Let's Play War

Inside 4chan's intergroup rivalry, contingent community formation, and fandomized war reporting

This project investigates two competing 4chan groups concerned with the war in Ukraine. We follow the pro-Ukrainian (/uhg/) and the pro-Russian (/chug/) threads and their fandomized war reporting. A journalistic register dominates the /uhg/ sets, and a strategic-logistic register dominates the /chug/ sets. The two threads fandomize the Ukrainian war through anthropomorphising and fictionalising nations and militaries in the form of memes. Surprisingly, there is a lack in the differential political positioning of the threads. Their sensemaking is antisemitic in nature. The differences are more stylistic than substantial. /chug/ is more conscious about the community's identity, reflected in the abundance of logos, while /uhg/ images are more evidentiary, indicating a greater emphasis on reportage and points at original journalistic endeavours. There is a relative (in)visibility of memes to the mainstream web. The vernacularity of hyper-specific online discourse emerges through absence, especially so in /uhg/, which represents a vernacular within a vernacular.

Warning: Poster contains offensive content

How is 4chan /pol/ making sense of the RUS-UKR war and how does this sense-making affect its own dynamics of contingent community formation?

/uhg/ Opening post (OP) structure   **/chug/** Opening post (OP) structure

Green text ①
OP picture ②

PROTOCOL

- QUERY - 4CAT
  /uhg/ + /chug/ 1/10/2021-4/7/2022
- SEPARATE OPENING POSTS (OPs)
- DOWNLOAD IMAGES FROM 4CAT
  /uhg/ + /chug/ 1/10/2021-4/7/2022
- GOOGLE API WEB DETENTION - MEMESPECTOR
  pages with full matching images and web entities
- PROCESSING OF POST TEXT - PYTHON
  vectorizing with TF-IDF with
- IMAGE ANALYSIS
  visualization sorted by hue and timestamp
- IMAGE ANALYSIS - PIXPLOT
  "evidentiary images" & "/chug/ logos"
- SPAZIALIZATION OF CO-OCCURRENCES - GEPHI
  of web-entities and images
- NMF-TOPIC MODELING
  of both post-text and OP-text to cluster text into topics of both communities
- NAÏVE BAYES CLASSIFICATION
  trained to find most distinct language usage for both communities
- NETWORK - GEPHI
  of chug-logos and pages

① OPs — GREENTEXT ANALYSIS

/uhg/ — similarity to previous post

NUMBER OF POSTS / NUMBER OF CHARACTERS

SIMILARITY

disruption

FEB 13 FEB 27 MAR 13 MAR 27 APR 10 APR 24 MAY 08 MAY 22 JUN 05 JUN 19 JUL 03

/chug/ — similarity to previous post

NUMBER OF POSTS / NUMBER OF CHARACTERS

maturation   coherence

FEB 27 MAR 13 MAR 27 APR 10 APR 24 MAY 08 MAY 22 JUN 05 JUN 19 JUL 03

② OPs — IMAGE ANALYSIS

february 2022
/uhg/ focusing on the "facts" of the war

may 2022
/uhg/ getting more playful with anime girls

february 2022
/chug/ reacting to /uhg/

march 2022
/chug/ cat & bread:
I love this thread so much!

april 2022
Rally up with logos!

① OPs & Posts— TEXT ANALYSIS

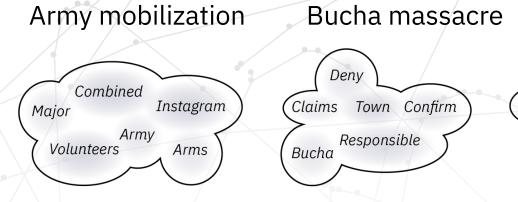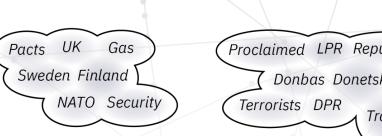**/uhg/ — naïve Bayes classification — top words**

OPs

ru force | **missile hit** | **isw russian** | **ru navy** | russio soy | claim kill | anti ship | could last | general kia | russion general kia | navy black | navy black sea | counter offensive | seo moskva

Posts

gay rape | cum chug gers | cum chug | cope cage | cope cages | lend lease | russion shill | russion shills | trust plan | 9th may | according plan | germany france | buck broken | slava ukraini

/chug/ — naïve Bayes classification — top words

OPs

by post thread | **post thread** | **israel control** | denounce talmud volition | israel control nato | control nato | talmud volition | denounce talmud | post thread recognize | thread recognize | irrevocably denounce | recognize israel control | nato council

Posts

webm plus | **maps chinese** | **new clips** | **webms webm** | ukroinion war crimes | stoy comfy | chug bros | baker needed | new baker | denounce talmud | morning sirs | goood morning sirs | morning sirs | fuck jonnies

/uhg/ — NMF topic modeling — OPs

Army mobilization | Bucha massacre | Geopolitics | Donbas separatism | Battle of Chernobyl | Siege of Azovstal

/chug/ — NMF topic modeling — OPs

Diplomacy | Sanctions | Military activity | Shelling / bombing | War crime

/uhg/ — NMF topic modeling — posts

Thread practices | 4chan vernacular | War updates | Geopolitics | Taunting

/chug/ — NMF topic modeling — posts

Taunting | War | In-group reinforcement | Thread practices | 4chan vernacular

② OPs — IMAGE ANALYSIS

a. non-web entities

b. recognised web entities

a. non-web entities

b. recognised web entities

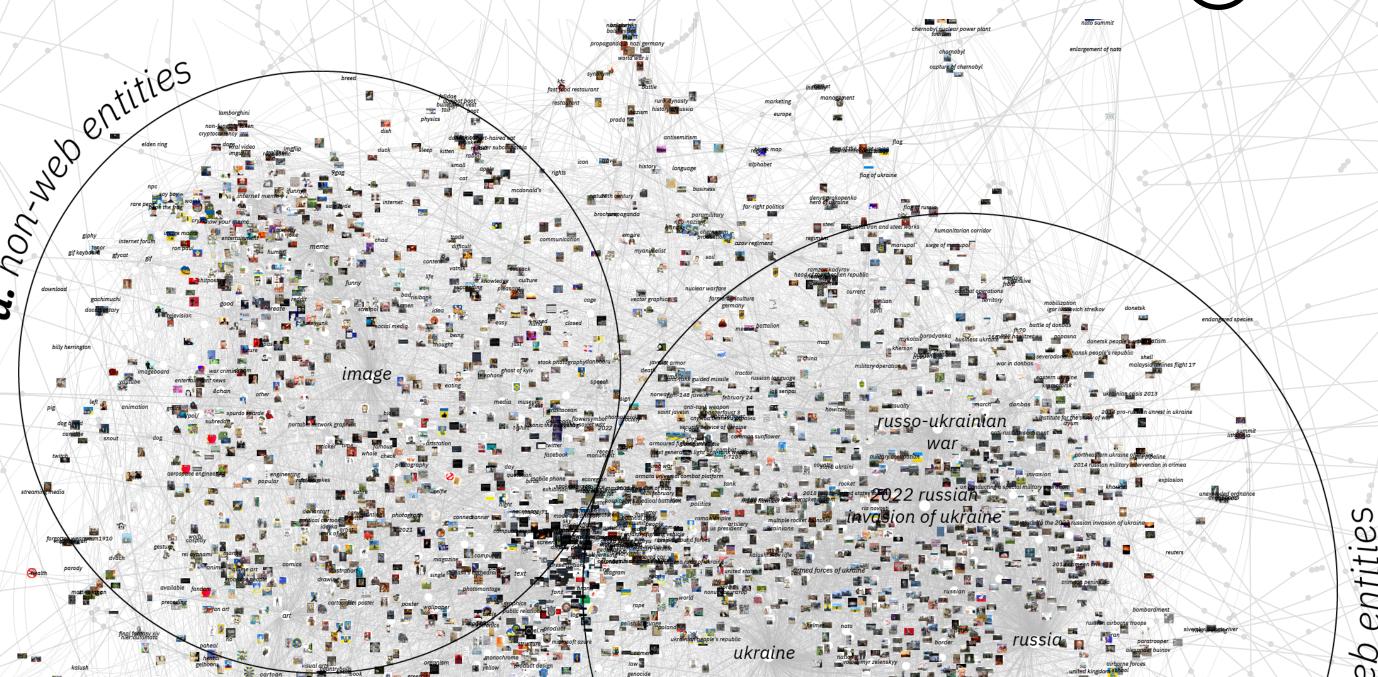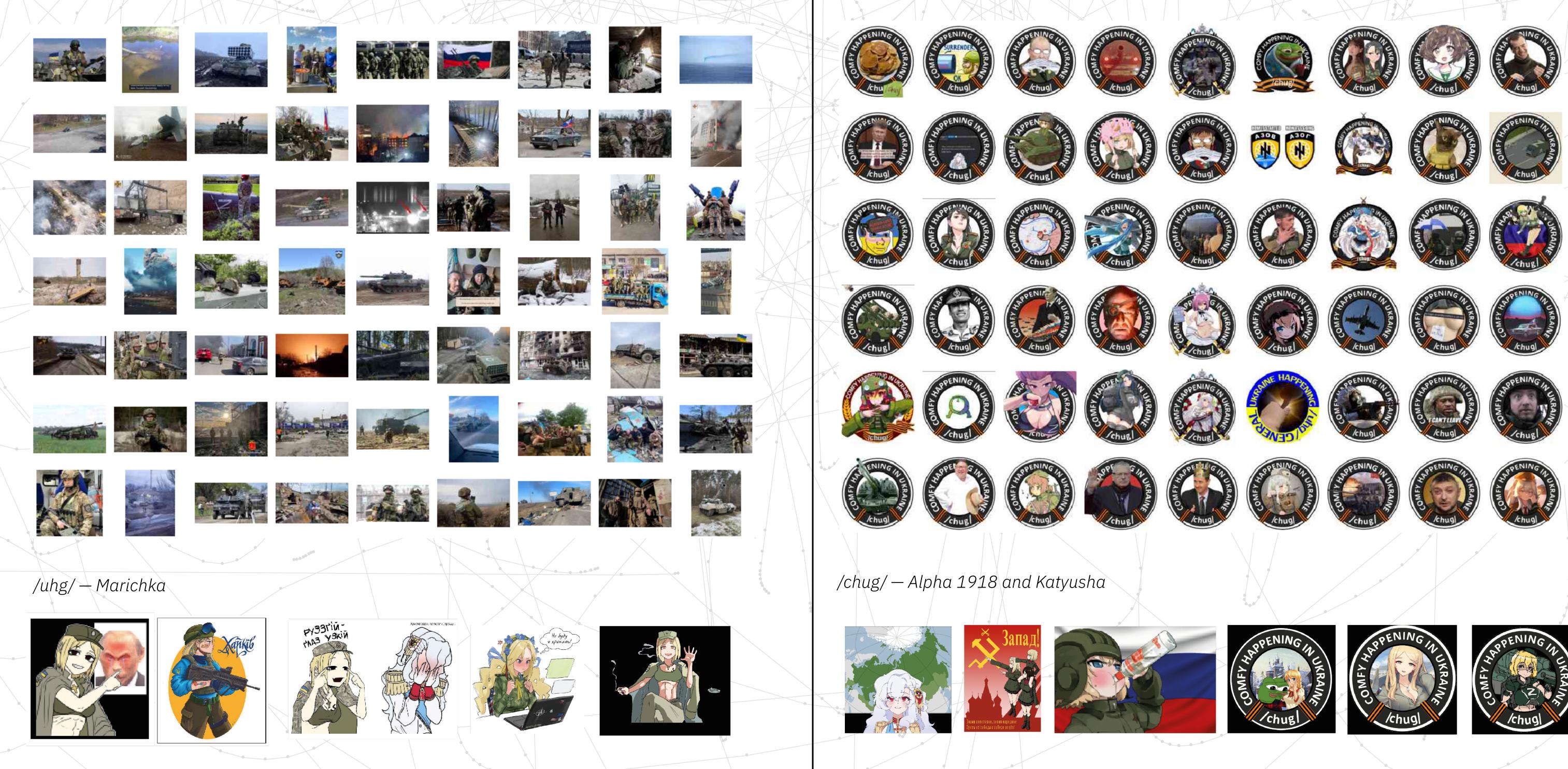/uhg/ — evidentiary images

/chug/ — branding

/uhg/ — Marichka

/chug/ — Alpha 1918 and Katyusha

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