

Judith Butler notes for quet2011 * 6 October 2011

The winner of the [Bad Writing Contest](#) for 1998 (with Homi Bhabha coming in second!):

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.

common sense

common language

language/grammar produces and constrains our sense of the world

popular culture/popular ideas

jargon

accessibility?

difficulty/politics of discomfort

translation

critical (being/thinking critically)

“new”/“different”

Sullivan: “Queer” as the endlessly mutating token of non-assimilation by reflect a certain bourgeois aspiration to always be *au courant*” **What are the dangers of promoting the unconventional/difficult/always new?** (see “Values of Difficulty” 202)

Judith Butler in different registers?

I believe it is important that intellectuals with a sense of social responsibility be able to shift registers and to work at various levels, to communicate what they're communicating in various ways ("Changing the Subject")

register one: an op-ed for the New York Times

No doubt, scholars in the humanities should be able to clarify how their work informs and illuminates everyday life. Equally, however, such scholars are obliged to question common sense, interrogate its tacit presumptions and provoke new ways of looking at a familiar world.

register two: an interview with jac

It may well be that we want to construct a fiction called "the public sphere," or a fiction called "common sense," or a fiction called "accessible meaning" that would allow us to think and feel for a moment as if we all inhabit the same linguistic world. What does it mean to dream of a common sense? What does it mean to want that today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when there's enormous conflict at the level of language? When Serbian and Croatian are now claiming they are separate languages? When speaking even in a Berkeley classroom means speaking across inflection, across dialect, across genres of academic writing to students for whom English is very often a second language? Every classroom I've ever been in is a hermeneutic problem. It's not as if there's a "common" language. I suppose if I were to speak in the language of the television commercial, I might get a kind of uniform recognition--at least for a brief moment--but I'm not going to be able to presuppose a common language in my classroom.

register three: a book chapter

assumes the status of "common" language, who polices the "common," and what uses of language are thereby ruled out as uncommon or, indeed, unintelligible? Adorno thus claimed that a critical theory must use language in ways that call into question its everyday assumptions, precisely because some of the most problematic views about reality have become sedimented in everyday parlance. His worry was that to speak in ways that are already accepted as intelligible is precisely to speak in ways that do not make people think critically, ways that accept the status quo and do not make use of the resource of language to rethink the world radically.

Of course, one political response to such a view is to claim that to reach people and to have effects one must write in an accessible and popular way. And perhaps it is that Adorno fails to understand the critical or subversive potential within consumer culture itself. But is he also making another point about criticality that might be separated from his claim about consumer culture? Is he telling us that the moment in which understanding is challenged and risked is the one in which a critical perspective emerges? Is this not the moment, the occasion, when I come to recognize that it is my ignorance, and my tenacious hold on ignorance, that dictates what I will come to call communicable knowledge? What does it say about me when I insist that the only knowledge I will validate is one that appears in a form that is familiar to me, that answers my need for familiarity, that does not make me pass through what is isolating, estranging, difficult, and demanding?