KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

CYBER-CARNIVAL

GRADUATE THESIS

DİLARA TEKRİN

April, 2014

CYBER-CARNIVAL

DİLARA TEKRİN

Submitted to the Graduate School of Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
COMMUNICATION STUDIES

KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY
April, 2014

KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

CYBER-CARNIVAL

DİLARA TEKRİN

APPROVED BY:

Assist. Prof. İrem İnceoğlu Advisor   Kadir Has University

Assoc. Prof. Levent Soysal Co-Advisor   Kadir Has University

Dr. Bülent Eken   Kadir Has University

Assist. Prof. Defne Karaosmanoğlu   Bahçeşehir University

APPROVAL DATE: 17/April/2014

"I, Dilara Tekrin, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the Thesis."

DİLARA TEKRİN

ABSTRACT

CYBER-CARNIVAL

Dilara Tekrin

Master of Arts in Communication Studies

Advisors: Asst. Prof. İrem İnceoğlu

Assoc. Prof. Levent Soysal

April, 2014

In this thesis I define the concept of the cyber-carnival as the non-official sphere of carnival in cyberspace and explore it in terms of the particular nature of cyberspace, drawing upon Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the carnival. Since its earliest forms in ancient times, the carnivalesque has generated second worlds in the realm of the carnival which differ from daily life in that they turn official life upside down, temporarily cancelling its order. In the case of the cyber-carnival, these worlds are established in cyberspace and their natures are distinct from earlier manifestations of the carnivalesque. In this study, the particular nature of these spheres is examined via elements of carnival such as inversion and collective laughter through case studies.

Keywords: Cyber-Carnival, Cyberspace, Collective Laughter, Lulz, Collective Joy

ÖZET

SİBER-KARNAVAL

Dilara Tekrin

İletişim Bilimleri, Yüksek Lisans

Danışmanlar: Yard. Doç. Dr. İrem İnceoğlu

Doç. Dr. Levent Soysal

Nisan, 2014

Bu tez, siberuzamda resmiyete yer vermeyen evrenler oluşturan Siber-Karnaval kavramını incelemektedir. Bu incelemede siberuzamın kendine has yapısı gözönünde bulundurulmuş, Mikhail Bakhtin' in bu teze de ilham veren karnaval kavramı ise bir referans noktası olarak kullanılmıştır. Antik çağlardan beri tüm karnavalesk formlar gündelik, resmi hayatın dışında bir hayat yaratarak, resmi hayatı karnaval süresince altüst etmiş, onu etkisiz kılmıştır. Siber-Karnaval konseptinde ise bu ikinci hayat, fiziksel uzam yerine siberuzamda kurulmakta, gerek bu farklılık gerek Siber-Karnavalın kendine has yapısı, onu önceki karnavalesk formlardan ayırmaktadır. Tezin kapsamında Siber-Karnavala has bu yapı araştırılmakta ve Siber-Karnavalın altüst etme, kolektif kahkaha gibi yapıtaşları örnekler üzerinden incelenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Siber-Karnaval, Siberuzam, Kolektif Kahkaha, Kolektif Eğlence, Lulz

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my thesis advisor Assist. Prof. İrem İnceoğlu for her precious comments, remarks and encouragement. I would also like to thank my co-advisor Assoc. Prof. Levent Soysal for providing a major guidance to me with his expertise as well as for introducing me to M. M. Bakhtin's concept of carnival. Last but not least, I would like to thank my family who have supported me throughout the entire process.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I introduce and elaborate on the concept of "cyber-carnival"which is comprised of carnivalesque spheres generated in cyberspace and owes a number of its features to the characteristics of cyberspace as well as the ancient phenomenon of carnival. These spheres resemble carnival's second world in that they are non-official and non-hierarchic and differ from the regulations of daily life. In this way, the carnival concept is a significant factor for cyber-carnival, and while there are a great number of sophisticated studies that have been done on carnival, this thesis draws mainly upon Mikhael Bakhtin's conceptualizations of carnival.

In the introduction chapter I specify the scope of the concepts of cyberspace and carnival for the thesis and briefly introduce the concept of cyber-carnival. In the second chapter I analyze cyber-carnival in terms of time, location and participation and attempt to show how the second world of carnival is constructed in cyberspace while at the same time discussing its characteristics. Within the scope of this chapter I analyze the second world of carnival in light of other second worlds in literature as

well. Following that I focus on the collective laughter of carnival which is an essential feature of both ancient carnivalesque forms and cyber-carnival. I define the collective laughter of carnival and outline its functions within the scope of its Bakhtinian meaning and then go on to define "lulz" as a counterpart of collective laughter, examining it within the framework of internet memes and related phenomena such as LOLcats and LOLcat Bible. In this thesis I attempt to demonstrate the most significant characteristics of cyber-carnival such as the grotesque, inversion and carnival language by relating them to collective laughter.

1.1. Cyberspace

Since the very first days of its involvement in our lives, cyberspace has been a subject of heated debates and there have even been disagreements over its definition. In daily life, scientific fiction literature provided the first perceptions of cyberspace, especially works such as William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* (1984) and the film *Blade Runner* (1982) by Ridley Scott.[1] These works offered an understanding of cyberspace as being an alternative reality to the physical world, namely in terms of virtual reality. A number of differing definitions of cyberspace have been developed in academic and activist circles as well. For instance, Critical Art Ensemble defined cyberspace as "a virtual informational landscape that is accessed through the phone system" in their famous manifest Electronic Civil Disobedience (1994). Two years later, John Perry Barlow argued that the word cyberspace should be written with a capital C and stated that "it is an act of nature

---

1 *Blade Runner* is an adaptation of the novel *Do Androids Dream of Electronic Sheep* by Philip K. Dick which was published in 1968.

and it grows itself through our collective actions" ("A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace," 1996). As use of the internet expanded, however, those debates became outdated and cyberspace was transformed into a household term.

Because clearly describing cyberspace is a requisite of defining cyber-carnival, I will first have to determine its scope. In this study, I do not conceptualize cyberspace as an antonym for physical space or as a parallel universe. In contrast, while I mostly refer solely to the internet, I think of cyberspace as the space where CMC-Computer Mediated Communication is established as a sphere built by ICT's – Information and Communication Technologies – and consequently as a territory where a significant part of daily life is lived especially in terms of social relations and this is not necessarily distinguishable from physical space. I should emphasize here that in this study I do not consider it to be a "virtual reality" in terms of science. It is obvious that virtual worlds can be built in cyberspace – the online gaming industry is a good example of that – but as far as the concept of cyber-carnival is concerned, cyberspace is a part of physical space; in other words, physical space and cyberspace constitute a whole which is life itself.

1.2. Carnival

Carnival has always played a significant role in social life and can be traced back to ancient times. As a consequence of its long history, carnival has been imbued with various meanings and been transformed into several different forms; nevertheless, forms of the carnivalesque survive down to the present day. While a

great number of studies on carnival have been carried out, the concept of cyber-carnival as I use it in this study was inspired by the carnival concept developed by Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian philosopher and literary critic. In 1940 he wrote "Rabelais and His World" as a dissertation, but because of World War II and the debates on that work, *Rabelais and His World* wasn't published as a book until 1965. This work is an examination of François Rabelais' masterpiece *Gargantua and Pantagruel* which was written in 1520 and has been harshly critiqued by conservative institutions. *Gargantua and Pantagruel* is a major source for the world of carnival because joy, feasting, grotesque figures and all the other main characters of medieval carnival can be found in Rabelais' narrative. While examining Rabelais' novel, Bakhtin bases his concept of carnival on the medieval carnival, which is a significant period because in the Middle Ages, joy and laughter had not yet been demeaned to mere forms of merriment and thus they still maintained the philosophical depth of the ancient concepts of laughter (Bakhtin 1984). The element of collective laughter is essential to the cyber-carnival concept just as it is to all carnival forms. Carnival is a second world for people which is constructed by collective laughter and established outside official daily life (Bakhtin 1984). Being a "second world" implies that during the carnival the regulations of daily life are cast aside and hierarchy as well as the officialdom of agents of power are denigrated; in short, a world of collective joy is established. The second worlds of cyber-carnival and the medieval carnival that Bakhtin studied have a number of differences, however, and that is an issue I will address in the following chapter.

Between Bakhtin's concept of medieval carnival and cyber-carnival there is

one more carnivalesque form that will be worthy of analysis in this study: the

protestival. The term, which was coined by John Jacobs (St. John 2008:168), refers

to carnivalized demonstrations and the carnivalesque face of contemporary activism.

The global protest "Carnival against Capital" is an apt case of such a protestival.

While protestival generally refers to physical spaces, St. John mentions festal

hacking in his paper on protestival events and discusses "the festival as a hacking

event":

> Here, the hack, not exclusively a negational practice, is radically creative since
> it involves the intentional disruption, disorientation and de-programming of
> "consensus" reality. (St John 2008: 172)

The "de-programming of consensus reality" through festal hacktivism resembles the

non-official, non- hierarchical second world of carnival because it transforms official

life as well, just as carnival does. Although I will also elaborate on carnival as a

festive aspect of resistance in cyberspace, my emphasis will not be on structured

protests such as those that are protestival; rather, I will focus on the resistances which

are built by the second world of collective joy.

1.3. Cyber-Carnival

Cyber-carnival is not a definite concept like the medieval carnival or the

contemporary protestival. Nor is cyber-carnival an event or celebration which occurs

at a specific time for a special occasion. Rather, cyber carnival is a set of formations

blended with carnivalesque features which are developed in cyberspace. Cyber-

carnival is not limited to carnival days and it does not occur in a physically limited

marketplace, such as a public space; it exists in cyberspace and is interwoven with daily life, but it still is distinguishable from daily life in terms of regulations, formality and hierarchy. In other words, while the Bakhtinian concept of carnival posited a second, separate world from daily life, the cyber-carnival is a second world that locates the carnival in daily life. Taking this change into consideration, cyber-carnival is not a carnival in the Bakhtinian sense because there aren't carnival days any longer and as a consequence it differs from the second world of medieval carnival. On the other hand, however, cyber-carnival brings the free, non-official world of carnival to daily life, generating the second world of carnival in the official world just as medieval carnival did.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONCEPT OF CYBER-CARNIVAL

In this study, while the concept of the cyber-carnival draws upon a Bakhtinian perception of the medieval carnival, it should not be considered as a derivative of his carnival theory. Bakhtin had already clarified that a revival is impossible for the medieval carnival and he points out that contemporary carnivals "…lack the essentials: the all-human character, the festivity, the utopian meaning, and philosophical depth" (1984:16). On the other hand, he stressed that the "narrowed and weakened" new forms of carnival "still continue to fertilize various areas of life and culture" despite the fact that it "ceased to be the second life, the temporary renascence and renewal of people" (Bakhtin 1984: 33-34). In brief, Bakhtin stated that the medieval carnival has disappeared but a number of its characteristics have been transformed and integrated into social life.

In light of Bakhtin's claim that medieval carnival no longer exists, it would be futile to search for the exact same carnival after a time gap of 500 years during which time societies have undergone major transformations. Moreover, in the case of cyber-carnival the medium has changed and carnival has been brought from the physical world to the realm of cyber. Taking up those changes, I will elaborate on the

carnivalesque second worlds of cyberspace by using the second world of Bakhtin's concept of the carnival as a starting point and guide for my concept of cyber-carnival.

In this chapter I define the second world of cyber-carnival, which is the essence of carnival that distinguishes it from official life. Initially I will focus on the dynamics of time, location and participation in these second worlds, and then offer an analysis of their significance and characteristics. After that I will discuss other theories about the idea of a second world such as those presented in the works of Raul Vaneigem and Hakim Bey.

2.1. Time, Location and Participation

In her book *Dancing in the Streets*, Barbara Ehrenreich analyzes the history of ecstatic collective joy, arguing that even in prehistoric times people used to dance, wear masks and experience collective ecstatic participation. Although they have been interpreted as "primitive and barbarian" in the European point of view, such rituals may be the oldest predecessors of the European medieval carnival. After locating the first traces of carnival in archaic dance rituals, she traces them to early Christianity which had festive aspects as well. She argues that the prohibitions in Christianity seeking to limit this festive tone brought about the birth of the medieval carnival:

> Extruded from the physical realm of the church, the dancing, drinking and other forms of play that so irritated the ecclesiastic authorities became the festivities that filled up the late medieval and early modern Church calendar: on saints' day, just before Lent and on a host of other occasions throughout the year. In its battle with the ecstatic strain within Christianity, the Church no doubt inadvertently, invented carnival. (Ehrenreich 2007:78)

Ehrenreich argues that after the 16ᵗʰ century traces of carnivals continued to exist in several forms, including rebellions (the main difference of which is the intention to permanently invert the hierarchy), nationalist spectacles, sport events, and rock concerts. In addition to Ehrenreich's claims about carnivals in the 20ᵗʰ century, the term "protestival" is a part of our lives as well, and that can also be considered to be a carnivalesque protest form.

Taking these various forms of carnival into consideration, it is commonly argued that a carnival always needs a specific time and place to occur, such as a marketplace, stadium, concert hall or even the space in front of a governmental building in the case of protests. Historically, there has always been a specific place and a definite time span for such events, such as a feast day, the days before Lent, before or after a sporting event, or during a demonstration, and there has always been a temporal limitation for the duration of carnivals as well. However, these time limits and specific locations cannot be applied to the cyber-carnival. In the cyber-carnival, carnival is occurring constantly and the decision to participate belongs to the individual. In other words, the carnivalesque second world is not a limited event; it has already started and theoretically it will continue until access is obstructed or becomes unavailable. The absence of a determined time span or space for carnival transforms it into a part of everyday life and carnival is not only experienced at specific time and locations; one can participate in the cyber-carnival at any time and in any place. In contrast, Bakhtin asserted that a carnival is a separate second life outside the realm of the official world. In this way, there may be appear to be a discrepancy between Bakhtin's understanding of carnival and the concept of cyber-

carnival; however the second world of carnival does not vanish when it is brought into daily life. On the contrary it changes daily life by creating unofficial holes/spheres in it. Therefore, the second world of cyber-carnival turns official life upside down as well, transforming it into a non-official form just as the second world of medieval carnival did.

Cyber-carnival does not occur at a specific time or location, nor is it a complete event with a beginning and an end. By implication it does not have a particular pattern of participation either, and one can join in the realm of these second worlds even for just a few seconds without any restrictions of place. The time and duration of participation is individually decided and the status of participation cannot be restricted by limits or borders.

Considering carnival forms of physical space, people who share common conditions or motivations are literally brought together during the carnival such as the people of a specific town or people who support a team or people who protest their work conditions. However, in cyber-carnival it is possible that people may not share anything in common except for collective joy, which is a consequence of individual-based participation patterns. It is important to stress that although participation is based on the individual, the cyber-carnival is lived collectively and this collectivity has always been the most significant element of all carnivalesque forms.

2.2. The Second World of Cyber-Carnival

In this section I investigate the carnivalesque world to determine its location in daily life, and I examine its nature and links with other theories.

2.2.1. The Second World of Carnival as an Inversion

I have already stressed that as a consequence of cyber-carnival's nature, which is free of restrictions of time, location, and participation, it is brought to daily and official life. In this way, official life is now riddled with non-official second worlds. I argue that the transportation of the carnivalesque second world into official life is an inversion. In carnival theory, inversion is a major concept because it turns power balances and daily practices upside down. The cross-dressing tradition of the medieval carnival is a good instance of inversion; women would wear men's clothes and men would wear women's clothes. In this manner, notions of gender are turned upside down. Although the example of cross-dressing may appear to be a simple tradition, inversion has a philosophical aspect as well: it is derived from the endless cycle of renewal of life and nature; in other words, it is the cycle of life and death, day and night. In spite of the fact that it involves negative phenomena, such as death, the transformation which is established through inversion cannot be considered to be destructive because it refers to an uncompleted world which is constantly changing and improving. Cyber-carnival induces the official and hierarchic nature of daily life to be occupied by non-official, non-hierarchic carnivalesque spheres; there is a shift

14

between opposite forms – official and carnivalesque – as in the instances of day and night, and birth and death, and therefore I argue that the development of the second world of carnival is an inversion as well.

Although inversion has a subversive manner in that it turns the official order upside down it should not be thought of as a rebellion because the goal is not revolution; rather, the shift of power balances is related to the endless transformation and improvement of the world. In the sphere of carnival, life is in a secondary, decentralized mode; but this world is temporary and afterward, carnival life returns to regular. This is the endless shift between the official and non-official forms of existence.

I have argued that the formation of carnivalesque second worlds in official life is an inversion. Now, I would like to examine what these spheres signify for people, life and society.

2.2.2. Cyber-Carnival as a Safety Valve

James Scott argues that inversion creates an "imaginative breathing space" (1990:168). The idea of a breathing space which seeks to make hierarchy and social order more bearable is reminiscent of the debates on carnival being a safety valve. However, the concept of the "safety valve" has been heatedly debated because there are varying arguments about it, such as:

> … [Carnival] is in fact a sort of social "safety valve" that allows the official world to operate unhindered the rest of the time, and is in this sense complicit with that which it superficially opposes. (Grindon 2004:151)

As I understand it, this argument assumes that people need these "breathing spaces" to temporarily escape from official life and after that period of relaxation they will return to the official order of life again. This approach is based on the premise of officialdom and refers to a world where official life is dominant. I argue, however, that the safety valve theory should be examined from another perspective which regards the non-ordinary, unofficial life of carnival as equal to official life; in other words, an examination of how day and night are equals and the opposite parts of an entity. In this approach, the idea of breathing spaces would be a part of the endless transformation of the world. Moreover, in terms of an endless cycle which is comprised of the continual shift of opposite concepts, these concepts – daily and carnivalesque worlds – should be considered to be inseparable. Thus, it can be argued that if carnival is a safety valve for official life, official life is also a safety valve for carnival. James Scott asserts that official life and carnival are inseparable and that they are conditional requirements for each other's existence. He delineates this inseparability in the following terms:

> The grotesquerie, profanity, ridicule, aggression, and character assassination of carnival make sense only in the context of the effect of power relations the rest of the year. (Scott 1990:176)

This approach can be applied to the case of cyber-carnival, especially when cyber-carnival's connection with the endless cycle of inversion is taken into account.

In contrast, Vaneigem calls official life a "survival sickness" and argues that the second life of collective joy should be the dominant life form. He describes official life as oppressive and the carnivalesque sphere as the true nature of humanity which opposes official life:

16

> The Situationists saw carnivalesque manifestations not as "safety valves" but as moments of crisis in capitalism, and as spaces that gave expression to relations that were to some extent "outside" those of capital and the spectacle. (Grindon 2004: 154)

In addition to its correspondence to Scott's approach, cyber-carnival can also be associated with Vaneigem's second world of joy which causes crises in capitalism. These crises, which are based on joy, will be discussed in the following chapter through case studies.

2.2.3. Cyber-Carnival is not an Escape

The second world of cyber-carnival should not be conceptualized as a sphere offering an escape from the imposed regulations of hierarchic, official daily life. On the contrary, it makes it possible for people to resist official life; in other words, cyber-carnival makes it possible for people to exist in spite of official life. The carnivalesque spheres are interruptions for the hegemony of agencies of power. In his well-known work *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel De Certeau writes about "perruque" and defines it as a "diversionary practice" in his analysis of "the manipulations of imposed spaces." He describes perruque as "worker's own work disguised as work for his employer" (1984:43) and states that workers' desire in the act of perruque is to create a space for him/herself. This motivation can also be found in another discussion put forward by De Certeau in the case of school children: "The child still scrawls and daubs on his schoolbooks; even if he is punished for this crime, he has made a space for himself and signs his existence as an author on it" (1984: 49). This is a typical manipulation of an imposed space – the classroom in the

case of young student and the work place in the case of perruque – in which the

individual creates a breathing space in the imposed space to be himself/herself. This

is not a passive act, nor is it done with the aim of hiding or escaping; on the contrary

it is a declaration of existence, an expression of true feelings, and thus it is an

opposition not an escape. If we apply De Certeau's and Vaneigem's thoughts to

cyber-carnival, official life would be the imposed space where the "survival

sickness" is being lived out and the carnivalesque sphere would be the territory of

perruque, the crisis moment of capitalism which is built by joy and celebrates the

existence of people and the world.

> In his work *Cyberspace, or, the Unbearable Closure of Being* Zizek writes:
>
> Years ago, in a TV interview, one of the participants in a contest for the best "Madonna lookalike" gave an appropriate answer to the journalist's patronizing question about how she felt being deprived of her true self in her imitation of another person: "For 364 days a year, I am forced to live with my true Self – it is a liberating experience to be able to get rid of it for at least one day! (2008:176)

This anecdote is a strong example of what cyber-carnival is not. The second world of

cyber-carnival does not refer to a hiding or escaping from unpleasant situations;

rather, it is a resistance against those unpleasant things. It is a resistance which is

built by laughing at them, degrading them and defeating them through carnival,

through joy. This is a critical feature of the second world of carnival: Rather than

being passive, it is subversive, powerful, liberating and joyful.

2.2.4. Cyber-Carnival and Play

Referring to a world outside officialdom evokes the idea of "play" and in spite of the similarity between the essentials of cyber-carnival and play, there are considerable differences as well. Firstly, both concepts are distinct from ordinary life and the regulations of official life are not valid in either sphere; however, these spheres differ by their very nature. Play has certain rules and "as soon as the rules are transgressed the whole play world collapses" (Huizinga 1949:11). On the other hand, in the carnivalesque sphere there is no room for rules, and moreover the absence of rules is a distinguishing factor in defining the carnivalesque world. Secondly, play commences and ends at determined times, and while this feature has been maintained for carnivals in physical space, cyber-carnival does not have a determined beginning or an end; the carnivalesque sphere of cyber-carnival begins and can only end with the destruction of access to the carnival. Taking into account the limits and rules of play, we can see that it creates a new order (1949:10) that replaces the official one, as Huizinga has asserted. This new order can be evaluated as an interruption of the official order, as carnival does; however, the difference is that carnival interrupts official life by turning its regulations upside down, while play interrupts it through the replacement of the official order with a new one, the order of play.

Online computer games are a reflection of how play generates a new order. In this regard, there is a popular online game that is called Second Life, which is an interactive game in which every user has an avatar – a persona – and is able to do almost everything that can be done in the physical world such as shopping, getting married or even earning real money. On its website, Second Life is described as a

19

"…3D world where everyone you see is a real person and every place you visit is built by people just like you" (secondlife.com). In the instance of Second Life, we have a literal second world that people inhabit, but this second life creates a new order by using the regulations of the official world – such as earning money and getting married – but it is neither subversive nor transformative. It does not challenge the official regulations but simply applies them on different grounds under different conditions. This is a critical point in the distinction between the second worlds of cyber-carnival and Second Life; the first resists the official world, while the second approves its rules by reproducing them in a different sphere.

2.2.5. The Invisibility of Cyber-Carnival

In the previous section I stressed that the carnivalesque second world and uprisings share the notion of interrupting the official regulations of daily life. However, cyber-carnival is not revolutionary because revolution changes the order permanently whereas cyber-carnival changes it temporarily. The concept of TAZ (Temporary Autonomous Zone), which was developed by Hakim Bey, suggests a similar temporary inversion:

> The TAZ is like an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/else when, before the State can crush it. (Hakim Bey 1985)

In terms of repeated temporary formations and liberation of an area, carnival and TAZ resemble one another. However, power's attitude regarding these two concepts differs; Hakim Bey argues that the TAZ will survive until the "State crushes it" but

the connection between carnival and agencies of power is more complicated. In Eagleton's words, carnival is "a licensed affair, a permissible rupture of hegemony" (Eagleton quoted in Grindon 2004:151). Although it is known that there are a number of instances in which power agencies are unable to control carnivals, they have theoretically been under the control of authorities since their emergence. On the other hand, in the case of cyber-carnival it is not entirely under the control of authorities because cyberspace cannot be completely governed or inspected because of its decentralized nature. This "invisibility" may be a common point between TAZ and cyber-carnival:

> Getting the TAZ started may involve tactics of violence and defense, but its greatest strength lies in its invisibility--the State cannot recognize it because History has no definition of it. As soon as the TAZ is named (represented, mediated), it must vanish, it will vanish, leaving behind it an empty husk, only to spring up again somewhere else, once again invisible because indefinable in terms of the Spectacle. (Hakim Bey 1985)

According to Hakim Bey, the state cannot recognize the TAZ because it does not have any information about it. In an analogous manner, cyber-carnival is not recognizable as well in that it does not have distinct limits; in other words, it does not exist in any specific place and hence cannot be searched for – it is experienced in an uncontrollable space and it is impossible to detect it precisely.

2.2.6. Cyber-Carnival is Uncountable

In this chapter I have used the term "second world" in both singular and plural forms because the cyber-carnival does not only refer to one second world. Cyber-carnival is comprised of several second worlds which are not necessarily

independent instead of a singular carnival situated within the limits of time and space. When the concept of carnival is applied to cyberspace, it ceases to be tangible; it is an idea, and this idea of the cyber-carnival involves all those second worlds. In subsequent chapters I will present a number of instances of carnivalesque spheres of cyber-carnival.

The Critical Art Ensemble published the manifesto "Electronic Civil Disobedience" which was inspired by Henry Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience*. The manifesto states that power has become decentralized in today's age and that approaches to challenging it should be decentralized as well (1996). In this way, they emphasize the decentralized nature of cyberspace and assert that it is the proper field for protesting decentralized agencies of power. In light of this argument, we can deduce that cyberspace is also a proper field for carnival. Taking into consideration the fact that power and carnival are interdependent, as Scott argued, the proliferation of carnival can be explained through the proliferation of agencies of power and the expansion of the realm of their authority.

In this chapter I analyzed and defined the second world of cyber-carnival and its most important characteristics. In the following chapter I will do case studies to explore cyber-carnival in greater detail.

CHAPTER THREE

THE COLLECTIVE LAUGHTER OF CYBER-CARNIVAL: LULZ

This chapter explores the concept of lulz, which is an essential aspect of

cyber-carnival. First I will define lulz and examine its roots and then explore its

relationship with the other essentials of carnival. After that, contemporary case

studies will be given to clarify the concept.

The word lulz originates from "LOL," which is the abbreviation of "Laugh

Out Loud" and is commonly used in today's world. Lulz can be thought of as the

plural form of LOL. Gabriela Coleman defines lulz as the "pluralization and

bastardization of lough out loud" (2011). Lulz corresponds to all the pranks, jokes,

memes or expressions and oppositions that combine with laughter; in short, it refers

to all activities which involve humor, especially subversive humor.

On the other hand we have the collective laughter of medieval carnival,

which has ancient roots and is an essential aspect of all carnivalesque spheres. This

collective laughter involves "bastardization" as well but it also has links with

philosophy and it is a distinct concept from the laughter of our age, especially in

terms of collectivity. Referring to the similarity between lulz and the ancient concept

of collective carnival laughter, I will analyze lulz as the collective laughter of cyber-carnival.

3.1. The Ancestor of Lulz: Carnival Laughter

I consider lulz to be analogous to the collective laughter of carnival which has major significance in Bakhtinian perceptions of carnival. Therefore, I will begin this chapter with an examination of carnival laughter.

The most significant trait of carnival laughter is that it is collective and is not directed toward a singular person or a specific happening because it is the celebration of the endless transformation and improvement of the world. Andrew Robinson explains the scope of carnival laughter in the following terms: "Carnival is differentiated from other kinds of humour because the crowd also includes itself in the world which is mocked, and which is reborn" (2011). Bakhtin identifies the significance of this world which is reborn,

> …just as the Roman Saturnalia announced the return of the Golden Age. Thus, the medieval feast had, as it were, the two faces of Janus. Its official ecclesiastical face was turned to the past of sanctioning the existing order, but the face of the people of the marketplace looked into the future and laughed, attending the funeral of the past and present. The marketplace feast opposed the protective, timeless stability, the unchanging established order and ideology, and stressed the element of change and renewal. (Bakhtin 1984:81)

Therefore carnival laughter should not be considered to be mere entertainment; it has a philosophical and ideological aspect, and "it is essentially linked to the ultimate philosophical questions concerning the regulation of life" (Bakhtin 1984:70). This philosophical aspect of laughter is derived from an antique conception of laughter which relies on the idea that laughter is the "highest spiritual privilege" of human

beings and a proclamation of wisdom. Thus, serious problems concerning the world and life were also included in the scope of laughter, and the masterpieces of literature such as Shakespeare's and Euripides's works involve both seriousness and laughter. In the medieval carnival, the second world of carnival was built on the premise of collective joy. According to Bakhtin, during the carnival people leave behind their official lives and "perceive the world in its laughing aspect" (Bakhtin 1984:13). The carnivalesque traditions such as the "uncrowning of the king ritual" were based on this joy. The uncrowning of the king was a process of inversion, which was also observed in Roman Saturnalia. The transformation of the king and the clown is a prime example of the uncrowning ritual and it represents a desire to mock power through inversion. In the traditional ritual, a person was chosen to be the king during the carnival, and afterwards that "king" was beaten and his clothes were torn, and in the process he was stripped of power and transformed back into a clown. In this case, power is in the hands of the people; first they give the crown and then they take it back. Although in this tradition the uncrowning ritual was very explicit – there is a king whose crown is seized – uncrowning does not only mean taking the crown of a king; it corresponds to all the degradations of the powerful, the authoritarian agencies such as the church or the state. Parodies which mocked the church, Christianity and priests were also uncrowning rituals, and a number of instances of such parodies can be found in Rabelais' novel as well. Later in this chapter, I will examine a number of contemporary uncrowning rituals.

As I emphasized above, the uncrowning ritual emerges from an inversion. Bringing the king from the top of the hierarchical order down to the bottom is a

typical inversion in that it crowns and uncrowns. In an uncrowning ritual, laughter is not directed at the person who is beaten and whose crown is taken; rather, it is directed to the act of inversion, to the shift between the balances of power. In other words, it is directed to the transformation. A crucial distinction should be made here; without laughter there would not be inversion in a carnivalesque sense, because the inversion would leave the territory of folk humor and become an act of revolt. The point I would like to highlight here is that through these inversion rituals, medieval carnival changed the balance of power balance through laughter and joy.

Another important feature of carnival laughter was that it was able to conquer fear. Official life in the Middle Ages was based on fear and intimidation, and "the idiom of laughter was never used by the authority" (Bakhtin 1984:90). Carnival turned the terrifying concepts of official life such as hell or authoritarian commandments into laughter. The concepts linked to fear were primarily transformed into comedic monster forms; for instance, death was symbolized by a pregnant monster. The pregnancy of the monster turns death upside down, transforming it into a concept which both gives and takes life. As this illustrates, "Victory over fear is not its abstract elimination; it is a simultaneous uncrowning and renewal, a gay transformation" (Bakhtin 1984:91).

Despite its significance in the Middle Ages, laughter was relegated to a lower position in the 17th century and after this time its connection with philosophical forms largely disappeared. In the 17th century, the epidemic of melancholy began (Ehrenreich 2006) and the carnival started to be individualized as well (Ehrenreich 2006, Bakhtin 1984). Ehrenreich argues that in the 16th and 17th centuries, carnival

began to become privatized and those private fests were especially common among the elite, although in the medieval ages they were celebrated in public spaces. From the 16th century onward, the elite started organizing private festivities and withdrew from public events. As a consequence of this individualization and privatization of the carnival, these new private fests differed from the previously popular festive forms both in terms of location and the attitudes and manners of the participants during the celebration. As Bakhtin points out, "the popular frankness of the marketplace is replaced by chamber intimacies of private life and the frank talk of marketplace and banquet hall were transformed into the novel of private manners of modern times" (1984:105-106). Ehrenreich asserts that "the disappearance of the traditional festivities was a factor contributing to depression" (2006:137), and she adds: "Even they are not factors of depression; the disappearance of them is the loss of the cure!" (2006:148). It can be argued that the diminishing of collective laughter and the individualization of the carnival and the epidemic of melancholy are linked. Bakhtin claims that the decrease of collective laughter was caused by the advent of an absolute monarchy and a new official order. As more laughter was excluded from the official sphere, the more it was marked by "exceptional radicalism, freedom and ruthlessness" (Bakhtin 1984: 71-72). I suggest that lulz primarily corresponds to these marks of exceptional radicalism, freedom and ruthlessness, since it is derided by the agents of the official sphere as well.

3.2. Lulz

Gabriela Coleman, who has researched the Anonymous, defines lulz as "a
pluralization and bastardization of laugh out loud- LOL" (Coleman 2011). I interpret
this "pluralization" as the boosting of laughter which is a result of actions inspired by
lulz and indicates collective laughter as well. In this sense it can be argued that lulz
itself is a promotion of laughter. The "bastardization" may be an indication of the
subversive and prankster aspects of lulz. This subversive aspect is an inseparable part
of collective laughter, and this subversiveness has links with the concept of the
grotesque. All the pranks, jokes, and trolling, or in Coleman's words the
"bastardization," inherent in lulz can be considered to be grotesque and the notion of
the grotesque connects lulz to the medieval carnival. For example, in the uncrowning
ritual, the old king was beaten and his clothes were torn; this is a typical grotesque
ritual because these actions are carried out to facilitate rebirth; the death of the old
king heralds the new king, and all these grotesque images are linked to the cycle of
life and death just as all carnival games and rituals are. Bakhtin commented on a
story in Rabelais' novel in which Gargantua drowns 260,418 people in his urine and
"…before performing his carnivalesque gesture, Gargantua declares that he will do
this only *par ris*, for sport or laughter's sake" (Bakhtin 1984: 192). Likewise,
Coleman asserts that the motivation for "…telephone pranking, having many unpaid
pizzas sent to the target's home, DDoSing[2], and most especially, splattering personal

2 DdoS, a Distributed Denial of Service attack, is an attempt to make an online service unavailable by
overwhelming it with traffic from multiple sources. (digitalattackmap.com)

information, preferably humiliating…" is lulz (Coleman 2011). In a manner similar to Rabelais' Gargantua, the idiom "I did it for lulz" is commonly used by the performers of these actions. Such actions inspired by lulz can be interpreted from two perspectives which are dependent on the target: if trolling is directed to a specific target, it may be defined as a carnivalesque protest in cyberspace, as a cyber-"protestival," and if the target is random, it can be argued that trolling serves the transformation of the world. If the target is random, the intention is not to harm a specific individual but just perform an act of degradation and perpetuate carnival's endless transformations.

As discussed in the former section, collective laughter has an ideological aspect, and serious problems about the world and life fall within its scope as well. I think this aspect can be explicitly observed in the collective actions of the internet group Anonymous which are blended with joy and mockery, namely lulz. Lulz is a component of Anonymous, which has protested the Church of Scientology for its abuses, supported WikiLeaks in its struggles for a free press, and even targeted governments in its operations such in the case of Op Israel. In some operations Anonymous uses lulz as a weapon, while in some cases lulz stays in the background and plays a minor role in the operation. For example, with Project Chanology, Anonymous had unpaid pizzas delivered, faxed nude photos and made a massive number of calls to the Church of Scientology; in such cases, lulz was used as a weapon. On the other hand, in the Payback Operation which was organized against Master Card, PayPal and other powerful organizations in order to protest their actions concerning WikiLeaks, Anonymous used a downloadable program[3] to set up

3 This program is called LOIC- Low Orbit Ion Cannon.

29

the DDoS attacks. The activation button of the program was named after a famous grotesque internet meme: "Imma Charging mah Lazer."[4] As can be seen in the Payback Operation, lulz is in the background but it is still there. Through these cases I would like to argue that lulz is engaged with serious problems about the world and life, just as the collective laughter of medieval carnival was engaged.

Coleman has discussed the association of lulz and the political actions carried out by Anonymous and points out that "…lulz provides 'a release valve,' as one participant explained, a valve that makes the hard and sometimes depressing work of political engagement more bearable" (Coleman 2011). This raises yet again the old debate of carnival being a safety valve, which I discussed in the second chapter; in this way, Vaneigem's approach, which considers carnivalesque manifestations to be crises in capitalism, appears to be more applicable to my case studies than the safety valve theory. In the case of Anonymous, lulz turns official life upside down and causes crises both through cyber-protests and attacks that incorporate lulz – for example Payback Operation and Op Israel literally caused crises in capitalism – and grotesque pranks are also used for similar ends. Although these grotesque pranks had different consequences from the Payback Operation and Op Israel, they did result in crises as well since they interrupted official life.

Lulz replaces the rules of daily life with joy and official content with the true feelings of people and as an element of the second world of cyber-carnival, lulz is brought to daily life. In the previous chapter I explored the outcomes of the carnivalesque second world's location in daily life, but I would like to stress yet

---

4 "Imma charging mah lazr" is an exclamatory sentence which the hero of the meme "Shoop da Whoop" says before firing a laser from its mouth.

again that the location of lulz in daily life interrupts at intervals the hegemony of power.

3.3. Internet memes

In this section I will examine internet memes as a product of the collective laughter of cyber-carnival. An internet meme is comprised of an image and accompanying captions. It is quite easy to create or edit an internet meme, and there are online generators that upload photos and add text to them, such as memegenerator.net and knowyourmeme.com. By clicking on an existing meme, it is possible to reedit the image or captions. Memes are spread over the internet through social media channels and platforms for the meme community such as through ICHC – I can haz cheezburgerz.com – but 4chan[5] is the platform where they first began to appear and circulate, eventually becoming an internet phenomena, and for that reason 4chan is considered to be the original source of internet memes.

Although it was used in another field, the word "meme" which is derived from the Greek "mimeme" was firstly used by the biologist Richard Dawkins, who defined a meme as: "...the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation." (1976: 171) and he adds:

> Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain... (Dawkins 1976: 172)

---

5 4chan is a simple image-based bulletin board where anyone can post comments and share images. Its format is considered to be collaborative-community and the users do not need to register a username before participating in the community (4chan).
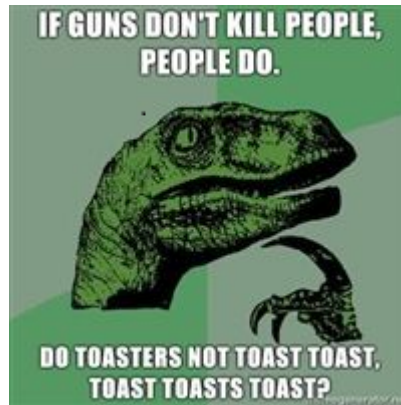
Illustration 3.1. An Internet
Meme
 Knowyourmeme.com
http://goo.gl/Z29d5E

However, memes are not self-replicating like genes; they are created and propagated

by people, as Henry Jenkins has asserted (Jenkins at 2011). An internet meme is

defined in Know Your Meme – a database and also a generator for internet memes –

as "a piece of content or an idea that's passed from person to person, changing and

evolving along the way" (Know Your Meme). The process of transmission is a

distinguishing factor here; if the content does not evolve while it spreads, it is not

considered to be an internet meme but rather viral content or a remixed meme

(Börzsei 2013). In other words, the originality of a meme is proven by the absence of

uniqueness and authenticity.

The most significant aspect of a meme is that it is created, shared and enjoyed

collectively; this collectivity was also an essential feature of medieval carnivals, as

Bakhtin pointed out. In terms of collective joy, memes can be considered to be the

equals of the games and rituals of the marketplace at medieval carnivals. A meme is

not a product created by an individual; countless people make contributions as they

edit and share it. Memes are generated and regenerated continuously, and the processes of creation and enjoyment are inseparable. The cycle of generation of the memes can be described in the following manner: a meme is created by an individual and then it is shared, and subsequently it is reedited by another individual and the new version of the meme is shared again. The process of editing and spreading memes may theoretically be an endless cycle, one that is generated collectively and generates collectivity. As a consequence of this cycle, memes do not have a single creator or author; they are like the anonymous folk stories or songs the content of which is continually developed by the people themselves.

The content of a large number of memes is linked to the continual cycle of win & fail; in these memes people or animals are depicted in situations in which they win or lose, are successful or unsuccessful, or are lucky or not. Epic win and epic fail are superlatives of these idioms; an epic win is defined in Encyclopedia Dramatica as:

> Epic Win by definition, is a win containing epic qualities. A win of such magnitude that it makes your jaw drop for at least 100 minutes before a sudden outburst of JESUS CHRIST ON A CRUTCH THAT WAS FUCKING AWSEOME and consequently falling to the floor twitching and babbling incoherently. (Encyclopedia Dramatica)

Illustration 3.2. An Epic Win
Cheezburger.com. http://goo.gl/drs8v

On the other hand an epic win may be turn into an epic fail, and in the same way an

epic fail always has the possibility of being transformed into an epic win:

> Any Epic Fail is a fail so incredibly bad that it paradoxically becomes a win.
> You cannot try to get an epic fail, because that would just be trying to attain a
> win. And then you would be trying too hard. (Encyclopedia Dramatica)

I suggest that there is an analogy between cycles of win & fail and the

continual shift of inversion; both are endless shifts between opposite forms such as

birth and death. The cycle of win & fail is a good indication of how opposite forms

are followed by each other and are ultimately inseparable.

Illustration 3.3. The Cycle of Win & Fail
Cheezburger.com. http://goo.gl/drs8v

The cycle of win & fail is akin to the abuse and praise cycle of the marketplace language. Bakhtin argues that "abuse and praise are two sides of the same coin" (1984:165). He gives the following example: "Hail, O most valiant and illustrious drinkers! Your health my precious and pox-ridden comrades..."(1984:168) and asserts that "Abuse and praise are mingled in this address. The positive superlative mode is combined with such semi-insulting terms…" (1984:168). He considers this address to be abusive praise and praiseful abuse, and he points out that this is typical marketplace speech. Abuse and praise resemble win and fail in that they are inseparable yet opposite concepts and have a tendency to turn into each other.

Moreover, the conversion between epic win and epic fail is a similar case of the pregnant monster of death. The transformation of an epic win into an epic fail – or the contrary – can be evaluated in terms of a shift in balance between negative and positive phenomena and be related to the endless transformation of the world which is essential to carnivalesque spheres. In the case of the pregnant monster of death, the negative phenomena of death intersects with the positive phenomena of pregnancy and is transformed into a comedic situation, and in the process, fear of death is defeated by pregnancy. In an epic fail, "succeeding in failing so badly" transforms the fail into a win and the fail is defeated by the win.

Memes are usually subversive in terms of their content; however this subversion is based on laughter, and as such, memes invert the balance of power for the sake of laughter. This attempt at inversion, however, cannot be considered to be a rebellion because it occurs within the unofficial sphere of laughter. On the other hand, memes are political, their senders are anonymous and their messages are collective. James Scott argued in *Arts of Resistance* that there are two types of resistance – public and hidden – and he adds:

> …there is a third realm of subordinate group politics that lies strategically between the first two. This is a politics of disguise and anonymity that takes place in public view but is designed to have a double meaning or to shield the identity of the actors. Rumor, gossip, folktales, jokes, songs, rituals; codes, and euphemisms-a good part of the folk culture of subordinate groups-fit this description. (2005: 19)

Illustration 3.4. An Internet Meme
memecenter.com http://goo.gl/P1lwzF

Considering this quotation, the claim could be made that Scott would appraise

memes as a "politics of disguise," but in the case of memes, the aim of anonymity is

not only to conceal the identities of individuals but also produce an outcome of

ubiquity. Memes can be created by anyone and in most cases the creator remains

undetected since the memes are constantly edited and re-edited. In other words, the

generator's identity is anonymous because the meme is created collectively. Taking

the subversive, critical manner of memes into account, I argue that collective

laughter has gained a new facet of resistance in cyber-carnival. As discussed in the

previous chapter, cyber-carnival differs from the medieval carnival in terms of time

and place. In the medieval carnival, the inversions prevailed only during the carnival

for a determined time span; however, in cyber-carnival, the inversions are brought

into daily life and do not disappear after a particular span of time because memes

will theoretically be always online. As a consequence of this change, the notion of

resistance that carnival laughter-lulz generates is more expanded in cyber-carnival in comparison to carnival forms which occur in physical space. Their impact is not limited by time or space – unless a blockage in access occurs – and they will be there forever. The outcome is that the subversive content of inversions appears at shorter intervals in daily life – by being always available – and thus the hegemony of power and officialdom is interrupted at shorter intervals as well.

3.4. LOLcats, Lolspeak and the LOLcat Bible Project

A LOLcat is an internet meme consisting of an image of a cat and related captions, and it has been found that the first instances of them began to emerge on 4chan's board /b/[6] in 2006 (Fiorentini 2013). In most of the LOLcats human characteristics are attributed to cats and also a special language is used in the captions; the name of this language is Lolspeak and the speakers of Lolspeak are called Cheezpeeps. At first sight Lolspeak is reminiscent of pidgin language; however, Rosen defines it as a mix of baby talk and Leetspeak[7] (Rosen 2010). Lolspeak can be imagined as a language of a cat with human-like thoughts or as dubbing a cat for a movie.

Although the first appearance of LOLcats and Lolspeak was on 4chan, the LOLcat community spread to other platforms as well such as icanhazcheezburger.com and cheezland.com. These sites are both databases and

6 /b/is one of the image boards on 4chan. There are several boards such as Photography, Anime& Manga, and Torrents, etc. If the content of a post is not related to these boards, it is posted on /b/ aka Random.
7 Leetspeak is an internet language in which letters are changed into numbers. For example 1337 Sp34k means Leetspeak.

generators for LOLcats, and as it was noted in the former section, it is very easy to create or edit memes on these sites. Chats and debates on LOLcats also occur on those sites, and thus they are the places where the LOLcats are enjoyed as well.

3.4.1. The Grotesque Body of the LOLcat

As seen above, LOLcats involve images of cats, but they are not ordinary cats; they are depicted with human attitudes. Miltner suggested in her paper on LOLcats that the appeal of LOLcats may be a consequence of this anthropomorphic element because a number of attendants in her focus group expressed their reluctance to laugh at others' misfortunes, and noted that the anthropomorphic distance provided by LOLcats made it more acceptable to do so (Miltner 2012).

I interpret this mixture which is comprised of cats and humans as the grotesque body of the cyber-carnival. Hegel makes the argument that there are three traits of the grotesque:

> The fusion of different natural spheres, immeasurable and exaggerated dimensions, and the multiplication of different members and organs of the human body (hands, feet and eyes of the Indian gods). (Quoted in Bakhtin 1984: 44)

As this definition suggests, the grotesque is mostly about abundance and exaggeration. A grotesque body is always transforming, especially in terms of its limits. The parts of the body expand or proliferate to enormous dimensions and transgress the limits of the body, ultimately merging with the universe. The cycle of eating, digesting and defecating is a typical grotesque act. In the act of eating, food

39

becomes a part of the body, and with defecation it leaves the body. This cycle

symbolizes the relationship of humans with the universe. As Bakhtin notes,

> The grotesque body, as we have often stressed, is a body in the act of
> becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created
> and builds and creates another body. Moreover, the body swallows the world,
> and is itself swallowed by the world. (Bakhtin 1984: 317)

Another concept of transgressing the limits of the body is the combination of the

human body with animal forms. In these chimeric figures, the body not only

transgress its own limits but also merges with another form as well, thus becoming

transformed into another being, as in the case of LOLcats. Bakhtin makes the claim

that "An object can transgress not only its quantitative but also its qualitative limits,

that it can outgrow itself and be fused with other objects" (1984: 308). This change in

the qualitative limits of the body is the humorous element in the case of LOLcats and

laughter is directed to this fusion of cat and human not to the misfortunes of the

character, and thus it is directed to the existence of the LOLcat.

Although after the Middle Ages several forms of carnival have been

observed, these forms have not usually included grotesque forms (Soysal 2005).

Even if there were any grotesque elements involved in carnival forms, they would

not have been considered as grotesque because in modern life the grotesque is not

engaged with in the same way as it was in the Middle Ages. In particular, the

grotesque body in the chimeric sense is a rather rare case in contemporary

carnivalesque spheres.

40

3.4.2. The Language of Laughter: Lolspeak

Lolspeak is the language of LOLcats, in addition to the memes; it is used on several platforms such as forums and image boards. Firstly I would like to emphasize the unofficial nature of Lolspeak. Lolspeak is a variation of English in which both the grammar and vocabulary forms have been altered. Here are some examples:

- The subject-verb inversion in questions:

  "I can haz?" instead of "Can I have?"

- The misuse of auxiliary verbs:

  "Ai iz glad" instead of "I am glad"

- The use of past tenses are exaggerated and/or deformed

  "Wi kommed home" instead of "We came home"

  "Ai nebber seed a kitteh do wat dey otter" instead of "I never saw a kitten do what they ought to" (In Fiorentini 2013)

- Verbal root repetition which is reminiscent of grotesque abundance

  "Taypetaypetaype de hedbonz tugevver wif pink dukkytaype" instead of "Tape the head bones together with pink duct tape"

  "Dey lublublubs u foarebber" instead of "They love you forever" (Fiorentini 2013)

Although there are common uses as indicated above, Lolspeak is an ambiguous language. For instance, Gawne and Vaughn point out two different uses for "the":

> "Genesis 01:02 In teh beginnin Ceiling Cat maded teh skiez an da Urfs, but he did not eated dem." (Gawne and Vaughn 2011)

And they add:

> Within one sentence we have two uses of "teh" and one use of "da," another common replacement for "the" […] this exemplifies the fact that Lolspeak's "rules" are not as rigid as those of natural languages. (Gawne and Vaughn 2011: 108)

Moreover they claim that the replacement of "the" with "teh" is a common typing mistake and adds to the joke. Rosen's findings support Gawne and Vaughn's assertion that the rules of Lolspeak are not rigid. Rosen translated a number of English words into Lolspeak using two different online translators and she showed that the results differed for a set of words. For instance while both translators wrote "with" as "wif" and "people" as "peeps," there were two different translations of "human" as "hyooman" and "hooman", "should" as "shud" and "shoodz", cats "kats" and "katkind" and "wrestling" as "wrestlin" and "cat-fytein"(Rosen 2010).

My argument is that the reason for the absence of strict rules and rigid grammar forms for Lolspeak is that it is the language of collective joy. Laughter replaces the rules; Lolspeak lives in the realm of laughter and within the borders of this second world the rules of official life – or language in this instance – are no longer valid. Lolspeak has transgressed the rules of official languages and entered into the second world of cyber-carnival, which means that its face is turned to the future, to endless transformations, rather than the rigid rules of official life. It doesn't matter if the word for "human" is "hooman" or "hyooman" as long as it is a word of the language of laughter. These flexible rules are indicative of the difference between the second worlds of carnival and play. In the sphere of play, the rules of official life

42

are replaced with the rules of play, and in this case there would be a determined – or multiple – word for "human" in play. However, in carnival there may be a great number of substitutes for a word because the only criterion is that it be in the realm of collective joy.

On the other hand, for this unofficial world there is always the risk of becoming official. C.S. from Miltner's focus group stated that:

> You know, this is our language, these are our shared cultural reference points. And, when it goes mainstream, you know, you feel like you've lost something, and it's time to move on to the next little bit of obscurity. (In Miltner 2012: 32)

As C.S. asserted, this "little bit of obscurity" may become an element of the official world, as it is in Börzsei's instance of emoticons. Börzsei points out in her work "Makes a Meme Instead" that the first memes were emoticons; however, after several books on the issue were written and dictionaries started making references to emoticons, and even telecommunications companies incorporated them, their use began to fade (Börzsei 2013). In light of these instances, one day Lolspeak may become official; maybe it already has, considering that it is already in Twitter's language options among official languages. If carnivalesque second worlds represent crises in capitalism, becoming official is the crisis of carnival, as in the case of Lolspeak.

If we compare Lolspeak with the language of the marketplace at medieval carnivals, it would appear that the language of marketplace is not written but spoken, in contrast to Lolspeak. However, we should bear in mind that the dominant word is not spoken anymore as it was in the Middle Ages. De Certeau points out that in today's day and age, the language of hegemony is written (1949:142). Taking into

account the fact that shifts in power balances occur, it is probable that the language which will be inverted by the carnival would be the dominant one, that is, the written language.

3.4.3. LOLcat Bible: The Degradation of the Sacred Text

In this section I will examine the LOLcat Bible Project which is involved with a considerable number of the essentials of the cyber-carnival. LOLcat Bible is a wiki page, the aim of which is to translate the entire Bible into Lolspeak. This project began in 2007 and much of the Bible has been translated. A wiki page is a template which is designed to enable people to contribute to the content and thus in the LOLcat Bible Project everyone has permission to translate or edit the translated text. It should be pointed out, however, that the LOLcat Bible is not just a translation of the Bible's words into Lolspeak. The content is also transformed into a form which would be appealing for a cat: God is replaced with "Ceiling Cat," Satan with "Basement Cat" and Jesus with "Happy Cat." All these holy cats are well-known LOLcats in the meme world.

Here is an example from the LOLcat Bible Project, beginning with the original language of the Bible:

> Genesis 1.09: And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so... (LOLcat Bible).

This passage was translated into Lolspeak as:

> "An Ceiling Cat gotted all teh waterz in ur base, An Ceiling Cat hadz dry placez cuz kittehs DO NOT WANT get wet." (LOLcat Bible)

It can be translated back in English as:

"And Ceiling Cat got all the water in your base, and Ceiling Cat had dry places cause kittens DO NOT WANT get wet." (LOLcat Bible)

As can be seen, holy symbols are replaced with LOLcats, the official language is replaced with Lolspeak and all of these occur on a wiki page; the outcome is the re-writing of the Bible by collective laughter-lulz. The hegemonic text which for ages was a source of intimidation is thus turned upside down in this project; for that reason I consider LOLcat Bible to be an uncrowning of religion. In our age, while religion may generally not be regarded as an agency of fear and intimidation as it was in the Middle Ages, the symbol of religion is still powerful; but in the LOLcat Bible Project it is defeated by lulz in the same way in which death is defeated by the grotesque pregnant monster. The LOLcat Bible is a typical grotesque degradation seeking to transform the subject of fear – religion – into a comic form. Moreover, LOLcat Bible correlates holy elements with daily objects, with animals and with material bodies, and this is a grotesque approach as well. Bakhtin provides a useful definition of grotesque degradation:

> The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation that is a lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity. Thus "Cyprian's supper" and many other Latin parodies of the Middle Ages are nothing but a selection of all the degrading, earthly details taken from the bible, the gospels, and other sacred texts. In the cosmic dialogues of Solomon with Morolf which were popular in the Middle Ages, Solomon's sententious pronouncements are contrasted to the flippant and debasing dictums of the clown Morolf, who brings the conversations down to a strongly emphasized bodily level of food, drink, digestion, and sexual life. One the main attributes of the medieval clown was precisely the transfer of every high ceremonial gesture or ritual to the material sphere; such was the clown's role during the tournaments, the knight's initiation, and so forth. (1984:19-20)

The grotesque degradations of LOLcat Bible can be considered to be a contemporary version of the degradations of the medieval carnival. For example in Genesis 1.26:

"An Ceiling Cat sayed, letz us do peeps like uz, becuz we ish teh qte, An let min p0wnz0r becuz tehy has can openers" (LOLcat Bible).The second sentence would be translated as, "Ceiling Cat lets men rule, because they have can openers." This sentence can be interpreted from two different perspectives: The first is that mankind is underestimated by Ceiling Cat and its superiority to cats is linked to a mere object, the can opener. On the other hand the can opener represents here the power to rule and thus it is shifted to a holy level which is a common carnivalesque approach, especially for kitchen utensils and food. This duality is reminiscent of Bakhtin's claim: "Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also regenerating one" (1984:21). This can be applied to the case of LOLcat Bible as well because the degradation of holy symbols promotes the ascendance of the material bodily level.

Gawne and Vaughn point out that LOLcat Bible has an obsession with "invisible" items:

> Thus we see an obsession with "invisible" items ("invisible bike", Genesis 01:02),"cheezburgers" (cheeseburgers), and "kittehs" (kitties, Genesis 01:09). These items are usually common, everyday items that have taken on specific salience for the language community through repeated use. (2011:102).

I argue that interpreting the invention and adoption of these new terms is a crowning of the material bodily level; cheeseburgers, bikes or kitties ascend to a sacred level, as in the case of the can opener. They are transformed into the holy beings of the LOLcat world by lulz in the same manner that the holy beings are degraded to the material level. Thus in the LOLcat Bible Project we observe both crownings and uncrownings; while it crowns ordinary objects such as can openers and

cheeseburgers, it uncrowns the holy ones. All these transformations build a new world: A second world of cyber-carnival.

> One might say that it (carnival laughter) builds its own world versus the official world, its own church versus the official church, its own state versus the official state. Laughter celebrates its masses, professes its faith, celebrates marriages and funerals, writes its epitaphs, elect kings and bishops. Even the smallest medieval parody is always built as part of a whole comic world. (Bakhtin 1984: 88)

This quote highlights the sphere of laughter and proposes that it represents a world with all its accompanying agencies. The LOLcat Bible Project brings this manifestation to life; it has literally built a religion and a church and changed the nature of the world through the domination of cats. However, we must clarify that this order is not definite or completed. If it were definite, LOLcat Bible would not have been a carnivalesque sphere but a play. The wiki page, which is the ground of the LOLcat Bible Project, is still active and it is still developing; at any time a change may occur in the translation and the order which lulz has constructed may be turned upside down by lulz yet again.

Illustration 3.4. Christ as a Child
LOLcat Bible http://goo.gl/iCPVaM

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Within the scope of this thesis I have introduced and developed the concept of cyber-carnival. First, I identified the differences between cyber-carnival and the medieval carnival, which I drew upon in this study. I emphasized that the dynamics of time and location as well as the participation patterns of cyber-carnival are distinct from those of medieval carnival and that these changes led to the creation of a carnivalesque sphere which is distinct from earlier carnivalesque forms. I analyzed a number of theories which have the potential to generate second worlds, as cyber-carnival does, and examined those spheres by comparing them with the cyber-carnival. In particular, I focused on the collective laughter of cyber-carnival: the lulz. Firstly I summarized the history of collective laughter and then analyzed lulz through case studies which I consider to be counterparts to collective carnival laughter.

The aim of this thesis was to demonstrate that there are carnivalesque spheres in cyberspace that have a particular nature as an outcome of the intersection of carnival's heritage and cyberspace's peculiar structure. Through the elaboration of location, time and the participation dynamics of cyber-carnival, it became clear that a transition has occurred in the patterns of individualization in carnival. The

individualization and the privatization of carnival commenced in the 17th century and continued in subsequent forms, and many traditions have become private moments for the nuclear family such as Christmas. In the case of the cyber-carnival, participation is individual-based but the festivity is not private; rather, it is collective as it was in the Middle Ages. The existing carnivalesque spheres can be entered individually but they are generated collectively, as the case studies indicated. I emphasized that these carnivalesque spheres are inversions as the result of their very being because they continually rupture everyday life and cause undetectable and uncontrollable interruptions in official life. I suggested that these interruptions are not escapes or "safety valves"; on the contrary, they are resistive in character because they are the declaration of an existence which stands against the impositions of official life.

The exploration of lulz revealed that it is linked with the concept of the collective laughter of older carnival forms. I presented the grotesque and ideological aspects of lulz through these interconnections, arguing that my case studies – internet memes, LOLcats, Lolspeak and LOLcat Bible Project – are connected to the endless cycle of transformation which has been at the heart of carnivalesque second worlds since ancient times. This argument is based on the fact that my case studies have been created, shared and enjoyed collectively and are engaged with forms of oppositeness such as the cycle of win & fail.

I also delved into the subversive manner of lulz, and I have analyzed internet memes as agents of political resistance and messages in which the sender is anonymous due to its collective process of creation. I emphasized that the LOLcat

Bible Project also has a critical aspect since it degrades holy concepts and promotes ordinary subjects of daily life. By examining the LOLcat Bible Project I have attempted to show how a new second world is created through collective laughter as well.

As I have repeatedly noted in this thesis, the cyber-carnival is not a definite occurrence; it is an idea which is the outcome of carnivalesque spheres in cyberspace. Since these spheres are continually generated and regenerated, it is impossible to identify all carnivalesque spheres in cyberspace – and in that regard, cyberspace's nature is also a factor. For that reason, I defined the concept of cyber-carnival and demonstrated that it is not an event with a beginning and an end, and it is comprised of unofficial spheres which are located in official life.

Due to the size limitations for this thesis, I have covered only one element of cyber-carnival in detail: collective laughter-lulz, and I chose interconnected case studies. I plan to analyze in detail other elements of the cyber-carnival, as I did for collective laughter-lulz, and write a PhD dissertation on the concept of cyber-carnival. The concept of the cyber-carnival has links both with cyberspace studies and the concept of the carnival. Through the introduction and development of this concept I hope to contribute to cyberspace studies and interpret the carnival concept within a new framework.

REFERENCES

4chan. Accessed: January 2014 http://www.4chan.org/

Bakhtin, M. 1984. *Rabelais and His World.* Bloomingdale: Indiana University Press.

Barlow, J. P. 1996. "A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace." *Electronic Frontier Foundation.* Accessed: March 2014 http://goo.gl/UTXamn

Bey, H. 1985. "TAZ: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism." *Hermetic.com.* Accessed: March 2014 http://hermetic.com/bey/taz_cont.html

Börzsei L. 2013. "Makes a Meme Instead: A Concise History of Internet Memes *New Media Studies Magazine*7. Accessed: January 2014. http://goo.gl/NyMWWR

Coleman, G. 2013. "Anonymous in Context: The Politics and Power behind the Mask". *Cigionline.org.* Accessed: January 2014 http://goo.gl/VVYz3C
-   2011. "Anonymous: From Lulz to Collective Action". *Mediacommons.org.* Accessed: January 2014 http://goo.gl/nquZAa

Critical Art Ensemble. 1996. *Electronic Civil Disobedience*. Accessed: March 2014 http://www.critical-art.net/books/ecd/ecd2.pdf

Dawkins, R. 1976. *The Selfish Gene.* Oxford: Ebook v1.0.

De Certeau, M. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life.* Berkeley: California Press.

Digitalattackmap. Accessed: April 2014. http://www.digitalattackmap.com/understanding-ddos/

Ehrenreich, B. 2006. *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy.* New York: Metropolitan Books.

Encyclopediadramatica. Accessed: January 2014 https://encyclopediadramatica.es

Fiorentini, I. 2013. "Zomg! Dis is a New Language": The Case of Lolspeak. *Selected Papers from Sociolinguistics Summer School 4.* Roberts, N. S. and Childs C. (eds.)

Gawne, L., Vaughan, J. 2011. "I can haz language play: The construction of language and identity in   LOLspeak." *Proceedings of the 42nd Australian Linguistic Society Conference – 2011* Accessed: November 2013 https://digitalcollections.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/9398

Grigoriadis V. 2011. 4Chan's Chaos Theory. *Vanity Fair.* Accessed: January 2014 http://goo.gl/CoHNxJ

Grindon, G. 2004. "Carnival Against Capital: A Comparison of Bakhtin, Vaneigem and Bey." *Anarchist Studies* 12(2): 147- 161.

Huizinga, J. 1949. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.

I can haz cheezburger. Accessed: January 2014 http://www.cheezburger.com/

Jenkins H., Li X., Krauskopf A., and Green J. 2011. If it doesn't spread, it is dead. MIT Convergence Culture Symposium

Knowyourmeme. Accessed: January 2014 http://knowyourmeme.com/

LOLcat Bible. Accessed: April 2014 http://goo.gl/MEdDwT

Memegenerator. Accessed: April 2014 http://memegenerator.net/

Miltner K. 2011. Srsyl Phenomenal: An Investigation into the Appeal of LOLcats. *Katemiltner.com.* Accessed: January 2014. http://katemiltner.com/

Robinson, A. 2011. "In Theory Bakhtin: Carnival against Capital, Carnival against Power." *Ceasefire.* Accessed: March 2014 http://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/in-theory-bakhtin-2/

Rosen A. 2010. "Iz in ur meme / aminalizin teh langwich: A linguistic study of LOLcats" *Goucher.edu.* Accessed: January 2014 goucher.edu/documents/verge/papers7/LING001fin.pdf

Second Life. Accessed: April 2014 http://secondlife.com/

Scott, J. C. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts.* Michigan: Yale University.

Soysal L. 2005. "Karneval als Spektakel. Plädoyer für eine aktualisierte Perspektive," *in Plausible Vielvalt. Wie der Karneval derKulturen denkt, lernt undKultur schafft* Michi Knecht and Levent Soysal, eds., Panama Verlag: Berlin.

St John, G. 2008. "Protestival: Global Days of Action and Carnivalized Politics in the Present." *Social Movement Studies*7(2): 167-190

The Lazer Collection. 2007. *YouTube.com.* Accessed: January 2014. http://goo.gl/EYgjnE

Urbandictionary. Accessed: January 2014 http://www.urbandictionary.com/

Vaneigem, R. 2006. *The Revolution of Everyday Life.* London: Rebel Press.

Zizek, S. 2008. *The Plague of Fantasies.*US: Verso.