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Are memes as a format of techno-literature effective as a new means of a new language for historical and archival text?

We are constantly consuming funny content on the internet, whether it be a short blurb of text, a 30 second video, or somewhere in-between. Our attention span for consuming and processing information gets shorter and shorter. How will we remember stuff? There's something very interesting about "#relatable" content on the internet. Memes are a form of a single instance of funniness shared over and over because so many people can relate to that specific idea, thought or moment in time. However, regardless of time and context, the constant flow of memes as information is the most generative format of information on the internet, and most likely the largest quantity of information. As humans we inherently remember and favor information presented to us as funny rather than unfunny. In addition each day we grow lazier and lazier as we sit on our phones and computers and drone blindly into the abyss of endless content. Memes are slowly becoming our primary resource for information online, without us even realizing. Analyzing the role of memes as a form of literature will help us to determine the effectiveness of memes at communicating information in parts or grains of large topics overtime. As we consume funny videos and images our mind creates an archive of these thoughts that because of their irrelevance are only brought up in the context of other memes, shared experience, or the urge to share experience. Therefore memes live as a sort of node of data, a minimalist way of storing information. Each individual's personal minimalist funny meme archive is a version of personal stored data that is shared between individuals as the meme. People may interpret the data differently but its existence as an object stays the same. Thus making the format a much more flexible means of remembrance.

First we need to define what a meme is. Webster dictionary defines a meme as "an amusing or interesting item (such as a captioned picture or video) or genre of items that is spread widely online especially through social media." In the context of this essay the "item" or objects of these memes constitute information.

Next, Webster defines Literary as "of, relating to, or having the characteristics of humane learning or literature." While processing memes as information when we view them, the act of consuming content inevitably is of relation to the characteristics of learning. Therefore it is safe to assume that consuming memes as content can be a subset of humane learning, therefore memes are "literary." Literature is often defined as a body of writings, and memes a body of widely spread items. We can think of memes as a generative neo-codex of items, where instead of text written by hand collected and archived together in a book, images, text, video and word

are collected and stored together in our minds. This starts to lead us in the direction of thinking of memes as modern archival literature.

The vitality of memes also speaks to memes being a form of performative language in which we use sometimes to communicate personal thoughts and emotions. Memes are often used as an abbreviation or slang of sorts for many emotions, thoughts and even more widely understood historical events. Jonathan Culler writes on performative language in his book "Literary Theory: a very short introduction." On page 94 he says "Performative utterances do not describe but perform the action they designate. It is in pronouncing these words that I promise, order, or marry. A simple test for the performative is the possibility of adding 'hereby' in English before the verb, where hereby means 'by uttering these words': 'I hereby promise'; 'We hereby declare our independence'; 'I hereby order you . . .'; but not 'I hereby walk to town'. I can't perform the act of walking by pronouncing certain words." If performance can be defined as the act of presenting a form of entertainment, we can assume that memes as a language are indeed performative, in the sense that they are not descriptions of events or thoughts, but a performative of them. They are often raw and blunt because of its need to be presented, consumed and spread fast. For instance this may be why we feel annoyed when someone asks to explain a meme, or why we feel left out when we don't understand why others find a particular meme funny.

Memes as performative language also leads to the creation of various trending slang as a result of the idea that certain shared opinions be categorized into an informal item. The performance being the first instance of using the word, and the slang is that performance becoming language. "Rizz or Unspoken Rizz is a slang term about men that means a man can attract women easily and is desirable without trying. It became notable from Twitch streamers Kai Cenat, Silky and Duke Dennis in mid-2021, but originated in New York City slang earlier. It became prominent in memes when referenced on TikTok and Twitter, among other platforms, in early 2022." This example of the birthings of new slang from KnowYourMeme.com, for instance, is most likely the result of the evolution of language through social context, the spread of that language on the internet because of a popular individual with a large following, and overall funniness. This is also an example of something that's been taken from someone's personal existing slang, and due to its widespread use its no longer that funny, a joke that's gone stale, and therefore "cringy", which in a way makes It funny again, but then again it wasn't that funny to begin with. This example further emphasizes the depths and complexities of memes as a language.

"Barbeque Bacon Burger, also written BBQ Bacon Burger or Barbecue Bacon Burger, refers to a man saying "barbeque bacon burger and a large order of fries and an orange soda with no ice" (among other fast-food orders) in an audio clip from the 2009 video game Left 4 Dead 2~In early 2022, a sped-up version of the audio became an original sound on TikTok." In contrast, this meme is "funny" because of its absence of meaning, history, origin etc. There are related memes where an individual lip syncs to the original game audio over and over again and something

about the randomness and that the words seem to have absolutely no meaning to them makes the sound funny. As lyrics are to songs, the absence of lyrics is what attracts people to memes like this as people are attracted to ambient or electronic music.

Webster defines Archive as “a place in which public records or historical materials (such as documents) are preserved.” In the context of my analogy, our mind is quite literally an archive. Memes are by very definition public and shared, and without knowing, we are creating a record of memes in our minds.

Are memes historical? If we assume history is the study of past events, then without a doubt. If anything, memes provide a depth to literature that no other form of literariness outside of literature has. Memes are very complex in the sense that they can be both broad and personal to an individual’s experience. They can be generally funny or only funny to a specific crowd, and in between all of this is where we see how individuals creating a personal archive of this increases the amount and depth of information stored in relation to the amount of content consumed.

Why are some memes so fucked up? At the end of the day most memes are created from personal experience and for various versions of shared personal beliefs and personalities. Effective? “memes and their meanings are co-constructed by multiple users in a social context”, Jennifer Nyzc states in a New York Times article on The Meaning and History of Memes. People use memes as any other form of language in times of local and shared distress to bring light to situations that maybe should never be jokes about. Memes are constantly being placed in. Again adding depth to memes as a form of archival text.

Mememes are an effective means of communication. However because of their complexities and subjectivities mememes are only as effective at communicating an “item,” whatever that may be as a person talking and sharing their personal opinions and experiences, with the off-chance that something they say becomes viral because of the format and context in which the information was shared. Mememes are historical text because they are “items” that exist on the internet, and are archival because you can go and back and find them and they share an how individuals felt at the time, what their reaction might have been to a particular event, or just random glimpses into hyper-specific moments in people's shared history that are brought back up over time, a specific depth that no other form of archival text presents. Mememes are a generative language that will continue to grow, and become more and more minimalist. In the year 2040 the sentence “got to go” will be reduced down to just “gaaaaaaaah.”

Sources

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