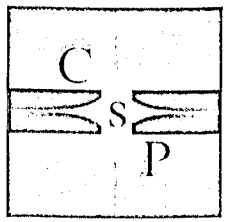
A Century of the Marx Brothers

Edited by

Joseph Mills



CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS PUBLISHING

A Century of the Marx Brothers, edited by Joseph Mills

This book first published 2007 by

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

15 Angerton Gardens, Newcastle, NE5 2JA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2007 by Joseph Mills and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.
ISBN 1-84718-240-2; ISBN 13: 9781847182401

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE BIG GREY IR-ELEPHANT: THE PLAY OF LANGUAGE IN THE MARX BROTHERS' SCRIPTS AND IN CHARLES BERNSTEIN'S L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E POETRY

ZOË BRIGLEY

In his collection, *Poetic Justice* (1979), the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poet, Charles Bernstein begins an untitled poem with the following lines:

> The elephant appears without the slightest indication that he is demanded.
> An infinite inappropriateness.
> Continually learning.[1]

The image of the elephant appears as a surprise or as an inappropriate occurrence, and its appearance indicates that one cannot rest easy in the conventional uses of language. Rather the poet must be in a state of continual "learning" discovering how language empowers some subjects and weakens others. As Bernstein writes in his essay, "Making Words Visible": "We all see words: signs of a language we live inside of. & yet these words seem exterior to us—we see them, projections of our desires, and act, often enough, out of a sense of their demands".[2] Through the surprise of the elephant, Bernstein exposes poetic linguistic practice as one kind of convention and he denies the authority of words as a means for an experiential journey.

Bernstein's elephant is reminiscent of the "ir-elephant," which first emerges in the Marx Brothers' vehicle, *Animal Crackers* (1930) (script written by

---

[1] Charles Bernstein, "An elephant appears...," *Poetic Justice* (Baltimore: Pod Books, 1979) 27.1-3.

[2] Charles Bernstein, "Making Words Visible," *The L=A=N-G=U=A-G=E Book*, ed. Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Press, 1984) 284 (284-286).

George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind).[3] It is in this film that one of Groucho Marx's funniest monologues appears. Margaret Dumont's Mrs. Rittenhouse asks Groucho to regale the assembly with tales of his travels and he responds with a nonsensical narrative that plays with grammar and the conventions of language:

> One morning I shot an elephant in my pyjamas. How he got in my pyjamas, I don't know. Then we tried to remove the tusks... But they were imbedded so firmly we couldn't budge them. Of course in Alabama, the Tuscaloosa. But that is entirely ir-elephant to what I was talking about.

As in Bernstein's poem, Groucho's elephant is an irrelevancy, a red herring, a nonsensical diversion, a non-sequitur or an illusion. In *Duck Soup* (1933), the motif of the "ir-elephant" emerges again (in a script written by Bert Kalmar and Harry Ruby).[4] Chico is brought before a court on charges of treason, but rather than kow-towing to the judge, he begins a joke: "What weighs thirty stone, works in a circus and packs everything in its trunk?" The judge replies, "That's irrelevant", to which Chico responds, "That's right, an ir-elephant." Just as Bernstein invokes the elephant as a means to challenge proscriptions about what the content of poetry should be and how a poetic narrative should unfold, so Chico's use of the "ir-elephant" joke challenges the authority of the judge, the language of the court-room and the power of order. The joke hinges on the irrelevancy of the elephant as does Bernstein's poem.

This paper proceeds from the motif of the "ir-elephant," which symbolises the non-sequitur, diversion, escape, catachresis and other forms of linguistic play that challenge conventional forms of writing, speaking and the languages that one uses. It reviews critical thought about the Marx Brothers' scripts and juxtaposes this with Bernstein's poetics. It provides detailed analysis of key speeches from *The Cocoanuts* (1929)[5] and *Horse Feathers* (1932)[6] in comparison with poems from Bernstein's *Rough Trades* (1991), *With Strings* (2001) and his libretto *Shadowtime* (2005) (which features Groucho Marx as a character). I argue that the Marx Brothers' dedication to undermining authority and releasing the comic potential of language is not so dissimilar to the Bernstein's view that poetry must undermine the authority of conventional language.

---

[3] *Animal Crackers*, DVD, directed by Victor Heerman. (1930; Universal 2003).
[4] *Duck Soup*, DVD, directed by Leo McCarey. (1933; Universal 2003).
[5] *The Cocoanuts*, DVD, directed by Robert Florey and Joseph Santley. (1929; Universal, 2004).
[6] *Horse Feathers*, DVD, directed by Norman Mcleod. (1932.: Universal, 2003).

Before presenting detailed analysis of scripts and poems, it is worth examining, juxtaposing and comparing the factors that Bernstein and the Marx Brothers have in common, which in turn may explain the influence that Marx Brothers' films have had on Bernstein's poetry. Bernstein's relationship with the Marx Brothers is a significant one and its origins may lie not only in the poet's Jewishness, but also another factor that he has in common with the Marx Brothers: a desire to resist categorization. In his poem, "Solidarity is a Name We Give to That We Cannot Hold," Bernstein's speaker declares himself to be affiliated with many different kinds of poets:

> I am a nude formalist poet, a sprung
> syntax poet, a multitrack poet, a
> wondering poet, a social expressionist
> poet, a Baroque poet, a constructivist poet,
> an ideolectical poet. [...][7]

The entire poem is made up of different factions, groupings and definitions for poets and amongst these Bernstein lists his status as "a Jewish poet hiding in the shadow/of my great-grandfather and great-grandmother," a stereotype that views Jewish writers as turning back to the great patriarchs and matriarchs of that culture.[8] However, its inclusion amongst all the other definitions of poets reveals how this means of self-definition is as limiting as any other.

In "'Yeah and I used to be a hunchback': Immigrants, Humour and the Marx Brothers," C.P. Lee describes how the Marx Brothers' immigrant background has something to do with their relation to language as the community that they lived and worked in was full of "mini-language communities" using languages like patois, argot, slang and Yiddish. Lee admires the Marx Brothers who are described as, "three Jews pretending to be a harp-playing mute, an Italian con-man and a motor-mouthed shyster" who, "could cross over from the ethnic melting pot and establish a rich vein of absurdist humour."[9] Lee argues that, "the English of the Marx Brothers is that of a dominant tongue filtered, mediated and regurgitated through the consciousness of an essential ethnicity of perception."[10] Lee notes that when the Marx Brothers were growing up, there was pressure from Theodore Roosevelt for standardization of American English,

---

[7] Charles Bernstein, "Solidarity is the Name We Give to What We Cannot Hold," *My Way: Speeches and Poems* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999) 33.1-5 (33-35).

[8] Bernstein, 'Solidarity is a Name We Give to That We Cannot Hold', 34.53-54.

[9] C.P. Lee, " 'Yeah and I used to be a hunchback': Immigrants, humour and the Marx Brothers," *Because I Tell A Joke or Two: Comedy, Politics and Social Difference*, ed. Stephen Wagg (London and New York: Taylor & Francis, 1998) 166 (165–179).

[10] C.P. Lee, " 'Yeah and I used to be a hunchback'," 168.

but in studying the play of language from the Marx Brothers, Lee responds: "So much for legislating the most amorphous and misleading of things—language."[11]

The desire to resist the standardized that homogenizes individuals is an essential part of Bernstein's poetics. Like the Marx Brothers, Bernstein disagrees with "standardization" of language describing it in "Comedy and the Poetics of Political Form" (1990) as a kind of "arteriosclerosis."[12] Bernstein's answer is a kind of play that:

> collapses into a more ambivolent[sic][13], destabilizing field of pathos, the ludicrous, schtick, sarcasm; a multidimensional textual field that is congenitally unable to maintain an evenness of surface tension or a flatness of affect, where linguistic shards of histrionic inappropriateness pierce the momentary calm of an obscure twist of phrase, before cantoring[sic] into the next available trope; less a shield than a probe.[14]

He continues: "If my loops and short circuits, my love of elision, my Groucho Marxian refusal of irony is an effort to explode the authority of those conventions I wish to discredit (disinherit), it constantly offers the consoling self-justification of Art."[15] Yet Bernstein emphasises that this must not be self-centered but an "interaction," "conversation" or "provocation."[16] Bernstein reaches towards the syncopated, the polyrhythmical, the heterogeneous and the offbeat, because, for too long, what he calls "male," patriarchal language has made people speak "to those aspects of their consciousness that have been programmed to receive the already digested scenes or commentaries provided."[17] The ellipsis, the non-sequitur and the irrelevancy are all significant elements in this linguistic reinvention.

In his seminal essay, "American Classic" (1947), Richard Rowland wonders which films will stand the test of time and he suggests that Marx Brothers' films

---

[11] Lee, " 'Yeah and I used to be a hunchback'," 165.

[12] Charles Bernstein, "Comedy and the Poetics of Political Form," *The Politics of Poetic Form*, ed. Charles Bernstein (New York: Roof, 1990) 236 (235–244).

[13] One may note that Bernstein often inserts an italicized "o" into words in an example of catachresis that performs his own theories about language whilst writing about it. The "o" may signify the lack in language and its italicized nature denies the perfection of the circle: "*o*." On a more fundamental level, his changes to words like "ambivalent" indicate a lack of commitment to the rules of language which in Bernstein's view hold a form of power.

[14] Bernstein, "Comedy and the Poetics of Political Form," 237.

[15] Ibid., 239.

[16] Ibid., 240.

[17] Ibid., 240.

have such a legacy. Rowland concludes that the classic nature of the films emerges from the fact that reality is what is at stake here: "They deal with the gravest question with which comedy can deal. They ask us, at least the successful ones do, 'What is the nature of reality?'."[18] What unfolds is a convincing argument as Rowland notes the inherent unreality of the Marx Brothers' world in which, "Harpo's wig is clearly a wig"; "Groucho's mustache [sic] is either painted or fastened to his cigar" and "Chico's accent is as detachable."[19] If the Marx Brothers unravel the nature of reality, then it is clear that language must be a part of that project, since as Bernstein states in his essay "Stray Straws and Straw Men," "there are no thoughts except through language, we are everywhere seeing through it, limited to it but not by it."[20] Some of the most interesting insights made by Rowland are on the nature of language in the Marx Brothers' films. Rowland describes how faith in words has "collapsed."[21] To the admonition not to "burn the candle at both ends," Harpo can produce just that object—a candle burning at both ends—and Rowland describes how we respond by feeling "the failure of words which seemed real but which have suddenly proved worse than useless since they always mean the wrong thing."[22]

In "Reading Cavell Reading Wittgenstein," Bernstein seems to express a similar view when he sets out his views on distortion, the object of language and games. For Bernstein, it is a fallacy to believe, "that words refer to 'transcendental signified' to use an expression from another tradition, rather than being part of a language which itself produces meaning in terms of its grammar, its conventions and its 'agreements in judgement'."[23] Like the Marx Brothers, Bernstein recognizes that, "the foundations of knowledge are not so much based on a pre-existing empirical world as on shared conventions and mutual attunement."[24]

It is clear that Bernstein has much in common with the Marx Brothers: a concern about the standardization of language; awareness of the problems in expressing oneself in language; and the pleasure of play in unexpected formulations of language. When Bernstein writes about the Marx Brothers, he

---

[18] Richard Rowland, "American Classic," *Hollywood Quarterly* 2, no. 3. (1947): 265 (264-269).
[19] Rowland, "American Classic," 265-266.
[20] Charles Bernstein, "Stray Straws and Straw Men," *The L=A=N-G=U=A-G=E Book*, ed. Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Press, 1984) 44 (39-45).
[21] Rowland, "American Classic," 267.
[22] Ibid, 267.
[23] Charles Bernstein, "Reading Cavell Reading Wittgenstein," *Boundary 2* IX, no. 2 (1981): 299 (295–306).
[24] Bernstein, "Reading Cavell Reading Wittgenstein" 299.

recognizes this sympathy and that he sees the Marx Brothers' play as being extremely significant. In "Comedy and the Poetics of Political Form," Bernstein offers as part of his compositional methods, a synthesis of "the three Marxes (Chico, Karl, Groucho)."[25] Bernstein's views on Marxism are relayed in "Three or Four Things I know About Him," in which he writes of his view that the Marxist aesthetic fails, because it fails to recognize that the gap between language and the subject is not simply another part of our illusory commodity lives. Language creates "commonness," yet Bernstein recommends a move from descriptive, common language to a language based on "its wordness, its physicality, its haecceity (thisness)."[26] To fulfill this lack, Bernstein supplements Karl Marx with two of the Marx Brothers associated particularly with linguistic humor, Chico and Groucho, and the implication seems to be that the Marx Brothers' relation to language is one of skepticism, challenge and deflation. These are all strategies of which Bernstein heartily approves.

It is now worth analyzing some scenes from Marx Brothers' films in detail to illuminate the understanding of their linguistic play, in comparison with two of Bernstein's poems that replicate the Marx Brothers' tendencies. I tend to use speeches as they resemble most closely Bernstein's poems and I focus on Groucho Marx's humor, because as I show in my analysis of Bernstein's libretto, *Shadowtime*, Groucho is a kind of synechdoche for the entire attitude of the Marx Brothers' humorous attitude to language.

The Cocoanuts, one of the Marx Brothers' early films sometimes deals with the language of capitalism. Written by George S. Kaufman and the unaccredited Morrie Ryskind, it tells the story of an impoverished hotelier (Groucho) in Florida as the other brothers play a nymphomaniac (Harpo), a stooge (Chico) and a dogsbody (Zeppo). At an auction, Groucho's speech undermines the "American dream" and the language of commerce:

> GROUCHO: Florida, folks, sunshine—perpetual sunshine—all year around. Let's get the auction started before we get a tornado. Right this way. Step forward. Step forward, everybody. Friends, you are now in Cocoanut Manor, one of the finest cities in Florida. Of course, we still need a few finishing touches. But who doesn't? This is the heart of the residential district. Every lot is a stone's throw from the station. As soon as they throw enough stones, we're going to build a station. Eight hundred beautiful residences will be built right here. Why, they are as good as up. Better, you can have any kind of home you want to. You can even get stucco—oh how you can get stucco. Now is the time to buy, while the new boom is on. Remember that old saying, a new boom sweeps clean? And

[25] Charles Bernstein, "Comedy and the Poetics of Political Form," 243.
[26] Charles Bernstein, "Three or Four Things I know About Him," *Content's Dream: Essays 1975-1984* (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1986) 26 (13-33).

> don't forget the guarantee—my personal guarantee: if those lots don't double in value in a year. I don't know what you can do about it.

Groucho begins the speech with the patter of a salesman, but his consequent flippant honesty when he mentions tornadoes reveals the emptiness of his words. This marks a pattern that characterizes the rest of the speech. He returns to the sales patter and describes the good qualities of the city, before slipping in that it needs a few "finishing touches." Groucho is seemingly complicit with the values of the mania-driven audience of house-buyers, yet the verbosity of his language again reveals the emptiness of language and desires behind it, in this case for Spanish pueblo style houses ("oh how you can get stucco"). Words like "boom" are the vectors of capitalism, yet Groucho's pun on "boom" and "broom" implies that the clean sweep will be for real estate agents rather than the buyers. The futility of commercial sales language is displayed in stark relief. Throughout the speech, Groucho refuses to remain in the standardized language of commerce and he uses the surprise of linguistic play to expose the nullity of the powerful language of jargon.

In his collection, *With Strings* (2001), Bernstein echoes Groucho's undermining of the language of capitalism. Parts of his long poem, "Log Rhythms," ponder modern life and the question of commerce:

> [...] Where
> there's life there's Coke and where there's
> Coke can Dr. Brown's Pluri-Cola be far behind
> if you'd just let me take the reading skills
> test-preparation course instead of making me waste
> my time with all these books [...][27]

As in the example of the play on words of "boom" and "broom" in *The Cocoanuts*, Bernstein replaces a word in a familiar phrase with another word in order to make a point. Instead of the phrase reading, "Where there's life there's hope," "hope" becomes "Coke," an unsuitable and unworthy replacement for abstract qualities of aspiration and desire. "Coke" then morphs into the advertising savvy brand, "Dr Brown's Pluri-Cola," a product endorsed by a supposed medical professional and heightened in appeal by its superlative prefix, "pluri." A seemingly serious Bernstein desires the product and wheedles with an unknown other who forces him into the world of books. The "reading skills/test preparation course" seems to be another kind of product that is carefully labeled and branded. Like Groucho, Bernstein feigns a seeming

[27] Charles Bernstein, "Log Rhythms," *With Strings* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001) 124.88-93 (122-129).

complicity with the language of capitalism, yet he also reveals its emptiness and its hollow nature.

Horse Feathers gives the Marx Brothers treatment to the university campus, as Groucho plays Quincy Adams Wagstaff, the new president of Huxley College, Zeppo plays his son, Chico is an iceman and Harpo is a dog-catcher. Rather than being adapted from a successful Broadway show, *Horse Feathers* was created from scratch by a team of writers (Bert Kalamar, Harry Ruby, S.J. Perelman and Will Johnstone). The play of language in Groucho's inaugural speech creates an eloquent, comedic riff on the language of university institutions and intellectual authority as it begins by deflating the academics as Groucho imagines them in a chaotic scramble for his cigar:

> PROFESSOR: It would please the faculty if you would throw away your cigar.
> GROUCHO: The faculty members might as well keep their seats. There'll be no diving for this cigar. (Clears throat). Members of this Faculty, students of Huxley, and Huxley students. I guess that covers everything. Well, I thought my razor was dull until I heard this speech, and that reminds me of a story that's so dirty I'm ashamed to think of it myself. As I look out over your eager faces I can't really understand why this college is flat on its back. The last college I presided over I was flat on my back. Things kept going from bad to worse, but we all put our shoulders to the wheel, and it wasn't long before I was flat on my back again. Any questions? Any answers? Any rags, any bottles today? Any rags – Let's have some action around here.

In the speech, a number of different discourses are used. Groucho begins with the traditional address to the audience, before deflating the pomposity of his own language with a comment that seems too casual for the occasion ("I guess that covers everything") and finally proceeding to the bathetic comedy and innuendo. For a moment, the speech returns to rhetorical discourse ("As I look out over your eager young faces..."), yet by the end of the sentence, the speech founders on a suggestive colloquialism ("flat on its back," "flat on my back"). The speech launches into a mini melodramatic narrative and the language of progress ("our shoulders to the wheel"), before descending into colloquialisms again: "I was flat on my back again." By asking if there are any questions, Groucho at last seems to have returned to the realm of order; he has the answers that the audience is seeking. However, this is deflated too when Groucho demands answers revealing that he never had them to begin with and he then calls in the voice of a rag and bone man. The language used by Groucho is not that of an academic or an intellectual, yet in the world of the film, he remains in command, and his hybrid language at least gives him the power to confuse and outwit.

The influence of this kind of speech is obvious in Bernstein's poetry and I direct the reader to his poem, "Being a Statement on Poetics for the New Poetics

Colloquium of the Kootenay School of Writing, Vancouver, British Columbia, August 1995" in *Rough Trades* (1991). The lengthy title indicates that this poem is situated within the verbose and long-winded language of academia, yet the poem itself undermines this kind of language just as Groucho's speech does in *Horse Feathers*:

> I've never been one for intellectualizing. Too much
> talk never enough action. [...].[28]

The denial of the speaker's intellectual nature is mismatched with the verbosity of the title. This leaves the reader feeling unsure as to whether the speaker is feigning modesty, especially when the speaker seems to contradict himself stating that he procrastinates too much. Different kinds of language emerge here to contradict each other.

> [...]This is
> what distinguishes American and Canadian verse—a topic
> we can ill afford to gloss over at this
> critical juncture in our binational course. I
> did not steal the pears. Indeed, the problem
> is not the bathwater but the baby. I want
> a poem real as an Orange Julius. But
> let us put aside the rhetoric and speak as from one
> heart to another words that will soothe
> and illuminate. It is no longer 1978, nor for
> that matter 1982. The new fades like the shine
> on your brown wingtip shoes: should you simply
> buff or put down a coat of polish first?[29]

As in Groucho's speech, the speaker begins in the language of academia: "American and Canadian verse," "critical juncture" and "binational course." Yet the poem then descends into seeming irrelevancies. The speaker denies guilt in the stealing of pears and plays on the phrase, "to throw the baby out with the bath-water." The suggestion that the baby is the problem of this idiom is sensible, yet what relevance it has to American and Canadian poetry is unclear. Similarly, the desire for a "poem as real as an Orange Julius" undermines the academic discourse, using a bathetic simile that compares the elevated form of poetry with a fruit smoothie. As in Groucho's speech, there are moments where

---

[28] Charles Bernstein, "Being a Statement on Poetics for the New Poetics Colloquium of the Kootenay School of Writing, Vancouver, British Columbia, August 1995," *Rough Trades* (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1991) 29.1-5 (29-30).

[29] Bernstein, "Being a Statement on Poetics...," 29.11-23.

the speaker seems to regain control over his own speech offering to "put aside the rhetoric." He expresses the desire to use words as a means to "soothe/and illuminate," yet this is precisely what he is not doing, since the academic discourse is unable to accommodate, to explain or project the workings or meanings of poetry. The speaker states the obvious, explaining that 1978 and 1982 have passed, yet the fact that he feels that he must state it suggests uncertainty and challenges linear narratives. This leads to a metaphor about time and its vengeance on the surface of a shoe, yet again bathetic humor undermines the poignancy of the metaphor with a question about the best routine in cleaning one's shoes. Bernstein sets out to write a statement of poetics, yet he does not do so in a conventional manner. Rather by the end of this poem, although we have no clear facts about why and how he writes poetry, his mistrust of standardized, academic language is clear, and he harnesses Groucho's power to confuse and outwit to exercise his poetics in the very language that he uses.

In his recent libretto, *Shadowtime* (2005), Bernstein returns to the image of "the three Marxes (Chico, Karl, Groucho)" from his essay, "The Poetics of Political Form."[30] *Shadowtime* is a thought-opera based on the life and work of Walter Benjamin, and it features a sequence entitled, "Opus Contra Naturam," a term that emerges from Renaissance alchemy signaling a moment of transformation. It is in this sequence that Benjamin descends into the underworld and one part is entitled "Two Headed figure of Karl Marx and Groucho Marx with Kerberus" with the subtitle, "Hoquetus-Melodrama." *Hoquetus* refers to a medieval form of European vocal music involving two voices and it seems that Bernstein has returned again to the idea of Groucho-Marxian comedy fulfilling the lack of consciousness about the power structures of language in the Marxian aesthetic. When Groucho does speak, his name is bracketed and his primary identity is a double one:

> THE TWO MARXES (GROUCHO): Is it possible to forget without remembering what one has forgotten?[31]
> [...]
> THE TWO MARXES (GROUCHO): Is it possible to remember without forgetting what one has remembered?[32]

Bernstein's questions remind one of the quotation attributed to Groucho: "I never forget a face, but in your case I'll make an exception," and it seems that Bernstein is drawing attention to the play of language in Groucho's supra-real

[30] Charles Bernstein, "Comedy and the Poetics of Political Form," 243.
[31] Charles Bernstein, "Two Headed figure of Karl Marx and Groucho Marx with Kerberus," *Shadowtime* (Kobenhavn and Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2005) 84 (84-86).
[32] Bernstein, "Two Headed figure of Karl Marx and Groucho Marx with Kerberus," 85.

comedy.[33] Through the formation of language, Groucho offers a riddling, unsolvable problem. How can one forget what one already knows? Or as Bernstein posits the question in *Shadowtime*, is it true that we have to forget in order to remember? Groucho's proposition uses language to challenge the very nature of being as is highlighted in Bernstein's portrayal of him in *Shadowtime*.

Along with Kerberus, Bernstein's version of Groucho guards the door to the underworld itself, and the Bernstein's idea of the underworld is not a place of death and gloom, but a site of self-consciousness. Bernstein's Groucho states: "Say the magic word and get one free ride around Alexanderplatz, say the magic letter and everybody returns to just as it is."[34] In Bernstein's view, Groucho's comedy unlocks the door to another way of being in the world: a mode that questions, challenges and interrogates language rather than a sphere in which everything is "just as it is." This is a mode that denies a standardized language, that uses the "wrong" kind of language in situations of power exchange and that brings in the unexpected element in linguistic play or the "ir-elephant." When the protagonist, Benjamin, moves on into the underworld, Bernstein's Groucho is still questioning the nature of objects and language: "Why a duck? Why a rabbit? Why a pipe? Why a carousel?"[35]

Works Cited

Animal Crackers. DVD. Directed by Victor Heerman. 1930; Universal 2003.

Bernstein, Charles. "An elephant appears..." *Poetic Justice*. Baltimore: Pod Books, 1979. 27.

—. "Being a Statement on Poetics for the New Poetics Colloquium of the Kootenay School of Writing, Vancouver, British Columbia, August 1995." *Rough Trades*. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1991. 29-30.

—. "Comedy and the Poetics of Political Form." *The Politics of Poetic Form*. Ed. Charles Bernstein. New York: Roof, 1990. 235–244.

—. "Log Rhythms." *With Strings*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001. 122-129.

—. "Reading Cavell Reading Wittgenstein." *Boundary 2* IX, no. 2 (1981): 295–306.

—. "Solidarity is the Name We Give to What We Cannot Hold." *My Way: Speeches and Poems*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999. 33-35.

[33] *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, repr. 2001, s.v. "Groucho Marx".
[34] Bernstein, "Two Headed figure of Karl Marx and Groucho Marx with Kerberus," 85.
[35] Ibid. 85.

—. "Stray Straws and Straw Men." *The L=A=N-G=U=A-G=E Book.* Ed. Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Press, 1984. 39-45.

—. "Three or Four Things I know About Him." *Content's Dream: Essays 1975-1984.* Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1986. 13-33.

—. "Two Headed figure of Karl Marx and Groucho Marx with Kerberus." *Shadowtime.* Kobenhavn and Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2005. 84-86.

Duck Soup. DVD. Directed by Leo McCarey. 1933; Universal 2003.

Horse Feathers. DVD. Directed by Norman Mcleod. 1932.: Universal, 2003.

Lee, C.P. " 'Yeah and I used to be a hunchback': Immigrants, humour and the Marx Brothers." *Because I Tell A Joke or Two: Comedy, Politics and Social Difference.* Ed. Stephen Wagg. London and New York: Taylor & Francis, 1998. 165–179.

Rowland, Richard. "American Classic." *Hollywood Quarterly* 2, no. 3. (1947): 265 (264-269).

The Cocoanuts. DVD. Directed by Robert Florey and Joseph Santley. 1929; Universal, 2004.

The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, repr. 2001, s.v. "Groucho Marx".