GATEKEEPERS OF THE ACADEMIC DISCOURSE COMMUNITY: A Play

[The scene: a small table at the front of a classroom in a small midwestern university during the EmmLA. The classroom is small and undistinguished; perhaps it is located in the back corner of some anonymous building buried in a relatively untrafficked corner of a quad. RACHEL, KATE, and JASON K. are sitting at a desk; in front of them, KIM shuffles through a pile of papers. This could be the end of a panel discussion, this could be an interview, we’re not sure. RACHEL looks sure of herself, yet vaguely apprehensive. JASON looks bored and angry. KATE looks chipper.]

CHRIS: Rachel, could you tell me how your work responds to, or establishes itself in, the critical tradition of the last half-century?

RACHEL: The move from a structuralist account in which capital is understood to structure social relations in relatively homologous ways to a view of hegemony in which power relations are subject to repetition, convergence, and rearticulation brought the question of temporality into the thinking of structure, and marked a shift from a form of Althusserian theory that takes structural totalities as theoretical objects to one in which the insights into the contingent possibility of structure inaugurate a renewed conception of hegemony as bound up with the contingent sites and strategies of the rearticulation of power.¹

It thus relativizes discourse not just to form—that familiar perversion of the modernist; nor to authorial intention—that conceit of the romantics; nor to a foundational world beyond discourse—that desperate grasping for a separate reality of the mystic and scientist alike; nor even to history and ideology—those refuges of the hermeneuticist; nor even less to language—that hypostasized abstraction of the linguist; nor, ultimately, even to discourse—that Nietzschean playground of world-lost signifiers of the structuralist and grammatologist, but to all or none of these, for it is anarchic, though not for the sake of anarchy but because it refuses to become a fetishized object among objects—to be dismantled, compared, classified, and neutered in that parody of scientific scrutiny known as criticism.²

KIM: Kate?

KATE: I like puppies!

KIM: mmmmmkay...Jason?

JASON: Look, boss, I know this is bullshit, you know this is bullshit, you’ve read my work, you’ve got my recommendations, why don’t we cut the crap and you just give me the job, okay?

¹ Butler, Judith. “Further Reflections on the Conversations of Our Time.” Diacritics (1997). For academics of a conservative tendency, this is (officially) the joke that keeps on giving – the stained blue dress, if you will, of academic prose. Still, it is a pretty crappy paragraph, sentence.

KIM: Well, I was particularly interested in the relationship of cultural memory to the Freudian notion of the unheimlich and how you tied it to the Transformers reruns you claim, in this most recent publication, to have watched instead of attending your 20th-century American Lit seminar...

JASON: Yeah, that stuff, totally...

KIM: ...and noted the strong current of rissentiment that was created at this site of resistance, your couch – the Cheetos –

JASON: [couldn’t care less] Yeah, exactly. What you said. Y’know, resentments, Cheetos, I’m into all that stuff...

KIM: Fascinating.

RACHEL: [begins to panic] I have an article!

KIM: Of course, Rachel. Tell me about your work.

RACHEL: Following a deconstructive reading, the article suggests that the ethnographic text should instead open itself to the limit and should remark the radical loss it implies as an ethical opening of and questioning by the other, because this is the limit where the name of ‘Man’ is inscribed as the name of the native informant.\(^3\)

KATE: I like to sing!

KIM: Jason, you list German as your second language. May we converse in German for a short period?

JASON: No.

KIM: Excellent.

KATE: Boys are icky! And gross.

RACHEL: [really sweating it now] Total presence breaks on the univocal predication of the exterior absolute the absolute existent (of that of which it is not possible to univocally predicate an outside, while the equivocal predication of the outside of the absolute exterior is possible of that of which the reality so predicated is not the reality, viz., of the dark/of the self, the identity of which is not outside the absolute identity of the outside...). This is the real exteriority of the absolute outside! the reality of the absolutely unconditioned absolute outside univocally predicated of the dark: the light univocally predicated of the darkness! the shining ... light ... uh ... univocally ... predicated\(^4\) ... Aaagh! [Rachel collapses]

KIM: Thank you all.

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