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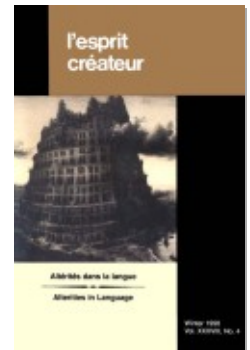
*A Poetics*, and: *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* (review)

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## Book Reviews

Charles Bernstein. *A Poetics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992. Pp. 232.

Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein, eds. *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*. Carbondale/Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ., 1984, 1997. Pp. 295.

A rather delicious ambiguity presides over Charles Bernstein's *A Poetics* even before we reach the first essay in the collection. The title as I have just cited it appears on the book's first flyleaf, but immediately after the table of contents the title is printed as "a p o e t i c s," with equal spaces between the letters, that is, as one word. *A Poetics*, a certain, particular poetics, that of one of America's foremost innovators in poetry, is thus rendered as a-poetics, perhaps even as apoetical. While this may be but a coincidence, and perhaps a bit of luck for traditionalists who would rather not hear of such a "poetics," it is perhaps also telling for the poetics the book puts forth, a poetics that can hardly be understood in the conventional sense of the term: a(-)poetics. For what Bernstein theorizes (if that is the right word), and what is enacted by many of the pieces in *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, that landmark publication selecting the majority of the diverse writings published in the magazine under the same title, is a poetry and poetics that would perform the "aversion of conformity in the pursuit of new forms" (1), a poetry and poetics of dissent, a poetry and poetics that would pursue this rupturing of the conventional through a self-conscious formal innovation and testing of the limits of language, from grammar and syntax to punctuation, spelling, and the effects of sound, sounding out the fissures and spaces in both the written and spoken word.

While such foregrounding of artifice, as Bernstein calls it, may well be familiar, the pieces collected in *A Poetics* are remarkable not only for the ever-changing spin they put on language, but also for expanding our sense of the consequences of this rethinking of poetic form(s) in the broadest sense. This is clear from the suggestive verse essay on "anti-absorptive" poetry—poetry comprised of "contradictory logic, multiple tonalities, polyrhythms" (22), and that as such resists "illusionistic" reading (42) and any attempt to absorb (captivate, "take in") the reader just as it resists becoming (self-)absorbed in any ideology—, to a meditation on the role of time in video games, to a consideration of Pound's poetry and politics. In fact, it is perhaps in forming a bridge between poetics and politics that Bernstein's book has the most to offer literary theory and criticism. While this concern is obviously linked to movements such as the New Historicism and the beginnings of cultural studies, Bernstein eschews any facile theory of an evasion of history and any reactionary stance in relation to Pound's fascism or WW II, for instance. Rather, the exploration of new poetic and linguistic forms here offers the possibility of a resistance to what we might term a certain hegemony. In this, not least, Bernstein, like the contributors to the "Writing and Politics" section of *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, points out that poetry may offer a certain alternative to, or at least a critique of, capitalist culture in such a way as to represent a liberating potential, so that poetry emerges as not only in-formed by the historical and political but as forming a certain political response and imperative as well. This is not a naive formalism but a very serious challenge to any attempt to reduce poetry and (in) all its forms to a dominant (cultural) ideology. Perhaps a(-)politics of a(-)poetics.

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Evelyne Grossman. *Artaud/Joyce. Le corps et le texte*. Paris: Nathan, coll. Le texte à l'œuvre, 1996. Pp. 240.

En rapprochant les noms d'Artaud et de Joyce, Evelyne Grossman n'entend pas se livrer à une étude d'influence littéraire étayée par quelques convergences biographiques. Sa démarche