

**Realtime Imageboards:**  
**A Promising Patchwork Future for Online Communities**

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A preliminary analysis of the traditional imageboard and the realtime imageboard innovation.

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## §1 Static Imageboard Exceptionalism

In the landscape of digital social communities, imageboards are wholly unique. Their structure falls somewhere in-between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0, and the products of their culture are uniquely influential, even onto the real world.

### §1.1 Key Features: Anonymity & Transiency

Imageboards are unique among Web 2.0 social platforms in having no accounts, usernames or identity of any kind. Users can simply navigate to the site and engage freely in posting—all posts carry the same "Anonymous" name by default.

In general, anonymity is believed to create an atmosphere of honesty and openness in debate, free from the egos and reputation that corrupt non-anonymous discussions.

The nature of anonymous discussion is commonly described as: "What's important is what is said, not who said it."

Anonymity is bolstered by data transiency: content is deleted shortly on the order of days, if not hours. There are a certain amount of threads allowed on each board, and as a new one is made, the oldest one to last receive a response is deleted; and after a certain number of posts, all threads stop counting any new responses.

This leads to a knowledge that anonymity won't be broken due to identification of historical speech patterns and contributes to the noise on the network.

Users are enabled by their confidence in post discreteness. As each individual post is not connected to any other, they have the freedom to change their attitude, contradict themselves, disengage a debate, argue controversial positions, play devil's advocate, etc. without reservation. There is no motivation to fight a lost argument to save face when there is no face to save.

The two tenets of anonymity and transiency are central to the imageboard structure and the culture that it produces.

The result is a reputation-less discussion with no social consequences levied on an individual's comments, allowing the pure discussion that leads to a genuine marketplace of ideas.

### **§1.1.1 Anonymity and Post-Authorship**

Individuals familiar with identity-based communities tend to misalign the freedom enabled by anonymity as also enabling disingenuous or sophistic communication: as there is no reputation cost to arguing dishonestly, it must incentivize it.

Yet, the incentive for sophistry itself stems from defending one's reputation, without it, there is no reason to participate in disingenuity—except for the sake of subversion, and subversion itself is harmless when the only goal and practice is intellectual debate.

"Dishonesty" is itself meaningless with no identity attributed to the speaker; all discussion may as well be taking the stance of devil's advocate.

In a community without ego or identity, the distinction between irony and sincerity, humor and seriousness is rendered moot. Intentionality cannot be derived without an author; anonymity refines discussion to content, and content alone.

This is the nature of ego-less discourse outsiders bred on less pure forms of online discussion have trouble understanding, which is primarily what leads them to being identifiable as such.

## **§1.2 Cultural Production**

In terms of cultural production and influence, it's commonly recognized that imageboards are significantly overrepresented over their contemporaneous digital alternatives.

There are multitude of aspects contributing to this phenomenon, but they all fundamentally rooted in the inherent network effects produced by imageboard's transient, anonymous communication.

### **§1.2.1 Complex Self-Organization**

Imageboards are known to quickly and suddenly coordinate into elaborate projects or "operations", organized horizontally, with no leader, yet capable of impressive results.

This behavior is not unlike those observed in nature as swarm intelligences or in self-organization in thermodynamic systems; in this way the user base can be seen as participants in a kind of digital hivemind.

Harnessing their lack of ego, they can perform as daemons, independent yet identical actors, tapping into the underlying current of the network, who, through them, can spontaneously manifest itself into complex structures.

### **§1.2.2 Distributed Think Tank**

The unique, counterintuitive predictions, criticism and analysis that are produced within imageboard networks are often surprisingly accurate or predictive.

The inherent culture of intense debates and free discussion operates on principles that lead to the common attribution of imageboards as a "massively distributed think tank."

The most similar parallel is to the RAND Corporation's Delphi Method, designed to aggregate the diverse opinions of experts on the principle that aggregate forecasting is more accurate than the individual; the same principle is at play in prediction markets-both systems well-known for their high predictive accuracy. Imageboards naturally perform the same process, leading the group as a whole towards insightful conclusions.

The opinions that have been settled into general consensus on any given board can be reliably counted upon to have the sharpest standards of taste, the most insightful analysis, or the most contemporaneous positioning of any other online community, and most individual experts, due to this.

This can be framed another way as a pure implementation of John Milton's marketplace of ideas: "the truth will emerge from the competition of ideas in free, transparent public discourse and concludes that ideas and ideologies will be culled according to their superiority or inferiority and widespread acceptance among the population."

Only through the elimination of ego and reputation can honest, free discourse be had, and through it, Truth illuminated.

### §1.2.3 Lucid Shitposting as Delphi Divination

Imageboards are renowned for their ability to convert the cultural zeitgeist into resonant memetic imagery and concepts that regularly filter downwards to the non-anonymous online communities, and even into real world culture.

It's been said 4chan is the wellspring from which all memes flow.

This can largely be attributed to the practice of shitposting, a form of posting that employs constant layered humor and compressed references, that in its most intense form one loses oneself in a "lucid state", where it feels as if one's words are not their own.

The act of going lucid works to subconsciously express the collective mind, as though it was divined from a muse-in reference to the aforementioned Delphi Method, the practice can be described as Delphi Divination: a trance-inducing ritual that uncovers the touchstones of the collective consciousness of that particular network, the imageboard community currently being engaged with.

Through aligning with the occult flows of the network, individuals become a multitude, and so achieve a divine (within the confines of this digital environ) inspiration that manifests in dense jokes and memetic artifacts, whose resonance, confirmed by propagation, speaks to their ability to express the archetypes present in the shared network.

## §2 Static Imageboard's Crippling Limitation: Exit Difficulty

### §2.1.0 Vulnerabilities

It's a commonly expressed sentiment that the board has become irrecoverably bad, but there are no alternative options available<sup>1</sup>. It appears that imageboards have inherent vulnerabilities, that when exploited, leave the community's initial character unrecoverable.

#### **§2.1.1 First Vulnerability: Foreign Influx**

As a general rule, active imageboards always tend towards growth. Death by stagnation for an already active imageboard is unheard of, outside of the textboards that slowly became a relic superseded by the imageboard.

Instead, imageboards receive a constant supply of new users, the majority of whom assimilate. As a form of community moderation, any identifiable foreigners are quickly shamed—the idea being: if you're visibly an outsider despite anonymity, you shouldn't be posting at all<sup>2</sup>.

This is most commonly a reflection of the user's inability to grok the nuances of anonymous posting, or shed the ego baggages of identity-based discussion.

The small portion of newcomers who reject assimilation, undesirably affecting the nature and quality of discussion, are known as "cancer," under the premise that cancer, if left untreated, will spread.

A large presence of cancer makes it difficult for newcomers to assimilate accurately, resulting in accidental imitations of the cancerous foreign agents instead of the host culture, resulting in them becoming "infected" themselves in a kind of self-propagating epidemic.

This often occurs in the event of a large influx of newcomers, such as when a board gains attention in the media or on other

<sup>1</sup> Captured by two frequently quoted aphorisms: (1) "[board]/ was always bad." (2) "Don't forget, you're here forever."

<sup>2</sup> Commonly phrased as "lurk moar" --- that is, spend more time observing and assimilating the culture before posting

websites; the community cannot actualize its shaming protocol fast enough to signal against the wave of foreign agents. This both leads to confusion on who is the host culture and who are also newcomers, as well as granting confidence to some newcomers who feel justified in rejecting assimilation when invading with many peers.

The ultimate result is an irreversible paradigm shift towards a new set of norms, leading the board to become progressively unrecognizable to the original community. Exit becomes imperative; the desire for it is frequently expressed, but the inertial nature of static imageboards makes it impossible to achieve.

This is an observable process on all major boards, which seems to suggest it's an inevitable function of the imageboard structure, the final stage in its lifecycle. On a long enough timescale, all boards succumb to eternal September.

### **§2.1.2 Second Vulnerability: Moderation Overreach**

Administrative moderation is only required to maintain legality—namely, banning CP and terrorist threats—and prevent robot spam; otherwise, imageboards are effectively independently sustainable.

Out of an instinct of self-preservation, the users naturally self-organize into what is known as community moderation: a set of practices that encourage and enforce assimilation by newcomers and thus help slow the degeneration:

- (1) Saging. Putting "sage" in the e-mail field when making a post results in the user's post not bumping the page and marks the post in a different color. This intended to be used as a polite manner for not bumping threads if your post is not making meaningful or relevant contribution. However, it was co-opted as a tool to express disapproval of the thread's content - thus, when the community spontaneously performs collective saging, it signals to newcomers the thread is of a type or standard considered unwelcome on the board (cancer), thereby teaching the culture and assisting the process of assimilation while removing the possibility of the cancer "infecting" a new poster.
- (2) Gore. Due to the limited moderation of imageboards, users are often exposed to grotesque and disgusting imagery that is hidden from the rest of the internet.

The community's subsequent desensitization to the material is taken as a point of pride. It's obvious then that the desensitization can be weaponized to repel innocent newcomers of a more sensitive stock, and so gore, as well as scat and other disgusting imagery, is shared every so often as a cleansing measure, and dumped collectively whenever an event might bring significant and sudden outside attention to the board (e.g. a news article).

These functions work remarkably well to maintain a cohesive community culture. However, moderation overreach is very common in imageboards, be it due to bored trolling, genuine hostility, incompetence, ego or otherwise; the low-status of the job-anonymous, unpaid-likely contributes to the frequent disrespect for the non-intervention principle.

While generally responsible for much of the bitterness that leads a user base to desire Exit, moderation becomes actively destructive most when it removes the community's ability to self-moderate.

This, too, is unfortunately common<sup>3</sup>. Removing the ability to shame obvious newcomers and enforce the practice of assimilation leaves the board highly vulnerable to cancer, effectively removing its immunity function such that even minimal immigration quickly leads to ruin.

## **§2.2 Barriers To Exit**

Even the best board cannot survive forever. The lack of community influence on administrative decision-making processes and the irreversibility of large changes in the culture makes clear the necessity for easy Exit for that inevitable stage when a board becomes lost.

Unfortunately, Exit is notoriously difficult for imageboards.

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps due to egotistic mods feeling the community moderation is an affront to their own power, or the desire to increase traffic without regard to quality in a bid for increased ad revenue. The most prominent and complete example was 4chan banning not just goreposting and sagebombing, but even the basic "announcement of sage" along with making the sage coloration invisible in 2012; entirely ending any practice of community shaming. Many other examples of hostility to community moderation proliferate, from the defunct 4chon.net to lainchan.org



### **§2.2.1 First Barrier to Exit: Inertia**

Activity on a imageboard is understood on a binary scale: active or dead. When a user examines a non-mainstream imageboard, known as "splinters," the first thing generally reviewed is the post activity rate<sup>4</sup>. If it is below a certain frequency, the user considers the board "dead" and rejects it as one worth visiting often enough to make a meaningful contribution<sup>5</sup> - in most cases, not even leaving behind a single post<sup>6</sup>.

If, however, the imageboard has a ppd rate high enough to be read as "active," there is a very real chance the user will make his contributions and make repeat visits to the board, possibly even adopting the board as his new "home board"<sup>7</sup>. Thus, the dead imageboard maintains its inertia and remains dead, while the active imageboard stays active.

### **§2.2.2 Second Barrier to Exit: Attrition**

With every attempted exit to a new imageboard, only a certain percentage of the posters will migrate. Even if the conditions of their original board have become intolerable and unrecognizable, many stay on by force of habit. Thus, every migration experiences attrition.

Coupled with the momentum needed to make the new imageboard active, and thereby successful, Exit is historically very prone to failure. It is only successful when the migration is both sudden and large.

<sup>4</sup> Measured in posts per day or ppd.

<sup>5</sup> A personal standard that varies by person, largely informed by their own imageboard usage rate, but the author's own standard would be less than 5ppd is a dead board

<sup>6</sup> This is known based on anecdotal evidence, general community consensus and the author's own experience reviewing the Google analytics data of managed imageboards of various sizes.

<sup>7</sup> Imageboard posters generally maintain a list of the boards they most frequently and regularly visit most can recount a personal history of their migration that can be read as their own cultural lineage. This home board phenomenon can be generally extrapolated to all internet socialites across platforms.

### **§2.2.3 Note on Hosting Costs: not a Barrier to Exit**

It's been suggested that the costs of hosting an imageboard are one of the major deterrents for users considering providing an alternative.

The costs of hosting are exaggerated: while outdated, poorly optimized imageboard software such as 8chan's vichan lead to unnecessary costs, many efficient open-source implementations have been released that make the costs of running a small-scale imageboard minimal<sup>8</sup>.

Further, 8chan allows anyone to create a board and covers the cost of hosting themselves, yet the adoption of new imageboards and frequency of Exit between them is still extremely limited.

It's clear hosting costs are not a barrier preventing ease of Exit.

### **§2.3 Note on Alternative Imageboards Attempts**

Prominent examples of 4chan forks that failed to achieve self-sustaining momentum at the time of writing:

- 4chon.net (2009 - 2014)
- 7chan.org (2005 - present)
- 76chan (2014 - 2017)
- Endchan.xyz (Unknown - present)

There are many other examples:

[https://encyclopedia.dramatica.rs/List\\_of\\_\\*chan\\_boards](https://encyclopedia.dramatica.rs/List_of_*chan_boards)

Notably “successful” forks of 4chan, that have maintained some sustainable activity:

- 8ch.net (2011 - present)
- 420chan.org (2005 - present)
- lainchan.org (Unknown - present)

However, none have achieved a rate anything close to the standard 4chan board.

<sup>8</sup> lynxchan, pychan, etc.

### §3. Realtime Imageboards: History and Nature

The realtime imageboard innovates on the static imageboard with one radically defining feature: posts written by the user are deployed live into the thread as they are being typed.

The original realtime imageboards - doushio and meguca - published updates to the post word by word as it was being typed.

This meant that posts could not be edited retroactively, even mid-sentence.

Meguca rebuilt its reimplementation on golang in 2017 and begun to show every letter as it was being typed, live, allowing the whole post to be edited until it was submitted. Meguca is the only currently developed implementation. It has also introduced an 8chan-like user board creation feature.

#### §3.1 History

Realtime imageboards were primarily developed and adopted by migrants from the /jp/ (Japanese Culture) and /a/ (Anime) 4chan boards.

Quietly hidden, the micro-communities organized on them were happy to have found a homely alternative to the static imageboards they had left, and avoided publicizing the new sites for fear of the same cancerous immigration that ruined their old homes.

The communities remained small and insular by design, enjoying a "comfy" character that was rarely disrupted by outsider attention. It wasn't until meguca introduced the ability for anyone to create their own board, and the subsequent adoption by the /pol/ userbase, described in §4.3, were realtime imageboards first introduced beyond this specific community that developed them. They still remain extremely obscure today.

#### §3.2 Survey

- Doushio: Unknown. The first realtime board, a splinter from 4chan's /a/. Development was abandoned in 2011.
- Meguca: /a/, 2011. A splinter from doushio after doushio development was abandoned.

- chaika: /tea/, Unknown. A splinter from doushio. Unique in being time-limited (only open 6 hours a day).
- Bun: A splinter from meguca's /a/.
- meguca --- /pol/, 2016: Unique in being the first outsider adoption from the original Doushio community. A splinter from 8chan's /pol/.
- Chen2 - /jp/ & /kr/, 2018: Second outsider adoption. An experiment run for this study.

### **§3.3 The Nature of Realtime Imageboards**

The change from static to realtime posting may seem like a minor innovation, but the deeply chaotic, self-organized nature of imageboard communities makes them highly receptive to any adjustment to the underlying system.

As such, the nature in which the community self-organizes on the board is radically effected in a few fundamental ways, all of which lead to an acceleration of the inherent network effects that have made traditional imageboards so resonant.

#### **§3.3.1 Thread Centralization**

The entirety of a realtime imageboard community finds themselves always gathered in the same, singular "active" thread - a stark contrast from the traditional imageboard's constant dispersal of the community across a multitude of threads.

The community collectively migrates to a new thread when the current one becomes too large and software begins to slow<sup>9</sup>. Threads have no defined topic and are host to conversations of all kinds.

The creation of new threads is a spontaneous and intuitive decision made by anyone in the community.

Sometimes the timing is too early and migration doesn't receive enough momentum to be understood as the new active thread, leaving the board with non-starters in its archive; some more resourceful communities make use of the non-starter threads when the correct time to migrate arrives as a rule. This element of spontaneous migration can be seen as representative of the inherent logic of imageboards: intuitive, anonymous, self-organized democracy.

<sup>9</sup> ~1000 posts on doushio, ~3000 on meguca

### §3.3.2 Imageboard-irc

The posts come rapidly and at an average length of one to three lines, in contrast to traditional imageboard's average post length of one to three paragraphs. Multiple, discreet conversations regularly occur simultaneously without confusion. In this aspect, the medium of conversation much more closely follows IRC than traditional imageboards.

However, in contrast to IRC, the post length is longer than IRC's average of less than ten words<sup>10</sup> and the filesharing functionality is more robust, with an emphasis on image sharing (hence the name "imageboard") that are embedded empathetically with the text, and finally, the users are anonymous, and the conversation is highly transient, allowing them to "post without ego," making the nature of the conversation largely similar to traditional imageboards. In this way, they are something a combination of both platforms, imageboard-irc.

### §3.3.3 Extension of Inherent Network Traits

Realtime imageboards not only retain traditional imageboard's fundamental emphases on anonymity and transiency but extend them, primarily due to the rapid rate of posting.

Conversation is centralized to a single main thread, produced in real-time, leading posts older than a few minutes to be rarely referenced as conversations rushes forward.

Anonymity is bolstered, too, as far as transiency benefits it: in its speed, and the attributive confusion gained in speed.

There is a sense of presence on the realtime imageboard: that if you look away for a moment, it will irreducibly change. Memetic artifacts are produced and consumed quickly, trends form and die on the order of days, not weeks.

The velocity of IRC introduced to the inherent structure of imageboards leads to a clear intensification of its culture-production: the sensation that it has reached even closer to the heart of the network is distinct.

In every aspect the inherent network effects achieved by the traditional imageboard, as described in §1.2 are accelerated.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a602658.pdf>, p 3

It remains unclear what forms we will see the realtime imageboard produce once mass adoption is achieved.

### **§3.4 Other Commentary**

#### **3.4.1 Note on Retroactive terminology**

The realtime innovation has resulted in a need to coin new terminology to describe the previous, and previously undifferentiated, iteration.

Users of realtime image boards refer to original imageboards as traditional or static imageboards and non-realtime posting as "static-" or "deadposting."

Realtime imageboards are sometimes referred to as liveboards, and realtime posting as live posting. The nature of realtime posting also makes obvious the typing speed of posters, assuredly a term to identify and mock low WPM posters was coined: snailposter.

The "realtime" designation is already used to describe traditional IRC as "realtime communication", due to being synchronous; supersynchronous communication or hyperrealtime communication is perhaps an accurate description of the format.

#### **§3.4.2 Note on Time-limited Boards**

Despite retaining static image board's functionality to host many threads on a board, it's found unnecessary to realtime imageboards. When retained, the function instead acts as a de facto archive of past threads for review.

However, some realtime boards (/tea/, and my own experiment, /syn/) choose to perform a reductionist elimination of multi-thread functionality, with little apparent consequence to the self-organization of the community beyond an extension to their transiency. Interestingly, they also operate on an open/close schedule, where the site is only online for certain hours of the day.

This forces the users to funnel into a smaller active window and presumably functions to make activity rates higher. It presumably also makes the storage costs of hosting much lower due to the daily purging of data.

## §3.5 Note on Antecedents

### **§3.5.1 Stickies**

Interestingly, the format does have two antecedents in the traditional imageboard experience. On the rare occasion of an unlocked (open to posting from non-staff) sticky (thread pinned to the top of the board by staff) on a popular board, there invariably results in a flood of users gathered in the same thread.

Whereas normal use of even a popular static imageboard would usually experience at most, in a highly active thread, about one reply a minute, a sticky could receive tens of replies in the same time; and where in normal use, the community of a static imageboard would always be entirely split among many threads (even many discussing the same topics), a sticky would gather a high portion of the community into a single thread—both factors producing a kind of pseudo-realtime analogue, as is sometimes noted by new users of realtime.

### **§3.5.2 Generals**

The other, impartial, antecedent to realtime imageboards are in the innovation of generals that came late in the traditional imageboard's lifetime. Unlike realtime posting, this innovation is not one of software but of community self-organization.

Generals first appeared on 4chan's /v/, the videogames board, with the release of Pokemon Black & White in 2011. The game received such a large, consistent and long running fanbase on the board that it transpired that there would always be at any time an active thread on the subject, a new one being made the moment the current one ran out of posts.

This resulted in a sub-community forming within the on-going threads that eventually had them be dubbed as "Pokemon B&W General" and numbered. Now, rather than spontaneous creation and discovery of a thread discussing the game as a subject, members of the sub-community could search for and always find their desired general that existed as a never ending thread.

The General concept was quickly picked up by the parallel sub-community around newly released Mass Effect 3 forming

nascently at the time and eventually began to spread to other boards. At this point in time, generals have become the dominant form of discussion on 4chan and despite their arrival often being heralded with serious detraction, they are quite possibly an inevitability following 4chan's meteoric rise in users; generals can be considered the organized form a traditional imageboard takes in the late-stage of its lifetime.

In any case, they can be seen as the predecessor to the realtime imageboard's own single active thread format, which could be understood as board-encompassing generals, or conversely, as if generals themselves were each their own independent board.



## §4 Realtime Imageboards Solve Free Exit

Realtime imageboards, heretofore largely unknown, resolve the key momentum problem that have kept traditional imageboards isolated to a few major sites, and so have high potential for mass adoption in a loose decentralized patchwork, moving closer to the inherent qualities of the community and greatly increasing its overall resilience in the face of a rapidly gentrifying internet.

### §4.1 Low Momentum Barrier

Due to the short message length and irc-like conversation of realtime imageboard discussion, a significantly lower online user count is required to project the "active" state than traditional imageboards<sup>11</sup>--the main barrier preventing all past attempts at Exit.

Even if only two users are online and posting, the illusion of very high activity is projected. A realtime board of no more than 5 or 6 regulars would be read as highly active throughout the day assuming users found their schedules sufficiently aligned such that at least two posters were engaged in conversation at all times.

Exit suddenly requires only a few like-minded individuals to perform a quiet departure, with enough strength to cultivate a stable, long-term base to accommodate a slowly growing population, rather than requiring the exceedingly rare mass exodus on the order of hundreds to reach stability.

A new board can achieve sustainability with a significantly smaller migration, and slowly accumulate new users from that point, needing neither the size or suddenness of a traditional imageboard's Exit.

### §4.2 Low Cost

Realtime imageboards are also low-cost relative to traditional imageboards. The lack of frequent threads, which require images on all imageboards, and nature of IRC-like posting leads to a lower rate of file-posting, contributing to lower bandwidth costs, and the heightened transiency means that

<sup>11</sup> Despite having a high ppd activity as noted above, meguca/pol/ reported a unique IP count of about 30 users online at any point in the day whereas 8chan generally reported ~200 total unique IP's within 24 hours

content stays stored for a shorter time. The natural upper limit of a community hovering lying around 100-150 users results in distributing the overhead between multiple hosts.

The net result is that an average size realtime imageboard can be hosted at zero-cost within Amazon Web Service's free tier, as demonstrated by our chen2 experiment. Money is removed as a barrier to Exit.

### **§4.3 Exit Case-study: /pol/ from 4chan to 8chan to Meguca**

The two cases of undeniably successful, meaningful Exit to a splinter imageboard are both tied to the same highly unique and uniquely controversial board, /pol/ - politically incorrect<sup>12</sup>. Notably, they were both triggered by the hostile misbehavior by the board's administration: the apparent driving point required for large scale migration; quality drop alone appears insufficient.

#### **§4.3.1 4chan -> 8chan**

Originating as 4chan's political board, the admin of 4chan temporarily destroyed the board by inviting the rest of the site to raid it and leaving it handicapped under a series of word filters, prompting its user base to perform a mass migration<sup>13</sup>. to a previously dead board of the same name on 8chan, an independent imageboard site that touted the ability for anyone to create a new board.

The new community thrived and it wasn't long before 8chan came to be seen not as a temporary bunker or an underdog splinter, but a rightful successor to their ruined home.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Originally known as /new/ - news, the board was removed from 4chan in January, 2011, shortly before its 1 year anniversary, and returned later that November under the new name, /pol/

<sup>13</sup> Known by the migrants as the Great Exodus. However, from the perspective of the users who did not migrate, the event was known as the /pol/ocaust

<sup>14</sup> Their original 4chan home board came to be characterized as existing exclusively of foreigners from Reddit- the second largest non-"social media" online community after 4chan and the most common source of the latter's newcomers. The users are known for having a distinctively uniform character and typing style that are both bitter to the imageboard poster's palette-and shills-the neologism for insincere posters who come to push a certain psyop program (Psychological Operations. The CIA and NSA have been known to target online communities for some time, though they certainly aren't the only groups with incentive to manipulate imageboard culture), political narrative or commercial product

The community enjoyed the freedom of speech and activity provided by what was initially a hands-off moderation team, who overtime began to increasingly intervene on the community in negative ways.

Attempts at Exit were made making use of 8chan's board creation feature, as well as to other imageboards<sup>15</sup> but all failed due to low momentum<sup>16</sup>. Complaints over moderation lowering the quality of discussion aside, the users remained on 8chan's /pol/.

#### §4.3.2 8chan -> Meguca

After two years of healthy activity on 8chan, the second migration occurred following a hack on April 1st, 2016 that ruined confidence in 8chan's management and data security<sup>17</sup> and discussed their options, many believing the datamining unacceptable and proposed using one of the bunkers as a new splinter.

Following a day of dispersal across multiple previously-dead boards, a new board was announced that quickly took prominence over all other splinters: a realtime board.

The realtime imageboard site meguca, previously host only to an /a/ (anime) community, had recently implemented an update that offered the ability for anyone to create a new board to be hosted on the site: the creation and introduction of a /pol/ board (dubbed "megu/pol/") was the first time the realtime board was ever introduced outside of its original /a/ community.

The board quickly reached extreme rates of activity with a ppd often outstripping 8chan /pol/ even at its height<sup>18</sup>, and while many users chose to remain on 8chan after it came back online - and all the other splinters returning to death - meguca/pol/ remained the dominant 8chan splinter two years after its

<sup>15</sup> Primarily, endchan and nextchan, which came to be seen as nothing more than "bunkers" to congregate on in the case of 8chan downtime

<sup>16</sup> The most successful fork at this time was undoubtedly /polk/

<sup>17</sup> In what became known as the April Fool's Hack, the site was taken down for multiple days with the homepage replaced and revealing the admin had been logging poster IP's (despite claiming otherwise) and evidence that the IP of a poster who made a mass shooting claim had been shared with federal agents.

<sup>18</sup> 3000ppd average during the first year; 8chan touted 1-2000ppd before the hack; 600ppd as of Nov 2018

founding, maintaining a dedicated community and high activity<sup>19</sup>.

Similar to the users who migrated from 4chan to 8chan, the users of meguca understood themselves to be the true vestigial remains of the original culture, carrying on the mantle of the community, and those who remained on 8chan to be a foreign mixture of cancer and shills.

Despite the attrition that doubly accumulated being the splinter of a splinter, the new board was a success: only possible due to the uniquely low momentum barrier of realtime imageboards.

<sup>19</sup> ~2000ppd as of Nov 2018

## §5 Towards a Patchwork Future

Realtime imageboards extend the inherent network effects of the traditional imageboard while dissolving their Exit barriers. In an era where the imageboard seems to be dying in the face of manipulative, self-limiting Web 2.0 social networks, the realtime imageboard offers a way forward.

Other future-minded implementations have sought to modernize imageboards by employing decentralized protocols to achieve robustness and security from the State<sup>20</sup>, but the primary barrier to a healthy universe of online communities is ease of Exit.

Imageboards fail due to unassimilated immigration and moderation overreach, not State threats, and contemporaneous privacy-focused solutions do nothing to eliminate the inertial barrier to Exit, and suffer the same consequences for it.

What does robustness matter if there's no one to use it?

We envision a Web 3.0 patchwork of thriving micro-communities, networked by webrings but independent in hosting, built fundamentally on the principles of anonymity and transiency-diametrically opposed to Web 2.0's centralized, identity-based social networks.

Realtime imageboards are non-manipulative, easily self-hosted, founded in anonymity, and enable a genuine market of ideas.

Knowledge aggregation is a powerful tool, producing synergistic insights more powerful than any individual analysis; accelerating the internet towards true interconnectedness is essential for reaping the benefits of the noosphere.

As imageboards broke through the malaise of the millennial web, showing what true hyper-networking could achieve, realtime imageboards could lead us to the next stage forward.

<sup>20</sup> E.g. NNTPchan, Zerochan