

I HAVE CAST MY COMMENTARY ON M.96 IN THE FORM OF ANOTHER KIND OF MEME KNOWN AS "INCREASINGLY VERBOSE." IN INSTANCES OF THE INCREASINGLY VERBOSE MEME, A GIVEN IMAGE IS PAIRED WITH SOME TEXT, USUALLY SIDE BY SIDE, THOUGH IN THIS CASE THE TEXT IS INTEGRATED INTO THE IMAGE. THE IMAGE AND TEXT PAIR ARE THEN ITERATED TWO OR THREE TIMES, WITH THE IMAGE BECOMING INCREASINGLY ABSTRACT OR SPARSE AND THE TEXT BECOMING INCREASINGLY LONG, OR VERBOSE. (OBVIOUSLY THE NAME "INCREASINGLY VERBOSE" FOR THIS MEME DERIVES FROM WHAT HAPPENS TO THE TEXT ALONE. OTHER NAMES FOR IT FOCUS ON THE IMAGE, SUCH AS "MEME DECAY" OR "DECONSTRUCTED MEMES.") FOR ME, THE CHARM OF THIS MEME LIES IN THE WAY ONE CAN "SAY THE SAME THING" AND YET, IN MAKING IT MORE VERBOSE, IMPLY WHAT IS SAID, MAKING EXPLICIT THINGS THAT MIGHT BE LEFT IMPLICIT IN THE ORIGINAL SAYING. (THIS PRESUPPOSES THAT THE ORIGINAL TEXT IS THE TRANSCRIPTION OF AN ACTUAL SPEECH ACT, AND NOT SIMPLY DISEMBODIED LANGUAGE. OTHERWISE, WHAT SENSE CAN BE MADE OF MERELY IMPLICIT CONTENT?) IN THIS CASE, I USE THE ARTIST'S ORIGINAL MEME AS THE FIRST PANEL OF AN INCREASINGLY VERBOSE MEME. THE SUBSEQUENT TWO ITERATIONS, IN WHICH THE "SAME THING" THAT IS SAID IN THE MEME IS SAID WITH INCREASING VERBOSITY, CONSTITUTE MY COMMENTARY ON IT. THIS FORM OF COMMENTARY SEEMS PARTICULARLY APPROPRIATE FOR THIS MEME, SINCE THE MEME ITSELF PLAYS WITH THE MINIMAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TEXT AND NO-TEXT. SINCE BATMAN AND ROBIN SAY SIMPLY THAT THEY ARE PERFORMING AN ACTION WHICH IS ENTIRELY MANIFEST, IT IS ALMOST AS IF THEY ARE SAYING NOTHING AT ALL. AS THE COMMENTARY DEVELOPS, THOUGH, ENTIRELY NEW CONTENT, DERIVING FROM FREUD AND FROM THE PHILOSOPHER OF LANGUAGE JOHN PERRY TURNS THE ALMOST-SILENCE INTO A POSITIVE EXPLOSION OF MEANING!

See M.70, on increasing degrees of abstraction in musical analysis (Heinrich Schenker).

The first panel of the commentary reproduces the original meme. That meme, therefore is both itself and part of a commentary on itself.

In the second panel, the indexical expressions of the first panel are replaced by proper names and hence the first-person of the verbs is replaced by the third-person. (This shows something interesting. The person of the verb, first or third, seems to be sensitive to the means by which the subject is referred to and not just by the relation the subject has to the speaker. One might have thought the first-person would be used whenever the subject is the speaker, but in fact, it only occurs with the pronoun "I." Other expressions that also refer to the speaker, such as the speaker's name, do not take the first person. And so, *mutatis mutandis*, for the third-person.)

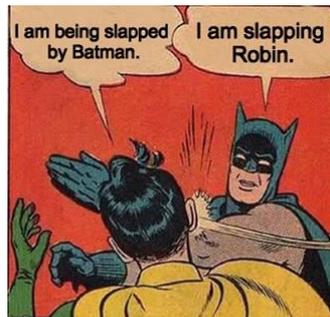
Yet the pronouns have not disappeared, and resurface in the Robin's statement "I like this" and Batman's "I don't want this."

In the third panel, the pronouns and names are brought together in an allusion to John Perry's classic paper "The Essential Indexical." Perry argues that when we use indexicals, we express propositions that can be expressed without them, but in distinctive manners keyed to the indexicals we use. Thus, if Batman were to say "I am slapping Robin," the proposition he expresses could also be expressed by an utterance, by anyone, of the sentence "Batman is slapping Robin." Batman's manner of expressing this proposition, however, is first-personal and is tied to the use of the pronoun "I." Robin can also express something using this manner, were he to utter the sentence "I am slapping Robin," but what he would express in that manner would be a different proposition, namely, the proposition anyone could express by uttering the sentence "Robin is slapping Robin" (which of course is false).

Indexical expressions are expressions that vary their reference in a systematic way in response to context. Here the commentary on the commentary is referring to the "I" in both Robin's and Batman's speech bubbles. "I" varies its referent systematically, referring, on any given occasion, to its utterer on that occasion. Other indexical expressions include "now" and "here." They are keyed to the time and place of utterance, rather than the utterer.

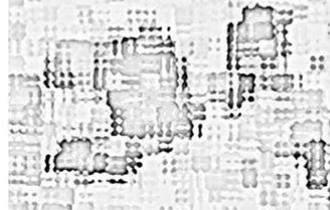
It contains only redundant text. M.96 is in some way equivalent to M.76, a meme without text at all.

Cf. Nancy McWilliams: "The recurrence in the therapeutic relationship of the main emotional currents in the client's history is a wondrous phenomenon. What makes it especially fascinating is that both parties to therapy start out earnestly resolving that what happened to the client earlier will not happen this time around. The patient is looking to undo the prior damage and thus tries to choose a therapist who offers a contrasting experience to the one internalized in childhood; the therapist longs not to fail the patient as the early caregivers did. And yet with stunning inevitability, both parties find themselves caught up in repetition" (199).



A child is being beaten. Beaten by Batman, Robin is that child. I like this. Despite his best intentions, and with stunning regularity, Batman finds himself caught up in the repetition of what happened to Robin. But what was it, exactly, that did happen to Robin? I don't want this.

A child is being slapped by Batman. Robin is that child. What, if anything, do I add to my knowledge when I come to know that I am Robin? Do I know who I am? Who Robin is? Do I want this? The proposition BATMAN IS SLAPPING ROBIN is being entertained by Batman in a manner in which only he can entertain it. It is a first-personal manner. I am Batman. I am slapping Robin. I need - this. With stunning regularity and despite my best intentions, I am Robin.



There is psychoanalytic theme running through the commentary which brings out the interplay of masochistic and sadistic currents contained in the image and the artist's use of it. Robin's "I like this" and "Do I want this?" suggest an ambivalent masochistic pleasure in being slapped. Ditto for Batman's "I don't want this" and "I need this." (And my use of "want," "need," and "like" also suggests variability in the modality of desire.)

In the second panel, Robin describes his own situation in terms of the title of Freud's classic paper on beating fantasies. Batman stresses the inevitability with which the pair fall into this violent pose, as analyst and patient will, inevitably, re-enact the patient's trauma. Yet the trauma they are forced into repeating remains a mystery as yet. The image of the meme is given without context, a mysterious and mysteriously repeated primal scene.

Batman's final assertion that he is Robin brings out to what degree the artist's use of the image in his memes is designed to express intrapsychic conflict. The beater and the beaten are the same person and this person both wants and does not want the slapping.

The fluid identities of Batman and Robin in this context are connected to the issue of pronouns and the manners of saying things discussed by Perry in "The Essential Indexical." Does either know who he really is in this scenario? Are they interchangeable? Is what differs only the manner of their occupancy of common roles?

See M.49 on pronouns and indexicals. See M.75 on sentences such as "I am Robin." Here discussed by Perry in M.75, as discussed by Strawson.

See M.6 and commentary ad loc. See also M.109 and M.110 on intrapsychic conflict versus collaboration.