



GRAAT On-Line issue #8 August 2010

**Interactions Of Practice And Theory In Charles Bernstein's "Artifice Of Absorption":
Trancendentalist Accessibility And Challenge**

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With an assertive statement like "Theory is never more than the extension of practice" (1982, 35), Charles Bernstein reformulates Robert Creeley's famous dictum "form is never more than an extension of content," and initiates us in one of the literary questions that most interest him, that of the relationship of pure creative writing as such and his style of critical or discursive writing. This paper demonstrates how Bernstein's poem/essay, "Artifice of Absorption," originally published as a single issue of the little magazine *Paper Air*, perfectly exemplifies writing as discourse and reaction, and also the hierarchization of author/reader involving "structure, social context, genre method, politics" (Bernstein 1986a, 409).¹ My own concern is that poetry and poetics for Bernstein involve matter and transcendence in this long poem, both appear with changing forms determined by social, political factors, and beyond, since "Poetry does have a mission to be as powerful as/ the strongest drug, to offer a vision-in-sound/ to compete with the world we know so that we can find the worlds we don't... Paradise, as hell,/ inheres: there are no limits that language cannot/ reach (1992, 76).²

Charles Bersntein's world can be thought in categories like "form, process, tradition, communication, subject matter, abstraction, representation, concreteness, expression, emotion, intellectuality, plainness, voice, meaning, clarity, difficulty, content, history, elegance, beauty, craft, simplicity, complexity, prosody, theme, sincerity, objectification, style, imagination, language, and realism have no unitary or definitive sense within

poetics; they are, like the personal pronouns, *shifters*, dependent for their meaning on the particular context in which they are used" (1990, 836). Most of these elements are strategic factors of the self that are reformed inter- and intra-textually and are inserted in a process that requires outside participation. There is however no doubt that they allow a clear affinity with Julia Kristeva's concept of the subject-in-process to be glimpsed, "a self continually fluctuating and reconstituting itself, continually being shaped by its intercourse with all forms of language, events, and instinctual drives" (Parsons 1994, 174). Reader and writer participate in the unavoidable process of language. However, it is worth noting that Bernstein has distanced himself from the deconstructionist radicals and shares the more Wittgensteinian view of a social self immersed in a continuous process of formation, that must arrive at verbal agreements and interactions with the Other. That is what Bernstein reproduces in "Artifice of Absorption" in his consideration of poetry, which "must be understood as epistemological inquiry" (12).

To examine the self and the social element in Bernstein we must resort to one of the foundations of his poetics, namely Wittgenstein. For both, literature and philosophy support each other as they refer to disciplines that reflect and analyze the possibilities of human knowledge.³ When both disciplines are excluded for methodological reasons, it is usually to establish that philosophy adheres to consistency, while poetry should be related to language and emotion. However, for Bernstein, both take part in "the project of investigating the possibilities (nature) and structures of phenomena" (1986a, 219-220) and he justifies this drawing on Aristotle via Wordsworth, "Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing... Poetry in the image of [humanity] and nature" (1986a, 229), which clearly recalls Ralph Waldo Emerson's transcendentalist notion in "The Poet," "He [the Poet] uses forms according to the life, and not according to the form" (236). The differences between these disciplines might be attributed to reasons of professionalization or segmentation, but in fact both coincide in explaining phenomena (events, objects, selves, realities) and the human consciousness above them. They both also explain aesthetic and social relationships, providing an ideological and political approach to reality, a commitment observed by Linda Reinfeld as generalized in the

language poets, when they defend the close connection between literary theory and social reality. In the case of Bernstein specifically, she alludes to the attraction he feels towards some of Theodor Adorno's works e.g.: *Aesthetic Theory*, or *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, precisely for not separating aesthetic questions from political commitment and ideological critique (1992, 53). Precisely, Bernstein's position against the Balkanization of theory is a consequence of perceiving methods of interpretation like feminism, psychoanalysis, materialism, sociology or romanticism as worldviews that tend to defend a territory or specialization. For this reason, all the modes of language in the twentieth century are liable to appear in his poetry, from computer language or T.V. jargon to more classical poetic diction, in a tour through the most intimate and undecipherable to the most complex philosophical imperative.

When Wittgenstein points out that "language is itself the vehicle of thought" (1958, 329) he is but stating that writing is self-knowledge and the imprint of human presence in the world. Language is also the central point for Bernstein, it is not just knowledge and meaning as for Wittgenstein, but action, coinciding again with Emerson's transcendentalist claim that "Words are also actions, and actions are a kind of words" (229), especially for our current multicultural world where it is necessary to face up to and accept the divergence that so repels mass culture. For Bernstein the medium of poetry with its atmosphere of uncompleted suggestions is suitable for quoting from Nietzsche's *The Genealogy of Morals*, capable of converting marginality into a moral question (the rebellion of the slave), considering it as an acceptance of the Other, up to recurring to the ethnic, social or gender differences in order to be prepared to accept it. Therefore, the concept of writing in Wittgenstein's sense is an individual literary action inscribed in a variable context full of contingencies.⁴ Indeed, Bernstein's books on poetics, *Content's Dream*, *A Poetics* and *My Way*, show a succession of ideas adhering to a language conceived as the pivotal point of not merely material existence but a truly transcendentalist and shared experience, living it and confronting its alternatives. This is what Hélène Aji defines as the "the common use of language" (344), or quoting Bernstein:

The lesson of a metaphysical finitude is not that the world is just codes and as a result presence is to be ruled out as anything more than nostalgia, but that we can have presence, insofar as we are able, only through a shared grammar. (1986a, 182)

The poet, for Emerson, “unlocks our chains and admits us to a new scene” (244). Bernstein offers the reader the chance of liberating what has been screened from view in his or her doubtful contexts. It is also true that part of Bernstein’s production is rather schizophrenic because of the multivalency and variety of devices used, where fragmentation is one of the most recurrent resources for offering multiple values for the signifiers that are constantly being reconstructed. However the desire to solidify this practice with concrete philosophical arguments is useful to evaluate the consistency of modern poetic discourse, where truth, if it exists, lies in the phenomena arising around and it does “not approximate a displaced ‘physical reality.’ They are the product of a mediation by the membrane of consciousness, which is language, and hence actualizations of such a reality” (1986a, 123-4).

Indeed, although Christopher Beach tells us the notion of intertextuality in Bernstein has clear correspondences with Barthes’ and Foucault’s theories (1992, 244), he acknowledges that Bernstein does not go so far as hold the disappearance of the I, mainly because, as Bernstein himself leaves it clear, “So I hope the reader does feel implicated because I want to show that *I* as a social construction, a *product* of language and not a pre-existing entity outside it; that *I* is first a *we*. We’re implicated in each other from the first!” (1986a, 410). Furthermore, Bakhtin’s dialogic structure could also be applied to Bernstein’s poetic proposals, but in this poet’s work the voice is individual and collective with an orientation “that pushes the limits of what can be identified, that not only reproduces difference but invents it, spawning nomadic syntaxes of desire and excess that defy genre (birth, race, class) in order to relocate it” (1986c, 88).

This literary game Charles Bernstein offers the reader in “Artifice of Absorption” is full of hidden forces and meta-commentaries among the different voices in his poems. The reconstitution of what is lost into the Derridian *differánce* has as its objective the liberation inherent to life-experience, not just literature. In this sense we are reminded of

what Julia Kristeva points out regarding Joyce's Modernism in *Finnegans Wake*, particularly in his use of a language free of "didacticism, rhetoric, dogmatism of any kind" (1980, 92). And I say "life" because the term 'language' in Bernstein is not limited to the literary world but extends to physical senses, visual, verbal, gestural and tactile dimensions with a clear projection into the individual's life history or biography. It is evident that this language transcends the mechanical sense of history to lodge itself in a more discursive and transcendentalist communication. Although characterized by deliberate opaqueness, the mode of expression itself makes us more aware of its forms and structures. Kristeva applies the concept of redemption to Joycean opaqueness, in that the experimental and radical are a source of new meanings, sometimes unexpected. In Bernstein's case, his language in "Artifice of Absorption" proceeds from many theorists, without deterritorializing signifiers or altering grammar, syntax or spelling to reclaim the idiosyncratic and personal, which will stimulate greater attention to language itself and to our awareness of its ideological-political role. Though he inevitably claims in his poems that word order and its servility to convention responds to a social order that limits the potential of the human being, whether in the interests of capitalism or of totalitarian communism.

"Artifice of Absorption" says something about the clear correspondence between practice and theory, pointed out by Antoine Cazé, "paradigmatic text... since it flaunts in its very composition the impossibility of separating the text from its theory" (96). It would be one of the most illustrative cases of this connection where that basic concern of writing is made clear: an area of research with communicative intentions and social power. It is difficult to ascertain whether "Artifice of Absorption" is a poem or an essay, formally it would be poetry as it is written in verse, but the rhythm and content are those of a prose essay with footnotes added. It has incidentally been included in his essayist book *A Poetics* published by Harvard University Press. Defining the terms of the title, Bernstein offers us the keys to understanding this text: "'Artifice' is a measure of a poem's/ intractability to being read as the sum of its/ devices and subject matters" (1992, 9), "By *absorption* I mean engrossing, engulfing/ completely, engaging, arresting

attention, reverie,/ attention intensification/ rhapsodic, spellbinding,/ mesmerizing,/ hypnotic,/ total, riveting,/ enthralling: belief, conviction, silence” (1992, 29).

He uses numerous examples and literary references throughout this poem/essay that help us to perceive the paradoxes of both language and the human condition. The names with the strongest presence are Veronica Forrest-Thomson, Steve McCaffery, Jerome McGann, Emily Dickinson, Bruce Andrews, David Antin, Samuel T. Coleridge, Ezra Pound, Helen Vendler, Donald Wesling, Robert Kelly, Velimir Khlebnikov, Gertrude Stein, Lyn Hejinian, Louis Zukofsky, Clark Coolidge, Ron Silliman, Georges Bataille, Robert Grenier, Nick Piombino, Leslie Scalapino, Samuel Beckett, and Merleau-Ponty. His quotes and explanations have concrete names and are also a sample of the poetic debate that has led him to varied critical and creative compositions. His main idea is that the anti-absorptive, less transparent techniques he uses are also capable of absorbing the reader, perhaps more powerfully than traditional methods, “non-absorptive means may get the reader/ absorbed into a more ideologized or politicized space” (1992, 53). Fascinated with form and its many shadows, Bernstein exhibits a concept of poetic language as witnessing and questioning transcendentalist individuality, obscuring it for us to judge it, be stimulated by it and use it as a tool in the construction of our selves. Here he combines references to spells and incantations, “universal truths passing before the predawn of our souls,” quoting Khlebnikov, (1992, 50), with Harry Lanz’s consideration that “in ordinary speech, in prose...the words become transparent...Poetry is called upon to save the physical element of words and bring it to our attention in the form of art” (1992, 44). Even the form this 89 page long poem/essay ends in has been altered, if we compare the first version in *Paper Air* with the latest included in his book *A Poetics*. In the first we read a clear exposé of his intentions: “We can try to/ bring our relationship with readers to/ fruition,/ that the site of reading become a fact of value” (1987, 65). The end that appears in the latter version differs slightly but with the same interactions in a more poetic tone “Do we cling to/ what we’ve grasped/ too well, or find tunes/ in each *new/ departure*” (1992, 89, emphasis added). In this way, Bernstein joins together poetry and essay, practice and

theory, offering the reader a vision of being a carrier of values to be explored in the composition itself and initiating something else.

The implications of this position with regard to language, whether in his poetry or poetics, lead us to consider the role of the self and try to decipher its social articulation and transcendentalist values. From my point of view, this type of literature widens the horizon and leaves behind the romantic self, on not blinkering or narrowing its vision from its own exclusivity outwards, but associating and contrasting it with the Other, the author and the reader intermingle in this aesthetic new order as a privileged mode of discourse since they wander between the subjective and non-subjective (the shared and the transcendent) as the main characteristic feature of what the text itself demands. "A social value of poetry/ may be/ to provide opportunities to/ tune ourselves/ up/ so that we can hear/ the tunes of our fellows/ (of all sexes)/ & of the earth & sky" (1992, 63). In other words, Bernstein's approach to language allows this identity of the modern self to debate between the realism of its social position and that which transcends it, by allowing a sense of totality, normally only attainable through art or literature.

I do not mean to say that Bernstein has this sense of cosmic consciousness or any connection with religion as his primary intention. However, there is no doubt that his heavy emphasis on the material projection of language and its ontological character can also lead us to the idea of the self realizing its own transcendence by paying special attention to creativity and imagination inside the community. What is more, there are very few references in his later work to the religious sense in the human being. When there are, as in "Pockets of Lime", published in *Rough Trades*, or the more explicit "Why I Am Not a Christian" in *The Sophist*, the Creator is seen as having left the human race waiting for a reward it never obtains. In any case I am referring more to a transcendence which tends to unite mankind in solidarity, to a sense of universal community where the individual is able to reach beyond the materialism in day to day affairs. An illustrative example is his poem "Matters of Policy," belonging to *Controlling Interests*, where he refers to everyday experiences, transcending them by suggesting their poetic side. This is actually a revision of what might be his ordinary day without a precise narrative. We are faced with a

network of his independent perceptions that begin by drinking Pepsi and asking someone the time. He then walks through the parking lot hearing people talking about the “affaires de la monde” (1986b, 2), buys flowers for the vase at home and is capable of quoting someone who connects religion with feelings, “If the/ great things of religion are really understood,/ they *will* affect the heart” (1986b, 3). The reality before him centers on the city and its physical features of summer and winter, with the Subway and its water and electricity piping, that runs through it underground, “But we have/ higher hopes” (1986b, 3). All the sophisticated New York culture and its gastronomic variety, its allusions to exotic geography like Madagascar, Paraguay or Australia, serve once more to focus on the Other and feel within the community, “You looked/ into my eyes & I felt the deep exotic textures of your otherworldliness” (1986b, 5). The conclusion to this poem is the literal image of buildings, but the poet evokes sensations that go beyond the physical and lodge in his remembrances and in a clear sense of transcendence that so delights us all, “The surrounding buildings have a stillness/ that is brought into ironic ridicule by the pounding/ beats of the bongo drums emanating from the candy/ store a few blocks away” (1986b, 9). The motif of the poem is the presence of an individual who is alert to perceive the complexity of the city, but he also leads us to reflect on ourselves and the complex matrices that follow on from the superimposition of proper names, places and quotes that also belong to the collectivity and the cosmic sense of life, with definite implications and distinctions between public and private worlds.

Linda Reinfeld makes it clear that Bernstein is a writer that needs a down-to-earth presence rather than Derridian insubstantiality, preferring Wittgenstein and Cavell for their commitment to meaning with intentions, to responsibility and even a certain coherence that makes him “personally committed to maintaining the possibility of a reasonable, politically enlightened discourse, a project he considers better served by Stanley Cavell’s *The Claim of Reason* than Derridian disclaimers and dissemination” (1992, 57). The form used in composition with the aim of putting this poetics into practice is far from being a modernist collage, it rather resembles an assemblage of pieces functioning as in a transcendentalist organism, “I’m interested in a work composed of a number of

autonomously distinct pieces that nonetheless functions as a whole –that is, has an overall configuration whose music is composed of differences” (1985, 189). At first sight, it is easy to see an accumulation of poetic forms and rapid perceptions in his “Artifice of Absorption”, working towards “Making writing, the activity itself, an active process, the fact of its own activity, autonomous, self-sufficient” (1986a, 72).

A long poem-essay like “Artifice of Absorption” configures a poetry considered as just an aesthetic object intended to seduce, but which really has a more complex nature. We are speaking here of absorption and the non-absorptive object and by extension of tensions between theories and the self who breaks down the limits. If there was a narrative in these poems it would not be telling one story but many, through monologues and dialogues that seem chaotic and make us advance and retreat in reading them, so as to continually discover we all belong to a universal community. The poem cannot be allegorical, of course it may be self-revealing but not to construct the psyche, rather to follow the direction of Gertrude Stein, Louis Zukofsky, Laura (Riding) Jackson, Samuel Beckett or Robert Creeley, writing that projects a worldview.

Therefore, let us return to the main argument of this essay, based on the intrinsic nature of Bernstein’s poetry and poetics that lead the reader to the self and the multiple views of the social community. Bernstein’s literary discourse, from the double perspective of form and content is also extra-literary with connotations and suggestions derived from his ideological discourse. It thus greatly expands beyond the textual opportunities of the formalist tradition. Grammar, syntax or poetic diction itself are not static notions here. On the contrary, his anti-absorptive subversion dissolves the elitist concept of literature. If the principal idea is to explore, it is no surprise that this assembled poetry with frequent non sequiturs looks so radical. However, the conclusion to the formal architecture of his poetry may be explained through a poetics that does not lead automatically to an appropriation of the poetic medium.

For him, ideology is a transcendentalist issue since “everywhere informs poetry and imparts to it, at its most resonant, a density of materialized social being expressed through the music of a work as well as its multifoliate references” (1992, 2). Writing implies holding

a political but also a transcendentalist position as it inevitably takes place within a culture, involves the Other in both our harmonious relationships and our differences and, of course, because it utilizes as its instrument the language belonging to a universal community. In this sense, the notion of authority plays a frequent decisive role in his writings, questioning the self and the person. We can observe this in Bernstein's dialogue with Ron Silliman in *Legend* or his book *Controlling Interests*, in which the self is a product of language, inserted in a wider context, "Formally, the 'I' allows the language's formative capacities to be scanned. -So I hope the reader does feel implicated because I want to show that 'I' as a social construction, a *product* of language and not a pre-existing entity outside it; that 'I' is first a 'we'. We're implicated in each other from the first" (1982, 42). Bernstein draws attention to participation with the intention that the reader should not just decipher the self but also observe the repressive manipulative role of institutionalized language. We see here a clear decision to challenge the individual who tries to unequivocally communicate his self, question the message to be transmitted (his attack on the emotions and experiences is especially violent) and lastly to reject language that attempts to be clear and transparent.

In the case of Bernstein it is necessary to point out that his attraction for Marx is different to the traditional sense of Socialist Realism, since his main interest is to show that language is not neutral and can change our perception of reality. Postmodernism and other philosophies akin to it complete the unfinished proposals of European nihilism by substantiating the ideology of hedonism, based above all on a process of desublimation and disenchantment when confronted with the prudential capitalist project of Hume and Althusser (Bernstein 1999, 306-7). This presents no obstacle to the continuing tension between the social and the moral in literature. Rather, I think Bernstein shares the idea put forward by Jiwei Ci that the present-day hedonism is subject to the "market's progressive exploitation of human hedonistic potential for profit-maximization" (1999, 305), and for this reason this poet makes us advance continually through questionings in order to attain a historical perspective of our social situation and the means we use to be ourselves. Language is revolutionary when it is based on this perception, with a dynamics that

involves fields as wide as psychology and sociology. Authority requires convention and acceptance, and it is precisely at this point that Bernstein and his companions at the Language project reject authority and try to subvert patriarchal discourse that “may be read in terms of sexual and racial politics as well as in terms of structural innovation in the abstract. At the same time, normative discourse practices need to be read in terms of the political meaning of their formal strategies” (Bernstein 1992, 221). From this viewpoint, Bernstein’s “Artifice of Absorption” can be labeled as critical, ideologist or naive transcendentalism. If authority and convention are historical constructions, whether appropriated by the divine right of kings or by capitalism as suggested by Bernstein in *A Poetics* (223), the task of the present-day creator should be to formulate and present political projects directed towards seeking alternatives to defy and defeat the dictatorial values of the market. This model of intentions needs a representation that subverts the previous compositional rules, taking the risk of lacking sufficient audience or public. It has however met with the opposite: Bernstein and many other American innovative poets have found allies in the field of literary criticism, philosophy, and progressively, in the academic world in general. One thing these authors teach us is that resistance and marginalization are two necessary conditions to face the discourse of dominance. Today its effects are not limited to the subjective rhetorical field of the isolated individual, but has political and transcendentalist implications for society in general.

Bernstein’s “Artifice of Absorption” demands to be read as his true poetics; these two aspects of his work (political and transcendentalist considerations) do not have an abstract relationship but one of clear concomitance, reinforcing each other. His ideas and creativity have the clear intention of presenting the self clearly rooted in community, utilizing the poetic form and permitting the most daring interpretations. He is conscious of fitting into a community in which he himself recognizes having reacted in a Puritan way, “I have a technique of bathing people in that cold, a Puritan conviction that people should know the world is hard, and they should face it strong and stern.... and show that one shares that hardness with others, who care. That I am one of them. One of us” (1986a, 22-23). Bernstein is aware of belonging to the literary (Stein, Zukofsky, Creeley),

and philosophical (Wittgenstein and Cavell, especially) communities, which have shared the ordinary everyday language of the Other, where present and past coexist and the limits are challenged. If Bernstein's poetry and poetics are obscure, difficult or polemical, it is because they speak to us of the unsolved complexities of language, and the self in society. His "Artifice and Absorption" as poetry and poetics, shows him in a constant dialogue/interaction with the old and new forms, and if Michael Duff demands a flicker of humanity in the Language poets (74), this can be easily seen through Bernstein's reaching back to the 19th-century universal transcendentalist issues of solidarity, organic relationships, and involvement of the self in a continual process searching for meaning.

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NOTES

¹ Bernstein's intellectual position allows one to read the Other and start a debate about its differences from the self. This is one of the reasons this poet thinks that the strongest emerging force in current American poetry is indeed multiculturalism with its clear effects on issues of race, gender, and social class, which generates a situation "quite different than the "academic" versus "New American" poetry of the fifties" (Bartholomae et al. 1996, 59). Some essays have been largely centered on Bernstein's "Artifice of Absorption," like Hélène Aji's "Writing (as) (and) Thinking: Charles Bernstein's Work "in" Language." *Études Anglaises* 59.3 (2006): 341-355; Antoine Cazé's "Margins of Theory, Theory of Margins." *Mechanics of the Mirage: Postwar American Poetry*. Ed. Michel Delville and Christine Pganouille. Liège: Department of English of the Univ. of

Liège, 200. 93-105; Daniel Barbiero's "Some Notes on 'Artifice of Absorption'," *Aerial* 5 (1989): 163-172; Michael Duff's, "Discourse on Transabsorbable Writing..." *Contact II* 9.53-54-55 (Summer-Fall 1989): 73-74; or Jerome McGann's "Private Enigmas and Critical Functions, with Special Thanks to the Poetry of Charles Bernstein." *The Point Is to Change It*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2007. 98-124.

² Otherwise indicated, all page references to "Artifice of Absorption" in this text are to the edition of this poem published in Charles Bernstein's *A Poetics*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1992.

³ To review his work demands attention to the interconnectedness of different disciplines that is one of the most recurrent themes in his many interviews with Loss Pequeño Glazier, "An Autobiographical Interview with Charles Bernstein". *Boundary 2* 23.3 (1996): 21-43; Manuel Brito, "Charles Bernstein," *A Suite of Poetic Voices* (Santa Brigida: Kadle, 1992): 23-36; Hannah Weiner, "Excerpts from an Interview with Hannah Weiner," *The Line in Postmodern Poetry*, ed. Frank, Robert & Henry Sayre (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988): 187-188; Bruce Boone, "An Interview," *Ottotole* 1 (Fall 1985): 29-62; Nina Zivancevic, "Interview with Charles Bernstein and Douglas Messerli," *Sagetrieb* 3.3 (Fall 1984): 63-78; and Bruce Andrews, "Pacifica Interview on Politics," *L=a=n=g=u=a=g=e*, Supplement No. 3, (October 1981) no pag. This is easily seen in his creative work, where he recurs to a style and intentions characterized by opaqueness and the reader's resultant need to explore each corner of the literary-critical map with constant recourse to the theoretical proposals underlying it.

⁴ In the particular case of Bernstein other philosophical, linguistic and aesthetic sources must not be forgotten: Russian Futurism, Surrealism, Stanley Cavell, Marx and Gertrude Stein's experiments in the psychological perception of language. Particularly, the core connection between Bernstein and Wittgenstein is given by considering language as the motor of that consciousness for interpretation. There is no automatic correspondence between signifier and signified and it is language itself that initiates us into knowledge and experience of society. Within this context, Stanley Cavell is another significant source to substantiate this position. The continual references made by Bernstein in his essay, "The Objects of Meaning: Reading Cavell Reading Wittgenstein," serve to make us appreciate once more that the foundations of knowledge are not to be found in a pre-existent world but in our shared conventions and the uses we make of language. In particular, I think Bernstein is attracted to the Wittgenstein that explains how language is associated with the nature of knowledge and the importance he gives to those images of our culture and community that restate us as individuals in society. From Cavell he selects the political character of all interpretations on entering into a dialogue with the text, the Other and reality, that leads us to a self-scrutiny or questioning of ourselves and the world that surrounds us. It coincides with what Gadamer calls a "hermeneutical experience" (1986, 356). However, in the same essay on Wittgenstein and Cavell, Bernstein tries to go a little further, to insinuate that our relationship with the world is not just that of knowing, but of being there and acting. From this arises his enormous interest in uniting the literary with the social.

