



Vol. 12, No. 1, Fall 2014, 351-356

Review / Reseña

Maquinarias deconstructivas: Poesía y juego en Juan Luis Martínez, Diego Maquieira y Rodrigo Lira. By Marcelo Rioseco. Santiago de Chile: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 2013.

The Transgressive Power of the Ludic in Chilean Poetry of the 1970s and 1980s

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Marcelo Rioseco's erudite book analyzes the significant ludic current present in Chilean neo-avant-garde poetry of the 1970s and 80s. It makes a valuable contribution to critical studies of recent Chilean literary production, establishing a clear case for the primacy of the ludic in a certain zone of poetic composition in Chile *vis-à-vis* a thorough contextualization of the writing scene in Santiago, Valparaíso and Viña del Mar during 70s and 80s in addition to close readings of seminal texts by Rodrigo Lira, Juan Luis Martínez and Diego Maquieira. Rioseco argues that these three poets can be

understood by way of the figure of the *Scriptor ludens*, a subversive operator of poetic war machines and machinations. This politicized and militarized *bricoleur* creates ludic literary experiments as games open to reality in a way that contests authority and its discourses of order and of ordering and representing reality. This is, in turn, a questioning of the literary through the language of the game, which, according to Rioseco, is what transforms the experimental into the transgressive, bestowing an ideological content on practices often defined as purely aesthetic, reaching beyond the literary towards epistemological and cognitive concerns regarding the interpretation of reality (314).

Following a brief introduction, *Maquinarias deconstructivas* consists of five chapters and a conclusion about games and the Postmodern. Rioseco's first two chapters are contextual in nature: the first presents a well-grounded historico-theoretical framework on literary humor and game theory (as it applies to literary studies). Whereas the two cardinal points of reference for Rioseco's discussion are Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois, he deftly touches upon texts by a diverse group of thinkers that includes Schiller, Kant, Gadamer, Freud, Benveniste, Derrida, Jean Duvignaud, Barthes and Susan Stewart, among others. The second chapter explores the major names and places in the Chilean cultural scene in the 1970s and 80s under dictatorship, contextualizing artistic production during this time period through the work of Nelly Richard and the *Escena de Avanzada* (including the Art Action Collective, *el CADA*) as well as though important links to the historical avant-gardes of approximately 1909-1938 and to Nicanor Parra's antipoetry. This moment of alternative cultural expression, which coalesced around 1977-8, has alternatively been called *Generación dispersa*, *Generación N.N.*, *Generación pos-golpe*, *Generación del 73*, *Generación de septiembre*, *poesía nueva horneada*, *la nueva poesía chilena*; Rioseco, however, prefers to delimit the major features of

the “new Chilean poetry” emerging during this time by following Ángel Rama’s analysis of the “two avant-gardes.” Rioseco argues that the Chilean neo-avant-garde reflects the unresolved tension between art and politics, highlighting the more openly political current embodied in the *Avanzada* (especially *el CADA*) and the alternative ludic line comprised of Juan Luis Martínez, Diego Maquieira and Rodrigo Lira (85). A key contribution of Rioseco’s book is his definition and delimitation of the “ludic neo-avant-garde.” He suggests that within the neo-avant-garde itself the ludic is the hinge around or through which these authors situate the multifaceted tension between the artistic and the political; while none of the three authors he examines advanced a specific political project, the seemingly formalist brand of poetic experimentation that their work represents was far from apolitical or indifferent to the socio-political situation of the 70s and 80s. The “poetics of the game” that Rioseco articulates in the writings of these three neo-avant-garde authors, then, demonstrates the way in which the critical and subversive activities produced by their “deconstructive machinations” contests the official discourses (political, social, etc.) that construct the environment in which we live. This field of ludic poetic writing, states Rioseco, is far from a purely aesthetic current.

Chapter three tackles the sardonic poetic writings of Rodrigo Lira, showing the ways in which Lira’s work internalized the teachings of the masters and subverted them through a series of satirical or parodic operations. Whereas Rioseco asserts that each of these three neo-avant-garde poets wrote “against Neruda and in favor of Parra” (318), Lira’s poetry most clearly pushed antipoetry to extremes in its multifarious challenges to traditional Chilean poetry and poetics. Lira, as a kind of carnivalized Enrique Lihn (93), created a poetic wager (“apuesta literaria”) that resulted in his own literary suicide or literature as suicide. Lira’s multilingual texts are verbal collages, digressions, notes and epigraphs, and carry out sharp

parodies of well-known texts in Chilean poetry (such as Huidobro's "Arte poética", for example) or are autoreferential webs of masks, quotations, and fragments of other texts in several languages. For Rioseco, Lira's poetry presents humor that is inseparable from irony, a game that is not opposed to that which is serious, and satire as ingenious verbal aggression (134). The larger critique of the institutionalization of poetry at play in Lira's work is well-developed in Rioseco's careful close readings of complex and dense assemblies of quotations and parodies of fixed discursive forms. Here, the critic delivers on his expressed claim that the careful reader of Lira can follow the poet's intertextual trail of fixed, pre-established bureaucratic forms and finally understand the complexities of this poetic project.

The following chapter turns to the infamous book-object that is truly the fundamental text of the Chilean neo-avant-garde, a work that is also the cornerstone of postmodernity within the scene of the new Chilean poetry: Juan Luis Martínez's artist's book *La nueva novela*, first published in 1977 and republished in 1985. Drawing on the ample bibliography on Martínez's masterpiece to analyze *La nueva novela's* semantic labyrinth as a disruption of supposedly objective discourses, Rioseco appeals to a number of theoretical paradigms (such as reader-response theory, structuralism, deconstruction, and game theory, to name a few) to show how Martínez's poetry is a philosophical questioning of the nature of reality. The complex fusion of poetry and games in Martínez's work confronts and contests the authority of Western logos as a literary authoritarianism that regulates, accepts or censures the standards of production of texts accepted as literary, as well as the larger context of political (military) authoritarianism surrounding the book's composition (182). Rioseco builds on the formal analysis done by Patricia Monarca in her book *Juan Luis Martínez: el juego de las contradicciones* in order to highlight the role of paratextual (game)

elements as part and parcel of the false clues and trails through which disappearance takes place in *La nueva novela*. He goes on to assert that the original nature of Martínez's work lies in his unique combinations of found elements, and concludes the chapter with an insightful reading of Martínez's mathematical poetics as a key element in the deconstruction of our conceptualization of reality and a profound interrogation of the relationship between poetry and philosophy.

The final chapter is an exploration of the carnivalesque games present in two key works by Diego Maquieira: *La Tirana* (1983) and *Los Sea Harrier en el firmamento de eclipses* (1993). Rioseco proposes the concept of "la lengua adversa" to approach Maquieira's dramatic, lucid texts, which articulate a polyphonic carnival in which literature declares war on authority itself. Foregrounding his analysis in the writings of Bakhtin, Rioseco writes that "Carnaval, heteroglosia y risa carnavalesca convergen en lo que se ha denominado aquí 'la lengua adversa', el juego festivo de una maquinaria de la escritura, pero también del habla" (260-1). In *La Tirana* in particular, he highlights the ritualistic decadence and eroticism in Maquieira's satirical portrait of the bourgeois global and historical cultural scene; *Los Sea Harrier*, on the other hand, portrays a socially marginal group linked to ideological transgression in a genre- and gender-bending poetic scene that creates a new poetic language as the space of "la lengua adversa." In this baroque concert, the poet's cinematic and SF-influenced imaginary presents a "lucid laugh, tragic carnival, postmodern or futuristic jubilation" (298) that is simultaneously "spectacle and spectacular" (307). Maquieira's writing, asserts Rioseco, is premodern in its humor with a sharp ideological critique insofar as it attacks both the Church's moral stance as well as the ideological discourses of the dominant classes of the time.

Rioseco's brief afterword neatly summarizes the main contributions of the ludic neo-avant-garde to Chilean poetry: 1) it put an end to the (strictly) serious way of thinking/writing poetry; 2) it cast the author as a particular kind of bricoleur (the *Scriptor ludens*); 3) it made the reader into a player of games through active participation; 4) its intense intertextuality annulled the possibility of literary hierarchies; and 5) it went beyond mere formal experimentation, insofar as it was subversive at the literary, moral and epistemological levels (324). As is evident from this schema, *Maquinarias deconstructivas* is clearly written and methodical. It is clearly relevant to a general (Spanish-language) readership with interest in humor or games in literature, avant-garde poetry, or recent Chilean literature; it is most useful, however, to specialists in the field given the book's exquisite bibliographic detail and its superb close readings of poems by Lira, Martínez and Maquieira. This book will serve as a key point of reference for scholars and students of the post-Parra poetic scene in Chile and yet is also an excellent introduction to the main features of the Chilean literary and artistic scene in the 70s and 80s.