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I Think About the Roman Empire Every Day is a satirical, Latin-language, media-archaeological poetry film that responds to the viral 2023 social media trend revealing an everyday male preoccupation with the Roman Empire. While the meme circles around humorous gender norms, the work traces its deeper cultural currents: Rome as a mythic ideal in certain, often more conservative spaces, but also as an ongoing civilizational substrate shaping basically everything from law, architecture, social norms to collective imagination. Combining machinima, TikTok dance video performance, and TEMU readymades, the project juxtaposes playful digital reenactment with critical reflection. Using 3D scans of Roman artefacts, AI-generated sequences hovering at the edge of so-called “AI slop”, and performative elements, it questions what it means to live in the successor states of empire, how historical power structures subtly endure, how an imagined Rome shaped virtually all of European geopolitics starting with Charlemagne, how imperialism and cultural narratives, ideals of civilization, and political visions still pivot around Rome. It examines how Rome’s legacy is continually rewritten—romanticized, weaponized, or deconstructed—depending on the ideological context. After all, the artist, too, thinks about the Roman Empire every day.

Keywords: Meme Culture, Machinima,
AI Art, Media Archaeology, TikTok
Performance, Readymades.

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Fig. 1. Screenshot of *I Think About the Roman Empire Every Day*.



I Think About the Roman Empire Every Day

Media Archaeology, Meme Culture, and the Afterlife of Empire

I Think About the Roman Empire Every Day is a satirical, Latin-language media-archaeological poetry film that responds to a viral social media phenomenon from 2023: the revelation, popularized through TikTok and Twitter, that a large number of men claim to think about the Roman Empire on a near-daily basis. While the meme circulated primarily as a humorous commentary on gendered preoccupations and online masculinity, it also inadvertently exposed a deeper and more persistent cultural structure: Rome as a mythic reference point, an ideological reservoir, and an enduring symbolic architecture underpinning Western notions of civilization, power, and historical continuity. Rather than treating the meme only as a fleeting internet joke, the project approaches it as a symptomatic cultural artefact, as an emanation of a subconscious cultural undercurrent manifesting itself through modern-day folklore: internet and meme culture. The question is not whether men actually think about Rome every day, but why *Rome*, specifically, remains such a stable object of fascination within contemporary imaginaries. What cultural work does “Rome” perform when it reappears in digital vernaculars? What forms of identification, authority, nostalgia, and legitimacy are being rehearsed, consciously or unconsciously, through this invocation? And how does this obsession intersect with present-day ideological formations, particularly in civilizationalist discourses?

Rome as Meme, Rome as Structure

The Roman Empire occupies a peculiar dual position: it is at once a distant historical entity and an ever-present conceptual framework. In online spaces, Rome often functions as shorthand for order, masculinity, hierarchy, endurance, and “lost greatness.” The meme economy

condenses these associations into an easily shareable format, where humour masks ideology and repetition normalizes myth. The project situates this phenomenon within a broader lineage of what could be described as the afterlives of empire: the persistence of imperial logics beyond their formal political demise. Rome is not merely remembered; it is continually re-performed. Its imagery, legal concepts, architectural forms, and political metaphors permeate modern Europe and its successor states. From neoclassical government buildings to legal systems grounded in Roman law, from imperial symbolism in fascist aesthetics to contemporary far-right invocations of “Western civilization,” Rome remains an active semiotic resource. Historically, this continuity was explicitly formalized during the reign of Charlemagne, whose coronation in 800 CE marked a deliberate attempt to revive Roman imperial authority in Christianized form, establishing a model of *translatio imperii* that would shape European geopolitics for centuries. The film argues that the meme’s resonance cannot be understood without acknowledging this longue durée of imperial continuity. Rome is not simply a past empire; it is a recurring template through which power is imagined, legitimized, and aestheticized.

Media Archaeology and Digital Reenactment

Methodologically, *I Think About the Roman Empire Every Day* draws on media-archaeological approaches that understand contemporary media not as a rupture from history, but as a recursive system in which older forms, logics, and fantasies reappear in new technological guises. The project treats TikTok, AI image generators, 3D scanning technologies, and machinima not as neutral tools, but as sites where historical imaginaries are actively recomposed.

The film combines several visual and performative strategies:

- **Machinima sequences** constructed from 3D scans of Roman artefacts, set in space.
- **AI-generated sequences** treating AI image and video generators as access points to the collective subconscious, not shying away from “AI slop” aesthetics.
- **TikTok dance performances**, using the language of text overlays in social media-short form content, deliberately anachronistic, staged against Roman iconography, emphasizing the collision between algorithmic attention economies and imperial spectacle.
- **3D scans of Roman artefacts**, self-sourced from museum collections and archaeological sites, recontextualized as manipulable digital objects rather than untouchable relics.
- **TEMU readymades**, cheap mass-produced pseudo-Roman objects, foregrounding the commodification and aesthetic flattening of classical heritage.

Through these strategies, the project stages Rome as a looped simulation, less a stable historical referent than a modular visual language endlessly recombined across platforms.

Fig. 2. Screenshot of *I Think About the Roman Empire Every Day*.



Latin as Affective Interface

The choice to work with Latin as the primary language of the film is both satirical and critical. Latin operates here not as a vehicle of historical authenticity, but as an affective interface. Stripped of everyday intelligibility for most contemporary audiences, it becomes a sound-based marker of authority, antiquity, and abstraction. The language functions similarly to how “Latin-ness” is deployed in legal terminology, mottos, academic rituals, and ecclesiastical contexts: it signals continuity, seriousness, and legitimacy without necessarily communicating semantic content. By using Latin in a poetic manner and taking the perspective of someone telling a future of space colonization through the female orator’s female descendants, the film destabilizes this authority and adds the element of a decidedly female will to power. The language becomes performative rather than informative, exposing how much of Rome’s power today resides not in concrete historical knowledge, but in atmosphere, tone, and symbolic weight.

Empire, Masculinity, and Algorithmic Desire

The viral meme that inspired the project is deeply entangled with questions of masculinity. Online discussions often frame men’s fascination with Rome as harmless nerdiness or historical curiosity. However, the film proposes that this fixation also reflects contemporary crises of identity, authority, and belonging. In a moment where traditional models of masculinity are contested, Rome appears as a compensatory fantasy: a world imagined as orderly, hierarchical, and unambiguous. Digital platforms amplify this dynamic. Algorithms reward content that resonates emotionally and ideologically, allowing imperial nostalgia to circulate alongside fitness content, “trad” aesthetics, military history, and civilizational discourse. The project situates the Roman meme within this broader ecology of algorithmic desire, where historical myths are repackaged as lifestyle signifiers. Rather than directly condemning this phenomenon, the film adopts satire and over-identification as critical strategies. By exaggerating Rome’s omnipresence, by insisting that ev-

everyone, including the filmmaker, thinks about the Roman Empire every day, the work reveals the absurdity and pervasiveness of the myth.

Fig. 3. Screenshot of *I Think About the Roman Empire Every Day*.



Continuity, Control, and the Successor States of Empire

A central concern of the project is what it means to live in the successor states of empire. Europe presents itself as post-imperial, progressive, and modern, yet its political structures, borders, and cultural hierarchies remain deeply shaped by imperial histories. Of course, this is complex and not necessarily questionable *per se*. Rome serves as a foundational myth through which these continuities are naturalized. The film suggests that imperial power does not primarily persist through overt domination, but through narrative continuity. By repeatedly evoking themselves as inheritors of Rome, contemporary political imaginaries position themselves as the rightful custodians of civilization—not always legitimately. In this sense, *I Think About the Roman Empire Every Day* is not only concerned with Rome as a historical object, but also with Rome as a technology of control, a projection canvas, and a narrative infrastructure that organizes time, legitimacy, and identity.

Artistic Positioning and Reflexivity

Importantly, the work does not position the artist outside of these structures. The concluding gesture, “After all, the filmmaker, too, thinks about the Roman Empire every day”, is not merely ironic. It acknowledges complicity. To engage critically with Rome is already to participate in its ongoing life. The project thus operates as a reflexive loop: a critique that recognizes its own entanglement in the systems it examines. This reflexivity aligns the work with contemporary artistic research practices that foreground situated knowledge, partiality, and performative inquiry. Rather than offering definitive answers, the film proposes a space of tension between fascination and critique, play and analysis, immersion and distance.

Conclusion

I Think About the Roman Empire Every Day treats a viral meme as an entry point into a deeper investigation of cultural memory, media archaeology, and imperial afterlives. By mobilizing digital reenactment, performative strategies, and poetic language, the project exposes how Rome continues to function as a structuring myth within contemporary algorithmic cultures. The work suggests that the persistence of empire is not merely a matter of history, but of repetition, of images, narratives, affects, and platforms. In this sense, thinking about the Roman Empire every day is not an eccentric habit, but a condition of modernity itself.

Link to Poetry Film: <https://vimeo.com/1091433500/03e1fa8ea6>

Fig. 4. Screenshot of *I Think About the Roman Empire Every Day*.



Poem

and in the future
when we have branched out to the stars
our cartographers will have to develop
new projections for their maps
we haven't conquered the blue sky yet
and the dust I will turn into
will travel in cosmic clouds
every empire falls eventually
but no empire ever really dies
the way people do

and I am sure that future archaeologists
will find my forgotten bones
they will try to reconstruct my story
they will clone me and
will get everything wrong
they will not remember the colour of my eyes
they will not remember the way I laughed
they will make up stories of someone
who was alive before we went to the stars

and every step I take
and everything I do
paves the way for emerging civilizations
of new peoples yet to come
so many of them will be born
with my daughter's mitochondria
they will fight and kill each other
some of my descendants will be
victims and rapists
some will be
saints and murderers
some will see new planets
some will scorch the earth

all the traces of extinguished fires
that taint the soil for millennia
maybe I will have set fire here on purpose
to lead them away from buried treasures
but I will leave almost nothing material
everything in the ether
everything else decayed
I will haunt empire

et olim, cum ad astra ramos extendimus
nostri mappae pictores
novas figurationes orbis fingent
nondum vicimus caelum caeruleum
atque pulvis, in quem redeam
vagabitur inter nubes aetheris
cuncta imperia tandem ruunt
sed nullum vere perit
sicut perit homo

scio enim,
futuros reperturos esse meos cineres
archaeologos alienos
temptabunt vitam meam componere
me referent imaginibus falsis
colorem oculorum meorum non noverint
risum meum non audierint
fingent fabulas
de femina viva
quae ante astra visa est

et omnis gressus meus, omnis actus
viam sternet gentibus venturis
populis nondum natis
ex mitochondriis filiae meae
plures oriantur
bellabunt, interficient
ex stirpe mea erunt
alii sancti, alii latrones
quidam victimae, quidam stupratores
quidam novas terras videbunt
quidam hanc terram comburent

vestigia ignium extinctorum
quae per saecula terras maculant
fortasse ignem ipse posui
ut thesauros absconditos fallerem
at nihil fere relinquens
materiam sub sole
totum in aethere evanescam
cetera marcescent
imperium ipse infestabo