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“Is The Lego Movie Anti-corporate and Pro-occupy Movement?”
TSAI Siu Jun, Desmond

There is a deeper message behind The Lego Movie than an animation about the blocks of Lego-people building Legos. Rather, it incorporates anti-business and pro-occupy movement agenda into this amusing animation (Cheney-Rice 2014, No Page). This worrying issue is what Hollywood filmmakers perceive the audiences would want to hear, as Americans generally consider “corporate influence, big government and their impact on their lives as a great threat,” as reflected from the soaring support over the occupy movement (Brook 2014, No Page). The Lego Movie reflects how Lego is doing its corporate social responsibility tricks to imply a world where corporations are trying to force individuals to conform to the status quo, and to encourage individuals to stand against these corporate manipulations, ultimately with the goal of generating more profits. Thus, should we continue on being fooled by the corporate social responsibility tricks?

First, there are invisible corporations penetrating “areas of life where they used to turn to individuals” to sculpture the ways individuals live their lives (Brook 2014, No Page). As observed from Emmet, who is a normal guy, and a normal construction worker, living a normal life. Everyday when he wakes up, he follows the instruction manual. He is also brainwashed to possess the same hobbies as others do, with his favourite soap opera being “Where are my pants?”, his favourite eatery being “Any chain restaurant,” and his favourite song being “Everything is Awesome!” (The Lego Movie 2014). He seems to be satisfied from blindly following the status quo.

Emmet and his fellow construction workers sing “Everything is Awesome” for hours without getting tired, with the lyrics: “Everything is awesome, everything is cool when you’re part of a team, … [and] when we’re living our dreams” (The Lego Movie 2014). It basically reflects corporate control, to unify the citizens in believing that as long as they follow the status quo, by singing the same song, watching the same silly soap opera, buying overpriced coffee, working for the big corporations like all others do, everything will be fine, despite all these activities aiming to make more profits for the corporations themselves. For instance, in reality, the corporations promote mass consumerism by producing products that are designed for the dump, as they are made easy to become damaged and obsolete, and with repair fees greater than the price of a new product, consumers would rather replace the old ones with an updated design to stay up-to-date. With the aid of advertising and marketing, corporations are orchestrating the desire to buy things that are redundant, which reflects the corporate hegemony in shaping a status quo with individuals conforming to the current consumerist behaviours.

Second, in The Lego Movie, traces of the occupy movement to fight against the status quo is observed when Emmet coincidently found “the Piece of Resistance”, and is prophesied as “the Special”, who could thwart President Business’ hegemony. He has gotten rid of his conformist habits of following instructions and to be himself, by “build[ing] your own worlds! Don’t follow the instructions” (The Lego Movie 2014). The prophecy is not about Emmet discovering that he is special and saved the world, but to inspire everyone to believe that they are all special and can become a Master Builder and whatever they aspired to become by embracing their own individuality. This is also another interpretation of “Everything is Awesome”, that encourages everyone to cooperate with each other to build another world by breaking the status quo. This is similar to the defiance against the political parties and large
corporations through occupy movements. With people joining hands to demand for the step down of the political parties that favour only the top 1% at the expense of the bottom 99%, to demand for the empowerment of the masses in factories to take over the manufacturing processes without the top-down management, and to demand for the truest essence of democracy.

Currently, more dissidents are opposing the political parties, as they noticed that most governments are solely concerned about their own profits and interests by adhering to the demands of the big corporations at the expense of the citizens. For instance, Robert Rubin was the US Treasury Secretary from 1995 to 1999, he schemed the implementation of policies that “ensured the overwhelming portion of benefits from economic growth goes to the rich”, and after his term, he joined Citigroup to benefit from the banking laws he wrote (Mokhiber & Weissman 1999, No Page). Thus, the top 1% utilize their own wealth and power to manipulate the political and legal system for personal gains (Evans 2000, p.230).

Likewise, President Business is constructing a world that follows his ideas of how things are supposed to be. Dissidents and freethinkers, namely the Master builders, are repressed and arrested through immense surveillance and a military system to bar decentralized communication (Hemingway 2014, No Page).

Additionally, President Business is obsessed with borders that function like passports and nationalities, which are ultimately created to separate individuals. Together with ethnicities, skin colors, religions, and wealth differences, these artificial disparities narrowed the standards of human freedom and rights to solely a certain group instead of a universal value (Amino 1997, p.137-138). The citizens were forced by their national leaders to glorify a certain group while marginalizing and persecuting the others (Amino 1997, p.140). For instance, this is how Hitler distorted the mindsets of the Germans to support his racist view of the superiority of the Germans against the Jews, which resulted in a massacre of millions of innocent humans (Githua 2014, No Page). Thus, nationalism is destroying the oneness of humanity, and hampering the efforts of individuals to unite people of different races and social status to attain social harmony.

Moreover, Lord Business introduced robots to replace humans at his office, signifying the prevailing replacement of human workers with robots in factories and industries in reality, so as to cut the expenses by eliminating cost from employee securities, pension funds, wages and more. Most importantly, there will be no more occupy movements as robots would always adhere to manual control without defiance.

Having acknowledged the defiance against his unification of the daily routines of the populace, President Business counterattacks by spraying Kragle on the citizens to stick them at a permanent state and position, so as to eternally keep things as he envisions the world should be and to achieve his personal goals. Similarly, the top managers in corporations are mostly selfish “Corporate Psychopaths” who are solely concerned about personal gains with no empathy to the others, and they would guide individuals to conform whatever that is beneficial to themselves (Boddy, Ladyshewsky & Galvin 2010a, p.121-122). They are also the roots of environmental pollutions, corruption, and harmful work practices, due to their unethical disposal of financial, environmental and human resources (Boddy et al. 2010a, p.125).
Third, it is ironic that a capitalist consumer company like Lego would spend money on corporate social responsibility by producing *The Lego Movie* to address these corporate influences in the mindless consumer culture. Apparently, this is the company’s strategy to attract consumers that are concerned about their corporate social responsibilities apart from profit generation. However, *The Lego Movie* is fundamentally a 90-minute commercial to promote the consumption of Lego.

Seemingly, the corporations are self-regulating themselves to be socially responsible for their economic actions and its impacts on society and the environment (Boddy *et al.* 2010b, p.3). However, it is impossible to believe that the “Corporate Psychopaths” would be socially responsible as they lack empathy to all others but themselves. Even if they followed their corporate social responsibility promises, they would never terminate those economic activities that impact the environment, finance and society most adversely, as these damages are the origins of their profits.

For instance, the Coca-Cola Company breached their promise of not marketing their sugar sodas to children, by which they hired children dressing in superhero costumes to send a heroic image of their brand on Mexican television (Corporate Crime Reporter 2014, No Page). Aptly, their sugar sodas have fuelled global obesity, diabetes and other chronic diseases, which is harming the wellbeing of its consumers. It is most obnoxious that they paid the paramilitaries to murder individuals attempting to form unions to fight for fair wages and treatments, so as to bar defiance regarding the company’s human rights and labour abuses in Columbia (Moore 2011, No Page). When their families reported to the local governments, they would never hear any response as the company has bribed the corrupted governments to avoid oppression towards their business operation in the region. The company only cares about generating money through these socially irresponsible actions. They would seamlessly cover their evil deeds by exaggerating their charitable contributions to NGOs like Oxfam and World Wildlife Fund (Corporate Crime Reporter 2014, No Page).

Similarly, Lego is promoting its image as encouraging creativity without conformity. However, they would not implement campaigns that harm their profits. For instance, they have signed a long-term contract with the oil company, Shell, which is one of the worst unethical corporations (Green Peace 2014, No Page). Although this contract is harming the socially responsible reputation of Lego, it has no interest in ending the profitable contract with Shell, as Lego is made of plastic that is petroleum derivatives to begin with. Therefore, all these corporate social responsibility schemes are vehicles for the multinational corporations to promote an “undeserved image of respectability” and to “escape real accountability” (Corporate Crime Reporter 2014, No Page).

Finally, having seen that the “Corporate Psychopaths” have no empathy for the bottom 99% of the population, we should gather more supporters despite the repression. Whereas, the accomplishments of the occupy movements in creating communities should be disseminated to the public, in regards to its success in integrating the currently isolated community and neighbourhoods together for mutual support and care in attaining the same democratic goal, not for individual benefits but society and future generations (Chomsky 2012, No Page). As seen from the greatness achieved when everyone in *The Lego Movie* was mobilized to join hands and support each other in fighting against President Business and the military forces.

Also, it might require teachers to transform the current educational institutions or media, just like Vitruvius who dispersed the evil plans of President Business, by educating the public
about the problems of blind adherence to the status quo and through addressing the citizens’ common concerns over police brutality and civic corruption to create anxiety towards the current governance (Chomsky 2012, No Page). A reconstruction of the media can be promoted, by creating a media managed by the local communities or workers themselves, like the community-based media platform in the suburbs of Brazil where locals could produce their own TV programs addressing issues that are part of their lives like debts and AIDS, instead of the monopolized TV programs in the mainstream media (Chomsky 2012, No Page). The localized media enables the isolated and powerless individuals to transmit their opinions about the problematic social norms to the other citizens, and with the facilitation of Internet social media, they could disperse these problems worldwide to transform the defiance into a global movement just like the impact of the Arab Spring (Evans 2000, p.232-233). The more engaged the public is towards occupy movements, the more rigid the defense would be against repression and violence (Chomsky 2012, No Page).

We should sober up from the self-regulating tricks casted by the “Corporate Psychopaths” to destroy our community. We, the bottom 99% should believe that we are the one with power. Only if we gather together to eliminate consumerism, nationalism, ethnic hatred and other methods the top 1% created to dissociate us, the empowerment of the populace will prevail.
References:


