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Résumé de l'article

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The 1968 Strax Affair and the Arts of Discombobulation

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Abstract

The bureaucratic precepts engendered by modern universities produce a slew of negative effects inimical to educational justice. Drawing on historiographical evidence from the 1968 Strax Affair, a little-known protest held at the University of New Brunswick, we identify the arts of discombobulation as a novel approach to challenge the intellectual constraints imposed by university bureaucracies. By theorizing the arts of discombobulation, we aim to counteract bureaucracy's most alienating affective residues, equipping scholars with an administrative arsenal capable of transforming the corporate academy into a playful, joyful environment. Inspired by cultural historian Johan Huizinga's theory of the "play-function," we introduce five interrelated tactics—burlesque versions of both formal and informal administrative practices—that amplify the contradictions inherent to the corporate academy's contemporary bureaucratic structure: personalization, befuddlement, signal jamming, mapping, and abeyance. Even during moments of Kafkaesque bureaucratic defeat, discombobulation can generate a sense of heightened play necessary to fuel democratic resistance.

> Modern elevators are strange and complex entities … This is because they operate on the curious principle of 'defocused temporal perception' … Not unnaturally, many elevators imbued with intelligence and precognition became terribly frustrated with the mindless business of going up and down, up and down, experimented briefly with the notion of going sideways, as a sort of existential protest, demanded participation in the decision-making process and finally took to squatting in basements sulking.
>
> — Douglas Adams, *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, 1980/2009, pp. 46-47.

"Fuck the ID cards!" read the mimeographed broadsheets plastered around the University of New Brunswick's Fredericton campus, then as now, a sleepy public university located on Canada's East Coast. The broadsheets, distributed in the early morning of September 20, 1968, urged the University's student body to destroy their newly introduced identification cards and refuse to have their photographs taken (Kent, 2012). For the protestors, the identification cards were symptomatic of a much broader anti-democratic tendency ingrained within the post-war consensus. By limiting access to a public good, identification cards, reasoned the protestors, prevented the distribution of knowledge, bolstering the University's surveillance capabilities, while sowing division among students, staff, faculty, and the surrounding community.

As the day progressed, the campus stood still. Later that evening, at six o'clock sharp, Dr. Norman Strax, an American sessional physics professor and recent graduate from Harvard University, swung open the Harriet Irving Library's heavy, hardwood-framed glass doors. Built three years prior in honour of Harriet Lila Irving, the first wife of K.C. Irving, an oil baron and scion of New Brunswick's most prominent industrial family, the library sported an imposing, red-brick exterior, contrasted by a drab, aseptic interior. Leaving the temperate fall weather behind, the moustachioed Strax, accompanied by two students—David Hallam, a philosophy student from Montreal, and Clayton Burns, an English student from Fredericton—entered the building. They each amassed an armful of books before returning to the library's front desk.

"Your library card, please?" the library clerk might have asked. "I'm afraid you can't take out books without a library card."

Strax, having ignored the rules of the game, shattering the play-world, might have shaken his head: "No."

Of course, Strax, Hallam, and Burns were not at the Harriet Irving Library to take out books. They were there to make a statement; to engage in a kind of pacifist guerilla warfare.

Undeterred by the library clerk's appeal to procedure, the three placed their books on the counter, returned to the stacks, and collected another batch. Before long, the trio of players had amassed over 250 books, a blockade of print capable of making even Gutenberg groan. The towering, paper-built tsunami soon overwhelmed the staff, who were forced to close the library. Days later, after repeating the protest, known as the "Bookie-Book Game," two more times, the protestors commandeered Strax's office in Loring Bailey Hall and rechristened it Liberation 130. For nearly two months, dozens of Arts students occupied the commune-like residence, played music, and printed their posters, circulars, and broadsheets. Fredericton's short-lived campus revolution had begun. In short order, Strax's playful antics had generated an unconventional form of grassroots protest, which relied on what we call *discombobulation*. Strax belonged to

Mobilization Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), also known as Canadian Struggle for a Democratic Society (CSDS), an intentionally non-hierarchical syndicalist group unaffiliated with American branches of Students for a Democratic Society. Its target? The burgeoning, increasingly corporate bureaucracy of the University of New Brunswick, manifested by its newly introduced identification cards.

The months-long "protest"—known among commentators as the Strax Affair—is both grossly misunderstood and criminally overlooked. It stands as an extraordinary episode in the somewhat unremarkable post-war history of the University of New Brunswick. Yet, the uncompromising radicalism of Strax and his allies, while nearly unprecedented for the small public university, was experienced as a fleeting episode in a much broader cultural moment. Indeed, even as it unfolded, the Strax Affair had already been outshone just eight months prior, when, during the events of May 1968, thousands of French students—informed by the writings of Marx, Mao, and Marcuse—stormed the streets of Paris, bringing the country to a grinding halt. A series of mini-revolutions erupted globally during the late 1960s. Student demonstrators, inspired by the successes of guerrillas in Cuba and Vietnam, organized protests on campuses in Canada and the United States, Latin America, West and East Africa, Western and Eastern Europe, and Japan, among others (Carey, 2016; McCormack, 1971).

Groundbreaking scholarship blossoms when nourished by human diversity and intellectual difference. Disruptive researchers often achieve innovative results during irregular yet intensive bursts of energy, interspersed with bouts of laziness and non-work. That is, innovation occurs when, as observers become participants, generating theory from practice, they pursue spontaneous and ostensibly "non-productive" experiences: taking a break or walk, attending a party, or chatting with a colleague, partner, or friend.[1] Playfulness and joy, inherent values which, in themselves, challenge economistic rationales for knowledge production, are therefore necessary ingredients for an intellectually rigorous life. Drawing from the Strax Affair, we think of discombobulation as an effective, short-term resistance strategy for scholars looking to combat the bureaucratization of contemporary neoliberal universities. By pushing structures to antistructure, discombobulation locates play as an act of resistance, highlighting the subversive potential of ludic disorder. We regard discombobulation as a culture-building exercise that, by provoking a militant counter-reaction from administrators, encourages academics to create revamped social spaces that stimulate intellectual creativity and familiarize players with projects of popular self-rule.

This article began as an experiment in markedly playful scholarship. Over a year, Pleshet and Tubb shared their observations in the hallway, complained after class, and exchanged heated text messages from home about the everyday challenges imposed by university bureaucracies. Dressler, who joined their discussions as an undergraduate student, later helped sketch the basic skeleton of this article. Our thinking was, in part, inspired by David Graeber, whose works advanced discussions about "surveillance capitalism" (Barassi, 2021). His anarchism, which displayed a sensitivity to Marxist political economy, alongside a suspicion of post-structuralist thinking, attracted supporters like David Harvey; their mutual engagement represented a merger between two oft-clashing but complementary intellectual traditions (Harvey, 2017).

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[1] Karl Marx's biographer, Francis Wheen (1990), explains that Marx and Engels were committed revolutionaries yet remarkably incompetent labourers. They often preferred the allures of food and drink, of wine and women, to writing and research. Seminal works like *Capital* and the *Communist Manifesto* were beset by delays and rewrites and ultimately completed during overnight marathons and frenzied dashes.

We complement Marxist and anarchist musings on bureaucracy and neoliberalism with theories of games and play from Johan Huizinga (1938/1980), a Dutch humanist and anti-fascist who published his masterwork, *Homo Ludens*, amidst a rising tide of European fascism on the eve of World War II. With *Homo Ludens* (Man the Player), Huizinga proposed an antidote to the rationalism of *Homo Sapiens* (Man the Wise) and the instrumentalism of *Homo Faber* (Man the Maker). Huizinga theorized playfulness as a necessary concomitant of reason and labour in every human being, in any cultural setting. His writings, part theory, part history, connected with a broader movement in twentieth-century European social thought that investigated the playful, performative, and agonistic qualities of ritual and ceremonial action in exchange and other fields (Boas, 1966/1897; Mauss 1966/1925). Critically, we suggest that Huizinga's intervention on play parallels other scholarship on anti-structural dynamics and social drama in human social life (Bateson, 1972; Turner, 1969; 1976; Van Gennep, 1960/1909), which sought to readdress overemphasis on order and stasis that characterized functionalist theories of ritual and ceremonial performance. Inspired, on the one hand, by "play" as a generative and transformative form of human action, and, on the other, by the structural and temporal dynamism of "play" as a category in the analysis of protest, we frame our discussion in reference to this grab-bag compendium of thinkers, such as it is.

As an exchange between historians and anthropologists, we have attempted to dismantle simplistic binaries that identify the professor as a teacher and the student as a learner, synthesizing our collective experiences and working to dislocate bureaucracy's *modus operandi*—that is, the pervasive belief that top-down, standardized, and synthetic forms of knowledge are infallible and all-seeing (Scott, 1998).

A Brief History of Corporate Bureaucracies in New Brunswick

Strax's protest occurred decades before neoliberal policies first ransacked New Brunswick's public coffers. Yet, even then, the province had already become deeply familiar with corporate centralization. The Irving family's command over the provincial economy ranged across several sectors, including pulp and paper, timber and forestry, shipping and manufacturing, construction and mining, news and television, and oil and gas (McCutcheon & Walker, 2020; Parenteau, 2013). In 1970, Senator Keith Davey, Chairman for the Special Senate Committee on Mass Media, described K.C. Irving as "the most important economic force in the province." An ideological powerhouse, Irving owned all five of the province's English language daily newspapers, alongside a handful of television and radio stations, which reached 94.9% of New Brunswick's overall TV audience (Davey & Beaubien, 1970, p. 29). These newspapers, Senator Davey contended, served as "refuges for the frustrated and disillusioned," where "Chamber-of-Commerce boosterism" masqueraded as an "adequate substitute for community service" (p. 85).

K.C. Irving, a long-time member of UNB's Board of Governors, also enjoyed a sizable influence over university and provincial affairs. He nurtured a friendship with Max Aitken, known among loyalists and laypeople alike as Lord Beaverbrook, a philanthropist and UNB's corporate benefactor *par excellence* (Miller, 1993; Stanley, 1984). During the 1960s, Irving served as national chair for UNB's Development Programme, a fundraising campaign orchestrated to attract capital from wealthy donors. Soon after, UNB President Colin Mackay successfully reorganized the University's bureaucracy, pushing the administration to become "more bureaucratic" and "less clubby." The reconfiguration, which coincided with the imposition of corporatist reforms, erected

a network of bureaucratic entanglements, with administrators accumulating an extensive stockpile of private funding (Kent, 2012, p. 45).

The situation in New Brunswick soon deteriorated, devolving from bad to worse. During the 1990s, Liberal Premier Frank McKenna promised New Brunswick to revitalize the provincial economy. His vehicle of choice? The humble call centre—possibly the most menial, managerial, and bureaucratic job ever devised by the human imagination. These call centres were staffed by low-paid, non-unionized workers, many of whom were university students struggling to repay their student loans (McFarland, 2009). Introduced under the guise of technological innovation, McKenna's economic program restructured the provincial economy, provoking rising rates of income inequality, stagnating wages, decreased work opportunities, weakened labour laws, the erosion of social assistance, the privatization of public firms, and the consolidation of news outlets (Aspinall et al., 2019; Workman, 2003).

Today, across Canada, a paltry five corporations control over 80% of the country's media outlets (Canada, 2022). The situation in New Brunswick looks even more dire. In February 2022, the Postmedia Network—Canada's largest newspaper chain—purchased the Irving family's outstanding shares of their publishing company, Brunswick News Inc., for $15 million, transferring the province's media monopoly from one corporate benefactor to another (Glynn & Rao, 2022). Government-funded call centres owned by TD Bank continue to flood into the province. Meanwhile, New Brunswick ranks as one of the poorest provinces in Canada, home to roughly 100,000 people in poverty, or nearly 13% of the population. Disinvestments in welfare provisions have, likewise, generated an underclass of around 18,000 people, many of whom are disabled, living in "deep poverty," a marker used by the United Nations to describe individuals deprived of basic human necessities like food and shelter (Dutton, 2020; Laidley & Tabbara, 2023). And where is Frank McKenna now, exactly? Working as an executive for TD Bank Group, of course.

On Bureaucracy, Human Difference, and the Death of Play

Corporate universities super-exploit academic passion on an unprecedented, industrial scale. In Canada, even as university enrolments have skyrocketed during the past four decades, hiring patterns for full-time faculty have not kept pace: students are underserved, professors are overworked, and contingent faculty are ruthlessly exploited (Brennan et al., 2021). While tenure-track positions continue to disappear, emerging academics, fuelled by the infamous slogan of "publish or perish," are expected to write more, publish earlier, and work longer hours than ever before. However, if universities are strapped for cash, their bureaucracies have not received the memo. In 1987, Canadian universities spent 12 cents on central administration costs for every dollar spent on instruction and non-sponsored research. That number ballooned to an astonishing 20 cents in 2010 (Smith, 2010). Between 1973 and 2008, meanwhile, administrative and general costs grew by a factor of 17.5, while academic salaries grew by a factor of only 10 (Polster, 2011).

Universities attract graduate students—the "essential workers" of modern universities, who provide crucial services in teaching and research—for several reasons, including that the academy offers temporary respite from alienation. These graduate workers are often captivated by the craftlike and artisanal nature of academic production, a profession once marked by a remarkable degree of intellectual and creative autonomy. For Marx, human flourishing occurs when labourers consciously engage with the labour process, consequently interacting with the "sensuous external

world" (Marx, 1932/1959). Meaningful, unalienated labour, including intellectual labour, Marx suggested, requires that labourers independently and voluntarily affirm themselves during the labour process, overcoming self-estrangement by engaging the faculties during everyday life.

Yet, counterintuitively, bureaucratization and structural constraints have steadily reduced the ability of students and precarious faculty—who often balance part-time jobs, teaching assistantships, and extracurriculars—to freely pursue research, engage in creative labour, and learn how to learn. A majority of graduate workers in Canada, albeit not all, receive a stipend from their university to complete their research. Funding amounts and sources are dependent upon institutional, faculty, and departmental constraints. On average, when enumerated as a 40-hour workweek, annual stipends awarded to research-based master's workers and doctoral workers amount to a pitifully low hourly wage of $6.37 and $8.46, respectively, putting them "well below the poverty line" (Laframboise et al., 2023, p. 12).[2] Ballooning tuition fees and meagre government funding mean that undergraduate students "are being asked to subsidize federal research grants," while most graduate workers—who are, on average, over $29,000 in debt—are being pushed into poverty while completing their degrees (Laframboise et al., 2023; Naylor et al., 2017, p. 34). Recently announced planned changes to postgraduate scholarships promise to infuse around $200 million annually into Tri-Council national funding agencies. The adjustments would increase scholarships for master's workers to $27,000 and doctoral workers to $40,000. The promises of the 2024 Budget, however, are contingent on the Liberal Party—helmed by a deeply unpopular Justin Trudeau—securing a victory in the October 2025 federal election. A Conservative government would likely axe the benefits (Laframboise & Qaiser, 2024; Owens, 2024). Moreover, the planned changes, while significant, would nonetheless maintain an atmosphere of hyper-competition among graduate workers. Independent researchers, expected to battle for scarce resources, would continue to regard their livable wage as locked behind the attainment of prestigious and scanty awards, protected by a complex infrastructure of bureaucratic finagling. Described by economic geographer David Harvey (2018) as a form of "universal alienation," debt peonage restricts the scope of the human imagination, foreclosing the ability of individuals to envision alternative futures by shackling their aspirations to immediate economic concerns. Young people, and graduate workers in particular, are systematically denied the ability to look forward to their futures. The effects on students' mental well-being have been disastrous. Graduate workers are roughly 2.4 to 6 times more likely than the general population to experience symptoms of depression and anxiety (Evans et al., 2018; Levecque et al., 2017). Propped up by a system of false scarcity, the bureaucratic academy resembles a microcosm of neoliberal society more broadly.

Put another way, bureaucratic capitalism kills spontaneity and stifles play. Overburdened by administrative procedures, bureaucracies transform otherwise interesting and eccentric intellectuals into ardent rule followers and joyless, bookish machines, individuals obsessed with productivity and self-advancement, yet relatively incapable of experiencing the vibrant dynamism of the outside world. Consider, for example, syllabi with their deadlines; timekeeping and payroll; citations and their management; health, dental, medical, and recreational fees; telecare appointments, parking fines, and library fees; two-factor authentication; annual performance reviews; applications for jobs, tenure, promotion, graduation, and scholarships; grants, grants, and

[2] We calculated these figures assuming a two-week vacation and nine public holidays, as well as $7,437 deducted in tuition payments (the national average for graduate workers in 2022/2023). The hourly wage for research-based master's workers and doctoral workers, without deductions in tuition payments, would amount to $10.23 and $12.32, respectively.

more grants; ad-hoc reimbursements for conferences, school trips, and seminars; educational busy-work, including discussion posts, reading responses, and role-play activities; annual paperwork for disability benefits, classroom resources, and learning accommodations. The everyday list of bureaucratic excess goes on.

These bureaucratic burdens exacerbate pre-existing tendencies endemic to capitalist development, quashing human difference and stifling creativity. For decades, disability theorists have argued that the rise of industrial capitalism, alongside the medicalization of human difference, collectively manufactured what scholars currently describe as "disability" (Oliver, 1990; Oliver & Barnes, 2010; Russell, 1998). From their view, disablement is a process rather than a substance, a dialectical relationship between an individual's impairment and the economic, environmental, and ideological structures that eject people with perceived biological, sensory, or cognitive differences from the labour process. As Marx (1867/1990) and Engels (1845/1987) explained, capitalism demands competition among both capitalists and workers, who remain in rivalry in spheres of production and employment, respectively. Capitalists maintain the extraction of relative surplus-value from workers during the workday by constantly increasing their standards of productivity, the average of which among competing enterprises reveals itself as "socially necessary labour-time." That is, capitalism's imminent tendency towards interpersonal competition, a form of dispossession, creates disability as a matter of political and economic expediency, shunning everybody incapable of producing according to socially necessary standards—perceived by employers as either "high cost" or "unproductive"—from the sphere of waged labour (Taylor, 2004).

Undoubtedly, neoliberalism, coupled with bureaucratization, has exacerbated tendencies of interpersonal competition among workers and erected structural barriers to employment for disabled people. In the academy, the effects have been particularly stark. Across Canada, disabled people are roughly half as likely as the general population to receive a postsecondary education, while neurodivergent people and people diagnosed with mental health conditions are between 17% to 41% less likely than the general population to enroll in postsecondary education (Arim & Frenette, 2019; Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2017). As educators Cynthia Bruce and Lynn Aylward (2021) have shown, Canadian universities' current disability frameworks, which employ the principle of "self-advocacy," promote the inequitable treatment of disabled people by forcing students to become part-time bureaucrats as they navigate labyrinthian, and altogether asymmetrical, bureaucratic games. University bureaucracies thereby reproduce what the late anthropologist David Graeber (2012) called "dead zones of the imagination," administrative structures that offload the interpretive labour of managers and bureaucrats onto subaltern populations, which quashes popular dissent, leads to self-blaming, and eschews tenets of participatory democracy.

These structural constraints have negatively impacted the research capabilities of everyone, emerging and established scholars alike. According to an eye-opening paper written by Michael Park, Erin Leahey, and Russell J. Funk (2023), universities are witnessing "a marked decline in disruptive science and technology over time," with scholars relying increasingly on tried-and-tested formulas—for example, by citing highly familiar, well-established knowledge—to advance their careers. The product of "an increasingly perverse academic culture," quantitative metrics for success, alongside hypercompetition, encourage unethical research practices by rewarding those who pursue quantity over quality, facilitating a counterproductive self-selection process wherein headstrong careerists flourish while sporadic innovators flounder (Edwards & Roy, 2017).

Canadian universities have, to the detriment of groundbreaking research, failed to accommodate the transhistorical reality of intellectual diversity and human difference. What occurred to disabled industrial labourers during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—that is, the erection of structural barriers to employment compounded by the demise of artisanal, craftlike labour (Dressler, 2024; Rose, 2017)—is happening once more to neurodiverse intellectual workers in information economies. Graeber (2015), a public intellectual of the highest calibre, once described the situation rather succinctly: "There was a time when academia was society's refuge for the eccentric, brilliant, and impractical. No longer. It is now the domain of professional self-marketers. As for the eccentric, brilliant, and impractical: it would seem society now has no place for them at all" (pp. 134-135).

Neoliberalism's Assault on the Self: Identification Cards, Bureaucratic Technologies, and the Medicalization of Alienation

Very few places are more bureaucratic than the modern, neoliberal university. But why neoliberalism, and why now? Harvey's (2007) influential definition identifies neoliberalism as a counterrevolutionary project orchestrated by the state to demolish welfare provisions and reaffirm the power of capital. For Harvey, neoliberalism is primarily a destructive project, "redistributive rather than generative," that ensures near-permanent economic crises to facilitate the privatization, financialization, and redistribution of hitherto public goods (p. 34). By funnelling wealth upwards, neoliberal policies make working-class life inhospitable, encouraging alienated, atomized, and poverty-stricken individuals to increase their competitive advantage on the market.

Seemingly counterintuitively, beginning in the 1970s, neoliberal policies grew coextensively with bureaucracies themselves, especially in the academy (Fisher, 2012; Graeber, 2015; Graeber, 2018). Following the implosion of Soviet-style Communism, Western governments began reorienting their universities away from "basic" and "curiosity-driven" research towards "applied" research: a form of scientific inquiry that favours incremental, quantifiable, and most importantly, profitable outcomes. The result? Intellectual inquiry stagnated, and "the technologies that emerged were in almost every case the kind that proved most conducive to surveillance, work discipline, and social control" (Graeber, 2015, pp. 128, 132). These include, for example, antidepressants like Zoloft and Prozac, data-extractive internet technologies perfected by Google and others, social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, email accounts, passwords, and, yes, even identification cards. Developments in information technology revolutionized the so-called post-industrial sphere of production, birthing a new stratum of managers, administrators, and bureaucrats—the modern-day factory overseers. The managerial and administrative classes, like the supervisors of the "dark Satanic mills" of yesteryear, are tasked by capitalists with commanding the labour of their underlings (Braverman, 1974/1998); nominally members of the working class, at least structurally, they receive compensation in salaries and wages, but are ideologically committed to valorizing the interests of finance capital (Poulantzas, 1979).

The rise of "surveillance capitalism," fuelled by the expansion of corporate bureaucracies, also introduced several gangrenous mutations into the very constitution of human subjectivity: the "social itself" became a primary domain of capitalist accumulation (Couldry, 2017, p. 184). For his part, critical theorist Gilles Deleuze (1992) diagnosed these technological afflictions during their embryonic stage. For Deleuze, under bureaucratic mass surveillance—an era preceded by the introduction of the seemingly innocuous identification card—self-optimization and constant

training came to gradually replace fixed work schedules, while passwords, algorithms, and datasets began modulating one's access to intellectual, material, and cultural resources.

Today, students, professors, and administrators flock towards time-saving devices like Artificial Intelligence to temporarily increase their competitive advantage on the market. Who can blame them? For those already suffering from the ravages of neoliberal reform—impoverished students, precarious workers, and disadvantaged minorities—techno-fixes like AI text and images offer promising avenues for self-emancipation. But even as they momentarily reduce bureaucratic burdens, these labour-saving devices exacerbate the most alienating effects of interpersonal competition, setting new standards for socially necessary labour-time while eliminating the uniquely *human* aspects of human creativity. All of these are what Graeber (2015) labelled "bureaucratic technologies," inventions that disaggregate complex human behaviours into their constituent components, transforming human beings into little more than glorified form-filling machines (p. 142).

Prior to his sudden and tragic death, Graeber (2017) once remarked that political theorist Mark Fisher "had already come up with half the ideas I thought were my own." In *Capitalist Realism*, a sobering examination of the neoliberal academy, Fisher (2009) points to the depoliticization of mental distress as a primary function of neoliberal ideology—what he called "reflexive impotence." Reflexive impotence, as an "affective regime," is a deeply felt form of alienation: a pervasive belief that far-reaching social change is either illusory or unattainable (Fisher & Gilbert, 2013). As Fisher (2009) notes, common-sense understandings of mental illness posit that symptoms of emotional distress are unfortunate but unavoidable by-products of neurochemical imbalances in the brain. The "neurochemical imbalance" hypothesis of depression, initially supported by professional organizations like the American Psychiatric Association during the 1990s and concurrently popularized by the pharmaceutical industry, has since been debunked by scientists. But, as a "zombie idea," its impact on popular discourse has been astonishing, perhaps even hegemonic (Ang, Horowitz, & Moncrieff, 2022; Healy, 2015; Moncrieff et al., 2022).

Contrary to popular opinion, however, "scientists have not identified a biological cause of, or even a reliable biomarker for, any mental disorder" (Deacon, 2013, p. 847). By reorienting broader political concerns inward, biomedical theories of mental illness, not unlike identification cards themselves, create ready-made identities for their users, transforming the psyche into a neurochemical battleground primed for the administration of pharmaceutical drugs (Lafrance & McKenzie-Mohr, 2013). Patients who subscribe to biomedical theories of mental distress, since they view their symptoms as immutable, are less likely to seek alternative treatment options: psychiatric diagnoses become self-fulfilling prophecies (Lebowitz & Applebaum, 2019). In other words, by ignoring the structural roots of students' alienation, reflexive impotence is politically immobilizing.

Harnessing the Play-Function: Ludic Disorder as an Act of Resistance

As academics, our critique of university bureaucracies, which foregrounds the disruptive potential of ludic disorder, suggests several research questions. For one, how can we alleviate the structural inequities perpetuated by neoliberal bureaucracies? Second, how might we nurture students' diverse intellectual aptitudes while cultivating innovative research? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, how can we unlock the transgressive potential of students' alienation, eschewing medicalized responses to human difference while combatting reflexive impotence?

Some disillusioned scholars might suggest the obvious: do nothing. By embracing a policy of minimum interference, a minority of academics could avoid unnecessary bureaucratic entanglements. However, this strategy, which perpetuates political apathy, would offload administrative duties onto marginalized academics, reproducing bureaucratic inequities.

Why not storm the academy with pitchforks? The answer is simple. For academics, especially students, the stakes are too high. Observers have, in recent years, witnessed the calcification of disciplinary capitalism under neoliberal regimes, which leverage techniques of surveillance and policing to pressure academics, especially non-tenured academics and graduate workers, into purveying institutional rhetoric and ignoring hot-button issues. As Graeber (2015) pointed out, bureaucracies are protected by networks of carceral violence, which promise to enact both physical and reputational damage against protestors. On the one hand, at the University of New Brunswick, the introduction of ID cards was accompanied by a parallel development: the establishment of the "Security Police." Staffed by ex-servicemen, the Security Police, led by former police chief Charles Barnett, were known to "harass" students while "protect[ing] campus property" (Film not returned, 1968; Kent, 2012, p. 23). On the other hand, students would risk their investments in money and time, as well as future earning potential, through expulsion.

One could perhaps become a better bureaucrat. By learning the rules of the game and mastering the play-world, scholars could embrace self-optimization and outdo the competition. However, uncompromising speed is unsustainable while navigating life's vicissitudes—health, family, and finances—and working harder inevitably means leaving people behind. Even union organizers, materially indebted to their occupation and ideologically committed to reproducing bureaucratic structures, sometimes ignore the uncompromising radicalism of their rank-and-file members, consolidating their privileges as a stratum of working-class professionals while pursuing piecemeal reforms over radical reformulations. Labour bureaucracies are indispensable vehicles for working-class resistance. However, they can also reproduce opaque, and sometimes impenetrable, rules and regulations (Graeber, 2015). For evidence, look no further than David Cox, the President of UNB's Student's Representative Council (SRC), who embraced "right of centre" politics and collaborated with UNB's reactionary administration during the Strax Affair. "He never seemed to know who was with him and who wasn't," writes Peter Kent (2012, p. 20), an historian who participated in and has written about the event.

The solution? Academics should learn new rules, create novel social spaces, and play different games. According to Kent (2012), the Strax Affair was both "fun" and "formative" for everybody involved (pp. 97-98). Classic studies of "social drama" and "play," informed by the role of generative disorder during routine interaction, might, therefore, provide some basic clues about the Strax Affair's central, radical thrust.

We return to theories of the "play-function," which Johan Huizinga (1938/1980) conceptualized as a fundamental principle underpinning human culture, shaping our social structures and daily behaviours. He observed the everydayness of play, denoting a childlike tendency among humans to reinsert drama and theatrics into avowedly serious activities: from sports to politics, legal systems to warfare. Societies are irrevocably game-like, and most games, Huizinga contended, share structural similarities. For one, games require rulebooks: either formal or informal documents that provide players with rules prescribing their behaviour. Games are also isolated from the temporal and spatial arrangements of the ordinary world, and they require gameboards, playgrounds, or "magic circle[s]," interpersonal environments that generate novel yet rule-bound parameters for social interaction.

For Huizinga, the play-function—a primary vehicle for human creativity—exists anterior to human culture, generating novel social arrangements through spontaneous, disorderly conduct. Outbursts of ludic disorder, which eventually produce game-like social structures, are therefore necessary for human flourishing. These game-like social structures, however, exhibit contradictory tendencies. By increasingly colonizing and thereby replacing the sphere of disorderly conduct, cultural conventions—described by Huizinga as, "A rank layer of ideas, systems of thought and knowledge doctrines, rules and regulations, moralities and conventions"—eventually envelop the play-function altogether (p. 75). Game-worlds, then, require constant innovation, particularly from rebels or trespassers, also known as "spoil-sports," who ignore cultural conventions. Spoil-sports represent an existential threat to entrenched social structures (encoded in formal rules), since they reveal their ethereal, arbitrary, and contingent qualities. "The outlaw, the revolutionary, the cabbalist," as Huizinga argued, "indeed heretics of all kinds[,] are of a highly associative if not sociable disposition, and a certain element of play is prominent in all their doings" (p. 12).

Some assessments of campus radicalism in Canada have belittled demonstrators as unserious and therefore misguided. In *Radical Campus*, partly a survey of Canada's student movement, partly an institutional history of Simon Fraser University, Hugh Johnston (2005) denigrates the would-be mutineers as "potheads" who considered "going to demonstrations … more fun than attending classes" (p. 129). Our reading proposes a different interpretation. Expounding upon what commentators have described as a penchant among campus radicals for theatrics and dramaticism in New Brunswick and elsewhere (Axelrod, 2010; Johnston, 2005; Kent, 2012; Lynch, 1968; Wilbur, 1970; Zaslov, 2007), we suggest that strategies of discombobulation were, both literally and figuratively, character-building exercises: they allowed players to transform themselves into political subjects by temporarily assuming roles and identities magnified by what Huizinga (1938/1980) described as the non-serious yet extraordinary character of games and play.

Enter Dr. Norman Strax—sessional instructor, anti-war activist, and social outcast—an expert tactician, we argue, of the arts of discombobulation.

Discombobulation Defined

Personalization describes the process wherein discombobulators dissolve bureaucracies into tangible human relationships, crosscutting official designations. Bureaucracies ultimately function by disaggregating personal and professional spheres into discrete entities, enforcing arbitrary divisions between so-called skilled and unskilled labourers. By rationalizing intraclass conflict, professionalization—personalization's antonym—deprives craftspeople of their shared interests, rendering workers politically impotent by fostering collective apathy. "What the hell can you do?" one Arts student remarked in 1968. "Apathy reigns on our side … I want my 20 credits and out" (Peppin, 1968, p. 5). The strategy of personalization attempts to dismantle these arbitrary boundaries by building alliances among people who occupy disparate professional positions: undergraduate students, graduate workers, doctoral candidates, postdoctoral researchers, sessional instructors, tenured professors, and support staff. By fostering unexpected moments of mentorship with students, personalization helps cultivate "strong nodes," human relationships that constitute the interpersonal groundwork necessary to support larger resistance movements.

By purveying naïve, seemingly innocuous questions, *befuddlement* redirects interpretive labour onto the managerial and administrative classes, illuminating "dead zones of the

imagination" (Graeber, 2012). A strategic deployment of real or feigned ignorance is an outgrowth of befuddlement, which encourages academics to employ what Graeber called "calculated ignorance," thereupon revealing administrative loopholes previously ignored by unsympathetic bureaucrats. Befuddlement, often confused for laziness or politeness, enables discombobulators to leverage feigned confusion, non-aggressive stupidity, and absurdist humour to acquire information about broader administrative structures. In other words, befuddlement temporarily transforms authority into an ally, allowing practitioners to ascend bureaucratic hierarchies through processes of relentless questioning.

Signal jamming, inspired by techniques from computer hacking and radio interference, allows academics to disrupt the circuitries of bureaucratic correspondence. These circuitries—which constitute the critical infrastructure of modern bureaucracies—create massive archives of information, allowing bureaucrats to tabulate violations, calculate transgressions, and document abnormalities. Radio jammers, like denial-of-service (DoS) attacks, function by interfering with communication networks and disrupting exchanges of information. By clogging bureaucracies with non-standard language and too many requests, signal jamming can provoke militant responses from both administrators and students, leveraging personalization's emphasis on "strong nodes" to destabilize the structures of rule-based behaviour and spark larger mass movements. As Kent (2012) notes, Strax's presence on campus functioned as a "lightning rod" or "catalyst for the radical potential that already existed" (p. 69). When transposed from a digital to an analogue or real-world milieu, signal jamming triggers an institution's immune system, catalyzing a counter-response that jeopardizes the reputation of the targeted university.

Mapping describes a process wherein people explain, document, and publish critiques of the universities where they work, live, and study. Mapping directly counteracts students' alienation by creating meaningful, public-facing research opportunities, decreasing boredom while fostering a culture of institutional critique. An outlet for scholarly muckraking, mapping encourages students to create or infiltrate alternative social spaces—including student newspapers, media cooperatives, and writing workshops—to understand power and disseminate counter-hegemonic narratives, employing didactic journalism to challenge dominant ideologies. Mapping increases in functionality when coupled with techniques like befuddlement and signal jamming, allowing discombobulators to publicize tensions festering between protestors and counter-protestors. By demystifying the publication process, mapping also increases students' participation, enriching their learning experiences while highlighting their ability to shape public discourse.

Abeyance, or the radical practice of waiting, should be deployed selectively. By targeting redundant and ineffective tasks and assignments, abeyance recentres human relationships, encouraging intellectual development while celebrating the craftlike nature of scholarly production. Practices of abeyance allow students to educate themselves about the importance of rejecting capitalist work-discipline—the economic and moral logic that calculates human value according to metrics of productivity and profit. As sociologists Janice Newson and Claire Polster (2019) note, part-time, precarious faculty are increasingly employing time-saving strategies to lighten their workloads. For example, lightweight assignments—including discussion posts, standardized tests, and hyper-brief essays—are easy to grade and complete. However, they adversely impact the experiences of students, especially graduate workers, who dislike busywork often yearn for open-ended, self-directed inquiry. Abeyance reduces bureaucratic burdens by encouraging graduate workers to temporarily ignore email and unnecessary readings, leveraging calculated laziness to pursue their own interests. Similarly, abeyance encourages professors to

prioritize longform enquiries over busyness and productivism. By celebrating leisurely activities like waiting and thinking or walking and daydreaming, abeyance promotes idleness as an essential bulwark against intellectual stagnation.

Personalization

For Strax's supporters, the University's identification cards supplanted previously informal administrative processes, portending the increasing militarization of university campuses. These "plastic-coated, colour-coded identification cards," the protestors reasoned, fomented tensions among students at the University of New Brunswick, St. Thomas University, and the Fredericton Teacher's College (White, 1968, p. 2). The movement's overarching ideology, while perhaps vaguely articulated, stressed the inherent autonomy and equality of students and professors, members of a common academic community. Commentators aptly characterized Strax's overwhelmingly non-scholastic demeanour as an assault against scholarly professionalism, exemplifying the tactic of personalization.

During his career, Dr. Norman Strax—who looked markedly different from the University's moderate academics—rejected the façade of scholarly professionalism. He regarded principles of managerial respectability as counterproductive for political organizing. Kent (2012) describes Strax as "unkempt and somewhat dirty," a soft-spoken man who wore "inappropriate dress," including "a jacket festooned with buttons and badges" (pp. 72-73). Strax's decrepit-looking Volkswagen Beetle demarcated the American academic as an eccentric outsider; covered with rust, it was equipped with one usable seat (Kent, 2012). Police had even arrested Strax once for "driving a defective car" (Wilbur, 1970). The University's administration, meanwhile, adopted an alternative approach. Chief of the Security Police Charles Barnett, for example, donned an "elaborate uniform trimmed with gold braid," reminding rulebreakers of their subservient roles (Kent, 2012, p. 24).

By erecting an informal, playful system of "public theatre," Strax's decision to kvetch with students about the ID cards represented an existential threat to the University's entrenched bureaucratic hierarchies (Kent, 2012, p. 97). Strax's Beetle and buttons—public-facing characteristics which conveyed an approachable, down-to-earth attitude—allowed the dissident to portray himself as outside the purview of institutional authority. He subtly crafted a temporary, rule-bound identity, mirroring what Huizinga (1938/1980) called "dressing up." In effect, when players establish a game-world, they recognize their experiences as particularly meaningful—as "un-serious" yet "extraordinary." Whereas "[e]very child knows perfectly well that he is 'only pretending,' or that it was 'only for fun,'" that "does not by any means prevent it from proceeding with the utmost seriousness … a devotion that passes into rapture" (Huizinga, 1938/1980, p. 8). The practice of "dressing up" established physical and symbolic distance between different teams: us and them, left and right, radicals and administrators. Students were supplanted by their characters: they played "another part"; they became "another being" (Huizinga, 1938/1980, p. 13). Radicals like Dan Weston stalked around campus wearing knee-high boots, "looking suitably revolutionary," while UNB President Colin Mackay described Lawson Hunter, a spokesperson for UNB's leftist movement, as "Lenin." And Kent (2012) contends that Alastair Robertson, acting President of the Student's Representative Council, played the role of "Robespierre or Trotsky" (p. 126). Meanwhile, the counter-protestors or "marauders"—derided by some radically-minded students as "conservative reformist[s]"—sported official UNB jackets. "You are not an individual if you wear one," one student remarked (Corbet, 1968, p. 5; Kent, 2012, p. 109). These play-like

designations provoked mounting disagreements among students, politicizing the University's previously apathetic campus.

For his part, Strax detested professional attitudes that positioned students as subservient to academic authorities. Participants demanded influence over their coursework and grading schemes, mirroring struggles for workers' control that erupted during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Bakes, 1968a, p. 3; Kent, 2012). He eschewed the tendency to valorize professional designations, befriended emerging academics considered popular among students, and openly accused administrators of treating "students [as] inferior to faculty" (Mobilization refuses, 1968, p. 1). Indeed, Strax's ideological underpinnings proved politically beneficial, as demonstrators cultivated an intellectually diverse movement, attracting first-year undergraduates, upper-year proctors, honours students, Jewish students, graduate workers, doctoral candidates, and postdoctoral researchers (Kent, 2012).

Befuddlement

During the months-long protest, Strax's supporters obeyed the principles of reasonable, orderly behaviour, practicing techniques of pacifist guerilla warfare. They employed absurdist humour to expose various bureaucratic absurdities, embracing the strategy of "befuddlement" to illuminate the hidden underbelly of administrative communication, the network of interpersonal relationships driving bureaucratic capitalism. Their peaceful approach allowed the protestors to forge alliances with the well-meaning bureaucrats who sympathized with their plight.

Counter-protestors and critics, in comparison, practiced antagonistic tactics, hurling epithets at Mobilization SDS, who nonetheless remained calm, collected, and a little perplexed. When Strax attended a teach-in about the Vietnam War in 1967, counter-protestors brought Nazi swastikas to the peaceful demonstration. Strax, however, remained unbothered, perhaps even bewildered by the response. Speaking "softly and reasonably," he convinced several counter-protestors of the importance of denouncing American atrocities in Vietnam (Kent, 2012, p. 73).

Importantly, during the "Bookie-Book Game," Strax had intentionally protected the books from being damaged. He remained perfectly "orderly" during the confrontation, avoiding unnecessary provocations. When students questioned administrators' authority, including William Stewart MacNutt, the University's Dean, the students kept their voices "carefully modulated," thereby minimizing further conflict.

If anything, Mobilization SDS' commitment to peaceful non-violence provoked further outrage among the University's administration. They attempted to stimulate an uproar by calling Strax "fascistic," privately belittling his Jewish identity (McDougall & Goldspink, 1968, p. 11). Disgruntled administrators resorted to ridiculing Mobilization SDS—an intentionally decentralized, non-hierarchical movement—anachronistically comparing them to Adolph Hitler's National Socialist Party (Kent, 2012, pp. 113, 174). When Dean MacNutt accused Mobilization SDS of creating a "public spectacle," Strax actually agreed. "Yes," he remarked, "and you're [the one] causing it" (McDougall & Goldspink, 1968, p. 11).

What's more, self-styled radicals employed absurdist humour to provide "comic relief" during otherwise tense situations (Kent, 2012, p. 96). During the "Bookie-Book Game," for example, one of Strax's supporters, a student named Peter Graham, approached an Exit Control Officer (ECO) with an unstamped book.

"Do you have an ID card?" Graham asked.

"No," the ECO responded. "I don't need one. I check books."

"How do I know that you are? You don't have an ID card to prove it."

"I'm wearing the uniform of an ECO."

"I have the uniform of an honest man," Graham concluded.

Graham proceeded to leave the Harriet Irving Library (McDougall & Goldspink, 1968, p. 11). The protestors' non-violent approach proved endearing to onlookers, as Mobilization SDS accrued sympathetic voices from within the University's bureaucracy. Professors stationed at Queen's University and the University of Toronto condemned the University's police-like response and, impressed by the Straxians' penchant for non-violence, threatened to boycott an upcoming conference (Academics score, 1968). Figures like doctoral worker Alastair Robertson collaborated with sympathetic administrators to obtain information about President Colin Mackay's private meetings. Similarly, Strax's supporters, including Lawson Hunter, Tom Murphy, and Dan Lingemann, attended late-evening meetings with bureaucrats, who "kept channels open" to monitor students' activities (Kent, 2012, pp. 105, 145).

By adopting non-violent politics, Mobilization SDS employed befuddlement as an organizational principle, exploiting simmering tensions among students to provoke militant reactions. They also proved perplexing to local authorities, including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, who remained bewildered by Strax's escapades (Hewitt, 2002). By fraternizing with the enemy, Strax and others navigated the bureaucratic hierarchy while extracting information from friendly administrators, supplying the movement with insider information.

Signal Jamming

Strax's infamous "Bookie-Book Game" of September 1968, as an experiment in "existential politics," might have dissipated with limited fanfare (Kent, 2012, p. 104). As one critic remarked, the movement had attracted a conglomerate of unserious troublemakers: "an assorted collection of rabble-rousers and sensationalists, nitwits, [and] semi-hippies" (Lockhart, 1968, p. 5). Yet, contrary to popular expectations, Strax's movement proved politically impactful. Administrators concluded that Strax's "Bookie-Book Game" had overburdened the Harriet Irving Library's administrative functions by "disrupting the normal functioning of the university," causing unnecessary and revenue-draining commotion in hallways and offices, courtrooms and newspapers (Kent, 2012; Wilbur, 1970). The disruption, emblematic of the strategy of signal jamming, prompted an immune-like response from onlookers, including administrators and counter-protestors. The Straxians erected a "magic circle" in Liberation 130 (Huizinga, 1938/1980), engaging in a kind of reputational standoff that overpowered the University's administrative functions.

The "Bookie-Book Game" triggered a response and counter-response helmed by two antagonistic yet co-dependent teams: the Straxians and counter-protestors. Whereas, in Huizinga's (1938/1980) vocabulary, the former were spoil-sports, malcontents who established a revamped game-world by ignoring the University's rules and regulations, "shatter[ing] the play-world itself," the latter were cheaters, dishonest brokers who attempted to secure a victory by gaming the system (p. 11). As Huizinga argued, cheaters inadvertently reaffirm the "play-world" by pretending to learn the rules of the game and thereby acknowledging their existence. "The rules of the [Bookie-

Book Game],” as one journalist explained, looked remarkably simple; the game required players to “take books from the stacks to the circulation desk and try to sign them out” (UNB students upset, 1968, p. 13). The University’s administration, desperate to redirect students’ concerns into “more normal channels,” proved unwilling to tolerate Strax’s demonstrations (Kent, 2012, pp. 27, 29). Bureaucrats decided to “cheat.” Deploying repressive tactics, they sparked a feedback loop wherein repression fuelled resistance.

Supporters of Strax, namely mathematics lecturer Gerald Pacholke, defended Strax’s innocence by demonstrating that the “Bookie-Book Game” required inputs from both students and administrators to function. Pacholke amassed 135 books at the Harriet Irving Library on October 7. Unlike Strax’s protest, however, Pacholke failed to stimulate an uproar, since the University’s administrators refused to acknowledge the demonstration. As *The Brunswickan* explained,

> There was no confrontation with the administration, library staff, or security police. Pacholke said he tried it as an experiment to show that if there is no confrontation there is no reason to close the library. He said it proved Dr. Strax alone did not cause serious enough disruption to close the library and the [University’s] administration must share equal responsibility for any disruption (Bulletin, 1968, p. 4; UNB students upset, 1968).

One could assume that, had the University ignored Strax’s “Bookie-Book Game,” the incident would have ended without causing further disruption. Instead, feelings of indignation and exuberance sparked a resistance movement centred around popular self-rule. On September 27, Mobilization SDS leveraged mounting tensions between students and administrators to establish a revamped play-world, or “magic circle,” in Room 130 of Loring Bailey Hall; the occupation (or encampment, to apply a modern valence) demarcated the office as separate from ordinary, rule-bound behaviour (Huizinga, 1938/1980).

Over forty-six days, campus radicals, armed with weapons like brightness and loudness, fostered an atmosphere of “small-scale anarchy” (Lockhart, 1968, p. 5). There, according to Kent (2012), Strax’s supporters reimagined themselves as “totally free individuals, outside the reach of any institutional authority and united in defence of their autonomy against external enemies” (p. 97). Huizinga (1938/1980) himself defined playfulness as an exhibition of human freedom; perhaps unsurprisingly, those responsible for the disruption were embroiled within Canada’s student movement, proponents of which adopted an irreverent and playful maxim: “Workers of the world, have fun!” (Palmer, 2009, p. 69). They maintained contact with members of Mobilization SDS, printing propaganda materials that stimulated unrest among onlookers. “The mimeograph machine churn[ed] out reams of paper spattered with black type,” *Brunswickan* columnist Tom Murphy (1968a) wrote on October 8. “Messages. Information. Data … The truth machine churned away” (p. 12). The occupants decorated Liberation 130 with red and black flags, the colours of socialism and anarchism; their voices conjoined into a cacophonous and dissonant timbre: “Guitars strumming, people singing, voices attuned and in tune (sometimes)” (Murphy, 1968a).

The disruption, centred around principles of playfulness and communitarianism, threatened to overwhelm the University’s bureaucratic channels, as participants established an “underworld” (Goffman, 1961)—an underground network of rule-breaking sociability—that impeded the institution’s day-to-day operations. Students redirected the weapons of disciplinary capitalism against themselves, leveraging the province’s corporate newspapers to force the University’s

implosion. Administrators were concerned about maintaining the "public image of the university," which meant showcasing "corporate loyalty" to Lord Beaverbrook and K.C. Irving (Kent, 2012, p. 113). Both the "Bookie-Book Game" and the Straxians' decision to occupy Liberation 130 generated an absurd, eye-catching scene. Indeed, one journalist, writing for *Canadian Dimension*, a leftist outlet, described the showdown between Strax and the University, as well as the dozens of students and professors who supported Strax's antics, as a "three-ring circus performance" (Wilbur, 1970, p. 10). Others suggested that "drunken [counter-protestors]" had "[brought] dishonour to [UNB]"—known among locals as the University of New "Booze" (Ip Se Dixit, 1968). Since corporate universities function as proving grounds for the professional and managerial classes (Graeber, 2015), the proceedings' markedly playful character appeared particularly appalling to donors and capitalists, as well as wealthy and well-respected parents and alumni—the University's economic backbone.

Signal jamming had enabled a determined yet modest, ragtag cadre of disenfranchised students to amass a sizeable following, generating a criminalizing discourse that tarnished the University's reputation. The resistance strategy, like a virus, required that players be capable of triggering the University's immune response without killing the movement entirely. The Strax Affair garnered between 30 and 100 rank-and-file members, meaning that "[a] small number of active demonstrators had the support of a larger number of sympathizers" (Kent, 2012, p. 102; Webber, 2008). By overwhelming the bureaucracy with irrelevant information, Mobilization SDS provoked militant responses from bureaucrats, allowing students to question fundamental assumptions about Canadian society.

Mapping

The Brunswickan, serving as a public forum of sorts, became an epicentre for student radicalism, energizing the protest movement while inspiring iconoclastic debate. Strax's supporters—an eclectic blend of Marxists, anarchists, social democrats, civil libertarians, and humanist liberals—infiltrated the publication's pages, crafting statements ranging from lukewarm acceptance to ardent support. Strax's detractors, meanwhile, criticized the movement as hopelessly utopian, fuelling what Kent (2012) calls the "sensitiz[ation of] public opinion" (p. 78). Publicizing the Strax Affair in both mainstream and alternative channels exacerbated reputational damages against the University's administration.

Students recalled using *The Brunswickan* to challenge administrative overreach through realms of communication and publicity. According to Kent (2012), *The Brunswickan* provided "relatively balanced coverage of [the Affair's] events and opinions," with student journalists competing against mainstream outlets to shape public opinion (p. 135). *Brunswickan* newcomer Dave Jonah described the publication as "the spiritual home, the theological centre," of the protest movement. The publication, Tom Murphy remarked, was "a real collective of its own," supplying students with an autonomous outlet for communicative action (pp. 67-68). Students succeeded in holding the University of New Brunswick accountable by documenting instances of bureaucratic violence, including when agents of the Security Police harassed unsuspecting students, and when Fredericton police officers allegedly assaulted pro-Strax demonstrators (Film confiscated, 1968: Film not returned, 1968; Forty-eight, 1968; Murphy, 1968b).

The Brunswickan, having sparked some heightened interest among the Canadian public, attracted mainstream outlets which arrived to investigate the commotion. Students used *The*

Brunswickan to compete against the province's Irving-owned press: a hegemony-making-machine fine-tuned to advance the interests of corporate capital. The technique of mapping ensured that journalists could leverage administrators' heavy-handed response to the occupation of Liberation 130 to threaten the University's credibility and reputation. Mainstream publications like the *Kings County Record* in Sussex and the *Hartland Observer* criticized the protestors' adoption of obscene language, contending that Strax had "destroyed" students' admiration for their professors, an attachment that bordered on idolatry (Nasty four-letter words, 1968, p. 2; Kent, 2012). The Strax Affair's proceedings were reprinted by student newspapers stationed across the country, prompting nationwide debates among university-aged, would-be radicals about UNB's propensity for "undemocracy" (Lambert, 1968, p. 4; Police take, 1968; Protest continues, 1968; UNB students upset, 1968).

Creating effective student publications requires moving beyond the rhetoric of "editorial neutrality," an approach currently practiced by the modern-day *Brunswickan*, where rundowns on culture and entertainment serve as the publication's foremost product. The ideology of editorial neutrality, an outgrowth of the early twentieth century—the heyday of monopoly capitalism—only emerged after corporate interests had already seized the country's newspapers. During World War One, the Canadian state undermined the viability of small-scale publications by censoring socialist and foreign-language outlets, as technological developments and mounting overhead costs generated a "high mortality [rate]" for labour journals (Elliot, 1948, p. 220; Kealey, 1992; Sotiron, 1997). A burgeoning yet precarious subculture of radical publications, a "proletarian public," survived during the interwar period, although working-class propagandists struggled to expand their readership (Hasenbank, 2019). The rhetoric of editorial neutrality, therefore, tended to emerge from the ashes of editorial diversity.

Yet, if properly coordinated, alternative media outlets, including student newspapers and media cooperatives, could serve as important bulwarks preventing further corporate-bureaucratic encroachment. Student journalists could hold universities accountable by publishing critiques and investigative reports about their institutions; forming student-led writing-workshops; and publishing narratives about people experiencing bureaucratic violence. Freedom of Information (FOI) requests could, likewise, bolster the of critiques of discombobulators by providing them with data and correspondence hidden behind administrative barriers. As always, Strax's supporters offered relevant advice concerning the merits of communicative action. "But isn't a university supposed to be a vocal point for ideas?" asked *Brunswickan* columnist Roger Bakes (1968b, p. 2). "Don't students come to university, partly, to absorb and reject new ideas?" These publications, we suggest, could familiarize disenfranchised, alienated students with the publication process, bolstering their self-confidence as political subjects while offering public-facing research opportunities for those enamoured with craftlike labour.

Abeyance

The occupation of Liberation 130 provoked violent responses from exasperated counter-protestors. Armed with makeshift weapons, counter-protestors damaged campus property and attacked Strax's supporters. The University's administration, however, proved unwilling to interrupt the assailants. By ignoring the counter-protestors, bureaucrats practiced a reactionary form of abeyance, deploying their intentional laziness to their advantage.

The occupation of Liberation 130 reached a crescendo on Halloween night, when legions of drunken counter-protestors—outfitted with an armoury of ramshackle projectiles, including rocks, bottles, apples, tomatoes, and eggs—launched an assault against Strax's supporters. As students erected barricades and barriers, they entrenched divisions between different "teams." Protestors and counter-protestors organized an impromptu game of 'cops and robbers'; indeed, the battlefield appeared reminiscent of Chris Columbus's 1990 film *Home Alone*. As one participant recalled, "Those who can't stay are out—the door locked, barred, chained. Oh yes the floor outside has been smeared with grease" (Kent, 2012, p. 108). At eight o'clock sharp, roughly two hundred counter-protestors, most of whom were geology, forestry, and business students, arrived at Loring Bailey Hall. Outside, shattered windows covered the game-world, a campus-turned-warzone, with shards and flakes of glass. Disgruntled students began ascending the building with ladders. Chanting "Kill Strax," they lobbed homophobic slurs towards the occupants, calling them "Queers" (Ip Se Dixit, 1968, p. 12). As the Straxians took cover, enveloped by near-total darkness, canisters of homemade chemical weapons entered Liberation 130 beneath the doorway, their smoky tendrils causing widespread nausea (Kent, 2012).

Where were the Security Police? Kent (2012) surmises that Chief Charles Barnett had ordered the Security Police to avoid Loring Bailey Hall on Halloween night. According to Kent, the University's administration had likely concocted a "concerted plan" to terminate the demonstration (p. 110). By temporarily abandoning their duties, the administration had leveraged their intentional laziness to advance the University's political objectives.

Several hours later, a plumbing mishap caused a deluge of water to inundate Liberation 130. Firsthand witness Tom Murphy, writing for the *Brunswickan*, accused the University's administration of exacerbating the effects of the flood to displace the occupants. According to Murphy, the Security police—who initially refused to call a plumber—proved unwilling to assist the occupants as they worked for roughly four hours to prevent further damage (Murphy, 1968b). They also refused to unlock the office below Liberation 130 for nearly an hour, causing sustained flooding.

The University's administration, we suggest, employed a reactionary form of abeyance designed to demoralize Strax's supporters. By weaponizing their intentional inactivity, the administration supported an assault against Strax's sympathizers—all without having actively collaborated with the assailants. The University's strategy, however, proved futile. Demonstrators practiced their own abeyance—abandoning their coursework and pausing their studies to support Strax and the protestors. Importantly, the occupation's emphasis on non-work encouraged the Straxians, who established an educational environment centred around values of cooperation and collaboration, to eschew capitalist work-discipline. Students recalled feeling thoroughly liberated by the occupation. "What a week," one first-year student named Franz Martin remarked. "No studies at all. I feel free though. It was a very educational experience. Forced to know oneself" (Kent, 2012, p. 99). Strax's allies had organized a form of radical abeyance by reappropriating the reactionary strategy employed by the University for purposes of resistance and transgression.

Conclusion: Why Not Flee?

The University of New Brunswick terminated the contract of Dr. Normal Strax—nuclear physicist, Jewish radical, and American firebrand—on July 1, 1969. That year, Strax retreated from academia to pursue an agrarian lifestyle. He occupied a modest cabin, valued at $800, on Royal

Road outside of Fredericton's northern boundary. "I don't need money," Strax told *The Brunswickan*. "I eat simply and can make any necessary money from the potato harvest" (Strax claims, 1968). Years later, Strax returned to the United States to accept a position at Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Indiana. He died in 2002.

Interpreting the Strax Affair during the twenty-first century, over fifty years later, requires an examination of ludic disorder. Huizinga (1938/1980) argued that, by rejecting the boundaries of ordinary, rule-bound behaviour, play-communities often establish permanent afterlives. Participants become entranced by sharing the experience of "[being] apart together" (p. 12). Spontaneous play, in other words, affects social relations and fuels subversive communities. How might we count and tally the Strax Affair's victories? Were they numerous, solitary, or somewhere in between? John Braddock (1969), a journalist, suggests that student-led militancy at the University of New Brunswick helped trigger similar demonstrations at other universities in Eastern Canada (Saint Mary's, Dalhousie, Memorial, and the Université de Moncton). Strax succeeded in radicalizing UNB's formerly apolitical campus, commentators generally agree (Kent, 2012; Tremblay, 2010). Mobilization SDS, wedded to its ideological hodgepodge of anarchism and socialism, catalyzed aftereffects that extended beyond the walls of the University of New Brunswick. As its rank-and-file members graduated, leaving UNB, they established the New Brunswick Socialists in December 1969. The Socialists became the "driving force behind the creation" of the New Brunswick Waffle, a Trotskyist organization. The socialists were incorporated into the provincial New Democratic Party in September 1970, disbanding in November 1971 (Webber, 2008). Among students attending the University of New Brunswick today, the Strax Affair prompts short-form explorations from student journalists and remains a constant source of inspiration (Bunce, 2021; Chisholm, 2018).

Take another example: Liberation 130 inspired Dan Weston's lifelong commitment to anti-poverty activism, which generated victories for Canada's working class (Kent, 2012). In 1983, Weston founded the Fredericton Anti-Poverty Organization (FAPO), an activist network that practices the organizational principles of mutual aid to provide low-income families in New Brunswick with emergency services. The Organization, a byproduct of the Strax Affair, emerged among rank-and-file members of Mobilization SDS (Dan Weston Runs, 2014). Alongside similar organizations like the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, the FAPO promotes a structural understanding of poverty rooted in Marxist political economy, repoliticizing systemic issues normally considered the product of personal failure (Palmer & Heroux, 2016; Rashid, 2015). Consequently, FAPO works to combat what Fisher (2009) called "reflexive impotence"; it leverages the generative potential of workers' alienation to advance principles of economic and social justice.

What about present-day concerns? Why not flee, as Strax ultimately did? Might Strax have encouraged disillusioned scholars to return to the countryside, where they could avoid the alienating effects of neoliberal and bureaucratic encroachment, namely hyperstimulation and over-competition? Indeed, for some academics, the appeal of reclusive agrarianism—of academic disengagement—are palpable. Yet scholarly production continues, fuelled by the exploitation of students' infatuation with ostensibly unalienated labour. Emerging academics, we suggest, ultimately deserve employment opportunities untainted by the political constraints imposed by neoliberal bureaucracies. Mounting an effective counter-offensive, we contend, requires that academics become markedly playful. That means embracing strategies of ludic disorder.

The neoliberal university, with its bureaucracy and network of carceral violence, is today expanding more quickly than ever. When the University of New Brunswick partnered with the Fredericton Police Force in September 2023, they travelled door-to-door, distributing pamphlets threatening to reprimand people caught attending parties deemed untoward or illegal. That month, the University enacted "increased police presence, surveillance, and enforcement." The partnership between authorities in education and policing has functioned to criminalize students' relationships and networks of sociability, which, as the legacy of the Strax Affair demonstrates, are necessary to fuel democratic resistance. By contributing to the increasing militarization of university campuses, an escalation first experienced during the global wave of protests in 1968, the partnership represents an insidious attack against student freedoms, fomenting a transition from consent to coercion characteristic of neoliberal governance.

Canada's neoliberal functionaries and ideologues, using similar tactics, have also undermined student freedoms by overseeing the crushing of peaceful demonstrations on university campuses beginning in late 2023 and continuing into early 2024. Thousands of Canadian students reacted to Israel's onslaught against Palestine, which began decades earlier but escalated in October, by organizing marches, walkouts, and teach-ins. However, one strategy has, throughout the movement's course, eclipsed all others. Students have chosen the modest encampment—a playful kind of protest meant to tarnish the reputation of a university and recapture a portion of the commons—to express their frustrations. Canadian and American students, morally outraged by Western support for Israeli apartheid, have drawn parallels between the settler-colonial legacy of North America and Israel's policies abroad, both of which have imposed patterns of elimination and dispossession upon colonized peoples. As students erected their columns of tarps and tents, bureaucrats responded with repression; as protestors organized for peace, administrators countered with violence. Universities have depicted the motivations of student protestors as criminal and therefore illegitimate—itself a central tactic in Israel's eliminatory campaign in Palestine (Khalidi, 2013)—thereby proving Graeber's (2015) observation: "Police are bureaucrats with weapons" (p. 73). The demonstrations, we think, have proven remarkably discombobulatory, forcing public institutions to overplay their cards, illuminating the contradictions inherent to contemporary university bureaucracies under neoliberalism—that is, public institutions formally dedicated to the public good but practically unaccountable to the public interest.

Have student encampments actually worked? Perhaps untangling an example would suffice to answer. At UNB Saint John, located on the Bay of Fundy in Southern New Brunswick, a small collective of students and professors established, in May 2024, a temporary, one-tent encampment, which they built on Wednesdays and took down at four o'clock in the afternoon. Whereas the protest was both non-violent and undeniably quaint, the University's response was comparatively inflammatory. The President released a statement clarifying that, first, "Expressing hate speech [was] not protected in Canada," and, second, "Violence [would] not be tolerated at [UNB]" (Mazerolle, 2024). He proceeded to direct the Fredericton police to issue a trespassing notice, forcing protestors to disband the encampment (Workman et al., 2024a). Professors countered by denouncing the President's statement. They concluded that administrators had delegitimized the protest movement *ipso facto*, producing a "criminalizing discourse" which "associate[d] things like protests, including the [en]camp[ment]s, with a kind of violence" (Cohen, 2024; Workman et al., 2024b).

The President's statement reaffirmed the University's ahistorical and counterfactual depiction of protest movements as both ineffective and counterproductive; they decided, as it were,

to pronounce the "end of history." The dispute provoked a flurry of emails and communication among faculty and staff, alongside a wave of both news and opinion pieces in mainstream and alternative outlets (Cox, 2024; Koch, 2024). Students and professors alike—members of a common academic community—debated the merits of the encampment, triggering an immune-like response that achieved significant communicative impacts disproportionate to its meagre size.

Encampments reveal the ideological and political bankruptcy of universities intent on making facile appeals to "institutional neutrality." How might public institutions remain ideologically neutral, students have asked, while also providing material support for genocidal regimes abroad? Student encampments have forced philanthropists to consider withholding investments from universities in Canada and the United States (Mendleson, 2024; Nerkar, Copeland, & Farrell), with several institutions having reached agreements with protestors over disclosure and divestment from Israeli companies (deHahn, 2024; Shetty, 2024), and dozens of student and faculty associations agreeing to boycott Israeli academic institutions (Who supports BDS, 2024).

Still, the weapons of neoliberal, corporate universities are becoming increasingly proficient; as scholars, we share a duty to blunt them. The strategy of discombobulation, we think—composed of interrelated tactics including personalization, befuddlement, signal jamming, mapping, and abeyance—might be capable of helping prevent or mitigate further conquest, reminding scholars about the uniquely playful possibilities of higher education. Discombobulation has potential, especially as bureaucrats continue to overreact. But perhaps their clumsiness might create moments of playfulness capable of revealing the contradictions inherent to university bureaucracies, unleashing and inflaming a ludic power to disrupt.

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