Cultural Studies should be... unsettled

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Several people have asked for the text of my 3-minute plenary talk at the CSA. Bruce Burgett, the CSA president, asked CSA members to contribute to the plenary by responding to this prompt:

- Cultural Studies should...
- Cultural Studies is...
- Cultural Studies could...

I approached this with my own idiosyncratic biography, anxieties, and hopes in mind. It is not meant to be taken seriously. I also wanted to approach it as a sort of Latour litany. Here is what I said:

- Cultural Studies should be unkempt, unsavory, disturbing.
- It should speak Spanish to French philosophers.
- It should quote Marx in board meetings.
- It should swear in polite company.
- It should wear muddy boots and drink whiskey in the art gallery.
- It should take pleasure in popular culture when others are critical, and it should critique pop culture when others get too comfortable.
- Cultural studies should not resign itself to adjunct positions, but it should instead agitate for benefits and full-time work for contingent faculty, as well as faculty unions and faculty governance.
- Cultural studies should never just say “Race, Class, and Gender” as if they were Hail Marys that absolve us of sin.
- It should not repeat things as if they were mantras. It should instead question how such repetitions arise.
- CS should infiltrate other fields, steal ideas from them, change them from within like double agents.
- CS should point out who’s actually doing the work at the catered party. Hint: it’s not the host.
- CS should theorize about the world as it can be, not just the world as it is.
CS should read those theorists and authors who are declared “off limits” by other fields.
CS should synthesize ideas that everyone knows are irreconcilable.
CS should pirate everything it possibly can get away with.
CS should give its knowledge away to anyone who wants it.
CS should do interviews with journalists.
CS should do interviews with Bill O’Reilly and tell him to shut up for once.
CS should regularly declare where stuff comes from.
CS should be a tour guide to where stuff is dumped.
CS should keep secrets and be anonymous, and work behind the scenes.
CS should make animated GIFs and wear day glow clothes.
It should not limit itself to 140 characters.
It should not have a Facebook profile or a Linkedin account.
It should not go to conferences to network, but rather go to conferences to drop off socialist propaganda.
It should go to socialist meetings and drop off libertarian propaganda.
It should put political organizing on its CV.
It shouldn’t play so many video games.
It should make video games.
It should be methodologically anarchistic.
It should study boring things and find beauty in them.
It should study beautiful things and find terror in them.
When Cultural Studies speaks, presidents should choose early retirement.
Cultural studies should be: unsettled.