

AGITPROP: A DEEP DIVE INTO LEFTIST AFFINITY SPACES

By

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ABSTRACT

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This project is designed to explore what methods and theories of how we learn can tell us about what is occurring in leftist digital affinity spaces. My focus is the HasanAbi community, an online collective built around Twitch streamer Hasan Piker. I will examine the way YouTubers create memetic systems using an understanding of semiotics and translingualism. Based on my own experiences with digital community, and inspired by Linda Adler-Kassner, and Elizabeth Wardle's discussion of Threshold Concepts in *Naming What We Know*, I've created five of my own Threshold Concepts for Leftist Community and crafted a video for each. In these videos I perform, discuss and analyze the relevant literature, conceptual frameworks, theories, values, assumptions and language (and sometimes emotes) that contribute to each Threshold Concept; Video #1 Bodies at the Problem, Video #2 Speaking My Peace, Video #3 People Gotta Eat, Video #4 Sustainability, and the final video, Video #5 Master's Tools, Master's House, in which I explain how each of these videos contribute to what I call the Abolitionist Classroom – a classroom that is not tied to any institution, but rather is guided by what we know and what we want to achieve in the world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to acknowledge my grandma, the person in my life who knew I could do it and was annoyed I didn't get it done sooner.

And Smokey helped.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
LIST OF APPENDICES.....	ix
INTRODUCTION / LETTER TO MY READER.....	1
LITERATURE REVIEW IN AN AGITPROP WAY	11
Thinking About Literature In a Different Way.....	11
We Create Meaning	16
Introducing You To Emotes	20
People in Process	25
The Literacy of Vibes	29
Doing Community	33
Utopia is a People, Not a Place.....	37
Conclusion	42
ARTIST REFLECTIONS.....	45
Note on the Reflections.....	45
Reflection for Video #1	51
Bodies at the Problem	51
Reflection for Video #2	58
Making My Peace (Speaking My Piece)	58
Reflection for Video #3	65

People Gotta Eat	65
Reflection for Video #4	71
Sustainability.....	72
Reflection for Video #5	80
Master’s Tools, Master’s House	81
CONCLUSION.....	86
Genre and Community.....	86
Community and Emotes.....	90
Stylistics and Style Guide	92
Spreading Leftist Community.....	99
The Conclusion To The Conclusion	107
The Conclusion to the Conclusion to the Conclusion.....	109
REFERENCES	111
APPENDICES	117
APPENDIX A.....	117
APPENDIX B.....	121
Video #2.....	121
Video #3.....	164
Video #4.....	203
Video #5.....	244

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 <i>Hasan's Daycare. HasanAbi and all the frogs are crafting.</i>	1
Figure 2 <i>Hasan's Daycare. Hasan is holding the frogs. A feral Gray Name frog is biting him.</i>	9
Figure 3 <i>FeelsGoodMan emote. A smiling animated frog. His name is Pepe. The way he is pictured here, small and aligned with the text, is how he would appear in a Twitch chat after typing FeelsGoodMan into chat with a BetterTTV browser extension.</i>	21
Figure 4 <i>A side-by-side comparison of Smokey, the cat who helps, and BebeLa, the frog emote that looks like Smokey. Smokey is pictured on the right, he is a blue-gray long-haired cat with light green eyes. He is squinting and his ears are positioned slightly back, indicating confusion, perhaps from inconsistent petting, which I must formally apologize for. BebeLa is a green frog with a blue shirt, the BebeLa is positioned on the left and is squinting with watery eyes and a toothless smile indicating discomfort from every bad take that has ever been written on the internet. I only post good takes so I have nothing to apologize for.</i>	24
Figure 5 <i>"We Should Improve Society Somewhat" meme. A brainless weirdo chastizes people for suggesting that we should improve society somewhat by using his powers of debate perversity to travel through time to three different eras where society could have been improved somewhat.</i>	44
Figure 6 <i>Marie Condo is here to tell you "using semiotics to describe cultural phenomenon" does spark joy while "using evolutionary biology to describe cultural phenomenon" does not spark joy.</i>	79
Figure 7 <i>A tweet made by @NoContextDM saying: "i ain't reading all that/i'm happy for u tho/or sorry that it happened. In memetic fashion, we are pretending that I replaced "reading" with writing.</i>	101
Figure 8 <i>My Amazon sponsored PhD. A stuffed toy dog sits at a table in the middle of a room that is on fire. "This is fine," he states, without recognizing the danger he is in. He is wearing a tiny hat.</i>	104
Figure 9 <i>PepeLa – he doesn't know (typically HasanAbi doesn't know). PepeLa is a blurry, bright green version of PepeLaugh.</i>	117

Figure 10 <i>PepeLaugh</i> , a Pepe frog that is laughing at the most embarrassing thing you've ever done because he wants you to know you are a bad person for having done embarrassing things.....	117
Figure 11 <i>FeelsStrongMan</i> – A Pepe frog expressing solidarity, congratulating achievement, showing strong emotion we don't always have the words for but want to share.....	117
Figure 12 <i>Gayge</i> – Gayge is a rainbow Pepe, however his head shape is slightly less rounded and looks more like a frog than Pepe. He is smiling. Gayge is an emote for the gays. If something gay happens you show your support by posting Gayge.....	118
Figure 13 <i>peepoClap</i> – The head and torso of a Pepe frog, but more rounded, with clapping hands and a smile to show excitement. This emote is an example of a gif emote – an emote that moves. PeepoClap expresses childlike excitement but usually in silly situations.	118
Figure 14 <i>KomodoHype</i> – KomodoHype is a Pogging Komodo Dragon. KomodoHype replaced PogChamp after the person in the PogChamp emote made some sussy comments about the January 6th capital riot.	118
Figure 15 <i>Poggers</i> . Poggers is a Pogging Pepe. Pogging is an expression of excitement where the individual Pogging has their mouth open in an exclamation and they appear to be about to speak. Do not say Poggers in public. But if you do you will be part of an exclusive club of very cool people.	119
Figure 16 <i>OMEGALUL</i> – OMEGALUL is a face that is distorted into an O shape. OMEGALUL is the emote you use when LOL (laugh out loud) doesn't express the hilarity of the situation. Because of its round O shape it is often used to replace the O in words. L OMEGALUL L means LOL.	119
Figure 17 <i>KEKW</i> – This emote was formerly a meme. It is the face of Spanish comedian Juan Joya Borja laughing hysterically. Use this emote when you want to say “this is the funniest shit ever” but you’ve been spamming OMEGALUL too often.....	119
Figure 18 <i>Shruge</i> -- A shrugging Pepe frog. He has cute little hands. For when you want to annoy the chat by indicating that life and it's vast complexity is too difficult to answer with a single typed message in the Discord chat.	120
Figure 19 <i>HUH</i> -- A cartoon turtle from the movie Over The Hedge. He has a shocked and horrified expression because you did something awful. Just awful.	120
Figure 20 <i>KEKWait</i> -- This emote is also the face of Spanish comedian Juan Joya Borja. He is not laughing hysterically this time and looks quite disappointed and confused. Use	

<i>this emote when you want to express that your streamer needs to play that part of the video back again because, bro, what?</i>	120
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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A.....	117
APPENDIX B	121

INTRODUCTION / LETTER TO MY READER

I want to tell you about memes. I don't just want to tell you about memes though. I want to tell you about memes in the language of memes. And that is a tall order because many of the people who will read this project aren't familiar with the memes that I know. Even though the memes we understand are from different communities and arise out of different situations, there is a poetics of the meme that is difficult to describe but deeply felt. Memes are not just the viral images of cats you are most familiar with but are a way of participating in a culture, a way of telling stories, a way of passing what we know down the line to the noobs who have just joined and are waiting to receive it. Memes help us to define ourselves as something greater than an individual; through memes we become part of a collective.

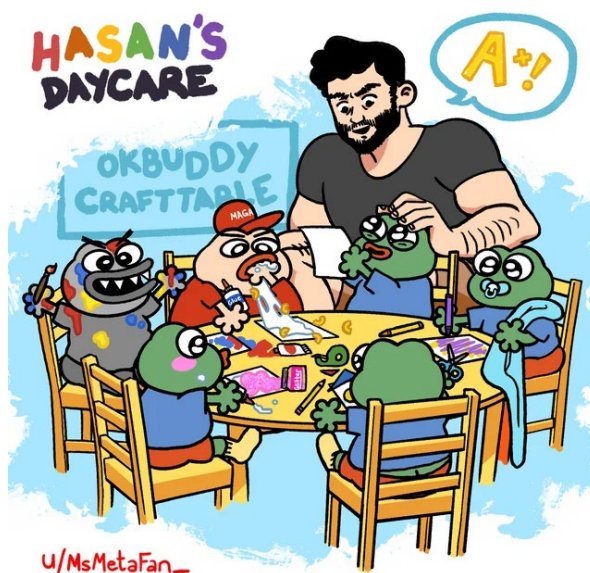


Figure 1 *Hasan's Daycare. HasanAbi and all the frogs are crafting.*

I can tell you all these things. But that doesn't mean you will understand them. An understanding of memes doesn't come from knowing what the meme is – it comes from experiencing the meme, learning how to use it, learning how to make your own memes. And if I have done my job correctly by the end of this project, you too will be memeing on the HasanAbi Community just like the best.

That is where I see the value of this project coming from.

I am trying to build a deeper, empathetic understanding for the community that comes from memes through the memes that come from a community. And the type of communities that make these memes. And the science of the memes.

This project engages with many types of digital discourses, and I even make a few claims about how we understand genre in digital spaces that might run counter to what is typically understood about genre in digital spaces. Because of the nature of digital spaces, discourses are rapidly forming and changing and out of this, new genres are being formed – and as soon as one genre is formed it splits into different genres. A cursory and casual glance at YouTube might suggest that we have the genre of the YouTube video, but a deeper look shows there are so many types of YouTube videos that are all so different from one another that calling YouTube videos a genre and the different types of videos subgenres would be practically meaningless to help you understand what a YouTube video is like.

While I can generally tell you the main components of a Harlequin romance novel, I cannot tell you the main components of a YouTube video because some videos are Video Essays which are videos created by people that explain theories, ideas, science

or literature about a thing – while other videos are that one movie that just went into public domain so now we can upload it without copyright infringement. Because of the nature of YouTube as a publisher, all of these are technically of the YouTube genre, because they were uploaded to YouTube by a person, while simultaneously belonging to specific genres and taking part in specific discourses.

When I tell you in Video #4 that mapping out all the genres – just on YouTube – could be the subject of a PhD project, I mean it.

Similarly, Twitch is a publisher of Livestreams. While YouTube is the only generally recognized platform for video sharing, there are a few different platforms for Livestreaming aside from Twitch. The platform a person streams from has some impact on the stream, which means that the same stream hosted on different platforms will be participating in different discourses depending on which platform is hosting them because there is often subtext occurring between platforms. For example: the site Kick was founded as an alternative to Twitch after Twitch banned gambling. This subtext means that viewers come into a particular instance of Livestreaming with preconceived ideas about the stream based on the platform, and then because they participate in making the content through the chat, the content itself will be influenced.

Furthermore, Livestreaming may not be atomized to the extent that YouTube video content has because generally speaking a Livestream is a person with a computer and a camera, but there are Livestreaming situations such as irl (in real life) streams which make generalizing about streaming difficult – consider that a person walking around town interviewing people on the street and a person playing a video game and a

group of people playing drinking games in the backyard are all examples of Livestreams while still being radically different situations. Considering that you have cross-platform subtextuality on top of all of this, the subject of Livestreaming and genre could probably also be the topic of its own dissertation.

Memes have been the topic of study already – but as I’ll argue in Video #4, I believe that many of the projects which attempt to understand and define memes start with a false premise of what constitutes a meme. This is further problematized by the fact that it is rare to consider memes as products of community; memes are often studied in the abstract like a painting in a museum that only has one painting and a really vague description written by a person who was born 200 years after the painter died and didn’t know the painter’s name, when or where they were born, their age at the time of the painting, the other paintings the painter had been looking at, the type of art they studied at, what art historians thought about the painting, and what current art critics have to say about the painting. Like they probably have a good sense of the medium, but they definitely don’t have a well-rounded understanding of things? Which is not great when much of the meaning of a meme is contained in its subtext because of its context.

The same meme can be published across many platforms with different meanings occurring depending on the platform, much like in the Twitch/Kick situation, but also, a single meme might be shared across the same community on many different platforms. This means that we can possibly understand a genre of meme based on publisher, but also probably not and it is entirely dependent on context. Memes are typically understood only by people participating within the discourse that the meme is participating in, that is, by

people who share the same values, assumptions and language (and emotes, when applicable). However, two communities might share the same meme despite the meme having radically different meanings in each of the communities to which it belongs. An example of this is Pepe the Frog which I will discuss at length in Video #4. This means that the exact same meme might belong to multiple genres, at which point you could probably call them sub-genres, but I would argue that genre is defined by discourse, and it is the discourse that makes the genre. Furthermore, we need to distinguish between The Meme as a concept to describe a cultural phenomenon and representations of memes themselves.

So, is the broad and nebulous concept of The Meme a genre?

Well. Like all things of this nature, not in any meaningful, stable or relevant capacity.

The concept of The Meme is still in the process of being defined by academics – the definition that appeals to me most, as a person of internet culture, is from “Internet memes as internet signs: A semiotic view of digital culture” where author Sara Cannizzaro defines memes as: “...*systems of signs with the tendency to take translational habits,*” (576) However, Cannizzaro admits that through this definition “...one can see how the development of internet memes is perhaps not that different from the growth of any other instance of culture,” (576). Using this definition, we see that a much better way of understanding the genre of memes comes from looking at specific memetic systems themselves. Those memetic systems are discursive bodies of knowledge that provide us a fascinating way to understand the creation and function of genre within a community.

Aside from establishing the wiggly squiggly nature of memes, and thus the difficulty that comes from understanding The Meme as a genre or thing, this definition means that specific instances of memes can be still images, a line of text, a block of text, a short video, a thirty minute video compilation, a moment of sound, a song, a fashion trend, or any other variation I have not thought to list here or that hasn't been invented yet but will be soon – and these mediums all form out of different discourses and the only thing that they hold in common, the reason why they can be considered memes, is that they are acted upon by a community.

A complication that comes from engaging in this work as a community member is that we often don't realize when we are engaging with the meme – and its established, though implicit, discourses – when communicating with people who are not aware of those discourses.

I speak in memes many times throughout this project, and if you aren't part of the communities that I am you may not recognize the thing I am saying is a meme and lose out on the extra meaning that may be contained. And occasionally I don't even realize I am using a meme because I have used that meme, or seen it in action, or participated in it so many times that the meaning almost seems to be inherent and obvious. We all know what a cat is, right? But each of our ideas of A Cat are going to be pretty different.

An example: many times throughout this project I will tell you that I am (and we are) vibes based scientists. This is a meme. And if you are not part of the HasanAbi community you may lack understanding of the context of this meme – the context being that sometimes our vibes lead us to be reactionary towards people who don't deserve it

and so relying too much on our intuition can end up harming us if we don't temper our gut reactions to things with a little empathy. This is not about denying things we know to be true and learning to distrust our intuition, or not holding people accountable for the harm they have caused, but rather understanding that we are hurt people who have the potential to hurt people. We are great at observing patterns, even if we don't always know what to do with these observations. When I say we are vibes based scientists, understand that, while this is a meme, it is based in truths about our reality, and our reality is what we know and sometimes what we know is part of a cycle of harm that we have been subjected to but must not subject others to. (And even in that description there were like two other memes; bonus points if you've watched the videos and can point out which ones they are.)

While you read this project I want you to read it with the knowledge that you too are a vibes based scientist: trust your instincts and be curious, but always remember to be empathetic in your engagements. Interrogate the vibes, research the topic, interrogate the vibes again. Rely on the resources you have to gain understanding. If you don't understand the meme from just the vibes you can always look it up on a site like [knowyourmeme.com](https://www.knowyourmeme.com). I want this project to be interactive and immersive; I want to introduce you to a whole new world and a wholly different way of perceiving things that you may have never encountered before. I want to encourage active engagement with this text and the accompanying videos, all of which can be found [here](#).

I want this project to be as much a Livestream as it possibly can be.

Of course a written document is not a Livestream. But who says it can't be like one? Who says that I can't write to you in the style of a Livestream? Who says I can't address you like a streamer would during a Livestream? Who says that I can't pull apart all of the different components of the Livestream and understand them in a way that blends Livestreaming and text writing? Who says that you can't yell at me through your computer screen or scribble notes in the margins? Who says that you can't send me angry emails or show up to my Livestream or like and subscribe to my channel? Who says that you can't subscribe for five dollars or for free with a Twitch Prime subscription in order to avoid the top of the hour ad break? Who says that many writers and readers aren't already doing this?

Again. We carry tacit knowledge and tacit understanding. I know what writing a paper is like. I know what watching and streaming a live stream is like. Now what is in that part of the Venn diagram that is shared between the two?

This project has two components: a written part and the videos. While the videos can be viewed separately without this written component, the videos are vital for understanding the written piece. You may want to pause here now and go watch them – if you don't wish to do that at this moment, then I will include messages later in this text notifying you of where you might wish to view them – for example, at the start of sections where they will be discussed.

We understand things best through our experience of them so I would further recommend that you go on a site like Twitch or YouTube and you engage with live streams yourself – it isn't necessary to watch for the entire duration, many streams last

for hours and most people only show up for the time that they are able. Viewing these streams allows us to come as we are with what we know and learn how to engage with a new group, rather than expecting us to already know how. Watch the way the streamer engages with chat and watch how the chat responds to different situations – especially watch the way they use emotes because emotes mean different things to different streaming communities. Some live streams aren't for everyone; but that's ok because no content is universal. Click around, find something you enjoy, find people you would like to hang out with. And most importantly: have fun.

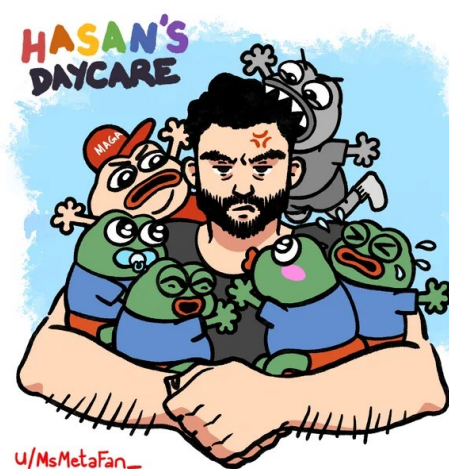


Figure 2 *Hasan's Daycare. Hasan is holding the frogs. A feral Gray Name frog is biting him.*

If this project is about anything it is that we need to have more fun. We need to find more pockets of joy in our lives. Things suck right now for a lot of us but we cannot lose hope and we cannot sacrifice the pleasures we can feel in the present to our anxieties about the future. Remember that scuff – the times where things go wrong – is part of the

journey, part of the experience. Not just of Livestreams, but of life. And it is in those spaces where scuff occurs, when we are trying to recover from the scuff, where our greatest talents and best content will be shown.

So thank you for joining, welcome to the stream, let me put on some no-copyright music and set up my intro screen, because it's about time we got started.

LITERATURE REVIEW IN AN AGITPROP WAY

Thinking About Literature In a Different Way

The relationship between writer and reader is supposed to be an intimate one – I think, like the relationship between streamer and viewer. I spend significant portions of my life laying out my thoughts and feelings, my approaches and perspectives, the evidence also, of course. I spend my time doing all of this, and then you read it and you learn it and you know it and you assimilate it into the crevices between your brain, maybe forgetting it or remembering it as you will, because like let's be real, this isn't something that is *important* to your like immediate needs or life, it's just something that is out there. It's out there, it's existing in the world, and it's trying to make sense of the world. And maybe, if I do this right, it will make sense to you too. I guess that's why they call it a literature review.

Sometimes the making sense part is difficult though.

So I want to call on you, my reader, my viewer, my follower, subscriber, companion on this journey, little pogchamp, buddy – take your pick, I want to call on you, to trust me, and that I know where I'm going, even if I don't know what I'm doing. Because I have to do this in a way that makes sense to me if I want it to make sense to you.

Like many people my age, I am afraid for the future. Not just my own future – whether I can make it through the next week, the next month, the coming years; but the

future in an existential sense. Everything feels like it is falling apart at the seams.

Depending on what talking head you look to, we are on the precipice of nuclear war, global mass extinction, American Civil War : The Sequel, the collapse of the continent into the ocean, the rise of petty theft in shopping malls, the collapse of the global economy, the rising price of eggs. Bad stuff. There is bad stuff all around. And it is easy, so very easy, to be sucked into that badness. And to sit with the sorrow that is mourning for the future that we never got to have. Despair is easy.

It is harder to have hope.

It is harder to see the potential in ourselves, in our lives. It is hard to see the changes that we make as we move through the world and the changes we do make in the lives of others. And I don't mean this in a "this is a public service announcement from PG&E, did you know that recycling and reducing and reusing and your personal carbon footprint" kind of way. I mean this in an "us" kind of way – the way that Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha speaks about in *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*: "...we are attempting to dream ways to access care deeply, in a way where we are in control, joyful, building community, loved giving and receiving, that doesn't burn anyone out or abuse or underpay anyone in the process" (Piepzna-Samarasinha 33). It's time to stop thinking about people as independent and self-sufficient, and time to start thinking about people as part of interconnected systems; things we do absolutely have impact and make meaning, but not in the way we have been led to believe.

The lives that we live are inherently meaningful because our lives are interconnected with other lives. In *The Body is not An Apology*, Sonya Renee Taylor states:

Radical self-love is interdependent. The radical self-love espoused in this book lives beyond the flimsy ethos of individualism and operates at both the individual and systemic levels. Radical self-love is about the self because the self is part of the whole. And therefore, radical self-love is the foundation of radical human love. Our relationships with our own bodies inform our relationships with others.

(20)

The interdependence proposed by Taylor exists in stark contrast to our current ideals of unique individuality that often pulls us deeper into consumerist conformity.

Americans strive to be individual and unique as we shop at the same few stores, we consume products made by the same few companies, we follow trends which will show how truly individual we are. Every step we strive to take towards individuality further entrenches our conformity. Everything we try to do to make ourselves special or different merely aligns us with one other group that we conform with. We can define ourselves in a billion different ways – by which candle scents we buy or which embroidered pillows or what kind of truck we drive or whether or not we allow our kids to have colorful toys or whether we have kids at all. At every level there is stratification of society where individuals combine together into an “us” and always, conveniently, have a “them” with whom to argue. And most of these battle lines are drawn around products that are somehow meant to communicate our values.

This seems trivial.

But we are *individuals*. And we have *personal responsibility*.

Working as an educator, I've noticed this trend where each group of kids is the group that is going to change the world. These kids right here, they're gonna do it. They're going to fix everything fucked up in the world. They're going to put out that river that was perpetually on fire and fix the acid rain problem and refill the ozone holes in the sky.

And I get it, encourage the kids to have big dreams, it's important.

But the messaging is always, *fix our shit, fix our shit*. The messaging is never, *we will leave the world a better place than we found it*.

And in this way we socialize the losses, don't even think about the gains, and each new crop of kids has the individual and personal responsibility to become a genius and fix the unfixable problems.

And now the problem is global mass extinction from human caused climate change. Or the rising tide of fascism across the globe. Or the ongoing issues of racial, gender, sexual and income inequality in the US. The way that capitalist economies continue to run us through the meat grinder and the incentives that people with the most power have to perpetuate these systems.

That's a tall order for the kids of the future.

And the thing is, I can't save the world. Frankly, I don't think anybody can. But that doesn't mean I can't change it.

I have this grand idea about the Abolitionist Classroom. And the way I talk about this in previous drafts of this project makes it feel like some kind of... *Something*. Something it's not. Because I don't really think abolition should be constrained to a classroom, or that it can be taught in a classroom. I certainly didn't learn about abolition and feminism in a classroom. I learned it from Tumblr. People on Tumblr quoting authors like Audre Lorde and "Poetry is not a Luxury" – poetry is the way those who have been silenced find the words to speak, or the slogan "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" – we cannot give equity to those held within systems of hierarchical injustice without changing the system which demands that hierarchical injustice persist to sustain it. Lorde is always telling us we need to do what feels right, not just to the headspace, for the creature comfort, but for the soul. And sometimes to do what's right for the soul we need to think *What the fuck we are doing here?* In Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* she speaks about joy and what it means to be a person living in a society that expects you to act certain ways and feel certain ways and embody certain ways of being. Forget the fact that our healthcare system is designed to serve customers rather than treat patients, forget the lack of agency we have over how we spend our time, forget the lack of agency we have over our own bodies and lives. The real problem is that we don't work hard enough or smile often enough or have the correct posture.

Sonya Renee Taylor's *The Body is not an Apology* tells us that we need to adopt radical self-love – radical self-love isn't self-confidence or self-acceptance. Radical self-love is about how we think about bodies: our bodies, other bodies, bodies in relation to other bodies, things that we do to our bodies and things we do to other bodies. "When we

speak of the ills of the world—violence, poverty, injustice—we are not speaking conceptually; we are talking about things that happen to bodies” (Taylor 17). In many ways, Taylor’s work echoes the closing paragraph of “Forward to the First Edition, 1981” of *This Bridge Called My Back*, where authors Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa remind us that “... the contracts we creative combatants will make to mutually care and cure each other into wholesomeness. And blue-prints we will draw up of the new order we will make manifest. And the personal unction we will discover in the mirror, in the dreams, or on the path across *This Bridge*. The work: To make revolution irresistible” (xxxi). All of them agree: the key to revolution and change is located in our embodied experiences, in the stories we tell about these experiences, in the way these stories inspire us, challenge us, make us think in different ways.

We Create Meaning

I struggle with anxiety. In the past I’ve spent too much time on Discord to deal with this anxiety. Discord is this hell place that claims to be all about community and togetherness and video gaming but is really just a place where depressed people go to fuel each other’s depression because we are afraid that recovering from our depression means losing the only good thing about our depression which was the friends we made online to be depressed with.

I know that sounds harsh but just think for a moment how many places online actually make you feel good about your life, achievements and future prospects, and how

many places online make you feel depressed but at least you don't have to be depressed alone.

Because there is a difference.

And this difference is vitally important to this project because I'm not creating a project *about* digital community, I'm creating a project about the *potential* of digital community.

Scholarship on digital spaces often explores streaming services as objects of capitalism, as aspects of the attention economy – YouTuber Khadija Mbowe has a whole video about clout, *Clout: The new fragrance from late-stage Capitalism* | *Khadija Mbowe*; the process through which people create things online to be in charge of, and invent arguments to be right about, all for getting clicks and views – and eventually money (Mbowe 2022).

It's important work. But I also think focusing on the attention economies and the movement of capital through these spaces doesn't always go far enough. Many authors, scholars and people making videos to talk about the next big thing, tend to look away from the ways these platforms exist as cultural artifacts around which a set of values and practices develop, and instead focus on the worst examples of the excesses of those who have accrued the grandiose wealth from making content on them. In this light the Miranda Sings scandal or the alt-right co-optation of Pepe the Frog are actually signs of moral decay of society and not pieces and parts of a broader culture that cannot really be understood through moralistic lenses of “the kids are not alright” (which, I would argue, the kids are not alright, but not for the reasons we are led to believe).

In *Streaming Culture : Subscription Platforms and the Unending Consumption of Culture*, David Arditi looks at the development of technologies; placing different entertainment technologies in contrast, like record players, streaming music, cinema, streaming movies and TV shows, and even Twitch streams, and discusses how each of these are instances of seemingly revolutionary change which were quickly cashed in on and then abandoned for the next cash cow once they lost their shiny newness on the market. Records were things your grandparents listened to – buy these new CDs, CDs take up too much space – stream music with your phone instead.

This understanding of technology moves us away from the idea that sites like YouTube, Twitch, Discord, Twitter or whatever the next big thing is, are simply abstracted digitalist-capitalist modes of accumulation and towards the idea that they exist within social and cultural contexts broader than simply modes of consumption.

I have been a part of many different digital communities, and I'm sure you have too. Some have been more welcoming than others, but each developed around a shared passion and interest that drew each of its members into the space. We call these communities digital affinity spaces (Gee & Hayes 2011). These are the communities we join online where we can be a part of something and contribute to something and learn something. Not all affinity spaces are digital, and you probably have many affinity spaces in your own life that you hadn't considered until this moment – but think about a place you go for fun, but also a place that has taught you something new, but also a place that you might have taught someone else something, but also a place where everybody is all

learning everything together. Affinity spaces are all about learning and sharing knowledge.

I don't know shit about Pokémon but I know a guy who can list every goddamn Pokémon by game or TV show in order of release date from memory. We tend to think that's not valuable. That's not anything you can *use* to *do* something with your life. Like our only goal in learning should be attaining marketable skills and knowing shit about Pokémon is not a marketable skill.

But what if the reasons for the way we assign value to things are wrong?

And what if this wrong way of assigning value is shaping how we understand things that actually give meaning to our lives?

We create meaning. *We* create value.

Affinity spaces aren't about that guy who really likes Pokémon – they're about the community that forms around that guy, the process of being in community with that community, the knowledge that is shared in the space, the creations that come out of it, and, most importantly, the distillation of all of this: the memes. Affinity spaces challenge our conventional assumptions and dispositions surrounding what should be valued within our society.

Because the value of the affinity space isn't the compensation that the Pokémon guy receives from running a three minute ad break at the top of the hour, which you can avoid by subscribing either for five dollars or for free with your Twitch Prime sub – it's about what the community decides they value. And in affinity spaces we value each other

because we are all on a journey together and it is our contributions to the space that make the space a space of value. A space of culture.

The affinity space gives us a framework for understanding a different way of valuing our contributions and participation within a space. And from this comes a different set of values. And assumptions. And language. And also sometimes emotes.

Introducing You To Emotes

Despite the desire to dichotomize a “high culture” and a “low culture” the fact is that any time humans get together and do things it becomes a culture. The only reason you think the graffiti on Pompeii is deep and soulful compared to the graffiti on walls today is because some scholar is out there trying to make you think this is the most important graffiti ever because the federal funding they get from this graffiti being more important than that graffiti is how they will be able to afford cases of Top Ramen and one half of a bedroom in their three bedroom apartment they share with eight other people – don’t try to do that math.

In practice, the graffiti on the walls of Pompeii were not philosophical musings about the nature of life and death but means of communication, just like any other “Jo was here” carved into a table or toilet stall. Graffiti on a wall is generally not intended to be a masterpiece or heirloom to be passed down through the ages (this project is anti-Banksy), but people leaving a mark upon the world – which is also the highest aim of any gray name chatter in the Twitch chat. And a wall, or the Twitch chat, is a really good

place for that message to be seen by a lot of people. Because why do we post? Well, put simply, we post because we want people to see the post.

And when people see the post we are brought into community.

And we want to be in community.

And when we are in the community fun things happen. We become closer to the people we are in community with. We share things with them. Sometimes the things we share are things we all made up together to overcome the fact that everyone in the community is from all over the world so we don't all necessarily share the same values, assumptions and language. So we make up emotes and with those come new values, assumptions and language. Some of those emotes are frogs.






This is a literature review so you want the facts.


The fact is, we call it languaging.

Language is both a process, and in process – you might say it's emergent, but you don't really have to, unless you want to. This is the process of meaning making. And meaning occurs when we share common systems of understanding – those pesky values, assumptions and language (and sometimes emotes). Not all of these systems are made of words because not all communication takes place through texts or novels or letters or written or spoken word. So yeah, sometimes communication is those little frogs

FeelsGoodMan .

Figure 3 *FeelsGoodMan emote. A smiling animated frog. His name is Pepe. The way he is pictured here, small and aligned with the text, is how he would appear in a Twitch chat after typing FeelsGoodMan into chat with a BetterTTV browser extension.*





I was obsessed with Shruge  for a month – for a description of each emote you can look at the [Glossary of Emotes](#). I was learning more about emotes in the Discord. It's a trial-and-error thing. You use an emote and you see how people respond and if they like the way you used it and react with something like KEKW  or OMEGALUL  you know you done a funny. If they give you a HUH  or a KEKWAIT  you might've done fucked up.



At first it's trial and error but eventually you think in emote before you think in words. Sometimes I say things are Poggers  in public. And if you know what that means then you know, if you don't you have plenty of time to learn.




But that's how language works: *The Joy of Semiotics*. The culture that exists around languaging is made by and born of language use, but language isn't just words, it is also the images, feelings and associations that come with language; language is merely a symbolic representation of communication. And from this a bunch of little pictures or phrases can be turned into a secret-unsecret code that we use to speak to one another: I like your shoelaces –


Thanks, I stole them from the president.

So yeah, I drove everybody nuts by Shruge-ing in response to just about everything I could think of.

After that I became obsessed with BebeLa , relative of PepeLa , an emote which is PepeLaugh  but blurry. PepeLaugh is a deep green frog with a shit eating grin; PepeLa  is that same frog but electric green and blurred out so you can only make out the general shape of the frog and not the expression. I've only experienced

PepeLaugh  when people who don't like me are mocking me for saying something they think is a *bad take* (your primary goal on the internet should always be having good takes, and people's takes are always the same no matter how much time has passed, like people don't ever change their minds about anything). PepeLa means something like "they don't know." PepeLa  came from the HasanAbi community and in the context of the Twitch chat means "he doesn't know." But the meaning changes depending on the situation, because languaging is something we do.

BebeLa  then comes out of PepeLaugh  and is what we call a Peepo  which is a little Pepe and he has the same look on his face that my cat gets when I'm petting his head and bump his nose with my palm. Sort of squinting and maybe uncomfortable, with his mouth hanging open slightly.

I was obsessed with posting BebeLa  with pictures of my cat for a while. Those were good times.

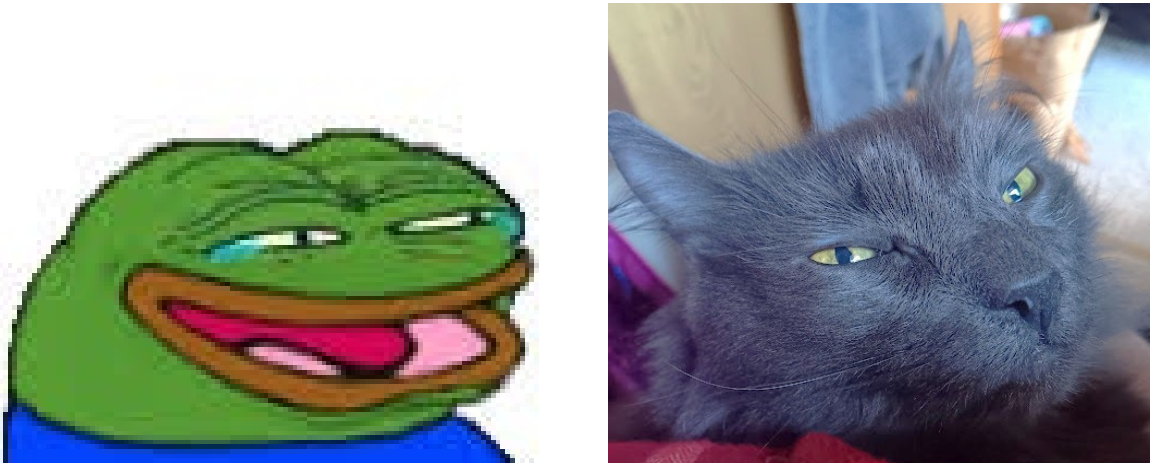


Figure 4 *A side-by-side comparison of Smokey, the cat who helps, and BebeLa, the frog emote that looks like Smokey. Smokey is pictured on the right, he is a blue-gray long-haired cat with light green eyes. He is squinting and his ears are positioned slightly back, indicating confusion, perhaps from inconsistent petting, which I must formally apologize for. BebeLa is a green frog with a blue shirt, the BebeLa is positioned on the left and is squinting with watery eyes and a toothless smile indicating discomfort from every bad take that has ever been written on the internet. I only post good takes so I have nothing to apologize for.*

People in Process

I used to write these blog posts about this made-up dude who was in the hospital dying from cancer who would have rather fallen into a volcano. His name was Timmy and he was a rhetorical device which developed into a character – I have this habit of turning everything into a narrative, even when it's meant to be non-fiction. But I was trying to articulate that our experiences are relative – *we are what we know*. You can't know my pain, I can't know yours. We can try to negotiate our meaning, and reach understanding, but we will never really know how another person feels or why they feel that way, so we gotta be empathetic. We gotta be kind. We gotta trust people when they tell us something hurts them.

It's not revolutionary.

In *An Interview : Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich*, Lorde speaks about white feminists and the way that white feminists don't understand the struggles of Black women and how Black women have different needs than white women do. The goal of white feminism was always to attain the level of capitalist aspiration that men had; the goal of Black feminism was always to dismantle that system that forces people to participate in a system of capital. Master's Tools, Master's House, you know.

You see, we understand these things. We know these things. On a deeply personal level. We write about them thinking we are the first person who ever thought of them, and then we read another person who wrote these things and fuck it speaks to our fucking soul.

We are the flesh. We are the theory.

The section “Entering the Lives of Others” from *This Bridge Called My Back* speaks about the idea of theory in the flesh: “A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives – our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings – all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (Anzaldúa and Moraga 19).

A politic born out of necessity.

I have this anxiety that sits right below my diaphragm and suffocates me whenever I think of what I’ll be doing this time next year. And if all the therapy and all the things I have read and studied have taught me anything, it’s that the solution to this anxiety comes from being able to see a future for myself. A future that is at least halfway decent. And if I need to be able to see myself into the future then I need to hold onto hope that the future will be a better place. And if I need to hold onto the hope that the future will be a better place then I need to find the courage to make it a better place. And that means I need to convince you to help me because I can’t do it alone.

Discord couldn’t fix me. Posting cat pictures was fun, but it also was not the cure. But what would a cure to existential dread for the future of humanity look like anyways? And we can’t throw the value of digital communities completely out the window just because we don’t always engage with them in healthy ways. In *Mapping Selfies and Memes as Touch*, Fiona Andreallo describes social media interactions as a type of touch – starting with the way we touch our screens to interact with media – but expanding this metaphor into the broader varieties of human interaction which can occur online. Just like

with offline interactions, there are good interactions and bad interactions; interactions that help or encourage or make you happy, and interactions that make you feel bad or violate your consent. *Good touch and bad touch.*

We are in process. We are doing shit even when we aren't doing shit. We are always having new experiences and learning new things. Even when we aren't trying to. We are always doing something and saying something and being something. We are always *something*. We are never *nothing*.

We are impacting people, and other people are impacting people, like some weird ass multilevel marketing scheme, and if we all impact fifteen people and those people all impact fifteen people then in like five turns the whole goddamn world has been impacted. I'm lowkey obsessed with thinking about the world in MLM terms because seven billion people is huge but in like fifteen cycles of fifteen people recruiting fifteen people each, you run out of people.

I want to plant seeds. I want to grow trees.

I want to articulate that there is a difference between a culture of commodity where our lives and experiences are bought and sold in little pieces to the highest bidder at the behest of some corporation that harvests our data like apples. And a culture of community that only exists for a brief moment in time but eclipses everything we knew before and the way we see everything after. I describe this as Utopian Futurity in my videos and the utopia I envision isn't a place but a way of engaging with one another that enacts all our desires for the future in the present.

A global utopia was one of the many promises of early social media creators, so much so that the language of liberation has become nearly synonymous with big tech. Programmers are revolutionaries who are moving fast to break traditional social dynamics by being thought leaders in the area of “drive me to the other side of town.” A taxi-cab or bus could never do that!

Unfortunately many of these promises made were kept only in the most exploitative ways that force the burdens usually taken over by traditional corporate structures onto individuals. But many of these platforms that focus on the creativity of individuals and building community have had interesting moments of counterculture potential, before that was scraped away and smoothed over by the incentive for capital. In *Streaming Culture : Subscription Platforms and the Unending Consumption of Culture*, David Ardititi states:

“No one would argue that streaming video games is a revolutionary act, but the fact that [Twitch] sold for so much in such a short time demonstrates Twitch is situated within the dominant culture (otherwise it wouldn’t be worth so much). Streaming culture changes so fast oppositional cultural forms get appropriated before they can reach their full potential.” (Arditi 138)

Oppositional cultural forms. This is something that fascinates me. All forms of counterculture are so quickly and efficiently coopted by capitalism. It seems that each new art form or design trend that arises out of people going about their daily lives who make nice things that they can have for themselves quickly becomes a mass-market product. Punk has died about nine times in the past two decades because it keeps being

revived by brands that want to sell you ripped jeans. Banksy gentrified graffiti and now walls are being ripped down to be sold for millions of dollars. The work of Frida Kahlo, a Communist, is sold in prints by Amazon dot com, a company that keeps shutting down factories when their employees try to unionize.

So what do genuinely oppositional cultural forms look like in a world that always wants to find a way to mass market oppositional cultural forms?

I think it's time to introduce you to the HasanAbi Community.

The Literacy of Vibes

At a time when I was returning to school to study the “Right Wing Pipeline” on YouTube, HasanAbi was telling the Twitch chat that it was time for leftist creators to rise up and flood the YouTube. To radically change the face of the internet so that you couldn't even click on something without leftist content being introduced into your algorithm.

Leftist community online just ten years ago basically didn't exist. Sure, you had BreadTube creators, but many of them shied away from showing explicitly political content or leanings. And the only leftist news channels were The Young Turks or Majority Report which had a few radical staffers and contributors but were more progressive liberals than legit socialists.

Michael Brooks died in 2020, not from covid, and his death is still mourned by many of us today who saw him as one of the leading leftist voices of the time.

And then HasanAbi said America deserved 9/11.

Now, America deserved 9/11 is not actually a controversial statement. Academics like Noam Chomsky have argued that 9/11 was a response to American foreign policy in the Middle East.

But Hasan is a loud angry Turkish man, sure he looks white to the average person who doesn't know his background or his name. But for people who create reactionary conservative propaganda, he is the perfect symbol for "great replacement" rhetoric.

Reactionary conservative propagandists like Alex Jones, a figure whom we have all but forgotten about except when we hear about how the lawsuits are going. (Not well for him, so I've heard.)

HIS NAME IS HASAN

This is perhaps the most famous meme of the HasanAbi community.

I've read about memes being like genes in Richard Dawkins' *The Selfish Gene* and I was not impressed. Dawkins speaks about memes like the guy Plato made up who lived in a cave; like a person who can describe things but has never experienced them. The memetics of Dawkins framework become the shadows that dance on Plato's wall, robbed of all context and substance, in this case, because of a peculiarly hard science need to understand why we do the things we do in concrete terms rather than accepting that we usually do the things we do because we enjoy doing them – shock box studies on boredom be damned!

In my experience as a person of memetic community, memes are far more like seeds than genes and as HasanAbi says: A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they will never sit in.

The casual botanist will know that far more effort goes into the cultivation of a plant than just the air and the wind and the sun and the rain. Different plants require different levels of light, different watering times, different climates. Bonsai trees are cultivated to mimic the natural forms of the trees which they are miniatures of – these tiny trees are specifically shaped, pruned, wired and potted to achieve something as close to a representation of the full-sized version of the tree. These trees can potentially grow into that full sized version of the tree if they are replanted outside of their pots or if the roots are not trimmed. But humans guide and shape bonsai to be as perfectly symbolic of a full-sized tree, but one that can fit inside your house, as possible.

In this same way, memes are only possible because of the way they come out of their communities of practice – their affinity spaces. And we understand what memes are by the process through which memes are created and shared, not virality but a cyclical system of creation where each member of the community can act upon the meme. If community is a being then memes are the product of this being. Memes are passed down from one cycle to the next and can change and flex through each iteration until they are indistinguishable from anything seen before – even though they still can retain the core of their meaning.

Because of the flexible nature of digital community, a meme can start in one place of the internet and then be transferred to others by the participants of the initial community. This meme can then be shaped and molded by thousands of different people and through this process the meaning contained within the meme will be different to each community that participated in it. A meme, like a bonsai, will always exist within the

context of human manipulation and creation and can be endlessly shaped and refigured to provide shade to all sorts of different ideologies and communities – think Pepe the Frog, a meme that for many symbolizes alt-right communities online, but for Twitch communities, Pepe the Frog is a symbol of conviviality and joy in many explicitly leftist and anti-fascist communities.

Today we understand genre not as shelves that organize books in a library, but as recurrent rhetorical situations tied to semiotic and social contexts (Devitt 576). And in this project I mention that a project about genres in digital spaces would be far larger than a project like this can discuss. This is because of the emergent nature of culture in digital spaces which is, in large part, due to memetics. Anything can and will become a meme, and while conventional understanding of memetics tells us that virality is short-lived, a meme's fifteen minutes of fame, I will show you that there is far deeper complexity and meaning contained within memes than we have heretofore believed – if a picture contains a thousand words, a meme contains a million. When we constrain our understanding of memes to memetics and virality, especially a type of memetics that does not interrogate both the semiotic and social contexts of a particular meme, like when we constrain genre to a shelf, we lose a significant chunk of the meaning that would otherwise be shared.

All of this to say, while cat pics can be memes, memes cannot be endlessly pumped out like cat pics can simply because memes require audience, a rhetorical reason for their creation and we, the audience members, are vibes-based scientists.

Vibes aren't mysterious feelings we have about things; vibes come out of the way we participate in community online. Not simply on a language level – the level where we

all share the same words – but a deeper level, like the languaging process through which I came to understand emotes; vibes are a form of literacy.

Doing Community

For many of us, the first time we encountered community outside of our home was in school. We bring our home literacies to our school but we engage in new literacies at school that can either allow us to assimilate easily and encourage the efforts we make or devalue those home literacies and leave us feeling rejected and alone. And considering that school is a place where young people spend so much time, and a place where their success or failure within can influence the rest of their lives, it is very important to understand what the goals, intentions and outcomes of schooling are intended to be. And to understand the set of values that these schools are attempting to pass on.

You see, literacies are not simply reading and writing and arithmetic, literacies are sets of values, assumptions, and language (typically there are no emotes in school). Understanding this, its important to look at the contradictions between what we are purportedly being taught – how to read and write and be a citizen of the world -- and what our institutions are actually designed to teach.

As an educator I have experienced the environment that has been built around teaching children. Starting from the sanitization of queer people from spaces where children are that is ongoing within American politics today, something which certainly harms our queer youth; the expectation of silence and complacency that must come from children being taught today; the institutional apparatus that sees children as empty slate

products that are easily influenced by *identity politics* and *critical race theory* who can't possibly have their own knowledge and experience being queer or trans or people of color or any combination of these identities and others that I haven't mentioned. The education offered by many public schools offers little more than training on how to obey the great ticking menace of the clock, all the better to acclimate them into capitalist ritualistic compartmentalization of time. Starting with our formative years we are trained into a system of alienation and competition where small mistakes are met with huge consequences and, quite often, public humiliation. And then people wonder why the teenagers are so mean to each other.

School could be a place where we establish our foremost ties to our community.

James Paul Gee approaches this topic in *Situated Language and Learning : A Critique of Traditional Schooling*, "...the tension that we readers, former students all, feel about academic and school-based forms of language and thinking, that some people find alienating and others find liberating." (Gee 2) In *Assessment, Equity and Opportunity to Learn* Pamela A. Moss et al address how the implementation of state mandated testing, which underlies the concept of opportunity to learn and is designed to gauge whether students are learning, does not take into consideration that equitable conditions are what truly give students opportunity to learn. They conclude that standardized testing often tells us where the educational system is breaking down, where students' needs are not being met by schools and teachers offerings, and which students are being left behind by policies like "No Child Left Behind." It may come as no surprise to you that those

students most harshly and negatively impacted by these policies are students with marginalized identities that impact them before they even step into the classroom.

Segregation in schools is still a major issue in America today, part of the inheritance of historical redlining which divided cities into poor Black neighborhoods and wealthy white neighborhoods. And of course, when your school funding is tied to the property taxes of your poor neighborhood, even though there is more than enough resources to go around in the wealthy, predominantly white, neighborhood across town, some children are going to inherently be left behind by this system.

The young people of today are supposed to be the *saviors* of tomorrow.

But they're actually going to be the customer service representatives, the service workers, the email senders, the baristas, the warehouse workers, the busy worker bees who drone on at bullshit corporate jobs that probably shouldn't exist, the prisoners, the unemployed, the unemployable, the unhoused, the abandoned, the forgotten. This isn't understood as the issues of a capitalist economy which sees prisoners as free labor and the unemployed, unemployable and unhoused as externalities. This is understood as a problem of personal responsibility because the Walmart break room has directions to accessing public benefits on the wall, and if that fails, just work more hours or raise the salary expectation higher on the Indeed dot com search.

And so we as educators are left with a quandary: what do we prepare our students for?

Are you a Harsh Realist or do you believe in Participation Trophies?

Or is this more culture war bullshit?

The culture war bullshit about participation trophies is another way that the true issues within our schools are obscured.

Rather than discussing the ways our schools are funded, and why school funding is going towards policing our students which limits the funds leftover for actually teaching students, and why the class sizes are growing while the teacher pools are shrinking, or the fact that Covid and many other illnesses are alive and well and rampaging through our students and teachers and support staff – many of whom will be unwell for months at a time. Rather than discussing what kind of activities we can provide for students that are not strictly study focused and might be, god forbid, *fun* for our students who are tired of studying all day.

Rather than address any of that, let's write about how kids these days and their iPads.

In the Preface of *Assessment, Equity and Opportunity to Learn* Fritz Mosher and Lauren Jones Young state, "...this book is advocating not just an *equal* opportunity to learn as a criterion for judging our schools, but rather an '*equalizing* opportunity to learn,'" (x Moss et al). I take up this idea of equalizing and compare it with the abolitionist feminist concept of equity. Rather than equality, or giving all students the same education, we need to tailor the resources we offer to the needs of our students. We need to bring our students into community.

When I was a child I went to an afterschool program, and later, as an adult, I worked there for many years. While the program was understaffed and underfunded, the staff who worked there, who mentored me, who tried and failed to get me to care about

my homework, felt like a family to me. I was one of the kids who, when my mom came to pick me up, didn't want to go home. I loved it there. I loved having adults in my life who cared deeply for me and wanted to see the best in me and for my future. And later when I got a job there I tried to do that for the kids I worked with.

There's something that happens to us when we are in community with other people. Something that happens when we have the option to be part of something. When we are around people who make us feel valued as we are. When we feel like our voice and our participation matters.

It's like going home.

I say "in community," and this might seem like a grammatical error. But I truly do believe that community is something we do, not just something we are a part of. Community, like anything else, is a process. And there are times when I am in a community with people but I am not in community with them.

I think many people feel this way.

Utopia is a People, Not a Place

During the pandemic in 2020, our interaction within digital affinity spaces grew at an unprecedented rate. Classes were forced online as lockdowns were instituted. There will perhaps be thousands of articles written on the implications of the pandemic on education, there are already people complaining that the kids can't read and the tweens are destroying Sephora, but here I want to focus on two theories of learning: learning through play, and learning as a social practice. These two concepts are related, but not

interchangeable. Learning as a social practice involves observation of different behavior and most of the learning happens through trial-and-error participation (Wenger 210-211). Learning through play often occurs in affinity spaces, for example, video gaming affinity spaces where players participate in collaborative efforts to learn and strategize their gaming, and some may go on to become experts in their chosen game and contribute to the creation of new games – many programmers I know of who work professionally on video games started out in modding communities (Gee and Hayes 82-83). Learning through play is a way of approaching learning which reduces the stakes for failure, something which weighs heavily on many learners' minds, leading them to either struggle desperately to overachieve, or lose hope and dread school because they know it is not designed for them to find success.

The research on multimodality and translingualism shows us that learning occurs any time students are negotiating meaning with whatever methods are available to them, including those that are outside of the text, and even sometimes outside of language itself. The process of exploration and negotiation of meaning is a vital way that students accumulate experiential knowledge and learn how it can be applied to other situations. This is explored by Poe in “On Writing Instruction and a Short Game of Chess: Connecting Multiple Ways of Knowing and the Writing Process” and Gonzales in “Multimodality, Translingualism, and Rhetorical Genre Studies.” While Poe discusses Multiple Intelligence Theory and the different ways that we might come to know a thing, Gonzales shows how students are engaging with many literacies in a multiplicity of ways

that display what they are learning in a way that does not mirror the typical expectations we have through which students display knowledge.

Twitch streams and YouTube videos pull people into affinity spaces and through this community is formed. The characteristics of affinity spaces encourage exploration and play that makes it easier to engage the literacies we already have to explore new ones. We bring our tacit knowledge and lived experiences – the economy kind of sucks and America seems to be doing bad stuff to the world – and they become informed by practical knowledge and complex theories. In the HasanAbi community we focus on political theory as Hasan makes specific examples to tie chatter's material realities into the theory we are discussing.

Hasan describes alienation to chat as the feeling you get when your boss controls everything about your life from your hours to your appearance to your manner of speech and compares that to the American ideals of freedom and individuality. Does your life live up to the ideal? Well, it could one day if I work hard enough. Is that belief reflected in the reality on the ground, or is it survivorship bias from the few people who made it because they received a small loan of a million dollars from their parents or their father had shares in an emerald mine?

These affinity spaces do not stop at what we can learn from the streamer, as we become part of the community we learn things the community knows, but we also share what we know with the community. We share parts of streams through the HasanAbi Industrial Clips Complex (the HICC); we share memes; we poopsock or jebait the top of the hour ad segue; we ask if HasanAbi will ever cover the breaking news in our specific

town that nobody has ever heard of; we pretend that Belgium is a real place and not some fake made up place; we collectively wince over Uncle Cenk's new antics and collectively celebrate Uncle Sam Seder's debate smash; we mourn the death of Henry Kissinger, whose passing was *super tragic* and *sad* and we all feel *totally bad* about it. We are not simply passive consumers of knowledge but active participants and contributors to a body of knowledge. In the words of James Paul Gee in *What Video Games Have to Tell Us About Learning and Literacy* : "...learning here is social, distributed, and part and parcel of a network composed of people, tools, technologies and companies all interconnected together." (Gee 177) We are not *just* consumers. We are students and teachers and knowledge makers and knowledge bringers. We are the dreamers of dreams and some of us are even music makers.

This community gives us the literacies we need to understand things that would be difficult to contextualize within a broader leftist theory on our own. Through Deborah Brandt's "The Sponsors of Literacy," we understand that reading sponsorship comes from many places and for many different reasons. Corporations like YouTube or Twitch have corporate advertisers who are willing to sponsor my literacies on many of the topics covered by Video Essayists. That said, many creators are funded by audience donations more than ad revenue and corporate sponsorships, which shows us that there is potential within these spaces for us to become the sponsors of our own literacies.

Different streamers have different motivations for the way they present content and there are different readings each streamer might want their viewers to take from the same source; but the truly interesting and engaging streamers are not simply trying to

give us simple answers to complex questions, but rather trying to *challenge our dispositions* – also known as our values, assumptions and language (and sometimes emotes) -- as Elizabeth Wardle writes on in “Creative Repurposing for Expansive Learning: Considering ‘Problem-Exploring’ and ‘Answer-Getting’ Dispositions in Individuals and Fields.”

(It is interesting to me that the largest leftist streamer on Twitch is primarily funded by audience subscriptions, and his main way of interrogating media involves chiding us for reactionary and simplistic takes to complex problems. It should be interesting to you, too.)

Texts like “On Writing Instruction and a Short Game of Chess: Connecting Multiple Ways of Knowing and the Writing Process” and “Multimodality, Translingualism, and Rhetorical Genre Studies” show that students already come into classrooms with vast bodies of untapped knowledge from their homelife and personal interests. Why don’t we engage with that knowledge? What are the inherent biases and dispositions of our educational institutions? Who are they biased towards and against?

This is a system that is invested in doing the wrong thing. And it will not suddenly decide to change its mind and do something different tomorrow because that’s not typically how change works within the neoliberal institution. Neoliberal institutions have their own motivations for the types of literacies that are sponsored, and the way they enact that sponsorship. They have their own values, assumptions and language (neoliberals don’t get to have emotes).

Which is why I feel the research I've done can't be turned into some new project that tells us the educational system is doing it wrong and needs to be fixed. I can't make something that will be ignored like all the rest.

I need to make something new.

I need to show you that there are moments where the right thing happened and we can create and participate in those moments often without knowing it. We can be a part of something bigger than ourselves. We can assume the responsibilities of people who care about the world in a way that doesn't mean it is our personal responsibility to save it. We can be valued just as we are even while we know that we are not done growing yet and still have much to learn. We can be silly without having our value and contributions put to question (this is especially important to me because I am a very silly person).

I don't want to tell you what is wrong and how to fix it.

I want to give you futurity – a sense of hope and imagination for what is to come. Because there will only be trees or grass or flowers if we plant the seeds, and we can only plant the seeds if we know what those seeds are, and we can only care for those little seedlings until they grow to be forests and grasslands and meadows together.

And in the HasanAbi community memes I see the potential for a radical futurity full of literacies that we can only dream of at the moment.

Conclusion

Using an Abolitionist Feminist framework based on the writings of women of color feminists, this project will take a semiotic approach to understanding memes as

works which constitute a collaborative community culture. As a person who watches streams and shares memes, I have a unique insider perspective which I can use to better represent this community than someone studying it from the outside could. This project also seeks to showcase ways to understand digital media as created by people who are engaged in the study of the content matter which they discuss. I do this to exhibit the emergent cultural forms which David Arditi speaks of in *Streaming Culture: Subscription Platforms and the Unending Consumption of Culture*. To have a better understanding of how this works, I have done research into the theories and concepts that form our current understanding of how we learn and have identified the ways in which we see the potential for memetic community within the Twitch stream. While I do believe that these forms have ongoing potential, I choose to focus especially on the years of the Covid pandemic when the most focus was on digital media like live streaming because it became one of our few outlets for social interaction – a moment of protest, uncertainty, and turmoil out of which many content creators arose. I see the HasanAbi Community as a focal point through which I discovered many of the other creators which I call upon within this piece – often not through HasanAbi’s direct interaction, but rather through a grapevine-like structure of memes, collaborative efforts and associated channels – structures which meme makers have termed “content icebergs.” My aim is not to elevate the HasanAbi Community over others, but rather tease out the interconnectivity of community and show that when we work together, we can all rise – which is what I claim is the true revolutionary potential of memes.

With this aim in mind, I've created five Threshold Concepts, based on Linda Adler-Kasner and Elizabeth Wardle's *Naming What We Know : Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*. These Concepts are inspired by what I have seen and experienced over my time in the HasanAbi Community and I see them as foundations for a community that is centered in a commitment to enacting radical change within the world. This list is not a list to judge other communities against, but rather is aspirational and empathetic – this list did not fall out of a coconut tree, and neither did we. The principles are: 1) Bodies at Problems, 2) Making My Peace/Speaking My Piece, 3) People Gotta Eat, 4) Sustainability aka The Sustainability of Memes, 5) Master's Tools, Master's House. Through them I attempt to establish that we live in a society and we should improve society somewhat.

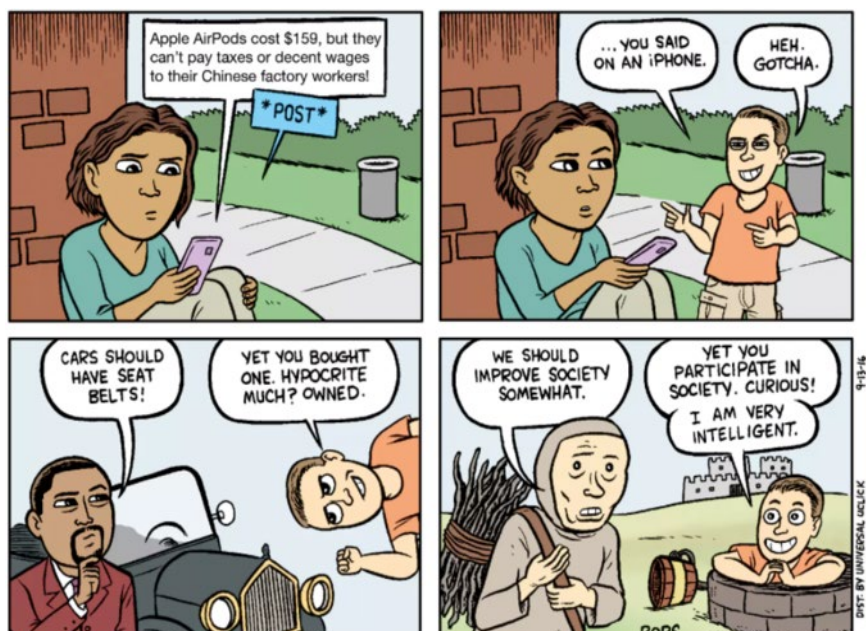


Figure 5 "We Should Improve Society Somewhat" meme. A brainless weirdo chastizes people for suggesting that we should improve society somewhat by using his powers of debate perversion to travel through time to three different eras where society could have been improved somewhat.

ARTIST REFLECTIONS

Note on the Reflections

These reflections were written as each video was finished. In them I discuss the choices I made in each video and how that relates to the larger themes of the project. In these reflections I speak extensively on the visual choices I make in each video because the visual dynamics of these videos are just as important to the content as the sources I cite or the script I read. Initially I wanted each video to represent a style of Video Essay that I was attempting to emulate, but with Video #3 I began to discover and refine my own style.

I briefly discuss Affinity Spaces in Video #4, citing James Paul Gee and Elisabeth Hayes's *Language and Learning in the Digital Age*, in which they describe a list of elements which appear in many Digital Affinity Spaces. This list and the concept of Affinity Spaces is important to my work because this project, especially my videos, are participating in Digital Leftist Community Affinity Spaces. On one level, these videos are posted to my personal YouTube account, and much of the work was Livestreamed on my Twitch account, and on another, deeper level, I am attempting to distill into memetic form all the things I have learned from my participation in these spaces.

Looking back at the list I cite in Video #4: "First, people are associated with them because of their shared endeavor or interest, not because of their 'credentials' (e.g. degrees). They can achieve expert status regardless of their official credentials. Such

spaces cannot be defined around or restricted to ‘professionals’ in any credentialing or institutional sense” (Gee and Hays 70). My endeavor and interest in participating in these spaces is promoting Leftist values, assumptions, language, and sometimes emotes. As a long term HasanAbi community member and a long-term leftist, I’ve developed a level of expertise both on HasanAbi memes, Leftist ideology, and the relationality between the two. Therefore, each video is an example of me demonstrating my knowledge on these subjects.

The next item on the list:

“Second, some people (unusually, but not always, around 20 percent) must have a deep passion for the common endeavor, not just a passing interest (Gee & Hayes 2012; Shirky 2008). This passion may be reflected in different ways, such as an extended commitment of time to the interest and space, high levels of production, and so forth. Others in the space will have many different degrees of interest and may come and go in various ways. but they must affiliate with others in terms of the common interest and show that they respect and value the passion that fuels the most active people in the space.” (Gee and Hayes 40)

This may seem obvious, but I have a deep passion for the common endeavor of promoting the HasanAbi Community, and the Leftist values, assumptions, language and sometimes emotes espoused therein – my passion is shown in the degree to which I have gone to present my interpretations of the value of this space to you. While this value cannot be measured by typical standards and I cannot *prove* my credentials in HasanAbi Science™ ®©, I can attempt to show you ways in which you might understand the

value of such a space, and introduce you into the space through the next element of affinity spaces.

“Third, in passionate affinity spaces, everyone can, if they choose, produce (produce knowledge, create things, do things) and not just consume what others have produced. Of course, there can be and usually are standards – high ones – for what counts as good production and people who produce must accept (or seek to negotiate) and meet those standards.” (Gee and Hayes 40)

Through this project I am becoming a producer of knowledge within the HasanAbi affinity space by creating videos that include HasanAbi memes – in my conclusion I describe a cyclical model through which audience, Video Essayists, and Streamers each participate in creation within the HasanAbi memetic space. These Video Essayists place me within that cycle, but as Gee and Hayes state, it is up to the standards of the community to decide whether my videos gain any traction or relevance within the space. So like and subscribe to my channel and spam my videos in the chat, you nerds.

“Fourth, in passionate affinity spaces, people sometimes lead and sometimes follow. Some people lead in some situations and others lead in others. Leadership is flexible, and takes different forms, such as managing the site, introducing new ideas and practices, and helping others. People sometimes mentor (‘teach’) others and sometimes get mentored. Mentoring is flexible.” (Gee and Hayes 40)

I find this principle to be especially interesting because we might be inclined to believe that since it is the HasanAbi community, Hasan is the one who leads it. When I go into a professor’s classroom that is their classroom, right? Part of why I find Twitch

Livestreaming so engaging is for this very reason; the main feature of Livestreaming for many is the interplay between streamer and chat. This peels back the layers that we would normally assume to exist between learners and teachers in a space and shows us that learning is a much more dynamic process than we may originally conceive. During a HasanAbi Livestream, the chat races past with emotes and text so quickly that it is nearly impossible to read any one message, it can be overwhelming to even try. But as HasanAbi pauses to read out a message we see that chatters are engaging with the stream in a variety of ways – by linking and recommending videos they guide the content of the stream, by contributing their own analysis for discussion they contribute to the discourse of the community and by sharing emotes and memes they participate in the culture of Twitch streaming, specifically with HasanAbi’s special subscriber emotes which are unique to the HasanAbi community and based on community memes.

This leads into the next principle: “Fifth, knowledge in the affinity space is ‘distributed’ in the sense that different people know different things and can share that knowledge when necessary. Often the space has good tools and technologies that store and facilitate knowledge. No one person has to or is expected to know everything all by themselves” (Gee and Hayes 40). Since we now understand the participatory nature of the LIVESTREAM ecosystem, we can see distributed knowledge within this system as a vast type of community infrastructure where each contribution made to the space becomes part of that distribution. From the HasanAbi Industrial Clips Complex (HICC) to the Video Essays Hasan watches to the individual chatters that share emotes -- each member contributes according to their own abilities, but there are many contributors so if one

person does not participate there are many others who will. I cannot view every hour of every stream, but I participate in the ones I can, and I watch many clips taken from streams on YouTube.

“Six, the affinity space is not closed, though there may be requirements for entry, and takes newcomers (‘newbies’). It refreshes itself. Unlike school, people do not ‘progress’ all at the same pace, age or ‘grade.’ Movement in the space is quite varied; people may focus on one narrow aspect or explore the entire breadth of the interest area, spend as much time as they want on a particular set of skills or practices, and otherwise pursue quite different learning trajectories.” (Gee and Hayes 40)

The best way to understand this is through my own experiences, first as a viewer on YouTube of clip channels, then as a participant in the streams, and now as a creator who makes videos and memes for the community. Through my time here I have taken many different learning trajectories and there are still more ways that I might engage in this community in the future.

“Seventh, affinity spaces are about sharing a common endeavor where people learn things, produce things or knowledge, and can, if they wish, become experts... Even these experts believe there is always something new to learn, more to discover, and higher standards to achieve” (Gee & Hayes 70). I believe this is one of the most important elements of affinity spaces – knowing there is always something more to achieve. As an educator myself I believe learning is a lifelong process, and as a member of the HasanAbi community, I experience this process every day. I will never know

everything, but I will always value the knowledge that people contribute to this space and how it helps shape my perspectives.

While these principles don't explain why I make the choices I do for my videos, they do help describe my motivation and rationale: the reasons why I participate in the space in the way I do. Ultimately, these videos are creative projects and I approach them with my own mind's eye of what I believe they should be. Part of this is a creative process which is mystified by the fact that my readers and viewers weren't hovering over my shoulder observing every movement of the process. I believe though, that these reflections can illuminate the strange, messy, and rather scuffed way that this project came to be.

Reflection for Video #1

Abstract: Bodies at the Problem is my first video and in this video I told you we learn through doing. Doing is scary. But we aren't doing alone. There are people just like us out there who are afraid of doing – whatever it is they need to do to learn. When we all work together to learn, to help each other learn, one person not knowing is far less scary. Our willingness to learn through doing and try even when we know we may fail is a Threshold of online leftist community building because community is the collected process of doing – the things we do together, the practices we build together, the ways we learn and speak and have fun together, the ways we change the world together, the knowledge that we share together. All of these are things we must have the courage and conviction to do. Many of us already implicitly understand what is wrong, even if we don't know how to fix it yet, and when we throw our bodies at the complex problems we face and struggle to find complex solutions we can activate the tacit knowledge we already have and contribute it to building something greater than we are capable of building alone.

Bodies at the Problem

This is the first video in my Threshold Concepts series for my YouTube channel. The plan for these Threshold Concepts is to give my stream a set of guiding principles that my Twitch streams and YouTube channel are attempting to emulate – these principles are also based in my experiences with different leftist communities online.

While I appreciate educational content creators, the types of educational content creation which my project deals with are not learning branded; when I say branded here I mean like branding like Oreos or Twix. An important part of social media is considering your personal branding and how it aligns with your values and goals, something which is discussed in “The Labour of Visual Authenticity on Social Media: Exploring Producers’ and Audiences’ Perceptions on Instagram,” :

“Entrepreneurial micro-bloggers therefore turn to authenticity labour to overcome some of the tension between having to brand themselves and their promotional work to sustain their business, and the need to portray themselves as genuine in order to connect with audiences (Long and Wilhoit, 2018). This reiterates the increasing use of authenticity as an important value in the attention economy and its ‘oxymoronic coupling’ with marketing practices (Pooley, 2010: 72).”

(Marres et al 83)

Authenticity labor is an important aspect of all social media which is designed around our desire to engage in real relationships with real people. But as microcelebrities gain popularity, it becomes more difficult to maintain that. At this stage however, I have a small channel that doesn’t have many viewers, which means the type of authenticity labor I need to engage in is the conversion of academic topics, terms, and discourses, into the discourses of my viewers. Thinking from this perspective, many YouTube viewers find purely educational content too structured and formal. This means if I want to cultivate an authentic experience of my channel for my viewers I need to consider how my audience

will perceive my content and take special care that my performance doesn't become too academic and alienating.

We see this done very well by Twitch streamer HasanAbi. While a HasanAbi stream is a place you will inevitably learn socialist ideology, you don't go to a HasanAbi stream to learn socialist ideology; you go to be a part of the community. Therefore, community focused, affinity-space-based learning spaces are what I am seeking to cultivate with these concepts. The Threshold Concepts themselves are simple and memorable slogans, these slogans are memetic interpretations of complex ideas I have about what it takes to be in community with people – the kinds of things we must be willing to do and understand about being in community.

“Bodies at Problems” is the first of these. I've heard HasanAbi say that you have to throw bodies at the problem on stream; it can have many different contexts, but usually it is related to the US Military Industrial Complex and the way that the United States “throws bodies at problems.” Despite this negative first meaning, there is another memetic meaning that comes out of this from HasanAbi's streams which is the potential of the US Military if it was demilitarized and used as a jobs program to achieve a variety of projects that could vastly improve the lives of Americans. Imagine a United States Military that was focused on improving roads, building high speed trains, solving housing issues and other problems we face in our society. This meme highlights the disparity between what *problems* a neoliberal capitalist society throws bodies at, and the kind of problems a society that was focused on the good of its people could throw bodies at. And in doing so it hints that a government who sees people as “bodies” that problems are

thrown at are part of a system that abuses them and uses them as tools, when, in a better society, a government would give people the agency to enact actual improvements on the quality of their lives by taking part in public works projects.

I chose this meme because this double meaning that hides subversive complexity which prompts us to think about what agency and consent is. I didn't have enough time to discuss that in this video because I needed it to be short for a specific project, but if I had time to do it over again there are so many layers of complexity that can be peeled back from this concept that challenge some of the most essential and often unquestioned frameworks of our lives – which is why it is a Threshold Concept.

Other than that, from a surface perspective, I liked the sense of embodiment that the phrase implies; problems can be solved by bodies doing things. The problems we face can be solved through actions we take and I see this as a first step towards building a collective consciousness of collective action in response to systemic issues. While this video does not immediately jump into collective action and systemic issues, when seen in the context of a Threshold concept, a small baby step that is working towards building a larger body of knowledge, I think this is the ideal step to start with. I'm not generally a fan of empowerment centered politics but I do believe the confidence that comes from knowing one can participate in acts that change the world around them, even in small ways, is very important, and changes to our internal worlds can be reflected in our experience of our external worlds.

For the video itself I chose footage of a difficult fight I was going through in the game *Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*. I chose this footage because it was at a very critical point

early in the game where I was feeling disappointed in my lack of skill and how overpowered I felt by the game. I see this fight as a moment of growth in my literacy of the game, as James Paul Gee states in *What Video Games Have to Teach is About Learning and Literacy*, “This game – and this turned out to be true of video games more generally – requires the player to learn and think in ways in which I am not adept. Suddenly all my baby-boomer ways of learning and thinking... did not work” (Gee 5). I am not a baby-boomer, I’m a millennial, but I am not particularly experienced in RPG games that have complex fighting systems and intricate character design systems. My primary experience is with *Bioshock*, a game that allows a variety of combat styles including long range and close range, and relatively free access to all sorts of ammunition and powerups that can blast any enemy you might encounter into ashy or gooey oblivion, without requiring too much skill – that said, people with less experience in that game than me might find it to be a complex literacy which they must learn through trial and error. But in this situation, the particular set of gaming skills I had were not transferable to this game, something which I realized when I came to this fight. This is an experience which also highlights that subtle dichotomy of *how* we throw our bodies at a problem; not just in the character creation, but the difference between a game that is an all-out free-for-all to a game where every move matters and resources must be used wisely, even the resource of movement.

The editing for this video condenses each separate fight starting with the beginning of the fight, a few short clips that show the gameplay that occurred within it, and the death screen. I also have little on screen text moments to help create a narrative

coherence. Originally I meant to do a play by play commentary for this, and I even mention doing that during my voice over recording stream, but in the end I went with something which felt more natural to me, which was a very casual discussion around a few major points I distilled from the text and my ideas about the experience. I didn't quote the text but rather tried to speak about it within the contexts of my own experiences, which I think contributes to the feeling of the content which I am trying to create. This Video Essay is more informal and, like its Concept meme, is a situation where I am, without really knowing what I am doing, throwing my body at the problem of *How do I do a video essay?* Although I do use some specific terminology which I have to define, I tried to keep that to a minimum because, as you will find out in my later videos, defining terms, on screen quotes of sources and complex theoretical frameworks add length to the video. Lots of length.

The voice-over process was the most difficult part of this project. I was working with Audacity so I didn't have to do it in one take, which was perfect because I could create small chunks and edit as I go. I have previous experience creating written work and notes with voice to text applications so this isn't completely new to me, but it was a strange experience both composing a narrative for an audience and performing a voice over on a stream. Creating on stream is a strange experience because I always want my writing to come out in the first take; I spend a lot of time when writing a sentence rethinking my phrasing and flow so that the sentence sounds like poetry (it's weird to think about writing while writing I had a lot of trouble with this sentence). While many people edit after they've written, I've always edited as I write. So recording a voice over

where I am stumbling and struggling to find words, where usually my experience is they find themselves arranged almost perfectly on the page, was weird and uncomfortable.

Despite this struggle, I see my perseverance as proof of concept: all I need to do is keep working on this project, and the more work I do towards achieving my goal of creating these videos, the more I will learn in the process.

Reflection for Video #2

Abstract: Making My Peace (Speaking My Piece) is my second video. In it I discuss how we all deserve to speak our piece – to say the things we need to say, even if we don't have the words yet. We must see things as they are rather than as we are told to by understanding how power works within our society. In this Threshold we see that participation in leftist online community requires we adopt an Abolitionist mindset that understands we are all people and we all have needs. We need to build a world that can accommodate us all, one that recognizes the ways we have all been disabled by the structure of our society, and furthermore, our communities must seek ways to reimagine ability and access in ways that do not exclude people. This is an equitable type of inclusion that thinks about the spaces and methods through which we live, work and play and how those spaces can be better suited for the needs of human beings rather than the needs of capital. Making our peace is not the responsibility of the individual; our peace comes from advocating for and designing a system that is both ecologically and interpersonally sustainable – and we must go into this work understanding that the quality of our environment is deeply tied to the wellbeing of our community.

Making My Peace (Speaking My Piece)

Making My Peace (Speaking My Piece) is one of my largest and most ambitious projects to date. I see this video as the positionality statement of my project. In it, I attempted to grapple with many different theoretical frameworks and complex topics.

Like the last video, it is not quite as polished as I would like it to be, but this is a combination of skill and technological limitations that I am gradually learning to overcome as I grow more familiar with video editing and find ways to project my creative intentions onto the screen.

This project came about as a transitional piece of work where I would take what I know – Sims 4 Speed Builds – and turn them into something I wanted to try, a YouTube Video Essay. These are both radically different genres, which is why I think there was so much confusion about what this project was going to look like. In the end though, despite the Sims 4 background, I think I managed to create a piece of academic work that I am very proud of.

This video is centered around a series of texts and concepts I chose to use as a framework for understanding my own life and experience with disability; I also consider this video to be part positionality statement. My work was primarily informed by *Care Work*, *This Bridge Called My Back*, and *The Cancer Journals* because of the ways that the main concept of Making My Peace, self-care, was operating in these texts. In *The Cancer Journals* by Audre Lorde, self-care is never mentioned explicitly, but the ideology of self-care is – understanding the reality that we live in, refusing to see the world through rose-colored lenses, refusing to acquiesce to the demands of those with privilege who expect us to pretend to be joyful so they don't have to be uncomfortable. All of these elements are resistant of what Barbara Foley would call the ideology of the bourgeoisie, and also represent Lenin's concept of the ideology of the socialists (Foley 60).

In “Centering Reflexivity, Positionality and Autoethnographic Practices in Creative Research,” John Horton states:

“Thinking reflexively – with ‘heightened openness and sensitivity to ... nuances and contingencies’ of research (Butz and Besio, 2009: 1664) – can prompt some complex, important questions about ourselves. In particular, many geographers have argued that reflexivity must include careful, self-critical consideration of how our ‘personal identities, emotions and values ... shape the nature of research we do’ (Cloke et al., 2004: 365).” (Horton 5)

Because of this, I began to think about *Making My Peace* as it relates to my positionality, and I began to think about my positionality more deeply, especially since I am disabled, both invisibly and visibly, and my journey to recognizing myself as a disabled person has been a long and difficult one – I was not always aware of myself and my needs, and I was ashamed for a long time about disability. And that’s something I needed to interrogate in myself; why was I so ashamed? This, coupled with the concept of crip time from “Critical Disability Studies and the Question of Palestine” by Jasbir K. Puar prompted me to see my experience with disability from a new light. I didn’t just become disabled one day – well I did, with the roller skating accident, but it didn’t become my identity in one day. It was a gradual process where I experienced crip time day by day, all the while thinking that everyone was experiencing crip time. But then, during the pandemic, when everyone was experiencing crip time and I was feeling great – that’s when I realized something was up. Ideology works in our minds to obscure the reality of our situation, and that’s what my video is trying to express. We know ourselves, but we know

ourselves through lenses that other people will allow us to know ourselves, rather than the ways that we know. And knowing what we know – reclaiming that process of knowing – that’s hard.

I didn’t want to write a video that was just about self-care. Self-care is an important part of making our peace, but it isn’t going to happen with our traditional conceptualizations of self-care. So in my research I worked backwards from self-care of today and discovered the self-care of Black feminists and woman of color feminists like Audre Lorde. Self-care arose out of the need for community; in a time where white feminists were refusing to speak about Black women’s issues (I think we still have that problem in a lot of places today). Authors like Lorde, Anzaldúa, Moraga, and Bambara were telling people that we can’t do this alone – that the Master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house – that white feminism that elevates white women into the workforce to be girl bosses isn’t going to change the way that our society values reproductive labor and the people who do it. The breakthrough into understanding that the concept underlying all of this was reproductive labor was massive for me in understanding both the concept of Making My Peace better, but also my own positionality. The work I have always done was reproductive labor, and I was never rewarded or respected for the work I did because reproductive labor is expected from femme coded people. This recontextualized my experiences with activist spaces online in a radical way and helped me understand what has always been missing and where the misunderstanding between myself and others occurs.

I feel like many projects get to the point where they state that everything is crap or everything is broken and they stop. For my work, and for the perspectives that I approach the world with – the perspectives of reproductive labor, where my goal is to build something and that something is the glue that holds us together – in order for that perspective to come across in my work, I can't just stop at "we need to accept hard truths." Because while that is important, there is more. Revolution needs to be irresistible as Bambara says in *This Bridge Called My Back* – so all of this is deeply tied to the Utopian Performative written about by Ramón H Rivera-Servera. And in my style of reflexive positionality I had to consider what about a bright pink Sims 4 build was making my peace – which is where the idea of defocusing comes from. It is *not* about the build; it is not about how I made the build or why I made the build or which elements went where, which I would discuss in a typical speed build narrative. But rather, it's about the build in a broader sense; the culture of the build, the community of the build, a larger process where we consider the movements we make through the world on grander scales. I move through digital worlds and one of the first digital worlds I felt comfortable in, one of the first digital worlds where I got to feel like a queer person, was the Sims 4 community online. When a bisexual Sims 4 streamer, TheEnglishSimmer, told us in a live stream that bisexual people are not fake gays (I was bisexual at the time), I felt like my identity was real for the first time. And so the Sims 4 build isn't just about the rainbow colors, it is about the rainbow community.

Through it all I attempted to make this project accessible in a theory in the flesh kind of way – talking about how I experienced an understanding of equity and abolition

in my own life through stories about my own experiences; like the hurt people hurt people story. I want my work to be accessible, not just in a who can watch it sense, but in a who can relate to it sense. And so I'm not just talking and thinking about my position as a disabled person, I'm thinking about how abled bodied people might also have trouble walking up a mountain for class. This invites my audience in to understand my experiences, empathize with me maybe, but mostly to begin to empathize with themselves and the little things that they push down or ignore because they are trying to perform able-bodiedness. An informative experience I had this semester was dealing with anxiety and talking about my anxiety meds pretty openly, and hearing all the other stories about people I would never have known dealt with anxiety tell me their stories. Those moments were so important to me – moments where we spoke our piece and related to one another, shared advice and tips about how to deal with things. I want to have more experiences like that with people because I believe it brings us closer together – which is why I think this video became so intimate, so confessional. I am breaking my silence on this issue in hopes that it will start a chain reaction of similar silence breaking.

While *Exile and Pride* by Eli Clare did not make it into a citation in the script, the first section titled “the mountain” – about Clare trying to climb a mountain, picking one too difficult, having to climb back down, getting frustrated with his limitations; this is an experience I understand, and this informed the way I thought about my mountain, the university (Clare 1). I thought about all the times when I was walking up all the stairs and hills and ramps and how I would start to get dizzy and have to hold the handrail, about all the pain I was feeling. I still have this “push through the pain” mindset where, when there

is something that needs to get done, I keep struggling through it, even if it ends up hurting me more than helping me. And so while the idea of the mountain came from attending a school built on a mountain, I also see the comparisons between my mountain and Clare's mountain, and how our experiences with mountains are informed by our struggle with disability, how we don't want to accept when we just can't do something, how we push ourselves too hard. And how that harms us. So even if it isn't cited within the work, it is still part of my work and my process – my next steps towards making my peace.

Reflection for Video #3

Abstract: People Gotta Eat is my third video. In this video I tell you that we are hurt people and we are gonna hurt people. We have been taught not to value boundaries and consent and our society holds different people to different standards – often unfairly. This is symptomatic of the conditioning of capitalistic society and we must engage with others in a constructive way that does not perpetuate cycles of harm. This Threshold concept introduces the importance of the consideration of material conditions and how they shape online community. The video focuses on creators who are behaving according to the conditions of digital enclosures, which I discuss at length. It is important for we who seek to build digital leftist community to understand that all the whacky things that happen online are complex and multifaceted and can often be related back to the way that capital moves through spaces, not just digital spaces but all spaces: There is always a ukulele, but the ukulele is not always a ukulele. This concept is intrinsically tied to Making my Peace; where Making my Peace seeks to understand how we can see a solution to the problems we face, People Gotta Eat seeks to give us a framework to understand why we face these problems.

People Gotta Eat

Note: There are notes that appear in italics; this reflection was written before this video was finished and I wanted to show that element of the process by keeping this early version but adding to it with the italicized notes you will see.

This video is a departure from both Sims 4 speed builds or gameplay videos into the Vlogging genre. While *Making My Peace* was a video essay that looked like a speed build, this is meant to be a video essay that looks like a vlog. The footage and recording of rain and waves that I intend to have playing in the background are from a trip I took to Trinidad where I made the recordings with a camcorder. There is also a segment of footage I recorded with my phone for the end of the video. This vlog feeling is meant to represent but also dissect the idea of authenticity which is a foundational part of this research. And so in these vlog videos I am musing about authenticity and identity and trying to tease out the contradictions. These moments were not scripted – but as I say in the video at one point, there isn't really any such thing as an unscripted moment because I am thinking the things I say before I say them. And in that way, even things I say in the moment are edited and processed through different filters. *Note: Most of this footage did not make it into the final video, but it does appear between sections. This was because the audio quality made it unbearable to listen to for lengthy periods of time.*

This footage is meant to be paired with my analysis of a few different YouTubers and a Twitter account. Part of the reason the video itself is taking so long is because of the way I am attempting to bring these sources into my script, which is why my citations on the script look so strange. Italicized moments in the script are all meant to refer to specific pieces of media which appear on screen. Some of these are memes I created based on meme templates or emotes – which I'm not sure how I would go about citing, but others are screenshots of articles or videos that I edited into my video. Since this is a script, I wasn't sure how specific I needed to be about what content I used, because that

would be clear when it translated into the video and I cited my sources at the end of the video and cited digital media elements with the links and in the order they appeared in the description box, it's also hard to make an in text citation for footage that had to be cut into bits and slowed down or sped up and no longer has the original time-stamps or even time frame that it had before. It is also possible that my works cited will be added to as I continue to edit the document, so the script and Works Cited may not be completely finished, which is why I am uploading "People Gotta Eat Preview" to my YouTube as a sample of the work I am doing on this project, and as a moment where the Works Cited is as accurate as it can possibly be, knowing that changes may be made later, and I've already brought in a few sources that haven't made it into the video but will, like the citation for the Blizzard lawsuit payout. *Note: I decided on creating a stream viewer simulation where a peepoComfy (a Pepe emote often used to represent chatters viewing a stream) represents the viewer and is placed in the corner "watching" a HasanAbi clip. This is the first video in which I include emotes and this stylistic choice will transfer into each of the subsequent videos. I chose to do this for this particular video because, as the first video that includes HasanAbi clips, I wanted to position myself as a viewer who was experiencing everything as any other HasanAbi viewer would. I consider this part of my performance of visual authenticity.*

Within YouTube content creation there is no code of ethics – we as creators must simply do what we think is most ethical, and so I feel that citing each of these elements in multiple ways both tells people what elements were used, giving credit to the people who made them, and shows people a way to find the original media if they are interested in

finding it. Which are two important facets of citation ethics – I think the links in the description box are especially important because on a medium like YouTube, viewers will want more immediate ways to look at sources. The ethics of YouTube citation are an important consideration in my video, especially as I get into my analysis of *Break Bread* and describe the important cultural/genre shift which I witnessed happening after *Break Bread*. And I see my consideration, discussion and participation as a creator within this discussion of ethical citations and collaborative storytelling as an important cultural hallmark that I am trying to participate in and perform as I attempt to become a video essayist myself.

While the script explores many of the major topics I planned on exploring, I feel that it is a little depersonalized. Trying to make such massive videos, so close together, and trying to do piles and piles of research for each of these incredibly distinct videos was biting off a little more than I could chew. So while the work does stand on its own, it is very clearly a companion piece to *Making my Peace*, which is ok because all of my concepts are meant to be companion pieces to one another. But it also just doesn't dig as deeply into my own experience as a content creator as I would have liked to, and in that way, it is not quite as grounded as *Making My Peace* is. *Note: I made this assumption at a very early stage in development of this video, at this point, after creating many videos in succession, I believe that each video is incredibly distinctive, and that shows especially in the transition from Video #1 to Video #2 and Video #2 to Video #3.*

One of the biggest edits to this project is going to be another section that will tie everything I spoke of back into my own experiences as a content creator – I would also

like to use that as a moment to talk about more of my research because I feel that specific citations of my research were both lacking, but also leaned towards chunky, jargony citations that were not completely accessible. While the project is technically complete without it, it doesn't feel complete. And that feeling complete is important to me as I go forward in my work on this video. *Note: I did not do this. I will not do this. This video is already long enough.*

While I regret that I wasn't able to complete it, I also think that it is an important experience where I have realized how labor intensive video essays are and now it makes sense why many creators aren't writing ten video essays a month (and the ones who do are typically plagiarizing Wikipedia) – it is hard work. And it takes a lot of time, effort and care to properly research your topics and to put together all that in your head, then to translate it into a script and then to further translate that script into a video. Editing a video is one thing, but reading a script, editing that footage, recording extra footage, bringing in videos outside of my own, editing those, and all the other processes involved in this make video essays complex and time consuming. While this video tried to focus more broadly on a cultural rhetoric of YouTube in general, I believe that I could make a video on the cultural rhetoric of video essays alone – and the video would still be an hour long – just based on my experiences with these two projects. *Note: Maybe in a few years after I recover from butt death.*

A moment of editing that I was engaged with in great detail was the “Colleen Ballinger’s Apology Video Is INSANE! | Hasanabi Reacts Ft. Boy Boy & I Did a Thing.” A theme of this video is defocusing from what is the apparent center of frame

and looking at the periphery – what is actually going on. And so while I think we want to focus on Ballinger and the ukulele, I made a deliberate choice to refocus on HasanAbi’s reaction. I was watching the stream live and chatting in the Discord when that moment happened and it was hard to pay attention to Ballinger because HasanAbi’s reaction was so hilarious; I even clipped his reaction into react images that I still use today. And so defocusing from her performance to the reaction of the performance sends a subtle message that reaffirms that this is not about the ukulele: it’s about the ecosystem that we are all participating in. The comedic effect that comes from slowing down this footage and bringing it back to regular speed right when I did was a bonus that I think makes my video more engaging and interesting. These types of images or jokes break down a large narrative video into smaller chunks that I think will be more manageable to viewers – which is why I tried to incorporate a few community memes and images into this piece like “AZAN gaming when?” with the HasMods emote. *Note: Ukuleles only became a recurrent theme of this video after I made the edit of that performance. These types of edits are reflected across each of the scripts as I only write suggestions of visuals into the scripts and often do something that is not what I have indicated in the script once I am working on the video. If you see these types of discrepancies in the script, that is why.*

Reflection for Video #4

Abstract: Sustainability is the fourth video. We need community because we are human. We need to share things because we are human. And sharing makes us stronger – sharing responsibility, sharing codes, sharing memes, sharing knowledge – all of this sharing builds us up. And eventually we will come to a place where we do not have to rely on our work alone or our capacity to persist in the space and do the work alone, because when we share the burden it becomes lighter for all of us. Typically videos on sustainability will talk about environmental sustainability, however this Threshold engages with sustainability of community – how do we get the message out, how do we bring people into community, how do we keep people from burning out and leaving the community, how do we hold off despair that the world will ever change. The type of community we are seeking to build -- one that is built on the Threshold concepts of taking action, speaking to the crises we face, and understanding the movement of capital through spaces -- will necessitate a type of community that will be environmentally sustainable, and so sustainability in this video primarily focuses on how we come together. The easy part of this is that we are often engaging in community through shared semiotic domains because of the translingual nature of language, the difficult part is teasing out how we do that, what it looks like, and how everyone can find their own ways to participate. And participation is perhaps the most important aspect of this because community only happens when we throw our bodies at the problem of building it.

Sustainability

This video is the video in which I finally tackle memes in a project about memes and leftist community, however, I believe that this video lays out the research I have been doing on memes in a way that shows I have been engaging with memes at every step in the project. Memes appear all over my work and are an integral part of the project, however many of the memes I engage with are not memes from communities that I share with all the people who will view this project. This is why I chose to watch HasanAbi memes for this segment – the sections where I am reacting to HasanAbi memes are from a stream I did with a playlist of memes, all of which were made by members of the HasanAbi community.

A person who is not familiar with these memes may have trouble understanding them, which is why an understanding of semiotics and translingualism is so important – research on memes that does not take into account that memes are (definition of translingualism from video) is not really studying memes but rather their own particular outsider perspective of a community and culture they don't really understand.

In the video I liken this to the problematic history of anthropology and in the script my plan was to react to the memes like a nature documentarian might – to emphasize that contrast between insider/outsider perspectives. I changed my mind about this and did something else. I'm just not much of an actor. I don't think I can even do a documentarian accent.

Despite this, documentaries still manage to become an allusion within this project as I keep referring to my viewer as a documentary watcher. This comes from

hbomborguy's story about listening to certain video essays while doing stuff (I say assembling Legos in the video, but it might have been assembling an Ikea shelf, it's not important enough to this project to confirm that I'm willing to watch the video again) and realizing that the video essay he was listening to was plagiarized nearly word for word and frame for frame from a documentary.

I start making these jokes because it is at this point that I am beginning to think about my videos participating within the discourse of the Video Essay and one way of doing that, much like with the HasanAbi Community, is to share memes. If hbomborguy assembling a thing while listening to Video Essays and realizing that the Video Essays were plagiarized isn't a meme yet, it should be.

Instead of reacting to something in character, as planned, I decided to try to explain what was happening in the memes, something I decided spontaneously while on stream with the playlist open in front of me. Despite things not going to plan, I think something interesting came out of this; the contexts which I thought were important for understanding the memes weren't necessarily helpful for my viewers who weren't familiar with the memes. Which means that despite the change of affect, these react clips perform the same way that I had originally rhetorically intended. One of the memes I often use to describe myself is "terminally online" this doesn't mean I'm *more* online than anyone else, but it does mean that, as a member of a particular affinity space, I am intensely involved in very specific online discourses – HasanAbi memes are one of those discourses. And so there are very specific contexts that seem pretty obvious to me but are not to others. This is one of the arguments of the video, the specification of meaning and

language: even as a meme grows to acquire more instances the meaning becomes increasingly more specific and refined.

One of the memes I reacted to was the “Can you do this Steven” meme which started as a true crime react video. HasanAbi was reacting to the true crime video on stream and during this livestream chat was sending in memes. The memes went through many different iterations with each chatter modifying text or image and eventually the meme was turned into a video. However, at some point HasanAbi read a message in chat saying “CAN YOU DO THIS STEVEN,” and at that point the meme became the “Can you do this Steven” meme.

It's been about a week since I published this video and the Works Cited and two of the clips I cited in my work have already been removed from the internet, highlighting the importance of my brief discussion of lost media. Just last week when I was working on the Works Cited those media were still easy to find, and now that they are gone, my video may be the only place on the internet where they can be found.

One of those memes is from the Leftovers podcast, a podcast HasanAbi appeared in in collaboration with H3H3 Productions, a YouTube channel that does live streamed podcasts. In this meme HasanAbi is describing the origins of the bussy meme and how it arose out of the queer community where “ussy” functioned as a suffix which conveyed the suggestion of penetrative sex. This meme is particularly interesting because it displays the transformative nature of language and memes – “ussy” as a suffix, but also the nuances of each of the things it might be applied to. Bussy is “butt” cussy is “car.”

But while bussy is used to describe gay penetrative sex, cussy is used to describe the cars ability to sexually procreate in the Disney Cars Cinematic Universe.

This meme is kind of gross, and it is certainly strange to see it within a project like this, especially right before an Audre Lorde quote. But I think the quote, taken from “Poetry is Not a Luxury,” explains why it is so important to have the type of contextual understanding of memetic community that I am trying to convey.

On their surface these memes are tongue in cheek or gross, but they convey complex systems of meaning and understanding, and furthermore, when we display knowledge of these memes we are positioning ourselves within very specific communities – the queer community and the HasanAbi community.

This gets us to the core of what this video is trying to convey – the aesthetic vs substance argument. We as scholars who choose to take up the study of memes must study memes with the understanding of context, not just knowing the context, but having a deep understanding of how memes are situated within community and culture, and if we lack this then we alienate the very people we wish to understand. It's very easy for a person with a fancy accent to sound well versed on a topic but it's a whole different thing to be a member of a community that is a topic of academic versing.

At the same time, we also see, in the reaction of my viewers, that sometimes those of us who understand the meaning will not be able to completely convey it. And so the work we do studying memes can only ever work to introduce people to a community and, at its best, it will encourage our readers to become curious and go engage with the memes themselves to cultivate understanding. While some might consider this a limitation to my

project, I believe that, like most moments of scuff, this is a valuable insight into the potential of the product – seeing the product as introductory, encouraging curiosity and engagement, challenging my peers to engage in this kind of open-ended study that doesn't lead to concrete resolutions but rather more complex understanding of things.

This is why I find this area of exploration so interesting; I want my work to inspire people to do their own work and cultivate their own interests. That's why I don't answer the “Why the ukulele?” question from Video #3 – my viewer needs to understand what being online is like, what living under capitalism is like, what growing up watching exploitative reality TV is like, what being your own production company is like, what seeing humans as objects that can accrue them wealth rather than as people with feelings is like, and all the associated pressures that can only come from living in that person's experiences. And while we can poke around the edges, these things don't have good, solid answers that can easily and simply be explained.

These issues are issues that will become increasingly more relevant in our society as we become more technologically entrenched, and they require complex understanding and complex discussions and complex solutions – reactionary ways of thinking can often prevent us from engaging in anything other than surface level analysis. My videos are Threshold Concepts – after *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*, and as such I view the pedagogical capacity not in what they tell my viewers, but how they situate my viewers within a discourse. As such I try to situate my viewers within a series of complex questions that they have to grapple with to get them used to

grappling with these questions – especially in such a low stakes environment as a YouTube video.

In this video I create a meme meta-narrative with the Twitch emotes. I do this to expose my viewers to the emotes which are an important part of Twitch culture and are also representations of Twitch memes. Each creator has their own set of emotes which reflect community memes and the ones I use, other than more general ones like YEP (a smiling Pepe that means “I agree”) are specifically HasanAbi emotes.

The emotes represent multiple converging narrative structures. They are my own meta commentary on my work, poking at memes within my own work – the first instances of Pepe are chiding me for not getting to the point quickly enough. They are also creating a narrative structure in a video that doesn't have much story holding it together; in longer videos I feel it is important to have visual cues which will give the viewer stronger associations with the video. Breaking the videos up into parts does part of this work, but I wanted to use the emotes to tell converging and supporting stories about what it is like to be a chatter and share some chat and streamer memes. For example, gray text in my video represents the “gray name” meme from the HasanAbi community. The meme is that gray names always have the worst takes – worst takes can mean a lot of things, not just fascist garbling, which means there is variation between the seriousness of what a gray name says, but in all cases you are meant to look at what this person is saying and see that they are not a very serious person but in fact quite silly and kind of annoying. Not every gray name is like this; this is just the meme.

My narrator voice in this video is black text with a white outline – this changes in the next video to orange because my name is orange in the Twitch chat. Pepe the emote uses green text. Through the video I bring in other emotes with more colors and eventually the emotes and their dialog are simulating HasanAbi reacting to the video with the Twitch chat. In later segments each emote becomes a different chatter – which might be confusing if you aren't paying attention to the color of the text because the color of the text identifies who the chatter is, not the emote they use. This may be confusing to a person not familiar with a Twitch chat, but I think the chat that is in many of the react videos might prompt some recognition from my viewers, and possibly make them curious about watching a stream.

This video attempts to discuss semiotics, discourse communities and translanguaging in very abbreviated and simple ways – which is why I chose pictures of cats as the base for my discussion of semiotics; we all understand the internet was made for sharing pictures of cats and we all know that a picture of a cat is not really a cat even though it is a cat. I am prompting my viewers to think about things that they probably have on their phones or sitting in their laps and how these things that seem so concrete are actually incredibly abstract – something which is a Threshold Concept on its own, and so it was very important for me to provide very specific examples and then build upon very basic understanding that we all share. We all share pictures of cats on the internet. Of course. Through my discussion of semiotics I was able to ground my

framework of memetics oppositionally to Dawkins, and thus, from much of the other research I read on memetics that did not spark joy.

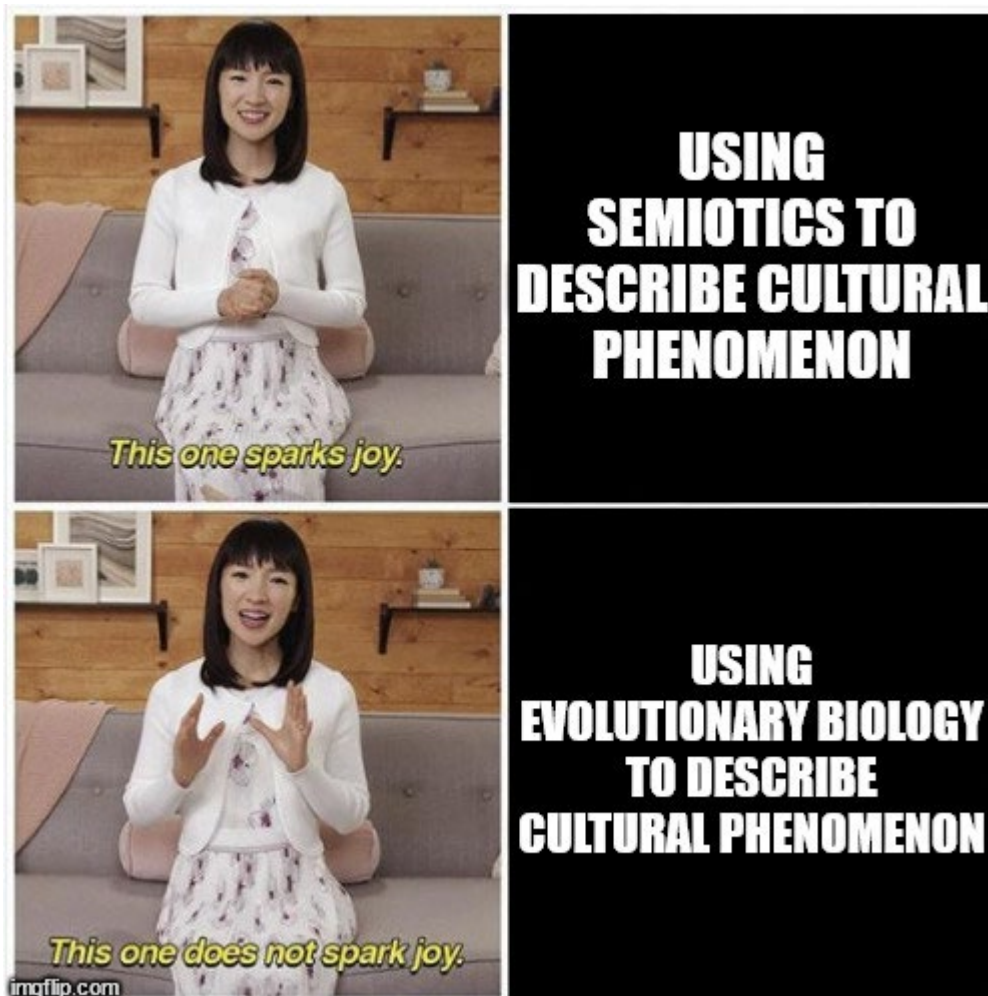


Figure 6 Marie Condo is here to tell you "using semiotics to describe cultural phenomenon" does spark joy while "using evolutionary biology to describe cultural phenomenon" does not spark joy.

Reflection for Video #5

Abstract: This is the fifth video in my series. Inspired by Audre Lorde's "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," this admonition tells us that we cannot affect change by assimilating into the Master's House – the house of power. Our true power does not come from the Master's House, but rather from within ourselves and the community we build around us. The real value in the skills we cultivate and the passions we have comes from what we build with them, and how we can share them with other people. These creative impulses are part of an always-emergent Utopian Futurity where we enact the future that we wish to see within the world – and through this we must inspire people, not just to watch, but to take action themselves, for when we all work together we will be an unstoppable force for change. Master's Tools, Master's House provides a framework into which each of the previous Threshold concepts fits – each of these concepts is designed either to enable us to see the master's tools and house, or to fight against it, it is the abolitionist core of the project that shows us what we are acting for and what we are acting against. It is not enough to be mere observers of the contradictions of our society, we must fight against these contradictions in any way we can. The primary proposal of this project is that we must do this together through community that is based on each of the concepts I have previously discussed, and my secondary proposal is that it is already happening all around us in ways we may not expect.

Master's Tools, Master's House

I really wanted to talk about *Bioshock 2*. This is the time of year I usually play it, and it is my favorite in the series because of how it deals with the issue of revolutionary aesthetics vs revolutionary action. Aesthetic vs action is an important theme in my videos because how something looks or feels does not always convey accurate information. I call upon my viewers to be vibes-based scientists – both in the sense of gut reactions to things, but also in the sense of searching out the truth behind our gut reaction and finding the meaning that is being conveyed. That will always be difficult because meaning making is complex, but I believe there will always be a way to build understanding through empathy.

Bioshock 2 makes you deal with these issues and how you deal with them impacts the ending. Choosing forgiveness means that your chosen family, Elenor will gain the agency to make her own choice to forgive. She is not being forced to be the saint of Rapture which means she finally exists in a world where her choices matter, which is far more important than the decision she makes. Elenor can save Sophia Lamb at the end because you worked to give her the agency to make that choice rather than take it away.

This parallels with what I want my work to do. I want to give people agency and make them realize that they had options they never knew they had. Not just with watching content, but how they respond to that content, how they understand themselves within the context of that content, and from there, how they might understand themselves within the world.

A major meta narrative of this video was my editor-self going on strike. This was both a bit – not exactly a *joke* but a scenario with different elements built in for a twitch chat and streamer that might be reacting (the call and response UNION where a chat or streamer or viewer watching on their own might respond STRIKE), but also the payoff where my character, who is trying to strike alone but is beginning to despair because they don't have support, eventually gains support in the form of the entire twitch chat coming to help.

I made this bit because I was tired of editing and needed a break. But I also wanted to show it – showing the process within the process – would be far more meaningful to the substance of the video than anything else I had planned for the video. So for the last three sections my editing self is on a union mandated lunch break. The union will be organizing future strikes for ice cream sammies and you can donate to my Kofi if you want to support us in our fight against me.

I know it sounds silly. But part of this is the fact that people want such simple things, to be able to survive, to find some contentment in life, to not work ourselves to the bone – or to butt death in my case, and to have some ice in our drinks during a union mandated lunch break that we can't be compelled to work through. And even though the things people want are so simple, it's ridiculous and unacceptable that we are even asking. More importantly than this though, we are not asking alone. And we need to realize that. Both as we shout strike in solidarity at the screen, but also as my SadgeBusiness editor is almost ready to give up and go back to work and a whole group

of angry chatters show up to support. Support comes from our community and, just like *Bioshock*, we have to lift each other up together.

In my “Approximation of a Post-Covid Coffeehouse Poetry Reading” section I meant to do a livestream react to “The Masters Tools Will Never Dismantle The Masters House.” There was a labor dispute because react me was fatigued from unfair working conditions. This section turned into the quote/analysis style from the previous video. I find these types of sections useful when I have a lot of text I want to read to my viewers, but I have also established the framework for understanding it, so we don't need itemized lists, like with the semiotics discussion.

I tried to make the *Bioshock* discussion distinct from the main point of the video so, after reading “The Master's Tools...” I could return with *Bioshock* and flip the script, folding each of these sections into one another and revealing that there was a complementary framework underlying each of them – I think this video did that the best.

The final *Bioshock 2* scene always makes me cry. It's a very beautiful scene that is a very big payoff after such an intense game. Eleanor is on the escape pod looking at your character who is dying, she uses Adam to carry you around with her (this works because of magic slug juice reasons) in the same way I see myself carrying around a community meme. And she will use your guidance as she goes through her life above ground. She has finally escaped the Master's house. Not just because she is no longer in Rapture, but because her fundamental understanding of what a utopia is has changed and utopia is no longer a place you go to but what you do and who you are with. Finally, Eleanor and the little sisters drop the big daddy doll into the ocean, big daddies who were their protectors

who worked at the behest of their captors. These big daddies were the symbol of the little sister nightmare and now the little sisters get to finally leave that nightmare behind and get a chance to make their own choices and find their own family. This ending is such a happy hopeful ending and I really do believe that playing this game gave me hope in the way nothing ever had before I played it.

In my final section I finally talk about the Abolitionist Classroom. In my literature review I talk about how the Abolitionist Classroom is not a place, and it's only now that I'm realizing that that is a *Bioshock 2* reference – a meme I didn't even realize was a meme until it became one.

I end the video by talking about my job in childcare and my disillusionment with the job I was doing, but my conviction in the potential of the program, and I finally talk about all the Threshold Concepts in one place, recontextualizing them for educational settings. This bridges the gap between what I am trying to do with my work as a video essayist/community builder and a grad student.

I am trying to do many things with this project and at many points in the project I stepped back from the pages of scripts and the extensive notes and the piles and piles of reading and thought to myself that it would be much easier if it was just one video and that video was the project. But I am a silly person and I want to do everything at once and, more importantly, I feel like each element of this project is integral to each of the others.

I made this project for my community, not *my* community, but all the people I am or want to be *in community with*. And with special love to the HasanAbi community. And

I don't think I could do that in the way that it needed to be done unless I did it in the most whole (holistic, possibly) way that I could find to do it. I didn't just want to share memes. I wanted to *become a part of a memetic system*. I wanted to show you what I have learned from this community and do that by sharing the most important parts of it with you. From the silly memes about chat and cussy and “can you do this Steven” to the things that HasanAbi has been repeating for years because these are the things that are most important for us to know. The “What do I always say chat?” meme video placed into context with my Threshold Concepts illustrates this. I believe the one for Video #2 may be confusing to some viewers, but *Making My Peace* is in part an exploration of Audre Lordes Cancer Journals and the idea of seeing things for what they are. HasanAbi Doctrine (if America, or any imperial nation accuses you of having nukes drop everything and get nukes) is very important in this regard because it encourages us to reject the comfort of American imperialist propaganda and begin to understand how the military industrial complex operates in a global stage. Rather than feeling empty joy – or nationalistic pride, we should be aware of our position as citizens within the imperial core and what that means if we were to successfully organize and reject the military industrial complex and reject US funding and support of Israel and reject US participation in proxy wars or invasions of places like Iraq and the constant congressional war mongering against Iran and China (and sometimes Russia).

CONCLUSION

Genre and Community

In my introduction I told you that a thorough study of digital genres would be a far larger project than I have time to accomplish here; in this conclusion I'd like to briefly scratch the surface of the genres my videos engage with to show why I chose to make the videos in the styles I do.

These creators I have mentioned in this project represent a variety of styles and cover a variety of content but they are all generally understood to be Video Essayists, the foremost genre to which my videos are contributing. Video Essays as a genre on YouTube are generally made by people who have highly specified knowledge in their subject area (FD Signifier, an educator and father who works with young men), and occasionally by people who plagiarize documentaries and Wikipedia pages (hbombberguy, a watcher of documentaries), they also do extensive extra research to supplement the knowledge they already have (Intelexual Media, a phenomenal researcher of Black history and culture), and they arrange and perform that information into the Video Essay (Contrapoints, who has a fabulous sense of mise en scène). Many Video Essays will feature the creator performing as one or more character types within their video, or some form of animation, but many are the creator simply speaking to the viewer in a casual way. The extent to which a Video Essay is a work of art akin to a feature film is limited only by the creator's own skill, and your particular tastes in film, and it should be noted

that production values of Video Essays often rise as creators have more access to resources, but many Video Essayists started out with webcam or videogame gameplay footage, a script and basic video editing software. This means that there are high standards for popular Video Essayists, but rather low and relatively achievable standards for Video Essayists who are just starting out.

The second genre I have attempted to meld into my videos is the Livestream. The Livestream sub-genres I engage with in this project are React Content and Lets Plays. Lets Plays are gaming streams and gaming streams can include player commentary or they can be silent streams where the player does not comment at all. In the clips I've used I appear in the bottom right hand corner and I am playing the game as I react to it; play in the Lets Play genre includes "acting" as my player character with my commentary (shouting at characters who attack me in the game), performing meta-analysis of my playstyle, "I'm like a dinosaur," (Video #4) as I am playing and making commentary and analysis about the broader themes, content and style of the game "How great is your undersea city if you haven't even developed the technology to have moving squid," (Video #4). Lets Plays are not limited to these types of commentary and performance, but these are the most common conventions seen within the Lets Play genre and the ones I've noticed myself engaging with most often. Anyone with a phone or computer can Livestream, and anyone with a computer can Livestream a Lets Play, so long as that computer can handle the technology requirements.

Livestreams generally do not require a specific set of skills, although being well versed with public speaking and performing can be helpful. Generally though, a

Livestreamer will gravitate towards making the type of content that they have skill in – occasionally I will stream craft and cross stitch content, and quite often I stream pieces of this project, in fact, if you are interested in viewing the streams that contributed to this project you can go to my YouTube channel where I have uploaded many of the VODs (Video On Demand) – think of it like the bonus content on a DVD.

The primary difference to note here between a Livestream and a Video Essay is that the Livestream is not scripted while often the Video Essay is. I have familiarity with the games I am playing in these videos so I have more in-depth commentary and analysis than a person playing it for the first time might, but all of my reactions are occurring as they are occurring, rather than according to a plan – this also happens in my React Content sections.

React Content is a Livestream where a creator is reacting to content, generally a YouTube video, often a Video Essay. Creators like HasanAbi are so well known to many Video Essayists, some of whom know he watches their content and others who would like the exposure that would come from him watching their content. Many video essayists will build mentions of HasanAbi memes into their content. In Video #4 I react to one of these community memes that were built into a video essay by Casually Explained – this video draws on a couple community memes: 1) Hasan is hot and 2) Hasan pauses the video very often when reacting to video essays, also known as the Pausanabi meme. When considering the hallmarks of the Video Essay genre, we might consider “Referencing HasanAbi Memes,” to be a genre convention, however not all Video Essays do mention HasanAbi memes.

You may have noticed that Video Essays and Livestream React Content are not the distinct genres that they might initially appear to be, especially since there are internalized discursive structures between different creators and communities – the meme referencing and sharing. I would broadly consider this structure to be part of Leftist Internet Community and in this way the HasanAbi Community becomes an umbrella not just for the HasanAbi Community and the HasanAbi Industrial Clips Complex (HICC) – the collective of YouTubers who clip, edit and upload moments of HasanAbi streams, but also many associated Leftist creators who make memes under this umbrella. If we understand Leftist Internet Community as an Affinity Space, then we can see how this might qualify as Gee and Hayes’ Affinity Space requirement of knowledge distribution from *Language and Learning in the Digital Age* – knowledge is distributed throughout a network of people, rather than the responsibility of any one individual. Of course, it is the audience of the associated Leftist creators who make this possible because the audience make the memes and distribute them through the HICC and other meme distribution sites like r/okbuddyhasan. After this Video Essayists reference memes from the HICC, then HasanAbi reacts to the videos from the Video Essayists, then the HICC clips the react and distributes it to cultivate a broader audience, then more Video Essayists join the trend in order to gain audience members. Each element of these cycles is dependent on the other elements and it is through this system combined that each of the respective audiences of all the creators grow together. Although not all of the Video Essayists I have mentioned participate in this cycle, I have found each of them through my own participation as an audience member in this cycle.

Community and Emotes

In Video #3 I begin to use emotes in my videos – these emotes are the emotes you would typically see in the chat of a Livestream and are text that can turn into emotes in a YouTube or Twitch chat with a BetterTTV browser extension. Most seasoned chatters will know the emote by its text just as well as by its image so the image and text can be used interchangeably – when HasanAbi had a PO Box, chatters would write fan mail and many of the fans would type out the names of emotes in their letters rather than include a picture of the emote. The emotes I use in my videos are usually variations of Pepe memes, but there are many other emotes including typical internet memes like cat memes or current event memes, and other, older community memes that are sometimes difficult to discern the origin of if they have not been documented. The KEKL meme is one that has origins in several different communities, depending on who you ask, but has been more broadly adopted by a general Twitch audience; something which may be attributed to Twitch culture – imagine the cyclical structure I described for Leftist Online Community, but occurring between Twitch streamers and viewers.

This cyclical understanding of the transfer of memes and emotes from community to community, and the regenerative nature of these cycles, is part of why I believe memes must be understood through a semiotic and translingual approach. I do not believe a purely memetic understanding of this phenomenon can flesh out the interactive and often, audience guided, nature of these cycles. Dawkins initial conception of a meme as a *thing we share* is too detached from my own experience of a memetics as a community practice

of symbolic meaning making. While the streamers and creators perform the memes and use the memes, it truly is the audience who makes the memes and without an audience the memes do not reach their full “memetic” potential.

A common question I see asked amongst literature that studies memes is “Why do we share memes,” “What makes a meme so popular,” or “What makes a meme go viral.” When we understand memes through a semiotic perspective that focuses on transliteracies we begin to see that memeing is a way of negotiating and sharing meaning between members of a culture. The framework of transliteracies shows us that language is not set in stone but rather transcends meaning based on the ways we have to communicate, and what we want to communicate, and as we perform communication all of the potential meanings will mesh and mold together to create something spontaneous and new. Emotes and memes do not mean one single thing, but rather exist as symbols that contain many meanings in many contexts – all of which their users and creators will create as they type them in chat or as they modify and share the modified versions. Something I think is summed up in the most scholarly way by stating simply: We share memes because it's fun. We enjoy being in community and sharing ways of understanding things, I enjoy it so much that I am creating this project right now. And in creating this project I am gaining and participating in many literacies all at the same time. Why would I do that if it wasn't fun? Why would I create a project like this if it wasn't based in the culmination of all of my passionate affinity spaces?

This is why I see my project as existing in a space of Utopian Futurity – Utopian Futurity, discussed in Video #3 is a rejection of Dystopian Pessimism, as Utopian

Futurists we find moments of hope and optimism that exist in the now to use as blueprints for the future. We understand that futurity is a process and no project is perfect, just another step in the right direction. I want the scholarship of students of the future, the students of my Abolitionist Classroom – a classroom that is not tied to classrooms or chairs or lessons, but rather is a way of thinking and being in the world that seeks to fundamentally change it according to our Utopian Futurist ideas of being in community – to participate in many methods and modalities that don't need to be tied to a specific language or literacy, and maybe even not to language at all, the way we understand it. And so I see my videos as conceptual playgrounds where I get to show people the potential, not just of the English Major and deeply engaging with study, but also the joy of affinity based community and the pleasure that comes from engaging with such a community. All too often we in affinity based community deride the pleasure we get from engaging in leftist digital community as “brain rot” or “terminal onlineness,” but these communities show a depth of engagement from even the most casual of participants that any English Composition professor would be absolutely overjoyed to have in their classroom. I challenge us, as educators, as students, as people who want to make the world a slightly better place, to think beyond what we have assumed are the boundaries of an educational environment and a fun environment.

Stylistics and Style Guide

Video Essays are not an academic genre, though I would consider them academic adjacent, and do not have a consistent Style Guide with the way sources are cited, if there

will be sources used, and whether or not some sources will simply appear on screen or will be read by someone. This is a good thing, and I see no reason why there should be an established Style Guide for Video Essays, especially as they begin to be adopted as subjects of study and curriculum by both students and professors. In the videos I have watched Stylistics are determined by Video Essayists themselves, their own skills and interests. Each creator brings their own unique way of being in and understanding the world to every video they make, which means the creative Video Essay can transcend the boundaries of the traditional academic essay in unexpected and interesting ways. The creator Foreign Man in a Foreign Land brings his own Caribbean storytelling style to his video essay performances, hbombguy chopped through a wall with an ax once to tell Ben Shapiro that Auquaman, CJ the X brings in different creators into a video for a collaborative discussion on *Subjectivity in Art*, and John The Duncan might be sitting on a chair in a room in his house -- or he might be cooking spaghetti. Each creator mixes in their own casual life experiences, interests and knowledge into the more formal aspects of essaying – engaging in research, designing an overarching essay narrative which helps the reader understand why this research is important, and presenting it in a way that is palatable and relatable to viewers. And this meshing of values, assumptions and language (and sometimes emotes) of the personal and political and academic results in Video Essays that are works of art that can be rewatched again and again and that provide greater accessibility into the subject matter for a broader audience than traditional essays do. Can Video Essays save the world? Probably not. But they're really freaking cool.

From this vast range of styles I had to find my own niche. Which I did in the lengthiest way possible: Livestreaming. I Livestreamed for about a year, for an average of about six hours a day (another way I threw my body at the problem) and both the segments where I appear in my videos and the clips of gaming are from those Livestreams. Sometimes I would dig through my YouTube catalogue of uploaded streams to find material, but for Video #4 I streamed specifically so I could live react to HasanAbi memes and videos. Most of my Livestreams are still visible on my YouTube channel today, but some were lost because I forgot to upload them before they expired.

This is not typical of the Video Essay genre, and it is in this that the style of the HICC blends with the style of the Video Essay – my own life experiences, interests and knowledge, in the form of Livestreaming and gaming, come into my Video Essays and give me a jumping off point for starting the essay and a center with which to ground it.

Video #4 again uses Livestreaming techniques to explore memes; remember, community is a doing not a being, and I wanted to show my viewers how community is done in Livestreaming through my performance of React Content. My React Content performance achieves two goals: I am showing how React Content is done to my viewers, and I am also showing how a community member responds to different community memes. These goals are important because it is my aim to show my viewers how community is done and welcome them to participate in it if they like. My viewers may not understand the memes or what is funny at first, but seeing my responses and attempting to gain understanding based on my reaction is an important part of learning as a social practice. This process of seeing memes and gradually coming to understand why

they are funny is one that I went through as I was joining the HasanAbi community, and even after writing hundreds of pages about it, I still don't understand *all* the memes. The informality of Livestream content also contributes to a sense of intimacy which comes from the spontaneity that occurs in a Livestream that doesn't happen in scripted content. For example: in my scripted content I have genuine moments of spontaneous commentary or laughter or loud dramatic sighs, but my viewer will be expecting these to be staged or part of a script direction because they are watching a Video Essay and they have looked at the part of this project titled something like "Video Essay Scripts." This means that we are a layer removed from *genuine* engagement. Meanwhile a Livestream records my genuine responses and reactions to things as they are happening, even if I "cheated" according to Livestream standards by having watched the videos I am watching before and played the games I am playing before (pre-watching, pre-watching!!). My response during a Livestream is always going to be more spontaneous, therefore more genuine, and therefore more intimate, according to my audience's experience.

This authenticity is important for establishing trust between myself and my audience; I am not an authority figure who they have to listen to, so why do they care what I have to say? Most commonly, Video Essayists relate to their audience through the experiences they share. I see Video #2 as my contribution to this area – in Video #2 I speak at length about my struggles with disabilities, something many of my viewers will share in common with me, especially if we consider disability in the way that I encourage my audience to see it – society as disabling rather than individuals as disabled.

If there is any informal sort of Style Guide for video essays, the one of authenticity and relationality as the “why should you care what I have to say,” stands out as potentially the most controversial. While I cannot make presumptions about the demographics of the broader Online Left, it is generally known that a majority of viewers on the YouTube and Twitch platforms are young white men – individual creators will know this by looking at their own metrics. Black creators, especially Black women, often have trouble gaining a foothold in this space because many white people believe they have nothing in common with Black people and therefore there is little potential for authentic relationality between them. Furthermore, there are specific white leftist communities – who are, for a good reason, not named in this project, even though they might consider themselves part of the Online Left – who engage in harassing Black content creators, especially Black women. I see this harassment as an attempt at gatekeeping, akin to the type I warned about in the beginning of this section, but in this case, specifically gatekeeping people of color out of broader Leftist Community because “Black Radicalism Scary.”

When we consider my discussion of “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master’s House” in Video #5, we see that this antagonistic behavior is one of the Master’s Tools that these particular white leftists may not recognize they are engaging with because of their preconceived biases. I have no advice to give on how to solve this problem other than some people need to pull their heads out of their asses, sit the hell down, and listen – that said, I’m not sure if that thing I just wrote will make it into the final version of this project, the heads in asses part.

Video Essays are still subject to the Master's Tools, outside of the actions of certain unnamed individuals; the algorithm is a serious inhibition to many creators, as discussed in Video #3. Compounding upon this, videos are algorithmically reviewed for monetization, meaning that monetization is often limited to things white advertisers making ads for white audiences will find appropriate – this is part of the reason why representation does matter, but also the reason why representation doesn't always solve a problem that necessitates structural change. Audience donations can make up a significant portion of a creator's income, but so long as People Gotta Eat, we will all be subject to the Master's Tools, both individually and systemically.

There is also the issue of predominantly white, male audiences demanding marginalized creators perform their trauma for the sake of authenticity. Marginalized people should be allowed to make whatever content they desire to, whether that is my Video #2 that explores my disability and pain, or my other videos that don't rely on that exploration as part of the narrative. All of these videos relate back to my experiences, but my experiences represent a vast swath and variety of interests. Not all of which are explained and described by: white, nonbinary person who is disabled and has lived in the suburbs most of their life. I would rather gnaw my own leg off than make videos only about nonbinary people issues or disabled people issues – and frankly the people who make videos about specifically white suburbanite issues scare me – and it would be silly for people to say that my other videos don't include perspectives that are shaped by each of the elements of my experience, even when I am not directly speaking about them. So then, why is it so hard for white people to understand that sometimes Black people or

trans people want to make fun Video Essays about, I don't know, stuff that is fun for them to make Video Essays about?

And at this point I pull out my soapbox again and state that, for many privileged people, our primary experience of people who are from groups that are not the same as ours are through their experiences of trauma, and this is why we expect marginalized people to perform trauma as authenticity. This should be, and may already be, a project of its own, but has been spoken about by creators like Jessie Gender, as well as many creators I've already named.

On the other side of this messy issue, we often hold our allies to absurdly high standards of performance and engagement, as discussed in the *Care Work* chapter about hyperaccountability (Piepzna-Smarasinha 213). Kadija Mbowe recently received criticism from her viewers for appearing in a Jubilee video – a channel controversial amongst leftists for the way it frames politically galvanizing topics. Mbowe viewed this appearance as an opportunity to reach an audience her channel might not typically reach because of previously discussed algorithmic restraints. Building community is an important part of content creation and Online Leftist Community participation – also, HasanAbi watches most Jubilee episodes, which would expose Mbowe to a massive swath of the Online Left.

There are many ways to “clip and ship” these engagements to make either side seem ridiculous, but it is a necessity that we as audience viewers trust that our creators understand the gravity of their role, especially if they have shown us time and time again that they do. And, importantly, participating in the content a creator makes encourages

the memetic cycle, which gradually spreads, bringing more people into community and exposing people who may disagree with your perspectives to creators who might convince them otherwise. And if there is any definitive Stylistic goal for Online Leftist Community, it is to spread Online Leftist Community.

Spreading Leftist Community

Inspired by reading *What Do Video Games Have To Teach Us About Learning and Literacy* by James Paul Gee and Adler-Kassner and Wardle in *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*, I sat on the side of my bed one night, one, very very late night, and composed a series of Tweets. Two years later I have turned each of these Concepts into a video, each one building up an important aspect of this project, and each created in a way that takes into consideration a complex variety of discourses and knowledge. At heart I am a storyteller, and the fundamental tenet of storytelling is “show, don’t tell” – just like a fundamental tenet of student engagement can be seen in their performance of their discourses, rather than the way they tell us about those discourses or bubble in tests about those discourses – something I discuss in Video #5. We learn through doing, as discussed in Video #1, and so I started my journey to learning through doing by streaming. At first I streamed from my crappy, slow laptop. The games would lag and I only had one monitor so this proved to be technologically difficult, but also immensely engaging. For the most part I was streaming for myself and that hasn’t changed through the time I’ve been streaming; I still don’t have much of an audience

when I stream, but even then I still find streaming to be a complex and taxing task with so many steps – despite the low bar for beginning streaming.

My first issue was stream art. If you are a new streamer and you post about streaming anywhere online you will be immediately bombarded by thousands of people who want you to buy stuff from them. Do not buy stuff from them. Most of them are bots and these bots attempt to sell you stream art – art so your stream isn't a box with your face and a box with your chat and box with whatever you're looking at. Stream art can be the border around the stream or emotes or alert notifications and images. You don't need any of these things.

My second issue was audience. Most viewers already have communities that they belong to, so unless my videos break the HasanAbi cell wall barrier, my woke mind virus won't have an opportunity to gain traction within the community and my memes and videos will be limited to those whomst'd've discovered me through the YouTube algorithm or browsing live channels on Twitch. I do not have a solution to this, other than to say: HasanAbi, please notice me, I have a lot of student loan debt to pay off.

I haven't decided on a third issue yet, and so I will save this place if this section needs revision.

Moving from the Livestream to the Video Essay, my first Video Essay was Threshold Concepts #1 | Bodies at the Problem |, affectionately known as Video #1. This video was made without a script and is the shortest video. The side of my brain that comes up with bright ideas suggested I remake it, the side of my brain that has to edit those videos was on a union mandated lunch break, a la Video #5. It is very important to

state here the amount of labor and love that goes into making these videos; creation is an intense process that involves the most dreadful first drafts you've ever seen in your life, short sections that morph into gigantic monster sections as you start to consider what your average viewer might understand about a topic, and hours and hours and hours of sitting in a chair which leads to dead butt syndrome. I could not make that up if I tried.

So, while it would look nicer and feel more rounded if Video #1 was some god awful monstrosity leveling out at one hour and fifteen minutes long, anyone who wants to make that video is politely and cordially invited to make it themselves and credit this project in the works cited but:



Figure 7 A tweet made by @NoContextDM saying: “i ain't reading all that/i'm happy for u tho/or sorry that it happened. In memetic fashion, we are pretending that I replaced “reading” with writing.

Aside from length, in Video #1 I established a process for video creation, which I subsequently forgot in Video #2 and had to relearn halfway through Video #3. First I would record my audio with Audacity, then I would edit IN Audacity, and then I would

transfer it to Adobe Premiere where I would edit the video and combine for a finished project. Title cards, transitions and quotes are some of the worst experiences I've ever had in my life, in part because I only realized I could download a color array to use with Premiere's color picker for Video #5. Before that I was clicking everything on my screen to try to get some viable color combination because god forbid we make anything black and white. Sarcasm aside, I had serious creative difficulty with figuring out what to use as background for my videos. I'm not much of an actor and I didn't have the plain, curated type of background many Video Essayists have, but I also am not a digital artist or animator so animation is off the table. I decided on footage from my stream, especially since the footage went so well with the subject matter – this was an important first step for me; understanding the importance between narrative and video cohesion. Bringing the content of the video into the script – something which I've discovered can take many different creative directions. The direction this took me was towards using my Livestreamed Lets Play videos as background for my Video Essays.

Visual dynamic difficulty aside, I sat down at my computer, hit Audacity to record, and rambled for a few minutes about throwing your body at the problem, with a few retakes as I realized I might need to have a few notes in front of me.

Secondary to the audio dynamic is the secondary audio dynamic, that is, background noise. Most videos have music as background noise. I am not a composer, until Video #5, so I used the stream noise as background noise – albeit, much lower than it originally was. If you couldn't tell by watching, I yell “no thank you” at the rock monster. Using my videos as background means that I can tweak the volume at certain

points when I want the background noises to become foreground noises, this leads to interesting effects. I don't have an academic explanation for this, I just think it's neat.

In Video #2 the audio quality got worse, or at least that's what I believe, the audio quality is pretty uniformly bad across all these videos, and all I can say is that I honestly, genuinely swear to god that I spent so much time trying to make the audio less bad but in the end I got my microphone for fifteen dollars off Amazon dot com and what more can I say. I used the same background music for this that I use for many of my streams, music I've gotten so sick of hearing that I want to scrub it from my brain with bleach. Its ok music, but listening to it for hours a day drives you out of your mind a little.

This video also utilizes a Lets Play Livestream as background – footage from a Sims 4 Lets Play stream where I build a house I designed called The Pink Lady. There are all kinds of reasons why this footage is a good choice, which I outline in my Reflection for this video, but ultimately, I chose it because it was pink. I like pink.

Video #3 takes a strange turn. Through the time I've been in Humboldt County I like to visit certain places to take a break from my work. I decided to share one of these moments in a Vlog style because I was writing a video addressing a few big YouTube creators, longtime YouTube viewers would be able to recognize this style and I could then cultivate an experience of authenticity through our shared experience of “being people who know what YouTube Vlog content is.” I mean, if it works, it works. The audio for this was awful because I forgot to plug the microphone in. Also I was using a fifteen dollar video camera off of Amazon dot com. It is at this moment where I will now request that Amazon dot com sponsor my applications to PhD programs and my time

conducting PhD study, and in exchange I will create my projects using the technology from the Amazon dot com recommended list – even the stuff that blows up when you plug it in.



Figure 8 *My Amazon sponsored PhD. A stuffed toy dog sits at a table in the middle of a room that is on fire. “This is fine,” he states, without recognizing the danger he is in. He is wearing a tiny hat.*

Not to be outdone, my highly-superior-in-video-and-audio-quality-phone was available when I drove to the beach one day and encountered the really cool rainbow that appears in Video #4. Originally meant for Video #3, I was too tired to make that video any longer, and so this rainbow became the background of Video #4.

I’ve talked about scuff before.

All of this stuff I’m talking about now is scuff. It’s process. And part of it is the creative process of doing the thing as you envision it, but far more is about overcoming whatever difficulties lie in your way to figure out how to do the damn thing and get it over and done with because it fucking needs to be done yesterday.

Video #3 was unfinished when I went to visit my family for winter break.

My grandma had been sick through 2023 with all sorts of unrelated illnesses. Until we realized those illnesses were related. Her cancer was back. In the early months of 2023 she died, and it was very difficult for me to pick up on this project after that happened.

I'm sure I've only managed to finish it now because I know she would be pissed enough to turn into a ghost and haunt me if I don't.

But that's what scuff is. Unexpected shit. Life shit. Expectation vs reality shit. My grandma won't make it to my graduation. But fuck all if I'm not going to drag my ass across that stage in her memory.

And yeah, her memory is here with me while I write this project, just like I talk about in Video #5 with the story of *Bioshock 2*. And I know that it's her creative energy – my whole family's creative energy, the constant urge to create and make shit, and to get better at the shit you're making and to make harder and to be proud of what you're making, I know that it's that encouraging environment, even if the stuff I wanted to make wasn't the stuff they wanted me to be making, I know that that is the spirit of this project, if there is one.

And so Video #3 was awful to create and I don't remember making it but I do know that in Video #3 I started using those emotes because it's those damn emotes that can express things for me when I feel so overwhelmed and drained and tired inside that I don't know how to continue.

And that broke down some door in me that I didn't even know was closed because with Video #4 I had fun again; in Video #4 and Video #5 I develop a style.

Writing those little subplots with the emotes, and writing my script knowing I would write subplots with the emotes, was possibly the most fun I've had with this project so far. Before Video #3 I was kind of afraid to write content that mentioned HasanAbi, but after Video #3 I realized that I could show-don't-tell with my own little army of frogs marching around the stream – with HasanAbi and the Mods watching over them of course. The frogs become a subplot where I simulate React Content; HasanAbi is represented by emotes from his Twitch channel, the mods are represented by hasMods, and the chat is represented by a few of the other frogs, and the goose guy. At the end of Video #5 we have gone through my highs and my lows – those of my editing-frog-self SadgeBusiness, who is overworked, underpaid and ice-cream sammyless (you too can donate to end my ice-cream sammyless for five dollars, or for free with a Twitch Prime sub, at the top of the hour), but finds community in the things I create for the HasanAbi community – both within the emote narrative, but also in the design of the narrative which encourages reactability through its audience interactivity – yeah, you thought there wasn't analysis here, didn't you. But there is! Because I am a vibes based scientist who has studied the forbidden meme texts and I know that my audience loves spontaneous fourth wall breaking between streamer and Video Essayist. And so I wrote that into a subplot of my project for fun, but also because I actually did need a break from video editing or I was sure my butt would die.

In Video #5 I finally got sick of copyright free music and instead of scrambling for something somewhat sound-like to stuff into my video I recorded about a minute of fuck-you-to-the-YouTube-copyright-system-in-particular. As a musician I know all of the

parts-of-songs and so, I improvised a few song doodads and cut them up and spliced them together. You will either find the tunes that come out of this splicing infernally annoying or kind of catchy. If you are of the latter group, I invite you to use them however you like; if you are in the former group, make it into the new Rickroll, I dare you.

The Conclusion To The Conclusion

In the truest of me fashions, I will now, for the first and final time in this project, in the conclusion of the conclusion, list out my Threshold Concepts for you. If you watched the video you might remember the attached HasanAbi memes, if you don't remember those memes, you may need to do some review before you are prepared to take this test:

1. Bodies at the Problem: In this video I told you we learn through doing. Doing is scary. But we aren't doing alone. There are people just like us out there who are afraid of doing – whatever it is they need to do to learn. When we all work together to learn, to help each other learn, one person not knowing is far less scary.
2. Making My Peace – We all deserve to speak our piece – to say the things we need to say, even if we don't have the words yet. We must see things as they are rather than as we are told to by understanding how power works within our society.
3. People Gotta Eat – We are hurt people and we are gonna hurt people. We have been taught not to value boundaries and consent and our society holds different people to different standards – often unfairly. This is symptomatic of a capitalist,

profit motive society and we must engage with others in a constructive way that does not perpetuate cycles of harm.

4. Sustainability – We need community because we are human. We need to share things because we are human. And sharing makes us stronger – sharing responsibility, sharing codes, sharing memes, sharing knowledge – all of this sharing builds us up. And eventually we will come to a place where we do not have to rely on our work alone or our capacity to persist in the space and do the work alone, because when we share the burden it becomes lighter for all of us.

Concept #5 didn't make it into this section of Video #5 because I wasn't telling you about it in the conclusion yet, so now, I get to tell you about Threshold Concept #5.

5) Master's Tools, Master's House – Inspired by Audre Lorde's "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," this admonition tells us that we cannot affect change by assimilating into the Master's House – the house of power. Our true power does not come from the Master's House, but rather from within ourselves and the community we build around us. The real value in the skills we cultivate and the passions we have comes from what we build with them, and how we can share them with other people. These creative impulses are part of an always-emergent Utopian Futurity where we enact the future that we wish to see within the world – and through this we must inspire people, not just to watch, but to take action themselves, for when we all work together we will be an unstoppable force for change.

The Conclusion to the Conclusion to the Conclusion

I'm sorry, I had to do it to you.

When I was a kid I used to watch this puppet show with this one lamb puppet called Lambchop, and there was this song called "The Song That Doesn't End" and now that song will be stuck in your head for the rest of the day. You're welcome. KEKL.

In this conclusion I've told you about how I had to throw my body at the problem, I told you about how this project was a project through which I speak my piece, I told you that I really, really, really need to eat an ice cream sammy, I told you that my project is part of a memetic system that is greater than anything I had imagined it being a part of before, and in Video #5 I told you about that scenario with Scabby the Rat.

You see, I am not just telling you about my interactions in affinity spaces, I am showing you.

With this whole performance and project, even the written part.

I am showing you the value and love and sense of belonging this space brings to my life.

I am doing community.

And imagine the potential of scholarship that could come out of such amalgamations?

You don't have to imagine it anymore. Because I've done it!

I am the first student of my own Abolitionist Classroom.

And now I'm welcoming you to join.

Remember comrades: Boss makes a dollar, I make a dime, so I watch HasanAbi
on company time.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Glossary of Emotes

This is a Glossary of some basic emotes, more emotes can be seen on betterttv.com.



Figure 9 *PepeLa – he doesn't know (typically HasanAbi doesn't know). PepeLa is a blurry, bright green version of PepeLaugh.*



Figure 10 *PepeLaugh, a Pepe frog that is laughing at the most embarrassing thing you've ever done because he wants you to know you are a bad person for having done embarrassing things.*

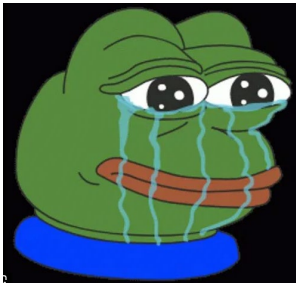


Figure 11 *FeelsStrongMan – A Pepe frog expressing solidarity, congratulating achievement, showing strong emotion we don't always have the words for but want to share.*



Figure 12 Gayge – *Gayge is a rainbow Pepe, however his head shape is slightly less rounded and looks more like a frog than Pepe. He is smiling. Gayge is an emote for the gays. If something gay happens you show your support by posting Gayge.*

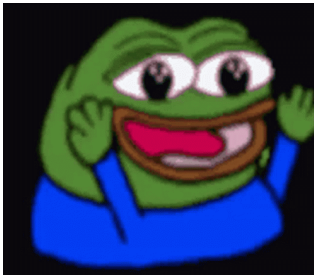


Figure 13 peepoClap – *The head and torso of a Pepe frog, but more rounded, with clapping hands and a smile to show excitement. This emote is an example of a gif emote – an emote that moves. PeepoClap expresses childlike excitement but usually in silly situations.*



Figure 14 KomodoHype – *KomodoHype is a Pogging Komodo Dragon. KomodoHype replaced PogChamp after the person in the PogChamp emote made some sussy comments about the January 6th capital riot.*



Figure 15 Poggers. *Poggers is a Pogging Pepe. Pogging is an expression of excitement where the individual Pogging has their mouth open in an exclamation and they appear to be about to speak. Do not say Poggers in public. But if you do you will be part of an exclusive club of very cool people.*

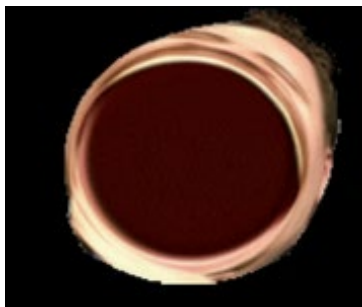


Figure 16 OMEGALUL – *OMEGALUL is a face that is distorted into an O shape. OMEGALUL is the emote you use when LOL (laugh out loud) doesn't express the hilarity of the situation. Because of its round O shape it is often used to replace the O in words. L OMEGALUL L means LOL.*

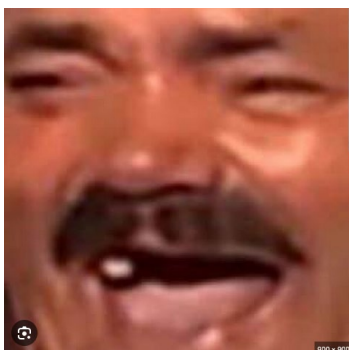


Figure 17 KEKW – *This emote was formerly a meme. It is the face of Spanish comedian Juan Joya Borja laughing hysterically. Use this emote when you want to say "this is the funniest shit ever" but you've been spamming OMEGALUL too often.*



Figure 18 *Shrugs* -- A shrugging Pepe frog. He has cute little hands. For when you want to annoy the chat by indicating that life and it's vast complexity is too difficult to answer with a single typed message in the Discord chat.



Figure 19 *HUH* -- A cartoon turtle from the movie *Over The Hedge*. He has a shocked and horrified expression because you did something awful. Just awful.



Figure 20 *KEKWait* -- This emote is also the face of Spanish comedian Juan Joya Borja. He is not laughing hysterically this time and looks quite disappointed and confused. Use this emote when you want to express that your streamer needs to play that part of the video back again because, bro, what?

APPENDIX B

Scripts

Scripts as they appeared during time of recording, individual Works Cited included. There is no script for Video #1

Video #2

Threshold Concept #2 Making My Peace (Piece) Script

The Pink Lady building (The Sims 4) stream footage. Look for the detailed moments – moments of care, moments of indecision, when I start playing with the lighting, when I stop to present the parts of the room I've been working on as a scene, when I'm trying out different pieces of furniture or different swatches to see which one is best for the room.

INTRODUCTION

I like to drive just to drive sometimes, it doesn't matter where or how far I go, eventually I know I'll have to turn back, but I like to drive. The drive isn't about the destination. It isn't about where we end up. Or where we go.

It's about unlocking new parts of the map.

Which is what I hope to do with this video.

To start with, this video is presented in the style of a Sims 4 speed build; I recorded footage of the build, and now I am recording a voice-over to describe my process. And while I do want to talk about process, I want to defocus from the build, I

want to step back and see the larger process which governs and guides me. The process which makes me, and through which I make and unmake myself.

And in this process I am going to do something new to me, something which scares me a little, but also something exciting. Last time we met I told you to throw your body at the problem, that we learn through play. Today I am going to learn new things about myself through this video, this footage I'm editing for you. This process and performance through which we all become actors and the world becomes our stage. I am going to learn – and maybe even teach – through play.

So be welcome and join me in my process so that I might become a part of yours.

Today we will be talking about concept #2 in my Threshold Concepts series, this concept is called Making My Peace.

PART ONE

It's hard for me to defocus. I go into everything I do with a laser pinpoint focus and an almost ruthless critical edge pointing out inconsistencies and picking out pieces. Analysis is something my ADHD brain gravitates towards; I call it my Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation after the theory of Cosmic Microwave Background which scientists consider the remnants of the Big Bang. In scans of the night sky the Cosmic Microwave Background is a blob and I imagine it makes the kind of sound a microwave makes when it's running. It's the brain go brrrrrrrrr meme. It makes the boundaries of my brain fuzzy, and like little fingers these radioactive waves reach out and drag things into me to be consumed by my brain process. These things never exist separate from me, but become a part of me – a part of the known, the observable. The

embodied experience. And so many of these disembodied concepts are tied to embodied experiences; many of the concepts I'll talk about later I understand because of these embodied experiences and situations through which they were incorporated. A smell, a sound, a general vibe in the room takes me back to them. Sometimes a keyword or phrase; I think in memes, but not just memes made by others, memes made through this process, a process that is often hard to recognize is happening because the way these things appear to be seamlessly incorporated.

And so it's hard to step back. It's hard to see my work as part of a process, rather than something that is complicated, messy or not perfectly formed on the first go. And so many of the pressures I face in the world expect perfection on the first try which makes it difficult to see myself as a person in process, as a person with flaws, as a person who is still working on myself and understanding myself.

We are expected to know ourselves. And not just know like "I have ADHD" or "I like the smell of eucalyptus trees when I drive down the highway" but *know* in a way that I've realized maybe we can't really know.

I am a mystery unto myself, maybe?

But that's not right is it? I know myself. I know my needs. I know.

But still I'm faced with this unknowing.

Dissonance. Dissonance between what I know about myself and dissonance between what the external world knows about me. In which unknowing is that dissonance in action, that dissonance given a form and shape, that questions me on what I know even though I insist I know it.

The point, I guess, is how do I defocus when I'm not designed for that?

How do I know what I know?

There's no easy answer to this. And I wouldn't want one even if there was. Easy answers are meant to give us peace of mind. They are meant to give us an easy way out – complacency. But I don't want complacency. I don't want to accept that I'm just a weirdo with a broken brain that is way too fucking loud. I want to go a level deeper. And if I can't have peace, I'm going to have to make it.

Mindfulness is the new solution to anxiety. Just choose to make your anxiety stop. Do self-care. What do you think of when you think about self-care? For many of us self-care is an individualized process where we try to decompress from the stresses of the day – work is tough, your boss stresses you out, do some retail therapy because it's self-care; the patriarchy getting you down? makeup is your self-care to reclaim your femininity and reassert yourself as the goddess you are.

Capitalism has this funny way of turning activist things into commercialized products.

And so with this concept, and with this video, I want to decenter self-care, I want to broaden the view, I want to take us away from self-care as a commodity, self-care as consumption – because people with money and time to participate in consumer culture have always had time for self-care – and I want to examine self-care at its radical roots. I want to dig a little deeper.

“Those fears are most powerful when they are not given voice, and close upon their heels comes the fury that I cannot shake them. I am learning to live beyond

fear by living through it, and in the process learning to turn fury at my own limitations into some more creative energy. I realize that if I wait until I am no longer afraid to act, write, speak, be, I'll be sending messages on a Ouija board, cryptic complaints from the other side. When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less important whether or not I am unafraid.” Audre Lorde, *The Cancer Journals* (15)

PART TWO

I first started using a cane in 2020 when I was finding it hard to walk long distances across the beach. I've been in pain for a long time, I had a roller-skating accident maybe 11 years ago and none of me has ever been quite right since. But I never considered myself disabled. It was a point of pride that I was not a disabled person – I could go the distance. I could walk. I could heave and ho my miserable body and then at the end of day when nobody was there to witness, only then could I curl up in a ball and sit with all that pain.

There's a lot of shit to process in there – my family is kinda anti-medication, I couldn't afford to go to a doctor, all sorts of layers. But the layer I need to interrogate is this one of disability, the invisibility of the disability, but not just it's invisibility: the way I couldn't see it, the way I couldn't admit it once I saw it, the way it took 2 years of using a cane when nobody I knew was watching before I became comfortable to use it around people like my family, who still don't see me as disabled, or people I don't know who fawn over me and assume I can't open doors. And like sure it is nice to have the door

opened, but I am not going to die from walking down the hall without my cane, I promise.

My cane allows me to walk in a way that prevents me from experiencing the same amount of pain I used to. Everything still hurts, but it hurts less, or it hurts in different ways that aren't so bad. There is a mental calculus I have to do each day; many people will be familiar with it as the concept of spoons. Spoons are how much energy a person has to do various life things before they just cannot even. I wake up with a deficit of spoons most days and through sheer dumb luck I manage to generate a couple throughout the day.

My cane isn't really a part of my body like arms or legs, but it is an extension of me. I use it to grapple with this insidious evil that is the ground or the vile contraptions we call "stairs" or the awful reality of a gradually ascending, or even worse, descending slope. I even use it to poke things like the automatic door opener or doorbells. It's both not a part of me and a part of me. It's a tool I use, but simultaneously an extension of my self and my will.

While the general understanding of prosthesis tells us a prosthetic is a replacement for a body part, I want to challenge us to think about prosthesis in a different way – what do prosthetics do for us? How do they become a part of us? What things do we use in our day to day lives, even abled people, that are so much part of us that we can't think of ourselves without them?

In Audre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* prosthesis is something that erases disability and difference – Lorde speaks of a whole industry that is built up around

prosthetic breasts to replace the breasts of people who have gone through mastectomy. Lorde emphasizes that it is important not to make judgment over the people who chose prosthesis, while demanding that we interrogate the way the prosthesis industry for breasts operates to provoke those feelings of insecurity and absence that come from no longer having both breasts. Women are already trained by society to be ruthless and critical of their appearances – to view themselves from outside their own bodies as the people who observe them, I think we all experience this to a degree – the sense of norms, the measuring of ourselves up to those norms, the way it's hard to recognize that many of those norms are simply unachievable for most people.

As Lorde says in *The Cancer Journals*: “Her message was, you are just as good as you were before because you can look exactly the same. Lambswool now, then a good prosthesis as soon as possible, and nobody 'll ever know the difference. But what she said was, "You'll never know the difference," and she lost me right there, because I knew sure as hell I'd know the difference.” (Lorde 42)

The dissonance created between the self and the other, the internal self and the perceived self. Who am I and what do I know? How do I know what I know?

Well first of all, I know the difference between touching my leg and touching my pant leg while it's on my leg. One is full of nerve endings that can receive my touch, one can hold its own heat, one can even do a little touching back and feel the texture of my fingertips. The other is some polyester blend woven into a pattern that will end up crumpled on the floor at the end of the day.

I know these things.

But I also know that when people perceive my leg they're not perceiving my leg – they're perceiving that cloth that covers my leg. The cut and style of that cloth. Whether that cloth is long or short – sometimes whether it's too long or too short. How the draping of the cloth or tightness of it accentuates or detracts from my personal affect.

And I am supposed to consider these things when I choose which pants to wear. I am supposed to be hyper aware of these judgements and either strive to create them or dispel them with careful clothing choices that people will use to determine my worth and value on the spot.

Dress for the job you want, you know.

This type of prosthesis, the “you will never know the difference” type, is not built around fulfilling our need to do things, to accomplish things; it's built around a need that is determined by people outside of ourselves, a need to comfort them and coddle them, to make them feel like people who go through mastectomy either don't exist, or can overcome this and become normal again.

The social model of disability was created by disability activists as an alternative to the medical model; the medical model tells us that disabled people are broken or wrong – kind of like how I sometimes fall into thinking about my ADHD, the social model tells us that disabled people don't need to be fixed, and often don't even want to be fixed, rather, we need to live in a society that is built around accommodation for all types of bodies – not just the ones we have decided are normal.

The industry around prosthetic breasts erases the evidence of disability and erases the discomfort that abled people have at confronting disability – the “oh it's so sad” or

“oh wow you’re so inspiring” reactions that able-bodied people have to people who have visibly been put through the wringer by life. And we have been put through the fucking wringer. But the fact that we have doesn't mean that you get to be inspired by it.

With all this in mind, let’s pause here and ask ourselves: Are prosthetics supposed to make us look “normal” or are they for helping one do tasks?

My cane makes me very visibly and noticeably *not normal*. From the way that my walk changes when I’m using it, to the extra space that it takes up next to my body, to all the weird fiddling I have to do with it any time I need to have an extra arm to do things and have to put it down – and inevitably it crashes on the floor.

But at the same time my cane helps me get places I couldn’t without it. I spent this whole semester climbing a damn mountain to get to class twice a week, I was barely able to accomplish that, and I was only able to do it because I had my cane.

My cane simultaneously helps me conform to norms, but also decidedly sets me against them.

Back to that place of dissonance. Knowing, unknowing. Being known, but not in a way that I know.

But let’s take this deeper – I’m not just disabled because I need a cane to survive climbing the mountain twice a week; the expectation that I climb the mountain twice a week makes me need the cane.

I can walk short-ish distances across flat surfaces just fine.

But nine flights of stairs and a hill from hell (I counted), that’s just fucking excessive.

And that's where I start to break down. That's where I have to remind myself to take it slow or I'm going to burn out because there are two more flights past this giant hill and then I have to get to the elevator after that.

And like why? Why is it like this?

Sure, the university was built on a mountain. But why do we live in a society where universities are built on mountains? What does this say about the type of students expected to attend university when the university is built on a mountain? What does it say about the students they're trying to keep out? Or perhaps less controversial but still thought provoking: What does this say about the students who simply were not considered in the "building the university on the mountain" process?

And how about those students who might not suffer from chronic pain but still have to devote so much of their time to walking up a mountain to get to class, then walking back down to go eat lunch, then walking back up to class, then walking back down to go home? Students for whom a few extra minutes could mean finishing a term paper and passing that class or not?

The design of our society does not consider the needs of the people who inhabit it. So what does it consider?

Let's go one level deeper.

In *Critical Disability Studies and the Question of Palestine*, Jasbir K. Puar states: "...those who are afforded the indexing of a 'before' the pandemic and an 'after' the pandemic are already displaying a mark of bodies deemed worthy of care in contrast to those who persist through braided strands of debilitation. What has been widely

fetishized as ‘pandemic time’ is actually what ‘crip time’ has always been—never on time, waiting out time, needing more time, unable to keep up with time, forced time at home, too long a waiting time.” (Puar 117)

Crip Time.

The time I spend walking up the mountain twice a week to get to class.

But not just that time, as slow and painful as it is. The time I spend contemplating and dreading it before I leave my house. The extra buffer of time I need to put between this and the time classes start so I know I’ll have time for my trudge. The time I spend in class trying to find ways to sit that will relieve the most pain instead of paying attention to the lecture. The time it takes to adjust my cane against the wall so it won’t fall over. The time I spend recovering from the walk up the hill and back down it.

Crip Time.

They say time is money, so being disabled has cost me a lot of money, even though my busted knees never charged me a dime.

And I think it would be easy to sit here with that focus, that focus that is narrowing in on those aches and pains I feel as I’m sitting at my desk. It’s perhaps harder to broaden this out. To imagine this video like dough. We spent a lot of time kneading it, right? Let’s roll it out some, cut out a few cookies maybe.

I want to expand our understanding of prosthesis, of the tools we use to do the tasks we need to get done. Of the limitations and capabilities of the human body.

Technology isn’t just our phones and computers.

Technology was woven into the fabric of humanity, into the embodied reality of the human since we started talking and smashing things with rocks.

The philosophy of transhumanism urges us to consider the ways in which future humans can transcend the boundaries of humanity; transhumanism is often wrapped up in anti-technology sentiments by authors imagining future dystopias – think the *Cyberpunk* idea that cybernetic enhancements make your character “less human” even as they give them superhuman abilities. I would like to suggest here that we have already transcended the capabilities of the “original” human by leaps and bounds. Common appliances we consider nearly universal today: the modern kitchen with running water – cold or hot; a refrigerator – with freezer; a stove/oven combo with electric timer and lcd readout for temperature control – these appliances did not exist in the way they do now a mere 100 years ago yet try to imagine your life without them. Imagine the endless drudgery of kitchen work – sitting in front of a stove for many many hours of the day tending to the fire, having milk delivered on a daily basis, even the preparation of bread – which many have taken on as a hobby today. Endless hours of food prep are no longer necessary for our survival but recreational activities we do in our free time; I grew up watching Rachel Ray’s *30-Minute Meals* on The Food Network, but if 30 minutes is too long of a wait or too tall of an order then the drive through can expedite even that process. The modern kitchen and fast food industry gives us free time.

It’s just hard to tell because that free time was quickly filled with an abundance of other tasks to complete.

Other modern technologies have made their own impacts upon our lives; think about phones and computers. It is impossible to get a job without a smartphone or computer today – employers do not look at paper applications, and most correspondence occurs through email and phone communication. Every article I read that mentions how tied we are to our phones, how obsessed we are with our emails, fails to consider the ramifications – imagined or otherwise – of ignoring the dreaded weekend work email. Our phones are like tiny computers because they *need* to be simultaneously because we have adapted to the changing technology but also because these adaptations have created a new standard within the hiring process.

These changing standards and adaptations require those of us living within a capitalist society to similarly adapt our standards – or we will be cut out of the labor market which we need to participate within to survive.

Part of the transhumanist discussion is the reliance which is created within us – the way we are trained into using these technologies without thinking about them as technologies that are separate from us. But even written and spoken language is a form of technology that radically changed human existence.

Because of this we cannot state that technology is bad – kitchen technology, the technology of language, the wheel – all of these things made changes to life that are nearly impossible to fully understand and conceive. But we also cannot say that all forms of technology are good. Many technologies are designed to benefit only a small group of people – consider ideologies, which are a form of technology. The ideology of colonialism considers the colonial project part of the white man's burden to civilize the

uncivil – the practice of colonialism results in cultural genocide and environmental destruction.

Cars.

In America we live in a car reliant society. Cars are a form of individual transportation and are considered liberating by people who grew up in isolated communities like small towns or suburbs, or other places with poor public transportation. Getting your driver's license and first car are a right of passage in American media. Owning your own car offers you agency about where you would like to be and when you would like to go there. However, like in the case of phones, our society is now designed around the movement of cars rather than the movement of people – we have adapted to the movement of cars. Our roads are designed for cars moving fast rather than bodies moving slow. And this makes finding transportation without a car costly, time consuming, and often dangerous – there was a bus stop near my house that was taken out by a car at least once a month. Just as funding was allocated to replace it another car would swing around the turn too hard and take it out.

So let's consider the concept of Crip Time again – I know I have to drive to do my grocery shopping about 15 miles in the next town over; imagine doing that without a car, think about trying to get a job without a phone, think about all the hours your great great grandma spent preparing a meal that you could throw together in 30 minutes while watching a rerun of Rachel Ray today.

I would never consider a person who does not own a car disabled – that would be silly, probably a little offensive to other disabled people. Right? In fact, some of you might think that this very premise erases the experiences of disabled people.

However there are many people out there with invisible disabilities – disabilities which we do not consider which are a daily part of their lives, and when we consider why they are disabled – when we consider the core of disability: restriction of movement, prohibition of access, marginalization, criminalization – the denial of access to technologies which our society has adapted to and standardized is a form of disabling. And this disabling comes in many forms, both visible and invisible. We are not just talking about invisible disabilities: we are talking about the invisibilizing of disability. And through this visible disabilities are made to be invisible – people with visible disabilities are pushed out of public life and denied access, and people with invisible disabilities are trained to not recognize their disability as disability. The pervasive able-bodiedness of our society prevents us from thinking about disability except as something that individuals either suffer from dreadfully or overcome triumphantly. Think back to my story about my cane; what was your reaction? I won't judge you for the way you reacted, but I do want you to think critically about what it was, and where it came from. Am I a lazy person who likes to complain, a tragic example of the dangers of high speed roller skating or am I a special smoll bean disabled person fighting to overcome my tragic backstory *sad winky face*.

We have this idea that disability could not possibly be contained within the design of a society that requires us to be able bodied, able minded, standardized and normed

workers who are proficient with modern technologies and can be slotted into job categories based on the different buzz words contained in a resume.

But a lot of us also believe that a person who is capable of landing a job within this system could not be disabled because they are able to work and disabled people are lazy and don't work. A lot of us believe that if we can't see the way someone is disabled then they don't deserve to have services provided for disabled people like parking placards, access to the disability accommodation stall in public restrooms, or other forms of accommodation.

Disabled people need to deserve their accommodation, and if they don't appear to really *need* it then they are lazy and should shut up about it.

We live with a culture of silence. One which silences our ability to even consider ourselves disabled because of the shameful implications that come with the acknowledgement of disability. Which kind of reminds me of the whole "are you one of the good gays or one of the bad gays" thing conservatives like to do.

Are you a good disabled person who keeps silent about your mental and physical health? Or are you a bad disabled person who admits that your needs are not being met by society?

We are a society of disabled people who fear to acknowledge our disability in our own minds, to take action on our needs when we acknowledge it, and to advocate for ourselves to people who refuse to acknowledge the disabilities in themselves, let alone other people.

We are afraid to unknow ourselves. To find new ways of knowing where we trust ourselves to know our needs. And a lot of us are afraid that even if we do trust ourselves, other people won't trust us.

So what the fuck do we do now?

It's time to learn to Speak Our Piece.

PART THREE

"To that piece of each of us which refuses to be silent." – Audre Lorde *A Burst of Light*

I was working on my Master's Project. I knew I wanted to write about the HasanAbi community – a community of people that were vital for me as I struggled with both the Covid pandemic and finishing up my BA. The HasanAbi Industrial Clips Complex posted videos on YouTube and I had something to wake up to, something to watch as I made my coffee, something to anticipate for the next day. But I also noticed that I was learning things from these videos – a lot of things I already knew; I've been an anarchist for longer than I remember, a leftist since I first heard the word. But I was learning them in new ways. The tacit knowledge I was carrying with me became something I could articulate and Hasan's ideas were incorporated into that Cosmic Microwave Background.

What do I always say, chat?

Bodies at Problems was the first video I made. I don't have a video, a timestamp, a neat citation that will take you to the moment where I first heard it. But when I was writing these concepts I had this feeling, this weird meme feeling. *Bodies At Problems*

was gonna be a meme, a phrase, something that unlocks this body of knowledge I carry around in my brain, a way to hand it over to others. And I know for certain, even if I can't show you the moment, that Hasan definitely told us chatters that we gotta throw our bodies at the problem.

And all these connections came out of that – the tacit knowledge of what it means to throw my body at a problem, the theoretical knowledge I was marinating in – research about Abolitionist Ecologies that give us new ways to think about racial capitalism and environmental racism, research about how we teach and learn – how the educational system is not designed with all our knowledge about our student's needs in mind, but rather with the needs of the state to have self-regulated student-products ready to enter the workforce.

And out of this I made *Bodies at Problems*, a video grounded in this knowledge, standing firmly to say that we can't just theorize and talk about all this shit: we need to fucking do it.

We need to throw our bodies at the problem because that's the only way we will solve the problem. Trying. Failing. Changing. Trying again. Failing and fucking up. But eventually, eventually, something will give. And that moment, that moment where the crack appears in the edifice of the institution – that's the moment where we can begin to see ways to tear it down altogether.

But we only get to that glorious point of revolution if we are trying to change things in the first place. And yeah, everything we do counts. Because throwing our body

at the problem isn't about me individually trying to overcome, it's about us, and the movement we build together.

Believe it or not, revolutionaries gotta eat. They gotta learn. They gotta be presented with alternatives. They gotta be healed, and they gotta learn how to heal others. They need to learn a whole ass revolutionary habitus. Let's start with this: From each according to their ability to each according to their need.

These Threshold Concepts I'm making are just the beginning – but they are made according to my ability, and they are the poetics through which I speak my piece. In “Poetry is Not a Luxury,” Lorde tells us that poetry, “...is not idle fantasy, but a disciplined attention to the true meaning of ‘it feels right to me.’ ” (Lorde 37) Through poetry we reclaim what we know. We reclaim that knowing of ourselves. We Make our Peace.

Audre Lorde introduced the concept of self care in *A Burst of Light* – and we can trace its roots back through the history of Black feminism and women of color feminism, and we can trace its branches and leaves forward into the work of modern Black feminists writing and working today. Sonya Renee Taylor presents us with a challenge in *The Body Is Not An Apology* – the challenge of Radical Self Love. What is Radical Self Love: “Radical self-love is not a destination you are trying to get to; it is who you already are, and it is already working tirelessly to guide your life. The question is how can you listen to it more distinctly, more often?” (Taylor 14)

Speaking my piece isn't just about my piece, my perspective. I've spoken about my perspectives all throughout this video, but I only do that because I don't know your's.

I don't know the intimate details of your life and experience, and I can't really *know*, not the way that you know. Speaking my piece is about talking about those hard things – the difficult shit, the scary shit, the shit that we hold inside us and carry like a massive weight on our shoulders.

Speaking my piece is about advocating for ourselves.

But not just ourselves, for others. Listening to others as they speak their piece. Knowing we can't experience another person's life, but we can try to understand what they've gone through – and what they need to keep going.

It's time to have a discussion about intersectionality – intersectionality tells us that we share similar experiences, but we will often carry blind spots because of those experiences we don't share. And part of our work is recognizing those blind spots – accepting those moments when we don't know, learning from them rather than shutting ourselves off from them.

Abolitionist feminism tells us that accountability is vital to an abolitionist future – accountability is not punitive, it is not about inflicting pain, it's not even about people calling us out and telling us we fucked up, accountability is about holding ourselves accountable to others in a way where we are actively engaged with the needs, perspectives and experiences of others. Accountability is about our willingness to learn from others – and not in an exploitative way that demands others drop their boundaries and answer our probing questions, but learning in a way that listens deeply to what they are saying and how they are saying it to understand what is missing, what is necessary but absent.

We need to get better at listening – and it needs to start with listening to the needs of our bodies, but it can't stop there.

People think they aren't disabled because they don't understand disability; they don't understand disability because of the fear and shame surrounding the discussion of disability.abled people don't understand because it's hard to listen to disabled people talk about all the shit we've been through to survive in a society that doesn't have a use for us – especially when society seems to have a use for them, even if it's just to grind them up and spit them out.

In *This Bridge Called My Back* many of the contributors express feeling tokenized by white people – they speak of moments when they were the only person of color invited to speak at conferences or rallies and being expected to speak for all people of color, or being friends with white people who ask them probing and insensitive questions – that they again have to answer for all people of color. These impositions come from people who expect to be taught, rather than those who seek to learn – which is why the book was created: “*This Bridge* can get us there. Can coax us into the habit of listening to each other and learning each other's ways of seeing and being.” (Bambara xxxi)

This Bridge cultivates people who seek to learn – who seek to cross the bridge, but don't know where to start or who to look to. And it does that in a way that doesn't exploit the labor of women of color or expect them to do all the work of liberation.

It gives you a source to look to, to inform yourself, to incorporate into the Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation, to influence the ways you act and the things you say. Because we can't just change hearts and minds – we gotta change body/minds.

The idea of the body/mind acknowledges that the ideas we have in our minds influence the ways we act: if I believe disabled people are helpless and I am able bodied then that means I must act to help disabled people. Holding open doors, carrying things, grabbing disabled people's bodies and stuff to "help" us do things – even when we didn't ask. Some of these things are more egregious than others, definitely. But all of them come from assumptions people carry in their minds and these things people carry in their minds influence their actions.

Oftentimes the things we carry in our minds come from our experiences. Many of my formative experiences were my parents, teachers or other adults around me criticizing how loud I was or how much space I occupied, telling me to make myself smaller and less noticeable – to make myself invisible. And I spent a lot of my life trying to do just that.

Until I couldn't anymore.

For a lot of reasons, but the reasons don't matter.

The point is, if I had to render myself invisible within my own life for one more fucking second I was going to jump on the nearest table and scream.

So it was time to find a new way.

This new way isn't actually new though. People have been talking about it for centuries, dreaming it into existence for decades, practicing it for longer than recorded time.

I'm talking about equity, baby.

Because abolition for me, and abolition for you isn't going to be brought about by equality. Equality is a simplistic form of justice, and justice is overwrought by legal systems that were designed to promote inequality from their inception. In *Are Prisons Obsolete*, Angela Davis critiques the Prison Industrial Complex and the frameworks of the American legal system that lead to compounding inequalities: "...prison construction and the attendant drive to fill these new structures with human bodies have been driven by ideologies of racism and the pursuit of profit." (Davis 84) The legal system is meant to be about bringing justice and preserving equality – but within our society it preserves racist hierarchies and promotes divisions.

So equality is not gonna cut it.

But equity: From each according to their ability to each according to their need.

Marx said it first. Then HasanAbi. Now me.

Passing the meme down the line – and the knowledge contained within it. Now it's your turn to grab a hold of it.

We want equity. What does equity look like?

In *CARE WORK*, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha tells us that "...when we reach for each other and make the most access possible, it is a radical act of love. When access is centralized at the beginning dream of every action or event, that is radical love. I mean that access is far more to me than a checklist of accessibility needs – though checklists are needed and necessary. I mean that without deep love and care for each other, for our cripp bodyminds, an event can have all the fragrance-free soap and

interpreters and thirty-six-inch-wide-doorways in the world. And it can still be empty.”

(Piepzna-Samarasinha 76)

Equity is about love. That type of Radical Self Love Sonya Renee Taylor talks about in *The Body is Not an Apology*. The kind of love that doesn’t need sameness – but can sit with difference. A type of love from *This Bridge Called My Back* where we are accountable for seeking out and listening to the people who are already out there speaking their piece.

We have been denied equity. Our ancestors were denied equity. And the pain of that denial has been passed down through generations – we call it intergenerational trauma.

Pain comes in many forms – physical pain, emotional and mental pain – anybody with a phone can tell you about the psychic damage they endured from that meme they saw last week. And that’s a silly thing to say when I’m talking about a serious topic. But we understand it, we understand that pain comes from many places, in many ways, even if we don’t always want to acknowledge it. And pain, especially experiencing a lot of it for a long time, it does something to you.

We are hurt people. And we get caught in the pain cycle. And even if we don’t want to, we end up passing that pain down the line.

When I was working in afterschool we used to have a speaker come to our training each year. I remember him as the Hurt People Hurt People guy. And he told us this story about how he was from Texas, where they are notorious for being tough on

crime. And in spite of that, they still had crime, lots of crime. You would think that if being tough on crime worked to reduce crime there would be less crime.

But it doesn't.

I was on Tumblr at the time, feminist Tumblr where I was reading about Abolition, so I knew of abolition as a concept. But the Hurt People Hurt People guy introduced me to Abolition as a practice. He presented a challenge: take what we know about Abolition, equity, justice – take it all into your classroom with you, and practice it. Make classroom policies for it.

Instead of punitive measures that punish children for being silly or careless, teach them empathy and love for their fellow classmates. Reconcile them with one another. Build camaraderie and trust. It's not easy, they're hurt people, I'm a hurt people. So it's not easy. And it takes time.

But there's a difference. I've seen it. So I know it's possible.

PART FOUR

I want to step back, because I've been digging deeper and deeper into these issues. But now we need to take a big picture moment. We need a *What does this all mean* moment. What do I want to do with this video?

Silence is Violence.

Part of the violence is silencing – we are made to be silent on the oppression we face, we are told not to speak; we are forbidden from comparing salaries, talking about discrimination and racism (liberal colorblindness), asking for an explanation for whether or not that was a microaggression we just experienced (it probably was).

The Civility Politics of Liberalism tell us that a good disabled person, a good person of color, a good queer, a good woman, a good... human – a person who deserves to be considered human – that person is going to be silent. They are going to be complacent. They are going to voice polite objections, if they really must, but they need to be civil about it, and they can't make anybody uncomfortable, because making people uncomfortable isn't really all that civil.

During the early Black Lives Matter protests in Ferguson, Missouri, political figures would lecture the protesters using MLK as an example of a civil protestor – a peaceful protestor. As we all know, the only speech MLK ever wrote or delivered was the “I Have a Dream” speech, and the goals of that speech have all been accomplished.

Except.

Ferguson was a peaceful protest.

And like, where are the protesters – especially the most visible ones – from Ferguson today? I'll give you a moment to fire up a search engine.

BLM began as a protest of police violence. And in the wake of these protests against police violence... The uh... The police did a bunch of targeted violence. Guess who they targeted.

Now this is all alleged – because the police are the ones who have to investigate their own crimes so, you know.

Maybe we should talk more about the benefits of civility again?

The way that civility is silencing – the way that silence is violence – the way that the threat of violence is used to silence – the way acts of violence literally silence.

Out of this we see our concept begin to take form: Making My Peace.

Peace isn't something we have. It's something we cultivate. We need to find the ways to exercise agency and create our own peace. Self care is important. Self care is not bubble baths and spa days but the regular and daily maintenance of the body/mind. This is the duality of making my peace and speaking my piece. We need to speak to the crises of our minds/bodies/experiences/areas/generations/other.

We've touched on self care before; how self care isn't a commodity, it's not something we can purchase. Self care is part of reproductive labor – labor that has been traditionally considered women's work by our society. But reproductive labor is how society is built, how it continues to function. Through reproductive labor we were taught our values, ideology. How to be little humans growing into adult humans, but now as adults, how we continue to engage socially within our groups.

Part of the core argument of *CARE WORK* is that we must urgently reevaluate how disability fits into activism, and by extension, how the reproductive labor that care requires is a fundamental part of activist movements – whether we want to acknowledge it or not.

And a lot of us don't.

Throughout the book Piepzna-Samarasinha points to the moments where things break down within activist groups – and most of these breakdowns occur from burnout. Burnout that could have often been resolved if we refuse to be silenced, even within our own movements, and stop ignoring our needs.

Self care isn't about individualistic individualizing by ourselves.

Self care is about finding different ways to engage in community.

Self care is about finding better ways to engage in community.

Self care is about making our peace by speaking our piece.

This work is how I speak my piece.

I'm writing this in December of 2023, but in the summer of 2023 I was having a major anxious relapse. Something that hit so much harder because I hadn't experienced anxiety quite like this in so long. For the first time since moving here, I felt alone. One night, in a moment of desperation, in a moment of needing someone to talk to, I went to the Discord. I went to the Discord and I was like yo, strangers I don't know, I need to not be alone right now. And the person who offered to dm with me, they saved me. I wasn't cured, I wasn't fixed. But I felt like I could go on one more day. And because I went on one more day I get to be here with you now.

In a world where so many of our interactions with others are shaped by the brutal structures and institutions of capitalism, learning to love yourself and others, and to contribute what you are capable of is a revolutionary act.

And most of what we contribute isn't going to break or even bend the world.

But that doesn't mean it's not necessary.

And so when I say self care doesn't happen alone, I mean it. I know it.

Global racial capitalism does a lot of work to divvy us up into smaller and smaller categories – even intersectionality can be weaponized by those with power to make us think that we cannot cross those divides, and it's easier to rule a divided people : “Some of you, like us, are up to here with the chorus of laments whose chief chant is ‘I’m more

poor, more oppressed than you,' who give suffering and pain more merit than laughter and health: And yes, we intimately know the origins of oppression; it brewed in our beds, tables, and streets; screaming out in anger is a necessary stage in our evolution into freedom, but do we have to dwell forever on that piece of terrain, forever stuck in the middle of that bridge? This land of thorns is not habitable. We carry this bridge inside us, the struggle, the movement toward liberation.” (Anzaldua xxvii)

It's time to cross the bridge.

It's time to reach out to the person who has already crossed and take their hand; it's time to reach back to the person behind, and offer ours.

PART FIVE

We are all trying to feel whole. And part of this need for wholeness comes from the pressures of living within a society that considers wholeness part of humanness. And so when we feel not-whole, we feel not-human. And we are made to feel not-human again and again by the oppressive structures we face, the violence, the silencing, the invisiblizing.

Alienation.

Capitalism creates competition – we are not allowed to *exist* in the world, we need to hustle and grind, grind ourselves to the bone. Capitalism is a zero sum game where one person's success means the failure of many others and so I must set myself out from the competition, I must be an individual, I must be The Special, and I must believe that I am The Special because if I don't believe that I am The Special, and Worthy, and The Best Person For The Job, then I have to consider that maybe I don't deserve the privilege that I

have attained through my hustle grind which was uniquely hustley grindy which is why I deserve Things.

And you see how this logic becomes circular?

But this is the logic of neoliberal capitalism.

The logic of alienation.

Marxist alienation tells us that we are alienated from our labor and our labor – the choice of what to labor over, when to labor, how to labor – these are all choices that can give us self determination, that give us ways to understand our lives as having meaning and value.

And interpersonal alienation, the kind I'm talking about, this kind of alienation would deny us the experience of culture which is, overwhelmingly and in spite of other constructs we have of culture, the experience of being with other people.

When is the last time you felt like you were part of a community?

No wait. Better question.

When is the last time you felt *in community*.

I love watching Grand Theft Auto V role play (GTAV rp) streams; they are fascinating to me.

GTAV rp is messy, it's complicated, frankly, its fucking weird – most role play communities are.

GTAV rp takes place in the GTAV game world – an open world designed to look a lot like Los Angeles, CA. Role play takes place during live streams where many live streamers are acting and streaming at the same time. There are rules – both acknowledged

and unacknowledged – which govern the role play. But nearly anything can happen within these limits. A lot of the “action” of the server is designed around bank robberies and heists – big moments with fast paced action that are all occurring unscripted in real time. And these things can happen because of the collaboration and agreement of all these different people – many of whom only realize that they were part of these big events *after* the event has occurred. There is certainly planning behind the scenes, but the actions and dialogue of the characters are improvised in the moment. And this makes GTAV rp one of the most fascinating things to watch because in real time we are seeing people engage collaboratively and cooperatively *in community*.

And if you ever told me when I graduated high school that one day I would be writing a master’s project about the community of role play, well I would actually probably tell you that's a really interesting idea I want to hear more about.

Community isn’t community because people are near each other. Community isn't being – community is doing. Community is *process*.

Role player’s aren't out here being role players, they are doing role play.

So what does that mean?

Well sometimes shit fucks up – the server crashes right after the big bank job, scuff, we got caught by the cops and we’re going to jail, scuff, we spent a five hour role play session sitting in court waiting for the trial to start but the lawyer guy wasn’t streaming today so our rp today was taking turns sneaking up to the judges chair to bang the gavel before anyone notices.

Scuff.

Shit happens we can control.

But more often than not shit happens that we can't control.

In *CARE WORK* Piepzna-Samarasinha speaks about care collectives she participated in falling apart: “I didn’t know that one group falling apart didn’t have to mean that was it... I wish we could’ve known that the struggles we hit weren’t failures or signs of how inadequate we were but incredibly valuable learnings... our struggle to figure these questions out is at the heart of our movement work.” (Piepzna-Samarasinha 60)

Scuff happens in all types of ways, but how we react to scuff, how we adjust and accommodate scuff. How we don’t let it stop us but instead use it to inform our future projects and plans – that is what makes community possible.

When we think about community as an intentional process – as something we do rather than something we are, we resist the alienation – the lie that tells us we have no agency, we have no self-determination, we have no choice. Because while this doesn’t change the ways we experience alienation from our labor, it does make a little change, a little dent in the overall misery.

Because believe it or not, activism, advocacy, abolition, these things aren't about our collective misery – they’re about something far more delightful than all that.

Pleasure Activism, written and gathered by adrienne maree brown, takes on Audre Lorde’s idea of The Erotic. The Erotic is not just pleasure, but the body/mind experience of pleasure, whether this pleasure comes from good food or friendship or sex. We know what it means to feel good, and we must use this knowing to understand why we feel bad

– and then we must take action. *Pleasure Activism* acts on this – how do we increase pleasure in different areas of our life. With section titles like “*The Pleasure of Deep, Intentional Friendship, A Conversation with Dani McClain and Jodie Tonita*” and “Care as Pleasure” and “Use Your Voice” *Pleasure Activism* situates pleasure and the erotic as something that cannot be contained within our own bodies, but something which must be shared – a mutual pleasure, a platonic pleasure wherein we learn that our lives can be and should be pleasurable experiences, and the only reason they aren’t is because of the shame, distance and distrust that has been cultivated within us.

So yeah. Leftists are not coming for your toothbrush. That would be gross.

I’m coming for your Dystopian Pessimism, and I’m gonna turn that little motherfucker into a Utopian Futurity.

In “Choreographies of Resistance: Latino Queer Dance and the Utopian Performative” Ramon H. Rivera-Servera pulls the concept of the Utopian Performative into focus: “The utopian performative is deeply rooted in a materialist appraisal of the inadequacies of contemporary experience and addresses them in the moment, through enactments that produce alternative experiences and visions of how things could and should be.” (Rivera-Servera 262)

The utopian is not about the perfect society – it is about imagining a society without all the crap it is currently full of that harms us. A society based on the principles of pleasure – “The Politics of Feeling Good” (adrienne maree brown 3)

And Utopian Futurity situates that that imagining in a process; the process of working and trying and failing and fucking up and figuring it out only to fuck up again.

And while society may never be perfected, it will be in this process. The process of figuring it out. The process of always imagining and striving for something better, something more fulfilling, something that we can't even imagine now, but generations in the future will because of the work we do today.

“This Bridge needs no Foreword. It is the Afterward that'll count. The coalitions of women determined to be a danger to our enemies... The will to be dangerous... And the contracts we creative combatants will make to mutually care and cure each other into wholesomeness. And blue-prints we will draw up of the new order we will make manifest. And the personal unction we will discover in the mirror, in the dreams, or on the path across *This Bridge*. The work: To make revolution irresistible.” (Bambara xxxi)

PART SIX

In *Bodies at Problems* I discussed learning through doing — learning through play – and my footage was from the game *Witcher 3 : Wild Hunt*, an rpg where you play as the character Geralt of Rivia and you explore the mostly open world that he lives in all the while fighting monsters which make you confront the concept of The Monster – are scary contorted figures that inconvenience humans monsters, or is the true monster in this world the things that humans are willing to do to each other.

It was a short video so I didn't have much room to really dig into things as deeply as I'm trying to now.

But now, I have time. So let's do this.

If community is a thing we do, how can we better understand what doing community looks like?

The concept of Affinity Spaces gives us a way to understand how people coagulate into community online. James Paul Gee and Elisabeth Hayes outline principles that are tacitly observed by the most engaging Affinity Spaces, we only need to know a few of them for this video:

“Fifth, knowledge in the affinity space is “distributed” in the sense that different people know different things and can share that knowledge when necessary. Often the space has good tools and technologies that store and facilitate knowledge. No one person has to or is expected to know everything all by themselves.

Six, the affinity space is not closed, though there may be requirements for entry, and takes newcomers (“newbies”). It refreshes itself. Unlike school, people do not “progress” all at the same pace, age or “grade.” Movement in the space is quite varied; people may focus on one narrow aspect or explore the entire breadth of the interest area, spend as much time as they want on a particular set of skills or practices, and otherwise pursue quite different learning trajectories.

Seventh, affinity spaces are about sharing a common endeavor where people learn things, produce things or knowledge, and can, if they wish, become experts (“professional amateurs” or “pro-ams,” see: Anderson 2006; Leadbeater & Miller 2004). Even these experts believe there is always something new to learn, more to discover, and higher standards to achieve.” (Gee & Hayes 2011)

Think about GTAV rp – things aren’t neat, they’re messy – scuff happens. Doing community isn’t easy – it’s hard. But sometimes things that are hard are worth it – not all the time, but sometimes. There is no guide to tell us how much we should all give – and

in a culture of giving it all or what you give is nothing, in a culture of “I am the one doing all the work to hold this together,” in a culture of production results quarterly review progress – fuck its hard to tell how much we gave vs how much we got. And in the end, we are Hurt People and we will Hurt People – it's inevitable. But we have a “common endeavor” – that of change. And not just changing ourselves on our own personal journey, but ultimately, changing the structures that hurt us in the first place.

And in that common endeavor of change we can learn how to help rather than harm. We can unlearn the alienation, we can maybe heal from the pain. We can find new ways of being and doing.

But we can't find it alone. And we can't force people to find it. But we can welcome them to it, we can leave a light on to show them the way to safe harbor. We can share the battle scars that keep record of our hurts and harms. And in this, we can join in the process of radical self love – a love that isn't stagnant, but which spreads like a viral video or meme, and impacts us deeply because it shows us all the ways we have been trained not to love ourselves, and by extension others. We can experience the delight and pleasure of being bold truth tellers as we climb out of our wells to shame mankind.

An Affinity Space I have loved since I first started really engaging with live-streaming and digital media is the Sims Community. The Sims Community is on Twitch and YouTube. We call the creators Simmers – a lot of my content would qualify me as a Simmer, even though it isn't my primary form of content. Within the Simmer category I'm a Builder – I like to build houses and community buildings. The Sims 4 is a sandbox kind of game – you build everything from scratch starting with your Sim: from their hair,

clothing, facial features, which you can customize with in game options or custom content that you or others create and download into the game – from there you can build their home lot from the ground up – and down if you’d like a basement, next you can create their neighbors and their homes, and there is even considerable customizability when it comes to the shape of community lots that make up the neighborhood.

The house I’m building is for a family I’ve been playing with for about 10 years. The family is in it’s 12th or 13th generation, I’ve lost track. I started playing it in the Sims 3; I recreated it for The Sims 4. This is a comfort game for me – a creative game, a game I come back to when an aesthetic or vibe or color or pattern hits me just right and I think to myself hmm how would I make that. And the community reflects that – not my community (I don’t have one yet), but The Sims Community.

For the 10 years I’ve been playing The Sims I’ve been playing it alongside Simmers like TheEnglishSimmer or FakeGamerGirl or Plumbella, or so many others who engage in this space – and their communities. As viewers we create blogs where we talk about our sims and make stories about their lives, we complain about what the game has and doesn’t have – how grotesque the cost of all the packs are. Playing a Sims video by one of these Simmers feels, in a way, like coming home.

And from there, participating in this community as a creator, it also feels like home.

But when I was on stream one day, and I said something like, “I don’t know if I’ll ever want to play The Sims 4 on stream again, I’ve lost interest...” That was a moment that felt like a great loss. A loss of community, a loss of home. A loss of those

collaborative energies that were always so fulfilling to me and felt like a place I could go to escape all the awful crap that I had to deal with every day.

There were so many pressures I felt in my life – streaming didn't seem to be working out, I could never get that view count up, I was definitely never going to monetize my content.

But then, having this overnight inspiration, having it turn into this beautiful build, this grotesque pink house, a house that is so pink, so vivid, so resplendent in its rainbows and details, a house that looks as queer, rainbow flag and all, as its inhabitants are – I was home again.

I was where I needed to be.

And that line about the queer rainbow flag of it all isn't a throwaway line. The Sims Community is one of the first places where I was able to talk about my queer identity. The first place where I was allowed to envision myself as a queer person within a queer community.

And so finally, with this build, this moment, I was able to recognize the value that this community had brought to my life, and how much it had contributed to what I know, who I am, how I approach the world.

And probably, most importantly, how I care for myself.

Because sure, we don't talk about the rough shit, the shit you reserve for your like one best friend, but Audre Lorde tells us that poetry is not a luxury, and there is a poetics to building ghastly pink houses – there is a truth telling there, even if we don't see it.

There is a truth telling we feel. And there is a poetics of being in community with people doing things that fulfills us and sustains us.

Cinema nerds would call it camp. The Sims Community does camp.

And it is fucking glorious.

And without those spaces of a deep and sustained effort towards collaborative creation, collaborative world building, a radical collaborative acceptance (even though there were still many blind spots because many early content creators were reticent towards appearing political) without those affinity spaces, something is lost in the fabric of our lives.

And so this build, this build that you've been watching me make – this build is Care. This build is my effort to be in community. This build is me struggling and failing and struggling again as I begin to understand that my view count is not the only value system I have – and it doesn't matter how many people watch me build this house because even if they did come, it's the joy of the build, the pleasure of creation, the enduring sense of participating in something bigger than me, the feeling of being in a community that didn't just accept queer people – but that was made by queer people, where queer people were given open invitation to be loud and queer and say yeah I'm bisexual or pansexual and that makes me Gay with a capital G, where creators would get criticized because there were token straights in their households, rather than token gays. It is something that doesn't need me to participate – but something I'm welcome to participate in, even in my own small way.

This is my Utopian Performativity. And out of it comes my Utopian Futurity.

And because of all these things, I know I'm not alone.

And that's such a wonderful feeling.

CONCLUSION

You know about revolutionary optimism, now I want to introduce you to revolutionary *joy*. And revolutionary joy doesn't come from things we do alone. Revolutionary joy isn't "The acceptance of illusion and appearance as reality..." (Lorde 74)

Revolutionary joy is the joy of *doing community*. Doing community in ways where we express our needs. In ways where we can Speak our Piece.

In ways that Make My Peace.

(Closing Line)

"I have found that battling despair does not mean closing my eyes to the enormity of the tasks of effecting change, nor ignoring the strength and the barbarity of the forces aligned against us. It means teaching, surviving and fighting with the most important resource I have, myself, and taking joy in that battle. It means, for me, recognizing the enemy outside and the enemy within, and knowing that my work is part of a continuum of women's work, of reclaiming this earth and our power, and knowing that this work did not begin with my birth nor will it end with my death. And it means knowing that within this continuum, my life and my love and my work has particular power and meaning relative to others." Audre Lorde, *The Cancer Journals* (page 18)

(Fade Out)

(On Screen Works Cited)

I've included in my works cited some texts that didn't make it into the final cut, but I want to take a moment to acknowledge that they have contributed to the habitus I'm cultivating for myself around this topic and recommend them to you for further reading. I know it might be difficult to get ahold of a particular book sometimes so I always recommend you look on openlibrary.org, especially for the older books. [Openlibrary.org](https://openlibrary.org) also has a function which can read many of the books they have available to you, which is something that is invaluable to me considering all the reading I have to do for these projects. This isn't a sponsored moment, just a way for me to share important resources and methods of access in hopes that you too will share them and make the world more resourceful and accessible to you and people you know.

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Video #3

Video #3 People Gotta Eat : An Interrogation of Authenticity Labor, Parasociality, Clout
and Capital within Digital Affinity Spaces

INTRODUCTION

(Vlog introduction and footage in background.)

(On Screen Quote) “No one would argue that streaming video games is a revolutionary act...” David Arditi, *Streaming Culture : Subscription Platforms and the Unending Consumption of Culture*

Depending on who you ask, digital media is either going to save the world or destroy it.

People tend to lean towards the destroy it side – it's a lot like the 90s scare about video games causing gun violence; often when we encounter new technologies, it's easier to be frightened and resist – to become reactionary and jump to the worst conclusions, than it is to try to understand what motivates people to act in the ways they do. Remember, it's not that Florida has unique public records laws that allow this information to be broadly accessible to the public in a way that most states do not allow – it's that people from Florida are uniquely awful.

I want to understand the culture of content creation – but in a way that is more particular and more useful to us than *thing bad* or *thing good*; I can call something revolutionary, I can call something counter-revolutionary – but these are both cop outs because they ignore the intricacies of human interaction. They ignore those places where things intersect and become complicated.

And it is in that complexity where my interest lies.

In all things we do we are haunted by the specter of capitalism. (*See what I just did there?*) I call it a specter because most people don't believe in ghosts and the people who do believe in ghosts need a lot of proof before they will admit a ghost exists.

And in this very way, capitalism as an ideology is invisibilized and we don't see the way it impacts everything we do and how we can and cannot think about things.

So how does this specter of capitalism play out within digital media?

This video will in no way be the end of this conversation, but I hope to pick up a few threads of conversations that have already been happening, weave them together, and maybe give you a new way to understand things – a way you might not have thought of before. And I'd like to do that in a way that encourages us to come to these situations with empathy – understanding, a recognition that we are all people in process, capable of growth and change, like I state in my last video, that Hurt People Hurt People, and accountability must come from within.

I cannot hold people accountable for the harm they have caused.

But I can try to understand the broader structures and ideologies they are participating in – often without even knowing.

So this won't be a callout video. Nobody is being canceled.

Call off your hordes because I'd rather not have to batten my hatches.

Because today, we are going to talk about people, and the thing is, People Gotta Eat.

PART ONE : People Gotta Eat

People Gotta Eat: The coercive influences of capital push people to behave in ways that they would not otherwise. This does not mean that people are not accountable for their actions, but rather explains the conditions of living under capitalism. (*On screen image of my Tweet*)

In my last video *Making My Peace (Speaking My Piece)* I spoke about the ways that liberal capitalism coerces us into silences – silences which we must break by *Speaking Our Piece to Make Our Peace (Speak/Make Piece/Peace on screen)*, how often we don't even understand the ways in which we have been silenced.

But why? Why do we have to be silent?

Often our survival is contingent upon our silence.

Liberal civility politics don't just prevent us from speaking – they prevent us from speaking in ways that rock the boat or challenge authority; “stick it to the man” or “speaking truth to power” are important activist memes because they acknowledge the silencing that occurs and they present this challenge of authority – even challenging the necessity of authority, the necessity of holding up a system in which so many of us are silenced.

Even this project is going to be run through the approval of various professors in a liberal institution – so there are limits to the extent that I can voice my ideology if I want the money and time I've invested (*borrowed*) to not be a complete waste.

But understanding that is important.

More important, is us as viewers learning to read for those silences.

What is a piece of media not saying? What can't it say? What can't it do?

We like to think the possibilities are endless, but there are all sorts of systems in place – the copyright system, critique from our peers, audiences, and other systems I haven't quite thought about but that you can list in the comments below like they should have been obvious to me.

There are systems in place to check and critique and postpone or prevent our behavior. To coerce us into making standardized projects instead of... Whatever weirdness we could be making. And sure, we can still make some of that weirdness, but there is a specter – the specter of capitalism, which haunts us; creators aren't just making fun projects, they are making content which carries this ideology and practice of capitalism. And so when we consider the culture of YouTube or Twitch, we need to consider it with that specter in mind.

In “The Labour of Visual Authenticity on Social Media: Exploring Producers’ and Audiences’ Perceptions on Instagram” Maares et al describe the phenomenon of the micro-celebrity: “Social media enable anyone to reach large audiences, broadening users’ followership outside of their personal contacts. Regardless of reach, however, all social media use is a public performance to some extent, and thus strategic (Vainikka, Noppari and Seppanen, ” 2017). By selecting which information and images to share of themselves, users engage in acts of performative ‘micro-celebrity’ – practices which arguably ‘amp up’ their popularity (Senft, 2008: 25). Marwick (2013a) describes micro-celebrity as a continuum along ascribed to achieved micro-celebrity, with the latter referring to the self-presentation strategy directed at an imaginary audience. This includes

perceiving all social media connections as fans or followers, continuously live-streaming the everyday, sharing personal information and fostering seemingly intimate relationships with them, as well as ‘creating an affable brand’ (Marwick and Boyd, 2011: 127), which offers their audiences a sense of credibility. This self-branding focuses on individual uniqueness (Van Nuenen, 2016) and aims to create favourable and easily-accessed associations in consumers (Speed, Butler and Collins, 2015). This includes marking out a specific niche-topic or style that micro-bloggers can be associated with, as well as a careful curation of various social media profiles to create a coherent public image (Dekavalla, 2019; Abidin, 2016; Duffy and Hund, 2015).” (Maares et al 2)

Ideology is an invisible hand, a guiding force, and it shapes everything we do. (Foley 63) Unlike legacy media, new media is structured to place production centrally and squarely on our shoulders – to individualize the content process, to make each creator their own production studio, advertisement agency and pr firm.

We are simultaneously creators and viewers. We are micro-celebrities.

And out of this weird mess comes a weird culture – internet culture.

Culture comes out of any social formation where people get together and do things; we can’t help it, we love inside jokes and shared knowledge. And we are precisely attuned to this culture because we have very specific considerations and demands about what the cultural products that are created must look like.

So what do they look like?

PART TWO : Why the ukulele?

I was visiting my grandparents in July when the Miranda Sings scandal broke and I sat on their back porch working on needlepoint dinosaur as I watched the two and three and four and five hour deep dives that came out one after the other going over the story: tweet threads, leaked messages, videos of her live shows. And of course. The ukulele apology. (*“Colleen Ballinger’s Apology Video Is INSANE! | Hasanabi Reacts Ft. Boy Boy & I Did a Thing.”*)

It was fucking weird.

I had heard of this creator before this event – my cousin used to watch her; other than that she wasn’t under my radar, I didn’t really care what she was doing, I wasn’t particularly invested in her content or situation.

But then this not-an-apology apology video came out and everybody I watch was watching it.

And like I said, it was so fucking weird.

So the scandal breaks, right. And Colleen Ballinger can afford to have PR representatives and lawyers – she can afford to have people advise her on what to do and how to make it through this.

Why didn’t she listen to them?

I think that’s what hits me every time I think about this. Because the allegations are bad. The allegations are indefensible. But she picks up her ukelele and she sings about how she grooms her cat and she calls the people who accuse her part of a toxic gossip train.

Choo choo, I guess?

And like, ok. I get what she's going for : Yall are liars and this is just weird gossip, sure I'm a wacky person but it's all part of the show, I'm just a silly lil guy.

But why the ukulele?

Videos discussing parasociality are a dime a dozen, if you want to be a YouTube video essayist, you need to make a video critiquing the parasocial. It's a rite of passage, you could say. *(Probably because you want to give a subtle hint to the most noxious of your viewers to knock that shit off.)* And so I'd like to take a moment to lay some groundwork for the theory of "But why the ukulele?" because it has a lot to do with parasociality and from that, authenticity.

Typically the critique of capitalism that comes from these videos stops with the idea that content creators want bigger audiences to make more money. And this is a valid position to hold.

But I want to try approaching this a different way.

You will recognize the idea of commodity fetishism most clearly in those late night commercials selling strange products that people don't necessarily need. For example, the Snuggie. The Snuggie is a commercial product designed to be a combination of a blanket and sweater. It has a long blanket section that drags on the floor, it is narrow for individual use *(so you need to buy two)*, and it has sleeves and even a pocket on some models. The Snuggie is a useless and weird item and you already have things around your house to better accommodate any of the needs that the Snuggie attempts to fill. But you don't have a Snuggie, do you? And a Snuggie is all the rage. A

Snuggie is super practical. A Snuggie can solve those rare occasions where you specifically need a sweater blanket – cue the camera roll of several situations that you probably find laughable that have never happened to you.

I'd like to take a moment here to acknowledge that, while these As Seen On TV type commercials are often staged ridiculously, disabled people are typically the consumer targets – people for whom the situations where a product like a Snuggie would come in useful are not laughable or ridiculous, but actually kind of normal – and these commercials are an attempt to market this item to a broader able-bodied group.

But at the same time, the idea that this product fills needs that you don't personally seem to have, and the apparent invention of a time in which you might need it – this is the core of commodity fetishism.

Commodity fetishism comes out of the need to sell products. Even if those products are useless or harmful or silly and this is inherently ideologically aligned with capitalist ideology that tells us that the way we can achieve things is through our personal consumption of products that allow us to achieve established norms that have been created because of societal adaptation to the product – think back to our discussion on transhumanism in *Making My Peace (Speaking My Peace)*

So is Colleen Ballinger trying to sell me a ukulele?

No.

It is important to understand that social media does not simply operate as a commodity, sure there are subscription services and pay models – live shows where you might be welcomed on stage to become part of the action, or ukulele themed merch – but

for the most part these are free to access services and within this model the user is the commodity, rather than the social media itself.

And this is the first way that we must understand social media ecosystems; viewer as product. We see this in the way that creators and platforms speak about viewers – the way they celebrate subscriber milestones with different play buttons. We the viewers have become the commodity – and the algorithmic view count monitoring system is an example of commodity fetishism.

We see commodity fetishism in action when a creator gravitates towards a few types of content and avoids others (*AZAN GAMING WHEN?*): viewers are going to “make the stream/content” happen, without viewers there would be no content, I love all my viewers and all that they contribute so drop a like and subscribe and @ me with your fan art.

Understand that I am not criticizing these elements as inauthentic. A key component of ideology is we do not recognize how it operates in our lives; ideology, like any technology, often becomes seamlessly integrated into our lives and values without our outward recognition that it occurs.

It is entirely possible for a content creator to be genuinely grateful for their viewers contributions to the content, but it is also a standard that creators express these sentiments, and if they don't they will be seen as ungrateful for their audiences or spoiled by their success.

Gratuitous performance of gratefulness is a measure of authenticity for audiences who demand a humble creator who doesn't forget their roots as a nobody until the audience came and lifted them out of obscurity.

And if this sounds like an unhealthy dynamic, it probably is. And we should maybe stop and think about that; about the humbling that some audiences feel the need to do to creators, about the control they feel that gives them.

If I was in a relationship with someone who told me I could only afford to be housed because of them, yall would probably tell me to get the fuck out. But if some rando comes into my stream, donates five dollars and tells me to be grateful because without that money my life would be trash and I would be nobody, well that's ok.

In spite of the obsession with view count and follower count, a creator's income will not necessarily correlate to subscribers or viewers – we only have to remember for a moment that the word “adpocalypse” is a word which describes the massive demonetization of content which occurred on YouTube in 2017. These sites may also refuse to payout creators if income thresholds are not met, and there is always the threat of copyright claims, both valid and false, which can shut down a channel altogether.

Other things which can shut down your channel altogether are gratuitous violations of terms of service.

So Colleen Ballinger sees the news drop. Scandal erupts. Those metrics are in danger, that follower count is dropping, lawyer says to keep quiet – anything you do or say will be used in a court of law and all that jazz.

But the follower count. The metrics.

And like sure, the massive income loss is probably sad too.

But the loss of public opinion?

People really like ukuleles, right?

PART THREE: It's not about the ukulele.

New media blurs the line between viewer and consumer, remember, micro-celebrity. With this shift from production studios like Warner Brothers or Disney or even Netflix to your dad or your cousin or you – a shift from corporate conglomerates who can afford numbers guys and audience pre-screenings to randos with ten dollars and an iPhone, we see the burdens of traditional media shifting onto the individual.

Twitter is a micro-celebrity making site where traditional media and new media collide. Stars in your favorite shows on Netflix today are tweeting things that will get them fired tomorrow. Your favorite YouTuber or Twitch streamer is probably tweeting up a storm and getting canceled every third day of the week.

It's a shit storm.

But there are also brands on Twitter.

Not just micro-celebrity brands, but like, Wendys.

Unlike most fast food social media accounts, Wendys' logo has a face. So it's easier to think of her as a snappy comeback slay queen. Which is why (*on screen montage of Wendys tweets*).

While this type of content is incredibly memeable, it's not in the way that one would think.

Or actually, not in the way the corporations which created these accounts would like it to be .

You see Wendys is not a girl named Wendy who wants to sell you hamburgers, but some rando being paid lots of money to manage a social media account. The Wendys account might even be piloted by many randos being paid lots of money. The randos might not actually be paid that good of money.

But an important designation here is that they are a corporate employee working for a corporate brand that is trying to sell you burgers rather than that kid your cousin bullied in high school who went viral for posting a video about throwing a shoe.

They are run by a real person, but they are not a real person.

This is a weird form of dissonance that occurs when things are both/and but also neither/nor.

And we understand this both/and and neither/nor because we are people of the internet – cultured individuals with peculiar tastes.

This brand is trying to be #relatable.

But we perceive that this attempt is shadowed by a corporate schema – tainted by the desire to sell us shit.

This damn Twitter account is trying to sell us woke burgers.

It's a #ad.

And we all hate ads.

When we describe a character as “queer coded” we typically have an understanding that queer people are gonna look at that character and think “Yeah that’s

pretty gay man.” Part of this is not the performance of queerness – the character is not labeled queer, but rather the performativity of queerness that the character engages in. In *Gender Trouble* Judith Butler describes the performativity of gender: “...gender proves to be performative— that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing...” (Butler 33)

It’s easy to look at this from the perspective of performance – these are, after all, performed acts for a Twitter audience. But performativity is not about things we do, but rather things we are.

(Vlog segment about identity)

There is an incongruence which comes out when our audience perceives that we are not the identity that we are performing – and we see this with Wendys.

Wendys is not authentic.

“Authenticity as a concept is commonly used to evaluate the genuineness and originality of objects or individuals. A constructivist perspective acknowledges the social construction of authenticity and investigates how it is assigned, staged, and performed (Grazian, 2010). Thus, it does not assume authenticity exists objectively, but instead focuses on the relational aspect of social negotiations. The aim is not to evaluate the authenticity of an object or person, or the truthfulness of the claim, but to understand how authenticity is used by producers and perceived by consumers of cultural products (Tolson, 2010; Van Nuenen, 2016). With increasing commercialization, authenticity has become the core narrative to overcome the perception of a mere profit-orientation across all fields of cultural production (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Grazian, 2010). Translated to the

logic of the entrepreneurial self, discourses around authentic behaviour comprise the contradictory goals to find one's true self while at the same time commodifying oneself as object (Pooley, 2010)." (Maares et al 2)

So does this explain the ukulele?

NO.

But we are getting closer. But also it's not about the ukulele. It's about cultivation of commodities – audience. And audiences hate ads. But audiences love things that are #relatable. They love it to death. Like that guy from the Eminem song – Stan.

PART FOUR: Stans

When I describe my research people often reply with the idea of 15 minutes of fame, but 15 minutes of fame is temporary, and after those few minutes the person is rarely seen in media again – they are rarely immediately accessible to mass audiences who want to personally speak to them. Even after the virality of the video has worn off, the creator who posted it will still be accessible to that audience – not necessarily personally accessible, but you can comment on the video, send them dm's, or find a variety of other ways to @ them and engage with them, even if they never engage back.

And these methods are all readily encouraged and made accessible by the platforms.

You can turn YouTube comments off – but the standard is to have them on. Creators even face criticism for turning off comments or deleting comments.

Most of the creators we enjoy the most appear to be as accessible as a friend that we would send a text to.

And that is where things get complicated.

Way back at the beginning of part three I told you about the burdens of traditional media being shifted to individuals who now act as their own production studios. Out of this comes authenticity labor: “Entrepreneurial micro-bloggers therefore turn to authenticity labour to overcome some of the tension between having to brand themselves and their promotional work to sustain their business, and the need to portray themselves as genuine in order to connect with audiences (Long and Wilhoit, 2018). This reiterates the increasing use of authenticity as an important value in the attention economy and its ‘oxymoronic coupling’ with marketing practices (Pooley, 2010: 72),” (Maares et al 1).

Authenticity labor is an investment in realness and relatability. Sure you’re a multi-millionaire now but you’re down to earth and relatable. Sure you have hundreds of thousands – if not millions – of fans, but I could call you in the middle of the night for life advice.

You gotta stay humble and be grateful.

And if it sounds like I already said something about this, well yeah I did.

(cut in what I already said)

There is both performativity and performance of authenticity in these digital media ecosystems which couple and combine and spit out a new iteration of a tale as old as time: Parasociality.

I think we all understand the concept of parasociality, but often our understanding comes from the most extreme forms. Eminem’s Stan – the people who think they are the creator’s best friend, who think the creator not responding to their comment is a personal

slight, the people who send messages about how the creator is personally slighting them because they have ignored the previous messages they sent.

Parasocialists are kinda scary.

But at the same time, we engage in parasocial behavior all the time and at different degrees. In “Theorizing Development of Parasocial Engagement” authors Riva Tukachinsky and Gayle Stever bring together research to propose a model for understanding parasocial relationships: “...PSRs [parasocial relationships] are conceptualized as a generalized emotional and cognitive involvement with the character than can occur outside the context of any particular media exposure situation (Klimmt, Hartmann, & Schramm, 2006).” (Tukachinsky & Stever 297). When I think about which creator I’m going to watch this morning as I make my coffee and prepare to work on my project – the amount of noise I want to be hearing; the amount of movement and brightness of color I want to see; whether I’m going have to read subtitles to understand what’s happening, or if I need something that is non-linear so I don’t need to pay attention to a plot or storyline – all of these considerations are being made over specific people who offer specific types of content. I’m familiar with the content they offer, and I have expectations about what content they will continue to offer. And I make those judgments as I pick out what to play, and I make those judgments as I select a variety of videos and set up my playlist for the day that will play as I go through my work.

According to Tukachinsky and Stever, these judgments come from a place of parasocial engagement where my awareness of a creator comes from a relationship that

has been cultivated between myself and the creator – a relationship where I know things about them.

And on their end of the relationship, they try to guess things about me.

Do I like ukuleles?

Not really. But there are probably audiences who do. And a creator will know which audiences like ukuleles and which ones don't.

Which is weird to think about.

But creators have spent time collecting and monitoring and observing their audiences – obsessively engaging with them and drawing out what they come to a platform or channel for. Personal branding isn't just for the creator to stand out from the crowd, but how a viewer will know who to go to, what is being offered. Whether or not ukuleles will be involved.

And this doesn't mean that your creator knows you – they definitely don't.

But they have a viewer composite, and it maybe contains little bits of you. Like that weird comment you left last week when their microphone was making whoosh noises. Cut that out.

PART FIVE: Genre

Now I'm going to step on some toes here because there are some people who would call digital media like YouTube genres and the content categories subgenres. And I get it, you're old-school. New technologies are scary because of their complexity. And if you dip a toe into the vast variety of content available you might actually realize that

the only way you can really experience the snorkel retreat you signed up for is to dive right in.

In *Materiality and “Genre in the Study of Discourse Communities,”* authors Devitt et al discuss the problem of the discourse: “...the concept of discourse community has been one of the most hotly contested notions in the field, subject to the range of by now well-known critiques that claim it is too utopian, hegemonic, stable, and abstract.” (Devitt et al 541) You are involved in many discourse communities – groups of people who share assumptions, values and language. But specific language: memes. In *Making My Peace* I spoke about my own personal memes that I create and understand. Those memes constitute me as a discourse community of one; but as those memes spread through my social group, my friend group, my fellow students and professors, those memes become part of a discursive body of knowledge that we share and we become a discourse community.

Discourse communities are complex; we are involved in many different discourse communities at once and we use different language to mean the same thing in those different communities – and I’m going to talk about that in my next video. But what is important to understand here is how discourse relates to genre, because out of discourse communities, genre arises. If we consider discourse communities a way of speaking, thinking, doing, then we can understand genre as the product of these ways of speaking, thinking, doing.

The problem with studying discourse communities is, “The process of sifting through the massive quantities of information gathered and attempting to stake out some

analytical claims...” (Devitt et al 542) This is where genre comes in. Genres represent somewhat stable categories around which we can organize our ideas about discourse communities. When I point to apology videos or tweets written by corporate accounts I am not just finding pithy examples and constructing a narrative – although that narrativizing does constitute a genre and is part of a discursive body – I am analyzing the cultural products of a discourse community and picking out the assumptions, values and language.

Now this language is going to be very accessible to my colleagues, but probably more difficult to parse for people who aren’t engaged in English or literary studies. And that’s ok, because I don’t really like it either.

Because I, like you, probably, am a vibes based scientist.

And we intimately know the discourses of these communities – even if we don’t always recognize them from the perspectives of the outsider.

And it is this insider/outsider perspective that I would like to think I bring to the table.

So as an outsider I can say that, broadly speaking, there is YouTube and Twitch culture – YouTube and Twitch discourse communities, same thing. But I can also say that there are many sub-communities within that culture. And while all YouTubers and Twitch streamers are People, and they Gotta Eat, they all decide to bake their bread in different ways – through different discourses.

On December 6, 2021 FD Signifier put out the video *Break Bread*, and I’m gonna be real, this video probably doesn’t happen if that one was never made. Because what

Break Bread told us is that there is a whole other world of creators who just are not being seen. But first, genre. This is about genre.

BreadTube (also known as LeftTube) is an umbrella for all the video essayists out there who are video essay-ing about leftie stuff – leftist assumptions, values and language. So BreadTube is a discourse community and out of this discourse community come the cultural products of the video essay. And I’m too tired to talk about the video essay so here are people who can explain it to you (*video essays about video essays*).

Video essays are made by a broad variety of creators from different backgrounds and experiences, at least they appear to be on my dash. But I follow a fuck ton of people, especially smaller accounts who don’t have much following yet. At the time though, I didn’t. And I didn’t because the YouTube algorithm was mostly promoting white men to me.

The algorithm is very good at recognizing discourse communities and genre – and its even better at narrowing those genres down with greater and greater specificity. And one of those specifics is race. And in this way the YouTube algorithm doesn’t just promote discourses and genres to you, it creates them.

Which is why we can have a BreadTube and then we can have a reaction to BreadTube and now we have a CornbreadTube.

Algorithms are primarily built by white people, and white privilege acts as a form of silencing and erasure within our society because white privilege erases the need for white people to consider the experiences and needs of people of color. And so when

algorithms are designed people of color are often left out – with disastrous consequences.

Algorithms of Oppression : How Search Engines Reinforce Racism was written by Safia Umoja Noble and the necessity of the book was made clear when Noble was googling “black girls” to look for gifts for the young girls in her family and the first results were porn. (Nobel 3)

This issue is tied to systemic issues in tech; tech is a white boys club. We’ve seen this time and time again as accusations come out against companies like Blizzard and every time people are so surprised when the scandal breaks. Like I’m sorry, you think it’s surprising that a bunch of dudes who romanticize their business as starting in a garage with the best bros in 2005 would have trouble transitioning into an office workplace environment that promotes a culture of respect? Just 10 years ago they were calling each other the f-slur as they played COD on Xbox live. And sure people can grow and change and become polite, decent office workers, but we have a problem of sexism in our society and office culture is known for its discrimination and sexism against women – especially women of color. So why are we surprised every time?

Call it white privilege or male privilege, people who have privilege just don’t have to see this stuff, even when it happens in front of our eyes. And so when FD Signifier was like BreadTube has a white problem, I was here for it. And I was ready to be part of the solution by taking control of my dash and seeking out those creators who were suspiciously absent from it.

After *Break Bread* something changed, and maybe it was always happening, I just didn't notice it before. But BreadTube was scholarly adjacent work – people were flying solo, grinding themselves to the bone, getting meticulous and obsessive about their work. I'm not saying those parts have changed, CornbreadTube has all the rigor of scholarly work, but it doesn't have the *alone*. You see the thing that changed, even if it was just for me, was the collaboration. After *Break Bread* I noticed, first of all, that creators were pointing more creators out to me, which was amazing, but even more, creators were referencing other creators, inviting them on to speak. There's this cool new element of the LeftTube space discourse where creators will bring in other creators and hang out podcast style for an interview and cut those podcast interviews into the body of their work. Which I think is the coolest way of citing a source I've ever seen in my life.

This type of citation actually inspired my previous work on my Reading Rainbow (But Gayer) series where I attempt to nest edits within edits to build up my analysis out of my reactions to texts I'm reading.

And so sure, we can call YouTube a genre, but when we understand that genres are symbolic of discourses, that's when we have to give things a little more complexity, when we have to dive into the discourse and understand what is being said – do a vibe check. Sus out the assumptions, values and language.

Because even in that delineation from BreadTube culture to CornbreadTube culture, we can see the values changing – from solo work to collaborative work. Lifting everyone up together. It's impossible to lift yourself up by your own bootstraps. But

when people climbing the ladder or walking up the stairs – or crossing the bridge – reach back to help the people behind them come up, we call get to come up together.

While some really great things have come out of *Break Bread*, YouTube still has that algorithm problem. One of the major critiques of *Break Bread* was the white guy problem. But this problem isn't just a problem of white guys – it's a problem of discourse and genre. It's a problem of how the algorithm recognizes discourses and genres and narrows those genres down so the whitest faces are the ones showing. And while it would be neat and easy and even practical to leave the issue there and say that YouTube has a racism problem – end of story, I think we can get more out of this.

PART SIX

“10,000 Every Day You Survive In A Grocery Store,” “7 Days Stranded At Sea,” “Train Vs Giant Pit,” “World’s Deadliest Laser Mase!” What do all these titles have in common? Well, they’re titles first of all, I guess. But they’re titles from a particular creator: Mr. Beast.

While it has become de rigueur to critique Mr. Beast for doing charity because *charity bad* (an argument which I am not going to get into now and will never because y'all should know better than to engage with this silly type of shit), I do want us to take a moment and think about these titles. They sound really cool, don't they? Kind of exciting? Probably dangerous? What if somebody died? Or was like really uncomfortable? But then they won money???? Oh my god.

Game shows have existed since reality TV has existed starting with the reality TV show *COPs* where regular people were out there playing the game of life – and then a

bunch of cops showed up to chase them and beat them to a pulp. And we were meant to be entertained by this.

But reality TV didn't just stop there. You see people are broke. And People Gotta Eat. So let's give people some money to eat – but first you have to drink this pig intestine milkshake.

Before Joe Rogan was a weird podcast guy he was the host of *Fear Factor*. A show where people did disgusting things, dangerous stunts, and more disgusting things for money. And I'm pretty sure that under some kind of international convention or law if you did these things to people who hadn't signed 300 pages of consent forms you would be in jail right now.

Because People Gotta Eat and sometimes we do whacky things so we can eat.

It's all very *Squid Game* isn't it?

You see engaging in activities that a court of law would consider torture is par for the course of American media and I'm sure we aren't alone because *Squid Game* is a South Korean show.

But it's not just the torture itself, its the title.

We are all familiar with click-bait – you see a title and you just can't resist and now some girl named Bethany keeps sending you emails about hot singles in your area. Probably shouldn't have signed up for the sketchy click-bait website mailing list. But that was then and this is now and you have a new email that will get leaked in a big tech data breach so Bethany can find you and renew your acquaintance with those hot singles – in your area.

Click-bait titles are most often associated with the experience of clicking on the bait and then realizing that the bait was in fact a lie. But in reality we live in an attention economy where we are the commodities and corporations need us. They love us.

(Bethany and the singles need us too.) And they want us to spend as much time as possible looking at their shit so that their shit can sell us some other guy's shit because everybody got into drop shipping to afford college.

And so here we are in a day and age where we can't just like look at stuff. No. We are looking at the whackiest zanniest "oh my god you don't think he would do that" shit ever. In high school English they told you your essay needs to have a flashy title and a hook – and some people took that too far. And now here we are.

Believe it or not, reality TV is actually boring and not much happens and those flash forwards between commercial breaks really try to convince you that if you stick around a moment longer Things Will Happen. And then you stick around through the commercials and you find out that... Nothing happened. Or something does but you see an interview after the nondisclosure contract expires and the people on the show tell you everything was fake.

Let's be real. Our reality is kinda boring most of the time. Which is why we want to watch other people's realities – because we assume everyone else is living a more exciting and fabulous life than us.

And they aren't.

So everything we know is a lie.

And also YouTube is like reality TV if you were the desperate producer and the actors and the film crew and the editors all at once. It is a tall order. But understand that we are seeing genre in action here – we are seeing assumptions, values and language in action here. We assume we need audience, we value attaining capital at any cost, we speak in the language of clickbait. And that is a crass oversimplification but it gets at the core of why YouTube is so... YouTube.

PART SEVEN

In December of 2017, Logan Paul uploaded a video of himself in Aokigahara, Japan. I'm not going into specifics but if you want to know, I think it's only fair to give you a content warning for suicide.

This video is an example of the extreme side of things – most YouTubers are not out doing this type of thing. But at the same time, when you are in a culture of doing the most extreme, whacky shit you possibly can, and this culture has a habit of encouraging you to exploit your own needs and wellbeing, it isn't a very large jump from apathy towards yourself, to apathy towards others.

In digital discourses we call this the NPC trend.

NPC is short for Non Playable Character, a term used to describe the people who are not the Player Character in video games. NPCs are the people in the background who blend into the world and make it look full. They don't do much because that would distract from the main character who is Doing Important Things.

And when we consider this in correlation to the Logan Paul thing, it starts to make sense.

People in the background of videos we record in public aren't us – they are background characters. But also, people who aren't me who I record in my videos aren't people, they're NPCs I can interact with – think man in the street interviews, a popular YouTube and LiveStreaming genre.

You see, our society already has an empathy problem – callback to white privilege and male privilege – and so the content that people create reflects this.

Which is why somebody can do *that* and have 23.6 million subscribers today.

I'm not canceling Logan Paul.

But we need to see this as symptomatic of a larger process – a larger ecosystem.

An ecosystem where how we treat others is reflected in how we think about ourselves – think back to Sonya Renee Taylors' *The Body is Not an Apology*; shame comes from a place of denying our needs, and when we deny our own needs, it's easier to deny others theirs.

This is why it's important to read for silences.

A creator participating in these cycles most often cannot break away from them and retain their popularity, their followers, their income. And so there is an incentive to keep making this type of content, and to spiral deeper and deeper into weird and inappropriate and downright offensive shit – until they reach an invisible boundary or someone speaks out and people tell them to cut it the fuck out.

Some of the Colleen Ballinger accusations came from people who were at the live show, people surrounded by parents and children who thought nothing was wrong, who thought everybody was having fun – who didn't realize that something awful had

happened until they had a better way to understand their experience and the negative emotions that came from it.

And this is the culture of content creation.

Content creation, as opposed to creation, focuses on Content with a capital C. Is something going to push the boundaries? How far can we push the boundaries? Can we push them even further?

The problem is that sometimes the boundaries break. And if we don't do the work to acknowledge that breaking, and repair that trust, then we're caught in this situation where boundaries keep getting broken and we keep sucking it up and holding it in.

And if it almost sounds like this could be said about a lot of things, that is a good instinct.

Consent isn't just the absence of a "No," it's the presence of a "Yes." Not just in sex, but in all areas of our lives. And when we allow minor violations of consent – even things like who is recording me as I'm living my life in a public place, these violations compound until we have situations that we cannot resolve or heal from.

And that hurt sits in us, it festers. We are Hurt People, and we will Hurt People.

And that sucks.

And I don't really know what to do about it.

Because it is entrenched within our society – within the values of our society.

Within that specter of capitalism that haunts us. And if we could only see it, if we could only recognize it. If we could only join together and decide that enough it's enough I want this to stop.

If we could only fucking realize that People Gotta Eat.

Then maybe things could change.

But it's much easier to be hurt, and sit with the hurt. To sit in the uninhabitable place of thorns from *This Bridge Called My Back*.

PART EIGHT

Here I am, minding my own business, doing my own shit. Working hard and hardly working. And some damn conservative at some damn anti-abortion protest says the most ridiculous thing I ever heard in my whole god damn life.

You see friends, the deep state is trying to cancel babies from being born with abortions.

I swear to god. What the fuck is happening to this world. Who are these people?

Well these people are your grandparents or your parents or your cousin Jim who has some really weird opinions and won't stop creating burner accounts so he can keep sharing anti-vaxx memes on Facebook.

We know them because we see them every day, all around us. And sure their shit seems more extreme than everybody else's, but in 2009 George Tiller, an abortion provider, was assassinated by an anti-abortion extremist who was in no way discouraged by Bill O'Reilly's harassment campaign against Tiller.

So we aren't really becoming more extreme, I don't think.

Extremists are just engaging in different discourses and creating different genres.

It's not really comforting. But it could be... Worse?

The thing is, cancellation is nothing new, and while the Tiller assassination is an extreme example, I need you to understand that cancellation has historically had seriously material consequences for the people being canceled – and cancellation without material consequences is in fact no cancellation at all.

There is a difference between pushback and a harassment campaign. Sometimes that difference is hard to see because we are all participating in a culture where the only way to have people understand that Thing Happening is to present it in the most extreme way possible.

So people telling you to sit down and listen become violent mobs harassing you.

On the flipside of that coin though, we are all participating in click-bait culture where telling someone to sit down and listen isn't enough so I've doxxed you, I know where you live, and let me read you your license plate numbers in the DM's. It is easy to fall into extremes because so much of our culture cultivates extremes – and remember, this isn't unique to digital or YouTube culture, this is offline too.

And so we need to come to this discussion with nuance.

Do people often exaggerate about mild pushback?

Do people often go to extremes to pushback against someone who has done something fucked up?

Both of these things can be true at the same time.

But there are other dimensions to this discussion.

In the chapter “Protect Your Heart: Femme Leadership and Hyper-Accountability” of *CARE WORK*, Leah Lakshmi Pezma-Samarasinha describes just that – Hyper-Accountability:

“A common idea in social justice culture is that if someone calls you out on being oppressive, you need to shut up, listen, put aside your automatic defensive reaction, and accept what they’re saying, learn from it, and thank them. This is a useful ground rule, and it works for a lot of situations. We’ve all seen White Nonsense people clutch their pearls and deny they have privilege. Or cis people or abled people or non sex-workers or whatever. And also, people with all kinds of oppressions fuck up too and need to get told we’re fucking up.

But there’s also a line between setting aside defensiveness and being open to hearing how you’ve fucked up or hurt someone without knee-jerking to ‘You’re wrong! I’m perfect! Fuck you!’ and letting someone walk all over you and emotionally abuse you and gaslight you?” (Pezma-Samarasinha 214).

It’s the “Women literally can’t do anything” meme.

And it’s a meme because typically women and femme identified people CAN’T do anything without facing severe criticism.

Now we understand that different things are different. Sometimes women and femme identified people get accused of doing genuinely terrible things and decide to play a ukulele.

And sometimes their hair wasn’t perfect, or they misspoke, or they took a bad brand deal, or their merch didn’t arrive at your house on time, or they were deliberately

cornered by a person they were debating and said something that was taken out of context and is still used to defame them to this day.

And if you're thinking I'm referring to one particular incident and one particular creator and one particular debate then you are 1) part of the problem and 2) not realizing that there are so many other people in similar situations right now.

Femmes, especially femmes of color, are subjected to hyperaccountability on the internet and this hyperaccountability often comes with hordes of annoying little motherfuckers who "just want to be helpful" by telling you that if you just lost half of your body weight, or you just stopped being so ugly and undesirable then maybe you would have better opinions and people would listen to you.

And it SOUNDS like I'm being gratuitous in these descriptions for the sake of attention that is generated by extremes. But I'm actually talking about actual conversations I've had with actual people who actually thought they were being nice and giving me constructive criticism.

Yall are Hurt People and you're hurting people by being so nice and so helpful.

Understand. That this is a systemic issue. This doesn't come from one person – this comes from communities of people who view the world through a lens of privilege. Who don't have to consider that perhaps they are perpetuating cycles of trauma and pain. Who don't see themselves as hurt people who are hurting people because this is how I was helped when I was fat and ugly and dumb and undesirable sad winkly face.

I said it before and I'll say it again.

We cannot hold people accountable. Accountability comes from within.

PART NINE

This video is looking to be longer than Making My Peace (Speaking My Piece) and frankly I don't know how that happened.

But it's important. I've cut a lot that I realized wasn't going to fit in here – some of the stuff I was writing about theory, just because narratively it was driving us away from the plot. And you probably think I forgot about the ukulele.

And I said this before, I can't explain the ukulele – I can only offer this analysis I've been doing to you and hope that you use it to understand the ukulele.

I can only tell you that we are Hurt People and that we Hurt People, but also we Need People because people are the way that we get to eat and more than anything, People Gotta Eat.

We get trapped in these cycles, no matter what new technology comes and what new social formation arises out of it, there will always be these cycles – the cycles of making bread, breaking bread, realizing we need a new recipe for the bread.

And some people try to blame the oven because the temperature readout is broke or the knob is kinda falling off. And that oven might be crap because it's broken or whatever.

But even that oven was made by Hurt People who only knew how to Hurt People. The oven was made in a world where the discourse and genre of ovens is getting more people to buy more ovens – even if those damn ovens won't turn on or get hot. So my oven isn't broken – the whole damn world of ovens is broken – and all the ovens that will ever come from this world are gonna be broken.

This sounds dire and hopeless, I know.

But when we can recognize the level of shit we are in, when we can look at the world without rose colored lenses – that’s when we can see things as what they are, and start to find out what we need to do to unfuck it. Do you want to be the one sending cryptic messages from a Ouija board? Or do you want to recognize where things broke down so we can build something better in its place?

So stop sitting in the middle of despair; we are all gonna die someday and we don’t have time to waste waiting for the right opportunity to come along to do the work that needs to be done.

There are a lot of people out there who come from backgrounds like me, I think. People who say the cycle ends here, I ain’t gonna repeat the mistakes of my parents. And then they think those mistakes are only mistakes of how they treat children. And this isn’t a bad position to start from, but it is one that only sees the way your parents were to you – not the way they engaged with the rest of the world.

And trust me, whatever your parents brought home to you, they had that same energy for the rest of the world, even if it didn’t seem that way.

So the first step in moving forward isn’t *just* changing how we treat children, even though that is a vitally important place to focus our energy.

But rather, the first step is to change how we treat each other.

I am not your NPC. And you aren’t mine.

I am not a faceless nameless metric on the screen.

And neither are you.

We are people. And we come to the communities we come to because we have needs – the need to not be alone, the need for friends, the need for something that we haven't really conceptualized yet, but know deep down inside that is missing.

We are looking for family (*family family family*).

And we find family. But we don't find it with a content creator. We find it with the community that builds around them. The culture we build and share with them.

We find it in the memes.

Which is why my next video is about the sustainability of memes.

And I hope to see you there.

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Video #4

Sustainability or, The Sustainability of Memes

NOTES

Each section has multiple parts (but some might not and also not always in this order):

Quotes and citations part which are read straight and projected on the screen for accessibility purposes; Video part where we watch and react to videos and memes which will be done nature documentary style, practice English documentarian accent; analysis part where I talk about stuff.

Scene: Pride Flag on wall as background, (might need to move around living room.)

Hawaiian shirt (might need to check thrift stores for more Hawaiian shirts.) Headphones (for extra react content feels). Music (elevator music?).

Introduction

There's something about language, communication, symbols and codes that has always fascinated me – when I was younger I used to read code breaking books and design secret codes and ciphers to send messages and write notes that only I could understand. And it's a lot of fun to do that. Until you realize that it's even more fun when someone else understands your code. And just a few people understanding the code in a room full of people who don't.

That's a really cool experience.

If queer coding was coined today we would probably call it queer memeing. You probably know what queer coding is, but if you don't, queer coding is when queer people

know. We just know. Heteros? It might take them a minute to figure it out, but they aren't supposed to know. Because it's a code.

But the scientist of today writing from an alternate universe where queer coding has never been written about – lets ignore the other universe changes that might be relevant because queer coding wasn't written about, they would probably call it queer memeing.

I'm establishing something early here. A connection. A code. Something I want you to hold onto. And I want you to hold onto it because I think it's the key.

PART 1 Something Something The Heat Death of The Universe

AKA the part in which the cosmic theory of the heat death of the universe and the conspiracy theory of the death of the internet meet, and do a little cuddle.

“The new soup is the soup of human culture. We need a name for a new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transition, or a unit of *imitation*.” (Dawkins 249)

Let's start with the concept of lost media. I'm a scientist of vibes, not lost media, so if you want lost media research and science, you're going to have to go do some research because I don't have time for that. But the basic idea here is that media can be lost.

Amazing, I know.

This happens a lot with old films and paintings – old films and paintings were made out of flammable shit. So if your art house or film house or place where wealthy people store things they don't want the poors to have access to burns down and the only

known copy of a thing was in that building, its fucking gone. Again, I'm not deep diving into this, do your own research if the topic interests you.

The point I'm making here is that if there is just one of a thing, that one thing can be lost.

We tend to think that in the modern era of digitized everything that nothing can be lost.

But considering that there are quite a few video games that are lost media – digitization doesn't prove to be protection against lost media.

This is important because I think it is.

I mean, the people who specialize in this and actually do research find it important too.

But like. From the perspective of my project, this is important because I think it is.

Because I am digging into a community where many of its memes were established before it was considered more broadly relevant – before the days of HasanAabiClipCompiler1234 who has a back catalog of VODs that is literally thousands of hours of footage uploaded to YouTube.

So some of the memes that I can show you and track back through time would go back even further – I just don't have those VODs to point to because they have never been saved or uploaded to anywhere.

And this isn't the worst thing, sure, but it does make working in these digital spaces kind of difficult if you weren't the first rando to stumble into the stream whenever the streamer first made the account and started streaming.

Because for me, my experience with the HasanAbi community begins in Summer/Fall of 2020. But there are other people, Older Heads, if you will, who might attest that the community began far before that time.

And they would be right.

And that would kind of prove my point.

So let's start this analysis off with the idea that I am really coming into the middle of a thing, and I can only trace back as far as the moment that I came into the thing, and I will only be able to trace as far forward as this moment of writing this thing. And it is quite possible that even things from this narrow period might already be lost to time, algorithm, or channel demonetization/deletion.

With that in the back of our minds. I want to start with a basic question. Like very basic. Super basic. Incredibly basic.

What is a meme?

And everybody who asks this question in academia will be met with a recommendation to go read this book by Richard Dawkins called *The Selfish Gene* :

“The new soup is the soup of human culture. We need a name for a new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transition, or a unit of *imitation*.” (Dawkins 249)

You may already know where this is going. If you don't.

Semiotics. It's semiotics.

So, semiotics means symbolic – it's a fancy sounding word and all it really means is symbolic. Think of it like this – the word cat doesn't really represent an actual cat. It is an arbitrary set of symbols that we all agree mean cat. Cats are real things. But cats are not the word cat. The word cat is just a thing that we use so that we can talk to other people about cats.

Simple as right?

Well not exactly, because a picture of a cat is not actually a cat. A picture of a cat is a symbolic representation of a cat – but it is not actually a cat. The picture represents a moment in time where a person was taking a picture of a cat – and we all generally understand this to be true because we live in a society that understands how photography works – but we don't expect the picture of a cat to meow to us or to be able to pet it. Similarly a video of a cat is a moment in time that was recorded by a person who was taking a video of a cat. An example of a group of people who don't quite implicitly understand this are children who try to talk to videos of cats and don't understand that that cat cannot respond back.

Symbols – semiotic domains. Things that represent other things. And these things usually have cultural markers and processes attached to them – like in the photo or video of a cat example.

We often don't think of these things because they are seamlessly integrated into our lives – while I understand that picture of a cat is not actually a cat and is rather a picture, that is not relevant to me in a situation where I want to show someone what my

cat looks like. When I tell people I'm going to show them my cat they don't start castigating me about the ethics of carrying cats in bags; they understand that there will be some photographic medium which will display an authentic image of the cat I call my cat.

So then memes. Where do memes fit into all of this?

The word cat being a symbol for my cat is rather simple to understand – so is the idea of the photograph of my cat being a symbolic representation of my cat.

But when does a picture of a cat stop being a picture of a cat, and become something else?

Cat memes are one of the most popular memes. Source: I made it up.

But I am not alone in making this up because generally speaking we understand that the internet is made for sharing pictures of cats.

And so already we see here in these past three sentences that semiotic domains are wiggling around and converging and breaking apart and that a picture of a cat can simply be a picture of a cat – or it can be representative of an entire discourse genre of cultural exchange on a digital platform.

I spoke about discourse and genre in my last video.

(Discourse communities share values and assumptions clip)

With this very basic understanding of discourse and genre, we can establish a few principles:

1. Pictures of cats are pictures of cats.
2. Pictures of cats are not just pictures of cats.

3. Pictures of cats are part of a broader body of symbolic representations of other pictures of cats.
4. Pictures of cats are part of a shared body of knowledge of assumptions about pictures of cats.

So the first two are pretty simple and we don't really need to look much further.

The second two might require further explanation.

#3 can be parsed as simply as "there are lots of pictures of cats out there and all of them are pictures of cats."

#4 however is tricky territory which carries a lot of value judgments about what is and is not a cat.

Gatekeeping cat-dom if you will.

So the assumptions may be listed as such:

1. A picture of a dog is not a picture of a cat – we all have a basic understanding of what a cat looks like and we know that dogs are not cats.
2. Pictures of multiple cats are pictures of a cat – there is no reason to see the amount of cats pictured as a necessary variable when considering whether this is a picture of a cat or not.
3. A picture of a dog and a cat is still a picture of a cat because there is a cat in the picture – this may change by how much cat is present in the picture vs how much dog.
4. Cats can be doing cat-like things or things that are not-cat-like, in each of these situations the cat is still a cat – however the cat that does not-cat-like things may

be considered an instance of dramatic irony where we the audience know that the cat is not behaving like a cat, even though the cat doesn't know this which is ha ha funny.

5. The internet was designed for sharing pictures of cats.

These are not all of the possible assumptions and values we have about cat pictures because that list would go on for days, but these are just a few basic assumptions and values which I could come up with.

Through these assumptions we can understand which pictures are cat pictures, which pictures are not cat pictures, what we do with cat pictures (we post them), what might be interesting about a particular picture of a cat, and the fuzzy gray area where that picture might be a cat picture but it's open for debate. And even then these variables can be complicated further because is a cat dressed in a dog costume still a cat? Is a dog behaving cat-like a cat? These might be considered other things – but for each example we weigh them up against those assumptions and values and decide whether or not that is a picture of a cat and, as such, whether we should post it on the internet.

The Joy of Semiotics (**meme**)

So are cat memes just memes?

Well, unfortunately for you, memes are a semiotic domain.

This means that memes have genre.

And since we already know about the genre of the cat meme...

Let's dig into some others.

PART 2 The Poetics of Memes

AKA the part in which we critically analyze critical analysis itself.

Pepe the Frog is a frog from a comic strip written by a guy. Here's a documentary I would recommend if you want to know more about that. **(Feels Good Man documentary)**

Now you few, you astute watchers of documentaries, you true comrades to documentarians everywhere, you individuals who would know whether or not I've plagiarized this script from a documentary I've watched by casually listening to it while assembling Legos – or something –

You few happy band of brothers (yes, I am doing *Henry V* because I have no shame) know that Pepe the Frog was a fun little frog until he wasn't and everybody was big mad because Hilary Clinton and video games.

And yeah, it's a little more complicated than that. But let's first lay out all the basics.

1. Much like pictures of cats, the internet is made for sharing other cute pictures of cute things.
2. Frogs are cute things.
3. People who hate life hate when people enjoy things.
4. Especially when those things are cute things.
5. Turning much beloved cute things into hated objects of fear and derision is kind of their thing.

If you've heard the phrase that a table of liberals and a fascist is a table of fascists then you understand that there are more values and assumptions to that joke. But you also understand that fascists like to take our nice things and make them not-so-nice because under capitalism/neoliberalism everything is a culture war and if you can convince enough liberals that Hawaiian shirts are the sign of the devil then liberals will believe that all people who wear Hawaiian shirts are sent from the devil – this isn't a joke, this is how dogwhistles work.

I'm not going to get into the history of dogwhistles because, if you're interested enough, you will do the research yourself. But for our purposes, dogwhistles are when people who are involved in the fascism show other people they are involved in the fascism by doing a thing associated with the fascism. These things usually look normal or benign until the one thing is combined with like ten other things at which point you have yourself a fascist.

But before that point of the ten other things being confirmed you're like what this is just a regular guy, and the one anti-fascist who knows better is like nah dawg that is not a regular guy, and all the other fascists are like yo what that's just a regular guy, and you're like wait aren't you doing the thing that fascists do, and they're like no I'm just a regular guy. And then you ask them how they feel about social safety nets and they're like the elderly and the poor and sick children should be mulched and then you know they are not a regular guy.

But before we learn about their plan to mulch the elderly, for all intents and purposes we're pretty sure they're just a regular guy.

And so dogwhistles work in two ways: they let the other fascists know who is a fascist, they let the one sensible anti-fascist know who is a fascist, they make the liberals think the anti-fascist is crazy and actually it's ok to mulch the elderly (and the poor and sick children).

The thing is, even if liberalism and fascism often ideologically bump together, performatively at least, liberals hate fascism. Or at least fascist aesthetics.

Which is why liberals will sit next to a fascist and think that that fascist is a very civil person that they can have very interesting conversations about the people in a society who could be mulched – within reason of course – while simultaneously liberals can obsess over fascist aesthetics causing the moral decay of the youth.

Which takes us back to Pepe the Frog.

Pepe the Frog became a meme online which was taken up by the alt-right who made Pepe edits and shared them – some of which were kind of disturbing, many of which carried fascist aesthetics.

And liberals were like the problem here isn't the fascist ideology – you know the kind that would defund social security (**Biden defund social security clip**) or the kind that calls Black men superpredators (**Hilary Clinton super predators**) – but rather the little green frog guys.

Now let's take a step back and acknowledge that (**you did not fall out of a coconut tree Kamala**). We are vibes based scientists and we understand that memes are part of discourses, and if a meme genre is fascist then it carries fascist values and assumptions.

But, as vibes based scientists we also understand that memes are part of *many* discourses and there are *many* genres of a single meme.

Which is why one Pepe may carry one type of values and assumptions and another Pepe may carry another radically different set of values and assumptions.

(meme time)

PART 3 Community (I am still really bad at naming things)

AKA the part in which I remind you how bad I am at naming things.

Many of you may have already heard of twitch.tv. But for those who haven't, you know the drill. Check out these resources if you want to dig deeper.

But for now some basic knowledge: Twitch is a live streaming platform. There isn't much short form content like you would post to TikTok, there isn't much scripted and edited video content like you would find on YouTube. There are people sitting in front of cameras, typically at computers, and they are doing stuff. And the stuff that you are watching is probably happening at the time that you are watching. Think of it like a live news coverage but instead of an anchor standing knee deep in hurricane water it's some dude threatening to become your stepdad if you don't stop criticizing his Fortnite stats as he slams his desk. **(HasanAbi smash)** There's also a live chat full of people who chat in the chat (known as chatters) – and your new stepdad is going to read all of the messages in the chat but only focus on the mean ones. And if you download the right thing you can see certain words you type in the chat bar turn into little pictures in the chat log. These are called emotes.

And there are all types of people doing all types of things on Twitch – many discourses, many genres, many different values, assumptions and emotes. But for our purposes, we only care about one streamer: HasanAbi.

I doubt he will ever watch this on stream but if he does, make sure that it's the top of the hour right now.

(Black and Tans)

HasanAbi is a guy. And if you want to know more about this guy. You know the drill.

(video clip montage w/ titles and creators)

So in my previous video I told you that discourse communities involved shared assumptions, values and language.

And in this video I said something about emotes a second ago.

(replay values assumptions and emotes)

Which is why this is the part of the video where we talk about language.

So if all the linguists could do me a favor and check out right now because I am going to try to talk about a very complex and relatively new area of study in an incredibly simplified way and you might just die of rage if you stick around.

Are they gone?

Ok its safe now.

Let's look at some sources:

“Postcolonial societies have been marked by linguistic chauvinism—the belief in the superiority of one’s language, especially in the case of a standard language such as

English—and linguistic imperialism—the imposition of one language (such as English) as dominant over another or others (see Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002), often with the selected official dialect, the standard, being considered as linguistic capital (see Bourdieu, 1991), and being promoted/treated as Language rather than as a language. Given this erroneous association of the standard with Language and not just a language, other dialects (and other standards) are simultaneously rendered peripheral or minoritized—as are their users. Arising from these divisions and treatments of language varieties have been considerations of languages in contact as systems that are either discrete or integrated, with these considerations suggesting whether or not the contact languages are compatible.” (Vivette Milson-Whyte 116)

This is a heavy one. But let me break it down.

Much like the idea of artist with a capital A, gamers with a capital G or doctors with a PhD, we have a tendency to think of language with a capital L.

Notable moments where this happens – any situation any ESL (English second language) individual has ever been subjected to ever, the feeling that Black Americans have when white people post on Twitter, and whatever the fuck is going on in France.

These are all examples where a standardized language has been foisted on to people as a form of institutional gatekeeping. Out of the messy understanding of formalized language vs cultural language come the idea of codeswitching, and more recently codemeshing.

Linguists of today (for the most part) understand (at least they should) that language is a doing – much like gender, language is a performativity. And the language

we use speaks our identity into being – it is how we understand the relationship between ourself and our community. Because, say it with me everyone, discourses are shared values, assumptions and language.

The linguist who didn't leave is tearing out their hair right now.

I'm uh... Not sorry.

So yes, when you engage in shared language you are engaging in a shared discourse. Because ultimately discourse is just a discussion.

And yes, different communities have different discourses.

And yes, there is tension between dominant language and dominant discourse, and non-dominant language and non-dominant discourse.

Which takes us back to our quote.

There is a tension here, yes, and there is an attempt at separation. But as the French may find out, there is no way to sanitize one form of language or prevent a non-dominant language from breaking into the mainstream – as Twitter users find out every other day.

I'm not interested in a cultural appropriation vs appreciation discussion so don't come into my comments telling me about how there are good ways to share language or culture and bad ones.

I just.

I'm tired.

I don't care.

I'm tired.

The point is. Human culture is like a bag of cats: if you put all your cats into a bag and shake the bag around you will pull out some random combination of cats rather than cats in the specific order in which you placed them in the bag. (No cats were harmed in the bagging because those were pictures of cats.)

Humans do stuff. Other humans copy that stuff. Sometimes the humans copying the stuff don't know how the stuff works because they don't have experience with the appropriate contexts or the appropriate knowledge to do the thing correctly.

This is what we call school.

It's also what we call white people using AAVE on Twitter.

But and so and otherwise and therefore and so forth.

Out of this comes a few points.

1. Human communication is like 95% doing what the other guy is doing.
2. Different forms of human communication have no fixed or set boundaries and everything gets kind of fucked up in translation.
3. Everything gets kind of fucked up in translation.

And all my A+ documentary watching students are like Oh hey this is the Richard Dawkins meme thing right?

Right.

But linguists call it Translingualism.

"...the translingual approach we are advocating adopts a framework that locates language and language users, practices, conventions, and contexts in terms of time as well as space. Thus, instead of treating these as discrete, preexisting, stable, and

enumerable entities, a temporal-spatial frame treats all of them as always emergent, in process (a state of becoming), and their relations as mutually constitutive.” (Lu and Horner 587)

(you did not fall out of a coconut tree Kamala)

I feel like using this meme where Kamala Harris makes one good point is gonna make you think I’m like pro Kamala Harris so here is another clip of hers that isn’t so great.

(Kamala Harris the letter)

Liberals have shared values, assumptions and language, what can I say.

Anyways.

Language, like gender, is a doing. Which is where we get language.

“But wait,” cries the casual, comment section linguist, “Language is words, memes are cat pictures, so how can memes be a form of language?”

Astute question. Unless you’re being a dick about it, then fuck you.

You see comrades, a picture is worth a thousand words.

Yes.

Let us travel back in time to however long ago we talked about semiotics.

Semiotics literally just means symbols. And symbols are literally anything that can also mean something else.

And anything that can also mean something else involves language.

Because a cat picture isn’t just a cat: it is the assumptions, values and language we use to describe the cat.

But a cat meme isn't just a picture of a cat: it is the assumptions, values and language we use to describe cats *and* cat memes.

So we have this like Russian stacking doll of cat memes.

You have a cat in the middle, next is a cat picture, next is a cat meme, next is Idk man whatever is the next formation that we literally can't even imagine yet because it hasn't been invented.

And I just think that's neat.

(meme time)

PART 4 Forget the Blockchain, Look at These Memes

AKA the part in which I introduce you to some HasanAbi Community memes

I uh... I guess it's time to watch some memes now.

(stream of meme watching)

PART 5 Variations on a Theme – Poetics

AKA the part in which I re-explain the concept of Poetics, but this time, with memes.

“The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized. This is poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are – until the poem – nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt.” (Lorde 36)

We have a lot of theory assembled.

And I've been trying to hint at where this is all going; and you may have already taken the bits and pieces and started to assemble them yourself.

Or you might be confused as hell.

You might be a savvy memetics/semiotics understander.

You might be a vibes based scientist.

Or you might be wondering what the point is.

And well.

Unlike my last video I might have some more satisfying closure for you.

If you've watched the *Feels Good Man* documentary you were left with a somewhat disappointing ending. An ending that signaled loss of a beloved figure and failed attempts at reclamation. An ending that suggested that lost things are lost and can't really be reclaimed.

But that's wrong.

Because like you may have learned through the course of this video, language is not stable.

Meaning changes.

A rule of cooking is, generally speaking, you can't take the salt out, but you can always put more in. So use salt sparingly – to taste.

But what if you do put too much salt? What if that salt is angsty and angry and radicalized by the poor conditions that they are living under? What if that salt was promised things by society that the society was only ever going to deliver to people on the tippy top of the income bracket?

What if that salt was radicalized and was trying to turn the rest of the soup into a place for radicalization – slowly salting up the carrots and the celery, leeching itself into the potatoes, infecting the chicken and noodles?

Sometimes you have to add a little water to your soup. Dilute it some.

So while the alt right was trying to mark Pepe as a hate symbol, Twitch chatters were using him to speak in the twitch chat.

Some people see Pepe as a hate symbol, and we can't really change that or prevent it because language is complicated and meanings change over time. And those meanings are out of any one individual's control.

But when many of us band together to use the little frog as a symbol that can express the feelings we feel in a way that words can't quite manage – when we use the frog to express joy or love or hope or being woken up in the middle of the night or being gay or typing like some kind of maniac or cats and rats and drinking juice but in a sad way because why is there no Sunday Funday Mr. Streamer or wtf or man I love that song (Scooby Doo) or I'm definitely taking notes or stronk or #hustleygrindy or happy or, you know, shrug...

When we work together anything is possible.

Part 6 : The Part in Which I Shamelessly Plug *Bioshock*

Bioshock is one of my favorite game series. And a lot of mess has been made about the illusion of choice within the game and the morality of the choices within the game. And those discussions are kind of boring. Because *Bioshock*, like anything else, is a symbol. And so we as vibes based scientists should try to understand the symbols, the

stories. **(you should never rely on people who claim society is in decline because of new forms of media)**

What always brings me back to this game is the dichotomies.

If you decide that your life and your will hold more value than the lives of others, you become just like any of the other citizens of Rapture – a mindless monster hungry for power. Willing to do whatever it takes to hold onto the crumbling facade of your greatest achievements, at the expense of those around you, even the most vulnerable.

If you decide to take the hard route, but do the right thing, and rescue as many as you can, forgive those who caused harm, and push everyone forward – everyone you care for rises with you.

Andrew Ryan escaped communism in the USSR and escaped taxes in the USA and came to the bottom of the sea to build a city. Imagine being so individualist that you believe paying taxes for social welfare programs is worth fleeing to the middle of the ocean for. (<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/tax-evasion-billions-offshore-fatca-tax-reporting-loophole-senate-finance-committee-robert-brockman/>) He believes that this city is pulled along by a great chain – one which we all pull together. Throughout the text of *Bioshock* we see similar sentiments: the anarchist slogan “No Gods, No Masters” becomes “No Gods or Kings, Only Man.” Marx’s “From each to his ability to each according to his need.” becomes “Is a man not entitled to the sweat of his brow?” Even the great chain line itself seems to be a subversion of The Great Chain of Being which seems to be either about Shakespeare or Plato – I’m not a historian, man, do your own research. Either way, the great chain probably isn’t collectivist: “I believe in no God, no

invisible man in the sky. But there is something more powerful than each of us, a combination of our efforts: a Great Chain of industry that unites us.” And it probably isn’t individualist-mysticism either: “But it is only when we struggle in our own interest that the chain pulls society in the right direction. The chain is too powerful and too mysterious for any government to guide. Any man who tells you different either has his hand in your pocket, or a pistol to your neck.” Well maybe the mysticism part if we’re talking about the divine rights of kings but hey, do your own research.

So we hear Andrew Ryan engage in this rhetoric where he tries to take our nice socialist and anarchist and... Divine rightist? Uh... maybe not all of the things are nice.

But he tries to take a few of our nice things and make them not so nice.

He tries to turn them into symbols of individualism and use them to foment division in a city of people rapidly declining because they live in a house made out of glass under the sea and are all trying to shoot each other with machine guns and blow each other up. In the city made out of glass under the sea.

It is this elevation of individualism – squabbling over power and resources – that is the rot destroying the city. And our choices as the player character give us the ability to give into this individualism – or to reclaim the power of the collective.

The choice to elevate our own needs over those of others.

Or to sacrifice potential resources to save lives.

This is a game about killing drug-addled eugenicists with grenade launchers and machine guns.

But despite the horrific images, at the core of the story is an overwhelming message about the power of love, forgiveness and found family. A story about rejecting the aesthetics of propaganda and giving according to your own ability to another's need.

This is what we call poetics.

PART 7 The Part In Which Things Get Resource Heavy

This is the part of the video where I get to throw a little shade and sip a little tea. **(today's tea is Celestial Seasonings Sweet Harvest Pumpkin Black Tea, if you want to know)**

So far, according to watchers of documentaries, we've probably had a good citation to text ratio – but I have two papers which I absolutely adore, so here on out, we are gonna be a little source heavy.

Let's do this:

“...when banks and educational establishments turn their attention to Internet memes, albeit for marketing purposes, it is safe to assert that this trend now poses a mature cultural phenomenon and invites systematic media scrutiny. Yet despite the enshrined legitimacy of Internet memes to Web and App audiences, their relevance has only recently proved a fruitful field of critical enquiry (Davison 2012, 2014; Goriunova 2014; Knobel, Lankshear 2007). This is why discursive treatments of internet memes are arguably still in its infancy. Ironically, instead of academic publications, the most comprehensive and dynamic source of information on internet memes appears to be best covered in online sources and electronic ephemera. **[oh hey that's me]** Of course, web sites present a rich source of primary data on the historiography of internet memes whilst

grounding any serious study of the issue; however, Davison (2012: 122) recognizes how amongst the notable online meme-sources (Wikipedia, Urban Dictionary, Know Your Meme, Encyclopedia Dramatica), “none does so in an academically rigorous way” and so “Internet memes lack an accurate definition...” especially since attempts at defining this cultural device invariably prove whimsical and inconsistent. [oof]” (Sara Cannizzaro 563)

This is the part of the project where my professors are slamming on the desk and tearing out their hair and yelling at the screen that I haven’t defined meme yet. Nobody watching this knows what a meme is. At no point in my entire project about internet memes have I ever told you what a meme is.

Good point:

“...let us consider this statement from Techopedia (2014): “An Internet meme is an activity, concept, catchphrase or piece of media that gains popularity and spreads rapidly via the Internet”.⁴ This delimited definition offers little clarity because it posits a hopeless equivalence between particulars and thereby hopes to prove its universal justifiability. The origins of this short-sighted deduction can be traced back to an earlier academic statement as enunciated by Dawkins, the first and chief proponent of memes: “Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes, fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches” (Dawkins 2006[1976]: 192). It is here that Dawkins conflates ethereal forms with externalized references, and codes with instantiation of codes, an ambiguity that is then transposed onto popular definitions of internet memes.” (Sara Cannizzaro 564)

And uh, one more:

“Another theoretical ambivalence rehearses a linguistic discourse as it applies to internet memes: Urban Dictionary states that “An ‘Internet Meme’ is a word, phrase, expression, iconic imagery or recognizable reference popularized amongst online communities such as on forums or in online games” (Urbandictionary 2014; my italics, S. C.), whereas popular platform Whatis contends that “An internet meme is a cultural phenomenon that spreads from one person to another online” (Whatsis 20145; my italics, S. C.). The first definition implies that an internet meme is a single entity, whereas the latter, broader definition posits, instead, how memes consist at the very least of a set of objects (a cultural phenomenon). This disparity not only shows the incoherence that characterizes Web-based lexicography, but also suggests that internet memes are protean ideas whose reasonable limits prove insurmountable when examined.” (Sara Cannizzaro 564)

So this is a lot of words and basically what this lot of words means is that internet stuff is difficult to describe. Internet culture is a relatively recent phenomenon, and even more recent is its field of study. And even more recent is the phenomenon of the people of the internet studying the phenomenon of the internet.

The internet is a human soup.

And into this soup we are all contributing whatever we can for whatever reasons we do.

And that makes understanding what is going on on the internet kind of confusing.

Especially if:

“...information is a much more complex business than a mere unit, as Dawkins proposed and memeticians re-iterated.” (Sara Cannizzaro 571)

From the onset, the core principle of memetics, the idea of “unit of transmission” has been a poor way of understanding human culture. And you, as a vibes based scientist who watched all my little lists at the beginning of this video can now explain why. **(frog: Is it something about assumptions values language and emotes) (yes).**

You understand that a picture of a cat is not just a picture of a cat. And that there is always a ukulele, but the ukulele is not always a ukulele. You understand that there is a dissonance between aesthetic and meaning. You understand that stop signs are a nearly universal symbol that always mean stop, wait for things to be clear, and then go.

You understand that symbolic elements changes meaning depending upon the context in which it appears: Pepe in an alt-right server or Pepe in the Twitch chat, the things Andrew Ryan says in *Bioshock* and what they mean to a person who lives outside the *Bioshock* universe, a cat in my bag and a picture of a cat in my bag.

Context **(did not fall out of a coconut tree).**

Unless your context is that you did fall out of a coconut tree, in which case we have far greater problems than what memes are, are you getting medical treatment?

“Interestingly, even in digital culture, all those who sets out to say something meaningful about internet memes, whether new media scholars or grassroots web writers, intuitively adopt the notion of ‘information as relational’. They do so despite often advocating the groundings of their work in Dawkins’ non-relational view of information.” (Sara Cannizzaro 572)

This is the problem I met with often while doing research for this project.

I was participating in the HasanAbi community, I was looking at our memes, studying how we engage them, how we make them, how we become them.

But then the work I was reading to try to understand memetic theory was always running directly contradictory to what I *knew* about memes. Contradictory to the vibes based science – to the poetics of memetics.

I watched the Pepe documentary that told me that Pepe was a lost meme that could probably never be saved – as I was spamming Shrugge in the chat because I was obsessed with his little hands. I read a text that told me memes were going to lead to mass shootings and could be linked to rising rates of violent crime (**violent crime rates are not rising**) <https://www.npr.org/2024/02/12/1229891045/police-crime-baltimore-san-francisco-minneapolis-murder-statistics> while the memes coming from the community I was in were about cars from the Cars Cinematic Universe having a pussy.

I was experiencing a dissonance where the things that fancy people who style themselves as fancy intellectuals didn't reflect my lived reality.

Which I think is a very common experience for a lot of people who are objects of study.

What can I say other than the history of anthropology has been incredibly exploitative and this is not just because anthropologists themselves were racist, but because those anthropologists were studying within a discourse that carried values,

assumptions and language (**I don't think they had emotes yet**) and those values assumptions and language came from institutions which have not been completely dismantled to this day but rather retheorized and reconstituted so as to be more ethical – but will still miss the mark because we live in a society and, like in the case of Pepe, reclamation is hard work.

We do what we can until the next person comes along to pick up where we left off and take things even further.

And so I had to decide what my aim would be with this video.

How am I going to show you a community without harming that community?

How am I going to write about the HasanAbi community and the value it has to the people within it in a way that builds it up and welcomes people in?

“To date, memetics has only identified some very obvious mechanisms that facilitate the spread of ideas. It has failed, however, to identify the qualities that make certain ideas spreadable. Until memetics can do that, it will remain of dubious value.”
(Elliott Oring 447)

What makes certain ideas spreadable?

Let's take a step back and change focus because we cannot see the forest for the trees.

We cannot weigh the different types of transmissible ideas like they are brands of ketchup that we might buy in the store. Each of those ideas that might be transmitted exist within the soup, within the context, within the not-falling-out-of-a-coconut-tree-ness of human experience.

“The popular website Knowyourmeme also lists a number of items in order to illustrate the history of a single internet meme. In short, when observing an internet meme, these commentators have not merely observed a single media text (a discrete unit), but a collection of objects and the way these objects have triggered one another and related to one another through time. So, if internet memes can only be studied in relation to their numerous adaptations and versions across a period of time, it follows that an internet meme cannot be defined as a single image or video or catchphrase (as per the ill-defined conceptions outlined above) or, in other words, as isolated information; instead, internet memes must be defined at the very least as systems.” (Sara Cannizzaro 572)

Memes are not ideas. Memes are not singular instances.

Memes are discourses.

Memes are discourses which contain values, assumptions and language, and emotes. These memes are not simply spread, but rather created by a community, and they are modified by that community. Each edit grows the discursive bodies of knowledge contained within the meme. Meme will be translated most accurately by those within the community from which the meme came. Despite this, each successive translation will alter the meaning somewhat and therefore, even within a community there might be different interpretations of a single meme. A meme that leaves a community can take on a radically different meaning from the meaning it had before, which is why multiple communities can share the same meme *image* or *text* while having a different contextual and subtextual understanding of the meme.

Because of their nature as symbols, memes are both located within discourse, but also representative of a discourse in that a discourse makes a meme but also a meme, carrying more meaning than just the image itself, represents all the knowledge contained within the discourse.

Uh... A list on the textuality of memes?

1. Memes are metatextual in that they are both representative of a discourse, but also commentary on a discourse. **(meme from earlier undecided)**
2. Memes are hypertextual in that they are derivations of other memes – something which is often obscured to the extent that the original meme or instance that inspired the meme has been lost – and each derivation is in part a response to the previous derivation. **(cussy memes from earlier)**
3. Memes are intertextual, not simply because they are derivations of other memes, but also because many memes require understanding previous iterations of the meme to understand the meme. **(meme from earlier top of the hour ad break)**

And, of fucking course, memes are sustainable as fuck.

Because memes represent community and community on the internet is affinity spaces:

“First, people are associated with them because of their shared endeavor or interest, not because of their “credentials” (e.g. degrees). They can achieve expert status regardless of their official credentials. Such spaces cannot be defined around or restricted to “professionals” in any credentialing or institutional sense.

Second, some people (unusually, but not always, around 20 percent) must have a deep passion for the common endeavor, not just a passing interest (Gee & Hayes 2012; Shirky 2008). this passion may be reflected in different ways, such as an extended commitment of time to the interest and space, high levels of production, and so forth. Others in the space will have many different degrees of interest and may come and go in various ways. but they must affiliate with others in terms of the common interest and show that they respect and value the passion that fuels the most active people in the space.

Third, in passionate affinity spaces, everyone can, if they choose, produce (produce knowledge, create things, do things) and not just consume what others have produced. Of course, there can be and usually are standards – high ones – for what counts as good production and people who produce must accept (or seek to negotiate) and meet those standards.

Fourth, in passionate affinity spaces, people sometimes lead and sometimes follow. Some people lead in some situations and others lead in others. Leadership is flexible, and takes different forms, such as managing the site, introducing new ideas and practices, and helping others. People sometimes mentor (“teach”) others and sometimes get mentored. Mentoring is flexible.

Fifth, knowledge in the affinity space is “distributed” in the sense that different people know different things and can share that knowledge when necessary. Often the space has good tools and technologies that store and

facilitate knowledge. No one person has to or is expected to know everything all by themselves.

Six, the affinity space is not closed, though there may be requirements for entry, and takes newcomers (“newbies”). It refreshes itself. Unlike school, people do not “progress” all at the same pace, age or “grade.” Movement in the space is quite varied; people may focus on one narrow aspect or explore the entire breadth of the interest area, spend as much time as they want on a particular set of skills or practices, and otherwise pursue quite different learning trajectories.

Seventh, affinity spaces are about sharing a common endeavor where people learn things, produce things or knowledge, and can, if they wish, become experts... Even these experts believe there is always something new to learn, more to discover, and higher standards to achieve.” (Gee & Hayes 70)

It took us a while to get there, but this list of points is how we can understand the human soup. We can understand that the human soup is a human soup because we are all participating in it. And we can understand that memes are part of the human soup because memes are what come out of the human soup. And we can understand that memes are sustainable because even if there is some piece of media that is lost to time, there will be somebody who has been around long enough to tell you about it. And those things they tell you will become things that you can tell more people. And in this way memes are a way that we keep records and share knowledge – and assumptions and values and language and emotes. Memes do not rise like Venus out of the foam. Memes are *created* by passionate people who participate within a space.

And sure, I can't tell you *why*. **(But why?) (Because we are human. And humans like sharing shit with other humans.)**

But I'm not looking at one damn tree and weighing it against another damn tree.

I'm looking at the whole ass forest – the ecosystem that the tree is part of; the human soup. And the ways that that human soup ebbs and flows and boils over. And if you don't watch that soup the liquid might boil off and you'll be left with a bunch of nasty burned vegetables at the bottom. But hey, that was an amazing soup while it lasted and I'm going to use the same recipe and spices and ingredients from that soup to make new soup because I didn't fall out of the soup making coconut tree; I exist within the context of all the previous soups that I have ever made. And even when the pot is cleaned from all the crusty soup bits I will still be writing down that soup recipe and handing it out to all my friends because damn that was a nice soup. And they will change the recipe and with each change that recipe might drift further and further away from the original soup, but even through those changes that human core – the core that is humans sharing things and doing stuff together and sharing joy in something they are passionate about – that will remain.

And that's all I can think of to write for now but at some point somebody is going to come along and add ten more things to the list and I can't wait for that moment because it's at that moment that this project itself becomes a meme.

(And I just think that's neat)

PART 8 Conclusion

AKA The part where I actually don't do that and I instead end the video.

Hello comrades, this is the end of the video where I remind you to like and subscribe and leave a comment that doesn't annoy me – you know who you are, and what you did.

I'd like to thank Smokey, who did not help, but ended up helping after all.

And finally, most importantly, let me remind you to always buy high and sell low.

Thank you all for watching and I'll see you in the next video *Master's Tools, Master's House* which just might end up being a treatise on the ideology of Andrew Ryan from *Bioshock*.

I wouldn't know. I haven't written it yet.

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Video #5Introduction

(Rant about people coming to my streams to ask for money)

Intro to Bioshock 2 – (2024 playthrough vod)

Part One

I believe that a good magician never reveals their tricks.

When you reveal the trick or pull back the curtain, suddenly the magic becomes mundane. Some people call it spoilers – something is spoiled when you know the end of a story.

I don't believe we can't enjoy spoiled things.

But I do think there may be a point to this.

I like to write my papers like novels – something which annoys many of my professors to no end. I hold things back, I play sleight of hand. I put the thesis at the end of the paper instead of at the beginning.

Because if you think about it like a fiction writer, everything is building up to that thesis. Everything written is supporting the thesis – fleshing it out. Making it something we can pick up in our hands and carry around.

It's only in academic writing where the thesis needs to be in the first paragraph – or even the abstract. And I get it. Somebody reading a scientific study doesn't want to read to the end – they want the relevant information so they don't waste time scanning through data that might not even be useful.

But I don't write scientific studies.

I write video essays.

This is the final video in this series (**for now**) and my last chance to prove to you that there is *something* here – something that you should take with you. Something that will be valuable to you. Something. Anything.

This is the point of no return. The big reveal.

With this video I will show you my master plan.

And I hope the wait was worth it.

Part Two

(this meme: <http://www.quickmeme.com/meme/3uvhbc>)

In my previous video I told you about Bioshock: (**BioShock segment from previous video**)

Part Two of Part Two

- **No transition screen**
- Andrew Ryan is building a city under the sea
- The city under the sea is rapidly devolving into an arms race
- Eugenics and violence
- Why do we need to have fire hands?
- Sure having fire hands is useful and fun but statistics show us that having ready access to weapons means they are more likely to be used when they are not necessary`

This isn't about gun control.

But to understand this, we will need to talk a little bit about game design.

And to talk about game design we will need to first review semiotics.

In my previous video (Video #4) I told you about semiotics – semiotics are how we understand discourses and participation within a discourse is how we show that we share values, assumptions and language (and sometimes emotes). And of course, we go to school to learn these things; not just how to read and write – two particular forms of literacies, but many literacies and all the values, assumptions and language (typically not emotes, though) that are contained within. In (Video #3) I told you about ideology – ideology is a guiding force that shapes the fabric of our lives. These things both come up out of our material conditions, but also reinforce the status quo that creates our material conditions. For example: we are living under a capitalist system, the majority of wealth is within the hands of the few, and the rhetoric of our society is that people who work hard make wealth – which is why many people believe that billionaires work 2000 times harder than the average Starbucks barista, and in fact, that Starbucks barista is not actually working class but some kind of middle-man managerial class who is actually the one exploiting you by not serving you your latte fast enough.

Ideology. Discourses. Assumptions. Values. Language.

Emotes? (**SadgeBusiness**)

Emotes. (**TooBased**)

This is why we call learning a social act.

Learning is a social act because we do it together – students work to negotiate the new knowledge that a teacher is displaying to them, but students are also being assimilated into a socio-cultural fabric as they are negotiating that knowledge. In the end

a student's literacy is far less dependent on the knowledge that they can display and much more on the way they perform that knowledge – this is why multiple-choice standardized testing is not a reliable method of gauging a student's level of learning.

We call this situated learning and it happens across many different contexts.

And I'm going to pause here because situated learning is championed by many as the solution to the education problems of today – but as a theory, I think it is also useful to understand the problems with education of today.

We are always situated within ideology, we are always situated within culture, we are always situated within value systems. And it is important to reflect upon the vast discrepancy between what the educational system is touted to teach us and what the performance of our assimilation into that institution shows we learned.

In kindergarten we sat at our desks and learned ABC's. But we didn't just learn ABC's; we learned that the best way to learn ABC's was with a teacher standing at the front of the room, the children sitting silently with hands folded at desks, we learned that the teacher is always right about which ABC's are in which order. We learned that we shouldn't shout our ABC's, but we also learned that if you whisper your ABC's you aren't really learning. And so what you need to do to truly learn ABC's is face forward, with your feet on the ground, eyes to the front of the class, with no distractions on your desk, and without playing with something in your desk, and recite the ABC's in an even tone.

And just in learning our ABC's we have learned a whole metric fuck ton of values, assumptions and language about what *learning* is.

So, learning is situated – and we are always going to learn *something* even if what we learn was not what we were meant to learn.

I'm not going to do the Foucault/"Discipline and Punish"/panopticon schtick here, but if you know what it is then you've probably already written a comment about it. Good on you. For everyone else, uh, in the briefest way possible, discipline is not about being disciplined, it's about conforming to certain values, assumptions and language, through self-monitoring because we want to live in a society.

This is part of why it is so hard to change society.

We have assumptions, values and language about how society works, and the whole system is designed to replicate those assumptions, values and language, rather than teach the ABC's – or anything else.

This is why stem.

Nuff said.

Now let's take this idea of situated learning and apply it to the vidjuh games.

First I want to establish a dialogic shift which I will be taking for this section. Up until now we have understood that discourses are sets of values, assumptions and language (and sometimes emotes), in fact, I've said this so many times it's probably becoming a meme. But for at least the rest of this section, I will now be using the word *literacy* or *literacies* in place of values, assumptions and language (and sometimes emotes). This is because the performance of values, assumptions and language within a particular discourse is called a literacy – if you perform well you are typically considered to have good or high literacy, and if you perform poorly you are typically considered to

have low or poor literacy. The most important thing to remember here is that literacy is not about reading, speaking or writing words, but rather one's ability to *perform within a discourse* and *replicate a genre*.

In *What Do Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*, James Paul Gee tells us that there are 36 ways to learn a video game. Gee's understanding of video games is based in semiotics and situated learning and this book offers many ideas about why what we know about good video game design is good video game design.

And at the crux of this is the idea of environmental storytelling – which you will be familiar with if you watch video essays about video games.

Based on our previous discussion of situated learning we can understand that any type of environment within a game will teach us something about the world of that game because as we play the game we are building a literacy of the world within our game. And often this is difficult because those literacies may be radically different from any which we have developed familiarity with.

In hbomborguy's *Bloodbourne Is Genius, And Here's Why* we learn about the difficulty that many people have playing *Souls* games – and how this difficulty comes from specific game design elements and game mechanics that players are not accustomed to. Within the first five minutes of the video, hbomborguy explains how a core mechanic of the game – the tiny amount of lag between pressing a button and character response, requires that players must relearn what they know about video games. This means that *Souls* games represent a new form of literacy which players will have to acquire in order to enjoy participating within the game.

I have not acquired this literacy yet.

So.

Bioshock?

In Bioshock one you are Jack and you are up against Andrew Ryan, and then some other guy, I don't remember his name. **(Who is Atlas poster)**

In Bioshock two however. All of the antagonists of Bioshock one are long dead and gone. They are replaced by Doctor Sophia Lamb, a psychiatrist who wants to shove all the brains of Rapture into her daughter Elenor Lamb using the magic undersea-slug-juice that has driven everyone from Rapture completely and utterly bonkers. And this is supposed to turn Elenor into the savior of Rapture who will rule Rapture with her hive mind.

And this seems like a collectivist dream right?

Like last time we were critiquing individualism right?

So now it's time to #bothsides right?

Now it's time to take a jab at the dirty commies and do a red scare, right?

Right? Right? Right....

Part Three : The Part That Is No Longer Part Two

- Transition screen

Hold up.

I'm supposed to be showing you how I performed the magic trick. Not introducing more mysteries that I will have to resolve.

Fuck.

We need to focus. Focus on how the meat is made. Focus focus focus.

Ok. The videos. We need to talk about the videos.

Starting now:

Each of my videos has been made to illustrate a concept – I call these Threshold Concepts after *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies* by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle :

“Originally identified by researchers J. F. Meyer and Ray Land (2006), threshold concepts are ideas that learners must “see through and see with” (Kreber 2009, 11) in order to participate more fully in particular disciplines. Meyer and Land have identified characteristics that are associated with learners’ encounters with threshold concepts, noting that they are:

- *Troublesome*. These concepts may be conceptually difficult and butt up against prior knowledge that is inert, contradictory, rarely used, or unchallenged. They may also ask learners to take on new identities that are uncomfortable.
- *Liminal*. Threshold concepts involve what the name implies—thresholds. But the movement toward and the (hopeful) crossing of those thresholds isn’t straightforward; instead, it happens in a two-steps-for ward-one-step-back kind of way as learners push against troublesome knowledge.
- *Integrative and transformative*. Once learners cross a threshold, their ability to see through and with a threshold concept leads them to recognize new patterns of meaning around that concept. The ability to see through and with that concept also transforms their understandings of phenomena, people, and/or events.

- *Probably Irreversible*. Once a learner begins to see through and with a threshold concept, it's very difficult to “unlearn” or “unsee” through that lens.” (x Adler-Kassner and Wardle)

Using this framework I've attempted to create a set of concepts of my own and I believe these concepts are important for building leftist community – auto-correct says I should say communities here, but I'm not thinking about communities as a *thing*, rather community as an *action* – a process. In my literature review I briefly talk about all the different communities that I've been a part of – Sims communities, blogging communities, reviewing communities, gaming communities – and in all of these communities I found things that were necessary to me. But it wasn't until I found the HasanAbi community that I found *community*.

And each of the reasons is in my videos. **(What do I always say? HasanAbi reacts to What do I always Say – littlebear)**

- Bodies at the Problem: In this video I told you we learn through doing. Doing is scary. But we aren't doing alone. There are people just like us out there who are afraid of doing – whatever it is they need to do to learn. When we all work together to learn, to help each other learn, one person not knowing is far less scary. **(say the line chat, it's like a muscle)**
- Making My Peace – We all deserve to speak our piece – to say the things we need to say, even if we don't have the words yet. We must see things as they are rather than as we are told to by understanding how power works within our society. **(The nukes meme)**

- People Gotta Eat – We are hurt people and we are gonna hurt people. We have been taught not to value boundaries and consent and our society holds different people to different standards – often unfairly. This is symptomatic of a capitalist, profit motive society and we must engage with others in a constructive way that does not perpetuate cycles of harm. **(the gains are privatized but the losses are socialized)**
- Sustainability – We need community because we are human. We need to share things because we are human. And sharing makes us stronger – sharing responsibility, sharing codes, sharing memes, sharing knowledge – all of this sharing builds us up. And eventually we will come to a place where we do not have to rely on our work alone or our capacity to persist in the space and do the work alone, because when we share the burden it becomes lighter for all of us. **(I always have to repeat myself)**

Part Four : A General Approximation of a Coffeehouse Reading in the Post-Covid

Era (post as in after we realized covid was a thing not after the pandemic because uh)

I was going to do a livestream reading for this part but plans change.

But after seeing people with somewhat sketchy and contestable ideas of what Audre Lorde’s “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master’s House,” I just wanted to make sure we are all on the same page.

“It is a particular academic arrogance to assume any discussion of feminist theory without examining our many differences, and without a significant input from poor women, Black and Third World women, and lesbians. And yet, I stand here as a Black

lesbian feminist, having been invited to comment within the only panel at this conference where the input of Black feminists and lesbians is represented. What this says about the vision of this conference is sad, in a country where racism, sexism, and homophobia are inseparable. To read this program is to assume that lesbian and Black women have nothing to say about existentialism, the erotic, women's culture and silence, developing feminist theory, or heterosexuality and power. And what does it mean in personal and political terms when even the two Black women who did present here were literally found at the last hour? What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable.” (110-111 Lorde)

A surface reading of this might lead us to the assumption that the issue Lorde has is one of representation – there are not enough seats at the table for all the different identities within the world, and this issue could be fixed if we were just willing to hire more of x group of people. And I will not say that representation is unimportant, but I can say, without a doubt, that representation does not fundamentally change the issues that lack of representation seem to be the cause of. This text requires a deeper level of engagement than “representation matters.”

Lack of representation is a *symptom* of a greater issue.

“Advocating the mere tolerance of difference between women is the grossest reformism. It is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives. Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for

interdependency become unthreatening. Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters.” (113 Lorde)

With this quote we see that the issue of representation stems from a fundamental rejection of interdependency, something Lorde associates with patriarchy and individualism. Lorde believes that feminism should advocate for a world which rejects the patriarchal and capitalistic mythos of the individual – the one great man who represents all great men – in favor of interdependency. A world that rejects the very principle of the table – the table representing power, prestige, control and domination.

The table that determines which values, assumptions and language (and eventually emotes) are the ones that are rewarded, and which ones are rejected:

“Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference - those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older - know that *survival is not an academic skill*. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. *For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to

those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support.” (112 Lorde)

The master's house is not simply who wields power and authority – the women Lorde mentions who define the master's house as their support are women who would be victim to patriarchal violence just like any other, but in this situation they are allowed to wield that power and authority of the master's house – so long as they agree to use the master's tools.

We people of the meme understand this to be “girlboss, gaslight, gatekeep.”

The master's tools will designate people to represent their group; certain, excellent people, who are then meant to represent every single person of that group they come from. And if they represent them poorly, a phrase which here means “in ways that do not conform to the master's values,” this means that the master's door should never have been open to anyone of that group at all.

The table, the conference, the board of executives, the halls of congress, the presidency, the minimum wage distribution center or latte making job that you get fired from for attempting to unionize.

We see the master's tools and the master's house reflected in all levels of society.

We see the metaphorical table, a seat at which determines if we are valued by society. Or discarded.

We feel despair because even as there is more representation of our different experiences, our different experiences are so similar in the way that we are all barely

holding afloat as the boot slowly crushes our fingers clinging to the life raft that might be our only survival.

Lorde understands that we are all engaging in a culture war when we should be engaging in a class war.

Part Five : This section does not have a subtitle yet.

I am not a particularly religious person. But there is something undeniably powerful about the idea of nailing your *Nintey-five Theses* to the church door.

Luther's *Theses* was a rejection of the idea that your material wealth can determine your salvation. If you simply have enough cash on hand you can ensure that you will reach heaven – while the rest of the masses will have to dick around in purgatory because fuck those guys.

Luther was probably not the first class warrior, and I'm no theologian so I can't attest to whether he was a very good one, but the image of this, the idea of speaking truth to power in a time when the church is the power.

That's pretty fucking bad ass.

And with that as my inspiration, I try to make every work that I create something that I could nail to a church door, or whatever door is representative of "the master's" door.

It's not easy. Mostly because I don't know what the hell I'm doing.

But also because I know I am within the system – the master's system – and I know that as a product of that I have learned and internalized values and assumptions that I might not recognize I have, but I also know that within that system my value to that

system is entirely contingent upon whether I am a traitor to the communities I belong to – queer people, poor people, leftists, anarchists – and the communities I would conspire with – people of color, the people of Palestine, queer people whose identities are different from mine.

I do not want my work to be used to perpetuate harm.

I do not want my work to sit comfortably under the master's roof.

Shit, I don't even want it to sit on his front lawn.

I want it to be squatting outside of his house next to an inflatable scabby the rat.

(Scabby the Rat)

I want to smash the table into so many pieces that it can't be put back together again.

But we aren't there yet. We aren't ready.

So instead I need to learn. I need to learn, and read and grow and change. As much as I can. And with each project I create maybe I get a little closer. But I can't ever lose this framework, this way of understanding my work; what it wants to be doing, what it's capable of doing, what systems it exists within, and how those systems impact it – sometimes without me even recognizing it.

I call it process.

We are all in process.

Learning through doing, right?

We can try.

We can have a fun time.

We can have hope.

We can pass that hope on to other people.

Because if I have fun and I have hope even as I'm creating this disaster project, if I can do the hard work of learning, refining my ideas, struggling with how I want to be perceived and how my work is perceived – if I can do that, and still make it into a fun thing, a thing that isn't quite so scary, a thing that helps people along with their own journey of process – maybe that's what is really important about this project.

As long as we engage in struggle.

As long as we resist falling into despair.

As long as we find the small joys in life and celebrate them together.

I have faith.

That someday the trees I plant today will finally grow tall enough to give shade.

Part 6

(Bioshock 2 footage background)

I'm back on my Bioshock shit.

Life is about transitions. **(I just put a title card, you need another**

SadgeBusiness)

Not transition title card slides. Transitions in where we are, who we are, how we interact with the world, how we understand the world.

Way back in Part 2 (of part 2) I told you about Bioshock 2.

About the sea-slug-hive-mind.

The every-man.

The man that has all of the seats for all of the tables and everyone is sitting at a seat in those tables.

No, not Elenor Lamb, Gilbert Alexander.

Gilbert Alexander was a tool – a scientist who worked for both Frank Fontaine and Andrew Ryan, the two men who would be the master of Rapture. He was responsible for the creation of Big Daddies – the mindless, rage filled dive suits you fight in Bioshock 1 and 2. Big Daddies were once human (and the player character of Bioshock 2 shows that there is still humanity contained within the Big Daddy) but were turned into monstrous creations through the magic sea-slug juice that augmented their strength, their abilities, and eventually, even their minds. Alexander was responsible for the pair bond which is the reason why the player character of Bioshock 2 is so desperate to reach Elenor – if he doesn't he will die.

The other versions of this pair bond, the one we see displayed in most Big Daddies we meet within the game, make the Big Daddy territorial and possessive of the Little Sister he is meant to protect. In early versions of the pair bond, this was to an extent that the Big Daddy might die of despair if his Little Sister dies. Of course this model of the pair bond was too destructive, so after this they focused on binding Big Daddies to the symbol of the Little Sister, rather than any one individual.

This reflects the broader Bioshock theme of family; Andrew Ryan's perfect city, free of ideological weight and able to do free market capitalism fairly and justly has a tendency to warp and twist these family bonds. Ryan was killed by his own son who was taken by Fontaine and experimented on to create the perfect dog who would bark on

command. Big Daddies were warped into mindless monsters whose *fatherly* love will lead them to either kill or die. And Sophia Lamb, our resident “**collectivist**” wants to inject her child with so much of the magic juice that she will become a hive mind who knows all, sees all and controls all.

Of course, Sophia has reason to believe that this will not work. Because Alexander injected himself with the brain juice first and it turned him into.

Uh. So far as I can tell, a giant, probably radioactive sea slug. A giant, probably radioactive sea slug who wants to murder you. Granted, he probably only wants to murder you because he lives in a kill or be killed world where everyone has a grenade launcher in a city made of glass under the sea.

But who knows. The point is, Lamb knows what she’s doing. She is a product of Andrew Ryan’s Rapture even as she pretends that she is above it. And from within the protection of the master’s house she uses the master’s tools to rule. Ryan may be dead, but the spirit of Rapture lives on.

And in the previous game, in this game, we are shown the evidence of Rapture’s spirit. The crumbling edifice and infrastructure that was allowed to fail because the city’s leaders preferred endless war and power struggles over maintaining complex architecture. (The crumbling of which will eventually lead to the deaths of everyone when the whole thing eventually collapses because of the one physics word I know which is “pressure equalization” – think, a mass casualty event where everyone becomes fish food at once.) The arms race where all the bad guys have guns so all the good guys need better guns and fire hands. The instability of resources, the transactional nature with which human life is

treated, the many, many, many deaths of despair you see laid out in the bedrooms and hotel rooms of Rapture. A medical system designed around providing costly services to clients rather than giving care to patients.

Does this sound familiar to you?

Bioshock is like a feather tickling around the edges of your brain.

Calling to mind such images that feel familiar even though they are drastically different from how I experience the world outside of the game.

But even within this darkness there is hope.

Like Bioshock one, the choice to save or kill the Little Sisters is up to you.

But Bioshock two adds another layer of choice: you will encounter three people who play a great part in your journey and struggle. All of them are the reasons why you are in this state to begin with. And you can choose to kill them – something any other citizen of Rapture wouldn't think twice about. Or you can choose to forgive them.

In the end, Elenor, your Little Sister, will be free from Rapture and all of its nightmares and horrors. And what will she take with her to the world above? What will she teach to the Little Sisters she helped you rescue?

You get to choose that.

And your character will die.

But his spirit will live on within Elenor. And that spirit will be passed down from her to all those she meets.

(Society prospers HasanAbi)

Conclusion

(That Shakespeare thing about seasons)

I've actually written most of this on the Google docs app on my phone because my desk chair hurts to sit on.

So phone it is.

Having a terrible time with the autocorrect.

It's really annoying.

I hope you have enjoyed this video.

I hope that there was something in it for you.

It's my dream to find new ways of engaging students – to build the abolitionist classroom. The abolitionist classroom didn't make it into the final version of this project. I believe in learning through doing – throwing my body at the problem. And so this project, not just the videos, but the written portion, became this wild fantasy fever dream where I could stake out a place to imagine the world of the future, the student projects of the future, the scholarship of the future. The master's tools, you know.

But the abolitionist classroom is the classroom of the future. It's not a particular place, it can be anywhere at any time – there are no bells and desks and teachers standing at the front of the room dictating to students about the assumptions, values and language of the classroom.

The abolitionist classroom is built around students needs to be part of social groups, to face complex challenges that require complex solutions, and most importantly, to have fun.

Abolition doesn't start and end with prisons – just like anything else abolition is about abolition of a *system*. As Angela Davis says in *Are Prisons Obsolete*: “In most parts of the world, it is taken for granted that whoever is convicted of a serious crime will be sent to prison.” (Davis 9)

The prison is seen as inevitable. The prison is seen as necessary.

(The master’s tools are in the comment section ranting about Bad Guys)

And of course the prison is in our schools within our children in their restriction to certain spaces, their assignment to specific spaces and restriction from others, the top down authority where they are largely powerless within the system.

Does this sound familiar to you?

Like a feather tickling around the edges of your brain?

My first job was working in after-school – it was a government program that was funded because it was meant to be academic – think study hall for eight year olds after they've already spent the whole day sitting in school.

There was so much potential in this program but when we as workers with experience on the floor would struggle to make things better we were often met with rejection by the administration that claimed to know what they were doing but who were hopelessly incompetent when it came to actually dealing with children.

It was this job that radicalized me.

It was this job where I learned what it meant to build community.

It was this job where I learned that even adults need to apologize when we’ve fucked up.

It was this job where I learned that most of our problems can be resolved by talking about how we feel about something that has happened.

And it was at this job where I learned the strategies to move forward and heal, even if I couldn't see it at the time.

And so, in honor of those experiences, and the kids I worked with who I still think about all the time, and my coworkers who were all working just as hard as me to make the best out of a shitty situation, I want to tell you about my five threshold concepts, one last time:

1. Bodies at Problems - We learn best through doing, so believe in yourself and keep trying.
2. Making My Peace - We all need to learn emotional regulation, and part of that is just talking about what bothers us.
3. People Gotta Eat - Most people, but kids especially, don't have control over the things that will sustain them and are instead struggling to get what they need to survive. Have empathy and remember – from each according to their ability, to each according to their need.
4. Sustainability - We all have something worthy of passing on to others and one of the greatest joys in life is being part of a community that values you and what you have to share.
5. Master's Tools Master's House - We aren't going to change things by returning to tradition or creating stricter standards and higher expectations. Even if we believe that we need to prepare students who can thrive under

capitalism, the way we are teaching now doesn't do that. The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house, no matter how skillfully we think we can train our students to use them.

We need to cultivate a student who is brave enough to speak truth to power, who is willing to resist injustice, who fights for equity. We need students of a future that doesn't exist yet because those are the students who can imagine that future.

Those are the students who can kick ass to make it.

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