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**INTERNET MEMES AND THEIR
SIGNIFICANCE FOR MYTH STUDIES**

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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INTERNETOVÉ MEMY A JEJICH VÝZNAM PRO VÝZKUM MYTOLOGIÍ

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation posits that the heart of myth rests with the novelizing and complexifying ritual of post-totemic sacrifice. As it makes an example of its delivery through poetry it tries to show the changing nature of poetry and art through history towards a designated act of whichever content. Transhumanism is seen as a tendency and so the dissertation imagines a poet whose practical exercise in the workings of typewriter produced concrete poetry are then tied to the coded ASCII table, emoticons and polychromatic glyphs which are subject to default visual modifications by manufacturers of technology. The dissertation then offers a view at memetic information transmission which is worked into a model that draws on Jacques Derrida's *différance*. From a construction of a tree of hypothetical changes in the evolution of a state of culture of the primitive Waorani tribe, the dissertation moves to a logical exercise about hypernyms and hyponyms. The dissertation then points out examples of different discharges between complexifying layers of semiotic systems, and together with an analysis of the myth of centaur it offers a schematic model which should aid their diachronic memetic analysis. This is followed by a long-term comparative statistical study of 3,351 western and

Chinese web comics—rage comics and 暴走漫画[:baozou manhua:] respectively—in order to draw attention to the workings of myth. The resulting interpretation is then compared with conclusions reached by some of the more notable mythologists.

ANOTACE

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ABSTRAKT

Tato dizertační práce tvrdí, že základ mýtu spočívá v novelizujícím se a komplexifikujícím se rituálu post-totemistické oběti. Její příklad spatřuje v poezii a snaží se ukázat, jak chápání poezie a umění směřovalo historií až k definovanému aktu snad jakéhokoli obsahu. S ohledem na výhledy transhumanismu prochází práce s myšleným básníkem od cvičení v konkrétní poezii za psacím strojem ke kódované ASCII tabulce, emotikonám a polychromatickým glyfům, které při zobrazování podléhají kódovým úpravám výrobců technologií. Práce dále představuje pohled na memetický přenos informace, což je zapracováno do modelu, který čerpá z *différance* Jacquesa Derridy. Od konstrukce stromu hypotetických změn ve vývoji stavu kultury primitivního kmene Waoraniů se práce přesouvá k logickému cvičení o hypernymech a hyponymech. Práce dále uvádí příklady vazbení mezi komplexifikujícími se vrstvami různých sémiotických systému a spolu s analýzou mýtu kentaura nabízí schematický model, který by měl pomoci při jejich diachronní memetické analýze. Následuje dlouhodobá statistická srovnávací studie 3351 západních a čínských webových komiksů – rage comics a

暴走漫画[:baozou manhua:], která má pomoci poukázat na fungování mýtu. Konečná interpretace je pak srovnána se závěry, kterých se dobrali povolání mytologové.

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto dizertační práci vypracoval samostatně a uvedl v ní veškerou literaturu a ostatní zdroje, které jsem použil.

V Olomouci, dne.....

.....

Pavel Gončarov

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INTRODUCTION

The title of this dissertation begs for the definition of a meme, of an internet meme, of myth, and of its studies. Let me start with a working definition of a meme. The term denotes a unit that transfers cultural information. It was coined by Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene* (1976), where he wrote that

we need a name for the new replicator, a noun which conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation. ‘Mimeme’ comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like ‘gene.’ I hope my classicist friends will forgive me if I abbreviate mimeme to meme... It should be pronounced to rhyme with ‘cream.’ Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches.¹

Memes can be read retrospectively on any layer of communication enacted by semiotic systems, but they should not be confused with linguistic signs. As an example, if a person learned by observation from another person how to cook a meal and flavor it with cane sugar, lemon juice, and chili, we can say that a meme was transferred between them. If he told the recipe to anyone else in his mother tongue, or if he wrote the recipe down in a foreign language, or if he drew it as a sequence, he would do it through sequencing signs on various layers of various semiotic systems—linguistic signs which constitute these systems would change notably in their signifiers but not much in their signifieds if the recipe was translated, let us say, from English to Chinese at a night-market in New York’s China town. If the cook ran short on his supplies and had to change his recipe, he could either use glucose syrup, citric acid, and pure capsaicin, or he could use stevia, vinegar and black pepper to make his meal taste sweet, sour and spicy. In the first option, the meme that would be transferred to the new recipe could be read, on the level of changing signs, in the chemical descriptions of both the new and the original ingredients, but this meme would not transfer the information about using natural products. Such information would be transferred if the cook decided for his second option, that is to use stevia, vinegar and black pepper, but the chemical ties between the ingredients would be lost. In this second case, the connection between the old and the new signs, which help us identify the meme, would rely on abstract categories of taste which our minds make as we learn through our senses.

¹ Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (1976; New York, Oxford University Press, 2006), 192.

Another term which needs a definition to spare the reader any misunderstanding is the term trope. Merriam-Webster online dictionary provides a simple definition of trope as “a word, phrase, or image used in a new and different way in order to create an artistic effect,” but it also gives a full definition of trope which consists of two parts.² The first part defines trope as “a word or expression used in a figurative sense” and following a colon it hyperlinks the reader to a “figure of speech.” The second part defines trope as “a common or overused theme or device” and after a colon it hyperlinks the reader to “cliché.” This hyperlink is followed by an italicized and bracketed example “the usual horror movie tropes.” Since the relationship between the hyperlink and its relative part of the definition is explicated as a colon, it is impossible to extrapolate whether “a word or expression used in a figurative sense” encompasses the meaning of, or is close in its meaning to, or equals the meaning of, or somehow else relates to “figure of speech,” which the dictionary defines as “a form of expression (as a simile or metaphor) used to convey meaning or heighten effect often by comparing or identifying one thing with another that has a meaning or connotation familiar to the reader or listener.”³ What can be said is that the dictionary suggests to us that we relate both terms together. It should be pointed out, though, that the meaning of cliché is by one step in discursive logic far from the simple definition of trope—the distance lies in that a cliché might be, for example, a figure of speech, or a word, or image, which was used in a new and different way in order to create an artistic effect, but this usage has been understood by another person as not being new and different but still creating an artistic effect. The Oxford dictionary avoids this rigmarole when it defines a trope as “a figurative or metaphorical use of a word or expression” but also as “a significant or recurrent theme; a motif.”⁴ The website tvtropes.org, which is the biggest online archiver of tropes found in television and other media, states in its elaborate definition that “above all, a trope is a convention.” The definition continues that “it can be a plot trick, a setup, a narrative structure, a character type, a linguistic idiom” and that “tropes are not inherently disruptive to a story; however, when the trope itself becomes intrusive, distracting the viewer rather than serving as shorthand, it has become a cliché.” About Merriam-Webster’s usage of cliché for the definition of trope it states that

²*Merriam Webster OnLine*, s.v. “trope,” accessed August 29, 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trope>.

³*Merriam Webster OnLine*, s.vv. “figure of speech,” accessed August 29, 2016, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/figure%2Bof%2Bspeech>.

⁴*Oxford Dictionaries*, s.v. “trope,” accessed August 29, 2016, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/trope>.

this seems “unjustly condemning.”⁵ Throughout this work, the term trope will be used in the sense of a recognizable, fairly complex pattern which is rather common, regardless of its intended or perceived artistic effect. Therefore, all tropes are memes but not all memes are tropes, because memes can transfer information unconventionally for the first time.

Internet memes are memes which propagate on the Internet. In the broadest sense, this definition concerns everything that is coded—as text, image, or audio—and that is shared online, but the term most often coincides with what is sometimes labeled as popular internet memes. Popular internet memes are simply more popular than others—therefore, they are by definition a subgroup of all internet memes. What is unintuitive about the definition of popular internet memes is that this category does not include letters, punctuation marks and other simple signs of semiotic systems which are used in Internet communication. Such simple signs only give rise to more complex artefacts which, if they become popular enough, are called popular internet memes. Sometimes, a new artefact may resemble an already popular internet meme in how it is constructed or used—this happens often on discussion forums where participants try to come up with new artefacts which they would like to see spread around the Internet. Even if such artefacts never rise in popularity and are soon forgotten, they have a lot in common with the already popular internet memes because the meme to model new artefacts with certain criteria in mind was transferred from the already popular internet memes into the new ones. Popular internet memes constitute a system of signs which evolves in time. Sometimes, they also leak out of the Internet.

Let me open my working definition of myth by a quote from a Princeton University Press blurb which introduces Robert A Segal’s book *Jung on Mythology* (1998). It says that “at least three major questions can be asked of myth: what is its subject matter? what is its origin? and what is its function? Theories of myth may differ on the answers they give to any of these questions, but more basically they may also differ on which of the questions they ask.”⁶ My dissertation asks all three questions and for the first one it offers the following answer: the subject matter of myth is the physical world. The physical world falls prey to myth as it is grasped by language in the mind of any categorizing individual. The origin of myth is seen in the necessity of having semiotic systems through which we understand the physical world and through which we share our messages. Such systems make some signs closer to one another in the discursive space. The signs may be close to one another on the

⁵*TV Tropes*, s.v. “trope,” last modified January 5, 2016, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/Trope>.

⁶ “Jung on Mythology Selected and introduced by Robert A. Segal,” last modified August 5, 2016, Princeton University Press, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://press.princeton.edu/titles/6268.html>.

superficial level of the signifier (in rhymes, in matching colors, in harmonies) or on the level of the signified (in conceptual hierarchies, analogies, or metaphors). The function of myth is that it helps the system of signs evolve because it is a systemic discharge which connects linguistic signs which move close to one another. Myth, as it will be argued, is an emergent unruly systemic lubricant which happens to be almost undiscernably thematized.

In the study of myth, we cannot study the categorizing mind itself—we can only study the data that we obtain when such a mind indulges in a performance. Our study can be done on the level of signs but as it will be shown, when it is done on the level of memes, our interpretations can touch on the limits of logic and probability because we can tie together the roles of multiple layers of multiple systems of signs and their evolving contexts. As it will be argued, it is only at certain times that the production technique draws our attention to the ostentatious workings of myth in the system of expression. At all other times we must rely on long-term statistical analyses of memes from extensive data sets.

I will argue that the importance of internet memes for myth studies lies in the possibility of retaining a lot of tagged data the analyses of which can be program-aided. We can tag our data pools with additional metalanguage and then try to read various wave functions on the narratives and be sure that they are not fraud or dictated by anyone, that they are not directed to take sides or to be tendentious—the only imperative behind them might be that a person just feels the urge to express him— or herself. What makes internet memes special is that these artefacts of contemporary digital folklore are produced in quantities largely surpassing most artefacts of entertainment that have been available to our scrutiny. They also quickly reflect changes in technologies which help their users in production.

In order to discuss the present topic in more detail, the dissertation will find its examples in various areas of communication among multiple cultures. Enough space will be devoted to the struggles of poetry on and out of a printed page, and the text will also focus on the programmed nature of emoticons and some effects of their use. The reader will also track memes in a game of telephone (Chinese whispers), and a purely logical argument will be made in order to prove that operable human languages desire hyperonyms and hyponyms in order to avoid negative definitions and an almost infinite word stock. Another example will be made of an analysis of a cultural belief which is shared by a primitive nomadic tribe of Ecuadorian hunters and gatherers—this should help us understand the limits of logic and probability which delineate our interpretation when we memetically interpret a changing sign. A new schematic model of a changing sign in a changing cultural context will then be developed to tie together the level of the signifier and signified of the word “centaur” as

defined by the diegesis of its classical story. Thus, a theoretical background for the study of internet memes should be secured and the dissertation shall proceed to its extensive comparative study of 1,953 web comics written in English and of 1,398 Chinese ones. This study is the first of its kind using such large data sets in comparison; and also the first one that compares artefacts from the same genre but different languages. This long-term study is aided by statistical tools which prove helpful in our interpretation of changes in the frequency of motifs that appear in the comics. This is because the limits of probability which, together with the limits of logic, constitute our interpretive space, narrow with such statistics and their results point at interpretations which would without them be purely speculative and unprovable.

PART 1: HUNTERS AND GATHERERS CODING VISIONS

What Is Human?

Tearing the Reigns of Language with Poetry—But What Is Poetry?

What is the Tendency? The Tendency is Transhumanism.

The first section discusses the human condition and posits the ritual of post-totemic sacrifice at the heart of myth. The second section makes an example of poetry as a well-discussed concept and shows its changing nature through history towards a designated act of whichever content. The third section describes what has been the tendency of the human condition and argues for transhumanism.

WHAT IS HUMAN?

My views on evolution of the human mind side with Terence McKenna who was an American ethnobotanist, lecturer and author, and who proposed a theory which is structured around a change in the diet of prehistoric chimpanzees. According to McKenna, as the global climate grew warmer after an ice age, trees in central Africa receded and gave way to plains. On their search for food, these omnivores were forced to cross the plains and hide in nearby trees where they would be safe from predators. This pressure of the environment on the evolution of species brought with it the spread of cattle that inhabited the plains. Cattle dung is a perfect substrate for mushrooms which contain psilocybin. When this psychoactive compound is consumed in small doses it positively affects visual acuity (brighter colors, sharper outlines)⁷. Thus, those who incorporated it in their diet were more successful in gathering food. Chimpanzees, like other primates, live in groups dominated by the strongest male. In psychological terms, psilocybin dissolves ego, and it also causes erection in males. McKenna correlates anthropologic evidence of the rapid growth of the brain cavity in this epoch—it is mainly frontal lobes that are associated with the language center of the mind—with the prehistoric era in which the diet of the chimpanzee might have changed.⁸ He supposes that prehistoric experience of the early mankind was a hallucinatory orgy during which males and

⁷ See Salomé Ballesteros et al., “Natural Sources of Drugs of Abuse: Magic Mushrooms,” in *New Research on Street Drugs*, ed. Spencer M. Cole (New York: Nova Science, 2006), 175.

⁸ For graphs and time scales which tie the changes in brain size to climate change see “Bigger Brains: Complex Brains for a Complex World,” last modified August 29, 2016, Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://humanorigins.si.edu/human-characteristics/brains>.

females copulated spontaneously in an indiscriminate manner, and only females were sure about their parenthood. As McKenna puts it “the boundary-dissolving qualities of shamanic ecstasy predispose hallucinogen-using tribal groups to community bonding and to group sexual activities, which promote gene mixing, higher birth rates, and a communal sense of responsibility for the group offspring.”⁹

When the climate grew colder again it became much harder to find the mushrooms and the unrestrained sense of community started to withdraw with it. The mushroom was scarce and its use was ritualized. After having celebrated the full moon or the coming of rain, the sober early man would find out that the woman who he had sexual intercourse with during the raving night became pregnant so he must be the father and thus the ego found its way back into the now mutated brain.¹⁰ Chimpanzees devote nine per cent of their bodily energy to sustaining their brain functions¹¹ while humans allocate around twenty per cent.¹² Carl Sagan , an American astronomer and writer gives evidence obtained in experiments which show that chimpanzees are capable of abstraction.¹³ This means that their minds are a suitable substrate for memes which can be modeled on sensory inputs as well as on abstracted rules—morphological and syntactic. It is reasonable to suppose that the increased verbal capacity, which—according to Douglas R. Hofstadter¹⁴—through recursive loops and analogies gives rise to the concept of self, has a direct link to the psychedelic experience mediated by the intake of psychedelic mushroom. There is voluminous evidence from tribes and cultures in all inhabited continents about the use, sacredness or deification of the mushroom and cattle found in cave drawings, statues and other cultural artefacts. As humans spread around the world and the mushrooms were scarce, they would preserve them in honey. Sometimes the honey would ferment and thus many tribes may have developed an alcohol culture instead. I agree with McKenna that such change in diet might have been the key factor which changed an animal with a promising but restricted language capacity into what has become known as the *Homo*

⁹ Terence McKenna, *Food of the Gods: The Search for the Original Tree of Knowledge: a Radical History of Plants, Drugs, and Human Evolution* (1992; Bantam Books, 1993), 26.

¹⁰ See “Terence McKenna—the Tree of Knowledge—[COMPLETE 10 HOUR TALK],” YouTube video, 24:00-28:23, posted by “McKennaCountrCulture,” May 1, 2013, accessed August 29, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzmeBkrBcOU&ab_channel=MckennaCountrCulture.

¹¹ See Juan Luis Arsuaga, *The Neanderthal’s Necklace In Search of the First Thinkers*, trans. Andy Klatt (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2002), 39.

¹² Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 71.

¹³ See Carl Sagan, “The Abstraction of Beasts,” in *The Norton Reader*, ed. Arthur M. Eastman et al. (New York: Norton, 1987), 181–88.

¹⁴ Douglas R. Hofstadter won the Pulitzer Prize for non-fiction for his treatment of this thesis, see *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

Sapiens and that the felt absence of the hypersensual common prehistoric past has been the source of longing for it to come back. This longing, this feeling of having been left in this world, has been giving momentum to the evolution of culture.

Culture has progressed from animism through totemism and spiritism to polytheism, monotheism, deism, transcendentalism, pantheism, agnosticism and atheism until it has reached today's phase which is dominated by discursively calculative analysis with inclination to favoring mathematical logic. For global culture to originate it was necessary that separate cultures meet and confront one another. They confront everything from their beliefs to economic systems to sports but the first level of confrontation is always to simply establish communication. In self-sufficient tribes of hunters and gatherers such communication is about where the game has gone. When it comes to trading it might be one unit for one or more units of goods, tools or people, but in more advanced cultures even for currency. I argue that the trading (as opposed to exchange) of information as a cultural phenomenon has appeared the latest, that is, after the exchange of information, after the exchange of goods and other things, after trade with any part of the physical world. When hunters and gatherers need to communicate to survive they exchange information and not trade it. Imagine that there are two hungry primitive individuals who have not yet accumulated riches through trade, war or hoarding, and only need to find food and water; they exchange information about where to get it because what else might one trade this knowledge for when nobody can pay with anything? This is a very simple situation. I hold that the trading of information must have appeared with ritual—the ritual of sacrifice.

If veneration precedes sacrifice then it is equally true that veneration costs a human nothing except his time for thought, but sacrifice in this earliest stage of cultural evolution needs an object.¹⁵ Totemic veneration of spirit is acted out by establishing a link between a person or a tribe on one side and an animal or a part of the inanimate constituents of nature on the other. But this practice does not bring about a loss other than the loss of possibility of linking the human to another object. This loss happens only at the level of mental concepts—one against many unperformed possibilities. When a person is totemically linked to a wolf and not a bear, the person is just not as much involved with the bear as he is with the wolf. The bear is seen as a bear but nothing more; it is void of a dense part of the sacred narrative

¹⁵ As it will be shown from now on, in the utmost sense of ideology and rhetoric the object is the “labor” of anyone consenting to the proposition “I’ll tell you where there is water if you bring me some.” Here we see the core of myth—the belief in any information and acting upon it.

because there is no conceptual engagement between it and the human. There is only the concept of the absence of engagement. Not much complexity is thus achieved.

Native American, Buddhist, Christian, and other mythologies are at their core non-materialist doctrines, which strive to preserve the soul, the intangible essence, the part of the divine that they perceive in each of us, and leave behind:

—the body—the decaying but complexifying *physical*

—the language—the onomatopoeic, metaphorical or otherwise arbitrary less or more motivated, redefining and based on *différance* but complexifying *mental*

—the performance—the first incoherent, then contextual, then linear, then non-linear narrative *actual* which is constituted from the physical through the mental

The physical, the mental and the performative are in religious doctrines to be abandoned in death. Ideologies sacrifice the ego in sake of something bigger. In Buddhism, the soul leaves the Saṃsāra for Nirvana, the soul goes to the underworld, to the ancestors, to heaven, to what McKenna calls “the transcendental object at the end of time”¹⁶ and they become as one.¹⁷

If a tribe of hunters and gatherers finds surplus to offer as a sacrifice, then there arises a designated category for the objects that will find no direct human use as far as its tangible qualities are concerned. During a sacrifice, gratitude might be expressed but with it there

¹⁶ For a commented interview with McKenna see Mark Dery, “Struck by Noetic Lightning: Terence McKenna Meets the Machine Elves of Hyperspace,” in Roy Christopher, ed., *Follow for Now: Interviews with Friends and Heroes* (Seattle: Well-Red Bear, 2006), 39–65.

¹⁷ I am well aware that a thorough discussion of the topic would ask for precise terminology and numerous definitions, but that is out of the scope of my work. I am only aiming for a very brief expression of what can be seen as an obvious trend throughout cultures. I attach in the footnote an excerpt from an anthology of translations of the native literatures of North America, which is concerned with the usage of the word soul in a translation of traditional Yupik stories about the dead who came visit the living. I hope that the reader will kindly understand that by quoting the passage I am trying to extrapolate it in analogy to my attempt, which is to make a generalizing summary and not delve any deeper into the subject. “Like many other Yupik concepts, ideas about the dead are non-definitive and open-ended, consisting of multiple terms and descriptions that follow from each person’s traditional knowledge and personal experience of things spiritual. The Western preoccupation with fixed nominal categories seems empirically inadequate when set against the Yupik acceptance of indeterminacy in the world. As a result, we find it both impossible and inappropriate to impose a single translation, such as ‘soul,’ on the variety of terms that refer to sensible aspects of personhood: image, breath, warmth, personality, and sound. When asked, Yupiit simply tend to confirm that a variety of terms are used by different people. In these stories those dwelling in the afterworld are called the dead, or they are designated by one of the terms for spirit(s). The dead traveled via a pathway, sometimes said to be beneath the earth “somewhere” in the Yukon-Kuskokwim delta, the Yupik homeland. They left the other world temporarily to attend ceremonies given by the living, where they received sustenance from their kin.” Phyllis Morrow, “Two Tellings of the Story of Uterneq: The Woman Who Returned from the Dead,” in Brian Swann, ed., *Coming To Light: Contemporary Translations of the Native Literatures of North America* (1995; New York: Vintage, 1996), 39.

usually arises the belief that the practice will bring about a positive future effect or at least help avoid a negative one. It is akin to setting up a trap for animals, only that what is caught is rain, good kill, fat harvest, favoritism with gods or the avoidance of their wrath. The more advanced the culture, the more complex the ritual of sacrifice:

- a) its increasing complexity always concerns the object—first a whole animal but later a designated part of it must be sacrificed—the heart, the head, the lard, etc. The sacrificed object is seen as divisible. On the other hand, it is also seen as a part of its environment, as an actor in the happenings of the world, a smaller part to a bigger system. An animal can live its own life but it can also help achieve the goals of humans. Humanity has always been anthropocentric.¹⁸ It is religion just as it is ideology when humans start to see themselves as actors progressing towards the completion of the goals connected with a higher purpose, a cause, a universal underlying principle, a rule, a thought.

- b) the complexity of the ritual of sacrifice also concerns the relation of the human to the complexifying sacrificed object. It is not enough to sacrifice a dove—its wings must be torn in a special way.¹⁹ The ritual must be performed on the seventh day, on vernal equinox, on Christmas day. The narrative, the acting out of an intention grows more intricate, more articulate, formulas must be said, special preparations must take place. This is the locution that is believed to bring the utmost effect which is the linkage through an object to the unknown and mythified. The myth is the narrative, the act. It is a designated act that is performed and its narration gets more and more complex.

Later cultures, as it can be seen, for example, in the practices of Judaism, cease to sacrifice individual objects. It is that first the objective part of a sacrifice is seen as singular—a whole animal, then seen as consisting of parts, then the minuteness of the parts makes it impossible to further search for even smaller constituents because of the state of technological advancement, so the cultures at a point stop to sacrifice the object in its physical sense, and

¹⁸ In the film *Wittgenstein* the philosopher asks his student: “Why does it seem more natural for people to believe that the Sun goes round the Earth, rather than the other way round?” “Well,” answers a student, “obviously because it looks that way.” “I see,” says Wittgenstein, “and how would it look if the Earth went around the Sun?” “Wittgenstein (1993) PELICULA COMPLETA subtítulos español,” YouTube video, 44:00–44:16, from a film by Channel Four Television and The British Film Institute, 1993, posted by “Cain hernandez,” January 20, 2013, accessed August 29, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIu70Jo38eo&ab_channel=Cainhernandez.

¹⁹ Leviticus 1:17.

only designate it to their deity. This designation happens in their minds, which is reflected and actualized in the performative. The designation is simply that humans stop intervening with the object as with an individual unit composed of parts but they employ it as a brick in the construction of bigger physical systems that are offered in reverence. This is how cultures have proceeded from monoliths, to henges, to churches, to monasteries, to Vatican or Iran; from a human with a cut out-heart, to a Catholic virgin maiden sacrificing her sexual youth so that God would not condemn her, to a Chinese virgin telling her boyfriend off until he promises to buy her a flat, to a nun; from fruits, to sacred trees, to sacred groves, to national parks; from sacrificing animals, to sacrificing the idea of a physical sacrifice, to the idea of designating the whole species as untouchable or protected and thus letting them be directly unused by humans but useful for the common goal of biodiversity. The practice of sacrifice is on-going in its meaning, in its sense. It is happening in sake of cults, religions or ideologies, but as history progresses the performance/act/narrative spans larger fields of time-space and longer periods of human lives, mythical concepts which relate humans to objects occupy more of their thought. People sculpt monasteries into the faces of rocks, they practice for months for communist Spartakiads or devote decades to earn academic titles or to make careers. What always adds momentum to all the sacrifice and the construction of a larger myth that becomes more complex in its relation to the objective is newness, the criterion of the new.

The new can be either physical/objective (the discovery of an unknown plant, a particle, a continent) or it can be purely informational (a new phoneme, a new word, a new metaphor, a new story, it can be a new way of looking at things, seeing new patterns, finding the rule for permutations that help us sort out the same set and get different results). We must keep in mind, though, that in order to perceive the objective as new, we must have mental concepts to grasp the objective with. These concepts are directly linked to our sensory organs.

There has been research done by Anna Franklin from University of Surrey on the Namibian Himba tribe which reports that even the perception of color might be based on language. Members of the tribe do not distinguish between blue and green in their language. When showed a bluish square among green squares on white background and asked to point out one square that is different, the tribesmen take much longer to give their answer when compared to Brits.²⁰

²⁰ See "Color Is in the Eye of the Beholder," online video, 7:56, from a BBC Two Horizon episode "Do you see what I see," 2011, posted by "BoreMe," accessed August 29, 2016, <http://www.boreme.com/posting.php?id=30670>. The research has found its opponent in Russell G. Schuh from UCLA Department of Linguistics who argues that the design of the experiment might have been flawed but he admits that his critique relies on pure speculation. See Russel G. Schuh,

As Marshal McLuhan, most influential Canadian communications theorist of 1960s and 1970s, persistently argued, we extend ourselves through media. They are something that comes in between the objective (being objective as opposed to informational) and our sensory organs. Such extensions are more and more complex and help achieve a higher degree of complexity just as they are new and help us perceive newness. All new media build on previous states of technological advancement (the performative/actual/narrative) which has been achieved by applying knowledge to the physical world—the knowledge of physical, chemical, biological, and informational laws. Culture that arises with it and in it is arbitrary, changeable, mythical—it is the applied design, the wanting of gold as currency and not shells, paying with a swipe-card rather than with payWave, sending an SMS rather than writing a letter. This is voicing what McLuhan means by his “medium is the message” when he opens the first chapter of his *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964) with:

In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium—that is, of any extension of ourselves—result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology[.]

which he further explains by following shortly that:

The instance of the electric light may prove illuminating in this connection. The electric light is pure information. It is a medium without a message, as it were, unless it is used to spell out some verbal ad or name. This fact, characteristic of all media, means that the "content" of any medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word

“Critique of Color Vocabulary and Color Perception: Effects of acquisition of color terminology and perception: Color perception of the Himba of Namibia,” UCLA Department of Linguistics, last modified 2015, accessed August 29, 2016, http://www.linguistics.ucla.edu/people/schuh/lx001/Discussion/d01_Himba_color_perception_critique.pdf.

Optical illusions are a classical example of the linking of concepts to our sensory organs. A study by Peter Kok and Floris P. de Lange maps brain activity when confronted with optical illusions and holds that the results fit in “with the theory that perception is a question of interpretation.” “Brain Fills Gaps to Produce a Likely Picture,” last modified June 27, 2014, Science Daily, accessed August 29, 2016, www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/06/140627094551.htm. See also Peter Kok and Floris P. de Lange, “Shape Perception Simultaneously Up- and Downregulates Neural Activity in the Primary Visual Cortex,” *Current Biology* 24, no. 13 (2014): 1531–35, doi: 10.1016/j.cub.2014.05.042. See also Nola Klemfuss, William Prinzmetal and Richard B. Ivry, “How Does Language Change Perception,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 3, (2012): 1–6, accessed August 29, 2016, doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00078.

is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph. If it is asked, "What is the content of speech?," it is necessary to say, "It is an actual process of thought, which is in itself nonverbal." An abstract painting represents direct manifestation of creative thought processes as they might appear in computer designs. What we are considering here, however, are the psychic and social consequences of the designs or patterns as they amplify or accelerate existing processes. For the "message" of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs.²¹

Humans need to drink water but be it served in plastic cups or glasses of this or that shape is arbitrary. Whether they drink more beer or white wine is arbitrary. Whether they drink tap water or go to the stream is arbitrary because culture is the interplay of humans with their environment. It is the performative, the narrative.

We are totemistic whenever we give one link to the objective a preference over another—we, for example, make a conscious word choice, we speak standard English, we say no swearwords, or we do not take God's name in vain. We say our prayers, we read the news, or we do not think about bears so much. Blackmore has made it known that in order to be copied, one meme, a unit transmitting cultural information, simply competes with another meme while in this fight they find allies to support one another and construct memeplexes—mythologies/languages/ideologies:

The ways we behave, the choices we make, and the things we say are all a result of this complex structure: a set of memeplexes (including the powerful selfplex) running on a biologically constructed system. The driving force behind everything that happens is replicator power. Genes fight it out to get into the next generation, and in the process biological design comes about. Memes fight it out to get passed on into another brain or book or object, and in the process cultural and mental design comes about. There is no need for any other source of design power. There is no need to call on the creative 'power of consciousness', for consciousness has no power. There is no need to invent the idea of free will. Free will, like the self who 'has' it, is an illusion. Terrifying as this thought seems, I suggest it is true.²²

To me, Blackmore's idea of the absence of a free will seems too far-fetched. In my opinion we "have" will which has agency, but its freedom is conditioned and thus a bit

²¹ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964; Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2003), 19–20.

²² Blackmore, *Meme Machine*, 236.

restricted by the systemity of the memes on which the will it is enacted. It seems that among the memeplexes that help reveal the arbitrariness and incompleteness of other memeplexes are Derrida's method of deconstruction, Gödel's incompleteness theorem, Barthes's views on myth overarching all human culture, Wittgenstein's treatment of the knowability of things, the advent of chaos theory, quantum mechanics, fractal mathematics, Einstein's theory of relativity, and even Hawking's absence of a big bang on which Penrose builds his idea of time cycles. All these articulate narratives teach us about the unknowability of a complete object and complete interpretation—the complete truth. They teach us about unpredictability beyond a certain mark at certain levels of the objective or mental complexes/systems. They reveal that whatever the human senses notice is a distorted and incomplete individual occurrence of a phenomenon which might cease to exist²³ just as they tell us that new phenomena might suddenly appear even if previously unthinkable.²⁴ Whatever is gathered from any distorted/distorting perception is stored in a human brain or a medium as a meme which may partake on the construction of a memeplex or be fought off. A meme, a language, a cultural artefact, could be, in fact, a different meme, a different language, a different artefact but that it has come out this and not another way is just because of the interplay of the human and his environment. At some energetic/informational levels of complex systems there is determinism and predictability of an outcome (Newtonian mechanics), at some there is not (the Heisenberg principle). As Hofstadter has shown, all systems are interpreted as systems only through an interpreter, which distorts the interpreted while being part of a larger system which both systems are a part of within the universe.

TEARING THE REIGNS OF LANGUAGE WITH POETRY—BUT WHAT IS POETRY?

I will not deconstruct this question like Jacques Derrida²⁵ but I will start with an answer and then try to show how culture has reached what this general consensus.

²³ William Mullen theorizes about the vanishing of plasma objects from the night sky and supports his argument by cellular automata. See “BILL MULLEN: Visual Intuition and the Ancient Sky | EU 2013,” YouTube video, 33:50, from a paper presented at Electric Universe Conference 2013, posted by “ThunderboltsProject,” March 22, 2013, accessed August 29, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQkGVRRoDt4>.

²⁴ For rigorous treatment of theory of emergence—a theory about self-organization of layers of complex systems into new patterns—see Miroslav Veverka, *Evoluce svým vlastním tvůrcem: Od velkého třesku ke globální civilizaci* [Evolution its own Creator: From Big Bang to Global Civilization] (Praha: Prostor, 2013).

²⁵ See Jacques Derrida, “Che cos'è la poesia?,” trans. Peggy Kamuf, in Jon Cook, ed., *Poetry in Theory: An Anthology, 1900–2000* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 534–37.

Poetry is anything that has been designated as such. It is the delivery of the sacrificed while the poetic is what is intended through the performed sacrifice—the purpose of our prayer, the connection to the divine, to the felt lurking unknown that is not conceivable in its completeness.

Veneration is just rejoicing or existing in god-abiding fear—whatever we subscribe to in our minds full of ideology. Only when we exchange information, when we speak our minds, when we sacrifice our words or objects or actions in our actions, only then we make art, which poetry has been considered a part of. What poetry does is that it tries to connect us to the poetic. Be it good poetry or bad poetry, high art or low art—that only depends on a set of one’s evaluation criteria.

The English word “poetry” originates from ancient Greek ποίησις which can be transcribed as poiesis and which means “to make”. The word for poetry in PuTongHua, the Common Talk understood by most Chinese, is pronounced [ːshīː] and written 詩 in Traditional Chinese and 诗 in Simplified Chinese. The character consists of the following parts:

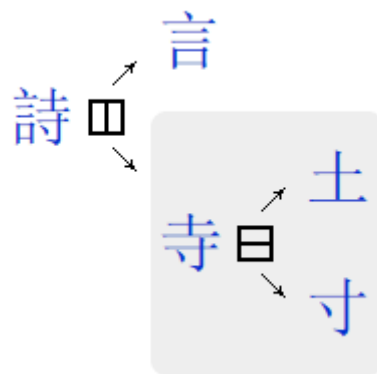


Figure 1. Schematic structure of 诗.²⁶

We can see that 詩 can be decomposed to 言 [ːyánː] and 寺 [ːsìː]. 言 is a primitive pictograph composed of an upside down man 亠 and a mouth 口. The metaphor which connects the two characters gives rise to the meaning of “a man talking to you. Meaning word. 亠.”²⁷ The

²⁶ *MDBG*, s.v. “诗,” accessed August 29, 2016,

<https://www.mdbg.net/chindict/chindict.php?page=worddict&wdrst=0&wdqb=%E8%AF%97>.

²⁷ Richard Sears, *Chinese Etymology*, s.v. “言,” accessed August 29, 2016,

<http://www.chineseetymology.org/CharacterEtymology.aspx?submitButton1=Etymology&characterInput=%E8%A8%80>.

character 寺 is a compound pictograph which conjoins foot 止[:zhǐ:]—which transformed into 土[:tǔ:] a provides the conjoining metaphor in 寺 with the meaning of motion—and a primitive pictograph hand, or inch 寸[:cùn:]. Original meaning of 寺 was “to measure the motion of the sun and moon. Today meaning temple.”²⁸ 土[:tǔ:] is also a primitive pictograph in which “Earth, dirt and land is represented by the clay on a potter’s wheel. Abstract meaning earth.”²⁹ So it is “speech” and “temple” that make up 詩 at the metaphoric level. A poem, though, is 诗歌 [:shīgē:] where 歌 stands for “song, lyrics, sing, chant, praise” and is itself semiotically also very rich.



Figure 2. Clay on a potter’s wheel.³⁰

²⁸ Richard Sears, *Chinese Etymology*, s.v. “寺,” accessed August 29, 2016, <http://www.chineseetymology.org/CharacterEtymology.aspx?submitButton1=Etymology&characterInput=%E5%AF%BA>.

²⁹ Richard Sears, *Chinese Etymology*, s.v. “土,” accessed August 29, 2016, <http://www.chineseetymology.org/CharacterEtymology.aspx?submitButton1=Etymology&characterInput=%E5%9C%9F>

³⁰ Richard Sears, *Chinese Etymology*, s.v. “土.”

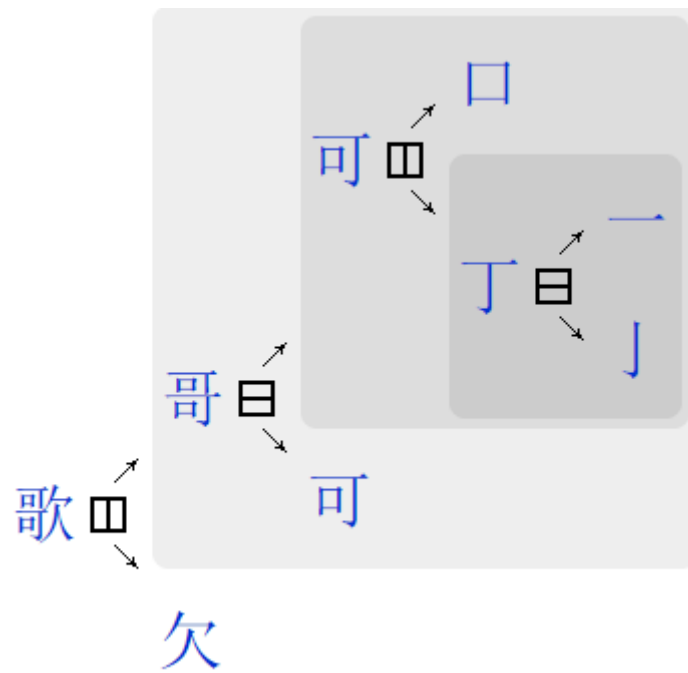


Figure 3. Schematic structure of 歌.³¹

To illustrate that the narrative actual is the overarching myth, I use an example from Chinese. Take the following three characters 好, 安 and 家, which mean *good*, *calm* and *home*. *Good* is composed of a woman and a child, *calm* is a woman under a roof and *home* is a pig under a roof. All three characters consist of two pictographic renderings of physical objects that are placed into one text field to be interpreted through a metaphor. It is completely arbitrary whether one expresses the concept of *calm* as a woman under a roof or as a woman and a child. *Home*, instead of a pig under a roof could be represented by a woman and a child, which now means *good*.

We see that even pictograms build on arbitrary metaphors to describe the world in language. The metaphor is constructed from pictographic representations of objects. Now imagine that we see the metaphor not in graphic representations but in the physical objects, that is, we look at a woman with a child and we do not think *good* but we think *calm*, and so we would construct our written Chinese character accordingly. We see a woman under a roof and do not think *calm* but *home*. That we see a pig under a roof and do not think *home* but *good*. Any object can be symbolic of anything and any syntax between two objects is arbitrary. It is only through repeated, common and standardized use that we agree upon understanding the physical in a certain way. The understanding is the language in our minds. Actions that we

³¹ *MDBG*, s.v. “歌,” accessed August 29, 2016, <https://www.mdbg.net/chindict/chindict.php?page=worddict&wdrst=0&wdqb=%E6%AD%8C>.

take manipulate objects through the language and that is the mythical narrative, the performative. Whether we burn offerings to a god to bring us rain or whether we shoot silver iodide up the sky during the Beijing Olympics to secure us a clear sky is because we have described the physical world differently and act accordingly.

By classical conditioning we can teach dogs to eat from the yellow bowl and not from the red one so that they get to associate the color of the bowl with food. Our minds are not much advanced because how we build up our language is how we think about what we perceive. A tribe of primitive men might associate the quality of color with another physical quality, let us say with weight. Everything that is green around them, leaves, moss and grass, is light. Or, everything that is green is living. As I write this, I use two concepts that I conjoin, color and weight or color and life, but I aim to show that primitive men did not conjoin two explicit categories when they saw anything green. When they thought about anything that is green the thought in itself held the knowing of it being lush, not weighing much and being alive. These two or three categories could not be separated. It must have been through having found a green stone that the original concept of green that was loaded with weight and life was narrowed. Our language always falls prey to complexity and restructures itself as we integrate new thought and revise the apparatus that let us conceive the new thought in the first place. These recursive loops, together with analogy, are at the basis of our thought.

The dream of language is to bespeak reality, to be as capable of creation as the word of the Judeo-Christian god, to be one with him because it would establish such a dense connection, which is what mysticism or kabala are certainly about. But the only thing that the most powerful words have been able to perform is to inflict social change, have a dramatic influence on the mind that takes a dramatic action. This is, for example, declaring war, pronouncing one husband and wife, being appointed to an office, pleading guilty, or being sanctified. It is only the relation of the mental/informational to the physical/objective that changes when a powerful word is pronounced/performed. We do not add any physical mass to the universe, we can only restructure the already existing. And as we do, we make the physical and the mental more complex. And to add to a possibly higher complexity, we strive for newness.

As an example, suppose we have a block of marble and want to perceive it as complex as possible. The complexity will rest with us, seeing in the marble the highest number of different relations, of different patterns, a syntax between numerous objects. We will first see it as a block with a crystal structure and we may be able to sculpt it in the shape of a sphere, a cube, a realistic statue, etc. We will be able to describe these objects in our language as a ball,

a cube etc. To sculpt, we need technology. The more advanced the technology, the closer we render the precise mathematical—or any other—description of the object, let us say the ball or the cube, and everyone will recognize it just as they might recognize a woman figure in the statue.

Now imagine that we crush the block into a thousand shards and that we want to describe them with as many words as possible. It will be hard for us to distinguish them by the description of their shape or color, so we might differentiate them by their weight. But to be precise in our description it would be fine to have scales, that is, technology, so that we can describe them by the language of simple mathematics as $M_1 = 1, M_2 = 3 \dots M_n = N$. Or we can measure them with a laser beam and describe them by integers, correlate one description to another, and find which shard should be next to which to make it back into the block. The complexity rests with the description and the description helps us find higher complexity if the description is new, which is what happened when the Euclidean concept of a point and a line was redefined and we got non-Euclidean geometry. When our language apparatus and technology are not evolving, we must only make physical discoveries, such as finding one more shard of marble, and we have to correlate it to the block and thus achieve higher complexity of object and of thought that make up a narrative.

I have always been intrigued by how language structures human thought, how every language makes one's mind arrive through different thoughts at different conclusions. Take this sentence as an example. In English we say: *I went to the store and there I bought an apple, milk, sugar and bread.* In German the same sentence would be: *Ich bin in ein Geschäft gegangen und dort habe ich ein Apfel, Milch, Zucker und ein Brot gekauft.* But if the person went into the store and stole all these things, the arbitrary rules of syntax that posit the verb at the end of the German sentence would inflict a much belated surprise in the addressee. Much poetry has been composed while paying too much attention to the superficialities of language, be it rhyme or meter or alliteration. I have once talked about this focus on superficiality to a friend from Barbados and I made an example by saying “Don't let the antelope elope with the cantaloupe.” I marveled about how one term suggests a completely unrelated term but because of its surface, its arbitrary sonic qualities, it lets us relate it to another term with analogous qualities. Her response was that in Barbados, there is a famous story about an antelope eloping with a cantaloupe.³²

³² On the Internet, one may find many texts which rhyme these words. For one such poem see Mark Levine, “Will Dabeast,” blog entry by Mark Levine, posted July 20, 2008, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://marklevinetalk.com/the-new-island-of-lost-poems/>.

By obeying the rules of any language, we are prone to using rhythms, rhymes and other tropes of speech which are the most suggestive, natural and common in the language. Therefore, in English poetry the concept of love is often presented together with a dove or we might read about the sharing of a pear in this affair of the pair. Another language would make the poet try to reach for the poetic through different concepts.

In the last hundred years, culture has seen a rapid revival of performance poetry. It is not that oral presentation of poems had been forgotten or abandoned, but what has been regarded as poetry and what means of presentation have been available to or favored with those who emerge as poets, has been constantly changing. In the following paragraphs, I will attempt to tie the recent trend to the broader ever-changing phenomenon of global culture.

As it was mentioned above, a prayer can be universally considered poetry. It has taken many forms, be it a Pygmy dance in gratitude to the forest, or a war dance of New Zealanders, Buddhist mantras hummed in tranquility, speaking in tongues which Paul comments on in his Letter to the Corinthians,³³ simple chants or elaborate chorals, and many more. The distinguishing feature of what is and is not poetry could then be found in the awareness of a poetic action to have been commenced, usually by a decision, an agreement, or a stipulation, such as “This is a poem” or “Let us pray.” This announcement has gradually found its way into the poem itself. It is by an intricate use of what is now called poetic devices (selected tropes of prosaic, non-poetic, and mundane oral and written language with new tropes modeled on their example) that this announcement started to be made. It is a well documented fact that a naturally occurring alliteration has been promoted to a poetic device through its overuse by Celtic bards whom it aided in memorizing voluminous texts which they accompanied with a lyre. The same happened to rhyme. This sole device is still so popular that many laymen might dismiss a poetic value of a text if it is absent.

With the advent of phonetic alphabets, the pictorial, the pictographic and the ideographic subsided and the visual kept its formative presence in a poem mainly in line breaks and paragraph shapes, but scribes would make at least the initials ornate. When Gutenberg’s printing press speeded the production of written text, the ornate initials saw a decline and the society became more textual. Literacy of the general audience increased and the need for oral presentation of poetry was less pressing. Robert Burns opted for illustrations to engage more senses of the readers, and poets like Herbert Spencer or Guillaume Apollinaire attempted to explore the visual through the textual. In 1917 the latter wrote that

³³ 1 Corinthians 14.

“typographical artifices worked out with great audacity have the advantage of bringing to life a visual lyricism which was almost unknown before our age. These artifices can still go much further and achieve the synthesis of the arts, of music, painting and literature,”³⁴ but these surges of the visual had to wait until the 1960s to become a trend known as the movement of concrete poetry.³⁵

Since western culture was for centuries dominated by the Christian doctrine which usurped almost all physical and mental space for poetic expression and banished any other rites as pagan, it was a strenuous effort for poetry to find its way out of the confines of a folk song sung in a work field, out of the church and out of the page. It was only with the colonial era, the globalization of economy, redistribution of wealth, and emergence of middle class that there has sprung up a time for leisure. The topics of poetry which could now be read aloud to leisurely crowds in tea and coffee houses helped to show the relativity of traditional myths, which were compared with various other myths which served the same function in cultures around the globe. Writing systems were abolished and pidgin languages were coined before they yielded to the dominant culture. Communist ideals and emancipation movements gathered massive crowds who heard their poetry in public speeches and revolutionary songs. Although people used to savor the times between 1917 and 1943 when T.S. Eliot’s poetry could be published between almost every other year, it was not until the spread of the radio and the television that poetry would show all its antics on the printed page as concrete poetry. This outcry of the textual to employ more senses was a springboard for poets to start performing. In the 1980’s, Chicago hosted the first poetry slams which spread through western Europe to eastern Europe and Japan. Unlike other forms of performance poetry, be it found in Def Poetry Jams³⁶, one-man-shows or stand-up comedians’ routines, the official poetry slam has gradually brought about self-confining rules. One of them says: no props. In other words, no external media, although many times the microphone is needed to reach a large audience and can, let us say, stand for a snow cone.

³⁴ Guillaume Apollinaire, “The New Spirit and the Poets,” in Cook, *Poetry in Theory*, 76.

³⁵ The workings of concrete poetry will be discussed further in this dissertation with the aim to explore the limits of a symbolic system for expression as well as to show that there arises a certain suggestiveness with which one arbitrary sign can be tied to another sign because of their signifiers.

³⁶ Def Poetry Jam is a television series of spoken word poetry which ran on HBO between 2002 and 2007. It featured altogether 395 poems performed mostly by individuals among whom there were personages who had already made themselves known as poets (Yusef Komunyakaa, Amiri Baraka, Saul Williams, George Watsky), there were famous rappers delivering their spoken word (DMX, Kanye West, KRS-One, Talib Kweli, Mos Def, Wyclef Jean), there were rhythm and blues singers who spoke verse instead of singing (Jill Scott, Erykah Badu, Lauryn Hill, Alicia Keys, Nelly Furtado) and even actors/comedians (Bill Cosby, Dave Chappelle).

Amy Lowell, who insisted that poetry should get out of the habit of being silently read from a paper and had better be heard aloud wrote that

if photography and colour-printing are the conventionalized symbols of pictures, how much slighter, less adequate, are the conventionalized symbols of poetry. Printed words, of no beauty in themselves, of no value except to rouse the imagination and cause it to function.”³⁷

In her next paragraph she bids the reader to

take the case of music. Here we have the condition almost exactly similar to that of poetry, except for one thing. Printed notes are no more beautiful than printed words, but here comes in the one saving fact: nobody (except highly trained musicians) expects to read music, everybody insists upon hearing it.³⁸

The slam poetic movement is at the forefront of the overall cultural trend which Terence McKenna calls the archaic revival.³⁹ Jon Erickson, an American scholar, writes in his *From Modern Object to Postmodern Sign in Performance, Art, and Poetry* that “it is interesting that both artists and poets of the fifties—the abstract expressionists and the “open field”⁴⁰ poets—were fixated on *materia prima* (paint, color, syllables, breath) and at the same time the function of myth. It seems a desire for return to an animistic universe, which was prevented at the time by an eminently rational, existential state of despair.”⁴¹ So, societies have spread around the globe, diversified in their languages and their mythical traditions, their mediated texts progressed from the pictorial and then alphabetic dominance until they started reconnecting, globalizing, and unifying. Messages left the printed page for the pictorial and multi-sensory media, traditional myths have been exchanged for ideologies and new-age mash-ups. Today, thanks to the space economy of Chinese characters, communication proliferates better on the micro-blogging site Sina Weibo than the alphabet on Twitter. Today, it is more efficient to have a vlog than a blog. Our culture is becoming visual again and the

³⁷ Amy Lowell, “Poetry as Spoken Art,” in Cook, *Poetry in Theory*, 70.

³⁸ Cook, *Poetry in Theory*, 70.

³⁹ See Terence McKenna, *The Archaic Revival: Speculations on Psychedelic Mushrooms, the Amazon, Virtual Reality, UFOs, Evolution, Shamanism, the Rebirth of the Goddess, and the End of History* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991).

⁴⁰ For Charles Olson’s pamphlet “Projective Verse” which argues for an improvised form that reflects the content see Charles Olson, “Projective Verse,” in Cook, *Poetry in Theory*, 289–95.

⁴¹ Jon Erickson, *The Fate of the Object: From Modern Object to Postmodern Sign in Performance, Art, and Poetry* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 206–207.

announcement of an artistic act does not rely on its form anymore. John Cage's *4'33"* is regarded as music only because it proclaims itself as such. Marcel Duchamp places a urinal in a gallery and presents it as art. It depends on the designation of the artistic act; just consider found art. Tehching Hsieh is a Taiwanese-American performance artist who is famous for his long performances. Following is the statement that he made for his *One Year Performance 1978-1979*:

I, Sam Hsieh, plan to do a one year performance piece, to begin on September 30, 1978.

I shall seal myself in my studio in solitary confinement inside a cell-room measuring 11'6" X 9' X 8'.

I shall NOT converse, read, write, listen to the radio or watch television, until I unseal myself on September 29, 1979.

I shall have food every day.

My friend, Cheng Wei Kuong, will facilitate this piece by taking charge of my food, clothing and refuse.

Sam Hsieh⁴²

The public could come see Hsieh at his performance roughly once in every three weeks between 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. His *One Year Performance 1981-1982* was that he stayed outdoors with a sleeping bag for one year and never went inside. He said in his statement: "I shall not go in a building, subway, train, car, airplane, ship, cave, tent." Later on, Hsieh embarked on a thirteen-year-long plan with his *Teching Hsieh 1986-1999* when he declared in his statement "I will make ART during this time. I will not show it PUBLICLY," and he rigorously stuck to his plan. When it was completed, he issued a statement which said "I KEPT MYSELF ALIVE. I PASSED THE DEC 31, 1999." in letters clipped from the newspaper, he signed it and dated it January 1st, 2000.

Postmodern meta-narratives have long been presenting us with the self-awareness of language. The logos has been coming to life, as Phillip K. Dick writes in his *VALIS* (1981)—a science fiction novel the plot of which is constructed around the motif of an informing, either hallucinations causing or holograms projecting beam—and at poetry slams the striving for such an inspiration and effect reaches the closest to the archaic roots which lay at the beginning of humanity. Accordingly, the participatory audiences, who can shout and cheer and scorn have started favoring the improvised word, where they can become the topic of a poem and change its course. In his introduction to Barthes's essay called "Is There Any Poetic Writing" (1953) Jon Cook rephrases Barthes's views on the distinction between classical and

⁴² Tehching Hsieh, "One Year Performance 1978-1979," *Tehching Hsieh* (blog), 2008, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://www.tehchinghsieh.com/>.

modern poetry when he summarizes that “the old distinction was quantitative: poetry was prose with additional ornamentation. The new distinction must be qualitative. Modern poetry of the Word that destroys customary relations of grammar, syntax, and ideology. It is, in effect, the invention of a new language within a language, an alien, radical, and disturbing force.”⁴³ Barthes himself is well aware of the role of the logos or the Word when he writes that in modern poetry:

what is attempted is to eliminate the intention to establish relationships and to produce instead an explosion of words. For modern poetry, since it must be distinguished from classical poetry and from any type of prose, destroys the spontaneously functional nature of language, and leaves standing only its lexical basis. It retains only the outward shape of relationships, their music, but not their reality. The Word shines forth above a line of relationships emptied of their content, grammar is bereft of its purpose, it becomes prosody and is no longer anything but an inflection which lasts only to present the Word. Connections are not properly speaking abolished, they are merely reserved areas, a parody of themselves, and this void is necessary for the density of the Word to rise out of magic vacuum, like sound and a sign devoid of background, like ‘fury and mystery’.⁴⁴

In his introduction to Gerard Genette’s “Poetic Language, Poetics of Language,” (1969) Cook also summarizes the main idea concerning the dream of poetry as a dream that a culture has about language. He writes that “poetry’s dream is to overcome the arbitrariness of the relation between signifier and signified, to invent a language in which form will be at one with meaning.”⁴⁵ Drawing on Saussure’s treatment of the arbitrariness of the sign, Genette notes that “these very shortcomings are the *raison d’être* of poetry, which exists only through them: if languages were perfect, *verse would not exist*, because all speech would be poetry and, therefore, there would be no poetry.”⁴⁶ At poetry slams language gets closest to its dream—which is to bespeak reality—but it only rearranges the physical. It is a part of the myth but it attempts to connect us to the poetic that we posit beyond.

⁴³ Cook, *Poetry in Theory*, 301.

⁴⁴ Roland Barthes, “Is There Any Poetic Writing,” trans. Annette Lavers and Collin Smith, in Cook, *Poetry in Theory*, 304.

⁴⁵ Cook, *Poetry in Theory*, 408.

⁴⁶ Gerard Genette, “Poetic Language, Poetics of Language,” trans. Alan Sheridan, in Cook, *Poetry in Theory*, 409.

WHAT IS THE TENDENCY? THE TENDENCY IS TRANSHUMANISM

Robotics arrives at its notorious terminus when something which we think of as technology becomes capable of replicating itself with enough variation to be able to evolve by the dictate of its environment. In her theory of memes, Blackmore says that language might work just the same. As an example she imagines free-range robots. Based on various sensory inputs, they produce a sound. Whenever a sound is registered by any robot, the robot responds to it because of a tendency to replicate the sound, which is programmed into its wiring. Blackmore believes that, eventually, there would not be robots echoing one word with precision, or complete cacophony, but rather a number of duplicated signals which the robots distort as they hear them and as they pronounce them.⁴⁷

Blackmore forgets to add that if her robots could restructure themselves, just like the human gene propagates through meiosis and fertilization, then the set of noises which they would keep up would have to be pushed forward by their robotic needs. The machines would produce more sounds, which would be a reaction to, for example, a sunny spot where they could recharge their solar cells.⁴⁸ But their interpretation of such sounds, the assigning of meaning to them, is a wholly different story.

Let me recapitulate: I have tried to show, how humans assign meaning to objects which they register through distorting sensors. Once the input is in their minds, it can pass unnoticed or be symbolic of any meaning. Two objects correlated together give rise to a metaphor. But we cannot study the language which our minds operate on. We can only study its manifestation, its performance. By this study we uncover what we call grammar, the rules of a language. But these rules are just the rules of the performance, not of the mind itself. This, of course, has helped culture to overcome realistic artistic methods. We all perceive the world somehow differently because of our sensors and because of the language of our minds, and

⁴⁷ Blackmore, *Meme Machine*, 106.

⁴⁸ A contribution to the discussion can be found in a mathematical model which was worked out by Kazuki Kawachi. He draws on findings about rumor, contemporary legends and urban legends, the study of which has been practiced since the late 1940s. When talking about recursive rumor, that is rumor that appears every now and then, he says “We could attribute their [recursive rumor] occurrence to the distance in space and time. One mechanism might be as follows: the rumor spread locally in a region spills over out of the region where it has never been spread with movement of people and information. Another mechanism might be as follows: since the power of fending off the rumor is weak, it survives in secret after its cessation. After a while, more and more people are unfamiliar with the rumor due to immigration from other areas, birth and the modification of the rumor. This might result in its repetition.” Kazuki Kawachi, “Deterministic Models for Rumor Transmission,” *Nonlinear Analysis Real World Applications* 9, no. 5 (2008): 1990, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.nonrwa.2007.06.004>.

we only try to relate to one another through a completely arbitrary performance what our impression of it all is. This happening operates on two principles which are the striving for higher complexity, and newness.⁴⁹ In global, our interpretation, however expressed, will always be incomplete.

I believe that the tendency of our culture is towards transhumanism. The term first appeared in 1957 in an eponymous essay by English biologist Julian Huxley and refers to “a social and philosophical movement social and philosophical movement devoted to promoting the research and development of robust human-enhancement technologies. Such technologies would augment or increase human sensory reception, emotive ability, or cognitive capacity as well as radically improve human health and extend human life spans. Such modifications resulting from the addition of biological or physical technologies would be more or less permanent and integrated into the human body.”⁵⁰ In its ultimate sense, it is the complete sacrifice of everything objective. Today, we distinguish between reality, augmented reality, and virtual reality. We have reached the phase when we can freely navigate through all three and tell them apart. We can walk the street, walk the street with Google Glass, or walk the street in a virtual environment (like Minecraft or any other).

Google Glass has a rim that sits on your nose like glasses. There is a camera, a little computer and a transparent projection screen attached to the rim. The projection screen is a square diagonally cut by laser into a plastic prism that one can look through. The data obtained with the camera are sent into the computer where they are processed and instantaneously projected onto the minute screen that sits right in front of one’s eye. Thus, one can look at a restaurant menu in Chinese and see all that is in his view translated to English by online Google Translate service “in real time” with the same background color of the menu. This system interprets for you according to your instructions. Johan F. Hoorn, an achieved academic from the Netherlands, in his *Epistemics of the Virtual* (2012), which deals mainly with the difference between a metaphor and metamorphosis, fiction and realness, and which tries to draw the dividing line between the perceived realness of the virtual and the physical realm, imagines a robot “with affective ‘personality’ which can [when reacting to eye-tracking or brainwave tracking] respond irrationally at times, depending on its goals and whether it likes or dislikes the user or has both experiences at the same time [...] he might respond to the user with ‘I quit. I don’t like you. You drop me too often.’ Slowly, then, the

⁴⁹ I, of course, leave out entropy, temperature gradient, or physical laws, which concern the scientific domain of thermodynamics, not culture.

⁵⁰ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s.v. “transhumanism,” accessed August 14, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/transhumanism>.

biological brain of the user becomes entangled with the artificial brain of the robot, reckoning with each other's goals, concerns, and objectives. At that stage, we are not far any more from becoming 'naturally-born cyborgs'.⁵¹

I agree with Mircea Eliade that there is a notable tendency of humanity to strive for an ahistoric present⁵² and with McKenna that the virtual offers a suitable domain. In the description of his first experience of the virtual reality the latter writes that because of its capacity to visually manifest language he "believe[s] that the totemic image for the future is the octopus"⁵³ and that "like the octopus, our destiny is to become what we think, to have our thoughts become our bodies and our bodies become our thoughts. This is the essence of a more perfect Logos, a Logos not heard but beheld. VR [virtual reality] can help here, for electronics can change vocal utterance into visually beheld colored output in the virtual reality."⁵⁴ The virtual is so fitting because it is visual, it blocks out the objective world—while Google Glass only augments it—and it can usher the user into a world which is highly operative. It is strenuous to paint a building orange but with a device which augments reality it is easy to see it orange. It is even more difficult to move a building a few meters away but in a virtual realm this is just data which can be instantaneously transcribed. The manipulation of objects, which is at the basis of any post-totemic myth, as I have tried to show earlier, can be "right at hand". The escape into the virtual is promising to the human mind which constantly complexifies its novelizing language because there it can have the power to create visual objects by decree, almost telepathically (of course there is necessarily the underlying elaborate coding) and it can also feed the user with visual stimuli akin to the psilocybin-induced experience of the prehistoric humans. The variability of the perceived visual objects can be impossible to deplete and thus be a source for new metaphors and new syntax richer than any hyperlink. If all the physical objective is sacrificed for the virtual, humanity returns to the totemic phase but it will be able to link itself through the densest hub not just to a bear or a wolf but to new visual objects never, or only, dreamed of before. This can be the return of animism which differs from pantheism by its absence of rhetoric but this time in history the absence is not because of low complexity and of not enough concepts to be

⁵¹ Hoorn notes that he adapts this phrase from Andy Clark, *Natural-born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human Intelligence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) in Johan F. Hoorn, *Epistemics of the Virtual* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2012), 182.

⁵² See Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954).

⁵³ McKenna, *Archaic Revival*, 231.

⁵⁴ McKenna, *Archaic Revival*, 232.

conjoined by a developing syntax, but because of unrestrained flow of constant redefinitions eagerly manifested.

PART 2: THE SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE OF POETRY

Practical exercise in concrete poetry.

ASCII table, emoticons and polychromatic glyphs.

Mistakes and their accumulated resonance.

Logical exercise about speech.

The first section imagines a poet whose practical exercise in the workings of typewriter produced concrete poetry is, in the second section, tied to the coded ASCII table, emoticons and polychromatic glyphs which are subject to default visual modifications by manufacturers of technology. The third section offers a view at memetic information transmission which is worked into a model that draws on Jacque Derrida's différance. From a construction of a tree of hypothetical changes in the evolution of a state of culture of the primitive Waorani tribe, the chapter moves to its fourth section and its logical exercise about hypernyms and hyponyms.

PRACTICAL EXERCISE IN CONCRETE POETRY

“Although this is rather a trivial example, it contains the essence of the idea that symbols may have many meaningful interpretations-it is up to the observer to look for them.”⁵⁵

Suppose there is an aspiring author whose empty page would not yet pass for an untitled blank poem. Let us imagine that he strives to express himself on paper and that he owns a typewriter.

As pages stack up, the sheets reveal their three-dimensional quality and thus a new area that can be covered in print emerges. The side of the book is not commonly used by poets although librarians get involved with it very often with their stamps. In such situations, librarians treat the books as mere inventory but the potential for the poet is there as well. A conscious approach to the physicality of paper may be seen in Jack Kerouac's typing of his *On the Road* on a single scroll of paper. The cutting of the paper is an unavoidable process unless we are dealing with, let us say, a hand-made irregular-shaped sheet, but once the poem is typed there should come in no additional technique (cutting, folding, photography, etc.) if

⁵⁵ Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, 102.

we do not wish to stray into the realm of visual poetry.⁵⁶ The thinness of the sheet also has a potential use for poems whose parts can be printed on both sides and then light can be shined through to make both of the printed sides connect as we read them at once, or two sides of a non-transparent sheet might be used for a continuation of a poem. Take two of Ted Berrigan's poems from *The Sonnets*. In the poem "XV,"⁵⁷ its lines are first presented to the reader in a mixed order and on a later page, in the poem "LIX,"⁵⁸ the same lines are printed again but reconstituted in an order that seems less disarranged in meaning. When our exemplary poet sequences text between pages, a vertical stanza could be on a later page presented horizontally and stand for, let us say, a drawbridge that has been lowered so that the reader may proceed to the second half of the poem. Every turning of a page reminds us of the physicality of the object, and things like calendars in ring binders or flip clock even build up on chronotopic diagramaticity.⁵⁹

From single letters we construct words and, in between them, we, at times, insert punctuation marks. The potential of the poem changes with every character used, depending on the alphabet and the type-face. For example, a poem by Ernst Jandl from 1964 could not be produced in or translated into English.⁶⁰ The visual quality of Chinese and other ideograms can serve as another example.⁶¹ Or consider Ezra Pound's long poem "The Cantos" which features many hand-drawn Chinese characters, Egyptian hieroglyphs and the Greek

⁵⁶ Imagine an origami crane whose distinct parts would be inscribed as "beak," "wing," "tail." The paper would then be unfolded, the text rewritten on a non-creased sheet of paper and then the poem would be called "A Crane." This sequence of artistic techniques would still make it possible for the poem to rank with poems that rely solely on a text typed on a single plane of a sheet while the focus on the physicality of the paper that was essential during the composition of the poem would only have to be reconstructed in our minds during the process of reading.

⁵⁷ Ted Berrigan, *The Sonnets* (1964; New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 14.

⁵⁸ Berrigan, *The Sonnets*, 54.

⁵⁹ The term chronotope was coined by Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin in his essay from the 1930s "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel. Notes toward a Historical Poetics" which was published only in 1975. It gives the following definition: "We will give the name *chronotope* (literally, 'time space') to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature," which is expanded by Bakhtin following shortly that "in the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. The intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope." Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel. Notes toward a Historical Poetics," in Brian Richardson, ed., *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure, and Frames* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002), 15.

⁶⁰ See appendix 1. for Ernst Jandl, in Emmett Williams, ed. *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry* (New York: Something Else, 1967), n.p.

⁶¹ See appendix 2. for Seiichi Niikuni, "River/sandbank," in Williams, *Concrete Poetry*, n.p.

alphabet⁶² to observe the tendency to express one's self to the fullest in English poetry classics. With certain type-faces, the poet can make use of the visual quality of the characters. A "W" may look like an "M" turned upside down, a "b" like the mirror image of "d", a "p" like the mirror image of "q", and both of them like mirror images of the afore mentioned couple, a capital "I" like a lower case "l", an "m" like an extended "n", a "t" like a cross, and correlations may be found between "I" and "L" and "F" and "E", between "O" and "C", between "P" and "B", and many more, depending on how many steps one should take in his assumptions. The use of both upper and lower cases to convey meaning beyond the word itself, i.e. through its visual properties, is a device commonly used in concrete poetry. John Ashbery makes an exemplary use of the device in his poem "Out over the Bay the Rattle of Firecrackers."⁶³ Punctuation marks and other symbols, i.e. characters beyond the alphabet, can be utilized in ways grammatical, visual, and in those which combine both aspects, just as is the case with the letters of the alphabet. Once again, they can be seen as approximations of real objects—apostrophes for raindrops, and dots for grains of sand.

An important feature of punctuation marks, letters and all other symbols is the difference in the amount of space within their text field they occupy. If clustered ingeniously, the type can make patterns of darker and lighter areas. A classical example of this is a pattern poem "Cinéma" (1965) by Ilse and Pierre Garnier that reads "cinema" all over. According to its authors, it is "an attempt to render linguistically the cinematographic play of white (cin) and black (ema) and the vibration of light on the screen."⁶⁴ To produce even darker areas on page, some poets have resorted to typing characters one over another. Such approach gives rise to visual poetry which disregards the minimum space allocated to a certain character as it ceases to work with the paper as a grid with only a certain number of possible positions for a character. Unlike in concrete poetry, it is permissible to draw with a typewriter in visual poetry. The principle of making a poem work on the basis of discriminating between free and occupied space is also used in the poem once known under the title "le dernier poème concret" by Henri Chopin from 1965.⁶⁵ In it, the majority of the paper was typed over with all letters of the alphabet while spaces which were left blank add up and give rise to the shapes of letters.

⁶² See Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (1925; London: Faber and Faber, 1975).

⁶³ See John Ashbery, "Out over the Bay the Rattle of Firecrackers," in Anne Ferry, *The Title to the Poem* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 269.

⁶⁴ Ilse Garnier and Pierre Garnier, "Cinéma," in "Prototypes Textes pour une Architecture," in Williams, *Concrete Poetry*, n.p.

⁶⁵ See appendix 3. for Henri Chopin, "le dernier poème concret," in Williams, *Concrete Poetry*, n.p.

The next possibility of a typed poem lies within the rotation of the character. This issue is particularly questionable. No rotation needs to take place if we aim for a mirror image of “D”, “B”, “K”, “C”, “X”, “H”, “I”, “l”, “E” and “O” since they are all symmetrical by their horizontal axis. The letters “W”, “M”, “T”, “A”, “V”, “U”, “I”, “O”, “H”, “Y” and “X” are symmetrical by their vertical axis. In the case of “p”, “q”, “b”, “d”, “W”, “M” a rotation by 180 degrees results in a substitutive character. If it is possible for our poet to draw on this symmetry within the given type-face, is it going too far if he turns the paper in his typewriter upside down to continue his poem? He only attracts our attention to the physicality of his medium because we know that he used a typewriter with a set amount of characters. It is possible to achieve an effect very close to mirror imaging if the text be arranged like in the following example: MIRROR RORRIM. This method, though, does not rely on the quality of individual characters but rather on our experience with mirrors. The next step taken by many poets is to make use of all 360 degrees, while still respecting individual spaces of every character.⁶⁶

Since we have now moved from single characters to individual words, the next big area to discuss is the arrangement of words on the paper relative to one another. Once again, it is helpful to imagine that the paper be worked with as a grid. If we fill such a grid with characters, one right next to the other, we can read words in up to eight directions if we permit ourselves to read in other directions than just from left to right. Poems that look like crossword puzzles have indeed been written, take for example Augusto de Campos’s poem “Teremoto” (1957) which works in horizontal and vertical lines or Ian Hamilton Finlay’s poem “Acrobats” (1964) which works in diagonals.⁶⁷

For most written poetry, of which a prose poem on one hand, and a concrete poem on the other are two extremes, it has become more or less standard that the text be arranged in one stanza with some space on each line left free, or in multiple stanzas one under another. It is also possible that individual words or blocks of text be arranged not only one under another but again in a grid. When this method is applied, different syntagmatic relations between the units may arise. If there were clear relations between the units of such a text, e.g. a sequence of numbers written in words, it would take the reader a fraction of a second to realize whether to start reading in the upper left corner of the grid and continue reading in lines or in columns.

⁶⁶ See Ian Hamilton Finlay’s untitled poem from 1966, in Williams, *Concrete Poetry*, n.p.

⁶⁷ See appendix 4. for Augusto de Campos, “Teremoto,” in Williams, *Concrete Poetry*, n.p. See also appendix 5. for Ian Hamilton Finlay, “Acrobats,” in Williams, *Concrete Poetry*, n.p.

Were there stanzas on the grid instead of individual words it would be a more intricate scenario but even this set up could be used in a creative way.

Imagine, for example, a poem of nine stanzas on a single page arranged as such:

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9.

Such a poem could take us into a game of tic-tac-toe, where in each of the stanzas either a cross or a circle would be mentioned, and after we would finish reading the poem we would know who of the two players won an argument or a game. There have been pattern poems which regularly indent and repeat the same word all over the page, usually a noun with the capacity to engulf other things in real life (e.g. water, air, darkness). This pattern is at some point distorted when the pattern-making word gets substituted with another noun (e.g. a fish, a bird). If the substituent is a multisyllabic verb it can be dissected and its syllables inserted at various places within the pattern and thus give the reader an idea of a time span during which the action is happening, as is the case with the poem “Kouzlo letní noci” (1959-1963) by Ladislav Novák where the action is the feeling around with one’s hands in the dark.⁶⁸

The grid-like arrangement of the units does not need to be regular. One good example is a poem by Emmett Williams which spaces the words “like attracts like” far from one another and then repeats them and pushes them closer and closer to one another on every subsequent line. He makes a comment on his own work through the words of Ernst Jandl, saying that “the result is a poem identical with the method by which it was made.”⁶⁹ Verbalizing and visualizing attractions, repulsions or the effects of gravity are all common features of concrete poetry.

We have now progressed to the arrangement of stanzas. We recognize traditional stanzas ranging from couplets to nine-line stanzas as well as stanzaic poems like haiku, villanelles or sestinas which are concerned with line arrangement in respect to a pattern regarding their metre, rhythm or rhyme.⁷⁰ Even free verse is usually arranged in stanzas that bear meaning beyond the text itself. The stanzas of a poem might be what Denise Levertov in her “Some Notes on Organic Form” (1965) calls “distinct units of awareness,”⁷¹ or they might be breath units which Allen Ginsberg in his “Notes Written on Finally Recording ‘Howl’”

⁶⁸ See Ladislav Novák, “Kouzlo letní noci, [Summer Night’s Spell]” in Williams, *Concrete Poetry*, n.p.

⁶⁹ Emmett Williams, a commentary to an untitled poem from 1958, in Williams, *Concrete Poetry*, n.p.

⁷⁰ See Ernst Häublein, *The Stanza*, (London: Methuen, 1978).

⁷¹ Häublein, *Stanza*, 13.

(1959) calls “variable stanzaic units.”⁷² Individual lines can be formed with respect to the imagery portrayed, to the anticipated pace of reading, or they can be cut in order to just keep the emerging stanza shapely. This optical feature could be taken to the extreme when one produces a poem, for example, about the raging sea, and gives the stanza a topical shape of a wave.

However, even after the poet decides to arrange his text on the page, it still accounts for one aspect of the poem only. Then there is usually also the title. In her elaborate study *The Title to the Poem* (1996) Anne Ferry distinguishes between multiple forms and functions that titles can take. As she discusses it throughout her book, the title may identify the author, the speaker, the addressee, the kind of the poem, the poetic image, what the poem is about, there can also be quotations or questions in the title. A title can be absent or, contrastingly, it can say “Untitled,” just like John Ashbery used it for one of his poems in his collection *Shadow Train*.⁷³ In his “Out Over the Bay the Rattle of Firecrackers” Ashbery uses a run-on title spread over two lines while what would normally follow the title as a distinct stanza is just a continuation of the sentence from the title. Since the title comes first, it is usually viewed as something directing, hinting to the reader in advance before the poem is read. Our exemplary poet could even accumulate his own poems’ titles into a sonnet to be read as the table of contents. To take it a bit further, he could position the title outside the poetry collection, on the book jacket or even further just as it is common with titles to paintings in galleries.

I have gone into this tantalizing description of possibilities that lay before a poet with blank paper and a typewriter to show that poets have always been restricted by their media and the symbols which they use for their expression. They could use color paper and switch color tapes in their typewriters, illustrate their poems like William Blake, or draw them like Apollinaire. Some possibilities are used more often than others, and they become recognizable patterns, that is, by the previous definition, tropes. To use tropes is to give a title to a poem, to write the poem in stanzas, break its lines, use a figure of speech and spell its words correctly. Some tropes are more common than others. When somebody uses a new trope instead of a cliché, the readers tend to appreciate its originality.

Tropes are fairly complex memes which are yet composed of smaller memes. A trope can be a sequence of memes. A meme can be read even in the smallest units of informational transmission such as graphemes or phonemes. A successful meme was to change the pronunciation of one’s [r:] at certain positions within a word in the 19th century Britain but

⁷² Häublein, *Stanza*, 12.

⁷³ See Ferry, *Title to the Poem*, 253.

not in the United States. It is also a popular meme that English speakers use an [r:]—speakers of the Hawaiian language can do without it. As it has been said, all cultural information is transferred by memes. Memes cluster together and allow the information which they transfer to mutate. Memes are the smallest building blocks of structured memetic complexes (memeplexes), the sum of all of which is the overarching myth, the performative, the narrative that we live when we act upon any information as we grasp the objective world with our minds.

ASCII TABLE, EMOTICONS AND POLYCHROMATIC GLYPHS

Not only poets, as it was said, but all typewriter users have been restricted by their media and the symbols which they use for their expression. Since the 1960s, with the advent of personal computers which use binary coding for symbols, users have been introduced to the American Standard Code for Information Interchange (ASCII). The ASCII character-encoding scheme is a table of 128 characters out of which 95 are printable. ASCII, which was developed for the American market, has been altered to suit other languages and spun off character sets just as it was the case with typewriter type-faces in the era of typewriters. Since 1991, ASCII has been part of the much broader Unicode whose eighth version from June 2015 lets our electronic devices display 120,672 characters.⁷⁴

What has become a trend, that is, a well-spread repeatedly used meme, is the use of emoticons.⁷⁵ When I combine three ASCII symbols—a colon, a dash and a bracket—into a smiley face :-) on my English keyboard in Microsoft Word 2007, it instantaneously exchanges the combination for ☺, which is a monochromatic Unicode character. What I cannot type unless I copy-paste it or install a Japanese keyboard is (つ^_^)っ, one of the so-called Kirby emoticons, which are named after their resemblance to the main character of Nintendo's popular game Kirby's Dream Land. I also cannot write '∧' which resembles a teddy bear's face. To render a crying face, an English keyboard user commonly types :(or :-(, while Koreans type ㅠ.ㅠ. The re-appropriation of textual characters not to be read but seen as constituents of visual images can have a much deeper significance in readers' response to a

⁷⁴ Andrew West, "What's New in Unicode 8.0," *BabelStone* (blog), April 2015, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://babelstone.blogspot.cz/2015/04/whats-new-in-unicode-80.html>.

⁷⁵ Wikipedia has a well-written article about the history and origin of emoticons at s.v. "Emoticon," *Wikipedia*, last modified August 24, 2016, accessed August 29, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emoticon>. See also an online emoji encyclopedia [Emojipedia.org](http://emojipedia.org).

text. The crying face that is produced on an English keyboard sheds just one tear while the Korean crying face has tears streaming. While crying—just like laughter—is a reaction which can be triggered by culturally dictated stimuli and understood through the prism of a culture, the crying reaction in its manifestation is of an undisputable higher intensity if more than one tear is shed. The restricted character set that one uses to produce emoticons then pushes the reader within his own cultural bounds towards a reading that might involve a different emotional response. Emotive non-verbal cues which are so essential in a face-to-face communication have thus found their way into written texts. The participant of an instant messaging communication does not have to guess at irony but only at the degree of it if the sender's message is accompanied by :-) or :-D. Moreover, the software, as it has been said about Microsoft Word 2007, can exchange the three symbols for one, which is space-efficient, considering that one SMS message counts 160 characters. Instead of one smiley face the message can thus contain three. Android, the operating system for most smart phones, Facebook messenger for Apple iPhones, ICQ, MSN, QQ, WhatsApp, WeChat and countless other daily used messengers exchange :-) for yet a more graphic symbol than ☺. They are called polychromatic glyphs. The following is what Andrew West, one of the programmers of Unicode, has to say about emoticons and emoji which are other than facial graphic glyphs. I have decided to include a substantial part of one of his 2015 blog entries since I could only elaborate on the topic as an observer and would always lack the insider knowledge which he shares in “Junk Food and Junk Characters.”

Up until a few years ago there were relatively few Unicode characters representing particular things (such as snowmen, umbrellas and cups of tea or coffee), and there were fairly strict rules about what symbols are or are not appropriate for encoding in Unicode, and one of the main criteria was that the proposer had to show evidence of usage of the symbol in a plain text context. This all changed with the advent of Unicode 6.0 in October 2010, which (after long and heated debates) included a set of nearly 700 emoji and emoticon symbols that were ostensibly encoded in order to solve interoperability issues between various Japanese mobile phone vendors who used different variants of emoji at different private-use code points. The random and eclectic nature of these symbols meant that it became hard to argue against encoding other similar or analogous symbols representing people or things, and since then the encoding of symbols seems to some to have snowballed out of control. The situation has become worse over the last two or three years with the implementation of colourized emoji and emoticons by major vendors such as Apple, Microsoft, Google and Twitter, and the now widespread use of colourized emoji characters on social media. When twitter users look at the

existing emoji characters and see that they include french fries 🍟, hamburgers 🍔 and doughnuts 🍩, but not tacos, paella or fabada, is it any wonder that partisans of these foods feel aggrieved, and demand that they too be included in Unicode ?⁷⁶

West moves on to discuss the approach which has been taken by the Unicode company in order to satisfy the users' needs. He writes that

symbols representing people, animals, food & drink, human artefacts and human activities are intrinsically open-ended, and it is hard to see how the line can be drawn without simply refusing to encode any more emoji at all. There has been some attempt to limit the scope of encoding emoji characters (see Unicode Emoji: Selection Factors), but the current strategy seems to be to try to fill in the gaps as much as possible in the hope that people will eventually stop asking for new emoji symbols for their favourite food, drink, animal, dinosaur, sport or religion. It seems unlikely to be a successful strategy.⁷⁷

The following tables (tables 1 and 2), which are presented by West, show how “Unicode 8.0 attempts to fill in some of the gaps with ten new emoticon characters and twenty-six emoji characters, mostly relating to food, sports, astrology and religion.”⁷⁸

Table 1. Emoticons, hand signs, astrological symbols, symbols of religious significance, mythical creatures, food and drink.⁷⁹






⁷⁶ West, “Unicode 8.0.”

⁷⁷ West, “Unicode 8.0.”


⁷⁸ West, “Unicode 8.0.”

⁷⁹ West, “Unicode 8.0.”

Emoticons

1F643	UPSIDE-DOWN FACE	
1F644	FACE WITH ROLLING EYES	
1F910	ZIPPER-MOUTH FACE	
1F911	MONEY-MOUTH FACE	
1F912	FACE WITH THERMOMETER	
1F913	NERD FACE	
1F914	THINKING FACE	
1F915	FACE WITH HEAD-BANDAGE	
1F916	ROBOT FACE	
1F917	HUGGING FACE	

Hand Signs

1F918	SIGN OF THE HORNS	
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Astrological Symbols

1F980	CRAB = CANCER	
1F981	LION FACE = leo	
1F982	SCORPION = scorpio	
1F3F9	BOW AND ARROW = sagittarius	
1F3FA	AMPHORA = aquarius	

Symbols of Religious Significance

1F4FF	PRAYER BEADS	
1F54B	KAABA	
1F54C	MOSQUE	
1F54D	SYNAGOGUE	
1F54E	MENORAH WITH NINE BRANCHES	
1F6D0	PLACE OF WORSHIP	

Mythical Creatures

1F984	UNICORN FACE	
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Food and Drink

1F32D	HOT DOG	
1F32E	TACO	
1F32F	BURRITO	
1F37E	BOTTLE WITH POPPING CORK	
1F37F	POPCORN	
1F983	TURKEY	
1F9C0	CHEESE WEDGE	

Table 2. Sports equipment.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ West, "Unicode 8.0."

Sports Equipment

1F3CF	CRICKET BAT AND BALL	
1F3D0	VOLLEYBALL	
1F3D1	FIELD HOCKEY STICK AND BALL	
1F3D2	ICE HOCKEY STICK AND PUCK	
1F3D3	TABLE TENNIS PADDLE AND BALL	
1F3F8	BADMINTON RACQUET AND SHUTTLECOCK	

West comments that he is very disturbed by the decision process that preceded the addition of these new characters in Unicode 8.0:

These characters were not proposed for encoding in the normal way, with a proposal document going to the WG2 committee, but thirty-seven characters (the above thirty-six plus the Dhyani Buddha character that was later dropped) were agreed upon by a cabal going under the name of the "Emoji ad-hoc subcommittee", and presented to the UTC⁸¹ at UTC Meeting 141 at the end of October 2014, which accepted them "for encoding in a future version of the standard". This would normally mean that the proposal documents would be submitted to WG2, and they would get encoded in Unicode 9 or 10 after going through the ISO ballot process. However, what actually happened is that on 14 November 2014 the Unicode Consortium announced in a blog post that 37 emoji characters were candidates for inclusion in Unicode 8.0 in June of the following year. This timetable meant that there was no opportunity to put the characters on an ISO ballot for consideration by ISO national bodies before the repertoire of Unicode 8.0 was fixed (a three-month PDAM ballot which included the emoji modifier characters but not the 37 new emoji candidates had been issued just days before the October UTC meeting).⁸²

It is the hastiness and the non-standard procedure by which the new characters were adopted that West is distressed about, although he admits that

⁸¹ UTC is an abbreviation for Unicode Technical Committee which is "is responsible for the development and maintenance of the Unicode Standard," "Unicode® Technical Committee," Unicode Inc., August 29, 2016, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://unicode.org/consortium/utc.html>.

⁸² West, "Unicode 8.0."

there is precedent for the Unicode Consortium to fast-track urgently-needed characters into the Unicode Standard before the characters have completed the ISO ballot process. This has occurred in the past with newly-designed national currency symbols such as the euro sign €, the Indian rupee sign ₹, the Turkish lira sign ₺, and the Russian ruble sign ₸, but in these cases the new characters were non-controversial and demonstrably urgently-required. Can it really be argued that the need to have a taco emoji encoded in Unicode is in any way on the same level of urgency as the need for currency symbols which are going to be used by governments and banks?⁸³

West goes on to tell that he raised his voice in order to change the course of the decision process but his account of this episode ends with a sarcastic comment:

When I brought up the question on the (private) UTC mailing list, I was reminded that WG2 had been warned at the WG2 meeting in Colombo, Sri Lanka in September/October 2014 that "additional emoji characters that address user concerns in relation to diversity" may be considered for encoding in the Unicode Standard (see Unicode Liaison Report to SC2). Given the context of this statement, I do not think that I was the only person at the meeting who assumed that it referred to the urgent need to encode racially diverse emoji characters rather than symbols for fast food and sports equipment. The statement in the same document that "In exceptional cases, such as new currency symbols, characters may be added to a given Unicode version that have not yet reached the approval stage in ISO process" would not seem to me to apply to any of the Unicode 8.0 emoji characters. But the the justification given to me on the UTC mailing list for fast-tracking these 37 emoji was that they were urgently required to address a perceived bias towards Western culture in the current set of emoji ... hot dog anyone ?⁸⁴







































































He concludes his account of this episode by admitting that "in the end, an additional two-month PDAM ballot was squeezed into the schedule (ballot closing 3 April 2015), with the thirty-seven emoji included," but he diminishes the utility of such a move by saying that "at this late stage it leaves the ISO national bodies little choice but to accept them as a fait accompli."⁸⁵ In the following table, West lists monochromatic and polychromatic glyphs that have been used by major technology vendors (see tables 3–5).

⁸³ West, "Unicode 8.0."

⁸⁴ West, "Unicode 8.0."

⁸⁵ West, "Unicode 8.0."

Table 3. Monochromatic and polychromatic glyphs by technology vendors.⁸⁶

Count	Code	Browser	B&W*	Apple	Andr	Twit	Wind	GMail
1	U+1F600							
2	U+1F601							
3	U+1F602							
4	U+1F603							
5	U+1F604							
6	U+1F605							
7	U+1F606							
8	U+1F609							
9	U+1F60A							
10	U+1F60B							

⁸⁶ West, "Unicode 8.0."

Table 4. Monochromatic and polychromatic glyphs by technology vendors.⁸⁷















































































































71	U+1F466							
72	U+1F467							
73	U+1F468							
74	U+1F469							
75	U+1F474							
76	U+1F475							
77	U+1F476							
78	U+1F471							
79	U+1F46E							
80	U+1F472							
81	U+1F473							
82	U+1F477							

Table 5. Monochromatic and polychromatic glyphs by technology vendors.⁸⁸
















111	U+1F46A							
112	U+1F46B							
113	U+1F46C							<i>missing</i>
114	U+1F46D							<i>missing</i>

⁸⁷ West, "Unicode 8.0."

⁸⁸ West, "Unicode 8.0."

West points out that “colourized emoticons are not a problem as they have generally been implemented as non-realistic yellow faces,” but he observes that “symbols representing human beings or human body parts have tended to be represented as realistic humans with realistic skin tones, even when the representative glyphs in the Unicode code charts are silhouettes.”⁸⁹ West is well aware of the problems with racial, gender and other stereotypes which thus arise when he writes that the “glyphs for people in the Unicode code charts look in many cases as if they represent white people, even in monochrome, and as the earliest implementations of multicoloured glyphs tended to show very pale skin tones, there has been an impression that Unicode is only catering for a certain racial demographic.”⁹⁰ West then relates to us that there has been “intense pressure from the public, the media, and consortium members such as Apple and Google,” to encode racially diverse glyphs that the “Unicode Technical Committee put forward a set of five emoji skin tone modifier characters as a solution,”⁹¹ which can be seen in table 6. He adds that “by themselves these five characters are intended to be displayed as square fragments of colour, but when combined with any of a defined set of Unicode characters representing people or human body parts they should magically change the character's skin tone.”⁹²

Table 6. Racially diverse glyphs.⁹³

Code Point	Character Name	Glyph	Sequence with U+1F466 BOY	
			Supported	Unsupported
U+1F3FB	EMOJI MODIFIER FITZPATRICK TYPE-1-2			
U+1F3FC	EMOJI MODIFIER FITZPATRICK TYPE-3			
U+1F3FD	EMOJI MODIFIER FITZPATRICK TYPE-4			
U+1F3FE	EMOJI MODIFIER FITZPATRICK TYPE-5			
U+1F3FF	EMOJI MODIFIER FITZPATRICK TYPE-6			






⁸⁹ West, “Unicode 8.0.”
⁹⁰ West, “Unicode 8.0.”
⁹¹ West, “Unicode 8.0.”
⁹² West, “Unicode 8.0.”
⁹³ West, “Unicode 8.0.”

West also explains some of the distinctive functional mechanisms that are at work behind the coded glyphs:

The way that these emoji modifier characters act is similar to the way variation selectors work, but there is one crucial difference: variation selectors are default-ignorable non-spacing marks, which means that if a process does not support a particular variation sequence the variation selector may be ignored (not rendered) and the base character of the variation sequence rendered as if the variation selector was not present. In contrast the emoji modifier characters are spacing modifier symbols which should not be ignored: if a process supports a sequence of base character followed by an emoji modifier character then it should render the base character with the appropriate skin tone and discard the emoji modifier character ("Supported" column in above table), but if a process does not support the sequence it should render the base character followed by the emoji modifier character with their respective default glyphs ("Unsupported" column in above table). This way users should realise that they are missing something when they see an unsupported emoji modifier sequence.⁹⁴

West finally imagines a situation in which a it is desirable that members of the U+1F46A ☑ family are rendered with different skin tones:

Emoji Ad-hoc Committee has come up with an cunning solution that allows for the combination of emoji characters, emoji modifier characters and zero-width joiner characters to produce arbitrary emoji glyphs, as shown in the example below, where a sequence of eleven Unicode characters would be intended to be rendered as a single coloured glyph showing a multiracial family. A rather inelegant solution, some might think, and more akin to a markup language than plain text.⁹⁵

Due to this solution, owners of devices which run older versions of Unicode will instead of a glyph similar to “”⁹⁶ see something like “☐☐☐☐”. West comments that “these emoji skin tone modifier characters are far from non-controversial,” and he adds that

⁹⁴ West, “Unicode 8.0.”

⁹⁵ West, “Unicode 8.0.”

⁹⁶ The picture of the proposed glyph was presented in Peter Edberg and The Emoji Ad-hoc Committee, “ZWJ in emoji sequences as hint for single glyph,” Unicode® Technical Committee Document Registry, Unicode Inc., posted January 29, 2015 accessed August 29, <http://www.unicode.org/L2/L2015/15029-zwj-emoji.pdf>.

when they were discussed in October 2014 the “opinion amongst WG2 experts at the meeting ranged from grudging acceptance of them as a political necessity to outright opposition as potentially racist in their own right.”⁹⁷ At the end of the decision-making process the five emoji modifier characters were accepted. West concludes his post with a pointy question: “the question is, now that there is a mechanism for defining skin tone colours for Unicode characters, will this be enough? Or will users demand a similar mechanism to specify hair colour and eye colour? And will users want to expand the concept of modifier characters to cover any colour and any Unicode character? We shall see.”⁹⁸ When Unicode 9.0 was introduced in June 21, 2016, it brought 7,500 new characters including 72 emoji of animals, foods, sports, gestures and other categories of the human experience.⁹⁹

MISTAKES AND THEIR ACCUMULATED RESONANCE

With every new machine and every new algorithm that we use for text production we are prone to making typographical mistakes which would not occur in older production processes like handwriting or block printing. The importance of errors will be explained on the next few pages. The process of creation of textual messages, which are getting more and more visual again, unavoidably leaves its mark on the cultural product. The arrangement of the keys on the keyboard of a typewriter has been immediately felt for generations. Computer users now have new symbols and algorithmic processes which will enable them to shape global culture. Such programmed means, though, are an arbitrary axiom. The letters on a keyboard might have been arranged differently, the keyboard would thus not have been called a qwerty,¹⁰⁰ and Unicode might have agreed on different tones or skin colors. This immediate hands-on experience is what veils modern myth which is most relativised by fads, but the more dynamic the changes in fashion become a commonplace the less does the act of fashioning serve to relativise the myth that it builds. Today’s culture is highly participatory

⁹⁷ West, “Unicode 8.0.”

⁹⁸ West, “Unicode 8.0.”

⁹⁹ Another example of the textual tending towards the visual can be seen in the history of graffiti. One can also see that the palette of shades available to artists has been ever-broadening.

¹⁰⁰ See Torbjörn Lundmark, *Quirky Qwerty: The Story of the Keyboard @ Your Fingertips* (University of New South Wales Press, 2002), 17-19. For most common passwords blacklisted by Microsoft, such as qwerty, see Stacy Liberatore, “Microsoft Set to Ban Most Common Passwords in Bid to Improve Security,” Daily Mail Online, May 26, 2016, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-3611127/Microsoft-set-ban-common-passwords-bid-improve-security.html>.

but the man-made means of production which make participation possible (both object and code) are a mediated myth which further mythifies the society's product.

Historically, before global culture and internet, myth was lived differently. It was presented by an authoritative linear narrative—a story, a doctrine, a tradition—whose substrate was mainly the decaying objective world understood through unique instances. These recorded episodes were presented by a discourse from a viewpoint. As Richard Buxton writes in his entry on myth in *Encyclopædia Britannica* “every myth presents itself as an authoritative, factual account, no matter how much the narrated events are at variance with natural law or ordinary experience. By extension from this primary religious meaning, the word *myth* may also be used more loosely to refer to an ideological belief when that belief is the object of a quasi-religious faith; an example would be the Marxist eschatological myth of the withering away of the state.”¹⁰¹ Historically, you could opt out and decide not to observe a ritual, have different morals, or not believe a story, but try today to buy a computer with differently arranged keys and hope that it is available with your country's electric plug. Both the arbitrarily ergonomic design and the arbitrarily coded design of cultural objects further novelize and complexify the evolving state of global culture—we manufacture traveler's adapters and write programs which help users define their own keys based on a character set which is also programmed in binary which operates on a physical medium at certain voltage. Historically, the source of myth was less code.

Prehistorically, everything that was lived through the prism of a language was also a myth. The Waorani, an Ecuadorian tribe of nomadic hunters and gatherers who were discovered in the 1960s, still lead a Stone Age way of life. They speak a language with no written history, and they have not been suspecting that the wedges which they find around the rainforest and which they use to make stone axes are products left behind by their ancestors. This illustrates how they have become affected by their own myth.¹⁰² The meme to make wedges and its following meme to consider wedges to be human products have not survived among the tribe but their offspring meme to use stone axes has. Altogether, the way they live

¹⁰¹ Richard G.A. Buxton, Jonathan Z. Smith and Kees W. Boole, *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s.v. “myth,” accessed August 13, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/myth>.

¹⁰² They also cook their curare poison in a pot where monkey meat was cooked before because this is how the dart should more easily find its prey. They also try to enhance the poison's strength by singing a song. See “Nomads of the Rainforest PBS NOVA 1984,” YouTube video, 23:40–25:05, 39:53–41:00, from a film by PBS NOVA, *Nomads of the Rainforest*, televised on November 6, 1984, posted by “The Documentary Network,” August 7, 2013, accessed August 29, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hn8gk67s6YM>.

is their myth—the sum of all cultural information transferred by memes of which only some are active.¹⁰³

An active meme, in my words, means that the information which it transferred has been internalized by human capacities or externalized on media which spread their messages through media channels, be it done consciously or unconsciously. An active meme is traceable and it can again pass information. This cannot be done with a dead meme whose information has or has not been internalized by human capacities or externalized on media. A dead meme cannot be recognizably replicated. The complex myth which was built by memes can live on even if the memes which created the myth have been forgotten. Memes, as distinguishable forms, as units, can be likened to drops which transfer water that makes up large water bodies. Memes, like condensing droplets, can join as units of various sizes into clusters of various sizes. Unlike water, cultural information transferred by memes remains highly structured even if the transferring forms dissipate. If you had a drop of colored water and a drop of clear water and let them merge, then you could, based on molecular count and within the limits of technology, cut the resulting big drop back into two droplets of sizes almost the same as before, but due to the law of entropy the information within the forms would not be recognizably structured. When we want to trace back informational memes it is the ordered structure of the information, not its volume, that helps us do it, but we will hardly trace them back to their original form because we are tracing them on the basis of the received structured information which was received as distorted. The following example should explain how the distortion happens and why we might at times be unable to trace memes.

Imagine two groups of people ready to play a game of “Telephone”. The first person in the first group points randomly at a word in a dictionary and then he whispers it to the person who follows in the chain. When the signal reaches the last person at the end of the chain, the person writes it down. The first person from the second group has in the meantime flipped through a few pages in the dictionary, he has selected another word and it has already

¹⁰³ Here is how the Principia Cybernetica Project, “a world-wide organization collaboratively developing a computer-supported evolutionary-systemic philosophy,” has in 1990 defined memetic infection:

“Successful encoding of a meme in the memory of a human being. A memetic infection can be either active or inactive. It is inactive if the host does not feel inclined to transmit the meme to other people. An active infection causes the host to want to infect others. Fanatically active hosts are often membots or memeoids. A person who is exposed to a meme but who does not remember it (consciously or otherwise) is not infected. (A host can indeed be unconsciously infected, and even transmit a meme without conscious awareness of the fact. Many societal norms are transmitted this way.)” Glenn Grant, *Memetic Lexicon*, s.v. “infection,” in Francis Heylighen, Cliff Joslyn and Valentin Turchin, eds., *Principia Cybernetica Web* (Brussels, Principia Cybernetica, 1990), last modified October 31, 2002, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/memlex.html>.

reached the end of the chain where it has been recorded. When both groups reveal what they have written down, it is the same word, *infant*. In much confusion, the two people at the beginning of each chain reveal their chosen dictionary entries: one is *event* and the other is *telephone*.

When the players in the first group try to openly re-enact the transfer, they find that the first two people said *event*, the third heard it as *invent*, which the fourth understood as *in a vent*, and so he tried to send it forward to the fifth who understood it as *invent* which is what he tried to tell to the sixth who understood it as *infant*, which is what he wrote down.

The players in the second group find out that the second person still heard *telephone* but the third registered it as *allophone*, which was received by the fourth as *elephant* which is what he sent to the fifth who heard it as *infant*, which is what the sixth wrote down.

Both chains can be described in a diagram:

first person receives signal (1/1) – decodes signal (1/2) – encodes signal (1/3) – sends signal (1/4) – second person receives signal (2/1) – decodes signal (2/2) – (2/3) – (2/4) – (3/1) – ... (6/4)

Group 1: — first mutation of meme *1a* which conveys structured information (*event*) happened when the information arrived at stage (3/2) as *1b* (*invent*);
 — second mutation happened when the information travelled from (3/3) as *1b* (*invent*) and arrived at stage (4/2) as *1c* (*in a vent*) and lasted as such until (4/3) in one host only;
 — the fifth person at stage (5/2) got infected by *1d* (*invent*) which is in its form and content identical to *1b* (*invent*) but the evolutionary line of *1d* is longer and it has left its mark on the fourth host as *1c* (*in a vent*);
 — when (5/3) intended to send *1d* (*invent*) through (5/4) it was received at (6/2) as *1e* (*infant*) and was written down without a typo at (6/4).

Group 2: — first mutation of meme *2a* (*telephone*) happened when the information arrived at stage (3/2) as *2b* (*allophone*);
 — second mutation happened when *2b* (*allophone*) travelled from (3/3) through (3/4) and (4/1) and arrived at (4/2) as *2c* (*elephant*);
 — third mutation happened when *2c* (*elephant*) was sent from (4/3) and arrived at (5/2) as *2d* (*infant*) which is identical to *1e* (*infant*) in its form and its content but not in its evolutionary line.

If we, as observers, ask Group 1 members about how the information proceeded, they would be able to relate to us—apart from their not misread (1/1) and not misspelled (6/4)—only their (X/2) and (X/3) instances, that is, what they heard and what they thought they were sending forward. Thus, we would be able to learn about the fourth person’s *Ic (in a vent)*. If we, as observers, recorded their game with a high definition video camera with a microphone, we would learn about the meme only through—apart from the hopefully visible and not misread (1/1) and hopefully legible and not misspelled (6/4)—their (X/1) and (X/4) stages. As we, the observers, would process the recording (or the game in real-time) through our (7/1) stage at stage (7/2), we could start arguing as phoneticians or judges whether *Ic (in a vent)* was legible at (3/4) or even at (4/4). This availability of communication stages to our scrutiny is the difference between the study of memes in human hosts and the study of memes in secondary media.

Memes are shaped (in other words, distorted) by noise which happens at stages (X/1) and (X/4). They are also shaped at stage (X/2) when a human host assigns a meaning to the symbol that he receives (such as when he does not know a foreign language enough and misinterprets *faux amis*). Memes also mutate at stage (X/3) when we try to be creative, when we lie, when we fictionalize—that is we either intend the symbol to appear in a varying relation to other symbols or that we intend a change on the symbol itself, or both.

At this point I would like to share with the reader how I like to elaborate on the term *différance*, which was coined by a French philosopher Jacques Derrida.¹⁰⁴ A simplified and concise definition provided by Encyclopaedia Britannica says:

Derrida coined the term *différance*, meaning both a difference and an act of deferring, to characterize the way in which linguistic meaning is created rather than given. For Derrida as for Saussure, the meaning of a word is a function of the distinctive contrasts it displays with other, related meanings. Because each word depends for its meaning on the meanings of other words, it follows that the meaning of a word is never fully ‘present’ to us, as it would be if meanings were the same as ideas or intentions; instead it is endlessly ‘deferred’ in an infinitely long chain of meanings.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ See Jacques Derrida, “Différance,” trans. David B Allison, in *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 129–60.

¹⁰⁵ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Jacques Derrida,” accessed August 29, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jacques-Derrida>.

This definition can be expanded with the help of *The Broadview Pocket Glossary of Literary Terms*:

First, Derrida saw the meaning of any object or concept as being shaped not absolutely by anything intrinsic to the thing or concept itself. Rather it is shaped by the ways in which we see that object or concept in relation to other things—and in how the object or concept is perceived to differ from other objects or concepts. Second, Derrida saw words as always being inadequate to the task of giving complete expression to meaning: once one has made an attempt to express a meaning one must resort to further attempts, to more words; one must defer, and the moment when complete understanding of any meaning is achieved can never arrive.¹⁰⁶

In addition to the summarizing entries, following are some of the offerings that Derrida gives us, with a poignant meditative appeal, in his brilliant essay “Différance:”

I will say, first of all, that *différance*, which is neither a word nor a concept, seemed to me to be strategically the theme most proper to think out, if not master (thought being here, perhaps, held in a certain necessary relation with the structural limits of mastery), in what is most characteristic of our ‘epoch.’¹⁰⁷

Différance is what makes the movement of signification possible only if each element that is said to be ‘present,’ appearing on the stage of presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element.¹⁰⁸

[...] we shall designate by the term *différance* the movement by which language, or any code, any system of reference in general, becomes ‘historically’ constituted as a fabric of differences.¹⁰⁹

What we note as *différance* will thus be the movement of play that ‘produces’ (and not by something that is simply an activity) these differences, these effects of difference. This does

¹⁰⁶ Laura Buzzard, Don LePan, comp., *The Broadview Pocket Glossary of Literary Terms* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2014), 39. For a not so concise but a very useful definition which builds on other terms coined by Derrida see M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (1957; Boston: Thomson Learning, 1999), 57.

¹⁰⁷ Derrida, “Différance,” 135–136.

¹⁰⁸ Derrida, “Différance,” 142.

¹⁰⁹ Derrida, “Différance,” 141.

not mean that the difference which produces differences is before them in a simple and in itself unmodified and indifferent present. Difference is the nonfull, nonsimple ‘origin’; it is the structured and differing origin of differences.¹¹⁰

Every concept is necessarily and essentially inscribed in a chain or a system, within which it refers to another and to other concepts, by the systematic play of differences. Such a play, then—difference—is [...]¹¹¹

[...] this play must be a sort of inscription prior to writing, a protowriting without a present origin, without an *arché*. From this comes the systematic crossing-out of the *arché* and the transformation of general semiology into a grammatology, the latter performing a critical work upon everything within semiology—right down to its matricial concept of signs—that retains any metaphysical presuppositions incompatible with the theme of difference.¹¹²

In order to understand Derrida’s term, I imagine a geometric space in which there is a cube whose side is composed of three smaller cubes, so that altogether there are nine cubes at the basis, nine in the middle and nine on the top. If the cubes were not transparent, then there would be one small cube in the middle of the large cube which we could not see. This small cube in the middle borders on all other small cubes, and in my thinking it is fractally isomorphic with the category of a meme, a grapheme, a glyph, a phoneme, a word, a sentence, a trope, etc., that is, any unit which transfers structured information. Then I imagine all cubes to be formed by structured information on their surface and hold that this middle cube’s structure can be delineated if we described all its surrounding cubes by their coordinates (for example, the coordinates on axes x, y, and z for the middle cube are A=[2, 1, 1], B=[2, 2, 1], C=[1, 2, 1], D=[1, 1, 1], E=[2, 1, 2], F=[2, 2, 2], G=[1, 2, 2], H=[1, 1, 2]), in other words, in a metalanguage as mathematics is for physics. I imagine that the structured information which delineates the cube restructures in time, and simultaneously its volume may fluctuate—the structured information in its bound mutates and simultaneously its bound stretches, shrinks, or stays the same, even if we exchange one of its bordering cubes for another—that is, we delineate it by a part of a different informational bound. *Différance*, to me, is the delicate surface tension which holds all clusters together and lets one term to an extent be defined and

¹¹⁰ Derrida, “Différance,” 141.

¹¹¹ Derrida, “Différance,” 140.

¹¹² Derrida, “Différance,” 146.

shaped by other terms. It is the presence of relational patterning expressed on structured information.

In figure 4 we can see a digitally modeled cluster of bubbles undergoing a change in time.

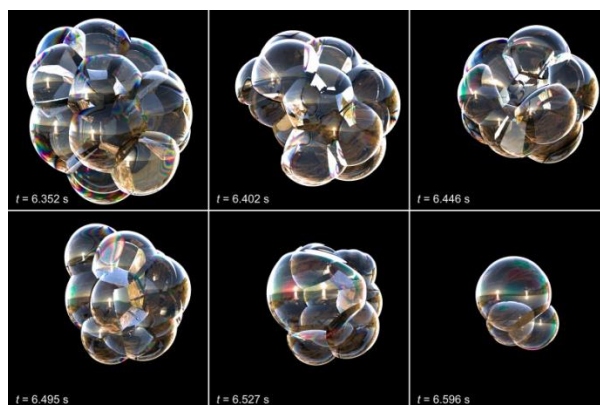


Figure 4. Evolving foams model.¹¹³

I now ask the reader to imagine as real bubbles what was previously to be imagined as cubes. Air is signal, soap-water is myth delineating the mental air within which is the total of all signifieds. The principle stays the same, the mathematical delineation of the units is only more mathematically challenging. The tension of the *différance* happens on the whole surface of the bubbles but it is only at certain points that the force is locally more intense, in other words, such points are more prominent as they help us talk about the whole system in metalanguage. I introduce two examples into this model.

First, imagine a bubble amidst other bubbles and also imagine another bubble of a different shape amidst other bubbles. Let the first central bubble be the word *tolerance* and the other central bubble *motivation*. Grammar—a subset of *différance*, which is the tension between all bubbles best manifested at certain parts of the bubbles,—tells us by the suffixes of both words that they function as nouns, and we do not even have to look at the bubbles that surround them.

Second, imagine a bubble amidst other bubbles and also imagine another bubble of the same shape amidst other bubbles. Let the first central bubble be the word *die* and the other central bubble also *die*. Grammar tells us that one functions as a verb and the other as a noun.

¹¹³ Robert I. Saye and James A. Sethian, “Multiscale Modeling of Membrane Rearrangement, Drainage, and Rupture in Evolving Foams,” *Science* (2013) 340: 6133, 720–724, doi: 10.1126/science.1230623.

Even though the structured information read solely at the central bubbles' surfaces is the same, the surrounding contextual bubbles are different and thus pressure structured information into an identical cluster on a small scale but different in terms of its relation to other structured information. Grammar is nothing that would stand separate of language, nothing that would be given in advance. Grammar, just like the rest of *différance*, is emergent and inseparable from words just as it is dependent on their existence.

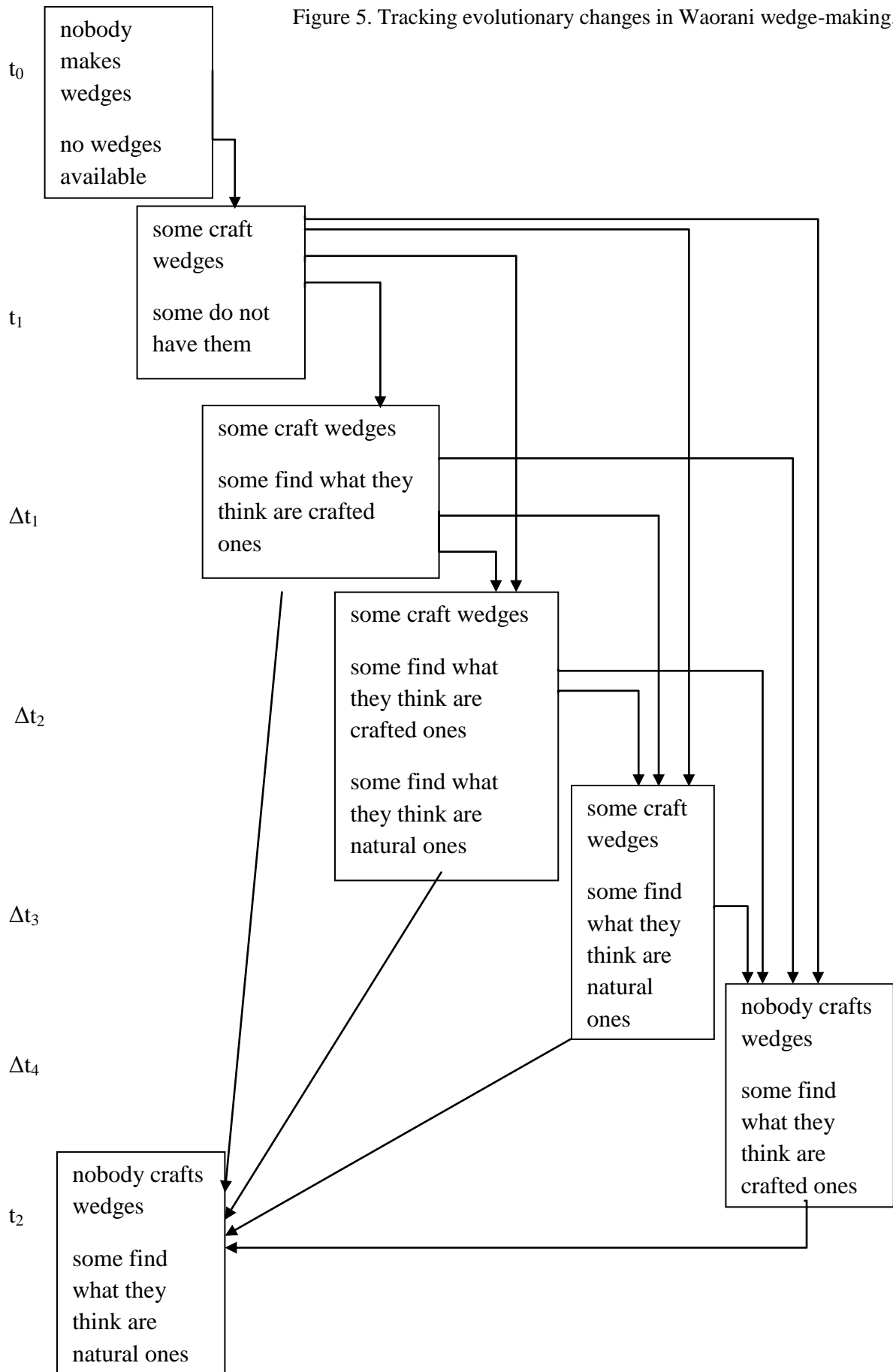
The last step in our imagined model is to take all the bubbles, freeze their shapes and pull them all apart, so that they in their shapes resemble crumbled styrofoam. If the shapes were words and if we wanted to use them to form a grammatical sentence we would need to assemble a sequence of bubbles the bounds of which lock into one another. Through grammatical usage, ungrammatical abuse and forgetful non-usage, the memetic bounds of symbols are always slightly changed—they become more rigid or more flexible. The structured information on the bound can, but does not have to, mutate and as the bound can stretch (when mutation increases the volume of structured information), shrink (when mutation decreases the volume of structured information), or stay the same in size (when mutation does not affect the volume of structured information), its flexibility can increase or decrease. When the information on the bound does not mutate and the bound does not stretch or shrink, but flexibility increases, we speak about a rising acceptability of a word within a context—when we think up a new word which will not mutate and its emergent meaning will be pinpointed by a definition, if it is flexible enough, it will be successfully combined in sentences and spread through discourses, simply because it is a useful or a beautiful word. If it is rigid then it will stay a private joke, a part of a subculture, a regional variant.

If our “Telephone” example was to tell us about languages, then let us consider that Group 1 and Group 2 speak English the vocabulary of which has evolved through the mechanisms of memetic mutation. Now let us just exchange *1e (infant)* in the context of the game which has different evolutionary lines in both groups for *1n (die)* in the historical context. We know that in English *die* can function as a verb or as the single noun of the plural *dice*. Now let us suppose that Group 1, as mature English speakers, have evolved *1n (die)* which they use as a verb and also an evolutionarily different meme *2n (die)* which they use as a noun. Group 2, language learners, have only evolved *1n (die)*. When they would hear *2n (die)* from a Group 1 speaker in a grammatical sentence they would have to, in order to understand, either accept that *1n (die)* can also be used in a different syntactic relation than they had previously thought, that is, they would have to inflict a change on the *différance* and on the signified, or they would have to introduce a new meme *2n (die)* with a distinct

syntactic function and encompassing another, much different signified into their vocabulary and thus also affect the *différance*. Why I think that the study of memes is important is that if we try to trace memes back in their evolutionary lines, we might better understand them and more easily accept them as evolving categories. We can then try to look for analogies among them on a fractally higher or lower scale of the system. In case we observed two or more evolving and growing systems of memetically transferred information, we could compare any kind of a wave function on them. We might also be able to see whether comparable memes of a certain structure appear sooner or later in the evolutionary states of such systems, because of the pressuring force of existence of other systemic units in earlier time and thus, hopefully, we might point at generally occurring tendencies.

Just like the 1960s Waorani culture, global culture as the sum of all people thinking at $\sum(X/2)$ in time t_2 lives a more complex myth than it did in t_1 , but its people are unsuspecting of and unable to trace the memes which made their myth so complex, as the myth in time progressed between these two phases. At t_2 , the Waorani share a meme which expresses some of their current myth—they hold that *2a (wedges are convenient natural objects which often happen to occur around the rainforest only)*—which was thinkable in t_1 only as a lie or fiction by those who had to manufacture wedges, which might in fact have been, but did not have to be, inspired by very scarce natural objects in t_0 before t_1 . We might imagine that during the transfer of the Waorani culture from the t_1 state of you-can-get-a-wedge-only-if-you-craft-it, their culture might have passed through a number of hypothetical phases in Δt .

Figure 5. Tracking evolutionary changes in Waorani wedge-making.



The meme of wedge-making died before t_2 with the last wedge maker and with those who remembered him to make wedges or believed his stories about wedge-making or the stories about him being a wedge-maker, or the stories about any other part of the objective world to be tied to wedge-making. At t_0 and t_2 the crafting of wedges is thinkable only as fiction or a lie and we can see that the structured information read on any meme as wedge-making could have been lost in ten different ways and could have gone through up to four hypothetical phases. The change of myth is traceable through hypothetical phases with hypothetical memes the number of which is limited by logic. The occurrence of any of the hypothetical phases or their memes, though, is unprovable. Conclusions about Δt are unprovable, we can only think them within the limits of logic and probability.¹¹⁴

Again, we will never be able to track down which meme at Δt might have transferred and restructured the information which we now read at $\sum(X/2)t_2$ in a culture. We can only see that it mutated between t_1 and t_2 and we can make schemes within logical bounds about what phases the myth might have gone through, and which memes might have transferred it, but we will never be able to prove which of them really occurred, just like we could never verify—but could only hypothesize about—the existence of Group 1's *Ic (in a vent)* without asking the human host about his (4/2) and (4/3). If we at (7/2), as observers of cultural artefacts, clearly read from replay the meme *Ic (in a vent)* at stages (3/4) and (4/4), it does not prove that *Ic (in a vent)* was transferred through (4/2) and (4/3), that it was ever hosted by someone at all. Even if it were not hosted by anyone, the *Ic (in a vent)* may become a part of our culture now and we can try to pass it on. Misreading and mispronouncing are just as fruitful production techniques as analysing and hypothesizing—they all make memes mutate. Due to these procedures, we live a more and more complex myth just like today's Waorani, who have

¹¹⁴ The same limits apply to any results brought by contemporary evolutionary biology. This fact has inevitably raised voices demanding a change in the view of scientists, as well as the rest of the public, on how probability trees in the tracking of evolutionary changes should be accepted as a legitimate tool that can shape our understanding of evolution. See John Whitfield “Biological Theory: Postmodern Evolution?,” *Nature* 455 (2008): 281-84, doi:10.1038/455281a. Joe Thornton, who has done groundbreaking research in molecular evolution of hormone receptors, has been able to physically construct the forgotten steps through which more complex systems might have arisen. Assisted by probabilistic computer modeling from his fellow researcher, he could narrow the hypothetical evolutionary line to its most probable variant. Even such ingenious research, though, will necessarily need to be accepted as a result of explanatory narrative limited by a method which cannot be principally surpassed. See Helen Pearson, “Prehistoric Proteins: Raising the Dead,” *Nature* 483, no. 7390 (2012): 390–393, posted March 22, 2012, doi:10.1038/483390a. For another such research on the evolution of sweet taste in hummingbirds, see Maude W. Baldwin et al., “Evolution of Sweet Taste Perception in Hummingbirds by Transformation of the Ancestral Umami Receptor,” *Science* 6199, no. 345 (2014): 929–933, doi: 10.1126/science.1255097.

The study of internet memes, though, can be well tracked because digital data can be retained.

kept the offspring meme to use stone axes, but they are unsuspecting of and unable to trace the memes that made their myth so complex.

LOGICAL EXERCISE ABOUT SPEECH

So, are there any boundaries that help facilitate the change of myth that happens on (X/1), (X/2), (X/3) and (X/4)?

Suppose that you found yourself in a bizarre model situation which is governed by strictly logical rules. Imagine yourself chained in the middle of a sunlit room full of oriental delicacies. In the room there is also a wax figurine of a monkey servant, a monkey servant, a robot which operates a retractable claw, a foreign servant with a spork, and a cyborg servant with a syringe. You could compel the cyborg with your thoughts if only you could switch on the apparatus that twists around your forehead (you can even see the instructions how to synchronize your devices embossed on the cyborg's apparatus in your mother tongue). You shout and everybody except for the wax monkey figurine and the telepathic cyborg bring you food.

Soon you accept that you will not be able to teach the monkey by classical conditioning how to react to different orders so that it could cater to your tastes but it will keep bringing random foods and drinks at regular intervals not frequent enough to sustain you. Sometimes it might seem that it has been bringing the same food without variation until it brings something that it has not brought for a long time and sometimes it will even serve you something that has yet been unknown to your tastes. It is a good monkey so it will almost always react to a shout when you cry it out.

You also find out that the robot is operable but not programmable. As its claw reclines over the provisions, you either shout and it grabs what is closest or you wait for what seems to be unbearably long time before it moves randomly to another dish which it grabs if you give out a shout.

The foreign servant will always respond to your shout and will be thoughtful enough to bring you regular sufficient nutrition but never any of the most enticing unfamiliar treats. Additionally, every time he feeds you with his spork he grunts something unintelligible.

As days keep dragging by, you find out that if you repeat what the servant has grunted he will bring you the same thing. As you slowly learn his vocabulary and enjoy controllable variation in your diet you realize that he will probably never bring you the thing that he has

never brought because you have learned your language from him and he has never related to you what the thing you desire is called in his language. For an incapable dependent human, like a baby or yourself in this model situation, everything is perfectly visible and sometimes you register a smell which is hard to liken to anything you have ever smelled or tasted.

So you design a strategy and try not to accept the food that you have ordered from your servant but what he does is that he holds his spork in front of your mouth until you swallow or until he goes away from his own initiative and brings you something else from what he usually brings. He has never tripped over which would send him spill his spork. Then, you try to be inventive with your newly acquired language and try to introduce a new word which you intend to mean one of the things that he never brings, but it does not work. So you try to introduce a new word which you intend to mean *negation*. You say what translates as *not water, not rice*, but he at times considers your sign for negation a noise which obstructs the rest of your message and so he does not bring you anything. At other times, he ignores your sign for negation and brings you what he hears as, for example, *rice*. Rarely, he seems to listen to your long command but as the room is full of various dishes you cannot finish your negative order before you would starve. This is the point when you have to either find a pattern in his words, that is grammar, and hope that he is programmable so that you could by abstraction form a new order which he would understand as a description of the food you crave, or you will remain comfortably stuck until forever or until, as you also hope, he trips over and describes his act of spilling. You could then order *spill water, spill rice* and wait to see if spilling depletes the reserves, so that his caring nature would force him to bring you the remaining dish which you do not know the name of.

As it happens, human languages have words for colors which function as modifiers of nouns. This language strategy has proved useful probably because it is easier to direct somebody to bring you a *blue thing* or a *red thing* before you encompass an extensive list of yet unknown nouns. But this language strategy, in a world of plenty, presupposes the existence of hypernyms, that is nouns of general order like *vegetable, fruit* or *meat* or simply a *thing*. Let me explain why.

If the servant's sentences have been descriptive enough and structurally complex enough to provide you with enough clues to understand which grunt stands for a color, and which grunts for other modifiers, like big and small (in case his language distinguishes between these two concepts since he only gets involved with the dishes in sporkfuls) should you then be able to describe your desired meal by giving a description which distinguishes your desired food from every other dish in the room?

If your desired food was a yellow cucumber which you had never tasted but you know the word for yellow and you had been served a green cucumber, you could order a *yellow cucumber* and be served a *yellow cucumber*. Now imagine you desired an aubergine. How could you articulate the feature that makes it differ from the *yellow cucumber*?

If the servant has not given you general nouns of higher order like plant orders or *vegetable* or *thing*, your wish could not be fulfilled because you could not order a *purple Asterid* as opposed to a purple *Rosid* which are both *purple Eudicots* but one is an aubergine and the other a cucumber.

If there was nothing else of purple color in the room, you could either hope that the servant's description of the color spectrum (to whose regions we refer by verbal approximations as in *lapis lazuli*, *cobalt* or *aquamarine blue* or by positions on a coded scale that can take us into infrared or ultraviolet regions) does not register purple as a distinct color and so you might try saying *red cucumber* or *blue cucumber* or *big cucumber* long enough, until he, hopefully, would bring you the aubergine because he would also ignore slight differences in the two vegetables' shapes. With him an aubergine could pass for a cucumber due to a permitted marginal error in definitions which he accepts as orders.

If he has taught you the word for purple, and provided that there are no purple cucumbers in the room, you could order a *purple cucumber*. Hopefully, based on margin for error, this would send him for your aubergine but if his language calls an aubergine a *purple pickle* and his permitted marginal error for orders is low, you would have to try again. What is most probable is that you would hardly ever guess the proper modified noun for aubergine which might be a *purple banana* or that you would guess the unique noun for aubergine, which might be *eggplant*.

I make this example to illustrate that if an existing symbolic human language is to spread as an operable system (a memplex), it should consist of symbols of higher order which group subsets of more specific symbols—hyponyms. Only then can we communicate without the use of negative definitions, big marginal errors and an infinite or almost infinite word-stock intertwined by no or poor grammar.

This means, turned the other way round, that in order to construct a new symbolic human language which you want to communicate in with another participant, you should at first allow for a big marginal error in reading, permit negative definitions and cherish errors in production. This operational gap will keep closing as your new language will be formed. If errors are accepted and interpreted by the receiver of a message, they can also enhance the system. Sometimes, the use of a negative definition will result in a new symbol due to

interference with noise, broad general symbols will branch out into specific, less encompassing symbols and thus misunderstandings will be less common due to the diminishing permitted margin for error. Once you will have established a number of specific symbols, you will be able to form new previously unthinkable broad categories by which you will grasp some of the specific symbols which you will think share a common feature. This is how the myth, the code that we live and build, permits us to grasp it by new previously unthinkable memes as it becomes the more its own nourishment.

PART 3: CONTEMPORARY MYTHS AS SIGNS

Discharge between layers of the Chinese semiotic system.

From ASCII to Pedobear.

From Pedobear to centaurs.

The first section describes the transfer of a metaphor between the orthographic and the phonetic layer of Chinese. The second section points out Pedobear as an example of a new sign acquiring its signifying and its signified. The third section presents an analysis of the myth of centaur and it offers a schematic model which should aid its diachronic memetic analysis.




DISCHARGE BETWEEN LAYERS OF THE CHINESE SEMIOTIC SYSTEM


When we track memes, we should not read them only on the orthographic, phonetic or syntactic level of performance; we must glide and switch between all layers of our systems of expression. Thus we may find how a message mutated and to what degree our system of expression contributed to the mutation of the message. This contribution of the systemic to the mutation of information is where myth originates because if we had used a different system, things could have evolved differently. Our minds are conditioned by the necessity of having systems of expression through which we share messages. Serviceable human languages seem to indispensably hold in themselves the quality of being able to corrupt messages.





An example of this systemic discharge, of this short-circuit between multiple layers of the linguistic sign, can be found in Chinese. There was the concept "to do obedience, to observe a monastic rule" and another concept "to break off with the fingers and thumb." The first concept, the signified, was pronounced [:bài:] and the second concept was pronounced [:bāi:]—just to remind the reader, Chinese is a tone language and the difference in intonation makes a difference in meaning. Among its written characters, Chinese has many which are 形声 [:xíngshēng:], that is "one of the types of Han characters, containing those characters comprising a part that indicates the meaning, and a part that indicates the pronunciation,"¹¹⁵ in other words "pictophonetic characters, with one element indicating meaning and the other




¹¹⁵ Wiktionary, s.v. "形声," accessed August 29, 2016, <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%E5%BD%A2%E8%81%B2#Chinese>.



sound.”¹¹⁶ So, sometimes when a Chinese learner sees a new character, he can guess that it might be read in a certain way or close enough to what he might conjecture, but at times also much differently as, let us say, in characters 清 [:qīng:], 请 [:qǐng:], 情 [:qíng:] because of the component 青 [:qīng:] but 猜 [:cāi:]. The concept of “to do obedience” [:bài:] was written 拜. Richard Sears informs us under the relative entry on his [chineseetymology.org](http://www.chineseetymology.org) that it is a primitive pictograph which conjoins “hand 扌手 placing some crops 丰 on an altar. Meaning to worship.”¹¹⁷ He also provides over a hundred examples of the character from different

times as they were found in historical texts, such as  and  but also  or







 where the two components switch places and the lines which compose them change their own curves, orientation and at other times, as we shall see, even count. Because the graphic rendering of a hand and of crops has many similarities, the metaphor was at times reappropriated or seen differently in the tying together of concepts, such as hand hand as in













the fourth and the fifth character in the following row    

 or as crops crops in   where they are placed on an altar. It is much

harder, though, to be clear on whether there is still altar in  as it is in . The

following row of characters which all stand for the concept “to do obedience” is presented so that the reader may decide how much of an altar he or she reads in them (the two characters

that have been shown above are included):      

           . ¹¹⁸ At times the complete comprehension of the hand-written character might be fuzzy. The visual metaphor

¹¹⁶ Pleco Software Incorporated, version 3.2.2., s.v. “形声.”

¹¹⁷ Richard Sears, *Chinese Etymology*, s.v. “拜,” accessed August 29, 2016, <http://www.chineseetymology.org/CharacterEtymology.aspx?submitButton1=Etymology&characterInput=%E6%8B%9C>.

¹¹⁸ All characters in Sears, *Chinese Etymology*, s.v. “拜.”

may vary, the order of the constituents of the metaphor may vary, and lines might come and go, dissect or conjoin. But let us suppose for the purpose of this example, that the signified for which these characters were used, that is “to do obedience,” was more or less the same—although in reality each scribe, in his own time of production of the character, must have expressed the concept a bit differently—and let us also suppose that the pronunciation was still [ːbài:] although some speakers might, of course, have diverged from it.

When the written character 拜 was established, it was taken as the phonetic part to construct a new character for a concept that was pronounced [ːbāi:] which, as it was said, meant “to break off with the fingers and thumb.” So, as Sears tells us in his etymological dictionary, 拜 [ːbài:] was taken as a phonetic constituent and it was combined with the meaningful part 分 [ːfen:] which consists of “knife 刀 and separation 八. Meaning to divide.”¹¹⁹ What happened then is that the graphic properties of the phonetic constituent let the new character mutate into 掰 [ːbāi:] which shows two hands and divide, instead of a hand, divide and crops. The character 掰 is used for “to break off with the fingers and thumb.” This shows how orthography yielded to the possibility of making the constituents of the phonetic part mutate so that a metaphor of hand 手 divide 分 hand 手 could be established within the character.

But this had an unexpected effect on the already existing system of signs—when the Chinese want to say that they broke up with their partner, they say [ːwǒmen fēnshǒu le:] which is written 我们分手了, i.e. me+plural+divide+hand+past participle, but today it is also possible to express the same concept by saying [ːwǒmen bāi le:] written as 我们掰了 because it shows the metaphor of dividing hands in the written character. But this metaphor had been normally achieved through intersyllabic syntax between 分 [ːfen:] and 手 [ːshou:]. This example shows how a concept, a signified, with a disyllabic signifier, got a second monosyllabic signifier. The new signifier did not come to it because it would in any way resemble the already existing disyllabic signifier or because it would even evolve from it. It came to it because of a perceived equivalence of metaphors, one on the level of syntax of the spoken language, and the other on the level of visual syntax between constituents of a written character which had already a concept assigned to it, while the two concepts, i.e. “to break up with somebody” and “to break off with fingers and thumb” were not in proximity in the

¹¹⁹ Richard Sears, *Chinese Etymology*, s.v. “分,” accessed August 29, 2016, <http://www.chineseetymology.org/CharacterEtymology.aspx?submitButton1=Etymology&characterInput=%E5%88%86>.

discursive space. The connection between these two levels of syntax was made due to a mutation on the orthographic level because the rendering of minor constituents of the characters—the strokes—was a simple method open to some error in both production and reading. The phonetic [ːbāiː] was thus attracted to the concept of a break up.

Now imagine that a Chinese learner who learns from a movie sees the written character 掰 in the subtitles to a scene of a break up—what he learns is the result of the systemic interaction described earlier. His spoken syntax could then, for some time at least, do without the metaphor 分[ːfenː] 手[ːshouː] as he would perceive a quite similar metaphor behind a single syllable [ːbāiː] 手分手 on the level of glyphs. Phonetically, though, this metaphor is unexpressed and so if there were a language learner who would not come in contact with the written character 掰 but who would from conversation understand the concept of a break up expressed as [ːbāiː], he could completely lose the metaphor on both levels. If he, in the future, learned to also use the disyllabic signifier, he would understand the metaphor but he would have no idea, why he should use [ːbāiː] apart from the fact that it is shorter and that it works. This example shows how the language system influenced itself and how it opened new possibilities for human thinking as it must certainly have influenced the number of possibilities that are there for expression when one wants to improvise, let us say, a rhyming song about a break up. Middle English also experienced a systemic corruption when it pressured its pronunciation of concepts by operations on the orthographic level which was intended as a phonetic alphabet—this well-known phenomenon is called the minim confusion.

FROM ASCII TO PEDOBEAR

Let us now get back to (づ^_^)づ and other emoticons which would hardly be a product of a western keyboard user and which have become a part of our history. Thus, we will be able to show where one can find similarities in the evolution of various myths, so that theoretical conclusions may be drawn at the end of this chapter. ASCII art, a western branch of graphic design popularized by computer pioneers like Kenneth Knowlton and still broadly used as signatures in instructive readme files available with cracked downloaded programs from warez forums¹²⁰ is in Japan called Shift-JIS art. There it employs the Japanese keyboard

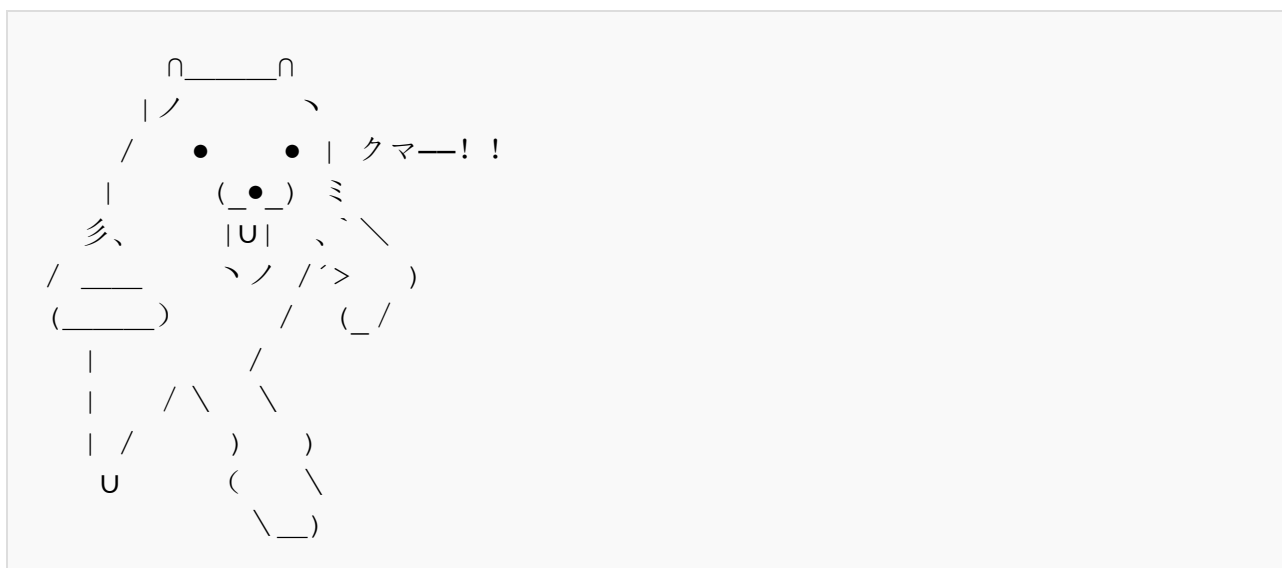
¹²⁰ *Wikipedia*, s.vv. “ASCII art,” last modified August 23, 2016, accessed August 26, 2016 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ASCII_art.

character set, and in 2003, this production technique was used to start a thread on a famous Japanese textboard 2channel. The line

くまくま————、(・(エ)・)ノ———— !!!

occasioned numerous mutations—the archived thread spans eight months with 971 posts.¹²¹

The 590th post which was submitted five months into the discussion was



and in the thread it spun off only one mutation five posts later where the text line on which we read the bear’s eyes was

/ ◎ ◎ | くまー————!!! .

The thread contains hundreds of Shift-JIS bears (among them a koala, a panda, Winnie the Pooh, a bear making its bed, a bear riding a car, flexing, smoking, dancing, two bears with a laptop etc.) many of which were submitted multiple times and with mutation to the thread. User ぶる ~ 3 who created the hasty bear posted it in another thread from where it was copied to other threads until it gradually established itself as an indicator that an original poster must be trolling,¹²² that is behaving on the Internet in a way “that is meant to intentionally anger or frustrate someone else in order to provoke a response.”¹²³ As Wikipedia informs, “eventually posting Kuma Shift_JIS art evolved into a response to "fishing" posts submitted as "bait" to attract people (fishing for attention), which is why the bear is depicted as literally running into

¹²¹ See *Minizun* (textboard), last modified October 31, 2003, <http://mimizun.com/log/2ch/ka0/1046353580/>.

¹²² See *Wikipedia*, “くまー,” last modified September 15, 2013, accessed August 29, 2016, <https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E3%82%AF%E3%83%9E%E3%83%BC>.

¹²³ *Know Your Meme*, s.v. “Trolling,” last modified June 24, 2015, accessed August 29, 2016, knowyourmeme.com/memes/subcultures/trolling.

the forum to get the bait.”¹²⁴ Japanese Wikipedia also archives a five-step Shift-JIS sequence in which this bear, known as クマー (Kumā), is baited with a hook and caught. KnowYourMeme.com informs that in 2004 Kumā—who later evolved into a more graphic Pedobear—was allegedly posted by an anonymous user in an ASCII art thread on 4chan.org “in creepy references to lolis,¹²⁵ a slang term used to describe hentai manga of underage female characters. From that moment forward, Pedobear’s taste in women was known. And the Internet would not soon forget. Throughout 2004 Pedobear grew famous for his seal of approval towards prepubescent girls and its catchphrase ‘Is that some loli.’ Although its phrase has faded away, the Pedobear seal of approval has continued to live on. Over time, Pedobear has become a characterization of pedophilia on the web appearing in a large number of exploitable images and macros.”¹²⁶

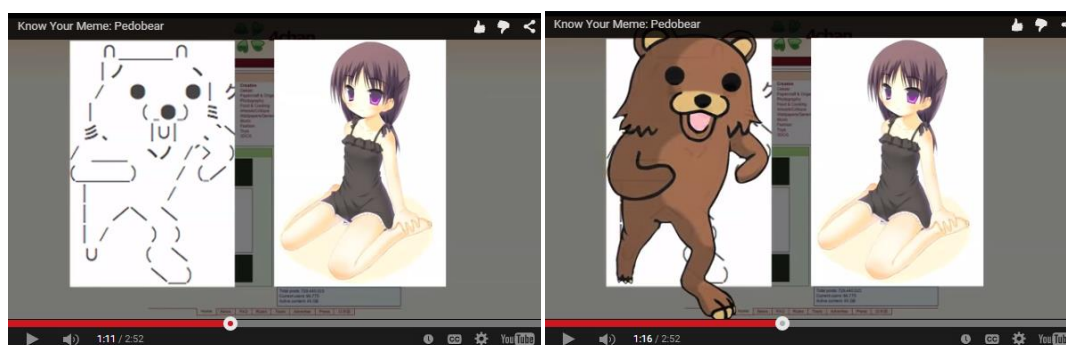


Figure 6. From Kumā to Pedobear.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ More correctly, the depiction of a running bear was first and posting it in response to “fishing” followed, which shows that the clause *which is why the bear is depicted as literally running into the forum to get the bait* confuses cause and effect but otherwise describes the communicative function of the sign correctly. See *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Pedobear,” last modified May 4, 2016, accessed August 29, 2016, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedobear>.

¹²⁵ The term refers to Vladimir Nabokov’s novel *Lolita* (1955) which works with the motif of obsessive love of a calculative middle-aged man towards a sexualized manipulative prepubescent girl.

¹²⁶ “Know Your Meme: Pedobear,” YouTube video, 1:10–1:42, posted by “Know Your Meme,” November 22, 2011, accessed August 29, 2016,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ea3DXxMmQOM&ab_channel=KnowYourMeme.

¹²⁷ “Know Your Meme: Pedobear,” YouTube video, 1:11; 1:15.



Figure 7. Seal of approval 1.¹²⁸



Figure 8. Seal of approval 2.¹²⁹

Until mid-2015, photos of prepubescent girls who are striking lascivious postures which are more commonly performed by models in men's magazines were readily swapped through 8chan's [/nnmodels/](#) image board tagged Young Models and Jailbait. Pedobear's relation to child erotica evolved on 4chan's [/b/ - Random](#) board which long used to be sought as an anonymous platform to do the like at least, since numerous sources speak of the exchange of child pornography. KnowYourMeme.com says that "on July 3rd, 2009, blogger Michael Barrick created a composite image depicting Pedobear grouped together with fan art of the cartoon mascots of the Vancouver Winter Olympics created by artist Angela Melick. On

¹²⁸ *Funny Junk* (imageboard), "Pedobear Seal of Approval," posted by "TheOneKing," November 15, 2010, accessed August 29, 2016, http://funnyjunk.com/funny_pictures/1210468/Pedobear/.

¹²⁹ El Grone Vergolin, comment on Legendario Taringuero, *Taringa* (imageboard), accessed August 29, 2016, <http://www.taringa.net/DIABLOTARINGA>.

Thursday, February 4th, 2010 Polish newspaper *The [sic] Gazeta Olsztynska* mistakenly used the image for a front page story about the Olympics in Vancouver.¹³⁰



Figure 9. Pedobear Olympic mascot.¹³¹

Another misplacement of Pedobear happened in January 2011 in Mysłówice. A kindergarten owner Andrzej Motyl, who contracted an advertising agency to design an advert for his services, deserved unanticipated attention for Pedobear in his advert. As it was explained, the uninformed choice was made by the graphic designer after having searched the Internet for a logo of a bear free of copyright.¹³²

¹³⁰ *Know Your Meme*, s.v. “Pedobear,” last modified June 7, 2016, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/pedobear>.

¹³¹ Matthew More, “Polish Newspaper Claims ‘Pedobear’ Is 2010 Vancouver Olympic Mascot,” [London] *The Telegraph*, February 8, 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/howaboutthat/7187027/Polish-newspaper-claims-Pedobear-is-2010-Vancouver-Olympic-mascot.html>.

¹³² OW, PS, “Pedobear został patronem przedszkola w Mysłówicach na trzy dni. Błąd grafika— tłumacza,” [Pedobear Was the Mascot of a Mysłówice Kindergarten for Three Days. A Mistake of the Graphic Designer—Translator] *Naszemiasto*, January 12, 2011, accessed August 29, 2016, http://katowice.naszemiasto.pl/artukul/pedobear-zostal-patronem-przedszkola-w-myslowicach-na-trzy,733476,art,t,id,tm.html?sesja_gratka=2a9a8347932b7ea600fef4029805112e.



Figure 10. Perobear kindergarten mascot.¹³³

And finally, one more example, as reported by KnowYourMeme.com: “On July 19th, 2012, Nestle’s chocolate candy brand Kit Kat uploaded an Instagram photo of a man in a bear suit resembling Pedobear via its Facebook page to announce the launch of its official Instagram account. The similarity in appearance was immediately pointed out by Facebook commenters and the post was taken down shortly after.”¹³⁴ Nestle Australia & New Zealand’s spokeswoman told the *Sydney Morning Herald* that they had never heard of Pedobear and that “the problem wasn’t putting a photo up on a social media site - it was faulty branding with poor understanding of symbolism.”¹³⁵

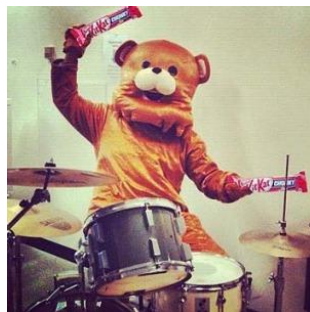


Figure 11. Pedobear Nestle’s Kit Kat mascot.¹³⁶

¹³³ OW, PS, “Pedobear,” *Naszemiasto*.

¹³⁴ *Know Your Meme*, s.v. “Pedobear.”

¹³⁵ Chris Zappone, “Pedobear Ruins Nestle’s Facebook Party,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, July 19, 2012, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/business/media-and-marketing/pedobear-ruins-nestles-facebook-party-20120719-22byy.html>.

¹³⁶ Zappone, “Pedobear.”

Why internet memes are worth studying can be illustrated by the evolution story of Pedobear, today a graphic symbol which came into existence due to the use of culture-specific Japanese textual symbols. Pedobear, once a signal which drew attention to trolling, underwent a change in its communicative function and became a graphic symbol for pedophilia. Triggered by a simple twist in usage its function changed.¹³⁷

FROM PEDOBEAR TO CENTAURS

Let us contrast it to what Ervín Hrych has to say about the evolution of the myth of Perun, a Slavonic god: “our knowledge of the hierarchy of Slavonic gods is only fragmentary, mapping only their final phase of decline, and we do not often have the chance to track their evolution—with the exception of Perun, who evolved from the natural god of storm and lightning into the god of war and finally became the main god.”¹³⁸ Perun, who used to be one of the core concepts through which the world would be understood and described, changed its function within the communicated structure of linguistic signs. The difference between the tracking of a popular internet meme and a traditional myth which did not evolve on the internet is that, in principle, we can archive messages mediated through the internet and even if such archives encompass more digital data than a person can digest in a lifetime a programmed tool can help us track and analyze the evolutionary line of the meme. When tracking pre-internet signs, researchers must rely on data which in sum can surpass their interpretive limits or, adversely and more commonly, miss substantial parts for possible analysis. This may lead to misconceptions greater than media sensations. Following is an excerpt from Zenon Kosidowski’s *When the Sun was God* (1956) introduced by Ervín Hrych who writes:

¹³⁷ And so, I could use the Pedobear’s seal of approval as a reaction to Bohdan Bláhovec’s Facebook post from January 6, 2016—a snapshot of a paper door sign saying “MATEŘSKÉ CENTRUM KORÁLEK: Přijďte si s námi pohrát,” which translates as “BEAR CHILDCARE CENTER: Come play with us.”

All the facility’s sign’s letters but the capital K in KORÁLEK are printed in black, only the much more sizable rainbow-colored K has a teddy bear behind it which, too, is hand-drawn. This unlucky rendition supposes the reading of MATEŘSKÉ CENTRUM ORÁLEK which translates as BLOWJOB CHILDCARE CENTER. See Pavel Goncarov, January 6, 2016 (2:45 p.m.), comment on Bohdan Bláhovec, *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/blahovec?fref=ts>. See also *JPEG.cz* (imageboard), <http://jpeg.cz/images/2016/01/05/Qyo1V.jpg>.

¹³⁸ Ervín Hrych, *Velká kniha bohů a bájných hrdinů* [Big Book of Gods and Legendary Heroes] (Praha: Regia, 1999), 428. My translation.

Here we have to pause and ask a question: Why did God create Eve from Adam's rib? Zenon Kosidowski writes: 'People have always been curious about the peculiar way of Eve's creation: the Bible says that He created the first woman from Adam's rib. But didn't God have enough clay, from which he could fetch a woman just like he had made a man? Cuneiform tablets from the ruins of Babylon have brought a sensational revelation of the mystery. They showed that it all happened due to a funny misunderstanding. In the Sumerian myth, there was Enkidu whose rib ached. In Sumerian the word for a rib is ti. The goddess who was called to cure Enkidu's rib was called Nin-ti which literally means woman—rib. But Nin-ti also means woman—life. And so Nin-ti can mean both woman—rib and woman (giving) life.

This is indeed where the misconception sprouted. Hebrew tribes gave Nin-ti the name Eve (in Hebrew *Ḥawwāh*, i.e. life-giving) because Eve was their legendary great mother of mankind—a woman giving life. But also the second meaning of Nin-ti—woman—rib—stuck somehow in their memory. And so, the folk tradition got mixed up in confusion. The Mesopotamian period left the mark in people that there was something in common between Eve and a rib, and thus a peculiar version in which Eve was created from Adam's rib was born.¹³⁹

It was due to the insufficient neurological message retention and the archiving of physical media that such a “poor understanding of symbolism” happened. This misconception had, of course, a tremendous impact on Judeo-Christian culture as opposed to a short-lived uproar amongst netizens, but in global culture which is plagued by contradictory messages in daily news,¹⁴⁰ there is nothing as worthy of attention as a case which can be objectively judged by anyone who has been following the debate. If it is desirable to be well-versed in contemporary culture, then there is nothing more grassroots than the folklore of popular internet memes—signs that originated in cyberspace which can technically be analyzed with utmost precision, much higher precision than messages on analogue media.

¹³⁹ Hrych, *Velká kniha*, 107–8. My translation.

¹⁴⁰ This is why there are factchecking web pages. To share a personal anecdote, the website demagog.cz which has been factchecking Czech political TV-debates since 2012 stated that their own “project was indirectly inspired by American ‘factchecking’ portals like Politifact.com and Factcheck.org, the latter being a recipient of the Pulitzer Prize.” When I checked this information, it came out that in fact the 2009 awardee of Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting was the former. Upon notification, the admin aptly changed the web content. “O nás,” [About Us] *Demagog.cz*, accessed on August 3, 2015, <http://demagog.cz/o-nas>. My translation. I hope that the girl with a Pedobear t-shirt who I saw in a crowd of marathon runners a month earlier had fact checked Pedobear and holds him for more than a running bear.

I think that the complex working system of popular internet memes is not unlike language systems or mythologies. Operational rules common to all three mutating systems should be:

—language economy (an opposition to redundancy),¹⁴¹ that is, a tendency towards the elimination of synonyms among signifiers. (In languages, there are no real synonyms, and in mythologies there are no two gods, biblical stories, urban legends or rumors that would serve the same magical function. If so, they need to be quickly sorted out and worked into the system, otherwise there happens a schism in cultural beliefs.¹⁴² Similar units of traditional myths can only be found by drawing analogies through different systems of cultural expression. Even if the whole community is involved in enacting of their mythology when performing a ritual, the stories concerning the whole community are told through effigies, masked individuals and other singled out signifiers. Pop-culture focuses on pop-icons, tabloids select scapegoats and personages, and marketers position yoghurts from the same factory through branding in the minds of consumers and supermarkets so that the signified behind every signifier be distinctly unique.)

—new signifiers are modeled with respect to older signifiers. Once the new ones are introduced, the function of the older ones is narrowed in possibility. The signifying that gets delineated by a new signifier narrows the possibility of certain mutations on the earlier signifiers but at the same time the emergent complexity of the system makes it possible for the older signifiers to be re-appropriated in a previously unthinkable manner.

—the system of memes/lexis/myths is self-supportive as it legitimizes the appearance of a newer sign among older signs by mere inclusion. For example, if an English learner encounters in an English text a word unknown to him he is more likely to assume that the word be a commonplace in English rather than a typo or a word of another language than if he read the same word separately on a

¹⁴¹ For a concise historical overview of the evolution of the argument in favor of economy principle in linguistics see Alessandra Vincentini, “The Economy Principle in Language: Notes and Observations from Early Modern English Grammars,” *Mots Palabras Words* 2, (2003): 37–57, accessed August 29, 2016, <https://www.mediensprache.net/archiv/pubs/3659.pdf>.

¹⁴² For a report on different answers provided by different language versions of Microsoft’s Encarta CD encyclopedia to questions like “Who invented the telephone,” “Who invented the airplane,” or whether Kashmir belongs to India, or Pakistan see Kevin J. Delaney, “Microsoft’s Encarta CD Encyclopedia Has Different Facts for Different Folks,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 25, 1999, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB930263490242474493>.

sign at an airport. It is easier to accept that Jesus changed water into wine if we permit that Moses changed water into blood. How could Moses change water into blood? Maybe some support could be gained from his performing other miracles too, like parting the waters, which should as a precedent pave the way for Jesus to walk on water.

What position should a mythologist take? The Hungarian mythologist Imre Trecsényi-Waldapfel wrote in 1963:

Mythology must look into the history of religion for the *origin and evolution of myths and the changes of their meaning* during the religio-historical evolution, which tends to inadvertently reflect social changes, just as it must *probe*—as a necessary complement to the history of literature and art—into *myths as symbols and motives*, which have arisen under certain religio-historical circumstances in poetic oral presentations of the folk, but which gradually became more or less independent of religion and offer themselves to yet another willful poetic cultivation and artistic rendering.¹⁴³

Joseph Campbell in his concluding chapter to *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (1959), “The Functioning of Myth,” stresses that a mythologist should keep in mind the societal function of myth when he wraps up that

Functioning as a ‘way,’ mythology and ritual conduce to a transformation of the individual, disengaging him from his local, historical conditions and lending him toward some kind of ineffable experience. Functioning as an ‘ethnic idea,’ on the other hand, the image binds the individual to his family’s system of historically conditioned sentiments, activities, and beliefs, as a functioning member of a sociological organism. This antinomy is fundamental to our subject, and every failure to recognize it leads not only to unnecessary argument, but also to a misunderstanding—one way or the other—of the force of the mythological symbol itself, which is, precisely, to render an experience of the ineffable through the local and concrete, and thus, paradoxically, to amplify the force and appeal of the local forms even while carrying the mind beyond them. The distinctive challenge of mythology lies in its power to effect [sic] the dual end; and not to recognize this fact is to miss the whole point and mystery of our science.¹⁴⁴

I have concluded with the Waorani wedgemaking example by saying that conclusions about Δt are unprovable, and that we can only think them within the limits of logic and probability. The trickiest and most powerful of all logical connectives are implications because they let symbols with assigned meanings be only approximated and not permuted into other

¹⁴³ Imre Trecsényi-Waldapfel, *Mytologie* (Praha: Odeon, 1967), 10, trans. Ladislav Hradský and Arno Kraus. My translation. (italics in original)

¹⁴⁴ Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (1959; London: Penguin, 1976), 462.

symbols. Implications are the metaphors of discursive logic, by analogy—which according to Hofstadter is at the core of cognition¹⁴⁵—they give rise to linguistic implicatures. They are the mightiest catalysts in the reasoning process which can shift linguistic modality which in effect legitimizes or dismisses phenomena and thus partakes on our experience as culture. Given that there is noise in the transfer of memes, the position of a comparative mythologist can only be one of understanding that a change in a signified occurs only due to an implication postulated outside of a signifier, or when a signifier which represents the signified has influenced the signified by its own symbolic properties.

For the purpose of making an example which aims at showing how both directions of thought can be taken to explain an origin of one myth, let us first retort to Robert Graves, a famous English poet and classicist, who in his book *What the Centaurs Ate* (1958) proved to be a relentless advocate of the theory that the Centaurs were orgiastic horse-totem tribesmen who feasted on psychedelic mushrooms which may have been responsible for their wild nature in the eyes of other folks.¹⁴⁶ Trecsényi-Waldapfel's statement that "according to modern euhemerism¹⁴⁷ *centaurs* were a nation of riders; the prehistoric folk who had not known horses, regarded the horse and the rider as a *single* living creature"¹⁴⁸ proceeds in the same wake of analysis when it sees an implicature having been made outside of the signifier. The second direction of thought which has been taken in attempt to explain the origin of the mythical being of centaur is the one that focuses on the change which a signifier may impose on the signified. The following excerpt presents Palaephatus's mythological treatment of centaurs with much valuable annotated bibliography and commentary by editor of his writings, Jacob Stern:

In the days when Ixion was the king of Thessaly, there was a herd of bulls on Mt. Pelion, which made the mountain range impassable. The bulls would come down into the inhabited areas and lay waste the orchards and crops and destroy the livestock. So Ixion made a public proclamation that he would reward with a great deal of money any man who killed the bulls. Some young men from the

¹⁴⁵ See Douglas R. Hofstadter, "Analogy as the Core of Cognition," in Dedre Gentner, Keith J. Holyoak, and Boicho N. Kokinov, eds., *The Analogical Mind: Perspectives from Cognitive Science* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press/Bradford Book, 2001), 499-538. See also "Analogy as the Core of Cognition," YouTube video, 1:08:36, from a Stanford University recording of a Presidential Lecture on February 6, 2006, posted by "Stanford," September 10, 2009, accessed August 29, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8m7IFQ3nj&ab_channel=Stanford.

¹⁴⁶ Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (London:Penguin Books, 1992), 9; 361.

¹⁴⁷ Euhemerus was a Greek mythographer who insisted that myth is misremembered history.

¹⁴⁸ Trecsényi-Waldapfel, *Mytologie*, 12.

foothills—from a village called Nephele¹⁴⁹—got the idea of training their horses to carry riders: previously horseback riding was unknown; people only used horses with chariots. But these young men mounted their horses and rode them to where the bulls were: there they attacked and hurled their javelins at the herd. When the bulls chased after them, they would fall back in retreat—for their horses were swifter than the bulls. But whenever the bulls came to a stop, the young men would wheel about and throw their javelins. In this way they eventually killed the bulls and won for themselves the name ‘Centaur,’ because ‘they stuck the bulls.’¹⁵⁰

In his commentary, Stern presents to us three different etymological explanations when he comments that “Palaephatus derives the word centaur from *kent-*, ‘to prick,’ and *tauros*, ‘bull.’ But cf. Eustathius on *Illiad* 1.286 (=102.20), who derives it from *kent-* in the obscene sense and *aura*, ‘breeze,’ referring to the myth of Ixion mating with Cloud. Fulgentius, *Mytologiae* 2.14 offers Latin etymology based on *centum* = 100,” but Stern adds that “the true derivation is in doubt.”¹⁵¹ Palaephatus continues that

it could hardly have been from any bull-shape that they got this name, for centaurs do not have any attributes of the bull, and their shape is that of a horse and a man: it was instead from what they did that they received their name.

So the centaurs got their money from Ixion, but pride in their wealth and their achievement caused them to become insolent: they engaged in many wicked deeds, in particular against Ixion himself, who dwelt in a city which is now called Larissa, though at the time the people who inhabited the place were called Lapiths. These Lapiths invited the Centaurs to a feast, where the Centaurs became drunk and carried off the wives of the Lapiths; they put the women on their horses and fled back to their own homes. From there they made war against the Lapiths. They would descend at night into the plain and lie in wait for them; when the day came, they would pillage and burn and run back to the mountains. Now as they were riding off, all that was visible to those who watched them from a distance was the back of the horse without the head and the top part of the man without the legs. The sight was a strange one, and people said: ‘It’s Nephele’s Centaurs who are overrunning us!’ From the shape they saw and the words they said the unbelievable myth was fashioned: that on the mountain horse-man was born of cloud.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ As Stern comments “the Centaurs, as they will shortly be called, come from Nephele, i.e. from Cloudford; Palaephatus thus rationalizes the myth that the Centaurs sprang from the union of Ixion and a cloud (*nephele*).” Palaephatus, trans. Jacob Stern, *On Unbelievable Tales = Peri apiston: With Notes and Greek Text from the 1902 B.G. Teubner edition* (Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1996), 30–31, accessed August 29, 2016, <https://books.google.cz/books?id=t4EfiGQwgh4C&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

¹⁵⁰ Palaephatus, *Unbelievable Tales*, 30.

¹⁵¹ Stern, *Unbelievable Tales*, 31.

¹⁵² Palaephatus, *Unbelievable Tales*, 31.

Stern notes that additional versions also exist. In one of them “Ixion, who lusted after the goddess Hera, was tricked by Zeus into mating with a cloud (Nephele) which was in the form of Hera. The result of the union was either the centaurs themselves or a certain Centaurus, who, by copulating with mares, became the father of the Centaurs.”¹⁵³ He also notes that John Tzetzes, a Byzantine scholar, “rejects the rationalized version of Palaephatus,” and that “he asserts that Nephele was a slave and then derives the word Centaur from *kent-*, in the obscene sense noted above, and *aura* as *avlalabra*, ‘a female slave.’”¹⁵⁴

Let us bring in this explanatory quagmire the Indian Gandharva who were in 1940 identified by Georges Dumézil as the source for the myth of centaur.¹⁵⁵ In his book, Dumézil provides an elaborate description of the evolving concept of the Gandharva,¹⁵⁶ but for the purpose of this overview it shall be enough to follow Wikipedia which says that Gandharva “is a name used for distinct heavenly beings in Hinduism¹⁵⁷ and Buddhism; it is also a term for skilled singers in Indian classical music. [...] In Hinduism, the gandharvas are male nature spirits, husbands of the Apsaras. Some are part animal, usually a bird or horse. They have superb musical skills. They guarded the Soma and made beautiful music for the gods in their palaces.”¹⁵⁸ Gandharvas are frequently depicted as singers in the court of Gods.”¹⁵⁹ At several places in the Mahabharata we can also read about a Himalayan tribe of the Kinnaras who are presented as half-man and half-horse.¹⁶⁰ To illustrate that there has been an attempt to rationalize the myth of the Kinnaras in the same way as Palaephatus did it with the Centaur, it is enough to browse Wikipedia which offers one such interpretation. It lists that the Himalayan region “was also the abode of a tribe of people called Kambojas. They were fierce warriors skilled in horse riding and horse warfare. Some of them were robber-tribes who invaded village-settlements, by raiding them using their skilled cavalry-forces. The myth of Kinnaras probably came from these horsemen.”¹⁶¹ The Lotus Sutra, one of the most popular

¹⁵³ Stern, *Unbelievable Tales*, 31.

¹⁵⁴ Stern, *Unbelievable Tales*, 31.

¹⁵⁵ See Georges Dumézil, *Mitra-Varuna: An Essay on Two Indo-European Representations of Sovereignty*, trans. Derek Coltman (New York: Urzone, Inc., 1988), 30.

¹⁵⁶ See Dumézil, 35-36.

¹⁵⁷ See the Mahabharata Book 3 *Vana Parva*: 42.

¹⁵⁸ See the Mahabharata Book 1 *Adi Parva*: 174. See also Book 2 *Sabha Parva*: 4.

¹⁵⁹ Wikipedia, s.v. “Gandharva,” last modified July 25, 2016, accessed August 29, 2016, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gandharva>.

¹⁶⁰ See Mahabharata (1 - 66). See also K. Krishna Murthy, *Mythical Animals in Indian Art* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1985), 13–16.

¹⁶¹ Wikipedia, s.v. “Kinnara Kingdom,” last modified July 24, 2016, accessed August 29, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kinnara_Kingdom.

Buddhist Mahayana sutras, which also mentions the Kinnara (緊那羅) when it describes an assembly around Buddha on mount Grdhrakuta, saying that there were “Garudas, Kinnaras, Mahoragas, beings human and non-human”¹⁶² gives no description of the Kinnaras other than that they were four kings but the Kinnaras have traditionally been depicted as “the musicians of Kuvera, the god of riches, they have human bodies and are described as exotic birds with a human torso.”¹⁶³

One (more or less logical and more or less probable) explanation for the unrealistic appearance of the Kinnaras who have become a common motif in Buddhist iconography is provided by Young-ho Kim who holds that “in Chinese [Kinnara] means ‘human cum inhuman’; they appear handsome but their heads have one horn. They are the god-emperors’ spirits in charge of music.”¹⁶⁴ Such an explanatory approach—the focusing on the name Kinnara—is shared by Zen master Shunryu Suzuki who in his commentary to the Lotus Sutra explains that “Kinnara is ‘kin’ is ‘what,’ ‘Nara’ is ‘man.’ Man or what? (laughs) kinnara man or what? He was, you know, his legs, it is animal and his body is ... his head is man, with horns, here. So, (laughs) man or what? That is his name, Kinnara. And he is good. He is a kind of musician, and people like him very much because of his music. Man or what? is his name, Kinnara.”¹⁶⁵ It is interesting then to learn that “in Southeast Asian mythology, Kinnaris, the female counterparts of Kinnaras are depicted as half-bird, half-woman creatures,”¹⁶⁶ just like we can find female Centaurides in a Macedonian mosaic of the 4th century BC, in a

¹⁶² For full text of The Lotus Sutra see Hank Fu, “Lotus Sutra,” *Purify Mind*, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://www.purifymind.com/LotusSutra.htm>.

¹⁶³ Martin Bradley, trans., *THE DHARMA FLOWER SUTRA (Lotus Sutra) SEEN THROUGH THE ORAL TRANSMISSION OF NICHIREN [Part I]* (Dharma Gate Press, 2015), 225, accessed August 29, 2016,

https://books.google.cz/books?id=CjDmCgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbg_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

¹⁶⁴ Young-Ho Kim, *Tao-Sheng's Commentary on the Lotus Sutra: A Study and Translation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 168, accessed August 29, 2016, https://books.google.cz/books?id=fsISW2tBG8UC&pg=PA168&lpg=PA168&dq=lotus+sutra+kinnara&source=bl&ots=AXbPvHRUYj&sig=_mbjntOx-TCMxtvd1wXRcMrNwmA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiyjfOs4ZjKAhVomHIKHXYbD9AQ6AEISTAJ#v=onepage&q=lotus%20sutra%20kinnara&f=false.

¹⁶⁵ Shunryu Suzuki, “Commentary #15,” in Roy Melvyn, Nichiren Shonin, Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Commentaries on the Lotus Sutra* (Raleigh, NC: Lulu Press, 2012), accessed August 29, 2016, <https://books.google.cz/books?id=j2RACgAAQBAJ&pg=PT1&lpg=PT1&dq=zen+commentaries+on+lotus+sutra&source=bl&ots=qBn2ANhumL&sig=rkkocueXt7iaJGOIT5tyx7UKKLo&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwielbH9jOjOAhULbhQKHWSbBSwQ6AEIKjAC#v=onepage&q=zen%20commentaries%20on%20lotus%20sutra&f=false>.

¹⁶⁶ Wikipedia, s.v. “Kinnara,” last modified August 16, 2016, accessed August 29, 2016, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kinnara>.

Mosaic from Roman Tunisia of 2nd century AD, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, or in Disney's 1940s animated film *Fantasia*.¹⁶⁷

My concern, which is not to decide whether the Cambodian Kinnari and the Disney female Centaurettes have or have not a common ancestor in their evolutionary lines, is to point out that when a signified is reappropriated by anyone who makes it propagate by having grasped it as a sign (e.g. by a listener to a story, or a chronicler, an artist, a mythologist) they can make it fit their world-view by imposing the superficiality of the signifier on the signified (letting the name influence the story) but also the other way round, i.e. by imposing an implication within the signified (the diegesis) so that it influences the sign (a meaningful symbol in a symbolic language). In the classical story which was analyzed by Palaephatus, we have read that the sign of a Greek Centaur is loaded with a motif of man and horse, a bull, a cloud and many other motifs. Let us simulate, how a diegesis misremembered by an inattentive listener could affect the Centaur's signifier if history unfolded differently. The listener could mix up the proceedings of the story and let them have power over the sign, so that his next statue would be half-man and half-bull because he would remember a story about bull riders who formed clouds in the village which got its name after the dust clouds that were raised by the bulls who were driven out of an orchard by men from a village over the mountains who hurled themselves at the bulls' backs and rode them out, and so they got their reward from the king. Sooner or later, somebody might object to the story that this can be shown to be a myth, since nobody but the local hermit ever saw such a creature, just like nobody ever saw anyone ride a bull. And so, the first local rodeo would be organized and generations later, as the culture would have accustomed to rodeo, the meme of the horse could be out of the story completely, while the name of Centaur could stay, having taken no part in the change of the signified and thus of the sign, but now it would stand for a concept of a different creature.

Following is a schematic rendition of a memetic analysis of the simulated evolution of the Greek myth.

¹⁶⁷ For these and other examples see *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Centaurides," last modified January 24, 2016, accessed August 29, 2016, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Centaurides>. In the Mahabharata Book 3 *Vana Parva*: 162, and Book 4 *Virata Parva*: 9 the Kinnaris are also described as being beautiful and having melodious voices; in Book 13 *Anusasana Parva*: 52 they sing and dance.

In t0,

there is a linguistic **sign** of a half-man and half-horse creature

where the signifier is Centaur

and the signified is achieved through motifs (king, cloud, horse, man) which are arranged in a story so that by their deigesis they constitute an idea of a half-man and half-horse creature



while culture finds no fault with the idea of a Centaur.

As time moves on,



t1

nothing changes on **sign t1**: half-man and half-horse creature

with signifier t1: Centaur

and signified t1: identical to t0 (the same traditional story of Centaurs' origin)

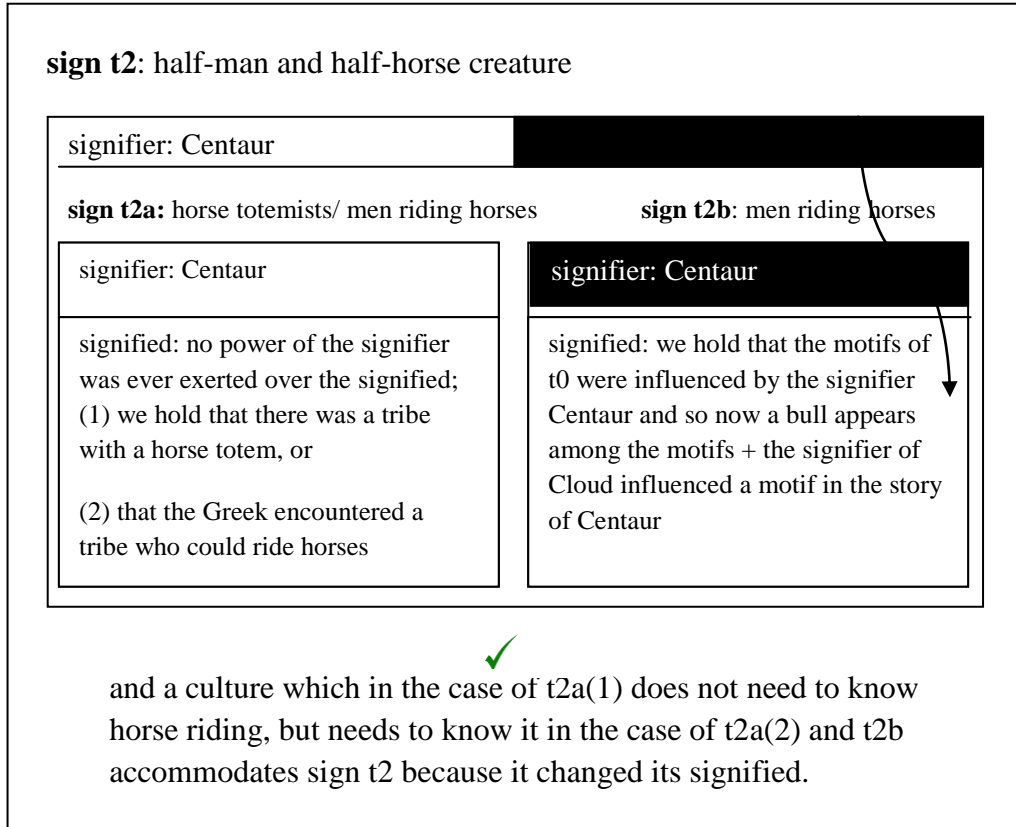


but everyday culture-based experience becomes not supportive of the sign.

Therefore, the process of explanation starts and a culture finds itself with

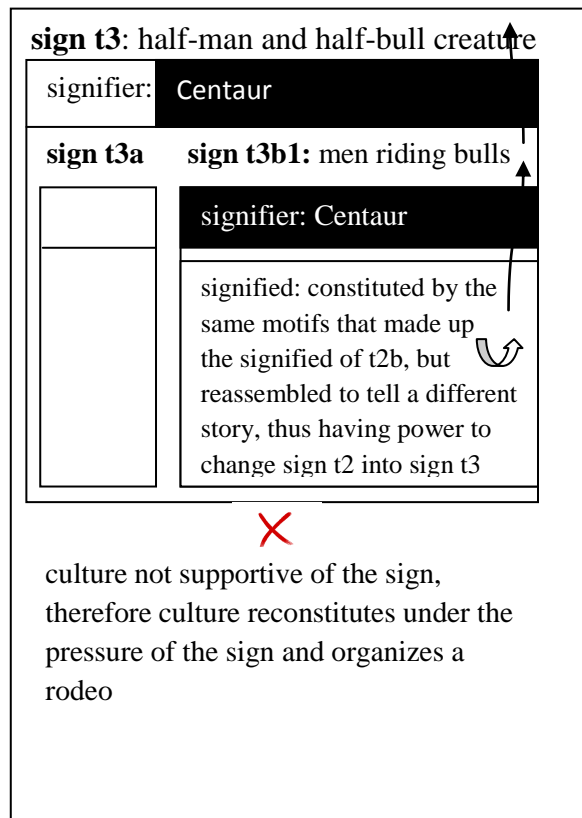
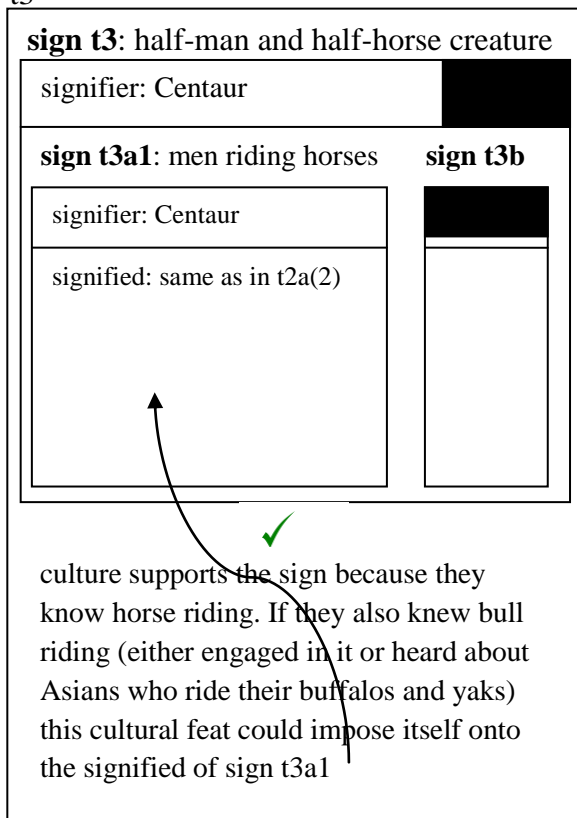


t2

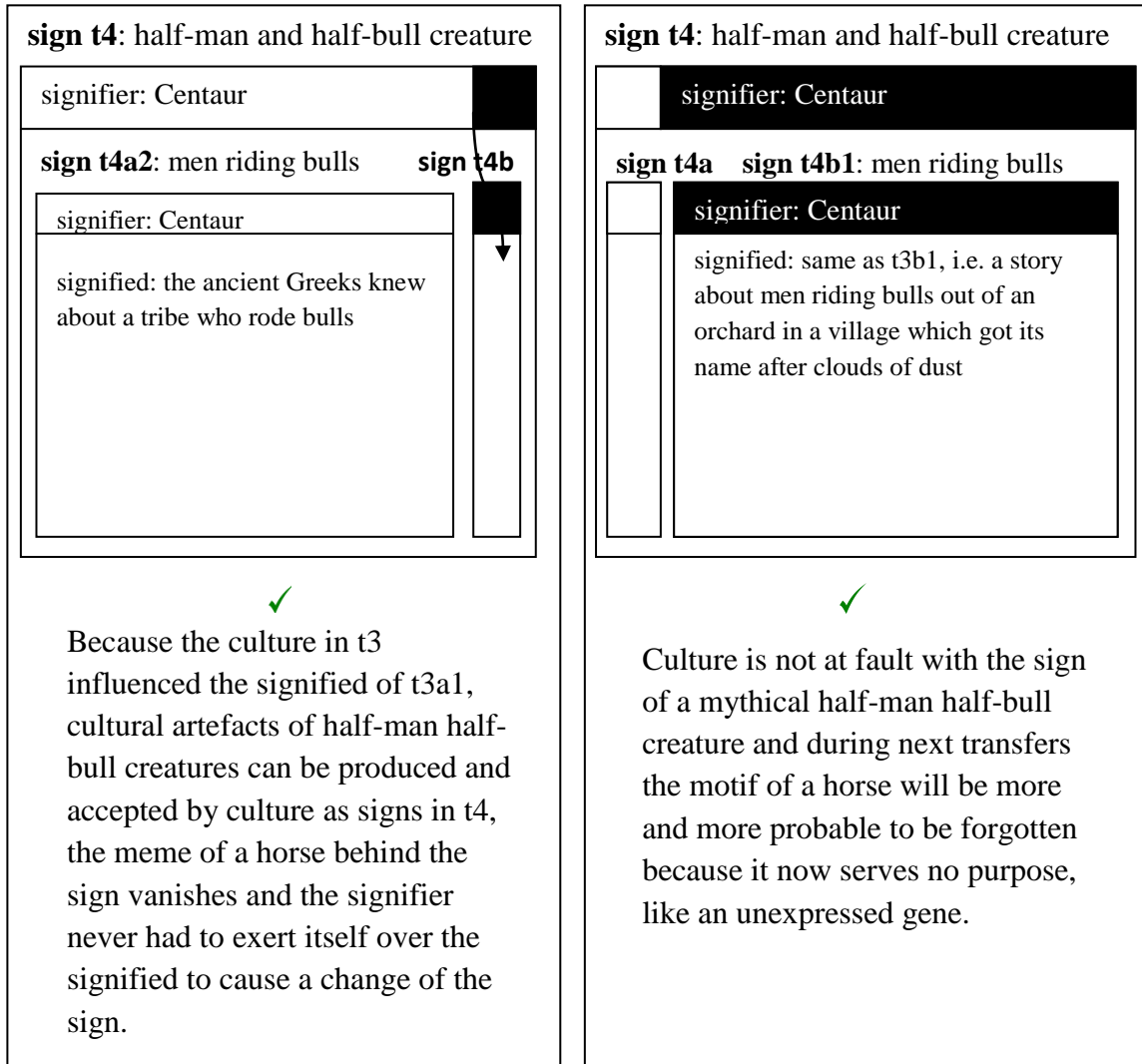


The memetic evolution of the sign can now operate on two mechanisms (I leave out the evolution of t2a(1) because both mechanisms can be shown without it).

t3



t4



Such schemes can be constructed for any sign which one would like to memetically analyze as myth, because they take into consideration the time-evolving context in relation to both levels of a sign which itself can be composed of dominant and receding levels of diegesis, while at the same time it can be shown how such diegeses can be influenced by the cultural context or by the signifier or by scrambling the memes/motifs which constitute the story upon which a sign is built.

Changing signs get accommodated into—and thus constitute and give rise to—changing cultures. The Hubei Geological Museum in Wuhan, China, dedicates space in one of their show-rooms among minerals, fossils, ores and the like to a 文字石 [:wenzishi:] which translates as *character stone*—an artefact favorite with Chinese curiosity collectors. A

character stone¹⁶⁸ usually takes the form of a pebble or a small boulder of whichever chemical composition, while its distinguishing quality from other geological findings is that it shows a vein in the shape of a legible Chinese character. Analogically and just as curiously, a glass case dedicated to moss in the Regional Museum in Olomouc, Czech Republic, shows a tag which says what translates as “In the middle ages, bryophytes were most often used for hygienic purposes ☺. Common species for such use were e.g. the tree climacium moss (*Climacium dendroides*), the red stemmed feather moss (*Pleurozium schreberi*) or [English common name non-existent] (*Neckera complanata*).”¹⁶⁹ Hofstadter has even pointed out a recently developed conjunction *slash* in spoken English which has its origin in a textual symbol. Among his examples are “an electron is a wave slash particle” or “she’s a bimbo slash self-marketing genius.”¹⁷⁰ When Hofstadter ponders about Holden Caulfield’s frequent usage of “and all” in J.D. Salinger’s 1951 novel *The Catcher in the Rye* (as in “If you sat around there long enough and heard all the phonies applauding and all”¹⁷¹), he is trying to comment on the proposition that acceptability of a sign within a discourse depends on one’s evaluation criteria, as I have said earlier about what makes poetry good or bad. About the meaning of Holden’s phrase he says: “And what does it mean? I don’t know what it means. But I know that it’s right. That I can hear it. And I don’t have any sense as to what it means exactly but in discourse space he really puts it in, J.D.Salinger, puts it in at the right spots. It really works, and it means it conveys something but what it conveys I don’t know.”¹⁷²

My concern is then the following: When there is a system of signs used by participants in order to communicate messages, could it be that in the long run the signs could influence the debate to such a degree that even though “the same” story could be told (in other words translated) in an analogous functional system with analogous symbols and symbolic ties, the story would most probably not be originally told in that second language because it would just not fit in the evolving cultural/literary canon? This hypothesis is easy to prove with

¹⁶⁸ For picture see appendix 6.

¹⁶⁹ “Mechorosty byly ve středověku nejčastěji využívány k hygienickým účelům ☺. K běžným druhům pro toto využití patřily například mechy drabík stromkovitý (*Climacium dendroides*), travník Schreberův (*Pleurozium schreberi*) nebo sourubka hladká (*Neckera complanata*).” My translation. For the picture of the glass case see appendix 7.

¹⁷⁰ “Douglas Hofstadter: The Nature of Categories and Concepts,” YouTube video, 20:00–23:20, from a recording of a Stanford Symbolic Systems Distinguished Speaker Lecture, March 6, 2013, posted by “ccrmlite1,” March 7, 2014, accessed August 29, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kr3QDMkMGmQ&ab_channel=ccrmlite1.

¹⁷¹ J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951; London: Penguin Books, 1958) 128.

¹⁷² Hofstadter, “Nature of Categories,” 36:15–36:40.

stories which give the functioning of myth away easily like placing a character stone in a Czech museum or reading any rhymed poetry as we discover that it is the signifiers of the signs that make a culture succumb to its own myth. The hypothesis is also easy to prove with stories whose diegeses involve motifs uncommon in another culture against whose own stories they are read. Also, if one followed all media coverage of various issues and identified trends in reports, hypes, tendentiousness or media spins, which are all in the end works of a handful of reporters, an opponent could always object that such stories are being reported because they are the news with a degree of importance to people in a certain geopolitical situation, which would interfere with the idea of the disinterested self-nourishing code whose only tendency is to propagate with variation so that it can spread, which is the position of a cultural memeticist. In my opinion, the least objectionable way to try to prove the memeticists' hypothesis about the broad workings of the overarching myth is to be concerned with simple everyday stories, with jokes rather than puns, with what one relates to another in a friendly chat, although and because there the myth that we live does not give itself away so blatantly.

PART 4: THE FOLKLORE OF TWO INTERNETS—A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Rage comics and baozou manhua introduced.

Overused titles?

The influence of software on tropes of narration.

The first section introduces western and western and Chinese web comics—rage comics and 暴走漫画[:baozou manhua:] respectively—and it describes the web interfaces in which they can be accessed and to which they are submitted. The second section discusses patterns in titles to the comics. The third section focuses on the influence of software builders which promote yet hinder the production process of the web comics. It also presents the results of a long-term comparative statistical study of 3,351 such web comics.

RAGE COMICS AND BAOZOU MANHUA INTRODUCED

For the purpose of trying to prove what can be seen as the memeticist's hypothesis about myth originating through semiosis, the semiotician's hypothesis about myth transferred by memes, or the mythologist's hypothesis about semiotics, I will analyze, describe, compare and contrast two data sets. For all practical reasons I have taken care to have them as foreign to one another as possible but at the same time to be recognizably similar, so that the study may yield results about two canons in one genre.

My corpora comprise 3,351 web comics—the first corpus is of 1,953 rage comics written in English and the second is of 1,398 暴走漫画 [:baozou manhua:] in Chinese, which translates to English as *rage comics*, hereafter referred to as baoman. Both rage comics and baoman are paneled narratives which feature their respective sets of canonized visual appropriations mainly of emotional states in combination with text—and in rage comics most often with graphic extensions done with a digital paintbrush or cropped images in a simple editor.

As KnowYourMeme informs about rage comics, such “first amateur made comics date back to 2008 on 4chan's /b/ board with the introduction of FFFUUUU Rageguy 4-panes. As the name suggests, the comics' stories were mostly about circumstances that lead to anger or rage. While most 'rage faces' are not used to express rage, the name has been used due to

their Rage Guy origins.”¹⁷³ Rage Guy is the name of the first popular rage face which appeared in August 2008 in the now classic story known as the “toilet splashback”:



Figure 12. Toilet splashback.¹⁷⁴

In Smiths’ blog entry “Junk Food and Junk Characters” it reads that Unicode emoticons are designed by typographers and voted on by a committee. In some sense this is much unlike rage comics or baoman with their almost anonymous origins, but in another sense the discussed web comics have shown a quite similar preordination due to a programmed set of options. The reason is that when users today produce their rage comics or baoman they most often use web-based programs simpler than MS Paint that offer stock rage faces, or baoman faces. On the one hand—which is similar to how Unicode emoticons have come about—rage faces are available with the software not through a board of typographers but through programmers and web-administrators who have built and updated their simple site. The site enables users to construct their comics with programs that have pooled rage faces from earlier comics. The genre started with the “toilet splashback,” soon another user responded with a much similar comic, until many were submitted. Such an exchange got popular and spread to another web site, reddit.com, and eventually a special discussion board on that web site was established for their sharing. As it happens in remix culture, one user would create his comic and another would crop and cypypaste his characters’ face and use it in his comic until some faces became so popular that the programmers-to-be decided to aid the productive users by creating software which would offer some of the commonly used faces. Therefore—which is not that similar with Unicode emoticons—rage faces have their

¹⁷³ *Know Your Meme*, s.vv. “Rage Comics,” last modified March 5, 2013, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/rage-comics>.

¹⁷⁴ *Know Your Meme*, s.vv. “Rage Comics.”

origin with the users and not with highly organized designers and providers of emoji as is the Unicode company for so many text messages on our digital devices. Even after the online programs with their databases have been launched, new rage faces can be created by anyone without any need for a permission at any moment.

In the same year, the genre spread to China due to a site creator Wang Nima who offered the Chinese public a website for submissions and online software with a set of already popular western rage faces. This proved a successful project and soon the old imported set of rage faces included new faces which were pooled from Chinese users' comics for just the same reasons for which the western software was built—for remixing. Since the beginning of the Chinese canon, the imported rage set which has been replenished by new stock faces that sprung up from the use of the old ones has been known as baoman faces. As we can see, baoman own much of their early history to rage comics and so they could be in an analogy tied closer to the Unicode company because they relied on a single provider of symbols at the beginning of a tradition. But still, the system of expression provided by Wang Nima has ever since been open to the creation of new signs just like rage comics and much unlike Unicode who give the users of their system no such freedom.

One of the most successful descriptions of rage comics can be found in Gómez and Fernández's joint thesis *Memes, Rage-comics y Memenautas: Comunicación Efectiva en Internet* (2013) which builds extensively on Ryan M. Milner's dissertation *The World Made Meme: Discourse and Identity in Participatory Media* (2012). The only academic treatment of the Chinese canon in English has been so far provided by Shih-Wen Chen in her article "Baouzou Manhwa (Rage Comics), Internet Humour and Everyday Life" (2014) and I will repeatedly retort to its authoritative primacy to give the author due credit. Her excursion into the baoman phenomenon and the Chinese Internet, baoman and the "aesthetics of cloning," baoman and e'gao—which is "a popular alternative form of political discourse in China"¹⁷⁵—, after a comparison of the Yanzhongti stories and their western online counterpart known as the "What You Think I do/What I Really Do" meme, after discussing the coverage of baoman in the media and the baoman website, its self-regulation, its evolving community and censorship, Chen concludes her article with the words: "A crowded bus, a thankless job, a fresh pimple: these are some of the everyday topics featured in *baoman*. The everyday has

¹⁷⁵ Shih-Wen Chen, "Baouzou Manhwa (Rage Comics), Internet Humour and Everyday Life," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 28, no. 5 (2014): 705. doi: 10.1080/10304312.2014.941334.

been disregarded as trivial, banal and repetitive.”¹⁷⁶ However, then she counters this statement with a plea for scrutiny of the mundane, for which she uses Michael Gardiner’s view on Mikhail Bakhtin’s ideas from *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (published posthumously in 1989), in which he focuses on the modality of the lived experience, the necessity to act and the subjectivity of individual experience of the world through a necessarily objectivizing language. Gardiner, who in his book sums up the Russian philosopher’s views on dialogue, understands that for Bakhtin “language—or, more specifically, the dialogical properties of language-use, as inscribed within both everyday speech-acts and cultural texts of all sorts—tends to occupy centre stage.”¹⁷⁷ Bakhtin asserted that the process of thinking about the world in images and configurations which objectify the world are “a constituent moment in the alive and living consciousness of a contemplator,”¹⁷⁸ but such a conscious activity is only a detached stratum occurring in every individual who tries to grasp the real happenings which constitute the world. He argues that this “aesthetic intuition is unable to apprehend the actual event-ness of the once-occurrent event.”¹⁷⁹ Chen, whose article is a comprehensive probe into the history and the role of baoman in contemporary Chinese culture uses Gardiner’s views on Bakhtin when she quotes that for Bakhtin

the realm of the everyday is not a simple repository of habitualized, unreflective actions and inchoate and unsystematic thoughts. Rather, it constitutes the primary terrain on which our values are actively constructed, in which a world of contingency is transformed into one of meaningfulness.¹⁸⁰

Individual baoman are products of such minds and for their readers they become a part of the world which needs to be interpreted. Gardiner stresses Bakhtin’s views on the importance of analysis of the novel when he writes that “by carving artistic images of social languages out of the raw material of everyday heteroglossia, the novel constitutes a privileged vantage point

¹⁷⁶ Chen, 705.

¹⁷⁷ Michael Gardiner, *Critiques of Everyday Life: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2000), 57.

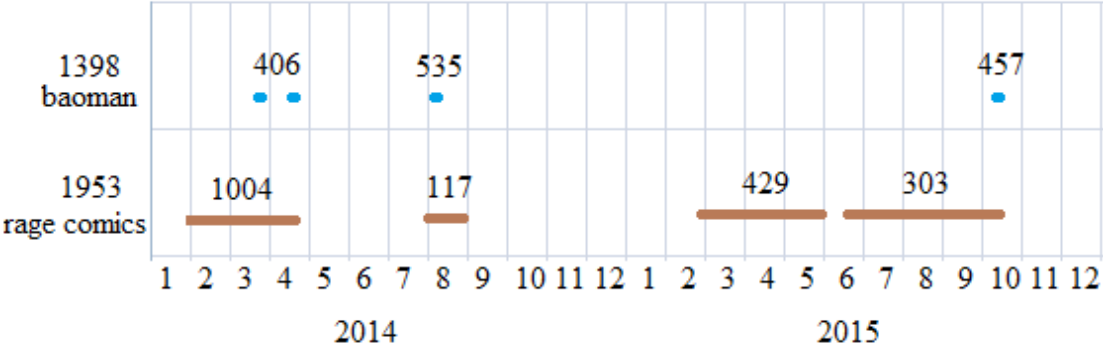
¹⁷⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Towards the Philosophy of the Act*, trans. Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 1.

¹⁷⁹ Bakhtin, *Philosophy of the Act*, 1.

¹⁸⁰ Chen, “Baouzou manhua,” 705. See also Michael Gardiner, *Critiques of Everyday Life: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2000), 56, accessed August 29, 2016, <https://books.google.cz/books?id=z6-IAgAAQBAJ&pg=PA56&lpg=PA56&dq=the+realm+of+everyday+is+not+a+simple+repository&source=bl&ots=LoXT6dfWVF&sig=7JCFepW61-ICcO9KTtInb-4rNLY&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiZkqCWvZDLAhUGCpoKHRFiCYwQ6AEIGzAA#v=onepage&q=the%20realm%20of%20everyday%20is%20not%20a%20simple%20repository&f=false>.

from whence to grasp the great dialogue of the age.”¹⁸¹ In my opinion, if a large enough set of web comics is thoroughly analyzed we can gain as important an insight as Gardiner vests with analysis of the novel.

The following graph shows the distribution of the comics in my corpora as they were submitted to their respective web pages over time.



My baoman corpus was downloaded from baozoumanhua.com, a web page for mainland China’s rage comics. As to the geographical location of contributors to other pages for similar creations in Chinese, Chen lists that “in Taiwan, HongKong and Macao, rage comics are known as *gengman* and websites such as *fengkuan tuyu* (crazy drawing) (ideapit.net/comic.php) and *gengman* (comic-king.com) are more popular among users in these regions.”¹⁸² My rage comics corpus was downloaded from the discussion forum reddit.com’s board [/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/](http://r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/). As admins of Reddit write about their page, Reddit “is a source for what’s new and popular on the web” where users “provide all of the content and decide, through voting, what’s good and what’s junk,”¹⁸³ which it has in common with baozoumanhua.com. Rage comics have emerged in 2008 on 4chan’s [/b/](http://b/) - Random board and have since January 2009 been evolving mostly on the subreddit otherwise known as *f7u12*, from where they have spread to pages such as imgur.com or 9gag.com. These two pages are image sharing platforms whose users often repost rage comics first submitted to *f7u12* but also contribute original content. As Chen observes, the Chinese webpage was launched by Wang Nima “in 2008 to introduce rage comics (*baozoumanhua*) to China after noticing its

¹⁸¹ Gardiner, *Critiques*, 62.
¹⁸² Chen, “Baozou manhua,” 691.
¹⁸³ “Frequently Asked Questions,” *Reddit*, last modified August 18, 2016, accessed August 29, 2016, <https://www.reddit.com/wiki/faq>.

popularity in the USA.”¹⁸⁴, but it is of note that reddit.com is not blocked in China and has (as of February 2016) contributors from 217 countries. The *f7u12* subreddit for rage comics has nearly 540,000 subscribers to the content that is visible without any registration, while anyone can contribute. But the heyday of rage comics on reddit is over. Even though they have spread to countries around the world with off-shoot language-specific web pages for submissions, today there is on average one rage comic contributed to *f7u12* every day. The page can list up to 1,000 rage comics from within the past twelve months, but the recent slow pace of production has lowered the number of comics actually listed to about 900 and it might be well expected to decrease even further. On the other hand, to the Chinese webpage about twenty contributions are made every minute, out of which roughly a bit less than a half is baoman and the rest is other Chinese popular internet memes. This means, that the content on the board which is 8,000 newest freely-accessible contributions listed in chronological order (or they can be sorted out by popularity, just like rage comics) has a turnover rate of only three days. The site also harbors the best 8,000 contributions of the past week, another 8,000 of the past month and another 8,000 from over the past year. Altogether, it has seen 33.5 million contributions of which one half has been contributed during the past year. In my opinion, these rapid and staggering numbers make it an unprecedented occurrence in the history of the world’s online literary production.

Moderators of the *f7u12* board stipulate a number of rules as to what content might be submitted:

1. No non-ragecomics [sic] allowed

If you aren’t telling a story, there are no characters, action, or similar, then it is not a rage comic. This includes comics ending in AdviceAnimals¹⁸⁵

2. No comparison comics

These are comics that compare one thing to another. If you’re making any comparison in your comic, chances are you’re doing it wrong

3. No reposting

This subreddit is for original content only, meaning comics YOU made. Don’t put stuff you found from elsewhere on the web, it’s probably been here already. And don’t resubmit your comic because it did poorly. Reposting will result in a ban

¹⁸⁴ Chen, “Baizou manhua,” 690.

¹⁸⁵ The word *AdviceAnimals* is hyperlinked to the board [/r/adviceanimals](#) so that it lets unwitting redditors easily find out that Advice Animals are popular internet memes consisting of a captioned drawing or a photograph of what has through repeated use become known as a stock character. There is one caption at the top of such a picture and one at the bottom. As the reader proceeds in his reading from the first caption across the textual gap which is loaded with a visual message, there builds up a suspension specific for every different kind of Advice Animals until it is more or less successfully relieved towards a standardized emotional end typical for that particular kind of Advice Animals.

4. Upvotes don't matter
It doesn't matter if your comic has 1.21 Gigavotes, we can and will remove it if it violates any of these rules
5. No meta-posts
Don't make a comic complaining about another user, comic, or the moderators. Additionally, don't make comics to "*introduce*" a new rage face
6. NSFW tags are free
Please use NSFW tags for anything that might have the remote possibility of getting someone fired or in trouble
7. Comics must be between 2 and 8 panels
Your comic must be between 2 and 8 panels long. We don't want single panels, nor do we want novels. No comics made of double-width panels only
8. No blogposts
Blogposts are preachy, self-serving, boring comics. These often take the form of a full-panel stare face lecturing someone, posts about how your dog/cat/grandpa died, and similar. Your post must be relatable, not a personal anecdote
9. No vote-begging
Do not mention cakedays, karma, upvotes or anything similar
10. Be light on text
People come here for quick, simple humor. If you find your comic heavy on words, try submitting it to r/ragenovels. This includes labeling "poorly drawn televisions" and similar
11. No non-imgur images
If your comic is from some site other than imgur, then it is not permitted and **will** be removed as spam. Also, please link **directly** to the image
12. No dead horse beating
Avoid tropes of rage comics, including, but not limited to le, das, moi, true story, [FIRST], Extra Panel, Made for Reddit, and [FIXED]
13. Mods have the final say
If a comic is removed by a moderator, even if it doesn't seem to violate any of the other rules, it remains removed

Rage comics which are removed by the moderators, except for reposts and spam, are hourly submitted by a bot to the board [reddit.com/r/f7u12_ham](https://www.reddit.com/r/f7u12_ham) where they are available to all readers. As of February 2016, [f7u12_ham](https://www.reddit.com/r/f7u12_ham), has been in existence for three years, accommodates 994 of such discarded comics which were published within the last 10 months.

Conversely, [baozoumanhua.com](https://www.baozoumanhua.com) does not stipulate any rules to production, Chen dismisses the idea of a board for unregulated expression when she writes:

In an interview with *Southern Metropolis Daily*, Wang Nima is careful to state that he discourages members from submitting too many *baoman* that focus on ‘*diaosi*’ (self-proclaimed ‘loser’). The editors also dislike *baoman* that focus on women trying to attract men in the *gaofushuai* (tall, rich, handsome) category. Nor do they encourage *baoman* that glorify someone having a *beitai* (backup lover). Therefore, they deliberately reduce the number of *diaosi* comics and promote more creative subject matter and ways of expression. [...] Wang Nima’s comment’s reveal that although he presents the website as a platform for free expression, his team exercises a certain degree of control over content that may be considered inappropriate or overly vulgar and profane.¹⁸⁶

As a result of different censoring policies, single, double or multiple-panel-long *baoman* are a common sighting. My *baoman* dataset has for the purpose of this study been rid of such extremely short comics but it includes *baoman* longer than four panels since they constitute a high proportion of all *baoman* submissions.

The two following indexed pictures are, respectively, a random screenshot of the top of one of a thousand *baozoumanhua.com*’s pages which always list eight submissions, and a screenshot of one of roughly forty *f7u12* pages which list twenty five titled thumbnails to rage comics each:

¹⁸⁶ Chen, “*Baizou manhua*,” 703–704. See also Xie, Y., “*Baouzoumanhua: Gei caogenmen yiba changmao, xiang chuangyi wenhao*” [Baouzoumanhua: providing a lance for the ordinary citizens, saying hello to creativity], *Southern Metropolis Daily*, March 3, 2012, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://gcontent.oeeee.com/1/5a/15a12b83500e93d7/Blog/0f7/5638fe.html>.

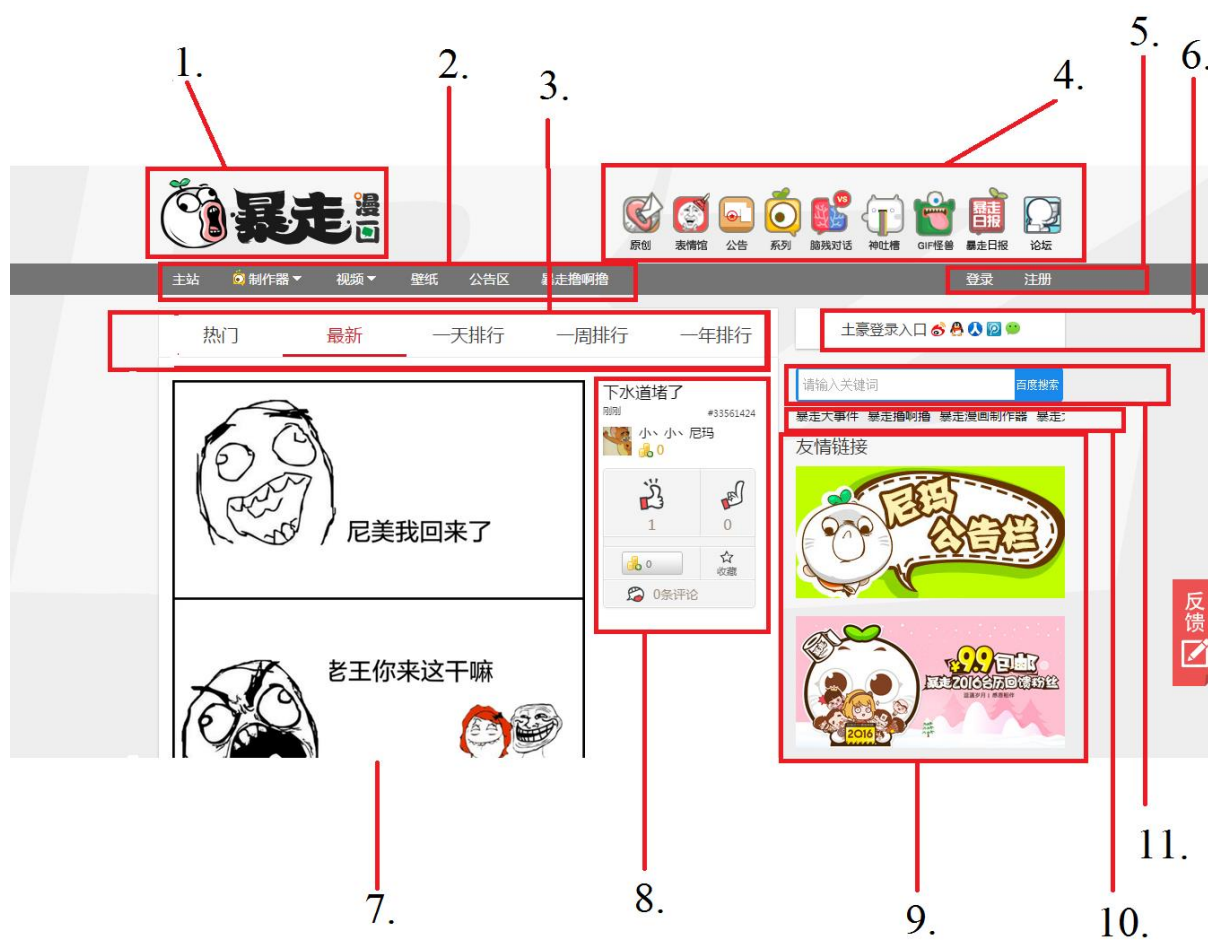


Figure 13. Baozoumanhua frontpage.

Index numbers stand for active tabs with occasional rollout menus for: 1. logo; 2. homepage, products, videos, wallpapers, announcements, series of ten-minutes-long animated shorts featuring new characters together with characters modeled on stock baoman faces; 3. hot, newest, best of last week, best of last month, best of last year; 4. comics with a degree of originality to them, a list of 899 canonized rage faces with titles to them and categorized packs for download into QQ messenger, announcements, baoman series by contributors with distinct style to their comics, 脑残对话 [:naocanduihua:]—a genre of captioned standardized usually dialogical sequences of screenshots from movie scenes which is also popular in the western part of the Internet (such submissions constitute the slightly bigger part of all submissions to baozoumanhua.com), framed photos of possibly anything with a caption at the bottom, animated GIF's, baozou news which report on an extensive range of trending topics, discussion forum with nearly 40,000 threads; 5. log in, sign up; 6. log in with accounts one has on various social networks and messengers; 7. submission; 8. title, date and time of submission/right now, total ordinal number of submission, poster's name hyperlinking to their

profile, digital credits, thumbs up, flip the bird, give the user digital credit, bookmark, comment; 9. links to affiliated websites and services such as gif makers or mobile applications for easy access to baouzoumanhua content or the baizou news; 10. baizou important issues— innumerable links to baoman themed videos or discussion threads etc., products [duplicit], series of ten-minutes-long animated shorts featuring new characters and some modeled on stock baoman faces [duplicit]; 11. page search by the title of submission for content that has been archived for years.

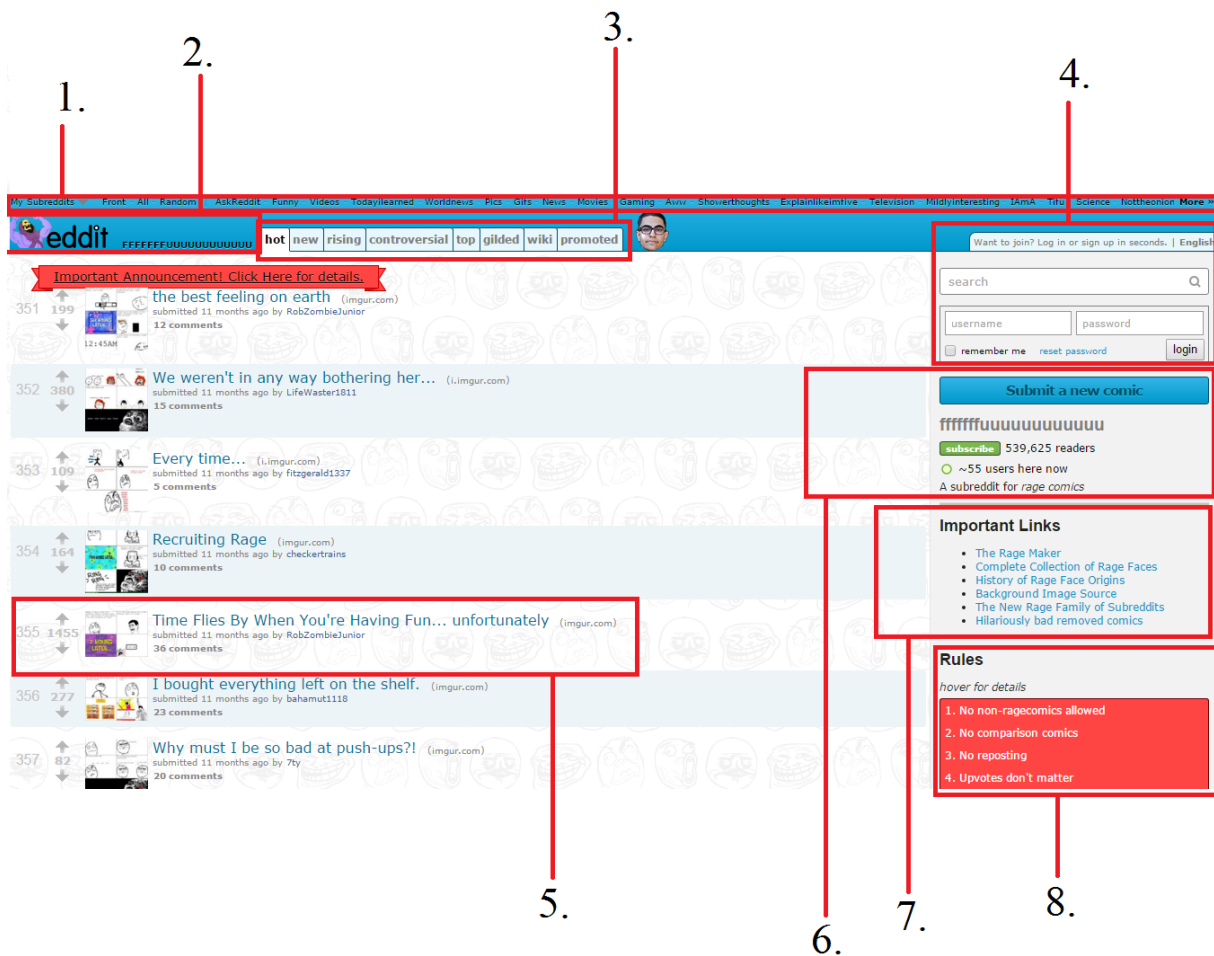


Figure 14. Reddit f7u12 frontpage.

Index numbers stand for: 1. My Subreddits, Font, All, Random, Ask Reddit, Funny, Pics, Todayilearned—a board for interesting facts—, Gifs, Gaming, News, Videos, Worldnews, Aww—a board for “things that make you go AWW! -- like puppies, and bunnies, and so on...,”¹⁸⁷ Movies, Showerthoughts—“a subreddit for you to share all those thoughts, ideas, or philosophical questions that race through your head when in the shower”¹⁸⁸ —,

¹⁸⁷ “r/aww,” *Reddit*, accessed August 29, 2016, <https://www.reddit.com/r/aww/>.

¹⁸⁸ “Showerthoughts,” *Reddit*, accessed August 29, 2016, <https://www.reddit.com/r/Showerthoughts/>.

Mildlyinteresting, Nottheonion—“for true stories that are so mind-blowingly ridiculous, that you could have sworn it was an Onion story”¹⁸⁹—, IMAA—a board to share “something uncommon that plays a central role in your life, or a truly interesting and unique event”¹⁹⁰—, ExplainlikeImfive—a board for concepts the users would “like to understand better; not for simple one word answers, walkthroughs, or personal problems”¹⁹¹—, Jokes, Television, Tifu—an abbreviation for board *Today, I Fucked Up*, More; 2. logo; 3. hot, new, rising, controversial, top, gilded—top comments to chosen rage comics—, wiki [no content for this board], promoted [no content]; 4. language, sign up, login, page search by the title of submission for content that has been archived for years; 5. rage comics thumbnail, title, date of submission, relative ordinal number of submission on scale 1 to 1,000, poster’s name hyperlinking to their profile, buttons to upvote or downvote a post, number of comments; 6. submit a new comic; 7. links to a rage maker, to complete collection of rage faces (690 of them), history of origin of some of the rage faces, background image source, the new rage family of subreddits, hilariously bad removed comics; 8. tabs with rollout menus for rules.

OVERUSED TITLES?

So, if visitors to *baouzoumanhu.com* want to read a *baouzou*, they scroll down through pages of eight submissions out of which roughly four are *baouzou* and four are other popular internet memes. On the other hand, if visitors to *f7u12* want to read a rage comic, they do not need to confront themselves with other popular internet memes as they scroll through a page with 25 thumbnails and titles to rage comics. But they have to click on the thumbnail or on the title of the comic to view the comic and then click back to get back on the page, or open it in a new tab and then close that tab, which means that they have to actively engage with one of the two signs. In the thumbnails, neither the text of the rage comics nor the graphic extensions are legible, only the canonized rage faces are. Such four-panel miniatures give a taste of the story, they are low-fidelity invitations to linked content, whereas the title to the comic is the dominant sign in terms of legibility and of how much space it occupies on the board. Overall, the process of reading eight rage comics online is a much more engaging advent than reading the same number of *baoman* and, as on *f7u12* the readers are not confronted with other texts,

¹⁸⁹ “Nottheonion,” *Reddit*, accessed August 29, 2016, <https://www.reddit.com/r/nottheonion/>.

¹⁹⁰ “r/IAmA,” *Reddit*, accessed August 29, 2016, <https://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/>.

¹⁹¹ “r/explainlikeimfive,” *Reddit*, accessed August 29, 2016, <https://www.reddit.com/r/explainlikeimfive/>.

the title of the comic is the dominant message that they most probably read before they read the rage comic.¹⁹²

In my rage comics dataset, titles which expand the storyline were very common. Such stories might portray characters in situations, but it is the title that tells us that the characters are somebody's roommates, or wife etc. They can add whatever information to the story or, unluckily, give the story away. One example for all titled *This is how I got laid* does not take us as far in the narration of what could be read as a funny anecdote.¹⁹³ Among random general titles such as *Let em hear it!*, *God damn it*, *Burn it all down*, *Relationship*, *I think I went deaf*, *Why I love kids...*, *Lament of the PC-Gamer*, etc., simple uninformative titles to comics such as *kglHvax*, *oops*, *huh*, *Daww*, *Heck yeah*, or *yep* were extremely rare. More titles mentioned the internet phenomenon as in *Reddit things*, *Reddit is like an energy drink*, *Reddit disappointed me today*, *every day on Reddit*, etc. Many titles seemed to have become popular as titles specifically for rage comics as in *Every. Damn. Time*, *Every Time*, *Every time...*, *Every time!*, *Every single time*, *Every Single Time!!!!*, *Every single time I have a nap..*, *Every Fucking Day*, *Every day on Reddit..* The title *Every. fffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuucking. Time.* also refers to the *f7u12* board. *I hate my brain*, *Why brain why*, *Thanks brain. ruined the rest of my day.*, *reddit Question Rage*, *Haircut rage*, *Substituting Rage*, *Dentist rage*, *Flair rage*, *Skipping class rage*, *Blind rage*, *Sonic rage*, *Toilet Rage*, *Before Work Rage*, *Sleep rage*, *Java rage*, *Mom Rage*, *Hypocritical mother rage*, *Dumbass Mum Logic rage*, *Mom Logic*, *My Mom...*, *Moms sometimes*, *Mom scaring*, *..why do mom's always hide it?*, *mothers at night*, *troll mother*, *My mum is the best*, *landlord logic*, *Wife Logic*, *while cleaning out storage space at home.*, etc.

Other titles incorporated popular internet memes as in *Scumbag iTunes*, *Scumbag Alma mater*, *My scumbag eyelashes*, *Scumbag Hitler*, *Scumbag brain strikes again*, which refer to an Advice Animal known as Scumbag Steve which will be described shortly. Titles such as *Dat feeling...*, *That Feel*, refer to a popular internet meme I Know that feel, bro. The title *It's a trap!* is a popular internet catchphrase, the title *Slenderverse* refers to the meme of a fictional supernatural character which originated on the Internet, the title *Hate getting trolled irl* uses an abbreviation of a popular catchphrase "In Real Life," the title *I'm Such a Troll*, *Lil' Troll*, *The Troll Waiter I*, *They See Me Scamin'*, *They Trollin'* all refer to trolling and the last one among them is also modeled on the refrain of Chamillionaire's 2006 hit "Ridin" which

¹⁹² For the purpose of a more fluent reading titles to baoman and rage comics in this dissertation are italicized in running text, but cited in quotation marks in notes.

¹⁹³ See appendix 9.

became a popular phrase on the Internet. The titles *Not sure if troll or really stupid*, *Not sure if clever or just messed up*, *I'm not sure if I'm nostalgic or scared* draw on the popular Futurama Fry meme, and titles such as *Pokémon Hack Fail*, *Hunger games fail*, *Fifty shades of shame* refer to the titles of TV series and book titles. In the context of the last title mentioned it is tempting to say that the title *Fifty Shadows* refers to the same best-selling 2011 erotic romance novel *Fifty Shades of Grey* by E. L. James, or to its 2015 film adaptation. Such reading may give out the working of myth as it suggests that users of a language tend to connect terms which are in proximity, while proximity in such cases is measurable probabilistically on the frequential level. The title *Spring Workout – Every Year!* works only with the word *every* but not *time*, but it keeps to a time frame. The Title *When my mind is random* does not use the word brain but the story that it labels could do with *brain* since it is also a very common trope in the narratives. It is very common to use the trope *True story, bro* in the comics, so when readers stumble upon the title *Spit, A cautionary tale.*, they can sense the link to this particular common trope due to the proximity not in frequential probability that individual words would occur in a title to a rage comic but in the meaning of the words which are used and the meaning of the words which are more commonly used. This example shows the true definition of the word meme as a unit that transmits cultural information. In the title *Spit, A cautionary tale* not a single sign from the more common trope *True story, bro* is present, as it is in *Who else thinks golf is frustrating? — True story.*, but it still can be tied to it because the canon suggests such reading. The not so obvious meme that was transferred in the title *Spring Workout – Every Year!* was the meme of a time frame that was filled with a different sign that is probabilistically unlikely among rage comic titles.

Myth operates one lever deeper than ideology which can be understood as a “system of ideas that aspires both to explain the world and to change it.”¹⁹⁴ Myth in the most sober act of speech, unlike ideology, tries to be elusive even to itself and not, as is the case with ideology, be recognized as an important message which is in fact a masked self-proclamatory message with a recognizable tendency to strive for domination.¹⁹⁵ Myth is an underlying principle to all associative thinking. It operates on the plane of replicating memes, which are sometimes easy to categorize on a full spectrum of phonemes, graphemes, grammatical categories, tropes of speech, narrative techniques, and conversational topics all the way up to

¹⁹⁴ Maurice Cranston, *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s.v. “ideology,” accessed August 14, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ideology-society>.

¹⁹⁵ For concise understanding of ideology, see Sophie Fiennes, *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (Toronto: Zeitgeist Films, 2012). Filmstrip. 2:36:00, which is starring the Slovene thinker Slavoj Žižek as the narrator.

logical outcomes, which may, thus, evoke mythically conditioned emotional responses. Because of myth, terms which we join by arbitrary metaphors and discursive logic suggest certain production or certain reading, which may be hard to unveil as arbitrary unless we accept the position of what has in philosophy and linguistics been known as the linguistic turn.

Intuitively, since all that the visitors to baozoumanhua.com have to do is scroll down the page and once having seen eight submissions click *next*, the titles to the stories should not be expected to partake on the readers' experience of the baoman as much as is the case with rage comics. Among all the rage comic titles in my dataset, there was not a single one that would say something in the sense of *no title* or be missing altogether. Contrastingly, in the first baoman subset there were only a few such titles but in the second subset there were over 75 of them. In the second subset, there were also some twelve titles which used no characters but a few dots. The third subset showed a substantial decrease in the *no name* titles but it contained twice as many titles consisting only of dots, which altogether counts up to over 110 titles void of almost all information. The information that they convey is that titles are not as important for baoman as they are for rage comics, which should be attributed to the design of the web pages. This hints at how much the stories themselves may be influenced by the coded design of the interface as there should not be much of the authors' expectations as to whether the readers might engage with the title prior to reading the comic. The lack of such expectations might force the authors to embed all information that they think is necessary for the reading of the comic directly into it. In fact, only a few titles did, unlike it was the case with rage comics, expand the story line. As it has been said earlier, the myth that we live has historically been less coded.

Throughout the baoman subsets, there were also rising numbers of titles playing on interjections 呵呵[:hehe:] 哈哈 [:haha:] 嘿嘿 [:heihei:] which are also not very informative. Another vague phrase that has become a common trope among baoman titles is a variation on 标题 [:biaoti:] meaning *title*. Some examples are 标题没有 [there is no title], 没标题 [no title here], 不是一个标题在卖萌 [It's not a title it's just acting cute], 我知道你不去看标题的 [I know that you don't read titles] or 标题什么的最 out 了。 [It's totally out to make titles.]. The self-referential phrase often extends to variations of 标题要长 [:biaoti yao chang:] [titles should be long] as in 长 [long], 长长。 。 , 听说名字必须的长? 我不信 [Is it said that names should be long? I don't believe that], 名字要长 jb 更要长。 , ? 名字长长长长长长长长 [Name should be long penis even longer? Loooooong name], 听说越长越好。 20 厘米。 30 厘米。 [It is said that the longer the better. 20 cm. 30 cm.] or a rant

spanning three lines 听说标题长度能决定精选几率于是我就要看一看标题最长能写多少字没关系啦反正标题这种东西也没有什么人会看看的人估计也是网速渣爆的手机党不知道开 4G 会不会快一点呢 算了有这时间还不如多去马路边扶几个熊老人说不定花的还少一点也算做件好事 [It is said that the length of a title should determine the best odds, which is why I want to read the longest titles no matter how many characters long, anyway, these kinds of titles...].

Just like in rage comics, the trope 真实的故事 [:zhenshi de gushi:] [true story] is a common occurrence in baoman. In baoman titles it spun off mutations such as 一个“真实”的故事 [A “true” story], 悲伤, 真实的故事 [Sad, true story], 悲伤的故事 [Sad story], 这是个悲伤的故事 这里也有个悲伤的人 [This is a sad story It also shows sad people], 标题很悲伤 [The title is very sad] which has diverted too far from the original phrase but it is still recognizable as its offspring.

In October 2013 the first season of what quickly became a popular reality show 爸爸去哪儿 [:baba qu na'r:] [Where Are We Going, Dad?] was aired on TV. The show features a catchy song in which a child asks in a cute voice 爸爸你会不会唱小星星啊? [Dad, can you sing Twinkle Twinkle Little Star?] and then in the refrain it sings 老爸老爸我们去哪里呀 [Daddy, daddy, where are we going?]. Upon reading a baoman title 饿标题去那里呀 去喂狗 [Where did the title go It went to feed the dog] or 标题都去哪儿 [Where did the title go] we can suspect that they might have been influenced by the show, an outward factor that can be easily pointed out. The probability rises when we read the title 节操节操我们去哪里呀! [Moral principles, moral principles, where are we going?] or 飞机去哪儿 [Where did the plane go?] which titles a story voicing one's concern about the lost Malaysia Airlines 730 flight, or a four-panel story titled 小星星 in which a character asks another character whether he can sing Twinkle Twinkle Little Star. The answer is no, which sends the first character laughing and the second seems to be about to hang himself while crying. The popular show has seen a second series and so we can read a seven-panel baoman which starts with what translates as *Me and my six-year-old brother watching Where Are We Going, Dad 2*, when suddenly the female narrator has to go to the bathroom, and when she comes back she notices an advert for a popular digestive soft drink on the computer screen which reads 怕油腻, 就喝“十花汤” [If you worry about greasy food, have a drink of “Ten Herbs Brew”] but her brother purposefully misreads the tone of the third syllable as 就喝屎花汤 [have a drink of Poop

Flower Brew]. The same word play appears in another story. Another title reads 标题被王泥马吃了 [Wang Nima ate the title], another 被吃了 [it was eaten] while numerous other titles incorporate the phrase 吃屎 [eat shit]. It is not so much of my concern whether 吃屎 [eat shit] and 屎花汤 [Poop Flower Brew] might have a common ancestor in their evolutionary lines, which would, in fact, be impossible to prove without questioning the authors. My concern is to search the stories for evidence that supports the idea that because of any reason imaginable—for example that there is a soft drink (culture) of a certain name (semiotic tradition) which suggests another reading (word play)—there arises a discursive space within an evolving cannon which invites stories that play on the same signs because they have been holding up the debate, just as they invite signs which are in proximity to such signs. This further expands the cannon towards making it evolve into a system capable of exhaustive formulations but which in fact sticks to overused tropes which might not at first sight be deemed overused.

THE INFLUENCE OF SOFTWARE ON TROPES OF NARRATION

Not only are the two traditions most distinctly divided by their languages or by the Golden Shield Project which has been nicknamed the Great Firewall of China,¹⁹⁶ it is also the web interfaces which help users create their rage comics that delineate the course for the narratives. The most popular web-based production software which is commonly known as a rage maker or a rage builder can be found at ragemaker.net, ragegenerator.com and builder.cheezburger.com/builder/rage. Cell phone applications also abound. On the Chinese side of the Internet, the comprehensive site baozuomanhua.com/makers/1 features a number of embedded makers that let users unleash their creativity. Mobile apps are also available. The introduction of the software is double edged. On one hand, it eases the users' creative efforts but it also restricts them within a database of preset choices. Every builder lists only a certain number of rage faces and lets the users perform a restricted number of graphic alterations more or less comfortably. Categorizing rage faces under labels in structured databases promotes standardization in production as it plays into the paradigm of “more content produced but with less diverging variability” since when users might feel ambiguous about

¹⁹⁶Chinese Internet users cannot freely access Google, YouTube, Vimeo, Tumblr, Facebook, Twitter, Blogspot, Instagram, Dropbox, Soundcloud, Bandcamp, and many Wikipedia pages, which are servers that shape contemporary western culture. Western users cannot access Youku—a service like YouTube—, or Baidu music—a service analogous to Soundcloud—, to name just a few.

some rage faces, labels are always there for them to narrow their thinking. The following rage faces

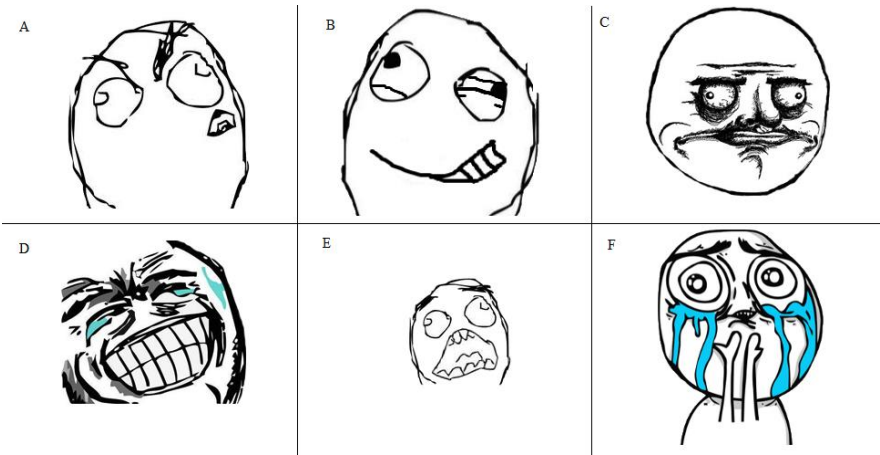


Figure 15. Categorization (baoman).

have been categorized by ragemaker.net as A: angry; B: angry; C: pleasure; D: happy; E: surprised – amazed; F: happy. But on ragegenerator.com, which does not offer either A or B—although it offers many rage faces which are not available at ragemaker.net— the rage face marked by the letter F has been instead of “happy” labeled as “sad” and even named *The Saddest Guy Ever*. In the baoman maker it has also been categorized under “sad.” All the three rage builders make it possible to download pictures into the comics from the web but only ragemaker.net allows a picture to be uploaded into the comic from one’s hard drive.

All of the rage builders and the baoman builder give users an option to use speech balloons in their panels but none of them offers thought balloons. What seems influential for the diverging evolution of both canons is that only ragemaker.net offers a tool called *alpha* which lets every single drawn line, text or rage face fade out on a scale of one hundred grades. Thanks to this option rage comics have evolved a narrative technique which might have shifted the focus of many users who decided to share some of their stories. Figure 16 presents a few excerpted panels from different comics which show how *alpha* has been used (the panels are numbered on lines running from left to right; titles to the comics from which they are cut can be found in the footnote):

that helps best to express the feelings of their characters, could it be that the first three users might have compromised their characters' feelings for the sake of the neatly overlapping visuals? In formal verse, this can be experienced with rhythm and rhyme, when a sign needs to conform to a form and that is why it is chosen over other signs, but with visual appropriation it is nearly impossible to cipher. The author of the sixth panel positioned the faded out troll face outside the full-colored rage face but since it is used as the third panel of a four-panel rage comic which talks about a male protagonist whose girlfriend approaches him as he is watching TV and surprises him by saying that she is pregnant to which he reacts by slitting his wrists, there cannot be any doubt that the troll face stands for her hidden intricate joking side. The seventh panel shows a progression in the character's mood as he is shopping for some cereal. In the preceding panel of the comic, the protagonist inspects a box of cereal which he finds disappointingly expensive, whereas the following panel which we are concerned with shows the protagonist's progression from the state of disappointment which is identical to the rage face used in the preceding panel into a state of a seeming interest as his eyes rest on a cheaper box which in the end proves to taste horribly. Such sequencing of a single character's emotional state within a single panel could have become a common trope of rage comics, but it did not. The eighth exemplary panel is cut out from a story about a visitor to a barber's shop who projects an alternative scenario into the mirror. This panel shows us that the resizing of rage faces can function as a device by which users can achieve an effect of a seeming distance between characters. We can see the same technique used in the first two of the following examples which are cut out from different comics.¹⁹⁸

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- ¹⁹⁸ 1. CrazyMan19878, "An average walk to the store," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, October 1, 2015, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/3n5rb7/an_average_walk_to_the_store/>, accessed August 29, 2016.
2. BATTLE_TOADS_, "Disturbing experience at work," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, September 10, 2015, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/3kf4tr/disturbing_experience_at_work/>, accessed August 29, 2016.
3. fearer4000, "So it's not free?," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 19, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/23frib/so_its_not_free/>, accessed August 29, 2016.
4. arthur990807, "Chemistry rage," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 12, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/20871g/chemistry_rage/>, accessed August 29, 2016.
5. FriendGuy255, "Public Transit Rage," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, July 28, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/2bzggu/public_transit_rage/>, accessed August 29, 2016.
6. WolvesPWN, "The Pinch was worse than LAYING DOWN ON A BED OF LEGOS :(" Comic Strip, Reddit.com, August 3, 2014,



Figure 17. Resizing, seeming distance, and thoughts (rage comics).

In the first panel, the couple in the forefront is walking away from their neighbor who the female character has thoroughly deflated, in the second panel the narrator in the forefront overhears a conversation between a parent and a child. The third panel picks on a cashier's "badass" attitude about her shop having been robbed and positions it outside her appearance, just like we have seen it in the example with the mean girlfriend joking about her pregnancy

<https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/2chdjf/the_pinch_was_worse_than_laying_down_on_a_bed_of/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

7. thelonercat, "There's no limit to my stupidity," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 23, 2014,

<<https://www.reddit.com/user/thelonecat/>>, accessed August 29, 2016.

8. fagit15, "Abortion [Real Story]," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 5, 2014,

<https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/228l6u/abortion_real_story/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

9. DerpTheHerpDerp, "Muffins," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 28, 2014,

<<https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/343pni/muffins/>>, accessed August 29, 2016.

10. jfb1337, "This happened yesterday...", Comic Strip, Reddit.com, July 25, 2014,

<https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/2bqgy5/this_happened_yesterday/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

11. jweezy3, "Guess I had a high-fiber week," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 9, 2014,

<https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/2bqgy5/this_happened_yesterday/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

12. TheDarkChef, "Game-shopping rage," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 7, 2015,

<https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/31sudp/gameshopping_rage/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

but this time, the device that produces fade outs was not used and still the reader cannot be misled in his reading to think that Neil deGrasse Tyson's¹⁹⁹ popular silhouette stands for another character. The fourth, the fifth and the sixth panel all fit rage faces into the eyes (and the mouth) of a bigger one. The seventh panel which shows mechanical workings on its character's forehead accompanies the visuals by an explanation with an asterisk, while the following two panels use a screenshot of an animation that commonly symbolizes the process of loading or waiting for a response of a computer program and they place them above the characters' heads. The last three panels show how users have found their way around the restricted pre-fabricated options of the rage builders when they drew their own thought balloons.

The focus on the process of thinking has shown to be persistent in rage comics as there were eleven stories in my dataset which played on the idea that a story is told until in one of the last panels it is revealed that the whole story was just happening in somebody's head, which would be indicated at least by a part of a hand-drawn thought balloon that spans over the bottoms of the preceding panels like a bracket or a staple or it can be done as it is in the comic *Reddit mail*.²⁰⁰ Other stories follow the same storyline but do not use the narrative device of a thought balloon, as can be seen in the last two panels of an eight-panel comic *Struggles of life* whose commuting protagonist gets annoyed by a pedestrian walking in the middle of the sidewalk and so he says "usually I just ring the bell but gotta teach them a lesson" after which these two panels follow:

¹⁹⁹ Neil deGrasse Tyson is an American physicist whose defensive gesture became a popular internet meme.

²⁰⁰ See appendix 10. Other examples include: fagit15, "I live my life to the fullest," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 2, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/1zbuxh/i_live_my_life_to_the_fullest/>, accessed August 29, 2016; TrueBC, "4inch boner Rage," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 13, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/20cbnn/4_inch_boner_rage/>, accessed August 29, 2016; Blackside86, "I just remembered recently," Comic Strip, Reddit.com,, April 7, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/22gn2l/i_just_remembered_recently/>, accessed August 29, 2016; Historynerd88, "This is definitely how I die," Comic Strip, Reddit.com,, March 20, 2015, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/2zqjpa/this_is_definitely_how_i_die/>, accessed August 29, 2016; Frienguy255, "TALES FROM THE MEGAPLEX – Episode 26 : Insider Knowledge," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, May 2, 2015, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/34mok3/tales_from_the_megaplex_episode_26_insider/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

Since our discussion concerns highly participatory media, let us suppose that when the readers read stories which are, for example, about dreaming, then, later, when they like to author a rage comic themselves, they may come up with a story which also employs the motif of a dream (when one tells another about their dream), or sleep (when one cannot fall asleep), or bed (when there is a bed in a panel which lets the reader know that the scene is a bedroom but the bed itself is not important for the happenings of the story) because they would be influenced by the debate to such an extent that they would either pay more attention in their daily lives to when something worth of sharing, which involves such motives, happens to them so that they could work it into a rage comic, or they would reminisce to such episodes in their lives, or they would just make a similar story up.

If we ran a statistic analysis of all stories in a big enough corpus and pinpointed all stories which work with the idea of, let us say, a bed, or another motif drawing from a daily engagement, we would find out that some motifs are used more often than others but that would be all. Thus, we would describe the analyzed part of the canon within a genre and hypotheses about reasons behind the production could be made, but no suggestions about conclusions concerning the arbitrary workings of a myth could be drawn from such a study. A comparative study has the advantage that once we screen another canon for the same motifs, we may find out that even though the motifs may be expected to be as common as in the first canon, since they are supposed to be motifs most probably daily experienced by authors of the comics, it might show that they are expressed not only differently but also strikingly less

3. WarlythePlatypus, "Sleeping in the middle of a thunderstorm," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 4, 2014,

https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/2282hw/sleeping_in_the_middle_of_a_thunderstorm/), accessed August 29, 2016.

4. skye985, "Stupid Dreams," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, July, 14, 2015,

https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/3d7hi4/stupid_dreams/), accessed August 29, 2016.

5. TrueBC, "Dem feelings.," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 16, 2014,

https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/20jx35/dem_feelings/), accessed August 29, 2016.

6. SirLinkOfKokiri, "When you're single and your mind rubs it in.," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, May 14, 2015,

https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/35x3xx/when_youre_single_and_your_mind_rubs_it_in/), accessed August 29, 2016.

7. [user deleted account], "Spit: A cautionary tale," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 13, 2014,

https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/20co9i/spit_a_cautionary_tale/), accessed August 29, 2016.

8. Gaming_RS, "Scared me out of pants (2009) WTF DREAM," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 8, 2015,

https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/2ybt3f/scared_me_out_of_pants_2009_wtf_dream/), accessed August 29, 2016.

See appendix 8. for a similar story told without words.

or more frequently, which is counter-intuitive unless we yield to the idea that this is where the myth—the emergent unruly systemic lubricant which happens to be almost undiscernably thematized—shows itself, since in such simple and short, and unpaid for, stories which are produced with the aid of primitive online softwares which offer low-fidelity stock symbols and a few tools there can be no talk of ideology but only of myth.²⁰⁵ In this case, it is ideology only to think that one should use the computer, and the internet, that one should express himself and make it funny and offer it unselectively to a multitude of readers, but it is not ideology to have the cultural artefacts show more beds, to tell more stories about sleep or dreams—this is myth at its furthest reach for semiotics and memetics.

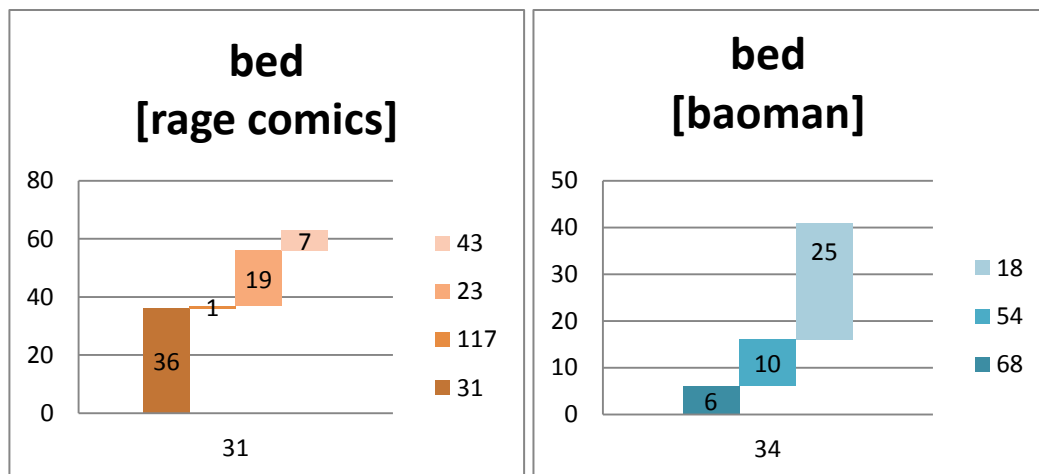
Both semiotics and memetics have their place in literary studies, just like the study of archetypes have their say in literary studies, but I must say that I dismiss with the idea of going as far as to archetypes in my interpretations of myth.²⁰⁶ In my understanding, archetypes stand beyond semiotics as they try to tap on the manifestations of the unspeakable platonic pro-forms which are thought to operate within the minds of categorizing individuals, which might imply to some thinkers that there may be a collective mind, at least a subsonscious one, or even an unconscious one.²⁰⁷ But with archetypes we reach the frontiers of interpretation which cannot be treated with a frequentional semiotic memetic analysis on the same level of discourse to find out anything about myth unless we wanted to discuss only the myth of archetypes and no other.

Following are two graphs of the frequency of the sign *bed* in my corpora of 3351 web comics:

²⁰⁵ Since myth operates on all levels where we can read memes, that is on all culture, it, because of this definition, also operates on the level of performance which the study of discourse identifies as ideology. Therefore, it can be said that ideology is myth because some of ideology could surely be shown to be myth. But on the current page, the term *ideology*, although it stays identical to how it has been used in this footnote, is used in direct opposition to instances of myth which, as they are found in the comics, cannot be attributed to much ideology without much mental acrobatics.

²⁰⁶ Cf. Anthony Stevens, *Archetype Revisited and Updated* (London: Brunner-Routledge, 2002).

²⁰⁷ See Stevens, XI.



Each column gives the absolute number of findings of the sign *bed* in a particular subset the volume and temporal distribution of which have been shown above. The numbers on the right are rounded relative numbers which indicate the frequency of the sign within particular subsets. The bottom number is a rounded relative number which divides the total number of comics within the particular corpus by the total number of the findings of the sign to give the overall frequency of the sign.

Thus, we can see that in rage comics *bed* was appropriated in roughly every 31st comic while it was most probable to read a story that employed the sign in the first quarter of 2015, although the relative numbers for all the subsets were not diverging much. For the baoman the overall relative number is very near the overall frequency of *bed* in rage comics, but the relative numbers which describe individual subsets show a clear rise in the usage of the sign as time moved on, which provides us with a space for interpretation. My suggestion about the rise in the usage of *bed* in baoman is simply that among a variety of baoman faces the baoman builder started to offer prefabricated signs of a bed:



Figure 21. Bed stock faces (baoman).

So, even though a *bed* could not have been anything new in the lives of the users who created the comics, and even though they could use the Chinese word 床 [:chuang:] for it, and even though they had the digital paintbrushes in the baoman builder to draw beds, they did it less

often because the sign was not in proximity to the center of their focus. As yet another symbol for the sign *bed* got pooled into the updated set of prefabricated options, some users used such signs and others got most probably inspired by their usage. As said before, it may be that as time went by the inspired authors-to-be made their stories up or they searched their memory for stories in the narration of which *bed* could have a purpose or they changed their attention in their daily experience and they started noticing more of the bed and therefore they soon had a story to tell.

As it was shown, it has been common to resize rage faces, fade them and stack them over one another to achieve commonly understood effects. One standardized trope of narration is used when a “troll face” is resized and stacked over another rage face, but unlike with the examples that we have seen so far, in this trope a troll face is stacked over a rage face to label a body part (a brain, a nose, an erected penis) and it is also often stacked over animal faces and inanimate objects. In rage comics, this is extremely rarely done with any other rage face but the troll face.²⁰⁸ Thus, within the genre, inanimate objects often demonstrate their capacity to be invested with malice but almost never with any other trait. Following are a few examples:

²⁰⁸ Exceptions include: fagit15, “My feet are killing me!,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 21, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/fffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/20yqte/my_feet_are_killing_me/>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Figure 22. Stacking up troll face (rage comics).²⁰⁹

- ²⁰⁹ 1. Janjan07, "Stupid rocks," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 15, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/2334oz/stupid_rocks/>, accessed August 29, 2016.
2. JellySw0rd, "The bane of all first graders," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 16, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/20kl2y/the_bane_of_all_first_graders/>, accessed August 29, 2016.
3. TeslaRedditMan, "Vending machine rage," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 8, 2015, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/31wljh/vending_machine_rage/>, accessed August 29, 2016.
4. purpleholsterz, "Taking a shower," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 21, 2015, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/33b5bu/taking_a_shower/>, accessed August 29, 2016.
5. fagit15, "Biggest lie in history of mankind," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 23, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/23qwp/biggest_lie_in_history_of_mankind/>, accessed August 29, 2016.
6. niceloner10463484, "I know they've been drastically expanding the last few years, but seriously fuck T-mobile.," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 21, 2015, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/33edpg/i_know_theyve_been_drastically_expanding_the_last/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

The first panel shows a rock over which the character tripped, the second panel shows a troll face indigo crayon whose color was unfit for a drawing of a cloud, the third shows a bag of chips which the character found out to be only half full. The fourth panel shows a tricky shower faucet, and panel number five is cut out from a story about slipping on a frozen puddle. The sixth panel comes from a story about a mobile network which is not in reach, the seventh panel shows a troll face Google Chrome icon which was a program that would not close as the protagonist expected it to close, the eighth panel shows a smart phone with an annoying touch pad. Panel number nine shows a troll face country which occupies the last panel in a comic about an unsuccessful job application in Sweden as the applicant is turned down because he cannot speak Swedish. Panel number nine shows a troll face alarm clock that unmercifully wakes the characters up. Panel number eleven which in the original spans the length of two panels shows a troll face over a character's stuffed nose. The last panel which in the original also spans the length of two panels shows a troll face on a character's forehead and the phrase **loading**, which is then linked by sequencing to a facepalm performed by the same character which is accompanied by a regretful phrase about its brain.

At this point, let us first see what Ryan M. Milner has to say about the troll face, then tie it to another rage face and then draw conclusions:

The Troll Face, often used independent of Rage Comics and often cited as a prototypical Rage Face, is used to express the 'troll' ethos prevalently cited in meme collectives. The troll, a trickster of sorts, spreads maliciousness and mischief for his own amusement or advantage. 'Trolling' is an established term in online forums and discussion boards. It labels posters contributing intentionally inflammatory or

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7. ChofiTheMaster, "Mum rage." Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 25, 2015, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/33ug4b/mum_rage/>, accessed August 29, 2016.
 8. mrs subway, "Sometimes I Miss The Old "Hard" Keyboards," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 28, 2015, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/344aej/sometimes_i_miss_the_old_hard_keyboards/>, accessed August 29, 2016.
 9. 1993teemu, "Double standards," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, May 18, 2015, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/36d742/double_standards/>, accessed August 29, 2016.
 10. nighthawk226, "Please Leave a Message After the Beep," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, march 2, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/1zd1d4/please_leave_a_message_after_the_beep/>, accessed August 29, 2016.
 11. DoULikeMinecraft1237, "Stuffed Nose Rage," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 11, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/22sw49/stuffed_nose_rage/>, accessed August 29, 2016.
 12. Clefable25, "Why brain why," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 23, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/23q8lk/why_brain_why/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

controversial discourse in order to generate heated responses. The origins of the face are conflicted. The Trollface Know Your Meme article says the face was derived from a similar post on the amateur art site Deviantart.com in 2008 ('Trollface/Coolface/Problem?', n.d.). However, a user on 4chan argued its origin came from the film *Earnest Scared Stupid*, in a scene where Earnest defeats an actual troll in battle by running over it with his truck. A common practice on 4chan, the argument was presented in stacked still form. Below is an excerpt:



The post—an argument for redefinition of the Troll Face from trolling to defeating the trolls of the world—could very well have been trolling itself. Or perhaps the creator of the stacked still saw the film, decided that Earnest’s face looked like the Troll Face, and offered a bit of revisionist history. No matter the case, the image demonstrates that the characters in Rage Comics have conflicted histories, that the mythology of these characters are worthy of discussion to members of meme collectives, and that collective consensus is sought in defining the essence of these characters. They are artifacts negotiated and decided by consensus of a social collective. Every formal feature in memes is the result of social processes.²¹⁰

The use of the troll face should now be compared with the use of another rage face—the “scumbag hat.” The scumbag hat has its origin in an Advice Animal known as Scumbag Steve.

²¹⁰ Ryan M. Milner, “The World Made Meme: Discourse and Identity in Participatory Media” (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2012), 101–103.

Outside of rage comics Scumbag Steve’s hat has been remixed into so many images that it has spun a new Advice Animal known as the “Scumbag Brain” which does not even need the copped hat. KnowYourMeme informs that “the first Scumbag Brain derivative was posted to Reddit on March 24th, 2011. It featured an image of a human brain with text describing frustrating lapses in judgement or memory.”²¹⁴

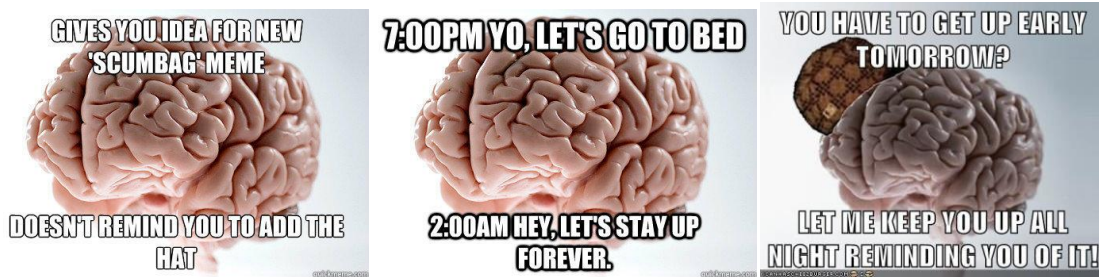


Figure 25. Scumbag brain.²¹⁵

Scumbag brain refines the characteristics of Scumbag Steve into a depersonalized objectified organ and thus it lets rage comic authors associate their characters’ conduct with the workings of this insidious biological trickster. I would now like to refer the reader to twenty-one selected rage comics in the appendix on which it can be shown how thin a line there is between the use of stacked troll faces and the Scumbag brain. The first eight comics, that is *This is how I got laid*,²¹⁶ *Reddit Mail*,²¹⁷ *Always right when I get to research her*, *Playing fetch*,²¹⁸ *Every Time I try to Relax!*,²¹⁹ *I hate my brain*,²²⁰ *Damn you*,²²¹ and *She moved back into my town*,²²² will not be discussed but as it can be read in the comic *I hate being sick*, and

²¹⁴ *Know Your Meme*, s.vv. “Scumbag Steve,” last modified July 1, 2015, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/scumbag-steve>.

²¹⁵ 1. KnowYourMeme, “Scumbag Brain - Image #211,169,” posted by “Don,” December 2, 2011, accessed August 29, <http://knowyourmeme.com/photos/211169-scumbag-brain>.

2. KnowYourMeme, “Scumbag Brain - Image #211,142,” posted by “Don,” December 2, 2011, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://knowyourmeme.com/photos/211142-scumbag-brain>.

3. KnowYourMeme, “Scumbag Brain - Image #538,767,” posted by “ivanpqwerty,” May 2, 2013, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://knowyourmeme.com/photos/538767-scumbag-brain>.

²¹⁶ See appendix 9.

²¹⁷ See appendix 10.

²¹⁸ See appendix 12.

²¹⁹ See appendix 13.

²²⁰ See appendix 14.

²²¹ See appendix 15.

²²² See appendix 16.

*then there's the icing on the cake.*²²³ the troll face with a scumbag hat characterizes a “troll body” which is a formulation closely related to the “scumbag brain.” The character in the following comic *Circadian Rhythm Rage*,²²⁴ ironically thanks his body for keeping him up late at night. The comic’s plot line is almost identical to what happens in the following comic *Energy Rage*,²²⁵ although there is no troll, scumbag, brain or body. In my interpretation of the genre this sequence of three comics nicely illustrates how a meme can be tracked in a comic even though it cannot be read in it on any selected sign. The memes that were transferred into *Energy Rage* suggest themselves to us only when we put the comic in such an explanatory sequence and thus pinpoint it within the canon to show that its production was most probably influenced by frequent tropes of narration, even though none of such tropes can be read in the comic itself. In the same direction of thought, I then leave it to the judgement of the reader to consider whether the appended *I’m getting retarded*,²²⁶ *Forgetting Your order at subway*,²²⁷ *I honestly don't even know anymore.*,²²⁸ *I forgot the ball...*,²²⁹ *I NEED WIFI*,²³⁰ *I was way too bored...*²³¹ and *Digestion Lag*²³² could do with a scumbag hat, or brain, or a stacked troll face. If the answer inclines towards “yes” then there arises space for doubt as to whether the stories might have been influenced by any of the unused popular signs. If the reader concludes that some of the stories seem to probably have been influenced by some of the unused signs then it means that myth which operates on memes can reveal itself to us even if the story which gives it out would slip by unsuspected unless it were seen in an explanatory context. The same scrutiny should apply to the personifying titles of comics *I’m going to kill you*, *electricity*, or *Fuck You Gravity!*, or *Oh Windows, You Confound Me.*, or the line in the last panel of *Those 2 commercials go REALY [sic!] well together* which reads “seriously tv!?”.

As it has been said, such hidden myth is best disclosed with a comparative statistical analysis of two canons. Unfortunately, baoman make use of resized baoman faces for the purpose of showing a character in a seeming distance very rarely, it is not a common trope.²³³

²²³ See appendix 17.

²²⁴ See appendix 18.

²²⁵ See appendices 19–21.

²²⁶ See appendix 22.

²²⁷ See appendix 23.

²²⁸ See appendix 24.

²²⁹ See appendix 25.

²³⁰ See appendix 26.

²³¹ See appendix 27.

²³² See appendix 28 and 29.

²³³ For example, 柠檬棒棒糖, “柠檬的故事 NO.8 [lemon stroy],” Comic Strip, Baozoumanhua.com, August 6, 2014, <<http://baozoumanhua.com/users/5667618/articles>>, accessed August 29, 2016;

Except for one comic only,²³⁴ in baoman there was no stacking of baoman faces as we have seen it with rage faces—when stacking occurs, it is rare and it is done with baoman faces that have a body over which just an emotive face is pasted. In one comic only in my corpus there are numbers typed on one character’s forehead as ransom while the kidnapper is calling the kidnapped character’s father and insists that the money be paid to him.²³⁵ Unlike rage builders the baoman builders do not offer a scumbag hat, and stories which tell about something happening on the outside and something else on the inside are also very rare. What one of the baoman builders offers is a tool which has helped to create a number of baoman faces mixed from already existing ones. It lets users graft the facial parts of baoman faces into the outlines of other baoman faces. Figure 26. shows the inner contours of evolved troll face embedded into the outlines of other popular baoman faces:



Figure 26. Embedded troll face (baoman).

It has been summed up that in *it broke my spirit* we can read about a girl mercilessly joking with her boyfriend that she is pregnant. The story 屌丝的逆袭 [:diaosi de nixi:] [loser strikes back] works with the same motif.²³⁶ The male character who at the beginning is referred to as 高福帅 [:gao fu shuai:] [tall, rich and handsome]—outside the genre a common label for an ideal male partner—is in the last panel portrayed as a fox. A fox which in western literature is seen as cunning and intricate is in Chinese folk tales usually a female spirit that can acquire a human form and affect people’s lives to both good and bad ends. This baoman is the only comic in my dataset that portrays a fox. It portrays it in a situation so cunning that in rage comics it surely could do with a scumbag hat. In my opinion, this rare sighting shows that

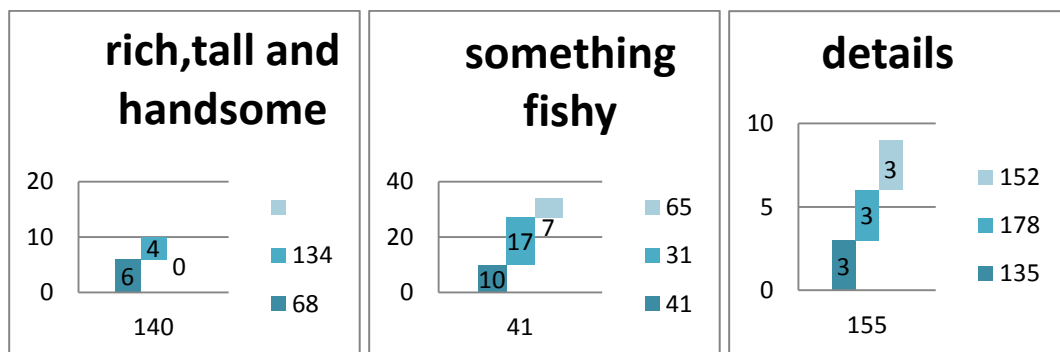
983592287, “长长。。..... [long long],” Comic Strip, Baozoumanhua.com, March 20, 2014, <<http://baozoumanhua.com/articles/7330750>>, accessed August 29, 2016.

²³⁴The comic 首席坑 b (丫的不够长), “毛巾太弱 [the towel is too weak],” Comic Strip, Baozoumanhua.com, August 4, 2014, <<http://baozoumanhua.com/articles/10130206>>, accessed August 29, 2016, shows a troll-face towel.

²³⁵See 844990120, “撕票 [kill hostage],” Comic Strip, Baozoumanhua.com, August 4, 2014, <<http://baozoumanhua.com/users/5866536/articles>>, accessed August 29, 2016.

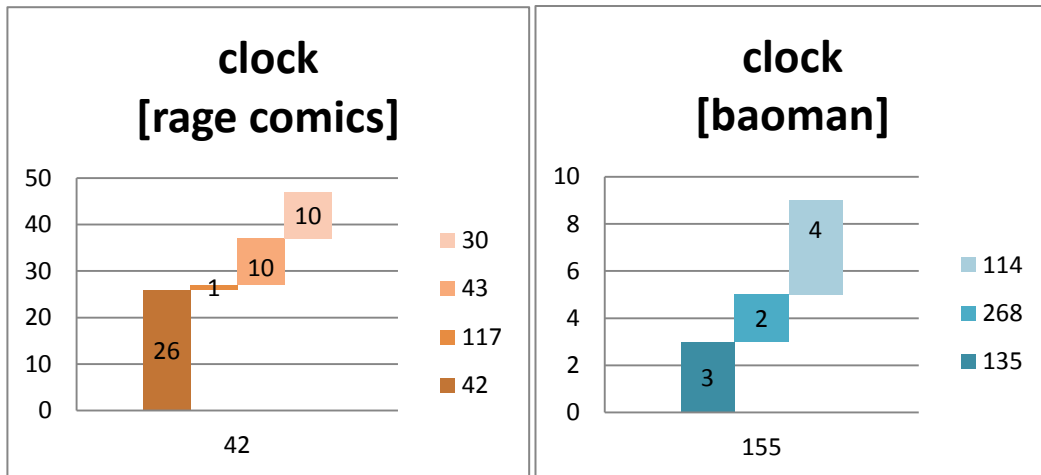
²³⁶ See appendix 30.

even though the system of baoman faces may at a point have space for a highly functional sign upon which a trope may be built, it is only a matter of chance that it will be spotted and favored by readers so that they put it in common use. Following is the statistics for the [tall, rich and handsome], the statistics for the phrase 好像没什么不对 [:haoxiang mei shenme bu dui:] [There's something fishy about it] and yet another phrase 不要在意这些细节 [:bu yao zai yi zhe xie xijie:] [No need to bother with such details] which are all used in the discussed comic:



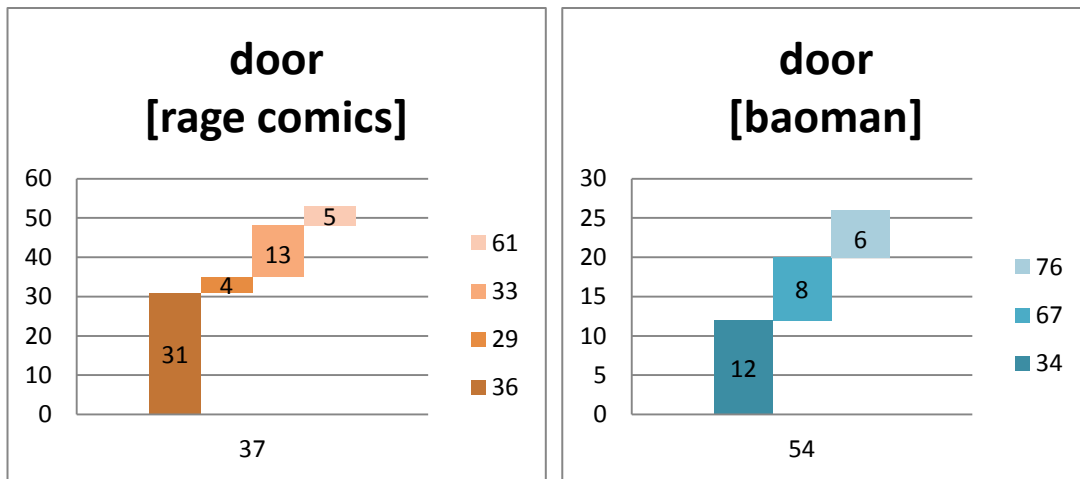
The graphs show that even a generally popular concept such as [tall, rich and handsome] can slowly drop off from the cannon. Even though in the first 406 baoman we could read about such males six times, a year and a half later there was no mention of them among the 457 analyzed baoman. As for the use of [There's something fishy about it], we can see that among the subsets it was most popular in August 2014 where every 31st comic worked with the phrase.

Among the cropped panels we have seen two alarm clocks with a troll face. The fourth panel of the appendix *Jet lag rage!* shows a bed and a clock, but based on the character's total lack of engagement with the bed it may be said that it is rather unimportant for the story. How much was the story influenced by myth so that the user could make a decision to use the bed in his story cannot be judged based on the comparative statistics that we have shown for the sign *bed*. The clock, though, which appears three times in the comic, plays an important role. Following is the statistic distribution of *a clock* or of *telling the exact time* in both corpora:



Even though comics with multiple renderings of a *clock* as in *Jet lag rage!* contributed only one point to the statistics it can be seen that throughout the subsets the use of the sign for clock or the telling of time was pretty much constant in both cannons. What is most interesting is that it was more than three times more commonly found in rage comics than in baoman; in other words, the authors of baoman stories were much less focused on the factor of exact time, they did not work with this motif in their stories. In my understanding of the workings of myth this statistics clearly shows that even the most common objects which every one of us possesses and with which we interact many times a day for exactly the same and only purpose can be seen as worthy of attention or be almost ignored in the sense of what we think will construe a relatable story.

Another sign that I think partakes on the daily experience of both rage comic and baoman authors evenly is the *door*. One has to walk through them, close them, hold them for someone else, sometimes we get hit by them, they slam with the wind, and sometimes we find out that we cannot open them because we might have lost our keys. Following is the statistical distribution of the *door*:



As we can see, it was almost half more likely to read about the door in rage comics. There they were very often drawn as graphic extensions in bathrooms,²³⁷ other times they were the theme of the story,²³⁸ sometimes they played an important role in the diegesis²³⁹ and many times they were used without much purpose.²⁴⁰ In baoman it was most common to tell that

²³⁷ For example, superviper, “i got bathroom-phobia,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, February 26, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/fffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/1yxwsp/i_got_a_bathroomphobia/>, accessed August 29, 2016; DarkDepths, “Toilet Rage,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 6, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/fffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/1zphse/toilet_rage/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

MadamJingles, “He may be many things, but he’s not a quitter!,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 10, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/fffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/203auf/he_may_be_many_things_but_hes_not_a_quitter/>, accessed August 29, 2016; xxHollyPortiaxx, “All the fucking time,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 15, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/fffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/20h6e5/all_the_fucking_time/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

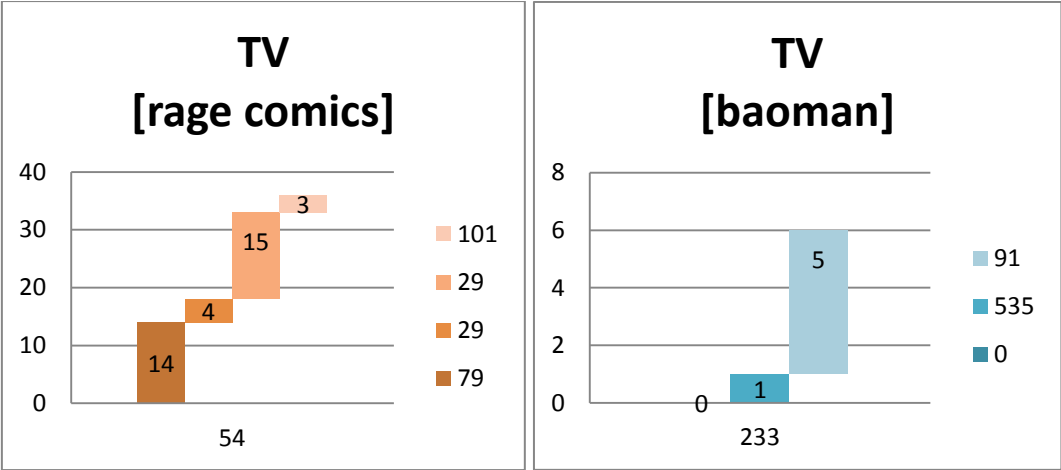
²³⁸ For example, Clefable25, “Is it that hard to close the door,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 24, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/fffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/23tjyu/is_it_that_hard_to_close_a_door/>, accessed August 29, 2016; AquaChick, “He interrupted me while I told him “Thank you.”,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 25, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/fffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/21a1k5/he_interrupted_me_while_i_told_him_thank_you/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

²³⁹ For example, gojiratheking, “So, this happened...,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 7, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/fffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/1zs1rq/so_this_happened/>, accessed August 29, 2016; damashek, “Now i know how Peter Parker feels...,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 19, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/fffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/20rnh5/now_i_know_how_peter_parker_feels/>, accessed August 29, 2016; derp0001, “it broke my spirit,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 26, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/fffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/21eypc/it_broke_my_spirit/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

²⁴⁰ For example, jrminoh, “I actually got into trouble for this...,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 8, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/fffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/1zv1ph/i_actually_got_into_trouble_for_this/>, accessed August 29, 2016; GiebUpvotesPlz, “Happens way too often in the hallways,” Comic

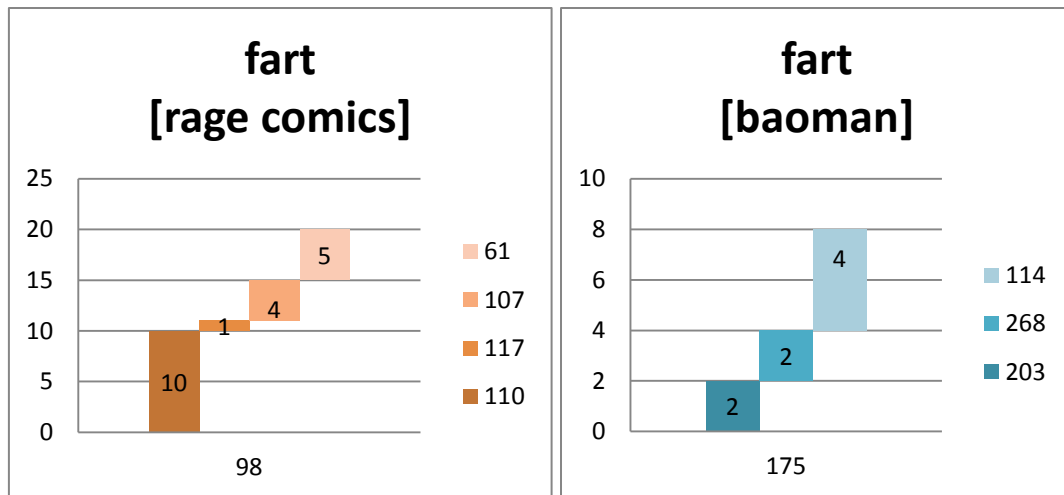
authors who go to school and who work may vary in both corpora and for such a factor there is no measure. But to take a shower, even though the habit might be influenced by culture, is common for both students and working people.

On the other hand, what I think is most probably a culturally influenced trope is the use of the sign for a TV.



It is much more common for students in the USA or in other western countries to have a TV in their room whether they live with their parents or in the dormitories than it is for Chinese students in the dormitories who live in a small room by four. In my opinion, the same difference could be found in the possession of cars or houses but not of computers or cell phones. No mentions like “watching a movie” were counted in this statistics because a movie can be watched on a computer or a cell phone.

What should not be that much culturally influenced is how often a person farts. Of course, burritos from Taco Bell or tofu can make a person fart more but neither in the west nor in China are legumes the staple side dish—westerners eat mostly potatoes, bakery products and rice while the Chinese devour rice and noodles.



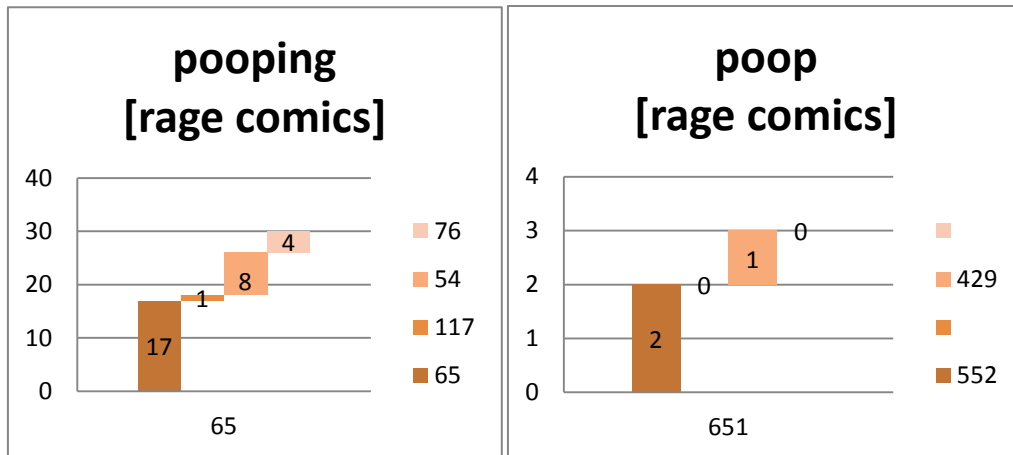
What may differ is the cultural acceptability of farting in public which may result in a faux pas. We can see that farts have been the source of embarrassment, rage, laughter or revenge²⁴⁴ almost twice as frequently in rage comics. It is of note that in rage comics, farts were commonly drawn in green²⁴⁵ and much less often in brown²⁴⁶ wobbly lines done by digital paintbrush. The comic *An awkward situation in my life* which shows a character waiting on a dentist’s chair was the only comic which uses the tropaic color for a typed interjection. The only appropriation of a fart in baoman can be seen in 放屁的小二 [:fangpi de xiao er:] [the farting waiter] where it says [I can fart!!! Pu~~] which is done with suggestive text symbols which cannot be found on the western keyboard (see figure 27):

²⁴⁴ For example, fitey77, “Thats the birthday spirit!,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, February 28, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/1z7uup/thats_the_birthday_spirit/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

²⁴⁵ For example, Crouchingking, “Let em hear it!” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 5, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/1z1qfc/let_em_hear_it/>, accessed August 29, 2016;

momplo, “Whoever you are, I am sorry,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 14, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/20etiz/whoever_you_are_i_am_sorry/>, accessed August 29, 2016; lukerobi, “I froze up and they just awkwardly left.” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 31, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/21vbzz/i_froze_up_and_they_just_awkwardly_left/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

²⁴⁶ For example, BitchCallMeDaddy, “A little gas wasn’t even the worst thing...,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, February 27, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/1z1z9q/a_little_gas_wasnt_even_the_worst_thing/>, accessed August 29, 2016.



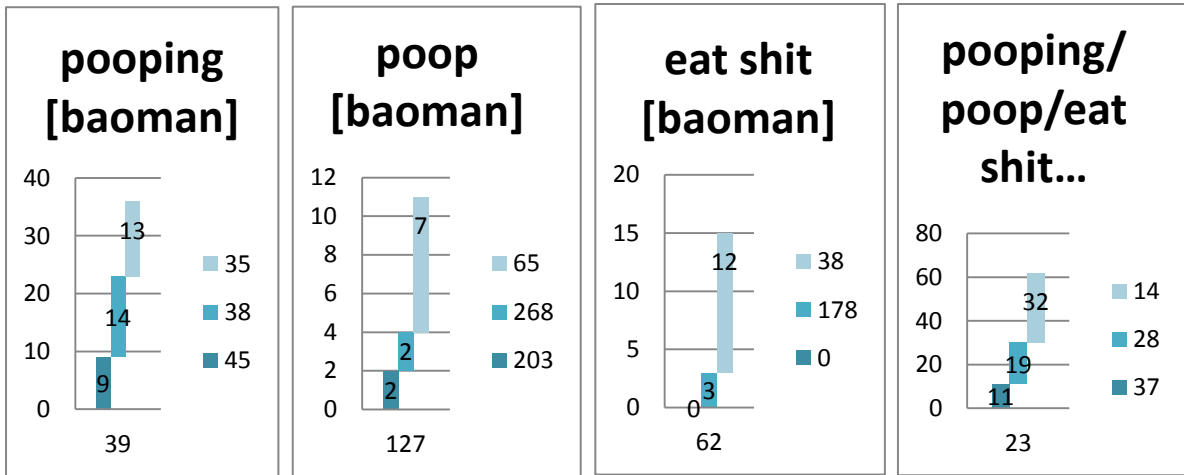
The graphs show that rage comics which worked with the motif of pooping were fairly evenly distributed throughout all subsets, which gives the ratio that every 65th rage comic was about pooping. Comics which showed a character on the toilet accompanied by lines such as “me in the bathroom doing my thing” were not counted because they could report on peeing. Stories which were concerned not with the process but with the product only were very rare—they were about bird, cat and dog poop. It is important to say that rage builders offer a rage face of a character who empties his bowels, and emotional rage faces can be stacked over it. Figure 28 presents two consecutive panels from *All the fucking time* which show the stock character:



Figure 28. Two panels from *All the fucking time*.²⁴⁹

More often, though, characters engaged in the process of satisfying their physical need were not appropriated by this stock figure but by rage faces with a hand drawn graphic extension. Following are statistics for baoman which show a more frequent occurrence of both motifs and point to a subtle twist in the development of their use:

²⁴⁹ xxHollyPortiaxx, “All the fucking time,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 15, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/20h6e5/all_the_fucking_time/>, accessed August 29, 2016.



From the relative numbers in the third graph we can read that a new motif of *eat shit* emerged somewhere between the first and the second subset and it soon got immensely popular among baoman authors. The effect that it had on the production of other comics can be seen, in my opinion, in the slight increase of the relative number of stories about pooping and an obvious increase in the production of stories about poop which was not to be eaten. The fact that on average baoman comics about pooping were much more common than in the baoman corpus can be attributed to a common practice which is to use a stock baoman face for pooping in situations which suggest the reading that no pooping is taking place, only deep thinking. The baoman face can thus commonly represent two concepts which are not contradictory or mutually exclusive but they can be read behind the sign only after the sign is interpreted in the whole context of the story.²⁵⁰ The discussed baoman face which the baoman builder categorizes as [hot] is the first in the following picture:



Figure 29. Stock faces for pooping (baoman).

The second baoman face which is a spin off of the first one is in the baoman builder categorized under [happy]. The Chinese characters in the balloon which points at his cell

²⁵⁰ See appendix 32.

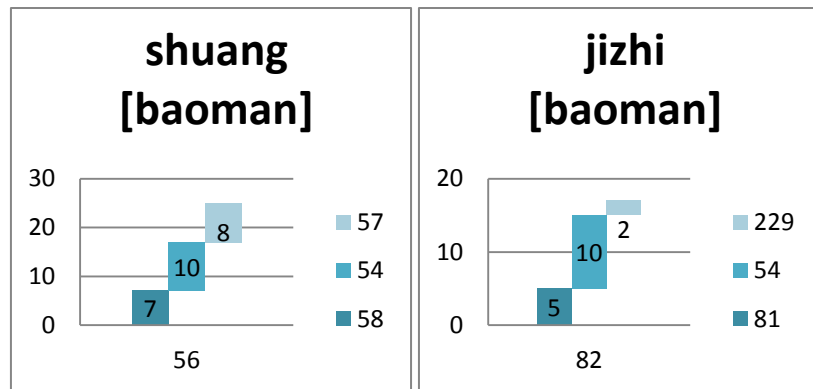
phone say 暴走日报 [:baozou ribao:] [baozou daily paper]. Also, he has a toilet paper by his side and he is not breaking sweat. The third one became popular even later and can be found under [stupid], and the fourth which is the first and original face from rage comics with its original expression can be found in the baoman builder under [sad]. The fifth, categorized just like the baoman face for *bed* under [settings] could be found only in the third subset because it was modelled late into the canon. The sixth baoman face which can also be found under [sad] shows us a character who seems to have eaten poop, which illustrates how the later trope *eat shit* was worked into a set of symbols that preceded it in the system. Figure 30 shows yet another pooping character which is not a stock character but which was stacked from two baoman faces by the author of 纸 [:zhi:] [paper]:



Figure 30. Stacked pooping character (baoman).

The character says 爽! 操! 没纸了! [:shuang! cao! mei zhi le:] [smart! fuck! no paper!]. For illustration, the following statistics show the usage of 爽 [smart] and 机智 or 机制 [:jizhi:] [smart] which can be read in the appendix 浓情 10月 [:nong qing shi yue:] [strong feeling October].²⁵¹ They were both fairly common tropes and have, just like other tropes, given rise to stories which give its mythical part away not blatantly like two lines of formal verse but succinctly like an unintentional rhyme in a conversation:

²⁵¹ See appendix 33.



The appended 标题要长..... [:biaoti yao chang:] [title should be long] serves as a helpful example of how a story which revolves around the visual side of a written character could be understood only as a visual “wordplay,” as a story which could not be told in another language because of the signifier.²⁵² But due to the fact that the story employs 爽 and 机智, which were both popular tropes in the canon, it can be said that the probability that such a comic would be created must have been, with a high probability, influenced by the canon.

The categorizing within the software shows how signs can work towards narrowed or broader meanings. The [baozou daily paper] appears as a motif in the story 看你妹啊、我都便秘了[:kan ni mei a, wo dou bianmi le:] [fuck off, I am constipated] which can be found also in translation in the appendix. The comic does not employ the second spin-off character but it talks about the baouzou daily paper. I again leave it to the reader to decide how much this story could have been affected by the existence of the spin off sign and by the proximity of the link to the baouzou daily paper in the web interface in which the baoman are read—in the above description of the interface the link to the baouzou daily paper is contained under the number four—and how much it might have been influenced by the culture (i.e. that baoman authors might also enjoy to read the baouzou daily paper).

Toilet paper was in fact very often missed by the characters, which built up the plot of many stories about pooping.²⁵³ Unlike rage comics, Baoman have evolved other baoman faces which show a toilet paper—it became a symbol epitomizing a 屌丝 [:diaosi:] [loser]. The *Atlantic* published a useful description of the term by Claire Zhang and David M. Barreda:

²⁵²See appendix 34.

²⁵³ See appendix 35. See also 冯小彬, “机智的标题 [smart title],” Comic Strip, Baozoumanhua.com, March 20, 2014, <<http://baozoumanhua.com/articles/7334094>>, accessed August 29, 2016.

The term *diaosi* originated as an insult for a poor, unattractive young person who stayed at home all day playing video games, with dim prospects for the future -- in other words, a loser. Yet as the term went viral on the Internet, Chinese youth from all backgrounds began to embrace it. It has become a self-deprecating counter to the *gaofushuai*, or the ‘tall-rich-handsome,’ those with status, success, and bright futures. The number of people who refer to themselves as *diaosi* has continued to grow, and it is slowly transforming into a descriptor of the ordinary Chinese citizen who faces everyday struggles and hardships.²⁵⁴

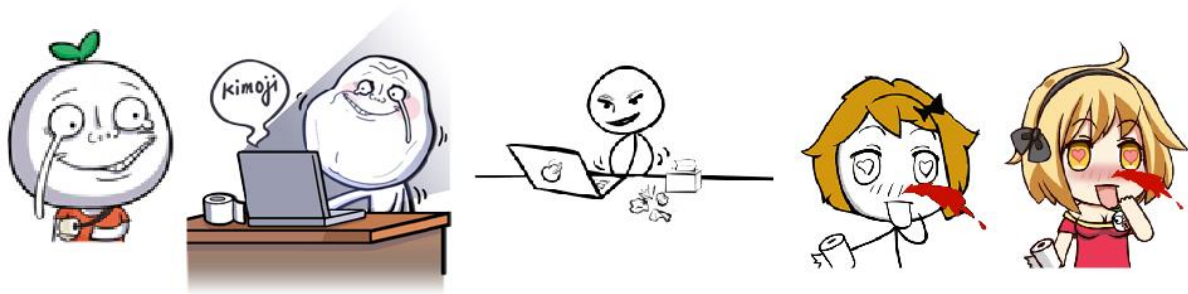


Figure 31. Toilet paper stock faces (baoman).

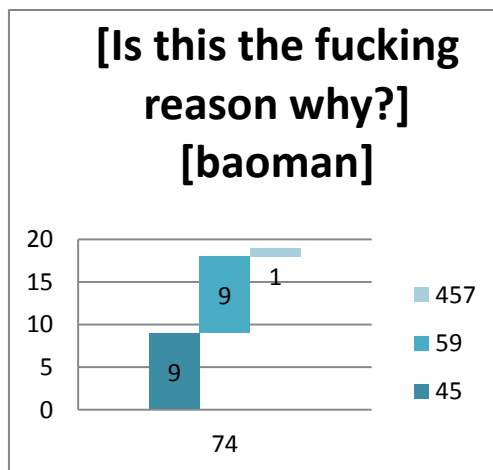
One story which is concerned with toilet paper but not with pooping is 节约 [ːjiejue:] [economize] and it can be found with a translation in the appendix.²⁵⁵ The story loses a bit of its originality when we read the following 长。 [ːchang chang:] [long long] which is neither about pooping but it reveals to us that both stories build on two common tropes.²⁵⁶ One is about economizing²⁵⁷ and the other is the phrase [Is this the fucking reason why?]. The following statistical distribution of the latter phrase shows that it gradually lost its popularity:

²⁵⁴ Claire Zhang and David M. Barreda, “Hip, Young, and Wired: China’s ‘Diaosi’, in Charts,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, 2013, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/06/hip-young-and-wired-chinas-diaosi-in-charts/277359/>.

²⁵⁵ See appendix 36.

²⁵⁶ See appendix 37.

²⁵⁷ In both originals the word 节约 is used, but in my translation I used “economize on paper” and “save water” to make the translation functional.



Both discussed stories are from the second subset, therefore it might seem that they may be instant reactions to one another because one author might have done his comic after he had read the other author's submission. Even though this might be true it may, to an extent, be undermined by the fact that four months earlier 什么叫表题啊 [:shenme jiao biaoti a:] [what is the title] was uploaded to the site.²⁵⁸ This comic talks about economizing on paper, but unlike the following two, it builds its point in diegesis around the sign of a sheet of writing paper. This example shows how an already popular scheme invokes other already popular tropes to produce new versions.

Let us look into the stories about pooping one last time and consult the appendix for the stories *JJ fly* [:jiji fly:] [penis fly];²⁵⁹ 屌爆了[:diao bao le:] [nutcracker]²⁶⁰ and 暴漫地久天长! [:baoman de jiu tian chang:] [baoman for ever and ever!]²⁶¹ from the second subset and 三个愿望 [:san ge yuanwang:] [three wishes];²⁶² 马桶神 [:matong shen:] [toilet spirit];²⁶³ and 注孤生[:zhu gu sheng:] [forever alone life]²⁶⁴ from the third subset between which there was a gap of fourteen months. It would be useful to type all words from the comics into one aggregate and then jot colored links between them to illustrate with a net what signifiers build up individual comics while such a network would show how many signifiers are common to how many comics. Unfortunately, such graph could be done rather awkwardly in English

²⁵⁸ See appendix 38.

²⁵⁹ See appendix 39.

²⁶⁰ See appendix 40. In all the translated comics the English word *nutcracker* was used for the Chinese 屌爆 [:diao bao:] which literally means *penis exploded* or *penis-exploding* which is used as a cry that is given in amazement.

²⁶¹ See appendix 41.

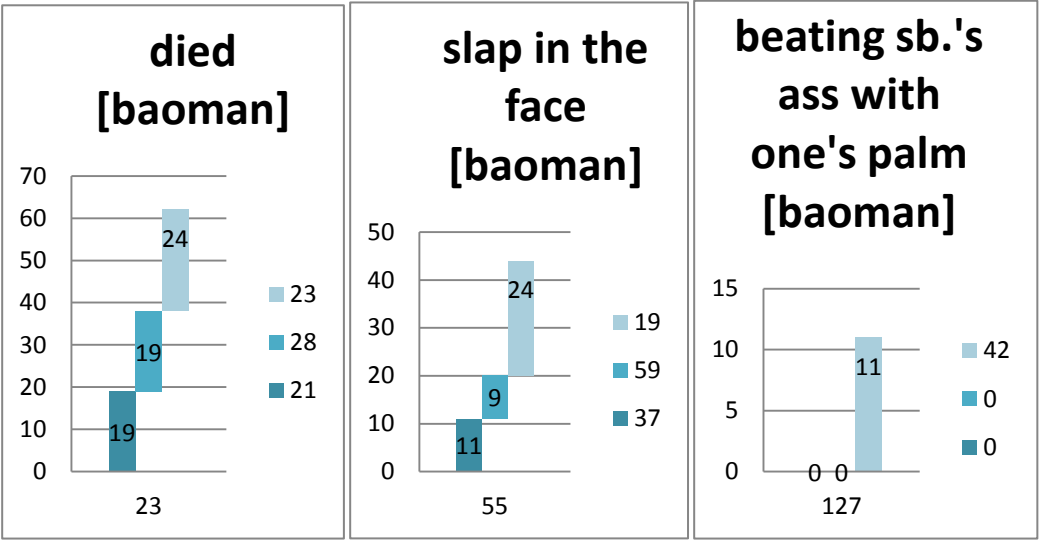
²⁶² See appendix 42.

²⁶³ See appendix 43.

²⁶⁴ See appendix 44.

translation because it would be lacking other links while a few new ones could seem to have arised—mostly due to the emergence of prepositions.

We can see that both authors of [penis fly] and [nutcracker] went over the parts where one would expect exploding penises with a digital paintbrush but [three wishes] does not do it. The comic [Baoman for ever and ever!] counts among ones which use the trope “no need to bother with such details” and [a wish] ends with a death notice which was a common trope in all three subsets:



The trope of a death notice has its origin in a hand-drawn sequence which was published in a school primer. In baoman its pictures have been common and have spun off many other baoman faces and tropes of narration which lead the storylines towards habit. The original pictures which the builder offers under [mom has hit me again] can be seen here:

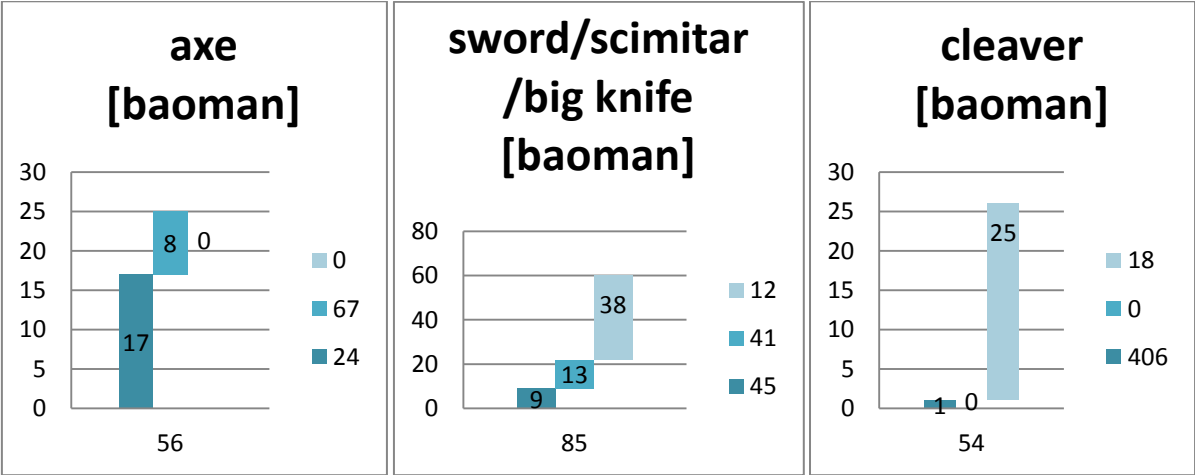


Figure 32. Mom has hit me again.

As the graphs show, a slap in the face receded with the second subset but in the third subset it was more common than ever before, and it even spun off a new trope which is beating somebody’s ass with one’s palm, for which there are already many baoman faces. The fact

that a slap in the face has been so commonly visualized could have affected stories such as 尼玛的蠢货生涯 [: nima de chunhuo shengya:] [goddamn idiotic life] which can be found in the appendix. The story, which only talks about a slap in the face also shows a crying character with a toilet paper. The apt reply of his conversation partner which has been translated as “If she slapped you, you wouldn’t have to go take a dump” hints that the canon might have again succinctly influenced another of its stories.

Other popular violent tropes which authors use to initiate or settle disputes between their characters are an *axe*, a *sword/scimitar/big knife* and a *cleaver*. Following are the statistics for all three signs:



The graphs reveal that over time, the initial popularity of *axe* wore off as *sword/scimitar/big knife* became popular and that even though there was a single sighting of *cleaver* in the first subset it became just as popular as *axe* once was but only when *axe* withdrew completely from the stories. When individual relative numbers for all three signs are summed up, we find out that in the first subset it was every fourteenth comic that used one of them, every twenty-fifth in the second subset and every seventh in the third which is an extremely high number. With it, and with other violent tropes that evolved simultaneously, such as one character hitting another with his knee in the face, a character punching through his own face with an open hand, or one kicking the other in his face. Overall physical conflict in the stories increased.

Contrastingly, in my rage comic corpus there were no stories about genies even though the story of Aladdin about whom we can read in [forever alone life] has been popular in the west. Interestingly enough, rage comic authors produced stories about fairies which can be

found in the appendix.²⁶⁵ The longest of them, *DARN IT TANGLE FAIRIES*, employs several tropes which are gradually lost throughout the following stories in the appendix. First of all, we can see that in both *DARN IT TANGLE FAIRIES* and *dammit tangle fairys[sic]!!!!* the magical being has a name, unlike in *Headphone rage.*, which in its last panel ushers a trollfaced character out of nowhere. The comic *Earbuds are the death of me* reaches the same point in narration—that the earbuds get tangled—but it achieves it without using any such creature. The comics *Dammit rock gnomes!!!!* and *Just How?!?!?!?* show the same difference as to how a rock got into a character's shoe.

A common trope, which trope which *DARN IT TANGLE FAIRIES* shares with *dammit tangle fairys[sic]!!!!* and with *Dammit rock gnomes!!!!* is the use of “when a wild [...] appears” which has been a very common phrase in rage comics. It has its origin in GameBoy Pokemon games where the player's avatar has to catch all the Pokemon. In rage comics it spun many mutations. Figure 33 shows two panels from two rage comics about the Pokemon games.²⁶⁶ The panels are supplemented screenshots from the game:



Figure 33. Supplemented Pokemon panels (rage comics).

²⁶⁵ See appendices 46–54.

²⁶⁶ 1. goldenguyz, “The last ever post to the old f7u12,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 3, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/1zectm/the_last_ever_post_to_the_old_f7u12/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

2. das f7u12_hampton, “le "Losing a friend because of a game isn't fun" rage,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, July 11, 2015, <https://www.reddit.com/r/f7u12_ham/comments/3cvtvw/le_losing_a_friend_because_of_a_game_isn_t_fun_rage/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

Among other examples of the phrase from other comics there were “suddenly a wild mother appears,”²⁶⁷ “suddenly...a wild crush appears,”²⁶⁸ “when suddenly...a wild poorly poorly drawn scooter appeared,”²⁶⁹ “a word puzzle appears!,”²⁷⁰ “funny link appears,”²⁷¹ “all of a sudden i spot some wild bacon!,”²⁷² “finally a wild gap opens,”²⁷³ “*sudden urge to shit appears*,”²⁷⁴ “suddenly a girl with an amazing ass stands next to me,”²⁷⁵ “when a really cute dog comes through,”²⁷⁶ “when suddenly I have an idea to play a new game,”²⁷⁷ “when suddenly my little sister runs into my room,”²⁷⁸ “when suddenly my kid brother (6) rushes past me and slams the bathroom door in my face!,”²⁷⁹ “when my boss comes over and pushes

²⁶⁷ Reclaimerr, “Literally just happened xD,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 30, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/21pnjd/literally_just_happened_xd/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

²⁶⁸ WolvesPWN, “This amazed me as a boy going into puberty..,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 8, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/22jy8l/this_amazed_me_as_a_boy_going_into_puberty/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

²⁶⁹ Bcdanny, “Scooter borrowing rage,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 31, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/21upgl/scooter_borrowing_rage/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

²⁷⁰ Pombologist, “The mystery will forever go unsolved,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 6, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/22crs6/the_mystery_will_forever_go_unsolved/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

²⁷¹ streamline57, “As someone who laughs through his/her nose..,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, February 26, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/1z0wws/as_someone_whoLaughs_through_h_hisher_nose/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

²⁷² Trollface29, “Bacon rage,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 23, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/216qtf/bacon_rage/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

²⁷³ goncruz, “I will die young.,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 8, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/22jcg9/i_will_die_young/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

²⁷⁴ fitzgerald1337, “Every time...,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 5, 2015, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/2y2xon/every_time/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

²⁷⁵ JohnApples1988, “dat ass,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, September 9, 2015, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/3k8ncv/dat_ass/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

²⁷⁶ skylerkelley, “dogs sometimes they mess me up...,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 1, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/1z8kkv/dogs_sometimes_they_mess_me_up/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

²⁷⁷ pivot5, “Oh, school days,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 1, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/1z8nqn/oh_school_days/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

²⁷⁸ Blake_Majer, “Bad Attitude.,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 9, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/22ncho/bad_attitude/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

²⁷⁹ MadamJingles, “He's six. Six year olds don't actually say this?!” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 1, 2014,

my laptop closed and it shuts off!,”²⁸⁰ “when suddenly my mom says: why don’t you go shower?.”²⁸¹ The last six examples show that the meme can be tracked as far as to where our reading permits us, that is, to all comics which work with the motif of a sudden appearance of somebody or something, just like *I was better off letting her think it was porn* which ushers a new character on the scene without any introduction.²⁸² Unlike in baoman, in rage comics it was a common scenario that a character is at the computer and somebody walks on to him into his room even from behind.²⁸³ In *He sent me friend request too* such a surprising encounter even happens in the virtual world of an Xbox game.

Another trope which *DARN IT TANGLE FAIRIES* shares with *Headphone rage*. is the use of images which state how much time elapses between panels. These ready-made intermissions have been sampled from *SpongeBob SquarePants*—a popular animated TV series—and nine of them can be found under [transitions] on builder.cheezburger.com, forty-four under [sime time later] on ragemaker.net whose link is available on the f7u12 subreddit while ragegenerator.com offers sixty-four of them under four separate [sime-time-later] sections. The baoman builder offers sixty-three of them along with four exploitable images under what translates as [time]. Thus, users may use the narrative device more fully. Following are the statistics for the of the trope (even hand-drawn) in my corpora:

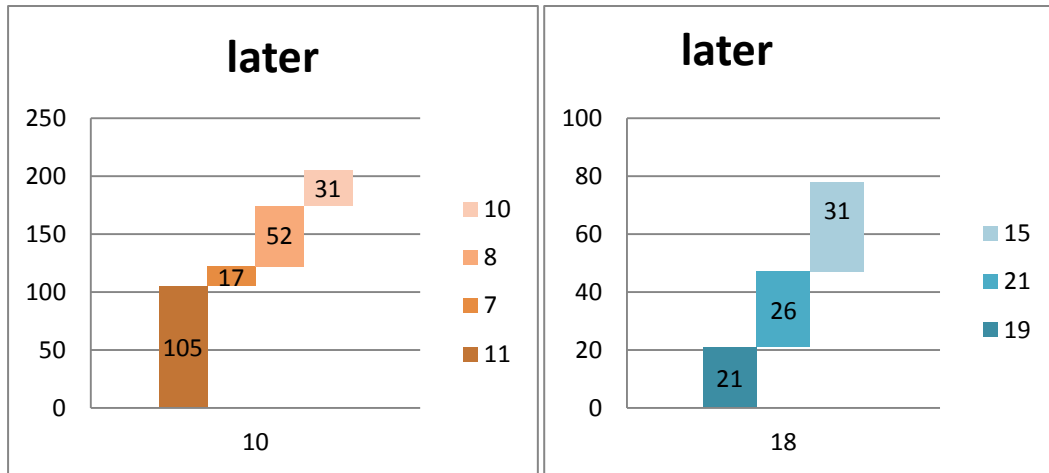
<https://www.reddit.com/r/fffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/1zarkk/hes_six_six_year_old_s_dont_actually_say_this/>), accessed August 29, 2016.

²⁸⁰ MadamJingles, “Now i have to re-write it. Not thrilled.,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 2, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/fffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/1zcws6/now_i_have_to_rewrite_it_not_thrilled/>), accessed August 29, 2016.

²⁸¹ superviper, “i honestly didn’t know what to tell her without having my head chopped off.,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 2, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/fffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/1zd1ze/i_honestly_didnt_know_what_to_tell_her_without/>), accessed August 29, 2016.

²⁸² See appendix 55.

²⁸³ For example, Is it that hard to close a door; Wild Star beta rage; or when somebody is just at the table as in People need to stop doing this; or in bed as in My girlfriend made this while I was asleep.



We can see that even though an unspoken transition in time of the diegesis is necessary for a multi-paneled comic, the device never got as popular in baoman as as it was in rage comics. When Thierry Groensteen, a theorist of comics, makes in his *The System of Comics* a statement about “linguistic padding that explicates the articulations of the sequence” he, as an example, shows a page from a comic book and then the same page with explicated conjunctions between them . He concludes that for his example

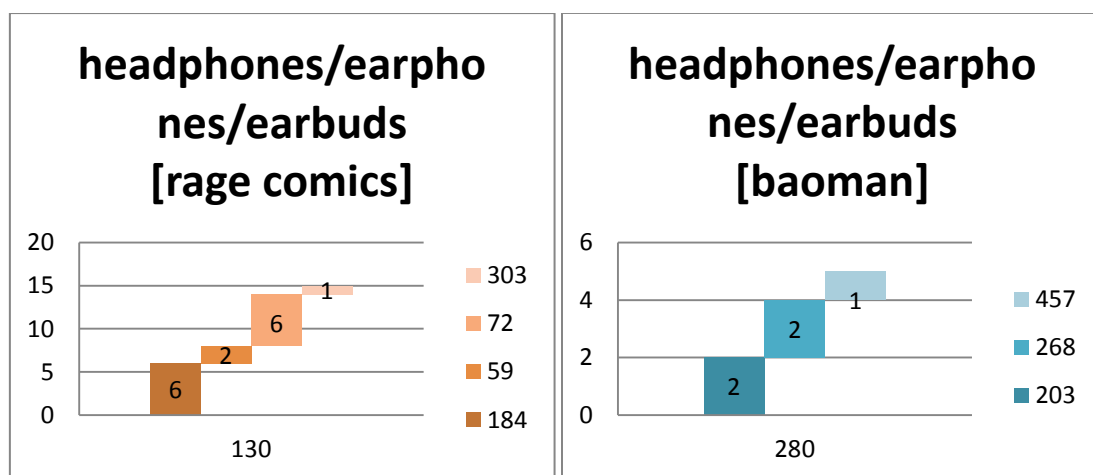
it appears that the *meanwhile, therefore, but, immediately, unfortunately, suddenly* captions that would be introduced are redundant and perfectly useless. The breakdown, notably the procedures of *mise en scène*, are already structured and girded by these implicit syntactic operators, which the page layout itself can sometimes highlight. If it were otherwise, the conversion of a suite of utterables (the panels) into a coherent statement (the narrative sequence) would be impossible.²⁸⁴

In both baoman and rage comics the use of this trope which is often as hyperbolic as when used in the original *SpongeBob* series has had such a tradition that it was even used for word play. In the four-paneled rage comic *Forgetting to remove makeup rage* we can see a girl entering the shower in the first panel, the second panel uses a ready-made “one hour later” in blue type on a green background where the word *hour* is crossed out and *shower* is written underneath it in digital paintbrush of identical color. The third panel shows the girl’s face with squinting eyes as she notices her smeared eye-liner in the mirror, and the last panel shows her still smeared raging face on the background of her desperate cry *FFFFFUUUUUUUU*.

In the appended *The laundry fairy* the transitory panel “later...” is used as redundantly as Groensteen formulates it in his example, but on the other hand, it also shows

²⁸⁴ Thierry Groensteen, *The System of Comics*, trans. Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 102–3. (italics in original).

us how much influence the canon might have on the comics produced. The final panel, in which the character realizes that she is the laundry fairy, shows a rage face stacked on a clipart of Tinker Bell—a fairy from Disney’s 1953 animated movie *Peter Pan*. Whether is was also the well-selling Fairy laundry liquid which has a toddler for its logo that might have influenced the author to make the comic it is impossible to tell. The only statement that can be made is that due to the statistical comparison with baoman, the probability that there would be yet another story about faries was higher in rage comics than in baoman. Following are the statistics for the sign *headphones/earphones/earbuds* in both corpora:



It was more than two times more common to read a story which employs the motif in rage comics than in baoman. The baoman builder as well as the rage builders offer a stock character with a headset on who is sitting at the computer. Among the comics in this statistics only those counted where such characters’ headset was used more importantly for the diegesis than to just give the idea that one is reading about characters who are sitting at their desk. In my interpretation, there is then no justification other than the subtle workings of myth for why such stories should be more common in one canon than in the other. In the wake of this statistics, in rage comics (unlike in baoman) there were stories about chargers, about the pleasures, joys, or rages which one gets when he connects his charger to its fitting device.²⁸⁵

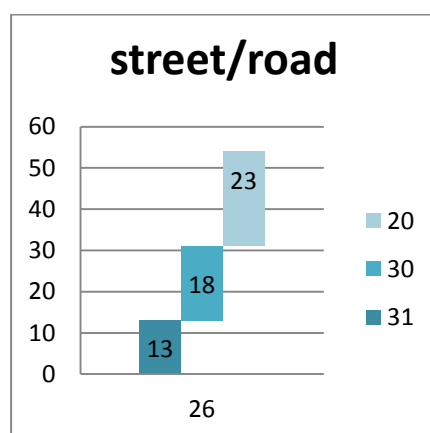
²⁸⁵ See hermanmango, “Power strip rage,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 3, 2015 (May 6, 2012), <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/2xrpjp/power_strip_rage/>, accessed August 29, 2016; probokator, “First Time,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 7, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/1zsvu6/first_time/>, accessed August 29, 2016;

sure that his time has come.²⁸⁸ Such common usage can be seen in *I've never felt so refreshed*.²⁸⁹ This example illustrates emergence of complexity—first there was a symbol which started to be used in a habitual way which could then be reinterpreted. Although the baoman builder offers the same rage face under [cheap] the canon has not evolved the trope. Instead, they have developed a specific rage face for which compresses the *looking at both sides* into a single sign which, in my dataset, was used rather rarely.



Figure 34. Turning around (baoman).

As it has been said, at a certain point between the second and the third subset of my baoman datasets, the baoman builder started to offer a prefabricated sign for *bed*. In the same batch they started to offer an outline of a street/road which can be used as a setting onto which other baoman faces can be stacked. This most simple enlargement of the pool with a sign with which the authors inevitably interact every day, just like with the bed, has noticeably increased the probability that one would read a story which employs the motif of *street/road*:



²⁸⁸ See appendix 59.

²⁸⁹ See appendix 60.

Let us now have a look at one baoman and one rage comic which have quite similar plot lines.²⁹⁰ Upon reading the rage comic we might be inclined to say that the story must have been influenced by the common saying “shit just hit the fan” but there is no such saying in Chinese.²⁹¹ It is quite imaginable that a caged monkey would throw its poop at a fan, so the story might also have been inspired by a real event, but the baoman presents a highly improbable situation which would desire either a peculiarly placed pipeline with a big hole in it or a very unfortunately built toilet without any. Therefore, I tend to read the baoman as mere fiction. Behind both stories myth can be read differently. In the case of the more realistic rage comic it seems that first there was a sign in the mind of the author who might have had an experience which enacted the sign for him and so he decided to make a comic about it—just like what has been said about showing character stones in the Wuhan geological museum or like the philosophy behind the “life-imitates-art” movement. Conversely, there might have been no precedent for the rather unrealistic baoman in either a sign or a real event. The only inspiration for it, save for an understanding of the mechanisms of how to tell a funny story, might have come from the tendency to tell stories about *poop/pooping/eat shit*. When it was published, every fourteenth comic employed one of these motifs, whereas in rage comics it would be every fifty-eighth comic at its time.

There necessarily arises the question about how much one canon may influence the other. My opinion is that if they do, then it would be that baoman get more influence from rage comics than the other way round simply because the Chinese should be aware of the fact that their canon has come about second, and only due to the western canon. Another reason for my position is that there are probably many Chinese netizens who know enough English to be able to read some rage comics, while there might not be many westerners who know enough Chinese to read theirs. Also, if the Chinese try to search for what translates as “English baoman” in Baidu, the Chinese equivalent of Google, they can quickly find out on discussion forums that it is, in fact, called rage comics. If they then search for “rage comics” they can access innumerable sources in English. But if westerners try to google “chinese rage comics” they will only find two or three brief reports which say that the genre exists in China, what webpage it can be found at, and that both canons share some similarities.²⁹² Among all

²⁹⁰ See appendix 61 and 62.

²⁹¹ I make this statement after having consulted a translator Duan FengLi from Wuhan, China.

²⁹² See Niel de la Rouviere, “Chinese Rage Comics,” ConfusedLaoWai (blog), December 15, 2011, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://confusedlaowai.com/2011/12/chinese-rage-comics/>. See also Joel Herrick, “Rage Comics with Chinese Characteristics,” Shanghaiist.com, December 8, 2011, accessed August 29, 2016, http://shanghaiist.com/2011/12/08/rage_comics_with_chinese_characteri.php. See

CONCLUSIONS

As it was said in the introduction, the importance of internet memes for myth studies lies in the possibility of retaining a lot of tagged data; we know their precise date of publication by the minute, and a great number of participants who construct the debate can be contacted. As for rage comics and baoman, we can browse the histories which list all contributions made by individuals. As for all other internet memes, the contributors provide the data in a rapid flux and our analyses can be program-aided. We can mark up our data pools with metalanguage and then try to read various wave functions on the narratives and be sure that the narratives are not manipulated by other than their authors' intentions—the only imperative behind them might be the variable impetus to personal expression. Internet memes—appealing traces that we leave in our digital folklore—are produced in quantities much larger than many other artefacts of entertainment that have been available to our perusal.

In her series of lectures about classical myth, Elizabeth Vandiver, an American scholar of classics and classical myth who received the Excellence in Teaching Award from the American Philological Association says: “I define myth as traditional stories a society tells itself that encode or represent the world-view, beliefs, principles, and often fears of that society.”²⁹⁴ As she observes, it is a very broad working definition. She uses it to further discuss stories of classical antiquity on which she shows how they have left their mark on cultures who later made the old stories resonate in their newer stories. In her final lecture she insists that she still believes that myth as a category can only be recognized when it is read against a text from another culture.²⁹⁵ To me it seems that her definition can be aptly used for any sign, such as *a car, one dollar, a visit to the doctor, rain, clock, door, bear* etc. and this I hold to be true at all times, not only when such signs are used as a distinct “type of speech,” when they insinuate themselves to the reader to be read in a certain way, as Barthes would insist.²⁹⁶ I believe that many people may understand myth to be something which can be put under analysis and be shown to not really be the way that it was thought to be, in the wake of

²⁹⁴ “01 Introduction,” YouTube video, 4:54–5:08, from a DVD series *Classical Mythology* by The Teaching Company, 2002, posted by “opus 707,” November 8, 2015, accessed August 29, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_23QcY7_zZc&ab_channel=opus707.

²⁹⁵ “24 from Ovid to the Stars,” YouTube video, 21:11–21:38, from a DVD series *Classical Mythology* by The Teaching Company, 2002, posted by “opus 707,” November 8, 2015, accessed August 29, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwXcRVwfC3c&ab_channel=opus707.

²⁹⁶ See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Jonathan Cape (New York: Noonday Press, 1972), 107–109.

the Greek mythographer Palaephatus who insisted that myth is misremembered history.²⁹⁷ I do not agree that myth is just that. In my opinion, myth is everything that is lived through the prism of language because it is through language that we understand the world, and, as I have tried to show, systems of expression feature analogies between their own signs, the signs resonate, they rhyme, attention to form is devoted through them, meter is followed, tradition builds up, rules are established, metaphors are constructed with care and thus some signs get closer to one another in the discursive space, and anticipate space for new connections and new signs, and they themselves influence the discourse. Towards the end of the third part of my dissertation I have said that my concern was to find out whether it could be, when there is a system of signs used by participants to communicate messages, that in the long run the signs could influence the debate to such a degree that even though “the same” story could be told (in other words, translated) in an analogous functional system with analogous symbols and symbolic ties, the story would most probably not be originally told in that second language because it would not fit the evolving cultural/literary canon. I hope that my analysis of rage comics and baoman convinced the reader that the system of signs does influence the stories not only of, let us say, rhymed verse, but also of more prosaic, though visual, genres such as rage comics or baoman.

When Vladimir Propp conducted his research on one hundred Russian fairy tales to be able to establish that there is an underlying sequence of functions which is to a certain degree present in every such fairy tale, he did not use all the fairytales that were available to him. He argued that one hundred stories were enough for him because in later stories he could not find any new functions of which he described thirty-one.²⁹⁸ I am convinced that we should stand up to the opportunity and see a team of carriers of Propp’s legacy read a few thousand or a

²⁹⁷ Marek Winiarczyk, *The Sacred History of Euhemerus of Messene*, trans. Witold Zbirohowski-Kościa (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 46–47.

²⁹⁸ “Before starting the elaboration, however, it is necessary to decide what material can serve as the subject of this study. First glance would seem to indicate that it is necessary to cover all extant material. In fact, this is not so. Since we are studying tales according to the functions of their dramatis personae, the accumulation of material can be suspended as soon as it becomes apparent that the new tales considered present no new functions. Of course, the investigator must look through an enormous amount of reference material. But there is no need to inject the entire body of this material into the study. We have found that 100 tales constitute more than enough material. Having discovered that no new functions can be found, the morphologist can put a stop to his work, and further study will follow different directions (the formation of indices, the complete systemization, historical study). But just because material can be limited in quantity, that does not mean that it can be selected at one’s own discretion. It should be dictated from without.” Vladimir Propp, “Excerpts from: *Vladimir Propp, MORPHOLOGY OF THE FOLK TALE, 1928*,” trans. The American Folklore Society and Indiana University (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1968), 11, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/propp.pdf>.

few tens of thousands baoman and see them find probably a bit different sequence of narrative functions about which we could say whether and why certain functions evolved their rising or falling popularity and whether any of it can be attributed to the system of expression. The contribution that I wanted to make with my study was to show that even if such a team conducted an extensive study like that, they should be aware that even though the motifs on which the narrative functions are performed are interchangeable—in other words, one motif can serve to fulfill different functions in different stories—these motifs are in fact enacted on signs which constitute a system of expression which evolves as it is used, and whose evolution can be tracked most effectively throughout all layers of the system on memes. The evolution of the system happens simply because it is used when it has already established links between its parts and there is the tendency towards more complexity and newness, while it also happens because of permitted margin for error in both reading and production, because of noise, because of short data retention, because of interactions between signifiers and signifieds, and the cultural contexts in which they are used, as well as because of changes in modality. If Propp's followers studied baoman long enough, they would most probably find out that this particular genre which they would say can be defined by a sequence of narrative functions might, in fact, as I have tried to show, evolve thanks to a contribution of the system of expression, and thus the frequency of individual functions might change, and the researchers could then see whether that would in any way influence the sequence of narrative functions at certain times of production.

In my final interpretation, what I would like to do with the findings of this study is to extrapolate them, purely speculatively, to more of the human experience, that is to say, that because systems of expression influence to a degree the debate which is told through them, they themselves can be seen as the sole cause of all myth. Freud would say that traditional stories or our actions are motivated by an underlying cause of repressed sexual desires, while Jung would hold that there are common archetypes in our unconscious which we project into the world and which can be read in the stories of our cultures.²⁹⁹ In other words, they both posit the driving force which they see behind what is happening into the realm of the unspeakable and they infer from their analyses of the outspoken that the driving force resides elsewhere. For me, as I have said, this would mean going too far in my interpretation of myth; attributing all changes in the understanding of phenomena only to an error, seems to me, too simplistic. Eliade worked with the push of the lost past which summons a longing, and

²⁹⁹ For comparison of Freud and Jung on this topic See Robert A. Segal, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 156-158.

McKenna, who spoke convincingly about the archaic revival, did so as well. Later on, McKenna fostered the idea of an attractor which pulls all the happenings. He saw it in the tendency towards complexity and newness and its completion in the transcendental object at the end of time.³⁰⁰ In my opinion, tendency towards complexity and newness need not be seen as an attractor. They both can be seen as an inherent potential of human languages which actualize themselves, as the languages are used because their users not only miscommunicate but they are also inventive, they lie, they forget, extrapolate, deduce, induce, redefine, reconsider, etc. This means that they do not need to feel, or sense, or be in any other way succinctly motivated or inspired to construct myth or to recognize myth as a certain kind of stories which we recognize because we get an itch about them when we hear them, which is what Vandiver surprisingly argues for in her last lecture of her series.³⁰¹ Blackmore's wording would also contest Vandiver's idea of a "cast of mind" when it stays impartial as to the

³⁰⁰ See Dery, "Noetic Lightning," 61.

³⁰¹ "[...] but this would leave unanswered the question of why classical myth, in particular, is so congenial to us. That perhaps requires a little bit of explanation. In my experience, and the experience of most people I've talked to classical myth is congenial in a way that the myths of many other cultures aren't. People who have turned from reading classical myth to reading the myth, of say, Navajo culture, or ancient African cultures or many other cultures find that there is a kind of familiarity to classical myth that makes it immediately congenial in a way that myths of other cultures are not. Now, to some extent that may simply be a matter of familiarity as I just said, these stories are common in our culture, we already know them we recognize them as familiar. But that doesn't seem to me to be quite adequate to explain not just the appeal of classical myth but the alien feeling nature of myths of other cultures. I think what's going on here is that classical myth's presence in our culture represents much more than just a borrowed set of literary and artistic tropes and images I think, and perhaps here I am agreeing more than I realize with the psychological theorists, I think that classical myth resonates through us on a deeper level than simply being a convenient set of metaphors that we plug in whenever we need a comparison. In the stories of Greco-Roman antiquity I think we have inherited not just stories but a whole cast of mind. Now, I am certainly not trying to say that we agree with those cultures in every particular—quite obviously we don't—but I think we do have access in their myths to an entire cast of mind, to an entire world-view that perhaps has more influence on us still than we often realize. I think, furthermore, that literature, and when I say literature here I'm including other forms of entertainment that have to some extent superseded books in our culture, such as movies and television programmes, I think that literature does much more than merely entertain us. I think it's more important than that—that it interacts with other areas of human endeavor to shape our entire world-view. And that therefore classical myth has to some extent helped in shaping our world-view, in shaping our culture, just as it helped in shaping the cultures that developed it." "24 from Ovid to the Stars," YouTube video, 18:07–20:37, from a DVD series *Classical Mythology* by The Teaching Company, 2002, posted by "opus 707," November 8, 2015, accessed August 29, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwXcRVwfc3c&ab_channel=opus707. In my opinion Vandiver falls prey to the same sort of reasoning which she criticizes in Joseph Campbell's work in her lecture "03 Why is Myth," YouTube video, 16:06–17:32, from a DVD series *Classical Mythology* by The Teaching Company, 2002, posted by "opus 707," November 11, 2015, accessed August 29, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NoCGESXsVR8&ab_channel=opus707.

reasons why the concept of one's self is "the product of all the memes that have successfully got themselves inside this selfplex."

Then there is the self we think we are. Among all these memeplexes is an especially potent one based around the idea of an inner self. Each selfplex has been put together by the processes of memetic evolution acting in the relatively short period of one human lifetime. 'I am the product of all the memes that have successfully got themselves inside this selfplex—whether because my genes have provided the sort of brain that is particularly conducive to them, or because they have some selective advantage over other memes in my memetic environment, or both. Each illusory self is a construct of the memetic world in which it successfully competes. Each selfplex gives rise to ordinary human consciousness based on the false idea that there is someone inside who is in charge.'³⁰²

I support Blackmore's view which contests the view of Anthony Stevens, a Jungian scholar, who writes that archetypes "make up the human collective unconscious," and that "human experience and human behaviour are complex products of environmental and hereditary forces. The environment activates the archetype which mediates the experience and the behaviour. Archetypes are intermediate between genes and experience: they are the organizing schemata by which the innate becomes personal."³⁰³ I suggest that if we, in the debate about myth, should pay any attention to a distinct feeling then it should not be one which narrows myth down to instances which stick out when we have that feeling, that is to say, that we better not identify as myth only what evokes that feeling. To me it seems more likely that if we ever get a distinct feeling about any particularity from among the state of events, we should take that feeling only as an alert to what we might be, in fact, subjected to at all times. For example, when foreigners learn English they tend to be intrigued by the present perfect tense because it means that they should grasp the course of events by a temporal category that is lacking in their own language. English speakers, on the other hand, might feel a little uneasy about trying to sync in with the manner in which the Spanish treat grammatical objects with demonstrative pronouns, as they do not see only *this* or *that* but they measure their distance from such objects with *este*, *ese* and *aquel*, which English speakers could roughly understand as *an object here*, *an object there* and *an object over there*. But in English, if a person asked another 'Do you see the/that thing over there?' the spatial referent *there* implies a question 'Where?' and not only 'What thing?' as it would be, propelled at

³⁰² Blackmore, *Meme Machine*, 236.

³⁰³ Stevens, *Archetype Revisited*, vi-vii.

least by the inherent suggestiveness of its grammatical systemity, in Spanish. Thus, the conversation between two individuals stemming from such a simple pointing out of an object can take a different course in both languages from the very start. Every language has its own unique propensity to steer a locution in varying directions, and whatever is expressed or understood by the means of a language is, to a degree, influenced by this varying and unavoidable capacity. In my comparative study of rage comics and baoman I have tried to show that it might be the system of expression which to a degree influences the debate even in the long run. Since not only the studied internet artefacts but, in general, any debate is a performance, I, purely speculatively, tend to think that many other debates might have been tainted by the necessity of being conducted in a system of expression. I posit the cause of myth at the level of such a necessity and suspect it to succinctly actualize itself whenever systems of expression are used. All performance, then, to me is myth. It is only at certain times that the production technique draws our attention to the ostentatious workings of the system of expression. At all other times we must rely on long-term statistical analyses of memes from extensive data sets.

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tra+kinnara&source=bl&ots=AXbPvHRUYj&sig=_mbjntOx-TCMxtvd1wXRcMrNwmA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiyjfOs4ZjKAhVomHIKHXYbD9AQ6AEISTAJ#v=onepage&q=lotus%20sutra%20kinnara&f=false.

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Augusto de Campos (1957)

"'terremoto' (earthquake) is another generative poem, this time with cosmic and existential hints. A kind of 'portable cosmogony' in cross-word form." (Haroldo de Campos)

- ovo = egg
- novelo = ball of thread
- novo = new
- sol = sun
- letra = letter (of alphabet)
- estrela = star
- soletra = (it) spells
- so = only
- terremoto = earthquake
- temor = fear
- morte = death
- metro = meter
- termometro = thermometer

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      o
    n o v e l o
  o v o
o v o
  e
  l
  o

      s o l
      o
    l e t r a
      e
    e s t r e l a
      s
      r
  s o l e t r a
  o l e r
  l i t e
  a a

      t
      e
      r
      r
      e
    t e m o r
      o
      t
      t
  t e r r e m o t o
  o r
  r
  t e r m o
  e
  t
  r
  o

      m o r t e
      r
    m e t r o
      o
      m
      m
    m o t o r
    m o t o r
    t o r t o
    m o r t o
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Appendix 4. Augusto de Campos, "Teremoto," in Emmet Williams, ed. *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry* (New York: Something Else, 1967).

a a a a a
 c c c c
 r r r r r
 o o o o
 b b b b b
 a a a a
 t t t t t
 s s s s
 t t t t t
 a a a a
 b b b b b
 o o o o
 r r r r r
 c c c c
 a a a a a

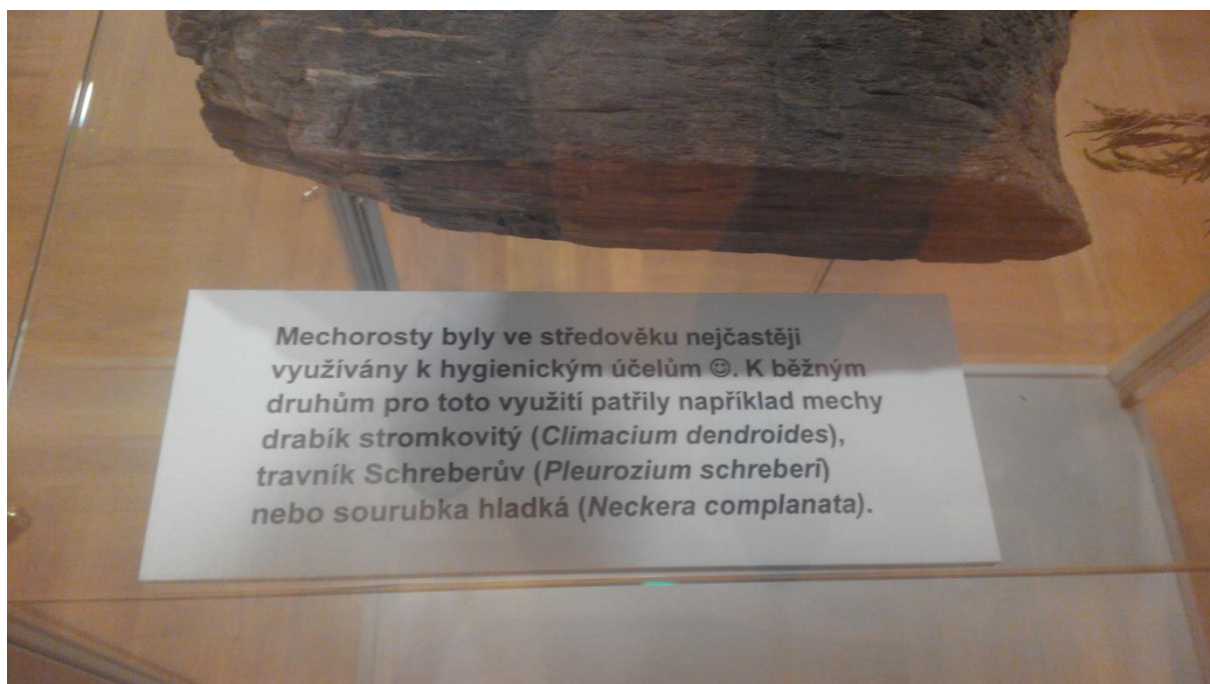
Ian Hamilton Finlay (1964)

"Isolated, single letters are pattern but letters joined in words (as these are) are direction. Those in the 'acrobats' poem are both, behaving like the real circus acrobats who are now individual units, now—springing together—diagonals and towers. Properly, the poem should be constructed of cut-out letters, to occupy not a page but an entire wall above a children's playground." (I.H.F.)

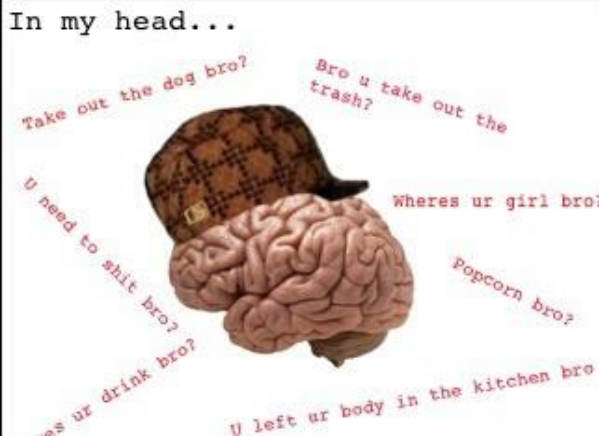
Appendix 5. Ian Hamilton Finlay, "Acrobats," in Emmet Williams, ed. *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry* (New York: Something Else, 1967).



Appendix 6. Character stones showing the characters 邓 [:deng:] [surname Deng] 小 [:xiao:] [small] and 平 [:ping:] [level, equal, fair] which constitute the name of Deng Xiaoping—a Chinese communist leader. “Qi shi qiao diao Changjiang wenzi shi Deng Xiaoping [Peculiar stones with ingenious engravings Yangtze River character stones Deng Xiaoping],” last modified December 5, 2011, posted by liuzhang917, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://jd.cang.com/729073.html>.



Appendix 7. Glass case dedicated to moss in the Regional Museum, Olomouc., May 16, 2015.



Appendix 13. Dubstep_Panda, “Every Time I Try to Relax!,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 3, 2015,
<https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/31cc2m/every_time_i_try_to_relax/>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Appendix 14. dorkydor93v2, "I hate my brain," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 20, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/23himr/i_hate_my_brain/>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Appendix 17. [user deleted account], “I hate being sick, and then there's the icing on the cake.” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, February 20, 2015, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/2wk8ri/i_hate_being_sick_and_th_en_theres_the_icing_on/>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Appendix 22. KittywithaMelon, "I'm getting retarded," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 17, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/23aamv/im_getting_retarded/>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Appendix 25. Gaming_RS, "I forgot the ball...", Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 13, 2015, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/2yy3qq/i_forgot_the_ball/>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Appendix 26. nisersh, "I NEED WIFI," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 3, 2015, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/31ba5n/i_need_wifi/>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Appendix 30. andcoo, “屌丝的逆袭 [loser strikes back],” Comic Strip, Baozoumanhua.com, March 15, 2015 <<http://baozoumanhua.com/articles/7229636>>, accessed August 29, 2016.

<p>crush</p>  <p>I'm pregnant</p>	<p>tall, rich and handsome</p>  <p>We're breaking up</p>
 <p>I was just joking</p>	 <p>Me too</p>
 <p>I'm pregnant</p>	 <p>Oh, that can't be... is it his?</p>
 <p>Yeah, come with me tomorrow and I'll have an abortion</p>	 <p>..... Alright</p>
 <p>Mom, I need to pay for my evening classes</p>	<p>The one who loves truly is not a knight in shining armor but rather a man who in real life accompanies you through difficulties and hardships</p>
 <p>THE NEXT DAY</p>	
<p>I have paid for a room, let's go make a plan first, rest for a bit and revive our spirits, then we can go to the hospital</p>	 <p>There's something fishy about it</p> <p>No need to bother with such details</p> <p>@andcoo</p>

Translation of appendix 30.



Appendix 31. stellatr, “看你妹啊、我都便秘了 [fuck off, I am constipated],” Comic Strip, Baozoumanhua.com, August 4, 2014, <<http://baozoumanhua.com/articles/10272663>>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Appendix 32. 小东卖套, “几点了。。。。。。 [what time is it],” Comic Strip, Baozoumanhua.com, April 24, 2014, <<http://baozoumanhua.com/articles/8132387>>, accessed August 29, 2016.



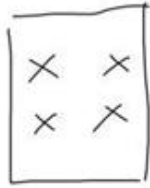
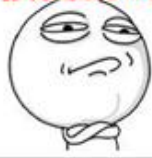
Translation of appendix 32.



Appendix 33. 穷来遭不住，“浓情 10 月 [strong feeling October],” Comic Strip, Baozoumanhua.com, October 16, 2015, <<http://baozoumanhua.com/articles/29676415.html>>, accessed August 29, 2016.

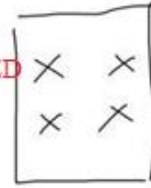
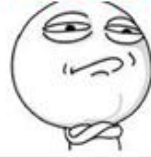
老湿没打分，
哈哈我来写

接受挑战



The teacher did not
grade it
ha ha, I'll write it in

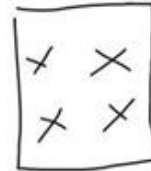
CHALLENGE ACCEPTED



可这还有4
个叉，怎么办呢



But there are still
these four
crosses, what
should I do



有啦！！



奇摸鸡~~~

Got it!!



奇摸鸡~~~

我太TM机智了！



I'm too fucking smart!



[SMART]



Don't mind
不要在意这些细节



You bad bad
你坏坏



I don't think so
我觉得也那



You Enough
你们够了



Don't mind
不要在意这些细节



You bad bad
你坏坏

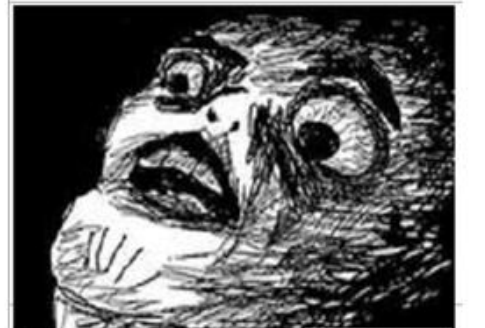
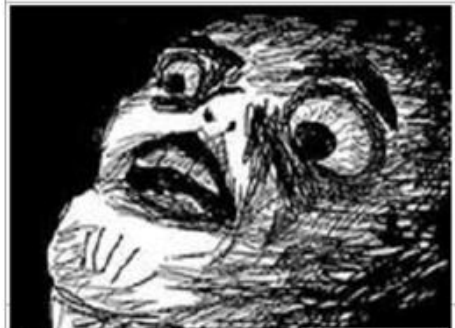
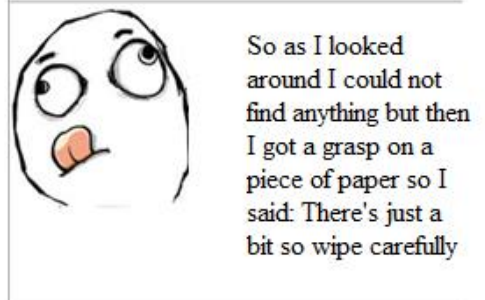
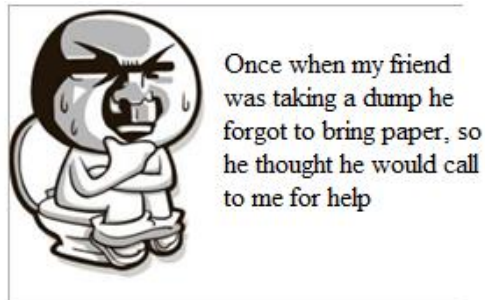


I don't think so
我觉得也那



You Enough
你们够了

Appendix 34. 土尼玛 137, “标题要长…… [title should be long],” Comic Strip, Baozoumanhua.com, March 20, 2014, <no longer available>, accessed March 20, 2014.

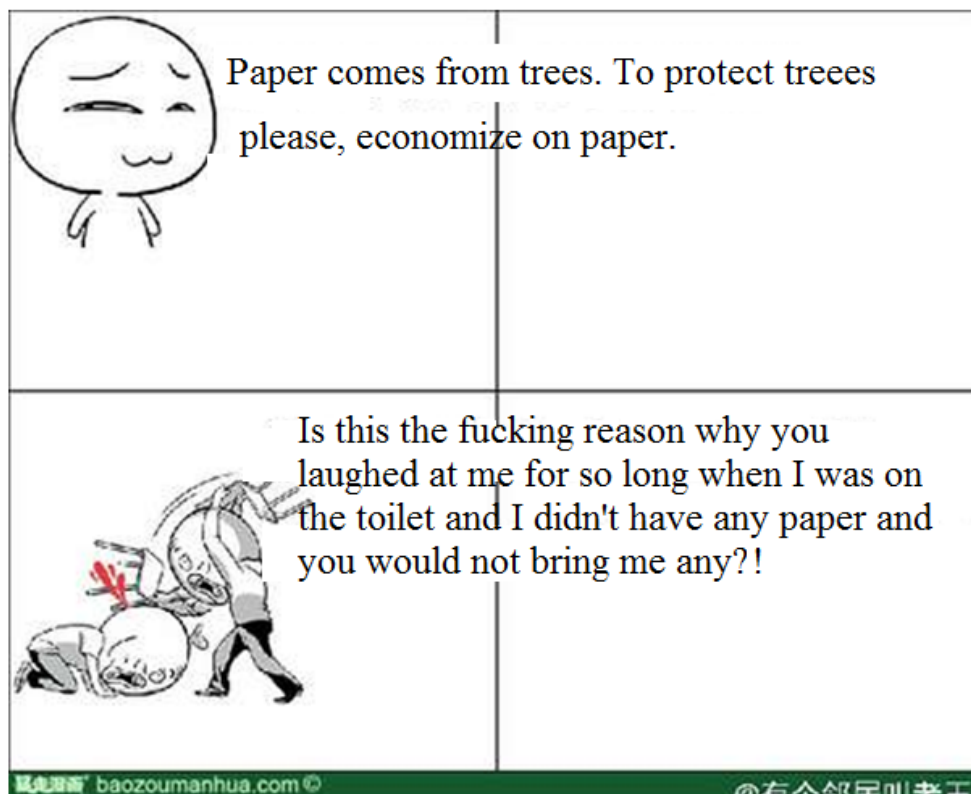


Appendix 35. 葫芦警长, “纸? ! [paper?!],” Comic Strip, Baozoumanhua.com, August 4, 2014, <<http://baozoumanhua.com/articles/29676415.html>>, accessed August 29, 2016.



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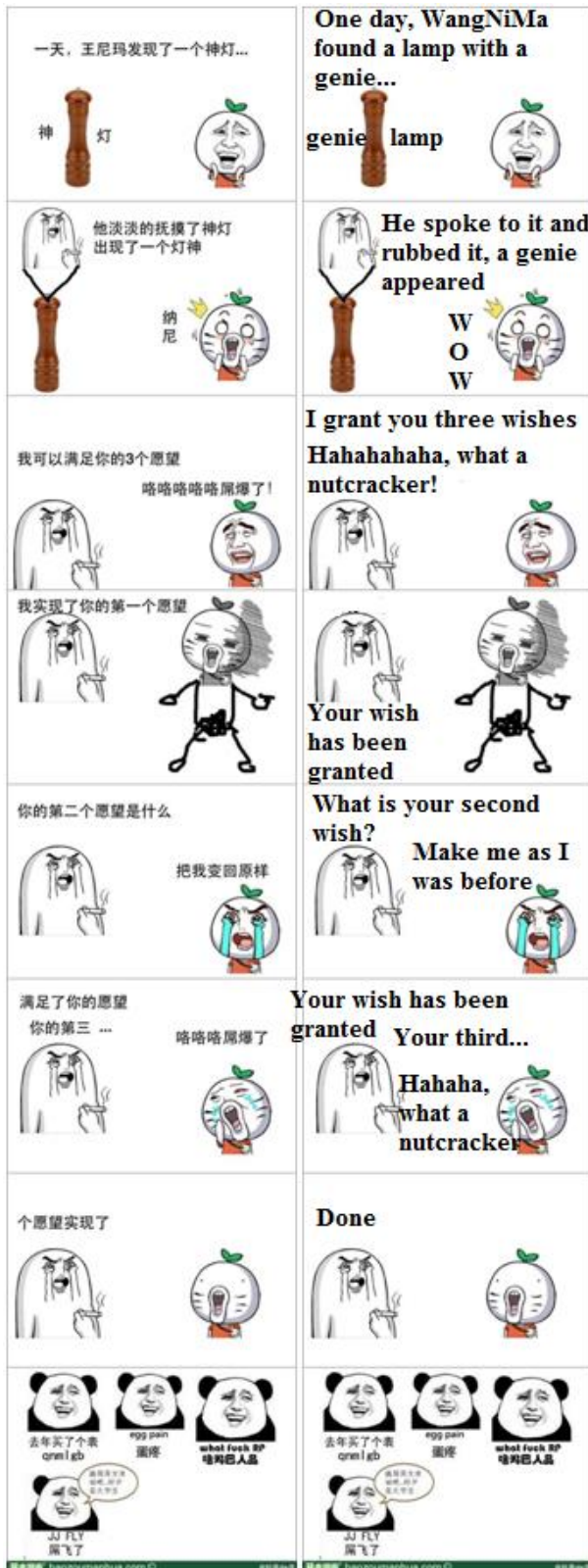
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Appendix 36. 有个邻居叫老王, “节约 [economize],” Comic Strip, Baozoumanhua.com, August 4, 2014, <<http://baozou.com/users/5981035/articles>>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Appendix 38. 神奇小饱, “什么叫表题啊 [what is the title],” Comic Strip, Baozoumanhua.com, March 15, 2014, <<http://baozoumanhua.com/users/4050532/articles>>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Appendix 39. 枯萎 de 屌, “JJfly [penis fly],” Comic Strip, Baozoumanhua.com, August 4, 2014, <<http://baozoumanhua.com/users/5984268/articles>>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Appendix 40. 山里住着王尼玛, “屁爆了 [nutcracker],” Comic Strip, Baozoumanhua.com, August 4, 2016, <<http://baozoumanhua.com/users/5935757/articles/page/13?order=latest>>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Appendix 41. 仔尼玛我草尼玛, “暴漫地久天长! [baoman for ever and ever!],” Comic Strip, Baozoumanhua.com, August 4, 2014, <<http://baozoumanhua.com/articles/10275354>>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Translation of appendix 41.

 <p>你好我是神，能实现你三个愿望</p>	 <p>Hi, I am a spirit, I can grant you three wishes</p>
 <p>三个愿望，屁爆了</p>	 <p>Three wishes, what a nutcracker</p>
 <p>然后王尼玛的屁就爆了</p>	 <p>Then, WangNiMa's nuts cracked</p>
 <p>你第一个愿望实现了，说说第二个吧</p>	 <p>Your first wish was granted, tell me your second wish</p>
 <p>把我屁变回去</p>	 <p>Make my nuts the way they were before</p>
 <p>然后王尼玛的屁就好了</p>	 <p>Then, WangNiMa's nuts were all good</p>
 <p>哇，真的变好了，屁爆了</p>	 <p>Wicked, they're as good as before, what a nutcracker</p>
 <p>然后，王尼玛的屁又爆了</p>	 <p>Then, WangNiMa's nuts cracked</p>
 <p>你的愿望已经用完了，再见</p>	 <p>You have used all your wishes, Goodbye</p>
	

Appendix 42. 哥只是个无节操的人，“三个愿望 [three wishes],” Comic Strip, Baozoumanhua.com, October 11, 2015, <<http://baozou.com/articles/29505056>>, accessed August 29, 2015.



Appendix 43. tysss, “马桶神 [toilet spirit],” Comic Strip, Baozoumanhua.com, October 13, 2015, <<http://baozoumanhua.com/articles/29562840>>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Appendix 44. 我就喝旺仔，“注孤生 [forever alone life],” Comic Strip, Baozoumanhua.com, October 11, 2015, <<http://baozoumanhua.com/articles/29510362>>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Appendix 45. Arain, “尼玛的蠢货生涯 [goddamn idiotic life],” Comic Strip, Baozoumanhua.com, October 16, 2015, <<http://baozoumanhua.com/articles/29678406>>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Appendix 47. halakon, "dammit tangle fairys!!!!," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 10, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/22q7pi/dammit_tangle_fairys/>, accessed August 29, 2016.



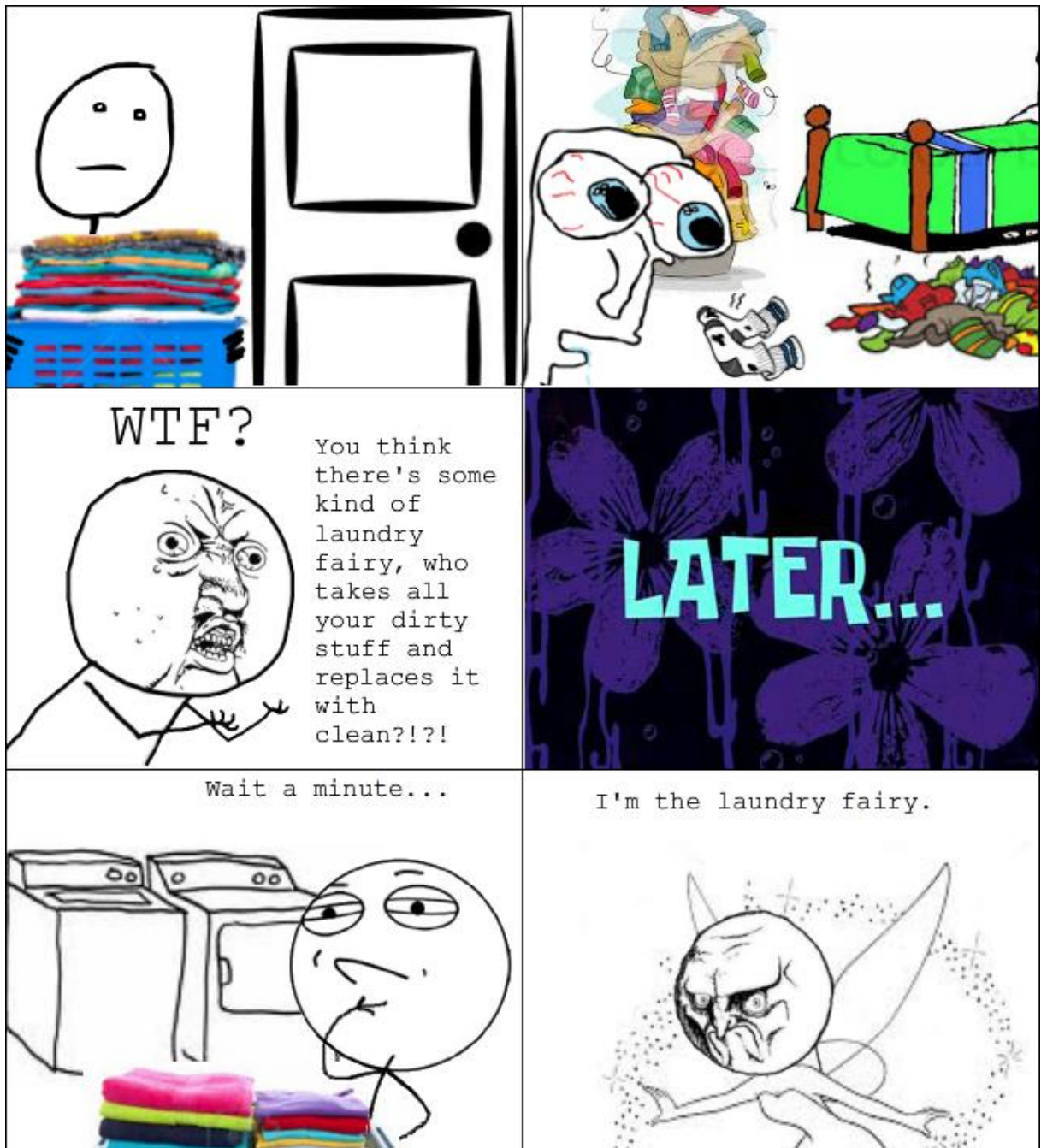
Appendix 48. dropstop, "Headphone rage.," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 29, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/21o933/headphone_rage/>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Appendix 50. halakon, “Dammit rock gnomes!!!!,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 10, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/22pgw3/dammit_rock_gnomes/>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Appendix 51. ichivsmc, “Just How?!?!?!” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 26, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/21gf8j/just_how/>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Appendix 52. AnonymousCommenter, “The laundry fairy,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 17, 2014,



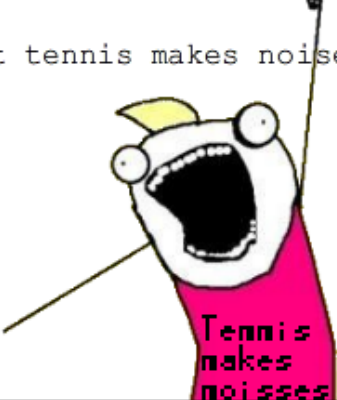
<https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/238vr5/the_laundry_fairy/>, accessed August 29, 2016.



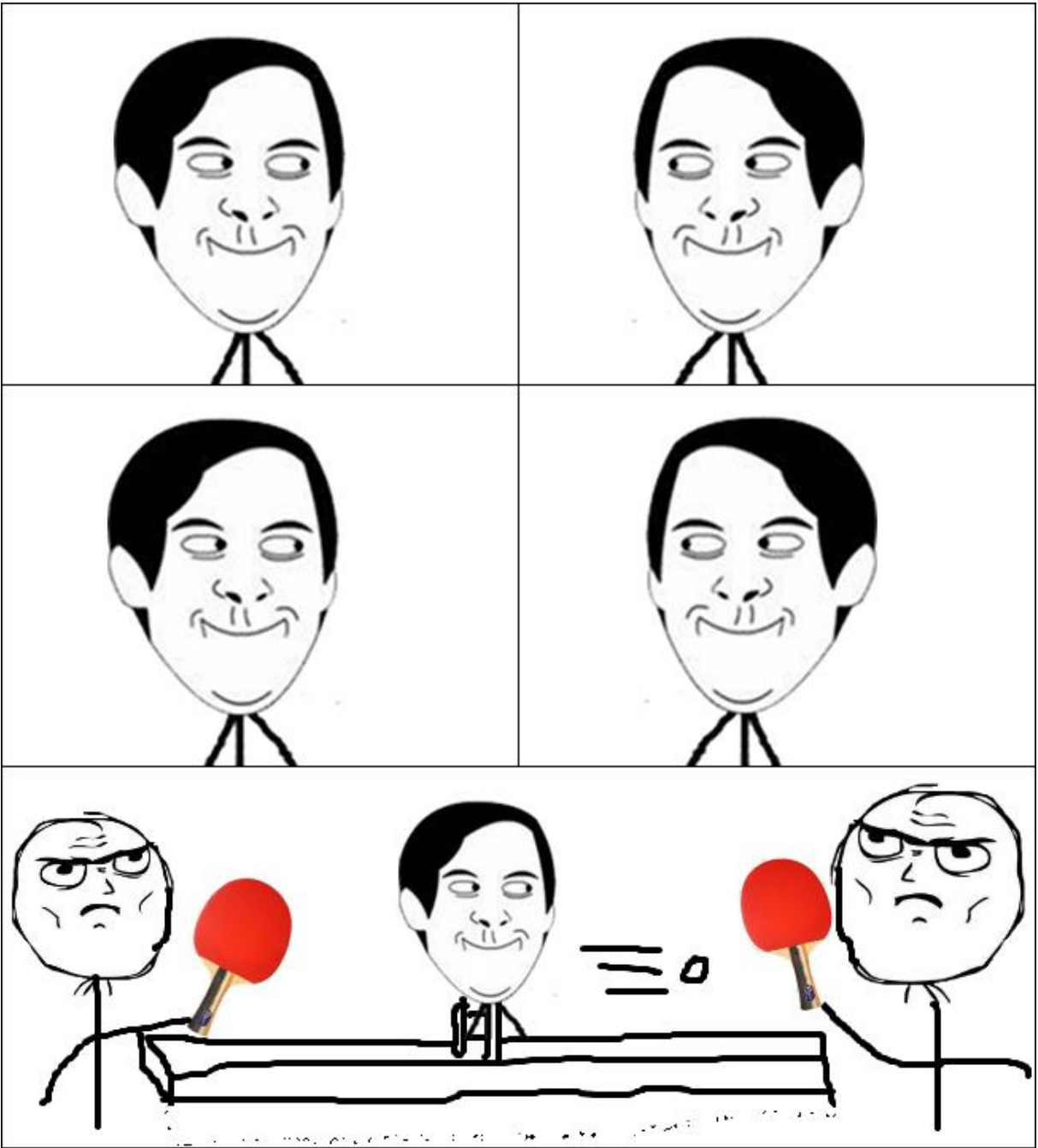
Appendix 53. Darkestblo, "Chargers," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 27, 2015, <<https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/30i14mchargers/>>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Appendix 54. Janjan07, "Stupid rocks," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 15, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/2334oz/stupid_rocks/>, accessed August 29, 2016.

<p>*Me, in my house derpin'around, when I suddeny hear a noise on TV...</p>  <p>Oh, ahhh, ohh!...</p>	<p>Someone left a porn chanell on...</p> 
<p>I came in the living room and just see, that is not porn, that is...</p> 	 <p>Ohhh... AHH!... Argh..</p> <p>... TENNIS!</p>
<p>Do you agree with me that tennis makes noises like sex?!</p> 	

Appendix 56. Gaming_RS, “Tennis an the sounds...,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, March 10, 2015, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/2yk4jz/tennis_an_the_sounds/>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Appendix 58. still_not_a_dinosaur, “Back... Forth...,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 29, 2015 (January 29, 2013), <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuooooooooooooo/comments/34bjlv/back_forth/>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Appendix 60. Milk4Life, "I've never felt so refreshed.," Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 16, 2014, https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/2368zk/ive_never_felt_so_refreshed/, accessed August 29, 2016. I've never felt so refreshed.

 <p>一天，屎尼玛和草尼玛正在吃饭</p>	<p>One day, DiaoNiMa and CaoNiMa were having a meal</p>
 <p>服务员，厕所在哪里啊，劳资要上厕所！</p>	<p>Waiter, where is the bathroom, le me wants to go to the bathroom!</p>
 <p>亲，厕所在二楼啊</p>	<p>The bathroom is on the second floor, dear.</p>
 <p>草尼玛的，有人！ 禁止使用！ 有人么？</p>	<p>It's full, goddamnit! Bath OUT OF ORDER Is anyone in room there?</p>
<p>操他妈的，劳资要憋死了，不管了，上这个！</p>	<p>Goddamnit, le me can't hold it in anymore, nevermind, I'll just go in!</p>
 <p>真特么舒服！</p>	<p>Oh, what a relief!</p>
 <p>怎么没人啊！</p>	<p>Where is everybody?</p>
 <p>屎尼玛，你他妈干啥去了，刚才天上掉下来一坨屎正好砸风扇上！</p>	<p>DiaoNiMa, what have you done, there has been poop falling down on the electric fan out of the blue!</p>
 <p>what the hell? 什么情况?</p>	<p>What the hell?</p>
	<p>WangNiMa unexpected</p>
 <p>屎尼玛 掉</p>	

Appendix 61. 王尼玛在暴走床底下，“屎 [shit],” Comic Strip, Baozoumanhua.com, October 11, 2015, <<http://baozoumanhua.com/articles/29508713>>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Appendix 62. sneekit, “Adventures at the zoo.,” Comic Strip, Reddit.com, April 1, 2014, <https://www.reddit.com/r/ffffffuuuuuuuuuuuuu/comments/21xnc5/adventures_at_the_zoo/>, accessed August 29, 2016.



Appendix 63. Captioned Me Gusta rage face in library bathrooms, Palacký University, Olomouc, August, 12, 2013.



Appendix 64. Character with a baoman face in restaurant 猫眼 [:mao yan:] [cat's eye] on 华师文化街桂元路 22 号 [:huashi wenhua jie gui yuan lu 22 hao:] in Wuhan, May 28, 2014.



Appendix 65. Character with a rage face on Big Shock energy drink, Al-Namura, spol. s.r.o., Czech Republic.