

I SEE WHAT YOU DID THERE:

How are the use of memes and tropes by those within online communities building a self-critical approach to contemporary cyber-culture?

Abstract:

Online communities such as 4Chan create in-jokes in order to discuss elements of online behavior. Is this seeking to codify the unfettered access of knowledge that cyber-culture allows, by providing references that only those who participate within narrow channels can possibly understand? Or is it a byproduct of the accelerated always-on culture that the internet has created?

Starting by defining an internet community, such as the players of World of Warcraft, or posters to 4Chan, examples of internet memes used as terminology to praise and criticise actions will be found. As one of the most widely-spread memes, the LolCat combination of images and infantile English will be used as a special example, as considering the attention given to it by mainstream media such as the Wall Street Journal, it has made headway into popular culture.

The essay will link the cyberculture surrounding the internet memes examined to the culture of Net Art and the netbehaviour list, itself a subculture within the internet, but one with importance attached to it by academic readers. While Net Art started as a loose confederation of people working with similar tools, a movement was identified which continued academic discussion of the computer as a site for art.

The conclusion of the essay will discuss the merits of internet memes and tropes as a referential language for discussion of the internet culture of contemporary society. Do these memes allow for Virilio-style filtering by resisting the constant acceleration that cyber-culture encourages, or are they an open-ended opportunity for consumers of contemporary culture to comment on the mediasphere?

Methodology:

Important critical theory for this essay will be the arguments of Paul Virilio, when he discusses the idea of information separating society, and the culture of speed destroying creativity. Some of these arguments will be balanced by Sherry Turkle's writing, that allows distributed self, and therefore distributed commenting on culture.

Secondary research on internet memes from respectable sources will be gathered and used to illustrate the points discussed within the essay.

Bibliography

Paul Virilio: City of Panic (Oxford: Berg, 2005), Speed and Panic (New York: Semiotext(e), 1977 [1986]), the Information Bomb (London and New York: Verso, 2000)
Anil Dash: Cats Can Have Grammar
(online essay, <http://dashes.com/anil/2007/04/cats-can-has-gr.html>, 2007)
Anderson: The Long Tail (Hyperion, 2006)
Sherry Turkle: Life on the Screen (Simon & Schuster, 1997)