Montreal Monochrome

*«**Meeting my favorite memes : un face à face avec moi-même**» -*
Script

par

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7 decembre 2022

- Voiceover:

Few years ago, I came close to winning a 100 thousand dollars on a show called Big Brother Canada. My dream of winning that 100 K got cut short when I got evicted from the house after making a not so great move.

Weeks after the show was over, I learned that I was a trending topic on the internet, and that I had become a meme.

It started from a real moment of frustration, captured from the show, and it became a relatable expression for the internets.

I remember being tagged almost everyday on twitter by family friends and strangers. It was such an interesting period of time because I was still a bit disoriented from the show I had been on and I was overwhelmed by the attention I was getting.

At the same time, it was pretty cool that a community could relate to my face, my body language, my expressions.

When I went back to school in the fall of 2017, coming back from the show, it was just so fitting to use my experience as the basis for my research project. Fascinated by the growing presence of memes on my social media over the past year, I was eager to know how other individuals with a similar experience to mine felt. Are they as fascinated as I am by their image circulating freely online? What if I could come face to face with another online meme and share experiences; what if I could meet my favorite memes in the flesh?

And that's how this journey started. With the support of my co-directors, I wrote a draft of my project with the themes and questions I'd like to explore. Got feedback, made adjustment, received the approval to go forward with my research by the ethics committee . I made a thorough action plan and was so excited to embark on this journey to meet my favorite memes
…

Then I realized there are so many steps I did not see coming.

END of Part 1 (timestamp 2:06 min)

(timestamp 2:08 min)

- Video Andre sitting in closet:

I'm feeling ok, but a little bit - lets say disappointed - in the fact that I could only send 4 emails today. I'm going to try again tomorrow (voice fade out)

- Voiceover:

Through weekly journal entries, I've documented my journey.

Recording my progress, from the search of the memes I'd like to meet to the actual interviews was always part of the plan.

And I knew tracking down the individuals behind the memes and finding their contact information would be a challenge! What I did not expect however, was how difficult it would be to get at least one of them to agree and fully commit to the project.

- Video Andre explaining discussion I want to have:

I want to dive into the perspectives of the individuals behind the memes, I wanna know what their stories are, I wanna know how did they become a meme, I wanna know how they feel about being a meme… You know! Just so many questions I wanna ask the individuals behind the images that we so love and that we like and that we share and that we use almost daily. And now the hard part is: I wanna track down these memes, and it's hard. It's hard. I've been sending emails and I haven't gotten any answers, well almost zero answers. And so I'm going public (voice fade out)

To get the attention I needed to attract the individuals behind the memes to this project, I decided to ask the help of the online community by sharing short videos on Instagram, explaining my project and asking them to tag their favorite memes under my videos.

To find the identity of the individuals I was interested in, I have also used information found on the Youtube channel of media companies like Buzzfeed and BET that were sharing interviews with some of the individuals behind viral memes, letting viewers discover the context behind those popular images. Although the interviews were interesting and serve as great material for this project… I was seeking more of a conversation type of interview,

meme to meme. I also reached out to those platforms in hopes of a collaboration…

  - Crickets sound

Despite the many efforts, I did not receive positive answers for most emails or messages sent. Actually,getting a no was not the most disappointing. What was most challenging was getting a few individuals that would initially show interest and then ghost me on the follow-up emails!

  - Crickets sound

And that's why I decided to explore a new idea with a meme I knew would be open to share with me a part of herself:

- Voice on call: I'm excited to meet you and get your perspective on this subject. I've been trying to reach out to different memes and (voice faded out)

END of Part 2 (timestamp 5:13 min)

<mark>Chapitre 3 - The Interview</mark> (timestamp 5:14 min)

  - Steps of Dre walking to chair

André: So how did you become a meme? What's the story behind the image?

Dre: Well, in 2017, I participated in a show called Big Brother Canada. And in that show it's a mix of physical and mental competition as well as social strategy, so emotions run really high. We were 16 houseguests, we're all strangers and the goal is not to be evicted from the house. So in that particular moment I was just very frustrated about something - I don't remember what - and I wanted to vent to one of my houseguest. And we went in one of the bedrooms, it was the pink room, we used to call that the pink room. And I was just venting, I was explaining my frustration. And that's when the moment was captured. But to be honest, it's more and more blurry now, I don't remember fully that moment anymore.

André: Were you in an argument at all during that moment? Because Twitter has named our meme The argument gif. So how do you relate to that name?

Dre: It's funny because I don't believe I was argumenting at all. I think I was just frustrated and I was explaining my frustration. But I can understand why it was perceived as an argument. You know, I had big hand gestures, my body language is very big, my face was really dramatic. I know I can be a bit dramatic or extra at times so…

André: I was just about to ask do you recognize yourself in that image ?

Dre: I actually recognize myself less and less. In the beginning, I was really excited. I would see my face and I was like : ahh it's me! And it's just cool to see your face everywhere basically or to me it felt like everywhere. And that meme reminded me of my journey on Big Brother, reminded me of the emotions that I felt. I had really a vivid memory of it. And nowadays I just feel more detached. It's me, but I don't fully recognize myself in it.

André: What changed? Can you walk us through maybe the different emotions that you've felt then versus now. Like when you first saw your meme compared to right now, lets say ?

Dre: Yeah! So the emotions I felt in the beginning seeing my face, as I said, I was really just excited. Because it's not often that you're transformed into a meme and that social media uses you to express their feeling or their emotions. So I was just really excited. And I remember scrolling on Twitter, seeing my meme from strangers being tweeted and just wanting to know everything about it. Like what was the Tweet, what was the use of my meme, what was the context, what comment did people leave under. And it was exciting, and I would get tagged by my family by friends so I would really see my face everywhere. It was a bit overwhelming but exciting most of it. And then, now I feel detached and I think it's because I see how people are using it or sometimes the opinions are just very different from mine so I can't relate. I feel like the meme belongs to the internet now.

André: Why is that? Can you explain?

Dre: Yeah. Well, I feel like it belongs to the internet in the sense that physically it is me, it's my face it's my body it's my hand gestures. But as time passes by and as the meme is circulating online, people just appropriate that image and they use it for their own emotions, let's say – to express their own emotions. So I feel like its less and less me. It's physically

me but I don't feel represented in that meme I think the internet decides who ever is in that meme.

André: That's super interesting. I haven't thought of it that way…

Dre: Sometimes I scroll on Twitter and I see a few comments like "Who is that girl" and I think it's interesting because I feel like people don't really care or want to know who is behind the meme. So the few times that I see the "who is that girl", I think it's pretty cool to see that people are interested to know. But I never reply to say "hey its me". I don't know, its kinda weird.

André: But why not?

Dre: I don't know. I feel like I don't have to claim my meme. I feel like it's already my face so inside I know it's me. And I guess I'm satisfied with the few people that watch the show and that know that I'm from that show or from my family that sometimes text me and are like "hey this person is using your meme". I think that's satisfactory enough. I don't know, I don't feel like I have to claim it online.

André: Girl, we are literally a social phenomenon! But you said something interesting, you said you don't feel like you have to claim your meme? Why is that ?

Dre: I don't feel like it belongs to me anymore. It's my face it's my body it's my hand gestures but I feel like the image is now for the social media streets it's not for me anymore.

André: Does it bother you at all when strangers use your meme to give opinions that are really not related to yours or that are really different from yours?

Dre: That's a really good question. When strangers use my meme to express opinions that I don't agree with, in the beginning it use to bother me a lot, again because I had that attachment to my image. because it was my face so I was thinking ah they're not representing me well. But as time passes, I just realize more and more – again - that it doesn't really belong to me so now it doesn't really bother me.

André: You know the meme, the disaster girl meme. I think her name is Zoe Roth. She said something during an interview, where she wanted to reclaim her meme and that's why she sold it as an NFT. Would you ever consider selling your meme?

Dre: If the opportunity comes, I would love to sell my meme. Yeah. I think we have our faces and our image just freely circulating online and I think that it would be great if we could be compensated in some way for just contributing to the online entertainment. What would the online world be without memes?

André: So if you had an opportunity to sell you meme, you would do it?

Dre: I definitely think that people should be compensated financially (laughs) for contributing to all of that

I haven't had the opportunity and I'm not looking to sell my meme on NFGT although kudos to anybody that is able to reclaim their meme in that way. I think for me I'm so far detach that I just don't care anymore. So, if the opportunity showed up, would I? I don't know actually. Maybe, maybe not. I don't know.

André: And if you had one thing to say to a meme or a question to ask to a meme what would that be?

Dre: If I could talk to another meme or see another meme, I would ask them the same questions you're asking me. I would want to know how they became a meme and what's that experience like. And if they feel the same thing as me about feeling detach and not feeling like the meme belongs to them and all of that.

André: That's exactly why I wanted to do this project. I wanted to be able to interview 3 or 4 people behind the memes and just be able to have a conversation and relate to them. So that's exactly the purpose of this project.

Dre: Well I think it's a great project. I wish you had more people that came and accepted to do the interview but I'm glad I'm here.

André: (Voice fade out) Yeah perfect well thanks for coming…

End (timestamp 13:30 min)

(timestamp 13:31 min)

- Background voice

Dre: wow! It gives a bit of a documentary vibe. I love it.

André: Oh my goodness wow!

Dre: Is it me or watching ourselves back is a little bit… *cringe face*!? That's why I never watched my season of Big Brother!

André: Yeah. I think I can't watch without analysing the work, I find myself looking at my editing choices and some of the things that I wish I could change. So I wonder what it's like to have a fresh perspective on it. I wonder what it's like for someone to watch this for the first time because I feel like I can no longer have this experience. And I cringe when I hear some pronunciation errors I made. It's like my brain mixes French and English at times

Dre: Yeah like when you said…

André: Let's not point it out! Let's not point it out!

Dre: Why did you decide to go through this project in English by the way?

André: Doing my research, I found out that the memes that I was interested - well my favorite memes that I was interested to interview were from North America and most likely they spoke English. So I thought it would be better for the flow of the project to keep it in English.

Dre: So how do you feel? How do you feel looking back at what you've created?

André: This project really brought me through highs and lows. And a part of me thinks it's because I was influenced the entertainment aspect of it all … I was influenced by you

Dre: Me!!!!?? *overexaggerate*

André: YES! The Big Brother experience obviously was a huge inspiration to this project so the show, the performance, the production were all element that I was thinking of as I was creating this. And I feel like I was putting a lot of energy

into actually meeting my favorite memes and how I was going to
document the conversations and the interactions that we could
have. Not only for the research. Not only because I was curious
to discover the individual behind the memes, but also because I
knew of the possibility to share this content online and
potentially getting the public involved and getting the public
to participate. So I feel like I had created this expectation of
creating a great show.

Dre: What changed?

André: Well, getting discouraged from not being able to reach my
favorite memes and also reading an article by Louis-Claude
Paquin, a professor at UQAM that spoke about art and research
and how they mix and merge together to create and form a new way
of understanding the world and our experiences. So after reading
that it allowed me to put the entertainment aspect aside, to see
less of the entertainment value in this creation and to recenter
myself on my own experience and to put the emphasis on the
questions I wanted to explore and the themes that I wanted to
explore… on my problematization at the end of the day.

Dre: What's that?

André: Ok so, based on the notions of «social interaction» and
«face» as introduced by Erving Goffman, my project seeks to
explore the relationship between the individual - the face - the
meme. There is a hyper visibility of the face of the meme as it
circulates online and I was seeking to explore the visibility of
the individual in their day to day life when they're not online.
In their existence beyond the online world.

Dre: Yeah absolutely!

Through this process I also wanted to place them in a space
outside of their meme. And that's why I thought that asking
questions that could lead to conversations and having not
necessarily an interview but more so a conversation guided by
questions, that's why I thought it would result in an
interesting exchange where the power dynamic that we can see
sometimes between the researcher and the participant or the
researcher and the subject would be reduced because as the
researcher I'm also the subject or the participant. That's what
I find interesting in the way I approached this research.

Dre: Wow! What would you say was your biggest challenge in this project?

André: Biggest challenge? probably letting go of this idea of meeting my favorite memes face to face and recentering on my own experience, recentering on the experience of this whole process in general!

Dre: What have you learned? How do you come out of this? What's your feeling coming out from this project?

André: I learned patience in my creative process and a form of therapy as I discussed my meme! In a way I feel like I am learning to accept that my face no longer belongs to me online. I'm accepting to share this flattened, 2-dimensional version of my face online.

   - Voiceover:

The interview also highlighted issues of recognition and representation that I verbalized, but initially were not part of the themes I wanted to explore and that was interesting for me to navigate and to look back at.

This project, through my eyes as well as the documented experience of other memes, shines a light on the multifaceted beings that constitute memes. It also explores how the face of the meme, its social value, could be defined by the individual but also by the culture in which the meme exists. In the future, I think this project could also contribute to a bigger conversation about personhood in memes.

Dre: Looking back, would you have done anything differently?

André: I wouldn't! I wouldn't! This process taught me a lot about my creativity as I said. It also allowed me to push the limit in my head about a more traditional research approach… all in all I think I created something to be proud of!
André: Et toi? I feel like the big question remains. What would YOU ask your favorite meme if you had the opportunity to meet them, face to face ?

End (timestamp 21:28 min)