Post Memes

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1. The human is always already posthuman.

   The human is the animal that relies on technology in order to realize its humanity.

   The “post-human” is thus an ontological category, more than a historical one. The very first humans were, from this perspective, as posthuman as we are today. We are ever using tools and prostheses to get ahead of ourselves.

   This perspective is known as “originary technicity” (see Bernard Stiegler, David Wills, and others).

2. Politics is built into the bones of (post)human culture.

   See, for example, the bone which one chimp uses to beat the other at the beginning of Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*; or the bones used by our early human ancestors as tools for painting, adornment, or charms.

3. Technology and art stem from the same root in *technē*.
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*Technē* being the ancient Greek word incorporating “art, artifice, making, fashioning, bringing-forth, revealing.”

4. Technology and politics stem from the same root in *cybernetics*.

Cybernetics comes from the ancient Greek word *kybernētikē*, meaning “governance,” especially through the metaphorical act of steering or navigation (*kybernēsis*).

5. Art and politics are thus connected and mediated by *technics*.

Technics being the wider or deeper logic (social, economic, mechanical) nestled within technology itself.

6. Different technological artifacts enlist humans in their campaign to come into existence.

Just as different human groups favor specific media and technologies in order to realize their aspirations and express their affections.

7. We call “media” the manifold tools and assemblages that not only comprise the interface for our attempts at communication, but that — perhaps more importantly — also engineer new “structures of feeling” (Raymond Williams).

8. Each new technological object or arrangement allows and encourages a new aesthetic orientation out of the detritus of former aesthetic materials, which in turn foster new affects. This happens by way of new vectors of proliferation.

9. We call the volunteer maintenance staff of these new vectors of proliferation “artists.”
10. Proliferation in the posthuman context is largely an instance of contagion and enthusiasm, obliging us to focus on what Hayden White calls “the content of the form” (that is, the ways in which the medium shapes and pre-determines the message). Such contagion occurs in different degrees of technical mediation, and the medium of enthusiasm can often be its own message.

11. Analogue proliferation is at once amplified, accelerated, and complicated by digital proliferation.

Think, for instance, of an irresistible rumor. Last century this would have been transmitted by word-of-mouth, and then perhaps picked up by radio or television. Today such rumors take on new textures, temporalities, scales, and impacts by virtue of being distributed through the Internet.

12. Some forms of proliferation depend on visibility within the attention economy (trending topics, hashtags, viral videos, political movements, etc.).

13. Other forms of proliferation depend on the lack of personal, public, or political attention (computer viruses, Bitcoin, pollution, arms, etc.).

14. Some forms of proliferation depend on a complex combination of both visibility and invisibility; contagion and excommunication (terrorism, extremism, state violence, etc.).

15. The Internet — especially so-called “social media” — can be viewed as a planetary proliferation chamber, or global meme machine, communicating micro- and macro-enthusiasms on a scale and speed never seen before (and cancelling earlier enthusiasms in the process).

Memes are an idea, behavior, or style that spreads from person to person within or across cultures.
A meme is a “cultural unit” for carrying ideas, symbols, or practices that can be transmitted from one mind to another through media.

Richard Dawkins considers memes to be something akin to cultural genes.

More specifically, however, memes have begun to describe those deliberately clunky images, with accompanying text, designed to make us laugh, feel, and/or think, and that circulate primarily through social media, spreading like a virus.

An especially effective or popular meme is described as “dank.”

16. For example, the ideological identity-position known as being “pro-life” uses deliberate modes of image “pro-liferation” in an attempt to influence others into feeling indignant righteousness: an affect that Spinoza classed as one of “the sad passions.” This in turn encourages an overdetermined biopolitical relationship to women’s bodies, personal freedoms, medical technologies, etc.

17. A propos, predatory professionalized proponents of the pro-life position misappropriate the proprietary proliferation of yet more proponents of pro-life propaganda, lead-
ing—appropriately perhaps—to prolific ideological pria-
pisms beyond all propriety.

18. We may go so far as to consider memes as a new folk-art, often given powerful signal boosts by corporate, political, and ideological interests.

19. We thus live in the Golden Age of Memetic Desire.

“Memetic desire” is related to, but also distinct from, “mi-
metic desire,” made famous by theorist René Girard. (The latter identifies the origin of all desires as external to the desiring subject, whereby the rival or role model inspires desire, more so than the object upon which such desire eventually rests.)

Memetic desire also derives from elsewhere, but is not born in imitation, but rather infection or contagion. It re-
tains traces of the original and essential triangular structure (desirer–mediator–desired), but fractalizes this throughout the network—to the degree that a specific mediator can no longer be confidently ascribed. The subject is therefore less an ape of established ideological patterns, and more the reflex, medium, or host, through which memetic currents flow or grow. The human is revealed to be less an impressionable marionette than an extension of the string. (Or better yet, the tension which guides the connecting threads.)

So to say, where the posthumans of the pre-Internet age desired what other people already found desirable (e.g., Don Quixote, Emma Bovary), the posthumans of today desire to be told what to desire—and indeed how to desire—by trending algorithms and recommendation engines (e.g., anyone of us in conversation with Siri, Echo, and others). Indeed, we ourselves now function as semi-organic nodes of the memetic network.

20. The Golden Age of Memetic Desire is thus the dawning of an era in which our structures of feeling are liquified into
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reflecting pools upon which bloom and float these sad and passionate “cultural units” of compressed affect; the blue-green algae of the general intellect.