
This is an electronic reprint of the original article.
This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

Zhang, Ningfeng

Toward a Phenomenological Understanding of Internet-Mediated Meme-ing as a Lived Experience in Social Distancing via Autoethnography

Published in:
Journal of Contemporary Ethnography

DOI:
[10.1177/08912416231216980](https://doi.org/10.1177/08912416231216980)

Published: 02/04/2024

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published under the following license:
CC BY

Please cite the original version:
Zhang, N. (2024). Toward a Phenomenological Understanding of Internet-Mediated Meme-ing as a Lived Experience in Social Distancing via Autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 53(2), 181-211. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08912416231216980>

Toward a Phenomenological Understanding of Internet-Mediated Meme-ing as a Lived Experience in Social Distancing *via* Autoethnography

Journal of Contemporary Ethnography
2024, Vol. 53(2) 181–211
© The Author(s) 2023



Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/08912416231216980
journals.sagepub.com/home/jce



Ningfeng Zhang¹ 

Abstract

As the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent social distancing measures have rendered online communication a “new normal” in the post-pandemic era, the production and consumption of internet memes have also emerged as a significant communicative paradigm in this context. However, academic discourses on internet-mediated meme-ing have tended to focus on socially oriented macro-perspectives with a pursuit of positivistic objectivity, leaving the experiential and subjective aspects of “everyday internet-mediated meme-ing” vis-à-vis individuals in a lifeworld less explored. To address this gap, this study uses structured vignette analysis (SVA) coupled with individual-oriented phenomenological reflexivity to elaborate on how internet-mediated meme-ing reveals itself as a meaningful lived experience for a “solitary conscious self” in the overall context of social distancing. It seeks to demonstrate the phenomenological applicability of the SVA as an autoethnographic method

¹Department of Art and Media, Aalto University, School of Arts, Design, and Architecture, Espoo, Finland

Corresponding Author:

Ningfeng Zhang, Department of Art and Media, Aalto University, School of Arts, Design, and Architecture, Otaniementie 16, Espoo 02150, Finland.

Email: ningfeng.zhang@aalto.fi

as well as highlight the individual-oriented phenomenological substantiality of meme-ing that involves self-other relations in social distancing.

Keywords

autoethnography, phenomenology, internet-mediated meme-ing, solitary self, social distancing

Introduction

The popularity of internet memes as a phenomenon of modern digital culture (Vitiuk et al. 2020) has been analyzed by many scholars (e.g., Denisova 2019; de Saint Laurent, Glăveanu, and Literat 2022; Grundlingh 2018; Shifman 2014) in light of their socio-political, linguistic, and communicative values. In this respect, internet memes have been understood as a new form of digital artifacts for political communication, a value-laden expressive repertoire, a means of identity-building, an internet language, and a shared social phenomenon (Literat 2021).

As a social phenomenon, the online production and consumption of internet memes, namely *internet-mediated meme-ing* (hereafter “meme-ing”), can be examined through human experiences with the assumption that social forces and relationships shape humans (Chang 2022), creating a relational subjectivity in the recognition of others and a *self* that discovers voice through the relationships involved (Gannon 2022). Meme-ing may also assume various forms and be perceived, imagined, anticipated, or recollected from different perspectives (Zahavi 2019) with subjective experiences of life (Pitard 2019). However, most epistemological approaches adopted by meme scholars underscore a comparatively naturalistic third-person description (Moran 2017) highlighting the “conceptual distinction between researcher subjectivity and participant objectivity” (Chang 2022, 53). They see “internet memes” as a distant analytical sample. Thus far, the naturalistic-oriented objectivity espoused by some social science research may be conceptualized as a rhetorical posture adopted within a written text, and this stance is marked by a set of rhetorical conventions that involve the suppression and omission of specific details to project an air of neutrality and objectivity (Ellis 2009; Gannon 2022). Such a tendency privileges objectivity stemming from the positivistic paradigm (Creswell and Creswell 2018) and might have overlooked the value of meme scholars’ personal experiences as sources in understanding meme-ing as a phenomenon. Meme scholars are fully engaged with the participatory digital culture and have fewer restrictions to access their own experiences

and related socio-cultural contexts (Chang 2022). Thus, a phenomenological understanding is needed for the process through which meme-ing has become a shared social phenomenon based on the personal experiential richness of individuals' everyday lives.

As the post-pandemic social distancing context has enhanced the role of meme-ing in producing and exchanging symbolic expressions, I conducted an empirical autoethnographic investigation through a phenomenological lens to explore the experiences of meme-ing with its embodied and relational significances for a solitary self in a confined residence in Finland from April 2021 through to April 2022. Within my online communication contexts, this study mainly focuses on my memetic interaction with friends and my romantic partner in China through the use of WeChat (微信), one of the most popular social apps in China (Thomala 2022), as well as my followers on Jike (即刻), a niche Chinese interest-based online community. The structured vignette analysis (SVA) has been adopted as the autoethnographic method with which to foreground my unique perspective as a single Chinese male living in Finland who faces challenges returning to China. These challenges are due to current Chinese epidemic prevention policies. Using eight autoethnographic vignettes,¹ I aim to present my phenomenological self-reflexivity on the meaning-making journey of meme-ing, placing myself within the online social context to answer the central research question:

How is “meme-ing” revealing itself as a meaningful lived experience to a solitary conscious self with social needs when facing social distancing?

This research question has personal implications as it may help me to understand my self-positionality in various meme-related contexts, including as a friend in a friendship, a romantic partner in a sadomasochistic relationship, and a netizen with an academic background in an online community. With a reflexive self-monitoring of my biases, beliefs, feelings, and experiences impacted by the dynamics of meme-ing, I seek to offer a “critical mode of affirmation” (Adams, Jones, and Ellis 2022, 5) to resist ontological attempts asserting the singularity of truth in human experience as an analytical unit in social phenomena.

Nevertheless, this research does not seek to diminish the contributions of previous scholars in meme studies but rather intends to provide a new exploratory perspective in the area researched. Using an autoethnographic approach, instead of an objectivity-oriented one, does not claim that I may produce better research than those who use other methods, but rather that I may conduct *different* research (Adams et al. 2022) highlighting distinctive ontological

and epistemological aspects of personal experience by including those perspectives in my work.

The article is structured as follows: there is a literature review of meme-ing, autoethnography, and their phenomenological reliance, followed by a presentation of the SVA, the sampling criteria and collecting method of data, as well as the analytical procedure. In “Findings and Discussions,” I provide a detailed phenomenological analysis with three of my autoethnographic vignettes as examples concerning my first personal meaning-making journey of meme-ing. Lastly, I discuss the results in “Conclusion.”

Defining Internet Memes

Coined by Richard Dawkins in 1976, the term “meme” refers to a “new replicator, a noun conveying the idea of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation” (Dawkins 1989, 192). This unit ranges from a simple or concrete expression, joke, mannerism, or catchphrase to a complicated or abstract idea, ideology or faith, and it composes the eternity of human culture by “imitation” (Dawkins 1989, 192). This term has evolved from the Dawkinsian definition and now primarily refers to user-generated multimodal online media forms, such as images, pictures, sounds, texts, videos, emojis, and GIFs, that are shared, (re)produced, remixed, and re-semiotized by internet users through social media platforms (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013; Vitiuk et al. 2020). With the centrality of human-involved and human-driven reproduction and dissemination of memetic media elements, the term “internet memes” that are based on the Dawkinsian ground of genetic replication have emerged in cyberspace with user participation, viral circulation, and formal variation as its distinctive features (Leiser 2019; Shifman 2014).

Meme-ing as an Analytical Unit of Phenomenology

In today’s digital culture, meme-ing has become a new and specific expressive mode of communication (Shifman 2014) with the digitalization of memes allowing for information and ideology-sharing, as well as open and horizontal communication (Huntington 2016; Vitiuk et al. 2020). This phenomenon has arisen from people’s primitive desires for communication, entertainment, and distraction from monotony and life problems, creating a new relational basis rooted in the “affectability” of meme-ing (Jenkins 2014, 448) for social symbolic production and exchange among digitalized individuals (Smith and Linker 2021).

As both an expressive mode and a phenomenon, meme-ing can illustrate a virtual reality that can be seen as a relational structure extending via the

circulation of internet memes across media and viewers (Jenkins 2014). Though the memetic forms, contents, stances, contexts, and the audience may differ in their actualizations, meme-ing as an expressive mode crosses them all, enabling the audience to see snapshots of life for life-likeness (Jenkins 2014). Such a mode contains a relational capacity to affect individuals and be affected, activated, and energized in encounters with others (Deleuze 1988; Jenkins 2014).

In the process of meme-ing, felt affections result from actualizations of the memetic mode, from individuals' embodied experiences of orienting according to this mode (Jenkins 2014). As an expressive mode of communication, meme-ing carries a holistic repertoire that is replete with embodied interactive experiences with which meme prosumers may orient themselves to their perceptions and cognitions of the lifeworld they are inhabiting. Thus, the orienting process of embodied experiences in meme-ing can be considered an analytical unit of phenomenology whose essence is to study lived experience in a *lifeworld* (Husserl 1970) lived by a person, and to describe the orientation of him/herself to lived experience (Van Manen 1990). As Stoller (1997) stresses how cinema screens provide the means for viewers to understand and perceive a lifeworld through a phenomenological reduction, Provencher (2014) asserts that similar phenomenological reductions are also necessary to understand meme-ing. As such, studying meme-ing as a phenomenon permits researchers a phenomenological lens with which to consider personal bodily experiences. This means that the "memer" and "memes" are not independently examined as they are methodically interconnected, but engaging through embodied manners within a lifeworld (Jenkins 2014).

Applicability of Autoethnography as a Phenomenological Tool

As a qualitative method that has been widely used for describing, recording, conceptualizing, and analyzing first-person experiences, autoethnography contains three inherent components. The "auto" stands for "self," the "ethno" culture, and the "graphy" signifies writing a representation or story. It encourages researchers to speak from the heart about existential crises and transformational experiences (Anderson 2006). Despite facing controversies about its objectivity and self-indulgence (Chang 2007), autoethnography still functions as a useful tool enabling researchers to probe into personal experiences on a meaningful, accessible, and evocative ground (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011). Harding (2015) and Gorichanaz (2017) also stress that research communities usually operate from a particular standpoint or "bias" that is impossible to overcome, and it is deceptive to ignore such a standpoint

under the guise of disinterested neutrality and objectivity. Embracing this standpoint helps to reveal previously hidden phenomena and biases (Gorichanaz 2017). As assumptions of neutrality and objectivity have increasingly become unattainable requirements for, and unrealistic expectations of, conventional social scientific research, acknowledging researcher positionality is progressively encouraged in social sciences to challenge oppressive cultural beliefs, norms, and practices, producing new knowledge concerning their phenomenological lifeworld (everyday reality) (Adams et al. 2022; Berry 2022).

While scientific methods excel at precisely defining matters, most entities studied in human and social sciences possess an inherently vague and morphological essence, which Zahavi (2019) calls an “essential vagueness” (43). Thus, adopting naturalistic methods that aim for mathematical precision to study phenomena in the lived experience may lead to only approximative classifications and descriptions of these entities (Zahavi 2019). Heidegger (1993) argues that scientific rigor cannot be equated with mathematical precision and it is wrong to assume that domains without mathematical exactitude are less valuable or less real. Similarly, for Husserl (1969), it is dangerous to be dazzled solely by the “absolute norm” of being “true” and “real,” which is typically constituted by the methodology and ideals of the exact sciences. Instead, we should be guided by that which is given to us in its purity in our experience, without the accidental properties of the given that are often extracted by a third-person scientific perspective (Zahavi 2019). This is because our experiential world has its own criteria of validity and truth, which do not require the approval of science, although scientific findings do not necessarily conflict with our everyday experiences (Moran 2000; Zahavi 2019). Furthermore, our experiential subjectivity and scientific objectivity may coexist because, within a phenomenological framework, the worlds of experience and science are the same world appearing in two different ways (Husserl 1982; Strasser 1963). After all, “any objectivity, explanation, understanding, and theoretical modelling presupposes the first-person perspective as its precondition” (Zahavi 2019, 53). Consequently, an applicable method in a phenomenological inquiry is to follow what happens to us, what we see with our own eyes, what we feel with our own bodies, what we experience at a *pre-reflective experiential stage* at the moment, and not to follow our prejudices and preconceptions (Husserl 1965).

Autoethnography is not inherently phenomenological, but its in-depth descriptive account can produce real-world knowledge that originates from first-person experience (Husserl 1970) and is experienced by the person at the center of the experience (Pitard 2019). It is self-focused, subjective-centered, and context-conscious (Brisini and Simmons 2022), and shares a relevant epistemological ground with phenomenology. This connection underscores

the idea that personal experience is viewed as something that happens to the individual, is consciously reacted to in the moment, and is subjectively interpreted (Pitard 2019).

Method and Data

Pitard's SVA as an Autoethnographic Method in Phenomenological Inquiries

Vignettes were first used by Alexander and Becker (1978) to elicit people's responses to a hypothetical scenario, which could be a photograph (Lanza and Carifio 1992) or a short story (Finch 1987). It is commonly used in social sciences to explore people's perceptions of a complicated situation and to navigate social problems and prejudicial decision-making (Cheah and Koay 2022; Reedy and King 2019).

Jayne Pitard (2016) expanded the concept of a vignette and developed a six-step autoethnographic framework called SVA to analyze vignettes that she experienced as an Australian teacher in Timor-Leste in 2013. The SVA enables researchers to uncover multiple layers of personal awareness through self-writing in the form of *layered accounts*.² For Pitard (2016), a vignette is created using a written *anecdote* "to tell something noteworthy or important about life" (Van Manen 2014, 250), giving voice to the unconscious, profound, and phatic sensations experienced by autoethnographers during their phenomenological reductions (Pitard 2019).

While the anecdote allows researchers to express the lived experience in immersivity with its trance-like state of writing (Pitard 2019), it is still too personal for readers to penetrate the pre-reflective substrates of our lived experience to discover the ontological core of our being (Van Manen 2014). Therefore, autoethnographers should reflect on and analyze their innermost stimulating moments, described as their vignettes in anecdotes, to connect *the personal to the cultural* (Pitard 2019). By doing so, autoethnographers can provoke understanding from readers with their innermost feelings, transporting them to the experienced moment of truth of the researcher with a logically presentable and extractive voice (Pitard 2019). In Pitard's example (2016), her SVA's six-step framework enables her to reflect on and analyze her innermost cross-cultural teaching experience as a vignette. The six steps include the following: (1) context, (2) anecdote, (3) emotional responses, (4) reflexivity, (5) strategies developed, and (6) conclusive comments on layers.

Context. Context is crucial to understanding processes, time-dependent changes, and emergent patterns (Dervin 2003). It plays a vital role in the negotiation of truth and the shaping of data (Pitard 2016). By considering the

context relevant to each vignette, readers can gain insight into the researcher's evolving perspective over time (Pitard 2016).

Anecdote. Narrative anecdotes allow researchers to revisit the pre-reflective experiential impact as a reminder of the conditions experienced before conscious reflection, restoring contact with the lived experience (Van Manen 2014). To gather narrative data and edit experiential accounts into exemplary anecdotes, Van Manen (2014) proposes a set of guidelines stressing that an anecdote should be short and simple, describe a single incident, begin close to the center of the experiential moment, include significant details and quotes about what has been said and done, end after the climax of the described incident, and finish with a punchy line (252).

Emotional response. As a subjective, involuntary, and unconscious experience, emotional response refers to an immediate physiological and emotional response experienced by the researcher as existential experiences unfold (Pitard 2016). This response helps the researcher recall noteworthy emotional details during shifts in their cultural understanding.

Reflexivity. Reflexivity is a continuous process of internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation regarding a researcher's positionality, which can impact the research process and its outcome (Berger 2015). In autoethnographic studies, reality may be in a constant state of flux as it is observed with this internal dialogue beginning when the researcher experiences something (Pitard 2016). The practice of reflexivity involves being attentive to this internal dialogue and learning to control it (Pitard 2016). According to Berger (2015), researchers can achieve this by focusing on self-knowledge and sensitivity, gaining a better understanding of their self-positionality in the process of knowledge creation, mindfully monitoring the impact of biases, beliefs, and personal experience, and maintaining a balance between the personal and the universal.

Strategies developed. Pitard (2016) used this specific layer account in the autoethnographic study of herself as a teacher in a cross-cultural teaching process in 2013. It was based on her reflexivity and recorded her change of approach when interacting with her students to better accommodate the cultural differences prevalent at the time.

Conclusive comments on layers. According to Pitard (2016), a holistic integration of different layer accounts provides a concise summary of the effects of

the studied experience and the development of the researchers' understanding of the experience they have lived.

In summary, while other autoethnographic methods have faced criticism for being excessively subjective, overly descriptive, and filled with esoteric jargon (Adams et al. 2022), the SVA maintains an academically presentable reflexive voice (Pitard 2019), rather than an introspective self-indulgence distancing readers from the researcher's experiential presentation and interaction (Chang 2007). Its hermeneutic kernel allows researchers to achieve a high level of self-awareness, externalize, and articulate their innermost experiences in qualitative research (Benjamin 2014).

My Own SVA-Based on Pitard's Perspective

As a phenomenological inquiry is an open-ended and demanding process that allows for further modifications upon new evidence (Zahavi 2019), Pitard's SVA cannot be viewed as a fixed framework, but rather as an experience-dependent instrument that enables different researchers to modify its layer accounts based on their own experiences, interests, and professional practices (Pitard 2019). Therefore, in this article, I propose my own SVA framework based on Pitard's perspective as a research method.

In my SVA, I have chosen to omit the layer account of "strategies developed" as I believe it is unnecessary for my focus on my sense-making journey of meme-ing. Instead, I have retained the other five in my SVA framework: context, anecdote, emotional response, reflexivity, and conclusive comments on layers.

Using WeChat and Jike as Data Sources

WeChat is considered one of China's most popular social apps. It has a limited global reach but enjoys high domestic popularity (Harwit 2016), boasting nearly 1.3 billion active users as of the first quarter of 2022 (Iqbal 2022). It is often referred to as a Chinese "Swiss Army Knife" social app (Clover 2016), as it combines features of WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, PayPal, and Apple Pay into one platform, offering instant text, voice, image, and video communication among users.

Jike is a niche interest-based Chinese online information-sharing community that supports both iOS and Android platforms (Liu 2020). It also offers social functionality, allowing users to follow information, events, and other users they like, and to post multimodal user-generated media content for public comment (Liu 2020).

As a solitary Chinese living in Finland during the COVID-19 pandemic, I mainly used these two apps to engage with my friends, relatives, and intimate partners in China, satisfying my social communication needs through memetic interaction.

Sampling Criteria for Anecdotal Moments in My Memetic Interaction Vignettes

I established a set of criteria for defining the anecdotal moments of my memetic interaction, and these criteria include the following:

- (1) They should be pre-reflexive experiential incidents.
- (2) They should involve the act of meme-ing with internet memes.
- (3) They should have significant concrete details.
- (4) They should provoke my immediate physiological, emotional, and/or bodily responses.³
- (5) They should have a mnemonic impact when recalled.

Method and Process of Data Collection

To capture the pre-reflective experience of meme-ing, I took screenshots of my memetic interactions on WeChat and Jike whenever they stirred up emotional or bodily responses. This data collection occurred between April 2021 and April 2022. These screenshots functioned as visual journal entries, providing the physical evidence that could help me recall critical experiences (Chang 2022; Pitard 2019), and capturing “snapshots” of the moments that impacted me the most (Muncey 2010).

To immerse myself in these experiences, I entered a “trance-like state” (Pitard 2019), allowing me to revisit the exact point of the experiential impact and better understand my reflexivity. To aid in this process, I wrote notes in Chinese on each visual journal entry. This created a repertoire of eight written vignettes as my autoethnographic data for my SVA.

Relational Ethics in Autoethnography

This autoethnographic study is focused on my personal experiences and sense-making journey of meme-ing, but these experiences did not happen “in a relational vacuum” (Chang 2022, 61). Given the interactive nature of meme-ing, addressing the relational ethics that arise from involving others is important. To this end, I followed the examples of Chang (2022) and Cutler (2023), by informing all implicated others of my research purpose, data

collection and analytical procedures, and data management plan. During my writing, I was mindful of anonymization to protect the privacy of those involved, preventing any potential impact of self-disclosure on their personal or professional lives. The use of screenshots involving others for analysis and presentation in this paper was given with prior informed consent from those involved.

Analytical Procedure

I conducted a two-phased analysis, as shown in Figure 1, of my vignettes on meme-ing. The first phase involved re-familiarizing myself with my self-indulgent descriptive notes on my vignettes and categorizing them into four scholarly presentable layer accounts: context, anecdote, emotional responses, and reflexivity for each vignette. This process helped me revisit the pre-reflective moment of each experience in its purity, a stage of *epoché* (Husserl 1970), by suspending my preconceived judgments, habits of thought, prejudices, and theoretical assumptions through bracketing or phenomenological reduction (Pitard 2019; Van Manen 2014). The goal was to return to the experience itself (Zahavi 2019) and perform a philosophical technique called *eidetic variation*⁴ (Husserl 1977a) using imaginative contemplation to vary the experiences and strip away their accidental features. Through this process, I identified an array of keywords that were highlighted in a bold italic style in the “Reflexivity” section that concluded the invariable properties of my first-person meme-ing experiences in each vignette.

In the second phase, I used a phenomenological lens to briefly review these keywords and the four preceding layer accounts in each vignette. The phenomenological lens allowed me to reflect on the keywords employing phenomenological theories and thoughts. It helped me to reveal the essential structure of meme-ing as a lived experience for myself and develop my own understanding of the phenomenology of meme-ing. I then documented my brief reviews in the fifth layer account called “conclusive comments on layers” in each vignette and further elaborated them as a whole with phenomenological contemplations substantiated by theoretical references as my findings in the “Findings and discussions” section.

Findings and Discussions

Meme-ing reveals itself as a lived experience in terms of an internet-mediated manner of expressive engagement that can actualize an embodied act of self-presenting face-work and a mutually engaged and negotiated relational coupling in sharing and exchanging social, cultural, political, and emotional

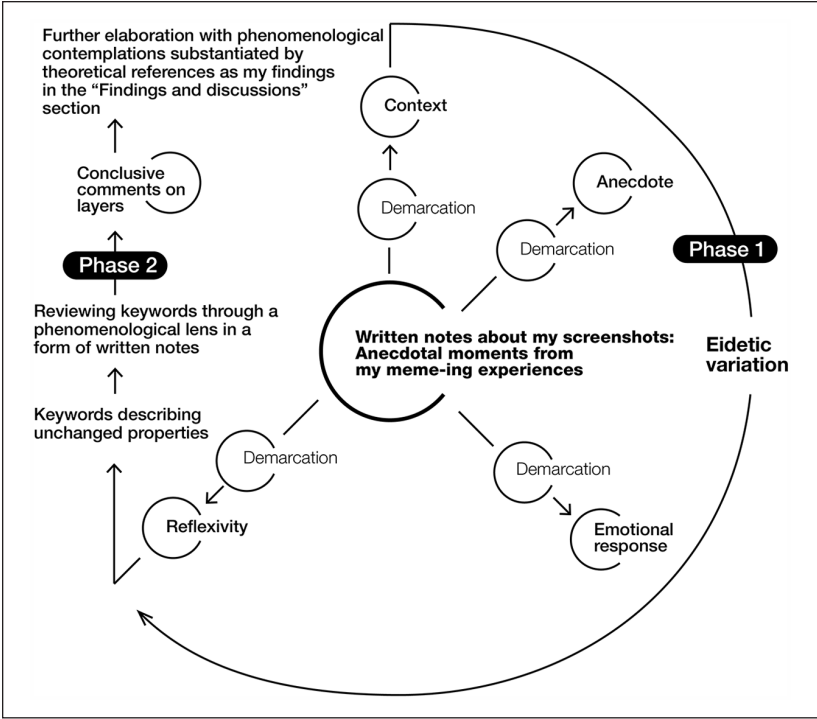


Figure 1. A two-phased procedure.

meanings between self-aware subjects via producing, disseminating, receiving, and reacting to internet memes within a latent intersubjective and intercorporeal reciprocity.

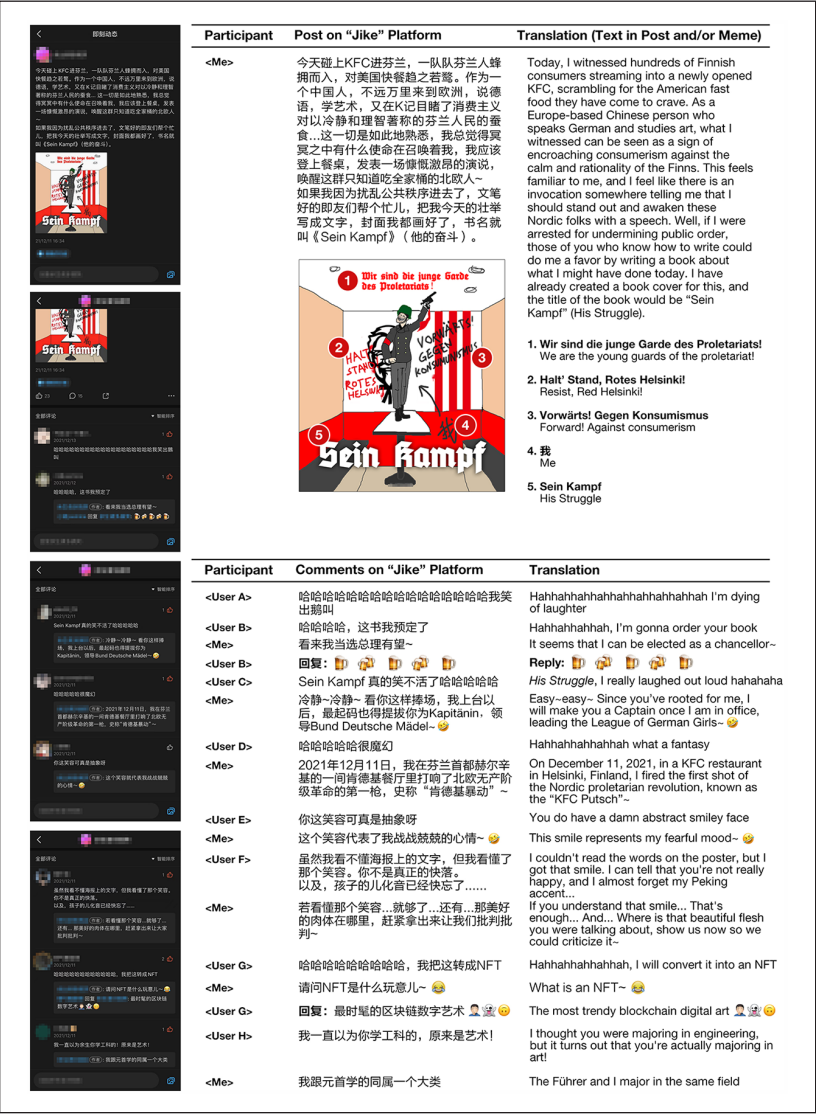
Meme-ing as an Embodied Act of Self-Presenting Face-Work and a Mutually Engaged and Negotiated Relational Coupling

As popular cultural artifacts, internet memes aim not to trigger human aesthetic appreciation but rather to mimic *life* in an unconventional way (Kariko and Anasih 2019). Life in the digital realm can take on diverse forms, as individuals may project identities and characteristics distinct from their real-world personas. However, this does not imply that their *digital self-construction* lacks authenticity (Deumert 2014). Individuals possess intricate and varied personalities. Producing and consuming internet memes allow them to express

their uniqueness and connectivity by personifying the contents, forms, and stances of internet memes as embodied memetic lexicons of the digital self (Kariko and Anasih 2019). Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate my meme-ing experience and its vignette as examples of an embodied self-presentation.

Internet memes serve as a shared collective language, but meme-ing also represents a single individual's embodied expression (Petrova 2021). Through meme-ing, one can convey ideas, personal experiences, and even world-views, allowing others to glimpse one's individuality beyond mere appearance (Cavarero 2005). In Figures 2 and 3, readers can see that I created a meme featuring myself with my ideological thoughts that are transformed into the form of multimodal *linguistic clownery* (Bakhtin 1984). By doing so, I creatively utilized a variety of modes (image, text, color, font) beyond linguistic texts to construct a memetic self-presentation used for meme-ing at will. Essentially, I aimed to demonstrate to my Jike followers that I am a witty, stylish, ideologically aware, and culturally enriched artist. In this context, the centrality of my embodied presentation focused on the concept of my *face*. This presentation process can be conceptualized as akin to the *face-work* defined by Goffman (1967). The term "face" encompasses not just its literal interpretation but also represents a constructed image of oneself defined by socially sanctioned qualities (Dolezal 2017). More precisely, my "face" denotes the self-image I purposefully project when engaging with fellow individuals (Dolezal 2017).

In Figure 2, the linguistic responses of my Jike followers provide validation for this meme-ing experience as an embodied self-presentation. Notably, their laughter and attention directed toward the "Trollface" smile are key indicators of this self-presenting context. The preexisting visual and cultural signs (the Trollface, the Wehrmacht uniform, the "Schaftstiefelgrotesk" typeface, and the altered title of *Mein Kampf*) and forms of speech (German political slogans in referential, emotive, and conative tones) were playfully remixed, creating new self-voices and meanings to reflect a carnivalesque mood (Deumert 2014). Moreover, the carnivalesque mood may reflect a taste of the *grotesque realism* (Deumert 2014, 37) which is considered the language of the marketplace (Bakhtin 1984, 154), challenging the prevailing social norm in a specific cultural realm where this topic may be taboo (Deumert 2014). In this grotesque realism, the multimodal attribute of meme-ing enables the grotesque to move beyond the market language to a visual depiction of *my* creatively modified and presented grotesque body (Bakhtin 1984, 317). The memetic image in Figure 2 highlights the embodied carnality of the grotesque body via its visible body gestures (smiling, standing, and arm-raising) and sexuality (male). With these two grounds, my meme-ing experience can reveal itself as an embodied act of self-presenting face-work.



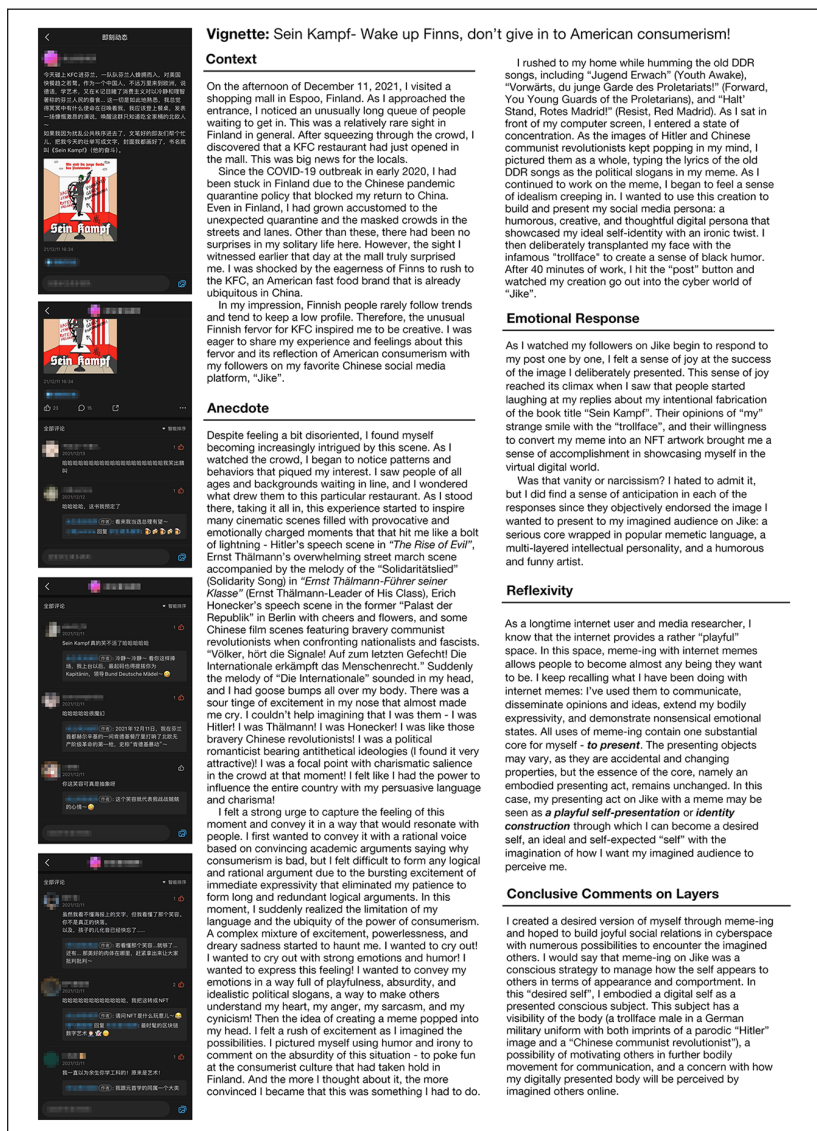


Figure 3. The vignette of my meme creation experience on Jike.

emerge, wherein my feeling could be empathetically felt and my seeing could be perceptively seen.

However, the aforementioned process underwent a reversal and intensification when I received and reacted to internet memes from unfamiliar

individuals. In this context, I assumed a passive role as a perceiver, encountering a memetic interaction. Simultaneously, I adopted a reflexive position as a respondent, utilizing my bodily actions informed by my historical, social-cultural, and political underpinnings to assert my immediate presence and engage with these unknown others.

Figure 4 illustrates a memetic interaction, wherein I established a “point of contact” by presenting snapshots of my immediate life moments through the embodied presentation. This presentation, in turn, “inspired” and “elicited” a bodily response from User A, who actively engaged in meme-ing a vodka-themed meme as a direct response to my original post, demonstrating User A’s recognition and empathetic connection to my vodka picture. Moreover, it reflects the “signifyingness of the irreducible otherness of others” (Diprose 2017, 28). This *otherness* derives from the fact that we are not entirely transparent to ourselves and we are often not in conscious control of much of what our body communicates (Dolezal 2017). In this case, when User A’s bodily presence to me was incarnated as a vodka meme and an array of visual-electronically displayed texts on an online social platform, there has always been certain aspect of his embodied memetic presence that may escape his thematic control due to his inherent inner idiosyncrasies and the “ambiguity of the body” (Diprose 2017, 27) with the unknowability and unique value arising from his sharing of cultural and emotional meanings. The unknowability and unique value then provoked my desire to keep engaging with User A. Yet, the shared meanings derived from User A’s presence extended beyond the explicit content of his meme and texts, encompassing likewise my own historical experiences and socio-cultural context.

In Figure 5, my anecdote illustrates how my historical and socio-cultural experiences shaped my perception and reaction to the vodka meme and User A. Receiving User A’s vodka meme immediately triggered various associations related to User A’s memetic presence, including body language, ideology, personality, and lifestyle. What started as a mere appreciation for vodka evolved into an endorsement of Soviet socialism, transforming User A’s memetic presence from an anonymous internet user into a warm, generous, and sincere “comrade” driven by universal love. These qualities were not inherent in the vodka meme or User A, nor were they merely products of my imagination imposed on the world without origins. Instead, they were ideas brought to life from existing socio-political imaginary worlds (Merleau-Ponty 1968), shaping my corporeal-spatial-temporal expression of meaning through socio-political values and ideas that we collectively signify and experience (Diprose 2017).

Likewise, User A’s perception of my *otherness* as a stranger was revealed through my linguistic and memetic response to his vodka meme and other

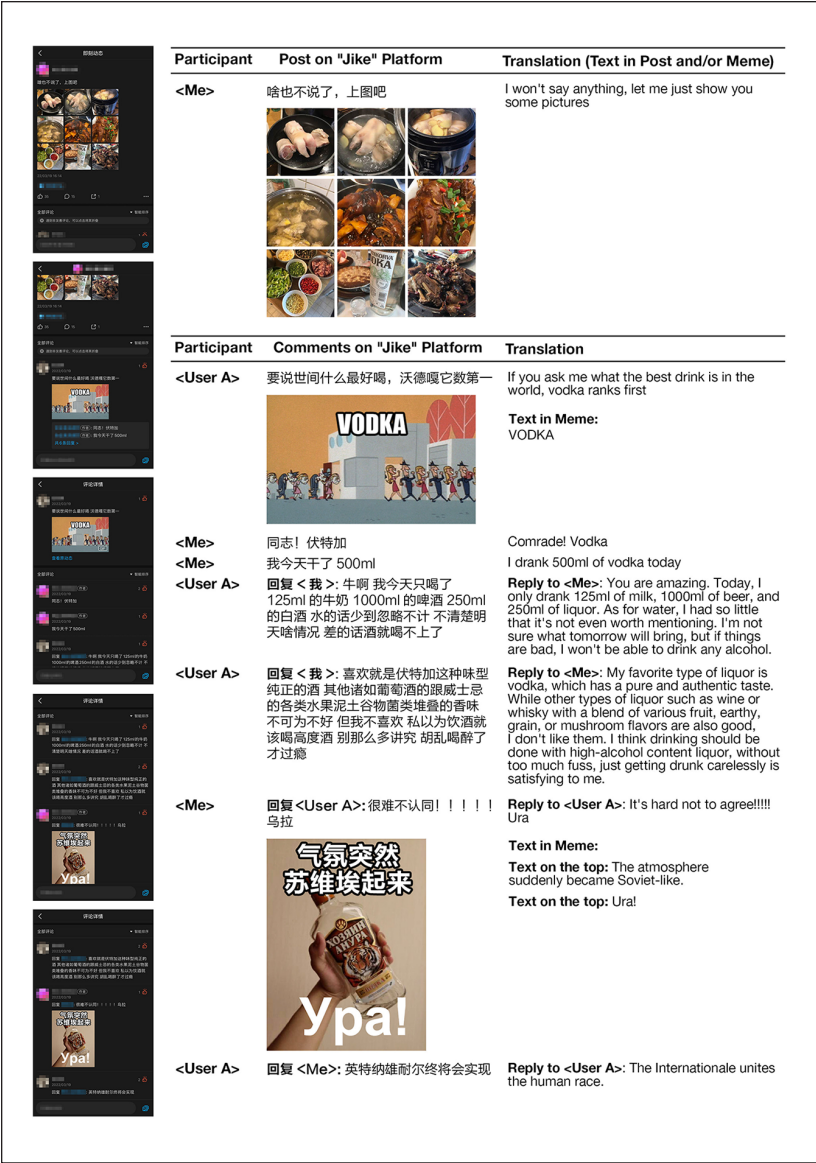


Figure 4. Screenshots and transcription of my meme consumption experience on Jike.

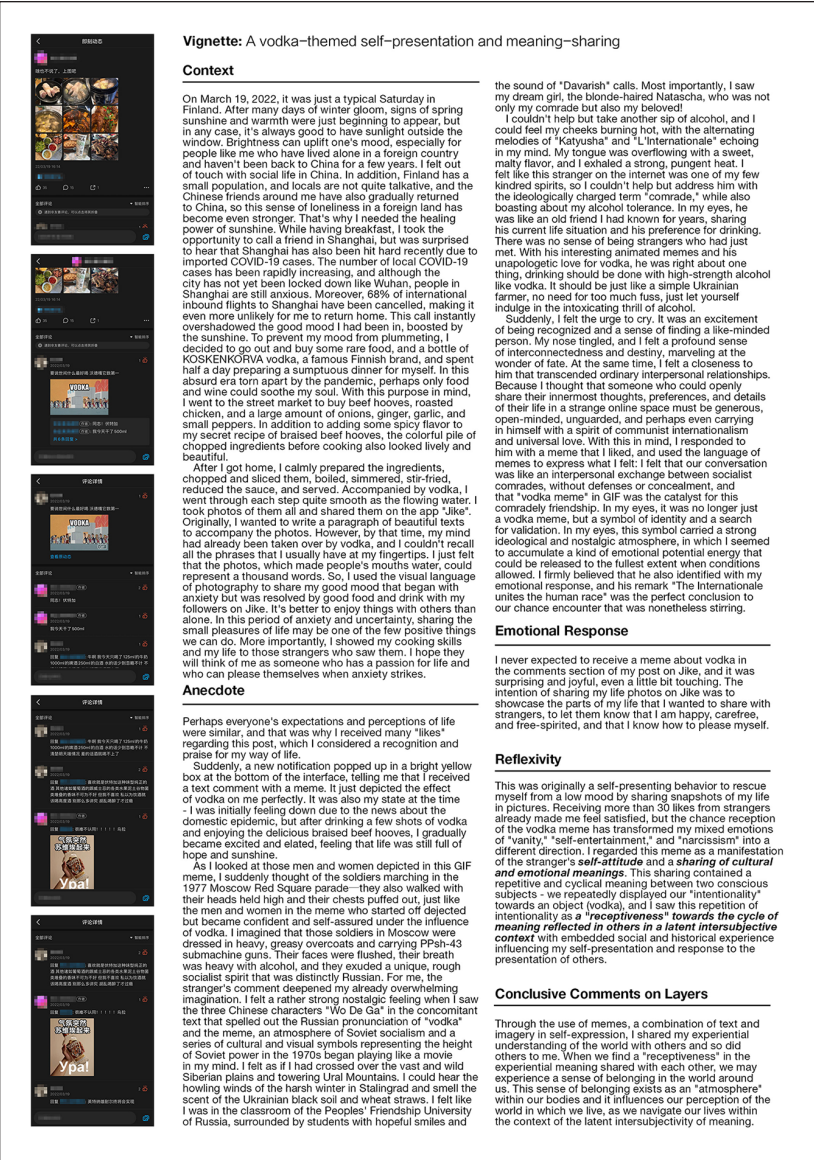


Figure 5. The vignette of my meme consumption experience on Jike.

comments. This manifestation prompted User A's immediate embodiment of meaning, influenced by his historical and socio-cultural trajectories, as he continued to interact with me through his responsive action. Consequently, we engaged in a reciprocal relational coupling, characterized by a negotiated receptiveness to circulating meanings embodied in others through the memetic presence and an outward orientation where one's history did not dictate the world but shaped how one responded to and influenced others (Diprose 2017).

Meme-ing as Latent Intersubjective and Intercorporeal Reciprocity

Figures 6 and 7 illustrate how a meaning-loaded meme-ing experience can establish an intersubjective relationship in an accidental context. For Dolezal (2017), intersubjectivity is a relational medium involving communication and the relation between self-aware subjects. In this case, before I memed, I, as an individual subject, recognized the existence of another (Miss A); thus, I had lived in a *prior intersubjectivity* (Taipale 2014, 74). The interactive structure of my meme-ing experience also implies the existence of others in this world, suggesting that each perceptual experience connects to potential anonymous co-perceivers (Ratcliffe 2007).

The meme-ing experience demonstrated in Figure 6 echoes the twofold nature of encountering others. First, I encounter others as animate organisms, as psychophysical objects in the world (Husserl 1977b). Meanwhile, I acknowledge and experience them as subjects for this world (Husserl 1977b). Similarly, others also experience me as a subject in the same world I experience (Dolezal 2017). Thus, the *lifeworld* locates itself in the way members of social groups (cultures and/or linguistic communities) structure the world into objects (Beyer 2022).

According to Beyer (2022), intersubjectivity occurs through empathetic acts; thus, intersubjective experience is an empathetic experience. In other words, it occurs when we consciously attribute intentional actions to other subjects and place ourselves in their shoes. For example, Figure 6 shows that Miss A "placed herself in my shoes" by sending me a sexy meme for sexual seduction, along with the statement "You will love this." In response, I acknowledged her empathetic ascription by replying "You do know how to find memes." At that moment, she saw me as a partner with sexual needs and social willingness, recognizing me as a conscious subject and perceiving me as appropriate for her sexual arousal as well as her experience of sensual pleasure and emotional intimacy.










Participant	Chat (in Chinese with Memes)	Translation (Chat / Text in Meme)
<Miss A>		Text in Meme: GIF meme, no text (Nudity in the original GIF was pixelated by the author for academic presentation)
<Miss A>		
<Miss A>	你肯定喜欢	You will love this
<Me>	你倒是蛮会找表情	You do know how to find memes
<Miss A>		Text in Meme: GIF meme, no text
<Miss A>	我还是喜欢狗	I still like to have dogs more
<Me>	狗主要是比猫服从性强一些	Dogs are more submissive than cats
<Miss A>	我喜欢可爱的小狗	I like cute little puppies
<Miss A>		Text in Meme: GIF meme, no text
<Miss A>		Text in Meme: GIF meme, no text
<Miss A>		Text in Meme: GIF meme, no text
<Miss A>	我喜欢	(This is what) I like
<Miss A>		Text in Meme: GIF meme, no text
<Miss A>	主人~ 我休息啦	Master~ I'm going to bed
<Miss A>		Text in Meme: Good night
<Me>	晚安 🌙💤	Good night 🌙💤
<Miss A>		Text in Meme: GIF meme, no text

Figure 6. Screenshots and transcription of my meme-ing experience with Miss A on WeChat.

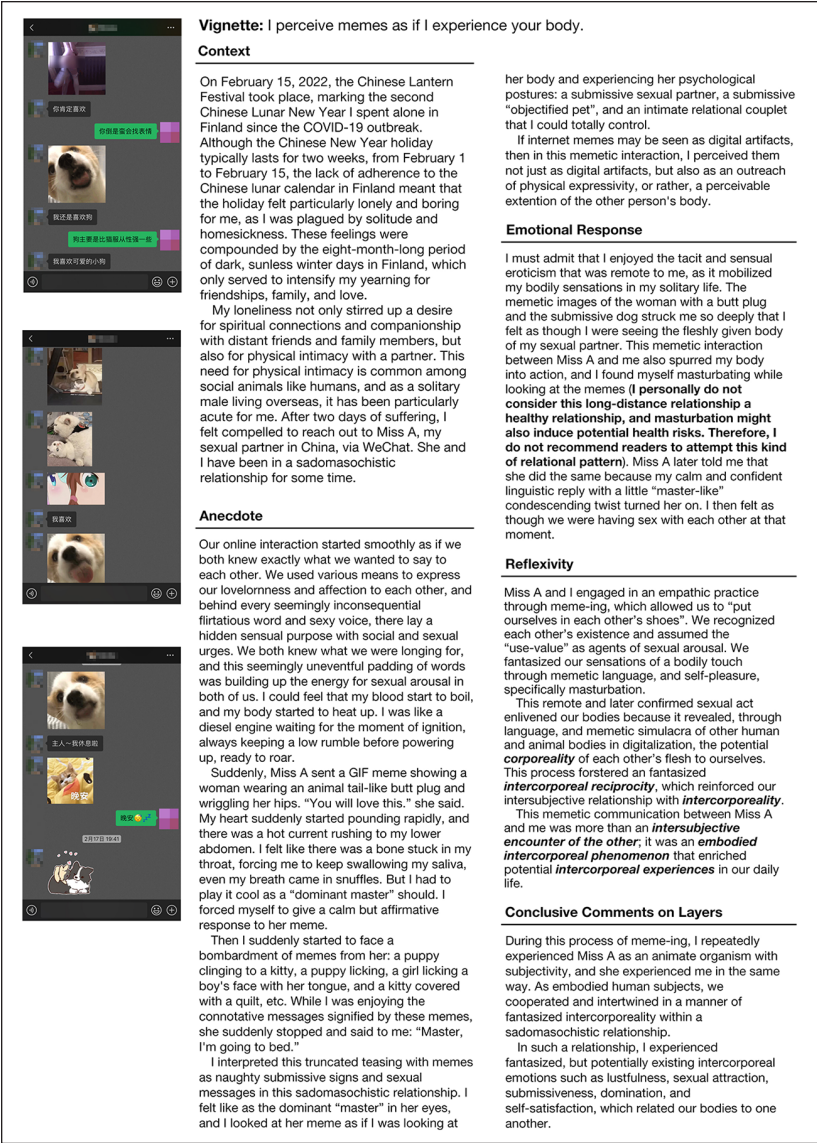


Figure 7. The vignette of my meme-ing experience with Miss A on WeChat.

My response in Figure 6 and my masturbatory act, mentioned in Figure 7, indicate that I have also apprehended her in a similar way. My masturbatory act can illuminate an intersubjective use-value as it was an immediate bodily response to Miss A's bodily act, driven by an *empathic attunement* (Husserl 1977b). This attunement causes a *phenomenal pairing* (Dolezal 2017), wherein the sense of one body is intrinsically bound to the sense of another person's body as the same (Ratcliffe 2007). Within this memetic interaction, we were in a lifeworld where we shared the same intersubjective context and language, and meme-ing as linguistic conduct was intersubjectively effective for us (Etelämäki 2016).

The intersubjective aspect of language becomes evident in our interpretation of meme meanings, which hinges on a shared cultural backdrop (Kariko and Anasih 2019). In this cultural context, the memetic lexicon that pertains to our first-person experiences evolves through our reciprocal engagement in a collective socio-historical tradition. Furthermore, our behavior as subjects (I) can be influenced by the reciprocal participation of others (Miss A), who share the same meaning as ourselves (Schütz 1953).

In Moran's (2017) account, the *body* is a convergence site for our sensorial channels, wherein the senses are tuned and transformed by the body's diverse corporeal movements, gestures, and overall integrity. Different senses may overlap, and Merleau-Ponty (1964) used this property of overlapping to define *flesh*. He speaks of the *flesh of the world* (Merleau-Ponty 1964) and the *flesh of things* (Merleau-Ponty 1968) to demonstrate the reciprocity and communality between the lived body and the multisensorial world, to whose properties our senses are finely tuned (Moran 2017). The flesh of the world embodied in sensuousness mirrors our embodied flesh, suggesting that the availability of the world to perception and human perceptual systems is correlated with human subjects, who are part of this world and are also perceived (Moran 2017). My meme-ing experience depicted in Figures 6 and 7 likewise shows such intercorporeal reciprocity constructed in the form of sadomasochism in this multisensorial world.

The *body* presented in this meme-ing experience possesses a twofold nature. For one, my romantic partner Miss A on WeChat has an undeniable physical presence. I know her and I am aware of her existence in reality, and her memetic presence also implies an actual location, gravity, and embeddedness (Moran 2017) of her lived body in my perceptual domain, which likewise reveals my lived body. Moreover, during our interaction, she used a meme featuring sexually oriented nudity and a series of animal and cartoon memes as an extended form of bodily expressivity, an avatar to present her own lived body. This *lived body* presents itself in a peculiar way, as an imagination, a fantasy, an erotic reverie, a "calling to mind"

referring to “all appresentations which are not direct perception of something bodily given in the flesh” (Moran 2017, 285), and a form of presence in the absence (Bachelard 1971).

In Figure 7, I used the term “memetic simulacra” to refer to all the bodies presented (human and animal) in this meme-ing experience because of their absence in the flesh. However, these simulacra did activate, as defined by Moran (2017), my *subjective exploration* regarding the lived body of Miss A through mindful focusing, concentrating, and imagining of bodily action. Such a subjective exploration refers to an intercorporeal phenomenon wherein a lived body interacts through meme-ing with another lived body in the overall context of intersubjectivity (Moran 2017). Furthermore, the subjective exploration of the memetic simulacra caused, as I wrote in my vignette, a behavior of phone sex masturbation in which I was the dominant and Miss A was my submissive controlled object. This embodiment of a sexual experience as intercorporeality suggests that such an embodied act is not a private affair, but “is always already mediated by our continual interaction with other human and nonhuman bodies” (Moran 2017, 286). As Sartre (1995) emphasizes, the caress brings alive the other’s lived body for me and for the others, and in my case, Miss A’s body came to appear and was experienced by my body as a lived flesh, and vice versa.

Conclusion

Using autoethnography to interpret meme-ing as a first-person lived experience through a phenomenological lens, this article not only illuminates the applicability of a specific autoethnographic method as a phenomenological tool in externalizing a subjective meme-ing experience in an academically presentable way but also reveals the existential significance of meme-ing as a considerable part of the structure of human sociality. This involvement in meme-ing includes embodied self-presenting face-work, mutually engaged and negotiated relational coupling, latent intersubjectivity, and intercorporeality in a solitary and confined environment under the overall context of a controlled society.

The SVA coupled with the Husserlian eidetic variation has enabled me to externalize my intentional act and suspend preconceived judgments and prejudices. It involves stripping away the accidental properties of meme-ing from its discursive, communicative, cultural, political, and semiotic positionalities whenever the meme-ing experience happens to me, thereby experiencing what is given to me in its purity and revealing its unchanged properties in my first-person experience.

The property of meme-ing as an embodied self-presenting face-work and mutually engaged relational coupling illuminates the agential context of the lifeworld where consciousness and self-other relations are possible. The property of meme-ing as a latent intersubjective and intercorporeal reciprocity depicts a complex layer of embodied responsivity, expressivity, and communication supporting our intentional relations to others through intersubjectivity and sociality. Both properties involve communication and relations between self-aware subjects. In this way, even when people, such as myself, have located themselves in social distancing overseas, in which other animated organisms in their cultural field (in my case, China) have become homogenized and remote biological entities with whom they may not initiate actual physical contact, they may still use meme-ing as a form of the shared vocabulary of our *body idioms* (Dolezal 2020) to establish possible intercorporeal communication on a potential intersubjective basis. Thus, the presentational, relational, intersubjective, and intercorporeal properties of meme-ing may enact empathic reciprocity enabling the mutual transfer of feeling, emotion, and even kinship between self-aware subjects with agency stemming from the needs of sociality. In this context, the phenomenology of meme-ing involves encountering and interacting with other intercorporeal beings through internet memes, creating a reciprocal relational assemblage that reveals each other as lived bodies in an intersubjective world.

However, as an autoethnographic inquiry in phenomenology with few cases, using the structured vignette analysis with the Husserlian eidetic variation is context-dependent. This article does not claim an infallible source of insight about meme-ing in general nor does it seek to reach a statistical generalization, which has long been mistaken as an important objective of qualitative inquiries in a positivist paradigm (Gorichanaz 2017). The Husserlian eidetic variation is a demanding and open-ended process, and the insights streaming from it always possess a certain provisionality and presumptiveness, remaining open for further modification based on new contexts and evidence (Zahavi 2019). Single-case research seeks to challenge the positivist-rooted generalization of a singularity of truth by striving for an analytical generalization (Yin 2014), and an epistemological transferability to other specific cases and contexts on a case-by-case basis (Maxwell 2005). Thus, according to Gorichanaz (2017), it provides an accessible manner to study new contexts, as well as a point of entry to document a particular context and epistemological idiosyncrasies that may not have emerged in group studies.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Statement of Data Transparency

Other than the data presented in the main text as examples with the informed consent from certain involved human participants of this paper, other data, not granted the right to be publicly shared by the remaining human participants, have been stored on an online archive. Access to these data is only meant for editors and reviewers. They can be found at: https://chocolate-frown-ala.notion.site/Vignettes-Archive_-799adaf625be43a7961f657832ef91f8.

Informed Consent

All examples of screenshots involving other human participants used for analysis and presentation in this paper have been given by the involved others with their prior informed consent.

ORCID iD

Ningfeng Zhang  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6298-3784>

Notes

1. Other than the data presented in this paper as examples with informed consent from involved human participants, other data, not granted the right to be publicly shared, have been stored on an online archive. The access is only meant for reviewers.
2. According to Ronai (1995), a layered account is a postmodern ethnographic reporting technique offering an impressionistic sketch with which to hand layers of experience to readers to enable them to fill in the spaces and construct an interpretation of the writer's narrative (396).
3. Before the implementation of social distancing measures, engaging in internet-mediated meme-ing was an ordinary experience I "lived" in a mode of "taken-for-grantedness" (Van Manen 2014, 31). I did not give it much reflection. However, within the broader context of solitude in a socially distant environment, meme-ing ceased to be ordinary for me. It took on an elusive, almost illusory quality, accompanied by emotional and bodily effects. These effects made me aware of thoughts, feelings, or emotions that had always been there but were previously ignored. This research context transformed meme-ing from once a mundane experience into something of meaningful significance. In this way, the emotional and physical aspects served as a phenomenological "accelerant," allowing me to recognize, as Van Manen (2014) describes, "the phenomenal phenomenality of a phenomenon" (31) within a specific context.
4. The Husserlian eidetic variation involves starting with what is given to us and using our imagination to alter it through a play of fantasy. It is to obtain eidetic

knowledge in the form of *eidos*, the “idea in the Platonic sense” (Husserl 1977a, 54). By repeatedly imagining variations of what is given, we move from one variation to another. This continuous advancing of new multiplicities of variation is characterized by its optional nature, and within the form of *optionalness*, the same *eidos* must result “again and again” in the same universal essence “tone” being universally adopted (Husserl 1977a, 55). The optionalness of the same *eidos* is the accidental property of what is given, and the universal “*eidos*” is the invariant structure forming the essence of what is given (Zahavi 2019, 45).

References

- Adams, Tony E., Stacy H. Jones, and Carolyn Ellis, eds. 2022. *Handbook of Autoethnography*. New York: Routledge.
- Alexander, Cheryl S., and Henry Jay Becker. 1978. “The Use of Vignettes in Survey Research.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 42 (1): 93–104. <https://doi.org/10.1086/268432>
- Anderson, Leon. 2006. “Analytic Autoethnography.” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35 (4): 373–94. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241605280449>
- Bachelard, Gaston. 1971. *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language, and the Cosmos*. Translated by D. Russell. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1984. *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Benjamin, Elliot. 2014. *Life after Death: An Experiential Exploration with Mediums by an Agnostic Investigator*. Raleigh, NC: Lulu Publishing Service.
- Berger, Roni. 2015. “Now I See It, Now I Don’t: Researcher’s Position and Reflexivity in Qualitative Research.” *Qualitative Research* 15 (2): 219–34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475>
- Berry, Keith. 2022. “Mediations on the Story I Cannot Write: Reflexivity, Autoethnography, and the Possibilities of Maybe.” In *Handbook of Autoethnography*, edited by Tony E. Adams, Stacy Holman Jones and Carolyn Ellis, 29–40. New York: Routledge.
- Beyer, Christian. 2022. “Edmund Husserl.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, December 19. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/husserl/>
- Brisini, Travis, and Jake Simmons. 2022. “Posthumanist Autoethnography.” In *Handbook of Autoethnography*, edited by Tony E. Adams, Stacy Holman Jones and Carolyn Ellis, 355–66. New York: Routledge.
- Cavarero, Adriana. 2005. *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Chang, Heewon. 2007. “Autoethnography: Raising Cultural Consciousness of Self and Others.” In *Methodological Developments in Ethnography*, edited by Geoffrey Walford, 207–21. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Chang, Heewon. 2022. “Individual and Collaborative Autoethnography for Social Science Research.” In *Handbook of Autoethnography*, edited by Tony E. Adams, Stacy Holman Jones and Carolyn Ellis, 53–65. New York: Routledge.

- Cheah, Chee Wei, and Kian Yeik Koay. 2022. "Knowing the Unknown: Application of Qualitative-Vignette Method in the Social-Political Sensitive Business Environment." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* (Online) 21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221074495>
- Clover, Charles. 2016. "Tencent's WeChat Dominates China's Lucrative Messaging App Market." *Financial Times*, 18 March. Accessed December 19, 2022, from <https://www.ft.com/content/aadd256e-d0ef-11e5-831d-09f7778e7377>
- Creswell, John W., and John D. Creswell. 2018. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Cutler, Blake. 2023. "'Just Wear Their Hate with Pride': A Phenomenological Autoethnography of a Gay Beginning Teacher in a Rural School." *Sex Education* 23 (4): 363–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2022.2035344>
- Dawkins, Richard. 1989. *The Selfish Gene*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1988. *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. Translated by R. Hurley. San Francisco, CA: City Light Books.
- Denisova, Anastasia. 2019. *Internet Memes and Society: Social, Cultural, and Political Contexts*. New York: Routledge.
- Dervin, Brenda. 2003. "Given a Context by Any Other Name: Methodological Tools for Taming the Unruly Beast." In *Sense-Making Methodology Reader: Selected Writings of Brenda Dervin*, edited by Brenda Dervin and Lois Foreman-Wernet, 111–32. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- De Saint Laurent, Constance, Vlad P. Glăveanu, and Ioana Literat. 2022. "Mimetic Representations of the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Analysis of Objectification, Anchoring, and Identification Processes in Coronavirus Memes." *Psychology of Popular Media* 11 (4): 340–54. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000370>
- Deumert, Ana. 2014. "The Performance of a Ludic Self on Social Network(ing) Sites." In *The Language of Social Media: Identity and Community on the Internet*, edited by Philip Seargeant and Caroline Tagg, 23–45. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Diprose, Rosalyn. 2017. "The Body and Political Violence: Between Isolation and Homogenization." In *Body/Self/Other: The Phenomenology of Social Encounters*, edited by Luna Dolezal and Danielle Petherbridge, 21–45. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Dolezal, Luna. 2017. "The Phenomenology of Self-Presentation: Describing the Structures of Intercorporeality with Erving Goffman." *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 16: 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-015-9447-6>
- Dolezal, Luna. 2020. "Intercorporeality and Social Distancing." *The Philosopher*, 20 July. Accessed December 20, 2022, from <https://www.thephilosopher1923.org/post/intercorporeality-and-social-distancing>
- Ellis, Carolyn. 2009. *Revision: Autoethnography Reflection on Life and Work*. New York: Routledge.
- Ellis, Carolyn, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner. 2011. "Autoethnography: An Overview." *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 36 (4): 273–90.

- Etelämäki, Marja. 2016. "Introduction: Discourse, Grammar and Intersubjectivity." *Nordic Journal of Linguistics* 39 (2): 101–12. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S033258651600007X>
- Finch, Janet. 1987. The Vignette Technique in Survey Research. *Sociology* 21 (1): 105–14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038587021001008>
- Gannon, Susanne. 2022. "Sketching Subjectivities." In *Handbook of Autoethnography*, edited by Tony E. Adams, Stacy Holman Jones and Carolyn Ellis, 41–51. New York: Routledge.
- Goffman, Erving. 1967. *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behaviour*. New York: Phantheton Books.
- Gorichanaz, Tim. 2017. "Auto-Hermeneutics: A Phenomenological Approach to Information Experience." *Library & Information Science Research* 39 (1): 1–7. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2017.01.001>
- Grundlingh, Lezandra. 2018. "Memes as Speech Acts." *Social Semiotics* 28 (2): 147–68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2017.1303020>
- Harding, Sandra. 2015. *Objectivity and Diversity: Another Logic of Scientific Research*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Harwit, Eric. 2017. "WeChat: Social and Political Development of China's Dominant Messaging App." *Chinese Journal of Communication* 10 (3): 312–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17544750.2016.1213757>
- Heidegger, Martin. 1993. "The Question Concerning Technology." In *Basic Writings*, edited by David Farrell Krell, 311–41. San Francisco, CA: Harper.
- Huntington, Heidi E. 2016. "Pepper Spray Cop and the American Dream: Using Synecdoche and Metaphor to Unlock Internet Memes' Visual Political Rhetoric." *Communication Studies* 67 (1): 77–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2015.1087414>
- Husserl, Edmund. 1965. *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy: Philosophy as Rigorous Science, and Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man*. Translated by Q. Lauer. New York: Harper Torchbooks.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1969. *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. Translated by D. Cairns. The Hague, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1970. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*. Translated by D. J. Carr. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1977a. *Phenomenological Psychology: Lectures, Summer Semester, 1925*. Translated by J. Scanlon. The Hague, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1977b. *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Translated by D. Cairns. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1982. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*. Translated by F. Kersten. The Hague, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Iqbal, Mansoor. 2022. "WeChat Revenue and Usage Statistics (2022)." *Business of Apps*. December 21. <https://www.businessofapps.com/data/wechat-statistics/>

- Jenkins, Eric S. 2014. "The Modes of Visual Rhetoric: Circulating Memes as Expressions." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 100 (4): 442–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630.2014.989258>
- Jenkins, Henry, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green. 2013. *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*. New York: NYU Press.
- Kariko, Abdul Aziz Turhan, and Nonny Anasih. 2019. "Laughing at One's Self: A Study of Self-Reflective Internet Memes." *Journal of Physics: Conference Series* 1175: 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/1175/1/012250>
- Lanza, Marilyn Lewis, and James Carifio. 1992. "Use of a Panel of Experts to Establish Validity for Patient Assault Vignettes." *Evaluation Review* 16 (1): 82–92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193841X9201600106>
- Leiser, Anne. 2019. "Spreadable Media, Citizens, and Participatory Culture: Uses and Effects of Political Internet Memes." PhD dissertation, Department of Social Sciences, Universität Bremen, Germany.
- Literat, Ioana. 2021. "Memes in the Time of Corona: An Autoethnographic Visual Essay on Memes as Relational Resources during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Visual Studies* 36 (2): 116–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2021.1911678>
- Liu, Y. (2020). "A look at the Destiny of Jike App from a Perspective of Product Iteration." Accessed December 21, 2022, from <https://www.woshipm.com/evaluating/4009322.html>
- Maxwell, Joseph A. 2005. *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1964. "Eye and Mind." In *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Arts, History and Politics*, edited by James M. Edie, 159–90. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1968. *The Visible and Invisible*. Translated by A. Lingis. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Moran, Demort. 2000. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. London: Routledge.
- Moran, Demort. 2017. "Lived Body, Intersubjectivity, and Intercorporeality: The Body in Phenomenology." In *Body/Self/Other: The Phenomenology of Social Encounters*, edited by Luna Dolezal and Danielle Petherbridge, 269–309. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Muncey, Tessa. 2010. *Creating Autoethnographies*. London: Sage.
- Petrova, Yulia. 2021. "Meme Language, Its Impact on Digital Culture and Collective Thinking." *E3S Web of Conferences* 273 (4): 11026.
- Pitard, Jayne. 2016. "Using Vignettes Within Autoethnography to Explore Layers of Cross-Cultural Awareness as a Teacher." *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/ Forum: Qualitative Social Research* Accessed December 29, 2022, from <https://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/2393/3923>
- Pitard, Jayne. 2019. "Autoethnography as a Phenomenological Tool: Connecting the Personal to the Cultural." In *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences*, edited by Pranee Liamputtong, 1829–45. Singapore: Springer.
- Provencher, Marion. 2014. "Making Sense of Memes: Where They Came from and Why We Keep Clicking Them." *Inquiries Journal/Student Pulse*, Accessed

- December 30, 2022, from <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/879/making-sense-of-memes-where-they-came-from-and-why-we-keep-clicking-them>
- Ratcliffe, Matthew. 2007. *Rethinking Commonsense Psychology: A Critique of Folk Psychology, Theory of Mind and Simulation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Reedy, Patrick C, and Daniel R. King. 2019. "Critical Performativity in the Field: Methodological Principles for Activist Ethnographers." *Organizational Research Methods* 22 (2): 564–89. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428117744881>
- Ronai, Carol Rambo. 1995. "Multiple Reflections of Child Sex Abuse: An Argument for a Layered Account." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 23 (4): 395–426. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124195023004001>
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1995. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. Translated by H. E. Barnes. London: Routledge.
- Schütz, Alfred. 1953. "Common-sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 14 (1): 1–38. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2104013>
- Shifman, Limor. 2014. *Memes in Digital Culture*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Smith, Nicholas, and Shannah Linker. 2021. "Suicide-memes as Exemplars of the Everyday Inauthentic Relationship with Death." *Mortality* 26 (4): 408–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2021.1987668>
- Stoller, Paul. 1997. *Sensuous Scholarship*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Strasser, Stephan. 1963. *Phenomenology and the Human Sciences: A Contribution to a New Scientific Ideal*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.
- Taipale, Joonas. 2014. *Phenomenology and Embodiment: Husserl and the Constitution of Subjectivity*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Thomala, Lai Lin. 2022. *Number of Active WeChat Messenger Accounts Q2 2011-Q1 2022*. Statista. Accessed January 2, 2023, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/255778/number-of-active-wechat-messenger-accounts/>
- Van Manen, Max. 1990. *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Van Manen, Max. 2014. *Phenomenology of Practice: Meaning-Giving Methods in Phenomenological Research and Writing*. New York: Routledge.
- Vitiuk, Iryna, Olena Polishchuk, Nataliia Kovtun, and Volodymyr Fed. 2020. "Memes as the Phenomenon of Modern Digital Culture." *Wisdom* 15 (2): 45–55. <https://doi.org/10.24234/wisdom.v15i2.361>
- Yin, Robert K. 2014. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Zahavi, Dan. 2019. *Phenomenology: The Basics*. New York: Routledge.

Author Biography

Ningfeng Zhang is a doctoral candidate, a media researcher, and a Chinese visual communication design professional based in Finland. His research interests include visual communication design, semiology, discourse analysis, phenomenology, ethnography, and other practice-led artistic research methods. His current research

activities are focused upon how convergent media forms such as multimodal internet memes in social media are being evaluated and used in online civil engagement characterized by ideological unrest, exploring divergent meaning-making mechanisms of internet memes functioning as a semiotic entity, a form of visual rhetoric, a hupomnema, as well as a facet of citizen journalism in different media environments.