

**Milner, Ryan M.:**  
***The World Made Meme:***  
***Public Conversations and Participatory Media.***  
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With this decidedly poor attempt at meme-making, I will introduce an expert in meme theory and meme analysis. *The World Made Meme* is a culmination of Ryan Milner's PhD dissertation and several of his academic publications related to memes over the past five years. Milner is currently an assistant professor at the College of Charleston, where he is

studying the social, political, and cultural implications of mediated communication. The introduction is named The Rise of Memetic Media, which references the most recent book publications on the phenomenon, all from the present decade in the USA. As an exemption I will mention Shifman (2014) from Israel, whose work on memes Milner references throughout the book. Milner also links his analysis to related works which discuss participation and the spreadability of media more generally (Jenkins et al. 2013). Milner underlines the social processes and the vibrancy that memes bring to public conversations.

In the first part of his book, Milner outlines a micro/meso focus on how media are made memetic. The second part of the book relates to social, political and cultural uses of memes and is conceived of as a macro focus on memetic public participation.

Richard Dawkins' (1976) original coinage of the term meme is explored in order to counter the determinism often linked to Dawkins' original conception. We are well advised by Milner and Dawkins himself to refrain from stating that cultural memes "operate just like" biological genes.

Milner does not limit his analysis to specific media types. Instead he distinguishes between a few loose subtypes of memes: memetic phrases, memetic videos, memetic performances and memetic images. Milner argues in favour of five fundamental logics of memetic participation. *Multimodality* is a first given logic of the Internet memes, which share the mutability of expressive modes with the media landscape they populate. *Reappropriation* is not new but essential to memetic media, as they emerge when participants poach from multiple modes of communication and engage in bricolage. *Resonance* covers an elusive tendency for memes to connect with or inspire different people for different reasons. Milner references the distinction between *studium* and *punctum* discussed by Barthes (1981) in an attempt to gauge the feelings evoked in the readers by the texts. Importantly, Milner notes that not only humour resonates. Poignant social, political and cultural statements resonate as well, which is exemplified in the second part of the book. *Collectivism* foregrounds the social experience of being part of and subscribing to the norms of a local or vast collective, e.g. an obscure corner of 4chan or popular YouTubers' fan communities. Lastly, *spread* sums up the pervasive circulation and sharing of resonant media texts. Discussing this logic, Milner points out that *virality* tends to label a specific type of accelerated information circulation, whereas *memetics* tends to label processes of transformative reappropriation (p. 38).

These logics are further elaborated as a basis for a grammar of memetic conversation described in detail in chapter 2. Along the way Milner aptly explains image macros and reaction gifs among other grammatical structures of meme lingua franca. In chapter 3 Milner makes a point of discussing how adherence to grammar produces a memetic vernacular. Vernacular creativity and vernacular ambivalence are at times subject to subcultural standards. This is discussed with reference to the sites where Milner has collected or traced the memes to: 4chan, reddit, and tumblr. He points out how various

groupings of participants invested in media collectives as social imaginaries police how others use their subcultural texts.

Part 2 adopts a macro focus. Chapter 4 deals with the political and cultural issues of antagonism and agonism. Chapter 5 shows how having a public voice easily translates mimetically, resulting in the meeting of pop and populism, as in the case of Occupy Wall Street. Chapter 6 discusses how considerable gatekeeping powers are still held by the culture industries and concludes that, "...the systems that perpetuate celebrity, orchestrate publicity, and commodify culture are alive and well in participatory media." (p. 214).

I notice a methodological vagueness. Milner does reflect on his approach to the field. This began as personal and academic curiosity and a burgeoning collection of funny Internet photos. Five years on and following several academic publications, Milner collects his research and builds a theoretical framework through textual analysis based on critical discourse analysis. However, besides a brief mention of Google Trend, he cites no attempts to approach the empirical body of memes quantitatively, neither his own nor those of other researchers. Logics, grammar and even subtypes of memes are introduced and discussed with no reference to an overview of the empirical data. This might be based on an editorial decision. However, Milner does reference the user-generated repository Knowyourmeme.com as a sort of knowledge database of memes.

The appendix is recommendable as an instructive reference for others who wish to study memes, public conversations or participatory media. It discusses the merits of critical discourse analysis and the highly relevant ethical considerations. For example, when and when not to cite or identify the sometimes unwittingly "Internet famous".

The book builds on thorough insights and is well structured and easily read. Milner makes good use of illustrative examples (B/W) from simple explanations of image macros to discussions of the ambivalent yet healthy agonism and rampant use of irony in polyvocal conversations. For this reason the book will be useful for students seeking a theoretical framework with which to approach memes, whether they are in it for the lulz or for exams!

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