

Digitalized Natural Selection: The Importance of the Internet, Literature, and Art in Alterhuman Communities

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The alterhuman communities are largely digital in their current iterations. They rely heavily on content created, cultivated, and curated through the Internet: from essays, to comics, to personal websites, to digital Howls (in spaces like Second Life, VRChat, Discord, etc.), most of the foundation for creation and communication within these communities relies on this unique feature.

But it's no surprise that the alterhuman communities are so reliant on the Internet for keeping in contact with one another: in-person meetings that don't coincide with other large-scale groups congregating, like at furry conventions, are fairly uncommon or even downright rare, both because of how scattered we tend to be, and how we tend to not be geographically-focused in where our communities are divided, instead being more mindful towards the interpretation or details of experience and identity. Even when there may be a high concentration of alterhumans in a single area, they may not intermingle due to difference in identity or experience—such as therians not welcoming fictionkin at their gatherings, or otherkin not welcoming copinglinkers.

Internet netiquette has also evolved to become a large part of our spaces and how we orient ourselves with one another: We tend to not go barging into one another's spaces with the intent of causing havoc or wrecking house, even when those spaces are wholly digital, in the form of Discords, Skypes, or even tags. While anonymous hate mail and harassment campaigns aren't nonexistent, it certainly feels like more often people will back up commentary or arguments because of differences with others with their own community face and history. We also “talk with our feet” insofar as we tend to show our support of positions and politics within spaces through follows, reblogs, and likes primarily, and with re-writing and publishing our own perspectives and how we agree or disagree with the most popular or extreme opinions on the matter. It's a balancing give-and-take act, with members constantly shifting and changing the playing field through their own contributions.

It's easy to wonder if the alterhuman communities would look anywhere near the same if they had stayed in or migrated to largely physical spaces, and to that question I believe the answer would solidly be no. Because of the way the Internet forces the alterhuman communities to evolve through discussion and debate, we've evolved into ways that prioritize individuals who can best convey their ideas in understandable, easily dissected ways. Doublespeak, pseudointellectualism, and sanctimony isn't well-received, and the regular use of it usually relegates someone into being pushed out of many alterhuman circles due to an inability to clearly communicate.

Partially through this prioritization of language, we see individuals who can eloquently explain or display their thoughts, feelings, and experiences particularly respected within nonhuman and alterhuman spaces: but these specific types of creators and debaters aren't *just* prized for their abilities on these fronts. Their works of art and the records of their discussion serve important primary purposes in the community regarding representation and memory.

Because of the nonphysicality and constant changing of online spaces, it can be difficult to pinpoint and track aspects of the alterhuman community's history. Websites are constantly in flux, and what one person may have taken for granted as a necessary community resource or classic community experience may be all but forgotten ten years later, with little to no trace of it findable in any way beyond word-of-mouth. This ability for our community to almost lose time in a way, where important, pivotal moments may be entirely lost to the abyss of Internet 404 pages, is something that has functioned as a driving agent, forcing the alterhuman communities to adapt or die out.

I propose that the alterhuman communities especially appreciate and respect their creators and discourses because of a form of digitalized natural selection: online communities which survive over the course of several decades and which don't have some form of unifying, existing foundation that exists physically outside of these spaces—such as fandoms and religions do—rely wholly on not only online creations and discussions, but also on how well such is tracked and recorded. Without a form of community memory, you either end up with the group dissipating entirely or the group getting continuously resurrected and subsequently dying off over and over again in different iterations that end up recycling the same beginning dialogues and topics. A

dead community or zombie community isn't a successful community, by almost all standards.

Contributions and creators on the artistic front, especially, also function as important representation within alterhuman communities, for alterhumans. While some popularized fiction may have themes which are reminiscent of these identities—especially fiction surrounding were-creatures and other transformation-based works—there's just the fact that if someone wants to see their experiences and aspects of their life accurately portrayed, no one is going to do them right outside of other individuals within the alterhuman communities. Otherwise you end up with mockumentaries like *I Think I'm an Animal!* where alterhumans are meant to be the butt of the joke, or films like *Wolf*, that center around species dysphoria and portray it in an incredibly questionable light.

The art of the community also serves a secondary purpose in forming something of a community mythology. From the community memory you have connections and pinpoints of facts, but from the art and emotional economies you can trace and experience yourself that is interlaced in the tapestry of this history, you get legends, stories, and cherished art pieces. It's where the *Their Theres* are carried on from generation to generation, where legends of "this one otherkin, who..." get shared around the bonfires of Howls. It's where the rising theta delta meets the falling elven star in a night sky of a hundred different comics, podcasts, short stories, plays, microfictions, poems, novels, games, and zines.

While it's easy to reduce the communities to their bare-bones quantitative components, these emotional aspects are just as important. It's the spark of life that makes alterhumanity and the communities centered around it so engaging to interact with and vibrant overall. Without the combination of the effects of a primarily digital atmosphere, and a community which survives through such a harsh environment by recording where it's been and what it's doing or otherwise leaving their mark, there's a well chance that the alterhuman communities would exist in an entirely unrecognizable form without these factors.