

# Wearing the Trickster Mask in the Contemporary Social Movements of Anonymous and Occupy

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The Guy Fawkes mask from the dystopian film, *V for Vendetta*, has become iconic of the contemporary social movements of Anonymous and Occupy, as it embodies the trickster archetype and the potential of ordinary people to take part in movements against such oppressive forces as oligarchic corporatism, corrupt politicians, and police brutality. The trickster archetype is a social role predicated on crossing boundaries and subverting social structures, using cunning, deception, and ambiguity. Alternately celebrated by those who benefit from their actions, and reviled by those who do not, the transgressive speech and actions of trickster social activists frequently invite strong critiques and reprisals from the state.

This paper explores the opportunities and responsibilities that the trickster ethos affords contemporary social activists. It examines the emergent culture of both the Anonymous and Occupy social movements, with a focus on the values that emerge through their discourse, actions, and iconography. After a brief background on the trickster and the Anonymous and the Occupy movements, the paper explores opportunities for the trickster in contemporary social movements, followed by examples of the trickster ethos in Anonymous and Occupy. Finally, it considers if and how social movements with a trickster ethos take responsibility for their actions and the future of their movements.

## Defining the Trickster

In mythology and folklore worldwide, trickster gods and heroes use deception to create the world, change power relations in the world, or outwit oppressive forces. Anthropologist Paul Radin's classic definition of North American Indian trickster myths embodies key characteristics of trickster figures found in mythologies throughout the world:

they give an account of the creation of the earth, or at least the transforming of the world, and have a hero who is always wandering, who is always hungry, who is not guided by normal conceptions of good or evil, who is either playing tricks on people or having them played on him and who is highly sexed (155).

According to William J. Hynes, trickster figures are often ambiguous and anomalous, existing beyond borders and categories. Adept at deception and trickery, tricksters may take the form of unconscious numskulls or malicious spoilers. Sometimes tricksters are caught in their own traps, as the tricks gain momentum and turn back upon the tricksters. Shape shifters and border crossers, tricksters can change their gender or their appearance, and cross the borders between the living and the dead, the sacred and the profane. Tricksters are adept at inverting situations, breaking rules, mocking conventions, subverting beliefs. Tinkering with both the sacred and the lewd and finding the one in the other, tricksters bring new life out of both. Tricksters are often associated with gustatory, sexual, and scatological images (Hynes 1997, 33-45). In his masterful book, *Trickster Makes This World*, Lewis Hyde argues that cultures need trickster heroes to maintain their liveliness and durability, as trickster figures function "to uncover and disrupt the very thing that cultures are based on" (1998:9).

The trickster abounds in the carnivalesque, according to both Carl Jung and Mikhail Bakhtin. Jung traces the *Schelmenfigur's* or Trickster's appearance in Medieval festivals, carnivals, tales, and comedies (Jung 1890, c1956, 1972,196-200), and Bakhtin argues that the carnivalesque, whether in festivals or in literature, provides the space to invert social hierarchies, stimulating creativity and laughter, change and renewal (Bakhtin 1984, 81).<sup>1</sup> The Internet, in its anarchic, open-endedness,

provides carnivalesque sites where participants can mask their own identities, unmask the identities of others, and create transgressive spaces “where the frustrations, aspirations and protests about the quality of everyday life of the people can be expressed” (Theall 1999, 159-160). Theall argues that a certain “moral panic” pervades contemporary discussion of the Internet, provoking at times a “techno-ethical McCarthyism” and such Internet regulatory legislation in the US as the CDA (Computer Decency Act) and COPA (Child Online Privacy Act) (1999, 154,157). More recent attempts to control the Internet, such as the proposed SOPA (Stop Online Piracy Act) legislation in 2010 have been met with fierce resistance by Internet activists such as Aaron Schwartz (Regalado 2012), whose suicide in early 2013 has focused new attention on the struggle for freedom of information. Occupations, especially prolonged ones, can also evoke the spirit of carnival, as occupiers enter a liminal space outside of their everyday roles and routines.

Many contemporary social activists and movements invoke the spirit of carnival and the trickster in their actions. Andrew Robinson points to such activist initiatives as the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army, the Laboratory of the Insurrectionary Imagination, Reclaim the Streets, particularly the Carnival against Capital, as well as the free party movement (2011) Hactivist groups such as the Yes Men, with their “Ream Weaver” software, have made it easy to “culture jam” corporate websites, substituting critical messages that undermine their messages, while keeping their same website style.<sup>2</sup> Earlier manifestations of the trickster ethos in the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be found in such groups as the Situationists (the Notre Dame Affair), the Yippies, and the Merry Pranksters.

Since 2008, two social movements that draw on a trickster ethos and tactics have come to the fore: Anonymous and Occupy Wall Street (along with the worldwide Occupy movement). Both groups worked together in the fall of 2011, with Anonymous providing Internet support to Occupy Wall Street. Members of both adopted the Guy Fawkes mask to provide anonymity during their occupations and protests, and both are horizontally organized, with non-hierarchical leadership structures. Anonymous embodies more of the classic trickster ethos, which ranges from the crude, lewd, amoral transgressor of

social rules who plays cruel games or pranks on people or organizations just for the sake of laughs (lulz), to the increasingly ethical persona of a defender of Internet freedom and social justice.

It is important to foreground the difference between human beings who participate in social movements such as Anonymous and Occupy Wall Street, and the trickster characters in folklore and mythology. Human beings are multidimensional and take on a variety of social roles, from the more serious and responsible roles of parenting or work life, to those of play, deception, or protest. While members of Anonymous and Occupy may strategically adopt trickster-like tactics, they may also – and do – choose other modus operandi.

### **Background on Anonymous and the Occupy Movements**

Anonymous defines itself as “a decentralized network of individuals focused on promoting access to information, free speech, and transparency” (Anonymous Analytics 2012). Biella Coleman, a Professor at MIT who has been studying Anonymous since 2008 writes that: “Anonymous is not a united front, but a hydra, a rhizome, comprising numerous different networks and working groups that are often at odds with one another” (2012). This network had its start in an image board website called 4chan, developed in 2003 by a New York City teenager, Christopher Poole. Modeled on the Japanese website 2chan, which was devoted to images and discussions of Japanese manga and anime, 4chan quickly developed a number of discussion boards. While 4chan first allowed users to post using a nickname, by 2004 it introduced a new feature called “Forced\_Anon” on a few of its boards, that forced commenters to be anonymous.

One discussion board in particular, called /b/, is a random board that became, according to one user, “the beating heart of this site,” a “free-for-all” in which users rapidly posted any ideas and comments of interest (Olson 2012, 26-28). Early actions of Anonymous on 4chan consisted of various pranks and acts of ridicule to produce laughs or “lulz.” In 2008, Anonymous members launched Project Chanology made up of cyberattacks, pranks, and demonstrations against the Church of Scientology to critique its ideology and tactics and support anti-

ensorship. When members of Anonymous physically demonstrated in front of Scientology churches, many of them wore the Guy Fawkes mask in order to retain their anonymity and protect themselves from retaliatory legal actions by Scientology. Following this successful foray into political activism, Anonymous members supported other causes, such as providing Internet aid to Tunisian activists in the Arab Spring, and “supporting anti-corruption movements in Zimbabwe and India, and providing secure platforms for Iranian citizens to criticize their government” (Anonymous Analytics, 2011). Government efforts to stop music and film piracy, as well as suppression of Wikileaks, spurred Anonymous to increased political acts, including denial of service attacks on the websites of cybersecurity firms, PayPal, Fox News, Amazon, the FBI, the CIA, Scotland Yard, and the Vatican, to name but a few. Anonymous members have taken part in Internet vigilantism against child pornographers as well, and a faction called KnightSec used their hacking skills to uncover evidence of participation in or support of a gang rape in Steubenville, Ohio, in 2012, with Occupy Steubenville demonstrating in response (Elfling 2012). When Anonymous hacks into a website, it often takes credit by defacing the homepage with an icon that evokes the olive-branch surrounded global emblem of the United Nations, except that the continents are replaced by a headless man in a suit with a question mark in place of the head—or in some cases, the Guy Fawkes mask. The arms on the man are behind his back, so that one cannot see what his hands are doing. Such iconography suggests the international and global reach of Anonymous, its leaderless nature, its peaceful intent, its trickster ethos (just who is it and what are those hands doing?) and of course, its anonymity. Underneath this icon follow its signature words:

We are Anonymous.  
We are Legion.  
We do not forgive.  
We do not forget.  
Expect us.

In the fall of 2011, Anonymous members helped the fledgling Occupy Wall Street movement by providing Internet support and helping to prevent violence through a Tweeting campaign. Not all Anonymous information-gathering activities involve illegal hacking. One

faction, Anonymous Analytics, formed in 2011, uses legal forms of information gathering to expose corporate corruption (Fish 2012). In 2012, *Time Magazine* included Anonymous in its list of the 100 most influential people of the world (Gellman 2012).

The Occupy Wall Street movement began on September 7, 2011 with an encampment of protesters in Zuccotti Park in the Wall Street financial district in New York City. The Canadian magazine and activist group Adbusters takes credit for the moniker and the idea to occupy Wall Street, but antecedent protests in Spain called the *indignados*, as well as the Arab Spring, provided important stimuli and models. United around the slogan, “We are the 99%,” Occupy Wall Street protested the actions of the 1% that led to the Great Recession and the increasing impoverishment of Americans. In its “Declaration of the Occupation of New York City,” OWS says: “We come to you at a time when corporations, which place profit over people, self-interest over justice, and oppression over equality, run our governments” (#OccupyWallStreet, September 29, 2011). Adhering to the Spanish *indignados* commitment to participatory democracy, OWS adopted the spirit of the Puerto del Sol communication policies that stressed participatory democracy and consensus. The Occupy Wall Street concept spread to cities and towns throughout the U.S. and the world.

Following the forced evictions of protesters from their Occupy encampments during the winter of 2011-2012, many have called into question whether the Occupy movement can continue without public spaces to inhabit. Others have criticized the Occupy movement’s lack of a uniform platform and its reluctance to take part in electoral politics. Adbusters continues to urge the Occupy movement to resist being coopted by mainstream political parties, and numerous Occupy organizations continue meeting throughout the U.S. and around the world. New tactics include flash-occupations and occupations of foreclosed houses, to prevent evictions. In July 2012, a national convention of Occupy Wall Street was held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Both Occupy and Anonymous are examples of hybrid organizations that bring virtual and real life protests together. As Quinn Norton argues,

they are “each examples of a new kind of hybrid entity, one that breaks the boundaries between “real life” and the internet, creatures of the network embodied as citizens in the real world. As one member of The Pirate Bay explained on IRC, “We prefer afk (away from keyboard) to irl (in real life). This is real life” (Norton 2011).

### **Opportunities for the Trickster in Contemporary Social Movements**

In an age in which large multinational corporations exercise enormous power, Internet search engines and social media track users as they move through cyberspace, selling information about their activity, and state security systems can routinely screen citizens’ email (Sullivan 2012), it has become increasingly difficult for people to maintain their privacy. As mainstream media have been consolidated and owned by a few corporations, the existence and quality of media coverage of social protests may be contingent on the business interests of corporate owners. As a consequence of an increasing loss of power by citizens, some social movements have adopted a traditional weapon of the powerless – wit, coupled with surprise and the shape-shifting, amorphous characteristics of the trickster – to capture attention and gain an audience for their messages.

A website dedicated to providing advice, strategies, and tools to the Occupy movement provides an apt rationale for the trickster ethos under the name of creative activism:

18. Reflectantes – creative activism. Usually the media tries to silence our movement. However, when violent incidents (this is, property destruction) arises, they get crazy about it, they love to portray activists as violent marginals. A way to move forward out of this is creative activism: through the use of imagination, theatrics, and art, activists can break the rules of the game in nonviolent ways, confuse policemen, protect activists and attract positive media attention (Cronopioelectronic 2012).

Similarly, the magazine *Adbusters*, which takes credit for inspiring the initial Occupy Wall Street Movement, recommends “culture jamming” and other creative techniques. Both Anonymous and the Occupy movements call for nonviolent

tactics and seek creative ways to gain public attention.

The trickster ethos may be coming to the fore in the current economic and environmental crises because of the increasing tricksterism of global capitalism. Wall Street and large banks, with their “interest rate swaps,” “credit default swaps” and their no-equity, balloon interest mortgage schemes, make ample use of trickster *modus operandi*. A young Wall Street employee, Alexis Goldstein, quit her job and joined the Occupy Wall Street movement and revealed some of the trickster culture of Wall Street:

Goldstein devised trading software for Deutsche Bank and Merrill Lynch. She has divulged some of Wall Street’s most closely held cultural secrets such as the phrase “rip the client’s face off” which means selling some derivative “solution” to a naive client such as a convent of nuns in Europe at a huge profit to the trader and to Wall Street while convincing the client that it’s the best deal they ever made. Sometimes they refer to these clients as “muppets” (Lawrence 2012).

The Obama administration’s involvement in developing the computer virus Stuxnet to use in covert cyberattacks against Iran’s nuclear program is but one example of U.S. covert operations that rely on trickster tactics not unlike those of hacktivists in Anonymous and LulzSec (Sanger 2012; Naughton 2012).

Another opportunity provided by the trickster ethos lies in its amorphous, ambiguous, and shape-shifting characteristics. Both Anonymous and the Occupy movements embody this amorphous “structure” through their horizontal organization and “open-source politics” that make use of the concept of the “hive mind” or collective intelligence. Instead of a hierarchical organization, both movements are based on an ideal of open and free participation, with each participant encouraged to voice his or her ideas. In the case of Anonymous, participants suggest actions and ideas online on such forums as the image board /b/ on 4chan and on Internet Relay Chats (IRCs). Quick and constant postings of suggested actions by many participants mean that many suggestions for action never bear fruit. But when ideas resonate with a number of viewers, ideas can quickly turn into widespread operations, as in Anonymous’s famous

“Chanology” operation against the Church of Scientology in 2008, involving thousands of Anons from 42 countries. The Occupy movement is committed to an agora-like participatory democracy and ideas are tested through group assemblies, following elaborate procedures to ensure that everyone can speak or express his or her opinions, and other ideas take expression through the many websites that support the Occupy movements worldwide. One such website, [takethesquare.net](http://takethesquare.net), makes this claim about the virtues of horizontal organization:

21. We try by all means to remain open, horizontal, confident, fearless. . . . Horizontality, too, guarantees that the movement cannot be “beheaded.” We assemble in public spaces, we share the minutes with everyone in highly visible websites ([www.tomalaplaza.net](http://www.tomalaplaza.net)) and yet, we frustrate their desire to lead us to self-repress ourselves, we haven’t changed, for we have nothing to hide. Their Panopticon, their Big Brothers seems not to be working any more (Cronopioelectronic 2012).

A fundamental document passed by the General Assembly at Occupy Wall street on November 10, 2011, articulates a “Statement of Autonomy” that defines OWS as a “people’s movement” that is “is party-less, leaderless, by the people and for the people. It is not a business, a political party, an advertising campaign or a brand. It is not for sale.” Keenly aware of the dangers of the movement being coopted by other organizations, the “Statement of Autonomy” concludes by saying:

We acknowledge the existence of professional activists who work to make our world a better place. If you are representing, or being compensated by an independent source while participating in our process, please disclose your affiliation at the outset. Those seeking to capitalize on this movement or undermine it by appropriating its message or symbols are not a part of Occupy Wall Street.

We stand in solidarity. We are Occupy Wall Street

(#OccupyWallStreet, Nov. 10, 2012).

In carving out public spaces, either real or virtual, for participatory discourse that encourages multiple voices, both Occupy and Anonymous, like the trickster, have a liminal status, betwixt and between established, institutional organizations and political frameworks. As Victor Turner argues, such liminal spaces often give rise to a profound *communitas*, wherein participants experience intense community (Turner 1969, 96).

## Trickster Ethos and Tactics in Anonymous and Occupy

### Anonymous

Before Anonymous took a political turn in 2008 with its Chanology Project, it already possessed a distinctive trickster ethos through the goal of many Anons to create and enjoy “lulz”—laughs at other people’s expense, created through online ridicule, such as defacing someone’s Facebook or website or through embarrassing pranks, like having unwanted pizzas delivered to someone’s house, reserving unwanted taxis, or faxing black paper to victims in order to drain their ink cartridges (Olson 2012:68). Almost any kind of posting is acceptable on 4chan, and the anonymity made it easy to avoid self-censorship. Nudity, profanity, gore, and foul language are common. Parmy Olson describes 4chan as “a teeming pit of depraved images and nasty jokes, yet at the same time a source of extraordinary, unhindered creativity” (32). Users developed the famous LOLcats meme, and many other memes that gained popularity throughout the Internet. Users also developed a special jargon and communication etiquette. For example, users call each other fags, with modifying adjectives according to their perceived status and goals within the collective (fag is non-pejorative among Anons). A tripfag refers to those who wanted to use nicknames and override the forced anonymity by typing in “tripcodes” (Olson 2012, 28). Further describing their discourse and nomenclature, Olson says:

Racist comments, homophobia, and jokes about disabled people were the norm. It was customary for users to call one another “nigger,” “faggot,” or just “fag.” New 4chan users were newfags, old ones oldfags, and Brits were britfags, homosexuals were fagfags or gayfags. It was a gritty world yet strangely accepting. It became taboo to

identify one's sex, race, or age. Stripping 4chan users of their identifying features made everyone feel more like part of a collective, and this is what kept many coming back (34).

The random discussion board /b/ had "two big no-no's": child porn and moralfags, who were visitors to /b/ who took issue with some of the depraved content and tried to change it or, "worse, tried to get /b/ to act on some other kind of wrongdoing" (Olson 2012:35). Moralfags proved successful in attracting hundreds of Anons to support the Chanology cause, and increasingly, moralfags attracted Anons to many other political actions, such as the Occupy Wall Street movement. The Chanology Project marked the beginning of a split of Anonymous into two camps—those in it just for the lulz and those interested in activism (Olson 2012:89). Perhaps the increasing number of moralfags and the political turn to hacktivism suggests a developing moral consciousness in Anonymous.

Certainly the raw language and pornographic images that filled /b/ on 4chan are part of a classic trickster ethos. One /b/ user, known as "William," who Olson interviewed at length, reported that his morals "were also becoming increasingly ambiguous as he constantly watched and laughed at gore, rape, racism, and abuse":

Everything was "cash" or "win" (good and acceptable). /b/tards knew the difference between right and wrong—they just chose not to recognize either designation on 4chan. Everyone accepted they were there for lulz, and that the act of attaining lulz often meant hurting someone. It was no wonder that a future tagline for Anonymous would be, "None of us are as cruel as all of us." William's increasing ambivalence over sex and morality was being multiplied on a mass scale for others on 4chan and would become a basis for the cultlike identity of Anonymous" (Olson 37).

The anything-goes atmosphere of /b/ and the trickster goals of creating lulz contributed to enmity between some of the Anons. One of the key participants in the Chanology Project, a middle-aged housewife named Jennifer Emick, was a moralfag who ultimately became disillusioned with Anonymous's hacking projects.

After some Anons "doxed" her, that is, reported her real identity, and made intimidating threats to her family, Emick retaliated. She devoted herself to discovering the real identity of Hector Monseguer, aka "Sabu," one of a small group of Anon hackers who made up a new hacking team called "LulzSec" or Lulz Security, whose goal it was to hack high-profile corporations such as Sony and government agencies such as the FBI and the CIA. (It was Sabu who provided the idea and leadership for helping Tunisian revolutionaries circumvent government Internet censorship.)

In a June 17 2011 statement to celebrate its 1000<sup>th</sup> Tweet, LulzSec extolled its own trickster ethos. The image accompanying its statement, had LulzSec's icon, a cartoon of a winking man in a suit and topcoat, with a monocle, a handle-bar mustache, and holding a wine-glass, riding on a green chameleon. Such iconography seems to suggest a trickster who is nonchalantly and elegantly in control of a protean force. In the last sentences, LulzSec turned the tables on and ridiculed the reader, for wasting time reading its statement:

This is the Internet, where we screw each other over for a jolt of satisfaction. There are peons and lulz lizards; trolls and victims. There's losers that post shit they think matters, and other losers telling them their shit does not matter. In this situation, we are both of these parties, because we're fully aware that every single person that reached this final sentence just wasted a few moments of their time.

Thank you, bitches.

Emick turned her information over to the FBI, ultimately leading to the arrest of key LulzSec members (Olson 2012: 212-17). Just as in trickster myths where the trickster's actions backfire, in this case, lulzing Emick ultimately led to Emick having the last lulz on LulzSec. When Sabu was arrested by the FBI, he cut a deal wherein he became a spy for them, ultimately betraying other LulzSec members, such as Topiary.

Due to the anonymity in Anonymous, it is difficult to trust anyone on the site. Several of the Rules of the Internet developed by Anonymous users capture this distrust:

1. Do not talk about /b/
2. Do NOT talk about /b/
27. Always question a person's sexual preferences without any real reason.
28. Always question a person's sexual gender – just in case it's really a man.
29. In the internet all girls are men and all kids are undercover FBI agents.
31. You must have pictures to prove your statements.
32. Lurk more – it's never enough.
37. There are NO girls on the internet (*Know Your Meme*).

The amorphous boundary-crossing trickster of myth often brings chaos in his wake. The freedom of expression licensed by anonymity in both Anonymous and LulzSec, coupled with the high speed of Internet postings, led to a chaos that became wearing on key players in LulzSec. Topiary (real name Jake Davis) reported to Parmy Olson that:

It was chaos. Every day now the core group was spending more time dealing with internal issues, conspiring against trolls like Jester and Backtrace, rotting out snitches, or worrying about what Ryan might say to the police (340).

In his haste to publish data hacked from the Arizona police department that a hacker outside of LulzSec offered them in response to Arizona's anti-immigration law involving racial profiling by police, Topiary let the hacker write the press release. Instead of the kind of lighthearted rhetoric that characterized Topiary's press releases, this was entitled "Chinga La Migra" ("Fuck the Immigration Service"), with the words "Off the pigs" and an image of an AK-47 machine gun made out of keyboard symbols (Olson 2012: 339). Shortly after this incident, both Topiary and Tflow, another LulzSec member, decided to resign from LulzSec.

Yet in the midst of the adolescent pranks and sophisticated hacking found among Anons, is the kind of creative destruction for which trickster figures are known. Publishing their successful hacks led to better online security systems and more careful Internet users. Assisting Tunisian and Iranian citizens overcome state Internet censorship helped advance opposition to oppressive regimes. Attacks on Scientology and later, the Westboro Baptist Church, served to build knowledge of

and opposition to both groups. As Biella Coleman writes,

What started as a network of trolls has become, much of the time, a force for good in the world; what started as a reaction to the Church of Scientology has come to encompass free-speech causes from Tunisia to Zuccotti Park. While Anonymous has not put forward any programmatic plan to topple institutions or change unjust laws, it has made evading them seem easy and desirable. To those donning the Guy Fawkes mask associated with Anonymous, this—and not the commercialized, "transparent" social networking of Facebook—is the promise of the Internet, and it entails trading individualism for collectivism (2012).

When key operators of Anonymous and LulzSec were arrested, their defenders on the #FreeAnons Anonymous Solidarity Network argued that the distributed denial of service attacks on corporations and organizations were nothing more than a kind of digital sit-in, a way of expressing free speech on the Internet. The Anonymous Solidarity Network bills itself as a cyberliberation group and says this about itself:

The Anonymous Solidarity Network provides support for those who are facing prosecution for alleged involvement in "Anonymous" activities. We believe that community acts of internet protest are not crimes nor conspiracies and should not be prosecuted as such. We plan on keeping folks updated with legal developments as well as provide information and resources to other Anons to protect themselves and have a better understanding of what we're up against. Remember, you cannot arrest an idea, and while they may be able to harass and arrest a few of us, they can never stop us all. *Free em all! (#FreeAnons, 2011).*

### **Occupy**

In contrast to the raw, wild, and relatively uncensored actions in the virtual world of Anonymous, the Occupy Movement seems to be a tamer trickster, but nevertheless a trickster. Its name and its first prolonged occupations of public spaces are inherently transgressive. Instead of the typical, occasional public protests that happen in public spaces, Occupy Wall Street set out to indicate its displeasure with the

current economic and political system in the U.S. by moving into public spaces in semi-permanent encampments. Pedro Noel and Santiago Carrion describe these occupied spaces as creating “temporary autonomous zones:”

The will to re-appropriate the physical center of the polis — the ancient heart of politics — is deeply related to the impulse to engage with fellow humans, and is irrevocably linked with the concept of transparency. The new squares are the place to apprehend reality, a piece of land where there is no space for the administrative control of information. The square has once again returned to its role as a place of exchange for individual initiatives, art and politics (2011).

The Occupy movement also exists in cyberspace, as numerous Occupy news websites and Facebook pages have become sites for citizens to exchange stories and strategies and organize new actions. Noel and Carrion see the occupation of online space, coupled with the occupation of public spaces, as the birth of a new global civil consciousness:

We believe that this process has come to a high point in history during the last year, serving to create a massive collective consciousness, now oriented towards systemic transformation.

In this specific context, we propose the term *cyber occupying*, which is inevitably linked with the new culture of resistance, as the appropriation of society’s virtual and physical systemics (Noel and Carrion, 2011).

In the spring of 2012, Occupiers turned to new trickster-like tactics beyond the occupation of public spaces to call attention to their grievances. Reporting on one of the “Summer Disobedience Schools” organized by Occupy Wall Street in New York on May 17, Julia Reinhart said that many of the 200 or so participants broke up into smaller groups to:

march upon the seven banks in the area that are open on Saturdays, with the goal to shut them down for at least a little while. Change thrown to the floor and only very slowly being picked up, serious questions about ethical

loan policies and other interactions kept the bankers unusually busy this Saturday until the cops finally intervened and kicked everybody out (Reinhart 2012).

The actions taken by the Occupiers in the bank illustrate the disruption of the flow of business as usual that Noel and Carrion (2011) argue is central to these new global social movements:

By occupying the traditional channels of information exchange (both physical and virtual), a resistance is built against the flow which normally serves to aid and perpetuate the established systems of society. Cyber occupation is based on the prolonged permanence and concentration on strategic spots of informative, political, behavioral or monetary flow (among others).

In New York on June 6, Occupy activists delivered sacks of two million dollars to bribe Gov. Cuomo to raise the minimum wage. The only catch in this publicity stunt was that the sacks were full of play money (OccupyWallStreet 2012, June 6). *Adbusters* continues its self-made role as an organizer of the Occupy movement by issuing online a series of Tactical Briefings. In its Tactical Briefing 27, prior to the May 18 G8 meeting at Camp David, *Adbusters* extols one of the key tactics of the trickster – laughter – and calls for a May 18 Global #laughriot:

On May 18, the day the G8 leaders meet in Camp David, why don’t we, the people of the world have a #LAUGHRIOT. Let roars of laughter rise up from towns and cities everywhere at the spectacle of the world’s leaders trying to crisis manage the economy from behind closed doors and razor wire fences.

Laughter is one of the most powerful tactical weapons of memewar ... it signals supremacy and loss of fear. So let’s pull off the greatest comedy of howling flash mobs, riotous street parties and hysterical pranks the world has ever seen. May 18 could be a monumental tipping point... an ahahaha! moment when the people of the world have a collective epiphany, and from that point on start thinking differently about how the world should be governed (*Adbusters Blog*, March 12, 2012).



Still another trickster move of the Occupy movement builds on the power of social media to activate the hive mind to take part in flash mob actions, such as flash encampments and flash mobs to intervene in the evictions of tenants from foreclosed properties. The latter actions are having wide-spread success in Spain and increasing success in cities in the U.S.

### **Responsibilities of the Trickster Ethos in Social Movements**

Although there are many examples of the trickster ethos at work in Anonymous and the Occupy movements, are movements characterized by a trickster ethos capable of acting responsibly? What responsibilities do such movements take to protect participants and the credibility of and support for their movements? Does the trickster ethos provide an opportunity for long-lasting social change, or only for short-term relief? Does the leaderless, horizontal structure of both Anonymous and Occupy make them more likely to have their reputations tarnished by violent or illegal actions?

As hybrid entities that exist in both cyberspace and real space, both Anonymous and Occupy appeal to the so-called Hive Mind or collective intelligence to build their movements. Olson's assessment of the numbers of Anons who took part in past Anonymous operations suggests that those actions that are perceived to have a strong ethical bent attract the most participants. For example, operations against Scientology (perceived by many to be an exploitative cult) and actions against HBGary, Inc., a company planning to attack the Internet freedoms of groups like Anonymous and Wikileaks, attracted wide participation among Anonymous followers.

Occupy Wall Street and other Occupy movements around the country have taken great care to develop policies and communication tactics to promote nonviolence, regulate their encampments, protect participants, and keep it in harmony with neighbors of its actions. For example, OWS, through its General Assembly, developed a Good Neighbor Policy in dialogue with members of the local community that included such principles as:

- OWS has zero tolerance for drugs or alcohol anywhere in Liberty Plaza;
- Zero tolerance for violence or verbal abuse towards anyone;
- Zero tolerance for abuse of personal or public property.
- OWS will at all times have a community relations representative on-site, to monitor and respond to community concerns and complaints (#OccupyWallStreet 2, 2011).

Likewise, when OWS discovered that some female occupiers were being sexually harassed, they began offering female-only sections in the encampment.

Although the Occupy Movement proudly articulates its leaderless, horizontal organization, that does not mean that it has not taken care to construct both internal and external communication rules that promote equality, participatory democracy, and prevent discord in the group. The website [takethesquare.net](http://takethesquare.net) offers resources to help Occupy movements run General Assemblies and offers a document developed by the Group Dynamics Commission for the Assemblies of the Puerta del Sol Protest Camp in Spain as a blueprint for learning how to participate in an Assembly. This document uses communication techniques designed to build Collective Thinking, which it defines as a constructive process in which "two people with differing ideas work together to build something new." This dialectical process necessitates "active listening" rather than "merely be[ing] preoccupied with preparing our response." The document also emphasizes transparency, and that the disabled and the deaf be accommodated. The Puerto del Sol document gives guidelines for oral expression of both moderators and speakers that emphasizes the importance of "positive speech" that is "less aggressive and more conciliatory" and avoiding "negative statements which close the door to constructive debate." It also recommends "inclusive speech" that makes no gender distinctions. The Puerto del Sol document also contains suggestions for moderating discussions, determining a speaking order, and handling decision-making through an orderly process of debate and consensus. It suggests sign language that can be used by participants

in a Group Assembly to express concerns nonverbally:

- 1) **APPLAUSE/AGREEMENT**: Upraised, open hands moving from side to side.
- 2) **DISAGREEMENT**: Arms folded in cross above the head.
- 3) **“THAT HAS ALREADY BEEN SAID”/“GET TO THE POINT”**: As if requesting a substitution in sport, revolving upraised hands.
- 4) **“YOUR INTERVENTION IS TAKING UP TOO MUCH TIME”**: Crossed arms. Forearms come together and move apart as if they were the hands of a clock so that palms touch above head.
- 5) **“DIFFICULTY HEARING INTERVENTION”**: Cupped hands to ears or hand moving up and down as if to indicate, “turn the volume up” (Carolina 2012).

While many Occupy groups around the world have used the Puerto del Sol guidelines as a model, it is important to note that the general assemblies of Occupy groups develop their own guidelines, and some of these are posted on the Internet. Occupy Wall Street uses the Internet to inform participants about their legal rights to protest in various locations in New York City and trains participants in nonviolent behavior (#OccupyWallStreet, 2011, “Legal Fact Sheet”).

After the May Day protests of 2012, some declared that the Occupy movement in the U.S. was virtually dead. Members of the more radical Oakland Commune argued that the police evictions of Occupy camps and the failure of Occupiers to hold public space, rendered it impossible to continue general assemblies:

May 1 confirmed the end of the national Occupy Wall Street movement because it was the best opportunity the movement had to reestablish the occupations, and yet it couldn't. Nowhere was this more clear than in Oakland as the sun set after a day of marches, pickets and clashes. [ . . . ] The hundreds of riot police backed by armored personnel carriers and SWAT teams carrying assault rifles made no secret of their intention to sweep the

plaza clear after all the “good protesters” scurried home, making any reoccupation physically impossible. [ . . . ] Any hopes of a spring offensive leading to a new round of space reclamations and liberated zones has come and gone. And with that, Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Oakland are now dead (Oakland Commune, 2012).

Agreeing with this assessment on the importance of space to the movement, Arun Gupta, in his excellent piece, “What Happened to the Occupy Movement,” argues that:

The real stumbling block for the Occupy movement is also the reason for its success: space, or now, the lack thereof. Understanding the significance of political space and Occupy's inability to recapture it reveals why the movement is having difficulty re-gaining traction (Gupta 2012).

Chris Francescani, in “Can Occupy Wall Street Survive,” notes that donations to the New York chapter of the Occupy movement are flagging and media coverage of it has dropped. He quotes a liberal Harvard University Professor, Theda Skocpol, who says, “Most of the social scientists who are at all like me – unsentimental leftists – ... think this movement is over.” Francescani says that Skocpol and others “wonder whether Occupy will ever really thrive without solid footing in the mainstream of American political discourse.” In contrast to the Tea Party, the Occupy Movement has not gotten involved in political elections.

But in opposition to Skocpol's viewpoint, Bill Dobbs, on the press team of Occupy New York, likens the “OWS struggle to that of America's civil rights movement – long and uphill, with broad goals to radically alter American society. The first step, he said, has been to re-animate America's long-dormant spirit of social activism” (Francescani 2012). Also opposing Skocpol's negative view of the future of the Occupy Movement is noted sociologist and social movement scholar, Francis Fox Piven, who says,

“I don't know of a movement that unfolds in less than a decade. People are impatient, and some of them are too quick to pass judgment. But it's the beginning, I think, of a great movement. One of a series of movements that has episodically changed

history, which is not the way we tell the story of American history” (Gupta 2012).

Should Occupy continue its trickster-like persona, or should it become a more predictable social movement that participates in electoral politics? Helen Barlow argues “Don’t let occupy be occupied;” the movement must resist the pressures to institutionalize, such as incorporating as a 503b non-profit or narrowing it to a single-issue orientation. She writes,

Since the first days in Zuccotti Park, traditionalists have chastised Occupy for refusing to “say what they want.” What that usually means is “Support my issue.” However, in the one-page OWS September 29 Declaration, the occupiers spoke as clearly as the Founding Fathers in saying that what is wrong is not a function of any single issue. It is systemic and it is the obligation of us all to fix it (Barlow 2012).

Indeed, the OWS Declaration of September 29 outlines a set of grievances that cannot easily be addressed within the framework of the current capitalist system. In the aftermath of the Citizens United decision by the Supreme Court that allows corporations to funnel unlimited amounts of money to political campaigns, it is hard to imagine how politicians will do much to redistribute wealth from the 1% through progressive taxation. Barlow writes, “if we institutionalize its thinking so that the Occupy spirit succumbs to the politics of the possible, rather than continuing to create new possibility, we will have missed an opportunity that history seldom offers” (2012). Similarly, Slavoj Žižek argues that:

What one should resist at this stage is precisely such a quick translation of the energy of the protest into a set of “concrete” pragmatic demands. Yes, the protests did create a vacuum – a vacuum in the field of hegemonic ideology, and time is needed to fill this vacuum in a proper way, since it is a pregnant vacuum, an opening for the truly New (2012).

And *Adbusters* sees the future of Occupy as a “battle for the soul of Occupy... a fight to the finish between the impotent old left and the new vibrant, horizontal left who launched Occupy Wall Street from the bottom-up and who dreams

of real democracy and another world” (*Adbusters Blog*, April 12, 2012). *Adbusters* writes, “the Zuccotti model is morphing and Occupy is undergoing a period of sustained global tactical innovation. This is all just the beginning...” (*Adbusters* n.d.).

What signs are there that Anonymous is assuming greater responsibilities for its actions? This is a more difficult question to answer because of the anonymity that lies at the heart of Anonymous. It is not really an organization, but a culture born of the Internet (Norton 2011; Auerbach 2012), or perhaps, as Tim Nafziger argues, a tactic (2010).

One of the chief drawbacks of anonymity, however, is the lack of trust that lies at its very core. One never can be sure to whom one is talking, or his or her true identity or motives. Provocateurs might lead participants into an illegal action or allow them to use a hacking program that has been subverted by government officials, leading them to be arrested. Emick’s work to “dox” LulzSec, and Sabu’s betrayal of his fellow LulzSec members are signs of the dangers that can lurk in this anonymous world. Olson points out that some of the seasoned operators within Anonymous did not inform new participants that they might be indicted for using the LOIC (low orbit ion cannon) in DDoS attacks (79, 122-129).

There are signs, however, that the trickster ethos of Anonymous is maturing and developing principles that will serve to undergird its activism. The site *WhyWeProtest.com* serves as “a virtual meeting place” for “diverse activist initiatives.” On its homepage, is a link entitled “Looking for Anonymous,” which leads to Anonymous’s ongoing campaign against Scientology. *WhyWeProtest* has a Freedom of Information initiative that outlines a philosophical basis for the kinds of cyberliberation actions taken by Anonymous activists that is grounded in Article 19 of the United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” (*WhyWeProtest*, 2012). In their statement endorsing Freedom of Information, it is significant that *WhyWeProtest* describes a range of interpretations that

individuals, such as those in Anonymous, hold on the subject:

The precise meaning of “Freedom of Information” varies according to the individual. To some, it simply means being able to seek out public knowledge on a subject without fear of retribution or censorship from the government. This view is based on the idea that access to accurate, relevant information informs rational opinions about the world around us.

To others, Freedom of Information is a call for greater corporate and governmental transparency. This conviction stems from the notion that in order for citizens to participate fully and democratically, those in power must share all kinds of information—whether or not it is politic for them to do so. Thus fraud, theft and abuse must be exposed to the public, and the perpetrators held accountable for their actions.

Finally, some individuals view Freedom of Information as a call to rethink current positions on the concept of intellectual property, in the interest of a better world. This view favors diminishing legal and corporate limitations on the use of ideas or creative work that may inhibit innovation and progress.

WhyWeProtest concludes by saying, “For any or all of these reasons, many Anonymous activists believe that Freedom of Information is as vital to a free society as the universal right to freedom of expression. WhyWeProtest supports these activists in their various Freedom of Information initiatives” (WhyWeProtest, 2012).

Another sign of responsibility within Anonymous is the emergence of the #FreeAnons Anonymous Solidarity Network, mentioned above, that is raising funds for arrested Anonymous members and outlining a legal defense strategy based on an interpretation of denial of service attacks as protected free speech, a kind of digital sit-in. And the new Anonymous faction, Anon Analytics, focuses on exposing corporate corruption through legal means (see McMillan 2011). Comprised of “analysts, forensic accountants, statisticians, computer experts, and lawyers from various jurisdictions and

backgrounds,” Anon Analytics says that: “All information presented in our reports is acquired through legal channels, fact-checked, and vetted thoroughly before release. This is both for the protection of our associates as well as groups/individuals who rely on our work” (*Anon Analytics*, 2011). But in spite of the legal, technical, and high-brow level of their work, members of Anon Analytics have not lost their trickster ethos; instead, they have channeled it into strictly legal activities:

Our members grew up within the Internet subculture and cesspool that is 4chan. We have been active in the Anon community over the last several years in some capacity. Some of us eventually grew up and got jobs in industry and government but we retained the dark humor that is Anonymous. More importantly, we retained the skill to source information and social-engineering capabilities that we honed through our work with Anonymous. This ability has proved useful in our more high-brow work with Anon Analytics (Fish, 2012).

## Conclusion

In concluding this discussion of the trickster ethos in the contemporary social movements of Anonymous and Occupy, it seems fitting to return to Paul Radin’s observations on the Winnebago Trickster Cycle. Over the course of time, the trickster Wakdjunkaga develops “some sense of social and moral responsibility” (Radin 143). Like this Winnebago trickster, Occupy and Anonymous have both matured as movements, despite – or perhaps because of – the arrests of some of its members.

When Jake Davis, aka “Topiary,” from Anonymous and LulzSec was arrested, his final Tweet was, “You can’t arrest an idea” (Olson, 406). Despite the arrests of active Anonymous members and claims by the FBI that it had chopped off the head of LulzSec, authorities have failed to stop Anonymous. Olson reports that in February 2012 alone, other hackers “took up the cause,” “attacking the websites of the CIA, Interpol, Citigroup, and a string of banks in Brazil, among other targets” (407).

The amorphous and ambiguous nature of the trickster seems to rise naturally from the leaderless, horizontal, and fluid structures of

both Anonymous and Occupy. The medium of the Internet, with its carnivalesque and viral qualities, provides an ideal ecology for horizontal, leaderless movements. Wearing the mask of the trickster enables these two intertwined social movements to maintain their freedom and to stay nimble and unpredictable. They remain open to new opportunities to resist oppression while creating a more just society.

#### Notes:

1. For more on the association of C.G. Jung and Mikhail Bakhtin, see Sheppard, 1983, 116-17.
2. For more on hactivism used on environmental websites, see Fine, 2012.

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