

The spread of ideas is the next form of evolution, transcending technology. We live in the Information Age, and knowledge holds more value than ever. Because of our recent scientific advancements, we know exponentially more about our existence than in very recent past years. These technological advancements also aid in the diffusion and dissemination of knowledge, theories, and studies that we conduct, as we conduct them. Richard Dawkins' idea of a *meme* is a great jumping off point for exploring the concept of transferrable information.

He defines the meme as an idea or thought pattern that can jump from brain to brain. It is a self-replicating theoretical unit of societal transmission which primarily benefits its own survival value (Chandler 61). It is a concept closely linked with Dawkins' "selfish gene" theory. He believes living organisms to be dominated by the the instinct of the genes that all life carries, to survive and replicate (Dawkins 15). Dawkins groundbreaking theory, and its application to the spread and transmission of ideas is essential in understanding modern cultural idea dissemination.

I am very invested in this process of the assessment of the survival and replication values of ideas because I am constantly bombarded by them, and choose to seek after even more. I am an information junkie through and through. I believe it stems from my intense curiosity and fascination of the unknown, coupled with my love of learning. I am generally very open to the exploration of new frontiers in order to enhance my perspective. I believe that people can use ideas, information, and knowledge to enhance and enrich their perception and living experience. As Nelson Mandela put it "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Ideas are the new replicators, they, like organisms have survival and replication value. Their survival value is defined by the intellectual or emotional benefit they provide their hosts (Dawkins 199). Like symbiotic relationships, they take value and offer the reward of knowledge (Godin 12). Knowledge is important in today's society as it offers power.

Although the memes which we spread may seem like our own, almost all of the ideas which we have are influenced by others' ideas and memes, as we are often influenced obliviously (Lynch 23). This allows for unconscious meme replication and mutation as our brains break down a previous idea, belonging to a past paradigm or zeitgeist, and synthesize those bits of data into new *strains* of the original meme. This is a very common occurrence especially during times of Enlightenment, especially science and art influenced eras, like the Renaissance, or when migration or cultural emigration occurs (Stein).

There is a multitude of media with the capacity to spread ideas. One of the most successful and ubiquitous mediums is language. The nature, structure and modification of language is a very accurate representation of the dissemination of information in the human brain. Early humans intuitively developed language, expanding, adding, and creating more complex structures which created more fluid ease of communication (Pagel). The ability to verbally communicate encourages and most important barrier which discourages transmission. Ideas are often spread more easily, however.

We are bombarded with ideas and memes daily through advertising, marketing, and branding strategies that propagate and self-replicate. We are usually the vessels by which these memes travel and reproduce. Any instance of communication is usually accompanied by some form of idea exchange, and that exchange allows for replication of these memes. There are a variety of media by which these memes are spread. My research, however, has led me to further explore the most effectual medium, the internet.

One of the most easily accessible and cutting edge technologies we have today is the Internet and social media. It is an excellent and substantial symbol for the meme. Ideas transfer so rapidly and across such great distances, previous generations would have thought it impossible. One can view all the world's news on one webpage, research and explore any topic, and most likely find a forum, or group of individuals communicating online, that take interest in the same subject.

My research has taken me in the direction of taking a website, and introducing it in a population through social media, allowing it to diffuse as it will. This will provide deep insight into the means by which an idea does travel through a culture. I like to think of this concept of letting the art and ideas spread by the will of others as *Open-Source Art*, as the project may be continued and expanded upon by whoever receives a link. The project could be continued or destroyed based on the whims of whoever it affects, and that is the reality of a fragile experiment like this. The Open-Source Art-form is based on a Zen-like, mindful absolution of the outcome. It gives anonymity and purpose to those who continue and propagate the idea; there is no more value in the origin of the art than in the process by which it spreads. The connections which it causes are the most important elements of the piece.

Mirror neurons in the human brain are responsible for a good portion of learning and communication between individuals (How 1). They are utilized during the performance of an activity and when an individual watches another perform that activity. It is the driving scientific theory behind the layman's "*monkey see, monkey do*" idiom. It describes the intuitive mimicry that primates and humans are capable of performing. This is the most pure form of meme-transmission; the recipient of the information needs only to use his senses of sight to fully understand the action of another and have the capacity to perform it himself. Actionable-memes are spread this way the easiest, as the recipient must only watch to garner the information, and the originator need only perform the action.

Some individuals have even dedicated themselves to attempting to maximize their potential meme-absorbing capabilities. Joshua Waitzkin, a child prodigy of chess and a later Tai Chi master, demonstrates his meme-absorbing potential in the mere accomplishments he had made. The amazing, awe-inspiring feats Waitzkin accomplishes are distracting and, while great, aren't the most valuable parts of his story. The most important part is his process and the method by which he learns and practices his disciplines.

Josh Waitzkin, possibly the world's premiere learner is an adept example of a meta-learner (Skotzko 1). As a child he took up chess as a hobby, playing in the park with the local players. He rapidly picked up the game from the wits in the park and was adopted under the tutelage of world-renown chess announcer and shrewd chessman, Bruce Pandolfini. He went on to compete in top-tier chess competitions and enter the top .5% of chess players world wide, but that's not the impressive part. He quit chess at 16 and moved on to Tai Chi.

His pursuit of Tai Chi was purely in search of a calming, meditative activity to get his mind off the ever-mounting pressures of his career life. He sought out a skilled mentor and dived deep into practice. He proceeded to compete at the world-class level, barely losing the world title and coming back to take first place at the international competition in Taiwan only six years after taking up the sport. He defeated opponents who had been training for the same moment their entire lives.

Waitzkin is a naturally talented individual with laser-like focus and the strength to push himself to push himself to practice and learn the disciplines he takes up in the best way. He makes learning an art-form rather than a means to an end.

There are an interesting abundance of ways to train yourself to practice and become mindful in a similar way to Waitzkin. Tim Ferriss, an avid biohacker and neurobiology enthusiast, experimented heavily with techniques to promote rapid information recall and synthesis, as well as collection, while writing his most recent book, *The Four Hour Chef*. The book is an overall dedication to Meta-Learning with a discipline focus on cooking, which is an effective medium for demonstrating the techniques outlined in the book.

These books and individual examples of personal success with experimentation of learning are an interesting facet of idea-transmission, as these individuals have actually made themselves more susceptible to the effect of the memes they seek.

They also published their findings, allowing their thoughts on the spread, and their absorption, of ideas to be spread and subsequently absorbed by others. In essence, the entirety of this project, and I would claim all other projects, is greatly influenced by alpha-memes, or memes which have survived and spread far enough to be adopted and used by other individuals, and incorporated into new content.

These findings are also influenced by cultural spread and informational diaspora throughout the world, as when one individual moves from one culture to another, that individual brings a new perspective and spreads that memetic perspective, allowing for new ideas to be mutated and developed upon (Laura).

Humans have genes with survival and replication value, but as each generation reproduces they only pass half of the parents' genes forward, the genes that one is comprised of quickly become insignificant. The next paradigm of survival, vicarious living, and evolutionary success has now become more defined as what sort of effect one can have on the world before one passes away. Memes and ideas, large or small, are the best way to create a lineage for oneself. We are ultimately succeeded by the thoughts and ideas of others, and the thoughts and ideas we manage to propagate.

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