In the preface to the first edition of his Critique of Pure Reason, Immanuel Kant states:

If we measured the size of a book, not by the number of its pages, but by the time we require for mastering it, then it could be said of many a book that it would be much shorter if it were not so short. On the other hand, if we ask how a wide-ranging whole of speculative knowledge that yet coheres in one principle can best be rendered intelligible, we might be equally justified in saying that many a book would have been clearer if it had not tried to be so very clear. The reader does not arrive quickly enough at an overview of the whole, and the bright colours of illustrations hide and distort the articulation and organization of the system, which, after all, matter most if we want to judge of its unity and solidity.¹

Similar criteria could be applied in a critique of pure memage: in any meme-building exercise, brevity and clarity are requisite, but can also naturally come at the cost of a fuller appreciation of a situation’s complexity, which mightn’t be open to so reductive a rendering; a well-crafted meme will jostle but should ultimately balance correlatively with its wider contextualization, which it will also offset in some catchy, critical, or farcical way, although it is of course this that might misconstrue further problematics inherent in that upon which it is a commentary (none of which it might be too bothered by), in its quest for virality; if misjudged, a meme will fail in its intended purpose, remaining pat and static—although, of course, a meme can easily run off from authorial grasp, as Pepe has proven—and endlessly be de- and reterritorialized. Thus, a meme in part is a play between reduction, reductiveness, and also often irreducibility; that is, a meme can encompass that kernel, or bit, that sticks, that resonates, that may illuminate—however fleetingly, or only introductorily—the principle in which its subject matter coheres (however temporary this phenomenon of coherence itself might prove be upon the dank waves of discursivity). The

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2 Even in terms of the articulation of the spread of memes, and of memic popularity, something of a dichotomy can be seen between the terms most commonly used to describe this: the disease-laced, parasitic “virality,” and the equality-couched (re)distributive “shareability.”

3 I have in previous work relayed this against “sinthomic” processes in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, conceptualising the sinthome as a sort of empty signified, or memic blank, in which a “little bit of real” can get stuck and effloresce enjoyable meaning, or myriad meanings (“enjoymeants”). An early instance that chimes with this current work can be found in EDA Collective, “The Sinthomic Blank in Future Bass and Dubstep,” in Twerking to Turking: Everyday Analysis, Volume 2 (Alresford: Zero Books, 2015), 158–59. In this vein, much in the way of memes and the analysis of their modes of operation can be run through a musicological lens, from the (formal) units into which musical measurement is divided, to practices like that employed by the band The Books, of selecting instances of “found sound” (as the content) to construct their songs around (which can perhaps be likened to practices involved in shitposting); see their collected works: The Books, A Dot in Time (New York: Temporary Residence
ur-meme is rhythmical — like a beat, or measure, or, better still, like a riddim, as utilized in reggae and dancehall music — over which the memic message may dance (to put this in Nietzschean terms: the Apollonian opens out onto the Dionysian), but the argument to be made here will posit that this is not simply a matter of form, or forms, being filled with content, but something more dialectical, structural.

The object of the brief analysis ahead will thus be to look at memes, alongside other instances of internet activity — comments, for example, into which memes are often posted — through the spectral lens of three interconnected categories: form, content, and structure. Its aim will be to postulate some of the ways in which the subject matter of these activities gets spectralized through such means (that may in fact amount to — however consciously or unconsciously — methods) of representation. For example, let’s take a “meme” (approximating more the Dawkinsian sense here; as something that has been reduced into a transferrable bit, or kernel) to begin at; that of sexism: what might sprout out of just this decontextualized, memically presented phenomenon — that is, excerpted here as only something like a trigger word — might be instances of fragile male egoic fears over just what behaviors men are “any longer permitted,” and the attendant victim blaming and berating that comes with these attitudes; essentialist universalizations based on psycho-social and medico-nominative promulgations of sex and gender, and the misapprehension of the ideologies underlying these; structuralist accounts of how sexism is inscribed in the very contours of systematicities that format and formulate how sex and gender are experienced by modern and historical subjects. From the structuralist position that this essay launches from, form and content will come to be conceived as something like sides, both unified to, and separated from, each other by structure, or structures, understandings, or apprehensions, of which may be able to rein back in from other sides biases or

Limited, 2012). For more on memic-musical crossings, see Tom Whyman’s chapter on the online art of The Simpsons in this collection.
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prejudices rigid adherence to them can give rise to. This is not say that structuralism is something like “neutrality,” or a claim to some inherent truth, but that it can be utilized as a principle for apprehending and contemplating division, contradiction, and antagonism, and that it is in the thus dialectically materialist place of these that it takes up its very position. For each category we will take up discussion of a topic that makes it regularly into meme posting and online activity in the political realm: for form, feminism; for content, racism; and for structure, capitalism.

form

“The Queen being the Queen isn’t an emancipatory feminist fact.”
— Dawn Foster, Lean Out

In her extremely insightful short tract Lean Out (2015), Dawn Foster exposes a great deal of what we might term “formalist feminism” (including corporate feminism, choice feminism, lifestyle feminism, etc.), encompassed for Foster in the project and projected image of Sheryl Sandberg, and her book — the title of which Foster of course flips — Lean In (2013). Its subtitle, Women, Work, and the Will to Lead, sums up its stance: if women will it, it will come; success is achievable in the workplace, top positions are available to women, if the requisite effort is put in. Just look at this case in point: Sandberg made it to Chief Operating Officer (COO) of Facebook. But because one woman has, doesn’t mean all women can, which is what the argument seems to boil down to.4

4 Although they’re brilliant for young readers, and a very welcome publishing event, this is something that Elena Favilli and Francesca Cavello’s Goodnight Stories for Rebel Girls books, for example — and probably necessarily, given the complexity to be communicated to a younger audience who are less likely to have had, or to have been parentally more protected from, directly oppressive experiences — structurally elide. Such subsequent publications as The
An inspirational message tacked on to a professional corporate photograph mightn’t tend to be what we first think of in terms of dank meme stashes, but such of Sandberg exist (quoting her “if you’re offered a seat on a rocket ship, don’t ask what seat. Just get on” soundbite, for example), and are no doubt shared, most likely on “professional networking” social media sites like LinkedIn, where they’ll be posted with the intention of chivvying along the aspiration-shy into becoming better ladder climbers, while they really partake of a form of policing dissent — from those who might bemoan the fact that however far they’ve leant in, it hasn’t worked out for them — and any potential break-ins of emotional, or political (not business-minded politics, that is), subjectivity, through a sort of accidental, or un-

*Good Guys: 50 Heroes Who Changed the World with Kindness*, which focuses on compassionate men only, not only ride the bandwagon, and miss the point, but can only seem a tad reactionary.

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**Thanks Sheryl. (r/getmotivated)**

Fig. 1. Source: Sizzle. See https://onsizzle.com/i/if-youre-offered-a-seat-on-a-rocket-ship-dont-15875341.
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conscious, user-generated, and mob/mod-moderated, panoptical surveillance (fig. 1).

The form that this takes in corporate feminism is that if she could, you can; in corporate egalitarianism (in other words, the sovereign rule of individualism, in emulation of the “free” market economy), if they could, you can (and if you don’t, that’s down to you): nothing else should be considered (e.g., the conditions into which one was born, opportunities, nepotism, etc.). The ideological maneuver of the formalism at work here has repackaged and re-presented—even sold (such professional networking sites often offer a paid premium service boasting of boosting success rates)—a universalized individual as an individualized universal; that is, they make out such successful figures to merely be individuals who have achieved the universally achievable, and then attach this to a social cause as an add-on: advancements made in feminism, “social mobility,” “self-makeable success,” etc. This (self-help 101) formula is simple: “because a woman, so all women”; because a worker got a promotion—perhaps even jumped a class boundary—all successes can, because a success was self-made, all successes can be.

What is occurring is the transposition of an individual content into a universal form. Foster explains this in the confused conflation of feminism with anything that pertains to women, or even a particular woman, in the phenomenon of “choice feminism [that] states that any choice is feminist purely by virtue of having been made by a woman: that she is in a position to, and has, made a choice is thereby feminist. There’s little analysis paid to what this means for women in society as a whole.”5 A part—which in this instance happens to be of the correctly corresponding gender—is mistaken for, or wilfully construed as, the whole. This is what feeds into how feminism becomes apprehended by its antagonists. Most often male (though also anti-feminist female) resentment becomes stoked up by the idea—a tautological extension of its original—that because a woman is a woman, they can do this and that, and may even be un-

fairly favored to. (This finds voice, for example, in a supposedly meritocracy-advocating railing against “equal opportunities” in employment law: memes along these lines contain such messages as, “Discrimination against women is wrong/Discrimination against men is equal opportunity,” or Morpheus from *The Matrix* saying, “What if I told you/the term ‘equal opportunity’ has become a euphemism for: ‘straight white males need not apply’” (figs. 2, 3). There then may also arise the paranoid male fear that women have become untouchable, *a priori*, by any criticism or reprobation — not to mention, in its creepiest manifestation, sexually; misrecognition of what consent, and conversation, is being paramount to this — *because* of their status as women (which completely misrecognizes the culturally promulgated and then unquestioningly *assumed* possessive right to — or something like unpaid debt from — women; women’s bodies, and minds). And yet this can also extend into paranoidically checking oneself for hallmarks of anti-feminism (and this is the
kind of formalism that can get mobilized by liberals; for example, against the straw man of universalized “brocialism”\(^6\). In her

\(^6\) While there are of course actual ‘Bernie Bros,” the construal of all Sanders supporters being such is preposterous. On this, Angela Nagle is illuminating: “while the alt-right regard the Guardian [sic], BBC and CNN as the media of ‘the left,’ espousing ‘Cultural Marxism,’ it became obvious when the possibility of any kind of economically ‘left’ political force emerged that liberal media sources were often the most vicious and oppositional. Liberal feminist journalist Joan Walsh called Bernie Sanders’s supporters ‘Berniebot keyboard warriors,’ while Salon [sic] was one of the main propagators of the Berniebro meme with headlines like, ‘Bernie Bros out of control: Explosion of misogynist rage…’ and, ‘Just like a Bernie Bro, Sanders bullies Clinton…’ Meanwhile Vice, a magazine that made its brand on the most degenerate combination of vacuous hipster aesthetics and pornified transgression, published things like ‘How to spot a brocialist.” Before the elections The Guardian [sic] newspaper ran a piece with the comically cultish wording: ‘Time to hail Hilary Clinton — and face down the testosterone left.’ Despite overwhelming evidence of Bernie’s popularity among young women, the myth was relentlessly peddled until it passed into the realm of Internet truth. The old liberal establishment then weighed in; for example, when feminist Gloria Steinem claimed that these numerous female Bernie fans were merely trying to impress their male peers. In the UK, an almost identical phenomenon occurred when the British liberal media establishment, in particular The Guardian [sic], joined forces with their more youthful online offspring in smearing...
book, Foster effortlessly puts paid to these notions with these statements: “criticism of any woman isn’t anti-feminist purely because she is a woman: women occupy all sections of society now. The Queen being the Queen isn’t an emancipatory feminist fact. Margaret Thatcher harmed more than helped women by becoming Prime Minister.”

A reduction to, and reliance on, form in these instances is a cruel and domimative, often unconscious, circular logic that yet will regularly misrecognize itself — if not more insidiously motivated — as a clear, logical response to progressive social change. Feminism in these instances is mistaken for, and distilled into, formalism. This distillation is handy for those who want to criticize feminism, as through characterizing it as formalist makes it appear illogical. Cunningly and connivingly, form is relied upon in this maneuver, while it is railed against, and anything beyond it (that might surface in terms of content — particular women’s experiences, which are formally subsumed into grand and overarching narratives about those types of experience — or structure, which might hint at other, outside forces at work) is constrained to silence and the shadows.

Content

“It’s clear that equality doesn’t quite cut it. Asking for a sliver of disproportional power is too polite a request. I don’t want to be included. Instead, I want to question who created the standard in the first place. After a lifetime of embodying difference, I have no desire to be equal. I want to deconstruct the structural power of a system that marked me out as different. I don’t wish to be assimilated into the status quo. I want to be liberated from all negative

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Corbyn and his supporters as being motivated primarily by this nefarious tide of brocialism, despite his squeaky-clean track record on women’s issues in the UK.” See Angela Nagle, Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right (Alresford: Zero Books, 2017), 43–44.

7 Foster, Lean Out, 79.
assumptions that my characteristics bring. The onus is not on me to change. Instead, it’s the world around me.”
— Reni Eddo-Lodge, *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People about Race*

Racism, like sexism (most overtly, yet not exclusively), operates along formalist lines: it reduces anything and everything that is subjectively individual to an “ineluctable modality” (to use James Joyce’s famous words), to the color of one’s skin (or another racial marker). It is of course, and it can only be, those on the receiving end of it that will know this best. While presenting in form is obvious, racism does a better job at hiding behind content (whether its hosts in such circumstances wittingly know

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9 In the introduction to Mike and Trevor Phillips’s *Windrush* — published on the fiftieth anniversary of the *Empire Windrush*’s arrival on British shores in 1948 — they discuss the fact that “few black British people can be in any doubt that the majority of their fellow citizens take the colour of their skins to be a characteristic which defines what they are and what they can do,” and how this has affected citizenship status: “if we were engaged in a struggle, it wasn’t about our ‘acceptance’ as individuals. Instead, it was about our status as citizens, and it seemed obvious that if our citizenship was to mean more than the paper on which it was written, it would be necessary for the whole country to reassess not only its own identity, and history, but also what it meant to be British.” See Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips, *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), 5. The Windrush scandal, that broke over the course of 2018 (another significant anniversary), clearly indicates the retardation that this reassessment has met with, with governmental policy still operating along fundamentally formalist racist lines in its intentional creation of a “hostile environment” that would lead to deportations to meet target figures. (One resultant meme — utilizing a homophonic play on words — shows a back-and-forth between former Home Secretary, and architect of these scandalous policies, Prime Minister Theresa May and then-Home Secretary (who resigned in light of the scandal, and fell on May’s Sword) Amber Rudd: “One of my constituents is going to the Caribbean”/“Jamaica?”/“Yes.” It is featured in Paul Sorene, *Windrush Children Only Became Visible When They Became Criminals,* Anorak, April 17, 2018, http://www.anorak.co.uk/449047/politicians/windrush-children-only-became-visible-when-they-became-criminals.html.
it — or rather, understand it — or not). Content is what often gets mobilized and deployed against anti-racism, and is, in the deepest sense, reactionary. Race itself might remain untouched — issues pertaining to race unacknowledged — in conversations ostensibly on the topic, due to this maneuver; for example, if in flagging up elements of the structural racism of white people and institutions, it gets met with a “but” (the famous “but” that always implies a little more than meets the eye in matters of racism; i.e., in the commonplace “I’m not racist, but…”), we can often provide the translation: “but I’m not racist, so that notion’s invalid.” What is probably often missed, even by the (supposed) defendants, in this defense, is the fact that it defends beyond itself. In this unnecessary retort, the individual is (perhaps unwittingly) universalizing, deflecting not only from oneself, but, due to recourse to this method of defense, from the structure(s) under critique. In relation to clashes stoked by racism in the city of Nottingham in the UK in 1958, Reni Eddo-Lodge talks of “white resentment towards the city’s black residents [being] rife, and black resentment at white resentment […] simmering.” What’s occurring, absurdly, in these abovementioned content-fueled reactions, are thus manifestations of white resentment at black resentment at white resentment.

As she delineates time and again in her extraordinary book Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People about Race, when conversations go this way, the original topic is quickly gotten away from; the focus most often becomes the injured ego of the other party; racism and race dissolve away, and “reverse racism”— a perennially memed concept— rears its head. In the added chapter to the paperback edition, “Aftermath,” Eddo-Lodge discusses the book’s publication, and the waves it ended up making. Even before its release, she discusses how the title (taken from the name she gave to the 2014 blog post that in many ways launched the project) and the cover were received: “when I posted the cover to social media, roughly a year before publication, the shares were out of control, and the anticipation

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10 Eddo-Lodge, Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People about Race, 23.
was palpable. Much of this response was thanks to that cardinal sin—judging a book by its cover.”¹¹ The cover portrays the title in black against a white background, except for the words “to white people,” which are debossed into the white of the cover (and appear in white on white on the spine) (it is hoped that handholding through metaphorical decoding here should be unnecessary).¹²

Like a red rag to a bull, the attention came in droves. It enthralled some, and sent others into a rage. In amongst the praise were early signs of ire from white people; some lectured me about segregation, or told me Martin Luther King Junior would never approve of my work. Others admonished me for my prejudice.

[…] This was the scenario an east London bookseller relayed to me after I visited her shop to sign books. An elderly white man had entered the shop, saw the book in the window, and, shaking with rage, proceeded to make a scene at the counter, angry because ‘it wouldn’t be allowed the other way round’. ‘He was so angry, I couldn’t speak to him,’ she told me. Then there was the young black man who, on reading the book in public, had to endure the displeasure of a white woman approaching him to let him know that the book he was reading ‘really didn’t help the conversation’. White middle class people can be particularly calculated with their discomfort.¹³

¹¹ Ibid., 231.
¹² In an earlier, and probably quite inadequate, essay, I briefly explored similar ways in which Audre Lorde has shown up the social hiddenness of whiteness and racism in her work (the word “white,” for example, being always lowercase in contrast to the always capitalized signifier “Black”). See Daniel Bristow, “New Spellings: Auto-orthographies in Zami and Vanity of Duluoz,” *Life Writing* 11, no. 3 (2014): 275–92.
In a meme, Dr Evil from the *Austin Powers* film franchise looks quizzically to camera with this statement superimposed: “I noticed that you hate racism and openly protest against it/But you are being racist by accusing anyone who’s white of being racist.”\(^{14}\) (Whether the substitution of “anyone” for “everyone” was deliberate or unconscious, it nonetheless highlights the racism out of which the meme originates.) The (very personal) instances of offense taken in the quotation above accord to these “reverse racism” lines: the first seems unabashedly racist in identifying something as racist and then bemoaning that “it wouldn’t be allowed the other way round”; the second in denial, specifically of structural racism, in suggesting that it is not “helping the conversation,” but not asking by whom this “conversation” has been set; if it’s even really taking place; or why it should be a “conversation” at all, as if whether racism is valid or not is, and should be, up for debate.

As Eddo-Lodge simply and unequivocally puts it: “racism does not go both ways. There are unique forms of discrimination that are backed up by entitlement, assertion and, most importantly, supported by a structural power strong enough to scare you into complying with the demands of the status quo. We have to recognise this.”\(^{15}\) The elision of the structural in not thinking privilege — hallmarked in “entitlement,” “assertion,” and “power” — can only make the content claim show its disingenuousness. We arrive back at the assumed meritocracy (as if it is the unchallengeably societally inherent order of things), and the kind of sentiment that underwrites the memes that champion it (a meme supposedly in sympathy with Rachel Dolezal — the former president of the National Association for the Advancement

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\(^{15}\) Eddo-Lodge, *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People about Race*, 98.
of Colored People who lied about being black, and identifies as “transracial” — puts over a picture of her the words: “When you have to lie about being black/Just to get a job”). Eddo-Lodge deftly puts paid to these notions:

The underlying assumption to all opposition to positive discrimination is that it just isn’t fair play.

The insistence is on merit, insinuating that any current majority white leadership in any industry has got there through hard work and no outside help, as if whiteness isn’t it its own leg-up, as if it doesn’t imply a familiarity that warms an interviewer to a candidate. When each of the sectors I mentioned earlier have such dire racial representations, you’d have to be fooling yourself if you really think that the homogeneous glut of middle-aged white men currently clogging the upper echelons of most professions got there purely through talent alone. We don’t live in a meritocracy, and to pretend that simple hard work will elevate all to success is an exercise in wilful ignorance. 16

What can be discerned in these supposedly meritocracy-advocating responses is the fact that content mobilizes itself to militate against its perceived accusers (non-structurally-informed content feels persecuted), which it singles out in any suggestion that form (structurally co-opted form, that is) may have had a part to play in one’s success, privilege, power, attainment of private property, etc. — down to whatever last vestige can be hierarchically held onto against another. Its range of memic tropes — from “I’m alright, Jack” to “wan’t me, guv” — want to be seen to be de-logicizing, and thereby delegitimizing, discussions that touch on race and (structural manifestations of) racism (by appearing to quarantine racism off as a purely formal prejudice that others may have, and which one’s own content thus entirely resists (“nothing to do with me”), thus mistaking the opposite of racism as (passive) non-racism, as opposed to

16 Ibid., 78–79.
(active) anti-racism). But these contented tropes — in both the senses of relying on content and resting on laurels — are really rather purposefully evading any dialectical engagement with the issues at hand.

**Structure**

“At this point, it may be useful to try to identify some of the important characteristics and implications of a structural approach to symbolic systems and cultural forms. First, meaning does not arise in the world, it is not there waiting to be discovered. Meaning is not something which is out there in the world apart from language which language, acting simply like a mirror, reflects. The world is what it is, and societies use the instrumentality of symbolism to make certain relations in the world intelligible to them. They have to impose a system of meaning on the world. [...] Meaning and intelligibility are articulated onto the world. It is not given or already present in the world and then simply expressed or reproduced through language.”

— Stuart Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983*

Memes present an indeterminate face; their messages, if in earnest, often verge so much on the absurd that it is difficult to tell if they’re irony or iron-fistedness. Indeed, with many memes, satire is in the irony of the beholder. The range of responses in typical comments sections (encompassing earnestness, gullibility, failure to “get” the joke, trolling) is indicative here. Memes become, and are infinitely open to becoming, overdetermined. As cultural creations, in their origination they are steeped in meaning (or even attempts at anti-meaning, amongst certain

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18 See Jay Owens’s article above and Giacomo Bianco’s below for more on how irony is marshalled, and is inherent, in relation to memes.
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avant-gardists), but — to use Stuart Hall’s words above — meaning and intelligibility are also articulated onto memes.

Hall outlines in a series of lectures newly collected as Cultural Studies 1983 some vital lessons about capitalism, hegemony, and (prefiguring to some extent Kimberlé Crenshaw’s intersectionality) the crossovers between different struggles: gender, race, class. Fundamentally, culture is presented by Hall as operating on the plane of articulation:

The relationship between social forces and ideology is absolutely dialectical[]. It is the articulation, the nonnecessary link between a social force which is making itself and the ideology or conceptions of the world which make intelligible the process they are going through, which begins to bring onto the historical stage a new social position and political position, a new set of social and political subjects.19

In the Internet age, the memic field is one on which the process of articulation plays out. Capitalism is a complex structural and structuring system that, like the meme itself, thrives on its indeterminacy, as it does on its crises.20 That is to say, the less it can be made sense of, the more mystically essential and necessitous it can seem. Plenty of pro-capitalist or anti-socialist reaction memes will sarcastically juxtapose pictures of unidentified Western suburban streets with those of (equally unidentified) rundown “foreign” slums, presented in a sort of “no-brainer-between-these-alternatives” manner, without any questioning of, e.g., population demographics; whether comparable streets and areas exist vice versa, and in what proximity to each other; where — if that’s the case — has greater inequality or larger di-

20 The structure of capitalism is a sublime force, incalculable (it demands so many different sets of sums, so variegated an array of economic approaches to the very idea of doing the maths, in its current metastases) in its massiveness. Often it is whimsicality that is the only thing that can look in the face of the sublime, hence…Cats Against Capitalism (and similar Facebook groups, Twitter feeds, memes, etc.).
vides between rich and poor, and what sections of society might be affected by these divides (racially, in terms of gender, etc.); whether what we see on the “non-capitalist” side is in fact an effect of global(ized) capitalism; whether there’s an amount of glee taken in the implicit conclusion that the pro-capitalist memer (and their intended audience) belongs to the suburban and not the slum scene, and if this is indicative of class prejudice, etc. (figs. 4, 5). As both Foster and Eddo-Lodge delineate in their books, while there are important differences in respective intersectional struggles that must be respected, capitalism is a structuring force that more often than not doesn’t respect these, and
which can separate society along not only class lines, but within these, further along gender and race lines (Foster: “women have been disproportionately affected by austerity, with single mothers and pensioners particularly affected”; Eddo-Lodge: “in the wake of the 2015 summer budget, analysis from race equality think tank the Runnymede Trust found that 4 million black and minority ethnic people would be worse off as a result of it, that BME people were over-represented in areas hit by the budget, and that race inequality will worsen over time because of it”).

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Hall identifies “an interdiscursive field generated by at least three different contradictions (class, race, gender), each of which has a different history; a different mode of operation; each divides and classifies the world in different ways.” In memes we see concretised ways in which the world gets cut up into elements of its ideological representation; snapshots of thought within the conjunctural articulation; “ways in which class, race, and gender are articulated with one another to establish particular condensed social positions[, which are] by definition overdetermined.” It is on the plane of articulation that their overdetermination is hegemonically fought over. As Hall states: “the domain of culture and ideology is where those new positions are opened and where the new articulations have to be made. And in that domain, people can change and struggle.”

Memes are bits lodged in the cultural, and are part of the stuff that makes it up. Seizing the memes of production means that we need to see resistance as the continual practices of working on the cultural domain and opening up cultural possibilities. […] The conditions within which people are able to construct subjective possibilities and new political subjectivities for themselves are not simply given in the dominant system. They are won in the practices of articulation which produce them.

What Hall articulates most pertinently is a properly structural analysis that favors neither form nor content in highlighting the

22 Hall, Cultural Studies 1983, 150.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid, 190.
25 Ibid., 206. One example of the memic jostling for socially just articulation can be seen in Spike Lee’s Do the Right Thing (1989), in Buggin Out’s (Giancarlo Esposito) campaign to have black heroes featured on Sal’s (Danny Aiello) Wall of Fame in his Famous Pizzeria, and in Smiley’s (Roger Guenveur Smith) symbolic seizure of the wall, redistributing its representation with Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, after the uproarious events brought on by the brutal police murder of Radio Raheem (Bill Nunn).
irreducibility of difference (which sustains intersectional unity),
and the politics that can arise out of such an analytic:

It is necessary [...] to acknowledge the irreducibility of one
contradiction to another. Different contradictions have dif-
ferent effects in the social field, and it is the tendency to re-
duce one to the other that is the theoretical problem. For this
reason, the suspension of the capitalist mode of production
in a particular society will not guarantee the liberation of
blacks, women, or subordinate classes.

 [...] The only alternative is a Marxist politics which rec-
ognises the necessary differentiation of different struggles
and the importance of these struggles on different fronts,
that is to say, a Marxist politics which understands the na-
ture of a hegemonic politics, in which different struggles take
the leading position on a range of different fronts. Such [...] 
rejects reductionism in favor of an understanding of com-
plexity in unity or unity through complexity.26

What memes can and do teach us is that the very dialectic be-
tween form and content is structural, and in its effects is ma-
terial. Thus, while — as Hall puts it, apropos of the above — “the
mode of production does not command every contradiction,”
the mode of articulation can come to positively alter the con-
tradictions if seized successfully.27 In terms of the work of
art(iculation) in the age of memic rhythmicality, then, we are
such stuff as memes are made on, and it is in memes that one
source of such articulable potential resides.

∴, carpe meme.

27 Ibid., 185.
Bibliography


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