
H-France Review Vol. 20 (August 2020), No. 146

Leo Shtutin, *Spatiality and Subjecthood in Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Maeterlinck, and Jarry: Between Page and Stage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. xii + 226 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$75.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN: 9780198821854.

Review by Corry Cropper, Brigham Young University.

At first glance, the choice of authors in the title of Leo Shtutin's study of spatiality and subjecthood may strike the reader as somewhat arbitrary. Yes, Mallarmé and Apollinaire are both poets, Maeterlinck and Jarry both playwrights, and they all wrote in approximately the same era, but their styles do not necessarily make them natural pairs. In critical studies, Guillaume Apollinaire is more frequently linked with Cendrars than with Stéphane Mallarmé, and Alfred Jarry has been more frequently studied alongside Duchamp and even Joyce than alongside Maeterlinck. But Shtutin makes a compelling argument for studying them together in a brilliant introduction and first chapter that together lay out the esthetic and ontological stakes of the work of these four writers.

Shtutin posits that an ontological and epistemological shift between 1890 and 1920 disrupted the long-held Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm. "The human subject gradually ceased to be conceived as unitary, self-sovereign, and disembodied (to list three primary attributes of the Cartesian ego); meanwhile, the notion of Newtonian absolute space (a container a priori to, and independent of, its contents), was problematized and ultimately dismantled" (p. 1). Shtutin argues that this paradigm shift can be seen in, and was to some extent driven by, the literary creations of the four authors in his book.

In theater, this epistemological shift could be seen in the fluctuating use of space. The conventional stage with its fourth wall gave way to a reconfigured playhouse that created intimacy between performer and spectator, bringing "the audience into proximity with the actor's moving bodies in an attempt to elicit a kinaesthetic (rather than merely intellectual) response to the performance" (p. 3). This change, Shtutin suggests, reflects "the epistemological shift away from subject-object dualism," and points both to the recorporealized subject and to a subject that is no longer self-contained and autonomous, but that is instead enmeshed with objects that share the same space.

In poetry, the issue of space (and subjecthood) is renegotiated by exploiting the physical page through punctuation (or lack thereof) and through the valorization of "expressive, positivized negativity" (p. 4), that is blank space on the page. Reading, like spectatorship, can potentially bring the writer and the reader into communion, erasing hierarchies and challenging ontologies.

Shtutin contends that the authors examined in this book can all be seen as turning back the clock to the pre-Descartes, pre-Newtonian esthetic of the Middle Ages. They appropriate a medieval “signifying system ... for the construction of [their] own mythopoeia” (p. 26). In this new counter-Classical epistemology, “the boundaries between subject and object become porous and permeable” (p. 25). In other words, the authors and works studied by Shtutin work against the tradition of the Classical world, the presuppositions of the Enlightenment, and the philosophical underpinnings of Naturalism. They effectively dismantle what was until then taken for granted: the unitary self and the notion of static, absolute space.

After laying this groundwork, Shtutin goes on to analyze spatiality and subjecthood in wide-ranging chapters that touch on the works of multiple artists, authors, playwrights, and philosophers. The chapter titled “Defamiliarizing the Page,” primarily about Mallarmé’s *Un Coup de dés* and Apollinaire’s *Calligrammes*, also considers works by Whistler, Derrida, Joyce, and DeLillo, to name a few. The chapter, “Staging the Liminal,” focuses on Maeterlinck and Jarry and details how they conform to and reject Symbolist “orthodoxy,” but it also touches on Beckett and Chekhov. The next two chapters, “Space Subjectivized” and “Spatialized Subjects,” look at the fluid interplay between subjecthood and space in the works of the four primary authors and also feature analyses of train travel, Einstein’s discussion of montage, Picasso’s “double-faced” paintings, and the 2006 film *Borat*. Reading this work is an enjoyable “stroll,” to use Shtutin’s metaphor, that produces important insights into the works of the four primary authors studied. Placing the characters of *Les Aveugles* and *Ubu roi* on Masahiro Mori’s “Uncanny Valley Graph” sheds light on Maeterlinck’s and Jarry’s strategies and intentions. And the analysis of the act of reading Apollinaire’s *Calligrammes* (complete with an eye-tracking study) provides strong evidence for Shtutin’s thesis, namely, that the disruption of “page-space” amounts to a challenge of Newton’s unassailable definition of space.

For a work that extensively discusses ontology, the non-human, and boundaries between subject and object, for a work that sets out to show how late nineteenth and early twentieth-century writers resisted both phenomenological, Cartesian notions of the human subject and settled Newtonian ideas of space, it is surprising that this book does not engage with recent thinkers on these very topics. Bringing Latour’s Actor Network Theory, Harman’s Object-Oriented Ontology, or Bennett’s theory of Vibrant Matter into this study would have undoubtedly strengthened its argument.[1] I would like to see Shtutin use, adapt, or challenge these thinkers, all of whom engage with literature in important ways. How does Shtutin’s understanding of personification and anthropomorphism square with Bennett’s? How might his analysis of defamiliarization have been modified by Harman’s OOO or by his reading of Lovecraft? How might Shtutin’s study of space or of interactions between characters and objects have been enriched by Latour’s writings on ecology and networks?

What’s more, the secondary critical sources cited by Shtutin are nearly all more than ten years old. Granted, there are not a great many recent studies on Maeterlinck, for example, but Mallarmé’s *Un coup de dés* has enjoyed something of a renaissance of late, particularly since the publication of Meillassoux’s controversial *Le Nombre de la sirène*. [2] And while Apollinaire’s *Calligrammes* have not been extensively treated recently, Jarry studies have continued to develop in interesting ways, particularly around the human body’s connection to machines and Jarry’s darkly humorous criticisms of Positivism, that could have directly influenced some of the arguments in Shtutin’s work.

Shtutin is an excellent writer and an insightful thinker. He succeeds in making difficult concepts clear through multiple concrete examples and via an effective and playful use of metaphor. I do hope he will continue to develop his ideas, explaining why the shifts he describes in the book took place (what brings about the “epistemological crisis” he hints at throughout the book) and detailing how the works he analyzes here were echoed or rejected by subsequent authors.

NOTES

[1] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (London: Pelican, 2018); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

[2] Quentin Meillassoux, *Le nombre de la sirène : un déchiffrement du Coup de dés de Mallarmé* (Paris : Fayard, 2011).

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ISSN 1553-9172