

Keywords in



Remix
Studies

Edited by Eduardo Navas, Owen Gallagher and xtine burrough

18

MEMES

Authored in Collaboration with Contributors

Authors included in *Keywords in Remix Studies* contributed a meme of their choice for this chapter. Authors were asked to share their thoughts as openly as possible, which resulted in some entries being longer than others. Each author is attributed at the end of their respective entries. This collaborative approach aims to provide an intertextual relation among the selected memes and the chapter contributions. In this way, this chapter functions as a megamix of the many interests at play throughout the essays in the compilation.

an 'internet meme' is a hijacking of [an] original idea [but] instead of mutating by random change and spreading by a form of Darwinian selection, they are altered deliberately by human creativity. Unlike with genes (and Dawkins' original meaning of "meme"), there is no attempt at accuracy of copying; internet memes are deliberately altered.¹

Political Memes

My suggestion for a meme would be the use of the image of Princess Leia as an icon of the Women's Marches protesting Donald Trump's inauguration to president (Figure 18.1). There are many versions of this image but this one is a good example.

The selection of this particular image is most likely a byproduct of two factors—the return of *Star Wars* as a core text in contemporary popular culture (and especially the image of Princess Leia from *A New Hope* as seen most recently in *Rogue One*) and the public awareness surrounding the death of actress Carrie Fisher just a few weeks before the marches. Recalling Fisher had led to greater public awareness of her off-screen personality, including her outspoken feminism and her criticisms of Donald Trump through the years. These two popular memories

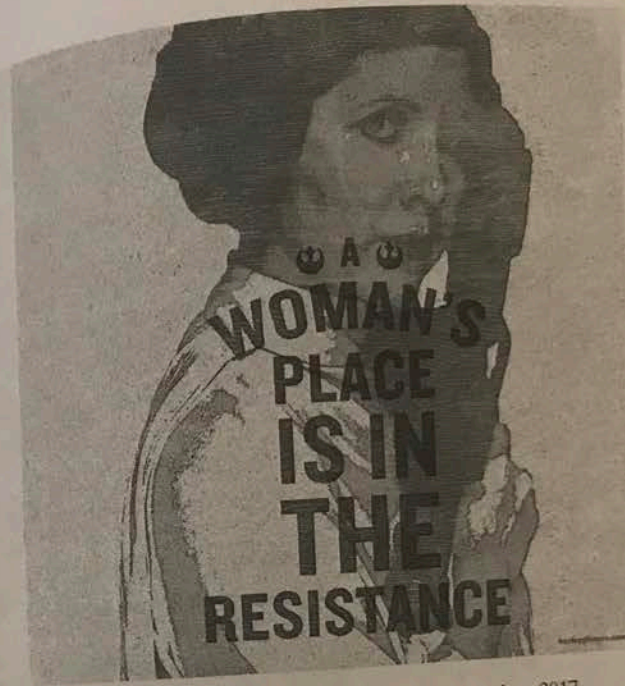


FIGURE 18.1 Princess Leia as an icon of the Women's Marches, 2017.

come together to insure the widespread embrace of this particular meme in the first wave of protest following Trump's transition to power.
Henry Jenkins et al.²

The pussyhat is a symbol of protest against rape culture in which sexual assault is perpetuated by behaviors such as those exhibited by men at the highest leadership positions in the United States (Figure 18.2).

From a new materialism perspective, I have selected an object—the pussyhat—as a meme. It is not only the object or its pattern circulated on the Internet but the making of the object and the wearing of it by millions of women throughout the world with variations but distinctly a pussyhat; and then posting the photos of wearing a pussyhat as part of a protest march. The pussyhat functions as a meme on the terms of its continued use, reuse, and circulation.
Karen Keifer-Boyd

The Koi Dance (Love Dance) from a Japanese TV drama became a video meme in late 2016 in Japan and beyond. The dance was originally the ending music video of a TV drama that raised discussions about compensation for women's work as housewives. Many people, including the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo (Figure 18.3) recreated the dance video and it became a social phenomenon in Japan.

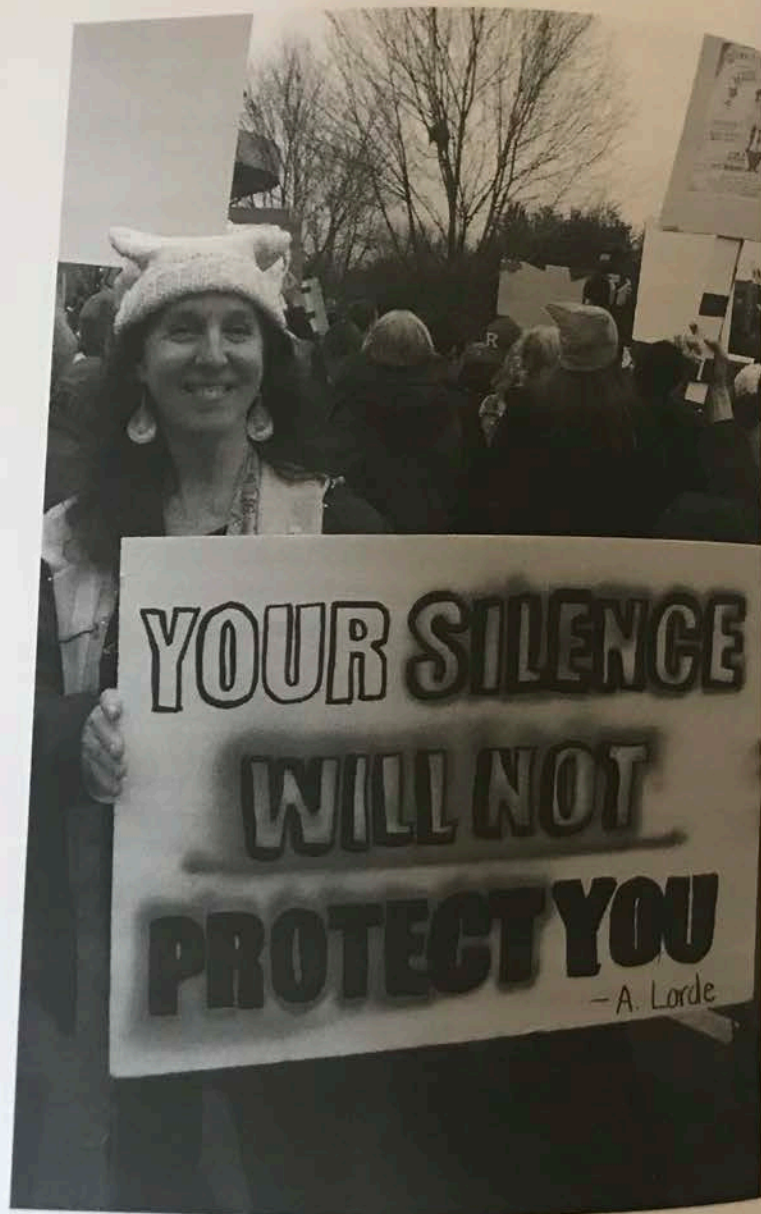


FIGURE 18.2 Karen Keifer-Boyd wearing the pussyhat at the Women's March in 2017.



FIGURE 18.3 The Koi Dance (Love Dance) as an online video meme.

Although, similar to many other memes, for most people, the intention to participate and recreate the dance video was fun, entertaining, and trending, the popularity of the dance video meme brought attention to the TV drama and, subsequently, the issues of often invisible economic impact of housewives and the equality of men and women in marriage. I consider this an example of meme that had a social impact.

Christine Liao³

Although this meme is stereotypical in its presentation (white Impact font, appropriated image from the 1980s), it nonetheless performs what memes ought to: critical reflection of the status quo. In their better iterations, they destabilize the present by defamiliarizing the commonplace, putting politics front and center (Figure 18.4).

Nate Harrison

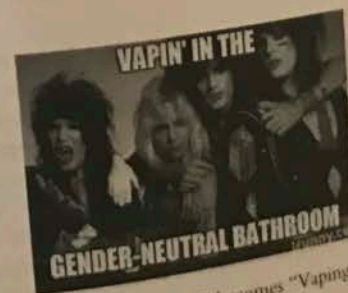


FIGURE 18.4 "Smoking in the boys' room" becomes "Vaping in the gender neutral bathroom" in this meme critical of the status quo.

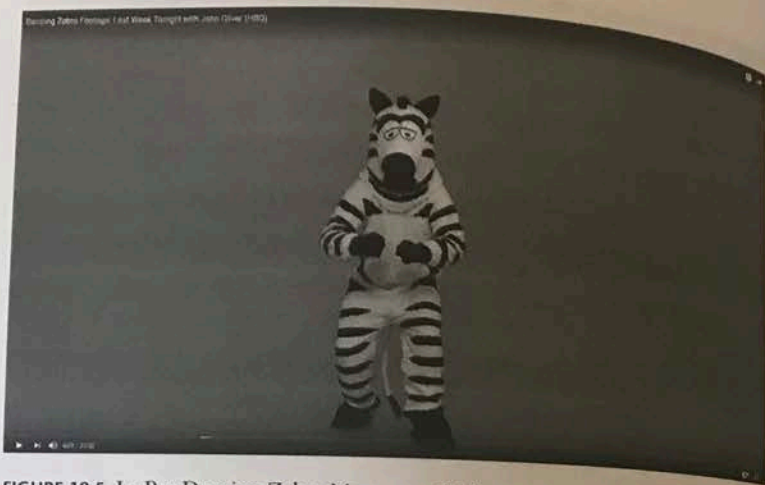


FIGURE 18.5 La Paz Dancing Zebra Meme, available on green screen for global remix opportunities.

A March 2017 transnational meme that exemplifies sharable culture is the La Paz, Bolivia zebra, introduced on John Oliver's show *Last Week Tonight* (Figure 18.5). The dancers in zebra costumes are a Bolivian strategy for reducing traffic jams and increasing traffic safety. To "Make the news more bearable," Oliver shared 24 minutes of footage of dancing zebras recorded on a green screen on his website. He suggested that dancing zebras, when added to other painful moments, bring about a new way to think of the moment. That is, Oliver suggests remix as a strategy for reimagining the world's problems.

xtine burrough⁴

Memes to Rewrite Culture

I submit the *Civil War* meme (Figure 18.6), in which fans create various hilarious arguments between Steve and Tony as the impetus for *Captain America: Civil War*, such as Figure 18.6 and the brilliant "It's pronounced jif" (which, by the way, it is). Other examples below show fans rewriting and re-performing popular culture.

Francesca Coppa⁵

My choice for a meme is "old school"—a kind of a proto-meme or a meme *avant la lettre*. It is the postcard made famous by Jacques Derrida in *La Carta Postale* (Figure 18.7). It is a weird anomaly and the perfect image of remix. The image shows Plato dictating to Socrates behind his back. The image not only inverts

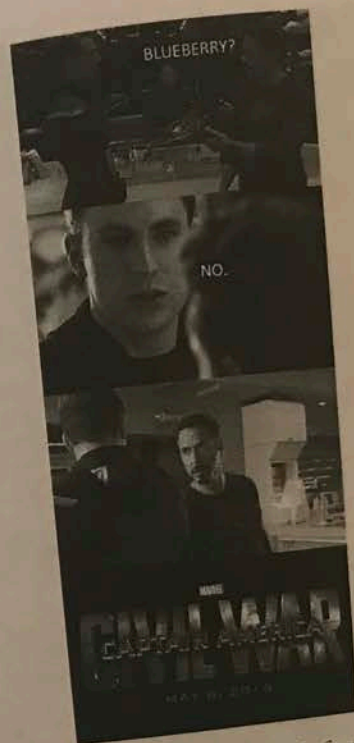


FIGURE 18.6 The *Civil War* meme provides fans a platform for generating new arguments between characters.

the usual understanding of the relationship between Socrates ("he who does not write") and Plato ("the writer who recorded the words of Socrates") but shows how remix can make an author say something other than what he originally meant to say.

David Gunkel

My favorite meme is an oldie-but-goodie: it's an image of Mandy Patinkin as Inigo Montoya in the film *The Princess Bride*. Unlike many photo memes, which keep one static element (the image) while offering thematic variations on the overlying text (e.g., Scumbag Steve, Philosoraptor, and so on), the text surrounding Mandy's image is almost always the same. It's a snippet of his dialogue from the film:

You keep using that word.
I do not think it means what you think it means.

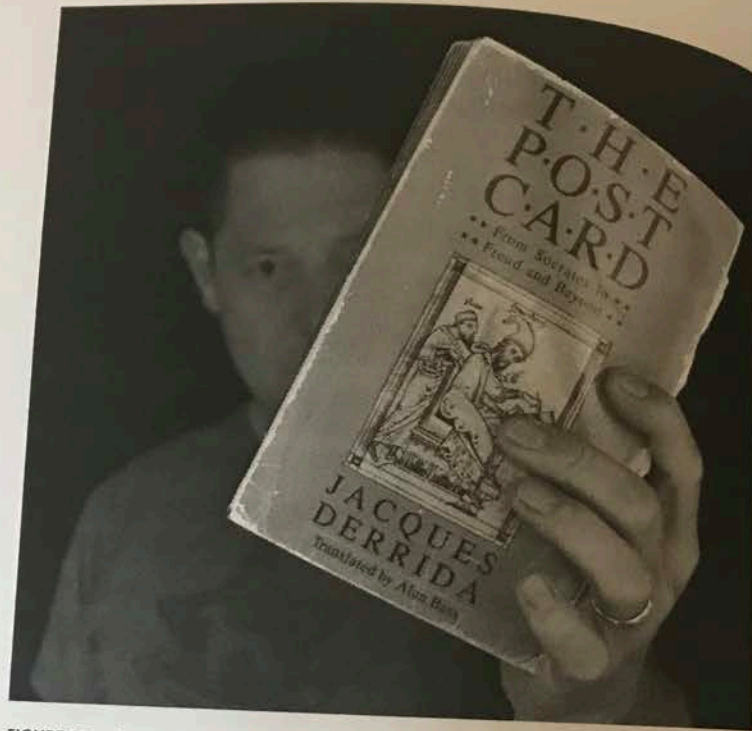


FIGURE 18.7 Postcard from the cover of Jacques Derrida's *La Carta Postale*.

This line refers to a very specific context in the film *The Princess Bride*—the villain, played by Wallace Shawn, repeatedly exclaims that it would be “inconceivable” for his elaborate plans to be foiled by a masked man following his party.⁶ Repeatedly, the inconceivable turns out to be the inevitable. Montoya, a mercenary swordsman, offers this pithy analysis to his criminal employer after several such letdowns (Figure 18.8).

I guess what I love most about this meme (other than the priceless expression on Patinkin's face) is that, in its immutability, it points to a universal truth of the human condition. Over and over again, the circumstances, which we believe to be “inconceivable”—either because of our hubris, or the narrowness of our purview, or both—manifest themselves as reality. And over and over again, the language we use to tame the wilderness of our sensoria, to build a predictive model for the unpredictable world, comes up short. We slip into routines, using words as stand-ins for genuine reflection, and this sets us up to get it wrong, again and again.

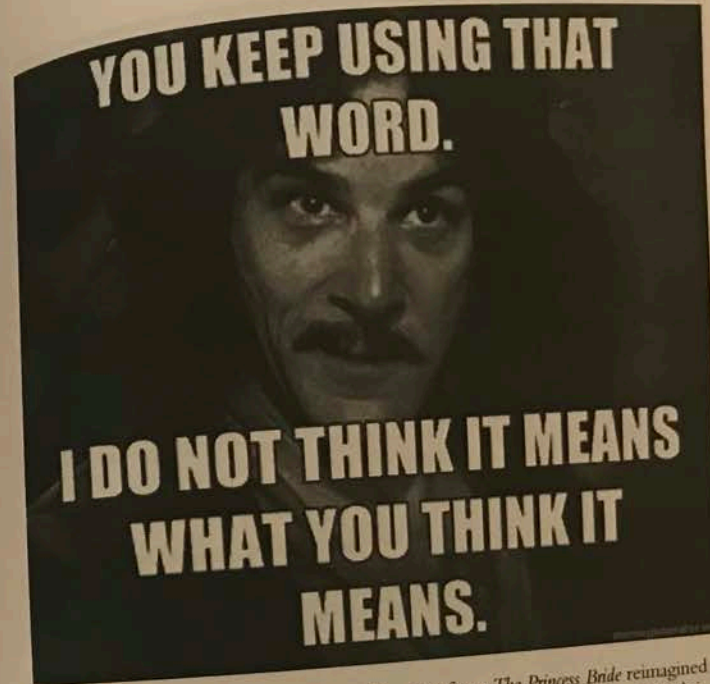


FIGURE 18.8 Mandy Patinkin as Inigo Montoya from *The Princess Bride* reimaged as a meme for his often cited quote, “You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.”

Once upon a time, in the analog days of the twentieth century, we had no social mechanism to observe or remedy this kind of cognitive tic. Today, thanks to the wonders of social media, our hubris can be checked with a cut-and-pasted smirk and a snippet of movie dialogue. Just like a well-timed swat from a Zen master's switch, the image awakens us from our solipsistic ruminations, and offers us the opportunity for enlightenment by forcing us to confront head-on the limitations of our linguistic minds. And, as with some of Zen's most enduring wisdom, we can best understand the dictum in the form of a haiku:

YOU KEEP USING THAT
WORD. I DO NOT THINK IT MEANS
WHAT YOU THINK IT MEANS

Aram Sinnreich⁷

Memes as Parody

This clip from the Norwegian show *Øystein og jeg* transposes the modern idea of the “IT-helpdesk” to early medieval times (Figure 18.9). In this video a monk explains to a colleague how to use the latest technology, a “book.” It depicts the shift in information technology from scrolls to codex bound books (reminding us that, yes, the book is also a technology), yet at the same time it functions as a satire on media change today and our ongoing adaptation to new technology, from mobile phones to iPads and Kindles. This video has gone viral and been translated into several languages while also inspiring various remakes.

Janneke Adema⁴

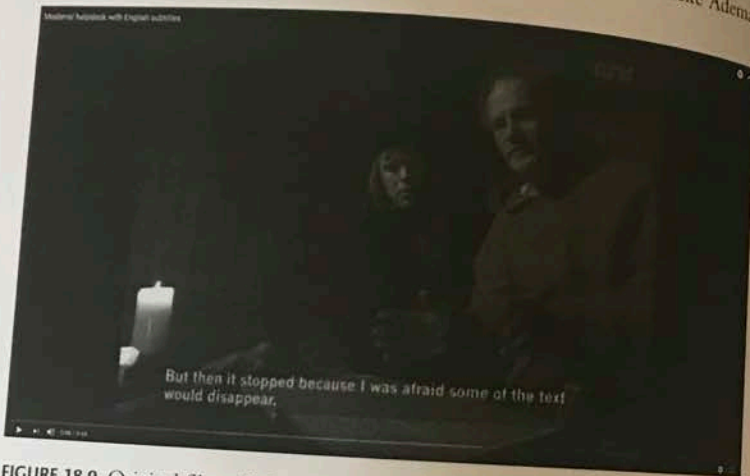


FIGURE 18.9 Original film still from *Øystein og jeg* on Norwegian Broadcasting (NRK) in 2001, with Øystein Backe (helper) and Rune Gokstad (desperate monk). Written by Knut Nærum.

My meme contribution is the *Downfall* parody memes known as “Hitler finds out . . .” or “Hitler Reacts to . . .” (Figure 18.10). I learned about these viral videos while doing research on music video mashups. These parodies consist of various excerpts from a film released in 2004 titled *Downfall*, which focuses on Hitler’s last days, before he committed suicide. In the scene, Hitler is told by key members of his inner circle that Berlin is surrounded and will soon fall. Hitler becomes very upset because he was not told the truth sooner, and rants at length until he eventually accepts the inevitability of defeat.

The parodies add subtitles to the original footage in a few languages, including English, that have nothing to do with what Hitler is actually saying in German. Some of the early memes show him ranting about the lack of features of the iPad, his realization that Pokémon do not exist, and his disbelief that Kanye West

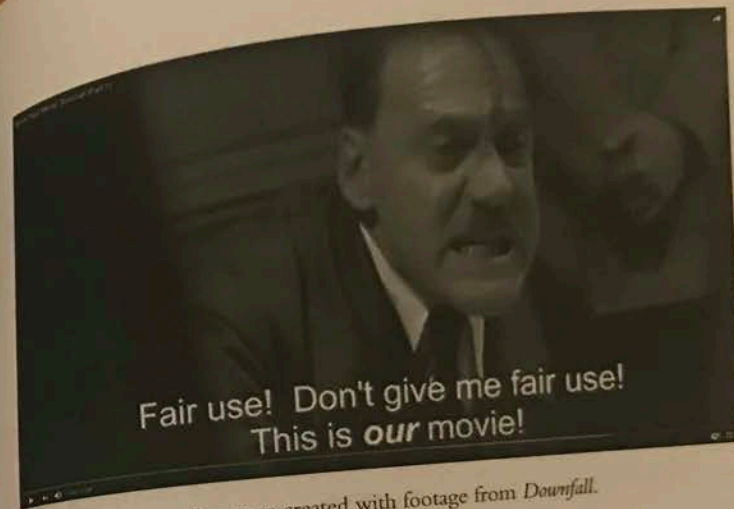


FIGURE 18.10 A parody meme created with footage from *Downfall*.

was rude to Taylor Swift when West interrupted Swift’s acceptance speech at an MTV video awards to tell her that Beyoncé was a much better music artist. Many of these memes were removed because takedown notices were issued aggressively at this time, but the meme lives on and includes rants on Trump becoming nominated for the United States presidency. This meme is interesting because it is able to make fun of one of the most disturbing moments in the history of the world as a means to reflect on the insanity of a man who took modern civilization on a very dark path for several years.

Eduardo Navas⁵

This *Dumb and Dumber* meme ironically talks about the poor capacity of the Spanish Prime Minister to talk in his mother tongue and his poor knowledge of English. The text on the meme is a word-for-word translation of one of his most hilarious statements (Figure 18.11).

Pau Figueres



FIGURE 18.11 *Dumb and Dumber*.

Memes that Re-Popularize Culture

You on Kazoo is the stuff of remix dreams (Figure 18.12). It is hard to imagine this content ever existed as an earnest attempt at children's programming. The opening safety advisory ("Remember: don't run, jump, or dance while playing the kazoo") greets its audience with the following advice: "We hope you play along and have fun with this video." And that is exactly what many Internet users have chosen to do. Kazoo Kid remixes operate within a meme logic that depends upon repetition (recognizable citation) and difference (alteration of content.) And as with any good meme, its circulation as a meme is far more recognizable and well-known to Internet audiences than the originating video. Kazoo Kid remixes operate within an open-ended ecology of parodied works that cite and remix each other in an ongoing circulation. But unlike straight-up parodies, which attempt to undermine the authority of an originating text, Kazoo Kid memes are made up of equal parts tribute and mockery, placing them more within the realm of pastiche than parody.

Mark Nunes¹⁰

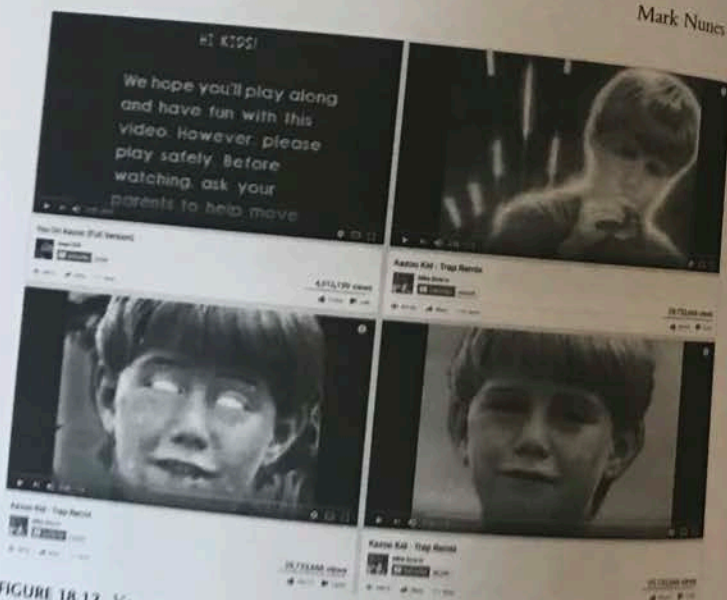


FIGURE 18.12 *You on Kazoo* meme screenshots from the YouTube video.

Rickrolling is an established online practice of bait-and-switch whereby an unsuspecting victim is provided with a web URL that is seemingly relevant to the topic at hand, but when they click the link it redirects to Rick Astley's

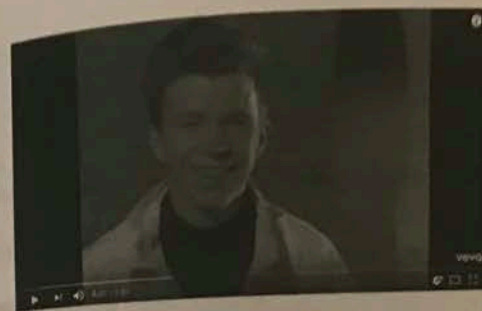


FIGURE 18.13 "Never Gonna Give You Up" YouTube video for Rick Astley's 1987 pop-single.

uber-cheesy 1987 hit single "Never Gonna Give You Up" (Figure 18.13). The URL is frequently disguised as a shortlink (e.g., goo.gl or bitly.com) to lure in and trick even experienced web users. Whenever somebody inadvertently encounters Rick Astley's song by clicking on a link they thought was something else, they are said to have been rickrolled.

Although this meme reached peak popularity in 2008, it is still going strong in 2017, with countless derivatives and remixed variations now in online circulation. The original 2007 RickRoll'D YouTube video has over 76 million views, while Rick Astley's official "Never Gonna Give You Up" has amassed over 300 million views since 2009, largely as a result of the meme's popularity. Owen Gallagher¹¹

Insider Memes

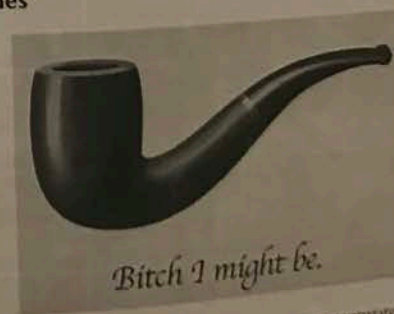


FIGURE 18.14 René Magritte's *The Treachery of Images* is appropriated into a meme.

This reworking of Magritte (Figure 18.14) relies on knowledge of art history and modern meme culture (the phrase is taken from a quote falsely attributed to a rapper supposedly being asked if he was guilty of a crime). Like a mustache-on

the Mona Lisa, it forces us to reconsider our relationship to notions of value, art, and reality. And, it's also funny.

Rebecca Tusinet¹²

This does not meet Shifman's definition of "meme"¹³—but it speaks to my own work of how young women remix Jennifer Lawrence in their own identity work (Figure 18.15).

Akane Kanai¹⁴



FIGURE 18.15 Jennifer Lawrence meme as representation of identity.

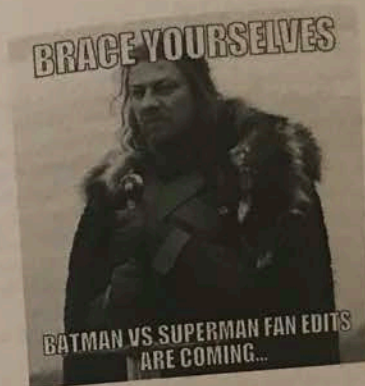


FIGURE 18.16 Imminent Ned meme used as an announcement for an upcoming fan edit.

Appropriating a foreboding catchphrase from the television series *Game of Thrones*, this "Imminent Ned" image macro states: "Brace yourselves/Batman vs Superman fan edits are coming . . ." (Figure 18.16). It was shared with me by a fan editor named "JobWillins" on June 27, 2016, just a few weeks before the home video release of *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016). The sarcastic image accurately predicted the astonishing surge of fan edits based on the film. It also reflects an emerging trend on social media in which audiences increasingly anticipate, and even demand, new fan edits to confront what some consider to be Hollywood's recent misfires, like *The Hobbit* trilogy and DC Comics superhero films.

Joshua Wille¹⁵

Notes

- 1 Olivia Solon, "Richard Dawkins on the Internet's Hijacking of the Word 'Meme,'" *Wired* (June 20, 2013) www.wired.co.uk/article/richard-dawkins-memes.
- 2 www.yahoo.com/style/princess-leia-and-wonder-woman-emerge-as-icons-in-womens-anti-trump-marches-221231196.html.
- 3 www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xuXlpvWw1I.
- 4 Dancing Zebra Meme from John Oliver's Last Week Tonight: www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/john-oliver-just-add-zebras-footage-trump-budget-987285 and www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Z668Qc0P4Q.
- 5 Meme image source: <http://i1.kym-cdn.com/photos/images/original/000/896/362/b54.jpg>. See <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/captain-america-civil-war-4> and <http://smosh.com/smash-pit/memes/captain-america-civil-war-memes>. Relatedly, check out this—not quite a meme but the Civil War of the Roses: cosplay as fan performance. <http://datara-riot.tumblr.com/post/151057360021/civil-war-of-the-roses-thank-you-to> and www.buzzfeed.com/julieareinstein/this-is-the-future-liberals-want?utm_term=.5141e0668#f5R5YnYXk.