‘Meme Warriors’

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Occupy’s Digital Media Use

Figure 0.0: Pepper Spraying the Declaration of Independence (Source: Pepper Spraying Cop, 2011)

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Abstract
In this thesis, Occupy’s use of memes is analyzed. Memes are units of popular culture that are shared through social networks on the Internet. By spreading memes via digital media, the networked social movement Occupy attempted to impact political discourse by gaining counterpower against dominant political and economic elites in society. The digital media that Occupy used are defined as alternative/activist new media. Social movements like Occupy use this sort of media to establish their own channels of autonomous communication, without having to deal with the hegemonic filters of the mass media. Applying scholars from cultural studies like Pierre Bourdieu, this thesis argues that Occupy’s memes contained written and visual language that is inherently ideological. Therefore, a critical discourse analysis is applied to three of Occupy’s memes: #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme, the We Are The 99 Percent meme and the Pepper Spraying Cop meme. This thesis shows that especially the second meme was successful in influencing political discourse, because it created the shared us-versus-them representations that formed the movement’s ideology: the 99 versus the 1 percent. It is concluded that memes can be very powerful if they are used for this purpose: shaping ideologies to bring people together in favor of a shared cause. When it comes to making concrete policy demands though, memes turned out to be far less useful for networked activists.

Keywords
Occupy, memes, memetics, digital media, networks, activists, social movements, critical discourse analysis
**Preface**

This thesis is the eventual result of a personal interest I have had for over 2 years. In 2011, I was infected with the Occupy virus myself. With a group of friends I travelled to Amsterdam to witness the first day of the protests myself. It was an uplifting, enlightening and also weird experience. There was a microphone that everyone could use to say what was on his or her mind. There were religious people. There were anarchists. There were also a LOT of people from the Zeitgeist movement, which basically believes everything any politician has ever told is a lie. Journalist Jelle Brandt-Corstius was there and showed the great documentary *Inside Job* about the late-2000s financial crisis. Unlike some friends, I didn’t stay but took the last train home instead. Sleeping in a tent in the middle of a city was a step too far for me.

Still, I kept following the movement. I wrote a feature about the Occupy camp in Nijmegen (where I was living at the time) for the university magazine and finally stayed a night at the camp. It was one of the coldest nights I ever experienced and my respect for the Occupiers grew. Still, it was clear the movement couldn’t last the cold winter. The movement disappeared from the public’s eye and also from my own attention.

When I had to come up with a thesis subject though, I immediately had to think of Occupy. In relation to media, especially the movement’s use of memes struck me. Memes are mainly known for procrastination purposes: browsing 9Gag while having to work on a thesis for instance. Still, Occupy has proven that memes can be used in a serious manner. You can read all about Occupy’s meme use in this thesis.

I would like to thank my supervisor Ansgard Heinrich for her fast responses on my e-mails and her extensive and thorough feedback on my draft chapters. Also, I would like to thank my fellow journalism students for their support, especially Julia Kramer for making me aware of the Global Uprisings conference in de Balie and Petra Huijgen for helping me identify some of the paintings photoshopped in the Pepper Spraying Cop meme.

I hope my thesis makes for an interesting read.
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The call for action by the magazine Adbusters shown in figure 1.1 launched the Occupy movement: a gathering of activists seeking social and political change by occupying public spaces all over the world, starting with Zucotti Park near Wall Street.

During a weekend almost two years and two months after Adbusters’ initial call to action, activists, journalists and scholars from all over the world came to the Amsterdam-based debate center De Balie. There, they discussed Occupy and the many other popular uprisings of the past two and a half years\(^1\), in a sizeable conference dubbed Global Uprisings. The Occupy movement was a reaction of popular outrage to collapsing banks and a financial system believed to be untenable, especially by young people with a difficult position on the labor market. According to the organizers of Global Uprisings the people rising up against governments, repressive regimes and corporations represent a “global legitimation crisis that affects authoritarian regimes and liberal democracies alike” (Global Uprisings, 2013).

Part of the conference was a debate on media use of social movements: how do networked social movements relate to both mainstream and social media? The topics discussed during that very interesting debate, are the main topics of this thesis. Beka Economopoulos and Jason Jones from Not An

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\(^1\) For a very visual presentation of increasing protests on the planet, see Stuster (2013). Political scientist John Beieler used data from The Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone (GDELT) to map all protests from 1979 until today. The explosion of worldwide protests in the last two and a half years is clearly visible on this map.
Alternative\(^2\), involved in Occupy Wall Street, spoke specifically about Occupy’s digital media strategy at the *Global Uprisings* conference. They made frequent use of the metaphor of a *fire* on which to put *fuel* to explain how the movement made use of the anger that was present in society. Yet another metaphor, *domino blocks* was used to describe how Occupy’s media attempted to create a *myth*, a historical reality, to build new protests on top of the ones already taking place.

How did Occupy do that? The main argument raised at *Global Uprisings* was that social networks, blogs, and video’s were important channels for Occupy to start *viral* campaigns, attract large numbers of followers and communicate with them. Social media tools that became popular in the last decade, provided important new ways for Occupy to spread their message outside of the mainstream media. Occupy performed viral campaigns through the use of **memes**. Originally understood as cultural replicators equivalent to genes, the word ‘memes’ nowadays mainly refers to fast-spreading online content. Internet memes exist in many forms: hashtags, images, videos or mere words or phrases. Most people associate them with light-hearted humorous websites like 9Gag which feature tremendous amounts of cat pictures. However, recent social movements like Occupy have proven that memes can also transport serious messages. By using memes the movement created contagious counter narratives: material that people would want to modify, replicate and spread very quickly through sharing on social media. What the meanings of these memes were, and what representations and ideologies they were actually carrying can best be found out by performing a critical discourse analysis. It is through language use that social movements can gain the counterpower to represent themselves the way they want, and make a lasting impact on political discourse. As various authors of cultural studies like Bourdieu and Foucault point out, language can be understood as a social, practical tool that activists - as well as the dominant groups they counter - use for their specific purposes. This view of language as a social practice with causes and effects makes critical discourse analysis the appropriate method to research three of Occupy’s most famous Internet memes:

\(^{2}\) Not An Alternative is an art collective and non-profit organization that wants to “affect popular understandings of events, symbols, and history” and is specialized in using cultural productions for activist mobilization (Not An Alternative, n.d.)
the original #OCCUPYWALLSTREET blogpost by Adbusters, the We Are The 99 Percent blog on Tumblr and the Pepper Spray Cop.

Why is it relevant to study how Occupy spread those memes through digital media tools? Occupy has been a subject of scientific work (i.e. Milkman, Luce & Lewis, 2013; Milner, 2013; Castells, 2012) and so have Internet memes (i.e. Johnson, 2007; Knobel & Lankshear, 2006) – although certainly not extensively. Still, the meme concept, activist literacies, new digital media tools and critical discourse analysis have not yet been combined within media studies. Some new ways to link theoretical foundations of the meme concept to the way social movement make use of memes will be made in this thesis. Furthermore, only very recently critical communication scholars like Shifman (2013) have begun to apply tools of critical discourse analysis to the use of Internet memes. However, the way contemporary networked social movements like Occupy use memes to achieve their purposes has not been researched before.3 On top of that, networked social movements like Occupy appear to be of lasting significance. This is proven by recent protests in Turkey, Brazil, Peru and Bulgaria. Although the Occupy movement itself was more or less dead one year after it started, the “same spirit of rebellion”, as it was put during the Global Uprisings conference, is still alive. Like Occupy the new social movements in Turkey, Brazil, Peru and Bulgaria rely on a strategy of social media as a “new architecture of protest” (Gutierrez, 2013). Focusing on Occupy, this thesis will examine this “new architecture of protest” to find out how activists actually use new digital media tools. The main research question of this thesis is accordingly:

*How did Occupy use Internet memes to impact political discourse?*

To approach this question it is necessary to begin with an investigation of the following sub-questions:

- *What is Occupy and why is it important to study this movement in relation to digital media tools and memes?*

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3 Milner (2013) similarly combines Occupy, memes and a critical discourse analysis perspective. However, he analyzes how Occupy was perceived by the outside world: how were different perspectives on Occupy articulated through memes within the contemporary “polyvocal” public discourse? This thesis rather analyzes how Occupiers themselves used Internet memes.
What are the theoretical understandings of memes and how are memes being used in a contemporary online environment?
- How do social movements use digital media?
- Why do social movements create their own media?
- How do activists use language in memes?

What’s next?

In the first chapter, the history of Occupy and the reason to select the movement as the case for this study will be further explained. Specifically the movement’s use of memes and digital media are important factors. In the second chapter, the meme itself will be under closer examination. First, the origins of the term will be briefly discussed, as well as the scientific debate about its usefulness. Memes in the popular understanding are online cultural expressions that carry ideologies, goals and interests. They are used for specific reasons by human beings: for instance to form social movements like Occupy. These movements now have a large arsenal of online tools at hand to spread memes globally: the subject of chapter 3. It is easy to imagine how all these tools offer new possibilities, not just for viral marketers but also for activists, seeking for new ways to tell their stories. However, why some of these cultural producers would want to use all the new possibilities of the Web 2.0 to counter mainstream media and therefore to counter powerful elite groups within society has yet to be explained. This will be the subject of chapter 4. Activists have a history of setting up their own media to provide their own news with their own point of view, rather than to uncritically accept the mainstream media’s hegemonic version of events. Central to this practice of counter-memimg (explained in more detail later) is language use, the subject of chapter 5. Hegemony is always contested. Memes, spread through digital media, could therefore be used as a tool by activists to countermeme dominant groups in society. In chapter 6, a specific methodological framework will be outlined featuring linguistic and visual tools to analyse three famous Occupy memes. Next, this analysis will be carried out through close textual and visual reading of the texts, presented in a visual manner as well to make for a case as strong as possible.
1

**OCCUPY: A NETWORKED SOCIAL MOVEMENT**

(...) the excitement of being wrapped up in this community and constantly seeing other people and networking and having conversations, making connections, developing projects on the fly. You’d go there and get sucked in, and couldn’t leave for hours, and all you had done was have conversations. That is such powerful fodder for organizing.

- Occupier Nathan Schneider (quoted in Milkman, Luce & Lewis, 2013, p. 25) on the importance of networking and occupying physical space in Occupy’s success.

On September 17, 2011 about 2,000 activists occupied Zucotti Park near Wall Street in New York City. There, they protested against the financial system that nearly collapsed and was rescued by taxpayer’s money without financial companies being held accountable. These activists, including many former ‘Obamists’4 (Milkman et al., 2013) were inspired by protests earlier that year, including the Arab Spring uprisings and the demonstrations of the Indignados in Spain (Costanza-Chock, 2012). From September 17 on things went fast: by 9 October there had been protests in over 951 cities across 82 countries, in every continent except Antarctica (Adam, 2011; Thompson, 2011). In this chapter, the reasons for designating Occupy as the specific case for this thesis will be outlined, as well as the relevance in studying the movement in relation to memes and digital media tools.

1.1 **INJUSTICE**

Occupy was not a spontaneous movement. To the contrary, the occupation had been carefully planned by experienced political activists who were particularly inspired by the Arab Spring (Graeber, 2011; Milkman et al., 2013, pp.2-6). In a survey conducted by Occupy Research (2012), more than half of the respondents reported that Occupy was not their first social movement.

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4 Americans who voted for Barack Obama during the 2008 presidential elections.
‘Culture jamming’\textsuperscript{5} magazine Adbusters was directly responsible for the launch of the movement with its online call for a ‘Tahrir moment’. However, the magazine, originated in the 1980’s wave of alternative media, started long before the Internet age with the aim to establish alternative media forms outside of the mainstream. Adbusters was not the only group responsible for initiating Occupy Wall Street. AmpedStatus, a network of activists organized around a website had teamed up with the hackers network Anonymous and they had tried to occupy Zucotti Park earlier, but this was unsuccessful (Castells, 2012, p.161).

It is the distinctively activist nature of those combined networks that made the rise of the Occupy movement possible eventually. Occupy in this thesis will be defined as a networked social movement consisting of activists. The tools the movement used to spread globally are understood as memes spread through digital social networks. Important to note is that the movement consists of very different individuals with their own motivations and emotions. Usually, there are two emotions that cause individuals to form social movements (ibid., pp.13-14): fear (negative) and enthusiasm (positive). According to Castells (ibid.), individuals need to overcome this fear to let the positive emotion of enthusiasm take over, and turn emotion into action.

The focus on individuals is important because it differs from the notion of “the people” or “the masses” common in social movement studies. Those are unitary conceptions reducing diversity to a single identity (Hardt & Negri, 2004, p.xiv), meaning social movements are seen as single unities rather than gatherings of many very different individuals sharing a common goal. Following political philosophers Hardt and Negri, Occupy will not be conceived of as a movement of ‘the people’, ‘the masses’ or ‘the working class’ but rather as one of the multitude, defined as “an open and expansive network” (ibid.) with many internal differences. In order to overcome those differences, the multitude must find out “the common” (ibid.) that allows activists to communicate and act together in favor of a cause. “The multitude is an internally different, multiple

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\(5\) Culture jamming is a tactic employed by anti-consumerist social movements to disrupt media culture, particularly advertising. Klein (2000) calls it “the practice of parodying advertisements and hijacking billboards in order to drastically alter their messages”, a practice that has gained momentum due to the Internet. Culture jammers ‘play’ with the images of consumer culture to expose the questionable political assumptions behind them, and make people aware of the branded environment in which they live. Culture jams in short “challenge the idea of what’s cool” (University of Washington, n.d.).
social subject whose constitution and action is based not on identity or unity (...) but on what it has in common” (ibid., pp.99-100). What is the common in the case of Occupy?

Injustices
Occupy can be defined as a social movement because it shared the main characteristics that are central to all social movements. That is, Occupy’s roots stem from a perceived “fundamental injustice” (Castells, 2012, p.12) in society: for instance economic exploitation, poverty, unfair inequality, police brutality, environmental exploitation of the planet and other concerns. For Occupy, specifically the “injustices associated with the global economic crisis and the staggering growth of inequality in the 21st century” (Milkman et al., 2013, p.6) were central concerns.

According to Castells (2012, p.12) “social movements always have an array of structural causes and individual reasons to rise up against one or many of the dimensions of social domination”. This is certainly true for Occupy, as there was indeed great social and political diversity among protesters. But there is still something like a typical Occupier: a relatively young, high-educated Caucasian with employment problems. Occupy Wall Street activists were either underemployed or had recently lost their job, and many were carrying “substantial debt” (ibid.). Still, the household income of Occupy activists was higher than the New York City average. Coloured people and activists were underrepresented. Politically the movement was a mixture of everything from socialists and anarchists to Libertarians and disappointed Tea Party activists. Occupy was definitely not a movement representing a specific political school of thought. Occupier Amin Husain, a respondent in the study of Milkman et al.

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6 These employment issues are an important factor of the availability of activists in the first place, as these issues allow them to spend sufficient energy and time on building up a social movement. Many Occupy activists were prototypes of what social movement scholars like McAdam (1986) call “biographical availability” (Milkman et al., 2013, p.13).

7 For more extensive demographics of Occupy Wall Street protesters see Milkman et al. (2013).

8 Also for extensive research on specific political orientations of Occupy Wall Street activists, see Milkman et al. (2013).
(2013, p.24), expresses this as follows: “A beautiful thing about Occupy is that it said, ‘We’re not going to deal with ‘isms’. We don’t know what those mean. We’re interested in how we live and how we relate to one another.” Occupy was a broad social movement in its political beliefs and demands but yet very determined in its actions: online as well as offline.

Indeed, Occupy’s offline actions were as important as its online presence. Occupying something to gain counterpower against dominant political and economic elites is definitely not a new idea: throughout the history of activism the tactic was employed extensively by squatters and other protesters. In itself, occupying a square can hardly be seen as a serious threat to those in power. Still, this practice can have high symbolic value for activists. This was definitely the case for Occupy. An important feature of Occupy “that helped it attract widespread support was the tactic of occupation itself, and the fact that it maintained a continual presence in Zucotti Park, in close proximity to Wall Street” (Milkman et al., 2013, p.24). Wall Street was a highly symbolic location because it is the heart of the U.S. finance world. Such powerful symbolism was important for Occupy, because the financial institutions of Wall Street were the movement’s primary target (ibid.).

1.2 **Why Occupy?**

Like The Arab Spring protesters and the Indignados, Occupy used a hybrid method of online and offline action (Costanza-Chock, 2012; Pickerill & Krinsky, 2012). The movement was kick-started through blogs and Facebook pages and remained communicating online, but also existed physically in the form of occupations all around the world. Still, there are a few good reasons to choose Occupy as a case, instead of other digitally launched revolutions like the Egyptian revolution or the Indignados in Spain. The most important reason to designate Occupy is the very deliberate use the movement makes of digital media tools for “mediated mobilization” (Lievrouw, 2011, p.150). This is why Occupy can be called a *networked* social movement. Social media were essential for Occupy. According to Milkman et al. (2013, p.4), Occupy “was able to attract supporters with a wide variety of concerns, many of whom had not worked together before, reflecting the centrality of social media to the process”. Indeed the movement was “born on the Internet, diffused by the Internet” as Castells (2012, p.168)
puts it. Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis interested in Occupy's online presence, an 'Occupier' or 'Occupy activist' will be regarded as someone participating offline and/or online. One does not need to have slept in a tent at one of the camps to count as an Occupier.

It was Adbusters editor Kalle Lasn who was responsible for the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET blog, as well as for the attached poster of a ballerina of a muscular bull (a statue on Wall Street). Those were “tools for creating a mental environment”, states Lasn. As he explained in the New York Times: “If you're able to come up with a very sexy sounding hashtag like we did for Occupy Wall Street, and you come up with a very magical looking poster that seems to have something very profound about it, these devices push these memes, these meta memes, into the public imagination in a very powerful way” (Yardley, 2011). This proves the deliberate use Occupy-initiator Adbusters made of memes - these signifying pictures that spread across the web. Indeed, as Milner (2013, p.2360) notes “[d]uring the months OWS [Occupy Wall Street] was most active, participatory media networks buzzed with such artifacts.” Memes became a prominent part of Occupy's media use.

In 2011 however, when Occupy activists created the memes that shaped the movement's ideology, their meanings were in no way fixed. What memes are, how human beings - including activists - create and alter them, and how memes can potentially shift meanings is the subject of the next chapter.
2

THE MEME: FROM A NON-PROGRESSIVE RESEARCH PROGRAM TO A BUZZWORD

The neologism ‘meme’ has recently become a buzzword on the Internet. From silly clips on YouTube to edited pictures referring to popular culture that go ‘viral’ on websites like 9gag to Kalle Lasn of the anti-consumerist magazine Adbusters referring to “sexy sounding hashtags” to push Occupy Wall Street into the public imagination (Yardley, 2011), the meme has been adopted widely by contemporary Internet users. However, the term ‘meme’ has been introduced more than three decades ago by Richard Dawkins in his classic book The Selfish Gene (1976), to refer to a much broader category of cultural information. The meme is for Dawkins a cultural replicator. The meme is the cultural equivalent of the gene: the smallest possible unit of evolutionary material, shaping not biological but cultural change by self-replicating. By introducing the term, Dawkins launched the highly controversial scientific field of memetics, a field which to date carries little consensus over definitions, research methods and operationalizations. In the two decennia following Dawkins’ publication, memetics did not become a very progressive program of research. As Aunger (2002, p.22) remarks, “the social sciences have gotten along just fine for more than 100 years without invoking memes, and in 25 years of consideration, no major conceptual or empirical advances in memetics have appeared.” Still it is
useful to go into the theoretical debate on memes. Because, while there is a huge difference between contemporary Internet memes and the concept of memes as discussed in the formal discourse of memetics, there are also some striking — though superficial — similarities. This chapter will therefore focus on making a comparison between theoretical memes and Internet memes.

2.1 Dawkins’ ‘New Soup’: Human Culture

First, the theoretical understandings of the meme concept will be explained. According to its originator Dawkins (1976/2006, pp.189-191) culture can, just like genes do, generate a form of evolution. He sees cultural transmission of information as analogous to genetic transmission. Mankind is a “unique” species, thinks Dawkins. Culture, according to Dawkins, is what separates man from animal, although he notes that cultural transmission is not necessarily unique to man.9 However, forms of cultural evolution in birds and monkeys are nothing but “interesting oddities” (ibid.).10

Dawkins is dissatisfied with biological explanations for human behaviour at the time, which tried to evaluate every attribute of human civilization by looking for the “biological advantageous” by choosing a particular way of acting instead of another option. “These ideas are plausible as far as they go, but I find that they do not begin to square up to the formidable challenge of explaining culture, cultural evolution, and the immense differences between human cultures around the world (...)” (ibid.). It is the specific realm of human culture where evolution through genes does not always gives a satisfactory explanation. There is no solid reason why evolution could not occur through other replicators than genes, according to Dawkins. To gain a better understanding of the evolution of modern man, we have to think of other replicators than the gene as possible bases for ideas on evolution.

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9 See the example of P.F. Jenkins who describes the evolution of songs of the saddleback, a bird that lives on islands of New Zealand. Jenkins lists “cultural mutations” as the origin of new songs, as opposed to evolution by genetic means (Dawkins, 1976/2006, pp.190-191).

10 Subsequent authors on memes have begun their argumentation in a similar fashion. Dennett (1995, p.338) remarks in the beginning of The Cranes of Culture that “people ache to believe that we human beings are vastly different from all other species — and they are right! We are different. We are the only species that has an extra medium of design preservation and design communication: culture.”
But we don’t have to look too far to find them, Dawkins pursues. For a new kind of replicator has already emerged on Earth. “It is still in its infancy, still drifting clumsily about in its primeval soup, but already it is achieving evolutionary change at a rate that leaves the old gene panting far behind. The new soup is the soup of human culture.” (ibid., p.192). Dawkins calls the new replicator *meme*, and continues with listing a few examples in practice of what a meme can be: tunes, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building axes as well as more abstract ideas like the concept of God. According to Dennett (1995, p.344) it is important to realize that memes are not simple ideas as ‘blue’, ‘round’ or ‘warm’ but complex ideas “that form themselves into distinct memorable units”, examples of which are the ideas of ‘alphabet’, ‘chess’ or ‘Impressionism’. Rather different concepts than genes, but Dawkins (1976/2006, p.192) continues the meme-gene analogy by declaring imitation as the process by which memes proliferate.

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 via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation. If a scientist hears, or reads about, a good idea, he passes it on to his colleagues and students. He mentions it in his articles and his lectures. If the idea catches on, it can be said to propagate itself, spreading from brain to brain.

This idea that memes act in their own interests and not necessarily in that of their hosts, is called the memes’ eye view. Blackmore (1999) argues that according to start to think memetically, we have to make “a giant flip” in our minds. “Instead of thinking of our ideas as our own creations, and as working for us, we have to think of them as autonomous selfish memes, working only to get themselves copied. We humans (...) have become just the physical ‘hosts’ needed for the memes to get around” (pp.7-8). This underlines the theoretical memeticists’ view that the meme is not a product of human creation, but a self-replicating entity that uses humans as mere hosts for their interest. In short, memes use us. This is in many ways similar to Aaron Lynch’s analogy between
memes and epidemic diseases\textsuperscript{11}: “Much as biological evolution keeps viruses renewed and infectious, so too does memetic evolution keep certain beliefs current and contagious. It all happens without plan, and it gives evolving thought contagions a profound influence on society” (1996, p.12). Also in Lynch’s take on memetics, a central point is that we don’t use memes but the memes use us.

There are a number of obvious questions that the idea of a “mind virus”, hopping from brain to brain propagating itself, invokes. The replicator for genetic material has been scientifically proven to exist: DNA. But what is the memes’ DNA? How can ideas propagate themselves, as Dawkins proclaims? This seems counter-intuitive for us human beings: aren’t we in charge ourselves of deciding which ideas, faiths or ideologies we adhere to? Since Dawkins launched his ideas on memes, there has been a lot of controversy about its premises. “[A] downside of the vibrancy of memetics is a certain lack of rigor, so that the general level of discourse in memetics is somewhat low by “hard science standards”, remarks Aunger (2002, p.16) who thinks that because of the lack of biologists and anthropologist involved, memetics has a “populist” flavor and fails to adhere to hard scientific standards.”\textsuperscript{12}

2.2 The Internet: A Fertile Birth Ground for Memes

Regardless of the scientific weaknesses, there is still solid ground to make a comparison between theoretical memetics and popular usage of the word ‘meme’. Scholars have been reluctant in combining the two perspectives. As Shifman (2013, p.372) remarks, “[w]hile memes and digital culture seem like an ideal fit, scholars – particularly in the field of communication – have so far been

\textsuperscript{11} Although the starting point Lynch takes for his epidemiological take on memes is different than that of the ‘memes as replicator’ paradigm of authors like Blackmore. Not the analogy with genes is put central, that is the practice of imitation by which memes are supposed to copy themselves. Instead, memes according to Lynch are viruses, infecting everyone within reach.

\textsuperscript{12} That is why Aunger (2002) came up with the idea of a ‘neuromeme’ in his attempt to lift memetics up to neuroscientist standards and finally make the meme a concrete thing instead of a theoretical idea. This theory is not all too relevant for the purpose of this thesis, but will be shortly spelled out here. Starting point of neuromemetics is that there is activity in the brain that is not directed by genes, like short-term memory. And that leaves room for another replicator to be responsible for brain activity, another mechanism. Indeed, according to Goodman and Parisi (2010) recent memetic theory argues that memory is distributed in the gaps of neural networks, in the brain’s “synaptic plasticity” (p.346). Cultural memory (short-term) is added to long-term (genetic) memory. Skills become habits as information patterns move through the brain. Memes are then essentially a specific subspecies of memory: a class of memories that can copy themselves, making memes not just physical, but electrical.
timid about coupling them.” This thesis states that a couple of theoretical memetic concepts are usefully interpretable in terms of online social networks: the \textit{vocabulary of viruses}, \textit{small world networks}, and \textit{horizontal transmission}.

Memes indeed are popularly thought to be spread through this kind of communication and through those kinds of networks. The word has become mainstream, be it not in the hard scientific sense that authors like Aunger (2002) strive for. Dawkins “inaugurated a flurry of discursive activity that continues to escalate in a variety of arenas ranging from evolutionary science to advertising” (Johnson, 2007, p.29). In this latter sense, viral marketers like Seth Godin popularized memetic concepts for use in marketing. They adopted the ideas of memetics to business practice, by using the epidemic nature of social media to attempt to ‘create a buzz’ and spread a company’s message through society in a cost-effective manner.

The Internet is indeed a fertile birth ground for these cultural replicators. “The consequence of the availability of both e-mail and the World Wide Web is that the Internet is, for its users, an ideal medium for the spread, replication and storage of memes”, as Marshall (2005) points out. According to Marshall, “activities taking place at various levels in the organisation of the Internet can be interpreted in terms of memes and memetics.” Indeed, many similarities can be found in the vocabulary of memeticists and Internet users. If a YouTube video “spreads” and gets really popular, it goes “viral”. And if computer systems are being attacked by hackers they can be “infected” by “viruses”.

It is possible to make some more analogies. Blackmore for instance states that memes can spread more easily as societies communicate more horizontally (between peers) instead of vertically (from parent to child). Blackmore remarks that modern industrialized life is “a world of horizontal transmission” (1999, p.133)\textsuperscript{13}. Our main sources of information became schools, radio, television, newspapers, books and magazines “and lots and lots of friends and acquaintances widely spread around the city, the country or even the world” (ibid.). Writing her book in 1999, Blackmore did not explicitly include the

\textsuperscript{13} Aaron Lynch (1996) similarly speaks of ‘proselytic’ transmission to describe this kind of transmission: “A proselytic idea’s hosts generally pass the idea to people other than just their children” (p.5).
Internet in this list of ‘new’ sources within society by which we receive information in a horizontal manner. But it can be argued that in the new millennium, horizontal transmission of information increased dramatically because of the World Wide Web. Throughout history there have been few revolutions in horizontal transmission this big.

Another analogy worthwhile making is Aunger’s (2002, pp.205-209) idea that memes move faster through ‘small world networks’: networks in which not only the nodes next to each other can then be connected, but any two nodes within the network. An important feature of small-world networks is their irregular connectivity. In the brain (Aunger’s topic of interest) “physically neighboring neurons need not to be closest in terms of the length of the pathway that has to be followed to get there” (ibid., p.209). A single axon can stretch from one side of the brain to the other, connecting two disparate neighborhoods. Aunger compares the brain to the Internet: close e-mail, Twitter or Facebook pals may be on the other side of the world while you don’t even know your neighbor. Infectious diseases tend to spread more easily in small world networks than in regular networks or completely random networks. The same can be said for memes: the brains as well as the Internet are “homes” for memes, places where movement is more feasible.

2.3 The Internet meme
In sum, there are similarities between how theoretical memeticists think of the meme concept and the contemporary popular usage of the term online. Specifically, the kinds of communication and networks through which memes would spread theoretically match well with the characteristics of the Internet. Still, there is one huge essential difference: memes do not use us, like in memeticists’ definition of the theoretical meme. To the contrary, we human beings use Internet memes for our purposes. The perspective of the meme’s eye view is thus reversed completely. This point is crucial in understanding how the concept of the Internet meme is used in this thesis.
Dawkins himself stated in 2013 that Internet memes are a “hijacking” of his original ideas\textsuperscript{14}, the idea of a meme itself has evolved in a new direction (The Saatchi & Saatchi New Directors’ Showcase, 2013). Indeed, as Knobel and Lankshear (2006, p.202) remark, “the concept of a ‘meme’ itself has become something of a meme online.”\textsuperscript{15} Contrary to the original concept of a meme, that spread through replication in a Darwinian sense according to its own interests (the meme’s eye view), Internet memes are, according to Dawkins, \textit{deliberately altered} by human creativity. They are \textit{designed, not random}. This gives Internet memes some possible significance for activist literacies: “If we don’t like their contagious ideas, we need to produce some of our \textit{own}” (Lankshear and Knobel, 2003). This is the greatest difference between theoretical memes and Internet memes. This thesis from now on will completely abandon the idea of the meme’s eye view to focus on human creativity, meanings and language. Following Shifman (2013, p.367), Internet memes are defined as “units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated, and transformed by individual Internet users, creating a shared cultural experience in the process.” This definition allows the meme concept to be used in cultural research because the agency is placed solely within humans, in this case Internet users. According to Shifman, “the conceptualization of humans as active agents is highly appropriate for understanding how memes travel on the digital highway [...]” (ibid., p.366). If the goal is to research memes as activists use them for their purposes, it is necessary to let go of the idea that memes proliferate in their own interest. Memetics has been the domain of biologists, philosophers, anthropologists, psychologists and more, but communication theorists hardly ever adopted the meme. However, as in the present Internet age the meme has become a mainstream word mainly used from a communication perspective to refer to “units of popular culture”

\textsuperscript{14} Dawkins stated this in a remarkable speech at the Saatchi & Saatchi New Directors’ Showcase in Cannes. First he elaborated on genes and memes. Then he went on about the “hijacked version”: Internet memes. His last words \textit{a mutation in the mind} passed into in a dance beat as psychedelic visuals took over. Fragments of Dawkins’ speech were sampled in a song; through repetition it became a musical explanation of how memes work. In the end, Dawkins came back to play the electronic trumpet. The video can be found on YouTube: \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFn-ixX9edg}.

\textsuperscript{15} Knobel and Lankshear describe the general concept of Internet memes as follows: “Among Internet insiders, “meme” is a popular term for describing the rapid uptake and spread of a particular idea presented as a written text, image, language “move,” or some other unit of “cultural stuff”” (2006, p.202).
spread through social media, the meme is now a very relevant concept to communication scholarship (ibid., p.363).

The meme has accordingly been analysed in relation to the online world, although certainly not extensively. Bauckhage (2011) explicitly uses the vocabulary of the epidemiological approach to memetics as he investigates the “epidemic dynamics” of 150 famous Internet memes. The scientific evidence of viral behaviour of Internet memes is scarce, according to Bauckhage. He concludes that “(...) the majority of currently famous Internet memes spreads through homogenous communities and social networks rather than through the Internet at large” (2011, p.49). It is therefore important to not focus on “the Internet at large” but to stay focused on blogs and social media solely: memes seem to spread through the kind of small-world networks that Aunger (2002) thinks of as the ‘home’ for memes.

Some scholars however, choose to abandon the term completely. Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford and Joshua Green for instance argue in their 2013 book *Spreadable Media* about the contemporary media environment “while the idea of the meme is a compelling one, it may not adequately account for how content circulates through participatory culture”¹⁶ (p.19). In this view, discussions of memes lead to a “pseudoscientific” model of audience behaviour. The authors specifically attack the idea of self-replicating memes, “as culture is a human product and replicates through human agency” (ibid.). It has already been stated above that the involvement of human creativity is the biggest difference between theoretical memes and Internet memes. This difference is very much recognized here. But, other than Jenkins et al. it will be argued that Internet memes are a useful term for discussions on online participatory culture. Other authors like Shifman (2013, p.366) contend that “the undermining of human agency is not inherent to the meme concept itself – only to one strain of its interpretation.” If memes are understood as units of pop culture designed and spread by people, they are very much applicable to a thesis on the digital communication of activists: Internet memes can be used explicitly to influence political discourse. Occupy recognizes this quality of the Internet meme, and specifically uses the word to describe how the movements attempts to “push” the movement “into

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¹⁶ Footnote 30 on page 33 in the next chapter will elaborate on participatory culture.
the public imagination in a very powerful way” (Yardley, 2011), as Adbusters editor Kalle Lasn was quoted in the previous chapter.

**Characteristics of Internet memes**

Internet memes are not typically known for their activist possibilities. Indeed, Knobel and Lankshear (2006) made a typology of successful Internet memes and found that many of them are humorous and absurdist, and carry little serious content. According to Knobel and Lankshear (ibid., p.209), any Internet meme is likely to have three characteristics:

- “Some element of humour”: often memes are meant to be funny. They carry primarily absurdist and ironic kinds of humour;
- “A rich kind of intertextuality”: making cross-references to all kinds of popular culture;
- “Anomalous juxtaposition”: often images of totally different events are combined to create a new “hook”: an incentive for passing the meme from mind to mind.

A famous example of a humorous meme is ‘All Your Base Are Belong To Us’, in which grammar mistakes in the subtitles of the Japanese video game *Zero Wing* went viral and led to many creative alterations by using Photoshop. The catchphrase ‘All Your Base Are Belong To Us’ now “regularly appears in news or political reports in the broadcast media or the blogosphere, and is used to describe clumsy, heavy-handed take-over bids for positions of power and the like” (ibid., pp.209-211). The meme, first spread in 1998 (!), continues to be remixed today. In the example of figure 2.2 the meme is juxtaposed with the ‘Kanye Interrupts’ meme: a meme mocking famous rap artist Kanye West for interrupting Taylor Swift’s acceptance speech at the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards (Know Your Meme, 2009). All three characteristics are visible in this meme: it makes references to popular culture (MTV), it juxtaposes images anomalously (rap culture and Japanese video games) and this is meant to be funny, as Kanye West directs his assumed arrogance not at a fellow artist but at a video game character.
However, there are also memes that do carry serious content, with the goal of **social critique and commentary**. A combination is also likely: some memes "put humour to use in generating biting social commentary memes" (ibid., p.211). Thus, humour and social commentary don’t exclude each other.\(^{17}\)

An example of this kind of memes is the 'Nike Sweat Shop Shoes meme'. Its originator Jonah Peretti (2001) mocked at a Nike campaign allowing customers to customize their shoes. Peretti attempted to have the word “sweatshop” embroidered on his shoes, but Nike refused doing this. Peretti forwarded the e-mail conversation he had with Nike to his friends and soon it reached thousands of people (see figure 2.3). The meme was both funny, as Nike’s responses to Peretti’s mails remained very formal, and serious, as Peretti addressed Nike’s poor labor standards.

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\(^{17}\) Furthermore, as Shifman (2007, p.187) argues “humour can serve as a unique key for the understanding of social and cultural processes”. Humorous commentary can have a serious social impact because it works to “strip away artifice, highlight inconsistencies, and generally challenge the authority of official political discourse” (Dahlgren, 2009, p.139). Participating via humorous memes gives citizens the opportunity to offer commentary on socio-political affairs. Not only scholars dealing with memes but also those interested in alternative media (see chapter 3) recognize the value of humour. As Lievrouw (2011, p.66) describes, “alternative/activist media projects have an acute sense of irony and humour, especially in their appropriation of mainstream cultural images and ideas to advance alternative or oppositional meanings.” A true example of counter-meming.
This thesis will focus on social commentary memes. Regardless of the serious content, these memes often deliver their message in a “playful” manner. An important feature of social commentary memes is timeliness: there needs to be a match between the meme and events that happen in the real world. The Nike Sweatshop Shoes meme for example was able to catch attention because it was launched at a time when Nike was under attack for exploiting its workers in developing countries (Knobel & Lankshear, 2006, p.211). If a meme is timed well it can spread very fast because it is on top of mind, allowing for an augmentation of feelings already out there in society. As Jenkins et al. (2013) write: “Often, a media text spreads particularly far in when it depicts a controversy a community cares about at the precise time it is looking for content which might act as it’s rallying cry.” Also, the quotability of memes is an important factor, because in the Internet era “if it can’t be quoted, it might not mean anything. The social practices of spreadable media necessitate material that is quotable – providing easy ways for audiences to excerpt from that material and to share those excerpts with others” (ibid.). To be shared maximally, a meme needs to be urgent and easy to quote.

2.4 "Memetic engineering" through countermemes

Indeed, Adbusters attempted to seize the moment and “manage the minds of others” on July 13 2011, when the magazine created the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET hashtag on Twitter and the poster of a ballerina on the bull on Wall Street – the memes that launched the movement. When it comes to the Internet, Mike
Godwin (1994), famous for creating “Godwin’s Law if Nazi Analogies” 18 calls this practice of managing other people’s minds memetic engineering: identifying harmful memes and releasing a counter meme into the idea stream. 19 This is how memetics can be connected to critical theory. According to Knobel and Lankshear (2006, p.224) “studying memetic engineering may well prove to be an important component of classroom critical literacy approaches to understanding social power and influence.” Johnson (2007, pp.27-28) shares this belief that memetics “has much to offer critical communication studies.” Johnson regards the meme as a “valuable methodological tool that is particularly suited to the analysis of popular culture discourses that transform social practices in spite of their apparent superficiality and triviality.” 20 Memes may appear absurd or even nihilist, but underneath the surface they may carry a very serious message. Transforming social practices is essentially what Occupy aimed to do by protesting against economic inequality in society. By releasing social commentary memes, Occupy’s digital sphere attempted to counter-meme political and economic elites. The movement’s co-founder Adbusters has experience with memetic engineering and uses countermemes deliberately to battle mainstream media, marketing and consumption memes (see figure 3.1). Culture jammers explicitly use memes – “appropriated images, sound or text from popular culture” (Lievrouw, 2011, p.23) – to critique the very same popular/mainstream culture, “particularly corporate capitalism, commercialism and consumerism” (ibid.). The next chapter will explain in more detail how activists use digital tools with the purpose of counter-meming.

18 Godwin’s law states that the longer an online discussion grows, the bigger the probability becomes of a comparison involving Nazis or Hitler. This counter meme quickly got attention, and has been used ever since to judge the worth of a discussion threat: nazi-references count as invalid arguments.
19 Memetic engineering of course does not necessarily have to be a good thing. For instance, online “trolls” on communities like 4Chan also understand that “memes are not passive and do not follow the model of biological infection.” Instead, they understand memes as being actively engaged and/or remixed into existence “because something about a given image or phrase or video or whatever lines up with an already-established set of linguistic and cultural norms” (Philips, 2009). In the case of 4Chan, this remixing is often “disrespectful”: for example the widely spread images that present U.S. president Barack Obama as Batman character The Joker. Members of the Tea Party movement used these images for protests against Obamacare.
20 Although it is agreed here with Johnson that memes are relevant to critical communication studies, it is important to note that Johnson proposes the meme as an alternative to McGee’s ideograph. Thereby he places agency in the hands of the meme and rejects the category of ‘meaning’ commonly used by critical scholars to explain how language - often falsely, according to Johnson - represents the material reality. In this thesis however the idea that memes (at least Internet memes as defined above) can have agency is disputed.
3

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND ALTERNATIVE/ACTIVIST NEW MEDIA

We are a global network of artists, activists, writers, pranksters, students, educators and entrepreneurs who want to advance the new social activist movement of the information age. Our aim is to topple existing power structures and forge a major shift in the way we will live in the 21st century.

Figure 3.1: Adbusters on its aims (Source: Adbusters, n.d.)

Culture jamming magazine Adbusters is an example of what in academic literature is known as ‘alternative media’: “(...) projects that tend to be edited, written and run by non-professionals” (Atton & Hamilton, 2008, p.77-78). Alternative media oppose what is referred to as ‘mainstream media’: a business model that is “largely monolithic, centred on profit-making, hierarchical organization and a practice of journalism that, by dint of its routinization and codification as a profession, is implicitly exclusive” (ibid.). While activists have been starting up their own media channels for decades through print publications, radio and even television, the Internet age provides much more possibilities to anyone attempting to spread their message through their own independent media. Particularly, the evolution of the Internet into the ‘Web 2.0’ led to new forms of communication and formats such as blogging, social networking sites and video tools that can now be used by activists to spread their message without using any mainstream media channels. The new possibilities that this networked ‘participatory culture’ provides to activists will be explored in the following chapter.

3.1 ALTERNATIVE/ACTIVIST NEW MEDIA

First, the specific kind of media this thesis is interested in must be defined. Although there are media that can be called ‘alternative’ on the far right of the political spectrum, the term is more commonly applied to media with a background in social anarchistic movements. Downing (1984) calls these politicized forms of alternative media ‘radical’. But this term is too narrow to refer to alternative media a whole. ‘Alternative’ is somewhat more general,
applicable to more media forms, such as community media and fanzines, whose content is not so politically radical at all. It is primarily the non-professional mode of production that sets these media apart as ‘alternative’. It is clear though that ‘alternative media’ as a term is somewhat too vague to be applicable to the material under analysis in this thesis. Although all alternative media have some reason to feel excluded by the mainstream, they are not all evenly political. ‘Alternative media’ may - amongst many other forms - also refer to pirate radio stations, the zines of science-fiction of punk fans, or the avant-garde publications of Surrealist and Dadaist artists (Atton, 2004; Lievrouw, 2011) 21.

Therefore, to avoid any definitional haziness regarding the media that are referred to specifically, Lievrouw’s (2011, p.19) definition of **alternative/activist new media** will be adopted. 22

> Alternative/activist new media employ or modify the communication artifacts, practices, and social arrangements of new information and communication technologies to challenge or alter dominant, expected, or accepted ways of doing society, culture, and politics.

Alternative/activist new media can refer to any kind of online, non-traditional, non-mainstream media used specifically for activist purposes, be it social media tools, be it blogs, be it magazines or be it videos. 23 Its purpose of counter-memimg

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21 Examples of avant-garde media are *Dada* (first published in 1917) and *La Révolution surréaliste* (first published in 1924).

22 Downing’s (1984) term radical media is not adopted for it is too narrow for the goal of this thesis, as it refers primarily to social movements on the far left of the political spectrum during the 1970’s and 1980’s. Although there were definitely some hardcore leftists involved, Occupy as a whole can hardly be given any clear position on the political spectrum, as was made clear in chapter one. It is a distinctively populist movement, representing the mass revolting against the elite, but the movement as a whole does not clearly adhere to any kind of Marxist theory. Although Occupy speaks of ‘the 99 percent’, they never refer to the people they represent in terms of ‘the proletariat’ etcetera. This is logical as a lot of protesters were not part of what used to be called proletariat, but members of the middle class (Milkman et al., 2013). Furthermore, Occupy “spurned traditional left-wing organizations as overly hierarchical” (ibid., p.26) and thus had no close bonds with the radical left.

23 Although the analysis that will follow is mainly interested in Occupy's use of digital media, it is important to emphasize that the movement's media use in general was not limited to social media and blogs. According to Pickerill and Kristy (2012, p.285), “Occupy was mediated through a mix of ‘old’ and ‘new’ methods of diffusion”. Not everyone involved in the movement was equally new media-savvy. As Costanza-Chock (2012, p.384) remarks, Occupy was internally differentiated when it comes to technological tools and skills. In parallel with “cutting edge technology” the media practices within Occupy were marked by “extensive offline, analog, poster and print-based, and ‘low-tech’ forms of media production” (ibid., p.4). An example of print publication is the four-page broadsheet called the Occupied Wall Street Journal (Lang, 2011).
is clear in the last phrase: “challenge or alter dominant (...) ways of doing society, culture, and politics.” Although alternative media have been around for a long time\(^\text{24}\), the popularization of the Internet in the first decade of the 21\(^{\text{st}}\) century resulted in the greatest expansion in activists resorting to alternative forms of media, starting in 1999 with Indymedia’s coverage of the World Trade Organization’s summit in Seattle. Indymedia was a clear example of a “distributed network organization” (Hardt & Negri, 2004, p.86) and acted as a medium for a “broad coalition of social justice groups, trade unions, anarchists, socialists, communists, environmental groups and others” (Atton, 2004, p.31). Indymedia distributed streaming audio, video and written reports of the demonstrations, made possible through open publishing software with which any independent journalist or activist could upload reports without approval of the small core staff. The result was hundreds of hours of video and audio footage and hundreds of thousands of eyewitness reports, analyses or commentary being made available to a global audience of supporters. This creative use of alternative/activist new media made Seattle “a watershed moment” (Lievrouw, 2011, p.163) for the new possibilities that those media grant activists.

3.2 The Web 2.0
Since the Seattle summit in 1999 however, a lot more has changed. The emergence of the Web 2.0 featured blogs replacing personal websites, websites becoming dynamic instead of static and an explosion of social media like Facebook and Twitter, “turning the web into a kind of global brain” (O’Reilly, 2005) and allowing for rapid hybrid circulation of media content. What in these Web 2.0 days is really unique about the Internet is its emphasis on the network.\(^\text{25}\) “Compared with Web 1.0, Web 2.0 is fundamentally social.” (Lievrouw, 2011, p.178). As Manovich (2009) writes, “(...) if the web was mostly a publishing medium in the ’90s, since the year 2000 it has increasingly become a communication medium” (p.33), linking the huge already existing body of

\(^{24}\) In the nineteenth century the Amateur Press Organization was set up to help young people hand set, type and print their own articles about culture, politics, and daily life and mail them through elaborate circuits that would now probably be called social networks (Petrik, 1992). This proved that the people’s aspiration to establish autonomous communication is in no way new, as will be explained more extensively in the next chapter.

\(^{25}\) The emphasis on the network is not only what distinguishes the Internet, but also the brain, as Robert Aunger’s idea of the neuromeme made clear in the previous chapter.
information of Web 1.0 with “personal interaction, and collaborative creativity of people linked to one another in complex, far-flung social and technological networks”, turning the document repository that was Web 1.0 into “a cultural festival in which anyone can perform, contribute, comment and debate” (Lievrouw, 2011, pp.177-178). A combination between globalized many-to-many communication and the status of the Web 2.0 as a “machinic network” [emphasis added] that enables the creation and recreation of cultural objects” (Poster as cited in Atton, 2004, p.xi) enables subjects (creator, producer, audience, ‘agent’) to “go beyond the confines of the established few-to-many modes of communication (newspapers radio, television) and to realise both itself and the cultural objects it encounters through this network” (ibid.). This post-modern communication allows activists to spread memes in an online environment, directly through social media and bypassing traditional forms of mass communication.26

This development provided far more possibilities for activists: “[s]ocial media create new contexts for activism that do not exist in the world of traditional mass media organizations” (DeLuca, Lawson and Sun, 2012, p.500). These “new contexts” became fully clear for the first time during the Arab Spring in 2011. As Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013, p.41) write:

Journalists, bloggers, and other cyber-enthusiasts have celebrated the use of sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube by protesters across the Muslim world and their supporters from the West as a decisive sign that grassroots communicators might be able to route around government censors and that citizen journalists might be able to force international concerns onto the agenda of the professional news media.

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26 The described developments do not at all mean that we have to resort to technological determinism, the idea that technological developments determine new kinds of human behavior (McLuhan, 1962), to explain new ways of media circulation. The technology does not determine the practice of making content viral, but only facilitates the individual’s interests of sharing stories with one’s friends, family or neighbor: an important form of human communication for ages. As Hardt and Negri (2004, p.94) remark, “[l]ooking only at the formal correspondence might give the impression that technological innovation is the primary force driving social change.” Instead, “[w]e need to look now at the content of what is being produced, how, and by whom.” The mere fact that humankind found it necessary to invent all these new sharing technologies is due to the trend that people “increasingly interact through sharing meaningful bits of media content” (Jenkins et al. 2013, p.11).
Activist groups started organizing through the social network Facebook. The Egyptian 6 April Youth Movement for instance created a Facebook group that soon had 70,000 followers. Many activists of the movement played an important role in the demonstrations that eventually led to the occupation of the Tahrir square in Cairo on January 25, 2011 (Castells, 2012, p.54). In Spain, citizens concerned about the euro-crisis, the massive youth unemployment and the political system, which was perceived as dysfunctional and unresponsive from various cities created the Facebook group ‘Platform of Coordination of Groups Pro-Citizen Mobilization’. Some of them were activists for a free Internet, for instance the Anonymous hackers network. The platform soon evolved into a Facebook group of debate and action called “¡Democracia real YA!” (Real Democracy Now!), which eventually launched the so-called Indignados movement, an important precursor of Occupy.

Also for Occupy, social networks like Tumblr, Facebook, Reddit, YouTube and Twitter were very important tools for organizing purposes: internal communication, linking to other occupations and planning of actions. According to Milkman et al. (2013, p.8) the early phase of Occupy “brought together distinct networks of activists who had not worked together in the past, reflecting the centrality of social media to the process.” While the “spirit of rebellion” was there, memes spread through social media proved essential for bringing people together and starting a concrete protest. “Using Twitter from their cell phones, the protesters were able to constantly distribute information, photos, videos and comments to build a real-time network of communication overlaid on the occupied space” (Castells, 2012, pp.171-172). Livestreams proved to be another important Internet technology used by Occupy: “a key symbol of the sophistication of media practices in the Occupy movement”, as Costanza-Chock (2012, p.382) puts it. Livestreams allowed protesters to broadcast real-time video content over the Internet. Especially during police raids, when mainstream media blacked out, viewership of livestreams peaked. At the peak of Occupy’s

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27 Of all these tools, Facebook was the most popular new media platform among Occupiers. According to the survey by Occupy Research (2012), 64 percent of respondents used Facebook for Occupy-related information, in contrast to YouTube (29%), blogs (23%), Twitter (23%) and livestreams (19%). Over 1500 unique Facebook pages were set up globally in order to spread the movement (Gaby & Caren, 2012, p.367). The reason for the popularity of Facebook was according to Gaby and Caren largely the “reduced costs of participation” the network offers.
mobilizations up to 80,000 unique viewers per day watched livestreams from the various Occupations around the world (ibid.).

**Memes, video's and blogs**

Next to organizing, social media are also used by activists to spread memes. In Egypt, Internet memes started playing a role in identity building of the protesters. In the Arab Spring for instance, the ‘Epic Libyan Man’ meme celebrated the rebels fighting against leader Muammar Gaddafi (Flock, 2011), the ‘Bread Helmet Man’ was a humorous meme of a Yemeni protester wearing baguettes around his head – seemingly for protection (Know Your Meme, 2011a). Even the Tahrir square in Cairo itself had evolved in a meme-like fashion (Deterritorial Support Group, 2011). The idea of a central encampment maintained for as long as deemed necessary became very powerful and indeed spread through other countries and other protests: The Indignados and Occupy.

Counternememng is better possible than ever because digital network tools allow online memes to travel faster than ever. Elsaesser (2008) for instance discusses the memetic qualities of the video website YouTube: “(...it seems to mimic certain primitive forms of life, comparable to the swarms and clusters of bacteria (...), not least because what exists on YouTube is constantly growing, changing and adapting” (p.30). Next to video’s, blogs, understood as “online postings of comments by citizens, groups, and news professionals, outside of the normal values provided my mainstream news organizations” (Reese et. al. 2007, p.235-236) are important new tools for activists to spread memes. The We Are The 99 Percent meme spread through the social blog Tumblr is a good example.28

**3.3 Autonomous communication**

Historically, communication methods have always been very important for social movements, be it rumors, pamphlets or manifestos (Jenkins et al., p.15). In modern times, activists often resort to new digital networks, because they are now **the best tools for autonomous and interactive communication.** According to Gaby and Caren (2012, pp.367-368), the social network Facebook

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28 Later in this thesis (chapter 7), the We Are The 99 meme will be analyzed in detail.
allowed Occupy to “engage with an incredibly large audience without the filter of the mass media and without having to develop a new media infrastructure.” Importantly, Facebook was already there in people’s lives, so Occupy could easily be incorporated in their everyday media use.29 “With the ease of showing support for Rihanna or the Hunger Games that regularly takes place online, individuals could express support in the same medium for the Occupy movement by clicking ‘Like’” (ibid., p.369). Consequently, the “reduced costs of participation” (ibid.) that Facebook offers social movements like Occupy can be identified as the core reason for its popularity among Occupiers.30

The absence of the “filter of the mass media” that Gaby and Caren (2012, pp.367-368) regard as a core benefit of communicating through Facebook, is important for networked activist. Castells (2012, p.2) argues that contemporary social networks are “spaces of autonomy, largely beyond the control of governments and corporations that had monopolized the channels of communication as the foundation of their power, throughout history.” Controlling these ‘channels of communication’ made it hard for activists to achieve autonomous communication. But in the contemporary networked world activists are able to escape the power of institutions as they create spaces of autonomy on the Internet. Heinrich (2012, p.61) points to features of new digital networks which offer new ways for citizens to participate.

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29 The same thing can be said about the hardware with which people access social networks like Facebook. According to DeLuca et al. (2012, p.486), we now live in a mediated world all the time because of the introduction of smartphones. “We need no longer go to a medium or find an Internet connection, for they are in our pocket, a part of us. When people widely adopt and deploy in expected and unexpected ways a new medium such as smartphones, they transform a host of practices and contexts, including activist, business, consumer, interpersonal, journalistic, leisure, organizational, parenting, and pedagogical practices.” Occupy was one of the first social movements “armed” with smartphones, thereby having constant access to social media.

30 Participation in social movements has become easier because of recent social network tools like Facebook. However, Jenkins introduced the term participatory culture already in 1992, referring primarily to the cultural production and social interaction of ‘fan communities’: a group that started modes of spectatorship that were more participatory than those of other audiences. Fans for instance started making zines to write about their niche interests. Now, however, the term has evolved further and now refers to much more diverse groups “who are strongly motivated to produce and circulate media materials as parts of their on-going social interactions”, including activist groups such as Occupy “who seek to change public perceptions of an issue of concern to the group” (ibid., p.29). Circulation of media content in short can serve many interests, be it personal, (sub)cultural or political. Activists can now let their media content circulate through their own independent channels.
The low-cost digital technologies developed over the past decades have enabled information providers to gain a voice in the global communication exchange market. From the Indymedia movement to the Occupy protests (…) or the activist tweeting from Syria or Egypt, spreading newsworthy information is increasingly practiced outside the narrow confines of financially strong newsrooms.

The spaces of autonomy on the Internet created by using low-cost digital technologies allow social movements like Occupy to “spread by contagion” (Castells, 2012, p.2) and diffuse memes fast, virally, and globally.\(^{31}\)\(^{32}\)

However, Occupy’s specific motivations have not yet been explained. Just because activists are now better able to build their own global autonomous communication methods outside of the mainstream media, does not explain why they would want to do so. The answer to this question is that social movements like Occupy tend to believe that mainstream media are in control of the economic and political elites in society: the exact groups Occupy attempts to counterbalance. How Occupy and its predecessors have tried to counter hegemony by establishing their own media, is the subject of the next chapter.

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\(^{31}\) The usage of distinctively memetic discourse like “contagion” is not uncommon for scholars writing about recent networked social movements. Indeed, scholars like Hardt & Negri (2004, p.91) focus on the “swarming” network structures of these movements. “Since the network has no center that dictates order, those who only think in terms of traditional models may assume it has no organization whatsoever – they see mere spontaneity and anarchy. The network attack appears as something like a swarm of birds or insects in a horror film, a multitude of mindless assailants, unknown, uncertain, unseen, and unexpected. If one looks inside a network, however, one can see that it is indeed organized, rational and creative. It has swarm intelligence (…) based fundamentally on communication [emphasis in original]. ‘The multitude’, open networks like Occupy, can organize and disorganize rapidly and unpredictably in the style of a swarm. From the cooperation and communication in the multitude emerges “collective intelligence”, based on the common that is shared by its members.

\(^{32}\) The greater scope in which the cultural objects that are in this thesis called ‘memes’ circulate, has been analyzed by anthropologist Arjun Appadurai – a leading scholar on globalization – who argues: “Cultural objects, including images, languages and hairstyles now move more swiftly across regional and national boundaries. This acceleration is a consequence of the speed and spread of the Internet and the simultaneous, comparative growth in travel, cross-cultural media and global advertising.” (2010, p.4). The Internet is indeed a factor of major importance in the onset of a global public sphere. Not only is the Internet, according to Shifman and Tewhwall (2009, pp.2568-2569) “probably more than any previous medium (…) suitable for large-scale meme distribution” it also “transcends national boundaries, allowing, theoretically at least, successful memes to spread globally.” The emergence of the globally spread Occupy movement was only possible because there is now a global public sphere due to technological developments, in which activist memes can transcend national boundaries and call all kinds of activist subcultures from diverse countries to action.
4

COUNTER-MEMING

There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures.

- Shakespeare’s Brutus on the importance of timing in revolutionary practice
  (Julius Ceasar, act 4, scene 3)

In memetics, a much-debated topic is: which memes spread and which don’t? According to Dawkins (1976/2006, p.194) there are three characteristics of successful memes: fidelity, fecundity and longevity. Fidelity refers to the qualities of the meme itself to be copied. Fecundity is the rate at which the meme spreads through society. Longevity is also needed for a meme to be successful: the longer the meme survives, the more it can be copied to new minds, and thereby ensure its “ongoing transmission” (Knobel & Lankshear, 2006, p.202). Longevity thus “assumes optimal conditions for a meme’s replication and innovation.” Most memeticist don’t go into great lengths to discuss these “optimal conditions” for meme replication. Still, it is the third characteristic longevity that is of interest here, as those optimal conditions historically were often not granted to those spreading memes[^13] that are outside of the mainstream. The reason for this lies in the ‘implicit exclusiveness’ (Atton & Hamilton, 2008, p.78) of the mainstream media. The attempts of activists to counter the hegemonic memes expressed through mainstream media will be the subject of this chapter.

[^13]: Memes are here still regarded as created and spread by human beings for their purposes, instead of proliferating in their own interests.
4.1 Hegemony and Propaganda

It is here that not memeticists but authors from cultural studies can provide insight. After all, the perspective of the memetic eye view is abandoned and memes are regarded as being created by individuals for specific purposes. Not everyone however is equally able to achieve their purposes through the same media. For some groups in society it is much easier to get their memes spread via mainstream media than it is for other groups. Social groups therefore start their own media outlets because they feel they are either misrepresented or not represented at all in mainstream media. This has much to do with the concept hegemony, first coined by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. Hegemony is “rooted in an economically dominant, or potentially dominant, mode of [capitalist] production” (DiMaggio, 2009, p.15). Societal elites use a combination of “coercion and consent to exercise leadership. But coercion is not typically the way hegemony is achieved. Rather, ideological control is achieved historically, “through the prestige, and consequent confidence, which the dominant [political and economic] group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of [economic] production” (ibid.). In Gramsci’s theory, to achieve hegemony “an active and practical involvement of hegemonized groups” (ibid.) is needed. One such group is journalists, making the application of hegemony in media studies relevant, because all news is socially constructed, as scholars like Berkowitz (2011) and Esser (1998) explain. News is not impartial or objective but the result of a selective process in which journalists and editors are ‘gatekeepers’: they make decisions on what events are newsworthy to be covered and how to cover them. Commercial interests inevitably shape those decisions, as media corporations are commercial organizations with according business interests (Reese, 2001). Hegemony theorists therefore “content that reporters and editors have been co-opted within a system where they actively subscribe to the norms that drive the capitalist system of economic production, thereby circumventing the need for regular suppression and censorship from business owners above them” (DiMaggio, 2009 p.16). Not only is all news socially constructed, it is also used specifically for the aim of legitimizing capitalism and for maintaining the dominance of large corporations in society. Indeed, as Castells (2009, p.414) argues, power “is primarily exercised by the construction of meaning in the human mind through processes of communication enacted in global/local
multimedia networks”. Power is exercised by communication and the media facilitate this communication in a way beneficial for those already in power, since they have control over the media to a certain extent as well.

For activists and other dissident voices that want to compete with the powerful, capitalism-driven memes of the dominant class this provides a problem, because they are marginalized by “the reliance of media on information provided by government, business, and ‘experts’ funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power” (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p.2). And those who are not willing to conform to the criteria of the debate set by powerful political and economic elites, are systemically denied media exposure, because of this “lapdog” role of the mass media. The reliance of media on these elites is the third filter of the ‘propaganda model’ of news that Herman and Chomsky developed. This model states that the institutional bias within commercial news media leads to the mobilization of propaganda campaigns on behalf of elites.

However, by using contemporary online tools, activist groups like Occupy are better than ever able to bypass the traditional media and start their own projects without the commercial interests that inevitably lead to the incorporation of editors and reporters in a capitalist system. Because this system, this “lapdog” role of the mainstream media leads to an enduring coverage of social movements (Atton, 2004, DeLuca et al., 2012). The practice of stereotyping is essential in executing symbolic power through representation. This practice leads to a representation of social movement actors as “deviants on the margins of society (Atton, 2004, p.31), or “deviant and unruly disturbers of the established order” (DeLuca et al., 2012, p.491). Mainstream media tend to cover social movements as a threat and simplify their often complex ideologies and practices.

4.2 Counterbalance

To avoid these representations by the dominant group, gaining the power of autonomous communication (Castells, 2012, pp.10-12) is a central aim for social movements. The point in starting up alternative media for activist purposes is to consciously counter the institutional bias present in the mainstream media. As Castells (2012, p.9) argues, “[s]ocial movements exercise
counterpower by constructing themselves in the first place through a process of autonomous communication, free from the control of those holding institutional power." Social movements regard the mass media as being part of the dominant institutions. In the contemporary Internet age, activists commonly gain communicative authority through online social networks (ibid.). But the history of activists attempting to gain this power goes further back. Magazines like Do or Die (the magazine of the radical environmental group Earth First!), Squall, Green Anarchist and SchNEWS were all started (in the 1980’s and 1990’s) to establish autonomous communication, free from dominant institutions.

Those activists involved in alternative media projects want to invert the “hierarchy of access” (Glasgow University Media Group, 1976, p.245), the reliance of the mass media on experts, the government and business as Herman and Chomsky stated, to bring the views of ‘normal people’ - those “citizens whose visibility in the mainstream media tends to be obscured by the presence of elite groups and individuals” (Atton, 2004, p.40) - back to the foreground of the news. To do this, activists set up media outlets to make their own stories, create their own narratives about themselves. Atton (2002, p.112) calls the activities of activists working within communities native reporting. Native reporters are participants "at the center of things", feeding debate "from the perspective of the colonized" and providing “information for action”. Knowledge production – “the process whereby social movements create identity and meaning for themselves and their members” (ibid., p.105) – has in alternative media become the domain of the activists themselves, in media that aim to be participatory and non-hierarchical\(^{34}\).

Accordingly, the reports of media like Do or Die, Squall, Green Anarchist and SchNEWS are to a large extent written by activists themselves. This practice “offers a challenge to intellectual discourse as well as the opportunity to discuss the ideas in that discourse to an extent unknown in the mainstream media” (Atton, 2002, p.111). There is room for new ideas as well as a significant space for the ‘non-established intellectual’ (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991, pp.104-106) as opposed to the ‘expert’ sourcing of mainstream media. Alternative/activist new

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\(^{34}\) In the Communist media of the former Soviet countries this knowledge production was the terrain of writing elites. The readership remained passive and communication hierarchical and vertical. The editorial staff of the Socialist Worker recognized this problem for the revolutionary aim of the papers from the start (Atton, 2002, p.103-104).
media introduce new forms of knowledge and many more social actors, and they are offered the same status as the intellectual. The hierarchy of access is consequently inverted and writing for the media becomes an egalitarian practice (ibid.). If everyone has access to the media, the expert bias of the mainstream media, which functions to reinforce dominant power because it systematically ignores those with views outside the mainstream, is effectively countered. The roots of participatory culture, the tools of which are used by contemporary activists to achieve counterpower, lie within previous alternative/activist new media, like the four magazines mentioned.

In sum, alternative/activist new media replace the ethics of objectivity common in mainstream media with an “ethics of representation” (Atton, 2002, p.112): a concern with citizens. Alternative/activist new media want to make ordinary citizens’ voices audible in a media environment that is dominated by the memes of the dominant group, which represent activists as harmful, marginal deviants.

4.3  Ideology

Occupy relied on digital media tools to be able to tell its own stories through native reporting. Also when the movement gained a physical form, Occupy continued spreading memes through social media to provide a balance to the stereotypical social movement coverage by the mainstream media. Activists from the movement used these tools to represent themselves as well as the dominant groups they attempted to counter.

The representations that were shared by the members of a specific social group (Occupy) to make sense of both the in-group and the out-group are in this thesis understood as the social group’s ideology. In Bourdieu’s (1991, p.221) terms ideology is then a set of principles which, when imposed on a social group, “establish meaning and a consensus about meaning, and in particular about the identity and unity of the group, which creates the reality of the unity and the identity of the group.” A set of shared principles and representations – an ideology - formed the identity and unity of the group Occupy. The gathering of very different individuals that called themselves ‘Occupiers’ created the actual reality of Occupy. Very important to analyze is therefore what these representations that created the reality of Occupy were.
Social media like Facebook, Reddit and Twitter, each according to its specific benefits, all proved to be important for Occupy’s identity forming which preceded the actual camps. Internet memes\textsuperscript{35} were used for the purpose of identity building. Popular culture may well shape ideologies. As Dahlgren (2009, p.137) points out, popular culture “offers images and symbols that express and evoke emotion, that we use not least in shaping our individual and collective identities”. This ‘shared (pop)cultural experience’ formed Occupy’s ideology in the Bourdieuan sense: the shared representations that eventually created the actual reality of the movement.

Then, ideology is formulated, reproduced and reinforced through discourse (Barker & Galasinski, 2001, p.65). According to Van Dijk (2009, p.193), ideology has both discursive and cognitive dimensions: “[I]deas (beliefs) and hence ideologies are mental representations (...) largely produced by text, talk and communication.” Ideology is not necessarily a negative concept within discourse studies. “[I]deologies as socially shared by groups are not only used to legitimate power abuse (domination), but also to bolster resistance, as is the case for the socialist, feminist or pacifist movements” (ibid.). The focus on memetic engineering by countermememng already suggested that in this thesis the discourse of resistance against dominant ideology is central and not so much the discourse of dominant power itself.

In this discourse of resistance, polarizing us-versus-them representations are likely to be found. Van Dijk calls this polarization the ‘ideological square’, meaning that ideological discourse is “typically organized by emphasizing the positive representation of Us (the in-group) and the negative representation of Them (the out-group) – and its corollary (mitigating the negative representation of Us and the positive representation of Them)” (ibid., p.194). The specific us/them representations of Occupy are an important factor of the three memes that will be critically analyzed. In the next chapter it will be explained how ideology is distributed through language, that is: through specific discourse.

\textsuperscript{35} Defined in chapter 2 as the “units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated, and transformed by individual Internet users, creating a shared cultural experience in the process” (Shifman, 2013, p.367).
(...) so if we really want a paradigm shift in the science of economics we have to move beyond our comfort zones and become meme warriors ... we have to occupy our school’s economic department: disrupt lectures, walk en masse out of classes, post a never-ending stream of posters and provocations in the corridors, nail manifestos to our professors doors.

(Lasn & Adbusters, 2012)

In his book *Meme Wars: The Creative Destruction of Neoclassical Economics*, which was released in 2012, Adbusters editor Kalle Lasn calls out to university students to start a riot. It was Lasn who created the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme. He refers to modern protesters against the economic system as ‘meme warriors’. The word ‘creative’ in the title of Lasn’s book is important, as it resembles Dawkins’ view of the popular conception of Internet memes as being “deliberately altered by human creativity”. Knobel and Lankshear (2003) suggest that this gives Internet memes possible significance for activist literacies, despite their in general quite un-serious, often nihilist nature. Lasn acknowledges this quality of the meme. His attempt to start a “meme war” is an example of memetic engineering (Godwin, 1994): releasing a counter-meme - a new “open, holistic, and human-scale paradigm within economic science” – (Lasn & Adbusters, 2012) against the dominant meme - ‘standard’ neoclassical economics - within the idea stream.36 Occupy used social media tools to spread online memes that contain certain content: a textual and a visual language, which can be seen as a tool itself to pursue the movement’s goals. This view of language as an ideological tool will be explored in the following chapter.

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36 Lasn (2012) is inspired here by famous philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn (1962) who sees science as evolving through periodic revolutions, abruptly transforming a certain scientific field. “Nasty, messy and dirty” affairs according to Lasn, who dismisses ‘standard’ epistemologies of scientific progress - as progressing linearly via accumulating more knowledge - as a myth.
5.1 ‘IDEOLOGY HUNTING’

Alternative/activist new media texts are calls to action: they strive to link subcultural groups through shared sociality and identity, to drive active community discussion and transform audiences into active networked publics. Those publics accordingly collaborate with alternative/activist new media in community action to establish social change by counterneming dominant power. By doing this, alternative/activist new media texts operate at the intersection between popular culture and civic discourse (Jenkins et al., 2013). These are not the same. Fiske (1989) states that there is a difference between mass culture and popular culture: meaning that not everything that is produced and distributed also integrates into people’s lives in a meaningful manner. In fact, only some material from mass culture enters popular culture. Producers of a text encode messages into the content, audiences decode meanings from the producer’s message. Often, these decoded meanings deviate from the original producer’s message. Thus, to find out what messages are stored into Occupy’s most successful memes, first it must be made clear why these cannot be found by what Matheson (2005, p.10) calls ‘ideology hunting’: looking for hidden messages within texts as if they are “crosswords or Bible passages, within which some deep meaning is hidden.”

That idea that deeper meaning can be found within the text comes from the structuralist perspective within cultural studies. Authors like Barthes argue that texts are “not to be grasped in terms of utterances or interpretations of specific human beings but as a set of signifying practices” (Barker & Galasinski, 2001, p.5). Therefore, the semiotic analysis of signification would be the appropriate method to unravel which meanings text generate through signifying practices. If specific connotations - “meanings generated by connecting signifiers to wider cultural codes of meaning” (ibid.) – become naturalized as hegemonic, they become what Barthes calls myths.

While in the whole tradition of cultural studies scholars agree that meanings can become hegemonic and language “does not mirror an independent object world but constructs and constitutes it”37 (ibid., p.1), critics of

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37 What this means exactly is well expressed by Wetherell (2001, p.16) “Words are about the world but they also form the world as they represent it. What is the case for humans, what reality is, what the world is, only emerges through human meaning making.”
structuralism like Derrida, Foucault and Bourdieu argue that language is far from a stable and rule governed system. Many different meanings can be constructed from texts. Therefore, cultural understanding of a text cannot be realized by endlessly focusing on meanings within the text itself but from studying its material and historical context. In the words of Foucault (1969/1972, pp.27-28):

The analysis of thought is always allegorical in relation to the discourse that it employs. Its question is unfailingly: what was being said in what was said? The analysis of the discursive field is orientated in a quite different way; we must grasp the statement in the exact specificity of its occurrence; determine its conditions of existence, fix at least its limits, establish its correlations with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statement it excludes.

‘Deep meanings’ can’t be found within text, but only in relation to a text’s context. Certainly in the case of Occupy and online memes it is crucial to not focus solely on the text but also take the context into account, as the movement cannot be seen separately from the economic crisis and the widespread popular anger about the bank bailouts in 2011. Equally, the texts in itself can’t be seen apart from the modern digital tools. They were created for social media, published via social media and shared through social media. Researching Internet memes calls for a thorough analysis of communicational context. As Knobel and Lankshear (2006, p.225) remark:

Studying online memes that aim at promoting social critique can help educators to rethink conventional approaches to critical literacy that all too often operate at the level of text analysis without taking sufficient account of the social practices, ideas, affinities and new forms of social participation and cultural production that generated the phenomenon under examination.

The context, the processes by which activists actually engage in social online activities and produce memes, is crucial in understanding how they try to impact political discourse and gain counterpower.

To understand the relationship between discourse and power, the first step is to understand that all language is inherently social. As Wetherell (2001,
p.23) points out, “as members of a culture we are rarely original. Rather, to communicate at all, we have to draw on accepted and conventional images, ideas and modes of talking about ourselves and others.” A central idea in this regard is Wittgenstein’s attack on the possibility of a private language. According to Wittgenstein (quoted in Potter, 2001, p.42) meanings don’t originate and reside in the private psychological space that we call ‘mind’. Language is instead “itself the vehicle of thought”, to the contrary of a cognitive approach that sees words as a translation of inner meanings or feelings.

This inherent sociality of language has consequences. Bourdieu (1972/1977, p.19) argues that our general social practices and our use of language in particular are bound up with causes and effects of which we are not aware under normal conditions. “The highly ambiguous vocabulary of rules, the language of grammar, morality, and law” are often used to express the social practice of language that “in fact obey quite different principles.” The causes and effects of our language use are particularly misunderstood when it comes to the connection between language use and exercise of power. These relations are often not clear to people, but appear to be “vitaly important to the workings of power” (Fairclough, 1995, p.54). The language use and the representations of the dominant group, often enacted through subtle, everyday forms of text and talk instead through blunt manipulation (Van Dijk, 2001, p.302) become ‘naturalized’ and work to sustain the hegemony of political and economic elites. Occupy can be seen as a reaction to this hegemony: Castells’ (2012) categories of power and counterpower, which he applies to networked social movements like Occupy, are very similar to Gramsci’s philosophy of hegemony and counter-hegemony (Butcher, 2013, p.96).

5.2 Language as a Tool

While these critics of structuralism can provide a thorough understanding of how discourses of power constitute the social order, they do not provide a practical method of how to closely investigate those discourses. Therefore, first it has to be clear how human beings use language as a mode of action. Language needs to be considered a tool, used by human beings to achieve their purposes. Wittgenstein (quoted in Potter, 2001, p.40) proposes to “think of the tools in a tool-box: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screw-driver, a rule, a glue-pot, glue,
nails and screws – the functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects.” Barker and Galasinski (2001, p.18) explain this view of language as it being simply “a series of marks and noises made by human animals by which they attempt to achieve their purposes.” Getting a true or objective picture of reality is not the way to achieve knowledge. Rather, authors like Wittgenstein believe that “the real is always already a representation” (ibid.). Getting a clear picture of how this representation works, how it constitutes marginality and subordination and how it is realized and, especially, resisted by human beings is what this thesis aims to do.

The new discursive communities made possible by Web 2.0 tools - particularly social media - make counter-meming the dominant group a better realizable practice for Occupy. Much critical research is focused on how dominant groups establish and maintain their hegemony through their discursive power. No doubt, the power to represent something in a certain way is a great power. It is not to be understood as physical coercion or economic exploitation. Rather, cultural, symbolic or ritual power is exercised through representational practice: the power to “mark, assign and classify” (Hall, 2001, p.338). Key to the exercise of symbolic power through representation is often the practice of stereotyping: for instance the mainstream media’s representation of social movements as marginal, harmful deviants. The good news for social groups like Occupy is according to Hall that meanings can never be finally fixed. “If meaning could be fixed through representation, then there would be no change – and so on no counter-strategies or interventions.” But this is not the case.

Ultimately, meaning begins to slip and slide; it begins to drift, or be wrenched, or inflected into new directions. New meanings are grafted on to old ones. Words and images carry connotations over which no one has complete control, and these marginal or submerged meanings come to the surface, allowing different meanings to be constructed, different things to be shown and said (ibid., p. 340).

How can social movements achieve this? According to Alexander (2006, pp.229-230), today’s social movements are fundamentally cultural: their success depends on their ability to “translate” their particular concerns to the wider society by using “significant idioms, codes and narratives (...) transcending,
overarching symbolic frameworks.” To spread through culture, one needs a cultural replicator. Modern networked social movements therefore specifically use counter-memes in an attempt to shift meanings and gain discursive, symbolic, cultural and ritual power. While earlier social movements such as the U.S. civil rights movement and the early feminist movement used to build hierarchical structures based on charismatic leaders, modern networked social movements like Occupy tend to mobilize themselves horizontally by “cultivating collective identities, shared values, and a sense of belonging among people linked in diffuse, decentralized social and community networks” (Lievrouw, 2011, p.155). The shared symbolic representations of activists challenge those of the dominant groups.

It seems in sum that the ‘meme war’ that Kalle Lasn tried to inflict by launching the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme is not just a utopia: meanings can actually shift away from dominant political and economic groups. The battle over meaning is not necessarily won by dominant groups, although they have quite a head start due to the great amount of symbolic power they possess.
ON CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

This is not analysis of the basic building blocks of language, but of the ‘ruts in the road’ that have been formed over time in language use because of the dominance of certain social interests.

(Matheson, 2005, p. 5)

If language can be seen as a tool with which human beings attempt to chase their goals, then critical discourse analysis (CDA) is the appropriate method to analyze the memetic engineering being performed by online activists. CDA is very much usable for showing “how social constructions are built” (Barker and Galasinski, 2001, p.21), how a social movement’s self-consciousness is constituted through language – that is “how people make emotional and identity-related claims about themselves” (ibid.) – and how activists participate in linguistic patterns that can be conscious or subconscious but can have consequences either way. First, this approach will be outlined. Then, the three memes under investigation as well as the research sample will be described. Finally, the practical method tools to analyse these memes shall be further explained.

6.1 A REPEATABLE METHOD

Scholars who work through CDA attempt to combine insights in the social nature of language and the way it functions within society with close textual analysis. ‘Discourse’ can refer to spoken or written language. Following Fairclough (1995) and with the often multi-medial nature of Internet memes in mind, other types of semiotic activity (activity which produces meanings) will also be included: visual images (video, photography) and non-verbal communication (gestures). As Milner (2013, p.2363) points out “while CDA has historically focused primarily on words, the connections made through memes are predominantly multimodal”. Internet memes’ messages often only partly consist of small portions of texts. A tweet can only feature 140 characters and other social media that were extensively used by Occupy like Tumblr and Facebook have a strong
visual component. It is therefore very useful to take these kinds of discourse into account. The social meanings of linguistic structures can be analysed in lexical, syntactic or other ways. CDA therefore provides a “checklist” (ibid.) of aspects of language for systematic evaluation of language-based data.

A great advantage of CDA is that it is a repeatable and empirically viable method providing practical tools for tackling language-based data (Barker & Galasinski, 2001, pp.22-24). It is not too much dependant on the erudition and the literary capacities of the individual writer like the semiotic analyses by Barthes or the deconstructionist techniques of Derrida. Instead, data can be approached regardless of the cultural background of the writer. This background is still important, as the analysis is to a large extent interpretative: making the process dependent on researcher’s attitudes and beliefs. There is no universally correct way to interpret a text (ibid., p.64). The method does however not aim for finding ‘universal objective truths’, but through accepting certain rules (for instance: English grammar) a degree of quasi-objectivity in the results can be achieved, reducing the arbitrariness of interpretation by focusing on the discourse form itself: how it is organized and what it is doing.

6.2 Occupy’s memes

An important reason to choose Occupy as a case is very practical: all the important texts under investigation are English and this easier to analyse. A third reason is that Occupy was to a large extent inspired by prior protests, particularly the Arab Spring and the Indignados. This makes retrospective intertextual analysis of these influences possible. A final reason to pick Occupy as a case is that it is more or less a ‘closed case’: the movement in its original form is more or less dead now, unlike the still on-going political struggles in Egypt. This ensures that the meanings of the movement’s memes in 2011 are to a certain extent ‘fixed’ and are not changed anymore by on-going creative alterations, which would shift meanings into new and unforeseen directions.

CDA can provide the tools needed to unravel the meanings of Occupy’s memes. The method is grounded in the analysis of the lexico-grammatical structures of language (Barker & Galasinski, 2001, p.25). Instead of looking for deep meanings within texts, CDA stays on the surface: it is there that the ideological framings and social meanings can be found because the surface is
where activists actually put their, often very direct, messages. This aim resonates well with the use of memes: according to Johnson (2007) the meme is particularly useful to critical communication studies because it can assess “superficial” cultural discourses that nevertheless are able to transform social practices. Apart from this characteristic, a couple of other features of Internet memes were mentioned in previous chapters that are important when studying memes in relation to networked social movements. These are shortly summarized here:

- An Internet meme’s core quality is its spreadability (Jenkins et al., 2013). According to Dawkins (1976/2006, p.194), a meme’s spreadability depends on three qualities: its fidelity, its fecundity and its longevity. While these qualities refer to theoretical memes, originally, they may be applied to Internet memes as well. Because they are broad categories, they are not very useful for specific critical analysis on a close level. Rather, at the end of the CDA it will be assessed how each of the memes scores on each of these three qualities.

- Based on the characteristics of Knobel and Lankshear (2006, p.209), there are three characteristics that Internet memes likely possess: some element of humour, rich intertextual references to popular cultural and anomalous juxtaposition, usually of images. Internet memes are defined as “units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated, and transformed by individual Internet users, creating a shared cultural experience in the process” (Shifman, 2013, p.367). Important is that Internet users - human beings - are the agents in this definition and memes themselves are not.

- Of the categories of memes that Knobel and Lankshear (2006) separate, this thesis is mainly interested in social commentary memes: memes with a serious social or political message. The fecundity of those memes depends to a large extent on their timeliness: there needs to be a connection between the meme and urgent events going on in society. Also their quotability is important to ensure maximal spreadability.

- Social commentary memes may be used by networked social movements for the purpose of countermemining. This practice is called memetic engineering (Godwin, 1994). Because those activist memes are spread
through digital social networks, their fecundity and longevity are better ensured than ever before: networked activists can communicate autonomously and are not dependent on the mainstream media that represents them stereotypically. Social commentary memes may shift meanings away from the interests of the dominant groups and have an impact on political discourse.

In order to do that, memes contain a textual and/or a visual language. Language is used as a tool by activists to represent themselves and the out-group according to their interests. Following Bourdieu (1991, p.221), the shared representations of a group of individuals that eventually create the reality of a social movement are called the movement’s ideology. According to Castells (2012, pp.13-14), to form a social movement two primary emotions are necessary: fear and enthusiasm. To determine what ideologies memes carry with them, it is important to look for specific polarizing us/them representations (Van Dijk, 2009, p.194).

Three of the most prominent memes constructed by various activists closely affiliated with Occupy will be under closer investigation in this thesis and analyzed according to the criteria mentioned above.

1) The #OCCUPYWALLSTREET post by Adbusters. On July 17, 2011 the anti-consumerism magazine posted this blog with the kicker Are you ready for a Tahrir moment? on its website, which went viral within two weeks. Two months later Wall Street was actually occupied, making the ‘call for action’ by this meme very relevant for closer critical investigation. A prominent feature of the meme was the poster featuring a ballerina dancing on the Charging Bull statue in Bowling Green park near Wall Street, the ‘unofficial mascot’ of the movement (Gleisner, 2011);
2) On August 23, an activist called Chris (last name unknown) launched a blog on Tumblr called *We Are The 99 Percent*. The aim was to promote Occupy (Weinstein, 2011) and to voice “the collective frustrations from underpaid and overworked Americans” (Gleisner, 2011). To do this, people were asked to submit pictures of themselves with a hand-written sign telling what hard times they go through, and identifying themselves as the ‘99 percent’.

3) Occupy’s relationship with the authorities and especially the police was difficult. Amongst other memes, specifically the Pepper Spraying Cop
went viral. This meme was created after a cop pepper-prayed a group of peaceful Occupy demonstrators at the University of California, Davis. This visually oriented meme will be critically analyzed to reconstruct Occupy’s relation to the authorities.

![Image of the Pepper Spraying Cop meme](image)

*Figure 6.3 The Pepper Spraying Cop meme in one of its many adaptations (Source: Know Your Meme, 2011b).*

**Sample**

The sample of the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme consists of the Adbusters’ blog post itself, containing 565 characters and the additional poster of the bull statue that Adbusters released with the meme (Adbusters, 2011). Furthermore, the reactions on the meme in the comment section on the website are part of the analysis. To keep the sample manageable, only the comments on the same day (July 13, 2011) the meme was posted are taken into account. Those commenters can be seen as early adopters of the meme and the discussion was then still very on-topic.

For the **We Are the 99 Percent** meme it is somewhat more difficult to pick a sample. Certainly the original blog, posted on August 23, 2011 is important to analyse linguistically as well as contextually, because this post spawned the explosion of Internet users responding to it by making a sign identifying themselves as the 99 percent. To examine all the posts would be impossible because the sample would be far too large for thorough in-depth analysis. Therefore, the *last three signs* for each of the months September, October and November 2011 will be selected, the three months during which
Occupy was in bloom\textsuperscript{38}. Incomprehensible posts, for example because the handwriting is sloppy or the picture is blurry, are left out. The analysis of this meme is specifically focused on the identity-building of the movement. To see if patterns and meanings shifted over time it is useful to distinguish between the three months. A sample of fifteen posts will be sufficient to see how the discourse practices were understood, which meanings, ideologies and representations can be found within the meme and how those relate to the context of Occupy at large.\textsuperscript{39}

To analyze the third meme, the \textbf{Pepper Spraying Cop}, a somewhat different approach will be followed. Since the meme is mostly visual and does not feature much text, analysis can be more quickly conducted. This Tumblr is somewhat more comprehensible: there are 9 pages of each 15 posts, so in total there are 135 posts. Not every post is relevant in the context of Occupy’s ideological framings, since some versions of this specific meme are more political and others more pop-culture oriented (Shifman, 2013, pp.371-372). The analysis is mainly focused on the first. Within all these posts will be searched for \textit{patterns of representation}: different adaptations of the meme that feature the same representations. However, these patterns are not necessarily in order because the posts are ordered chronologically, and some submitters revert to earlier versions of the meme on a different page. To make more extensive intertextual analysis possible, therefore the whole sample will be included beforehand, and only during the analysis itself it will be decided which memes are relevant - part of a pattern and containing ideological representations – and which are not. In total, about one typical meme version for a certain intertextual pattern per page (9 in total) will be presented visually.

\section*{6.3 The data drives the process}

So, how exactly are the three memes analyzed? One feature of CDA is that the method is gathered from many different scientific fields: next to linguistics also

\footnotetext[38]{The Tumblr interface makes it easier to select the last five posts than the first five, since they are on top of the page and there is no quick way to scroll down.}

\footnotetext[39]{Important to note is that this small sample can in no way be understood as being representative for \textit{all} the posts in the \textit{We Are The 99 Percent} Tumblr. However, this will be a qualitative analysis, not a quantitative one. Tumblr’s interface does not allow a quick check of how many posts there were exactly. However, there are certainly far too many to analyse a representative sample qualitatively.}
scholars from sociology, anthropology, psychology and philosophy engage in
discourse analysis. The greatest advantage of the inter-disciplinary nature of the
method is that the social nature of language can be much better evaluated than
by focusing on formal linguistics solely.

The main disadvantage of CDA is that "we find important analyses of
media language tucked inside arguments about quite different problems" making
CDA sometimes appear a "large and messy hotchpotch" (Matheson, 2005, p.2).
There is no straightforward, definitive method of how to perform a critical
discourse analysis. As Barker & Galasinski (2001, p.84) acknowledge, "analysts
can fall into the trap of seeing the data only through predetermined theoretical
interests." This could be a problem, as it leaves the individual author free to
follow his own interpretation because there is no standard method to adhere to.

This subjectivity problem can best be tackled if the author lets, as Barker
and Galasinski (ibid., p.83) put it, "the data drive the analysis". Linguistic data are
the most crucial parts of any CDA and must for as far as possible be allowed to
"speak for themselves" (Wodak, quoted in Barker and Galasinski, 2001, p.83),
independent of the analyst. Politically committed interpretation is a crucial part
of CDA but must follow from an "empirically verifiable analysis of the text" (ibid.,
p.85). First the text must be analyzed linguistically and then it can be analyzed
interpretatively.

**Framework**

Finally, the specific framework for the CDA performed in this thesis will be
outlined here. As there is no definitive version of the method, the framework will
draw inspiration from various works on CDA including Fairclough (1995),
Barker and Galasinski (2001), Matheson (2005), Van Dijk (2001) and Wetherell
sources. As the data drives the process, for each meme (or series of memes) the
best suitable tools from this framework will be selected and applied.

CDA of media texts makes it possible to describe the sharing of meaning
by media texts in close detail (Matheson, 2005, p.1). Both the meaning and the
forms of texts are important, although these are often hard to separate
(Fairclough, 1995, p.57). CDA focuses on three main function categories within
texts:
- **Representations** – which particular representations of the social world predominate in the text? Which particular ideologies are carried by the text? This is the *ideational* function of the text.

- **Interactions** – what kind of interaction does the text set up between the speaker and the addressee? This is the *interpersonal* function of the text.

- **(Inter)textuality** – how does the text make sense within itself and within its context? Which references to popular culture are made? How is meaning structured through different media texts; which patterns can be found? This is the *textual* function of text.

Regarding the third function, there are two dimensions within the text’s wider context that need to be divided:

* Sociocultural practice (context)*
  Analysis of the sociocultural practice of a communicative event is the most abstract dimension. It may feature the situational context, the wider context of institutional practices in which the event is embedded, or the even wider society/culture in which the event takes place. The context of each meme will be analyzed through a literature study of existing material.

* Discourse practices*
  Discourse practice refers to the processes of text production, text consumption and social action performed by language users within social and cultural contexts. In the context of Occupy’s alternative media texts the analysis of the discourse practice will focus particularly on how the digital tools used by the movement allow for sharing, remixing or remaking Internet memes: what

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40 To remember the importance of context and intertextuality Foucault’s (1969/1972, pp.27-28) statement that one should not look for meanings within texts but by studying it’s material and historical context, is repeated here: “We must grasp the statement in the exact specificity of its occurrence; determine its conditions of existence, fix at least its limits, establish its correlations with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statement it excludes.” In addition, Wetherell (2001, p.24) emphasizes “all talk is dialogical, meaning that when we speak we combine together many different pieces of other conversations and texts and, significantly, other voices. We are often quoting.”
actions from the public does the meme invoke? Moreover, the move from online to offline activism is part of this dimension: how did people move from digital involvement in Occupy to setting up a tent on a square? Following Goffman, this could be seen as the interaction order (Wetherell, 2001, p.18) of the text.

**Linguistic tools**

From the various source texts referred to above, a number of linguistic tools will be drawn and adapted to the case under investigation. These are mostly inspired by the works of Barker and Galasinski (2001), Van Dijk (2001) and Wetherell (2001).

- **Transitivity**: the participant roles (nouns) and processes (verbs). Who is doing what? Who is represented as active and through which actions? Who is the ‘doer’ (the author of the words) and who is the ‘done-to’ (the one the words are about)? Are the processes material, mental or relational? Part of the syntactic style of the text (ideational);

- **Vocabulary**: which representations, connotations and associations (i.e. references to popular culture) can be found in the text’s terminology? Part of the lexical style of the text. (ideational);

- **Anaphora/deictics**: which pronouns and deictic expressions are used to identify with political and social positions (i.e. ‘this’ debate, ‘our’ democracy)? (ideational);

- **Rhetoric**: i.e. metaphors, rhetorical questions, alliterations, contrasts between us and them, emotions (ideational);

- **Specificity/completeness**: how specific is the discourse in describing events and how complete is it? Usually, irrelevant information is downplayed and preferred information is over-complete and detailed (ideational);

- **Mood**: which ‘speaker-role’ does the speaker take on with regard to the addressee? For instance: is the call to action of the text constituted by orders, requests or pleas? (interpersonal);
- **Modality**: the speaker's attitude towards the propositions they render in their utterances. Do they commit or distance themselves from what they say? To measure modality, judgements as to whether something *is, might be, or must be* the case are looked for, and whether one *may, should, ought or must* do something (interpersonal);

- **Cohesion**: what enables the text to stick together? Does the text make sense? Through cohesion, elements of a text are linked to each other. What is it that words refer to, what connections are made through conjunctions (‘therefore’, ‘because’, ‘but’), which phrases are repeated? (textual);

- **Thematic structure**: what are the themes and rhemes within the text? What kind of information do the sentences supply? (textual);

- **Information structure**: which information is assumed to be known by the audience and which is given? (textual);

- **Argumentation**: what is the main argumentative position of the speaker and how does he support that position (textual);

**Visual tools**

All three memes under analysis have both linguistic and visual features. For the latter, some additional specific tools will be outlined. Although those tools are more appropriate for news photographs than for deliberately altered (i.e. photoshopped) memes, they can be useful for identifying different strategies of memetic engineering (Godwin, 1994). Software tools can be used for the same ideological purposes as using a camera: to represent something in a certain way according to one's interests. According to Hall (2001, p.324) visual images are often very powerful. They can represent people and groups in subtle ways of which the audience is often not consciously aware. The mode of reading pictures is kept open and fluid, since pictures carry many associations and are multi-interpretable (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p.137). Different than with words, meanings emanate from depicted objects themselves rather than from a signification process: viewers read them into images (Barthes, 1957/1973). Van Leeuwen
(2008, pp.136-149) offers a basic framework of how to read images ideationally. There are a couple of tools to analyze this function of the visual meme (ibid.):

a) *Roles*: the people depicted can be involved performing an action. The doers of that action are agents; the people to whom the action is done are patients. Important is what they do or have done to them – or which things they do or have done to them in reality are not shown on the picture.

b) *Specific or generic*: are people depicted as specific individuals or as certain social types? Even when there is only one person on the picture, he/she may be depicted according to ruling stereotypes making the depiction generic. In the same fashion, groups can be depicted as a collection of individuals or as a homogenized group.

c) *(Sub)cultural categorization*: signified by means of attributes that are standardly used to categorize these groups (i.e. hairstyles or dress). These attributes connote negative or positive values/associations attached to the depicted group by the group that produces the representation. These *(sub)cultural categorization* can be signified by references to popular culture that the visual meme makes.

These are the tools to analyze Occupy’s meme warriors’ use of visual and linguistic discourse for attempting to achieve their purposes and getting marginal and submerged meanings to the surface.

Some data is more suitable for certain CDA tools, other data for other tools. For instance, not all tools suitable for the analysis of the mostly textual #OCCUPYWALLSTREET blog by Adbusters will be suitable for the much more visual nature of the police brutality memes, such as the analysis of *transitivity*, *vocabulary* and *deictics*. To the contrary, tools like the *(sub)cultural categorization* are exclusively used for visual analysis.

Having outlined the methodological framework now, the next chapter will feature a critical discourse analysis of the three online memes from the Occupy movement mentioned above.
A Critical Discourse Analysis of Occupy’s Memes

If it doesn’t spread, it’s dead.
(Jenkins et al., 2013)

Following the chronological order of the memes’ appearance on the Internet, first the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme will be analyzed, then the We Are The 99 Percent meme and then the Pepper Spraying Cop meme. For all of those memes, the context and the discourse practices will be analyzed. Also, in-depth textual/visual analysis of the text/picture itself will be conducted. After each analysis, it will be determined which characteristics of Internet memes (humor, intertextuality and anomalous juxtapositions) can be found in the three memes, what ideological discourse they contain, how they score on timeliness, quotability and on the broader categories of fidelity, fecundity and longevity. Finally it will be concluded if, how and why the memes have been able to shift meanings and might have a lasting impact on political discourse. For complete transcriptions of the memes, see appendix A, B and C.

7.1 #OCCUPYWALLSTREET

On July 17, 2011, Adbusters posted the blog entry on its website that eventually launched the Occupy movement two months later. The magazine told people to pack their tent and go to Wall Street on September 17, which is exactly what they did on that date. Therefore, the blog post must have caught attention. Indeed, by July 26, one week after the blog entry was posted, the hashtag #OCCUPYWALLSTREET already started trending on Twitter (Know Your Meme, 2013). #OCCUPYWALLSTREET functioned as Occupy’s call to action. What is it that made this blog post a spreadable meme that succeeded in creating a buzz and went viral so fast? Adbusters’ #OCCUPYWALLSTREET blog entry will now be analyzed in detail.
Images

On top of the blog post, there were two images. The first one was a poster featuring a ballerina on top of the ‘Charging Bull’, a Wall Street mascot.

![Figure 7.1.1 Adbuster’s poster of a ballerina dancing on the Charging Bull statue (Source: Adbusters, 2011)](image)

It was a very powerful image, polarizing between ‘beauty’ (Us) and ‘beast’ (Them). No other information was given than just the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET hashtag in black and yellow, the colors that came to characterize Occupy's pictures, signs and banners. Images of bulls or pigs are often used to portray capitalism in a negative manner (see i.e. Benford and Hunt, 1992). In the text, Adbusters spoke of “corporate criminals”. The charging bull signified the (masculine) greed of Wall Street corporations corrupting American democracy. The ballerina, then, signified the (feminine) taming of the beast. “As a synthetic construct set in an idealized world, the ballerina is an icon of femininity”, explains Melnychuck (1990, p.62)41. The ballerina of this poster was the grace which took over the greed, the “beauty” of the “new formula” that was supposed to start off a “new social dynamic” in the U.S in Adbusters’ words (Figure 7.1.2).

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41 Although the ballerina is an icon of femininity in an idealized world, in reality the ballerina, according to Melnychuck (1990), is very much a participant in the patriarchal order because she is “produced by the male mind through choreography and guided by the male hand on stage” (p.62). Still, because the ballerina in figure 7.1.1 is meant as a metaphor by Adbusters, so she indeed is an idealized icon of femininity.
Adbuster’s attempt to end Wall Street’s corruption of Washington was visualized by this graceful pose.

The beauty of this new formula

(...)  

This could be the beginning of a whole new social dynamic in America

Figure 7.1.2 beauty, new formula, new social dynamic (source: Adbusters, 2011)

In the background were vague figures behind the smoke, wearing weapons and gasmasks: seemingly a violent, war-like situation. Adbusters wanted Occupy to be a battle. It placed the protesters, signified by the graceful ballerina, on top, indicating they were going to win this fight. The picture stated: anything is possible. This image was the only element of the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme in which somewhat of an anomalous juxtaposition could be seen: two different images – the beauty and the beast - were mixed deliberately to create a new meaning or a new “hook” (Knobel and Lankshear, 2006, p.209), an incentive to pass the meme from mind to mind. The second image (depicted in figure 7.1.3) was visually more simple, featuring just text against a black background with once more the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET hashtag in black and yellow.

Figure 7.1.3 “Are you ready for a Tahrir moment?” (Source: Adbusters, 2011)

42 The word ‘somewhat’ is used here because Knobel and Lankshear mainly regard the feature of Internet memes described as ‘anomalous juxtapositions’ to refer to pop-cultural references placed into different and absurd positions. An example of this was given in chapter 2 with the combination of the Kanye Interrupts meme and the All Your Base Are Belong To Us meme: a cool rapper is mixed into a nerdy video game. The ballerina on the bull poster instead can be regarded a juxtaposition of symbols rather than of pop cultural icons, and therefore does not fit Knobel and Lankshear’s idea of this characteristic completely.
The lowermost sentence in figure 7.1.3 gave exact instructions on what to do the 17th of September. Adbusters in this image spoke of “peaceful barricades” which was contrasting the war images in the background figure 7.1.2. Apart from that, especially the phrase Are you ready for a Tahrir moment? was provocative because it referred to the occupation of Tahrir square in Cairo, which led to the dismissal of Egypt’s leader Hosni Mubarak. The phrase tells a lot about the context of the meme, on which the next paragraph is focused.

Context
The #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme proves how directly Adbusters was inspired by the on-going protests in the Arab world and in Spain. In figure 7.1.3, Adbusters spoke of “a Tahrir moment”. The lead of the text refers again to Egypt and the Indignados (Figure 7.1.4).

A worldwide shift in revolutionary tactics is underway right now that bodes well for the future. The spirit of this fresh tactic, a fusion of Tahrir with the acampadas of Spain, is captured in this quote:

(...)  
Figure 7.1.4 Tahrir and the acampadas of Spain (Source: Adbusters, 2011)

What exactly happened in Egypt, that was so inspiring to Adbusters? The first coordinated protests in Cairo began around the end of January 2011. One month after that, Egypt’s leader Hosni Mubarak stepped down (Blight, Pulham and Torpey, 2012). This quick and radical result, achieved through deliberative repetition of a single demand, was Adbusters’ main influence.

Tahrir succeeded in large part because the people of Egypt made a straightforward ultimatum – that Mubarak must go – over and over again until they won. Following this model, what is our equally uncomplicated demand?

(...)  
and then we go out and seize a square of singular symbolic significance  
Figure 7.1.5 A straightforward ultimatum (Source: Adbusters, 2011)
The citations in figure 7.1.5 prove indeed that the Tahrir square had itself evolved into a spreadable meme: the idea that a **central encampment** on a “square of singular symbolic significance”, held for has long as deemed necessary, is powerful.

The influence of the Indignados is less visible in this blog; the “acampadas” are only mentioned in the lead. Regarding the concerns expressed in the blog, the influence of the protests in Spain is clear: it was a **concern with money ruling politics**. “Indignados” is Spanish for “the outraged”. The anger of the Indignados was equally directed against “the economic dictatorship of the markets” (Ainger, 2012). The **economic crisis**, which started around the fall of Lehman Brothers in 2008, and anger at the subsequent bank bailouts were also at the heart of Occupy. The power of money over representatives formed the “corporatocracy” that is American politics, according to Adbusters.

Next to the Indignados and the Arab spring, the **antiglobalization** movement was mentioned in the text as an earlier inspirational movement, by quoting professor Raimundo Viejo (see Figure 7.1.7). He spoke of modern social movements as “one big swarm of people”, similar to Hardt & Negri’s (2004) conception of the “swarm intelligence” of networked social movements.\(^{43}\)

![Figure 7.1.7 Quote Raimundo Viejo (source: Adbusters, 2011)](image)

Occupy's economic concerns were similar to the ones expressed by antiglobalization activists a decade earlier: “the ballooning corporate power” (Klein, 2007, p. 9) that activists protested against in Seattle in 1999. Interestingly, Adbusters referred to the “whole new social dynamic” it attempted to start as “a

\(^{43}\) See footnote 31 on page 34 for more information on swarm intelligence.
Beyond the Tea Party movement (see Figure 7.1.8), a conservative populist movement mainly concerned with security and American sovereignty. This could be the beginning of a whole new social dynamic in America, a step beyond the Tea Party movement, where, instead of being caught (...) Figure 7.1.8 A step beyond the Tea Party (source: Adbusters, 2011)

Adbusters did not distance Occupy explicitly from the Tea Party, which defends gun ownership, pledges for a strong military and opposes illegal aliens (Eichler, n.d.). However, the Tea Party shared with Occupy its grassroots approach, as well as a concern with special interests and bank bailouts. Perhaps Adbusters was looking for not-so-obvious, broad political bonds to support its concerns. Identifying with the Tea Party could also be an attempt to avoid Occupy being stereotyped as a clichéd left-wing movement. Instead, Adbusters wanted the movement to appeal to all Americans (figure 7.1.9).

This demand seems to capture the current national mood because cleaning up corruption in Washington is something all Americans, right and left, yearn for and can stand behind. If we hang in there, 20,000- (...) Figure 7.1.9 “Cleaning up corruption in Washington” (source: Adbusters, 2011)

Adbusters, then, deliberately attempted to make Occupy a broad grassroots people’s movement – indeed similar to the Tea Party.

Discourse Practices
The #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme invoked a couple of interesting discourse practices through a reaction function on the website that invited people to react on what ‘the one demand’ of Occupy should be. This appears like a very 2.0, bottom-up way to get the public involved. Still, this discourse practice was not at all as bottom-up as it might seem. After all, Adbusters already stated what the one demand was going to be in the blog post (see figure 7.1.10).

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44 The Tea Party was also a reaction to the economic crisis and started in 2009.
The most exciting candidate that we’ve heard so far is one that gets at the core of why the American political establishment is currently unworthy of being called a democracy: we demand that Barack Obama ordain a Presidential Commission tasked with ending the influence money has over our representatives in Washington. It’s time for DEMOCRACY NOT CORPORATOCRACY, we’re doomed without it.

Figure 7.1.10 Adbusters’ one demand (Source: Adbusters, 2011)

In the last paragraph of the blog entry, Adbusters invited readers to “post a comment and zero in on what our demand will be.” Particularly the term ‘zero in’ is telling: Adbusters invited its readers to collectively agree on the demand the magazine already made up itself. However, the blog suggested that this demand was rather a result of an opinion poll of some sort. “Following this [Egyptian] model, what is our equally uncomplicated demand?” Adbusters asks. The answer was supposedly based on “the most exiting candidate we’ve heard so far” (figure 7.1.10). But from whom did Adbusters ‘hear’ that demand then? It does not become clear.

The reaction feature was **used for debate extensively however**. Within two weeks the blog received 534 comments. The first comment (posted on 13 July 2011 at 05:12 pm) already expressed concerns regarding the attempt to “zero in” on only one demand. “How can the will of all people be whittled down, considering the mass and complexity of oppressions?” an anonymous commenter asked (Adbusters, 2011). Other early commenters agreed with the attempt to agree on one demand and suggested possible slogans. Those comments appeared to be concerned with the **quotability** of the meme. For instance, an anonymous commenter (13 July 2011 at 10:54 pm) suggested agreeing on “a three-beats and a rest slogan we can shout over and over again” (Adbusters, 2011). Among his suggestions were *End the Fed!, Where’s Our Gold?* and *Cough It Up!* According to a commenter who went by the user name ‘davezak’, (posted on 13 July 2011 at 06:12 pm) “the power of ONE demand is crucial. If all the signs say the same thing, that message will be the only thing the media can see” (Adbusters, 2011). Other commenters agreed on Adbuster’s demand or post other suggestions. **Editors of Adbusters did not react on any of these suggestions**, but only used the comment section to promote Occupy
further by linking to other pages about the movement. This adds up to the evidence that the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme was not so bottom-up at all, but rather a top-down attempt by Adbusters’ editors to make their audience do what they want.

Text
The main argumentative position of Adbusters was that it was necessary to occupy Wall Street to express a single demand (see figure 7.1.10). This was supposedly so because Wall Street, “the financial Gomorrah of America”, had been corrupting American democracy. However, first the “redeemers, rebels and radicals” Adbusters (2011) directed itself to needed to “zero in” (ibid.) on what the - already established - one demand was going to be. This is where the text got complicated. To support its position, Adbusters made a comparison with Egypt and Spain. In fact, the text begins with this comparison. The specific reason for starting a demonstration only comes after. It thus seems the worldwide “shift in revolutionary tactics” (see Figure 7.1.4) was the primary reason to join in, and the need to revolt against the enemy Wall Street – only introduced in the third paragraph! - came second. Much information was assumed to be known, or even agreed upon, by the audience. The text did not make a single effort to explain who or what ‘Wall Street’ referred to specifically and how and why it was that ‘Wall Street’ was corrupting American democracy. It merely stated: “corruption in Washington is something all Americans, right and left, yearn for and can stand behind” (see figure 7.1.9). This was a mental process: the participants were the sensers of this apparent corruption; the corruption itself was the phenomenon. It was again the comparison with Egypt that was supposed to support the argument.

Regarding the cohesion of the text: the blog entry stuck together because of the constant references to Egypt, being the incentive to start a similar social movement: “this fresh tactic”, “this new formula”, “this novel tactic”, “this emerging stratagem” (Adbusters, 2011) were themes in the beginning of the text, all making a comparison with Egypt. In Egypt, the simple demand ‘Mubarak must go’ was repeated over and over again until the leader eventually went. “Following this model, what is our equally uncomplicated demand?” Adbusters asked (see figure 7.1.5). The answer was: “we demand that Barack Obama ordain
a Presidential Commission tasked with ending the influence money has over our representatives in Washington” (see figure 7.1.10). A demand actually quite not as simple as Egypt’s “our leader has to go”. It was a pragmatic, political kind of demand that can hardly be called radical. Ordaining a committee is a typical move of politicians attempting to escape controversy. As Kitts (2006) explains, committees are often used by Presidents to be able to delay action on an issue, but still look concerned about the matter. Although there have been cases of reports of Presidential Committees that were used us evidence in criminal proceedings, ordaining a committee is not an uncomplicated demand but one of which the results are very uncertain. Next to ‘the one demand’ there were three other possible demands that Adbusters listed as examples of what would be possible if Occupy and the “new social dynamic in America” were to become a reality (see figure 7.1.11)

This could be the beginning of a whole new social dynamic in America, a step beyond the Tea Party movement, where, instead of being caught helpless by the current power structure, we the people start getting what we want whether it be the dismantling of half the 1,000 military bases America has around the world to the reinstatement of the Glass-Steagall Act or a three strikes and you're out law for corporate criminals. Beginning from one simple demand – a presidential commission to separate money from politics – we start setting the agenda for a new America.

Ironically, the first demand of dismantling half the 1,000 military bases America has around the world was made in the same sentence in which Occupy was called a step beyond the Tea Party, a movement very much in favor of military power. With this demand, Adbusters instead attempted to push Occupy in an anti-military direction: not beyond but very far from the Tea Party. The second demand, the reinstatement of the Glass-Steagall Act, was not explained in the text. It was assumed the audience knows what this act is, as no further information was given. The Glass Steagall Act was meant to prohibit commercial banks from engaging in investment business (Times Topics, n.d.). The law was passed by Congress in 1933, but was significantly altered in 1999 to allow for
“financial modernization” by removing those barriers between banking and investing. By wanting to reinstate the act, Adbusters directed itself at commercial banks and the legislation that allows them to engage in investment business. It is by stating this demand that Wall Street, the “financial Gomorrah of America”, and the corrupting influence that money had over “our representatives in Washington” became most concrete and explicit. The ‘them’ in this phrase were both commercial banks and legislators. The third demand, a “three strikes and you’re out law for corporate criminals” pointed in the same direction. Here, using the word ‘criminals’ signifies a very polarizing discourse. ‘Three strikes you’re out’ – a term originally used in baseball – is moreover usually applied to very heavy criminal acts (Stanford Three Strikes Project, n.d.). The corporations of Wall Street were consequently represented as heavy criminals in this phrase.

If the ‘them’ in this text were “criminal” corporations, commercial banks and legislators, then who were ‘us’? While the themes in the beginning of the text referred to the Egyptian revolution, in the second part of the text the pronoun ‘we’ was a much repeated theme: “we talk to each other”, “we zero in”, “we go out”, “we want to see”, “we shall incessantly repeat”. However, the meaning of this active ‘we’ shifted sometimes. When Adbusters wrote: “We want to see 20,000 people flood into lower Manhattan”, ‘we’ referred to the magazine itself as the initiator of this action. The next sentence was: “Once there, we shall incessantly repeat one simple demand in a plurality of voices.” Here, ‘we’ referred to the imagined 20,000 protesters as a whole. This recurring ‘we’ was the doer in the text. The mood of the text, the role of the speaker, is unclear: the call to action was most of the time not constituted by orders, pleas or requests but simply by statements, like in: “we shall incessantly repeat one simple demand in a plurality of voices”. At the end of the text however, the call to action was a mix between a direct order and a proposal: “Post a comment and help (order) each other zero in on what our one demand will be. And then let’s (proposal) screw up our courage, pack our tents and head to Wall Street.”

The done-to45 in the text varied between Wall Street, president Obama, “the American political establishment”, “our representatives in Washington” and “our government”. This pronoun ‘our’ was used a lot: our democracy, our

45 The person or persons the words are about. See chapter 6, p.56.
representatives, our government. The meme was posted on July 17, a highly symbolic date as it marks the anniversary of the signing of the U.S. constitution. This made for a polarizing ‘us-versus-them’ discourse: the people against the dominant economic and political powers. The latter were perceived to be the target, the done-to, of the occupation: “Our government would be forced to choose publicly between the will of the people and the lucre of the corporations.” The political institutions were principally represented as once belonging to the people but taken over by the corporations on Wall Street.

The processes ‘we’ ought to perform according to the blog were very material46: seize a square, flood into lower Manhattan, set up tents, kitchens and peaceful barricades, occupy Wall Street. The text features little relational processes, which means that the identity of ‘we’ remains vague: the subject ‘we’ is not given any constituting attributes or identities. As vague as the text was about the specific identities of ‘we’ and ‘Wall Street’, as detailed were the specific instructions on what people ought to do on 17 September: zero in on the one demand, pack tents and head to Wall Street.

Interesting in this last regard is the metaphor of a flood, used in the sentence “we want to see 20,000 people flood into lower Manhattan” (see figure 7.1.3). The word ‘flood’ represented the movement as a whole as a nameless, anonymous force. This correlates with the quote of Raimundo Viejo in Figure 7.1.7: “Today we are one big swarm of people”. Typically, these metaphors are used in a negative manner in right-wing populist political discourse: for instance to refer to illegal immigrants ‘flood’ our country (Charteris-Black, 2006). Flood metaphors are then used for generic stereotyping of those groups, which are homogenized accordingly, perceived as consisting of certain social types instead of many different individuals. As Castells (2012, p.12) describes, social movements are in reality always made of individuals. And according to Atton (2004, p.31), mainstream media tend to cover social movements as a threat and simplify their often complex ideologies and practices: the core reason why activists want to represent themselves instead of being represented by mainstream media. Adbusters however, effectively downplayed the many individual faces behind the movement in this blog and saw Occupy's anonymity

46 A process can either be material, relational or mental, see chapter 6, p.56.
as something positive, and its ‘swarm’- or ‘flood’-like threat as a core source of power.\footnote{Although homogenizing a group is usually negative, Adbusters’ attempt to frame Occupy as a ‘flood’ is not the first time the practice is viewed as something positive. French poet Arthur Rimbaud supported the revolutionary Paris Commune in the war against the French government in 1871. Rimbaud, in his hymns to the Commune, described the Communards as ‘ants’ (fourmiller) roaming through the city. The poet sung “the praises of the swarm” (Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. 92).}

However, Adbusters clearly did not take the successfullness of the \#OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme for granted. The text was very high in modality in this regard: “[t]his demand seems to capture the current national mood”; “if we hang in there (...) it would be impossible for Obama to ignore us”; “[o]ur government would be forced to choose”; “[t]his could be the beginning of a whole new social dynamic” (Adbusters, 2011, emphasis added). While highly modal texts could be perceived as ones in which speakers distance themselves from what they say - signifying they are not so sure about their statements - in this blog the modal auxiliaries have another purpose. Adbusters was saying that all of the possible results of Occupy Wall Street might become true, but were as yet just wishes. Results were still far away. To fulfill them, action was needed and that is why the statements were formulated so carefully: it made readers realize that in order to make these aims reality, they needed to “put [their] asses on the line to make it happen”. Thereby the meme’s high modality amplified its call to action.

**Outcome: \#OCCUPYWALLSTREET**

The \#OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme was an atypical Internet meme according to Knobel and Lankshear’s (2006) categorization.\footnote{See chapter 6, pp.49-50.} The meme was very serious and didn’t contain any element of humor. Furthermore, the meme didn’t make cross-references to popular culture but only to other social movements like the Tahrir occupation and the Indignados. The meme therefore featured intertextuality, but only to other political situations and not to books, movies, pop icons et cetera: the kind of pop-cultural intertextuality that is typical for Internet memes. There was one element of anomalous juxtaposition: the poster of the ballerina and the
bull (see figure 7.1.1), also missing the elements of pop icons typical for Internet memes.49

Yet, the meme succeeded in creating a buzz and went viral. One week after Adbusters blog post, the hashtag #OCCUPYWALLSTREET started trending on Twitter. The last reaction in the comment section on Adbusters’ website was posted on July 29. Around the end of July, #OCCUPYWALLSTREET was finally out of Adbusters’ hands. Until then the meme was very much a top-down attempt by Adbusters to make people agree on their one demand. By the end of July however, the hashtag was trending throughout much larger circles on Twitter, compared to the limited reach of the blog and its reaction feature. This part of the meme, the hashtag itself, proved timely, quotable and thereby highly fecund.

However, the meme failed to spread the demands it made. Its fidelity in this regard is therefore somewhat low. Adbusters explicitly pitched the one demand Occupy must ‘zero in’ on and names three other possible demands, but failed in achieving this. The movement was never able to finally agree on its ‘one demand’. As Milkman et al. (2013, p.22) note, Occupy “famously refused to define its ‘demands’”. This even became a “key ingredient in the movement’s appeal”, as well as a core reason for criticizing the movement. Critics of Occupy for instance made memes mocking the movements’ lack of specific goals, demands and solutions (Milner, 2013).

The top down way in which Adbusters tried to make its one demand go viral, is an odd fit with the “extreme openness” (Costanza-Chock, 2012, p.382) that came to characterize the horizontally organized Occupy movement: no leaders, no hierarchy, no central body. Furthermore, as Pickerill & Kristy (2012, p.283) point out, many Occupiers were sceptical of the government being an actor capable of implementing policies according to popular demands. Rather, activists wanted to be the change themselves. Instead of making demands they “simply created the alternative” (ibid.) within the camps. Downing (1984) calls this anarchist practice prefigurative politics: activists model the ideal social conditions of the society they would want to be a part of. Occupy applied models of deliberative democracy to make decisions based on consensus (Milkman et al, 2013, pp.27-30), for instance by using the ‘people’s mic’ technique during

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49 See footnote 42 on page 61.
General Assemblees.\textsuperscript{50} Occupy’s prefigurative politics provided a further complication for the fidelity of Adbusters’ one demand proposal, as the demand was directed at the government.

Adbusters did not formulate or propagate the identity of the movement as it remained vague on the ‘us’ in the text. The framing of ‘them’ - corporations on Wall Street being the ‘collective enemy’ – proved \textit{timely} (and thereby \textit{fecund}) but also remained vague. The part of the meme that proved most contagious was simply the idea that it was time for a large, peaceful, anonymous Egypt-style occupation by a broad, nameless force without a pre-determined political direction. The meme thus functioned as a \textbf{reinforcement of the Tahrir Square meme} (Deterritorial Support Group, 2011): the idea that occupying a square of symbolic significance is powerful. It is not the content, but primarily the \textit{discourse practices} that the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme invokes which proved highly consequential. In the last paragraph, Adbusters repeated in much detail which practices it would like to see. The first one, to ‘zero in’ on one single demand, was never successful. The meme was not able to make a lasting impact on political discourse. But the second proposal, “let’s screw up our courage, pack our tents and head to Wall Street with a vengeance September 17” became reality on that very day. Indeed, activists followed the highly detailed instructions on what to do on 17 September. Although there were not 20,000 people but only 2,000, the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme proved sufficiently \textit{quotable} and \textit{timely} to launch the social movement Occupy in both the online and the offline sphere.

\section{We Are The 99 Percent}

Adbusters’ failure to make its ‘one demand’ spread had consequences. Early supporters of the movement thought the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme was too much focused on ‘the one demand’, and did not succeed in mobilizing a social movement based on people’s common concerns. A clear ideology based on shared representations (Bourdieu, 1991) was not formed by the meme. Therefore, these early supporters came up with the slogan ‘We Are The 99

\textsuperscript{50} During the people’s mic, one individual speaks loudly and pauses after each sentence. Their words are being repeated after each pause by the rest of the people gathered in the assembly, so everyone can hear it. For an example of Occupy using the people’s mic, see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Bu9K26Qt1I
Percent, attempting to mobilize 99 percent of the population against ‘the 1 percent’ regarded as being in control of political and economic power. The slogan became an Internet meme as the We Are The 99 blog was launched on Tumblr on August 23 and went viral quickly. From just 5 posts per day by September 8, less than a month later almost 100 entries per day were posted (Weinstein, 2011).

Context
The We Are The 99 Percent meme had a very different focus than the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme. Anthropologist David Graeber (2011), credited with helping to invent the We Are The 99 Percent slogan during a work group preceding the occupations, wrote:

Adbusters’ idea had been that we focus on “one key demand”. This was a brilliant idea from a marketing perspective, but from an organizing perspective, it made no sense at all. We put that one aside almost immediately. There were much more fundamental questions to be hashed out. Like: who were we? Who did we want to appeal to? Who did we represent?

The We Are The 99 Percent meme came to represent those who were angry about the financial system, those whose jobs were affected by the economic crisis. Instead of political demands, it brought ‘personal’ economic issues to the forefront: education, jobs, pensions, debt and so on. Those were the problems people could relate to, due to their own difficult situation.

The economic realities in the U.S. of late 2011 were harsh indeed. The Pew Research Center (2012) conducted a survey among Americans aged 18-34 and found that 49 percent of respondents worked a job they didn’t want just “to pay the bills”, and only 30 percent considered their job “a career”. Stone, Van Horn and Zukin (2012) surveyed college graduates of November 2006. 60 percent reported that four years later their job did not require a degree and 40 percent said their job was unrelated to their major. On top of that, 24 percent were earning “a lot less” than expected. Furthermore, two thirds of all undergraduates who earned their bachelor’s degree in 2011 borrowed money to pay their education. Student loan debt in 2011 averaged $26,600, almost $8000 higher than in 2004 (Project on Student Debt, 2012).
The We Are The 99 Percent meme struck a chord with these people affected by the crisis. The activists that became involved in Occupy Wall Street were either underemployed or had recently lost their job, and many were carrying “substantial debt” (Milkman et al., 2013, p.4). Higher educated young activists were likely to carry over $1.000 in student debt. Youth-unemployment was high (14.6 percent among all 20-24 years old in September 2011), especially under the lower educated. Older activists were likely to have credit card debt.

“These experiences gave many respondents a personal connection to the issues Occupy raised” (ibid.). Graeber (2011) characterized the Occupy activists as “forward-looking people who have been stopped dead in their tracks (...) young people bursting with energy with plenty of time on their hands, every reason to be angry, and access to the entire history of radical thought.”

The perfect conditions for a social movement like Occupy were there.

**Discourse Practices**

How did the meme spread? The We Are The 99 Percent meme received a lot of attention through the ‘social blog’ Tumblr: an ideal medium for storytelling, with many posts consisting of pictures, video’s or links, instead of long texts. Users are able to ‘like’ blogs and to re-blog posts from other users and share them with their own followers. When a post is either liked or re-blogged by another user, it picks up a ‘note’. The first post on the We Are The 99 Percent Tumblr blog, a blog entry that gave instructions on the format, received 84 notes. The subsequent pictures deviate in how many notes they received, with the smallest number in this sample being 12 and the largest being 908. It is also possible to re-blog a post and add a comment to it. Within the 84 notes of the first blog entry were some supporting comments but also some negative ones criticizing the blog: “These problems have been around for centuries; you’re just looking for a scapegoat” and “This blog, by far, is one of the scariest and most depressing things I’ve seen in a very long time” for instance.

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51 Graeber (2011) uses this characterization to contrast Occupy sharply with the Tea Party, whose popular base he characterizes as “middle aged suburban white Republicans, most of middling economic means, anti-intellectual, terrified of social change”. This sharp contrast is very different than Adbusters (2011) view of the Tea Party. The magazine viewed Occupy as a “a step beyond” the Tea Party, and not as an entirely different movement.
The first post on August 23 (figure 7.2.0) gave very specific instructions on what to do to participate in “the 99 Percent Project”.

While the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme was created entirely by Adbusters’ editors, the We Are The 99 Percent meme consists of people’s own blog posts. Almost all submissions were posted (Weinstein, 2011). The blog’s editors did not do much curating and treated the format flexibly, regardless of the specific instructions given in the first blog entry. The We Are The 99 Percent meme thus served as a truly bottom-up way for people to participate in a grassroots project. The discourse practice was not predetermined extensively.

**Text**

A striking difference with the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme is how *relational* the processes put forward in the We Are The 99 Percent meme were. While the former described political situations and proposed material processes and made no attempt to relate to peoples personal circumstances, the latter began with **three relational questions** in the first blog (figure 7.2.0), almost in the style of a television commercial. The meme attempted to relate to peoples’ financial troubles through these questions. The repeated *theme* of these first three sentences is the relational “Are you...” The *rhemes* deal with financial problems:

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52 Exceptions are ones that deviate from the format too much or are illegible.
“drowning in debt that never goes away”, “-facing the real possibility of eviction and homelessness” and “worried that the social programs you depend on will get cut in the name of austerity”. The first words of the rhemes were all verbs – ‘drowning’, ‘facing’ and ‘worried’ – that signify the negative emotion of fear. To apply Castells (2012, pp.13-14), fear is one of the two central motivations for individuals to organize themselves in social movements. The rest of the text was devoted to helping people overcome this fear, by giving exact instructions on how to rise up against their troubling circumstances by invoking enthusiasm to swing into action. Enthusiasm is the other essential emotion to form social movements, essential for turning emotion into action. The call to action of the text was constituted by orders: themes in the second half of the text are words such as ‘let’, ‘make’, ‘write’ and ‘take’.

The diversity in even the small sample (9 posts) of this study is striking. Among the posts one can find a partly disabled Navy veteran, 4 students, 2 graduates, 1 fulltime worker and a 14-year-old girl. There is also one a-typical post (figure 7.2.1) in which the submitter did not give any specific information about himself and did not begin the text with the theme “I am...”.

This was a more theoretical analysis of the “failed” capitalistic system, analyzing the causes of the financial crisis and climate change. It is the post that received
the most notes: 908. The other stories were more personal. Most of the submitters named their age and their occupation. Two students even named their grade point average (GPA). The submitters described their troubling financial situation in much detail. The navy veteran in figure 7.2.2 wrote her monthly income was $875 a month, while she had loaned $27,000 for the schools of her two children.

Figure 7.2.2 45 notes (Source: We Are The 99 Percent, 2011)

Three other submitters expressed college debts, ranging from $8,000 to the prediction of $72,000, by the time this freshman student is finished (figure 7.2.3).

Figure 7.2.3: 12 notes (Source: We Are The 99 Percent, 2011)

In most posts, the pronoun 'I' was a very prominent theme, signifying that the individual position of the submitter was central in the text. Examples are: "I live
within my means” (figure 7.2.3), “I no longer believe in the American dream” (figure 7.2.4) and “I haven’t been to the doctor for basic medical care in two years because I can’t afford it”.

Figure 7.2.4: 168 notes (Source: We Are The 99 Percent, 2011)

However, although there was indeed much diversity and many individual details were given, the individuality of the submitters was also effectively
downplayed. In six out of the nine pictures in this sample, submitters hide (at least part of) their faces. See for example figure 7.2.4.

This practice adds up well to Adbusters’ use of the metaphors ‘swarm’ and ‘flood’, which defined Occupy as a large anonymous force. While the stories on the signs were very personal and individual, the pictures represented Occupy generically, saying: ‘we are all in the same ship’. This homogeneity was thus perceived as something positive. It was not instructed specifically in the first blog to hide faces; therefore this development was not intended from the start. Yet, We Are The 99 Percent co-editor Priscilla Grim set the trend: "I submitted one of the first photos on the site, and I chose to obscure my face because I did not want to be recognized," said Grim. "I saw it as a way to anonymize myself: I am only one of many" (Weinstein, 2011). This anonymity strengthened by similar subsequent posts truly shaped the idea of the 99 percent, the ‘flood’ of angry, energetic people that were to become Occupy. As was seen in the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme as well, de-individualizing the movement proved essential to gain counterpower: we are the 99 percent, we are all in the same ship and we are countering them, the 1 percent. Although far not as prominent as ‘I’, the pronoun ‘we’ – or ‘us’ - is indeed a theme in some posts, used to relate to the broader nascent community that is ‘the 99 percent’. Figure 7.2.1 for instance, the submission that received the most notes, begins by
defining the 99 percent as “All of us who were told that if we worked hard and saved money we could retire with few financial worries.” And the 19-year-old student’s post shown in figure 7.2.4 included the phrase “We can’t just sit here and take it.”

How was ‘the 1 percent’ represented, then? The initial blog entry (figure 7.2.0) was vague about this. It was assumed people knew who is referred to by either the 1 percent or the 99 percent. Still, the blog’s editors gave three examples that hinted at possible members of the 99 percent: (a) students in debt, (b) people needing surgery but unable to afford it and (c) homeowners awaiting foreclosure. The 1 percent was not defined explicitly. Examples (a) and (b) hint at the education and healthcare systems respectively. Example (c) is somewhat more explicit as it hints at banks or other creditors being the 1 percent. Regarding the subsequent submissions, 5 of the submitters didn’t refer to the 1 percent at all and focused on their own situation as members of the 99 percent.

Some of the other 4 posts carried specific representations of the 1 percent, others don’t. Figure 7.2.1 features repetition of the theme ‘They’ without making clear what this refers to. For example: “They forgot to tell us about the tech bubble (...)”, “They told us technology and medicine would save us” and “They talked us into believing that our homes would appreciate enough to buy retirement (...).” Only in the fourth paragraph the submitter elaborated on the identity of ‘they’ a little: “We are at the mercy of the 55 wall Streeters who peer over the balconies and laugh at our angst. The corporations and the banks are sitting on piles of our money.” In figure 7.2.5 instead the 1 percent is defined by statistics: “a single percent of the population controls (...) 21.3% of the total U.S. income.”

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53 A percentage that is true for the year 2006, according to the factcheck website Truthful Politics (2013). However, by the year 2009 the number has dropped to 17.2 percent. Since the We Are The 99 Percent blogs were posted in 2011, this last number would have been more accurate.
The 19-year-old student whose post is shown in figure 7.2.4 wrote sarcastically “the 1% believes education should take a backseat to more “important” things, like waging war”. This implicitly hints at ‘the one percent’ representing politicians or political institutions, people in the position to make decisions about war. Figure 7.2.1 shows the only other post in which the word ‘war’ is mentioned, in the phrase: “Let’s create an inclusive vision of the future where education and social justice are better choices than war and wall $treet.” Here, the one percent was also seen as something political: persons or institutions that in theory are able to choose ‘education’ and ‘social justice’ as policy alternatives to ‘war’ and ‘wall $treet’.

On the contrary, the student depicted in figure 7.2.8 represented the one percent as financial institutions.
This student spoke of particular institutions: Bank of America is mentioned specifically two times. She claimed this bank had tried to “illegally foreclose” on the student and her family. However, at the end of the sign she represented the one percent somewhat more generally as “corporations” and “banks”.

While the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme mainly expressed a concern with money corrupting democracy (our democracy, our representatives, our government), the We Are The 99 Percent meme expressed more specific personal financial concerns. The only text that mentions the word ‘democracy’ is not surprisingly the more theoretical submission shown in figure 7.2.1: “Capitalism has failed democracy”. The common concern was that corporations and banks were disadvantaging people, while the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme represented these institutions as corrupting democracy at large.

While in the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme the targeted reader was perceived as the doer\(^{54}\) (‘we’) and the political institutions as the done-to\(^{55}\), the

\[54\] The performer of an action.

\[55\] The one that is affected by the action.
We Are The 99 Percent meme reversed this. The initial blog entry and the subsequent submitters perceived themselves as the done-to and the 1 percent as the doer. “The 99 percent have been set up against each other, fighting over the crumbs the 1 percent have left behind. But we’re all struggling. We’re all fighting. It’s time we recognize our common struggles, our common cause” (We Are The 99 Percent, 2011, emphasis added). The argument was mainly founded on the conjunction ‘but’. This is the turning point of the sentence and the main argument of the blog entry: the 99 percent had to stop being the victim and “let the 1 percent know” it’s out there. The social positions of the 99 percent were identified by the underscored pronoun ‘our’, saying: ‘We share these struggles, ‘we’ share a cause.

Outcome: We Are The 99 Percent

Like the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme, the meme did not feature the likely features of Internet memes according to Knobel and Lankshear (2006)\textsuperscript{56}. The posts included in the sample were very serious and contained no elements of humour. There were also no anomalous juxtapositions and no intertextual references to popular culture.

Yet, the meme possessed qualities that made it very fecund. The timeliness of the meme is obvious, as there was high controversy over excesses in the financial sector in 2011, including bank bailouts and CEO’s leaving bankrupt corporations with large bonuses in their pockets, while at the same time lots of people lost their jobs due to the economic crisis. A particular reason for the success of We Are The 99 Percent meme is that it was so easily quotable: many people could relate to this very simple phrase and the polarizing us-versus-them discourse. Those shared representations of mostly young, hard-working yet financially troubled Americans to whom had been done injustice by the ‘one percent’ truly formed Occupy’s ideology if one adapts Bourdieu’s (1991) definition\textsuperscript{57}. The shared representations of being the 99 percent “fighting over the crumbs the 1 percent have left behind” (We Are The 99 Percent, 2011)

\textsuperscript{56} See chapter 6, pp.49-50.

\textsuperscript{57} See chapter 5, pp.39-40.
established the “consensus about meaning” (Bourdieu, 1991, p.221) that created the reality of the unity and the identity of Occupy.

Those straightforward and easily quotable shared representations promoted by the We Are The 99 Percent meme appealed to a lot of different people, not necessarily ones that were already involved in radical politics. As Occupier Matt Presto, interviewed by Milkman et al. (2013, p.39) remarks on Occupy’s beginnings:

There were a lot of people who were attracted to the movement in the first few weeks who didn’t necessarily have any kind of articulated political philosophy but were frustrated with the way things currently are and were looking for new ideas, and it created this space for people to become radicalized (...).

The ‘Us’ in the We Are The 99 Percent meme were those people that became attracted to Occupy. The ‘Them’ in the We Are The 99 Percent meme are represented in a variety of ways, generally as politicians choosing for ‘war and wall $treet’, corporations and banks “sitting on piles of our money” or very specifically as the “fraudulent” Bank of America.

The option given to participators to have their messages posted anonymously with their faces hidden, proved to be crucial for the spread of the We are the 99 Percent meme: “Tumblr provided a platform for personal storytelling in anonymity, with most people hiding their faces in the video, yet narrating their personal drama in coping with an unjust society” (Castells, 2012, pp.173-174). This unlikely combination of very personal stories presented in a large, anonymous ‘flood’ of messages made this a meme with a high fidelity: it made sense to many people. According to Pickerill and Kristy (2012, p.281), the meme was “incredibly powerful” because “it immediately created a sense of inclusion and majority”. People felt they belonged to the 99 percent and wanted to express that.\footnote{Many people could relate to the meme, but the We Are The 99 Percent meme also received criticism expressed through counter-memes. For instance, the ‘We Are The 53 Percent’ tumblr blog was a sharp response based on the number of Americans that receive income tax (Milner, 2013, pp.2373-2381). This meme represented the 99 percent as a bunch of unemployed slackers. Yet, there was also support from unlikely directions, such as a Tumblr blog for members of the 1 percent who stand with the 99 percent (ibid.).}
An important function of the We Are The 99 Percent meme was to promote Occupy (Weinstein, 2011). This was not only achieved through contagion via social media: the We Are The 99 Percent meme also was an incentive for the mainstream media to start covering Occupy. As journalist Esra Klein (2011) wrote in The Washington Post:

It’s not the arrests that convinced me that ‘Occupy Wall Street’ was worth covering seriously. Nor was it their press strategy, which largely consisted of tweeting journalists to cover a small protest that couldn’t say what, exactly, it hoped to achieve. It was a Tumblr called, ‘We Are The 99 Percent.’

The viral discourse practices of The We Are The 99 Percent meme expanded the media exposure of Occupy in many ways. Largely due to this extensive media coverage, the meme had a profound impact on political discourse. Politicians including president Obama made use of the new 99-versus-the-1-percent discourse to express the inequality in American society. According to Milkman et al. (2013, pp.1-4) Occupy had an “enduring impact”. The movement “transformed U.S. political discourse” and “brought inequality in the mainstream of U.S. political debate, changing the national conversation”. Milkman et al. further elaborate:

It [Occupy] elevated the issue of growing economic inequality to the center of public attention, and also highlighted the creators and the beneficiaries of that inequality: “the 1%”, wealthy elites whose interests were opposed to those of the other 99% of the population. To a degree unprecedented in recent public memory, social class became a central focus of political debate.

This quote makes clear how central the We Are The 99 Percent meme was in the eventual impact on political discourse that is attributed to Occupy. It was

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59 Although Ezra Klein suggests that Occupy’s online memes were the reason to start covering the movement, authors like DeLuca et al. (2012) are skeptical of the mainstream coverage of the movement. These authors call the mass media’s delivery of Occupy “belabored” (p.488), especially in the beginning: “For its first 8 days, OWS [Occupy] was subject to a total major newspaper blackout.” It took until the beginning of October for most newspapers to start covering the movement, and when they did so, it was in a negative, stereotypical manner. The New York Times for instance “represented the protestors as hippies and flakes and the OWS movement as frivolous and aimless” (ibid., p.491).
definitely the meme that had the most longevity: even after Occupy in its physical form had to a large extent seized to exist by winter 2011, the discourse of the 1 percent versus the 99 percent was still in wide use.

### 7.3 Pepper Spraying Cop

After the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET and We Are The 99 Percent memes trended online in July and August 2011, Occupy Wall Street finally got physical form on September 17, the day the occupations in Zucotti Park started. Soon, the movement spread to other countries and cities. Occupy had not asked official permission to start the camps, and its relationship with the police was always difficult during the months the movement was in bloom. This relationship was reflected in the movement’s memes. As the police disrupted the camps with ever more violence, so too Occupy’s memes got more critical. This development culminated in the ‘Pepper Spraying Cop’, a meme created after Lieutenant John Pike pepper-prayed a group of peaceful Occupy demonstrators at the University of California, Davis. The meme consisted mostly of photoshopped renditions in which Pike is inserted into several contexts, “spanning historical; artistic; and pop-culture-oriented backgrounds” (Shifman, 2013, p.371). Instead of Occupiers, Pike was now pepper spraying art, peace icons, pop artists, and symbols of the American Revolution.

**Context**

The Pepper Spraying Cop meme mainly symbolizes a protest against the police brutality that Occupy claimed to suffer from. Initially, the police allowed the camps, which was “a vital precondition for the occupation’s success” (Milkman et al., 2013, p.21). However, this was coupled with many incidents. NYPD officer Anthony Bologna pepper sprayed two protesters and became “an international villain” (DeLuca et al., 2012, p.487) after a YouTube video in which his actions are captured received more than 900,000 views.60 “The incident became an early rallying cry for those supportive of the movement” (Milner, 2013, p.2365). The movement also condemned the police brutality on October 1, 2011, when the police arrested 700 protestors during a march in which 5000 people took over

60 The video can be found here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZ05rWx1pig](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZ05rWx1pig).
the Brooklyn Bridge. However, this police brutality frame was an important reason for the mainstream media to pay more attention to Occupy (Chan, n.d.; Baker et al., 2011, Costanza-Chock, 2012, Milkman et al. 2013). This in turn spiralled into more buzz on new media again. The relationship with the police was an important inspiration for meme creators. For instance, the ‘Hipster Cop’ (Figure 7.3.1) was a playful, humorous meme making fun of a sharply dressed police officer (Know Your Meme, 2013).

As the relationship with the police got grimmer, so did Occupy’s memes. On November 15, the police evicted the original Occupy Wall Street camp in New York City, while the press was not allowed in. A picture of a cop taken during the clash of the evicted protesters and the police received much attention on the web due to “his raw expression of anger and the raised fist suggesting an attempt at physical assault” (Know Your Meme, 2013). Soon photoshopped renditions of the picture appeared via sites like Memegenerator, Tumblr and BuzzFeed, and the ‘Angry NYPD Cop’ meme (Figure 7.3.2) became a symbol of police brutality (ibid.).
However, there was one incident that received even more attention. Three days later, on November 18, there was an Occupy protest at the University of California Davis. Students formed a ‘human chain’ by linking their arms together. When the police requested them to leave, they refused (Know Your Meme, 2011b). A UC Davis police officer then “in apparent nonchalance” (Milner, 2013, p.2383) decided to pepper spray the students who remained on their spot.61 ‘Hacktivists’62 affiliated with Anonymous and in support of Occupy soon released the identity of the cop: Lieutenant John Pike63, who became known as the Pepper Spraying Cop.

**Discourse Practices**

Like the We Are The 99 Percent Meme, the Pepper Spraying Cop to a large extent spread through a Tumblr blog with the same name. Also in this case, there was a blog entry that gave specific instructions on what to do (Figure 7.3.4).

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61 This has been captured on video, see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WmJmmnMkuEM#t=42
62 Hackers with activist purposes
63 Those hacktivists even released the home address, salary records and contact information of Pike, who accordingly received more than 10,000 text messages and 17,000 e-mails criticizing his actions (Sangree & Stanton, 2012).
This entry specifically invited participants to make alterations of a picture in which the cop pepper sprays “famous moments in history”. All those renditions were based on a picture taken by Louise Macabitas (Figure 7.3.5), who posted it on Reddit on November 19, 2011 (Know Your Meme, 2011b).

People could participate in two ways: by sending in a text inquiry or a picture of “PSC pepper spraying somebody in history” (Figure 7.3.4). Accordingly, the majority of the blog posts consists of pictures with an accompanying text. The texts and pictures were provided by various submitters. It is unclear who edited
the Tumblr blog and if the texts and pictures are moderated before appearing online. Posts could receive ‘notes’ by other users being either re-blogged or liked.

Unlike the We Are The 99 Percent meme, the Pepper Spraying Cop was not confined to Tumblr alone. Like many viral Internet memes, the meme appeared on various platforms such as Reddit, Facebook and BuzzFeed. Three more Tumblr blogs were created around the Pepper Spraying Cop, called So I Sprayed Them, Fat Cop With Pepper Spray, and EAT MY SPRAY! (Know Your Meme, 2011b). The satirical Twitter account @PepperSprayCop was launched to provide more commentary on the development of the meme. The meme also found its way to mainstream media such as The Washington Post, ABC News and CBS News (ibid.). What was the meme saying exactly?

Text

The meme protested the police brutality exercised by John Pike in multiple ways, by juxtaposing the Pepper Spraying Cop with paintings and historic events. In the sample selected for this study, the word ‘police brutality’ was mentioned once explicitly. The accompanying text underneath the post shown in figure 7.3.6 said: “The chances of me becoming a victim of police brutality here are so low from a statistical standpoint.”

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64 The analysis here is limited to the Pepper Spraying Cop Tumblr blog because this is the only one that features a combination of text and pictures. Because the pictures are accompanied by texts, their message is more telling, more explicit and therefore more interesting.

65 For the full sample of analysed posts, see Appendix C (p.128).
"The chances of me being a victim of police brutality here are so low from a statistical standpoint. There are so many people in this park right now, and I am so blended in that singling me out for a beating or pepper spray would be completely improbableAUUAUHAHGAHAGHAGAHGHHHAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHH"

Figure 7.3.6 Pepper Spraying Waldo (452 notes) (Source: Pepper Spraying Cop, 2011)

Like all the posts, figure 7.3.6 shows an anomalous juxtaposition of Pike with a different context. In this case, the pepper spraying cop was juxtaposed with Where's Waldo, a well-known series of children's books in which children have to find the main character Waldo in chaotic, crowded pictures. The book series have received somewhat of a cult status and are often referred to in popular culture (Waldo Wiki, n.d.). Based on the text of figure 7.3.6 the Where’s Waldo
picture was used as a metaphor for the Occupy camps.\textsuperscript{66} The phrase “this park” most likely referred to Zucotti Park or one of the other camps. “There are so many people in this park right now, and I am so blended in that singling me out for a beating or pepper spray would be completely improbable AUUAUHGAHAGHAGAHHH"H"H"H"H"H"H"H"H"H"H"H"H"H"H"H"H", with this last shout in exclamation marks being the moment the narrator is fictitiously pepper sprayed.\textsuperscript{67} This rendition of the meme thus directly referred to police brutality against Occupy specifically.

In the other posts, the notion of police brutality was moved to more far-fetched and absurd contexts. There were for instance many versions of the meme in which Pike is shown pepper spraying art. ‘Police brutality’ was taken very literary in these renditions of the meme, as Lieutenant Pike was ruining works of fine art in the pictures. An example is figure 7.3.7, in which Pike was pepper spraying Georges Seurat’s A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte.

"God, finally the shade hits us. All these petticoats and overcoats and shit are cooking me like a game hen. I can actually relax now and have me a nice park sitAAAAAUAAUAAAGAGAGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGH"H"H"H"H"H"H"H"

\textbf{Figure 7.3.7: Pepper Spraying Georges Seurat’s A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte (92 notes) (Source: Pepper Spraying Cop, 2011)}

\textsuperscript{66} The text could be submitted by someone else as the picture, making it unclear if the picture in itself was meant as a metaphor for the Occupy camps.

\textsuperscript{67} This phrase was repeated at the end of every text on the Pepper Spraying Cop Tumblr blog.
The text accompanying the picture referred to someone relaxing in the shades and then being pepper sprayed by Pike. The ‘Us’ in the picture were innocent people who constitute the patients by being pepper sprayed, Pike himself was the agent\textsuperscript{68}, as he was pepper spraying innocent people. However, the text also made fun of the painting itself. The phrase “All these petticoats and overcoats and shit are cooking me like a game hen” was mocking the aristocracy depicted in the painting.

The juxtaposition of Pike with Pablo Picasso’s Guernica (figure 7.3.8) had a more radical political message. Here, Occupy (Us) was equated with the victims of the Spanish civil war while the Pepper Spraying Cop (Them) is put in the position of the German and Italian warplanes backing fascist dictator Francisco Franco by bombing the Spanish village Guernica in 1937.

"In España, we can sit wherever we want. Unless we get bombed by warplanes. But that hasn’t happened since 1937AUUAUAAUAUAAHAHHHHHHFFGGHHGHHGHHHHHHHHH"

Figure 7.3.8 Pepper Spraying Pablo Picasso’s Guernica (844 notes) (Source: We Are The 99 Percent, 2011)

In another rendition of the meme, Pike was represented as counterworking the French revolution depicted in Eugène Delacroix’ painting Liberty Leading the People (figure 7.3.9).

\textsuperscript{68} According to Van Leeuwen’s (2008, pp. 136-149) category of roles. See chapter 6, p.58.
"I sure hope some milquetoast mom-rock band doesn’t ever co-opt my image for their crappy album coverAAAAUAUAUAAAAGGGGGGGGGGGHHHHHHHHHHH"

Figure 7.3.9 Pepper Spraying Eugène Delacroix’ Liberty Leading the People (90 notes) (Source: Pepper Spraying Cop, 2011)

Pike was depicted here as a reactionary defending the established order, while the revolutionaries were representing Occupy. The text however had an entirely different focus: it mocked at “milquetoast mom-rock band” Coldplay for using the painting as the cover of their 2008 album *Viva la Vida or Death and All His Friends*. The text in this case deviated from the political message of the picture.

In another category of renditions, *Pike was pepper spraying famous historic peace icons* like Rosa Parks (figure 7.3.10), The Chinese ‘Tank Man’ and Ghandi (see Appendix C).
"Damn skippy. Sitting is a perfectly peaceful form of activism. What are they gonna do about somebody calmly sitting down to make a point?

Figure 7.3.10 Pepper Spraying Rosa Parks (115 notes)

Rosa Parks is known for protesting apartheid in the U.S. by refusing to give up her seat in the bus to a white passenger. In the text of figure 7.3.5, the Occupy protest at University of California is equated with Parks’ protest: both Parks and the Occupiers were protesting by just “calmly sitting down to make a point”, before Pike interrupted. Again, Pike was equated with a conservative, reactionary force; in this case the supporters of racial segregation in the U.S.

Yet another category of posts took the notion of police brutality even further as Pike was shown interrupting defining moments in American history. In figure 7.3.11, Pike is pepper spraying the signers of the Declaration of
Independence, “the document that represents the core of American liberty” (Milner, 2013, p.2386).

The texts suggests that the Founding Fathers were just figuring out a way to improve the system so “it benefits everybody, not just the fat cats” when Pike came in and interrupted. This rendition of the meme adds up well to the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme, in which Adbusters (2011) framed the political institutions of the U.S. as being controlled by the “fat cats”, namely the corporations on Wall Street. Equally to the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme,

69 This meme rendition could also be put in the category ‘pepper spraying art’, as John Trumbull’s painting Declaration of Independence is used. However, the event portrayed here is more important than the notion of destroying art in itself, like in the category of Pike pepper spraying art. Similarly, Rosa Parks protest can be seen as ‘a defining moment in American history’ as well. This rendition of the meme however has more in common with the other renditions featuring peace icons like Tank Man and Gandhi (see Appendix C). The categories are meant for providing clarity and are not mutually exclusive.
Occupy itself was represented as reclaiming these institutions. This becomes clear in the post depicted in figure 7.2.12, in which Occupy was equated with Crispus Attucks, known as the first martyr of the American Revolution.

“God. I was just out trying to find a mini mart that was open past 10pm and ran into these friggin’ trigger happy lobsterbacks! Don’t shoot me because I get a hankering for Hostess fruit pies after hours. You know, if Boston wasn’t so stupid about everything shutting down at 10pm this would never be happeningAUUHHAGGAGGAGAGGHGHHHHHHHHHHHHHH

Figure 7.3.12 Pepper Spraying Crispus Attucks (134 notes) (Source: Pepper Spraying Cop, 2011)

Attucks was shot in the Boston Massacre in 1770 by British soldiers defending the British colonial regime (Library of Congress, n.d.). In this rendition of the meme, Pike is replacing the British soldiers by pepper spraying Attucks in the face like he did in reality at the University of California Davis. Pike was thereby once again represented as disrupting Occupy’s attempt to reclaim control over political institutions, here symbolized by the American Revolution. The Pepper Spraying Cop in this category truly was represented as “an attack on American ideals” (Milner, 2013, p.2386) that Occupy claims to serve.

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70 As Pickerill and Kristy (2012, p.281) point out, ‘occupy’ is a more powerful word than for instance ‘sit-in’ or ‘protest’ camp, because in order to occupy something it must already be owned. Therefore, to occupy something is to reclaim it.
**Pepper Spraying Cop – outcome**

Of the three social commentary memes analyzed in this thesis, Pepper Spraying Cop was the most typical one. Almost all the posts in the sample contained all of Knobel and Lankshear’s (2006) core features. All of the meme’s renditions were based on *anomalous juxtapositions* of lieutenant John Pike in different historic and cultural contexts. Most of the renditions contained an *element of humor*. Even if the image was serious, the accompanying texts provided by individual users could be playful (figures 7.3.9 and 7.3.12) or vice versa (figure 7.3.6). The meme furthermore contained *rich intertextuality*: there were renditions referring to children’s books, paintings, rock bands, historic events and peace icons.

*The Pepper Spraying Cop, lieutenant John Pike, was constantly depicted specifically rather than generically.* Since hacktivists revealed Pike’s identity, the meme was about his controversial actions and not about those of the police as a whole. Pike’s face was shown in every rendition of the meme. He was not used to stereotype the police, but rather as a metaphor for the dominant powers in society that oppose Occupy’s actions. Pike was equated with British soldiers preventing the American Revolution, supporters of racial segregation and the forces of Spanish dictator Franco. On top of that, he was depicted as destroying art and pepper spraying the signers of the Declaration of Independence. On the contrary, Occupy was equated with historic icons of peaceful activism, revolutionaries of France and the U.S., and innocent victims of the Spanish civil war.

*A very polarizing ‘us-versus-them’ discourse could be observed in the analyzed renditions of the Pepper Spraying Cop meme.* Especially the category of Pike pepper spraying key moments of American history was very critical about the dominant groups opposing the people’s will. “Each of these historical moments signifies the stern resolution of activists in the face of

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71 See chapter 6, pp.49-50.

72 The actual number of references to pop-culture is larger than the sample selected for this thesis suggests. As Shifman (2013, pp.371-372) points out, some versions of this specific meme are more political and others more pop-culture oriented. The latter category has to a large extent been deliberately left out of the sample, as the posts are less relevant in the context of Occupy’s ideological framings.

73 According to Van Leeuwen’s (2008, pp.136-149) division between specific and generic representation. See chapter 6, p.58.
oppressing state forces. And each was degraded by a rogue lieutenant with a spray can” (Milner, 2014, p.2386). According to Milner, “the larger picture” of the meme “shows innocents and heroes oppressed and attacked by an instrument of soulless government control” (ibid., p.2387). The question whether it was smart to polarize against police brutality could be posited. The Pepper Spraying Cop was popularized around the end of the movement’s physical existence in November. The camp in New York City had already been evicted by the police, which resulted in the creation of the ‘Angry NYPD Cop’ meme around the same time. Occupier Arun Gupta, quoted in Milkman et al. (2013, p.34) saw Occupy’s furious condemnation of police brutality as “a deadly trap”.

If it seems to be all about these images of police violence, people think, ‘I’m not going anywhere near that.’ More important, the movement was not about fighting cops, it was and is about ending the rule of capital over our lives, and it did so in a joyous, festive manner. It was infused with righteous anger, but if it becomes nothing but anger, aggression, 'Fuck The Police’ marches (...) most people will be scared away.

Maybe the Pepper Spraying Cop was indeed one of the final rallying cries of a movement on the edge of disintegrating. In that case, using police brutality as a metaphor for everything Occupy opposes was not helping the movement. Still the depictions of both the Pepper Spraying Cop (agent) as the ones being pepper sprayed (patients) shed a very interesting light on the representations that Occupiers shared: 'We’ are a peaceful activist movement trying to reclaim control over political institutions, while ‘They’ are a brutal, reactionary force which violently prevents us from doing that.
The Viability of Memes and Occupy’s Rapid Rise and Fall

The protesters are giving voice to a more broad-based frustration with how our finance sector works... The American people understand that not everybody’s been following the rules.

President Barack Obama after nearly three weeks of occupations
(quoted in DeLuca et al., 2012, p.483)

Applying Hall (2001, p.338), this thesis predicted that the meanings of the dominant groups can never be finally fixed. Hegemony can always be contested. According to various authors (i.e. DeLuca et al., 2012; Milkman et al., 2013), Occupy's countermemes have indeed changed the “national conversation” in the United States. American politicians made frequent use of the new 99-versus-the-1-percent discourse in the 2012 election campaign. If one looks at Occupy's online activities, this change is primarily due to the issues raised by We Are The 99 Percent meme. This meme brought inequality in American society to the center of attention. However, there were other ways Occupy used memes to impact political discourse. One was making a concrete political demand, like the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme did. The other is protesting police brutality through heavy polarization. In this chapter, the ways Occupy used memes to impact political discourse will be summarized. Also, the way Occupy disintegrated just as quickly as it appeared and the role memes play in that matter will be elaborated on. Also, the viability of memes as a research object will be discussed.

8.1 The Varying Success of Occupy’s Memes

The We Are The 99 Percent meme gave a voice to the 99 percent that Occupy claimed to represent. The ideology of Occupy in the Bourdieuan (1991) sense was to a large extent formed according to the shared representations that the meme facilitated. This way of using memes proved very successful: invoking a bottom-up way to let people speak about their own financial problems. The #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme had a different approach. The meme called for a
Presidential Commission ordained by President Obama to end the influence money has on politics. This way of using memes failed: the one demand was not shared and spread by Occupiers. Even the goal of having an influence on mainstream politics was not shared within the movement. Rather, Occupiers wanted to set an example in the camps by their prefigurative politics (Downing, 1984) and ‘be the change’ it wanted to see for instance by introducing direct forms of democracy in the Occupy camps. It seems as if memes are not capable of making clear and concrete demands, especially not when those demands are made in a top-down manner: this is our demand and you have to share it. Rather, the success of the We Are The 99 Percent meme proves that memes are useful for spreading more abstract, broad and relational ideas that can appeal to a diverse audience: We are the 99 percent and we are against the 1 percent. This was the primary shared representation that formed Occupy’s ideology. It was a very broad ideology, but nevertheless able to bring people from various backgrounds together for a common cause.

There was yet one more way Occupy used memes: to protest against police brutality. The Pepper Spraying Cop meme featured a very polarizing us-versus-them discourse: Van Dijk’s (2009, p.194) ideological square. Occupy emphasized both the positive representation of Us - the in-group (Occupy) - and the negative representation of Them - the out-group (John Pike representing police brutality). Still, it is the question if this polarization helped the movement. According to Occupiers quoted in the study of Milkman et al. (2013, p.34), the new ‘Fuck the Police’ attitude of the movement did not appeal to the broad audience the movement was looking for, and further diminished Occupy’s appeal while the movement was already in decline.

8.2 Disorganizing Swarm-style

Occupy expanded very rapidly during autumn of 2011, but after a harsh winter there were only few protestors that continued with the same stamina as before when spring arrived in 2012. Maybe the very rapid initial expansion is part of the problem: the movement did not only attract hardcore activists devoted to the goals of the movement, but also various other, less political, groups including homeless people, alcoholics and drug addicts. The movement was in doubt about what to do with these people (Milkman et al., 2013, p.31). To send them away
would mean resorting to the same mistake that society as a whole made, according to Occupy. To allow them into the camps would mean negative press and a focus that shifts away from the central protest against the financial system.

To apply Jenkins et al. (2013, p.175) Occupy’s rapid expansion signifies one of the core challenges of contemporary participatory culture: “[C]ommunities grow faster than their capacity to socialize their norms and expectations, and this accelerated scale makes it hard to maintain the intimacy and coherence of earlier forms of participatory culture.” This explains the tragedy of Occupy: the movement grew faster than it should have to be of truly lasting significance. The movement’s rapid decline adds up to Hardt & Negri’s (2004) conception of the “swarming” structure of networked social movements. Like swarms, networked social movements can organize rapidly and unpredictably, but also disorganize just as rapidly and unpredictably.

Perhaps the problem was that Occupy’s shared representations were too superficial. This may have to do with the role meme’s played in forming those shared representations: while memes may help to form ideologies of social movements by facilitating shared representations – like the We Are The 99 Percent meme did – it is unclear how stable and ‘deep’ that ideology is. Johnson (2007, pp.27-28) thinks of memes as “transforming social practices in spite of their apparent superficiality and triviality.” However, based on the rapid rise and fall of Occupy, maybe memes do not transform social practices as a whole. Maybe only the surface of those practices is transformed. Spreading quickly through the alternative/activist new media (Lievrouw, 2011) made possible by Web 2.0 tools like Tumblr, Facebook and Twitter, a meme can rapidly gather a multitude of people connected by shared representations. Alternative/activist new media proved essential as being Occupy’s own network of autonomous communication: As DeLuca et al. (2012, p.491) note, the mainstream media’s coverage of Occupy was often negative and stereotypical. By spreading memes, Occupiers were able to spread their own unfiltered message to a wide global audience. This in turn urged mainstream journalists to take the movement more seriously, as The Washington Post’s Ezra Klein (2011) notes.

However, do memes really change anything concrete? To gather all those different people, memes have to stay on a superficial level: the level of broad generalizations like ‘the 99 percent versus the 1 percent’. As soon as matters are
made more concrete, people start realizing that they may have widely diverging goals, which makes working together in a networked social movement less logical. This was indeed a problem for Occupy. Activists were not united in their vision and were “grappling with the question of whether, and if so how, to link their movement to electoral politics and efforts to win policy changes through traditional political means” (Milkman et al., 2013, p.41). It was hard for Occupy to transform their broad concerns into concrete policy proposals on which the movement could agree internally. However, since 2011 Occupy has indeed evolved in other “new and interesting directions” (Pickerill & Kristy, 2012, p.285), such as Occupy Our Homes against foreclosures and Occupy Sandy, a self-organized benefit to assist the victims of superstorm Sandy in New York and New Jersey (Milkman et al., 2013, p.35). Perhaps concrete policies were not the way to go for Occupy.

8.3 The Fuzziness of the Meme Concept

The same is generally true for Internet memes. While social commentary memes may not be able to transform concerns in concrete policy, the critical discourse analysis carried out in this thesis has shown they nevertheless can be very powerful on a more abstract level. Countermemes are indeed able to shift meanings away from the interests of the dominant groups, as the We Are The 99 Percent Meme has proven. As the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme shows, by spreading through online alternative/activist new media and ‘infecting’ ever more people, memes are also able to gather people in a physical space.

A “shared cultural experience”

Social commentary memes are indeed a viable research subject as they were used very deliberately and successfully by Occupy. This thesis has made some new connections between the original biological conception of the term, and the contemporary use of the word ‘meme’ online. Next to the vocabulary of viral marketers, Aunger’s (2002) idea of “small world networks” and Blackmore’s (1999) idea of horizontal transmission were used to make a comparison with how memes spread rapidly through social networks on the Internet. Eventually, memes were defined as “units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated, and transformed by individual Internet users, creating a shared cultural
experience in the process.” (Shifman, 2013, p.367). This makes social commentary memes suitable for CDA research, as the “shared cultural experience” experience adds up well to Bourdieu's (1991, p.221) understanding of “shared representations” as being the reason individuals gather in social movements. In short: a shared cultural experience created by Internet memes may cause many different individuals to share representations that allow them to come together in an open social movement like Occupy. The success of Occupy's memes prove that the textual and visual language Internet memes can indeed be seen as a tool (Wittgenstein, in Potter, 2001, p.40) for activists to achieve their common goal: make Occupy go viral on the Internet.

… but what is a meme?

Still, there are a number of questions that have not been solved surrounding the conceptualization of memes. For instance, what exactly constitutes one unit? In this thesis, a lengthy blog post (#OCCUPYWALLSTREET), a collection of uploaded photo’s (We Are The 99 Percent) and a collection of photoshopped renditions of a photo (Pepper Spraying Cop) have been called ‘memes’. But in terms of units, these memes are very different. Perhaps this conceptual problem could be resolved by using the word ‘meme’ only for the exact part of a text that succeeds to spread. In the case of #OCCUPYWALLSTREET, this would for instance mean that ‘one meme unit’ is the mere idea that it is time for a Tahrir-style occupation, not the whole text itself.

Another issue that has not been resolved fully is the question of agency. Who’s in charge? The core of the attractiveness of the meme as a theoretical idea is that it possesses agency: the meme’s eye view. This allows memeticists to explain how big ideas like ‘Christianity’ spread through human cultures relatively fast. If there is another replicator next to the gene that determines the way we evolve, this explains how certain forms of culture are able to spread so fast: the memes act in self-interest. But in the case of Internet memes, agency resides solely within the human individuals that create and spread those memes. Are we still speaking of memes then, in a way that is even remotely comparable? Some authors like Johnson (2007) embrace the meme’s eye view for the research of memes in critical theory/cultural studies. But this also creates problems when applied to Internet memes: the idea that we humans are not in charge when
creating and sharing online units of popular culture, seems absurd. If it is not a human Internet user who uploads a version of The Pepper Spraying Cop meme to Tumblr, then who is doing that? Surely the pictures don’t upload themselves.

However, although the concept ‘meme’ is still too fuzzy, activists with a culture jamming tradition like Adbusters explicitly use memetic discourse themselves to describe how they attempt to spread their beliefs. This fact alone makes the meme relevant when it comes to studying the online actions of networked activists: they believe in the concept themselves and their faith in Internet memes has – given the success of Occupy in 2011 – certainly not led them down.
CONCLUSION

In this thesis, Occupy’s use of memes has been analyzed. How did Occupy use memes to impact political discourse? The main outcome of this thesis is that Occupy spread social commentary memes through the alternative/activist new media (Lievrouw, 2011) that were Occupy’s own autonomous channels of communication, to protest inequality in American society by successfully creating and spreading the shared us-versus-them representations (Bourdieu, 1991) that formed Occupy's ideology. The content of the memes was easily quotable and thus spreadable language: We Are The 99 Percent. The success of this meme - timed in the middle of an economic crisis - meant that many Americans simply recognized themselves in the struggle of the 99 percent. The Occupiers agreed the ‘1 percent’, hardly ever defined more specific than “the fat cats on Wall Street” (Adbusters, 2011), was to blame. While the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET failed in spreading a concrete policy demand – a Presidential Committee ordained by Obama to end the influence money has on politics - the We Are The 99 Percent meme succeeded in spreading the general us-versus-them representations that shaped Occupy's ideology in the Bourdieuan (1991) sense and had a profound impact on American discourse as a whole. The many different individuals that gathered themselves in the ‘multitude’ (Hardt & Negri, 2004) of Occupy used memes for polarizing between ‘them’ and ‘us’, resembling Van Dijk’s (1991) ideological square: towards the demise of the movement at the end of 2011, the Pepper Spraying Cop meme for instance featured sharp condemnation of police brutality, although it didn’t help Occupy much further. Occupy’s countermemes have indeed proven to be able to ‘shift’ meanings (Hall, 2001) away from the dominant political and economic elites in society. Both the #OCCUPYWALLSTREET meme and the We Are The 99 Percent meme for example transformed the often negative, stereotypical and homogenizing meanings of words like ‘flood’ or ‘swarm’ (Charteris-Black, 2006) into positive meanings giving Occupy power instead. The memes constructed Occupy as an anonymous, nameless ‘flood’ of angry, determined and energetic activists willing to ‘occupy’ Wall Street and other symbolic places around the world for as long as it takes to make society more equal.

There are a couple of ways in which this thesis contributes to existing research. First of all, there is Knobel and Lankshear’s (2003) assertion that
memes could have possible significance for activist literacies: “If we don’t like *their* contagious ideas, we need to produce some of our own” (p.37). This assertion had not been tested extensively on specific cases within critical/cultural studies, but this thesis has shown that, based on Occupy’s case, memes indeed have significance for activist literacies. Especially the We Are The 99 Percent meme proved memes can be used to impact political discourse. Even after Occupy’s rapid decline in the winter of 2011, the new ‘99 versus 1 percent’ discourse was used extensively in American politics. Indeed, Occupy has “changed the national conversation” in the U.S. (Milkman et al. (2013, pp.1-4).

A contribution of this thesis on a more theoretical level is that some new and previously unexplored ways to link the original meme concept (Dawkins, 1976/2006) to the contemporary popular usage of the term (Shifman, 2013) have been suggested. This thesis states that a couple of theoretical memetic concepts are usefully interpretable in terms of digital social networks: the vocabulary of viruses (Marshall, 2005), “small world networks” (Aunger, 2002, pp.205-209) and horizontal transmission (Blackmore, 1999).

However, there are also a number of aspects of Occupy’s meme use that this thesis was not able to cover. Due to time and space limits, only three of Occupy’s memes have been analyzed, while the movement also spurred other successful memes like Occupy Sesame Street (Milner, 2013) that would have been interesting to include. The main shortcoming is that only a small sample of the We Are The 99 Percent meme and the Pepper Spraying Cop meme was included, especially when taken into account that the latter meme spread via multiple online platforms (Know Your Meme, 2011b). Furthermore, there was no space here to analyze the memes counting Occupy, like the We Are The 53 Percent meme74, which was mocking the We Are The 99 Percent meme.75 Also, existing research, including this thesis, has been focused strongly on the American branches of the global movement Occupy and its influences on American political discourse. This thesis falls short in covering the international differences and similarities within Occupy. Therefore, it would be an interesting next step to study international differences and similarities among Occupiers in relation to memes. An appropriate method to do this would be ‘web memetics’,

74 Based on the premise that only 53 percent of Americans pay income tax (Milner, 2013).
75 For more information on the memes countering Occupy, see Milner (2013, pp.2373-2381).
designed by Shifman and Thelwall (2009) to analyze how memes spread globally and “negotiate their way through cultural and linguistic borders” (p.2567).\textsuperscript{76}

The alternative/activist new media that Occupy used to spread globally are global themselves. The social networking tools of the Web 2.0 like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Reddit are not confined by geographical borders and make it easy for activist to reach a global audience. In 2011, many activists felt the appeal of these new media. The Arab Spring made clear how these tools could be employed by activists to organize even in dictatorships, and Occupy showed how this feeling of empowerment could be spread globally. Recently however, authors who are very skeptical about social media have received a lot of attention. Dave Eggers wrote the dystopian science-fiction novel \textit{The Circle} (2013) on how dangerous a corporation like Facebook could become. Newspaper The Guardian revealed that companies like Facebook and Twitter are forced to hand over metadata to the American National Security Agency (NSA) (Greenwald & MacAskill, 2013). What do these recent revelations regarding the privacy of Internet users mean for activists willing to counter the dominant groups in society - the very same corporations that own these social media platforms (DeLuca et al, 2013, p.500)? This could be an interesting angle for future research as well.

However, as DeLuca et al. continue on corporate control over social media, “owning the architecture is one thing. Providing and controlling the content is another” (ibid.). Alternative/activist new media and Internet memes indeed create new contexts for activism. The tools might not be perfect, but they might do the job if they are used the right way. Furthermore, recent uprisings in Turkey, Brazil and other countries have proven that the powerful Tahrir Square meme is still alive: the idea that peacefully occupying a square can be very empowering. It is up to future network social movements to continue action based on the “faith that freedom is contagious”, as David Graeber (2011), who invented the We Are The 99 Percent slogan, puts it. At least activists can be sure they now have the tools to \textit{make} freedom contagious: memes. And if those memes are used to create shared representations from the bottom up, like Graeber intended, they can be very, very powerful.

\textsuperscript{76} For more information about the method of web memetics, see Shifman and Thelwall (2009, p.2569).
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Alright you 90,000 redeemers, rebels and radicals out there,

A worldwide shift in revolutionary tactics is underway right now that bodes well for the future. The spirit of this fresh tactic, a fusion of Tahrir with the acampadas of Spain, is captured in this quote:
"The antiglobalization movement was the first step on the road. Back then our model was to attack the system like a pack of wolves. There was an alpha male, a wolf who led the pack, and those who followed behind. Now the model has evolved. Today we are one big swarm of people."

— Raimundo Viejo, Pompeu Fabra University Barcelona, Spain

The beauty of this new formula, and what makes this novel tactic exciting, is its pragmatic simplicity: we talk to each other in various physical gatherings and virtual people’s assemblies ... we zero in on what our one demand will be, a demand that awakens the imagination and, if achieved, would propel us toward the radical democracy of the future ... and then we go out and seize a square of singular symbolic significance and put our asses on the line to make it happen.

The time has come to deploy this emerging stratagem against the greatest corrupter of our democracy: Wall Street, the financial Gomorrah of America.

On September 17, we want to see 20,000 people flood into lower Manhattan, set up tents, kitchens, peaceful barricades and occupy Wall Street for a few months. Once there, we shall incessantly repeat one simple demand in a plurality of voices.

Tahrir succeeded in large part because the people of Egypt made a straightforward ultimatum – that Mubarak must go – over and over again until they won. Following this model, what is our equally uncomplicated demand?

The most exciting candidate that we’ve heard so far is one that gets at the core of why the American political establishment is currently unworthy of being called a democracy: we demand that Barack Obama ordain a Presidential Commission tasked with ending the influence money has over our representatives in Washington. It’s time for DEMOCRACY NOT CORPORATOCRACY, we’re doomed without it.

This demand seems to capture the current national mood because cleaning up corruption in Washington is something all Americans, right and left, yearn for and can stand behind. If we hang in there, 20,000-strong, week after week against every police and National Guard effort to expel us from Wall Street, it would be impossible for Obama to ignore us. Our government would be forced to choose publicly between the will of the people and the lucre of the corporations.
This could be the beginning of a whole new social dynamic in America, a step beyond the Tea Party movement, where, instead of being caught helpless by the current power structure, we the people start getting what we want whether it be the dismantling of half the 1,000 military bases America has around the world to the reinstatement of the Glass-Steagall Act or a three strikes and you're out law for corporate criminals. Beginning from one simple demand – a presidential commission to separate money from politics – we start setting the agenda for a new America.

Post a comment and help each other zero in on what our one demand will be. And then let's screw up our courage, pack our tents and head to Wall Street with a vengeance September 17.

for the wild,
Culture Jammers HQ
Appendix B: We Are The 99 Percent Sample

August

23rd August 2011

Post with 84 notes

We Are The 99 Percent

Are you drowning in debt that never goes away? Are you facing the real possibility of eviction and homelessness? Are you worried that the social programs you depend on will get cut in the name of austerity? Let the 1 percent know by taking part in the 99 Percent Project. Make a sign. Write your circumstance at the top, no longer than a single sentence. Examples:

“I am a student with $25,000 in debt.”

“I need surgery and I’m more worried about the expense than my health.”

“I’m a homeowner who’s about to face foreclosure.”

Below that, write “I am the 99 percent.”

Below that, write “OccupyTogether”

Then, take a picture of yourself holding the sign and submit it to us. The 99 percent have been set against each other, fighting over the crumbs the 1 percent leaves behind. But we’re all struggling. We’re all fighting. It’s time we recognize our common struggles, our common cause. Be part of the 99 percent and let the 1 percent know you’re out there.

September
I am a 19-year-old college sophomore. I go to the flagship university in my state, and I can barely afford it. I am lucky enough to have a job on campus to cover some of my fees. Even though I work 20 hours/week, I will still be $8,000 in debt by the end of the school year.

I want to go to law school. If I get into my first choice, I will be $136,000 in debt by my 25th birthday. I no longer believe in the American Dream.

I AM THE 99%! OCCUPYWALLSTOCK

I am 29 years old and have been working full time since I was sixteen. I have $28k in school debt that is in default because I can’t afford to pay for it. My credit is likely ruined after ten years of building it up. I haven’t been to the doctor for basic medical care in two years because I can’t afford it. I’ve been laid off three times since 2009. I have $11.00 to my name & my car is on empty. I don’t know how I’ll pay for my apartment next month.

I AM THE 99%
October

I’m an 18 year old freshman. My parents cannot contribute to my college education and I had a 2.5 GPA. I chose to live at home. I applied for scholarships, got a job. I drive 1hr daily. When I graduate, I will be $72,000 ahead.

I live within my means. I am the 99%

#occupywallstreet
I'm 19. I'm a full-time student and I work a part-time job to pay for school, insurance, bills, and rent. I am currently studying history and English and I want to teach college someday...

...but the 1% believes education should take a back seat to more "important" things, like waging war.

I'm afraid not only for my future, but for the future generations. What will happen to our country when education slips even lower on the agenda? I'm terrified to find out.

We can't just sit here and take it.

I am the 99%.

occupywallst.org

November

Why are the 99%? All of us who were told that if we worked hard and saved money we could retire with the financial security. They forget to tell us about the tech bubble, followed by the housing bubble, followed by recession and anthropocentric global climate change.

They told us technology and medicine would save us. They forgot to mention the CO2 fuel and environmental degradation. The cost of healthcare and the deadly side effects of pharmaceutics.

They taught us the housing market was better than a savings account. They forgot to mention that only insiders, brokers, sellers, and the primary wealth get rich from the stock market for the rest of us is more like coming before taxes—there’s no way to win.

Our 401k's, pension funds, 401k, and 403b's are built on a house of cards, but it is too late, we’re trapped in the game. We hope the market will go up, even though we despise the thought of corporate rule. We are at the mercy of the 1% and shareholders who are siphoning the money out of our pensions and bought all our money. The corporations and the banks are in control of our money. They withhold it, and offer us poor rates on our savings.

And what are we told to do about this financial crisis? Save. Spend money! What money? We don’t have jobs. We can barely afford groceries. Corporations have failed democracy. Let's give our monies to this nation with a new ethic of economic prosperity. Let's create an economy that provides not greed and exploitation. Let's create an envisioned where the future where education and social justice are better choices than war and wall street.

"We're better off consumers" I read that on the United Federation for real. It’s no more reality. I am the 99%.
I am 18, and attend Boston University. I live with my mom, dad, nana, and little brother. My parents & grandma escaped the war in Bosnia in the 90s. Eventually, they came to America.

Both of my parents work full-time. We're all fine financially.

We bought a house 7 years ago. My parents can afford mortgage payments. We recently found out that our mortgage is FRAUDULENT. Bank of America tried to ILLEGALLY FORECLOSE on us a couple years ago. We were able to stop it.

We haven't paid our mortgage since January, when we found out that it is FRAUD. There are over 36,000 FRAUDULENT BANK DOCUMENTS in my county alone. I can't imagine how many there are in the entire country.

BoA knows that we know they tried to scam us. Since stopping our payments, we haven't received a foreclosure notice.

**We refuse to pay for fraud & corruption.**

Corporations that **outsource** our jobs get tax breaks; 1/3 of corporations **don't pay taxes**, but we'd go to jail if we didn't pay ours (hey “5%” – welcome to the revolution); people die because they don't have health insurance; banks drive people to homelessness & suicide by ILLEGALLY FORECLOSING.

I'm the 99%. & I'm sick of the elite **RUINING PEOPLE'S LIVES**.

**Join the global revolution.** [Occupywallst.org](http://Occupywallst.org)

For more info on fraudulent mortgages & illegal foreclosures, visit my mom's blog: [boston67.blogspot.com](http://boston67.blogspot.com)

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**I am PENNED AD.**

I am a GRADUATE STUDENT w/ a 4.0 GPA. I have a flexible job that allows me to go to school & pay my bills. I, although speaking, have experienced a 50% increase in my workload; I am PENNED to still have a job.

For the first time in 10 years, I have medical coverage, thanks to my husband's ability to insures me on his policy. Our cars are paid off & our mortgage is low.

I work hard, but I recognize that the more extreme is which I love being has granted me unfair advantages. I need to be able to do it by where I am.

Women still earn 76% for every dollar a man earns. The median black family still has 80% of the wealth of the median white family. Only 1% of people will ever surpass the income of their parent. A single percent of the population controls 42% of the financial wealth. 21% of the total U.S. income. Something is wrong.

A few bad paychecks, a lost job, a catastrophic injury or illness could undo any one of us.

There is no safety net, only a dragnet.

I am the 99%.
APPENDIX C: PEPPER SPRAYING COP SAMPLE

Little did we know that Pepper Spraying Cop has cracked down on so many famous moments in history! This Tumblr will help document the long pepper spraying arm of this officer of the law!

Send all text inquiries to peppersprayingcop@yahoo.com.

Got proof of PSC pepper spraying somebody in history? Send it in!

Above the text is a small picture of the cop, Lt. John Pike:

![Lt. John Pike](image)

The following pictures are selected to form the rest of the sample, and are categorized according to their themes:

Pepper spraying art:

![Pepper Spraying Art](image)

"God, finally the shade hits us. All these petticoats and overcoats and shit are cooking me like a game hen. I can actually relax now and have me a nice park"
"I sure hope some milquetoast mom-rock band doesn’t ever co-opt my image for their crappy album cover"

"In España, we can sit wherever we want. Unless we get bombed by warplanes. But that hasn’t happened since 1937"
Pepper spraying peace icons

"Worst. Day. Ever. I just want to get to my daughter’s birthday party. That’s all. That’s IT. And now this bullshit. Just one more fucking thing and I am going to lose itAAAAUAUAUAAGAGAGAGGGGGGGGGHHHHHHHHHHHHH"

"Damn skippy. Sitting is a perfectly peaceful form of activism. What are they gonna do about somebody calmly sitting down to make a pointAUUUAAAHAGHAGHGHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH"
"Jesus it was a mistake to skip a shower this morning. Now I am sweating like a pig in July and there is a hot babe mere inches from me and I think I actually have a shot. Come on, Mohandas, pull yourself togetherAAAUAUUUAUAAAUAUUGUUUGGGHAAAAHHH"

Pepper spraying American history

"Listen, guys. I'm just gonna sit here until we can work this system out so it benefits everybody, not just the fat catsAAAUAUUUAUAGAGGAGGGGGGGGGHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH"

"Meme Warriors" 131
"God. I was just out trying to find a mini mart that was open past 10pm and ran into these friggin' trigger happy lobsterbacks! Don't shoot me because I get a hankering for Hostess fruit pies after hours. You know, if Boston wasn't so stupid about everything shutting down at 10pm this would never be happening."

Where is Waldo?

"The chances of me being a victim of police brutality here are so low from a statistical standpoint. There are so many people in this park right now, and I am so blended in that singling me out for a beating or pepper spray would be completely improbable."