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Duck Watch

Trickster to the Dark Towers Came

Since the collapse of the World Trade Center Towers, it has become a public cliché to see September 11th as a cultural watershed. After the collapse, the world is not the same. And whether one talks of an America United, the war between civilizations, Macworld meets Tribal World, the morphing of freedom-fighters into terrorists or vice versa, or globalization vs. nationalism, folk wisdom has it that all is different on this side of that event. Such demarcation is fit subject for trickster research, and I suspect that cultural watersheds are exactly the kind of activities that trickster research concerns itself

We know, for example, that cultural prohibitions are the exact area of trickster play, and deceit, disguise, and destruction are surely markers of the darkside of Trickster, the enemy of boundaries and the transgressor of cultural prohibitions. Still Trickster is usually seen in terms of humor; as clown, buffoon, or selfdeceiver (to a knowing audience), he is the butt of jokes. But since grins and grimaces or tears and laughter have, as Wittgenstein might say, a "family resemblance", this disorderly aspect of Trickster can be dark and dangerous because it stirs up what the cultural mythos has tried to supplant, it violates the rules of cultural containment, and it turns marginalities so the culture has to reconsider the impact of its prohibitions on its members.

It is easy, in the fashion Attorney General Ashcroft or a host of other security bureaucrats, to go paranoid after the events of September 11. And it is equally easy to exo-phobically pull together against an outside threat with metaphoric or not so metaphoric wars, but from a wider viewpoint, this tricksteresque script is as much a narrative about Macworld globalization as it is about the President's global varmint hunt. The **World Trade Centers** surely represents the cultural change required by a globalized economy, and as has always been the case of economic expansion, the exportation/importation of economies meets cultural resistance. And the dynamic of such cultural clashes, internal or external -- colonial or post-colonial, is fit ground for Trickster's play. Yet here this play does not strike us as jokes where we know the limits of pain and can laugh with collusion at the strictures implied by trickster self-imposed difficulties, rather it plays itself out as Talibanic trauma, fundamentalist apocalypse, reactionary protection, visionary cultural drama, value projection, or real politick. The darkside of Trickster is frightening, and fear is a wondrous agent of conservative thinking.

Still, it is fortuitous (as is usually the case with working with Trickster) that this journal goes online during this time, and that the subject of the essays for the first volume of *Trickster's Way* is the Darkside of Trickster. I wish I could be so clever as to have thought of that sequence, but being short on prophecy, I simply have to trust to Trickster to make such strange connections, and that is exactly my hope for this journal. I have several goals in mind:

- **To provide a clearing house for trickster research and a valuable resource for trickster researchers**
- **To edit a journal that is peer-reviewed, establishing itself as both rigorous and experimental, with intellectual worth and academic value.**
- **To use the immediacy of electronic communication to distribute scholarship faster and further, with less lead-time to "publication".**
- **To build up a larger international community of scholars dealing with Trickster and to facilitate the exchange of their ideas.**
- **To explore the uses, abuses, and functions of the trickster figure from as large an interdisciplinary perspective as possible.**
- **To establish a forum where those interested in Trickster can share ideas, discoveries, resources, and responses and get quick feedback on their thinking.**
- **To explore the complexity of Trickster and to articulate the semiotic functions of the trickster figure.**
- **To help folks understand the kind of vision the trickster narratives can produce.**
- **To have the fun and to share the wooliness of Trickster.**

I realize that my goals, or any goals for that matter, about Trickster are subject to trickster's whim and that generalizations about Trickster are subject to the trickster transgression of boundaries. But that should be part of the fun and the vision that trickster narratives bring to authors and readers alike. Mostly, I think this electronic form, subject as it is to all sorts of errors and strangeness, is prime Trickster territory. It challenges our normal assumptions about scholarship, the disciplines, publication, collaboration, and other unarticulated cultural notions about the intellectual community and its examination of culture, and I think that challenge will be enough to satisfy, intrigue, and inspire interesting thoughts, publications, and dialogue -- what more could one want? I invite you, as reader or scholar, to join with me in this challenge and see where Trickster will take us -- sometimes to the darkside, sometimes to light, but always with a verve and vitality that is hard to ignore.

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