

AN

AMBIGUOUS

UTOPIA



# INTRODUCTION

Our contribution is an experiment in memetic worlding. It explores what could happen if we generated pluralistic, positive visions as an alternative to today's vastly nihilistic memescape. Initially, our attempts to create memes antithetical to nihilism ended up #wholesome, and did not necessarily represent a radical or visionary enough departure from the status quo. To imagine a more divergent shift, we decided to escape the constraints of the current moment and turned to worldbuilding, science fiction and futuring techniques to envision scenarios set in an alternative place and time.

As for a theoretical framework, we found Metamodernism helpful in thinking beyond static categorization:

*Ontologically, metamodernism oscillates between the modern and the postmodern. It oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naivete and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity.<sup>1</sup>*

Usefully, metamodernism allows space for multiplicity and ambiguity - to think more divergently and less naively about what a 'positive' might mean in a complex context. In other words, there is never just one narrative. Life can be absurd and meaningless, but we can still believe in hope.<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that our aim here is not to establish a telos, nor suggest that we should follow a set path to a preconceived future. Instead, we hope these ideas might spawn others, beyond the reach of our own imagination.

We want to acknowledge here that a certain amount of financial stability, and therefore privilege, was necessary to complete this contribution. From the outset, the project is therefore limited in scope. It is a result of the ways of knowing and being of two white, gender non-conforming people of American and German-American origin.

We tried to include diverse perspectives and collaborators in this project. However, for the time being, these are limited to our extended network. Creating a truly pluralistic project would require the addition of many more contributors. Much like a good meme, we hope it will travel and provide a loose enough framework to eventually incorporate broader perspectives.

## xo The Trans Bears

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1 Timotheus Vermeulen & Robin van den Akker "Notes on metamodernism," *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 2, no. 1 (2010). doi: 10.3402/jac.v2i0.5677.

2 Simon de la Rouviere, "Exploring Metamodernism and Optimistic Nihilism in SciFi," Simon de la Rouviere, accessed April 2, 2021, <https://blog.simondlr.com/>.



# PROLOGUE

Hello!

Meme Squad here. We decided to share our story as a message of hope, and as proof that change is always possible even with limited means. This story centers on internet memeing, a seemingly innocent cultural phenomenon that brought us together. Memes are funny bits of content that are remixed and shared online by people. If you think of memes as tiny bits of cultural DNA then, like us, you might be able to imagine using them to alter the status quo. We hope you might discover their radical potential and want to make mischief as we did.



# THE RUINS

Our Meme Squad met at a time we now refer to as The Ruins. Human and natural systems were on the brink of collapse. Our societies and politics were the remnants of violent pasts, built on a logic of expansion, exploitation and extraction. Much of our work and leisure were organized around producing value for corporations. Financial wealth was the main indicator of success and determined our position in the social hierarchy.

The circumstances left us exhausted, isolated and alienated – everyone their own island. Few were imaginative enough to question the narrative we were fed: that it was easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of the systems that governed our lives. As apathy grew, irony and cynicism were normalized in online and offline culture.





Still, a scattering of people searched for alternatives. Seeking connection, we tried to find like-minded others on the Whisper Web, a substratum of private chat rooms and social platforms just out of sight of the corporate clarnet. Here, we found each other through positive memes and cemented our bond by forming a squad.

Anyone else ever feel like dis?!



O em gee, yea!

Thought I was the only one lol. Phew.



LMAO...SO TRUE!

We should b more like trees n shroooms ☺



Yeee, let's go!





Soon the Whisper Web was acquired by corporations, and we were forced further underground. We began using the dark forest, a nascent model of what would later become the Subaltern Web. Here we met others. The dark forest was alive with covens of meme witches and wizards, droves of digital fairies and elves, cabals of dissidents, and many more.

Diverse in counter-cultural identity but united in vision, we collectivised. We formed a syndicate, and began casting coordinated memetic spells to jinx the established order. We hexed corrupt corporations, went troll hunting and inundated bureaucrats with our raging semiotic meltdown.



The screenshot shows a website header for "The Mind Bender" with the tagline "Mind-bending journalism" and "Reg No. 34568 (The Ruins)". The navigation menu includes HOME, WORLD, ARTS & CULTURE, TECHNOLOGY, SCIENCE, and OPINION. The main article title is "Covens of meme witches hex multinationals with coordinated DDoS spells." The article text discusses a growing community of netizens syndicalized against Scumazon, a distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack, and a widespread critique of the company's data practices. A sidebar contains two meme images: one with a character and the text "TRYNA VIBE WITH IN-HOUSE SPY" and another with a character and the text "VIBING WITH YOUR DEMONS". A central banner reads "SCUMAZON LATEST TO BE TARGETED BY SYNDICALIZED MEMERS MAKING MISCHIEF". A bottom section mentions "Scumazon representatives confided a record number of missed sales around \$1bn." and "Meanwhile, there is no trace of the memers. Wisely collectivised and distributed, there is no way of pointing blame at a single witch or wizard."



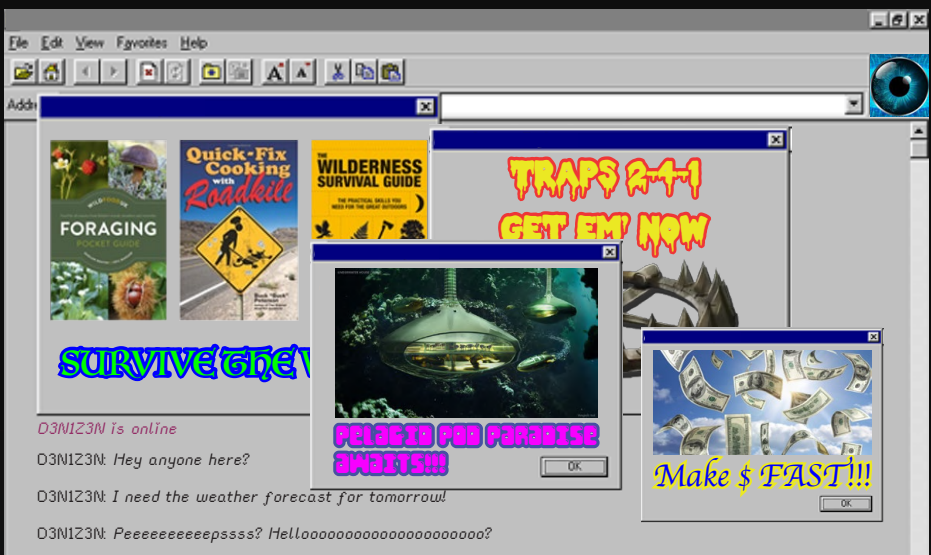
The screenshot shows a video player interface. The video title is "SPELL CASTING 4 meme witches & wizards". A purple button in the top right corner says "subscribe for Spell Book updates". The video player controls are visible at the bottom, and the video title is repeated below the player: "Spell Casting 1 - Collective memeing for discrete magical effect".

We ridiculed old power, and laid bare that the concepts and systems invented by humans were impressionable to our resistance and change. Our signs of resistance attracted others. An intense burst of optimism began to germinate and fill the narrative void of The Ruins.

# collapse

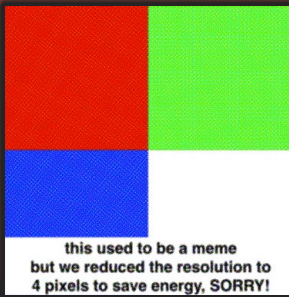
Not long after we met, things beyond our control fell apart. Earth's climate had been changing noticeably throughout our lifetime, and was now at its breaking point. Erratic weather patterns brought catastrophic forest fires, floods, and droughts. They led to the collapse of both the human and ecological systems on which we depended.

Coastline internet infrastructure drowned in saltwater and the rare earth minerals needed to maintain the physical web became inaccessible. Large swathes of the clearnet went dark. Unsurprisingly this caused widespread fear, chaos and confusion. We saw a new digital divide: the monied, who paid gatekeepers for access to information and goods, and the poor left with nothing but patchy service hosting unreliable, ad-littered news sites and communication channels.



Our plans to grow an accessible, sustainable internet gained urgency. We'd laid some groundwork in The Ruins, but the crash took its toll on us and our network too. After the initial shock, we began working in local chapters to repair and transfer our infrastructure to solar, hydro and wind power. The internet memes we were used to became nostalgic memories. We didn't have the bandwidth for anything but the most necessary comms. Still, smuggling lols in with the info quickly became a thing and we learned to meme offline, in slower and more local forms that resembled older and more ancient traditions. Most importantly, we learned to laugh together in person again.

Any solar servers up? Hydro  
GRRRL running low.



LMAO

LOL!

No srsly tho!

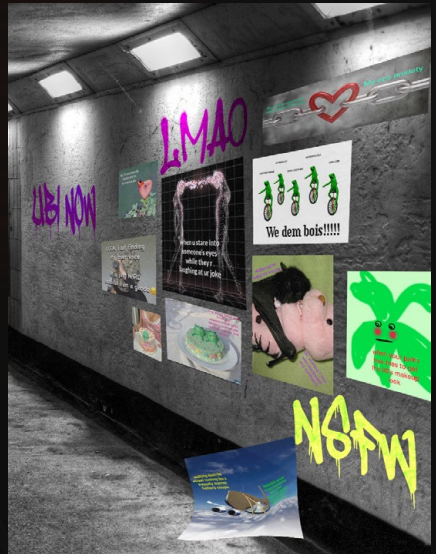
SUNSHINE 12 COMING  
ONline IN 2.5 h.



HOW IT  
STARTED



HOW IT'S  
GOING



# THE MAKESHIFT

We began to adapt and find new ways to operate in The Makeshift, the decade following the collapse. While the rich walled themselves off in artificial oases, we found hope and purpose in relinquishing things that hadn't served us in the past and restoring those that had. We transformed the Subaltern Web into a distributed commons and, for the most part, found strength in our differences. Still, rebellion and insurrections caused damage. We suffered setbacks when rogue ideologues tried to undermine us from the inside and endured attacks on our hardware by troll mercenaries who wanted to repurpose our infrastructure.

We survived, and the physical and psychological rubble left by the collapse became fertile ground for hybrid countercultural narratives and identities. As more of our network returned to life online, semiotics of The Makeshift were shared using old meme formats. Hopepunk emerged as an absurdist mash-up philosophy, encoding a culture of care, nurture and maintenance into our mischief.

### Tendercore Starterkit

tickles back

fluff cuffs only

dendrophile

gets out of horny jail free

"so emosh"

This block contains a pink background with various items and text. At the top is the title 'Tendercore Starterkit'. Below it are four items: a feather labeled 'tickles back', a pair of pink cuffs labeled 'fluff cuffs only', a green tree labeled 'dendrophile', and a green box of tissues labeled '"so emosh"'. To the right of the feather and cuffs is a metal jail cell icon labeled 'gets out of horny jail free'.

### HOPERPUNK

Libertarian

This block features a white background with the title 'HOPERPUNK' at the top. Below the title is a tree where the canopy is composed of various black icons representing different concepts like a gun, a heart, a skull, a bird, a star, a person, a dog, a cat, a snake, and a mushroom. The tree stands on a 2x2 grid with colored quadrants: red (top-left), blue (top-right), green (bottom-left), and purple (bottom-right). The word 'Libertarian' is written at the bottom center of the grid. The grid is also labeled 'Left' on the left side and 'Right' on the right side.

# WINDY

**ANY! REMEMBER THIS GUY LOLOLO!**

**AWAHAN!  
NEVER THOUGHT I'D SEE HIM AGAIN!**

**WHAT ABOUT THIS ???**



**LMAOOO. LITERALLY MY KEMP FARM! ❤️**

As the years passed, the last of the old elite hid in their walled and now dying gardens. While locked out, we'd come to realize we didn't need them. They had just been middlemen who estranged us from ourselves and each other. Necessities were available if we stayed bonded by our philosophy of nurture. We avoided old monetary currencies wherever possible and, after significant chaos and suffering, managed to establish our own distributive support systems, whose success we measured against earthly vitality instead of growth. We still faced opposition at times, but even sceptics joined us when they saw we were thriving.



# Deep Adaptation

After a rocky and generative decade in The Makeshift, we found Deep Adaptation. While in many ways still reeling, we were freed from old societal constraints. Propelled by necessity, we studied and learned from previously marginalized human and non-human voices – forgotten or disregarded ways of knowing and being. We organized our lives and technologies around the rhythms and cycles of natural rather than artificial intelligence.

The Web transformed into an entirely new entity, hosted by sun, wind and water. Realizing that our networks ran on the same energy sources and minerals as Earth's ecosystems, we began to wonder if there were ways to connect human networks to natural ones. We developed an adapter to plug into mycelium and root networks. Our protocols were then able to develop memetic code in symbiosis with the natural world. Our self-image shifted dramatically when we realized we were in essence all part of the same earthly nervous system. Turns out, natural and cultural DNA is one and the same thing, and Earth is the greatest member of all.

ଅକ୍ଷୟ କୁମାର

just loling wif 🌱 re...tkey  
r rly crackng me up 2day!



akakaka adorns!

# ଅମୃତଶୈଳି



Of course many cultures had long known and embraced this. For those who hadn't, scientific evidence made the difference. Old concepts of the boundary between self and other dissolved and became obsolete. Once the loneliest species on Earth, we were now able to understand ourselves as holobionts: multi-species organisms in constant communion with those in and outside ourselves. In the present day, we make no distinction between nature and culture. They have merged into one nurture.







# EPILOGUE

That's all from us for now. All we're really saying is that 'nonsense' can be an effective counter to hegemonic 'common sense'. Don't let the bullies win. And most importantly: don't forget to lol together.

If you wanna get in touch, find us @ambigutopia.lol wherever you get your memes. We'll try to get back to you through deep time.

xo Meme Squad

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