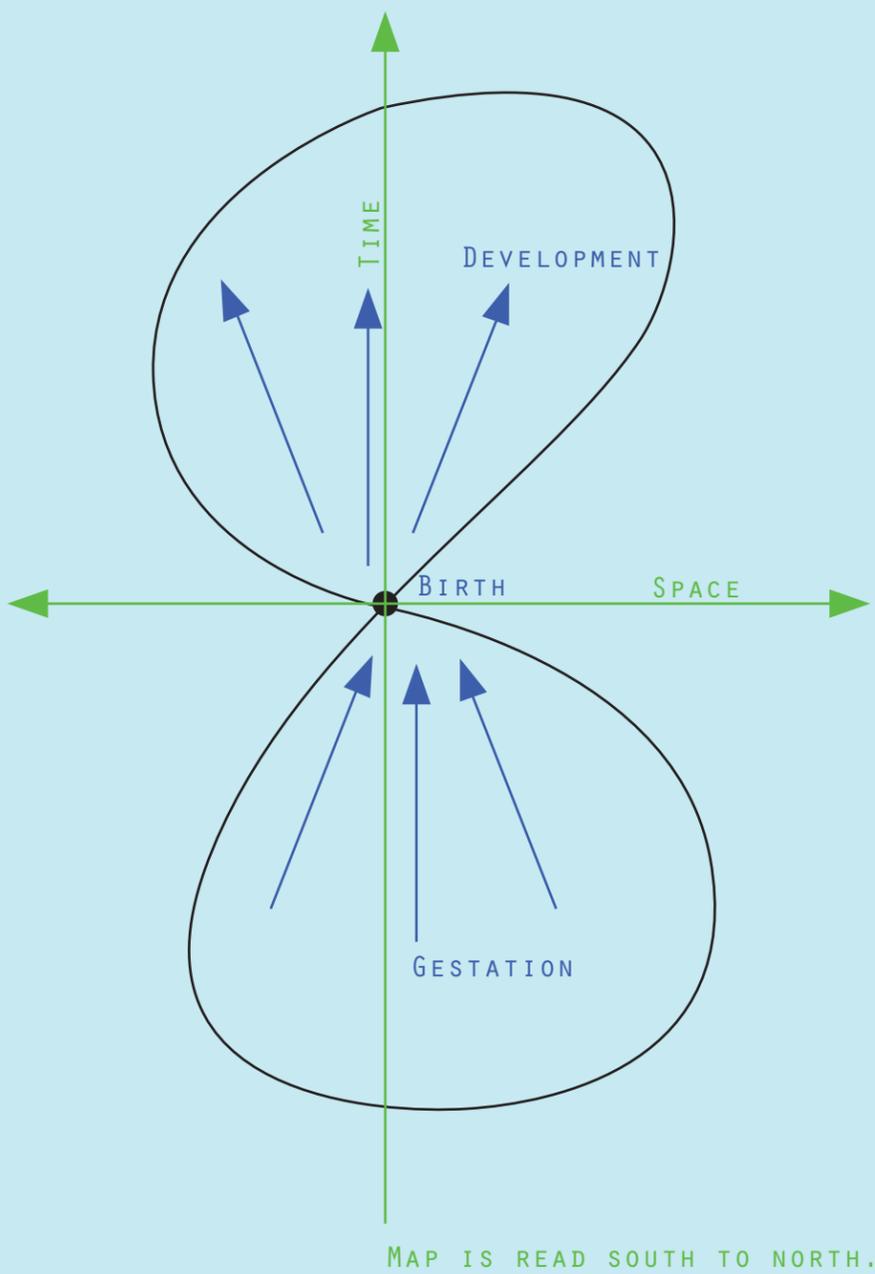


V I S U A L I Z I N G

The Development of the Internet Meme through the Meme Map

David Bedsole



● 2013: Richard Dawkins denies that internet memes are memes

● 2012: Grumpy Cat

● 2007: Leave Britney Alone

● 2005: Flying Spaghetti Monster

● 2005: LOLCATS appear

● 2003: 4chan.com founded

● 1999: Susan Marshall publishes *The Meme Machine*

● 1998: Garry Marshall writes "The Internet and Memetics"

● 1996: "Dancing baby" meme *

● 1995: short article about memes appears in *The New York Times Magazine*

● 1995: Dawkins featured in *Wired* magazine

● 1995: "Save Sesame Street" email appears

● 1982: Carnegie Mellon connects a Coke machine to the Internet

● 1976: Richard Dawkins publishes *The Selfish Gene*

The meme map was proposed by John Paull, a Ph.D candidate at Australian National University, in 2009. In a paper originally published in the *European Journal of Scientific Research*, he situates the map as a handy, though imprecise way to visualize information, analogous to a Venn diagram. The map provides a way to understand the development of a meme in time and space, with the key elements being the lower zone (the gestation zone), the birth point, and the upper zone (the development zone).

Once the mapper has identified the birth point and main chronological events of a meme's lifecycle, she can then map them onto the diagram, placing more horizontal space between events that occurred further away, less horizontal space between events that occurred in closer proximity. Paull makes it clear that events are ranked and not positioned; these maps are not intended to be to scale (12).

* There is no real agreement on which internet meme was the first, but many seem to agree it was sometime in the mid to late 90's. Alternate nominees include the "Save Sesame Street" meme (1995), and the dancing hamsters meme (1998). The website 4chan appeared in 2003, and has been steadily producing memes ever since. Some researchers insist, however, that the meme was born much earlier, with the linking of Coke machines to the Internet at Carnegie Mellon's school of computer science in 1982. Many other universities followed suit: <http://tinyurl.com/kl688od>

Part of the problem in agreeing on a certain meme as a starting point, is that we have to agree on which platforms (email, GIF, video, phrase, webpages, etc) are in, and which are out. This is harder than it sounds.

Ultimately, I chose the "Dancing Baby" meme as a gestation point because of its undeniable reach, in conjunction with the surge in publishing about memetics at that time.