IN SEARCH OF THE NINETY NINE PERCENT: SOCIAL
MOVEMENTS, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND THE RHETORIC OF OCCUPY
WALL STREET

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
San Diego State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Rhetoric and Writing Studies

by
Julie Anne Hendricks
Spring 2013
SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

The Undersigned Faculty Committee Approves the

Thesis of Julie Anne Hendricks:

In Search of the Ninety Nine Percent: Social Movements, Social Media, and the
Rhetoric of Occupy Wall Street

Cezar Ornatowski, Chair
Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies

Richard Boyd
Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies

Jane Robinett
Department of English

4/8/13
Approval Date
Let America be America again.
Let it be the dream it used to be.
Let it be the pioneer on the plain
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

--Langston Hughes
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

In Search of the Ninety Nine Percent: Social Media, Social Movements, and the Rhetoric of Occupy Wall Street
by
Julie Anne Hendricks
Master of Arts in Rhetoric and Writing Studies
San Diego State University, 2013

The Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement has been widely reported on in the mass media since its inception in September, 2011. Opinions vary, however, on both the effectiveness of this movement as well as its purpose. This thesis is an attempt to understand not only the movement’s purpose, but also how members of the movement use social media to engage with their audience and create identification.

Social movements in general have a long history of being studied rhetorically. This thesis first conducts a review of many of these studies, highlighting the different rhetorical aspects that apply to OWS. As many scholars have asserted, a social movement revolves around the dialectic that it is able to create. I therefore turn to Kenneth Burke and explore his theories of dialectic, identification, dramatism, and the rhetorical importance of symbols in order to understand the OWS movement through these terms. Because the movement relies heavily on the Internet and social media to communicate, I then conduct a Burkean cluster analysis of the OWS website, Facebook page, and Twitter account. By identifying the key symbols that are repeatedly utilized and the associational clusters of words, or symbols, that surround them, I am able to rhetorically determine the message, or purpose, of the OWS movement.

Finally, because the movement does rely so heavily on the internet and social media, I explore how these tools function rhetorically. Because users are able to create their own experience on the web, the opportunities for identification become vast. Moreover, the prolific access and participatory nature of these tools have allowed the OWS movement to create an entire notion, or brand, of Occupy, that has extended far past the original idea of Occupy Wall St. By understanding both the efficacy and the limitations of social media, we as a society may be able to learn how to utilize these tools in order to participate as citizens and even incite change.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>WHY WALL ST.?</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>KEY CONCEPTS IN THE RHETORIC OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>IDENTIFYING THROUGH SYMBOLS: KENNETH BURKE AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>SYMBOLIC CLUSTER ANALYSIS</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>RHETORICAL FUNCTIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>INCITING CHANGE</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express sincere thanks to the entire RWS Faculty. The many professors with whom I had the distinct pleasure of working with were consistently gracious in offering their time, thoughtfulness, and expertise. They have opened my eyes to the world of rhetoric and therefore given me a clearer understanding of the world in which we live. I would like to express particular gratitude to Dr. Cezar Ornatowski, whose mentorship and instruction have been paramount in exploring both academia and the many broad uses and implications of the art that we call rhetoric. Without his dedicated guidance this thesis would still be a notion of an idea that would have never come to fruition on these pages.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2011, I was eating lunch with my fellow service members on a military base in Baghdad, Iraq. The small TV in the corner of the room was broadcasting CNN, and we were watching a clip of a small group of protesters that had gathered in New York City’s Zuccotti Park. I remember thinking, “what exactly are they protesting?” As coverage of the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement continued throughout 2011, that question seemingly remained unanswered for the general American public. Interestingly, however, my peers and I always had disparaging comments to say about the protesters whenever we did catch a quick news-spot. Although we were very far away, and knew little about the cause, the majority of my peers and I felt overwhelming negativity towards the movement. As the months went by and coverage became more sparse, I spent less time thinking about the OWS movement and more time thinking about returning home.

Upon arrival back to the United States in January 2012, it became clear to me that OWS was still on the scene and in the news, and that many people still had negative attitudes towards the protesters. I began to realize that the major gripe people had with the so-called movement was that they didn’t understand its message and they did not believe that the movement was positively changing anything. Through the lens of the mass media, the American public saw this movement as a small group of young, jobless, uneducated radicals who had nothing better to do than sleep in tents and wander the streets of New York City chanting anti-Wall Street slogans.
As a rhetorician, however, I could not ignore the fact that the OWS movement had picked up traction, as evidenced by the pockets of occupiers that spawned all over the country (Occupy Boston, Occupy Oakland, Occupy Washington DC, to name a few of the most highly-publicized). Additionally, the solidarity that these protesters were claiming to have with similar movements mobilizing around the globe in response to major political and economic crisis is also significant. While these occupiers can certainly be seen and studied through the context of sociology, political science, or global economics, much can be learned by studying their movement from the rhetorical perspective. Further, the utilization of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other independent Internet sites, combined with the rapid growth and usage of these social media tools by the American as well as global public, could have significant implications for future social movement studies. By relying primarily on the Internet and social media to spread its message, OWS has embarked on a relatively new strategy for social change.

Hence, after returning to the United States and seeing OWS and the “99%” repeatedly mentioned in the news, but being no closer to understanding what the movement was actually demanding, I decided to conduct a rhetorical analysis to figure out just that. By getting online and studying three of the tools that OWS uses — their webpage, Facebook, and Twitter accounts – I perform a Burkean cluster analysis to try to understand the message of the movement. In doing so, I also study the context of social media as an evolving medium for the discourse created by social movements in the globalized world that these tools have facilitated.
A review of current literature on the topic of the OWS movement shows that indeed it is receiving more attention within the socio-political arena of scholarship.¹ The same can be true about theories of social movements and social movement strategy in general; however, work published in sociology is quite useful when interpreting the evolution of social movement discourse.² Published in 2001 and again in 2006, *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest* is an important collection that spans modern social movement theory, covering the nascent rhetorical conversation started by Leland Griffin in 1952 that continued through the 1960s and 70s, to the competing perspectives of the 1980s and the New Social Movements, including studies on women’s liberation and gay rights. While these scholars propose differing theories and critiques that focus on coercion, persuasion, the role of leaders, audience, and the role of the media, their willingness to analyze movements rhetorically speaks to the significance of understanding not merely why social movements happen, but how networks are negotiated and how protestors communicate to bring about social change. A newer collection, *Active Voices*, gathers more contemporary voices, applying the same underlying principle: “Broadening the scope of rhetoric to explicitly include social movements indicates that rhetoric is not only interactive and situated, but also transformative and material” (Malesh and Stevens 6).

While some of these scholars sought to define social movements by examining lifecycles of specific protests, others critiqued this analysis as too limited in scope and rather focused on the agency by which movements do their actual work. Robert Cathcart offers a

---

¹ Many articles have been published in journals such as *Foreign Affairs, International Critical Thought, Social Movement Studies, Socialism and Democracy.*

² See Tilly; Stewart; Johnston; Diani and McAdam for discussion on the evolution of social movement theory.
particularly useful rhetorical definition in responding to previous scholars, including Edwin Black, Herbert Simons, and Leland Griffin. He notes that previous conversations that attempted to define movements had created a vocabulary that was too linear, too confining. He argues that “all discussion about movements centers around the tokens, symbols, and transactions which unite or separate people who organize to produce change. Movements are carried forward through language, both verbal and nonverbal, in strategic forms that bring about identification of the individual with the movement” (Cathcart, “New Approaches” 86).

In a later essay, Cathcart continues to focus on the dialectical as the key component of movement theory. He refers to Kenneth Burke in defining what he calls the “strategies of identification and consubstantiation” of a “reform” movement: “In any good rightful system men accept the mystery and strive to keep the secret; that is, preserve the hierarchy” (Cathcart, “Movements” 98). In this case, the people are trying to change how the system works by maintaining the system, or the hierarchy within which they exist. On the other hand, he contrasts the reform movement with the “confrontational movement,” and “it is the confrontational form that produces dialectical enjoinment in the moral arena” (Cathcart, “Movements” 99). The focus on the language and symbols that bring people together and the emphasis on the dialectical that actually forms a movement serves the purpose of this project well, and will therefore be the rhetorical definition of movements—picked from a vast and

---

3 In his book entitled *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method*, Edwin Black classified movement theory as one of the three approaches to studying rhetorical criticism. Herbert Simons published “Requirement, Problems, and Strategies: A Theory of Persuasion for Social Movements” in order to address what he considered the problematic scope of Griffin’s evaluation of social movement theory. He presents a leader-centered focus, describing “the intentional symbolic acts of those who lead social movements.” (1970)

4 The mystery he is describing comes from Burke’s *Rhetoric of Motives*, which will be explained in detail in a later chapter.
complicated selection—that I will focus on in studying the rhetoric of OWS. In addition, after publishing his first essay on the topic in 1952, Leland Griffin also ascribes to Burke’s philosophy by applying Burke’s notion of dramatism to the rhetoric of movements.

However, as this project concerns not only rhetorical definitions but the application of social media in establishing a new movement discourse, my review of literature would be incomplete if I studied only those works that label themselves as concerned with the rhetoric of social movements. While the Civil Rights and New Left movements provided a fertile source of data for social movement theorists in the 1970s and 80s, one of the deciding characteristics of movements of that time was class distinction. Sociologists were primarily concerned with studying the collective identity and ideology that bonded the have-nots and the motivations that caused them to rise up against the have or the institutions or governments that were holding them down. What was thought to be pattern-less and irrational prior to 1960, transformed into rational and moral mobilization during the civil rights era.\(^5\) With the dawn of women’s liberation and gay rights, it became clear that not all movements centered around class conflict and institutionalization, but rather that a new era of contemporary movements was taking the stage: one in which “the grievances and mobilizing factors tend to focus on cultural and symbolic issues that are linked with issues of identity rather than on economic grievances that characterized the working-class movement” (Larana, Johnston, and Gusfield 7). These New Social Movements also tended to be much more decentralized, as participating members were not a readily identifiable group to be labeled but rather a cross-section of America that was seeking to change cultural norms. As James

---

\(^5\) See Malesh and McKenzie Stevens; Larana, Johnston, and Gusfield for further discussion of the change in perception of social movement theory during and after the Civil Rights movement.
Darsey points out in his study of the gay rights movement, “unity is the most prominent value appeal” (491) in the period of the New Social Movement. He highlights the fact that “unity is as difficult for the gay rights movement as it is for any movement where the constituency is a national rather than a regional or local community” (491) and that this constituency had to rely primarily on mass media and a few newspapers that were published in the gay community. This challenge is significant to note when we consider the vastly connected world in which we live in today and the ability that movement networks possess to use completely independent media, a faculty that movements have not had until very recently.

And finally, perhaps the era that aligns most closely with both the sentiments and the strategies of the OWS movement is the globalization period and the subsequent anti-globalization movements that began in the 1990s. Sociology and communication scholars provide a wide spectrum of research that explores new tactics used to mobilize these movements both internally and externally. Many of the scholars who specialize in researching information and communication technologies (ICTs) are still exploring the use of the Internet in facilitating social movements and have varying opinions as to the magnitude of its impact on social activism. While many claim that although the Internet will contribute to information dissemination, networking, and organization, it will not have a significant impact on the outcomes of social movements because it cannot replace the face-to-face interaction of direct action or protestors on the streets (Rucht; Van Aelst and Walgrave, Wright; Bennett), some maintain that the networks, space, and solidarity that the Internet creates will ultimately become an invaluable aspect of movements (Gurak and Logie; Cleaver; Kidd).
One of, if not the, first movements to “go viral” and be analyzed through the lens of new media studies is the Zapatista Movement that occurred in 1994 in Chiapas, Mexico. The significance of this movement stems not only from the innovative manner by which the global solidarity for the indigenous Mexicans spread, but rather the conversation it incited among scholars and critics concerning the actual role that the Internet played in the movement (Cleaver 627-630). But still, that conversation revolved around the role of the World Wide Web, when Indimedia.org was one of the few independent resources for activists to spread their message; we were still more than a decade removed from the introduction of social media tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as the innumerable and widely accessible independent news sites that have made this question even more complex. These studies, however, show a definite trend that even in the early 90s movements were evolving to become much more decentralized than what we had witnessed in the past. Indeed, Paolo Gerbaudo published Tweets and the Streets, Social Media and Contemporary Activism in order to specifically examine how people in Egypt, Spain, and New York utilized social media to mobilize, and in particular put the efficacy of such tools to the test in assessing the OWS claim of being a leaderless movement.

Although most of these scholars have not been concentrating on a rhetorical analysis per se, at the same time more literature is being written about online rhetoric, that is, how people are interacting within the discourse of the Internet and social media. In her book, Rhetoric Online, Barbara Warnick asks “whether the Internet’s capacity to serve as a platform of public discourse has contributed to a reinvigoration of the public sphere” (8). This thesis seeks to further that question, by studying the employment of social media and
their importance in the rhetoric of the OWS movement, for indeed, this movement exhibits
trends that may truly be considered unique in the history of social movements.

This project aims to investigate how the OWS movement functions rhetorically by
examining the three communication tools previously mentioned: the OWS website, Facebook
page, and Twitter account. By qualitatively selecting six key phrases, chosen for both
frequency and magnitude of importance, I conduct a cluster analysis of the message
surrounding these key terms: Occupy, Wall St., Ninety-nine percent, solidarity, debt, and
government. These words become symbols that are negotiated within the movement as well
as outside the movement in order to form identification.

If, as Burke and others have argued, a movement is produced in the dialectical tension
that occurs between a self-identified group and a perceived established order, what tension
can be seen in recognizing the established symbols and counter-symbols of the Occupy Wall
Street movement? Once this has been established, I then seek to start to examine the change
in social movement phenomenon that this reliance on symbols has created. Whereas
previous activists had to rely on mass media to promulgate small, grassroots messages, OWS
has seemingly done the opposite by the simple brand of Occupy.

And finally, if OWS represents the interests of the “99%,” as its trademark slogan
proclaims, then why has it fizzled out since its marquee moment on September 17, 2011,
when thousands of protesters set up camp and occupied Zuccotti park for several months? If,
as David Graeber claims in his editorial for The Nation: “The idea of the ‘99 percent’
managed to do something that no one has done in the United States since the Great
Depression: revive the concept of social class as a political issue,” (“Can Debt”) then
understanding how the movement was able to do so will provide insight into the way social media and technology is changing how rhetoric functions.
CHAPTER 2

WHY WALL ST.?

No analysis of a social movement would be considered complete without considering the current socio-political context in which the movement evolves. It is important to note that the Occupy Wall Street movement followed closely on the heels of the Arab Spring that was credited with unseating the tyrannical regimes in Tunisia and Egypt. The interrelationship of these two movements cannot be ignored; however, I would like to start by first exploring the present economic situation in the United States.

Consider the lead sentence of this New York Times article, published in the “Economy” section on October 16th, 2012: “Income inequality has soared to the highest levels since the Great Depression . . . with the top 1 percent of earners taking 93 percent of the income gains in the first full year of the recovery,” (Lowrey) referring to the slow economic recovery that has been noted since the “Great Recession” of 2008. This statement is significant for two reasons: first, for what it says about economic conditions for the majority of American people, and second because it incorporates the rhetoric of OWS. More than a year after the initial encampment formed in Zuccotti Park, the “1%” has made its way into mainstream media not as a radical slogan, but as a familiar concept.

Perhaps the concept cannot be ignored because the statistics behind it are so staggering. According to economists Emmanual Saez of the University of California, Berkeley and Thomas Piketty of the Paris School of Economics, “the 1 percent earns about one-sixth of all income and the top 10 percent about half” (Lowrey). Put in more pragmatic terms, Nobel prize winning economist Joseph E. Stiglitz elaborates, “The top 1 percent get in
one week 40 percent more than the bottom fifth receive in a year; the top .1 percent received in a day and a half about what the bottom 90 percent received in a year; and the richest 20 percent of income earners earn in total after tax more than the bottom 80 percent combined” (4; emphasis in the orig.).

But, as Stiglitz asserts, the crisis that America has found itself in is not merely about income inequality alone. There are farther-reaching impacts of a weak economy that support the conclusion that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. In November 2009, the unemployment rate in America hit its highest level in 26 years at 10.5% (Goodman). The unemployment rate has since dropped to just under 8%, but remains higher for those without a college degree. And as Stiglitz points out, not only is the unemployment rate up, but the long-term unemployment rate is also up. Thus, in past stronger economies, people have been unemployed for a shorter amount of time, but in 2012, for people aged 45-54, unemployment was at 43 weeks and for people aged 55-64, the average unemployment already exceeded one year (Stiglitz 12). Furthermore, studies have shown that when a person enters the labor market in a weak economy, he or she will continue to earn lower wages throughout their lifetime.6

Another aspect of the U.S. economy that cannot be overlooked is the burst of the housing bubble that had been expanding since the mid-2000s. Millions of families have lost their homes since the housing market crashed, and more than one fifth of those that were able to keep their home are “underwater,” meaning that they owe more on their house than it is

---

6 For example, in a study published in 2010, researchers found that graduating from college and entering the labor force right away has a long-term negative impact on employment and wages, and that these effects are “significant and permanent” (Kahn 312).
even worth (Stiglitz 13). But in 2008, when many of these millions were losing their homes, what they saw on television was the majority of banks responsible for creating the bubble getting bailed out by the U.S. government. CEOs were walking away with bonuses, as hundreds of thousands of Americans were losing their homes and losing their jobs.

And the “triple whammy” of losses for many Americans that Stiglitz notes—“their jobs, their retirement incomes, and their homes” (13)—only compounded the mounds of debt they had already accumulated. Some of which, for many younger Americans finding themselves unemployed, or underemployed, was due to massive student loans. According to a special news report on student debt conducted by CNBC in December, 2010, 67% of American graduates had debt in 2009, averaging at $24,000 per person, which was up 6% from 2008 (Cohn). The study quotes the non-profit FinAid.org, which estimated that national student debt was growing at a rate of close to $3,000 per second, with signs pointing toward an increase as opposed to a decrease of debt in the future.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Stiglitz highlights the “decline in opportunity” in America that” has gone hand in hand with our growing inequality” (18). America was built on the notion of the American Dream, which, although it might mean something different to everyone, it is still a concept that we hold dearly and one that signifies equal opportunity for anyone willing to work hard. I would argue that the American Dream is one aspect of our county that allows citizens to identify as Americans. We are happy enough with the status quo of the hierarchy because we have been promised opportunity. And indeed, after the Great Depression and WWII, America seemingly fulfilled that promise for a majority of its citizens, creating the GI Bill and major infrastructure jobs that helped lead to the strong, suburban, middle class of America. However, in America today the poor
are at an extreme disadvantage, and have overwhelmingly lost this opportunity to excel, or even become middle class (Feedman). If education is any marker of success, as many believe it is, several studies have proven that there is a distinct correlation between income level and graduating from a top-level University: “only around 9 percent of students come from the bottom half of the population, while 74 percent come from the top quarter” (Stiglitz 19). For the majority of Americans, the dream of even going to college is now determined by their parents’ own income level. Whereas in the last century children have been expected to “do better”—that is, receive better education, more important jobs, or earn more money than their parents, today a child has a much lower chance of moving out of the income bracket that his or her parents are in. Which, for the quarter of American children living in poverty, does not look promising.

Such stunning statistics would seem to be the type of numbers that call people to action, or at the very least, to question what has been happening to the American middle class over the last 30-50 years. While many turn to politics, to the pre-established right or left wing sector, and many more seemingly turn a blind eye, there were a few who, in 2011, decided that the direction in which the American economy, and indeed America, was headed was unacceptable.

Unknown to most Americans, and called radical by many who do know him, Kalle Lasn is the man behind Adbusters, a Canadian magazine that challenges Western ideals of capitalism, consumerism, and consumption that have taken over the American mainstream. Lasn is also given credit for being the man behind the OWS movement. According to the New York Times and Time Magazine, Adbusters gave OWS both its name and conception date, as well as its first visual symbol—that of a graceful ballerina balanced on top of Wall
Street’s iconic, raging bull statue, with armed men wearing gasmasks emerging out of a tear-gassed background. However, the original campaign that started in July took several months of planning and reinventing before it came to fruition in Zuccotti Park on September 17, 2011.

In his extensive study of the Arab Spring, the Spanish Indignados, and the OWS movement, Paolo Gerbaudo chronicles the origin of the Occupy movement in the United States. He contrasts the carefully planned formation of OWS to the impulsive nature of the protests in Egypt. He writes, “Against the claims to spontaneity and leaderlessness which have since been associated with the movement, at its inception Occupy was a carefully orchestrated campaign, whose logo, copy and imagery had been professionally packaged by the creative graphic team of Adbusters” (108). Gerbaudo interviews Lasn, who explains “For 20 years we have been calling for a global uprising and when that turmoil in Greece and in other parts of Europe happened and then in Egypt and Tunisia we saw an opportunity” (Gerbaudo 109). Interestingly, Lasn and Adbusters editor-in-chief Micah White decided early on that the movement should have only “one demand,” as they felt that was one of the reasons for the success of the revolution in Egypt (Gerbaudo 110).

However, local activists physically located in New York City (among them David Graeber, the activist and anthropologist who recognizes himself as the inventor of the “We are the “99%” slogan), did not believe that the protest movement, or Occupation, could realistically launch simply by releasing the launch poster created by Adbusters. A small group of activists began meeting regularly in the summer of 2011 to plan and organize what would become the first General Assembly in August, and what would later lead to the occupation of Zuccotti Park. Thus, the two sects, the initial designers behind Adbusters and
the local activists including David Graeber, began to see things differently, *Adbusters* focusing largely on communication and the others focusing on physical organizing. Indeed, Kalle Lasn never came to New York City but perhaps contributed in a more significant way by turning the name of the envisioned movement into a Twitter hashtag - #OccupyWallSt. As Gerbaudo points out, however, in contrast to the Egyptian revolution, the online momentum of this movement was almost nonexistent until people began setting up tents and physically occupying space.

Moreover, this physical presence coincided with mass media coverage that increased substantially after the first protesters came face-to-face with New York police officers. Although Kalle Lasn and the *Adbusters* team hoped that by adding the hashtag to #OccupyWallSt they would create Twitter buzz, Gerbaudo asserts that that was not the case. He cites a report that shows that many of the Twitter users actually tweeting #OccupyWallSt “were in fact Spanish tweets connected to the indignados movement eager to see it making ripples across the Atlantic, rather than people based in the U.S.” (113). Gerbaudo argues that the “elitist” attitude of the original organizers in selecting Twitter as the social media tool of choice—as opposed to Facebook, which includes a much larger network of users and therefore a larger audience, and was also the primary mode of communication for young protesters in Egypt in January 2011—hindered the initial online momentum (114).

The website *OccupyWallSt.org* claims that the movement uses “the Arab Spring tactic,” (“OccupyWallStreet” 14 Sep. 2013) but put in context, in the two months prior to the September 17th occupation of Zuccotti park, the OWS Facebook page received “only 891 ‘likes’ compared to the” Kullena Khaled Said page in Egypt, which attracted 36,000 users on the first day of its existence!” (Gerbaudo 114). However, after September 17, or #S17, and
after the first police confrontations, social media traffic for the movement picked up. Today, in March 2013, the OWS Facebook page has 414,780 likes and the OWS Twitter account currently has 177,735 “followers.” (“Occupy Wall St.” 3 Mar. 2013; “Occupy Wall Street” 3 Mar. 3013”). These numbers are somewhat subjective, in that the number of “likes” is not indicative of how many people look at the Facebook page, and the number of “followers” on a Twitter account can change daily. However, these numbers are by no means slight, and they represent many more people that are involved somehow online than were ever involved in the physical protests organized by OWS, which is significant. Moreover, because the movement is so decentralized, there are many more accounts online that claim the brand of Occupy. These numbers become important in considering the broader implications of activists communicating online.
CHAPTER 3

KEY CONCEPTS IN THE RHETORIC OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Compared to previous moments in American history, it is clear that the socio-political and economic climate that currently defines America is ripe for change. The 1960s in America were a tumultuous period of civil strife, arriving on the heels of one of the more stable periods in U.S. history, due largely to the post-World War II economic boom and the vast expansion of the middle class. By the end of the 1950s, small pockets of activists were finding their voices and finding each other, so that by the time Dr. Martin Luther King marched on Washington, the Civil Rights Movement and the anti-Vietnam war movements were unfolding in the media before the eyes and ears of the American public. Whether you were for or against a certain cause, you could probably not escape that cause, and that was through, by today’s standards, simple print and television media. Perhaps it was the momentum of the movements themselves or perhaps times were changing in the realm of rhetoric as a whole, but scholars started paying more attention to the rhetoric of protest and of social movement. Leland Griffin is widely credited with writing the first essay addressing rhetorical theory of social movements in 1952, but many others followed suit during the 1960s and 1970s—indeed a time ripe with raw data to analyze.

Many of these rhetoricians cautioned against the very study of social movements, however, claiming that there wasn’t the proper language, terminology, context, perspective, etc. (Griffin; Simons; Cathcart). Of course, social movements are certainly an interdisciplinary phenomenon that has been studied by sociologists, anthropologists,
historians, and political scientists alike. Robert Cathcart’s definition was proposed due to his dissatisfaction with the sociological definition that previous rhetoricians (Griffin; Simons) had been assuming. In his emphasis of the “symbols and transactions” people use to “unite or separate,” Cathcart opens the conversation to take a more rhetorical turn (“New Approaches” 86). Many scholars felt that they had to establish a new vision of how we see rhetoric—not simply in the ancient tradition as one orator talking to another or to a group of people to try to persuade those people for a particular reason, as in Aristotle’s Rhetoric, but rather as the ways in which people come together to unite for a common cause. Rhetoric, therefore, implicitly encompasses many different discourses to include communications, sociology, political science, and indeed the act of democracy itself.

Whereas there are many theories of social movements, the conversation started by Leland Griffin in 1952 and continued on through the 60s and 70s revolves around the establishment, and whether people are trying to disassemble the establishment, change it, or bring it back to traditional values. Movements can be innovative, radical, even revolutionary. They revolve around confrontation and conflict. Griffin introduces two key concepts – the “pro movement” vs. the “anti movement” and the “aggressor rhetorician” vs. the “defendant rhetorician” (“Rhetoric” 11). He also describes the social movement in three stages: inception, crisis, and consummation. He continues to describe movements this way throughout his career, later applying Burke’s philosophy to his own previously published theory of movements, which is where I rely on his theory most heavily. Many scholars responded to Griffin’s original piece on the rhetoric of movements over the next several decades, generally calling his scope and terminology too narrow and linear, as well as criticizing his theory because it limits scholars to analyzing historical movements that are
considered complete (Simons; Cathcart; Scott and Smith). Although this thesis is concerned most prominently with the theories of Kenneth Burke, it is useful to perform a more in-depth review of some of these challenges to Griffin’s work, as many of the key questions and ideas raised by these rhetoricians will be applicable in the study of the OWS movement.

Whereas Griffin was concerned primarily with discovering patterns in historical movements that had already occurred, Franklyn S. Haiman offered a different perspective in answering the call to the study of social movements. He eloquently brings to light why it is important to study movements when he writes, “when one finds those who profess neutrality or friendship toward the goals of the dissenters also expressing doubt about the methods they employ, it is time to attempt a serious assessment of the situation” (Haiman 14). His essay, “The Rhetoric of the Streets: Some Legal and Ethical Considerations,” was published in 1967, but his point strikes a chord with OWS. According to a poll taken in October, 2011, “almost half of the public thinks the sentiment at the root of the Occupy movement generally reflects the views of most Americans” (Zeleny and Thee-Brennan). This point is exactly why I find the OWS movement significant and why I feel it is important to analyze its rhetoric.

Haiman also makes the distinction between rioters and citizens who “engage in conscientious disobedience” (19). He is concerned with the time, place, and manner of protest, and figuring out if the protest is justified within the Constitution and protections of the law, both of the protesters and those they are protesting against. He makes an important point at the conclusion of his article. He cannot ignore the democratic process of the United States and how the imbalance of power can prohibit discussion and thus the movement process, which may cause “non-rational strategies of persuasion” (Haiman 27). His
contribution becomes significant when considering what it means to be a citizen and how citizens find their voice, particularly in today’s political sphere that is highly influenced by special interest groups and campaign donations from the rich.

Robert L. Scott and Donald K. Smith introduce an aspect of movements that has become a crucial distinction in movement theory as well as the evolution of class distinction. They remark that the “have-nots” are not “hoping to receive what they lack through action by the ‘haves.’” Neither do they accept any assumption that what they wish is membership in the institutions of those who have, or an opportunity to learn and join their value system” (Scott and Smith 29). Herein lies the distinction that Cathcart elaborated on when he distinguished between reform movements vs. confrontational movements. This concept is realized more and more, especially in studies of New Social Movements, in which the main goal is transforming notions of what is culturally acceptable. Scott and Smith apply their theory to the New Left, a movement that could potentially be likened to the OWS movement in terms of its central ideology: “For students in the New Left, the enemy to be confronted is simply ‘the establishment,’ or often in the United States, ‘technocracy’” (29). The concept of a “technocracy” and financial and social reform is a central issue to OWS. But, more importantly, their recognition of the old language as no longer relevant is revealed at the forefront of the OWS movement, since never before has a movement identified itself as representing the majority of a population, as opposed to an oppressed minority. In the rhetoric of OWS, “99%” of America rises up. Examining the core of the protesters, however, would perhaps tell us a different story.

In reality, the small group protesters that claims to represent the vast majority of American citizens has, in effect, polarized many of those citizens who do not take the
occupiers seriously. Richard B. Gregg reflects on a possible phenomenon of social movements, one which can be seen today in the OWS Movement, whereby the rhetoric of protest swerves from the traditional conception of awareness, and instead of encouraging communication and discussion, can seem to do the opposite. He notes that demands can often “foreclose meaningful discussion” with those “in positions of power” and that “opportunities for dialogue become further limited” (Gregg 47) when the protesters are reduced to common slogans, chants, or symbols, or even obscene gestures. Where this becomes significant is the paradox between how the media portray the protesters and how the protesters see themselves. Violence, as well as perceived violence, can be a major detractor for potential sympathizers with the movement. In this new age, violence can also detract from the actual message of the movement. Now that the protesters have the capability to upload photos and stream live videos of police interaction in real time, the people occupying physical space can get wrapped up in proving to their online audience that they are being mistreated by police. Much of the live-streaming video I have watched for this project does just that; it revolves so much around catching very specific incidents of police using force and arresting other protesters that the audience would be forced to wonder if OWS is a movement against police brutality only.

One more rhetorical theory is important to note in this context, for it differs from many of the theories previously discussed, as well as points out a distinct difference between OWS and other traditional movements. In 1975, twenty five tumultuous years after Griffin had published “The Rhetoric of Historical Movements,” Ralph Smith and Russel Windes argued that Griffin’s theory of the rhetoric of social movements, which they dubbed the “establishment-conflict movement,” was too restrictive and they introduced the “innovational
movement" as an alternative (82). They claimed that the innovational movement has a different end-goal than that of the establishment-conflict movement, one that doesn’t involve changing the entire establishment, and therefore social norms or values. A number of stipulations must be met for a movement to be considered innovational. The main precept is that the aggressor rhetoricians, or spokesmen, are from the establishment itself. This concept becomes tricky when trying to figure out how to classify the rhetoric of OWS. The spokesmen claim to represent “99%” of the American population, which would, by definition, classify them as part of the establishment.

Moreover, “the innovational movement cannot appear to be in conflict with the dominant groups in society, those which must be persuaded to approve the proposed innovation and to work for its general acceptance” (Smith and Windes 85). Currently, it would appear that the majority of Americans, despite making up the “99%,” are still defenders of established institutions. The challenge to OWS is bringing them over, or rather making them see their (OWS’s) side. This is a distinctly different challenge than that faced by various other important social movements, in which a minority was seeking rights enjoyed by the majority. In this case, OWS would appear to be arguing that the establishment has strengthened the minority and their power, and has further weakened the majority, and has thus failed. But it would seem that OWS, to date, has done a poor job of relaying this message. Although OWS is fighting to bring back traditional values, presumably, they are having a problem getting even the vast majority of Americans to accept them, never mind the dominant group: the malevolent “1%.”

In addition, “the innovational movement must emphasize the weakness of the traditional institutions and the strength of traditional values” (Smith and Windes 85). I
believe we could easily apply this concept to OWS; however, it is not evident that the
protestors know how to communicate this effectively. A large part of their argument revolves
around the concept of a disorganized society that is crucial to foster the type of environment
in which an innovational movement would succeed. Smith and Windes cite specific 19th
century religious and educational movements to support their theory. Clearly, it is too early
to tell whether the dawn of the 21st century points towards this type of environment, but early
on I would say that with global terrorism, the Arab Spring, and the fast rise of the Internet
and technology, we could start to make this case.

Therefore, it is not unreasonable to ask if OWS is sparking an innovational movement
of the 21st century. Smith and Windes conclude by claiming the significance of their theory:

Indeed, our society may need insight into the rhetoric of innovation as we move
into an era in which new forces replace mobility as sources of stress in the
American experience, and as the hope of radical change, so bright in the 1960s,
begins to fade. *In a post-industrial America of scarcity and pollution*,
*innovational movements in ecology and consumerism will, in the long run, figure
as important sources of public discourse.* Rhetoricians should be prepared to
understand and improve this discourse. (91; emphasis added)

In Chapter 4 I address this notion again through the predictions of Kenneth Burke and
Michael Ignatieff, two prominent interdisciplinary philosophers who contribute to
discussions of communication and citizenship, and therefore to social movement theory.

Finally, one of the most important recurring themes in rhetorical studies of
movements is the importance of the leader. Introduced by Herbert Simons, who argues that
“the primary rhetorical test of the leader—and, indirectly, of the strategies he employs—is
his capacity to fulfill the requirements of his movement by resolving or reducing rhetorical
problems” (36). Indeed, one not need to have studied movements to readily reference the
names of prominent leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Stokely Carmichael, and even
Malcolm X, who were instrumental in the evolution of the Civil Rights movement. As
Gerard Hauser and Erin Daina McClellan note that rhetorical “studies of social movements mostly have focused on the discourse of leaders, on single events, or on movement strategies . . . Even in social movement, leaders have greater access to the podium, press, and public attention than those whose resistance is expressed in rhetorical exchanges of the everyday” (25).

However, we see this notion of a strong leader challenged during the women’s liberation as well as the anti-globalization movements of the 90s. Recently, the conversation has changed as theorists start to study the role of social media in movements, albeit a very new conversation. Thus, Occupy Wall St. is not the first leaderless movement America has seen. In a contribution to the Person of the Year 2011 issue of Time Magazine, in which the Person of the Year was “The Protestor,” author and activist Heather Gautney notes:

On these issues, the movement has been clear: This is a leaderless movement without an official set of demands. There are no projected outcomes, no bottom lines and no talking heads. In the Occupy movement, We are all leaders. This is not just a charming mess. We are all leaders represents a real praxis, and it has a real history. . . . In the 1960s and 70s, feminists convened consciousness-raising meetings aimed at politicizing the various forms of women’s oppression that were occurring in private . . . Consciousness-raising was also the heart and soul of gay rights activism. The process of sharing coming-out stories in a free environment helped others liberate themselves from the closet of ill repute . . . Fast-forward to the late 1990s when protest networks emerged around the world in opposition to the World Bank, WTO and G-8. (Andersen)

In his book, Tweets and the Streets, Paolo Gerbaudo addresses those who would call the latest global movements “leaderless,” arguing instead that social media have enabled the utilization of “soft leaders” (13). Soft leaders are the activists behind the scenes, and for Gerbaudo that means generally the people behind the tweets and the online posts. They go beyond that small, core group of organizers mentioned in Chapter 2, as they continue to carry what is left of the OWS movement online. Gerbaudo asserts that the participatory conversations that social media allows for “were led and moderated by a handful of core
organisers managing influential movement Facebook and Twitter accounts. Such activists came to acquire a role as invisible choreographers who by using social media to publicise the movement’s plans and events have had much influence in shaping its manifestations” (132).

Indeed, in researching the topic of leaderlessness, I spoke, via email, to several people associated with the OWS Press Team. I was informed that there is a small group of approximately 98 people (Gerbaudo estimates 25) who have access to the OWS Twitter account and who are responsible for posting new tweets. According to one woman I spoke with (who, quite appropriately, uses the email address occupyrhetoric@gmail.com), the social media accounts, including Facebook and Twitter, are operated by individual people associated with the movement, “for whom their technically-necessary roles, externally-dubbed ‘owner’ or ‘moderator’, should be seen to have no descriptive value within the network or over the resource as a whole, (held currently by small team with no entry/exit/accountability processes)” (email interview with Meghan, occupyrhetoric@gmail.com, 5 Feb. 2013). Ultimately, what Gerbaudo argues is that these moderators do indeed influence the manifestations of OWS, and therefore play a part as a leader. The feature that OWS pays special attention to, however, is that these people are there for practical, technical reasons only, and there is no authoritative voice that grants these people permission to post links or share comments on the OWS account; in other words, there is no one authoritative voice that speaks for OWS, but rather a fluid collaboration of accountholders post information. Nor do these moderators use their own names or seek any sort of publicity, but rather remain anonymous leaders under the brand of OWS.

As I will discuss in Chapter 6, despite the people that control physical accounts on Facebook and Twitter, the rhetoric that the movement utilizes is clearly broad-based and far-
reaching, stemming not from one set of principles or one isolated agenda. While I agree with Gerbaudo that the movement is not completely leaderless, I do claim that social media have enabled the movement to operate without publicized leaders while maintaining as much transparency as possible, in order to most fully accommodate its ideology of participatory democracy.
CHAPTER 4
IDENTIFYING THROUGH SYMBOLS: KENNETH BURKE AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY

It is clear that social movement theory is both complex and interdisciplinary. It is therefore not surprising that many of Kenneth Burke’s theories and assumptions might be used to better comprehend the complexities of social movement structure, organization, and application. Burke’s notions of symbols, identification, and dramatism will be applied in this thesis in order to understand more fully both the rhetoric of OWS as well as its future implications for the movement. Indeed, as I will be relying on a Burkean cluster analysis to identify the message of OWS, it is important to discuss some of Burke’s key ideas on motivation and on how people use symbols to interact. As previously mentioned, a few scholars have turned to his theories in order to lay a framework for studying movements, and I will use their writing as a jumping off point for the analysis of OWS.

After publishing his first essay on social movements in 1952, where he described the life cycle of a social movement, Leland Griffin turned to Burke’s dramatistic theory in analyzing the New Left Movement in America. He wrote “A Dramatistic Theory of the Rhetoric of Movements” as an extension of his “The Rhetorical Structure of the ‘New Left’ Movement: Part I,” in which he applied a Burkean philosophy to identify key components that made up the New Left movement. Griffin did this by examining certain New Left publications in terms of both his original definitions of movement rhetoric and Burke’s concept of humanism. In these articles, he identified the audience that the New Left
movement was seeking to reach as the American intellectual. He also identified the major goal of the New Left movement. Finally, Griffin focused, like others who have explored the rhetoric of social movements, on the importance of a leader in the movement (Simons; Barker, Johnson and Lavalette).

In 1984, Charles Stewart, Craig Smith, and Robert Denton published a book entitled *Persuasion and Social Movements*, which contained the chapter “A Burkeian Approach to Persuasion and Social Movements.” Their application was much broader and gave less extensive examples of multiple movements (as compared to Griffin’s in-depth analysis of the New Left) highlighting Burke’s definition of man, identification, dramatistic pentad, and hierarchy. As they emphasize, “By analyzing a persuader’s language, the rhetorical critic may be able to reveal the substance of the persuader’s attempts at identification and thereby to structure the persuader’s strategies” (Stewart, Smith, and Denton 93). Hence, Burke’s theories provide a frame for breaking down human interaction within a society, which in turn can provide many insights into the driving forces of a social movement.

To start, then, we must further examine Burke’s terminology, including his definition of man. For Burke, the distinguishing factor between humans and other animals is our use of symbols. We are a “symbol-using, symbol-making, and symbol-misusing animal” (Burke, *Language* 6). Burke asks us to consider this concept further: “But can we bring ourselves to realize just what that formula implies, just how overwhelmingly much of what we mean by ‘reality’ has been built up for us through nothing by our symbol systems?” (*Language* 5) Moreover, we are “goaded by the spirit of hierarchy” (Burke, *Language* 15), meaning we use

---

7 Griffin writes that one element of the New Left Movement was “an inclination to direct their address primarily to intellectuals; to see the intellectual, rather than the worker, as the essential maker of history, the agent of change” (“Rhetorical Structure” 115).
these symbols to place ourselves in a sense of social order. Ultimately, man, in seeking to
identify, is striving towards peace and good order. \(^8\) But as we can see by surveying both
history and the current cultural and political climate, men do not live in a perfect unity. So
because they are not unified, they are divided. According to Burke, therefore, this is why
people communicate – in order to rise above or transcend their differences. Thus,
movements are born when people are no longer satisfied with the current status. Rhetoric
allows us to start to figure out the process of identification and transcendence.\(^9\) “But put
identification and division ambiguously together, so that you cannot know for certain just
where one ends and the other begins, and you have the characteristic invitation to rhetoric”
(Burke, *Rhetoric* 25). Put in other words, we have a method for analyzing the dialectical
tension that has brought the movement to the surface.

Burke’s theory of dramatism helps us understand this concept further. His theory
utilizes five key terms: act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose. Burke explains:

> In a rounded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the
> act (name what took place, in thought or deed), and another that names the scene
> (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also you must
> indicate what person or kind of person (agent) performed the act, what means or
> instruments he used (agency), and the purpose. (*Grammar* xv; emphasis in orig.)

As Stewart, Smith, and Denton assert, these terms are supremely helpful in recognizing what
is taking place over the course of a social movement. Dramatism enables a researcher to
break down the different parts of an exceptionally complex social phenomenon. Moreover,
as this thesis is concerned with utilization of specific words and symbols, we will turn to

---

\(^8\) To summarize, “In pure identification there would be no strife” (Burke, *Rhetoric* 25).

\(^9\) See Burke, *Rhetoric of Motives* (22, 150) and Burke, *Grammar of Motives* (402, 420) for further
discussion of division and transcendence.
Burke as “he provides tools for analyzing the effects of symbols on human motivation” (Stewart, Smith and Denton 85).

Throughout his work, Burke references feudal and well as Marxist class distinctions to exemplify his assertions concerning identification. If identification creates division, and people strive to overcome division, there will be times in an organized society when people form a collective identity in order to change the status quo. It can easily be argued that the OWS movement does not identify itself in the traditional Marxist class distinctions, which Burke refers to often. But that does not mean the movement cannot be explained by his philosophy of human communication. Interestingly, when exploring the dialectic of the U.S. Constitution, Burke shows how early Americans formed a unity by dividing from the monarch of England. However, in unifying under the Constitution, another identification and correlating division was created: “And the Constitution was concerned with a new division, the rights of ‘minorities’” (Burke, Grammar 372). And clearly those minorities have struggled (and are still struggling) to transcend divisions in order to unite as a peaceful, coalescing people of the United States.

Further, Burke uses this dissection of the dialectic of the Constitution to show that people need not create division only with other people. Conflict can arise between a group or class of people and an institution, even a philosophy. As Burke suggests:
Recently, as we have said, the rise of monopolies has begun to produce a new opponent, thus calling for a corresponding reinterpretation of rights. For a long time the vessels of the business philosophy were felt to be representative for the nation’s ways (the businessmen’s justice served as everybody’s justice). . . . However, in proportion as some businesses emerged above the others, it became dubious whether they should be considered as the synecdochic part or as the divisive part. And though the monopolists use all the resources of finance, tradition, and journalistic indoctrination to perpetuate the earlier terminology in accordance with which their role would be interpreted as culminative rather than divisive, their very function as a new form of administration assigns them a crucial role in the dialectical redefinition of Constitutional rights. (Grammar 372)

Burke’s insight into the changing interpretation of Constitutional rights due to capitalism allowing the rise of certain monopolies is applicable to the change that has been going on in the United States since the 1980s as far as the rise of the wealthiest Americans, or “1%.” The supporters of OWS would argue that “Wall St.,” or more specifically large, profitable corporations, have played a significant role in “the dialectical redefinition of Constitutional rights” (Burke, Grammar 372); a role that has led to the manifestation of vast income inequality as well as the influence of money and special interests in defining policy. Burke asks whether the successful businesses should be considered the “synecdoche part or as the divisive part” in representing the nations’ system of values and rights. Meaning, do they represent the whole of the nation, and subsequently the best interests of all citizens, or do the interests of the monopolies (or corporations) start to diverge from the traditional values laid out in the Constitution? The growing power that these corporations have gained shows us, as Burke claims, that there is a dialectic even to the Constitution, or in other words, to American laws and values, which are always being re-negotiated through human identification.

In defining citizenship in the Western free-world, Michael Ignatieff discusses a similar paradox, even prediction, that could be aligned closely with the underlying
sentiment of the OWS movement. Ignatieff traces the concept of citizenship back to the ancient Greek and Roman ideals, where men were able to truly engage in civic discourse because they were free from the constraints of the working man. He asserts: “the myth of citizenship implied the following crucial chain of associations: political choice requires independence of mind; independence of mind presupposes material and social independence; citizenship therefore inheres only in those capable of material, social, and intellectual independence” (Ignatieff 57). In ancient Rome then, citizens were a small group of rich, male, slave and property owners. The foundation that our country is built on, then, which considers all humans entitled to equal-rights, and hence voting rights and citizenship, creates a paradox with the “traditional republican model” (Ignatieff 57).

It would follow, however, that a truly egalitarian society involves civic participation from all citizens. History has told us that those who are poor and uneducated, although are technically considered citizens, are not able to fully engage in the type of civic discourse that a true democratic republic demands. A phenomenon that manifests itself, for example, in the millions of dollars of campaign money that the Super PACS now invest in major elections, creating a situation in which the wealthy are essentially able to pay for their politics. Ignatieff poignantly asks, “If, as we rightly think, we cannot let our politics become the sport of a monied aristocracy, who would fit the criterion of ancient civic-mindedness, how will we, ordinary harried citizens that we are, approximate to these ancient virtues? Or is the ancient paradigm asking too much of us?” (62). Perhaps the OWS movement is
trying to assert that the model has indeed become unattainable for a democratic nation.

Furthermore, Ignatieff talks of the welfare state that was created in order to provide the citizens who struggle in their economic situation to be able to actually participate, to be able to attain the “intellectual independence” that he previously mentions (57). In explaining the failings of the welfare state Ignatieff asserts that the government attempted to use its own “to make sure that the market economy’s natural tendencies would not be allowed to vitiate the ideal of a community of equal citizens,” which was “sustained by important social forces . . . who understood that a just civic bargain was the essential precondition of economic efficiency” (67). These social forces, made up of trade unions and civic bargains are the same entities that the OWS activists so effusively stand by, as we will see in Chapter 5. Ignatieff predicts that the free-market state that the Western world has found is so “fraught with contradictions” (68) that it will surely be challenged. In Burkean and social movement terms, the negotiation will begin against the practices of free market capitalism and the rising inequality that it promotes.

A cursory examination of the OWS movement might come to the conclusion that the movement is fighting for the participatory rights of citizenship that Ignatieff discussed. Opinions vary, however, as to the scope of the movements’ concerns and the impact the movement has made. In order to analyze these two issues, a natural starting point would be to figure out the symbolic action of the movement, ultimately
an examination of the purpose of the movement with a major focus on the agency of social media.\textsuperscript{10}

Indeed, for Burke, a person’s motives are discovered through examining the words that he has uttered or written. Moreover, a person’s work contains many and varying “associational clusters” (Burke, Philosophy 20). In other words, an artifact will presumably contain key symbols (or words or images), and by identifying the symbols that cluster around the key symbols one will start to gain insight into the true motivation of the rhetor. As Burke explains, “the interrelationships themselves are his motives. For they are his situation; and situation is but another word for motives” (Philosophy 20; emphasis in orig.). Therefore, the researcher of these associational clusters make the implicit message of the rhetor, explicit; the process is a manageable way to analyze the rhetoric of OWS, particularly once the movement has been broken down according to the pentad.

In Chapter 2 I examined the scene that serves as the backdrop for the OWS movement. For the purpose of this thesis the agents will be all those who contribute to the social media sites we will be examining. The acts of this movement will be taking a backseat to the agency in the study. We could focus on individual physical acts, such as organized marches down Wall St. or encampments set up in specific Bank of America buildings, and indeed these acts will figure into the discussion. But the purpose and the agency of the OWS movement have been much more elusive, and this thesis therefore focuses on these two aspects. To be sure, the conversation that began in the 1990s about the use of the World Wide Web by social movements has expanded greatly in the last year and half due to the

\textsuperscript{10} Burke explains symbolic action in Philosophy of Literary Form (8-25).
Arab Spring, OWS, and other protest movements around the globe. Recent discussions of these movements include varying opinions as to the efficacy of social media. Some social movement theorists argue that social media are not, and cannot, be the only medium that sparks and/or sustains a movement. Others argue that social media have revolutionized protest movements. With the global uprisings that have produced regime change in the Middle East, however, their influence is undeniably a worthwhile endeavor to examine. Because the Western World does not have dictators to topple, we will have to look at different ways the OWS movement has impacted the United States.

One feature of a movement that was paramount to Griffin and Cathcart, and indeed Burke, was the notion of the counter-movement, or the “defender rhetorician,” as Griffin suggested in his landmark essay (“Rhetoric” 11). The countermovement is that which legitimizes the movement, indeed, what marks the culmination, in Griffin’s terms, of the second period of inception, where people’s attitudes start to shift against the countermovement, and thus for the movement. As Griffin writes, “Or put otherwise: it provides a Negation to be negated; and hence the potential for dialectical movement, the purifying struggle of contradictions, the purgative striving that ends in transformation and transcendence” (“Dramatistic” 209). When we look at OWS, a countermovement seems to elide our study. For the “1%” isn’t an organization, or even a bureaucracy that feels it must answer to the OWS movement. There are simply no consequences thus far for the corporate elite not to answer back, so they don’t.

Furthermore, Griffin argues that in discovering the “one motive” a movement has arrived at the “period of consummation” and thus has survived its period of
inception (“Dramatistic” 212). It is the transcendence that Burke explains in *Rhetoric of Motives*. In this discovery, the “old” is purged and the “birth of the new order” becomes the “birth of the new hierarchy, a new system of authority . . . Men are endowed with a new condition or ‘substance’—with a new identity, a new unity, a new motive (Griffin, “Dramatistic” 212-213). So for Burke and Griffin, the one motive was paramount. Once the motive was recognized and accepted, a new period of negotiation and transcendence, indeed, identity, has been reached, and the work of a movement would be complete. Suffice to say that we have not seen this period for OWS; however, understanding how the members have sought to express and come to terms with their motive, or motives, is valuable to study, because technology is expanding its reach, becoming accessible not only to people in Western countries, but also to people around the globe. As people become more adept at using technology, social media are becoming an important, if underutilized, way in which people may come together, whether to form a collective identity, a national identity, a social movement, or simply to engage as citizens. By studying the OWS movement, and how its members use symbols to engage in dialectic via social media, I hope to further an understanding of how this method can be effective for future action.
CHAPTER 5

SYMBOLIC CLUSTER ANALYSIS

I quickly came to realize that researching the rhetoric of the OWS Movement would be a daunting and slightly problematic task. Because of the very nature of the research problem—social media in social movements, my pool of data was overwhelming vast and ever-growing. However, I started with the assumption that there would be general themes running through the data that represent what the movement stands for. By identifying common words and phrases, or symbols, that are widely used on these social media sites that identify with OWS, and then focusing on the words, messages, and themes that are found around these core words and phrases, we have a method for starting to rhetorically comprehend the meaning and goals behind the movement—or, in pendactic terms—the purpose.

As we have already established, analyzing a movement rhetorically involves identifying the symbols that the activists use to interact with both each other and the public. Burke mentions the challenges that he faces in performing a cluster or symbolic analysis of the works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge due to “his highly complex mind” making the charting of the interrelationships between various works very difficult (Philosophy 21). Indeed, charting the message of OWS through various media platforms is a daunting task that comes with its own set of problems and challenges. My initial project set out to analyze word clusters that were posted on the OWS.org, Facebook, and Twitter sites during the same month. I chose September 2012, as September 17 of that month marked the official 1-year anniversary for the movement. I was too late though. Although preserving data online has
been a challenge from the start, recently social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter have taken steps to do just that. However, as I quickly found out, the “timeline” feature of Facebook in which the company tracks a membership from the beginning would not load all the information, and the recent move of Twitter to preserve all Tweets allows only the owner of the account to see their own Tweets from the beginning. Hence, therein lies the challenges facing a researcher who is trying to collect “historical data” from four months ago. I therefore chose to collect available data from the OWS.org website and OWS Facebook account from September 2012 to mark the anniversary and data from Twitter that was posted in October 2012 in order to most closely align the data. I then performed a cluster analysis of all posts on each of the three sites in January 2013 in order to survey the most current data available, as well as to show the changing nature of the rhetoric of OWS.

In addition to the evaporating data, I faced several other problems that are worth mentioning. As I have discussed earlier, the OWS movement calls itself leaderless and makes great attempts to live up to that claim. Consequently, conducting a search of “Occupy Wall Street” online or on Facebook or Twitter results in many multiple accounts to choose from. For example, when I type in “Occupy Wall St” to Facebook’s “friend” search engine, six differ accounts appear, each individually identifying itself as something different: “community,” “political party,” “interest,” “cause.” Because OccupyWallSt.org has a direct link to one Facebook page and one Twitter account, those are the social media that I chose to analyze in order to try to keep some sense of fidelity as far as the actors who are utilizing rhetoric. However, in a way this method goes against what the OWS movement expounds as far as leaderlessness, for the very website that I have chosen to study proclaims that it is unofficial: “OccupyWallSt.org is the unofficial de facto online resource for the growing
occupation movement happening on Wall Street and around the world. We're an affinity
group committed to doing technical support work for resistance movements. We're not . . .
affiliated with Adbusters, anonymous or any other organization” (“OccupyWallStreet,” 10
Dec. 2013; emphasis in orig.). Hence the very fact that you will not find the name of any
person, organizer, or leader on the Internet site or social media accounts is the movement’s
way of resisting hierarchy.

The next major challenge I had was deciding whether to analyze the clusters of the
interactive comments that the general public has access to write on Facebook and Twitter.
Are these comments worth following as far as the rhetoric of the movement? Certainly the
philosophy of the movement would say yes, since nothing is official, everything is valid.
That outlook becomes somewhat less realistic when put to practice, however, when analyzing
comments that are clearly not in favor of the movement at all. Therefore, I chose to use these
open conversations when exploring the overall impact of the rhetoric of social media in the
next chapter, as opposed to the rhetoric of OWS. Thus, the words I chose to analyze came
from posts that were published from the individual OWS accounts that I have mentioned.

Finally, I would be remiss to disregard mentioning the many other forms of media
and publications put out by the OWS movement. A few, such as YouTube live-streams and
the “We are the 99%” Tumblr blog will receive attention in the following chapter focusing
on the rhetoric of social media. Others, such as the “99% Declaration” and “Occupy
Together” blog, while extremely rich in information and rhetorical value, will be left to the
many researchers who have found this topic worthy of study. Regrettably, the bounds of this
thesis are not as comprehensive as they could be.
Now that I have addressed some of the problems that arose in selecting the media to study, I will turn to the selection of word clusters. Because of the evolving nature of the OWS movement, there are virtually hundreds of associational clusters that may potentially be identified. For the purpose of this project, I chose six, based on both their frequency throughout OWS media and their importance to the movement. These clusters are arranged in order of importance, both explicitly by OWS and implicitly in the broader cultural context of the movement. The associations are: Occupy (protest), Wall St. (corporation, banks, “1%”), Ninety-nine percent (“99%”, people, workers), solidarity (unity, community), debt, and government (Congress, politics). The words in parenthesis represent symbols that could be, and often were, interchanged, in the many messages put out during OWS during the months that I analyzed it.

After studying OWS for six months, I realized that one of the reasons why the movement is so hard to understand is that the term Occupy has become associated with so many different, seemingly unconnected events. Indeed, if I put that same search into Facebook but stop at typing simply “Occupy” the results vary from familiar terms such as “Occupy Wall St,” to “Occupy the NRA,” “Occupy Canada,” and even such seemingly strange concepts as “Occupy Bacon” and “Occupy Sesame Street” (“Occupy Wall St.” 22 Aug. 2012). Indeed, in my sample for September 2012, OWS followed “occupy” with at least five different cities, as well as numerous other phrases including “Occupy election 2012,” “Occupy colleges,” “Occupy our homes,” “Occupy KeystoneXL,” and even “Occupy Obama” (“Occupy Wall St.” 1-30 Sep. 2012).

Thus, in trying to figure out what the term Occupy means to the movement, we must look towards a vast array of both physical spaces as well as conceptual spaces. While the
original notion to Occupy Wall Street drew from the literal notion of bodies taking up physical space on Wall St, the symbol of Occupy has reached far and wide and evolved into its very own notion of activism. Paradoxically, the term does not always carry a negative connotation, i.e. the term protest could replace Occupy when it precedes Wall St, but what about when it precedes Sandy, as it does so many times in the Twitter feed in January. OccupySandy has become its own branch of the Occupy movement that has stirred hundreds of activists to come together and build shelters and donation centers for victims of the massive Superstorm Sandy that hit the East Coast of the United States in October 2012, devastating parts of New York and leaving hundreds of thousands of residents without power, and hundreds more without homes. An activist group that, at first glance, appears to be protesting the greed and wealth of corporations on Wall Street might seem like an unlikely support unit for hurricane victims, but it became just that. We can infer from the phenomenon of Occupy Sandy what a truly ubiquitous label Occupy has become.

Other clusters around Occupy reveal the many different agendas that construct the movement, and this is a theme that pervades the analysis. People have posted about Occupying cities, Occupying the Democratic National Convention, Occupying the Keystone XL environmental movement, and Occupying home foreclosures. Ultimately Occupy is a symbol for people who believe in a cause to identify with others who agree on the same cause. At the same time, Occupy is a way to create the tension in the formation of a movement that Griffin and Cathcart talk about. Activists come together to Occupy not because they are satisfied, but because they are trying to incite dialectical tension, to bring attention to the hierarchy in the Unites States that equates power with money, that they have indeed become dissatisfied with.
Hence, Occupy elicits identification and produces dialectic. But the remarkable aspect of this movement is that the symbol itself has instigated continuing identification. The very fact that Occupy’s meaning is so universal allows it to represent innumerable causes, and in doing so allows never-ending identification. It does not make a demand, but rather stands for an ideology of change that is marked by the label occupy. Many studies of the Civil Rights era movement emphasize the grass-roots structure, and the importance of local organizations becoming the medium for uniting the larger movement. For example, in her study of how the Civil Rights movement and the New Left influenced organization and structure in the women’s liberation movement, Sarah Evans highlights this point: “Students for a Democratic Society, the youth organization of the League for Industrial Democracy, was only one of a number of national and local campus organizations between 1960 and 1963 which became vehicles for the new activism” (105). Today, social media enable a symbol, Occupy, to be that vehicle. And people can, and do, use this symbol to unite in ways that would otherwise be impossible, primarily through of social media.

The next symbol that is used to identify is Wall St. Initially, I chose Wall St. and the “1%” as two different symbols, but after an in-depth study I realized that, for the movement, the two terms represent the same entity, along with the terms “corporations” and “banks.” Ironically, one of the major messages of OWS—“Banks are not people”—is somewhat obfuscated in their interchanging of the “1%” with the “corporations” that the “1%” own. And that could ultimately be one of the biggest problems the movement is facing. Because their protest is directed toward “Wall St.,” no one person or people are held accountable to the charges. And the charges are potent. The terms that surround the Wall St. symbols represent what some would call the harshest rhetoric of the movement.
In fact, it is helpful to mention Burke here again briefly, as his notion of God and devil terms applies very succinctly to the symbols of Wall St and the “1%.” For Burke, people communicate by relating to words and symbols. Those symbols that represent the virtuous and perfect identification of man that we are all striving for are God terms. However, those symbols that represent the negative, that is everything that is opposite of that which is morally true, are devil symbols. These devil terms represent, as Griffin says, “the Negation to be negated” (“Dramatistic” 209), which is ultimately why a movement starts. Therefore, these symbols become supremely important to the movement. For OWS, the themes that cluster around these symbols are “greed,” “reckless,” “lazy,” “controlling,” “exploitive” and “oppressive,” to name a few of the most potent. In essence, one could gather that Wall St. (corporations, “the 1%”) are as evil as the devil terms that represent them.

Moreover, the term “bailout” pervades the context around the symbol of Wall St, as in “Banks got bailed out, we got sold out,” which is one of the more popular chants during any given march down Wall St. Bailout, combined with clusters of the banks “cheating taxes,” combines into one message that the OWS movement make abundantly clear: corporations avoided any negative consequences during the government bailout of 2008 and as a consequence “the people,” i.e. the taxpayers or the “99%”, paid for it. The indignation that the occupiers display at the elite “1%” not following the rules is key to understanding the movement in rhetorical terms. Through this one cluster we might start to assume that the OWS movement is not trying to bring down the government of the U.S. There is no indication in these words and symbols that there should be no taxes, or that we should

11 For more on God terms and devil terms see Burke, Rhetoric of Motives (298-301).
radically change the institutional values of the United States of America, but rather that those values have devolved from the promise of equal opportunity that is promised to all American citizens. By analyzing the rhetoric of the movement we can start to validate it as the innovational movement that Smith and Windes introduce in contrast to Griffin’s more traditional establishment movement, which articulates its claims in class terms.

Indeed, “We are the “99%” evokes an identification of inclusion. The movement did not choose to promote the slogan “we are the middle class” because we accept that in America all citizens enjoy equal rights. The “99%” then, is made up of the majority of all Americans of every race, ethnicity, educational background, job status, and even political party. The distinction, instead, appeals to the income disparity between the elite “1%” and the rest of the deserving citizens. Hence, it is not surprising that the clusters around the “99%” and the “people” say that they are “the workers,” “the taxpayers,” “have the power,” “deserve fair wages,” and should be “served by the government.” That is not a radical call to overturn the government, but rather a message of the “99%” claiming what they feel they are entitled to. Indeed, this identification is exemplified through OccupySandy, in which the empowered people came together to help their fellow citizens. Although the occupiers took great pride in providing basic needs for victims and used the opportunity to show that the government was not able to do so for so many people, there was never a call to anarchy, but rather the sentiment that the government should be taking care of the victims.

The terms “civil disobedience” and “direct action” also cluster around the “people,” as well as “non-violence.” The OWS movement then, is seeking to gain the support, or identification, of the majority of people that it claims to be representing. However, in studying the movement in this way for several months, I see that this call to action is
constantly changing, making it hard for people to identify. For example, in September and October the feed on the three sites concentrated on asking the people to support many varied causes: the Walmart Strike, a strike of workers in a local NYC bakery, protests outside the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, changing the presidential candidates’ debate, the Chicago Teacher’s Union, and more. These causes are clearly representative of a vast cross-section of America, but when there are so many issues that “the people” are being called to support through “direct action” or “civil disobedience,” one can see how overwhelming the identification of the “99%” can be. Moreover, as in the case of Wall St., when the movement is represented by all these causes, it again becomes hard to distinguish a “defender rhetorician” (Griffin, “Rhetoric” 11) or even a “negation to be negated” (Griffin, “Dramatistic” 209). With so many causes, who is accountable to answer the movement, to contribute to the dialectic? For dialectic cannot be one-sided, and if the answer is no one, then we see a movement that never fully develops towards its goal of transcending the status quo. For as Cathcart and Griffin propose, without a counter-movement, the period of inception for a movement is never fully realized. The movement becomes stagnant when no one answers back to demands for change. More specifically, Wall St. has been virtually unaffected by people marching outside its doors. It feels no exigency to answer back to the protesters. Thus people may band together and identify with mistrusting large corporations, but the corporations themselves have yet to be affected enough to even answer back or defend themselves. For them the Occupiers are a non-issue.

Interestingly, as “solidarity” is the next symbol that abounds in the rhetoric of OWS, we can see that the movement believes in coming together and using collective power. But again, the question arises as to “solidarity” in what? If we examine the words and phrases
that cluster around “solidarity,” along with “community” and “unity,” we see that they are the same causes as those previously mentioned—often diverse and geographically disparate. Indeed, one of the main clusters is “worldwide” “solidarity” in supporting protests in Spain, Greece, and Egypt over the past six months. These are movements that have a very separate set of demands from their own governments, but OWS is seemingly using their struggles and success as examples of what could be accomplished in the U.S. if we can identify through “solidarity.”

Hence, the OWS movement seeks to “empower” people through this solidarity, but this strategy has proven to be a lackluster point of motivation. In casually assuming the “99%” as a collective identity, without actually appealing to individual actors to come together, the movement faces a great challenge; in trying to identify everyone with everything, the causes become isolated. The movement, while spreading and diversifying through the brand of Occupy, becomes fragmented and actually loses momentum. As Gerbaudo argues, the OWS movement has been failing to emotionally appeal to citizens of the United States (12-15). Conversely, however, some scholars remain more optimistic, suggesting instead that this all-encompassing, decentralized strategy that uses social media as agency might actually contribute to the survival of movements (Teruelle; Shirky).

Two final two symbols, “debt” and “government” appear less frequently, but are, in my opinion, two issues that are crucial in the survival of the movement. First, “debt” is not only a symbol that represents a larger concept; it is an actual problem that is threatening the U.S.. In popular mass media, the word “debt” is often followed by “crisis,” and it is not too far off the mark. In March 2013, hundreds of thousands of jobs may be lost and paychecks cut due to our national debt. The OWS movement focuses on more specific and personal
examples of “debt,” which I believe will be key in future identification and recruitment for the movement. The terms that cluster around “debt” are “education,” “home foreclosure,” “students,” and “impoverishment.” These issues strike at the heart of problems that are plaguing many Americans, and especially young Americans.

Recently, *The New York Times* reported that total outstanding student-loan debt exceeded $1 trillion in 2011, which is a year earlier than the previously mentioned study conducted in 2009 estimated (Rampell). Moreover, the report, released by the Education Department and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, claims that $864 billion of that debt is in federal government loans (Rampell). One can reasonably assert that the student loan bubble is headed in the same direction as the housing bubble—and will likely burst if continuing down the same track. Yet banks continue to charge high interest rates, and people continue to graduate from college and remain unemployed\(^\text{12}\), often unable to rent an apartment, never mind paying back their college loans. Therefore, as the problem of student loan debt, as well as that of home foreclosure, directly impacts more and more Americans, these appeals may new members to identify with the OWS movement.

Secondly, the clusters that surround “government” in the OWS movement are “inside deals,” “imperialistic,” “hypocrites,” “war,” “drones,” and “capitalism.” Lacking in the clusters is any affiliation with a particular political party; on the contrary, during the presidential debates in September and October, both candidates received harsh criticism on social media from OWS accounts. However, these clusters are more prevalent during times when the mass media is reporting on a political event, such as the debates in 2012 or the

\(^{12}\) In January, 2013 the unemployment rate for men and women aged 20-24 was 14.2%, as reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (“Bureau of Labor Statistics”).
President’s State of the Union address in February, or when a cabinet member is selected. Rhetorically, this indicates that the OWS movement is not simply ignoring the government, or the mass media, but rather responding to it using their own media. It also indicates that the movement is indeed interested in starting a debate about current, relevant issues in American politics. Although the comments are typically criticisms of government policies, and those in charge, again they do not promote anarchy or blatant disorder. I find this fact important, for it shows the movement is looking to reform, rather than to re-establish traditional values.

The overarching problem, then, when looking at all of these symbols and clusters that presumably represent the OWS movement, is that there is a marked lack of directive rhetoric. The actors that are in charge of the OWS social media accounts use these tools to report on the negative, without offering positive solutions, other than the generic endorsement of direct action without specific direction. Admittedly, conducting an analysis this way did not allow me to click on many of the individual links to articles and websites that furthered the quick, 140-character Tweet or attention-grabbing Facebook Post. But I assert that the average citizen who wants to find out more about OWS might not make the effort to investigate either, at least not every link to every explanation. Therefore, the words that are repeated often and that are easily accessible are (literally) the symbols that represent the rhetoric of OWS. And, as Sonja Foss concludes in her description of cluster analysis by quoting Burke: “the clusters manifest in someone’s rhetoric can ‘reveal, beneath an author’s “official front,” the level at which a lie is impossible . . . If a man talks dully of glory, but brilliantly employs the imagery of desolation, his true subject is desolation’” (66). Specifically in terms of OWS, by relying on social media to advance its message and promote identification, the
rhetoric comes across as vast and often disparate. I do not question that the Occupiers have passion for their cause, but Occupy has turned into such a large concept that the message of Occupy Wall St., specifically, gets confused in the many other causes that have attached themselves to the label of Occupy.

Thus, my original objective was to understand what the Occupy Wall St movement was all about. What is its message, what is it trying to accomplish? In Burkean terms, what is its purpose? I do not claim to have solved the mystery; however, I do feel that by studying the symbols that the movement uses I am able to better comprehend the message that the movement is trying to promote. In sum, Occupy Wall St is a coming together of people who are dissatisfied with the inequality that the current economic structure of rewarding big banks and corporations, that our government has supervised and even encouraged, has created. This structure has led to massive debt, home foreclosures, and unemployment for many Americans, who believe that by uniting they can empower themselves and the majority of citizens who have been treated unfairly. Admittedly, that is not a wholly satisfying answer to the question of what is the purpose of the movement, therefore the next chapter will continue to dissect the agency under question, through studying not the symbols but the rhetoric of the social media itself.
CHAPTER 6

RHETORICAL FUNCTIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Historically, movements of any kind have had to rely on media outlets as the vast disseminators of the message the movement is trying to convey. The action then, of a movement’s participants, is continually based on information screened through the media outlet that is portraying it. In their introduction to *Active Voices: Composing a Rhetoric for Social Movements*, Patricia Malesh and Sharon McKenzie Stevens point out this phenomenon: “movement constituencies and their affiliated organizations engage in self-definition. Outsiders, such as media sources and countermovement participants, also craft visible and interactive definitions” (7). While this is still certainly true today, in 2013, those outsiders have been put on the sidelines more than ever before, thanks to the world-wide web and social media. In the previous chapter, I performed an in-depth cluster analysis of the OWS movement in order to figure out what the participants’ rhetoric tells its audience. This chapter examines how social media functions rhetorically for that audience. By using OWS as a specific example, we can start to see the broader implications of the rhetoric of social media in the 21st century.

Indeed, a participant of OWS, or a potential participant looking to find out more information, could do so without ever having to see the movement through the screen of the mass media. Quite the contrary, social media outlets enable a movement to allow a mass audience to be educated through its own point of view. Take, for example a Facebook post on the OWS page, of a political cartoon illustrating a group of people, holding two signs. One simply reads “99%” in bold letters and the other reads “CORPORATIONS ARE NOT
PEOPLE,” the holder of that sign and another bystander both wearing bandanas over their mouths to signify the people being silenced (“Occupy Wall St.” 10 Dec. 2012). The poster, of course, was referring to a statement made by Mitt Romney while he was speaking at an Iowa State Fair during the 2012 presidential election. But a person would not need to have picked up a mass-produced newspaper or watched cable news to know that, or, consequently, be forced to grapple with any sort of context surrounding the comments, in order to align themselves with the notion that corporations are not people, but are somehow related to people being silenced, potentially drawing the conclusion that corporations are bad. Hence the outsiders that Malesh and Stevens refer to may now be taken out of the equation of the rhetoric of social movements.

Obviously, the equation is not as simple as presented above. Taken out of context, the cartoon could be more confusing than anything, and the viewer would never understand the part of the equation that was not just anti-corporation, but anti-Mitt Romney, the Republican presidential candidate. Moreover, if that viewer wanted to understand the cartoon further, he might turn to an online search engine to find out more. If you plug “corporations” into the search engine Google, the fourth auto-search subject line that pops up is “corporations are people,” indicating how popular that term was in users’ search for information in 2012 (Google). Thus the cartoon would then be put into context; however, there is no guarantee that the Facebook user would find any sort of empathy towards the OWS movement. He or she would, however, now be aware of the comment and be allowed to make his or her own judgment from the myriad of Internet hits (news articles, editorials, blogs, campaign material, movement websites, etc.) that pop up on the screen describing their own versions of “corporations are/are not people.”
Thus, the Internet allows for many different rhetorical scenarios and outcomes. In the cluster analysis I described in the previous chapter, I was searching specifically for clusters of words, not necessarily focusing any of the interactive aspects on the Internet and social media sites that I was using. That is one way to analyze the rhetoric, but I came to the conclusion that while it helped understand the what, or purpose, of the Occupy Wall St., I had virtually ignored the how, or the agency. To start, as I have defined social movement for the purpose of the thesis, I think it would be helpful to include a definition of media by scholars in the field. Andrea Press and Bruce Williams define the “media environment as both the specific communications technology in use (e.g., personal computers, newspapers, and television) and the social, political, and economic structure within which these technologies are used” (8). This definition is particularly helpful because it considers the physical tools that people use, which today include the very essential smart phones, as well as the “owner” of the media outlet that is being utilized, which is important when considering how people protest.

One of the most prominent scholars to take on the rhetoric of the Internet is Barbara Warnick. In her book, Rhetoric Online, she does not examine the Internet through the lens of social movements, but rather the larger concept of the potential for civic discourse in the public sphere. She provides a solid foundation for exploring how audiences experience rhetoric online, and hence how users can employ rhetoric online. In applying her theories to social movement studies, and specifically to my own study of the OWS movement, we can start to examine how social media can be better employed in order to create meaningful change.
While Facebook and Twitter are new players in the media scene, researchers have been studying the rhetoric of the Internet since the early 90s, including how it pertains to the rhetoric of social or protest movements. Two well-known studies are worth mentioning here: the Lotus Marketplace and Clipper Chip study, and the Zapatista movement. Both protests offer rich insight into the effects of the Internet on social movement resources and strategy.

Researchers often point toward Laura J. Gurak as conducting one of the first comprehensive rhetorical studies of protests online (Warnick; McCaughey and Ayers). In her book, *Persuasions and Privacy in Cyberspace*, Gurak explores the success of the Lotus Marketplace software protest vs. the failure of the Clipper Chip protest, both of which took place primarily online. In a later essay, she compares her findings to another, more contemporary online protest movement and furthers our understanding of online persuasion as applied to movements. Her second essay, written with John Logie, was published in 2003, ten years ago and before the onset of social media. Even then the authors remark that the Internet had advanced rhetorically, noting how the internet has evolved in the short span of ten years from text-based pages: “Now, Web pages that go far beyond text in their appeals, using color, sound, images, graphics, and of course, words, still demonstrate the rich opportunities for social action and persuasion in the increasingly visual space of the Internet” (Gurak and Logie 26). But even with these advances, Gurak and Logie claim that many of the appeals remain the same.

For one, the Internet allows for exigencies to come together faster than ever before, which, again, is enhanced even further by both social media and mobile devices, as exemplified by the speed of protests from beginning to end in both Tunisia and Egypt. Secondly, they claim that the Internet allows for powerful online communities to create
“instant ethos” (Gurak and Logie 31). This phenomenon is easily seen on Facebook, where people form a network of “friends,” which is a significant word choice (or symbol) for an online connection in and of itself. If I go online to the OWS Facebook page and see that one, or maybe even 20, of my “friends” officially “like” OWS (which is posted clearly on the page), then I may hold OWS in higher esteem. While Gurak and Logie do admit that same issue of ethos can cause problems as well—for the Internet allows for complete anonymity and de-centralization, which is markedly different from text-based movements, they remain optimistic about the power of the Internet in advancing social movement efforts: “protest participants seem willing to defer questions of credit and attribution in exchange for the establishment of a collective, community-centered ethos. Within these sites, leaders tend to be retroactively identified” (4). This concept has evolved even further in the utilization of social media by OWS, whereby anonymity and decentralization become not just a strategy but part of the ideology of the movement itself.

The Zapatista Movement is widely cited by media scholars as well, and was perhaps the best known example of people protesting their government before the Arab Spring. Maria Garrido and Alexander Halavais focus their study of this movement on the importance of the Internet in gaining transnational support for a very small, localized movement in Chiapas, Mexico. In mapping the Zapatista network, they attempt to “analyze the main characteristics of the global social networks of solidarity” (Garrido and Halavais 166) that supported the movement. Harry Cleaver goes so far as to call this phenomenon of transnational support the “Zapatista Effect” (621), pointing out that the online aspect of the movement’s success, in which a small indigenous community of farmers formed a guerilla army and rebelled against the Mexican government, was not because the Mexicans
themselves were going online and organizing, but because the Internet allowed others to be informed of their struggle. The network that then formed, existing “primarily at an international level, mostly in computer-rich North American and Western European countries” was powerful enough to put pressure on the Mexican government” (Cleaver 627).

Moreover, international observers were able to physically go to Chiapas and give the world first-hand reports of the struggle against the Mexican government and military, stemming from the mandated privatization of communal land, and skewed heavily by the “state control of mass media” (Cleaver 625). These studies emphasize the empowerment of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that the Internet allows for, which is also a main focus of many of the anti-globalization movements of the 1990s. Major Internet wars were waged against global forces such as the World Bank, Nike, and the World Trade Organization (McCaughey and Ayers). The Internet allowed for different kinds of wars; Sandor Vegh breaks down many of the anti-globalization movements to classify types of online activism into Awareness/Advocacy, Organization/Mobilization, and Action/Reaction (as in the case of cyber hacking) (72-75).

Indeed, the Internet’s capacity to raise awareness and promote advocacy has been shown in the previous two examples. Another important aspect of this function is the ability for people to search independent news sites that are not, as in the case of the Zapatistas, completely state controlled. Even in the free world, mass media is far from independent. In his 2004 book, The New Media Monopoly, Ben Bagdikian found that in the United States over half of the television and radio stations, print newspapers, magazines, publishers, and movie studios were owned by five companies (1-5; emphasis added). Although mass media is still important for information dissemination, as seen in the case of initial public awareness
of OWS, the Internet allows for countless independent sites that are not controlled by the special interests or political influence of mass private corporations.

An early example of unconventional news reporting is the Independent Media Center, or Indymedia.org. Started in 1999, the collaboration of independent journalists and media producers began as a conglomeration of more than “sixty autonomously operated and linked Web sites” (Kidd 49) from all over the world. During the World Trade Organization (WTO) summit in Seattle, Indymedia.org played an important role in covering the protests and more importantly, creating an information center for the anti-globalization activists that came together for the protests, for counter-opinions to the WTO were rarely published in any form of corporately-owned media (Kidd 49-50). As Kidd asserts, “Indymedia.org allowed real-time distribution of video, audio, text, and photos, with the potential for real interactivity through ‘open publishing,’ in which anyone with access to the Internet could both receive and send information” (50). Much like the OccupyWallSt.org website that enables occupiers to come together today, this site was fairly transformational in 1999, and has expanded to over 150 different independent media centers in less than 10 years (Warnick 57). Indymedia.org was important because it covered “stories and news perspectives elided in the mainstream news,” (Warnick 58) while still being a credible source of information, which, as Warnick highlights in her book, becomes a potentially problematic paradox when applying traditional rhetorical theory to new media.

Today, however, public space and usage of the Internet has become so prolific, and so accepted in our culture, that the question of credibility becomes almost a side note. Organizations are taking advantage of the fact that they have a ready-and-willing audience in creating their own websites. Obviously, OWS.org is at the forefront for this study, but the
countless other websites that one can find hyperlinks to on the OWS.org, Facebook, and even Twitter page are significant as well. Examples such as DemocracyNow.org, occupytheory.org, alternet.org, wagingnonviolence.org, truth-out.org, stopndaa.org, thenation.com, and nofracking.com are just a few of the links that I have come across on the OWS online resources. These examples show that the Internet allows almost any cause to have a public forum, and the advent of social media allows this information to be spread. For example, I would never even know the existence of most of these sites, or be able to find them simply by searching online, but if I subscribe to @OccupyWallSt (the movement’s handle for their Twitter Account), I could be exposed to any number of these in just one day. Hence, being part of one network promotes identification with other networks and other causes.

So, these multiple examples embody the capacity of the Internet to build networks and disseminate information, but this research still leaves a gap as to the functional rhetorical aspects of how people actually interact and identify online. I do not argue the Internet’s efficacy in creating a space for people to create networks, but I would like to further examine exactly how that identification forms. Therefore, I turn back to Barbara Warnick, as she addresses the creation of a webpage, and the actual rhetorical decisions that go into it. She “considers how such characteristics as nonlinearity, differential access, instability, and dispersion of Web texts affect the processes of Web production as well as users’ experiences of and responses to Web-based messages” (Warnick 27). Warnick emphasizes the nonlinear nature of web-based texts, and how this experience differs from traditional print media, for example, in the context of social movements: newsletters, flyers, posters, and direct mailings. Additionally, she highlights the phenomena of interactivity and intertextuality as part of
online discourse. Users experience the message differently because of the interactivity the web allows. They have many more choices than when viewing a static text that is one-sided—the message has been written by the author and does not change. Of course, it may be viewed differently depending on a reader’s contextual background, but the text itself does not change. Rhetoric online, however, is always changing depending on how a user chooses to experience it.

This starts with a user’s (or potential activist’s) choice of which media tool to even explore. In January 2013, Facebook announced that it had exceeded 1 billion users worldwide. In the same month, 414,896 people had “liked” the Occupy Wall St. page (“Occupy Wall St.” 20 Jan. 2013). Just the simple act of clicking the “like” button while browsing the OWS page is a form of interactivity that allows a person to start to identify with a cause. Furthermore, the language of how a reader experiences the page has changed as well. Typically, we do not read an online page or site, but rather we go to a website or Facebook page. The website then, is not merely a text to be read, but a space that is available to explore.

Furthermore, once a person is on the Facebook page which any of the 1+ billion Facebook users with accounts have access to, there are myriad choices how to experience the page (“Occupy Wall St.” 3 Mar. 2013). Facebook now allows its users to upload two photos to showcase themselves—a “profile picture” and a “cover photo.” So the reader experiences a form of visual rhetoric, chosen by the account holder, immediately upon going to a page. From there, the user has a choice of clicking on a number of hyperlinks to find out more information: “About,” “Photos,” “Events,” “Social Actions,” and even a link to “Likes,” which, when a user clicks on the hyperlink, he or she is sent to a page with historical
information about how many “new likes” the page has received per week (“Occupy Wall St.” 20 Jan. 2013). If a user were to click on “Photos,” she would instantly be immersed in an overwhelming collage of color and information—blocks of visual text that are made up of graphs, cartoons, images taken from television news headlines, captions overlaid on photos that have been digitally altered, photos of occupiers marching, and more (“Occupy Wall St. 20 Jan. 2013). From there, a user chooses which of these hundreds of images to click on and receive further information. As Warnick points out, “online interactivity plays a role in persuasion by bringing users to identify themselves with the speakers’ interests” (71). An experience that is made even more interactive by the decentralized ideology of OWS, which allows for multiple people posting about vastly different interests under the same brand of Occupy.

Moreover, the “Events” hyperlink takes that notion even further. Upon clicking on the hyperlink, a user is taken to a page listing various events on the left side of the page, and locations on the right. A typical example is “#D18 – Occupy the Port - #Blocktheboat” with the date and time listed underneath, and an intersection in New York City listed as the location (“Occupy Wall St.” 3 Mar. 2013). The way the OWS posts the event information is full of symbols that not every user would understand, but that has become a common way for the OWS community to communicate. For example, #D18 indicates an event happening on December 18th which can be easily posted and searched on Twitter, as indicated by the hashtag (#). This symbol allows for a more efficient way to search information as well as faster way to disseminate that information, but the audience not familiar with Twitter would not understand #D18 and might miss the message. On the other hand, those who understand the Twitter language, whether they align themselves with OWS or not, identify through
simply understanding the symbols. Incidentally, according to a Pew research study, in 2012 16% of Internet-using adults were on Twitter, the majority of these users aged 18-29 (“Pew Internet”). This statistic aligns closely with the tradition of social movements that are propelled by young activists. In this particular case, the primary audience is New York activists, as the location of this protest is planned for a physical space located within New York City.

However, several other events are much less specific to the New York community. One of the next events is entitled “Wall St to Walmart: Occupy Black Friday,” (“Occupy Wall St.” 3 Mar. 2013) held, not surprisingly, the day after Thanksgiving. Location, however, is “Your Hometown” (“Occupy Wall St.” 3 Mar. 2013). Hence, it speaks to an audience all over the country, attempting to create a connection between the person who has gone to the OWS Facebook page and the OWS movement itself. But more than that, it is attempting to connect local communities to the national movement. Despite the fact that the movement started as Occupy Wall St, it has grown into its own brand. This event location is significant, because it shows how social media reverses the traditional model of social movements—the challenge is not uniting individual, local community organizations together at a national level, but rather motivating activists at the local level to bring the movement to their town.

Yet, the movement doesn’t preclude itself to physical occupation of space. Another “Event” found on the Facebook page is “International Move Your Money Out Day of Action,” (“Occupy Wall St.” 3 Mar. 2013) which supposedly took place on November 5, 2012. The location for this event: “Your local credit union or community bank” (“Occupy Wall St.” 3 Mar. 2013). If a user clicks on the event, he or she will be given more
information, including negative comments about the greed of the big banks, and this statistic:

“So on this day before the elections, we encourage everyone to move their money and move their debt from big banks into credit unions and local community banks. Since November of last year, over $100 million has been moved, and we hope to see another $100 million moved on this day” (“Occupy Wall St.” 3 Mar. 2013). Scroll down the page and a user can find even more hyperlinks, with information on finding a local bank or credit union.

Thus, a user creates his or her experience depending on how much information he or she wants, or is motivated to find, and this experience could be completely different for any single user. As Warnick has noted, the interactivity that a website allows for can have different rhetorical effects. Ideally, for the movement, the content will join people together to support the agenda of OWS, and create identification. For example, a user would agree with the Walmart Black Friday strike, and actually use the information on the website to organize a strike in their own hometown. Conversely, this type of interactivity on the web could create a false sense of activism. As many critics have asserted, users could confuse activism with simply clicking on a “like” button or sharing an OWS message to their own Facebook page. While those small actions no doubt help to spread awareness of the movement, they don’t come close to the actual activism that is the real goal of OWS, i.e. moving your money from one of the major national banks to a local credit union. In fact, critics have even coined a term for this phenomenon: slacktivism, which will be discussed further in the concluding chapter.

Another new aspect to social media is that people are not merely engaging in conversation with the holders of the account, but rather having conversations with each other as well. Warnick uses examples of two websites in which president-elects took their
campaigns online in 2004, allowing for a limited amount of interactivity that created what she called, “user/candidate identification” (89). In this type of interactivity, the holder of the account, the president-elects campaigners, have one goal in mind—to get their candidate elected. So this type of two way communication is adequate to promote the identification necessary to do so. But with Facebook, people can communicate directly with each other and expand identification (or division) even further. For example, many Facebook posts involve a graphic or a link, and typically people will share comments that support the opinion or further the opinion with more information. People who may have zero physical, political, demographic, or any other type of connection with each other are coming together on this website and talking to each other about an issue. It is not hard to see how identification is strengthened through this process. However, the decentralization and freedom of social media allow for anyone to comment, including those who may have dissimilar viewpoints.

One striking example comes from a graphic that was posted on the OWS Facebook page on January 23rd, when the current theme of posts revolved around solidarity with Martin Luther King, Jr. This particular post was entitled “What Racism Means,” giving a definition and then comparing that definition to “What most people think racism means” with the “most” being one-lined and replaced by “white” as in “What white people think racism means” (“Occupy Wall St.” 25 Jan. 2013). The post showed 97 comments and 718 “shares,” i.e. Facebook users sharing the graphic with other Facebook “friends” (“Occupy Wall St.” 25 Jan. 2013). In reading through the comments, I found that many people called the message racist, but some users challenged those comments and a few engaged in lengthy dialogue with each other over what racism means in the United States. While it would be easy to say that this whole interaction went against solidarity, with the majority of users disagreeing with
the OWS post, using phrases such as “you guys,” (“Occupy Wall St.” 25 Jan. 2013) against OWS and each other, it is also fair to say that the post challenged a few citizens about their beliefs and made people think, if only briefly, about a perceived injustice that still pervades the United States. Moreover, the majority of this conversation came from average citizens who may or may not identify themselves with OWS, but who nonetheless found themselves having and voicing an opinion about a current social issue in America, hence creating their own dialectic.

Furthermore, Barbara Warnick contends that intertextuality on the Internet allows for deeper identification when people recognize and even construct meaning after viewing an image. She uses the example of Google’s home page and its changing logos for different occasions, and how “at the time that these are posted on the Google main page, there is no evident explanation for what they mean” (Warnick 91). However, if the user is forced to think about the meaning and then ultimately understands through their own experience or even research, they may gain pleasure from that connection. Warnick explains, “Google’s use of these intriguing images, which can only be understood when the user recognizes the allusion that gives them meaning, provides an example of the rhetorical workings of intertextuality” (91). Although in this example the rhetorical usage promotes consumerism, we can see how this intertextuality could be applied in the context of movement identification. When people are actually able to participate in the construction of meaning, that act becomes more valuable than simply reading a text. The previous example of the graphic on racism is both an example of interactivity as well as intertextuality, and many more inferences can be seen on the OWS page. Even in this prior example we see OWS involving Martin Luther King Day into their message, therefore inviting anyone who feels
compassion towards MLK and the Civil Rights movement to similarly feel compassion towards OWS.

As Warnick notes, intertextuality is not a product of the Internet and has been a common terminology in critical scholarship, referencing, in particular, Roland Barthes and his claim that the notion of a writer being the sole creator of a meaning in any text is false; readers and writers will naturally bring their own context to anything they read and create their own meaning (93). However, the Internet allows for endless opportunities to utilize intertextuality, in multiple ways, to reach a diverse audience. Warnick sites parody as a common rhetorical strategy on the Internet, which is sophisticated in that a reader must understand both the larger cultural or political context as well as the actual satire. Once a user does so, it would follow, he or she has now strengthened identification with the cause. For example, while most of the OWS parodies posted on Facebook actually do revolve around Wall St. and the greed of corporations, many images bring attention to other causes. For example, in January 2013 one of the Facebook posts on OWS was a cartoon of two campers looking down at a power plant. One camper is asking the other “What do you think our most powerful renewable energy is?” to which the other camper replies, “Denial” (“Occupy Wall St.” 27 Jan. 2013). The cartoon, which in its most basic understanding is disparaging against power plants, actually brings attention to the much larger debate of global warming that is raging in our country today. While the idea of global warming has been given more recognition lately, the cartoon quite clearly points out that as a country we are largely in a state of denial about the harm that global warming is doing to our environment. Hence, the satire has no direct links to Wall St., but promotes identification with environmentalists wanting to create change, and is therefore consistent with the brand of
Occupy. This cartoon and many others like it show how “authors of online commentary, parody, and satire rely on familiar events, known texts, culturally specific allegories, and other components of the cultural intertext to produce discourses meaningful to various audiences” (Warnick 119). Facebook and Twitter, therefore, allow for continual interaction between authors and users, ensuring that a movement has constant and evolving material that keeps up with current cultural events.

In addition, various forms of blogs and live-streaming have evolved to work in different rhetorical ways. As previously mentioned, the “We Are the “99%” Tumblr blog is another very popular website of the OWS movement. It is completely independent from the OWS.org website, yet espouses similar rhetoric in a different way. Tumblr is a collaborative blog site, where anyone with an account can post written text, photos, video, music and multimedia links. For most services, the account is free. The website currently boasts over 80 million posts, and is a prime example of a public space where people can come together online and share information. While not affiliated with any political or social cause, Tumblr allows for account holders, like the “We Are the “99%”, to open their page to public posts and information sharing. One significant feature of this particular blog is the “Get Known” link, which encourages users to submit a photo of themselves holding a hand-written sign describing who they are. The purpose of submitting one’s story, according the blog, is to “put a face to the 99%”. Let’s get known” (“We Are the 99 Percent”). More than fostering identification, this blog creates extreme pathos for the people who submit their personal stories.
The most recent example, for February 2013, shows an older man holding a clipboard. His note reads:

I am at least 5 years late in receiving a routine colonoscopy. I had a pre-cancerous polyp removed during my last procedure – colon cancer runs in my family. I was just told by St. Josephs hospital, Tampa, that I must pay $300 co-pay in order to receive this procedure. I have medical insurance thru SCBS that takes half of my family income. I am on disability and cannot pay the co-pay.

I suppose once the cancer sets in I’ll just go to the ER?

What options do I have?

I am the 99% ! ! ! (“We Are the 99 Percent”)

Another example posted by a young woman in April, 2012 that sums what many of the blog posts refer to:

My name is Darlene, I have a high school diploma, college experience, and job skills. I’m trying to start a family of my own after leaving Public Housing, BUT I CAN’T FIND A JOB… I AM THE 99%. (“We Are the 99 Percent”)

The image of an actual person, holding a hand-written note that describes his or her situation, forces the user to engage on a personal and even emotional level. This space allows people all over the country to come together, share their stories, and truly see each other, in a way that would never be possible without the social media tool.

Finally, another personal identification strategy originates when a person who has access to a computer or a smartphone has the ability to view what protesters are doing, in real time, through the eyes of the protestors, as opposed to the censure of the mass media. On September 17th, 2012, the one-year anniversary of the occupation of Zuccotti park, I was able to sit at home in San Diego and watch hours of demonstrations in New York City. As many critics point out, a person watching a protest does nothing for the cause compared to an activist actually engaging on the street. However, rhetorically, I, and thousands of others, were able to identify with the protesters in a way that was not possible before YouTube or
live-streaming video, where the creator of the content, (the activist), is sharing what they are experiencing as a抗议者, whether it is unification with other protesters or, for example, mistreatment by the police. As a viewer, I was able to experience and even sing along with the chants (“Banks got bailed out, we got sold out!”) (“OccupyWallStreet” 17 Sep. 2012), witness the “mic-check” form of communication in which everyone is given a chance to speak and decisions are made by the group, and gain an appreciation for what the people on the ground are trying to accomplish.

Hence, the activists now have a space where they can earn credibility for what they are doing. Social media provide this extremely powerful rhetorical function that, while it may not be activism in itself, certainly fosters greater access to activism and, in turn, may create more activists. While the video was streaming, people from all over the nation were engaging in conversations with each other about what was happening on the streets of New York City. At one point over 21,000 people were watching. Furthermore, I witnessed a person get arrested through the OWS live-stream, then later saw that very same image as a news photo on NBC.com. After having watched the action live, I consequently felt a greater connection to what I was seeing on a mass media site. I had a different, more sympathetic opinion than I perhaps would have had I simply seen the photo and read NBC’s version of the day’s events.

Hence, I assert that social media are indeed enhancing options for social movement activists by not simply enabling them to distribute information, but also by enabling them to create identification in ways that have not been utilized before. As people are able to navigate their own experience in an online space, share mutual beliefs, engage with others in dialogue, connect with strangers on a personal level, and visually see activism through the eyes of the
activists, they are able to identify further with a cause. Although the connections are certainly more tenuous than connections made between people on the streets, they are nonetheless present, and therefore social media are able to contribute significantly to rhetorical strategies of social movements. Furthermore, new media and social media have contributed to creating a concept that promotes the unity of countless causes through a single symbol—Occupy. The challenge then, becomes creating ways in which people can actually use these social media tools to create not just awareness, but actual change. More importantly, what I have learned about the rhetoric of this one social movement can be used to further examine how changing technology has created a space for people to engage in communication, identification, and civic discourse in the 21st century.
CHAPTER 7

INCITING CHANGE

In the introduction to their book *Cyberactivism*, Martha McCaughey and Michael D. Ayers offer simply that “the increasing commercialization of the Internet demands a scholarly and political response” (1). I hope that this thesis has added that the increasing politicization of the Internet and its potential for civic action demand an equally important response. If, as Griffin urges, we must place social movements in the context of time, we must consider the current digital age that the OWS activists have been immersed in, for the challenges that have faced them apply to how the American public communicates today. In many movements past, we can easily point to an end-state that the “aggressors” (Griffin, “Rhetoric” 10) are trying to reach: the right to vote, the end of segregation, stopping the draft, standard treatment and compensation for labor, etc. The priorities of the OWS movement, however, do not appear to lie in one set of demands, but rather a conglomeration of ideals that unite under one symbol.

As I have attempted to prove, social media harbor great potential for identification, yet there also exists great risk of a false sense of activism. For the past ten years critics have been warning of the phenomenon of slacktivism, defined in the *English Oxford Dictionary* as “actions performed via the Internet in support of a political or social cause but regarded as requiring little time or involvement, e.g., signing an online petition or joining a campaign group on a social media website” (“Slacktivism”). Slacktivism results in people feeling good about supporting a cause, when in reality they have not done much to advance the cause at all.
Malcolm Gladwell wrote an opinion piece for the *New Yorker* in October, 2010 entitled, “Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted.” Although the article was published three months before the revolutionary mass protests erupted in Tahrir Square and other parts of Egypt, Gladwell reinforces his stance in a second article he published during the Egyptian uprisings in 2011 entitled, “Does Egypt Need Twitter?” concluding, quite simply, that it does not. He holds on tight to his resolution, negating any power social media have on influencing the success of movements, stating simply that people brought down governments before the Internet or Facebook was invented, emphasizing, “Barely anyone in East Germany in the nineteen-eighties had a phone—and they ended up with hundreds of thousands of people in central Leipzig and brought down a regime that we all thought would last another hundred years” (Gladwell “Does Egypt”). No one argues this fact, nor the fact that hundreds of thousands of physical protesters were also necessary to bring down the regime in Egypt, that while Facebook and Twitter played a critical role in fast information dissemination, it was the people physically joining together and occupying public space that resulted in change.

But these protests, as well as the civil rights protests in the 1960s, had clearly defined demands that were different from those of OWS. Activists in these movements identified through sharing one set of goals. They, of course, came to the movement with their own perspectives and backgrounds, but they united for a specific reason. Social media or not, these people would find each other to negotiate that change. The Occupy movement, on the other hand, has created an entirely different notion of social movement, which could be expanded to an entirely different notion of public space created by social media, where people “go” to find out information and engage in dialogue with each other for a variety of
reasons. Whereas traditional rhetoricians focused on the movement and the countermovement, social media allows people to identify their own countermovement—to join in solidarity not with one demand, but as a people wanting to live better. As we saw from the cluster analysis in Chapter 5, all the different clusters and symbols that surround the term Occupy have created identification, but they have also divided motivation into many different directions.

Kurt Andersen suggests that the Occupiers are indeed placed in the context of a unique setting for social movements. In the Time Person of the Year 2011 article, “The Protestor,” he highlights that in the last century, “when major news events were chronicled strictly by professionals and printed on paper or transmitted through the air by the few for the masses, protesters were prime makers of history” (Andersen). Rhetoric functioned by people taking to the streets and voicing their words loudly, or through pamphlets, signs, and direct mailings. Much of the message, however, was then reported to the American public through the lens of the media. Moreover, Andersen points to Francis Fukuyama’s essay, “The End of History?” and argues that, at least in the West, we had accepted a post-Cold War, “Western liberalism” notion of the end of conflict and social strife:

By then came the End of History, summed up by Francis Fukuyama's influential 1989 essay declaring that mankind had arrived at the "end point of ... ideological evolution" in globally triumphant "Western liberalism." The two decades beginning in 1991 witnessed the greatest rise in living standards that the world has ever known. Credit was easy, complacency and apathy were rife, and street protests looked like pointless emotional sideshows — obsolete, quaint, the equivalent of cavalry to mid-20th-century war. The rare large demonstrations in the rich world seemed ineffectual and irrelevant. (Andersen)

But clearly, as a small segment of the U.S. has shown us, conflict and social strife are alive and well. However, a rhetorical shift has taken place. Whereas the street protest used to be the primary tactic of social movements, or even more broadly of people wanting their voices
to be heard, to create awareness, social media replaces that prime capability. No protest in
the United States has gained as much attention as OWS in the mass media or otherwise since
the Civil Rights movement resulted in the Civil Rights Act, and part of that is due to the
rhetorical power of social media.

As a result, small protest actions associated with OWS are continuing on throughout
the country. For example, the day after Thanksgiving, known to many American shoppers as
Black Friday, actually saw protesters outside of Walmarts in over 100 U.S. cities. While
newspapers reported that the percentage of employees who partook in the strike was small,
they were reportedly joined by thousands of non-employees who supported the cause
(“Walmart”). In reality, the protests did not make a dent in WalMart profits for the day. As
the Huffington Post reported after conducting interviews that, “while most shoppers
interviewed in the Dallas area said they supported the strikers, many were not willing to
acknowledge the crucial link between the discounted products they themselves were buying
and Walmart's low-wage jobs” (“Walmart”). Similar to the concept of slacktivists, these
supporters were not willing to take any action that would affect them personally. But while
the Walmart Strike did not succeed in the traditional sense, it shows an example of actual
activism that originated via social media, proving that social media can actually be a
powerful tool if harnessed effectively.

Furthermore, in Chapter 5 I discussed OccupySandy (OS) and how the concept of
Occupy transcended pure protest and turned into a support network for victims of the storm.
My conversation with Meghan, one of the physical activists in the OccupySandy effort, was
very enlightening. Meghan, who has studied both movements extensively as well as been
physically involved in both, shares her opinion on the difference between the two efforts:
Both OWS and OS were instances of responding to a form of crisis; both involved the coordination and influx of materials/good/resources/individuals and their redistribution; the latter, however, was made possible (it seems) because of the communicative platforms/concepts/language in place BEFORE disaster struck. OccupySandy is being considered the largest grassroots response to disaster in the U.S. with more than 80,000 volunteers volunteering with OccupySandy...and counting.” (Email interview with Meghan, occupyrhetoric@gmail.com, 17 Mar. 2013)

Hence, because the concept of Occupy and the communication links the movement had created were already established and in use, activists were prepared to respond to this new, separate crisis. This reasoning has significant implications for future action, as the networks and identification that have been created by OWS and Occupy are continuing to sustain and grow.

However, Meghan also points out a critical variation in OccupySandy:

One difference between the two is that consensus (a term near and dear or at least commonplace to OWS) was more difficult to ‘enforce’ or abide by during a crisis (Hurricane Sandy) that involves an IMMEDIATE response where decisions are more tangibly a matter of life and death. Essentially, it is less practical to seek consensus (when trying to make a decision) from the Occupy community when the minutes that go by mean another minute of someone being left in the cold with no heat. Or food. Or shelter” (Email interview with Megan, occupyrhetoric@gmail.com, 17 Mar. 2013)

Indeed, when people’s basic needs are on the line, exigency becomes paramount. It is not unreasonable, though, to consider OccupySandy as a prime example of how a pre-established network, can facilitate direct action. OccupySandy is one example, but it could be considered a model for future efforts of the movement. This model is also another example of how the rhetorical power, or dynamis, of social media allowed for direct action. For Aristotle, dynamis meant “capability or faculty.” (Kennedy 37). George Kennedy notes that in Aristotle’s “philosophical writing dynamis is the regular word for ‘potentiality’ in matter or form that is ‘actualized by an efficient cause’” (37). Specifically, in the previous case, the networks that had been set up through the symbol of Occupy allowed for a means of
mobilization to help American citizens in need—and the *dynamis* of social media is actualized by the OWS movement.

Moreover, before I ever spoke with Meghan, I noted in my research that on November 9, 2012, three days after the US Presidential Election and one week after massive SuperStorm Sandy hit the East Coast, the headlines on the major news networks (NBC, CNN, Fox, NYT) all revolved around the major national scandal that was breaking – the head of the CIA had been discovered having an extramarital affair with his biographer. At that same time, on the OWS website, the headline read “We Got This - #Occupy Sandy” (“OccupyWallStreet” 9 Nov. 2012). A YouTube video was posted, featuring an Occupier interviewing actual residents of NYC, who talked about how they had no power, food, or heat. It also showed the support center that OWS had created to supply people with what they needed. At a time of real crisis in America, particularly on the East Coast and in New York State, this group of criticized protesters came together to act, not against anything, but for the people they claim to represent. More than that, they were spreading important information for victims and potential supporters while the mass media had moved on from, even forgotten, the devastation of the storm. Hence, OccupySandy is not only a model, but a prime example of the rhetoric of Occupy put to action. If the movement of Occupy seeks to reclaim public space that they feel has been lost through privatization, then OccupySandy is a real-life example of how the movement is achieving this goal.

Set in the larger context of the potential empowerment, or again, rhetorical *dynamis*, of social media, this one example could have significant implications. One major critique of the impact of social media is that they are simply an extension of the communication forms that have come before them. But that is no reason to completely disregard their potential for
creating change. Indeed, history has taught us that new forms of media can be transformational. As media scholars Andrea Press and Bruce Williams assert that “communication constructs reality itself. . . . So, the development and spread of print culture precipitated fundamental changes in how societies could be organized, how the state would be organized, and how individuals would define themselves and their relationships to others” (12). And, as Burke claims, human interaction is about the symbols that we create and use to communicate with each other in order to identify with each other and sustain an ideal way of living. We are constantly engaged in dialectic, negotiating new identities to achieve this end. If social media, then, are able to create new ways in which we accomplish identification, by promoting symbols and creating concepts, then it becomes our duty, as citizens, to figure out how best to employ them.

Thus far, evidence points toward young people possessing the skills and desires to do so. Before the global protests of 2011, Jeffrey Juris and Geoffrey Pleyers coined a new phrase to describe what might be considered a precursor to the Occupy phenomenon. In studying youth activists across the globe, from Barcelona to San Francisco, they discovered a form of “alter-activism,” which, to them means “an emerging form of citizenship among young people” that is committed to “horizontal, networked organisation; creative direct action; the use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs); and the organisation of physical spaces and action camps as laboratories for developing alternative values and practices” (Juris and Pleyers 57). The OWS movement has shown us how this type of activism functions, and through their networked communication on social media we see a new type of space that is available to develop these alternate values. Perhaps, by
studying the interaction between activists on social media, people will begin to find alternative practices for engaging in citizenship.

Furthermore, in various studies published in the recent book *Social Media: Usage and Impact*, various researchers from around the world conduct empirical studies that show that people, and mostly young people, are using social media to engage in not only social networking, but for political engagement and activism as well. In one of the studies, “Social Media and Youth Activism,” Rohn Teruelle specifically targets users under 30 who were part of online activist groups in the U.S. and U.K. He compares contemporary youth activism to that of the 1960s, and contends that one of the reasons that youth activism today goes virtually unnoticed is because of minimal coverage in the mass media (Teruelle 203-204). Indeed, Juris, who also conducted an ethnographic study of OccupyBoston, verifies that large protests were continuing in 2012. He describes a march that he participated in while conducting his study in Boston, although media coverage was short lived. After participating in one such march in Boston, he acknowledges, “this afternoon’s march . . . would again draw several thousand protesters. It would also be one of more than a thousand October 15 #Occupy protests around the world, a testament to the viral circulation of protest in an era of social media” (Juris 259). As this entire thesis has intended to prove, the means for communication and coverage are available. The challenge then becomes persuading a larger audience to participate in the proprietary social networks that are formed by social movements; indeed, to engage more people in alter-activism, and ultimately, in civic discourse. Without a more comprehensive understanding of the rhetorical potential of social media, however, the average citizen is unable to participate.
Although not affiliated with OWS, Gavin Newsom, the current lieutenant governor of California, proposes a potential form of alter-citizenship in his 2013 book *Citizenville: How to Take the Town Square Digital and Reinvent Government*. Taking the name of a popular social media game called Farmville, in which users engage with friends online to create and maintain virtual farms, and blending it with the word citizenship, Newsom proposes a revolutionary concept that would turn the principle of this virtual gaming community into actual community action, by creating incentives for people to get out and physically make improvements to their neighborhoods. He uses this one example to introduce his vision of civic participation. Ultimately, he argues that it is the government’s responsibility to adapt to social media and innovative technology in order to become more accessible and facilitate participation in civic discourse. Newsom’s impetus for the concept, in his words, is that “millions of Americans can find hours every day to tweet, text, blog, post reviews, and play games with each other on social-networking sites. Yet in 2011 when our second-largest city, Los Angeles, held an election on a crucial initiative dealing with education and the environment, only 12 percent of registered voters found time to cast a ballot” (xi). By comparison, the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections produced markedly high voter turnout (according to the national organization NonprofitVote, 62% and 58.7% of eligible voters casting ballots).¹³ Many studies have been conducted studying the usage and impact of social media in these elections, including the popular buzz of President Obama’s 2008 Facebook election, suggesting that in these particular cases social media did have a role in electing a candidate (Hendricks and Frye).

¹³ Nonprofit Vote collects its statistics from a variety of sources including official voter turnout data collected by the 50 states and District of Columbia, as well as the National Election Exit Poll and the U.S. Census Bureau (“Nonprofit VOTE”).
However, as Newsom suggests, when it comes to smaller, local elections that perhaps have a larger impact on people’s standard of living, both mass media and social media are not utilized to their full potential. Therefore, he proposes his own sort of innovational movement that would allow citizens to have a direct link to decision-making—to foster a more comprehensive communication network between government and citizens. He writes, “yet this kind of bottom-up, two-way nonhierarchical structure is completely antithetical to the way government currently runs. So we have to start with the most basic but most important step. We have to learn how to ‘think different’” (Newsom xvii). This nonhierarchical structure that he talks about is exactly the model that OWS strives to attain, centered on collaboration and participatory democracy. His idea, while certainly revolutionary, is by no means radical, and it is perhaps the first step towards negotiating a solution for citizens who are dissatisfied with the current situation. For if the situation that Michael Ignatieff predicted is starting to transpire, whereby the free market creates unsustainable inequality within the country, social media may be the future for how citizens are able to challenge what their identity as Americans actually signifies.

Finally, in examining the rhetoric of the Occupy Wall St, I have attempted to make more explicit both the purpose of the movement as well as the efficacy of social media as agency, and even potential for action. In doing so, I have tried to incorporate future implications of using social media to create identification and eventually incite change. Clearly, challenges are still present, but as we see studies being conducted to understand these implications, perhaps too we will see more effective utilization. In concluding his ethnographic study of Occupy Boston, Jeffrey Juris offers significant insight into the phenomenon of Occupy:
The #Occupy movements have contributed to a shift in public discourse, shining a light on growing inequality and the influence of financial and corporate interests in our economy and politics while constituting laboratories for the production of alternative forms of democracy and community. Finally, achieving racial and class diversity remains a significant challenge for #Occupy, although specific sites, such as #Occupy Boston, have made inroads in building relationships with community-based organizations and initiatives that mobilize working-class people-of-color communities. Any conclusions are meant to be provisional, though, as #Occupy and the broader political context continue to evolve rapidly. (261)

As Juris points out, one of the major challenges remains reaching a broader audience. Indeed, while the term “99%” is effective in eliciting identification, the movement has not succeeded in uniting a vast cross section of American citizens to become active. In fact, one recent study, conducted by the Joseph F. Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies at the City University of New York, found that two thirds of those who considered themselves “actively involved” in OWS were white, and 80 percent had a bachelor’s degree or higher (Berman). While this is just one study that gathered data from one protest event, it highlights the challenge that OWS still faces in reaching a larger and more diverse audience without relying on a strong central leader or the mass media. Additionally, it exemplifies the need for further research on the potential of social media for creating a public space for political and civic dialectic to occur.

Still, I remain optimistic and assert that Occupy has already made a significant impact in the current public debate, or in other words it has proved its rhetorical dynamis. As evidence, consider President Obama’s 2013 State of the Union address. Not even one minute into the speech, the president states, “But we gather here knowing that there are millions of Americans whose hard work and dedication have not yet been rewarded. Our economy is adding jobs – but too many people still can’t find full-time employment. Corporate profits have rocketed to all-time highs – but for more than a decade, wages and incomes have barely
budged” (“Obama’s”). As I listened to the start of his speech, I was struck by how closely the president’s rhetoric aligned with the rhetoric of Occupy Wall St. However, while listening I was also watching the OWS Twitter feed, and most of tweets about what the president had to say were negative. The Occupiers perhaps did not even realize that their rhetoric has influenced the national conversation, because the movement has also fractured into so many separate, individual demands. The challenge remains then, to advance the conversation that the movement has started into action, for perhaps it marks the beginning of the countermovement for OWS, as well as a representation of how public and political debate will occur in a world where people do not need access to mass media to be heard.

If the president’s words are actually a rhetorical reflection of any part of the Occupy sentiment, then it marks a significant shift in how rhetoric is being utilized today, a shift in rhetorical *dynamis*. Moreover, if Senators, Congressmen, candidates, journalists, and even the Pope are communicating via Facebook and Twitter, the shift is already underway. Every day, much of the national political conversation is constantly taking place on Twitter, where users are allowed 140 characters in a post; thus, the symbols that people choose to represent themselves and identify become even more important. If awareness, culture, and even politics are now spread through social networks, then students must be taught ways to navigate these social networks in more expansive ways. By learning about the successes as well as the limits of the rhetorical functions of social media, citizens can start to take advantage of the public space that has been created for civic discourse in the 21st century.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

WORKS CITED


Garrido, Maria, and Alexander Halavais. “Mapping Networks of Support for the Zapatista Movement: Applying Social-Networks Analysis to Study Contemporary Social


WORKS CONSULTED


