

THE TRICKSTER AS FACILITATOR AND DESIGNER OF PLAY: EXPLORING SUBVERSION AND TRANSFORMATION THROUGH PLAY AND PLAYFULNESS

HENRIETA KRUPA

ABSTRACT

Tricksters, prevalent across cultures worldwide, have intrigued scholars with their multifaceted nature and enigmatic roles in mythology, folklore, religion, and art. Yet, defining the trickster proves challenging due to their inherent contradictions and complex functions within cultural contexts. This paper explores the trickster's diverse manifestations of features and roles, highlighting their subversive function and transformative potential within societal structures. Drawing from diverse theoretical frameworks including Wittgenstein's language games, Bakhtin's carnivalesque, and Gates' Signifying, the article sheds light on the ways the trickster's playful duplicity challenges established norms and systems, inviting audiences into playful subversion. Building upon Hynes's six-point typology of trickster features, the paper proposes an additional trait, portraying the trickster as a 'Facilitator and Designer of Play'. The article explores the transformative nature of play, emphasising its role in challenging established structures and fostering alternative expressions. Through an exploration of game theories and concepts of play and playfulness, particularly within the work of Sicart, the paper expands upon Hynes's typology and by aligning the trickster with principles of game theories and game design, the study offers a fresh perspective that facilitates understanding the trickster's subversive power. This expanded typology offers a nuanced view of the trickster's transformative function and underscores the significance of play and playfulness within trickster epistemology. Through an inclusive approach to language, a comprehensive exploration of the trickster archetype, and an expansion of Hynes's typology, this paper contributes to on-going discussions on the perplexing trickster phenomenon.

Keywords: trickster, play, game theory, subversion, transformation.

INTRODUCTION

Tricksters are a recurring motif worldwide, appearing in diverse forms across mythology, folklore, religion, and art. Examples include Coyote and Raven in Native American myths, Puck in English mythology, Legba and Eshu in Yoruba and Anansi in West African traditions, Hermes in Greek mythology, Wakdjunga in Winnebago and the Monkey King in Chinese mythology. However, the term

trickster is relatively modern, not commensurate with the ancient origins of the figure it represents. This disparity arises from the trickster's emergence in cultural contexts vastly different from those attempting to define the figure. Although tricksters garnered popularity for their association with dubious characters and their entertainment value, this popularity has led to an overuse of the term, often resulting in its deviation from the essence of what this mythical phenomenon truly represents.

According to The Oxford Dictionary, the term *trickster* was initially employed in 1711 to denote a rogue, cheater, or knave, engaging in fraudulent activities. However, such definition appears somewhat vague, merely aligning the trickster with popular culture's portrayal of deceitful characteristics typical of a liar or a con artist. This oversimplification not only neglects the intricate nature of the trickster phenomenon, failing to acknowledge their essential functions and roles within cultural contexts, but also impedes understanding of this figure. A more precise elucidation of the term did not emerge until the latter half of the nineteenth century, and since then, it has undergone continuous evolution, revision, and redefinition.

In *The Trickster in West Africa* (1980), a well-known trickster scholar, Robert D. Pelton attributes the inception of the trickster category within its mythological context to Daniel G. Brinton. Brinton, focusing on North American mythologies, penned an essay in 1885 titled 'The Chief God of the Algonkins in His Character as a Cheat and Liar', marking the very first use of the term *trickster* to refer to this archetypal figure within a mythical context. Pelton acknowledges Brinton as the trailblazer in identifying the trickster figure, portraying the mythic trickster as a multifaceted character embodying traits of "a gross deceiver, a crude prankster, a creator of the earth, a shaper of culture, and a fool caught in his own lies" (Pelton 1980: 6). Ever since Brinton's pioneering endeavour to delineate the trickster phenomenon in the late nineteenth century, scholars have grappled with a precise definition of the term. What stands out about Brinton's initial attempt is that the term *trickster* encompasses traits and characteristics that many would deem contradictory. Rather than merely associating the trickster with malevolent qualities, Brinton firmly links the trickster to the genesis of the world and culture, forging a crucial connection between foolishness and creation. This connection is also noted by folklorist and anthropologist Paul Radin, who in 1956 undertook a pioneering exploration of the trickster published in his seminal work, *The Trickster*. In this work, Radin meticulously examines the Winnebago trickster cycle of the indigenous tribes of North America, attempting to shed light on this enigmatic figure that has captivated audiences throughout history. Subsequently, a multitude of trickster figures have undergone meticulous scrutiny across various academic disciplines such as anthropology, religion, and psychology, and identified under different names and epithets, tricksters were attributed with diverse qualities and properties. This is because tricksters have assumed numerous guises, exhibiting diverse and often conflicting characteristics, playing varied roles, performing assorted tasks, and fulfilling versatile functions. This lack of uniformity, leading to multidimensionality, the inherent ambivalence and

unpredictability of tricksters, and the distinctive wisdom associated with trickster epistemology have posed challenges in defining the phenomenon. Academic discourse on trickster has thus generated a wide array of discussions and speculations, often yielding contradictory conclusions despite attempts to synthesise findings. In his article, 'The North American Indian Trickster', published in *History of Religions*, esteemed scholar in trickster studies Mac Linscott Ricketts, who underscores the perplexing nature of the trickster phenomenon, concludes that tricksters are one of the most confounding and intricate subjects in the humanities (1966). The challenge in understanding tricksters stems from their embodiment of conflicting features and contradictory functions, each aspect imbued with such ambiguity that it complicates comprehension and frustrates efforts to categorise tricksters within established frameworks. Consequently, those grappling with this concept, upon an encounter with the trickster who inherently subverts conventional systems of meaning, often find themselves confronted with considerable confusion.

Each illumination of the trickster is unique, and what is true for one trickster might not apply to another. As William J. Hynes aptly notes in his article, 'Mapping the Characteristics of Mythic Tricksters', tricksters embody a plethora of contradictory traits, encompassing "the sacred and profane, life and death, culture and nature, order and chaos, fertility and impotence and so on" (1997b: 34). Attempts to pin down the trickster seem impossible, and an encounter with the trickster often leads to more questions with no answers—a testament to the trickster's epistemology. Jarold Ramsey vividly describes defining the trickster akin to "trying to juggle hummingbirds", highlighting the inherent contradictions and complexities within this figure (*Reading the Fire* 1983: 26). The trickster's embodiment of multiple interrelated yet contradictory functions further complicates attempts of defining this phenomenon. In *The Trickster in West Africa*, Pelton's examination of African tricksters underscores the trickster's ability to evade fixed definitions due to their embodiment of the multivalence and plurality of life and the world we live in that the trickster figure stands for. Pelton views the trickster not merely as an archetype but as an embodiment of liminality: "the trickster is a symbol of the liminal state itself and of its permanent accessibility as a source of recreative power" (1980: 35). He views the trickster's inclination to contradiction and paradoxes as "his inner form", being "a personified limen" (58). Contrary to Jungian scholarship, Pelton sees the trickster's contradictions not merely as archetypal features but as a "symbolic pattern" that reflects the image of humankind, "tacking together the bits and pieces of experience until they become what they are – a web of many-layered beings" (3, 4). For Pelton, the trickster, in its messy ambiguity, mirrors societies, grappling with contradictory aspects of existence, embodying both structure and antistructure. The trickster "embodies all possibilities – the most positive and the most negative – and is paradox personified", as Barbara Babcock-Abrahams in *The Reversible World* notes (1978: 148). Likewise, in *The Signifying Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates views the trickster as "the epitome of paradox" that stands for "the unity of opposed forces", being a figure of "double duality of unreconciled oppositions" (1988: 6, 30).

The trickster thus functions as an integrating force that brings together mutually exclusive elements to reconcile differences, and in this process, the trickster paradoxically illuminates that the extreme opposing forces do not contradict but rather complement one another. In fact, this quality seems to be the essence of Carl Gustav Jung's description of the trickster Mercury, stating: "He is metallic yet liquid, matter yet spirit, cold yet fiery, poison yet healing draught – a symbol uniting all opposites" ('Psychology and Alchemy', 1944, in *The Collected Works* 1968: 295). Rather than seeking a closed definition, understanding the trickster requires contextualisation within its manifestations and functions. If there is a way to understand this inherently elusive phenomenon, instead of trying to stabilise them within rigid boundaries of fixed definitions, one should approach tricksters by examining their roles within cultural production, recognising the trickster's inherent relational nature, and take note of their playfully executed transformative function.

Inspired by Paul Radin's seminal work from 1956, forty years later William J. Hynes and William G. Doty embark on their journey to examine tricksters. They acknowledge the difficulty in defining the trickster but assert that identifying common traits exhibited by tricksters across different cultures can advance our understanding of this enigmatic phenomenon. In their widely-cited book *Mythical Trickster Figures* (1997), Hynes analyses tricksters across various cultures and establishes a set of criteria that serves as a rather loose framework for identifying tricksters within various contexts. In his widely-cited article 'Mapping the Characteristics of Mythic Tricksters', Hynes proposes a heuristic typology of six core trickster traits that allows for identifying mythical trickster within context (1997b). Rather than offering a rigid definition, Hynes presents these traits as a flexible guide, acknowledging that not all tricksters necessarily exhibit each characteristic to the same extent. Hynes's six-point typology outlines the trickster as being: 1) Ambiguous and Anomalous; 2) deceiver and Trick-Player; 3) Shape-shifter; 4) Situation-invertor; 5) Messenger and Imitator of the Gods; and 6) Sacred and Lewd Bricoleur. While not intended to confine tricksters within fixed boundaries, this typology aims to establish a common standard by which individual tricksters emerge. Each trait may manifest differently across various trickster iterations, allowing for contextual adaptation and audience appeal while maintaining an underlying archetypal pattern. This approach emphasises the dynamic interplay between the trickster archetype and their specific cultural manifestations, encouraging a nuanced understanding of these multifaceted figures.

Expanding upon Hynes's typology, the present article proposes an additional category that characterises the trickster as 'Facilitator and Designer of Play'. This observation stems from viewing the trickster not only as a mythical figure manifesting certain traits but also as fundamentally being aligned with transformative functions the archetypal trickster performs, particularly in the role of being a player. Viewing the trickster's transformative function within cultural production is crucial to what characterises the trickster, and this transformation as being triggered by the trickster's role associated with play, sets the trickster within the context of game theories. The present article offers an in-depth exploration of this newly proposed aspect of the trickster by drawing on studies on game theories,

mainly by game theorist Miguel Sicart, whose examinations of games and game design, addressing concepts of playing and playfulness, although oriented on the nature and function of games in general, may suggest a novel perspective on the trickster's role as a facilitator and designer of play – the one who creates play and invites the audience into playfulness. By situating the playful trickster within the framework of game theories, which emphasises the importance of play and playfulness, this proposed additional category expands upon Hynes's existing typology, offering a nuanced view on this perplexing archetype. Furthermore, this additional category underscores the active involvement of the audience, for which trickster tales in general are aiming for, and highlights the significance of playfulness within trickster epistemology.

Before proceeding further, it is important to acknowledge that tricksters, being inherently multifaceted, embodying the multiplicity of life and defying categorisation, often manifests within androgynous states that reflects their primordial nature. Anthropologist Victor Turner notes that many tricksters “have an uncertain sexual status” as “on various mythical occasions Loki and Wakdjunkaga transformed themselves into women, while Hermes was often represented in statuary as a hermaphrodite” (cited in *Trickster Makes This World*, Hyde 1998: 335). This suggests that the trickster archetype, being innately primordial, predates conventional gender identification, which leads the present study to use gender-neutral language such as the gender-neutral subjective pronoun *they*, and the corresponding objective, possessive, and reflexive pronouns when referring to the trickster, except when citing from other work. In my belief, this approach fosters a pluralistic perspective that encapsulates the trickster's essence, aligning it with the inherently inclusive nature of tricksters. Moreover, employing such linguistic inclusivity facilitates a nuanced loop input that synthesises, adjusts, and aligns the content, in this case the complex and playful trickster phenomenon, with the delivery of the discussion, promoting alignment with trickster performances. What follows is a brief summary of Hynes's typology, continued with a scholarly discussion that has previously linked the trickster to play and playfulness, and finally, the article offers an elaboration on the proposed category that expands Hynes's typology of the trickster trait, identifying the trickster as a ‘Facilitator and Designer of Play’.

TRICKSTER TRAITS IN HYNES'S TYPOLOGY

1. **Ambiguous and Anomalous:** In ‘Mapping the Characteristics of Mythic Tricksters’, Hynes identifies tricksters as embodying Nicholas of Cusa's notion of the *coincidence of opposites* (1997b, 34). Tricksters transcend binary oppositions such as culture and nature, life and death, and sacred and profane, dwelling on the edge of existing classifications and categories. With a penchant for disorder and disassembly, tricksters challenge established norms and structures, symbolising the multivalence of life.
2. **Deceiver and Trick-Player:** Aptly named, tricksters excel in playing tricks and deceiving, often causing disruptions and disorder. Truth and falsehood become malleable under the trickster's influence, showcased in many mythological tales featuring trickster's cunning performances.

3. **Shape-Shifter:** Hynes identifies the trickster the “master of metamorphosis”, highlighting tricksters’ abilities to change appearances and shapes to facilitate deception (Hynes 37). The distinctive trickery often involves situation-inversion, setting it apart from other forms of deceit. In the role of a shape-shifter, tricksters can change their physical form to whatever form is suited. The trickster’s shape-shifting abilities are not limited by species or gender boundaries, and tricksters can encompass a wide range of transformations. Minor shape-shifting may involve simple disguises such as changing clothes while more significant transformations can alter the trickster’s physical body, transforming into objects or the opposite sex to achieve their goals.
4. **Situation-Invertor:** In their role as situation-invertors, tricksters disrupt and upend societal norms and taboos, delighted in challenging conventions and overturning established orders. No order or taboo is immune to the trickster’s influence; safety can swiftly turn into danger, and vice versa as the trickster effortlessly transforms situations with bewildering ease, challenging societal values and expectations.
5. **Messenger and Imitator of the Gods:** Characterised by an uncertain lineage, tricksters serve as both messengers and imitators of the divine, blurring the lines between the sacred and the mundane. They convey messages, punishments, or cultural elements from gods to humanity, often flouting divine taboos. This intermediary role allows tricksters to facilitate cultural transformations.
6. **Sacred and Lewd Bricoleur:** The final characteristic is the trickster’s role as a bricoleur. The term draws from Levi-Strauss’ concept describing someone adept at using whatever is at hand to devise creative solutions. Tricksters do not respect established definitions and categories, allowing them to repurpose items for inventive ends. In this context, Pelton identifies tricksters as *sacred bricoleurs*, which Hynes extends to *lewd bricoleurs*. With the transformative ability to find the sacred within the profane and vice versa, tricksters challenge societal norms and offer alternative perspectives on the sacred and the mundane through inventive and outrageous acts.

TRICKSTER AND LANGUAGE GAMES

The trickster is characterised by opportunism, adept at recognising and seizing opportunities or even creating them, often through language and linguistic games. Throughout various trickster myths, there is a strong association between the trickster and language, with many mythical tales portraying the trickster as the originator of language and communication, introducing language, facilitating communication, and bringing comprehension to humans. However, the trickster also revels in manipulating and endlessly toying and deferring meaning, adding layers of interpretation and fostering contradictions and paradoxes within signifying processes, ultimately celebrating richness and ambiguity of meaning. The trickster thus delights in playing with meaning and interpretation, often disrupting the conventional associations within the signifying system. Consider

Hermes from Greek mythology, who after establishing the connection between signs and meanings, introducing meaning to the world, reveals the inherent elusiveness of and slipperiness with the relationship between the signifier and the signified. The field of inquiry into interpretation and understanding, known as hermeneutics, bears his name to this day. Yet, it is crucial to recognise that Hermes the trickster embodies not only understanding but also misunderstanding. Indeed, it is often within states of misunderstanding that communication flourishes, with profound understanding emerging from moments of confusion that would not arise within the state of clarity. In trickster realms, even seemingly contradictory concepts like understanding and misunderstanding often work together in a complementary manner. The trickster has a knack for generating, amplifying, and leveraging opposing forces simultaneously, frequently employing them to their advantage by the operations of Socratic non-propositional dialogics. Consequently, the enigmatic trickster sheds light on the inherently multifaceted and ever-expanding polysemic nature of language and the world around us. It is therefore no surprise that the African trickster, Legba, known as “the High God’s linguist” is also entitled to be the “originator of magic” (Pelton, ‘West African Tricksters’, in *Mythical Trickster Figures*, 1997: 126). In *Trickster Makes This World*, Lewis Hyde views the trickster as “the comic linguist” inhabiting the liminal space in the cracks within language and articulation, and as one who emerges at the precise points of articulation and keeps those points open and flexible (1998: 264). The trickster then embodies semiotic instability, shaping meaning not only through understanding but also through misunderstanding, playful manipulation and moulding the language to suit their purposes, ultimately reshapes our perception of reality. The symbiotic relationship between the trickster’s playful deceptive abilities and language is significant—both serve as transformative tools that influence how we perceive reality by introducing new possibilities. Therefore, language often becomes the primary instrument through which tricksters conduct their affairs. As evident in trickster narratives, the trickster’s adeptness at manipulating information, situations, and characters, using linguistic ambiguity, language games, and rhetoric deception to their advantage, outsmarting adversaries and maneuvering their way through any circumstance, often through seemingly innocuous conversations, highlights the trickster’s mastery of linguistic skills, making them uniquely captivating in their playfulness. Consequently, the trickster serves as a constant reminder of how acts of destabilisation, including linguistic ones, and playfulness serve as means to challenge discourse practices.

The trickster’s playful deceitfulness can be regarded as a unique form of duplicity. While conventional deception typically involves straightforward lying, the duplicity enacted by the trickster implies a form of double-dealing through their playful cunning manoeuvres. This also connotes a sense of duality, characterised as a quality of being twofold, and in the case of the trickster, often manifold, as elucidated by Gates’ Signifying Theory, viewing language as a game playfully put in use as a powerful liberating tool by the trickster’s rhetoric trickery. In other words, tricksters often appear to signify something while the true meaning arises from the interplay of the loosened components within the systems of signification.

By unleashing meaning that leads to reconfiguration of various systems, including those of signification, the trickster fundamentally embodies a critical spirit that is inherently liberatory due to playfulness.

TRICKSTER AND GATES' SIGNIFYING GAMES

In their various guises ranging from the selfish buffoon to the cultural hero – as discussed by Michael P. Carroll in his article ‘The Trickster as Selfish-Buffoon and Culture Hero’ (1984) – from the taboo breaker to the sacred figure, and the profane fool to the semi-god, the trickster embodies a non-heroic persona often pitted against more formidable adversaries. Their acts of defiance towards authority, their skilful trickery, and their interaction with the audience hinge on their linguistic prowess, portraying the trickster as a linguistic agent infused with rhetorical energy. Injecting humour, irony, and paradoxes into discourse, the trickster capitalises on the polyvalence of language and fluidity of meaning within the signifying system. Functioning as a bricoleur, the trickster adeptly repurposes anything at their disposal as a tool for schemes, whether it is bodily waste (Pelton 1980) or their phallus (Radin 1956) to confound opponents. Yet, when tangible resources are lacking, language becomes the trickster’s most potent device. Often the essence of the trickery lies in manipulating signifying processes in situations when the trickster dupes opponents into believing that they are speaking on one level of meaning while the meaning is two-folded. Misinterpretation or failure to decode the trickster’s speech frequently results in the overthrowing, outsmarting, and subverting the initial power dynamics. Henry Louis Gates coins the term “trick of mediation” or even “antimediation” to describe this rhetorical trickery, wherein signifying processes are twisted into subversive tropes that playfully engage with dominant discourses (*The Signifying Monkey* 1988: 56). This trickster strategy serves as a response to overbearing discourse, challenging and destabilising entrenched power structures.

In African American literary criticism, the trickster archetype has been utilised as a means to subvert the system of racial oppression from within. Given that African American authors were compelled to navigate within a linguistic and rhetorical framework that marginalised minorities to the cultural status of the *other*, the central question became how to challenge this system when the available signs within predominantly reflected the perspectives of the oppressors. Audre Lorde expresses the situation as that in which “the master’s tool never dismantle the master’s house” (‘Age, Race, Class, and Sex’, 1984: 123). However, Gates delves into the idea that the master’s house could indeed be dismantled using his own tools if those tools were employed unconventionally. This concept is central to Gates’ theory of Signifying in Black literature, which heavily relies on the trickster archetype. Gates derives his theory from the trickster Monkey, a figure present in many African American myths. In these tales, the Monkey consistently outwits the Lion, who represents authority and control being the King of the Jungle. However, the trickster Monkey succeeds in outwitting the Lion by using figurative language, speaking in symbolic code that the literal-minded Lion misunderstands. In other

words, because the Monkey's speech is misinterpreted by the Lion, the trickster Monkey is capable to signify upon the Lion, which leads the Lion to suffer the consequences of his folly. As Gates puts it, "the Monkey dethrones the Lion only because the Lion cannot read the nature of his discourse" (85). In this way, the Monkey uses the Lion's language but is able to reverse the Lion's superior status as the King of the Jungle. This interactive process of communication between the Monkey and the Lion, as Gates explains, operates as the "functional equivalent" for the mechanism that Gates calls "the Signifying Monkey" (1988: 52).

Gates contends that this mechanism is at work within Black literature, enabling the subversion of oppressive systems from within. His theory of Signifying heavily relies on unconventional linguistic strategies such as double talk, revealing the fluidity of meaning that undermines power structures from within. It becomes evident that the trickster, lacking physical superiority and privilege, relies on creativity to subvert hegemonic power structures. Instead of attempting to overpower oppressive systems by force, the marginalised employs cunning tactics. In essence, the trickster tradition aims to challenge dominant structures from within by pushing the boundaries of acceptable thought, thus redefining these boundaries and expanding the limits of both thought and action. Consequently, the trickster introduces a fresh perspective and a different mode of thinking, ultimately bringing about a shift in societal paradigms and fostering change. Therefore, the trickster tradition remains profoundly significant for societies and individuals, particularly during times of crisis. It is clear that the trickster tradition keeps serving transformative functions not only within religious, artistic, and entertainment spheres but also within scientific domains.

In his book *The Signifying Monkey*, Gates elaborates on the notion of Signifying, viewed as a unique mode of discourse related to other African tricksters like Eshu in Yoruba cultures (Nigeria) and Legba in Fon tribes (Benin). He discusses their significance within African American speech as a means of resistance within language, serving to reclaim identities and subject positions. As Gates explains, the Signifying Monkey, a creation of the New World, has derived from the African mythological trickster figures. Characterised by ambivalence, elusiveness, and slipperiness, the act of Signifying has become emblematic of African American rhetorical artistry. Although the term has accrued diverse interpretations and layers of meaning, at its core, it can be understood as a tactic employed in verbal sparring involving veiled meaning, often through indirect means. This process represents an alternative form of communication embedded within various discourses. Thus the term Signifying implies a form of double-talk and linguistic trickery, yet, as Gates acknowledges, it also defies precise definition.

Gates' research is partly grounded in Roger D. Abrahams' exploration of African American folklore, presented in *Deep Down in the Jungle: Negro Narrative Folklore from the Streets of Philadelphia* from 1964. Abrahams primarily interprets the act of Signifying as a set of rhetorical techniques, and describes the act of Signifying as that which involves implying, provoking, boasting, or otherwise communicating indirectly. He describes Signifying as a verbal art that "can mean any number of things", however, "it certainly refers to

the trickster's ability to talk with great innuendo, to carp, cajole, and lie" (Abrahams 1981: 51). It can also involve talking around a subject without directly addressing it. Gates expands on Abrahams' perspective by offering a variety of synonyms for Signifying such as: "talking shit, woofing, spouting, mucky muck, boogerbang, beating your gums, talking smart, putting down, putting on, playing, sounding, telling lies, shaglag, marking, schucking, jiving, jitterbugging, bugging, mounting, charging, cracking, harping, rapping, bookooing, low-rating, smart-talking" (1988: 77-78, emphasis in original). In essence, the crux of Signifying lies in its indirect mode of expression. To effectively Signify, the encoded message must be intentionally veiled within a more apparent one. This dual-layered approach to communication renders the act of Signifying as a form of play, which foregrounds the significance of the playful manner within encoding and decoding processes. Gates observes that "Esu's mouth, from which the audible word proceeds, sometimes appears double; his discourse, metaphorically, is double-voiced" (7). Noting that Esu's speech is being double-voiced, often playing upon itself and containing multiple layers of meaning, Gates points out that it is for this reason that sculptures depict the trickster with two mouths. Additionally, Gates emphasises that Signifying pertains to the manner or style rather than signifying a specific thing. One engages in Signifying through a particular mode of expression or communication or as Gates puts it, "one Signifies in *some way*" (78, emphasis in original).

Gates' theory seems to be rooted in the poststructuralist concept of deconstruction and its way of thinking, which posits that inherent ideologies entrenched in language condition our experiences. Moreover, this deconstructive viewpoint unveils that despite our yearning for a stable, fixed meaning in interpretative practices, the mechanism of language is inherently unstable, with the signifier consistently deferring meaning. Consequently, reality is perceived, shaped, and subjected to diverse perspectives, as evidenced by what deconstructionists term discourse. The deconstructive perspective, asserting that reality is language-determined, underscores that expectations, beliefs, and values are not discovered but rather constructed by language. Similarly, meaning is not inherent in a text but rather emerges through linguistic operations reflecting beliefs and values. Gates' conception of Signifying appears to align with this deconstructive outlook as he also emphasises the ambiguous, unstable, decentring, and dynamic nature of language that moulds reality and meaning. Gates' theory likewise reveals a meticulously constructed signifying system that engages with the complexities of language and addresses issues of representation and power dynamics. However, it is important to note that while discursive strategies like intertextuality, polyglossia, and narrative fragmentation employed by postmodern writers that aim to challenge singular viewpoints and subject positions may share common ground with the trickster tradition, unlike the self-referential postmodernism, the trickster tradition, actively engaging with the audience, aims at a transformative function. In other words, unlike postmodernism, the trickster tradition fosters vitality and innovation, ushering in new possibilities and changes through its playfully dialogic interactions with audiences.

The operations and functions within the act of Gates' Signifying processes are relevant to the trickster's performances, who functioning as a linguistic bricoleur, engages in such acts as verbal deceiving and linguistic trick-playing. Gates emphasises the importance of multiplicity, a concept he traces back to the trickster figure Eshu, whom he regards as embodying indeterminacy within the Signifying process. This indeterminacy is manifested through rhythmic or pattern elements and within the act of interpretation itself. Within Gates' Signifying framework, the trickster can be seen as more than just a character but also as a trope, serving as a narrative device or a mode of language usage for coding and decoding multi-layered meaning. As Gates asserts, the Signifying Monkey serves as the progenitor of Signifying – a rhetorical strategy not aimed at providing information but rather on engaging in playful signifying dynamics, in Gates' words, "a practice that is not engaged in the game of information-giving" but instead, "turns on the play and chain of signifiers" (1988: 52). In this role, the trickster acts as both a facilitator and designer of linguistic play, as this article proposes further below.

By adding complex layers of meaning and implication to the system of signification that serves the privileged, the subjugated have adapted and personalised the system to meet their needs – the action of personalisation of the system design in this context expands to refer to game theories, which undoubtedly situates the trickster within a context of play and consequently, the Play Theory. Furthermore, when it comes to the literary tradition, Gates emphasises that the concept of Signifying is intrinsically intertextual, as "intertextuality represents a process of repetition and revision" (Gates 1988: 82), and here I would add, of substitution and appropriation, which are aligned with the Play Theory, providing a further link with the trickster. To elucidate the Signifying processes further, Gates posits that Signifying entails "the figurative difference between the literal and the metaphorical, between surface and latent meaning", as it "presupposes an 'encoded' intention to say one thing but to mean quite another" (82), indicating a form of a language game and performative play that also posits the trickster within the Play Theory. Although Gates primarily discusses the act of Signifying within the context of African American literary tradition, the concept of Signifying, understood as linguistic and semiotic play, is equally applicable within other contexts. When the trickster, identified by Hynes as a trick-player and by Gates as a player of Signifying processes is approached through the lens of the Play Theory, the trickster's role as a cultural transformer who invites into play and playing indicates that the trickster is not only a trick-player or a player of Signifying but also, and fundamentally so, a facilitator and a designer of play.

TRICKSTER AS FACILITATOR AND DESIGNER OF PLAY

Regarding the connection between the trickster's critical spirit and their transformative function, their acts of deception and trickery, and the systems they engage with one is drawn to Michel Foucault's assertion that some of the most influential forces shaping and perpetuating systems of power are the inherent

games within discourse (*Madness and Civilisation* 2005). Ludwig Wittgenstein explicitly refers to these discursive frameworks as *language games*, as comprehensively summarised in Jean-François Lyotard's interpretation:

What [Wittgenstein] means by this term is that each of the various categories of utterance can be defined in terms of rules specifying their properties and the uses to which they can be put—in exactly the same way as the game of chess is defined by a set of rules determining the properties of each of the pieces, in other words, the proper way to move them (*The Postmodern Condition* 1984: 10).

What follows then is that rules serve as boundaries that delineate the permissible moves within any given context, including language as a tool of discourse. Rules then can be perceived as a form of control; thus, challenging or violating these rules with a critical intention may be interpreted as an act of resistance against control. When it comes to communication, adhering to truthfulness may be seen as compliance with the rules and alignment with the system whereas duplicity could be regarded as an act of resistance. However, it is important to note that deceit devoid of a critical spirit lacks liberatory potential, just as resistance alone may not necessarily be liberatory. For resistance to attain such cultural and societal liberation, it must engage in a dialogue with a broader discourse and become integrated into a larger structure that allows it to actualise its liberating potential. Therefore, the playful duplicity of the trickster differs from mere deception precisely because it embodies this critical spirit within its playfulness. In other words, because the trickster embodies a critical spirit, their performed duplicity serves as a playful form of resistance. The various deceptive language games and linguistic tactics that reshape and transform, the manifold duplicitous semiotic games played out by the trickster in response to dominant discursive power structures indeed serve a critical purpose and perform a critical function. In fact, as previously discussed, Gates' notion of Signifying involves such language games that perform through a double voice, executing the critical function of empowering those who lack discursive authority. It is within these language games when the intended meaning may be subtly concealed and the signified may be hiding in plain sight that allows the signifying processes function precisely with the aim to undermine hegemonic systems of dominance. Therefore, to excel at trick-playing, one must possess a deep understanding of the rules of the play and the boundaries of the game. The trickster, in this regard, is thus not only a proficient player but also a skilled facilitator and designer of play who invites the audience into their transformative play.

The trickery and deceit of the trickster appear in many guises, each however reflecting the inherent inclination of the trickster, the trick-player, towards playfulness, both manifesting and being elicited within the audience. The trickster's trickery operates as a vehicle for the trickster epistemology that privileges the heuristics of showing and discovery over the didactics. While the trick-player may appear to do little more than playing around and performing meaningless trickery, the trickster's play hold profound significance for societal and individual change by facilitating transformations. The trickster's games are not mere frivolities or innocent entertainment; rather, they serve as a platform for

social and personal change. As the ultimate player, but also the facilitator and designer of play, the trickster invites participation in play by creating a space for play where boundaries and constraints are challenged, perspectives expand, and established structures dismantled within playful settings. In *Literary Gaming*, Astrid Ensslin highlights that playing per se “triggers creativity and innovation... that may lead to the (temporary) reversal of power” (2014: 19). This concept resonates with what Mikhail. M. Bakhtin discusses in *Rabelais and His World* as the carnivalesque subversion of institutionalised conventions in a suspension of time when authority and power relations are temporarily reversed. Similarly, the trickster’s play exposes the underlying facades that the domineering systems have in play by manipulating the rules and structures of play. It is in playing and through play that individuals confront personal or collective challenges, exerting control over these affairs in a playful way and within the safe environment of playing. Play empowers to experiment and simply play around, and to mould the play world according to preferences. Playing creates a space for an appropriation of events and structures, for mocking and trivialising mechanisms of control. Within this playful realm, individuals can explore, question, and undermine established structures in a playful manner.

In his work *Play Matters* (2014), game theorist Miguel Sicart delves into the essence and significance of games, playing, playfulness, and game design. Although oriented on the nature and function of games in general, Sicart’s studies shed light on the divergent nature of playing and offer insights that extend beyond the realm of games to illuminate various forms of play, including that of the trickster. The trickster, as the quintessential player of tricks, also emerges as a facilitator and designer of play, inviting the audience to participate within a play in order to foster change. The trickster’s play emerges as a form of play that enhances introspection, creativity, and flexibility, fostering processes of transformation. Similar to language, every form of play operates within a set of rules; indeed, play cannot exist without rules. However, akin to linguistic rules, the rules of play are not immutable; they are subject to reinterpretation and manipulation. As Sicart reminds us, in games the rules are just “another prop that can be targeted by the transformative capacities of play” as players develop various strategies and tactics, interpreting, creatively appropriating, and adapting the rules to suit their purposes as the play unfolds (8). Thus, within the act of playing, participants appropriate and mould the rules, rendering them flexible and open to manipulation and adaptation over the course of play. Engaging in play reveals the intricate interplay between reality and possibility, creating a space where alternative experiences can be explored and where individuals can examine their roles and actions within both the realm of play and the broader reality such as who they are, what plays they perform, and what plays they are allowed to perform in life. Through play, hidden practices and values underlying everyday life are brought to light, fostering deeper understanding and reflection. Sicart proposes that play liberates us from moral norms while also making us conscious of their existence, influence, and significance. Through play, we have the opportunity to challenge and breach boundaries, and by such acts, often attention is drawn to them, revealing the

structures that coin our realities as being fundamental or else meaningless constructs.

Similar to the player involved in playing who is empowered to examine and potentially personalise its rules, the archetypal trickster who breaks taboos and disrupts norms to illustrate the consequences of such actions, thereby underscores the significance or arbitrariness of established rules within systems. In ‘Inconclusive Conclusions: Tricksters’, Hynes emphasises the importance of the trickster’s role in challenging rules, which can serve to either dismantle or reaffirm them within the system: “trickster myths can be a powerful teaching device utilizing deeply humorous negative examples that reveal and reinforce the societal values that are being broken” (1997a, 207). Thus, the act of playing itself shares characteristics with the trickster as it is likewise inherently liberating, yet it also illuminates the constraints, boundaries, and norms – both internal and external – which both resist and contribute to order and freedom. Sicart observes that “play can be dangerous” because it stands in stark contrast to the utilitarian, mechanical mind-set promoted by cultural industries (2014: 2). While trickster scholarship agrees that the mythical trickster is inherently playful, however only Hynes briefly touches upon this subject and acknowledges the disruptive potential of the trickster play within established systems. By describing the trickster as a “metaplayer and revealer”, who introduces novel perspectives into systems, and as this article argues through design and invitation to play, the trickster embodies a threatening force to those in control of the system (Hynes 1997a: 202). Hynes observes that as a metaplayer, the trickster’s play combines both “entertainment and education”, where amidst the laughter of the audience, “a deeper unfolding is at work” (205). This connection between play and awareness becomes apparent in the observation that tricksters often associate foolishness and play with wisdom. According to Hynes, “fools and tricksters seem to have an affinity for *linking foolishness and play with wisdom and work*” and both “the foolishness innate in us” and “the wine of wisdom fermenting within us” need expression through play, or as Hynes puts it, “need to be discharged through *games*” (206, emphasis added). Thus, playing leads to a divergent form of awareness and understanding, creating space for what in their article ‘Historical Overview of Theoretical Issues: the problem of the Trickster’ Doty and Hynes term “the transrational” (1997: 30). It is transrational precisely because as Hugo Rahner puts it, “to play is to yield oneself to a kind of magic, to enact to oneself the absolute other, to pre-empt the future, to give the lie to the inconvenient world of facts” (*Man at Play* 1967: 65, cited in Hynes 1997a: 214). While engaged in playing, novel possibilities and alternatives might emerge, with a potential to shape the reality outside of play. This transrational aspect of playing, which Hynes refers to in terms of metaplay, is perceived as “*irrational and threatening* by the orderly and established that may seek to control or suppress it” because “metaplay is fundamentally closer to the inchoate powers of creativity from which ordered social constructs have themselves originated and from which new constructs will arise” and therefore, “such metaplay can easily be perceived as *a menace* to those who represent the existing social constructs” (Hynes 1997a: 214, emphasis added). In other words, the act of playing taps into creative forces from

which social constructs originate and evolve, posing a threat to those who uphold existing social norms and structures.

What follows then is that the inherent freedom within play, brimming with subversive, deconstructive, and transformative potentials, poses a threat to established systems and closed structures. It is not surprising that the playful trickster, whose performances challenge various aspects of societal norms, exposing their instability and susceptibility to change, is perceived a threat to the established order and its inherent logic. Sicart's depiction of play as a dynamic interplay – “a dance between creation and destruction, between creativity and nihilism” or as a “movement between order and chaos” (2014: 3) – further embeds the trickster as a player, who as Radin reminds us, is “at one and the same time creator and destroyer” (1956: xxiii). Consequently, play can be seen as a rebellious endeavour that appropriates the acts of creation and destruction, tapping into innate desires to create as well as destroy, and by oscillating between the desire for order and the *jouissance* for destruction, it gives rise to the Nietzschean Apollonian and Dionysian forces.

Regarded within trickster scholarship as a manifestation of the Freudian *Id* within the personal unconscious and as the Jungian archetypal figure of the collective unconscious, the trickster spirit embodies a playful essence inherent within each individual. This inclination, underpinned by the Nietzschean Apollonian and Dionysian impulses to create and destroy indeed manifests as an act of play in playing. Nietzsche's concept of play is rooted in an impulse, characterised by a will with its “capacity to both create and destroy” (Spariosu 1982; cited in Ensslin 2014: 21). In *Ecce Homo*, published in 1908, Friedrich Nietzsche underscores the significance of irrational play as that which challenges rational constructs upheld by Kantianism: “I know of no other manner of dealing with great tasks, than as *play*; this, as a sign of greatness, is an essential prerequisite” (Nietzsche 2004: 53, emphasis in original). Unlike in Kant, Nietzsche's notion of play surpasses reason and ethics. For Nietzsche, play is a dynamic notion that not only encompasses the entirety of meaning of life but also paradoxically embraces destructive uncertainty. Nietzsche views the entire world as governed by play because, in his view, the human world is akin to Baudrillardian Simulacrum and the primal impulses aligned with play, ingrained in human psyche, constitute a fundamental aspect of human existence. In his attempt to extend the significance of play and game beyond Nietzsche's framework, Martin Heidegger introduces the idea of human reality as a game of being. In his work *Being and Time*, Heidegger posits that human existence is fundamentally play – a game of being, rooted in our engagement with the world, or what he terms *Weltspiel* (translated as the world play – being both players and playthings). The game of being holds significance across all domains of life, impacting the routine experiences of ordinary individuals as profoundly as it does broader social and political contexts. Additionally, this existential game of being is deeply intertwined with language, serving as a medium through which human reality is both constructed and dismantled. Thus, the concept of a play as being human signifies the essence of human existence, mediated through our engagement in life

through play, and play as having the power to construct and deconstruct reality. The archetypal player, acting upon the world through play therefore mirrors the human experience in life, which rooted in *Weltspiel*, is inherently predisposed to play. Consequently, playing is not merely a trivial, pastime activity but a mode of being and interacting with the world – a manner that manifests what it means to be human and what it means to be in the world as human. It is through playing that we exist and we play to be because playing provides the possibility of being, as Heidegger observes. Playing embodies the essence of human existence. Jean-Paul Sartre likewise articulates this idea, suggesting that “the desire to play is fundamentally the desire to be” (*Being and Nothingness* 1966: 742). We engage with the world through play, utilising playing as a vehicle for self-exploration and understanding.

Engaging in play is reflective by being expressive of whom we are but also it is destructive as well as productive by fostering novel insights, thereby promoting transformations and changes. Game theorist Klaus Meier highlights that play provides “opportunities to explore alternative modes of awareness” and fosters knowledge of “radically different possibilities perhaps not readily available elsewhere” (*Philosophic Inquiry in Sport* 1988: 194). Additionally, playing is also deeply personal. Playing is introspective, revealing aspects of one’s personality, including beliefs, biases, dislikes, and preferences as individuals immerse themselves in playful activities. Playing also becomes a kind of commentary on both the external and the internal because “in disrupting the normal state of affairs by being playful, we can go beyond fun... [and] reveal the inner workings of the context that we inhabit” (Sicart 2014: 15). Consequently, playing serves as a reflection on “a trace of character that defines us” (Sicart, 18). As a force for self-expression and introspection, playing fosters understanding of oneself and the world around, and by this understanding that which emerges within play, playing may potentially lead to the dissolution of old patterns and the formation of new ones.

Sicart underscores the transformative nature of play, asserting that the experiences gained through play leave a lasting impact on us: “whatever we do in play stays with us” (2014: 18). Thus, play serves as a medium for self-expression, revealing our being in the world and our making sense of it. Play operates as a deeply introspective force, shedding light on our identities. Moreover, play is both productive and transformative, fostering exploration of new ideas and possibilities while embodying both creative and destructive energies that manifest our attachments to existing structures and systems while also sparking the joy of being able to go beyond these limitations. The archetypal trickster, the ultimate player, explores these forces within us during the act of playing and acts as “an archaic speculum mentis”, an ancient mirror of the mind, conveying wisdom from the depths of the unconscious to the conscious through play in the manner of playing (Radin 1956: xxiv).

Playfulness is empowering, holding a transformative power. While playing is understood as a performance, a set of actions acted out with purpose, playfulness embodies an attitude, a mind-set, and a way of thinking, feeling, behaving, and

interacting with the world, reflecting a playful state of being. Thus, playfulness can be described as an approach to activities, a mode of engagement within various contexts, and notably, as a projection of traits that are characteristic of playing into non-play contexts. Playfulness is then an attitude of interacting with the world in a manner that mirrors the spirit of tricksters. Given that play contexts are not only defined but also often defy strict structures and rules, projecting and infusing elements of playfulness into non-play settings could be seen as a carnivalesque attack on systems that rigidly follow the dictates and rules of structures. For example, within the realm of language as a signifying system bound by rules and structures, playful expressions like puns, satire, irony, language games, and Gates' Signifying practice may pose a threat to the established system from which these emerge. In this context, the present article argues that the archetypal trick-player serves to awaken playfulness, which then by eliciting a projection of elements of play into non-play contexts, unsettles established norms; therefore, the trickster's facilitation of playfulness manifests as a threatening force to system designs with a potential to bring about changes.

By scaffolding playfulness within non-play contexts, often downplaying the seriousness of the situation by creating a space for de-personalisation of the audience/player within play contexts, and by setting up and inviting to play, the archetypal trickster aims to disrupt conventional structures and rules, creating a carnivalesque atmosphere that challenges the status quo. This lifts the audience from strict systems and transforms individuals into liberated players, allowing them to exert control over contexts, and by appropriating that which is not intended for playing, the trickster paves the way for subversion. Moreover, the trickster's scaffolding inversion of non-play situations into playful ones further underscores the transformative potential of playfulness. When it comes to the archetypal trickster, the feature of playfulness is further linked to the trickster trait that Hynes identifies as being a situation-invertor, in this particular context, as converting non-play contexts into play. As Sicart suggests, "playfulness frees us from the dictates of purpose through the carnivalesque inheritance of play" (2014: 29). Therefore, by playfully appropriating domains typically governed by strict structures and systems, the non-play contexts become liberated by play. Ultimately, the archetypal trickster is an agent of liberation, empowering individuals and societies because as Gerald Vizenor observes in *Trickster of Liberty*, "the trickster liberates the mind" (1988: xi). The playful trickster's endorsement of play becomes the epitome of the potential for liberation. Contrary to what Vizenor labels as *manifest manners*, practices that uphold and perpetuate rigid, static, and authoritative truths, the trickster's design and invitation into play serves as a liberating force, challenging these established norms. By introducing and facilitating playfulness into non-play contexts, the trickster creates an alternative space that fosters resistance through playful modes. This playful resistance serves as a means to challenge and subvert entrenched systems, ultimately paving the way for transformation across various paradigms by delivering possibilities through playfulness.

Furthermore, playfulness holds a personal significance. Integrating playfulness into non-playful contexts allows individuals to inject their subjective

viewpoints and creative expressions into formalised settings. Akin to Bakhtinian carnivalesque, playfulness opens space for a critique of official structures strictly designed. This infusion of personal expression transforms impersonal, non-play contexts and environments into spaces allowing for individuality and creativity. As Sicart suggests, playfulness imbues the realms beyond play with liberty and individual self-expression: “That is why playfulness matters: it brings the essential qualities of freedom and personal expression to the world outside play” (2014: 30). Thus, the concept of playfulness extends beyond game studies, with play and playfulness playing a crucial role in defining human existence. “We are because we play, but also because we can be playful” (Sicart, 33-4). Viewing the act of playing and the attitude of playfulness as manifestations of being human, as imbued with transformative potential, and as an avenue for exploration and expression, which are inherently human, elevates play from being solely an entertainment.

Just as a game, or in the case of the trickster, a trick played out, provides an avenue for channelling play through form, so does the trickster’s play serve as a conduit for playfulness, with the trickster acting as both facilitator and designer of play. By this point, it has been established that playing is a transformative endeavour, involving appropriation and negotiation, creation and destruction, as well as expression and reflection. In this light, the act of creating play becomes a creative demonstration of agency akin to what Foucault refers to as *pouvoir*—the sense of being able—and in this case as a designer of play, as being able to direct play; or as Sicart puts it, “to harness, control, steer and produce play for intended purposes” (2014: 86). Designing play revolves around the interplay between the structure/form of play and the systems design, with the crafted systems intended to engage players and the structured form as expressive within the confines of the intended design to convey play through systems. This perspective portrays the form of play as a closed system that frames, organises, defines, and regulates playing, constraining the emergence of play within the system and limiting the roles of players to predefined positions. This reveals that it is the system, rather than the acts of appropriation and negotiation, that gives rise to playing, with play being designed by controlling forces of the system. However, the play designed by the trickster transcends the boundaries of conventional play systems as it is fashioned to operate through processes that are appropriative, creative, context-driven, disruptive, and deeply personal.

The trickster’s designed play therefore prioritises the act of playing itself over the form of the system designs. As a designer of play, the trickster establishes a framework that initiates the process of playing without confining it within the structure. Instead, the trickster allows other elements within the network to come into play, fostering an environment where playing becomes an act of creation, negotiation, appropriation, and expression. Consequently, the trickster emerges as a play designer who constructs a context and opens up liminal spaces for uninhibited free playing to flourish, encouraging exploration through engagement. Given that the trickster’s play involves appropriation and negotiation, the design for play shifts towards establishing a context and creating a flexible space that enables appropriation, expression, and interaction to occur. This approach invites players to

interact with forms rather than adhering to a predetermined system design for limited play. The trickster's play thus arises from the dynamic interplay between control and chaos, with the act of playing itself as an invitation to manipulation of form. In such play, the pleasure arises from appropriating these forms, breaking them up, and distorting them to play with. Within the design principles of play, the disruptive nature of the trickster's play design may also be seen as aiming to "shock, alarm, and challenge conventions", aligning certain designed games with activities inherently associated with the trickster (Sicart 2014: 15). Nevertheless, the trickster's approach to play design revolves around the essence of playing itself, in other words, it is play-centred rather than designer-centred or system-centred. The primary objective of playing is to cultivate freedom through acts such as appropriation, expression, and negotiation among players rather than adhering to restrictions imposed and limitations dictated by the designer. As the designer of play, the trickster functions as an elicitor of playfulness and a facilitator of play, serving as a catalyst that sets play contexts and invites participants to engage in a playful exploration within an open form that is not dictated or imposed by the designer or the system but rather relinquished for the benefit of those involved in playing. Consequently, the trickster functions not only as a player but also as a facilitator and designer of play, seen not as the controller of play but rather as that which establishes and unleashes play into the world, allowing play to speak for itself and be spoken through.

As a play designer, the trickster also corresponds with the characteristics outlined in Hynes's six-point typology, particularly as a situation-invertor by inverting non-play contexts into playful ones, and as a bricoleur, adept at assembling materials for the purpose of play. In this sense, a game designer must possess a deep familiarity with the materials intended to be transformed for the purpose of playing, demonstrate creativity in manipulating them, and have the ability to appropriate and repurpose that which is not intended for playing into objects of play. The archetypal bricoleur trickster thus showcases their skill in appropriating, manipulating, and transforming elements (objects, subjects, systems, etc.) into play objects, demonstrating creative competence by transforming and introducing novel concepts into the world through free play. What is more, in their role of play facilitator and designer, the trickster manifests a thorough understanding of playing and plays—skilfulness in creating subject positions for the players invited to engage in trickster play and mastery over the objects appropriated and manipulated for play. Since design typically involves creation of something new, the art of play design can be seen as a socially transformative endeavour. By introducing novel forms of play, designers disrupt the current state of affairs, mediating fresh interactions between players and the world, thereby challenging established norms and systems. Hence, the trickster, as a play designer, has the ability to disrupt the perception of a stable reality by employing their skills as a play designer that re-designs the traditional rules into novel and often unconventional systems. This process of deconstruction and reconstruction through play can be viewed as "weapons to undermine and overcome the restrictions of mainstream policies and confront them with alternative forms of expression"

(Ensslin 2014: 26). Sicart describes playing as a dual process: both playing within systems and playing with systems, signifying “a dance of resistance and appropriation, of creation and destruction of order” (Sicart 2014: 98). This view aligns with Ensslin’s perspective, suggesting that playing can serve as a tool for subverting restrictive norms and promoting alternative expressions. Here I would like to add that the notion of a system refers to a variety of systems, including language, which identifies the trickster as a player but also, keeping in mind Gates’ Signifying practices, inviting the audience into play, marking the trickster as undoubtedly a facilitator and designer of play. Ultimately, understanding play as a form of rebellion and transformation underscores its potential for reshaping systems and challenging established patterns. The trickster, as both the player and the facilitator and designer of play, embodies this rebellious spirit, inviting us to participate in playfulness. By embracing the pleasure of creating and breaking rules, playing holds the power to redefine systems and system thinking, and fosters expressions of playfulness, revealing its inherent transformative potential. In essence, by inviting into a designed play, the trickster shakes up established ways of thinking and acting, fostering alternative perspectives and possibilities.

CONCLUSION

The significance of the trickster’s subversive function has been questioned by some who argue that every system inherently allows for transgression, neglecting the importance of play and playing that frames the trickster’s unique epistemology. Drawing from Bakhtin’s analysis of the carnivalesque, where he explores how cultural norms are temporarily suspended during festivals, these critics seem to overlook the fact that the playful trickster, who is by this point also identified as a designer and facilitator of play, is restricted by neither the time allowed for transgression nor by an approved system that would dictate the way of transgression. Moreover, it could be argued that the transgressions permitted within a system are often designed to maintain the system’s stability. While there might be some overlaps between the trickster tradition and Bakhtinian carnivalesque in terms of both serving as outlets for subversion, within the context of play and the transformative nature of playing, I contend that the trickster tradition surpasses Bakhtinian carnivalesque precisely due to its inherent transformative potential through play and playing, not bound to space or time allocated for playing. By analogy, Bakhtinian carnivalesque functions within the structured system much like an alter ego functions in relation to the ego, aimed at maintaining equilibrium and perpetuating the system. However, the playful trickster operates within the structured system more akin to how the Jungian shadow operates within the ego, disrupting the system and catalysing its renewal and regeneration through playful subversion. In this view, while Bakhtinian carnivalesque serves to sustain the system by providing a mechanism for monitoring and regulating social norms, the trickster functions to rejuvenate the system, which occurs precisely through play. Additionally, while Bakhtinian carnivalesque represents a dialectical tension between the formal and informal aspects of society, a dichotomy often found in

Western philosophy where the advocacy of one side necessitates the projection of its antithesis to maintain balance, the primordial archetypal trickster, anomalous and ambiguous, embodying both thesis and antithesis, structure and anti-structure, expands these boundaries through play and allows for greater exploration having a transformative function.

In the realm of the trickster archetype, play and playfulness serve as powerful tools for both subversion and transformation. Play, with its inherent freedom and creativity, allows challenging established norms and structures, revealing their limitations, and inviting alternative perspectives. Through playfulness, the trickster disrupts the status quo, prompting individuals to question and embrace unconventional thinking. Moreover, play enables to navigate complex social dynamics. In essence, play and playfulness are integral to the trickster's function to provoke reflection, inspire change, and ultimately, redefine the boundaries of possibility within society. The proposed facet of the trickster archetype, drawing insights from studies in game theories and exploring concepts of playing and playfulness, offers a fresh lens through which to view the trickster as not only a player but also as the one that actively facilitates and designs play experiences, drawing audiences into playfulness. By aligning the playful trickster with the principles of game theories, which highlight the importance of play and playfulness within trickster tradition, this addition to the existing typology proposed by Hynes broadens our understanding of the enigmatic trickster figure.

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