

Academic Labor

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Media Pranks: A Three-Act Essay

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Times are tough for public universities. Over the past quarter-century, state legislatures have slashed college budgets, and these cuts have only accelerated during a seemingly endless economic meltdown. We have been told to do more with less, make sacrifices, and be self-sufficient—and I couldn't agree more. Unlike those socialists lining up to mainline milk from the nanny state, many of us favor fiscally sound solutions. We should teach our children well by following dogmatically free-market principles that reject government meddling. My modest proposal is multipronged and forward-thinking. It would hand over all aspects of academic life to private companies, creating a university system that is more efficient, even profitable. In reimagining how higher education can be rebooted, we must ask ourselves, "What would a liberal arts education look like if McDonald's funded it?" Killing many birds with one lethal stone, we can simultaneously solve the problems of overstuffed budgets, overpaid professors, and—as an added, unexpected bonus—plagiarism. Let me explain.

Act I: A Modest Free Market Proposal for Educational Reform

The first part of the plan involves the sponsorship of classes, in which companies exchange cash and services for the prominent placement of their logos on syllabi and in teaching spaces. This is a no-brainer, especially since on-campus branding has expanded in recent years. Under this plan, rational economic decisions will play a greater role in determining course offerings; less popular, unprofitable classes will necessarily fall by the wayside. My second proposal will be more controversial, for it involves radically rethinking the way undergraduate students approach their coursework. These days, professors fret over undergrads using the services of "research assistance" companies—businesses that sell finished papers on every imaginable subject. Rather than siding with these fuddy-duddies, we should instead embrace this shift in student work habits. After all, the free market is influencing the decisions our students make, and it would be disastrous to regulate an emerging marketplace during these uncertain times.

It also seems morally wrong to force undergrads to waste their time reading, researching, writing, and revising when their labor could be put to better use in service jobs and other low-wage positions. This will allow them to buy pre-packaged papers and have spending money left over to inject into the economy. It's a win-win. Only lazy students who are not gainfully employed will lose out. Additionally, those who carefully manage their money (or whose families have already done so) can purchase higher quality papers that will earn them better grades: a one-dollar, one-vote approach to learning. While it is true that this shift in pedagogy will hurt some businesses—such as TurnItIn.com and

other companies that produce plagiarism-detecting software—the overall impact for society will be positive. The third and final part of my plan takes the economic potential of education to the next level, offering great rewards with virtually no risk. Still, I anticipate that some old-school professors will be alarmed by my suggestion that we should apply this new education/business model to train future faculty.

It's only fair that if we allow undergraduates to use research assistance companies, graduate students should be allowed to do so as well. One such business, PhD-Dissertations.com, is leading the charge on this front.¹ (When I first came across this Web site, I thought, *Why hasn't anyone thought of this before?* Talk about an untapped market!) By no longer having to conduct original research themselves, graduate students will have more hours to spend in the classroom as adjunct instructors. Let's do the math: PhD-Dissertations.com charges \$18 per page, which adds up to \$3,600 for a 200-page dissertation (not counting their special offer: "A discount of 10% applies to orders of 75+ pages!") (Dissertation Help). Although this might seem like a lot of money, consider the fact that most colleges pay adjunct faculty roughly the same, between \$3,000 and \$4,000, for each course taught per semester. Therefore, by adding just one extra course to his or her roster, a graduate student can pay for an entire dissertation in less than one academic year, while at the same time serving the university's undergraduate teaching needs.

Once this new generation of scholars/project managers enters the profession, there will be no more need for outrageously paid professors who waste their time on original research. Following this course of action, universities can be transformed into well-oiled machines that will generate more credit hours and, therefore, more tuition dollars. For years, college deans have argued that we need to find cheaper ways to process more students through the system. Predictably, many tenured radicals derisively use the phrase "credit factory" to describe this approach, but I think the industrial process is an apt metaphor for how universities should conduct their business. Fast food is another good model to follow, a point that is underscored on PhD-Dissertations.com's "Questions and Answers" page:

Will the material be one-of-a-kind and unique?

Yes, of course. As they say at *Jack-in-the-Box*, "We don't make it until you order it." We write all custom research materials from scratch, based on the specifications provided to us. Unlike other services with no sense of academic integrity, we do not copy-and-paste from writings that are freely available on the Internet.

Some will surely complain about this approach's "intellectually corrosive" effects, but those people—who have a practically medieval concept of what universities should do—are wrong. In fact, a legitimized research assistance industry will most definitely *improve* the quality of scholarly research and writing. Because these companies exist in the private sector, they naturally do a more efficient job than researchers in college bureaucracies, which are bloated with extensive, wasteful workforce redundancies.

¹ Special thanks to Ben Peters at the University of Tulsa's Department of Communication for bringing this Web site to my attention. Elements of this essay previously appeared in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and the *Huffington Post*.

In today's universities, some scholars examine similar topics, but from different perspectives. In other words, they hire multiple people to do a job fit for one! Corporate research factories, on the other hand, can maximize the resources needed to produce top-notch scholarship better than any state-funded school. This is because research assistance companies have a streamlined division of labor: one specialized staff researcher writes, another proofreads, a different employee fact-checks, and an administrator can manage the whole project. Only in the private sector can you achieve this level of efficiency. Hard times call for tough choices and new ideas, which my plan delivers. By creating synergistic links between universities and corporate sponsors—and by privatizing the work done by undergraduate students/workers and professors-in-training—we can create a lighter, leaner educational system that can better adapt to the realities of a changing world. More important, this approach will foster economic growth by turning the process of learning into a frictionless series of commodity exchanges. After all, what could go wrong?

Act II: Learning From Educational Pranks

I don't really believe any of that nonsense, but I wanted to see what might happen if those proposals were implemented, so I carried out a couple of educational pranks. First, in fall 2006, six corporations sponsored my University of Iowa "Intro to Media Production" class. I should say, with a wink, that the companies "sponsored" the course. There was no contractual exchange of money or services, and, to be honest, some of the businesses I contacted didn't want to be involved in my scheme. Throughout that semester, I referred to my syllabus as a McSyllabus, and myself as Professor M[®]Kembrew M[®]Leod (I even temporarily replaced the nameplate on my office door). I also planned to plaster a tweed sport coat with these brands—McDonald's, MTV, AT&T, Disney, Pfizer, and Sony Music—kind of like a NASCAR outfit, but with elbow patches. Alas, I never went through with that part of my plan, as there were too many papers to grade and not enough hours in the day. But I did have time for some mischief. After finding the e-mail addresses of the regents who oversee the University of Iowa, I wrote each posing as a professor-ally, telling them of my plan.

"In a class exercise I thought you'd appreciate," I wrote, "we are imagining what it would be like if several corporations sponsored this class." In the e-mail, I cheerfully explained how I slapped those McDonald's and MTV logos all over my syllabus. I then declared that advertising corporate brands was the future of higher education and complained, ". . . too many professors at the university are out of touch with real world business practices." Because I contacted the regents in the middle of a contentious battle with the university—and given my prankish history, which is just one Internet search away—I worried about two things. The regents would 1) try to have me fired for being a smarty-pants, or, 2) affirm the e-mail's core sentiments. Either way, it was a lose-lose proposition. Concluding, I stated, "Because it is so important to organize the university more like a business, I thought you would appreciate and agree with the philosophy that underpins this project." A couple of days later, I received an e-mail from one of the regents. "Conceptually, it sounds great," he wrote, adding, "Happy Thanksgiving!" Although this reply was not a smoking-gun admission—*Yes, product placement in the classroom is part of our nefarious plan for the future!*—my general suspicions were confirmed. I guess it is time to start stitching together that logo-slathered tweed jacket after all; the elbow patches are prime product-placement real estate.

After my classroom sponsorship prank/experiment, I wanted to execute the rest of my modest proposal. I turned to PhD-Dissertations.com because the company made it clear that its writers could handle *any* task. For instance, one of PhD-Dissertations.com's Web pages offers an absurdly long "Partial List of Dissertations Topics." Under "A" one can find "Abstraction," "Abu Ghraib," "Abusive Relationships," and "Academia" (Dissertation Proposals with "A" Topics). At first I genuinely thought the PhD-Dissertations.com site was a prank, not a real service, because it contains so many unintentionally ironic, caps-laden, or just-plain-farfetched claims: "Our staff of over 150 contracted, professional writers can research ANY doctoral dissertation topic, of ANY length, for almost ANY delivery date." "For urgent research orders, we assign writers who have perfected the art of 'speed reading.' These professionals can read, and fully comprehend, a lengthy text in a matter of hours"; and my favorite, coming from a company that specializes in doing other people's coursework, "The key to research is originality" (Dissertation Help).

As a cautious consumer, I wanted to evaluate other research assistance companies, so naturally I checked what PhD-Dissertations.com said about its competition. Below are some excerpts from a lengthy list of reasons why we "*MUST AVOID* all foreign sites, subscription sites, membership sites, free sites, and database sites." Here it goes:

2. AVOID any site that provides you with a FAX number beginning with "775" (775-242-6880, 775-599-4716, 775-667-6755, 775-720-0593, etc.; a notoriously fraudulent, Pakistani operation owns dozens of different sites and dozens of different FAX numbers that begin with the digits "775.")
3. Suspiciously low prices - (Obvious sign of a foreign company!)
11. Fake customer testimonials or pictures - (They must think you are a fool.)
13. Fake awards - (Again, completely fraudulent!)
15. "Hot Deals" - (You are NOT getting a deal—you are getting robbed.)
20. "Register" - (They see you as a walking "cash register"—don't fall for it.) (WARNING)

PhD-Dissertations.com offers a heavy helping of paranoia peppered with xenophobia. "Sites that charge less than \$17/page are more than likely NOT based in the United States, and blatantly LIE about their writers' skills, capabilities, and experience," its website states.

They are able to charge lower fees in American dollars because they pay unskilled, foreign laborers with the undervalued currency of Pakistan, Yemen, and other third-world countries. Their foreign writers are nowhere near master- or doctoral-level in American standards, and often have absolutely no grasp of proper grammar, punctuation, spelling, or any other standard writing guidelines in the English language. (WARNING)

PhD-Dissertations.com, which clearly stands on the highest of moral grounds, concludes by rhetorically asking, "You don't want a Pakistani teenager attempting to complete YOUR order, do you?"

It turns out that foreigners are a hot topic in the small, strange world that is the American research assistance industry. Plenty of other U.S.-based companies also believe that barbarians are charging the gates of our ivory towers, lowering standards. For instance, SparrowPapers.com warns,

The danger of selecting a thesis or dissertation research assistance service based on price is obvious. How can any business produce, say, 240 hours of research for \$15 per page? This would mean they pay their researchers \$3 per hour. Nowhere in America are those wages acceptable. If a service seems too inexpensive to be real, it means the work is being performed in Pakistan, India, or the Philippines. (Thesis and Dissertation Research Assistance Prices)

These research assistance companies repeatedly underscore the fact that they only employ native English speakers with advanced degrees or other professional experience, such as active magazine editors, retired professors, and, shockingly, doctoral candidates who have already earned MA degrees. I couldn't imagine a worse hell than being in grad school and having to write someone else's thesis or dissertation. But given the collapse of the academic job market, this may be the only realistic career option available for today's PhD students.

Ultimately, I decided to go with PhD-Dissertations.com because they claimed to be the most trustworthy: "Since 1998, PhD-Dissertations.com's affiliated corporation has maintained a 98% positive satisfaction ratio." They also claim: "It is a known FACT that over 94% of 'dissertation' and 'thesis' services steal sources and plagiarize text from published research papers and other documents. However, PhD-Dissertations.com is part of the legitimate 6%" (Why Choose Us). Thirty days and \$18 a page later, the company sent me a research proposal authored by "Username: Prof_Voland," who used the title I suggested—*A White Paper on the Benefits of "Research Assistance" Companies: Toward the Privatization of Learning, the Creation of New Education Markets, and the Streamlining of Research Methods*. Given the company's vigorous, pro-Anglo-American defense of proper writing skills, I was amused that Prof_Voland's lead sentence for the white paper was—wait for it—"In the current economic development of the world has very varying signs as to the possible future trends of its development." Here are some other logically and grammatically challenged quotes from Prof_Voland's—I mean my—paper:

The growth of the quality of such services is the social benefit from privatization of the establishments, while net financial gain by each graduate as sum of higher salary achievable after better education, is the net financial gain to each customer of privatized educational establishment.

Economic and social affect of neo-liberalism approach to educational system development must be studied in order to draw conclusions as to the nature of this affect.

Example of such supply is appearance of numerous research assistance companies often outsourcing researchers from developing countries who can not actively participate in the world labour division process and gain their financial wealth from the liberalization of the markets and creation of new commodity markets. (Prof. Voland, 2009)

I admit that professors like myself don't always do the best job of teaching graduate students good writing skills, so I should be careful throwing stones. We sometimes echo discursive styles learned in theory seminars—creating a feedback loop of elliptical clauses, obfuscating jargon, leads that are buried, sentences the length of paragraphs, and paragraphs the length of pages. Nevertheless, there are reasons for so-called difficult writing. Some ideas require a certain level of abstraction, and the use of particular terms can add a level of specificity to an argument that is aimed at colleagues. If we allowed “the market” to judge what is valuable, and what is not, a lot of important scholarly work would disappear. This is already happening. Budget cuts have placed a tremendous strain on the network of university presses, which now shy away from publishing books with limited marketing appeal.

These constraints have also transformed the nature of scholarly journal production. Over the past quarter-century, companies like Blackwell and Taylor & Francis have taken control of journal publishing. Before that, scholarly societies like the National Communication Association handled this task. Professors gave away their work to journals for free, something that was often referred to as a “contribution to the field.” But today, this kind of academic gift economy is being threatened. Contrary to what free-marketeers assume, the privatization of knowledge has created *more* economic inefficiencies. Typically, universities pay professors not only to teach, but also to produce scholarship; it's part of the job description. When researchers sign over their copyrights to journal conglomerates like Blackwell (again, for free), college libraries are then required to purchase the right to view those articles at inflated prices (especially compared to previous decades). In other words, schools are paying twice—to produce, and then rent—the same product. What's more disturbing is that these publishing companies often use technological means, such as Digital Rights Management (DRM), to block unauthorized access to articles.

DRM can, for instance, restrict the number of times one can view a PDF document file or print out a hard copy. I found this out the hard way when I e-mailed a PDF of my first academic article, published in the *Journal of Communication*, to students in an honors thesis writing class I taught in 2007. I wanted to have a discussion with them about the process of researching this article, but I didn't anticipate a major problem. It turned out that Blackwell, the company to which I stupidly signed away my copyrights when I was a grad student, placed DRM restrictions on the digital file. After the second student printed out a hard copy of the article from the same PDF, the rest of my class was blocked from doing so. Their computers would only allow them to print out blank sheets of paper, save for Blackwell's copyright notice at the bottom. In other words, I was prevented from sharing my own writing with my own class, an ironic and idiotic situation that runs counter to the principles of sharing and exchange that have traditionally characterized academia. I can't think of a more poetic expression of what is wrong with academic publishing than a blank sheet of paper where words and ideas should be. It's also a demonstration of how over-commercialization can generate economic friction (universities paying for the products of academic labor twice) and pedagogical disasters (my derailed class discussion).

Cutting the workforce and extracting more labor for less compensation may increase the bottom line of corporations, but it's no way to run a university. The downsizing of higher education necessitates a reliance on low-wage contract labor and the slashing of tenure-track jobs—which means, among other things, that undergrads have fewer opportunities to interact with professors. (I myself greatly benefited from faculty mentors as a student back in the day.) This is but one example of why educational institutions should not be run like businesses, for there are qualitative, intangible benefits to society that are hard to measure. To put our choices about funding higher education into perspective, we can look to the past for lessons. Between 1933 and 1939, the University of Iowa regularly broadcast a weekly, two-day schedule of programming from its experimental television station, W9XK, one of roughly 30 such stations scattered throughout the country at the time. Most of those stations only broadcast test signals used to assess the technical aspects of transmissions, but the University of Iowa distinguished itself by regularly offering “sight and sound” lectures, music, and dramatic performances (University of Iowa Libraries, 2009).

In the middle of the cornfields, and in the middle of the Great Depression, Iowa supported this idea decades before a majority of American households owned a television set. The thought of moving pictures flying through the air probably sounded like pointless science fiction to most people at the time. Nevertheless, those efforts contributed to the development one of the 20th century's most culturally significant—not to mention hugely profitable—industries. If the current conventional wisdom held sway back then, I'm sure the crackpots who dreamt up W9XK would have been run out of the state by legislators. It is amazing that Iowa supported an experimental television station during the economic crash of the 1930s, but it was the right thing to do. This is something we ought to remember when making budgetary decisions that will further cripple our university systems. While we should remain skeptical of the kind of market fundamentalism that attempts to force square scholarly pegs into round holes, I still do not wish to cling to a romantic ideal of what the academy once was. We need to embrace change, including rewarding the kind of publicly engaged work to which most universities currently only pay lip service.

Act III: Pranking as Pedagogy

An expanded vision of academic work can include op-eds, radio shows, documentaries, and of other ways of translating scholarly research to broader audiences. Other times, it might be less conventional, such as the mischief-making discussed earlier in this essay. Today, the word “prank” is often used to describe something akin to a hazing ritual that is meant to make someone else look foolish, and little more. I'm not interested in celebrating cruelty, especially the kinds of thoughtless practical jokes that prey on the weak. While socially conscious pranks sometimes do mock their targets, they serve a higher purpose by speaking truth to power, or at least cracking jokes that expose fissures in its facade. If reduced to a mathematical formula, these acts might be expressed as *Pranks = Satire + Performance Art x Media*. Put simply, they are playful critiques performed within the public sphere and amplified by media. By staging these semi-serious, semi-humorous spectacles, mischief-makers can spark important conversations. Storytelling can be a powerful tool, and the best kinds of pranks produce memorable morals that cry out to be retold.

I had this in mind when I launched what is perhaps my most successful provocation: trademarking “Freedom of Expression.” This idea evolved directly out of my primary research program, which focuses on the cultural impact of intellectual property law. When I submitted my application to the United States Patent and Trademark Office back in 1997, it was a kind of dare. Even though I hoped I didn’t live in a world where freedom of expression[®] could be privatized, the bureaucracy that processed my application believed otherwise. My little joke went public when I hired an attorney to pursue AT&T for using it in a newspaper advertisement—*without my consent!* On January 23, 2003, *The New York Times* broke the story with an article that began, “Freedom of expression, it turns out, may not be for everyone.” After the story was picked up by wire services, more reporters came calling. This gave me a platform to say deadpan things like, “I didn’t go through the time, effort, and expense to trademark freedom of expression[®] just to have someone come along and use it whenever they want.” News of my prank likely spread so quickly because it contained such a glaring, absurd contradiction that got people talking.

Sometimes pranksters craft a clear and direct message in an attempt to persuade, and other times they deliberately try to befuddle. The latter tactic can also be productive, especially when a stage-managed street theater performance jolts people out of their daily routines. When the world is temporarily turned upside down, it can be viewed from a new perspective. There are downsides to this strategy, because once a story becomes public it takes on a life of its own, and one loses control of how it is interpreted. This can be both exhilarating and troubling, but there are ways of mitigating uncertainty. The most important stage of a socially conscious media prank is “the reveal,” when the perpetrator’s motive is explained—for it is not good enough merely to outrage people or to make them laugh (though that can also be fun!). There needs to be an educational component. Pranking can also serve as a useful real-world learning lab for conducting social experiments and studying their effects.

Put another way, it allows us to open the hood of the culture industry’s engine in order to view the machinery and figure out how it operates. A useful example of this is the Banana Hoax of 1967, when news began circulating that one could get high by smoking banana peels (in reality, the only way to trip on a banana is to step on one). Even though the smokable banana myth was a bit frivolous, that doesn’t mean we can’t learn from the way it took root. The origins of the rumor are hazy, but its most likely source was the band Country Joe and the Fish. In late 1966, frontman “Country” Joe McDonald and drummer Gary “Chicken” Hirsh began spreading the word about the potency of bananas among friends and strangers. “Even if it didn’t work,” Hirsh said of the fruit’s hallucinogenic effects, “it was great fun” (McMillian, 2011, p. 70). Part of the humor stemmed from the fact that bananas were legal and would be difficult to outlaw; also, the thought of smoking bananas contained more than a whiff of slapstick silliness.

Word initially traveled orally, and the first printed account appeared in the March 3, 1967, issue of the influential *Berkeley Barb*. Ed Denson contributed a regular music column to this underground paper, and also served as Country Joe’s band manager. In the pages of the *Barb*, he claimed he was “turned on to bananas,” and offered a recipe. Denson later admitted, “I was fully involved in perpetrating the hoax when I wrote that article,” but denied penning a letter in the same issue in which the author claimed to have seen a cop “lurking in the fresh produce section” of a local food co-op. The writer predicted that possessing large amounts of bananas would soon become a criminal offense. Later that week, *The San Francisco Chronicle* ran an article titled “Kicks for Hippies: The Banana Turn-On” (McMillian, 2011, pp. 70-

71). By April of that year, *TIME* and *Newsweek* piled on, and Democratic Congressman Frank Thompson cheekily proposed the Banana Labeling Act of 1967. "From bananas, it is a short but shocking step to other fruits," he deadpanned. The Food and Drug Administration took it a little more seriously, issuing a press release soberly stating that FDA researchers failed to find "detectable quantities of known hallucinogenics" in bananas (McMillian, 2011, p. 67).

The colorful absurdity of the Banana Hoax masks a deeper social truth. As historian John McMillian suggests in his account of American alternative media, the manner in which this prank spread nationwide tells us much about the media landscape of the time. Working in confederation, underground papers created a virtual community that connected weirdoes and dropouts living in cities, suburbs, and rural areas. This growing communication network ensured that few things remained local for long. But even though counterculture media were important in the Banana Hoax's success, so was corporate mass media. Folk-pop singer Donovan had a huge hit at the time with his single "Mellow Yellow," which was widely rumored to be about you-know-what. The constant repetition of the song on radios amplified the hoax as it spread through subterranean tributaries, mainstream channels, and word of mouth (McMillian, 2011, p. 68).

As the Banana Hoax demonstrates, pulling pranks and studying them can be much like throwing a rock in the pop-culture pond. We can observe the ripple patterns as a mischievous meme makes its way through communication channels, helping us better understand a particular milieu. However, not everyone believes prankish tactics are useful. In Patricia Aufderheide and Peter Jaszsi's excellent book *Reclaiming Fair Use*, they criticize contemporary hacktivists, culture jammers, and other groups that gravitate toward monkey-wrenching and monkeyshines. More specifically, the authors described and then dismissed my freedom of expression® prank as being more or less pointless, or even counterproductive. "Such antics did indeed provide a broad-brush critique," Aufderheide and Jaszsi write, "but at the same time they often obscured for the vast majority of people positioned between the extremes of piracy and hyperprotectionism, the possibilities for practice and change of practice within the law" (2011, p. 63). I would totally agree with them—if it merely stopped at the publicity surrounding that fake lawsuit. But as I discussed in my book *Freedom of Expression®: Resistance and Repression in the Age of Intellectual Property* (2007a), and elsewhere (2010a), it was just the beginning. I tried to use the prank as a springboard to get people talking about an issue I cared about, in order to further intervene in an important public conversation.

"Of course, pranks won't change the world, nor do they have the same efficacy as organized direct actions such as labor strikes," I noted in another essay. "Still, they can have an important pedagogical value that can indirectly change people's behavior by prompting unsuspecting spectators to pause and reflect, even if it is only for a few seconds" (McLeod, 2011). After the initial shock value of a prank wears off, the next key step is spinning a narrative for as wide (or, alternately, specific) an audience as possible. That is what I did with my class sponsorship prank involving one of the University of Iowa regents. I wrote about it in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* for other scholars, explaining the purpose of my prank and the larger issues it raised (McLeod, 2007b). I also published a piece on the *Huffington Post* about the PhD-Dissertations.com prank, and why I did it (McLeod, 2010b). Sure, I used a broad-brush critique in how I caricatured a neoliberal approach to education, but, well, that is kind of the

nature of satire. I have also revealed and explained the purpose of some of my other pranks in public venues like the *Washington Post* (McLeod, 2007c). In fact, this essay is very much an extension of my oddball pedagogy.

In both academic and activist worlds, we should encourage people to occupy multiple positions, and to express themselves in a variety of registers. We need a plurality of strategies and tactics, rather than having to embrace the kind of programmatic One True Way ethic espoused by the Old Left. Its emphasis on class über alles and a stoic denial of pleasure was inherited to a certain extent by the New Left, which was often at odds with the Yuppies, Merry Pranksters, and other Groucho Marxists who fought on the cultural fronts. Not everyone, for instance, thought the Banana Hoax was all that funny, and some went so far as to call it counter-revolutionary. Students for a Democratic Society President Todd Gitlin grumbled in a Liberation News Service missive that this politically misguided stunt ignored the United Fruit Company's unfair land-distribution policies and labor practices. "These circumstances come to mind," he stated at the time, "whenever bananas are flaunted with humor or symbolic meaning, as a means of liberation" (McMillian, 2011, p. 79). With that in mind, I want to conclude with a call for a messy— anarchic, even—diversity of styles. We need to make room for "difficult" theoretical writing, "pragmatic" strategizing, "rhetorical excesses" associated activists, and the "zaniness" of media tricksters. (An individual fragmented subject may on occasion embody all of these characteristics in a single week!) All approaches—despite their flaws—move the ball forward in their own way, and avoid the kind of instrumental thinking that can shut down previously unimagined possibilities for a new world.

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