation of multiple

narratives and structures of feeling that create a nostalgia that entreats a rolling back neo-

liberal globalized capital. Yet, the political potential afforded by exploring the depths of

control does not solely reside in fostering personal awareness of the maneuverings of

control. Stiegler argues control can only be challenged "in a public space in the service of

a social organization always more and better equipped to discern, critique, improve,

create, transmit, and receive forms of knowledge and consciousness."[410] The uncoiling of

the snake must unify personal experiences of control into a publicized discourse focused

on an alternative. Steve's existence as an image macro allows for this type of publicity,

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[409.] Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," 182.

[410.] Stiegler, *Re-Enchantment,* 95.

because these memes circulate across the internet, creating publics attuned to their particular perspective.

Despite being the product of the fragmented experiences of partially anonymous members of a diverse collective, the criticism offered through Old Economy Steve works to deconstruct the naturalness neoliberalism attributes itself. The assumption that the Fed's market centered economy is the result of the natural progression of human political economy is central to the authority of neoliberalism.[411] This not only implies that there are no alternatives to neoliberalism, because this system is "natural", but also that the system is moral. In theorizing that the "new" economy is an active choice of the Boomers – rather than an inevitability of the evolution of markets – participants within the Old Economy Steve meme suggest that neoliberal capitalism is a human creation, rather than a certainty. By suggesting that a return to an economy prior to neoliberalism is possible, Old Economy Steve creates rhetorical space outside the rigid confines of neoliberalism – questioning its naturalism and *telos* of progress. It is only in creating an outside space that alternatives to contemporary capitalism can be imagined, opening possibilities for change.[412] In this capacity, the meta-narrative created through the iterations of Steve creates a common space that cannot be entirely subsumed by capitalism, and thus provides a resource for future resistance.

The power of this meta-narrative is emboldened by the ironic/comedic orientation engendered by the form of the meme. Burke has long attuned critics to the power of ironic reinterpretation of events to offer perspective by incongruity. However, extending

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[411.] Harvey, *A Brief History*, 204.

[412.] Doreen Massey, "Vocabularies of the Economy," in *After Neoliberalism? The Kilburn Manifesto* ed. Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey, and Michael Rustin (Surroundings, 2013), 11.

Baruch Spinoza's comments on the potential of the comic, Lars Tønder argues that each comic interpretation of an event remediates it, transforming a dominant affect into plural affective orientations.[413] The collective meta-narrative offered by Old Economy Steve highlights Millennial dissatisfaction with contemporary economics built around capitalism's denaturalization. However, the humor generated across individual iterations of the memes derives from differing emotions including despair, rage, and befuddlement.

This range of affective frames challenges the dominance of the neoliberal narrative and the complicity through consumption that it demands. Such a move opens democratic space. The proliferation of affective interpretations enabled by Steve invites deliberation over the exact nature of contemporary dissatisfaction with capitalism. Through their ability to allow multiple remediations, each participant can offer multiple iterations of an event, memes such as Steve invite democratic individuations in opposition to control, as the meta-narrative generated by the meme is a democratically created sum of remediations. Because of their commitment to mass participation in the collective construction of the comic, memes invite not just perspective by incongruity, but *perspectives by incongruities.*

Re-enchanting Millennials

Beyond the ubiquity and opacity of power under control, Stiegler notes that, "control runs through a dissociative logic."[414] Specifically, by positioning individuals' primary task as consumption, Bernanke's rhetoric, which is emblematic of control, denies

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[413.] Tønder, "Comic Power".

[414.] Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment,* 74.

any sense of a productive individual. Instead, by presenting economic narratives as

information to be consumed, rather than knowledge to individuate with, Bernanke's

rhetoric leaves individual subjects proletarianized.[415] Consequently, a central project of

resisting control is the re-enchantment of the political subject through the process of

individuation. It is not simply enough to highlight those forces that proletarianize the

subject, rather a resistive communication fosters individuation by enabling participants to

fashion a productive individuality attached to a collective identity. [416]

The memetic form of Old Economy Steve assists the process of individuation.

Stiegler asserts that because structures of networked communication center on logics of

contribution, they are best suited to break the "generalized proletarianization" of

control.[417] Each individual who circulates Steve is contributing to the meme's larger

social force. It would be easy to dismiss this circulation as mere imitation. However, as

the words and images move into new contexts, they function through the logic of

imitatio, the revitalization of the "spirit of the original" into new contexts.[418] Through this

imitative recontextualization, even those who simply share the meme are productive

participants, using their identification with a preexisting iteration of the meme to generate

a new individuated force. Because the circulatory force of image macros is driven by

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415. Stiegler draws on the differentiation between information and knowledge to demonstrate how technologies of mass communication can either program consumers via a stream of information to consume, or to enable individuation by allowing them to individuate that information into collective knowledge. Stiegler, *Taking Care,* 184.

416. Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment,* 82.

417. Ibid., 24.

418. David Goodwin, "*Imitatio* and Eighteenth-Century Rhetorics of Reaffirmation," *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 29. Muckelbauer notes that such *imatatio* not only moves this spirit into new contexts, but also in the spirit of classical education provides the model that may be copied, adapted, or a source of inspiration. John Muckelbauer, *The Future of Invention* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 2008), 56-57.

efforts for each new iteration to foster a more potent affective force, they invite

participants to produce new remediations of narrative. This remediation turns participants

into active commentators on politics, rather than passive proletarianized subjects.[419]

Beyond the productive elements common to the form of the image macro, the

Steve meme further individuates participants through its reliance on enthymematic

narrative and myth. In each of these cases, the form overrides the specific substance

promoting identification. Bernanke's rhetoric, built around static narratives of the "laws"

of economics, leaves little room to participate or identify. Conversely, as participants

read across the iterations of the meme, the openness of the form invites them to produce a

unifying meta-narrative through their connection to the affective and propositional

content. No single iteration offers a complete call to political action, yet the collectivity

of the iterations strongly implies one. In this way, each participant produces for

themselves the knowledge individuated within the iterations. Even for those users who do

not produce or circulate the meme, there is a potential for the meme to connect them to a

productive, rather than passive, political existence.[420]

In the process of constituting participants as productive individuals, Old Economy

Steve also orients them as a "collective individual." Bernanke reduces each individual to

a faceless consumer, precluding the posibility for large collective identifications.

However, by tapping into a larger sense of millennial angst, the meme functions as a

collective public statement.[421] The power of this statement comes from the meme's

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[419] Tønder, "Comic Power."

[420] Papacharissi, *Affective Publics,* 95.

[421] Amber Davisson, "Beyond the Borders of Red and Blue States: Google Maps as a Site of Rhetorical Invention in the 2008 Presidential Election," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 14, no. 1 (2011): 102

ability to be demonstrative of the lived experience of participants. However, because participants create the meme through individual biographical iterations, they are also able to express their unique dissatisfaction, allowing them to "feel" their own way into the political based on personal experience.[422] This balance of individual and collective affective attunement creates a diverse and adaptable assemblage that invites mass participation and eludes easy coopting of the narrative.[423] The constitution of a collective individual, the product of vernacular lived experience, lends an *ethos* of independence from control. Steve's ability to balance the desires of individuals with an affiliation with Millennial collectivity allows for the creation of a political subjectivity willing to struggle against control.

<center>Millennials' Politics of Care</center>

Aside from motivating alternative political individuations through uncoiling neoliberalism and creating an individuated collectivity, Steve also offers an articulation of an alternative politics – one of care. Recognizing that the complete overthrow of capitalism is unlikely under contemporary conditions, Stiegler suggests a politics of care may be the best response to the current limitations of control.

> *The question of care must return to the heart of political economy,* and with it, clearly, a new cultural, educational, scientific, and industrial politics capable of *taking care of the world.* This is why we propose as an axiom of our reflections and our actions that – as the primary meaning of the verb "economize" tells us, and as each of us know deep down – *to economize means that first and before all else to take care.*[424]

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422. Papacharissi, *Affective Publics,* 25.

423. Ibid., 73.

424. Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment,* 18, emphasis in original

Broadly, Stiegler theorizes care as the capacity of individuals to engage productive

knowledge to meet the needs of all life. Moreover, guaranteeing short-term needs of the

people and the planet, needs often ignored under neoliberalism, can set the stage for the

reversing of the proletarianization central to contemporary control.[425] Specifically,

Stiegler argues that networked communication is central to this process of reorienting

political economy towards care.

> The internet is the technical milieu, *par excellence,* which allows for the implementation of an industrial model that no longer rest upon *opposition* between dissociated producers and consumers, but upon *association* of addressees and addressors, productive of a new form of sociality and a new spirit of capitalism.[426]

It is through the creation of a public committed to cooperative industrial politics that

places care, rather than corporate profit, as the final goal of the system, that the re-

enchantment of spirit becomes possible.

Although the meta-narrative offered by the Steve meme primarily functions

through the rejection of contemporary capitalism, the specific ways that it nostalgizes the

past implicitly advocates for the Stieglerian ethic of care. Stiegler notes that while care is

driven by cultivating the values of the past, it is more than a simple nostalgia, instead it

must transmit the values of the past into a usable public vision for the future.[427] Through

its glorification of goals including retirement, affordable tuition, and available entry-level

jobs, Steve's capitalism is implicitly one of unions, fair wages, and protectionism – the

forces which created the conditions Steve nostalgizes. Yet the meme does not reject

capitalism; participants still glorify home ownership, corporate hierarchies, and wage

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[425.] Ibid., 22.

[426.] Ibid., 37.

[427.] Bernard Stiegler, *Uncontrollable Societies of Disaffected Individuals* (Malden: Polity, 2013), 109-10.

labor. Instead, Steve demands, just as Stiegler does, that the wealth generated from these practices should engage care first, and profit second.

However, this care is not simply gained by a nostalgic return. Instead, by allowing participants to write their contemporary struggles into the meme, many of which (such as the decline of print journalism) were not concerns for Steve's generation, they are able to use these values to cultivate a more desirable present. In this sense, the meme advocates for the specific short-term guaranteed prosperity that prevents the long-term trend of proletarianization. The individuated subject envisioned by Steve has the free time and access to desirable jobs to engage in productive labor that prevents proletarianization. None of the iterations of the meme challenge the goals of American industrial capitalism. Nor does this advocacy remove the structures of control, if such a thing is even possible. Rather the meme demonstrates the potential for politics where the collective uses the freedoms afforded within control society to push for a more humane and equitable distribution of care. In this sense, the narration offered by Steve does far more than just allow new political individuations, it suggests that Stiegler's spirit of care may already be alive within Millennials.

Chapter 4

Can You Meme Me Now? Technics and Terministic Democracy

A year after Old Economy Steve gave networked publics a mode to compose a narrative built around millennials' dissatisfaction with the American economy, memetic technics tapped into another political controversy particularly salient with networked publics: surveillance and privacy. These public's interest only increased as the use and scope of networked and mobile technology expands, creating conditions where the opportunity for privacy breaches and surveillance increasingly loom over all facets of communication.[428] The reality of these fears became particularly salient when in June of 2013 a series of reports by British newspaper *The Guardian* revealed that the National Security Agency (NSA) was collecting a wide range of US data across mobile networks and online communication. On June 5th *The Guardian* revealed that under the jurisdiction of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) the NSA had been collecting metadata on all Verizon customers – the largest US cellphone provider.[429] The next day the newspaper revealed the existence of the PRISM program, software which gave the NSA access to the servers of major online data holders including Apple, Google, and Facebook.[430]

[428.] Bob Sullivan, "Online Privacy Fears are Real," *NBC News* (December 9, 2015), http://www.nbcnews.com/id/3078835/t/online-privacy-fears-are-real/#.V2WJCLgrLIU.

[429.] Glenn Greenwald, "NSA Collecting Phone Records of Millions of Verizon Customers Daily," *The Guardian* (June 6, 2013), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/06/nsa-phone-records-verizon-court-order.

[430.] Glenn Greenwald, "NSA Prism program taps in to user data of Apple, Google and others," *The Guardian* (June 7, 2016), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/06/us-tech-giants-nsa-data. Although the name of the program generally appears in all-caps, it is not an acronym or "at least not one that intelligence officials reveal publicly;" Brad Knickerbocker, "PRISM: What's Behind This NSA Surveillance Tool Lurking About Your Facebook Page?," *The Christian Science Monitor* (June 8, 2013), http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Politics/DC-Decoder/2013/0608/PRISM-What-s-behind-this-NSA-surveillance-tool-lurking-about-your-Facebook-page.

News of these leaks quickly went viral. *The Guardian* story was shared more than ten thousand times in the first 12 hours and accrued over two hundred and fifty thousand Twitter mentions in 24 hours.[431] In response to the spread of these revelations, both the Obama Administration and the NSA issued press releases and gave interviews about the surveillance program. Despite the continued efforts of government officials to control the story, networked publics, particularly those in meme-centric communities, offered reinterpretations of the official story. Within hours of the leak, parodies of Verizon's slogans circulated around networked ecologies. Similarly, when *The Guardian* revealed their source two days later, a range of popular memes were used to debate the heroism or villainy of Edward Snowden.[432] Across the controversy, memes served as a mode for networked participants to share opinions, reactions, and feelings surrounding the uncovering of the largest domestic intelligence operation in US history.

This chapter explores the interplay between NSA rhetorics that sought to limit the symbolic responses to the controversy and memes which sought to proliferate them. I begin with an analysis of the rhetoric of Deputy Director of the NSA Richard Ledgett in defense of the NSA. Following Murray Edelman's observation that "the largely unpublicized decisions of hundreds of thousands of people working in administrative organizations determine who gets what," I focus on Ledgett because the figures at the head of these bureaucracies function to constitute the ideal political subject as the human

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[431.] Brad, "2013 NSA Surveillance Scandal," *Know Your Meme,* http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/events/2013-nsa-surveillance-scandal.

[432.] Glenn Greenwald, "Edward Snowden: the Whistleblower Behind the NSA Surveillance Revelations," *The Guardian* (June 11, 2016), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/06/us-tech-giants-nsa-data.

in service of these bureaucratically regulated structures.[433] In opposition to the banal, rational, expert style of these singular technocrats, networked memes emerged as collectively constructed expressions of social narratives and affect. Therefore, I turn to an analysis of the most popular memetic responses to the controversy. The constant addition of new iterations to these memes created a variety of fractured narratives and affective frames, preventing the official rhetoric's efforts at static informational and affective force. Instead, by creating perspectives by incongruities, the memetic responses create rhetorics with the potential to restore individuation through the collective renegotiation of terms. Through their recirculation of memes, participants collectively redefine these terms through a terministic democracy built around the individuations of the terms central to the rhetoric of security.

The NSA and the Anti-Rhetoric of Security

Working as a contractor for the NSA, Edward Snowden grew increasingly concerned about illegal and dangerous surveillance practices.[434] After collecting thousands of documents, Snowden arranged to meet with *The Guardian* reporter Glenn Greenwald. Snowden disclosed to Greenwald evidence of surveillance by the US and UK on allies, the collection of domestic surveillance and metadata, and other unsanctioned intelligence gathering.[435] These revelations quickly spurred international controversy about the morality and legality of both US surveillance and Snowden's leaks. The US

[433.] Murray Edelman, *Political Language: Words that Succeed and Policies that Fail* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), 77

[434.] Matthew Cole, Richard Esposito, Bill Dedman And Mark Schone, "Edward Snowden's Motive Revealed: He Can 'Sleep at Night'," *NBC News* (May 28, 2014), http://www.nbcnews.com/feature/edward-snowden-interview/edward-snowdens-motive-revealed-he-can-sleep-night-n116851.

[435.] "Edward Snowden: Leaks That Exposed US Spy Programme," *BBC News* (January 17, 2014): http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-23123964.

government was quick to label Snowden a traitor and charged the whistleblower with

espionage, arguing that there were ways to protect privacy without undermining US

security efforts.[436] Conversely, networked publics and international governments praised

Snowden as a patriot and a hero. Snowden even received a range of awards for

contribution to international freedom, peace, and democracy.[437] The debate about

Snowden's revelations revolved around the question of whether peace, freedom, and

democracy would be better protect by privileging security or privacy.

A year into this controversy, Edward Snowden made a surprise video appearance

at the TED 2014 conference (Snowden was a fugitive from US law enforcement).

Speaking on a platform that gave access to a wide range of networked publics, Snowden

was interviewed by Chris Anderson – the curator of the original TED series. Snowden

used this appearance not only to defend the leaks, but also to make a case for individual

and corporate resistance to surveillance.[438] Specifically, after Anderson provided the

history of the leaks, Snowden outlined the nature and scope of PRISM program, framed

the program as a breach of privacy, and answered common arguments about the banality

of the surveillance by arguing it was a matter of rights and national culture. Snowden also

posited that the leaks were not a threat to security, as courts had found no proof of plots

thwarted. Instead, Snowden positions terrorism as a "cover for action" used to hide the

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[436] Peter Finn and Sari Horwitz, "U.S. Chargers Snowden with Espionage," *The Washington Post* (June 21, 2013), https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-charges-snowden-with-espionage/2013/06/21/507497d8-dab1-11e2-a016-92547bf094cc_story.html.

[437] A full list of the awards granted to Snowden can be found at: https://edwardsnowden.com/category/awards/.

[438] Edward Snowden, "Here's How to Take Back the Internet," *TED2014* (March 2014): https://www.ted.com/talks/edward_snowden_here_s_how_we_take_back_the_internet/transcript?language=en.

invasive policies of the NSA. At the end of Snowden's interview, Anderson invited a

response stating, "if the NSA wants to respond, please do."

In response to this call, Deputy Director of the NSA Richard Ledgett took the

TED stage via video conference call. Ledgett, the top civilian authority at the NSA,

played an active role in the shaping of NSA polies and procedure as the Chief Operating

Officer.[439] In the interview Ledgett systematically responds to Snowden's claims about

the surveillance program. First, Ledgett emphasizes the possibility of legal protest by

Snowden, as opposed to the leaks. Ledgett then pivots to a series of arguments about the

lives put at risk by the leak, including an argument for the very real threat of terrorism.

Finally, Ledgett argues that the NSA takes careful steps to limit invasions of privacy to

only those necessary for maintaining security. These responses to Snowden's TED Talk

are representative of the larger NSA effort to justify their policies after they were made

public, offering an ideal case to study the rhetorical force of NSA rhetorics.

Although this interview took place nearly a year after Snowden's leak, I chose

this address for two reasons. First, this interview is one of the few public addresses made

by any senior official at the NSA. Further, the choice to address the TED audience is

particularly salient given my focus on networked publics. TED videos invite thousands of

viewers and are circulated across varied networked platforms. Consequently, TED

emerged as one of the premier avenues for elites to proliferate political and academic

ideas to networked publics.[440] Even in Ledgett's interview, Anderson acknowledges the

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[439.] Chris Anderson, "Richard Ledgett: The NSA Responds to Edward Snowden's TED Talk," *TED 2014* (March 2014), https://www.ted.com/talks/richard_ledgett_the_nsa_responds_to_edward_snowden_s_ted_talk/transcript?language=en.

[440.] Jon Kelly, "The Cult of TED," *BBC News Magazine* (June 21, 2012): http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-18511696.

relation of TED to networked publics. At the end of the interview Anderson exclaims, "Rick, it took a certain amount of courage, I think, actually, to come and speak openly to this group."[441] Aside from drawing attention to the NSA's reticence to publicly respond to its policies, Anderson's comment implicitly notes that participants in TED, as typical netizens, are particularly attuned to pro-privacy political stances. Nonetheless, in addressing networked publics, the Ledgett's rhetoric functioned as to deny individuation through two rhetorical strategies which bolster a rhetoric of national (in)security: evoking the NSA as an anti-rhetoric and establishing security as a god term/ideograph above all other ideals.

<p align="center">The NSA as Anti-Rhetoric</p>

While the bulk of Ledgett's statements deal with the NSA's role in maintaining security, the interview begins with a move to establish these statements as "anti-rhetorical." In examining scientific rhetorics, Michael Calvin McGee and John Lyne note that:

> anti-rhetoric's appeal to objective knowledge and its accompanying denunciation of rhetoric is one of the most effective rhetorical strategies available. No one was a greater master of the strategy than Plato. In our time, masters of the rhetoric of science command the most formidable rhetorical *ethos*. Theirs is the chaste rhetoric that pretends not to be rhetorical. Expert testimony in a legislative hearing, in interviews with the press, and in trial proceedings typically parades the rhetoric of objectivity. … The intense conviction of testifying experts that they are not acting rhetorically casts an aura of authenticity over their performance.[442]

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441. Anderson, "Richard Ledgett."

442. Michael Calvin McGee and John Lyne, "What are Nice Folks Like You Doing in a Place Like this? Some Entailments of Treating Knowledge Claims Rhetorically," in *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences,* eds. John S Nelson, Andrew McGill, and Donald McCloskey (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 392.

While McGee and Lyne argue that the natural sciences are particularly adept at evoking an anti-rhetorical frame, the sciences are by no means the only disciplines to do so. Anti-rhetorics exist across academic and public life. Edward M. Panetta and Marouf Hasian, Jr., note that,

> An anti-rhetorical stance is any foundational quest for truth that privileges itself as *the* only or primary 'rational,' 'objective,' and 'neutral' means of acquiring epistemic knowledge. This posturing enables powerful rhetors to exclude the boisterous voices of those groups who do not acquiesce in the establishment or discovery of the a *priori* standard for certified knowledge. Anti-rhetorics exist in both the arts and the sciences. Such a privileging of information is constantly presented to us in forms that invite the 'universal affirmation from all rightminded people.'[443]

Through their appeals to "facts," "reason," "information," and "objectivity," anti-rhetorics dissuade public participation in rhetorical individuation because "technical knowledge [has become the] basis for deciding 'what ought to be.'"[444] In appealing to technical knowledge as fact, anti-rhetorics dissuade amateur participation. Instead, anti-rhetorics proletarianize non-expert participants as lacking the *ethos* to challenge the technocratic authority of the anti-rhetoric. Without this *ethos,* any attempts by non-experts to iterate a new individuation is deemed as illegitimate and disconnected from the official evolution of that particular rhetoric.

Ledgett fosters the proletarianizing drive of anti-rhetorics from the onset of the interview. Anderson begins by asking Ledgett to respond to the remarks Snowden had made on the same stage days earlier. Rather than address the specific content of Snowden, Ledgett instead frames the NSA's entire stance as anti-rhetorical:

[443.] Edward M. Panetta and Marouf Hasian, Jr., "Anti-Rhetoric as Rhetoric: The Law and Economics Movement," *Communication Quarterly* 42 no. 1 (1994): 58.

[444.] Caitlin Wills Toker, "Debating 'What Ought to Be': The Comic Frame and Public Moral Argument," *Western Journal of Communication* 66 (2002): 53.

> I think that, like a lot of the things that have come out since Mr. Snowden started disclosing classified information, there were some kernels of truth in there, but a lot of extrapolations and half-truths in there, and I'm interested in helping to address those. I think this is a really important conversation that we're having in the United States and internationally, and I think it is important and of import, and so given that, we need to have that be a fact-based conversation, and we want to help make that happen.

Rather than address Snowden as conveying a valid perspective, Ledgett frames Snowden's claims as containing "kernels of truth" at best. By suggesting that Snowden, and all participants in the publics who agree with the value of having the PRISM program leaked, had a tenuous relation with the "truth," Ledgett identifies these rhetorics as lacking sufficient expertise and validity to individuate with the "objective" position of the NSA.

Ledgett's anti-rhetorical appeal is reaffirmed at the end of the interview. When asked for closing thoughts, Ledgett returns to an appeal to "facts" as a justification for the superiority of the NSA's position, arguing,

> The issue of privacy and personal data is much bigger than just the government, and so learn the facts. Don't rely on headlines, don't rely on sound bites, don't rely on one-sided conversations. So that's the idea, I think, worth spreading….So that's the idea worth spreading. Look at the data.

This statement reaffirms the supposed anti-rhetoricity of the NSA by aligning them with "facts" and "data." Conversely, anti-NSA positions are denied the same legitimacy within this anti-rhetorical frame because comments such as Snowden's are framed as "headlines" and "sound bites," implicitly suggesting they are tainted by sensationalism and "one-sided" partisanship that denies "the data." By using the opening and closing statements to frame the entire interview as anti-rhetorical, Ledgett's rhetoric works to foreclose the possibility of alternative legitimate rhetorics on the issue of national

security. Because all other positions, including Snowden's, lack the facticity of the

NSA's perspective, they can never properly individuate with the NSA's rhetoric. Such

perspectives would corrupt the objectivity of the "facts" that the NSA presents.

<div align="center">The Rhetoric of (In)Security</div>

Once establishing an anti-rhetorical frame to limit objections to the NSA's

arguments, Ledgett's discourse focuses on framing Snowden's actions within a rhetoric

of (in)security. Robert Ivie and Oscar Giner note that since 9/11, (in)security emerged as

one of the dominant rhetorical frames in American political and social life. They explain:

> American national security, considered from a rhetorical perspective,
> defaults to a discourse of national *in*security—to a political ritual of
> affirming national identity by articulating fear and loathing of a
> demonized enemy. It invokes a hyperbolic discourse of exaggerated
> danger, not unlike war propaganda, which Nicholas Jackson
> O'Shaughnessy astutely defines as "a fantasy of enmity, where we seek
> self-definition through constructing our antithesis." Rhetoric, myth, and
> symbolism—and thus metaphor, narrative, and ritual—are endemic to the
> articulation of self-defining and affirming fear, especially in today's
> hypersymbolic state of governing imagery, which positions both the
> general public and political elites within its cultural circumference.[445]

The ability to include a wide range of issues within its circumference gives insecurity a

strong grammatizing force that enables proletarianizing politics to define the issue.[446]

Specifically, it demands that all discourse fit within the ridged forms of <security>. The

range of potential symbolic participation is limited and defined by the ways that these

discourses fit within the frame of insecurity, because "what more compelling interest

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[445] Robert L. Ivie and Oscar Giner, "The Mythos of National Insecurity in The 2008 Presidential Primaries," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12 no. 2 (2009): 279.

[446] For a demonstration of how security extends into issues with seemingly tangential connections see: Dylan P. Wolfe, "Sidestepping Environmental Controversy through a Rhetoric of Security: George W. Bush in Summerhaven, Arizona," *Western Journal of Communication* 71 no. 1 (2007): 43.

could one find than the defense of a nation that is trying to survive catastrophic terrorism."[447]

This grammatizing force drifts towards proletarianizing because it empowers technocrats as the dominant rhetorical actors and denies alternative participation. Ledgett's argues, national security policy, due in large part to its heavy reliance on classified information, is the near exclusive domain of technocrats with the necessary security clearances.[448] Under these conditions, amateur participation is discouraged because such participation "would distract the nation in a time of war, and compromise sources and methods of intelligence collection."[449] Because of this, rhetorics of insecurity narrow issues and disqualify both topics and speakers from legitimacy within public deliberation; participants are strongly encouraged to unquestioningly consume technocrats' rhetoric, preventing any democratic individuation.[450] A range of rhetorical resources help to foster rhetorics of insecurity. However, in examining the proletarianizing rhetoric of Ledgett, the deployment of the ideograph of <security> as a god term creates a rigid terministic hierarchy that precludes symbolic participation from alternative perspectives.

[447.] Marouf Hasian, Jr., "Unitary Executives, Rhetorical Histories, and the National Security Agency's Strategic Remembrances of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA)," *Free Speech Yearbook* 43 (2006): 11.

[448.] Hamilton Bean, "'A Complicated and Frustrating Dance': National Security Reform, The Limits of *Parrhesia*, And The Case of The 9/11 Families," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12 no. 3 (2009): 432.

[449.] Ibid., 439.

[450.] Ibid., 447. Although the promise of security can potentially restore faith in American governance, it relies on moral frames that justify the expansion of control by the dominant security apparatus. Janicke Stramer, "The Language of War: George W. Bush's Discursive Practices in Securitizing the Western Value System in the 'War on Terror,'" *At the Interface / Probing the Boundaries* 64 (2010): 43.

Ledgett's opening analysis frames Snowden's actions as increasing insecurity.

Ledgett argued Snowden's actions were

> were inappropriate because of the fact that he put people's lives at risk, basically, in the long run, and I know there's been a lot of talk in public by Mr. Snowden and some of the journalists that say that the things that have been disclosed have not put national security and people at risk, and that is categorically not true.

<Security> functions as a dominant ideograph within Ledgett's rhetoric. McGee defined

an ideograph as "an ordinary language term found in political discourse" and "a high-

order abstraction representing collective commitment to a particular, but ill-defined,

normative goal."[451] While the most potent of these terms are those that undergird wide-

held social values such as <equality>, <freedom>, or <patriotism>, scholars have

demonstrated how a range of terms can function ideographically.[452] Moreover, rather

than operating independently, ideographs are "always understood in relation to

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[451.] Michael Calvin McGee, "The 'Ideograph': A Link between Rhetoric and Ideology," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 no. 1 (1980):15. Methods of ideographic criticism are particularly suited towards understanding the processes of individuation particular discursive formations both engage in and enable for their participants. Specifically, the theory's commitment to the framework of "rhetorical materialism," demands that usages of any ideograph must be situated within the term's diachronic deployments. Ronald Lee, "Ideographic Criticism" in *Rhetorical Criticism: Perspectives In Action* ed. James Kuypers and Andrew King (Lahnam MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 313. These past deployments are the locations where the relationships between ideographs playout; they are the preindividual conditions that enable the particular individuations of an ideograph and the political actions that it warrants. From here Mary Stuckey argues that "the point of ideographic criticism is not to label a given term an ideograph, but to make us aware of how individual [synchronic] articulations of ideographic terms can assist in tracing the workings of ideology as it is instantiated into policy through rhetoric." Mary E. Stuckey, *Jimmy Carter, Human Rights, and the National Agenda,* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 103. This second move highlights the importance of focusing on the ways that particular iterations of an ideograph draw on and change its diachronic/pre-individual form to create new – or reify old – politics of subjectivity.

[452] For examples, see Dana L. Cloud, "The Rhetoric Of <Family Values>: Scapegoating, Utopia, and the Privatization Of Social Responsibility'" *Western Journal of Communication, 62* no 4 (1998): 387-419; Jessica Enoch, "There's No Place Like The Child Care Center: A Feminist Analysis Of <Home> In The World War II Era," *Rhetoric Review,* 31, no 4 (2012): 422-442; Joshua P. Ewalt, "A Colonialist Celebration Of National <Heritage>: Verbal, Visual, And Landcape Ideographs At Homestead National Monument Of America,"*Western Journal of Communication,* 75, no 4 (2011): 367-385.

another."[453] For example, the ideograph of <security> is often related to other concepts

including <freedom> and <privacy>.

Ledgett's deployment of <security> continues the individuation traditional to the

ideograph – meaning that all other concerns must be placed as secondary. The link of

surveillance policy to <security> is strongly rooted in political and judicial debates in the

1970s. For example, the 1972 case *United States* v. *United States District Court* (often

referred to as the Keith case) set the norm that the goal of security policy was to protect

democracy by balancing appeals to <security> and <privacy>.[454] Furthermore, FISA

allowed for surveillance without warrants as long as it was in the name of national

security, establishing security as a dominant term in relation to privacy.[455] In this way,

traditional deployments of <security> justify unrestricted surveillance, and discourage

publics from challenging this particular individuation, as there is no space for political or

judicial review.

Ledgett draws from this traditional deployment of <security> by arguing that in

making their complaints public rather than using internal channels of review, Snowden

made Americans less secure. Ledgett argues:

> So the unconstrained disclosure of those capabilities means that as
> adversaries see them and recognize, 'Hey, I might be vulnerable to
> this,' they move away from that, and we have seen targets in terrorism, in
> the nation-state area, in smugglers of various types, and other folks who
> have, because of the disclosures, moved away from our ability to have
> insight into what they're doing. The net effect of that is that our
> people who are overseas in dangerous places, whether they're diplomats or
> military, and our allies who are in similar situations, are at greater risk

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453. McGee, "The 'Ideograph,'" 14.

454. Hasian, "Unitary Executives, 8.

455. Hasian, "Unitary Executives," 16.

because we don't see the threats that are coming their way.

While Ledgett does not explicitly evoke the term security, these criticisms fit within the larger modal expression of <security>. Ledgett follows the ideographic understanding of <security> that insists concerns of national security trump issues of privacy and therefore are outside traditional spaces of due process. This deployment is consistent with the ideograph's tendency to "outflank those who seek to question or revise the form and content of public good" through appeals to security[456] This limits non-technocratic individuations by precluding deliberation over matters of surveillance and security by arguing that any dissent fosters insecurity.

Ledgett's use of <security> gains much of its proletarianizing force through warranting a prohibition on dissent. Specifically, because dissenting individuations are prohibited, consumers of political rhetoric are left only the option of accepting (consuming) Ledgett's vision of <security>, lest they be framed as enabling insecurity. However, the proletarianizing force is bolstered by the symbolic hierarchies created through the synchronic deployment of this ideograph. Therefore, I turn to Kenneth Burke's conceptions of god terms and terministic screens to examine the ways that the symbolic order created by this deployment of <security> further enhances its proletarianizing force.[457] Burke argues that terministic screens motivate participants

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[456] Erik Doxtader, "Learning Public Deliberation Through the Critique of Institutional Argument," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 31 no. 4 (1995), 185.

[457.] The consideration of security as both a god term and an ideograph is important because, while ideographs recognize that vocabularies name motives, Barry Brummett notes "Burke insists that vocabularies do not name motives but rather are motives embodied in 'shorthand terms for situations.'" Barry Brummett, "Perfection and the Bomb: Nuclear Weapons, Teleology, and Motives," *Journal of Communication* 39 (1989):85. Therefore, a focus on ideographs as god terms not only attunes a critic to the material conditions of an ideologically laden term but also the symbolic order that plays an equally important role in defining its individuating or proletarianizing force.

towards particular modes of "symbolic perfection" by implying a *telos* intrinsic in particular terministic relationships.[458] This telos then sets the conditions for the individuation and/or proletarianization enabled by a particular term as "a given terminology contains various *implications,* and there is a corresponding 'perfectionist' tendency for men [sic] to attempt carrying out those implications."[459] Central to these implications is the evocation of "god terms." Burke noted "the Romans knew that you could get a god merely by taking an adjective and transforming it into an abstract noun."[460] Consequently, ideographs, which are particularly salient examples of such terministic manipulation and deification via abstraction, are particularly suited to functioning as god terms.

Ledgett evokes <security> as a god term in the discourse surrounding Snowden. Although <privacy> and <security> traditionally function as opposing ideographs in debates over surveillance, Ledgett removes <privacy> from consideration through statements like

> And I think that people have legitimate concerns about the balance between transparency and secrecy. That's sort of been couched as a balance between privacy and national security. I don't think that's the right framing. I think it really is transparency and secrecy. And so that's the national and international conversation that we're having, and we want to participate in that, and want people to participate in it in an informed way.

In framing <privacy> as a red herring, Ledgett places that ideograph – and all associated arguments, policies, and affective responses – as unwelcome in the debate. Furthermore,

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[458.] Burke, *Grammar*, 261.

[459.] Burke, *Language*, 19, emphasis in original.

[460.] Burke, *Rhetoric,* 301.

privacy's replacements, transparency and secrecy, are not hierarchically equivalent to

<security>. For example, in justifying previous surveillance, Ledgett argues,

> What we don't need to be transparent about, because it's bad for the
> U.S., it's bad for all those other countries that we work with and that we
> help provide information that helps them secure themselves and their
> people, it's bad to expose operations and capabilities in a way that allows
> the people that we're all working against, the generally recognized bad
> guys, to counter those.

Through comments such as these, Ledgett establishes <security> as the force that

mediates the decision between secrecy and transparency. It is the top of the terministic

hierarchy that determines the value of NSA and other intelligence policies.

Yet the proletarianizing force of <security> as a god term does not only come

from its ability to dictate the possible directions for policy independent of collective

participation. Rather as a god term, it creates rigid hierarchies of terms that preclude any

participatory individuation. For Burke, god terms – with their roots in a perfectionist *telos*

– utilize appeals to pure and evil motives to organize other terms.[461] The resulting

hierarchies function as a "system builder" that decides "what properly goes with

what."[462] For Ledgett and the NSA, if <security> is the god term, then terrorism is the

devil. When asked the threats the NSA engages, Ledgett response "terrorism is still

number one" and that terrorist are empowered by a "lack of governance." This appeal to

governance places NSA policies – and the proletarianizing systems that justify them – as

the only way to access <security> and the order it promises.

Conversely, any action that opposes the NSA is then terministically equated to

terrorism. Describing varied networked communication systems, Ledgett notes that they

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[461.] Burke, *Language,* 361.

[462.] Burke, *Permanence,* 75.

are used both by "people who are working against us and our allies." The moralistic binary of security-terrorism provides no middle ground, limiting the space of alternative individuations. In framing security as the god term, all related symbolic action is forced to either align itself with the "purity" of security, or else be in league with the evils of terrorism. Such rigid and binary hierarchies preclude possibilities of amateur symbolic production. If participants in the publics around surveillance are not consuming the NSA's symbolic order, in Ledgett's words they are "working against us." Consequently, opposing viewpoints are entirely delegitimized and terministic orders that would emerge through participatory individuation are framed as aiding terrorism. The symbolic technics of the NSA must be consumed as is, otherwise participants violate the symbolic order and empower the rhetorical devil. Because of this, ideographs as god terms are particularly powerful technics of proletarianization because they work to both prevent the emergence of alternative polices and to preclude the possibility of any symbolic order that does not directly align with the interests of the technocrats charged with administering particular realms of policy and discourse.

Networked Memes' Reopening of Deliberative Spaces

Although the technocratic anti-rhetoric of the NSA created conditions that limited the individuating potential of publics surrounding surveillance by preventing access to terministic participation, participants within networked public spheres were not without avenues of rhetorical recourse. The amateur participation afforded by networked memes allowed these technics to serve as locations that re-energized the individuating and deliberative potential that Ledgett's rhetoric sought to foreclose upon. The use of memes as networked commonplaces allowed for contested affects to deliberate about the tone –

if not the content – of the NSA's anti-rhetoric. Similarly, the ironic force of networked memes fractured the sanctity of security as a god term, creating varied narratives of the motives behind NSA policy and <security> itself.

<div align="center">Networked Commonplaces and Affective Framing</div>

Anti-rhetorics, such as those deployed by Ledgett, seek to use expertise and the façade of objectivity to prevent alternative individuations. However, the deployment of popular image macros to comment on the Snowden leaks and the NSA response opens deliberative space around these anti-rhetorics. Their deliberative potential, however, stems less from the introduction of facts or authority that challenges the specialized *ethos* of the NSA. Rather, through mobilizing the rhetorical force of memes to evoke shared secondary retentions, memetic commonplaces use common understandings of the traces of past affects to create new and varied structures of feelings around this expertise. To explore this, I expand upon understandings of memes as commonplaces to evaluate the ways that memes asked networked publics to feel about and respond to the NSA and the Snowden leaks.[463]

Commonplaces were distanced from invention in the late classical and modern eras when they were relegated to lists to be memorized.[464] However, as part of the efforts to revitalize theories of invention, Richard McKeon rejects the notion that commonplaces

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[463.] The range of views on commonplaces, common topics, and *topoi* is varied and inconclusive. Recognizing this, I reassert that all of these fit within the broad definition of *topoi* I offered by Wetherbee and cited in chapter 1, referring to any "appropriate set of conceptual and emotional associations for a given audience within a given cultural context." Wetherbee, "Picking Up," 3. Specifically, I focus on commonplaces not to delineate them from larger concepts of *topoi* – they fit within this broad category – rather I use the term to exclude memetic commonplaces from the Aristotelian common topics. While the questions of the common topics may inform the production of memes, it is the ability of commonplaces to build understanding around what is "applicable in common" that defines the most salient topical functions of memes. Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse* tran. George Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 45.

[464.] Richard McKeon, "Creativity and the Commonplace," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 6 no. 4 (1973): 201.

are simply catalogues of clichés or static wisdom. Instead, by bringing the familiar into

contact with the unfamiliar, they function as "places for the perception, discovery,

explanation of the unknown."[465] Commonplaces may be a container of wisdom, but it is

the ability of these places to move and be redeployed that allows them to be a "cauldron

in which form and substance are brought together" to "create material shaped for

argument and persuasion." [466] Thus while commonplaces are a location for the storage of

wisdom and clichés, the mobility of this place allows them to be profoundly inventive.[467]

Such a move, McKeon argues, allows commonplaces to operate as "sources of new

perceptions operative in new directions in the thought and culture and philosophy of the

twentieth century."[468]

The tension between this past rhetorical force and inventive iterations suggests

that commonplaces are a profoundly individuating technic. As Michael Leff notes, since

commonplaces are fundamentally tied to memory, they hold shared information and

demand the internalization of collective wisdom/views/affects.[469] In this way,

commonplaces are a technic that enables the shared secondary retentions that are at the

heart of rhetoric. Paolo Virno expands commonplaces' relation to the rhetorico-political

by positioning the concept as the linguistic manifestation of Marx's "general intellect."

Specifically, Virno draws on Aristotle's delineation between the "special places" and

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[465.] Ibid., 214.

[466.] Carolyn R. Miller, "The Aristotelian *Topos:* Hunting for Novelty," Rereading *Aristotle's Rhetoric*, ed. Alan G. Gross and Arthur E. Walzer (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 136.

[467.] Ibid., 134.

[468.] McKeon, "Commonplace," 207.

[469.] Michael Leff, "Commonplaces and Argumentation in Cicero and Quintilian," *Argumentation* 10 (1996): 450.

"common places."[470] Virno notes that special places are localized and applicable only in particular situations. However, as conditions of political economy destabilize local communities and rhetorics, "the 'special places' of discourse and of argumentation are perishing and dissolving."[471] Only those technocrats with dominion over particular special places can define these discourses and set the conditions for their individuation. For Ledgett, appeals to classified information and security expertise turn specific policy disputes into special topics, which most publics lack the rhetorical purchase to challenge, comment on, or more broadly participate with in an individuating manner.

Against this, Virno argues commonplaces are "the most generally valid logical and linguistic forms of all of our discourse (let us even say, the skeletal structure of it); they allow for the existence of every individual expression we use and they give structure to these expressions."[472] Through their universality across contexts, commonplaces serve as repositories of the wisdom and experience of larger publics – the "general intellect." Through enabling the broadest realm of shared secondary retentions, the commonplaces as tertiary retentions offer "a standard of orientation, and thus, some sort of refuge from the direction in which the world is going."[473] As long as commonplaces allow participation by varied publics, they decrease the potential for proletarianization by forms of control. When commonplaces individuate, they demand that the participants "echo back common sentiment" rather than try to dictate the conditions of individuations.[474]

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[470] Virno, *Grammar,* 35-36

[471] Ibid.

[472] Ibid.

[473] Ibid.*,* 37

[474] Floyd D. Anderson and Andrew King, "William Hazlitt and the Romantic Assault on the Commonplace," *Western Journal of Communication* 45 (1981): 321.

The ability of commonplaces to echo common sentiment allowed them to challenge the anti-rhetorical frame of the NSA. Although there were technical debates regarding the nature of programs like PRISM, networked memes – functioning as commonplaces – focused on the broadest potential reactions, fostering a different mode of deliberation. Following Zizi Papacharissi's recognition that participatory networked media tends towards soft structures of feeling,[475] these memes gave networked participants a range of ways to feel about the NSA, surveillance, and <security>. Through their ability to serve as common repositories for collective secondary retentions of affects' traces, memes as networked commonplaces allowed for the emergence of varied interpretations of how one should relate to NSA policies. To more fully understand the way that these affective commonplaces enable this mode of deliberation around anti-rhetorics, I look at three of the most circulated memetic commonplaces around the NSA controversy: Condescending Wonka, Annoyed Picard, and Overly Attached Girlfriend.[476]

[475.] Papacharissi, *Affective Publics,* 116.

[476.] Each of the examples that I use were chosen because they were amongst the most widely circulated image macros around the controversy. All three examples appear not only as the top (non-Snowden image) memes when searching NSA meme, Snowden Meme, and NSA Leak meme, but also they are also circulated in varied other networked texts. All three were catalogued as part of the major memes related to the NSA surveillance scandal by Know Your Meme and were also part of varied media commentaries such as Motherboard's "Here are 9 Top Secret NSA memes," http://motherboard.vice.com/blog/here-are-9-top-secret-nsa-memes. These factors combined suggest that they were both top amongst the memes used to respond to the controversy, and also were part of larger circulations in networked publics.
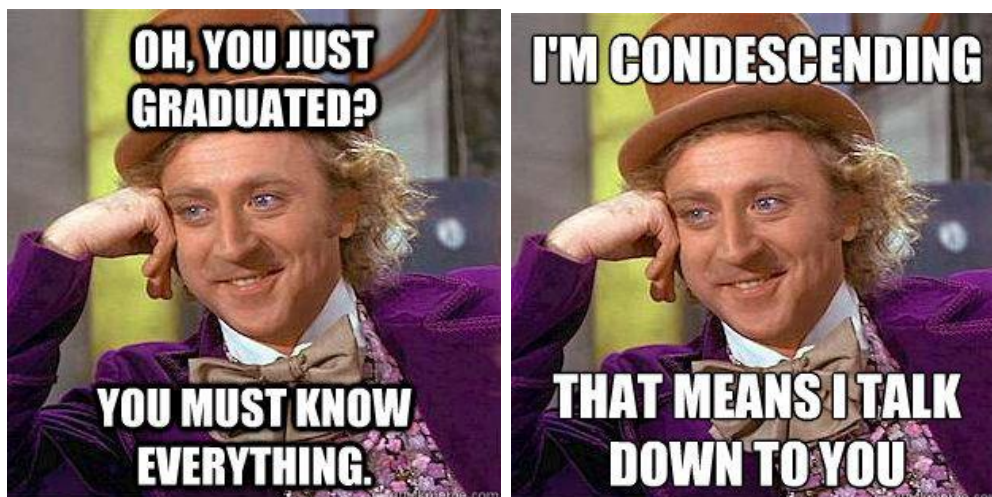
Figure 4.1 Initial iteration of Condescending Wonka (left) another popular iteration (right)

As one of the most popular networked memes, Condescending Wonka offered participants a range of targets for its circulation.[477] Although the image of Gene Wilder as Wonka originally circulated as "Creepy Wonka," in 2011 the meme exploded across Reddit and the internet when it was tied to a feeling of condescension.[478] The first iteration of Condescending Wonka was part of a Reddit thread titled "every time I speak to a recent grad…" and featured the text "oh, you just graduated // you must know everything." (Figure 4.1).[479] This form of the topline taking a comment by an implied interlocutor and the bottomline offering snide/condescending commentary quickly

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[477.] As McKeon notes commonplaces are "meaningless in isolation," as they have no argumentative force onto themselves but rather only provide new modes of understanding when placed into relation with other rhetorical forces. McKeon, "Commonplace," 208. Therefore, I will first establish the modal conditions of each meme, then see how the intersection of these modes with the NSA leaks offered new ways to relate to the controversy.

[478.] Brad and Don, "Condescending Wonka/Creepy Wonka," *Know Your Meme,* http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/condescending-wonka-creepy-wonka.

[479.] http://www.reddit.com/r/pics/comments/l8b9u/every_time_i_speak_to_a_recent_grad/.

emerged as the dominant mode tied to the image of Wonka.[480] The toplines tend to focus

on youthful arrogance. Other examples include "you're only 18 and engaged // you must

be really mature for your age" and "Oh, this is the first election cycle since you turned

old enough to vote // yes, please tell me more about your political wisdom." However,

any belief can be subject to condescension as long as the iteration follows the form of the

topline as naive or overly simple and the bottomline as a condescending correction.

Because this condescension is created by common understandings and functions as a

general (non-contextual) mapping of shared understandings, the larger meme functions in

a commonplace manner.

Opening the interview's commentary on the leaks, Ledgett argues that Snowden

could have reported within the system. Within the symbolic order of <security>, this

frames Snowden's public leak as an act of treason that supported terrorism. Ledgett's

admonishment of Snowden is a direct response to the narrative, popular across the

networked public sphere, that Snowden was a hero for defending privacy.[481] A range of

arguments about Snowden's heroism circulated around the internet; however, two

popular iterations of Condescending Wonka characterized the core of the debate (Figure

4.2). Although they offer opposing interpretations of the heroism of Snowden, they do so

without contradicting each other or the technocratic expertise of the NSA. The meme that

villainizes Snowden reaffirms the viewpoint of the NSA that Snowden's leak may have

aided terrorism. Conversely, the version that valorizes Snowden does not deny that

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[480.] The purchase of the condescending iterations of the meme are such that a thread titled "let's all agree to change his name to 'Condescending Wonka'" reached the front page of the advice animals reddit. Further condescending Wonka has been significantly more searched that the creep variation. Brad and Don, "Condescending Wonka."

[481.] Amanda Sakuma, "Democrats Split on Whether to Champion or Condemn Snowden," *MSNBC* (October 14, 2015), http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/democratic-divisions-over-what-make-edward-snowden.

information may have reached to terrorist, rather it suggests that despite this, the risk of

making NSA procedures transparent is a heroic act. This meme also does not contradict

the NSA's practices, Ledgett notes that the NSA collects metadata on civilians and finds

itself trying to maintain a balance between demanded transparency and the needs of

secrecy. The evaluation offered by ether iteration of Condescending Wonka does not

challenge the anti-rhetorical stance of the NSA – they are experts and their "factual"

claims are not refuted.

Figure 4.2 Wonka Debates the Snowden Leaks.

From these two memes two potential publics emerge, each offering a differing

view of Snowden and the leaks. The point of stasis between these publics is not

necessarily about particular policies, but rather over what or towards whom to be

condescending. This condescension emerges as a site for deliberation over the NSA

leaks. The varied iterations of the meme mobilize differing individuals to offer

alternative readings for the "proper" use of affect. This allows participants to deliberate

outside the circumference of the NSA's anti-rhetorics and their proletarianization through

"fact" based argument. Once outside this circumference, the meme allows participants to

reintroduce privacy to the conversation over the NSA policies. Rather than positing

<security> as a god term that is in opposition to terrorism, by focusing on what

participants ought to condescend towards, privacy and security are both held up as

potential god terms. Support of Snowden – as the embodiment of a god or devil,

depending on the terministic frame participants support – becomes a proxy for this larger

struggle. Memetic participants may "vote" via circulation to determine if Snowden was a

traitor or a hero – not based on specific arguments or propositions, but rather based on

broad feelings about the issue.

Figure 4.3: Some of the earliest iterations of the Annoyed Picard meme.

Condescension was not the only shared structure of feeling that networked

participants were invited to place the leak within: another meme invited them to feel

annoyed. Annoyed Picard is a popular networked meme for expressing excessive

frustration with the views or actions of implied interlocutors. The meme is a screen

capture of actor Patrick Stewart playing Jean-Luc Picard on the television show *Star

Trek: The Next Generation* (Figure 4.3). Prior to its emergence as a full-fledged image

macro, the image virally circulated with the static text "WTF is this shit."[482] Other

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[482] Don, "Annoyed Picard," *Know Your Meme,* http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/annoyed-picard.

captions emerged on the Advice Animals subreddit, opening the meme to comment on

specific actions worthy of Picard's visceral annoyed response. The modal form follows a

topline that is merely an exclamation of outrage (most often "[question word] the fuck")

followed by a bottomline that describes the source of the annoyance.

Figure 4.4: Picard is annoyed with the NSA controversy

In the face of the Snowden leaks, Picard found plenty to be annoyed about.

Suprisingly, participants in this meme did not offer judgement about the NSA, Snowden,

or the potential positive or negative ramifications of the leaks. Instead they focused on

their annoyance with the people who seemed outraged to learn about the spying program

(Figure 4.4). In the two most popularly circulated responses, the Picard suggests his

annoyance that Americans were not already aware of domestic surveillance. The memes

suggest that it should be common knowledge that the NSA spies, considering that the

PATRIOT act authorized this surveillance twelve years prior. Similar to Condescending

Wonka, this meme invites participation outside the anti-rhetorical frame offered by the

NSA. Rather than debate the specific impacts of the PRISM program on security or

privacy, the Picard memes' expression of annoyance implicitly suggests that PRISM is

not unique. Participants who identify with the structure of feeling around the meme are

invited to consider the leak as a continuation of existing policies of surveillance. Ledgett's erasure of privacy sought to frame all surveillance as improving <security>. However, the Picard meme, while not offering judgment on the policy, uses the commonplace of annoyance to provide a larger historical perspective. This contextualization contradicts the hierarchies established by the NSA's valorization of <security> above all else.

Beyond historicizing the narrative, the Picard meme invites participants to identify with a sense of superiority over the "masses."[483] In expressing annoyance with those who are uneducated about surveillance, the meme positions participants something akin to a wise vanguard. The meme implies that while the masses may accept official rhetorics of security, it contends more enlightened members of the networked public sphere resisted these narratives. By evoking the PATRIOT act, the meme suggests that any participant who was not personally researching surveillance and participating in these longstanding debates is complicit in the consequences of current surveillance policy. Through this, the meme draws attention to the proletarianizing force of NSA rhetorics and gestures towards the possibility of resistive individuations by pointing out the need for critical scrutiny of the surveillance programs. This fractures the dominance of <security> as a terministic screen by highlighting that the NSA is actively selecting a particular (not universal) vision of politics. Such attention is important, because as Stiegler suggests, when controlling forces gain sway over attention, resistive retentions

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[483.] I use the term masses here not because I believe it represents to political potential of participants in this meme nor those judged by the meme, but rather because the meme reduces those it is chastising to the sort of blind duped mob that Hardt and Negri associate with the term masses.

and individuations becomes impotent – not because they do not exist, but because participants do not know they are options.[484]

In the prior memes, the evocation of commonplaces was largely confined to placing affective judgment onto the ways that publics interacted with the leak controversy. Wonka was condescending towards those who thought Snowden was a hero or traitor and Picard was annoyed with uneducated netizens. However, image macros as commonplaces also offer the potential to reframe the participants in the controversy itself. Most notably, the meme Overly Attached Girlfriend was used to recast the motives (but not the policies) of the NSA.

Figure 4.5: Early Iteration of Overly Attached Girlfriend (left) the NSA iteration (right).

A screen cap from a parody music video about clingy relationships, this picture of a wide eyed young woman is one of the most popular image macros circulating around the internet [Figure 4.5].[485] The combination of the intense facial expression, series of pictures in the background, and narrative of the video (which garnered over 1.3 million

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484. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery vol. 1,* 64.
485. Don, "Overly Attached Girlfriend," *Know Your Meme,* http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/overly-attached-girlfriend.

views on YouTube) led participants to attach this image to the social narrative of a clingy or attached teenage girlfriend. In contrast to Wonka and Picard, new iterations of Overly Attached Girlfriend are used not to comment on specific conversations, instead new iterations function to add new and funny examples to the narrative behind the meme. To begin, the very name of the meme places all content within a affective frame. Every iteration must demonstrate a stance that is "overly attached," just as the iterations of Picard must be annoyed and Wonka condescending. Within this condensed structure of feeling, particular iterations then circulate examples of this attachment. The toplines typically feature a reasonable action by the implied boyfriend while the bottomlines responsivity frame the girlfriend as unreasonably attached. Iterations create a story of rampant jealousy "I was looking through your texts earlier // who's mom?," tricks to prolong the relationship "I poked holes in all the condoms // now you have to love me forever," and obsession bordering on stalking "You forgot to tell me where you were going on a trip with your friends // good thing I installed GPS on your car so I could tag along." Across the iterations, the meme develops a commonplace centered on narratives about the intensities and excesses of youthful romantic relations.

The memetic Girlfriend's predilection towards stalking/surveillance made this commonplace a fitting tool to parody the NSA [Figure 4.5]. In the most common iteration commenting on the NSA controversy, the pictures on the girlfriend's wall are replaced with the seal of the NSA and the meme features the text "I stole your Facebook login, cellphone records & email password // but its [sic] cool, you have nothing to hide right?" In framing the NSA as the girlfriend, the meme reframes the actions of the NSA as juvenile and obsessive, rather than necessary for security. While not challenging any

particular factual claims made by the NSA, the meme does challenge the motive of the PRISM program. Instead of a reverence for security, the meme suggests the possibility that the NSA acted out of its own selfish interests. Further, the bottomline reframes a common argument made by the NSA, which was explicitly made by Ledgett, that law abiding citizens should have no need for privacy. Ledgett uses this claim to suggest that anyone who opposes surveillance must have something to hide. Moreover, couching the argument in the commonplace of the attached girlfriend meme suggests that the civilian openness demanded by the NSA is unreasonable and violates acceptable norms of privacy. By suggesting an impurity of motives, this meme implies that <security> is not a god that should be sanctified. Instead the meme returns privacy to the terministic mix, suggesting that privacy is the only way to be protected from the irrational impulses of the Overly Attached NSA.

Combined, these memes challenge the proletarianizing force of Ledgett's rhetoric. The varied commonplaces destabilize <security> as a god term by re-introducing <privacy> as a rival symbolic deity. Moreover, although the technical nature of security policy allows an anti-rhetorical frame that discourages amateur participation, the imposition of networked commonplaces enables networked participants to engage in the construction of structures of feeling that circulate around that anti-rhetoric. Depending on the meme, they negotiate the direction of common affects such as annoyance, condescension, and emotional attachment as they apply to the leaks. As participants position themselves in relation to these memetic publics, and expand on them through circulatory practices, they spread these affective reframings of the controversy. This

allows democratically created and directed frames to counter the technocratic force offered by Ledgett.

<div align="center">Irony, Memes and Comic Remediation</div>

While each of these image macros relies on varied commonplaces to challenge the anti-rhetoricity of the NSA and the sanctity of <security>, irony is also central to the ways that networked publics challenged the proletarianizing rhetoric of the NSA. A series of memes built around the Verizon slogan "can you hear me now" were used to ironically deploy special topics to disrupt the NSA's technocratic valorization of security. Therefore, this chapter now turns to discussion of the functioning of networked irony before using the "can you hear me now" meme to explore its individuating force.

At its most basic, Burke defines irony as a reversal where "a returns as non-a."[486] The juxtaposition of normative expectations with some indecorous element (funny or not) provides an incongruity that Burke argues challenges informationist motion. Burke argues perspective by incongruity is the engine that drives poetic action – and by extension the possibilities of meaningful individuation. Because of this relation between humor and incongruity, rhetoricians posit that humor can have serious political consequences. Robert Hariman argues that parody opens up democratic space by de-privileging traditional institutions of power and creating alternative affects against dominant structures.[487] Tønder extends this potential to all forms of irony, arguing that irony (as a series of reversals which need not be dialectical negations) always remediates messages, undercutting their dominant force and refiguring them in such ways that they

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[486.] Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1945), 517.

[487.] Robert Hariman, "Political Parody and Public Culture," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94, no. 3 (2008): 249.

may be used in different in non-dominant forms.[488] Through its reliance on juxtaposition and remediation, irony tends towards democratic rhetorics. Ironic rhetorical techne open multiple modes of individuation. Combined these individuations open new and diverse rhetorical spaces that function in opposition to the consumptive proletarianization of control.

Figure 4.6 Sample tweet parodying Verizon.

When *The Guardian* first made public the scope and reach of the PRISM program on June 5, 2013, it did so with the headline "NSA Collecting Phone Records of Millions of Verizon Customers Daily."[489] While it would later be revealed that other cellphone providers were also complicit in the PRISM program, this early disclosure, as well as Verizon's status as the United States' largest cellular provider, made it central to the memetic responses across networked publics. Within hours of the online posting of *The Guardian* article, Twitter users were making jokes playing off the Orwellian undertones of the Verizon slogan "can you hear me now" and their "share everything plan" (Figure 4.6). By 10 am that morning, these slogans had been translated into a variety of memes

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488. Tønder, "Comic Power."

489. Greenwald, "NSA Collecting."

and drawn enough attention that *Buzzfeed* posted an article featuring a range of them.[490]

Rather than centering on a particular image, the modal conditions of the meme are

primarily defined by the ironic juxtaposition of Verizon's marketing rhetoric with a twist

gesturing towards the NSA leak. These memes provide different affective castings of the

controversy, providing an opportunity to explore the role the ironic plays in

individuation, especially to create a range of potentialities that subjectivities must then

negotiate.
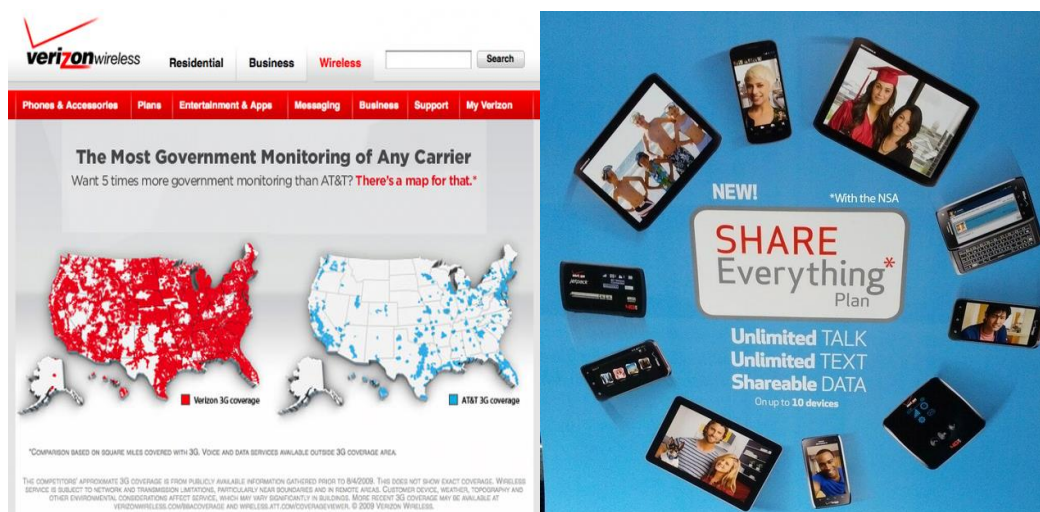
Figure 4.7 Refigured Verizon advertisments

The most basic iterations of the meme make subtle alterations to already existing

Verizon advertisements (Figure 4.7). For example, one meme added an asterisk to a share

anything plan advertisement, adding the text "with the NSA." The ad valorized Verizon's

efforts to let you share communication resources with members of your cell plan.

However, the memetic addition reframes this virtue as a simultaneous vice because the

information also goes to the NSA. Similarly, at the time Verizon relied heavily on

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[490.] Benny Johnson and Dorsey Shaw, "Make Your Own Verizon/NSA Ad!," *Buzzfeed* (June 6, 2013), https://www.buzzfeed.com/bennyjohnson/help-us-reimagine-verizons-ads?utm_term=.sixp9VX3DA#.fd3K5JMqQl.

mapping their coverage of the US compared to AT&T. Using an image from this campaign, participants substituted words to promise "5 times more government monitoring." This iteration challenges Verizon's assumption that more reach and coverage always benefits the consumer, enthymematically positing that if Verizon can reach more of America than ever before then so can the NSA.

These memes use perspective by incongruity to disrupt the perfection demanded by the NSA's valorization of security. A central component of irony as a trope, is that it enhances the perspective by incongruity enabled by metaphor by creating a deliberate misnomer through the pairing of antithetical terms.[491] Our consumptive practices and personal communication are supposed to be independent of security practices. However, by juxtaposing the Verizon advertisements which are tied to everyday behaviors to security, these memes create a new mode of seeing, inviting memetic participants to reconsider the NSA's ties to their everyday lives. While this frame still valorizes security as a motivating term, the juxtaposition prevents the closure that gives this god term its proletarianizing force. Because perspective by incongruity foregrounds contradictions, participants are asked to create alternative readings, rather than simply consuming dominant ones.[492] Although the NSA promotes <security> as noble, the ironic reframe in these memes makes it more mundane, disrupting the deification that justifies the proletarianizing hierarchies.

[491.] Burke, *Attitudes,* 133.

[492.] Martha Solomon, "Ideology as a Rhetorical Constraint: The Anarchist Agitation of 'Red Emma'," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 74 no. 2 (1988): 187.

Figure 4.8 "Can you hear me now?" parody memes.

Another strain of the meme specifically riffs on the "can you hear me now?" advertisements that Verizon had run until 2010. Starting in 2002, these adds featured Paul Marcarelli as the "Test Man." In these immensely popular commercials, Test Man is featured going around the country to check the reliability of the Verizon system serving as a stand-in for frustrated cell phone users.[493] Recontextualized into the meme, the NSA is positioned as answering the slogan's question (Figure 4.8). This positions consumers as complicit in the surveillance, as though they are actively asking to be surveilled. Moreover, by evoking the ads, these memes reaffirm the ubiquity of surveillance. This refigured narrative disrupts the notion that the NSA is the heroic protector of passive Americans. Instead it suggests that the NSA both works with and uses Americans to expand its surveillance power. Following Burke, this move both destabilizes the piety of established discourses and re-moralizes them by using juxtaposed narratives to offer a more complete understanding of the controversy.[494] By juxtaposition of consumer

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[493.] Theresa Howard, "'Can You Here Me Now?' a Hit," *USA Today* (February 23, 2004), http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/money/advertising/adtrack/2004-02-22-track-verizon_x.htm.

[494.] Burke, *Attitudes,* 309.

practice through Test Man with the NSA van, the second iteration complicates the narrative of the NSA and reopens the closed by the terministic deification of <security>.

A third grouping of the memes introduces another actor into the drama of the leak, president Barack Obama (Figure 4.9). One iteration of the meme shows Barack Obama on a cell phone asking for Verizon's "share everything plan." This iteration positions Obama as initiating the relationship between the NSA and Verizon. The second iteration returns Test Guy, but rather than the NSA answering the slogan, Obama is pictured responding "yes we can." Aside from repeating the assertion that Obama as president is directly complicit in the surveillance programs, the second meme also generates additional force through its use of Obama's 2008 campaign slogan as the answer. This slogan was used in the election to position Obama as the political manifestation of mass agency, hopes, and ideals. However, by recontextualizing it within the NSA scandal, the meme suggests this idealism is incompatible with the realities of politics.

Figure 4.9: Obama focused iterations of anti-NSA surveillance memes.

These incongruities move the NSA's rhetoric into a thoroughly comic frame.[495] Of Burke's three frames, the comic is most suited to democratic politics as it does not assume an intrinsic morality to actors, but rather that social ills come from human error.[496] For example, the "yes we can" slogan suggests that although NSA surveillance seems to work against Obama's electoral mandate, the president supported the policy in what seemed to be the best interests of the people. Robert Ivie argues comic reframes such as this necessitate deliberation, noting,

> Burke's notion of the comic corrective acknowledges that political relations are agonistic and recognizes that social cohesion and tolerance are promoted by people 'acting rhetorically upon themselves and one another.' It does not . . . assume that agonistic politics are inherently self-correcting or that their potential for realizing democratic ideals is easily fulfilled.[497]

By positioning the NSA, Obama, Verizon, and the consuming public as all complicit, imperfect, and effected by these policies, the translation of the hierarchies of the NSA into this comic corrective begs participants to recognize and work through contradictions. It is not Ledgett's limiting frame of security above all. It is the messy recognition that security, privacy, democracy, and safety are all important, but no one policy can meet these needs equally. By providing multiple incongruous perspectives, the grammars of technocratic rhetorics are never allowed to stabilize. This allows each participant to place themselves within competing, complex, and open narratives, rather than consuming a hierarchical order which prevents individuation.

[495.] Burke posits that humans use three primary frames of "organized meaning" to "[gauge] the historical situation and adopt a role in relation to it:" the tragic, the epic, and the poetic. Burke, *Attitudes,* 5.

[496.] A. Cheree Carlson, "Gandhi and the Comic Frame: 'Ad Bellum Purificandum'," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 72 no. 4 (1986): 444.

[497] Robert L. Ivie, *Democracy and America's War on Terror* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 39.

Participatory Networked Technics and Terministic Democracy

Each of these memes that emerged around the Snowden leaks work in different ways to disrupt the proletarianizing force of the NSA's deployment of <security>. This terministic fracturing would seem to disrupt the potential for unified opposition to the policies of the NSA. However, because they offer a variety of affective frames, terministic relations, and narratives around the leaks, these memes open the democratic space around the controversy. Memes create the space for multiple perspectives by incongruities. This allows for the democratic transindividuation of a particular preindividual state and the creation of multiple individuations related to a particular controversy that then must be democratically reconciled. Because of this, memes – and similar participatory technics – suggest the possibility of engendering terministic democracy through the destabilization and public negotiation of controlling rhetorics. Two features demonstrated in this case study contribute to this terministic democracy: incongruous remediations and commonplace repetition and difference.

Democratic Remediations

As each of these memes provides a different affective casting of the controversy, this case provides an opportunity to expand explorations of the role comic remediation plays in individuation, especially to create a range of individuations that subjectivities must then negotiate. Speaking on the organizing force of singular terministic screens, Burke famously notes that "even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality."[498] This power was highlighted as Ledgett's rhetoric reflected the need for security, selected terrorism as the terministic devil term,

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[498.] Burke, *Language,* 45, emphasis in original.

and deflected privacy concerns through reframing the issue into a secrecy/transparency dialectic. While the varied memetic responses offered a range of ways to feel about security, new actors to the narrative, and sought to re-introduce privacy as a terministic foil, none of them explicitly reject the importance of security as an organizing term. Rather through their (primarily ironic) remediations of the term, they each attach it to a different set of selections, reflections and deflections. Ledgett's proletarianizing rhetoric, with its seemingly stable and singular symbolic force, is transformed into a pluralism of related symbolic orders, each commenting on the other and fighting for public acceptance.

This terministic pluralism creates spaces for individuation in the face of the proletarianizing rhetorics of the NSA. The memes provide a way for participants to debate the meaning and feeling of <security> outside the policies and politics of government institutions. As the process of individuation necessarily produces transformation, the process is decisively political. This individuating potential is democratic and grounded in the common use of terms. Barry Brummett argues one of the most important tasks of rhetorical criticism is not to disprove the arguments around god terms, but rather to disrupt the aura of perfection. [499] Once this aura is tainted, alternative individuations can engage the symbolic order previously closed by god terms. Furthermore, as the organizing force of god terms establishes technical grammars, their disruption opens the processes of individuation related to the term. As long as individuation happens, transformation is inevitable as new symbolic orders will individuate through each iteration of a technic.

[499.] Brummett, "Perfection and the Bomb," 93

Because individuation is accompanied by symbolic pluralism, it is a necessary precondition for democratic action. This is not a representative democracy, which is fraught with concerns regarding the reductive nature of (mis)representation.[500] Instead, individuation, enabled by technics like memes, enables a direct democracy where all participants can engage in the creation of terministic conditions that define political issues. This terministic democracy limits the direction that influential symbols may individuate. Further, the comic remediations enabled by individuating technics creates varied structures of feelings around any singular issue, providing multiple avenues for individuals to not only engage the issue by feeling their way into relation with particular clusters of terms, but also democratically restructure these feelings through their participation in the memes. Each posting of a meme creates a new potential affective public seeking the attention of networked participants. This attention, and the subsequent expansion of the force of a particular affective public, gives each participant the possibility to "vote" on the rhetorical order they want to dominate rhetorical spaces. In this light, terministic democracy functions to shape rhetorical order through participants' transindividuation with these rhetorical technics.

Repeating Differing Commonplaces

Beyond the comic remediation of proletarianizing technics, those memes which function as networked commonplaces also enact democratizing force through their performance of repetition and difference. For example, while the NSA version of Overly Attached Girlfriend is a repetition of the form of the original meme, it is included in the larger meme only because the repeated elements lead to a different iteration. Through this

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[500.] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 241-45.

process, the commonplace knowledge stored within the meme is expanded to a new context. Aside from highlighting the inventive power of commonplaces, this repetition and difference also enhances the individuating potential of memes.[501] In operating through a logic of repetition, individuation functions as a sort of apprenticeship: we learn to do by repeating the externalized retentions of others.[502] Following this, a commonplace can only be understood through comparison to the similarities and differences of its past uses. It is the comparison of participants' own condescension with the NSA to the social understanding of Wonka's condensations that gives this intersection of controversy and commonplace meaning. Conversely, if participants are always encountering the novel, there is little capacity to form meaningful retentions because there is no preexisting technic to individuate from.[503] Ultimately, if repetition becomes a process of sameness, or if difference exists without repetition, the connection between the preindividual and the singularity is severed, disrupting the possibility of individuation.

This process of commonplace individuation is transformative of social conditions. Paolo Virno argues that it is the general (common) nature of commonplaces that enables their political force. As technocrats detach individuals from special topics, publics increasingly become nomadic. Under these conditions, Virno argues commonplaces provide political strength:

> Those who do not feel at home, in order to get a sense of orientation and to protect themselves, must turn to the 'common places,' or to the most general categories of the linguistic intellect… not in order for them to learn something about biology or advanced mathematics, but because they turn to the most essential categories of the abstract intellect in order to

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501. Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery vol. 2,* 82.

502. Ibid., 86.

503. Ibid.

protect themselves from the blows of random chance, in order to take refuge from contingency and from the unforeseen.[504]

As commonplaces emerge as the only technics that larger publics can individuate in relation to, they become increasingly political. Other technics, with their ties to special topics can always be directed by technocrats with expertise in that specialty. However, the very commonness of commonplaces suggests that these rhetorical technics – above all others – may be central to the establishment of a political voice less encumbered by the influences of control.

Despite the controversies engendered by Snowden's leaks and the subsequent memetic response, the PRISM program continues to surveil Americans – albeit in a more transparent and limited fashion.[505] Certainly, these memes are neither solely responsible for these limited reforms nor inadequate because of a failure to enact larger change. Instead, these memetic responses provided a larger range of symbolic technics with which participants may individuate. Increasing this range is important because as Burke notes the very quality and shape of our political world is tied to the quality and shape of our symbols.[506] Therefore, the common quality of these memes, as well as the competing interpretations offered through their remediation increases the odds of a democratically fostered individuation that enables a better quality of collective life.

Chapter 5

[504.] Virno, *Grammar,* 38.

[505.] Spence Ackerman, "FBI Quietly Changes its Privacy Rules for Accessing NSA Data on Americans," *The Guardian* (March 10, 2016): https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/mar/08/fbi-changes-privacy-rules-accessing-nsa-prism-data.

[506.] Burke, *Language,* 54.

Putting Putin on the Ritz: Memes Making Cosmopolitan Memories

Figure 5.1: One of many memes playing off the pun "Putin on the Ritz."

The image of Russian president Vladimir Putin riding shirtless on a cracker is remarkable in many ways: it is visually intriguing, it is a great visual pun, and circulating it in Russia could land you in jail (Figure 5.1). In April of 2015, the internet was aghast when news spread that Russia was taking steps to ban memes that disparage public figures.[507] Bradley Wiggens notes that although the Russian use of memes operates similarly to western and global networked meme culture, within sectors of the "Russian Internet," memes unique to Russian culture and politics circular dominate the rhetorical landscape.[508] Prior to the ban, Russian internet culture features rich memetic circulation commenting on politics, current events, and popular culture. Popular memes lambasted Putin, Russian driving, and the latest gossip with celebrities. However, as memes adopted more aggressive political commentary, the Russian government used a lawsuit from Russian singer Valeri Syutkin accusing a meme of defamation (figure 5.2) to justify a ban

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[507.] Sally French, "Russia Just Reminded Us that these Putin Memes Are Illegal," *MarketWatch* (April 13, 2015), http://www.marketwatch.com/story/russia-just-reminded-us-that-these-putin-memes-are-illegal-2015-04-13.

[508.] Bradley E. Wiggins, "Crimea River: Directionality in Memes from the Russia–Ukraine Conflict," *International Journal of Communication* 10 (2016): 455.

on any meme that specifically disparages a public figure.[509] The willingness of the

Russian government to specifically target internet memes for censorship suggests a

growing recognition by political leaders of the rhetorical (and perhaps anti-authoritarian)

force of networked communication.[510] Specifically, these memes operate in conversation

(and conflict) with official representations of public figures. For example, many memes

engage the public persona of Vladimir Putin, offering satirical commentary on the *ethos*

of masculinity and Russian tradition carefully crafted by government communication

experts.

Figure 5.2: The meme that launched the ban. Translates as "smack the bitch in the

face."

As the face of Russia, Vladimir Putin, together with his public relations apparatus,

has carefully constructed a public image designed to reify Russia's ideological

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[509.] Caitlin Dewey, "Russia Just Made a Ton of Internet Memes Illegal," *Washington Post* (April 10, 2015), http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2015/04/10/russia-just-made-a-ton-of-internet-memes-illegal/?tid=sm_fb,

[510.] This ban is the continuation of a larger effort by Russia to limit political communication online. In August of 2014, "Russia enacted a law that forced all bloggers with more than 3,000 daily readers to register with the Roskomnadzor, basically outlawing anonymous blogs;" Dewey, "Internet Memes Illegal."

commitments to masculine, authority-driven politics.[511] This cult of personality, and the resulting policies, are rooted in allusions to a nostalgic memory of the Soviet Union as a dominant authority in geopolitical affairs. In opposition to this carefully crafted memory of Putin, memes built around his persona disrupt this well-manicured façade, and have continued to do so even after the announcement of legal restrictions. These memes highlight the particular power of the amateur creation of narratives. Specifically, these memes are the re-articulation of a specific and focused control based narrative built upon the authority of Vladimir Putin into a vernacular narrative open to varied individuations. The interplay between these two discourses creates a space that makes apparent the conflict between official efforts to craft proletarianizing memories of Russian leaders – and by extension the nation – and the memes which function to open individuational space through the construction of ironic counter-memory.[512] Therefore, in this chapter, I argue that with their capacity to externalize shared secondary retentions, internet memes function to destabilize official rhetorics that mobilize memories to create static and controlling national identities. Such clash over public memory is particularly significant because, as Hannah Arendt notes, political identity comes directly from our capacity to remember.[513]

[511.] Andrew Foxall, "Photographing Vladimir Putin: Masculinity, Nationalism and Visuality in Russian Political Culture," *Geopolitics* 18 no. 1 (2013): 134. Although I have tried to avoid gendered pronoun use across this dissertation, because the technically constructed persona of Putin is grounded in a performance of masculinity, the use of gendered pronouns in reference to this masculine performance is the most arcuate way to represent the force of these assorted mnemotechnics.

[512.] Thomas R. Dunn, "Remembering 'a Great Fag': Visualizing Public Memory and the Construction of Queer Space," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97, no. 4 (2011): 442

[513.] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 176-177.

My analysis of the interplay between this official public memory and its memetic counterparts proceeds in three sections. I first situate the official narrative of Putin within the context of technics and their relationship to public memory. I next explore both Russian and international Putin memes to evaluate the unique affordances digital technics provides for the construction of counter-memory. I conclude by arguing that memetic counter-memories are uniquely suited to negotiating the limitations of political censorship. Further their potential to affectively reframe politics increases space for public deliberation through fostering democratically created vernacular memories that promote a networked cosmopolitan virtue.

Visual Technics and National Memories

Vladimir Putin is revered by his citizens to an extent that ought to makes other democratically elected heads of state jealous. His approval ratings frequently hover in the 70 percent range and only dipped into the high 40s during economic contractions and electoral scandals.[514] Much of Putin's popularity results from presiding over economic and political prosperity after the tumultuous Yeltsin years. However, the Russian leader has been able to maintain this approval for fifteen years through the construction of a carefully crafted persona that is equal parts protector, object of desire, and nostalgia for the memory of Soviet Power.[515] The resonance of this persona is such that Putin is globally popular. He was the top recipient of votes in *Time's* 2015 most influential person

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[514.] Tatiana Mikhailova, "Putin as the Father of the Nation: His Family and Other Animals," in *Putin as Celebrity and Cultural Icon* ed. Helena Goscilo (New York: Routledge, 2013), 65. I recognize that there is question to the legitimacy of Putin's "democratic" election. However, his public popularity remains high despite questionable election practices.

[515.] Helena Goscilo, "Russia's Ultimate Celebrity: VVP as VIP *Objet D'art*," in *Putin as Celebrity and Cultural Icon* ed. Helena Goscilo (New York: Routledge, 2013), 7.

poll.[516] As Russian officials carefully use varied rhetorical technics to craft Putin's image

through the management of public memory, this image functions as the official

embodiment of a public memory of what Russia once was and can be again.[517] This

rhetoric transforms the memory of Putin into a consumable technic that is profoundly

proletarianizing.[518] For Russians, not accepting the state vision of Putin can lead to both

social and political sanction. The centrality of Putin to Russian individuations of self-

concept and collective identity helps explain the restrictions on memes, as they enable

individuations that threaten to destabilize the "postmodern cult of personality" built on

equal parts authority and commercial appeal that is central to the Kremlin's vision of

Russian politics.[519] However, prior to examining this memetic destabilization, I first

expand on the relationship between technics and memory before exploring how the

Russian government uses these technics (particularly the visual) to develop official

memories constructed around the public persona of Putin.

[516.] Nolan Feeny, "Vladimir Putin Wins TIME 100 Reader's Poll," *Time* (April 13, 2014), http://time.com/3820069/time-100-readers-poll-results/. This vote had a global audience – over 50 percent of whom were American – suggesting even citizens of states antagonized by Putin respect his public persona. Putin's success in the poll is even more impressive as the remainder of the top five were global pop stars. Barack Obama was the next highest ranked head of state at eleventh.

[517.] Maya Eichler, "Russia's Post-Communist Transformation," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 8, no. 4 (2006): 498. Stiegler notes that because collective individuations are never stable, concepts such as national identity are fundamentally a fiction. If technics centered on 'Russianness' individuate, this idea's collectivizing force is "never completed, *never identified"* and as such "never produces identity but, rather, unity." Stiegler, *Taking,* 61. Because of this a rigid politics of identity will tend towards proletarnization, but unity found in amateur and open technics will be individuating.

[518.] Foxall, "Photographing Vladimir Putin,"134. In the tradition of the cults of personality built around Soviet leaders, the Kremlin "image makers" dedicate considerable resources to maintain of the myth of Putin. These efforts have resulted in not only a wide array of Putin images throughout Russia, but also Putin branded Vodka, caviar, and canned food.

[519.] Julie A. Cassiday and Emily D. Johnson, "A Personality Cult for the Postmodern Age," in *Putin as Celebrity and Cultural Icon* ed. Helena Goscilo (New York: Routledge, 2013), 37.

Technics and Memory

Because technics externalize human functionality, they are tied to memory. Fire is only useful as a technic insofar as users also have the social memory of the ways that it can be mobilized to cook, heat, etc. In this sense, technics are a connection to social memories that create a sense of historical identity.[520] Yet these memories are not simply created through the repeated use of technics.[521] Instead, recognizing the social force of technical memory, Stiegler is most interested in the capacity of technics to function as "mnemotechnics." A focus on mnemotechnics draws attention to the "objects and techniques able to preserve and make accessible experiences which I have not myself lived."[522] Technics' transformations of secondary retentions into technical memories that allow collative unity built around events one has not lived. These externalized memories, are the foundation of collective identities, they "authorize particular historical

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[520.] Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 2: Disorientation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2009)*,* 12.

[521.] As the embodiment of Russian public memory, the Kremlin actively constructs Putin as an historical figure acting in present time. Stiegler focuses on memory, rather than history, arguing technics are the externalization of individual memories, which may then be collectively shared through technics. However, when focusing on collective memories of the past, I maintain a focus on memory rather than history because of the academic and political stakes. Pierre Nora clarifies the distinction by arguing, "Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. … Memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual. History, on the other hand, belongs to everyone and to no one, whence its claim to universal authority;" Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," *Representations* 26 (1989): 8-9. In choosing to foreground memory over history, I conceive of the past not as a static truth to be uncovered, but rather as a series of contestable moments negotiated through individuation. Moreover, as individuations via technics memories are active in the present; communities create, redeploy, and alter memories in the routines enacted around the mobilizations of technics and the subsequent interpretation of past events. Stephen H. Browne, "Remembering Crispus Attucks: Race, Rhetoric, and the Politics of Commemoration," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 85 no. 2 (1999): 185. The debate over the meaning of past moments is thus generative of inventional resources for contemporary controversy. David W. Blight, "'For Something beyond the 'Battlefield': Frederick Douglass and the Struggle for Memory of the Civil War," *Journal of American History* 75 (1989): 1159.

[522.] Crogan, "Experience" 104.

narratives... to serve the interests of particular groups."[523] Because of this, even contemporary events ought to be understood, in part, through the lens of memory. But this memory is always mediated through technics. The grammars of participation in particular mnemotechnics set the conditions by which participants can individuate current events into prior tertiary retentions, generating their political force.[524] A focus on mnemotechnics orients the critic towards the way that technics are currently mobilizing and authorizing new memories, rather than focusing only on the way that past memories are mobilized and materialized.

In this capacity, mnemotechnics "constitute an intergenerational support of memory which, as *material culture*, overdetermines learning and mnesic activities."[525] As the material limits of public memory, mnemotechnics are subject to ritualization, resignifying uses, and debate. Because of this, mnemotechnics that are publicly mobilized are inherently rhetorical.[526] As communities deploy technologies that evoke particular memories, they bring a vision of historical events to bear upon contemporary action.[527] Moreover, in connecting individuals to visions of past retentions, mnemotechnics also authorize particular protentions based on the form of the mnemic collectivity.[528] Consequently, political conflict is often rooted not only in the struggle between contested

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[523.] Steve Hedley Clark, "Introduction: Paul Ricoeur: Memory, Identity, Ethics," *Theory, Culture & Society* 27 no. 5 (2010): 5-6.

[524.] Stiegler, *Taking Care,* 61.

[525.] Stiegler, *New Critique,* 9.

[526.] Dunn, "Remembering 'a Great Fag,'" 439.

[527.] Browne, "Remembering Crispus Attucks," 169.

[528.] Bernard Stiegler, *The Decadence of Industrial Democracies* (Malden: Polity, 2011), 117.

public memories,[529] but also in the very availability and form of the technics that allow these memories to circulate and individuate.[530] These different memories create the collective identities that enable different individuations.

Accordingly, the collective secondary retentions enabled by technical memory align strongly with the rhetorical concept of public memory. For memory scholars, public memory resides in any location (read: technic) where the past becomes active by either its literal enactment or its continuous presence, enforcing an authoritative rhetorical narrative.[531] The capacity to be active renders memory a public phenomenon constructed between individuals and communities in a "dialectic relationship" where "public memories influence collective identities and collective identities shape public memories."[532] This relationship, akin to transindividuation, creates a public memory as "a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present, and by implication its future."[533] Therefore, public memories are a political

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[529.] The study of the rhetoricity of public memory has tended to manifest in the study of events that are directly oriented to memory, memorials and other overtly commemorative acts. However, Michael Schudson warns that non-commemorative memory is as – if not more – important. The past constrains and mobilizes action in a range of rhetorical situations outside of "self-conscious memory sites." Michael Schudson, "Lives, Laws, and Language: Commemorative versus Non-Commemorative Forms of Effective Public Memory," *The Communication Review* 2 no. 1 (1997): 3. Prominent examples of investigation into the rhetoric of public memorials includes: Barbara Biesecker, "Remembering World War II: The Rhetoric And Politics Of National Commemoration At The Turn Of The 21st Century," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 88,(2002): 393-409; Carol Blair, Marsha S. Jeppeson, & Enrico Pucci Jr., "Public Memorializing In Postmodernity: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial As Prototype," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77 (1991): 263-288; Carol Blair, & Neil Michel, "Reproducing Civil Rights Tactics: The Rhetorical Performances Of The Civil Rights Memorial*," Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 30 (2000): 31-5.

[530.] Stiegler, *The Re-Enchantment*, 88.

[531.] G. Mitchell Reyes, "Memory and Alterity: The Case for an Analytic of Difference," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 43 no. 3 (2010): 227.

[532.] Ibid., 223.

[533.] John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 33.

tool *par excellence* because they assist in constituting the definition of the citizen.[534] The

deployment of mnemotechnics does not tell us what it means to be "Russian" or

"American," rather they function as a "rhetorical vocabulary" that imbues these

subjectivities with political meaning.[535] Once individuated into these subjectivities,

individual political action is limited because the memory leaves "residues that construct

and confine how we understand the world and how past and present govern our

preconceptions and actions."[536]

     Considering this political potential, it is hardly surprising that state actors are

heavily invested in the manipulation of public memory. Thomas Dunn contends,

> Within the frame of public memory, the past operates not as historical fact
> but as historical interpretation for the purposes of making public
> argument. Through framing the past, we serve a present need. Those most
> likely to do this memory work – nations, governments, institutions—
> occupy a position of power in society. These "official" memories are
> powerful rhetorical forces that reproduce existing power relations and
> minimize meanings of the past that run counter to currently accepted
> grand narratives.[537]

Consequently, romantic visions of the past are central to political identity across

ideologies ranging from authoritarian nationalism to radical Marxism.[538] State investment

in mnemotechnics such as monuments, memorials, and other mnemonic efforts

transfigure memories into a material form, injecting these memories into everyday

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[534.] Reyes, "Memory and Alterity," 223.

[535.] Ibid.," 235.

[536.] Schudson, "Lives, Laws, and Language," 5.

[537.] Dunn, "Remembering 'a Great Fag'," 439-440.

[538.] Andreas Huyssen, "Present Pasts: Media, Politics Amnesia," *Public Culture* 12 no. 1 (2000): 26.

experience.[539] As the material form of memory, individuated with as part of regular social interaction, mnemotechnics naturalize the ideological myths underlying the official construction of public memory into the fabric of social interaction – limiting individuations that vary from this normative memory.

<div align="center">Official Russian Visual Memory</div>

Kremlin image-makers have positioned Putin as a living figure of memory that embodies the Russian people. Insofar as the head of state functions in epideictic discourses, such officials are largely concerned with the demarcation of national values.[540] Consequently, Shawn and Trevor Parry-Giles argue, "collective memory works as an interpretive strategy for the definition of political image, as political actors seek to link their character to familiar and secure markers of collective identity drawn from the community's shared past."[541] Russian leaders are clearly aware of the need for a controlled public persona rooted in national memory. The Kremlin has staged a variety of events to further Putin's image and bolster his ego, ranging from shirtless photos to singing American standards.[542] Although Putin cultivates this image through myriad technics, his mnemonic persona is primarily rooted in the visual.[543] Mnemotechnics such

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[539.] James E. Young, "Memory and Counter-Memory: The End of the Monument in Germany," *Harvard Design Magazine* 9 (1999): 2.

[540.] Shawn J. Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles, "Collective Memory, Political Nostalgia, and the Rhetorical Presidency: Bill Clinton's Commemoration of the March on Washington, August 28, 1998," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 86 no. 4 (2000): 419.

[541.] Ibid.

[542.] Samantha Rollins, "8 Ridiculous Vladimir Putin Publicity Stunts," *The Week* (January 13, 2013), http://theweek.com/articles/468096/8-ridiculous-vladimir-putin-publicity-stunts.

[543.] For a more complete discussion of how Putin's linguistic choices foster his image see: Michael S. Gorham "Putin's Language," in *Putin as Celebrity and Cultural Icon* ed. Helena Goscilo (New York: Routledge, 2013), 82-103.

as photos, videos, and press events construct him as the strong and virile father of Russia, a visual orientation nostalgically drawing on memories from the Soviet era.[544]

Although official Soviet policy sought to deconstruct many of the patriarchal legal structures that had existed under the Tzars, media and propaganda still relied heavily on tropes of masculine strength and paternalism.[545] Propaganda posters of leaders, particularly Stalin, featured them as paternal figures looking caringly over assembled groups of women and children.[546] In these photos, Stalin is the proud father of Russia, using his masculine presence to organize the Soviet Union to greater international strength. Stalin, as the embodiment of a "New Soviet Man" became the embodiment of the strength and leadership that are nostalgically remembered as the pinnacle of Soviet strength and leadership.[547] This time period also saw an increase in the glorification of male athletes, suggesting that masculine virility was central to model citizenship.[548] Combined, these modes of visual communication set masculine authority as the frame through which idealized Soviet politics should be understood.

Despite a democratic transition in the 1990s, Soviet rhetorical styles have remained prominent because the Russian polity lacked a clearly articulated alternative.

[544.] Cassiday and Johnson, "A Personality Cult," 49.

[545.] Sarah Ashwin, *Gender, State, and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 75-77.

[546.] https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/564x/8c/e9/13/8ce9137ff7f26873f8b0302fc2831742.jpg. http://daphnecaruanagalizia.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Stalin-positive.jpg.

[547.] John Haynes, *New Soviet Man: Gender and Masculinity in Stalinist Soviet Cinema* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 14-15.

[548.] Julie Gilmour and Barbara Evans Clements, "'If You Want to Be Like Me, Train!': The Contradictions of Soviet Masculinity," in *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture* ed. Barbara Evans Clements, Rebecca Friedman, Dan Healey (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 210-11.

David Cratis Williams argues "Russia's 'instant democracy' lacked both engrained social, cultural, or political traditions of deliberative public discourse and sufficient human resources prepared by disposition or training to establish such traditions."[549] Drawing on the traditions of the Tzars and Soviet Premiers, Russian civic rhetoric curtails democratic participation, instead focusing on rhetorics that enable promulgation of executive mandates.[550] Despite claiming to be a defender of democratic principles, Putin has continued this autocratic political rhetoric. While autocratic and democratic rhetorics are seemingly at odds, for many Russians "the very term 'democracy' became conflated with blue jeans, free market capitalism and prosperity through its presentation as a 'democratic market system'."[551] In the process, concepts such as deliberation and participation have become dissociated with "democratic governance." With democracy tied to neoliberal values and consumptive practices, rather than participatory civics, Putin has carefully constructed an image as a rugged individual – the model neoliberal subject – to position himself as the embodiment of the ideal citizen and state. This idealization of Putin is then naturalized through the circulation of varied technics that reify this memory of masculine Russia as normal.[552] Contemporary Russia exists as a near literal example of Stiegler's definition of proletarianization – individuals are managed through the consumption of products and narratives foreclose participation.

[549.] David Cratis Williams, "Instant Democracy: Rhetorical Crises and the Russian Federation, 1991-2007," *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* 9 no. 1 (2006): 227.

[550.] Ibid., 230.

[551.] Ibid., 236.

[552.] Goscilo, "Russia's Ultimate Celebrity," 8.

Figure 5.3: Examples of publicity photos demonstrating Putin's rugged Masculinity

Central to the connection of Putin to the memory of the USSR are visual technics that highlight masculinity. Putin's symbolic masculinity was a strategic contrast to the enfeebled Yeltsin and late Soviet leaders. The memory of these leaders as old and out of shape became a visual representation of the decline of the Soviet Union and failings of Russia in the immediate wake of the collapse of the USSR.[553] Against this memory of emasculation, Putin's public relations team took a relative unknown politician and constructed an idealized persona for the president that described Putin through his "sobriety, intelligence, competence, vigorous physical and psychological health, and, above all, his manliness."[554] Officially released shirtless vacation photos featuring him fishing, riding a horse, and carrying a gun to hunt are the primary technics used to translate Putin's masculine image into public memory (Figure 5.3).[555] These images

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[553.] Cassiday and Johnson, "A Personality Cult," 43.

[554.] Ibid., 40.

[555.] Foxall, "Photographing Vladimir Putin," 135. Shirtless images of a range of political leaders have circulated through the press and online, however, the majority of these were candid photos captured by journalists or civilians. Conversely, Putin's "were released by the Kremlin with official news releases and appeared on the Kremlin website, and thus were located within a discourse of state power." This deliberate visage fits well within the mythos of a cult of personality. In the modern era, the only other leaders that have deliberately released such images are Benito Mussolini and Mao Zedong; in Cassiday and Johnson, "A Personality Cult," 40.

convey Putin as rugged, tough and virile, with a powerful physique – the ideal masculine

leader.

Figure 5.4: Putin: the strong but caring father of Russia

Aside from the shirtless photos, official photos consistently display Putin engaged

in feats of masculinity, codifying a rugged masculinity as the normative value of Russian

political culture.[556] These images connect Putin to memories of Soviet strength and are

central to efforts to restore "the image of the Leader as the Father of the Nation in the

post-Soviet condition."[557] Even those images that show his softer side, posing with

animals or children, reify this paternal association by implying Putin is strong enough to

fight for Russia, but is willing to care for you (Figure 5.4).[558] This totalizing "muscle"

memory of Putin has become a metaphor for the future of Russia; Putin's physical

presence will be replicated in domestic and international politics.

[556.] Foxall, "Photographing Vladimir Putin," 137. Foxall notes: "Some of Putin's other notable public performances,to which Russia's landscape usually provides the backdrop, include: flying a Tupolev Tu-160 (Blackjack) strategic bomber to test a new conventional cruise missile, in 2005; shooting a Siberian Tiger with a tranquilizer gun in the Ussuri reserve in the Russian Far East, in 2009; test driving a Renault Formula One car, in 2010; taking part in an archaeological excavation of an ancient Greek port on the Taman Peninsula, in 2011; attempting to bend a frying pan with his bare hands during a visit to the summer camp of the pro-Kremlin youth group 'Nashi' at Lake Seliger, in 2011; and riding a three-wheeled Harley Davidson with motorcycle enthusiasts during a bike festival in the southern Russian city of Novorossiisk, in 2011." For a sampling of the photos: http://www.businessinsider.com/43-pictures-vladimir-putin-tough-2013-9?op=1#ixzz3XKdw3Jl7.

[557.] Mikhailova, "Putin as the Father," 65.

These official images of Putin are widely circulated throughout Russia, appearing in media ranging from billboards and TV screens, to playing cards and action figures.[559] This commodification into technics of mass communication and consumption transforms Putin's masculine visage into a memory consumed by the Russian public.[560] In focusing on consumable, rather than individuating technics, these rhetorics are controlling. Oleg Riabov and Tatiana Riabova posit that such circulation of masculine memory is central to the Russian assertion of government authority.[561] As part of this remasculization of Russian society, visual technics built around Putin allow his body to stand in for the nation as a whole. Andrew Foxall contends,

> The images of Putin serve as a cultural product that connects the viewer, through the body of Putin, to the scale of the nation. This bridging of scale, from the individual body to the body politic, is 'necessary for the construction of a territorially bounded state occupied by a cohesive nation.' As well as demonstrating Putin's domination of space, the photographs also illustrate his domination of technology, nature, his own emotions (he is often pictured alone), and other bodies (both male and female).[562]

Commandeering visual technics to laud the prowess of Russian leaders furthers nostalgic ties to Soviet visual rhetorics.[563] Putin's politics are the continuation of Soviet technics and therefore force contemporary political individuations into this formal frame. By tying his vision of masculinity to idealized technics tied to the Soviet Union, these

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[558] Ibid., 77.

[559] Goscilo, "Russia's Ultimate Celebrity," 8.

[560] Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 46.

[561] Oleg Riabov and Tatiana Riabova, "The Remasculinization of Russia?: Gender, Nationalism, and the Legitimation of Power under Vladimir Putin," *Problems of Post-Communism* 61 no. 2 (2014): 32.

[562] Foxall, "Photographing Vladimir Putin," 142.

[563] Ibid., 135.

mnemotechnics root Putin's authoritarian tendencies in community ties to a proud past.[564]

Through the nostalgic valorizing of his masculinity, Putin glorifies a system that

privileges authority, action, and domination, over democratic values such as equality,

deliberation and freedom.

The strength of this mnemotechnicnical frame is such that it is also replicated

outside official technics. Across "the Russian Internet" many memes draw from this form

of leadership as masculine authority.[565] Specifically, Bradley Wiggins notes that many of

these memes continue the hypermasculine framing of Putin, explaining that

> Russian netizens recursively consume and produce memes either specific
> to or related to Putin to further the personalization of politics as
> spectacle... his virtue as a virile, masculine heterosexual is implied when
> memes accuse Russia's opponents of homosexuality. Equally, Putin's
> moral purity, love of animals, devotion to the Russian Orthodox Church,
> and his tireless efforts at building a better Russia for Russians are implied
> when memes associate urine and excrement with Ukrainian leadership and
> the European Union.[566]

Even memes which do not explicitly draw on these tropes further the masculine authority

of Putin. For example, one meme features an image of Joffrey from the HBO show *Game

of Thrones* (Figure 5.5).[567] This character, known for being petty and authoritarian, shouts

"Hey you! Get down from there." The next frame shows, Putin sitting on Joffrey's

throne, showing the target of Joffrey's admonishment. The final frame shows an

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[564.] Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles, "Collective Memory," 420.

[565.] Russian memes are drawn from the Twitter account @RUNetMemes. According to the creators of this Twitter account, "the memes tweeted from their account are primarily in Russian and accompanied by an English translation and are the creations of those individuals who comprise the 'Russian Internet,' a term defined as the part of the Internet that is related to or discusses Russia and Russian interests." Wiggins, "Crimea River," 455. @RUNetMemes features memes that argue both for and against Russian interests, making its contents particularly suiting for understanding how memetic struggles over the memory of Putin as Soviet father is engaged across Russian networked publics.

[566.] Wiggins, "Crimea River," 470.

[567.] https://twitter.com/RuNetMemes/status/443895747160068096?lang=en.

apologetic picture of Joffrey with the text "Excuse me, Vladimir Vladimirovich. I thought you were someone else." This exchange positions Putin as a figure of such masculine authority that he can bend the will of national leaders and displace their authority with his own. This meme demonstrates that for many Russians, Putin is influential not because of his policies or status as a democratically elected leader, but because he is a king above all kings.

Эй, ты! А ну-ка слезь оттуда!

Извините, Владимир Владимирович... обознался

Figure 5.5: Putin takes the Iron Throne

The domestic and global popularity of Putin suggests this rhetorical framing is decidedly successful, however, it has not been without detractors. Pro-democracy advocates in Russia have used similarities between the visual styles of Putin and Stalin to argue for the dictatorial tendencies of the current regime.[568] Accordingly, the Russian state has taken great pains to prevent efforts that undermine their romantic memory of Putin as the rebirth of the strength of the Soviet Union in a "democratic society." Russia frequently censors media that is critical even if only in a mild or humorous way.[569] That Russia clarified press restrictions also apply to memes suggests their potential to challenge the official public memory of Putin. They use the force of the state to enhance

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[568.] Cassiday and Johnson, "A Personality Cult," 39.

[569.] Williams, "Instant Democracy," 238.

the proletarianizing force of official technics, as those technics that might enable individuation are prohibited. Despite this, the dominance of official mnemotechnics, the range of ways that both the Russian Internet, and global participants in the networked publics sphere, used memes to challenge this official memory demonstrates that memes also may resist this control. Serving as a counter to official public memories, memes – as a mode of individuational technics – provide an opportunity for participants to circulate affective contrast to hegemonic constructions of memories. That is not to say that all memes enable individuations that resist control. The presence of many pro-Putin memes demonstrates that these technics may be used to simply expand the circulation of proletarianizing rhetorics. However, across the global and Russian internets, a range of memes challenge this proletarianizing force. Therefore, this chapter next explores the potential democratic individuations afforded internet memes.

Memetic Challenges to Official Memory

While the rhetorical technics circulated by public figures such as Putin dominate public memory, these are by no means the only way that memory manifests itself in public discourse. Publics can be built around any technic. Therefore, a variety of socially constructed memories exist, each with differing claims of authority and legitimacy in larger rhetorical ecologies.[570] A useful heuristic for understanding the tension between official public memories and other mnemotechnics is "counter-memory." Broadly, counter-memories refer to any force that has the potential to disrupt or displace dominant memory.[571] Counter-memories exist in many forms ranging from the official, e.g. Truth

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[570.] Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles, "Collective Memory," 419.

[571.] Young, "Memory and Counter-Memory," 3.

and Reconciliation Commissions, to ironic re-individuations of mnemonic texts.[572] More specifically, counter-memories are those perspectives "in which metanarratives are parodied, identities destabilized, and the impartiality of supposed historical knowledge is exposed."[573] Beyond that, "counter-memory also evokes the multiple forms of counterpublicity that clash, not just with official forms of public discourse, but also with simultaneous, alternate, counterpublic discourses."[574] Specific technics—museums, statues, paintings, speeches—serve as spaces to make visible particular memories; their multivocality can highlight the tensions in disputed or redirected memories.[575]

Counter-memories may occasionally emerge as discrete technics; however, in many cases they are derivative of official memory. Specifically they are created as amateur publics engage in individuating uses of these technics as either a re-performance of, or conversation with, official texts.[576] Visual forms, particularly those of public figures, can be prolific sites for the multivalent readings that enable counter-memories to form. As differing iterations complicate individuations, variations on the image of a figure function as a "Prism for reflecting multiple versions of civic values and mythic meanings."[577] These reflected versions become spaces where amateur vernacular

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[572.] Huyssen, "Present Pasts," 26.

[573.] Dunn "Remembering 'A Great Fag'," 440.

[574.] Ibid. I do not contend that these texts necessary create an entirely different counterpublic as not one text – or family of texts – can do so. Rather, in the disputation official public memory of Putin, these memes serve to infiltrate the carefully managed public fostered by the Russian government as well as providing further rhetorical space for those political interests operating oppositional to the official narrative. See: Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14 no. 1 (2002): 49-71; Robert Asen, "Seeking the 'Counter' in Counterpublics," *Communication Theory* 10 (2000): 444–455

[575.] Dunn "Remembering 'A Great Fag'," 442

[576.] Ibid., 440.

[577.] Roseann M. Mandziuk, "Commemorating Sojourner Truth: Negotiating the Politics of Race and Gender in the Spaces of Public Memory," *Western Journal of Communication* 67 no. 3 (2003): 272.

memories emerge. With localized interests that can disrupt with official public memories at any number of intersections, these memories have rich potential to open individuational space, creating the conditions for political action outside the boundaries of official public memory.[578]

Non-digital memories tend to coalesce around static memories imbued in material objects. Conversely, networked technics function as a "malleable yet somewhat durable surface" for memory.[579] Although digital iterations allow for an interactivity that changes the content, digital archiving and ease of access ensures that the majority of these memories are publicly available for future invention (individuations).[580] Johanna Hartelius notes that key features have emerged as central to the digitization of memory:

> The internet represents a different mode of publicity than physical and geographical markers. In part, this difference is one of audience and scale. But, importantly, differences can be traced to interactivity, and the necessity of interactivity for public deliberation… [Digital mnemotechnics] are living texts. While a statue or a paper archive is static, any virtual discourse is radically live - moving, evolving, growing.[581]

The scope of the audience and the availability of storage space increases the size and reach of these memories. However, these factors are mediated by attention; regardless of the potential size and reach of a digital memory, its rhetorical force can only be measured

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[578.] Bodnar, *Remaking America,* 14-16.

[579.] Kristen Foot, Barbara Warnick, & Steven M. Schneider, "Web-Based Memorializing after September 11: Toward a Conceptual Framework," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 11 no. 1 (2009): 93.

[580.] Following the path of their non-digital predecessors, explorations of the potential of digital public memory have largely focused on memorials. Prominent examples Foot, Warnick, "Web-Based Memorializing." Aaron Hess, "In Digital Remembrance: Vernacular Memory and the Rhetorical Construction of Web Memorials," *Media, Culture, & Society* 29 no. 5 (2007): 812-830; E. Johanna Hartelius, "Leave a Message of Hope or Tribute," Digital Memorializing as Public Deliberation," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 47 no. 2 (2010): 67-85. Andrew Hoskins, "Signs of the Holocaust: Exhibiting Memory in A Mediated Age," *Media, Culture and Society* 25 no. 1 (2003)*:* 7-22.

[581.] E Hartelius, "Leave a Message," 80.

by the degree to which it demands and organizes attention. The interactivity and renegotiation enabled by online mnemotechnics produces the potential for digitally mediated memories to continually grow and evolve, increasing their capacity for resistive individuations.

Seemingly aware of this potential, Putin's government has demonstrated itself wary of memes, prompting the further evaluation of the memeification of Vladimir Putin. I analyze both English and Russian language memes, however, much of the focus is on English memes.[582] While many of the Russian language memes featured content unique to the Russian Internet, because popular memes transcend language and boarders, the form of many popular memes remains consistent across languages. Russian language sites and threads often feature English memes interwoven with Russian ones. For example, alongside unique references to the Orthodox Church, RUNetMemes included references to popular English language memes like Bad Luck Brian, Go Home You're Drunk, and cat pictures.[583] Combined, the corpus of these memes exists at the intersection of localized and international memes negotiating the public memory of Putin. This trend is consistent with Andreas Huyssen's observations that while memories are still firmly rooted in national identity, they increasingly act and are acted upon by global structures

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[582.] The selection of English language memes was gathered from both the international press coverage of the meme bad as well as the Know Your Meme pages on the meme ban as well as the individual crisis (Russian elections, Putin's absence, Crimea, etc.). *Know Your Meme* is a useful site as it aggregates memes based on both their meme type as well as the controversies to which they are tied. @RUMemesNet was used to gather Russian memes. This Twitter feed both curates and translates these memes, providing an accessible and representative sample of the larger memescape in Russia. While I acknowledge that this sampling is in no way exhaustive, the presence of these memes in popular press and websites suggests these are the iterations that drew sufficient rhetorical attention as to have greater rhetorical effect.

[583.] To see examples: https://twitter.com/RuNetMemes/status/423464328969588736?lang=en, https://pbs.twimg.com/media/CIhVKqtUAAUrfFf.jpg, https://twitter.com/RuNetMemes/status/525139688819273729?lang=en.

of memory.[584] Putin memes take a variety of forms, suggesting it would be impossible to address all the iterations in this chapter. Instead, I will analyze early forms of the memeification of Putin and then move to how participants mobilized these memes to enact counter-memories during a string of political controversies.

Early Putin Memes: "Badassery" and Sex Appeal

Figure 5.6: Memes built on Putin's dictatorial *ethos*

Shortly after Putin's accession to the presidency of Russia, participants in networked publics took notice of the visual campaign creating a cult of Putin by using modern mnemotechnics to remobilize Soviet collective memory. In an act of ironic appreciation, these memes quickly extended the effort through the reinterpretation of these mnemonic photographs. Specifically, participants created a variety of stock character macros and single-issue blogs that accelerated the circulation of official Russian images of Putin into an ironic commentary regarding the official memory of his, and by extension Russia's, masculinity.

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584. Huyssen, "Present Pasts,"26. It is impossible to know the nationality of any particular poster of a meme, therefore following Wiggins, when I refer to Russian or anti-Russian meme, I am referring to the direction of individuations these memes orient participants towards rather than a concrete identity. Wiggins, "Crimea River," 455.

Although the topline/bottom lime form can be imposed onto specific images to respond to the context of that image, most stock image macros are circulated in a way that transcends the context in which the photo was taken.[585] As image macros of Putin originally emerged, they quickly moved outside the context of Russian politics and culture. To date, Putin is the subject of at least 15 image macros.[586] These macros feature images of Putin that tend to frame him as either cunning or powerful (Figure 5.6). One popular meme features Putin sitting in a throne-like chair with a commanding gaze. It is often used to issue humorous threats such as "you break in // I break you."[587] Another titled "Cunning Putin" features Putin sporting a coy smile and texts like "illegal to be president again // change the law."[588] These memes, often circulated as part of trivial internet disputes, serve to translate the fatherly authority of Putin into a form so exaggerated that it seems frivolous – casting him more as a parody of a dictator that a powerful father. The only popular Putin meme that does not rely on mocking of Putin's authority is "give that man a cookie" (Figure 5.7).[589] This image focuses on a picture of Putin pointing a pen at something behind the camera. Participants use it as an representative image of the affective experience of seeing something so phenomenal that it demands immediate praise, hence giving them a cookie.

[585.] Shifman, "Memes in Digital Culture,"123.

[586.] "Vladimir Putin," *Know Your Meme,* accessed April 28, 2015, http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/people/vladimir-putin. For examples of these macros see: http://memegenerator.net/memes/search?q=putin.

[587.] http://cdn.meme.am/instances/250x250/61737128.jpg.

[588.] http://memegenerator.net/instance/10209145.

[589.] http://cdn.meme.am/images/250x250/10109347.jpg.

Figure 5.7: The Give that Man a Cookie meme

While the stock character macros tend to parody the authority of Putin, the
collections of single-issue blogs hyperbolically glorify the official memory. These blogs
select an element of the Putin persona – him being shirtless, the preponderance of official
photos that are action shots, the general masculinity of his photos – and situates them in
collections that ironically praise these traits.[590] Early forms of these blogs simply
collected alike photos with little commentary. Viewers could see collections of Putin
posing with animals, or "50 pictures of Vladimir Putin looking like a complete
badass."[591] Although these collections do not overtly challenge the official memory of
Putin, by collecting the accumulation of similar photos in one place, they de-naturalize
the individual photos, instead positioning them as part of a concerted campaign. Later
single-issue blogs enhance this evaluative move. The blog "Vladimir Putin Doing

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[590.] Because these blogs are just the recirculation of unaltered images, Shifman would argue that
they are better examples of "virals" than memes. Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture,* 19. However, George
Kennedy notes, the act of circulation encodes a new energy onto message. Each with new circulation of a
text imbues it with new rhetorical force, even if the form of the text is not altered. George Kennedy, "A
Hoot in the Dark: The Evolution of General Rhetoric," *Philosophy &Rhetoric* 25 no. 1 (1992): 2

[591.] http://animalsandputin.tumblr.com/;
http://www.funnyordie.com/slideshows/7df05c1f10/pictures-of-vladimir-putin-looking-like-a-complete-
badass.

Things" circulated images of Putin in active poses.[592] However, the titles of each post provided an ironic commentary. A picture of Putin at a ballot box circulates with the title "scoring zillion votes," and a picture of Putin shirtless with a horse includes the title "Bringing Brokeback Mountain Back." These titles linguistically unsettle the authority, legitimacy, and masculinity of Putin; images of action become political theater, democratic leadership translates into authoritarianism, and Putin's masculinity takes on a homoerotic tone.[593] By accelerating and refocusing the circulation of the official memory, these blogs undermine the authenticity and authority of that memory by translating it into a parody of itself.

<div align="center">Putin Memes during Times of Political Crisis</div>

As a mockery of official efforts to memorialize Putin as the paragon of fatherly masculinity, the memetic recirculation of "official" photos has been a constant counter-mnemonic act during Putin's 15 years in power. However, in times of crisis not only are Putin's hyper-masculine and authoritarian tendencies highlighted, but external memes, functioning as *topoi* for networked argument, enter the rhetorical fray to re-interpret Putin's public memory.

[592.] https://web.archive.org/web/20160105074718/http://vladimirputindoingthings.tumblr.com/. This blog was also created as a tribute the blog "Kim Jong Il Looking at Things" creating a clear dictatorial link to Putin.

[593.] The suggestions of homo-eroticism are furthered by the entire blog dedicated to his shirtlessness: http://shirtlessputindointhings.tumblr.com/
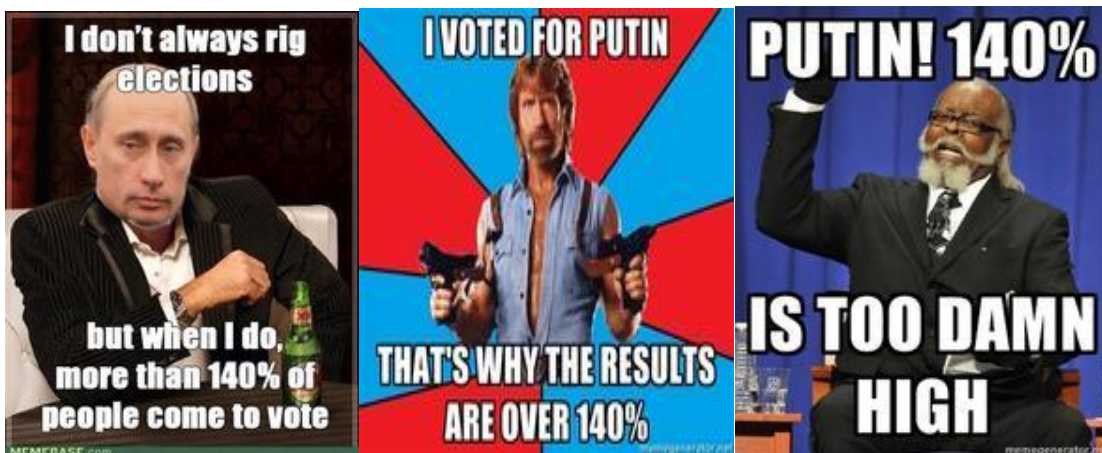
Figure 5.8: Popular memes comment on the 2011 election controversy

Although existing for over a decade, Putin memes coalesced into a common argumentative force as part of protests over Russian elections in 2011. During these elections, Putin's United Russia party eked out victories in a series of local elections. Protests emerged because official results varied from exit polls and had voter turnout as high as 140 percent.[594] Sharing in the outrage, memes joined the protest, focusing primarily on the absurdity of 140% turnout.[595] Many intertextually juxtaposed Putin with established memes. For example, his face was placed on the "Most Interesting Man in the World" – a meme dedicated to parodically highlighting masculinity and decadence – with the text "I don't always rig elections // but when I do more than 140% of people come out to vote" (figure 5.8).[596] This juxtaposition transforms Putin into a caricature of his official image, a man who will openly and proudly flaunt democracy.

[594.] "Voting, Russian Style," *The Economist* (December 10, 2011), http://www.economist.com/node/21541455.

[595.] "2011 Russian Protests, "Know *Your Meme,* accessed May 1, 2015, http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/events/2011-russian-protests.

[596.] http://i1.kym-cdn.com/photos/images/masonry/000/218/050/internet-memes-the-most-interesting-pm-in-the-world.jpg.

Other popular memes offered commentary from their narrative and affective perspectives. "The rent is too damn high," the meme form of New York politician Jimmy McMillian, paraphrased his popular slogan to show his exacerbation at the results "Putin 140% // is too damn high" (Figure 5.8). McMillian, whose image circulates as a demonstration of frustration, allowed users to demonstrate the incredulity felt upon seeing the results. Another meme featured a picture of Chuck Norris proclaiming, "I voted for Putin // that's why the results are over 140%"(figure 5.8).[597] This image played off the "Chuck Norris Facts" meme, where the hyper-masculinity of Norris is demonstrated by his ability to accomplish otherwise impossible feats.[598] By filtering the election results through Norris, the meme demonstrates a sense of ironic amazement: it would take the pseudo-divinity of Norris to make the results plausible. Through their force as mnemotechnics they limit the boundaries of what is an acceptable understanding of the election outcome. In each of these cases, participants' interactions with well-known memes placed particular affective overlays onto Russian efforts to proclaim the elections legitimate, creating a tension between the official memory and individual experience.

Memes protesting Putin as authoritarian did not just appear in English. A series of popular Russian memes also circulated, undermining the "democratic" *ethos* of official mnemotechnics.[599] One meme features a screenshot of a Russian official asking readers

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[597.] http://i2.kym-cdn.com/photos/images/masonry/000/233/486/113.jpg.

[598.] "Chuck Norris Facts," *Know Your Meme,* accessed May 3, 2015, http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/chuck-norris-facts.

[599.] Sarah Kaufman, "10 Putin Memes that are Probably Illegal in Russia Right Now," *Business Insider* (April 10, 2015), http://www.businessinsider.com/10-putin-memes-that-are-probably-illegal-now-2015-4.

to vote for a profile picture and features the caption "The only honest election" (Figure

5.9).[600] This meme argues that the marketing of visual technics is the only participation

that is officially sanctioned. Beyond this overt observation, many of these memes

generate their commentary by merging the image of Putin with western icons of popular

culture. One image features a picture of Dora the Explorer and her sidekick monkey

Boots. However, their faces are replaced with those of Putin and Dimitri Medvedev. This

image is accompanied with the text "Help Vova and Dima [Putin and Medvedev's

nicknames] put together the USSR" (Figure 5.9).[601] This meme magnifies the official

memory's nostalgia for the USSR, removing the romanticism and demanding the viewer

reflect on the reality such a return would bring. Another meme features Putin's face

imposed onto Gollum from *Lord of the Rings,* with the text "I will never give you to

anyone // my Russia" (Figure 5.9), transforming Putin's pro-Russia politics into a

destructive compulsion.[602] Aside from casting a negative structure of feeling onto Putin's

policies, both of these memes challenge his masculinity by transforming him into a young

girl or a decrepit monster respectively. Because these memes insert Putin into new

narratives, they disrupt his relationship with the narrative offered by the official memory.

[600.] https://twitter.com/RuNetMemes/status/487256807010603008?lang=en.

[601.] http://static6.businessinsider.com/image/5527ccf4ecad041306d03746-620-420/putin4-2.jpg.

[602.] http://static5.businessinsider.com/image/5527cd396bb3f7673628a777-620-620/putin6-2.jpg

Figure 5.9: Russian language memes respond to the election

While the circulation of these memes challenged official public memories tied to Putin, the Russian censorship apparatus largely ignored them. However, as memes began to more dramatically, and publicly, respond to political controversies, they drew the attention of the Russian state – becoming part of the (unofficial) impetus for the restrictions on memes.[603] Specifically, two memes are understood as initiating the Russian restriction: the internet's responses to Russian involvement in Crimea/Ukraine, as well as the "#wheresputin" response to Putin's mysterious absence from politics in 2015.

In late 2013, crowds amassed in Kiev, Ukraine to protest President Viktor Yanukovych's decision to focus on relations with Russia rather than the West.[604] By February of 2014, they had ousted the president. In response to the protesters' anti-Russian rhetoric, Putin supported Russian separatists throughout Ukraine and annexed Crimea after a questionably legitimate election where the region voted to join Russia.[605]

[603.] Dewey, "Internet Memes Illegal."

[604.] "Ukraine Crisis: Timeline," *BBC News* (November 13, 2014), http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26248275.

[605.] David Adesnik, "How Russia Rigged Crimean Referendum," *Forbes* (March 18, 2014), http://www.forbes.com/sites/davidadesnik/2014/03/18/how-russia-rigged-crimean-

Although international leaders condemned Russia, they tempered their rhetoric and

policies for fear of escalating tensions beyond Ukraine.[606]

Figure 5.10: Memes respond to the Ukraine crisis

Memes, however, were not nearly as tempered in their responses. Putin-based

stock character macros, previously used primarily outside of Russian politics, reemerged

to condemn the actions of Russia. A photo of Putin donning sunglasses, often used to

demonstrate an affect of nonchalance, was redeployed with the text "Spends 7 years and

50 billion dollars on the Olympics to improve Russian relations // ruins it in one day"

(Figure 5.10).[607] The bottom line clearly delineates that Putin's ambition has moved

beyond protecting Russian interests, questioning the adequacy of his fatherhood.

Similarly, multiple images of Putin pointing two fingers at the camera centered on the

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referendum/#24c8df837f63. The primary indictment of the vote, with its 96.77% pro-Russian result, is that anti-Russian voters stayed home due to military and mob intimidation.

[606.] Simon Tisdall, "West's Puny Response to Ukraine Crisis Will Not Deter Vladimir Putin," *The Guardian* (March 2, 2014): https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/mar/02/west-response-ukraine-vladimir-putin-russia.

[607.] http://f.tqn.com/y/politicalhumor/1/W/Q/F/6/putin-ruins-reputation.jpg.

pun "Crimea River" (Figure 5.10).[608] Both the carefree pose and the levity of the pun cast

Putin as a B-movie villain, a megalomaniac bent on world domination. The parodic tone

dictated by the form of the macros opened a space where the official memories could be

individuated into more anti-Russian directions.

**Figure 5.11: Challenges to masculinity with youthful text (left) and lolcat speak
(right)**

Beyond redeploying existing Putin memes to challenge the crisis, visuals of Putin

were also deployed to directly challenge Putin's masculinity. One features the image of

shirtless Putin carrying a rifle, with the text "BRB [be right back] // Got to take care of

some sh*t in Ukraine" (censorship in original) (Figure 5.11).[609] By using youth oriented

speech patterns, the meme takes Putin at his most masculine, hunting shirtless with a

large rifle/phallic symbol, and recasts him (and by extension Russia's involvement in

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608. https://stukjeduiding.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/78w53.jpg; http://87804c6124014826b3ef-3d214fd474cd2df9cdee1b4ee2b1a895.r73.cf2.rackcdn.com/691118.jpg. This pun also circulated on the Russian internet: https://twitter.com/RuNetMemes/status/440965684516753408?lang=en.

609. http://politicalmemes.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/image_6.jpg.

Ukraine) as juvenile hyper-masculine posturing. Similarly, a Russian language meme

borrowed from the popular grammatical forms of LOLcats to caption a picture of Putin at

a podium with the text "Can I haz already sent troops?" (Figure 5.11).[610] The stately

authority of Putin is reframed as the language of a kitten, translating Russian threats into

adorable and playful pleas. The memes that emerged as compartmentalization of the

affective dimensions of the official memory returned to it, using their affective judgment

to problematize the central premises of that memory.

Figure 5.12: Shirtless Putin makes the front page

The association between the memetic parody of Putin's masculinity and the

Crimean annexation was so pronounced that *The Economist* magazine used shirtless

Putin in its coverage of Crimea. Its cover on March 22, 2014 featured the headline "The

new world order" with a photoshopped image of shirtless Putin driving a Russian tank

past a stop sign (presumably into Crimea) (Figure 5.12).[611] The usage of a shirtless Putin

placed the annexation of Crimea as part of the discourse of his hyper-masculine

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[610.] https://twitter.com/RuNetMemes/status/440259947285065728?lang=en.

[611.] http://static2.businessinsider.com/image/532ae8e469bedd882fd7c738-400-560/bjlbskhiuaau5gr.png

performance, complete with the barrel of the tank serving as a hyperbolic phallic

extension. Contextualizing the Crimean crisis through the formal expectations of these

anti-Putin memes, *The Economist* framed the conflict as an effort for Putin to

demonstrate his personal masculine prowess, rather than as reasoned foreign policy. The

grammar of the meme operated as a *topos,* directing participants to the suggestion that

Putin's virile image may be a façade that will imperil, rather than protect, Russia's future.

Although Crimea allowed the networked opposition of Putin and the international

press to coopt Putin memes as an inventional resource, the hashtag #wheresputin

demonstrated the ability of memes to mobilize the press to foment chaos. In the period

between March 7th and 17th of 2015, Putin did not make any public appearances.

Recognizing that such a prolonged absence was unusual for such a publicly oriented

leader, the hashtag quickly spread around Twitter and Facebook.[612] Many of the memetic

posts were humorous in nature, one posited that Putin was "practicing for a surprise entry

into Eurovision" and another featured an image of European leaders looking around as

though they were searching for Putin.[613] The popularity of the hashtag led the press,

including both online outlets like Mashable and Bustle, as well as mainstream press

including *The Guardian* and *BBC News,* to ask the same question.[614] Aside from drawing

attention to his absence, the press coverage also led to wild speculation, ranging from

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[612.] Laura Smith-Spark, Alla Eshchenko and Madison Park, "Russia's Vladimir Putin Makes First Public Appearance in 10 Days," *CNN.com* (March 17, 2015), http://www.cnn.com/2015/03/16/world/russia-putin/index.html.

[613.]http://knowyourmeme.com/photos/932420-whereisputin, http://i0.kym-cdn.com/photos/images/newsfeed/000/932/407/c17.png. While this specific Eurovision joke is from an English language meme, the translation of political events into entries for the song contest is a frequently repeated joke across @RUNetMemes. E.g. https://twitter.com/RuNetMemes/status/731594375860498432?lang=en.

[614.] "#WhereIsPutin," *Know Your Meme,* accessed May 1, 2015, http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/whereisputin.

romantic interests and medical concerns to a coup. Upon his return, Putin dismissed the

absence proclaiming, "It would be boring without gossip."[615] The meme was able to set

the media agenda by highlighting how contemporary events were a stark deviation from

Putin's carefully managed public persona. It is ultimately disruptions such as those

enabled by this meme and the affective revaluing afforded by the Crimea memes that

prompted the new restrictions.

<p style="text-align:center">Making Memes Illegal… but the Memes Strike Back</p>

Against the backdrop of rising criticism, as well as the destabilization of Putin as

the re-embodiment of the memory of Soviet power and masculinity, the Russian

government decided to take action. In April of 2015,

> The Roskomnadzor, Russia's federal executive body responsible for
> overseeing the media, … posted the following announcement on social
> network Vkontakte (essentially Russia's version of Facebook): 'Violation
> of legislation on personal data in relation to public figures includes use of
> the photo of a public person to impersonate popular Internet memes,
> unrelated to the identity of the 'celebrity.'"[616]

A few days later press outlets clarified that the Roskomandor had not issued a new

prohibition on internet memes, but rather a clarification of existing law that gives the

government the ability to censor offending texts and sue the creator.[617] Officially, the

ruling was the result of a defamation lawsuit by Russian singer Valeri Syutkin.[618]

However, analysts argue that the Roskomnadzor was willing to make the ruling, and

ruling party elites supported the ban, because it gave them an avenue to respond to

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[615.] Smith-Spark, Eshchenko and Park, "Russia's Vladimir Putin".

[616.] French, "Russia Just Reminded."

[617.] "Russia's (Non) War on Memes?," *BBC News* (April 16, 2015),
http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-32302645?ocid=socialflow_twitter.

[618.] Dewey, "Internet Memes Illegal."

threatening memes such as those critical of recent Russian involvement in Ukraine and those that created rumors of a coup during Putin's 10-day absence.[619]
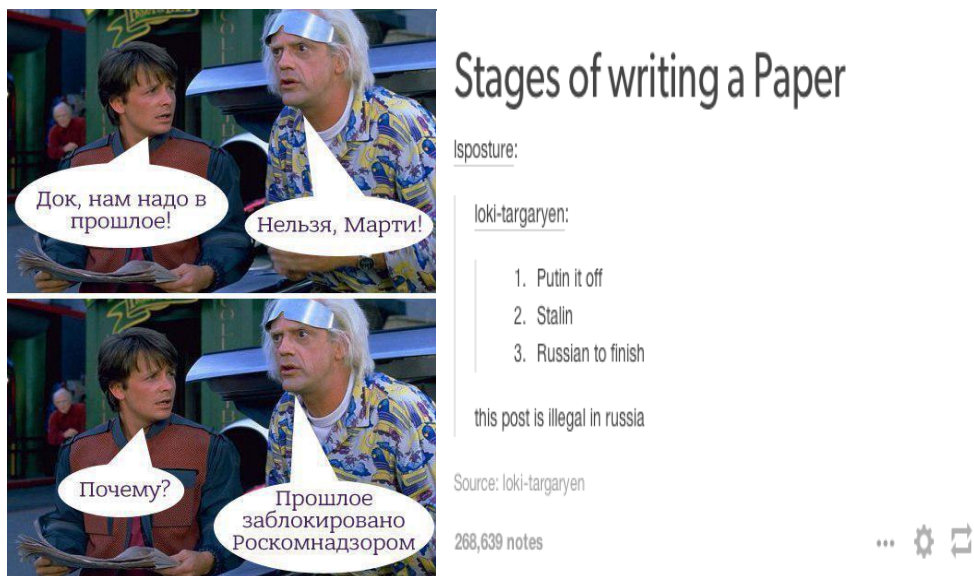

Figure 5.13: The Russian Internet responds to the ban

Immediately after the publicizing of the so-called "ban," the internet quickly made memes commenting on this turn of events. Russians responded primarily through memes that tangentially referred to the ban without targeting any one figure (Figure 5.13). Most prominent was a screen capture from *Back to the Future II* where Marty tells Doc Brown they must return to the past. Brown replies that this is impossible because "The past has been blocked by @roscomnadzor."[620] @RUNetMEmes also reposted a Reddit thread which listed a series of Russian theme puns, accompanied by the line "this post is illegal in Russia." Both these memes avoid the use of images or names of current figures to avoid the specific provisions of the ban. Instead, they use global media and English language puns to draw attention to the ridiculous nature of the ban. The ironic

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[619.] "Russia's (Non) War on Memes?"

[620.] https://twitter.com/RuNetMemes/status/614215789755920384?lang=en.

expectations these mnemotechnics create the conditions where even a purported ban on
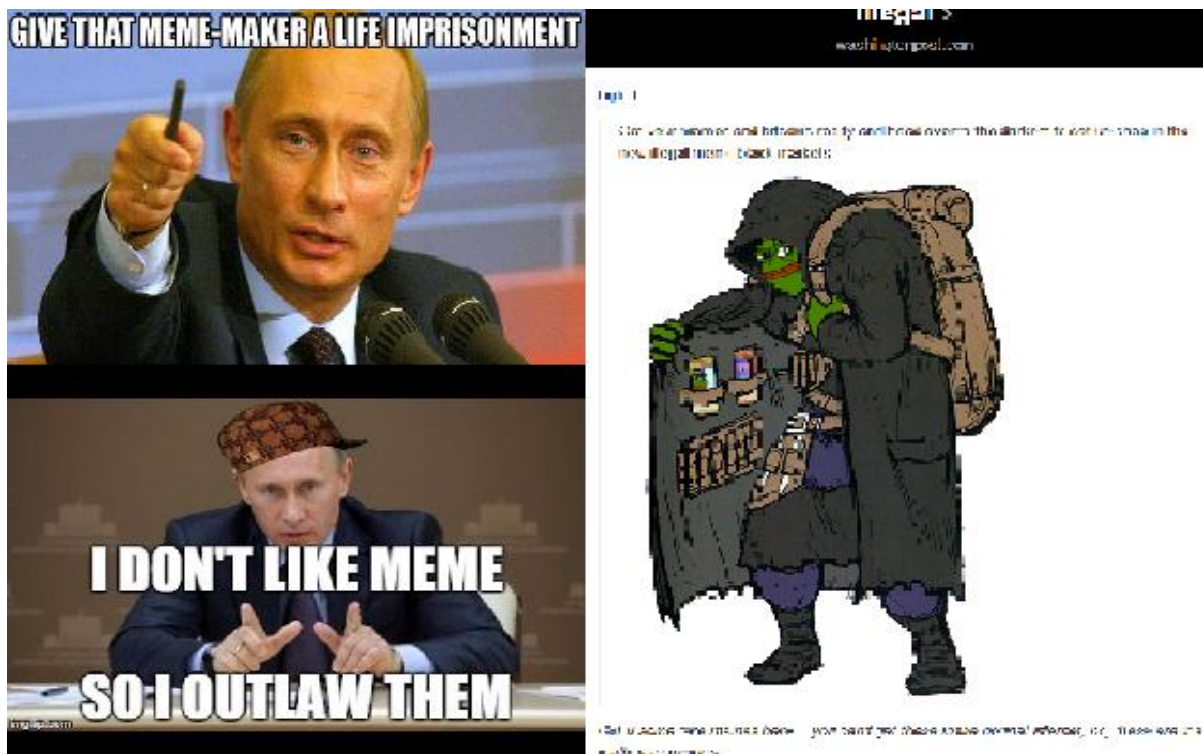
memes can be individuated into memetic logics.

Figure 5.14: International memes respond to the ban

Not under the threat of Russian sanction, the global networked public sphere was

much more overt in their criticism of Putin. The majority of these memes intertextually

linked Putin to more popular internet memes (Figure 5.14). One meme put the backward

hat of "Scum Bag Steve," with the text "I Don't Like Meme // So I outlaw them."

Another showed "Rare Pepe," an image of a frog used to mock the claims of "rare" web

images, distributing memes from inside a trench coat.[621] These memes argue an effort to

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[621] Although the Pepe meme has become associated with white nationalism in 2016, the meme has a longer history of networked usage. The majority of these earlier iterations do not promote any particular ideology, but instead were simply part of the native irony of networked discourse. Olivia Nuzzi, "How Pepe the Frog Became a Nazi Trump Supporter and Alt-Right Symbol," *The Daily Beast* (May 26, 2016), http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/05/26/how-pepe-the-frog-became-a-nazi-trump-supporter-and-alt-right-symbol.html.

regulate discourse on the internet is fruitless as the restrictions will anger users, who

would view Putin as a "scumbag" and promote further circulation – evidenced by Pepe

promising a new black-market. Even the Putin-based meme "Give that Man a Cookie"

joined the commentary, proclaiming, "Give that meme-maker life imprisonment." This

iteration highlights that Putin's very nature is authoritarian, as his first response to

criticism is imprisonment, framing the anti-meme clarification as another example of the

non-democratic reality of Russian life.

Once these critical individuations of memes began to emerge, the English

language press joined in the memeification of the controversy. Many of the articles

describing the alleged ban used memes of Putin to explain the controversy. The

Washington Post's Intersect Blog, their chief location for reporting about the internet,

published a story explaining the restrictions that opened with a meme as the first

symbolic content after the headline (Figure 5.15). The meme featured a picture of Putin

sitting at a desk, looking to explain something.[622] Imposed over the photo is the text "all

your memes are belong to me." The textual content alludes to the classic meme "all your

base are belong to us," an example of broken English from the 1989 video game *Zero

Wing*.[623] The meme commemorates a victory or dominance, usually by a megalomaniacal

character, and is a deeply ingrained part of internet vernacular. This allusion allows the

Washington Post to frame the policy as out of touch with the realities of the internet.

[622.] Dewey, "Internet Memes Illegal."

[623.] "All Your Base Are Belong to Us," *Know Your Meme,* accessed May 1, 2015, http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/all-your-base-are-belong-to-us. RU net offered similar commentary with its own version of the meme, https://twitter.com/RuNetMemes/status/440829311235264513?lang=en.

Figure 5.15: Putin and the "All your base" meme

Marketwatch's coverage of the law similarly tapped into the individuational potential afforded by anti-ban memes. Rather than using them to explain the story, the author simply added them to the end, proclaiming, "if you are reading this story from a computer in Russia, you probably won't see these."[624] This epilogue features a series of memes that mock the hyper-masculinity of Putin (Figure 5.16). The memes include him shirtless and riding a kitten (instead of the horse) as well as a Ritz cracker (Putin on the Ritz) (Figure 5.1). The final meme is a picture of Putin with a big smile that says "Ukraine? // No. Mykraine." While these articles themselves present an "objective" narration of the facts, English language media used the restrictions as an occasion to increase the circulation of those memes that hyperbolically deconstructed the masculinity and imperialist rhetoric of Putin. The memes, presented as a triviality, provided the onus for the mainstream press to circulate commentaries of Putin usually reserved for internet forums – allowing a wider range of audiences to participate in the individuation of this anti-Russian stance. In total, the memeification of the anti-meme statement functions as an ironic comment on official memories of authority. The restrictions read more like a

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[624.] French, "Russia Just Reminded"

Yaakov Smirnoff joke about Soviet censorship, rather than a return of the memory of
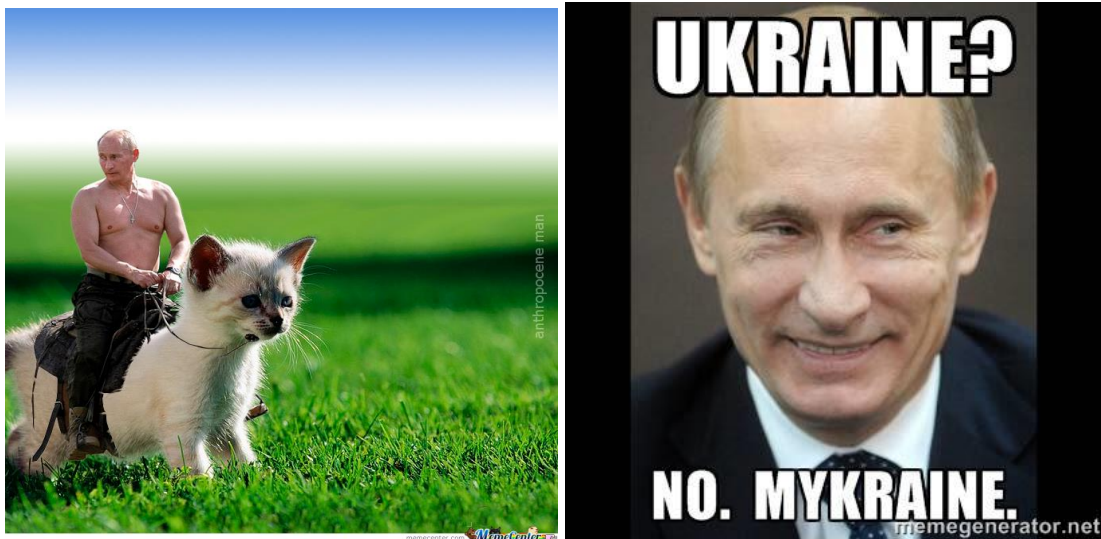
Soviet power.

Figure 5.16: The English language press joins the anti-masculine memes

Memes as International Resistance to Control

Aside from being a demonstration of the inability of technocrats to control the

production and force of networked mnemotechnics, these memes highlight the particular

power of the amateur creation of narratives. While each of these cases feature amateur

meme production, these Russian memes are the re-articulation of specific and focused

control based narratives regarding the authority of Vladimir Putin. In this context, they

are not simply memes that emerge from collective (rather than technical) expertise, but

rather they are indicative of direct transformation of a proletarianizing *hypomnemata* into

a participatory amateur form. The political force of these Russian memes highlights three

ways that mnemotechnics resist controlling rhetorics. First the individuational form of

memes resists censorship and other impediments to the circulation of networked technics.

Second memes are particularly suited for promoting mnemotechnics that enable counter-

memories. Finally, networked *hypomnemata* are uniquely suited to promote

individuations that promote a cosmopolitan ethic of care.

Networked Individuations as a Response to Censorship

The proliferation of memes in response to a restriction on memes demonstrates

the restive orientation that networked technics – and memes in particular – have towards

efforts at censorship. The tendency of online censorship to result in an increase of

circulation of censored information is so abundant that it has gained its own term in

online vernaculars, "the Streisand Effect." The term, coined by blogger Mike Masnick,

began as an allusion to a legal battle where Barbra Streisand's attempts to stop the digital

circulation of a picture of her beachfront mansion only prompted increased circulation.[625]

In networked rhetorics, which are premised on the freedom of information flow and

amateur participation, censorship itself becomes a *kairotic* moment where individuations

that circulate the silenced speech are situated as the only ethical response. The

recognition of the Streisand effect in Russia even manifested itself in meme form. One

iteration had Putin's face over "Bad Luck Brian," a meme dedicated to explaining

seemingly "good" ideas that inevitably go wrong (Figure 5.17).[626] The text reads "Bans

Memes // Victim of Streisand Effect." By using the Brian meme, this iteration suggests

that Putin ought to have known that the ban would backfire as it violates the *ethos* of an

internet that demands openness in the face of censorship, particularly of online content.

[625.] Mike Masnick, "Photo of Streisand Home Becomes an Internet Hit," *TechDirt,* (June 24, 2003), https://www.techdirt.com/articles/20030624/1231228.shtml.

[626.] http://i2.kym-cdn.com/photos/images/newsfeed/000/956/043/e6a.jpg

Figure 5.17: Initial, and typical, Bad Luck Brian meme (left), Putin ban iteration (right)

This movement of memes is demonstrative of Richard Lanham's observation that "Electronic information seems to resist ownership."[627] While Lanham was referring primarily to monetary ownership, this elusive nature also potentially frees such information from the bounds of censorship. As technics that demand individuation and circulation, memes' participatory form pushes them to resist the limitations of censorship. Further, because memes are, almost by definition, unsigned texts where form obfuscates the subjectivity of the creator, and because they are created and hosted on external sites that often do not demand identification, they afford an anonymity not available in other networked texts. Because of this they are an ideal mnemotechnic to resist efforts at official control.

Further, because memes often take the form of trivialities with a pop and often ironic sensibility, they are easy to ignore in their early stages. However, as

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[627.] Lanham, *The Electronic Word,* 19.

mnemotechnics that connect the present to an evaluative form, they can grow to carry populist political sensibilities.[628] #Wheresputin did not draw media attention until it had circulated well beyond the control of any network or government. Similarly, the protests of Crimea took Putin memes, which had been relatively benign, and mobilized them to offer stark commentary on Russian aggression in Ukraine. Individual utterances of a meme are easy to ignore, and thus hard to censor, but as they emerge as individuations that include numerous participants, they provide a profound tool for the evasion of censorship. In the face of Russian policy that includes international conflict, questionable democratic practices, and a hit or miss economy, the Russian and international meme-scape has commented on dominant ideologies, questioning and inverting them.

In a state full of press censorship, memes replicate what Michael Gurevtich and Jay Blumer recognize as the expected functions of a free press.[629] By commenting on Putin's absence these memes demonstrate the capacity to monitor politics and set the public agenda. In protesting Crimea, they gave voice to the interests of non-state groups. As memes also support Putin, they also gave voice to individuals who support the state, promoting an open dialogue. Further, their participatory form invites networked users to join politics. In sum, although memes may lack the analytical depth of long form articles, at their least they work to open the same democratic ruptures as is traditionally expected of a free press.

<center>Memes as Deliberative Counter-Memory</center>

[628.] Milner, "Pop Polyvocality," 2387.

[629.] Michael Gurevitch and Jay G. Blumler, "Political Communication Systems and Democratic Values," in *Democracy and the Mass Media,* ed. Judith Lichtenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 266-271.

Considering their potential to reorient official public memories, memetic mnemotechnics have the capacity to foster rhetorical conditions favorable to the individuation of counter-memories. However, memes perform this role in a unique fashion. Counter-memories, particularly in digital spaces, often function through the provision of information to contradict official public memory.[630] However, none of the memetic representations around Putin challenged the factual accuracy of the official public memory. Instead, the individuations enabled by memetic counter-memory operate through a logic of increased participation, cooperative construction, and affective recasting through vernacular experience.[631] Combined these factors utilize the formal expectations of memes to recast "facts" into individuations that challenge proletarianizing memories proliferated through bureaucratically controlled technics.

As noted, the unsigned form of memetic texts affords them freedom from ownership. While this works to evade the censorship and control of official public memories, the separation from the memetic creator is equally important. Because the rapid circulation and recontextualization of memes quickly dissociates the authors of memes from the rhetorical force of the text, the content and form of the meme end up belonging only to the meme itself – increasing the ease of individuation and circulation. This ease is promoted because when these individuating technics are unencumbered by past participants, mnemotechnics function in a method akin to prosthetic memory. Allison Landsburg explains that prosthetic memories

> circulate publicly, and although they are not organically based, they are
> nevertheless experienced with a person's body as a result of an

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630. Deborah James, "Social Networking Sarajevo Roses, Digital Representations of Postconflict Civil Life in (the Former) Yugoslavia," *Journal of Communication* 63 (2013): 976.

631. Hartelius, "Leave a Message," 72.

engagement with a wide range of cultural technologies. Prosthetic memories thus become part of one's personal archive of experience, informing one's subjectivity as well as one's relationship to present and future tenses. Made possible by advanced capitalism and emergent commoditized mass culture capable of widely disseminating images and narratives about the past, the memories are not "natural" or "authentic" and yet they organize and energize the bodies and subjectivities that take them on.[632]

As memes allow individuals to add their unsigned memories into technics that circulate as public counter-memories, they function as a prosthesis detached from a singular participant in the individuation. The formal elements of memes, such as shirtless Putin, are rooted in the narratives of the official public memory – in this case is representative power and masculinity. However, the re-articulation of these memories enabled by memes allows individual participants to deposit their narrative experience into the affective form of the meme. Following Stiegler's theorization of memory and technics, digital memes – as a mnemonic prosthetic – serve as a species of affective archive. However because these affects are not attached to individuals, this "choir of orphaned utterances" becomes an inventional resource for deliberation.[633] As official memories often rely on an affective connection to a nostalgic past, the ability to deploy alternative affective readings, in the form of memes, allows for the destabilization of dominant memories through affective contrasts that are afforded by networked mnemotechnics.

Beyond the anonymity afforded by networked rhetorics enabling affective memetic prosthesis, memetic counter-memories also generate collaborative unfinished texts. While official memories often function as closed texts immune to discussion, the

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[632.] Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 25-26.

[633.] Hartelius, "Leave a Message," 72.

juxtaposition created by memes re-opens them to deliberative individuation. A single iteration does not make a meme; rather they are the byproduct of negotiating social expectations. Because of this, memes – like many digital mnemotechnics – almost demand interactivity, as "each new digital expression extends opportunities to participate in the discussion and 'share' (repeat, rewrite, reinterpret, represent) experience within and beyond users' personal networks."[634] The collaborative form of memes allows each participant, content creator or circulator, to alter the form of the counter-memory. This transforms a mnemotechnical space, such as an image of Putin, from a hegemonic source of argument – to a space that revolves around multiple competing arguments.[635] These competing affective interpretations foster a contrast that prevents the dominant memory from stabilizing, disrupting the displaying boundaries imposed by official memory.[636]

Yet, it is not simply collective authorship, and the diverse opinions/structures of feeling this invites, that generates the deliberative potential of counter-memories. Because memes are socially individuated, they demand interaction between individuals. In this sense, memes are "unfinalizable."[637] Because there is always a new context to deploy a meme, or a new iteration that can be made, the official memory cannot be finalized, turning static sites of memory into active sites of individuated deliberation. The memeification of these images prevents the consistent circulation of a dominant memory. Instead, memes subject official memories to an alternative read that circulates ever faster.

[634.] James, "Social Networking," 976.

[635.] Marcin Lewinski and Dima Mohammed, "Tweeting the Arab Spring: Argumentative Polylogues in Digital Media," In *Disturbing Argument: Selected Works from the 18th NCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation,* ed. Catherine Palczewski (New York: Routledge, 2014), 295

[636.] Hartelius, "Leave a Message," 72.

[637.] Ibid., 81.

This reread disrupts the ideological interpellation afforded by the repetition of official public memory. If Putin's authority as a father is ever changing, it is harder to trust the selflessness of his actions.

Finally, memes help engender deliberation by translating official public myths, which are rooted in exclusionary cultural norms, into a participatory vernacular form. Peter Dahlgren notes "For democracy to happen, citizens must be able to encounter and talk to each other. They need access to each other to develop their collective political efforts, and contexts in which they can act together."[638] While the press in Russia is largely restricted from criticizing Putin or official narratives, memes circulated across the Russian internet translate political controversies into the experiences of everyday Russians. In commenting on Crimea, these memes bolstered Russian patriotism, highlighted the human costs of enlistment in a time of crisis and both celebrated and vilified Ukrainian pro-democracy protests.[639] Such understanding demystifies official public memories by rooting them in everyday language and experience. Moreover, as memetic counter-memories can be constructed and edited by anyone with an internet connection, they have the capacity to function as democratic online memories capable of critiquing the traditional modes of mnemonic production that privilege academics and historical institutions.[640] By allowing individuations that included everyday understandings of the conflict and allowed participation by Russians on both sides, these memetic mnmeotechnics function as one of the few truly democratic media in Russia.

[638.] Peter Dahlgren, *Media and Political Engagement: Citizens, Communication, and Democracy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press 2009),114.

[639.] Wiggins, "Crimea River,".

[640.] K. J. Rawson, "Transgendered Worldmaking in Cyberspace: Historical Activism on the Internet," *QED: A Journal of GLBTQ Worldmaking* 1 no. 2 (2014): 46.

Internationalizing Networked Values

Although the memes of the Russian internet served as a conduit for everyday Russians to meme politics at one another, they also invited global response to the assorted Putin-related political controversies. Despite being rooted in Russian political context, many of the memes around this controversy were composed in English and circulated by global participants. Because of this, the individuations enabled by the memes were able to transcend national boundaries, languages, and values. Consequently, I conclude by arguing that these international individuations of memes suggest a capacity of networked *hypomnemata* to promote an ethic of cosmopolitism rooted in care.

The internationalism of the memes in responding to varied Russian crises is partially enabled by their function as an internationalizing discourse. Part of this is enabled by the fact that the English language constitutes over 50% of internet content, with Russian being the next largest at 6.3%.[641] While the predominance of English is declining, Zazulak notes that when participants in the networked public sphere want to speak to international audiences they almost exclusively communicate in English.[642] Because of this, many memes that originally circulated in English are familiar to networked participants regardless of their nationality or language.

[641.] Steffanie Zazulak, "English: The Language Of The Internet," *Pearson English Blog* (August 21, 2015): https://www.english.com/blog/english-language-internet.

[642.] Ibid.

Figure 5.18: Popular meme forms Disaster Girl mocks Dmytro Yarosh (left) and Rage Comics comment on Russian involvement in Ukraine (right)

Moreover, because memes only minimally rely on linguistic content, they are particularly suited to function as an internationalizing *hypomnemata.* Ryan Milner notes that with their focus on form and visual content "memes can become a lingua franca for mediated cultural participation."[643] Anyone familiar with Jimmy McMillian and seeing the number 140 would be able to conclude that the subject of the meme is "too damn high." Similarly, Russian memes' use Bad Luck Brian, Disaster Girl, and Rage Faces combined with Cyrillic text to translate Russian politics into these international networked forms (Figure 5.18).[644] While they require translation to be understood by outside audiences, the form of the memes provides a context that allows the affect surrounding the mnemotechnic to be interpreted by any networked user. When networked *hypomnemata* are used to foster global understanding, the values of networked publics –

[643.] Milner, "Media Lingua Franca," 5.

[644.] https://twitter.com/RuNetMemes/status/463451041003237377?lang=en, The disaster girl meme is commenting on a controversy over the business card of a Ukrainian presidential candidate found at a the aftermath of a shootout. The meme was accompanied with the text "Don't think @lifenews_ru really found Yarosh's @pravyjsektor business card yesterday? It's not the 1st sighting…" https://twitter.com/RuNetMemes/status/458247494334308354?lang=en. The Rage comment meme lambasts military involvement in Ukraine stating ""Click 'like,' if you, too, are waiting for a war between Russia & Ukraine, so you can take part & become a veteran."

particularly an orientation towards irony – becomes the dominant frame available to participate in this internationalized memetic discourse.

Similarly, although I do not read Cyrillic, the imposition of Putin into the form of Gollum (Figure 5.8), allowed me to read the meme as criticizing Putin as selfish without any textual evaluation. The proliferation of global mass media culture provides a referent for cross cultural memetic understanding. As international markets such as China and Russia expand, much of Hollywood production has shifted with a focus towards these global audiences.[645] The result of this is that larger budget films "have fairly universal ideas and themes, they're not really culturally specific."[646] This move has widely been criticized as lessening the quality of major studio films, decreasing the individuational depth of these movies as technics. However, this same shallow universality ensures that these texts are widely accessible to international audiences. Understanding the childishness of Dora or the exasperation of Doc Brown allows audiences around the world to interpret these controversies even if they are not conversant in the typical uses of network native image macros.

That is not to say that all memes participate in this internationalizing trend. In studying @RUNetMeme's response to Crimea, Wiggins notes that memes that tended towards support of Russia used national symbols and culturally grounded jokes – frequently evoking homophobic, sexual, and excretory references associated with hyper masculine humor.[647] Conversely, directionally Ukrainian memes, a position which tends

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[645.] Tom Brook, "How the Global Boxoffice is Changing Hollywood," *BBC* (October 21, 2014): http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20130620-is-china-hollywoods-future.

[646.] Ibid.

[647.] Wiggins, "Crimea River," 472-73.

to ideologically align with more pro-western/internationalist ideologies, featured a wider range of intertextual references, pop culture, and adherence to memetic formal norms.[648] My own surveys of international memes and @RUNetMemes corroborates this observation across controversies. Memes that draw on networked conventions or global pop culture tended to be overwhelmingly critical of Putin, while supportive memes were more likely to draw on the same masculinity and cultural references as the official discourse.

Although networked memes may often rely on intertextuality and irony, when circulated in the service of more proletarianizing rhetorics, such as masculine nationalism, the memes can only individuate within the narrow confines of these discourses. Some memes only individuate within the confines of particular cultural identities, such as the Russian internet. However, because the form of memes opens them to proairetic modes of invention, even these will tend towards individuations that permeate across the networked public sphere. Because of this, these Russian memes suggests that networked *hypomnemata* – particularly memes – are especially suited towards promoting a cosmopolitan ethic that enables a politics of care.[649]

As was briefly considered in chapter 2, care is central to Stiegler's vision of the future of politics. Because the proletarianizing force of technics in the service of control tends to distance individuals from one another, care is first and foremost about

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[648.] Ibid., 472.

[649.] When I refer to cosmopolitanism I am not interested in structural cosmopolitism such as the international federalism of Kant. Instead, here I conceive of cosmopolitanism following the views of Jeremy Waldron, where cosmopolitism is "a way of being in the world" and "a way of constructing an identity." Jeremy Waldron, "What is Cosmopolitan," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 8 no. 2 (2000): 227. Therefore, I am not contending neither that memes explicitly erode national systems of governance, nor promote international governance, but rather they orient participants towards a networked ethic built around international/intersubjective deliberation and identification.

individuations and the role they play in "constituting the social."[650] Even though care is at

its base level about preventing conditions of inhumanity, Stiegler argues it is more than

this:

> Care cannot be seen as the basic conditions for survival, as subsistence.
> Care, 'strictly speaking,' always works through the care one takes *of*
> *oneself through* the care one takes of others, in that they are constituent
> elements of that 'self' as the transformation of individuation.[651]

For Stiegler, care is rooted in the ways that technics, as the materialization of retentions,

facilitate individuations that force an awareness of others with similar retentions.[652]

While this may begin with an awareness only of those who are close to us, as technics

draw this attention to these others they force attention onto "the world we share with

others" in a way that gestures towards more universal issues and concerns.[653] As the

tendencies enabled by particular techniques enable the frameworks that constitutes

systems of care, the potential for a politics of care can only be understood through the

particular technics used to promote it. [654]

Memes' ability to refigure localized political controversies through the lens of

networked affective frames suggests that their ability to foster care resides in their

capacity to evoke a sense of ironic cosmopolitanism. Seeking to establish a system of

virtues for cosmopolitanism that are neither culturally imperialist nor politically impotent

(read: proletarianizing), Bryan Turner turns to Socratic irony as the ideal driving force of

cosmopolitanism. Turner explains:

[650.] Stiegler, *Taking Care,* 178.

[651.] Ibid. emphasis in original.

[652.] Ibid., 173.

[653.] Ibid., 179.

[654.] Stiegler, *New Critique* 43-44.

> Cosmopolitan virtue requires Socratic irony, by which one can achieve some distance from the polity. The principal component of cosmopolitan virtue is irony, because the understanding of other cultures is assisted by an intellectual distance from one's own national or local culture. If Nussbaum's plea for global civic education can work, then understanding other cultures presupposes that we could treat our own culture disinterestedly as an object of inquiry. As such, cosmopolitan virtue also requires self-reflexivity with respect to both our own cultural context and other cultural values. Such an orientation of irony and reflexivity produces a humanistic skepticism towards the grand narratives of modern ideologies. As a result, cosmopolitan irony would share much in common with the pragmatism of Dewey and Rorty in that tolerance of others must start from a position of some uncertainty as to the ultimate authority of one's own culture.[655]

Turner's call for detachment and ironic perspective mirrors Burke's perspective by incongruity. Memes, as products of a globalized networked public sphere have the capacity to transcend particular cultural grounding, destabilize localized narratives – such as Russian masculinity – asking participants to reevaluate this frame from outside their narrow (officially sanctioned) subjectivity. This comic orientation then demands tolerance because no single orientation can claim "truth." Instead, different orientations are fostered through competing individuations.

Despite promoting an internationalized distance, this cosmopolitanism demands neither a forsaking of national identity nor localized conflicts. Stiegler is wary of national identity as a technic because homogenization precludes individuation.[656] Instead, such collectivities must be built around identifications, where the individuation of national technics allows a unity that does not deny the process of individuation. Memes' cosmopolitanism works to strike this balance. Turner notes, "Cosmopolitanism does not

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[655.] Turner, "Cosmopolitan Virtue," 57.

[656.] Stiegler, *Taking Care,* 61-62.

mean that one does not have a country or a homeland, but one has to have a certain reflexive distance from that homeland."[657] This distance is the space of individuation.

Many of the memes that are critical of Russia do not call for individuals to reject identifications with Russianness. Such simple rejections only breed conflict. Consequently, Turner contends that "The cosmopolitan intellectual does not argue that fundamentalism is, in some simple sense, wrong or dangerous. The cosmopolite joins, rather, with local voices to probe and if necessary to problematize debate." [658] Through their ironic recasting of troubling memories and technics, Russian memes ask that participants demand that Russianness is refigured in a more virtuous form. Even as international voices joined the conflict, they mocked the faux-masculinity of Putin, poking at the validity of mobilizing this particular memory, rather than simply antagonizing Putin or Russia writ large. Turner argues that if oriented towards this Socratic Irony (comic orientation), these distanced perspectives will promote an international ethic predicated around care for the other.[659] By adopting the internationalizing identifications of cosmopolitanism, memes enable Socratic Irony in a way that fosters attention to collective care.

To expand the appeal of Socratic Irony, William Smith turns to Hannah Arendt (who is also influential in Stiegler's theorization of spirit and care) to further elucidate ways to manifest a cosmopolitan ideal. Specifically, Smith turns to Arendt's concept of "worldliness" to argue "why citizens should be motivated to act on their cosmopolitan

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[657.] Turner, "Cosmopolitan Virtue," 57.

[658.] Ibid., 59.

[659.] Ibid., 52.

obligations."[660] For Arendt, the world is not the same as the earth, rather it is the product of human action created in common.[661] In the language of Stiegler, the world is those technics that are produced through broad social individuations (in common). Consequently, localized interests undermine worldliness by undermining common ties, and in doing so undermine the capacity for non-violent politics; if we cannot appreciate and care for the works of others, humans are doomed to the singularity that Stiegler warns is at the heart of proletarianization. Arendt notes "without being talked about by men [sic] and without housing them, the world would not be a human artifice but a heap of unrelated things to which each isolated individual was at liberty to add one more object."[662] Arendt's focus on the ways that talk and housing (both as individuating uses of a technic) that organize the world and worldliness gesture to the idea that such an ethic resides only in transindividuation.

Yet if cosmopolitanism at its heart promotes care, and in the process resists proletarianization, this is largely achieved through its mobilization of competing opinions. Stiegler argues that opinion is "like that fire that must be maintained in the hearth, and at the same time monitored, since it can either heat the house or burn it down, and, beyond the house, the city itself."[663] Similarly, Smith argues that competitive discourse lies at the heart of a cosmopolitanism. Commenting on Arendt's comparison of politics to performing arts, Smith notes:

[660.] William Smith, "Cosmopolitan Citizenship: Virtue, Irony and Worldliness," *European Journal of Social Theory* 10 no. 1 (2007): 42.

[661.] Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 52.

[662.] Ibid., 204.

[663.] Bernard Stiegler, *The Lost Spirit of Capitalism* (Malden: Polity, 2014), 89.

> This line of thought highlights the *discursiveness* of the political realm, indicating that being worldly involves talking with others, seeing things from alternative points of view, formulating an opinion on the matter at hand and seeking to persuade others of the soundness of one's view.[664]

Both political individuation and cosmopolitanism function through the circulation of technics that allow free individuation of opinion, proletarianizing rhetorics function through "diverting the energy that is *doxa*."[665] To participate in Russian memes, one has to both understand the Russian conflict, have a critical/ironic distance from it, and care about the outcome. Because memes – via their form – encourage the incorporation and competition of singular opinions into larger social individuations that will clash through competing individuations, they ask participants to be worldly.

Yet worldliness need not always be the civil persuasion suggested by Smith. Many of the Russian memes that challenge the masculinity of Soviet memory and Putin function through their incivility. Not only does the incongruity promoted by this incivility further promote the plurality of discourses at the heart of worldliness, but their polemical functions may be key to using memetic cosmopolitanism to promote care. Writing on the possibility of politics in the face of proletarianized *doxa*, Stiegler argues that social critique must be grounded in polemics "struggling for the life of the spirit."[666] As memes that mock Putin as a tyrant that relies on an unnatural masculinity, the energy of this discourse has the potential to mobilize collective passions. Moreover, because these polemics are rooted in incongruity, this fire is not a grounded in destruction or sacrifice, but rather a competition seeking the higher understanding and care of comic

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[664.] Smith, "Cosmopolitan Citizenship," 45.

[665.] Stiegler, *Lost Spirit,* 89.

[666.] Ibid., 89-90.

cosmopolitanism. In this sense, networked *hypomnemata* may be an ideal tool for the implementation of a cosmopolitan virtue of care. When we joke with the world, we are more likely to care for it.

Chapter 6

The Potential of Memetic Criticism

Across the course of this dissertation, I have made the case that although the primary use of memes may be to function as networked entertainment, when deployed within larger political conversations, memes are far more than trivial cultural phenomena or diversions from more 'productive' politics. Memes continue the long practice of participatory visual rhetorics challenging more traditional and elite controlled political rhetorics. In continuing this tradition, networked memes commenting on economics, security, and national memory demonstrate this digital technic's capacity to live up to the rhetorical force of its classical namesake – *mimesis*. Goodnight and Green illustrate the power of *mimesis* in the classical tradition, noting that,

> when deployed rhetorically, mimetic influence may cultivate ritualistic participation, call out common sense observation, affirm virtuous conduct as the link to just reward, distill desire through moments of compelling display, oppose dialectically shared opinion and refined knowledge, authorize expert models, justify actions that fulfill situated best practices for a recognized craft, and engage or extend media-blended, reputation-risking cultural performances. [667]

In their ability to create new enthymematic narratives, destabilize antirhetorical ideographs, and affectedly recast collective memory, networked memes demonstrate how networked repetition and difference engenders a politics that resists technocratic control. That is not to say that these are monumental political victories; dominant forces often react to critical theorization through social regulation via competing forms of controlling

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[667.] Goodnight and Green, "Rhetoric, Risk, and Markets," 120-21.

affect.[668] Despite this fleeting, and often-unrealized potential, such ruptures represent one of the few resistive opportunities in the face of ubiquitous control. Consequently, I conclude by considering that the potential of memes lay not just in their ability to illustrate Stiegler's political ethic, but in their capacity to function as collective rhetorical critics.

From the onset, the proairetic construction of memes positions the modal assemblage built around a particular meme as a rhetorical critic. None of the individual iterations may contain the elements of effective criticism. However, once they emerge as a modal assemblage – the formal stance of the meme created through its varied individuations – this larger collection of fragments combine to enact criticism independent of particular human agents. Michael McGee asserts that it is impossible to consider any particular act of communication as a complete text. The interplay between text, context, and audiences, renders discursive acts as fragmented parts of larger, not fully knowable, texts.[669] Consequently, McGee argues the role of the critic is first the construction of a meaningful text out of these fragments, and then using this constructed text to examine ideological forces and material affects of particular rhetorical contexts.

As a group of fragments that participants cannot understand outside their memetic assemblage, individual iterations of a meme – especially stock character macros – exemplify this concept of fragments. They derive their force only from the juxtaposition of formal context, textual particulars, participants' experience and affect, and their interrelation with socially negotiated understandings of stock character archetypes.

[668.] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (New York: Penguin Books 2009), 171.

[669.] McGee, "Fragmentation," 287.

However, as participants use the proairetic forces within the initial form of a meme to explore varied iterations, they individuate those fragments into a unified sense of form, content, and perspective. It is only across the repetitions of politically enacted memes that the criticism of neoliberalism, securitization, and official national memories emerge. From the enthymemes, terministic deliberation, and counter-mnemonic iterations, a critical reading of controlling technocratic discourses comes out of the communal reading and production of the meme. In this sense, the modal assemblage of these memes functions as a collective cultural/ideological critic.[670]

Moreover, the vernacular nature of memetic theorization bolsters the force of memetically generated social criticism. Specifically, because it is generated from the lived experiences of collective participants in politics, rather than from technical or academic elites, memetic criticism has the potential to be particularly impactful. Antonio Gramsci argues that any theorization of oppressive forces that does not originate from the lived experience of the oppressed ought to be suspect, as it likely originates in – and supports, intentionally or not – hegemonic ideologies.[671] Memetic criticism evolves organically, apart from traditional structures of criticism, because it is generated across the individuations of networked participants. If memetic criticisms were not representative of identifiable collective experience, participants would not propagate the meme – individuating within the publics connected with these technics. Because they are

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[670.] I use the term critic, rather than genre of criticism or some similar framing, because as the iterations combine the larger assemblage that is the meme exerts its own critical agency via its formal expectations and the circulation of iterations with particular ideological stances. Not only do the memes function as a sort of rhetorical critic, but considering Lawrence Grossberg argues that destabilizing neoliberalism is a central challenge of contemporary economic criticism in communication studies, they may be rhetorical critics *par excellence.* Lawrence Grossberg, *Cultural Studies in the Future Sense* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 117.

[671.] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 10.

rooted in aggregated vernacular experience, the narratives, terms, and memories constructed around memes provide alternatives to the dominant technocratic rhetorics that justify control. Moreover, since memes often rely on ironic modes of commentary, they pluralize this form – increasing the number of individuations and in the process the space for democratic deliberation.[672] However, as I will explore further in this chapter, this is a deliberation of the composition and interrelation of subjectivities, rather than a Habermasiean deliberation seeking consensus of policy and polity.

Through their capacity to use broad affective frames to reconstruct individual textual fragments into a collective comic meta-narrative, terministic dispute, or countermemory, the stock image macro has the potential to serve as a powerful venue for generating social criticism from the lived experience of internet users. The power of collective theorization led Deleuze to argue that it would be "user groups" not "wise men [sic]" who would give voice to revolutionary politics in the era of control.[673] The emergence of user groups as a defining term of digital culture – one that easily defines participants who individuate through networked memes – makes this gesture towards memetic criticism all the more prophetic. Memes are not just a subject for rhetorical critics to engage, they may very well function as a premier public intellectual for networked rhetorical ecologies.

Form, Irony, and Identification: Rhetoric as the Entelechial Individuating Technic

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[672.] Tønder, "Comic Power."

[673.] Deleuze, "Control and Becoming," 170.

Central to understanding the critical power of digital memes is an awareness of their capacity to function as an individuating technic. If participants could not engage in evolving individuations through memetic participation, there would be little capability for memes to comment on, let alone resist the proletarianizing rhetorics of technocrats. While this relationship was posited from the onset of this dissertation, form, irony, and identification, have emerged through my analysis as central rhetorical concepts for understanding the individuating force of rhetorics. Yet, it is not enough to simply glue these ideas onto Stiegler's theorization of individuation, as these Burkean concepts must also be rethought in relation to technics and individuation. Therefore, I will explore each in turn to make the case that a clear grasp of the evolution of these rhetorical concepts into an ecology of networked technics is key to understanding rhetoric as the central individuational technic in politics.

To begin, as networked technics push rhetoric to become increasingly proaretic and remixable, form emerges as dominant in driving understandings of both rhetorical force and individuation. While proletarianizing rhetorics function through establishing strict grammars centered around terministic features such as meaning and definition, the rapidly individuating movement of memes hold latent critical political potential that eschews these rigid grammars for force exerted primarily through form. Memes' participatory form enables a productive orientation that ruptures otherwise proletarianized existence because memetic technics are particularly oppositional to terministic stability. Their drive for circulation via *imitatio* transforms traditionally consumptive acts, such as the perusing of information on the internet, into the production of collective knowledge.

In transforming static information into individuating knowledge, particularly through enthymematic narratives, terministic destabilizations and countermemories that exist across a particular modal assemblage, memes encourage productive collectivities be formed by participants.[674] Participants cannot understand a meme if they do not understand its context, therefore they must engage the form not only to produce new memes, but even to circulate or consume them. As they do so, participants are afforded the resources to engage in the positive production of alternative affective theorization. In this sense, to understand the scope and potential directions of particular individuations, a critic must begin by understanding their formalistic expectations.

Beyond providing a tool for understanding individuation, a formalistic orientation also demands a refiguring of the terministic focus central to Burkean understandings of rhetoric. Because it is predicated on form, rather than meaning, networked rhetoric may be more driven by "formulistic screens" than terministic ones. Memes draw their force through the formal expectations that have individuated across their repeated iterations. The expectation that Steve will be out of touch, a meme will twist a Verizon slogan, or that Putin's masculine memory is a joke, is more important than the specific propositional content of any single iteration of these memes. Therefore, while memes' formal elements are relatively stable, their terministic content is open and unstable; any terministic iteration that fits the form can individuate with the meme. Because of this, the organizing power of the form overrides that of any particular term. The outraged annoyance of Picard becomes a meta-frame through which security must be read. Such formal preeminence demands a degree of leveling and incongruity. Any concept can be leveled

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[674.] Stiegler, *Taking Care,* 184.

into the same affective frame through its incorporation into the form of a particular meme. As the formal expectations of the mode supersedes the content of a particular iteration, the modal assemblage becomes a formal screen through which varied terms (and their resultant screens) are mediated. In this way, memetic formulistic screens are antagonistic to the stability of god terms and ideographs, which often function in support of proletarianizing rhetorics, as their openness prevents the terministic stability that gives these technics their rhetorical force.

A focus on formulistic screens does not deny the continued power or utility of terministic screens. Burke rightly notes that, "we *must* use terministic screens, since we can't say anything without the use of terms; whatever terms we use, they necessarily constitute a corresponding kind of screen; and any such screen necessarily directs the attention to one field rather than another."[675] Certainly, the efforts of memes to reintroduce privacy to the security debate, or unemployment to discourses of markets, demonstrate the continued reliance on terministic screens. However, modal expectations are built from more than terministic expectations. Anticipations of affective consistency with the formal assemblage – both in terms of matching the embodied emotion of a particular advice animal or just the broader memetic demands for irony – will undoubtedly tint whatever term is enfolded into the mode. In this way, formalistic screens organize terministic screens within particular affective and technical frames, creating a mosaic whereby each term has its own force and form, but, given their inclusion in the larger form, these terms cannot be read outside the larger modal context.

[675.] Burke, *Language,* 50, emphasis in original.

While formulistic screens are the lens through which individuation may be rhetorically understood, the politics of these individuating rhetorical technics are mediated through a strong reliance on irony. This is not necessarily an irony of humor, but rather a Burkean irony predicated on a movement of reversal where "what goes forth as A returns as non-A."[676] Stock image macros intensify this ironic *imitatio* grounded in repetition through difference. Thus, through their reliance on amateur recreation, by definition memes only exist as ironically re-iterated texts (otherwise they would be classified as virals). Therefore, when memes intervene in a specific context, by bringing new forms – and their embedded affects – to comment on a particular controversy, these new individuations return that controversy to public use through different structures of feeling, memories, and narratives: returning it as non-A.

Conversely, proletarianizing rhetorics demand a non-ironic finality. Certainly, their formal elements do allow a degree of personalization. After all, the same appetite may be fulfilled through a variety of technical options. Stiegler notes that proletarianization functions through the ability to appeal to niche interest of consumers in a manner that is so singular that it prevents collective individuations.[677] An individual is free to engage the new economy in myriad singular ways and Russian national identity can be expressed through a variety of rhetorical performances. However, these individual iterations built around proletarianizing technocratic forms demand that these different iterations return to the order of the key terms. The varied manifestations of privacy one could express are acceptable as long as they are still subservient to <security>, iterations

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[676.] Burke, *Grammar,* 517.

[677.] Stiegler, *Uncontrollable Societies,* 109.

of Russian identity must not challenge the memory of masculinity, performances of the new economy will be dismissed if they interfere with the rationality of the market. For proletarianizing rhetorics, while A might be iterated through a variety of performances, it always returns as A. Stiegler refers to this movement as "idiomatic exhaustion," as communication is no longer function as individuating symbols but rather as "digital pheromones," that demand a specific response.[678] Because of this, the foreclosure of ironic symbolic action becomes the foundation for a symbolic politics of control.

If an anti-ironic orientation is at the heart of proletarianization, irony may be the central trope for rhetorical technics that promote individuated resistance. Irony may not be just one of the master tropes, but instead a master among masters. Because individuation can only function through a repetition that also allows difference (returning as non-A), if a technic lacks the capacity for ironic use it is non-individuating. Conversely, technics, such as memes, which draw on the networked affordances of remix, *proairesis*, and *imitatio,* not only allow ironic deployment, but through their remediations of narratives, memories, affects, and other collective modes of sense making, they create a variety of perspectives, all at least partially incongruous with stable and proletarianizing rhetorics. In this sense, irony is more than a trope that rhetors can draw on; rather, it must be reconfigured as a technical property – pre-existing particular rhetorical deployments. The individuated pre-individual form of a technic must be such that it affords irony. If affording irony, these technical properties allow rhetors to deploy them to manifest particular incongruities. Further, it is only through these ironic technical forms that amateurs can participate in creation. If A must return as A, there is no space

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[678.] Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery Vol.1,* 70.

for an amateur to remake the technic, they can only consume it. Conversely if a technic allows a different return, each user is now a co-participant in the collective transidividuated renegotiation via *imitatio.*

This reliance on ironic technics for enabling transindividuation suggests that there is a greater space of amateur participation than Stiegler originally allowed for. In explaining symbolic misery, Stiegler argues that the transference of music to recordings removed their individuational capacity because the songs are replayed without difference.[679] However, if we take seriously the conclusions of this dissertation that individuation relies more on form than on specific iterated content, there may be individuational potential even if the propositional content never changes – suggesting that even virals may individuate. For many memes, the visual form never changes – analogous to the music on a record. However, as the picture is moved into different contexts and controversies, it allows new individuations, just as a record played in different audiences, temporalities, and cultures, may individuate through cultural resignification.[680] Such potential for resignification is particularly pronounced in digital spaces because networked logics encourage remix.[681] This individuating, ironic resignification, through contextual resignification opens even the seemingly most static technics to potential new individuations. As long as there is a space for some kind of formal or contextual irony, proletarianization can never be complete. New incongruities and perspectives will emerge through any range of resignifying performances.

[679.] Stiegler, *Symbolic Misery Vol. 2,* 22-23.

[680.] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York: Routledge 1979), 119.

[681.] Pfister, *Networked Rhetorics*, 191.

These varied perspectives gesture towards the deliberative/democratic potential of memes and similar networked technics. Specifically, as ironic variations create a range of technical perspectives, participants engage in a mode of deliberation through their ability to foster identification.[682] Specifically, identifications with particular technics enable the creation of democratically constructed subjectivities. Again this is neither a politics of traditional subjects nor of deliberation, but rather examining "the various ways individuals and groups constitute themselves as subjects through processes of subjectification" and the ways that these processes both elude established and create new modes of power.[683] Because each meme – or other individuating technic – allows the creation of a different collective we, each technic must also be considered as affording a unique mode of subjectification. Consequently, as participants move to individuate with one technic instead of another – e.g. a memetic narrative over a technocratic one – they are implicitly endorsing the mode of subjectivity that transindividuates with that particular form or iteration of a technic.

Through this process of negotiating varied technics and their differing processes of subjectification, the deliberative and democratic tendency of individuational politics becomes apparent. In negotiating varied individuations and their varied perspectives, networked participants do not come to agreement over the ideal vision of a particular policy or the polity writ large, rather they identify with a commonness in a particular mode of subjectification as it individuates in a particular context. In this sense,

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[682.] Burke's concept of identification is particularly useful in understanding individuation, as while rhetoric fosters a sense of sameness via identification, this sameness recognizes that individuals are "both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another." Burke, *Rhetoric*, 21. Because it creates space for both connectivity and divisive individuality, this identification allows for both the psychic and collective individuations central to Stiegler's politics.

[683.] Deleuze, "Control and Becoming," 175.

individuational deliberation is not a measured negotiation of arguments and policies, but rather the social creation of a technic that invites a wider range of identification. Those technics whose memories, narratives, and forms are identifiable will invite greater participation and thus have the potential to exert a wider social force. Old Economy Steve does not advocate a specific policy or renegotiate the tenants of economics. However, through the collective creation of a technic that houses an identifiable narrative, the meme creates space where participants can both negotiate the nature of their collective subjectivity through the inclusion of new iterations, and exert a greater pressure on dominant rhetorics through the creation of a larger collective that opposes technocratic rhetorics.

Consequently, this individuational democracy is not one of a singular public sphere – networked or otherwise. The existence of a "Russian internet" vs a more cosmopolitan in the battle over Russian memory, demonstrates that networked spaces, although affording greater international reach, are still comprised of multiple competing publics defined by rhetorical technics that are not always compatible. Networked publicity, just as other modes publicity, can enclave from, resist, or reify dominant publics. Moreover, these spaces have a nebulous tie at best to the policies and politics that dominate more conventional understandings of democracy and deliberation. Steve, the NSA memes, and Russian memes do not ask participants to vote differently, instead they hope these individuations identify with the experiences of the participants who might circulate them. In doing so, they present subjectivities that reject the very assumptions that drive traditional politics. The democracy of networked technics is one of ever mutating publics, who are democratically negotiated through the new unities of

participants who identify with the forms and collective identities of the technics that
serve as the foundations of these publics. This is a democracy of everyday symbolic
participation, not the speeches and elections of Liberal Western Democracy.

That does not mean that memes are without consequence in the realm of
traditional politics. Rather than explicitly directing publics, these memes provide an
affective bridge which has the potential to link memetic participants with already existing
publics and political action. Certainly this move has less discernible effects than other
political rhetorics. However, Jessalyn Keller notes that only focusing on "a direct tangible
and measurable 'effect' of activism ignores results like the production of feeling."[684] It is
precisely the potential of texts like memes to evoke particular structures of feeling that
led Papacharissi to theorize the role digital technics play in the formation of "affective
publics."[685]

Broadly, Papacharissi argues that texts proliferated by networked technologies
often do not overtly seek deliberation or consensus. Rather they use affective gestures to
attune participants to particular publics. Papacharissi notes, these technologies permit

> people to feel their way into politics …[they] engage in practices of
> rebroadcasting, listening, remixing content, and creatively presenting their
> views – or fragments of views – in ways that evolve beyond the
> conventional deliberative logic of a traditional public sphere. [686]

The affective publicity enabled by networked media enables participants to connect to
existing politics through an affective gesture by internetworked media. Specifically,

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[684.] Jessalyn Keller, "Making Activism Accessible". In: Claudia Mitchell and Carrie A. Rentschler
(eds) *Girlhood Studies and the Politics of Place: Contemporary Paradigms of Research*. (New York:
Berghahn Press, 2015), 12.

[685.] Papacharissi, *Affective Publics,* 12.

[686.] Ibid., 118. This is not to say that affective publics eschew reason or ideology. These concepts
have affective elements on their own right.

Papacharissi argues that through their mass circulation, technics such as hashtags and

memes remediate personal experience in the way that they identify with the experiences

of others. A meme like Old Economy Steve publicizes participants' personal angst at the

current state of the economy and the NSA memes highlight dissatisfaction with security

policy. Beyond articulating these particular stances, using these circulated texts connects

these users to other participants who share similar evaluations. Papacharissi argues this

move allows the connectivity, rather than collectivity, that is central to networked

publics.[687] A meme which connects or alludes to larger public attitudes through

identification with a particular structure of feeling can direct participants into larger

publics without overtly demanding political action itself.

In this context, it is easy to read a meme as personal gratification without any

larger political potential.[688] However, Papacharissi does not argue that affective publics

have the same force as more traditional social movements and other mass publics.

Papacharissi instead argues the structures of feeling tapped into by native internetworked

media are "soft."[689] Alone, they may not motivate action. However, in allowing

participants the ability to connect with larger publics, affective publics re-interpellate that

participant as more attuned to a particular mode of political being. Such attunement then

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[687.] Ibid., 128. For Papacharissi, connectivity focus on the creation of a mass subjectivity wherein users are still able to maintain a sense of singularity. Conversely collectivity, as a representative construct has a tendency to erase difference in the name of solidarity.

[688.] For examples of these arguments see: Jenkins, "Modes of Visual Rhetoric;" Jodi Dean, "Affective Networks," *Media Tropes eJournal* 2 no. 2 (2010): 19-44. Regarding memes and other network circulated texts, these certainly these criticisms have merit. The embedding of memes on corporate sites certainly enables them to function tools for subsuming labor. Moreover, individual iterations of memes may explicitly or implicitly reinforce hegemonic power. However, a meme is greater than the sum of its iterations, and when evaluated as entire meme or across a controversy, these fragments have the potential to come together to exert rhetorical force. The political potential of the collective negotiation of form will be further explored in the discussion of individuation in chapter 2.

[689.] Papacharissi, *Affective Publics,* 13.

provides an opportunity for that participant to engage in more traditional modes of publicity – something that may not have been possible had the originating affective gesture (e.g. circulating a meme) not provided the participant the resources to "locate private thoughts in a public setting."[690] This performance both draws and manages attention, making issues visible to a broader public – all while placing ideas in conflict, rather than consensus. In doing so, memes, as one of the dominant texts of networked public spheres, contain the potential to constitute networked publics

Memetic Multitudes

As memes emerge as a space for the negotiation of politics through identification with competing individuations, they demonstrate that the processes of individuation are intrinsically rhetorical, and that rhetoric cannot function without individuation. However, this individuational democracy, built on the connection of diverse participants around common production and uses of technics, also suggests that the political subjectivity that may best describe the individuational politics of networked rhetorical technics is that of the multitude.[691]

Many theorists who draw inspiration from Deleuze recognize that if control society is reliant on new modes of economic production, it also necessarily mobilizes a new political subject: the multitude. Because it exists outside the biopolitical logic of population, the multitude challenges the dominant conceptions of collective arrangement. Virno notes:

[690.] Ibid., 111.

[691.] I use the term multitude, over other options such as "the masses" or "the people" because the former denies the many a sense of agency and the latter reduces the diverse potentiality of each participant in networked rhetorics to a single representative factor. Such a move fails to recognize the complexity and diversity that enables true democratic mass action. Hardt and Negri, *Multitude,* 99-100.

> The contemporary multitude is composed neither of "citizens" nor of "producers;" it occupies a middle region between "individual and collective;" for the multitude, then, the distinction between "public" and "private" is in no way validated. And it is precisely because of the dissolution of the coupling of these terms, for so long held to be obvious, that one can no longer speak of a people converging into the unity of the state.[692]

In existing between the individual and the collective (to which Stiegler would add the technical) the multitude exists in a parallel space to individuation, rather than to more traditional associations of politics and collectivity. Rather than relying on traditional, representational conceptions of collectivity, the multitude is "an irreducible multiplicity; the singular social differences that constitute the multitude must always be expressed and can never be flattened into sameness, unity, identity, or indifference…[it is] singularities that act in common."[693] This relation of singularities in common is exemplified by the ability of memes to balance individual stories through particular iterations of memes with a sense of collective purpose found across the form of each meme.

In this way, form, which is produced across multiple singular iterations that find relation through a memetic technic, must be understood as a manifestation of the common – or that which is produced through relations of participants in the multutude. Hardt and Negri explain how exploitation of the common demands the emergence of the multitude.

> Since we have begun to recognize (from the standpoint of the critique of political economy) how the singular figures of postmodern labor do not remain fragmented and dispersed but tend through communication and collaboration to converge toward a common social being, we must now immerse ourselves in this social being as in something that is at once both

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[692.] Virno, *Grammar,* 25.

[693.] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude,* 105. Much as with individuation, it is worth noting that this unity and difference of the multitude is also central to Burke's conception of identification.

rich and miserable, full of productivity and suffering and yet devoid of form. This common social being is the powerful matrix that is central in the production and reproduction of contemporary society and has the potential to create a new, alternative society.[694]

As the new subject called forth by the conditions of communicative labor, the multitude is the central target for control. Moreover, as control breaks the logic of the population, the multitude emerges to explain how mobile individual consumers have the potential to exist in some collective capacity.

Although the multitude is central to contemporary understandings of control, this concept is largely absent from Stiegler's work. Recognizing that collective struggle is best embodied by "user groups," Deleuze gestures towards a multitude-oriented understanding of political subjectification.[695] Therefore, as a response to Deleuze's control thesis, which includes consideration of the very modes of immaterial production that define the multitude, some gesture towards the multitude can add further depth to Stiegler's understanding of control. In working with individuation, Stiegler moves towards a political subject akin to the multitude (or at least with a multitudinous character).[696]

Foucault famously notes that in understanding power, resistance comes first.[697] Drawing from this observation, both Hardt and Negri and Virno note that control functions through efforts to contain and direct the multitude. Virno directly links this struggle to individuation itself. In arguing that capital seeks to appropriate the common

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[694.] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude,* 159.

[695.] Deleuze, "Control and Becoming," 170.

[696.] Generally, my understanding of the Multitude is more in line with Virno than Hardt and Negri who explicitly position themselves against Simondon; Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 58.

[697.] Foucault, *History of Sexuality,* 96.

(which Virno notes is literally the space between individuals), Virno is speaking of the preindividual milieu created through the process of transindividuation.[698] As demonstrated by the memetic resistances to technocratic control, the struggle to reestablish spirit and care is precisely the effort to find a space for an individuating multitude to exist within current industrial technologies. For Virno the individual is the manifestation of the potentiality of the common – a process strongly akin to Stiegler's spirited individuation.[699] Therefore, while proletarianization represents a multitude detached from itself, reduced to pure singularity, a politics of care opens the space for a multitude that is at once the many and the one – a multitude that constantly challenges the forces of proletarianization.

Further, the tendency of networked publics towards cosmopolitan irony further enhances the argument for the multitudinous tendency of networked subjects. Not only does the worldliness of cosmopolitism rely on care for the common – the very conditions from which the multitude arises – but it does so by distancing one from their sense of home. Although the ironic cosmopolitan can comment on national and local conflicts, the enactment of this virtue destabilizes a sense of home. Turner explains:

> Ironists are often homeless people who are in some sense dislodged from their traditional worlds and find themselves in new situations where old answers no longer work. Cosmopolitan virtue may well turn out to be the ethic of exile.[700]

When participants joke about the falsity of Russian masculinity, the American security state, or the American dream, they may be seeking to improve these conditions.

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698. Virno, "Angels": 64

699. Virno, *Grammar,* 79.

700. Turner, "Cosmopolitan Virtue," 59.

However, by imposing distance through incongruous application of memes to these conditions, they also cannot return to the stable (if controlling) home of these discourses. To paraphrase a popular networked meme "incongruity: what has been seen cannot be unseen."[701]

However, the very alienation engendered by participation in networked, ironic, cosmopolitanism also helps to enable the development of a multitudinous subjectivity. As control replaces the biopolitical logic of populations with a focus on singular consumers, the multitude, as the manifestation of the general intellect, becomes the only productive collective subjectivity in a post-Fordist economy.[702] Although Hardt and Negri argue the capacity of the multitude to engage in immaterial labor exceeds the reach of capital, and in doing so has a resistive orientation,[703] Virno is more ambivalent towards the potential of the multitude. Virno notes that as control breaks down the boundaries of biopolitical power, it also destabilizes a sense of home within the many that make up the multitude.[704] Although a nomadic sense of withdrawal enabled by this lack of home is part of the political force of the multitude, this same lack can prompt the multitude to reproduce the very structures of control in order to fabricate the sense of home lost. While the multitude can be locations of resistance to control, it is not necessarily so, as it can often be easier and more comforting to simply reify control. As memes move participants outside the

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[701.] "(What Has Been Seen) Cannot Be Unseen is an Internet axiom which states that one literally cannot get rid of the mental image that becomes part of the memory after looking at a disturbing photo or a video." "What Has Been Seen Cannot Be Unseen," *Know Your Meme*: http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/what-has-been-seen-cannot-be-unseen. In this context, I am suggesting that the incongruity demanded by memetic remediations creates a similar mnemonic disturbance.

[702.] Virno, *Grammar,* 41.

[703.] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude,* 212.

[704.] Virno, *Grammar,* 35

normative subjectification of control, they gain the capacity to produce new and differing

modes of social relation, but as *pharmakon* this move always risks a return to control.

A central example of the relation between networked nomadism and the multitude

is the use of memes as a cultural commonplace. As Virno notes commonplaces, as

products of the multitude are central to both communicative production and

individuation. Specifically, Virno's use of commonplaces is a pun referring both to the

classical concept of cultural bound meaningful stories as well as the common as the place

where publics are both produced and reside.[705] However, this double entendre is key to

understanding the multitude. While a variety of technics may be shared across a wide

range of human relations, it is only the symbolic – as the home to the general intellect –

that is both the engine of capitalism and individuation of the multitude.[706] In this sense,

commonplaces are the only location that the common (the foundation of individuation)

can reside. And only a multitudinous subjectivity can fully embrace the individuational

potential of commonplace technics. The greater difference of subjectivities unified in

common, the greater range of individuations that a technic may take in opposition to

controlling forms.

In this way, a multitudinous subjectivity, grounded in mimetic uses of technics,

always exceeds the bounds of control. Certainly, much of their rhetorical production will

be re-enfolded into capitalism. The majority of the memes explored in this dissertation

are circulated for the profit of various media agencies. However, the collectivities created

by these technics also express narratives, memories and other affective forces that do not

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[705.] Virno, *Grammar,* 38.

[706.] Virno, *Grammar,* 107.

get fully contained by this capitalization. Specifically, the individuation of multitudinous

subjectivities allows for the constant renegotiation of the relations of varied individuals.

As I transindividuate with new (and constantly changing) technics, I am moving across a

range of potential subjectivities. This reorganization allows each act of individuation to

be a process of direct democracy. If the multitude's social conditions are those of

individuation, every utterance is an enactment of an individual's democratic influence on

those social conditions.

Moreover, if the political subject of networked individuation is the multitude, this

dissertation suggests that the resistive potential of the multitude may have a dominant

rhetorical orientation, that of a networked sophistic. Specifically, with their focus on

irreverence and play, memetic rhetorics align with the Sophists. Although the list of

individuals who fit under the label sophist include figures with a range of varied

philosophical and rhetorical views, Nathan Crick argues that they were unified by a

common "democratic *ethos* rooted in an experimental attitude that draws on the resources

of speculative reason to serve the purpose of radical invention necessary for a

democratization of the productive arts."[707] This unified stance includes a range of

conceptual commitments including, rhetorical experimentation, *dissoi logi,* imitation as

improvement, and a valorization to play, all in the name of improving the *polis*.[708]

Despite these elements, all of which are central to the political use of memes, Crick

asserts the "greatest legacy" of the Sophists may be their "artistic commitment to

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[707.] Crick, "The Sophistical Attitude," 25.

[708.] Ibid., 42.

form."[709] Specifically, the Sophists recognized that using commonly understood communicative structures (form) was the only way that collective experience could manifest influence in contingent rhetorical situations.

Although Aristotelian and Platonic rhetorical values tend to be central to contemporary understandings of politics, the sophistical attitude of experimental play and manipulation of form has also performed an influential role in American political discourse. Sophistic influences are present in parodic media and in satirical performances like the White House Correspondents dinner. However, sophistic styles have also found spaces outside dominant media and political institutions., most notably in guerrilla theatre and performance politics. By using hyperbolic, ironic, and intertextual performance, these presentations – and the publics they form – work to establish spaces for the articulation of voices traditionally excluded by dominant discourses.[710] For example, the Guerrilla Girls, a feminist art collective, used a range of visual juxtapositions and public performances to challenge the dominance of men in the art world. These sophistic, styled, performances provided a comic incongruity to dominant attitudes, prompting not revolution, but rather reconsideration of established social norms.[711]

While this sophistic tradition certainly influences the contemporary individuations of memes, the networked return to sophistry may be more than a reemergence of its classical namesake. Instead, commenting on the digital circulation of visual rhetorics Damien Smith Pfister and Carly Woods argue that contemporary visual culture might

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[709.] Ibid., 40.

[710.] Anne Teresa Demo, "The Guerrilla Girls' Comic Politics of Subversion," *Women's Studies in Communication* 23, no. 2 (2000): 152.

[711.] Ibid., 134.

best be understood as "hypersophistic."[712] Although they note that "As a prefix, 'hyper-' means 'over, above, beyond.',"" they also use the prefix to "signal how these sophistical attitudes are intensified through the affordances of hypertext, or the hyperimage, made available by digital media technology."[713] As demonstrated through the move of memetic sophistry to varied cosmopolitan modes of expression, memes follow Pfister and Wood's observations that the hypersophistic is more rapid in circulation, diverse in location, and varied in participants. Moreover, as irony via *imitatio* emerges as the dominant logic of memetic technics, play is no longer simply a way to experiment with rhetorics, but instead may be the default mode of rhetorical production.

This default ironic play highlights the potential link between multitudinous subjects and hypersophistic orientations. Crick notes that for the sophists rhetorical experimentation was key to mastering the "contingencies of life."[714] However, for the multitude, not only is life contingent, but the very nature of subjectivity and collective existence is rooted in constant flux.[715] While a memetically constructed public may draw on its form for some stability, every new iteration transindividuates this form, always already reforming it for its new contingent deployments. Therefore, as networked technics pull participants into increasingly multitudinous subjectivities, they are similarly further called to engage in sophistic rhetorical orientations to negotiate this politics of individuational flux.

[712.] Damien Smith Pfister and Carly S. Woods, "The Unnaturalistic Enthymeme: Figuration, Interpretation, and Critique after Digital Mediation," *Argumentation & Advocacy* 52 no. 4 (Spring, 2016): 151.

[713.] Ibid.

[714.] Crick, "The Sophistical Attitude," 28.

[715.] Virno, *Grammar,* 33.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although this dissertation certainly offers useful insights into the nature of digital rhetorics and technics, this study is not without limitations. Most notably because my analysis was grounded within a Stieglerian perspective it is bounded within the limits of this perspective. Specifically, in focusing on technics and individuation, other meaningful dimensions of both memes as well as specifics of the specific rhetorical controversies may have been under covered. Similarly, other rhetorical and philosophical approaches, such as phenomenology, argumentation, and others could yield different insights. However, I see this limitation not as a fault of this study, but rather something inherent to the nature of rhetorical research. This study offers but one of the many perspectives, that when combined, help to yield a richer and more full understanding of rhetorical phenomenon. As such, simply considering these contexts from other perspectives is a needed step for future research. Beyond this need for diverse approaches to memes, this dissertation also suggests a range of other directions of new research.

First and foremost, although memes, with their highly mutable and participatory nature, are a natural fit for understanding the relation between individuation and rhetoric, this relationship should be explored further. Following the insights of Stiegler, all technics have the potential for individuation. Therefore, it follows that other rhetorical technologies – including varied media forms, tropes and figures, as well as particular addresses might be understood through the logic of individuation. The assumption that rhetoric is a *techne* suggests a particular technical leaning across the history of rhetorical studies. Consequently, future research should explore the relationship between individuation and rhetoric writ large. Such an orientation has potential to help mediate the

divisions between more object oriented approaches and the humanistic tradition. A rhetorical theory of transindividuation, while grounded in complex rhetorical relationships between the technics of the material world, also recognizes that the human subjectivity – as another product of transindividuation – is one of the many objects that exerts force and shifts the direction of the rhetorical forces circulating in contemporary rhetorical ecologies.

Furthermore, this dissertation – in highlighting the role of technics in not only the contemporary production of – but also the classical understandings of – rhetoric suggests the need for a further rhetorical turn in contemporary theory. Certainly continental philosophy and other theorizations have made significant moves towards the centrality of symbolic action. However, frequently they do so by thinking of language without a technical history.[716] If the force of technics is their capacity to function as repositories of memory, the individuating force of all technics is always mediated through the rhetorical. We cannot individuate with any technic without some symbolic understanding of how it has been used in the past. Consequently, it is time not for rhetoric to turn to philosophy to keep up with its insights about the human condition. Instead philosophical thought should return to rhetoric, particularly a pre-Platonic sophistical rhetoric, because a rhetorical outlook has long attended to the role technics play in the understanding of politics.

Finally, memes through their highly individuational nature are a natural text for the construction of multitudinous understandings of networked publicity. However, following the insights of Virno, subjectivities in networked spaces – particularly when understood through the logic of a hypersophistic – are increasingly mobile, diverse and

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[716.] Stiegler, *Technics I,* 255.

diffuse – all conditions for the manufacture of the multitude. However, this same subject is often theorized as existing either in opposition to, or without interest in, the modes of representative government, deliberative discourse, and other more modern political and rhetorical figurations that have dominated contemporary politics and rhetorical studies.[717] Across these cases, we have seen how memetic technics orient multitudinous subjectivities around particular anti-control stances, narratives and memories, in a way that could potentially effect representative politics. However, the ability of such subjectivities to influence and exist within more traditional rhetorical spaces is still unclear. Consequently, rhetorical critics ought to take seriously the contention that networked technics individuate towards multitudinous subjects, and explore further the relations between these publics and the dominant political spheres that still govern contemporary life. Can multitudinous subjectivities exert direct rhetorical force, are they vocal critics, or do they simply provide a shared feeling that must then be directed into more traditional movements and other representative politics? Such research not only would increase our understandings of the ways that networked technics participate in politics, but also more importantly the potential of resistance that truly exists in networked publics spheres.

Conclusion

Although not all memes are politically revolutionary, when used to mobilize alternative individuations memes are technics particularly suited to resisting control. While such interactions have always been possible, digital media have expanded the speed and scope by which such networks of indiduation can develop, circulate and

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[717.] Virno, *Grammar,* 43; Hardt and Negri, *Multitude,* 263-4.

expand. Following the warnings of Johanna Hartelius, I am reticent to overly romanticize memes, or any digital space, as a democratic panacea because "Making content public does not automatically amount to genuine participation in the civic sphere."[718] However, if nothing else, memes trouble proletarianizing rhetorics by making them less certain. Thus, despite Hartelius' warning, I am cautiously optimistic because as David Cratis Williams notes, "Democracy occurs in the domain of the uncertain."[719]

[718.] Hartelius, "Leave a Message," 70

[719.] Williams, "Instant Democracy," 228.

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