



## Dialogic Comedy in Pirate Rhetoric

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This article analyzes how the groups of the Swedish Pirate movement (specifically the Piratbyrå, The Pirate Bay, the Missionerande Kopimistsamfundet, and the Piratpartiet) use dialogical comedy to counter the rhetoric of the copyright lobby. By appropriating the discourse, slogans, and even names of pro-copyright groups, the Swedish groups position themselves as the natural respondents to antipiracy campaigns. This positioning helps them to publicize onerous copyright legislation and prompt discussion on infringement, free speech, and digital rights. The reclamation of the term *piracy* and the subversive doubling of antipiracy rhetoric in parody, irony, and satire allows for the resignification of piracy and the recontextualization of incorrect and alarmist statements by industry representatives. As a rhetorical strategy, dialogic comedy counters hegemonic discourse, facilitates social learning, and inaugurates debate and dialogue.

*Keywords:* Piratbyrå, The Pirate Bay, Kopimism, Piratpartiet, piracy, parody, irony, satire, comedy, dialogism, copyright, rhetoric, appropriation

We have this history that every time somebody calls us something negative, we just take the name and make it ours.

—Peter Sunde, former spokesperson for The Pirate Bay

Beginning with the U.S. Copyright Act of 1909, Congress has allowed media industry representatives to revise and increasingly draft U.S. copyright legislation amongst themselves. This situation has led to broad rights for copyright owners and only limited exemptions for libraries, universities, and the public. The interindustry negotiations that produce these laws have privileged established actors, creating significant barriers to entry for newcomers and difficulties accommodating new technologies (Litman, 2006; Wu, 2004). Correspondingly, the length of copyright has continuously expanded, and the law now includes criminal penalties for noncommercial infringement (Netanel, 2008). International lobbying and trade agreements, which often link aid and trade to the protection of intellectual property (Wang, 2003), have exported this industry-centered copyright to Europe and are aligning regimes across the globe.

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With the creation of Napster in 1999, the film, recording, and software industries began litigating against private individuals and producing public media campaigns to curb peer-to-peer file sharing and other forms of unauthorized copying. Industry representatives describe such consumer practices as "piracy." Piracy rhetoric, when used by the same industries that write and influence copyright legislation, insists that noncommercial copyright infringement results in economic destruction and criminal villainy.<sup>1</sup> Although the term "piracy" originally denoted maritime predation, it became the common way to describe the supposed trespass on "literary property" by competing publishers in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Johns, 2009), and until the introduction of blank cassette tapes in the 1980s ("Watchdog under fire," 1984), the term did not include noncommercial copying. It is worth noting that the use of piracy to describe infringement is not simply metaphorical (Dawdy 2011), as piracy rhetoric functions the same across maritime and intellectual domains: Just as colonial sovereigns labeled pirates those who trespassed on their self-proclaimed right to pillage from and on the sea (Heller-Roazen, 2009), in the context of copyright, "piracy is a metaphor selected by the powerful and imposed upon the weak" (John, 2014, p. 8).

Over the last decade, however, the groups of the Swedish Pirate movement have embraced the terms *pirate* and *piracy* to challenge the rhetoric of the Motion Picture Association, the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, the Business Software Alliance, and their national affiliates. Led by the Piratbyrå (Pirate Bureau), The Pirate Bay BitTorrent tracking website, the Missionerande Kopimistsamfundet (Missionary Church of Kopimism), and the Piratpartiet (Pirate Party), this movement has significantly intervened in European debates over the status of digital piracy. Though lacking the economic and media resources of their opponents, these groups have affected the popular and political debates in Europe through the reappropriation of the term *pirate* and the recontextualization of industry representatives' statements. Through what I call *dialogic comedy*, which is the humorous appropriation of another's ideas and statements, the pirate groups have articulated their own positions and facilitated media dialogue and public education on the role and scope of intellectual property in society.

While designations of piracy define actions and exclude actors from authorized "circulatory channels" (i.e., the legitimate production and movement of goods and ideas) (Dent, 2012, p. 663), the embracing of the appended label can force a contest between the designator and designee. By reappropriating the pirate label and the term *piracy*, Swedish Pirates have positioned themselves as the natural respondents to antipiracy media campaigns. Though discursive appropriation need not be comedic, parody, irony, and satire align particularly well with the youthful, iconoclastic sensibility of digital natives while encouraging group identification and participation.

In this article, I review the development of the Swedish Pirate movement, integrate theories of discursive appropriation with scholarship on copyright rhetoric, and analyze pirate texts for their counterhegemonic and affiliative potential. I argue that groups in the movement have humorously

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, the Federation Against Copyright Theft's "Copyright Is a Matter of Fact," available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wssf122Hhp4>, and the Motion Picture Association's "Who Makes Movies?" available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20030801073303/http://wm9downloads.bur.synccast.com/mpaa/anti\\_piracy\\_128k.mov](https://web.archive.org/web/20030801073303/http://wm9downloads.bur.synccast.com/mpaa/anti_piracy_128k.mov).

appropriated the term *piracy* and antipiracy rhetoric to initiate a public dialogue on the undemocratic development of copyright legislation. The study of the so-called copyright wars is well established at this point, with particular focus on legal rhetoric, political lobbying, intra- and interindustry disputes, and on antipiracy campaigns aimed at consumers and even schoolchildren. Recently, several scholars have studied the Swedish Pirate movement as a social movement (Andersson 2011; Burkart, 2014; Lindgren & Linde, 2012; Lindgren & Lundström, 2011), and others have specifically analyzed the rhetoric of piracy, file sharing, and copyright reform advocates (John, 2014; Lindgren, 2013; Logie, 2006). This article contributes to this body of work.

### **Genealogy of the Swedish Pirate Movement**

Developing out of the Swedish hacker and Internet radio broadcast communities, Piratbyrån began in 2003 as a loose collective responding to the antipiracy group, Svenska Antipiratbyrån (Swedish Anti-Piracy Bureau). According to Piratbyrån member Magnus Eriksson,

There was no Bureau of Piracy for them to be against. They were against an invisible mass. So we thought that "ok, you can be against us." . . . Now they had to be against someone that gave them counter arguments. (in Lindgren & Linde, 2012, p. 149)

The group created and operated an Internet forum ([piratbyran.org](http://piratbyran.org)) that functioned as a knowledge pool and discussion space for more than 60,000 registered members who intervened in various media and events, such as issuing press releases; publishing op-eds in Swedish newspapers; participating in Swedish television and radio debates; launching pro-piracy media campaigns; and lecturing at universities, conferences, and festivals throughout Europe ("The Bureau," 2007; Fleisher & Torsson, 2006). In 2010, the group disbanded and shuttered its website.

During its first year, Piratbyrån started The Pirate Bay BitTorrent tracker website (<http://thepiratebay.se/>). Initially launched by Gottfrid Svartholm, Fredrik Neij later joined as technical support, and Peter Sunde eventually became the media spokesperson. Due to the technical nature of the site as well as its growth, The Pirate Bay separated from the Piratbyrån in 2004, though the two continued to act together occasionally. Although not the first torrent tracker, The Pirate Bay quickly became the largest in the world and, as of October 2014, had 6.6 million registered users sharing 5.7 million torrents and a global site rank of 84 out of 500.<sup>2</sup> The Pirate Bay originally operated legally under Swedish law, but in 2005 Sweden implemented the EU Copyright Directive, which harmonized copyright law with provisions similar to the U.S. Digital Millennium Copyright Act. Following implementation, pressure from the copyright lobby and the U.S. State Department led to police seizing the servers of The Pirate Bay and other websites (Piratbyrån's in particular), though the site returned after a few days. In 2008, a coalition of Nordic and U.S. media companies filed civil and criminal charges against the site and its operators, who were eventually sentenced to prison time and fines of several million dollars. At the time of this writing,

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<sup>2</sup> Site rank refers to the most visited websites for the current month. The Pirate Bay user information is available at <http://thepiratebay.se/>, and page ranks can be found at <http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/thepiratebay.se>.

Sunde has served his prison sentence, Svartholm and Neij are serving theirs (along with sentences hacking related offenses), and the site is run with the help of anonymous administrators. Attempts to shut down the site by international and local authorities continue.

According to Sunde, at some point in 2007, Monique Wadsted, the Swedish lawyer for the Motion Picture Association, was asked her view on file sharing advocates. Wadsted allegedly responded, "It's just a few people, very loud. *They're a cult*. They call themselves Kopimists" (Faris, 2012, para. 1). Sunde then appropriated the idea: "We were called pirates, so we said, 'Let's make pirates cool.' O.K., so now, we're a cult. Let's make that fun as well" (Faris, 2012, para. 1). Though Sunde never followed through with the idea, he devised a working name: Church of Copying Kopimists, or COCK for short (Sunde, 2012). In 2012, Isak Gerson and Gustav Nipe received official recognition in Sweden for the Missionerande Kopimistsamfundet. According to its constitution, the religion values "all information irrespective of its content" and holds the copying and disseminating of information "as ethically right." Adopting the key combinations Ctrl-C and Ctrl-V as its religious symbols, the religion's central commandment is "Copy and seed" (First United Church of Kopimism, 2012, para. 12). As of 2012, the Kopimists had more than 5,000 members in the Swedish congregation and congregations in 18 countries (Faris, 2012).

Rick Falkvinge founded the Piratpartiet in 2005 as a response to the unsuccessful fight against software patents in the EU Parliament, to the criminalization of file sharing in Sweden (with the adoption of the EU copyright directive), and to the EU's mandatory data retention of all telephony and Internet transmissions (Falkvinge, 2011a). Though the party did not originate from a Piratbyrå member, it copied the collective's name, ideas, and tactics (Falkvinge, 2011b). The speed at which the party garnered attention was remarkable: One day after Falkvinge set up a Web page and posted a link in a chat channel, Swedish national media reported on it, and two days later, international media did the same (Norton, 2006).

The Piratpartiet's single most important goal is protecting civil liberties. To do so, it advocates the abolishment of the patent system, which is "damaging to innovation, to competition, and to economic growth" (Engström, 2012, para. 2); the legalization of noncommercial file sharing; a prohibition on digital rights management software; a five-year limit on instant copyright, with a maximum of 15 years with registration; and reasonable regulation for quotations from audio, video, and other media, similar to those covered by fair use (Engström, 2012). The goal has clearly resonated; there are now parties in 63 countries, with representatives in local, city, state, national, and EU parliamentary seats. Nipe, the cofounder of the Missionerande Kopimistsamfundet, leads the party's youth organization, which is one of the largest and fastest growing in Sweden.

These related groups function as channels for the political energies of Swedish and European youth. Lindgren and Linde (2012) hold that online piracy in Sweden is a social movement, a group of people "acting together to change society" (p. 161). A "third wave" social movement, the pirate movement differs from earlier ones based on worker and identity politics because it coalesces around everyday practice, enabling the transition from subpolitical to political action (Lindgren & Linde, 2012). Burkart (2014) similarly finds, though from a different standpoint, that pirates are a "new social movement," a middle class, nonrevolutionary movement "dedicated to social learning and cultural

decolonization" (p. 37) of the lifeworld. That is, they aim to facilitate collective learning processes and combat attempts to dictate and determine daily access to, and use of, networked communications and computer technology.

Through reflexive media campaigns, this movement attempts to create consensus among the larger society on issues related to privacy, free speech, and personal liberty rather than to primarily influence commercial and political groups (Burkart, 2014). The movement's focus on debate and dialogue conflicts with the current legislation by industry approach, which imposes onerous and often unnecessary copyright legislation without public oversight (Agarwal, 2009; Burkart, 2014). As I will argue, by accepting the label of pirates and comically appropriating antipiracy discourse, the movement rhetorically performs the democratic dialogue on copyright and intellectual property that it desires to see in the larger society.

### **Antipiracy Rhetoric, Appropriation, and Dialogism**

In various media and educational campaigns, the copyright industry has attempted to affect the norms and practices of unauthorized copying. Media campaigns generally exploit anxieties over job security and unemployment, portraying piracy as a threat to "ordinary working people" (Gates, 2006, p. 58), or they villainize infringers by linking copying practices to theft of physical property, organized crime, terrorism, human trafficking, and other offenses (Mirghani, 2011). Through spurious statistics and unchecked hyperbole, copyright industry representatives attempt to create moral panics that conflate digital piracy and crime epidemics, thereby justifying the legislation that criminalized unauthorized copying in the first place (Patry, 2009; Yar, 2005). The educational campaigns likewise obfuscate realities: They oversimplify copyright law, omit or constrain fair use, equate infringement with theft of physical property and plagiarism, define digital culture solely as mass culture and commerce, and present creativity as a strictly individualized, isolated phenomenon (Gillespie 2009; Yar 2008).

By accepting the pirate label, the Swedish groups become the target of these campaigns, but the appropriation of the label also provides an opportunity to counter their claims. As John (2014) asserts, the reclaiming of the pirate epithet functions similarly to the process of resignifying derogatory terms to counter hate speech.<sup>3</sup> According to Butler's (1997) theorization of performative speech acts, the resignification of harmful speech lies in the creation of the subject through designation: Naming creates a subject who can be injured by speech but also, paradoxically, can "use language to counter the offensive call" (p. 2). Through the recontextualization of the original speech act, a different intention animates the offensive speech and enables it to "perform a reversal of effects" (Butler, 1997, p. 14).

John, in his application of Butler to piracy, cautions against the use of the term "piracy," as it evokes a "sense of lawlessness and excitement" (2014, p. 10). He advocates instead the term *file sharing*, which has a history within the cooperative formation of the Internet and signifies positive emotional engagement. Whereas piracy is imposed from the top down, file sharing "is a term that has emerged bottom-up from the field" (John, 2014, p. 7). According to John, academics and activists should

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<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for recommending this text.

not allow the “war on piracy” metaphor to gain ascendancy—not only because “piracy” is such a negative term, . . . but also, and mainly, because when we call file sharing “file sharing” we are issuing a critical challenge to the current copyright regime. (John, 2014, p. 12)

Yet piracy has already become the dominant way to describe file sharing, and piracy has an arguably longer history of critical challenge and greater potential for emotional engagement. Unlike most hate speech, in which derogatory terms have a primarily negative and traumatic history that overwhelms previous positive meanings, the term *piracy* has always been ambivalent. In the 5th century BCE, the Athenian historian Thucydides decried

the honor with which some of the inhabitants of the continent still regard a successful marauder, and by the question we find the old poets everywhere representing the people as asking of voyagers—“Are they pirates?”—as if those who are asked the question would have no idea of disclaiming the imputation, or their interrogators of reproaching them for it. (2004, p. 3)

In the 17th and 18th centuries, while colonial authorities deemed pirates the “villains of all nations,” popular ballads and other forms of folk literature celebrated the pirate as “doing justice to sailors” (Rediker, 2004, pp. 17, 83). A similar celebration of pirates exists in Hollywood cinema, in which they are at times represented, in the words of *Pirates of the Caribbean* director Gore Verbinski, as “rebellion distilled” (Surell, 2005, p. 119). The perennial ambivalence of piracy confirms a general understanding that what constitutes it “has been highly contested throughout history, usually based on conflicting political interests” (Kuhn, 2009, p. 7).

As Dent (2012) observes, piracy bifurcates into pejorative and celebratory appellations: Negatively, it is parasitic, lawless, and sociopathic; positively, it is just, liberatory, and revolutionary. If viewed as social banditry (Hobsbawm, 1959), piracy seeks to correct the inequities imposed on the weak by the powerful. When file sharers adopt the pirate label or the Jolly Roger symbol, as have several anarchist and anticapitalist protesters in recent years (Land, 2013), they adopt the positive history of revolt associated with pirates and contest the negative meanings. This is important because, as Butler (1997) insists, “to be addressed is not merely to be recognized for what one already is, but to have the very term conferred by which the recognition of existence becomes possible” (p. 5). Such recognition is essential in modern societies because, as Thompson (2005) maintains, the struggle for mediated visibility is the “principal means by which social and political struggles are articulated and carried out” (p. 49). To accept the designation of piracy acknowledges and pilfers the authority held by those making the designation, appropriating their symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991). Thus, the respect, authority, and media visibility of antipiracy industry representatives can facilitate the visibility of those who identify as pirates.

Through the symbolic power of their opponents, pirates interpose their pro-piracy rhetoric into the monological discourses of intellectual property. According to Bakhtin (1981), monological discourse attempts to silence the natural polyphony of language and deny subjectivity to others. The monological voice speaks not in the hope of being spoken to, but with the full confidence of its irreproachability

(Holquist, 1990). Dialogic discourse, which pirate comedy creates, inversely allows for "another's speech in another's language" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 324) by repeating the utterances, form, and style of copyright maximalist discourse. Such "double-voiced" (ibid.) discourse creates a dialogue between previously separate intentions and statements.

### **Dialogic Pirate Comedy**

The use of dialogic comedy to delegitimize copyright industry rhetoric and legislation distinguished Piratbyrå's approach to intellectual property reform. The name of the group was a "semantic joke" formed by dropping the *anti* in Antipiratbyrå (Fleisher, 2009), which both conjured and problematized its other: It was, on one level, a direct confrontation with Antipiratbyrå, but on another level it lent a retroactive authorization to Antipiratbyrå's existence, a posteriority that deconstructed Antipiratbyrå's mission. By extracting Piratbyrå from Antipiratbyrå, the collective simultaneously justified Antipiratbyrå's purpose by giving it an organized, recognizable enemy and undermined it by retroactively illustrating the excessiveness of the trade group's responses toward unorganized file sharers. As well, the members demonstrated in their own persons that pirates were not the dangerous criminals conjured by antipiracy campaigns, but rather articulate and passionate young adults.

As Hutcheon (1985) formulates, parody is "imitation characterized by ironic inversion" (p. 6). It is "repetition with critical distance" (p. 6), distance which comes from the knowledge of the parodist's place in history. Whereas the copyright lobby, to further its members' interests, is militantly ahistorical in its pronouncements, ignoring the long history of piracy in media development and commerce (Decherney, 2012; Wu, 2004), the "double-voice" of Piratbyrå's parody played "on the tensions created by . . . historical awareness" (Hutcheon, 1985, p. 4). This "trans-contextualization," which "partakes of both the code of a particular text parodied, and also of the parodic generic code in general" (Hutcheon, 1985, p. 42), transforms the meaning of the original trade group. The name Piratbyrå activated and questioned the binary morality posited by the copyright lobby.

In addition, the extraction of Piratbyrå from Antipiratbyrå deftly appropriated the latter's symbolic power. By closely mirroring the copyright group's name, Piratbyrå positioned itself as the obvious balance for all of the group's antipiracy interventions, campaigns, and public statements. Piratbyrå became the natural and necessary source for journalists to contact when reporting on Antipiratbyrå and piracy-related issues. This positioning is particularly ironic, because current media conglomeration facilitates the synergistic promotion of copyright lobby rhetoric across film, television, music, print publishing, newspaper, and software outlets. Through the "impasse of false symmetry" (Hall, 1974, p. 23) created by the myth of journalistic objectivity, the collective likely affected the profit of the very companies that reported on their activities.

For its logo, Piratbyrå similarly appropriated the history of the British Phonographic Industry's "Home Taping Is Killing Music" campaign. The logo featured the campaign's title over a modified Jolly

Roger: a cassette over crossbones. Underneath this symbol, the logo insisted, "and it's illegal."<sup>4</sup> When parodied by Piratbyrå, the symbol (sans slogan) became a double-coded reference to the collective's support for copying and to the previous campaign. The "Home Taping Is Killing Music" campaign harnessed the perennial fear of new technologies, yet the continuing existence of the recording industry (however diminished) demonstrates the falsity of the original claim and of the many similar claims that have since followed. By parodying the earlier campaign, Piratbyrå reactivated the copyright industry's alarmist and ultimately incorrect rhetoric, foregrounding the repetition of such claims for more than 30 years.

As with any parody, if the decoder of the text does not recognize the encoded parody, it does not work (Hutcheon, 1985). Yet both the name Piratbyrå and its symbol, even if read without the encoded parody, still signify a stance taken against copyright and a playful reappropriation of a stigmatized label. By self-designating as pirates, Piratbyrå harnessed piracy's positive connotations (rebellion, courage, protest, etc.) to counter antipiracy campaigns' negative ones (theft, job loss, danger, etc.). Such reappropriations "can both be a cause and a marker of elevated group status" (Galinsky, Hugenberg, Groom, & Bodenhausen, 2003, p. 223), and Piratbyrå used them to construct a "collective identity by referring to a common history and symbolism" (Lindgren & Linde, 2012, p. 158).

The Pirate Bay creates a similarly double-voiced discourse. The site's "Legal Threats" page features cease and desist letters from companies including Microsoft, Apple, DreamWorks, SEGA, EA, and Warner Bros. with responses from site operator Svartholm. A paradigmatic response, for both the site's attitude toward U.S. companies and its ironic textuality, is the response to the lawyer for DreamWorks SKG, who informed the operators that they would be liable for infringement under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act if they did not remove *Shrek 2*. Svartholm (2004) posted the original letter with this response:

As you may or may not be aware, Sweden is not a state in the United States of America. Sweden is a country in northern Europe. Unless you figured it out by now, US law does not apply here. For your information, no Swedish law is being violated.

Please be assured that any further contact with us, regardless of medium, will result in a) a suit being filed for harassment [and] b) a formal complaint lodged with the bar of your legal counsel, for sending frivolous legal threats.

It is the opinion of us and our lawyers that you are . . . morons, and that you should please go sodomize yourself with retractable batons.

Please also note that your e-mail and letter will be published in full on <http://www.thepiratebay.org>.

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<sup>4</sup> An image of the British Phonographic Industry's campaign logo is available at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Home\\_taping\\_is\\_killing\\_music.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Home_taping_is_killing_music.png). The Piratbyrå symbol is available at [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Piratbyran\\_logo.svg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Piratbyran_logo.svg).



Go fuck yourself.

Polite as usual, anakata.

The response begins with a simple statement of fact and moves toward a juvenile and perverse climax, culminating in an ironic ("Polite as usual") valediction. Yet the irony extends throughout the response, as became clear following the operators' trial. Even after the website was declared illegal under Swedish law, the operators maintained it. The continued operation after the injunction confirms that the site's operators have a rabid contempt for any law that inhibits technological experimentation and for any authority that limits Internet activity. Irony's edge, to use Hutcheon's (1994) term for the semantic and evaluative complexity of asserting irony, allows for dual readings of the legal response: as emphatic statement of national sovereignty *and* as empty bravado parading as legalist threat. Though Svartholm claims in the response that the site will sue for legal harassment and file a bar association complaint, it would not.<sup>5</sup> Well aware of the contradiction such a suit would highlight (and the impossibility of winning), the intention is not to follow the law but rather to publicize, mockingly, its maintenance of power.

The Missionerande Kopimistsamfundet, like Piratbyrå, borrows liberally from the terminology, tone, and ceremonies of other groups (specifically, other religions), and even copied the exact language from Sweden's laws into its application for official recognition (Cote, 2012). Like The Pirate Bay, the religion skates back and forth across irony's edge, almost to the point of undecidability. According to cofounder and chairman Nipe, the religion began as "a joke" (Faris, 2012, para. 4), but cofounder and spiritual leader Gerson insists, "I don't think it's a joke at all. I think that many religions have been ridiculed over the years. I don't think we're the first to experience it" (Romig, 2012, para. 13).<sup>6</sup> The ambiguity and irony of the religion (and its founders) highlights the crisis of religion in Sweden today, where registering a religion is "exactly the same process as registering a business company" (Romig, 2012, para. 8). With no deity and no afterlife, Kopimism is a reflexive satire of religion. Religions, at least as usually practiced, are inherently essentialist, positing an essence that transcends individual human life (soul, spirit, god, etc.). The holy is, therefore, that which transcends the physical. Yet by making the first tenet of the religion "Information is holy" (*Huffington Post*, 2012), Kopimism undermines any notion of transcendence, because its holiest of holies does not manifest in the physical world.

To combat copyright, the "church" advocates that all expression has potential value and should therefore be shared and spread; hence, its one commandment is "Copy and seed." In this formulation, that which is most valuable is that which is most shared, reversing the normal value in scarcity (Baraniuk, 2012). Like Piratbyrå, but in its own particular way, the religion denies the validity of copyright by apotheosizing copying and, implicitly, the desire to consume. If, as Dawdy (2011) claims, consumer "piracy represents one of the sharpest ironies of neoliberal capitalism" because it creates "new consumer frontiers for multinational corporations" *and* the "conditions that make it possible for local producers of imitations to satisfy the new demands of globalized desire" (p. 380), then Kopimists crown that irony by

<sup>5</sup> The site's "lawyers" was a law student contacted through Internet Relay Chat (Persson & Klose, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> The founder of the First United Church of Kopimism in the United States, Christopher Carmean, also insists that the U.S. church and its 666 members are "not a joke" (Fitzpatrick, 2012, para. 6).

sanctifying desire and piracy. The religion has selectively appropriated aspects of economics and theology that undermine other economic and religious systems: exchange without exchange value and belief without believing in something. Fittingly, Kopimists have taken one particular biblical passage as their own: "Copy me, my brothers, just as I copy Christ himself" (1 Cor. 11:1). Kopimism is sure to become the most successful missionary religion in history, considering that computer users practice it every time they press Ctrl-C and Ctrl-V.

Reflexive appropriation is also at the core of the Piratpartiet. Falkvinge (2011b) stresses that starting the party was not a radical innovation: "Pirate policies were already established by the Piratbyrå. When the time came to politicize the issues, it was not a matter of founding a new party and start [sic] contemplating its name" (para. 9). Just as "the gay movement reclaimed the word gay" (para. 15), pirates reclaim the term *pirate*: "By standing proud about being a pirate, and doing so in public, you take that weapon away from the copyright industry's lobby. These days, they are even complaining that branding people as pirates doesn't work anymore" (para. 15). By copying Piratbyrå, the party gained the copyright lobby's purloined symbolic power as well as the collective's members and supporters. After the police raid on The Pirate Bay and Piratbyrå's servers, party membership jumped from 2,000 to 6,000 (Poulsen, 2009), and media outlets that were previously uninterested in the party put Falkvinge's face, according to him, "on every news broadcast on every hour on every channel" (Anderson, 2009, para. 6). Following the guilty verdict in the site's trial, the party's membership more than doubled, increasing from 15,000 to 37,000 within a week (Poulsen, 2009).

Like the other groups, the Pirate Party has frequently used dialogic comedy to communicate its positions and compromise its opponents' positions. The first pirate platform held that the party, if elected, would ensure that Swedish Justice Minister Thomas Bodström would "get no other public job except selling hotdogs outside of parliament," because "he at least can't do any damage from there" (Falkvinge, 2011a, para. 14). For April Fools' Day 2012, the party demanded that the Swedish Parliament compensate it and its members for their labor. Through incomprehensible arithmetic that parodied piracy loss statistics, the party demanded "61 billion euros . . . from those who have stolen so much time from the party's activists, stolen it through their lack of interest for culture and privacy" (Falkvinge, 2012, para. 6). The year before, the party embraced copyright lobby statistics, claiming that they "might actually be accurate," even though "the copyright industry's claimed losses" far exceeded "the gross domestic product of the entire planet" (Troberg, 2011, para. 1). Ironically stating that it would generate "several million euros . . . every hour" by letting two computers copy music and movies back and forth (Troberg, 2011, para. 4), the party planned to hire the six million people comprising the entire Swedish workforce with the money it was taking from the copyright industry.

### **Comedy, Affiliation, and Democracy**

Dialogic comedy is not the only strategy used by the Swedish Pirate movement. Through a comparative analysis of corporate news organizations and pro-piracy blogs, Lindgren (2013) reveals that pirates practice the same moral panic discourse as antipiracy groups. Pirates too insist that their opponents are folk devils (Cohen, 1972), casting the industry and the government as threats to Internet users. This approach is not surprising, because demonization is a handy and simple rhetorical strategy,

and those aware of pirate blogs are probably already sympathetic to pirate politics. However, the centrality of dialogic comedy to the groups' formation, names, and positions (and thus all their subsequent interventions) indicates that, as a rhetorical strategy, dialogic comedy has functions other than countering opponents' assertions.

Conceptions of comedy based on the superiority theory of humor stress the aggressive nature of joking (Morreall, 2009), and pirate comedy certainly assaults its targets to delegitimize them. However, as several scholars have noted, comedy also helps to challenge accepted notions and create social bonds, which is essential for any emerging social movement. Emerson (1969) contends that joking provides a way for communicating taboo topics and facilitates bargaining arrangements between participants. Douglas (1999) claims that jokes simultaneously "destroy hierarchy and order" (p. 155) while establishing connections between ideas and individuals. And Davies (2005) finds that jokes "are a consequence of hegemony but are at odds with it," providing "an area of ambiguity and incongruity where no-one is quite sure what has been said" (p. 28).

Conceived in this way, pirate comedy creates the ambiguity necessary for questioning hegemonic discourses and, through its questions, creates shared understandings and establishes community. It examines the prohibitions against unauthorized circulation and reproduction of information in a captivating way, facilitating social learning through the repetition and recontextualization of discourse in parody, irony, and satire. In the United States, where the influences of lobbying and campaign contributions have created political deadlock, resulting in congressional favorability ratings falling from 65% in 2001 to 23% in 2014 (Pew Research, 2013), appropriative comedic modes are increasingly salient. As the interventions of *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, and others have demonstrated, dialogic comedy can inform and prompt people to political action. The concurrent appearance of these shows and pirate comedy suggests that when politics serves the interests of corporations and oligarchs over those of the citizenry, dialogic comedy enacts the processes of debate and consensus building necessary to democratic political action.

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