What did you think of the readings?

It's important not to mix up blog memes (little questionnaires that go around the blogsphere) and live memes. While blog memes have many of the same characteristics, they usually aren't very organic or gestalt-affecting, so it's useful to consider them as at best a degenerate form.

Csikszentmihalyi's article is a very nice introduction, I think. Gladwell doesn't seem to know that he's talking about the supporting infrastructure of memetics, but he is.

What are memes and what are their basic rules/behaviors?

Memes are ideas that (1) reproduce and (2) can vary between people, and (3) upon which a kind of natural selection selects some variations for continued reproduction.

What's the difference between memes and language?

Is language the sum of all memes? This possibility is especially apparent in logogramatic languages, like Chinese. Each symbol is an idea, or a meme. Given how thoroughly language structures our thinking, could they be the same?

What's the difference between memes and genes?

Aside from the material differences, are there different ways evolution works for life and for ideas?

Activity: What memetic drifts is your field experiencing?

What new ideas are coming on the scene in computer science, economics, mathematics, etc?

Activity: Try to propagate a meme.

Measure your success with a survey, word-frequency analysis, or a google trends graph.

Is software a collection of memes?

Software is structured logos. You could say that when we write code, we are writing the genetics of a vast meme– which in turn is also a network of smaller memes.

At the same time, in software development, we now realize that the work of making software is actually the work of designing user experiences. Every piece of software structures your world differently, just like a meme.

How healthy are the populations of certain memes?

How is "that's what she said" doing (discuss the power of phrases)? What about "global citizenship" (discuss idea adoption)? What about "genetic enhancement" (discuss emotional ties)? Or "tax relief" (discuss Don't Think of an Elephant)? Or "meme" (discuss meta-memology (how does thinking about memes affect our thinking?))?

ES.256 The Coming Years
Spring 2008