

In the Spirit of the Principality

By

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Abstract

Post-Net Principality is an installation experience that aims at a total conversion of a space into a temple for an egregore that is born of that communal experience.

An egregore (pronounced egg' gree gore) is a group thought-form; it can be created intentionally or unintentionally and becomes an autonomous entity with the power to influence. A group with a common purpose like a family, a club, a political party, a church, or a country can create an egregore, for better or worse, depending upon the type of thought that formed it.¹

The central locus of the egregore, which Post-Net Principality attempts to engage with, is composed of three main memetic points: the spirit of anti-craft, the insufflation/exsufflation of memetic content, and the memetic consequences of the latter two points. The embodiment of this egregore attempts to achieve this experience through an entirely non-digital, thoroughly digitally adjacent state. Conversely, this paper sits definitively in the upper register of existence, where it is removed from the inevitable corruption and decay of the physical world and aims to act as a permanent framing/binding device for the arisen egregore. Here in the upper register, we may confront the principality on terms we both can recognize. As a being of this upper register or "meta" realm (the Post-Net Principality), this egregore we created is a creature of pure ideas. As this paper informs you, those mental connections alter it; and so, dear reader, we will see what becomes of this new geist at the latter end of this thesis.

¹L S Bernstein, "What Is an Egregore?," Intuitive Investigations (The Rosicrucian Archive, 2002), <https://www.intuitive-investigations.com/single-post/what-is-an-egregore>.

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I: Introduction

Post-Net Principality was an MFA art installation exhibited from March 20th 2022 to March 25th. Its five-day span was marked by the perpetual humming of massive inflatable penguins emanating loudly from behind the opaque windows of the Edgar Heap of Birds Family Gallery and the occasional popping of balloons caused by viewers waddling through the balloon covered floor. One enters into a vast seascape of balloons and chaotic, crowd-like energy as the gallery is transformed into a vehicle for an emotional experience. Aluminum ductwork drapes from the ceiling, the walls, and boxes on the floor to pump life-giving air into the massive inflatable penguins which command the space (see figs. 1-2). From these beings' arms and noses, this same air pours out with a low droning sound and dictates a flow of movement amongst the breath-filled balloons below (see fig. 3). The golden glow of archival gallery lights radiates from expansive 35ft walls to define a bright central space upon which hang three massive flag standards; a palimpsest of cryptic texts and scribbled drawings scrawling across the standards with reckless authority (see figs. 4-4.3). Framing these standards are two large golden mirrors that spread and color the light, and flanking these are two carved wooden icons depicting sanctified Wojaks (see figs. 5.1 & 5.2). This bright transept is balanced by a dimly lit pew illuminated primarily by back-lit stained glass style windows depicting saint-like self-transforming meme penguins attempting various forms of self-ritualization and collective action (see figs. 6-7). As the viewer tentatively enters the space, avoiding popping the frail balloons, the viewer begins to form a level of understanding via a path cleared first by the artist. That understanding is continually challenged by the information posted within the installation and by the absurdity confronting the viewer as they begin to navigate and deal with the giant, ever-looming inflatable penguin creatures commanding the space. Add in the sheer amount of handwritten text that blurs into an abstract composition on the wall as the paragraphs and the texture of the tapestry become one (see figs. 8-9), and the viewer's attempts to break into this

world of information are perplexed even further. Layers of input continually break down the clues we thought we understood. Post-Net Principality attempts to craft an emotional path of curiosity and the need for meaning within the viewer by becoming the temple to house the spirit of the internet and embodying the spirit in physical space.

The temple, as understood by Mircea Eliade, is a paradoxical space in which the place of the sacred blends with the everyday world or the profane². The blending of these two diametrically opposed forces is made possible by the temple's ability to transcend the mundanity of its surrounding environment. "Every sacred space implies a hierophany, an irruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different."³ In order to consecrate a sacred space such as a temple, one must enact a ritual; an intentional action of repetition (in this case the imitation of the gods) "to organize a space is to repeat the paradigmatic work of the gods."⁴ The temple intentionally focuses your memetic output. This control is not an effect of the physical elements of the temple but of the collective meaning that forms the paradigmatic framework that the egregore expresses. As we insufflate the spirit from the temple and then exsulfflate it back out as we understand it, we are changing and shaping the body of the egregore. Consequently, the paradigmatic framework changes the environment of the temple and the information we take in and interpret with our next breath.

² Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968)

³ ibid

⁴ ibid



Figure 1. Powell, Jacob. *Post-Net Principality*. 20-25 March 2022, Edgar Heap of Birds Gallery, Lawrence, Kansas.



Figure 2. Powell, Jacob. *Post-Net Principality*. Penguin Greeter



Figure 3. Powell, Jacob. *Post-Net Principality*. Circle of Penguin Breath



Figure 4. Powell, Jacob. *Post-Net Principality*. 30' Banners



Figures 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3. Powell, Jacob. *Post-Net Principality*. 30' Banners.
From left to right: *The Collection*, *The Choir*, *The Place*



Figures 5.1 and 5.2. Powell, Jacob. *Post-Net Principality*. Icon Carvings



Figure 6. Powell, Jacob. *Post-Net Principality*. Stained Glass



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Figure 6.2. Powell, Jacob. *Post-Net Principality*. Stained Glass Window 2



Figure 6.3. Powell, Jacob. *Post-Net Principality*. Stained Glass Window 3



Figure 7. Powell, Jacob. *Post-Net Principality*. Stained Glass Doors



Figure 8. Powell, Jacob. *Post-Net Principality*. Heraldic Banners, full length



Figure 8.1. Powell, Jacob. *Post-Net Principality*. Heraldic Banners, front view



Figure 8.2. Powell, Jacob. *Post-Net Principality*. Banner Detail A

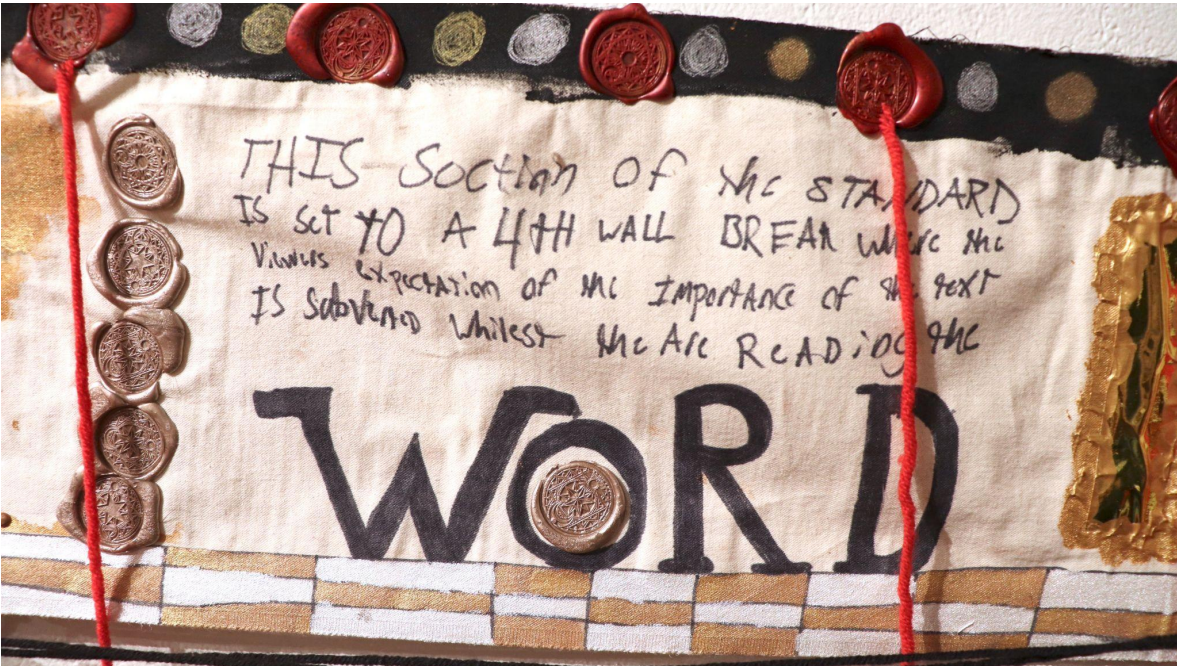


Figure 8.3. Powell, Jacob. *Post-Net Principality*. Banner Detail B

THERE IS SOMETHING
BETWEEN US, UP I
A MOVEMENT AS OUR
THOUGHTS RESPIRE IN THE
SPACE BETWEEN, FILLED
WITH MORE GOLD THAN THE
LUNGS OF MAN COULD
EXHALE

Figure 9. Powell, Jacob. *Post-Net Principality*. Exhale Plaque

II: The Repetition of Breath and the Body. The Cult of Authenticity, and Memetic War

The Repetition of Breath: Insufflation and Exsufflation

"In religious and magical practice, insufflation and exsufflation are ritual acts of blowing, breathing, hissing, or puffing that signify variously expulsion or renunciation of evil or of the devil (the Evil One), or infilling or blessing with good."⁵ Insufflation and exsufflation have been used across many cultures to represent consecration or the moment in which a being of divine nature becomes embodied within its specific temple or monument.⁶ This ritualized breathing would cleanse the breather by exsufflation of all that is anathema to the spirit and the insufflation of the essence of the spirit via smoke of the sacrifice or some form of ritual preparation. The conscious and intentional performance of an act that you would otherwise do innately grants power to the repetition of the act. This constant pattern of intake and exhalation would prime the space, statue, temple, or crowd in such a manner that the participants would genuinely believe that they were manifesting something greater than themselves, and really, were they not? Would the celebration of anointing the temple have happened if there had been no Spirit? Did the repetition cause the egregore, or did the egregore demand the repetition?

Posting, like breathing, is often an innate and unconscious part of our lives, but when it is repeatedly performed with intent, it becomes a ritualized, Sacred act.⁷ Sacred posting occurs when the meme has transcended the mimetic milieu surrounding it such that, like ritualized breathing, it is performed under the context of belief. That is to say, the poster of the meme has to fully imbibe the transcended quality of the memetic power that the meme has. We participate in this Sacred ritual daily, so why do we in the west believe that when we are online, we operate

⁵ "Insufflation," Wikipedia (Wikimedia Foundation, March 30, 2022), <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Insufflation>.

⁶ Andy Newman, "Breathing Life Into Gods, and Into a Hindu Temple," *The New York Times*, May 26, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/26/nyregion/26temple.html>.

⁷ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968)

ourselves in a secular, scientifically birthed, digital world with no temples, no spaces of liturgy, and no authentic place to manifest ritual?

The Cult of Authenticity

Post-Net Principality attempts to be that space of authenticity by using mimetic structures found in the digital realm, yet it ultimately fails and is physically corrupted by time; it feels somehow lacking and harkens one's mind to a reflection of some original. All physical temples now suffer this affliction as they all inevitably decay. This deterioration presents a lack of authenticity compared to the new temple in "The Cloud." Yet we demand authenticity more now than ever before. The internet is the new temple in the platonic. Because of its ability to repeat and ritualize perfectly and authentically every time over and over again, the internet out-competes anything outside of the upper register. The nature of the internet is unageing and permanent, full of authentic moments encapsulated perfectly outside of time. By providing us with a platform that allows for the recording and internal storage of verifiably authentic journeys, the internet creates a sacred space where you can now grow along in tandem with anyone, from any year that youtube existed on until forever. We approach the postings in a spirit of euhemerism; we interpret them as real and authentic. As long as the video creator, blogger, or content creator has started their journey from nearly the beginning (from where you are starting), you can learn and grow authentically with them. You can experience their genuine eureka moments and share the burden of learning together. You can experience this over and over with videos now more than fifteen years old. In this way, all online journeys are "fully authentic." They may have no production quality, no layer of finesse, just an eternally recurring one-on-one interaction between the viewer and the pilgrim. You circumambulate together, and thus the internet has taken its rightful place as The Temple. The Place, The Choir, and The Collection have become one; that is to say, everything and everyone now worships online.

Through our participation and our breathing, we created this new temple together. As we insufflate memetically through our participation in content, we intake information and data, digest and prune it and then exsufflate a new unique viewpoint. The internet has ritualized our memetic breathing: in and out, exsufflation and insufflation, like or don't like, retweet or don't retweet. As we inhale data and posts in the ongoing doom-scroll, we ask, "*Do you really feel it's okay to post something like that? Yes or No? In or out? 1 or 0.*"

There is something between us, you and I.
A movement as our thoughts respire the space between,
filled with more gold than the lungs of man could exhale.
The breath between us casts the brick of your palace,
its resplendent glory lost in its inescapable brevity.
It's just a Breath to you and nothing more,
Remaining indistinct from all the others.⁸

This is how your daily participation in the breath of the world is manifested. Our voices have a voice. This voice of the egregore makes demands, asks for worship, and creates rituals. The memes and posts, jokes, retweets, and fads we share crystallize via the aforementioned breathing method into ritualized memetic formats and create a glorified canon of the egregore that demanded/created them.

Memetic War

An example of this process in the real world would be the evolution of the Pepe meme during "The Great Meme War."⁹ The idea of the war itself was a symbolic representation of the Pepe egregore breaking away from the western hegemonic principality of the time. The representation of Pepe was moving away from an artist's innocent creation to a symbol of trolling and rebellion which was far removed from the artist's original context. Then roughly in

⁸ Powell, Jacob. *Untitled*, 2021.

⁹ Maxime Dafaure, "The 'Great Meme War:' the Alt-Right and Its Multifarious Enemies," *Angles*, no. 10 (January 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4000/angles.369>.

2016 Pepe began to undergo a shift of memetic ritualization. Political extremists began using Pepe as an open symbol of hate and racism. This led the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) to classify Pepe the Frog as a symbol of racism with antisemitic connotations.¹⁰ However, this classification did not end the life or use of the symbol of Pepe the Frog. On the contrary, many people within the "Pepe cult" enjoyed the new ritualization and context the spirit found itself representing. This resulted in a memetic exsufflation of certain users of Pepe the Frog. In a sense, the Cult of Pepe underwent a massive purge of members who found that their way of understanding had become anathema to the geist's very being and that when the cult's doctrines confronted their own personal moral landscape, they could no longer find the use of Pepe appropriate or funny. In this way, the Pepe egregore performed its own exsufflation of those users who found Pepe posting morally untenable.¹¹ This created a symbolic echo chamber of sorts. In effect, the alt-right doubled down on the use of Pepe, and the egregore's command to its cultists became such that they openly bound themselves to the values of hate that the Pepe image now focused on espousing.

Several years have passed since the Great Meme War, and since then, the memetic breathing practice of the Pepe egregore has compelled most of its users to cease posting Pepe. However, the changing and the evolution of Pepe has continued. To those willing to openly represent Pepe, his ADL classification as hate speech was emblematic of martyrdom. This ritualization of martyrdom followed a traditional western path, with Pepe achieving something like satirical sanctification by followers/users of Pepe (see figs. 10-11). There are now manifestations in which Pepe takes the form of a traditional western martyr or saint, appearing as a semi-divine figure seen as having certain symbolic virtues/dogmas based on which embodiment of Pepe is being depicted. It was the suffering not of the users but of Pepe itself

¹⁰ "Pepe the Frog," Anti-Defamation League, accessed April 7, 2022, <https://www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/pepe-the-frog>.

¹¹ Gary Lachman, *Dark Star Rising: Magick and Power in the Age of Trump* (New York: TarcherPerigee, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2018).

that mattered in this transformation. The users were affected very little while posting away in pre-crafted echo chambers, but a colloquial feeling arose that Pepe had suffered something that they perceived as making Pepe now wise/powerful. Interestingly, both memetic conversions (first in 2016 with the ADL classification, then towards the end of 2020 with the trend towards martyrdom/sanctification) roughly correspond chronologically with their Google Trends spikes (see fig. 12).

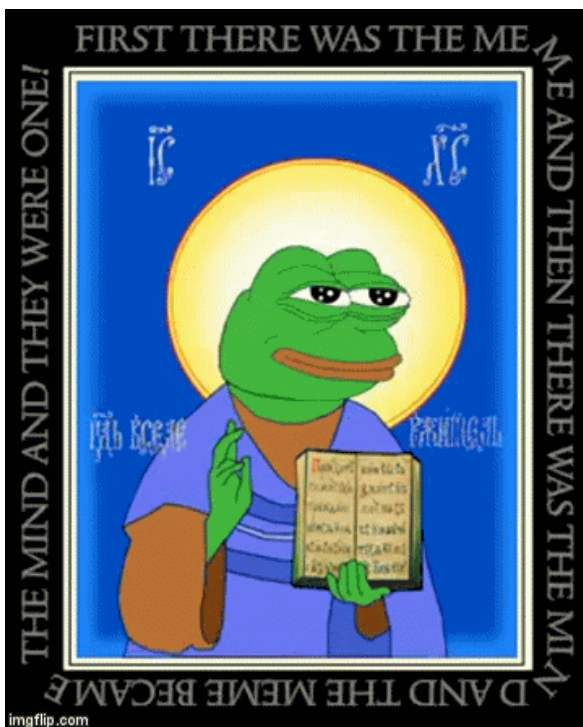


Figure 10. Saint Pepe¹²



Figure 11. Holy Pepe Blessing the Crying Wojak¹³

¹² "Holy Pepe" (Imgflip), accessed April 17, 2022, <https://imgflip.com/gif/1dyqn5>.

¹³ Aditya Vidyarthi Vidyarthi, "NEAR FUTURE," Twitter, February 18, 2022, <https://twitter.com/vidaditya1/status/1494463756361175040>.

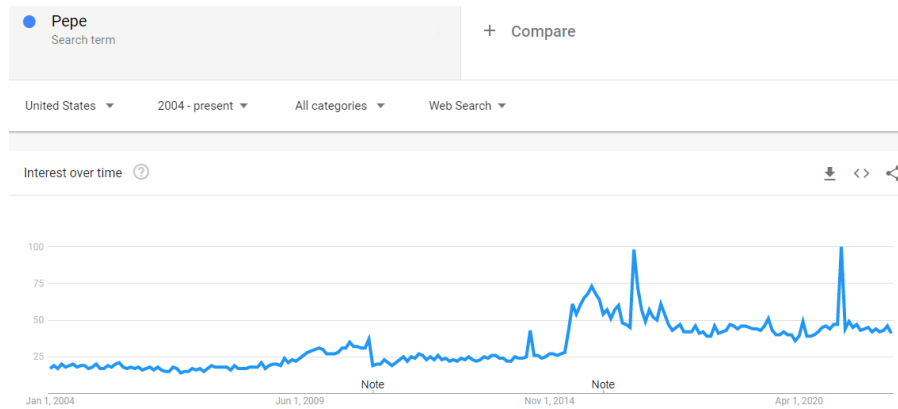


Figure 12. Graph of public interest in Pepe from 2004 to the present day. Accessed April 3rd 2022.¹⁴

And the Body

To understand how the congress of so many acts of Pepe meme posting became this egregore, we must look to the cutting edge of biology, specifically in the gene. Dawkins identified the meme as the cultural equivalent of the gene.¹⁵ Thus, understanding native gene plasticity can spur new insights within the memetic world.¹⁶ For this, we can look to the creation/invention of the entities known as Xenobots. Xenobots are a combination of computer engineering and biology whose unique behaviors challenge all current understanding of digital and living beings. These Xenobots are single embryonic cells digitally cut off from their native control matrix.¹⁷ There are currently two types of Xenobots, and for the purposes of our argument, we will be only discussing the non-sculpted, entirely native plasticity Xenobots. These Xenobots draw their name from *Xenopus laevis*, the frog species their cells come from. These embryonic cells are harvested at a critical stage of pre-development, which stops the chain of

¹⁴ “Pepe the Frog - Google Trends,” Google Trends (Google), accessed April 17, 2022, <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?q=pepe%20the%20frog>.

¹⁵ Metahaven, *Can Jokes Bring Down Governments?: Memes, Design and Politics* (Moscow: Strekla Press, 2014).

¹⁶ Sam Kriegman et al., “A Scalable Pipeline for Designing Reconfigurable Organisms,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117, no. 4 (2020): pp. 1853-1859, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1910837117>.

¹⁷ Sam Kriegman, pp. 1853-1859

cellular electrical communication that would usually tell the embryonic cell to begin developing into a specified type of cell (in this case, it would have been skin). They are then placed into a dish containing a nutrient yoke solution that emulates the cells' amniotic fuel source (see fig. 13). This artificially created neutral space puts the frog cells in a thoroughly impossible state they could never achieve on their own. This means there is no evolutionary precedent for the frog cells' behavior within this space. These Xenobots will, within a state of entirely native gene plasticity, begin to couple together, grow scilla (which these specific cells normally would not have) and form a larger structure to explore their environment (see fig. 14). While these Xenobots only live roughly seven days inside their yoke solutions, their cognitive capacities, such as preferences and learning capabilities, remain unknown.¹⁸ Unlocking the understanding of these Xenobots allows us to see how cooperation between a population of seemingly distinct and specific genes can generate actions that those genes are incapable of producing on their own. To extrapolate the analogy to the memetic world, we the posters are the DNA that creates the cell or meme that is itself in a state of native plasticity in which it is removed from our intent and, like the Xenobots, then interacts with others of its kinds to become more. A collection of Xenobots coupling together to create a body whose agency allows it to manipulate its environment. As our Memes couple together, like Pepe once coupled with a large enough congress of similar memes, they leave behind our intentions and create an egregore whose actions exceed the capacity and understanding of its DNA and creators. In fact, the action is expressly outside of the morphospace ("representation of all the morphologies an organism could or does have, each point of which represents an individual shape") of the original genetic designs. In order to understand the connection between the agency of an egregore and the agency of a collected body of xenobots, we must take the "intentional stance" as understood by Daniel Dennet.

¹⁸ Sam Kriegman et al., "A Scalable Pipeline for Designing Reconfigurable Organisms," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117, no. 4 (2020): pp. 1853-1859, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1910837117>.

Here is how it works: first you decide to treat the object whose behavior is to be predicted as a rational agent; then you figure out what beliefs that agent ought to have, given its place in the world and its purpose. Then you figure out what desires it ought to have, on the same considerations, and finally, you predict that this rational agent will act to further its goals in the light of its beliefs. A little practical reasoning from the chosen set of beliefs and desires will in most instances yield a decision about what the agent ought to do; that is what you predict the agent will do.¹⁹



Figure 13. Joshua Sokol, “A Swarm of Computer-Designed Organisms Couple Together.,” Meet the xenobots, virtual creatures brought to life (The New York Times, April 3, 2020).

¹⁹ Daniel Clement Dennett, *The Intentional Stance* (Cambridge, (Mass.): The MIT Press, 2006), p. 17.

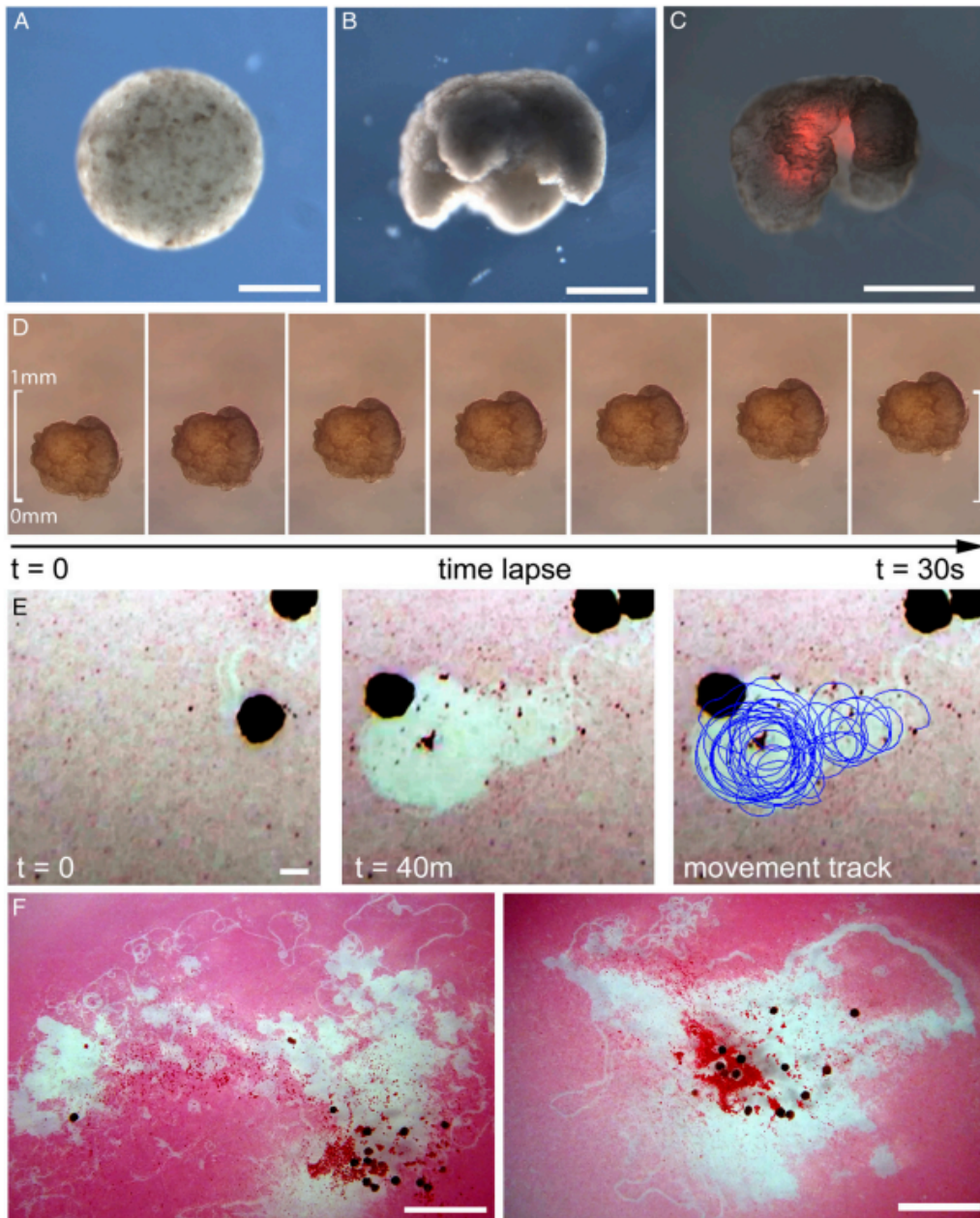


Figure 14. Xenobots. “Manufacturing reconfigured organisms. (A) Aggregation of pluripotent blastula cells harvested from *X. laevis* embryos. (B) Shaping results in 3D representations of the evolved in silico designs. (C) Layering of cardiac progenitor cells results in contractile cardiomyocyte tissue at specific locations, visualized by red fluorescent lineage tracer. (D) Time-lapse imaging of self-locomotion in an aqueous environment. (E) Emergent behavior of debris aggregation by an individual within the environment and (F) by groups of reconfigurable organisms over a 24-h period.”²⁰

²⁰ Sam Kriegman et al., “A Scalable Pipeline for Designing Reconfigurable Organisms,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117, no. 4 (2020): pp. 1853-1859, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1910837117>.

III: Anti-Craft, The Spirit of Anti-Finesse, Wojak and The New Religious Tapestry

Anti-Craft

The Post-Net Principality art installation and all included pieces have been created with the spirit of Anti-Craft. As the flags appear to be made of the cheapest opulence by unconcerned hands, gilded with glitter glue and metallic craft papers, and adorned with acrylic yarn tassels and scrap paper addendums, the viewer gains the understanding that the artist is doing the minimum necessary work to achieve the desired outcome. The reason for operating in this manner was two-fold. First, creating in this manner has an interesting, compelling effect on the viewer where the content of what is being achieved by the art is of such urgency and importance that the production quality is reduced to the bare minimum of what is required to convey the message. In this way, the urgent quality of the art serves as a metaphoric representation of the urgency and instant gratification supplied by the internet, but it also makes use of shared visual and methodological elements present on the internet. Post-Net Principality's closest visual contemporaries who share this urgency in craft and hold "media as message" are memes.²¹ Memes tend to use quickly drawn, low-resolution imagery that is recycled frequently and drawn over with layers of text and added elements which shift and add meanings as new versions are created; likewise, much of the content in *Post-Net Principalities*, including the banners and the central penguin statue, are compiled out of salvaged scrap writings and drawings layered onto each other and then added on to. In both cases, the use of palimpsest occurs frequently; writings that were once important enough to record are scribbled over to make room for the newest ideas, thus increasing the sense of immediacy and low physical value in direct juxtaposition to the meaning context of the "opulence" of the materiality.

²¹ Marshall McLuhan, "The Medium Is the Message," in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London: Sphere Books, 1967).

The Spirit of Anti-Finesse

Void memes, in particular, have been a source of artistic inspiration and musing (see fig. 15). These memes hold the Spirit of Anti-finesse in high regard, as most memes do when their anonymous creators draw them into existence. They attempt to express the ineffable void, a futile task that begins to enter into the viewer's subjective experience. The only way we engage with the meme itself is via the feeling it creates, or we look at it and just *know*. It's the feeling when you can't quite explain how or why you relate to the meme and then inevitably, if you feel it, you just *know* that this meme has something to it, and you come to a conclusion. You view it and ask yourself, "*Do you really feel it's okay to post something like that? Yes or No? In or out? 1 or 0.*" and based on your decision, you either replicate and repost the content or you let it die. This *knowing* is a part of the meme's fecundity, referring to its catchiness or ability for the meme to grab our attention and live within our minds.²² The specific aspect of *knowing* we are attempting to pinpoint is the emotional state of deciding whether or not the meme is Sacred or Profane. It is a framework upon which you evaluate the intensity of repetition the meme requires, with the most sacred meme demanding the most instant and strict replication. In a sense, it is the emotional side of the memetic agents' copy-fidelity.²³

²² Metahaven, *Can Jokes Bring Down Governments?: Memes, Design and Politics* (Moscow: Strekla Press, 2014).

²³ *Ibid*

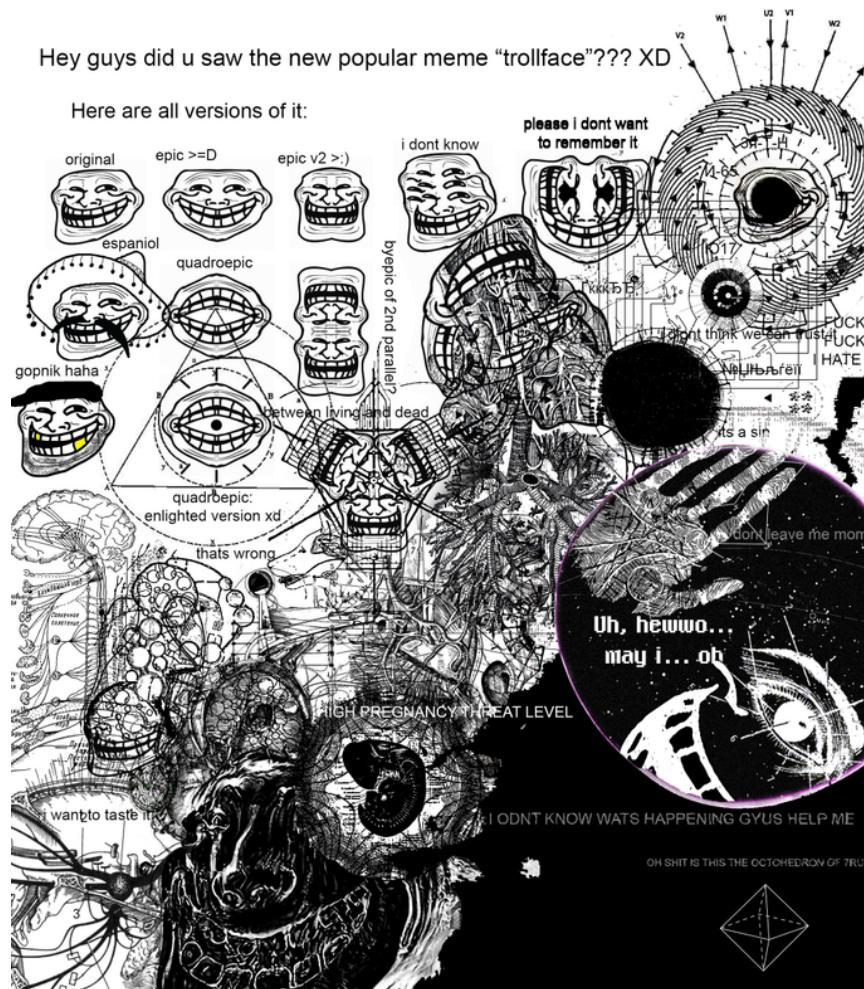


Figure 15. "Hey Guys Did You Saw the New Popular Meme Trollface?"[sic] Know Your Meme, January 18, 2022.

The second reason for operating in the spirit of anti-craft is its symbolic weight as an analog of the manner in which we engage with the internet. This manor is what I have named the "Spirit of Anti-Finesse". The name takes its understanding from Pascal's definition of the Spirit of Finesse: "'The intuitive mind, with its instinctive twists and turns, lucky hunches, and inspired guesswork'. Intuition. You feel things, but it will maybe not clear for others. Finesse embraces things."[sic]²⁴ Conversely, the spirit of anti-finesse moves us in the urgency of knowing and needing to share that knowledge, not for others to intuit, but to understand and to

²⁴ "Blaise Pascal (1623–1662)," Internet encyclopedia of philosophy, accessed April 7, 2022, <https://iep.utm.edu/pascal-b/>.

substantiate your position thus allowing it into their salience landscape where it is primed for memetic replication.²⁵ We need the others to *know*. The Spirit of Anti-Finesse is the spirit of posting both literally and metaphorically via its old-world analog," posting 1. display (a notice) in a public place. 'A curt notice had been posted on the door.'"²⁶ It is a rebellious act of knowing, an idea of such urgency that it must be instantly instantiated in the cloud or upper register/meta realm. We *must* post things when taken by the Spirit of Anti-Finesse; it is the innate desire to share the act of knowing. The spirit of Anti-Finesse is not remotely detached from the thingness that Finesse embraces. It is the opposite end of the spectrum, such that one could say that the spirit of Anti-Finesse is the absolute maximum of *knowing* and the minimum of *thingness*. These memes we curtly post are the stuff that makes egregores; simple, shareable, and absolute. Together the conglomeration of these posts is the method of creating an egregore and, as such, is the manner in which we each engage with the internet. Just as our DNA comes together and creates cells, and our cells come together to create us; our consciousnesses come together to create memes, and our memes come together to become egregores.

Wojak and the New Religious Tapestry

This world of egregores within the internet is the new religious tapestry, a new space much like the borders of a medieval tapestry laden with angelic and demonic entities who shout unspoken words into the "real world" of artistic depiction. The memetic world even begins to mimic the symbolic storytelling of the tapestry, in which the pilgrim, listener, or viewer was blankly slated as a representation of the individual experiencing the narrative. This individual (who is canonically depicted as an embodiment of Wojak in modern memes) is the memetic frame from which the viewer is inferring the experiential context the artist wished to convey. Here we can

²⁵ Ramachandran, Vilayanur S., and Lindsay M. Oberman. "Broken mirrors." *Scientific American* 295, no. 5 (2006): 62-69.

²⁶ "Posting," Dictionary (Oxford Languages), accessed April 17, 2022.

begin to see the new digital-analog that has arisen to replace this now outdated method of memetic propagation.

Wojak is, by its nature, a multiplicity that is ever hard to define as even its origin is unknown; however, it first experienced widespread use in 2009 on popular image boards like 4chan, at the time going by the name "Feels Guy."²⁷ "Wojak refers to a loose canon of similarly low-quality Microsoft Paint illustrations that are so loosely attributed that it is possible to label multiple illustrations which share almost no visual similarities as an original Wojak. Over time, these criteria have evolved into a ritualized form of memetic communication. Wojak's primary use is as a tabula-rasa style individual that represents the viewer undergoing similar emotions to the depicted Wojak. Such as in the case of "Doomer," a Wojak whose memetic framework is meant to provide the viewer with the emotional context of depression as the manner of viewing the meme/world in which Doomer resides. In this way, Wojak is the canonization of the viewer's engagement within the meme itself. The multiplicity of Wojak is also an aspect of this engagement; as Wojak changes, so do the aspects that the viewer identifies with. The evolution of these identities transcends gender, race, and species not via methodological whitewashing or homogenization but by becoming the empathic framing device from which the viewer should understand the context of the meme. Anecdotally, during the show, a viewer proclaimed themselves as a "Doomer" (the style of Wojak that self identifies as a depressed individual with very little hope in the world) and asked what the artist's favorite Wojak was (see fig. 16). As this introduction demonstrates, their chosen Wojak embodies an emotional point of view, identified by visual and cultural clues in its depictions. These archetypal signifiers of Wojack vary significantly from embodiment to embodiment and are the symbolic key to the understanding of the emotional point of view provided by a specific version of Wojak (see fig. 17). Note, within most meme formats, Wojak varieties are posted exclusively without textual context to explain

²⁷ "Wojak," Know Your Meme (Literally Media, July 9, 2016), <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/wojak>.

the position of the Wojak. The final interpretation is left to the viewer's inference of the provided symbolism.



Figure 16. "Doomer" *Goalcast*, November 24, 2021, <https://www.goalcast.com/doomer/>.

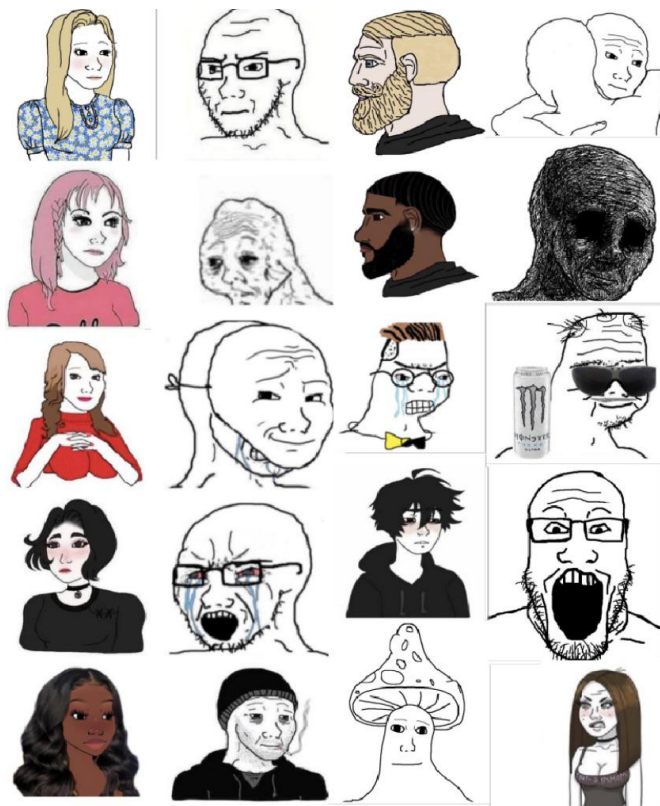


Figure 17. "Evolutions of Wojak" *Reddit*, August 2021

This is the same for the Post-Net Principality installation, where the posted Wojaks were "Not Crying, Not Wojak," "Yikesjak," "Withered Wojak," and base state "Wojak ." These are a few of the more common forms of Wojak, meaning they have a more canonized meaning while maintaining the most widespread usage. Via the same insufflation/exsufflation method as discussed in the first section, Wojaks are posted and edited, or created and reposted, or not. In and out and in the space in between, vying for emotional engagement is the primordial breath that is Wojak. From the cesspit of posting arise solid, crystalized, canonical versions of Wojak. "Bloomer," "Doomer," "Zoomer," and "Boomer," these forms are almost exclusively used in ritualized methods to describe a particular type of individual (see fig. 18). These descriptions are found by referring to the icon format of the "original" posting, however unoriginal the posting may be. It offers the viewer something akin to a page from an emblem book that thereby elicits the exact understanding of the symbolic elements of the referenced Wojak. This canonization is an inevitable effect of idolization within the Upper Register. When posted online, there is an effect of increased memetic fecundity via the authority of the timeless nature of the internet. Online, the Wojaks trend toward this binary form of communication because this is how we treat and mimic the gods. We must ritualize their actions to make them sacred and experience the hierophany. This symbolic or emblematic understanding of Wojak in the new religious tapestry is akin to hagiography, as these moments in the cloud and on the internet have a similar level of Meta-reality to the recounting of the lives of the saints. Their "truth" matters very little compared to the symbolic weight in meaning that each meme carries. It only matters that Wojak *feels* correct within its application, that it feels proper to the circumstances to invoke a certain Wojak to accent or make a certain point. This is why the insufflation/exsufflation demanded by an egregore is emotive; it comes in a feeling: *"Do you really feel it's okay to post something like that? Yes or No? In or out? 1 or 0."* As you waddle, feeling your way through the Meta-reality, feeding egregores made of Truths in the Spirit of Anti-Finesse, each new principality holds its own understanding of the Truth and demands renouncement of those who would claim its

dominion or its agency over you as "evil .""Do you really feel it's okay to post something like that? Yes or No? In or out? 1 or 0." The new religious tapestry is a fabric yet to be fully woven, and the ritualized ascension is far from complete. We weave it together as we post, you and I, and everything in between.

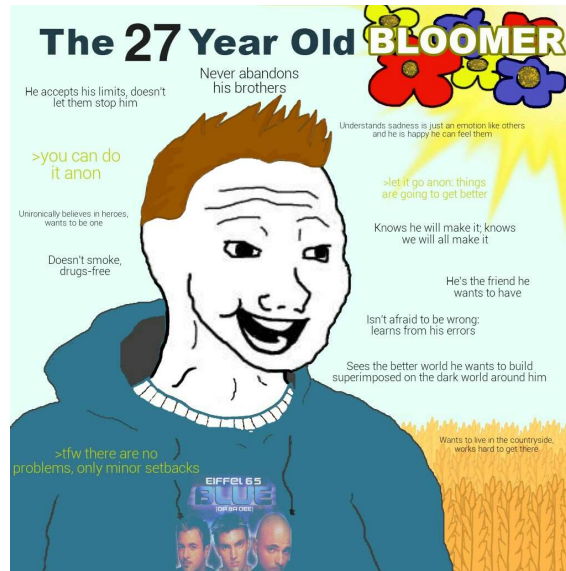


Figure 18. "Bloomer," Know Your Meme (Literally Media, April 2, 2022), <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/bloomer>.

IV: Penguins, The Choir, and An Embodiment

Penguins

To most of those connected to the internet, Penguins are entirely ethereal beings. Save for those individuals who are geographically aligned with penguins' natural habitats, most only encounter them during a select few trips to the zoo; however, these caged birds do not excite and entice like the memetic birds we see on the screen. You can feel their restriction within their enclosure; these are not the authentic birds we watch on the screen. They are less personified; their lack of freedom denies them the agency we key in on when watching them from drones and hidden cameras in their natural habitat. Our love of these birds demands they stay unrestricted and free to interact with their environment. They flock to their supercolonies far from human interaction, and we demand that all nations and companies allow them free reign. The canon of penguin films teaches us of the struggle of the penguin and justifies our demands for its safety. Who can forget such classic films as *Happy Feet*, *Surfs Up*, *The March of the Penguins*, *The March of the Penguins 2*, *Disney's Penguins*, and many more? We watch our flock of memetic birds as a choir of digital monitors singing praise to the penguins, and thus the penguins are personified. Who exactly taught us about these birds? Why do they hold colloquial respect despite being physically removed from a majority of the human population? And more so, when they exist to most only in their most depressing state, as caged birds. Looking upon them in the zoo, we all can tell they are not like the beautiful, never aging birds we see on the screen. Everyone who's been online for any amount of time *knows* about penguins; they *know* how to think about them, how to worry for them. We all just *know* how to harmonize with them (see fig. 19).



Figure 19 Powell, Jacob *Post-Net Principality*. Penguin

The Choir

This is the choir of the monitor, the collection of screens that we watch the little memetic birds from. These Screens have become ubiquitous. They function more like a constant dirge across the human experience-scape than a projector of light. The harmonizing and understanding we all have, the zeitgeist of the penguin in its distributed form, we are the body of the penguin. Formed out of screens, our song, the one we just *know*, weaves the egregore of the Penguin and the penguins we see online, demanding that they are personified. We can only attribute the spirit of this personification to the natural or "wild" unrestricted Penguin. The egregore can only manifest embodiment upon these entirely untouched Penguins.

An Embodiment

An embodiment of an egregore is when your understanding of reality becomes affected by the narrative quality of the egregore. It is a moment of transcendence. The things you just *know* descend from the upper register, descend from the clouds, and *exist*. The power of this principality is strong enough to affect such minds as Werner Herzog such that he even felt compelled to allot penguins with enough agency to potentially go "insane."²⁸ When it's in the zoo, it's just a penguin, but when the stories and movies are real, and they are out there, behaving unrestricted, waddling, *being* a penguin? Now *that's* a Penguin.

²⁸ *Encounters at the End of the World* (Discovery Films, 2008), 1:12:39, <https://youtu.be/6BB3YRtzRxE?t=4358>.

V: Consecration as Conclusion

For now, a single moment of embodiment exists for our Post-Net Principality. Its embodiment attempts to emotionally express these aforementioned artistic choices to invoke the multitude of experiences undergone by viewers. By no means is the viewer expected to deduce their involvement with the principality. As neurons cannot understand brain waves, the viewers create an understanding they do not understand. Those fleeting Instagram stories, shares, and posts create a colloquial understanding independent of a singular intention. Yet it was absolutely intended to lead viewers through an emotional experience that would frame their ability to visually understand an egregore as we created one. We gave it the agency that two 20' tall inflatable penguins demanded. We understood the space as holding some force of energy and saw the penguins not as yards of constructed plastic inflated and hung by monofilament but as solids; their solidity increased by the solidity of their peers. Instead, this installation created a new path, took you into a new place, following someone or something. The path intended for the viewer was meant to create a satirical level of curiosity and investigation, leading to the upper register where this thesis exists and placing a magnifying glass on the *Post-Net Principality* itself. To ask you one final question, did *I* lead you here? To this moment? To the end?

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