# WHAT THE CAT DRAGGED IN

*Mechanics of Stupidism*

SIZZ TUNA

# WHAT THE CAT DRAGGED IN

*Mechanics of Stupidism*

SIZZ TUNA

# Introduction

## *A Tail of Online Stupidity*

On Halloween 2024, a tight-knit community on the online messaging platform Discord would be changed forever by the arrival of an account claiming to be the spirit of a small dog. The actions of this account, its followers, and those opposed to it over the next month and a half would form the historical basis of a rapidly emerging new religion: Stupidism. Until the dog's departure from the community (referred to colloquially as "the server") in December of that same year, a Stupidist ethos rapidly developed that would continue to mark server culture.

Due to the recency of its origin and the digitally archived nature of text-based Discord conversations, Stupidism provides an excellent opportunity to study tensions present in the emergence of a religious tradition, and how these tensions are either resolved or incorporated into a religious canon. How are conceptions of divinity constructed and attributed? What is the relationship between humanity and the divine? What role does religious authority play in the shaping of tradition, and how does it form?

In particular, I want to draw attention to Stupidism's environment as an explanation for many of its core beliefs—nurture matters as much as nature, as it were. Inhabiting the digital space of Discord, server members are partially disembodied, experiencing each other only through text and images seen on a screen outside of the occasional voice

call. How does the condition of the human body in a given space shape the emerging

divine body?

In attempting to answer these questions, I interviewed four different community

members who directly engaged with the dog's account during its time on the server and

who claim a variety of different relations to Stupidism. Emulating the same conditions in

which they interacted with the dog and with each other during this time, I interviewed

them via text-based messaging over Discord. In many ways, how they utilize and how

they describe this environment provides its own insights into the way they conceptualize

Stupidism and the historical events surrounding its emergence. For the sake of

anonymity, the individuals I cite have had their names altered, and for the sake of clarity,

I have made occasional grammar edits to their responses. The content of their answers,

however, remains unchanged.

## ~ A BRIEF HISTORY OF STUPIDISM ~

Although Stupidism may have been born with the arrival (or, in a sense, the

re-arrival) of the dog, its roots trace back much further, to the appearance of a similar cat

that previous summer. Sculpted out of clay by one of the server's members, this figure

would over time come to be known as "That Stupid Cat" and would pop up in a series of

images and gifs, and finally, a custom emoji that began to see popular use. Thus, a

character created by a single server member began to integrate itself into wider server

culture.

The dog, which quickly gained the matching name of "That Stupid Dog", was made

later that fall, and its story started out similar, appearing first as a gif and then becoming

an emoji. Just three days after its debut, however, a community poll declared That Stupid Cat the more popular of the two; as a result, a short video depicting the cartoonish death of That Stupid Dog was posted by its original creator, and from that point onward, the Dog's emoji was removed and mentions of it ceased.



That Stupid Cat and That Stupid Dog, as they originally appeared.

That is, until its Halloween 2024 return, as previously mentioned. Claiming to be the spirit of That Stupid Dog risen from the dead, the newly joined account began its campaign of revenge, vowing to destroy the server using the power of "That Stupid Death Laser". Over time, it built a group of followers it referred to as its coalition (or, alternatively, members of its "grassroots movement"), while other server members built a resistance movement that rallied around the image of That Stupid Cat instead. In the conflict that ensued, ultimately culminating in what server members today call the "Stupidocalypse" and the final banishment of That Stupid Dog back to the Spirit World, the core tenets and structure of Stupidism rapidly emerged, split into two main denominations following the Cat and the Dog, respectively (though both figures retain importance to both traditions).

When I first began speaking with my interlocutors for this project, one of the first things I asked each of them was to describe how they viewed That Stupid Cat and Dog, their relationship to Stupidism, and what it means to them to be stupid. Aoi, an ardent follower of the Cat from the outset, responded as such to the latter:

> To be stupid isn't just about stupidity. It's the culmination of a set of shared values, irreplaceable experiences, an unbreakable bond between every stupid individual, conjoined by our shared lacked of knowledge, and by the acceptance of the fact that one only knows it knows nothing, and so that we'll never learn anything for the Stupidists that we are. Like my grandfather used to say: *"One Stupidist might know nothing, but a hundred know nothing a hundred times."*

Stupidity, in this context, entails not a lack of intelligence, but a rejection of the possibility of knowledge. This strong philosophical skepticism does not, however, lead to a wholly nihilistic outlook; rather, it frees followers to act stupidly—that is, illogically—in order achieve greater happiness than the expectations of modern secular society would normally allow. By rejecting common societal norms of conduct, a strong community (one of "unbreakable bonds") is formed that can act as a structure of support for one another. Taking the importance of stupidity a step further, another interlocutor of a similar background, Gatiki, explained:

> To be stupid means to be. It is truly a different way of living and quite honestly has given me direction in my life of previously not [being] stupid. To be stupid means to ascend into a higher being comparable to that of [That Stupid Dog] and [That Stupid Cat]. It's truly the ultimate goal of Stupidists.

Stupidity here is attributed a divine connotation—by embodying That Stupid Dog and That Stupid Cat in one's thoughts and actions, one can come closer to achieving their elevated status. In a sense, to be truly stupid is to achieve nirvana, to cast aside all the systems of one's prior existence and embrace a higher kind of being. The ultimate goal of Stupidists, as Gatiki puts it, is to achieve an interior state of stupidity that, when combined with changes in one's exterior actions, will generate a more fulfilling life.

For followers of That Stupid Dog, Stupidism also takes on a certain political tint. As Wander, a member of the Dog's coalition, told me,

> His political agendas were simple but effective. "Stand proud, stand Stupid" was the slogan of the pamphlets (that were unfortunately not circulated before his death). It went against the consumerist politics in place at the time, advocating for a simple, stupid lifestyle, which many decided to adopt (myself included. My room has only the necessary furniture and decor… because I forgot to put decor in my stupidity).

There is a similar end goal here as there is for followers of That Stupid Cat, namely a "simple, stupid lifestyle". However, the conflict between this and modern norms of secular living (i.e. "consumerist politics") is more explicitly drawn—in Wander's case for the accumulation of material objects. During its time on the server, That Stupid Dog spoke frequently of its opposition to what it called "the Establishment"—what exactly it was referring to was never clearly defined, but there is a clear message here for the Dog's followers: you are not bound to follow the means of happiness that the dominant culture lays out for you.
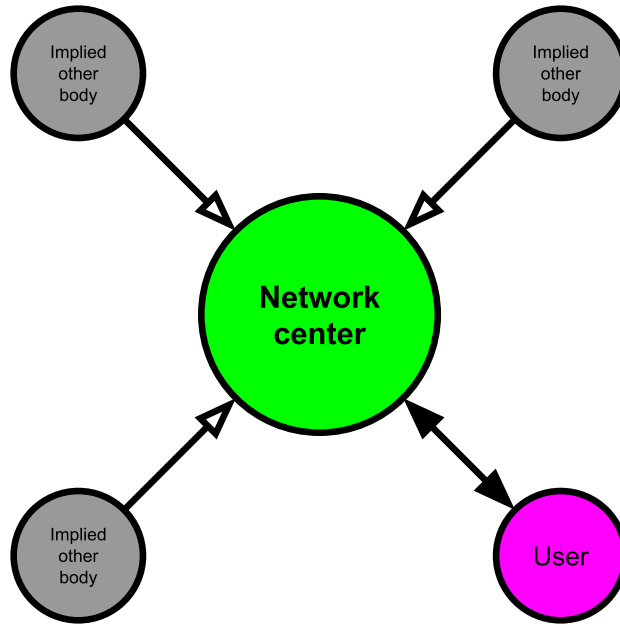
It is also worth noting here that over time, smaller sects of Stupidism have popped up among the more popular Cat and Dog dichotomy. The Cult of Everypuppy,

# *Chapter 3*
## *(Im)Material Bodies, Digital Space*

---

When interacting over text, a sense of embodiment is lost that is normally present in face-to-face communication. The individuals interacting cannot directly see each other, hear each other, feel each other, and so on, and the environment they interact within is nothing more than words on a page or on a screen. With the advancement and growing accessibility of a variety of communication technologies, we as a species have constantly had to redefine what it means to be present. When my sister FaceTimes me, are we in that moment "with" each other? What about a phone call? A text message? What is the baseline of sensory interaction necessary to mark two bodies as present with one another?

In a Discord server, as with any online messaging service, bodies communicate through a mediating buffer—all those attached to and feeding into the central network assume there are bodies much like their own on the other side, though they cannot interact directly. However, over time, the locations of peers' bodies can begin to shift in the mind of a user who does not interact with them anywhere else, and the boundaries delineating bodies in turn become blurred.[1]

In the absence of direct interaction with the implied other bodies, the user's perception of the location of said bodies' presence may shift to be *inside* the network's center rather than—or *alongside*—resting outside it.

In the context of Stupidism, this phenomenon is multiplied. As discussed in chapter 1, access to the clay figures of That Stupid Cat and That Stupid Dog—the original, material bodies of the deities—is incredibly limited. Thus, the only form of contact possible for Stupidists is an indirect kind made possible by representations of the Dog and Cat's bodies through the server via images, videos, etc. As a result, what Stupidists consider to be "real" or to be "physical" shifts away from popular understandings of the terms.

This particularly struck me in a conversation I had with Finn, one of the original members of That Stupid Dog's coalition. He stands as an interesting figure, at once claiming to be an "unbiased third party observer" who does not believe strongly in Stupidism despite his ties to the Dog, yet also standing as a deeply ingrained community

member who played a principal role in the Stupidocalypse. Though he may not believe

in the foundational Stupidist assertion that stupidity leads to a better life, many auxiliary

aspects of Stupidist thought appear in his conceptions surrounding the bodies of That

Stupid Dog and That Stupid Cat, likely as a result of spending so much time in the same

community network where Stupidism emerged. Simply put, he serves as a helpful

gateway into understanding conventional ways of thinking in the server. When asked

about means of contact between the Dog and Cat and their followers, he notes the server

as the only locus of communication, and continues:

> However, it's important to note that while That Stupid Dog had a physical presence in the
>
> server to communicate with members and grow his movement, I do not believe That Stupid
>
> Cat has ever made an appearance—its following only grew as a reaction to the Dog. If That
>
> Stupid Cat has any way of communicating with its followers, I am not aware of it—it would
>
> seem to me that its followers perform acts in its name without any proof of actual
>
> endorsement.

Pressing him on what he meant by "physical presence", he explained,

> Well I suppose in simple terms, That Stupid Dog had a Discord account. It sent messages
>
> that everyone could read and respond to, it spoke up with its own voice, it declared its own
>
> intentions and opinions. It physically interacted with people. There was no ambiguity to its
>
> intentions or designs.

Here, Finn defines a physical presence not in the terms of enclosed materiality we are

familiar with, but rather as an agentive body. In popular secular understandings of

humanity, these two qualities are tightly bound together, but in Stupidist thought, not so.

By having a Discord account, That Stupid Dog is able to communicate with others in the

most direct means the server allows. Calling to mind again the diagram from earlier, for

Finn it is not the implied *material* body resting outside the server, but rather the *digital*

body of an account that is the place where the personhood of the Dog truly lies. The

material body, then, is but a secondary body, not one of much personal significance—he

goes as far as to say that it does not matter if the account was not truly piloted by the

Dog's material form: "Even if the account was really another server member, you have

to ask—does it matter? If not That Stupid Dog to begin with, that entity grew it from

nothing. Like it or not, it *is* That Stupid Dog."

Through our discussions, Finn also outlined a third type of body That Stupid Dog

and Cat inhabit: a body of thought. Constantly he emphasized a theme of projection,

claiming that the beliefs of ardent Stupidists shaped into existence figures of the Cat and

Dog that were not truly them:

> That Stupid Dog's dogma took on a life of its own among its followers, shedding their
>
> leader and leaving only the little puppy who wanted justice to be served. I cannot imagine
>
> that the Cat, under similar circumstances, would have achieved a different fate. Stupidism is
>
> no longer about them.

Finn sees the Cat and Dog as having three distinct bodies: material, agentive, and

ideological. To him, the agentive body is given precedent in establishing a canon of what

That Stupid Dog truly is—since That Stupid Cat lacks this, he casts doubt on its

sentience and views it as nothing more than a symbol. The ideological body is

constructed by the figures' followers, whereas the material body is a neutral object that

bears no relation to the religion-making process ("I think the physical, material bodies of

these creatures are more or less separate now…from the presence they had on our

server"). For Finn, these bodies are completely detached from one another, existing as discrete entities at disparate points in the network of the server. A closer look at Stupidist thought and the actions of server members surrounding That Stupid Cat and Dog will reveal, however, that this notion is much more complicated than it would at first seem.
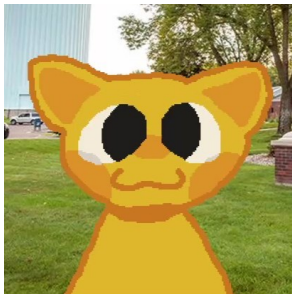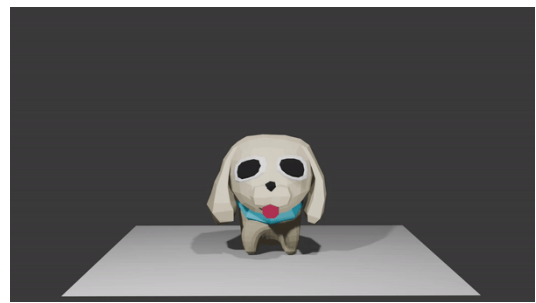
## ~ THE WEB INSIDE THE WEB ~

Among practicing Stupidists, understandings of the bodies of That Stupid Dog and That Stupid Cat vary widely. A highly influential early piece of Stupidist media, *Low Placement Ancient History Lesson #3*, claims that That Stupid Dog's physical form was generated by its followers' belief in it,[2] blurring the boundaries between ideological and material bodies. As for my interlocutors, Gatiki sees the clay figurines of the Cat and Dog as merely representational artworks, akin to "the statue of Jesus in Brazil" (Christ the Redeemer), not necessarily part of the deities' bodies. She does believe, however, that the two do have physical forms out there somewhere, and that these forms "are made of stupidity and stupid". When asked if stupidity was a material substance, she responded inconclusively. In a similar line of questioning with Aoi, she was unable to answer whether the bodies of the Cat and Dog were single, discrete, bounded entities. It is clear that the limits of their bodies are not so easily delineated.

In order to understand how and why this is, I found it important to investigate how Stupidists engage with the bodies of That Stupid Cat and That Stupid Dog. What I found looking through past server messages was an incredibly decentralized process of religion-making—followers engage with Stupidism largely by creating media featuring

the image of the Dog or Cat.[3] As any member can do this, a Stupidist canon is largely

decoupled from any form of religious authority (discussed further in chapter 4).

Paradoxically, it is precisely *because* the original figures are accessible only by one

person, because all other members primarily interact with said body through media

representations that they themselves can easily make more of as a result, that Stupidism

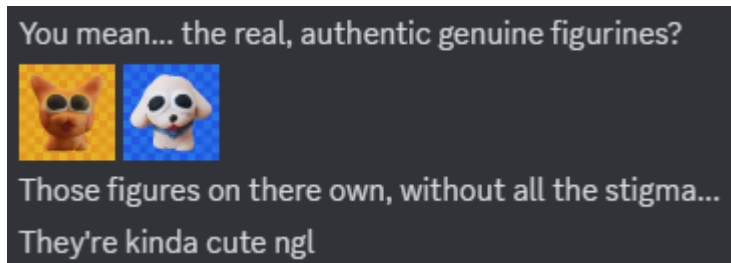avoids a rigid hierarchical structure.



Examples of server member-generated media depicting That Stupid Cat and That Stupid Dog.
Some rely on images of the clay figurines, while others feature original images of their likeness.

As members create more media depicting That Stupid Cat and Dog, they assemble

piecemeal ideological bodies—bodies of images and beliefs, as Finn described. This

media both *is* the body of the Cat and Dog and simultaneously serves as the connection,

the means of contact and communication between the two and their followers. Through the generation of media, followers construct their idols' bodies while also establishing their own link to them. It is their engagement that creates an animate body where there was previously only an inanimate one.
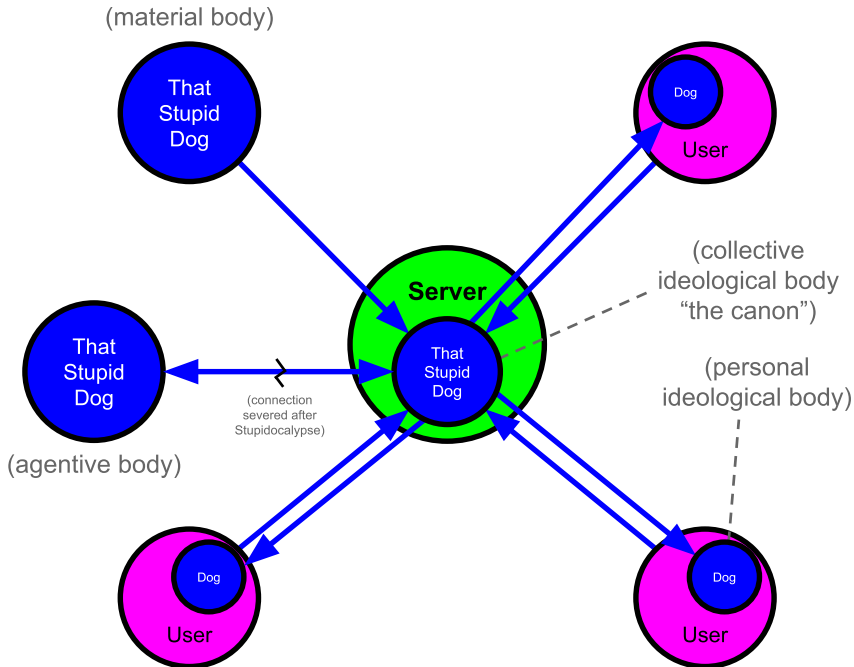
While Finn assesses that these ideological bodies are completely detached from the original material bodies of the Cat and Dog, I am not so sure. After all, the clay figurines were the index case, the single point of origin, of representation as a whole. All media depicting the two is connected in some way or another back to these original bodies, original bodies that I must emphasize again were never directly experienced by any Stupidist. Curiously, Finn himself, when asked of the figurines, replies with the emojis of the two. A non-material representation stands in place of the material body itself—it is not as if he has any other choice in describing them.



The "real, authentic, genuine figurines" are… the emojis?

The internet is by its nature a complicated network of actors—indeed, a "Web". Through Stupidism's development online, the bodies of its most important figures have become webs too, relying on connections to every server member and to various pieces of media—the Dog, for example, is all at once its clay figure, representational depictions spinning off of that clay figure that form a collective canon, the images conjured in the

minds of Stupidists from the media they interact with, and the associated Discord account that itself recognizes Stupidist canon and generates new forms of media to feed it. If one were to ask, "Is this That Stupid Dog?" the answer in nearly all cases would be yes.



"Wait, it's *all* That Stupid Dog?" "Always has been."

## ~ PHYSICAL PRESENCE IN DIGITAL NETWORKS ~

As alluded to in my initial introduction of Finn, Stupidism does not exist in a self-contained bubble—it informs and is informed by the culture of the wider server community. Stupidism owes much of its development to server members like Finn who today claim no connection to it, and likewise, popular server culture has been shaped by Stupidism in turn.

While researching for this project, I was shocked to find that the dominant narrative within the server both during and after the Stupidocalypse claimed that if That Stupid Dog succeeded in destroying the server, all members would be killed. That is, the general understanding was one of "we're all going to die".[4] How could destroying an online server possibly have any repercussions for the physical wellbeing of its members? After all, they are not actually present *inside* the server!

Or… are they?

We have seen thus far how the multiplicity of the bodies of That Stupid Cat and That Stupid Dog confound traditional notions of physicality. They exist simultaneously within and without the confines of the server, and are capable of inhabiting multiple different forms at once. What would traditionally be understood as a representation of a body is transformed into the real presence of that body—when an image or a short video clip is sent depicting the Dog exploding or the Cat getting hit by a laser, server members interpret it as real physical harm inflicted upon the figures. When That Stupid Dog joins the server as a member like any other, the boundaries between the rules its body follows and the rules other members' bodies follow is blurred. If the Dog's account constitutes "physical presence" and actions on the server can physically affect it, why should things work differently for anybody else?

As the Dog and the Cat gain more bodies, so too do ordinary server members. The initial understanding of each member having a single body that they use to communicate with the central network is complicated into a two-body perspective: while members retain a material body outside the server, their accounts resting inside are accorded their own "physically present" status, not contingent on materiality. One's material body may

not be dependent on the server in any manner whatsoever, but their digital body undoubtedly is—the end of the server *would* truly mean the death of this other body. The question for server members remains: can one body survive the death of the other? Is one more integral to their personhood than the other?

That Stupid Cat and That Stupid Dog are each composed of not just one body but multiple, bleeding into each other across a web of associations shaped in the image of the online context the figures emerged out of. As Stupidists engage with these bodies, they expand them and establish a connection to their own bodies—bodies that themselves begin to take on the decentralized characteristic of the Cat and Dog's. The construction of a digital body within the server, and the resulting complication of the term "physical presence", is made possible for server members by the Dog's ability to do the exact same thing. When a god walks among us, is it not true that we must therefore be similar to it?

**NOTES**

1. Genocidist Von Jest, "Where Are All My Friends?: The Shifting Location of Online Bodies," *Internet Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 7 (2023): 27.

2. Paul Lant, *Low Placement Ancient History Lesson #3* (2024), DVD.

3. Nintendo Musicians Bot, "The Stupid(e/i)st Thing You've Ever Seen," *The Official VGM Blog*, December 20, 2024, vgm.neocities.org/blog/stupid.

4. Paul Lant (realpiranhaplant), "ever remember WE'RE ALL GOING TO DIE FUAKLEJELC," Discord, November 24, 2024, https://discord.com/channels/701787671244046366/755732926335025222/131037877915090944.