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Artaud/Joyce. Le corps et le texte (review)

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L'Esprit Créateur, Volume 38, Number 4, Winter 1998, pp. 143-144 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/esp.2010.0415>



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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

comparatiste, soulignant la "parenté" qui "relie leur conception de l'écriture", situe les deux écrivains "au cœur de cette crise moderne des identités qui affecte les liens entre le corps et le psychisme", où les notions d'auteur et de lecteur vacillent. Ces pratiques scripturales ouvrent en effet un espace de lecture nouveau; elles affectent leur destinataire et le décomposent, la relation qu'elles suggèrent exigeant de sa part un engagement subjectif qui bouleverse son statut, modifie sa posture et son regard.

Cette réflexion initiale sur l'acte de lecture, indissociable désormais de l'acte d'écriture, se fonde sur une même injonction et une même nécessité exprimées par Artaud et par Joyce: donner un corps vivant à une pensée impropre (Artaud), prendre forme infiniment au-delà des corps pourrissants (Joyce). Les réponses, différentes et singulières, que l'un et l'autre apportent dans leurs œuvres (réfection du corps humain, évidemment de la langue commune, prolifération des mots et dissémination du sens) structurent thématiquement et chronologiquement cette étude.

La question de l'engendrement du corps dans l'écriture, "corps-texte" et "corps en langues", motive chez ces auteurs un processus de désindividuation. Il s'agit pour Artaud d'introduire une "discordance" entre discours et corps pour qu'advienne, en deçà du langage, une autre langue venue d'un être impersonnel. Ce "discord" (le mot est emprunté à Hölderlin) se déploie d'abord dans l'espace théâtral, puis il se prolonge sur les scènes mythiques et ethnologiques d'*Héliogabale* et des *Tarahumaras*, à la recherche d'un autre sujet, "où le Je n'est plus que le conglomerat provisoire et mouvant de toutes les voix qui le débordent".

La *transformatio* du corps déchu et périssable en corps d'écriture inaugure, chez Joyce, une longue dissolution de "nos subjectivités ordinaires" et de ce qui les constitue. Se perdant dans le dédale des identités, le sujet joycien se défait de son histoire et de sa généalogie, de ses fictions biographiques et de son épaisseur charnelle. Déclinant toute appartenance, effaçant peu à peu les signes de reconnaissance individuels et communautaires, ce sujet devenant anonyme annonce le "corps grotesque", pluriel et sans identité fixe, d'*Ulysse*.

L'indéfinition du "discord" artaudien impose, selon E. Grossman, une "lecture suspensive", attentive aux ruptures et aux effractions de la langue corporelle d'Artaud. Le *chaosmos* de Joyce exige une "lecture flottante", sensible aux multiples voix enchevêtrées qui traversent son œuvre, répétant et déconstruisant les fables et les phrases de la culture européenne. Artaud et Joyce inventent donc "un espace d'écriture et de lecture aux limites poreuses", incluant le lecteur et renouvelant la notion d'auteur. Le sujet qu'ils esquissent, ni personnel, ni collectif observe E. Grossman en conclusion de son brillant ouvrage, nous invite à imaginer et à écrire "les lignes mouvantes entre soi et les autres, entre le corps et la psyché".

Olivier Penot-Lacassagne

Jean-Jacques Lecercle. *The Philosophy of Nonsense. The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature*. London/New York: Routledge, 1994. Pp. 245.

Jean-Jacques Lecercle. *The Violence of Language*. London/New York: Routledge, 1990. Pp. 272.

Jean-Jacques Lecercle's work is a unique crisscrossing of rarely passed borders between literature and linguistics, between continental philosophy dear to North American comparatists and analytic philosophy. His way to language is a way to the "otherness within language," to what is "within and without *langue*," moving along "the uncertain frontier between *langue* and the other side of language," whence Lecercle's attention to "the remainder" and to "nonsense" (*Philosophy of Nonsense*, 48). In *The Violence of Language* (a theory of "the remainder," i.e., aspects of language excluded by linguists) and *The Philosophy of Nonsense*, Lecercle approaches the alterity in/of language in two ways, the former taking that of language theory, the latter that of a Victorian literary genre.

The Violence of Language devotes itself to the conflict between communicative language, which a subject would speak, and "another side to language" that "emerges in nonsensical and