

GERALD L. BRUNS

*Poetic Communities*

And one day they taught Hesiod glorious song while he was shepherding his lambs under holy Helicon, and this word first the goddesses said to me—the Muses of Olympus, daughters of Zeus who holds the aegis:

1

“Shepherds of the wilderness, wretched things of shame, mere bellies, we know how to speak many false things as though they were true; but we know, when we will, to utter true things.”

So said the ready-voiced daughters of great Zeus, and they plucked and gave me a rod, a shoot of sturdy laurel, a marvellous thing, and breathed into me a divine voice to celebrate things that shall be and things that were aforetime; and they bade me sing of the race of the blessed gods that are eternally, but ever to sing of themselves both first and last. But why all this about oak and stone?

—Hesiod, *Theogony*, 26-33

**ECSTASY.** Scholarly tradition pictures Hesiod, like Homer before him, as a great pedagogue.<sup>1</sup> The poet is in charge of a vast encyclopedia concerning gods and heroes (and also, in Hesiod’s particular case, everyday life). But from Hesiod we also learn that poetry itself is not a kind of learning but a species of ecstasy. No one studies to be a poet. No one asks to be such a thing. One is, for no reason, summoned out of one’s house and exposed to a kind of transcendence. Exactly what kind of transcendence is not always clear. One can imagine preferring the life of the belly where people who say they are hungry can usually be taken at their word. Like biblical prophecy, poetry is a condition of election and a mode of responsibility, as much a curse as a calling since one is now hostage to a “divine voice” (or perhaps we would now say: to “the voice itself”). In an essay on the poetic or prophetic voice, “the voice itself,” Jean-Luc Nancy says: “Someone singing, during the song, is not a subject.”<sup>2</sup> Likewise Emmanuel Levinas: inspiration “does not leave any place of refuge, any chance to slip away....”<sup>3</sup> In

ecstasy I am turned inside out, exposed to others, still myself perhaps but no longer an “I,” that is, no longer a spontaneous agent but only a “who” or a “me”: a passive, responsive, obsessive repercussion of the Muses.

- 2 **PARTAGE.** In the *Ion* Plato gives the basic theory of poetry as a condition of fascination, that is, of being touched, gripped, or magnetized (hypnotized).<sup>4</sup> Fascination is a reversal of subjectivity from cognition to obsession. Of the fascination of images, for example, Maurice Blanchot writes: “Seeing presupposes distance, decisiveness which separates, the power to stay out of contact and in contact to avoid confusion. Seeing means that this separation has nevertheless become an encounter. But what happens when what you see, although at a distance, seems to touch you with a gripping contact, when the manner of seeing is a kind of touch, when seeing is contact at a distance? What happens when what is seen imposes itself on the gaze, as if the gaze were seized, put in touch with appearance?”<sup>5</sup> An image is different from a concept. Seeing is conceptual: it grasps the world, holds it up for scrutiny as if at arm’s length; but in fascination distance (and therefore aesthetics) collapses and the eye suffers a seizure. It is transfixed or fixed in place by the image and can see nothing else. A visionary experience is always a condition of confusion in which the eye is absorbed or consumed by what is seen; hence the avid or the vacant stare, the stony, liquidated look. I am no longer myself but another. A true image is not a likeness but a Medusa-event in which I no longer know what I am looking at. Although still part of the world, I experience the world as a surface to be crossed rather than a place to be occupied. Ecstasy means that (starting with myself) I am outside of and uncontainable within any order of things, an exile or nomad. However, this does not mean no one shares my condition. On the contrary, Plato emphasizes the contagion of poetry; its magnetism flows from one to another like the spell that forms delirious Dionysian communities (536A-D). Fascination is a condition of participation in which one is no longer separated but is caught up in an ecstatic movement, which is always a movement from one to another that produces a gathering or string, that is, not a dialogue or conversation (which would be a philosophical community formed by friends stepping

in off the street) but what Jean-Luc Nancy calls a *partage*, a sharing or division of voices in which the divine voice or “voice itself” is multiplied by being passed from one singularity to another like rumor or panic (Nancy prefers the metaphor of the gift).<sup>6</sup> There is no abiding or indwelling universal spirit—no communion of “poetry in general,” as Nancy says—but only the singular “being-outside-oneself” that is received and handed on (think of the round of voices in traditional song—“the voice itself,” Nancy says, “can become yours or mine” [BP237]). This ecstasy is what poetry communicates, not a vision or a revelation; the sharing of ecstasy rather than of mind or spirit, language or myth, is the essence of poetry and of the poetic community (PV66/SV236-37). Such a community can never be sedentary; it does not grow or develop into a unitary order. A poetic community has the structure of a series of singularities rather than a fusion of many into one.<sup>7</sup> Hence the topos of poetry as discourse in flight—“panic” is Blanchot’s word for it: “Flight now makes each thing rise up as though it were all things and the whole of things—not like a secure order in which one might take shelter, nor even like a hostile order against which one must struggle, but as the movement that steals and steals away. Thus flight not only reveals reality as being this whole (a totality without gap and without issue) that one must flee: flight is this very whole that steals away, and to which it draws us even while repelling us.”<sup>8</sup> Poetry opens a hole in being through which every totality drains away. So it is not merely that the poet is outside and uncontainable with any order of things; it is that poetry disrupts in advance (*an-arché*) the possibility of any such order. As Blanchot says, incompleteness (*désœuvrement*) is its principle—“a principle of insufficiency” (IC5/UC5). Ecstasy, says Nancy, “defines the impossibility, both ontological and gnoseological, of absolute immanence (or of the absolute, and therefore of immanence) and consequently the impossibility either of an individuality in the precise sense of the term, or of a pure collective totality.”<sup>9</sup> In place (or in advance) of the settlement, the village, the realm, the social contract, civil society, liberal democracy, the total or merely procedural state, poetry opens up an ecstatic or anarchic community—a community that (Nancy says) “resists collectivity itself as much as it resists the individual” (CD177/INC71). An ecstatic community assembles and disperses (as at games, festivals, and rallies) but is

not meant to last. Incompleteness, as said, is its principle. Eric Havelock has shown that an ecstatic community is what Socrates saw in the Athens around him: a vast theater, a performance culture basically hypnotic and anarchic in its operations and results.<sup>10</sup>

4 Whence denial of ecstasy became for Socrates the first principle of his “city of words,” which is a totally integrated economic order administered by sealed-off punctual egos exercising rational control (our once and future philosophers). Recall that the starting-point of his construction is the critique of *mimesis* in Book III (393A-398B), where *mimesis* is a mode of “being-outside-oneself” or impersonation rather than the category of representation that it becomes in Book x. The problem of poetry is not its logical weakness but its power to project people outside of themselves. Poetry is a dispersal or dissemination of subjectivities in which no one is oneself and everyone is somebody else, as in theater. Here would be the place to recall Nietzsche’s analysis, which neatly summarizes Plato’s poetics (and anticipates Georges Bataille’s): “Dionysiac excitation is capable of communicating to a whole multitude this artistic power to feel itself surrounded by, and at one with, a host of spirits. What happens in the dramatic chorus is the primary dramatic phenomenon: projecting oneself outside oneself and then acting as though one had really entered another body, another character.... It should be made clear that this phenomenon is not singular but epidemic: a whole crowd becomes rapt in this manner.”<sup>11</sup> Belonging to a crowd (the first principle of theater) is a condition of rapture. Possibly mystics levitate alone. The ecstasy of poetry, however, is a social experience. In *The Unavowable Community* Maurice Blanchot recalls that for Georges Bataille ecstasy “could not take place if it was limited to a single individual...: [it] accomplishes itself...when it is shared” [C134-35/UC17].) Walter Benjamin: “man can be in ecstatic contact with the cosmos only communally. It is the dangerous error of modern men to regard this experience as unimportant and avoidable, and to consign it to the individual as the poetic rapture of starry nights.”<sup>12</sup> And he quotes Baudelaire as follows: “‘The pleasure of being in a crowd is a mysterious expression of sensual joy in the multiplication of number.... Number is in *all*.... Ecstasy is a number....Religious intoxication of great cities....’ Ch. B., *Œuvres*, vol. 2, pp. 626-627 (‘Fusées’). Extract the root of the human being!”<sup>13</sup>

**POETRY: A SHORT HISTORY.** Aristotle's *Organon* or rule of discourse gives us the purely logical form of Socrates' city. Here a place for poetry is found by reconceptualizing *mimesis* as *mathesis* or learning (1448b.4, 2-6), and then by laying bare as its deep structure a form of consecutive reasoning called *muthos* or plot (1450a.7, 1-7). Poetry is now for spectators on whom it has a therapeutic or calming effect. Instead of fascination it produces or enhances an essentially philosophical subjectivity. Aristotle is thought to have invented the concept of the critical spectator whose experience of literature is essentially solitary and reflective. (As Gadamer has shown, the Platonic spectator is always ecstatic.)<sup>14</sup> What is at least true is that a principle of disengagement has been introduced into the theory of poetic experience—a distancing factor (perhaps we can speak of this as the aestheticizing of the poetic).<sup>15</sup> As a species of discourse, poetry will henceforward be largely a branch of rhetoric reducible to handbooks, that is, not so much a discipline in its own right as a technique of mediation in the service of other discursive fields (or, as Horace said, in the service of empire). Poetry is defined by not having any discursive field of its own ("the allegory of the poets" derives from theology). One can remark in passing (1) on Longinus, who affirms the ecstatic tradition but is himself lost to the world until the Seventeenth Century; (2) on the genre of the lyric, with its lethal erotic and satiric traditions (the one drives people to perdition, the other to suicide; Rome in fact passed a law forbidding satire); (3) on the classical tradition of poetic exile (Ovid, Dante, Milton, Joyce); (4) on the myth of the unschooled poet like Wolfram von Eschenbach, who says: "I don't know a single letter of the alphabet" (*Parzival*, 11.115). But what characterizes poetry throughout most of its history is its confinement to institutions not of its own making. For example, in *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* Ernst Robert Curtius asks about "the mode of existence of the medieval poet." For Curtius "mode of existence" is a social rather than ontological category. The question is: "Why did one write poetry? One was taught to in school. A great many medieval authors wrote poetry because one had to be able to do so in order to prove oneself a *clericus* and *litteratus*; in order to turn out compliments, epitaphs, petitions, dedications, and thus gain favor with the powerful or correspond with equals; as also for the sake of vile Mammon. The writ-

5

ing of poetry can be taught and learned; it is schoolwork and a school subject.”<sup>16</sup> The modern university’s writers’ workshop preserves this tradition. Curtius notes that the concept of the poet’s “divine frenzy” is preserved as a rhetorical topos. Pope memorializes this topos in the *Peri Bathous; or, The Art of Sinking in Poetry*, a parody of Longinus aimed at a new poetic culture whose origins are internal to the development of print technology and the new autonomous social spaces that it opens up: with the rise of modern cities poetry becomes a discourse of the street (the tavern, the coffee house, the periodical) rather than of the court, the church, and the school. The invention of the concept of art (in which poetry can now reflect on itself as if in a space of its own) is made possible by these social changes, as when Friedrich Schlegel characterizes the poet as “a sociable being”: conversing about poetry with poets and lovers of poetry now becomes a condition of poetry as such.<sup>17</sup> But what counts as poetry as such? Beginning with the Jena Romantics (the Athenäum is arguably the first literary community of modernity and a prototype of the avant-garde group) this becomes an open question: as poetry ceases to be a genre distinction, poetic theories are now necessary in order to pick out a piece of language as poetic (see Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenäum Fragments*, nos. 116 & 238).<sup>18</sup> So we get the onset of modernism as a culture of prefaces and manifestoes. The distinction between theory and practice, or between poetry and poetics, ceases to be self-evident, as does the distinction between fragment and work. The poet Charles Bernstein says: “I imagine poetry...as that which can’t be contained by any set of formal qualities.”<sup>19</sup> It becomes what Maurice Blanchot calls “fragmentary writing”—writing that is “averse to masterpieces, and even withdraws from the idea of the work to the point of making the latter a form of worklessness [*désœuvrement*]” (E1592/IC403).<sup>20</sup> As if, twenty-five hundred years later, poetry were breaking out of the Organon.<sup>21</sup> As Bernstein says: “I imagine poetry as an invasion of the poetic into other realms: overflowing the bounds of genres, spilling into talk, essays, politics, philosophy” (P151). The Athenäum group is where this break-out or dissemination is first enacted as a program (the idea is, among other things, to make philosophy poetic and poetry philosophical). In their account of the group Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy write: “the fragment is the romantic genre par excellence....

In fact, only a single ensemble, published with the one-word title, *Fragments*, corresponds entirely (or as much as possible) to the fragmentary ideal of romanticism, notably in that it has no particular object and in that it is anonymously composed of pieces by several different authors.”<sup>22</sup> Imagine poetry not so much as a work of the spirit as a group experiment (Fr. 125: “Perhaps there would be a birth of a whole new era of the sciences and arts if symphilosophy and sympoetry became so universal and heartfelt that it would no longer be anything extraordinary for several complementary minds to create communal works of art”).

7

**THE COLLEGE OF SOCIOLOGY.** In Paris in 1937 Georges Bataille, along with Roger Callois, Michel Leiris, and Pierre Klossowski, began organizing a series of bi-monthly lectures called The College of Sociology, whose purpose was to investigate the nature of such social structures as the army, religious orders, secret societies, brotherhoods, companies, salons, drinking, gaming, or sporting clubs, youth groups, even political parties (normally) on the fringe.<sup>23</sup> Crucially, Bataille will later (in *Le coupable* 1944) add the community of lovers and the artists’ community.<sup>24</sup> These structures are, according to Callois, ecstatic or “sacred” communities, where the sacred consists “in the outburst of violations of rules of life: a sacred that *expends* itself, that *spends itself* (the orgiastic sacred)” (CS152). The sacred is not a theological but a social concept. Sacred communities are not part of the productive economies of modern capitalist states; or rather, whatever function or goal might be assigned to them in the bourgeois order of things, they are defined by what Bataille calls “nonproductive expenditures of energy [*dépense*].”<sup>25</sup> A nonproductive expenditure of energy is one in which there is no return on investment. It is a gratuitous expenditure, absolutely outside any economy of exchange- or use-value. It is predicated upon a principle of loss rather than on the accumulation of capital. It belongs, if anywhere, to the economy of the gift. In an essay on “The Notion of Expenditure” (1933) Bataille gives several examples of such free expenditures: jewelry, religious sacrifice, kinky sex, gambling, art. It is important to know that within the category of art he singles out poetry as the premier example of free expenditure:

The term poetry, applied to the least degraded and least intellectualized forms of the expression of a state of loss, can be considered synonymous with expenditure; it in fact signifies, in the most precise way, creation by means of loss. Its meaning is therefore close to that of *sacrifice*. It is true that the word “poetry” can only be appropriately applied to an extremely rare residue of what it commonly signifies and that, without a preliminary reduction, the worst confusions could result; it is, however, impossible in a first, rapid exposition to speak of the infinitely variable limits separating subsidiary formations from the residual element of poetry. It is easier to indicate that, for the rare human beings who have this element at their disposal, poetic expenditure ceases to be symbolic in its consequences; thus, to a certain extent, the function of representation engages the very life of the one who assumes it. It condemns him to the most disappointing forms of activity, to misery, to despair, to the pursuit of inconsistent shadows that provide nothing but vertigo or rage. The poet frequently can use words only for his own loss; he is often forced to choose between the destiny of a reprobate, who is as profoundly separated from society as dejecta are from apparent life, and a renunciation whose price is a mediocre activity, subordinated to vulgar and superficial needs (PM30-31/VE120).

The important line here is: “poetic expenditure ceases to be symbolic in its consequences.” This is the thesis of modern poetics.<sup>26</sup> Poems are made of words but are not a use of them. That is, the words of the poem are no longer forms of mediation; they have become events of *communication* in the special sense that Bataille attaches to this word. Communication is not a concept from information theory; it refers not to the transmission of messages but to the contagious relation in which states of existence are passed along from one subject to another (Nancy’s *partage*). Communication has the structure of Plato’s magnetic chain rather than the give-and-take anatomy of dialogue, commerce, and social struggle. In Bataille’s words, communication is made of “contagions of energy, of movement, of warmth, or transfers of elements,

which constitute inevitably the life of your organized being. Life is never situated at a particular point: it passes rapidly from one point to another (or from multiple points to other points), like a current or a sort of streaming of electricity.”<sup>27</sup> At all events in poetry words are no longer to be exchanged for meanings or things: they are now like images of fascination — moments of reversal that displace the logical or cognitive subject from its position of sovereignty and control. As Blanchot says apropos of Kafka: “The writer gives up saying ‘I’” (EL21/SL26). Poetry is heterogeneous with respect to an order of things organized from the perspective of the logical subject. So we should say that, at least from the poet’s point of view, Plato got poetry right.<sup>28</sup>

**LA BOHÈME.** Notice that Bataille defines the poet’s choice in terms of “the destiny of the reprobate” as against submission to the principle of necessity. Imagine this destiny as a condition that makes poetry possible. Students of Walter Benjamin tend to be guarded about the fact that he was among the occasional participants in Bataille’s College of Sociology (Benjamin’s saintliness seems out of place in this morally and politically dubious environment). In fact in the spring of 1939 Benjamin was scheduled to deliver a paper on “Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” but his presentation was postponed until the Fall, and by then France was at war and within a few months Benjamin would be a refugee (fortunately he gave his manuscripts to Bataille, a librarian, for safekeeping). There were in any case no more meetings of Bataille’s group. However, as we have it, the text of “Some Motifs in Baudelaire” is remarkably coherent with both the letter and spirit of inquiry around which Bataille had organized his College. Benjamin’s theme is social ecstasy. In the first place there is the thesis that Baudelaire intended his poetry to produce a state of shock.<sup>29</sup> (Undoubtedly Baudelaire, not Rimbaud, was the first Surrealist.) But perhaps more important is the mode of social existence that Baudelaire represents for Benjamin, namely that of the homeless *flâneur* whose environment is the street and the crowd, where “the man of the crowd” is restless, manic, obsessive, and unstable in his identities (GS.I.2.626-27/CB128). Benjamin says of Baudelaire: “the street...became a refuge for him” (“The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire,” GS.I.2.573/CB70). In the street one is

always outside of oneself, and for Benjamin Baudelaire is nothing in himself but is the consummate role-player (“*flâneur*, apache, dandy, and ragpicker were so many roles to him”) (GS.1.2.600/CB97). And again: “On the physiognomy of Baudelaire as that of the mime: Courbet reports that he looked different every day” (GS.V.1.419/AP333). Moreover, Baudelaire’s poetry is “nomadic” in Deleuze and Guattari’s sense of an art that is uncontainable within any rationalized order of things. Benjamin writes: “Around the middle of the century, the conditions of artistic production underwent a change. This change consisted in the fact that for the first time the form of the commodity imposed itself decisively on the work of art, and the form of the masses on its public. Particularly vulnerable to these developments, as can be seen now unmistakably in our century, was the lyric. It is the unique distinction of *Les Fleurs du mal* that Baudelaire responded to precisely these altered conditions with a book of poems. It is the best example of heroic conduct to be found in his life” (GS.V.1.424/AP336-377). Baudelaire’s achievement was not to have left us a novel. However, Benjamin’s Baudelaire is not merely the romantic artist in solitary metaphysical rebellion against a fallen world. He is rather the representative of the ecstatic social structure that makes him possible, namely the *Bohème* (GS.1.2.513-14/CB11-34). The *Bohème* is the underground (by no means the first of its kind when we think of Grubstreet, Bartholomew Fair, and the Elizabethan crowd that begins writing—about the London streets—for the printing press; think of how Marlowe ends his days). Benjamin defines the *Bohème* as the hiding-place of political conspirators during the Second Empire (“Professional conspirator and dandy meet in the concept of the modern hero. This hero represents for himself in his own person, a whole secret society” [GS.V.1.478/AP378]). It is the world of lowlifes, wastrels, criminals, prostitutes, and Balzacian destitutes—Bataille’s sacred realm of the “accursed.” It is where the gambler is deposited at the end of his run. Its defining genre is the detective story. It is also the condition of the modern poet’s existence. On Benjamin’s analysis the *Bohème* is a principle of modernist poetics (this is his Baudelaire-thesis). In antiquity it was the ecstasy of the poet that, according to the magnetic theory, constituted the condition of the anarchic community; in Benjamin it is the anarchic community

that is the condition of poetry. In order to become a poet it is no longer enough to possess (as if by nature) a certain kind of subjectivity (a dissatisfied memory is all one needs); it is now necessary to belong to a certain kind of world in order to take on the kinds of subjectivity that that world makes available—the man of the barricades, the painted woman, the beggar, the painter of modern life. (“In the guise of the beggar Baudelaire continually put the model of bourgeois society to the test” [GS.V.1.427/AP338].) At the end of the day Benjamin’s Baudelaire is a kind of urbanized romantic ironist, a transcendental *buffoon*, a performance artist:

11

Baudelaire did not have the humanitarian idealism of a Victor Hugo or a Lamartine. The emotional buoyancy of a Musset was not at his disposal. He did not, like Gautier, take pleasure in his times, nor could he deceive himself about them like Leconte de Lisle. It was not given him to find a refuge in devotions, like Verlaine, nor to heighten the youthful vigor of his lyric *élan* through the betrayal of his adulthood, like Rimbaud. As rich as Baudelaire is in the knowledge of his craft, he is relatively unprovided with stratagems to face the times. And even the grand tragic part he had composed for the arena of his day—the role of the “modern”—could be filled in the end only by himself. All this Baudelaire no doubt recognized. The eccentricities in which he took such pleasure were those of the mime who has to perform before a public incapable of following the action on the stage—a mime, furthermore, who knows this about his audience and, in his performance, allows that knowledge its rightful due (GS.V.1.429/AP340).

**BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE.** Voice, Jean-Luc Nancy says in “Vox Clamans in Deserto,” is not an expression of the self but a projection of it. “Voice is not present to itself, it is only an exterior manifestation, a trembling that offers itself to the outside, the half-beat of an opening—once again, a wilderness exposed where layers of air vibrate in the heat. The wilderness of the voice in the wilderness, in all its clamor—has no subject, no infinite unity; it always leaves for the outside, without self-presence, without self-

consciousness" (BP243). In Charles Olson's poetics the poetic subject does not reflect on itself but rather is projected like a breath (hence it is an "objectivist" rather than expressive or "subjectivist" poetics).<sup>30</sup> The poem is not the reworking or working-out of genres and conventions (what Olson called "closed form"); it is rather an event on the model of free expenditure (or "open form"): "The poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it (he will have some several causations), by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader.... Then the poem must be, at all points, a high energy-construct and, at all points, a high energy-discharge" (PV52).<sup>31</sup> Crucially, this is an expenditure of energy that is shaped by the poet's breath—the poetic line comes not from a manual of prosody but "(I swear it) from the breath of the poet, from the breathing of the man who writes" (PV54), which Olson identifies as "voice in its largest sense" (PV58). (Compare Adorno on breath as a musical unit in Schönberg.)<sup>32</sup> In composition, Olson says, the typewriter allows the poet to score the voice of the poem, so that poetry, whatever else it might be, becomes the communication of voice: "It is the advantage of the typewriter that, due to its rigidity and its space precisions, it can, for a poet, indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspensions even of the syllables, the juxtapositions even of part of phrases, which he intends. For the first time the poet has the stave and the bar a musician has had. For the first time he can, without the convention of rime and meter, record the listening he has done to his own speech and by that one act indicate how he would want any reader, silently or otherwise, to voice his work" (PV57-58). So the poem is not just composition but performance, and understanding the poem will mean performing it rather than subjecting it to exegesis. Sherman Paul compares the composition of projectivist verse to, among other things, action painting and jazz: "Projective verse is not only a poetics of presentation but a poetics of present experience, of enactment. It replaces spectatorship with participation, and brings the whole self—the single intelligence: body, mind, soul—to the activity of creation. Dance, which Olson appreciated because it recalls us to our bodies and 'we use ourselves,' is a correlative of this poetics; and so are action painting and jazz, which poets at this time turned to because they offered the instruction they wanted. 'There was no poetic,' Olson said of this time. 'It was Charlie Parker.'"<sup>33</sup> After Nancy one

can think of the poem as a voice that passes from poet to reader. Poet and reader are linked as a sharing or *partage* rather than as author and exegete, artist and critic, or producer and consumer. It is possible to think of it as a movement of poetry from poet to poet, where poetry opens up a mode of existence in which poems appear. Stephen Fredman's idea is that projectivism is a social poetics as well as a poetics of verse. It is a poetics aimed not only at the production of works but at the formation of the group—or, more exactly, the formation of a space (an open field) in which poets and artists can come and go and in which works of art are free to take place *under any description*. The formation of such a space is what Olson achieved (or sustained) at Black Mountain College during the early 1950s.<sup>34</sup> Black Mountain College was an art school founded in 1933. One of its first artists-in-residence was Josef Albers, who brought to the school an aesthetic outlook that he had acquired at the Bauhaus during the Weimar years: “art is concerned with the HOW and not with the WHAT; not with literal content but with the performance of factual content. The performance—how it is done—that is the content of art.”<sup>35</sup> Olson was the school's director during its last five years of operation. In *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community*, Martin Duberman's gives a detailed account of Olson's transformation of the college from an art school into an art colony—indeed, a colony of performance art.<sup>36</sup> In 1952, to take a famous example, John Cage (who had been visiting the college since the early forties) staged one of his “circuses” in which ten people (poets, dancers, musicians, painters) were each assigned a time-slot of forty-five minutes (each running concurrently with the others) in which to do whatever they wished:

Spectators took their seats in the square arena forming four triangles created by diagonal aisles, each holding the white cup that had been placed on their chair. White paintings by a visiting student, Robert Rauschenberg, hung overhead. From a stepladder Cage, in a black suit and tie, read a text “on the relation of music to Zen Bhuddism” and excerpts from Meister Eckhart. Then he performed a “composition with a radio,” following the pre-arranged “time brackets.” At the same time Rauschenberg played an old record on a hand-wound gramophone and David Tudor played a “pre-

pared piano.” Later Tudor turned to two buckets, pouring water from one to the other while, planted in the audience, Charles Olson and Mary Caroline Richards read poetry. Cunningham and others danced through the aisles chased by an excited dog, Rauschenberg flashed “abstract slides” (created by coloured gelatine sandwiched between the glass) and film clips projected onto the ceiling showed first the school cook, and then, as they gradually moved from the ceiling down the wall, the setting sun. In a corner, the composer Jay Watt played exotic musical instruments and “whistles blew, babies screamed, and coffee was served by four boys dressed in white.”<sup>37</sup>

It was at Black Mountain that Merce Cunningham assembled his first dance company—with a Dionysian Charles Olson, all six-foot-seven, two hundred fifty pounds of him, taking class. (Cunningham says: “it wasn’t unhappy to watch him—he was something like a light walrus.”)<sup>38</sup> One can imagine what Bataille would have made of Olson’s companionship. Fielding Dawson recalls: “Charley was an enthusiastic teacher, and in those days optimistic, completely absorbed in his talk: the white blackboard began to fill with blue diagrams, blue words and long blue sentences, his hands turned blue and he had blue smudges on his face and mustache from smoking his cigar with his chalk hand, on he went, and once, with no place to write, he wrote towards the edge of the blackboard, wrote down the right margin, there was no right margin, but he went on, crossing over and going through already sentences until he came to the chalk tray, and bending over went clean off the blackboard to the floor, laughing with us.”<sup>39</sup> (Recall Blanchot on the interminability of *l’écriture*.)

**DÉSŒUVREMENT: WORKLESSNESS.** What conception of art, if any, attaches itself to the theory of “nonproductive expenditure”? Perhaps only the Duchampean concept of art-in-general: art freed from genre distinctions (painting, sculpture, music, verse).<sup>40</sup> Blanchot thinks that fragmentary writing is not a genre of writing but is just the thing itself, *l’écriture*, where all discursive fields are vulnerable to the *désœuvrement* of *l’écriture*—in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* Habermas defines postmodernity as, among

other things, the seeping of poetry (opaque, self-reflexive language) into philosophy (of a certain stripe) and then into the problem-solving communicative praxis that defines the public sphere.<sup>41</sup> Anarchy follows. The question of nonproductive expenditure has particular relevance to the problem of the avant-garde work. The avant-garde work does not belong to the history of genius, much less the history of taste, but to the history of the anarchist group. The avant-garde work is less likely to resemble a monumental construction like Joyce's *Ulysses* than a minimalist event like John Cage's 4'33". Whereas the monumental work is classically self-sufficient (Heidegger's ideal of the originary selfstanding Greek edifice, which appears to have created itself), the avant-garde work is accessible only through layers of social mediation, meaning that one has to belong to the social space in which the work appears in order to make sense of it at all (but Gadamer would say that this belonging is a condition of every aesthetic experience, ancient or modern). Moreover, belonging to such a space entails belonging to its history and therefore understanding the conditions that make the work a possibility in the moment at hand (that not everything is possible at every moment is the motto of art history: the experience of the work demands responsiveness to historicity—Blanchot would call this the *exigency* of the avant garde). In this respect understanding a work is more like understanding a social practice or a form of life than it is understanding a concept, proposition, or the use of criteria. This helps to explain why the avant-garde work is often not really accessible to critical spectators of a certain traditional disposition. A clear and fruitful example of this is Michael Fried's famous reaction to the Minimalist (or, as Fried prefers, "literalist") work of Donald Judd and Frank Stella during the sixties. Judd's sculptures appear to be simple indeterminate shapes without parts or design or any sign of assembly or composition; Stella's paintings are painted stripes (famously, four identical paintings of black stripes exhibited in 1959-60). Fried meanwhile is a formalist whose relation to works of art is essentially judicial. Thus the issue for Fried is how, analytically, to tell a work of art from the material of which it is made (frame, canvas, painted shapes). "What is at stake," he says, "is whether the paintings or objects in question are experienced as paintings or as objects."<sup>42</sup> Fried's position is that the materiality of the work must be experienced as a medium and not

simply as material; otherwise we haven't got art but simply a mere thing. The position is similar to Adorno's formalism, which insists on matter as mediation, not in order to represent or intend something but simply to set the work apart from the empirical world ("The concept of form marks out art's sharp antithesis to an empirical world in which art's right to exist is uncertain").<sup>43</sup> To be an artwork the work must exhibit "aesthetic rationality" or the exercise of conscious control over its materials (AT58/AET34-35). *Exeunt* Duchamp, Cage, and the Minimalists. (Adorno again: "As soon as the artwork fears for its purity so fanatically that it loses faith in its possibility and begins to display outwardly what cannot become art—canvas and mere tones—it becomes its own enemy.... This tendency culminates in the *happening*" [AT158/AET103].) In Fried's language, by foregrounding medium the modernist work tries "to defeat or suspend its own objecthood" (AO120). No one sees a Jackson Pollock drip-painting as reducible to its material, although as action painting the work is perhaps inseparable from the performance of its composition. But with Stella the difference between a painting and a painted canvas is no longer self-evident. One cannot tell that the thing is art simply by looking at it (in Clement Greenberg's famous expression, one is perilously close to looking simply at a frame and canvas exhibiting a flat surface).<sup>44</sup> For Fried this means that the Minimalist or literalist work is art that can no longer be experienced as art. Minimalism or literalism "aspires, not to defeat or suspend its own objecthood, but on the contrary to discover and project objecthood as such" (AO120). In which case it is something other than art: an object, although perhaps not a real one. (!) It is interesting that Fried stops short of calling the Minimalist work a mere thinglike thing, although he no longer takes it as art. What is it, then? Or, as John Cage asked prophetically in a 1957 essay, "Where do we go from here?" (His answer was: "Towards theater.")<sup>45</sup>

**THEATER OF CRUELTY.** The interest of Fried's analysis is that he interprets the Minimalist work as an event or performance: "the literalist espousal of objecthood amounts to nothing other than a plea for a new genre of theater" (AO125).<sup>46</sup> Fried means this as an insult but like Plato's rejection of the poets it is the medium of an essential insight: "theater," he says, "is now the negation of art"

(which is, subtly, not the same as non-art) (AO125). The mode of appearance of the Minimalist work—its presence—“is basically a theatrical effect or quality—a kind of *stage* presence. It is a function, not just of the obtrusiveness and, often, even aggressiveness of the literalist work, but of the special complicity that that work extorts from the beholder” (AO127).<sup>47</sup> Complicity is the essential note, that is, it defines something essential about the social nature of the avant-garde work, whose “objecthood” is not that of a work that one simply beholds; rather the work is folded into an event in which one is a participant and not simply a beholder, at least not a critical observer whose job is zoning and assessment. The Minimalist work occupies something close to what Deleuze and Guattari call “haptic” or non-optical space, a space that can only be entered, not comprehended as a whole or from a perspective.<sup>48</sup> It is an event, moreover, in which one’s participation makes the work possible (as in Gadamer’s theory). Possibly the work may not outlast its event, as in performance art. Theater has this transitory ontology which Artaud’s “theater of cruelty” tries to isolate by separating the theater-event from any notion of work or text: in “pure theater,” otherwise called the “anarchic poetry of space,” there are no antecedents to performance—in other words, no dramatization; the language of theater becomes a medium of noise and physical shock; the after-effect of theater is not catharsis but trauma.<sup>49</sup> Performance art is a strong example of nonproductive expenditure because its purse is entirely exhausted by what takes place. Dance likewise is a good case of *désœuvrement*. A piece of choreography is a kind of body art that is extremely difficult to preserve over time: dancers grow old, the dance mistress forgets, or dies. Balanchine could never understand why people wanted him to revive his earlier achievements. There is no text for the choreography of *Swan Lake* the way there is a score for its music or a narrative for its story (dance notation is a good example of “indeterminacy of translation”). A performance can be repeated but not preserved. (A video recording of a performance is not a performance of anything but the video recording.) In an essay on “The Impermanent Art” (1955) Merce Cunningham said that his idea of dance is to perform something that is just the thing itself: for example, a jump (without musical accompaniment, but when Cunningham collaborated with his friend John Cage, not without

noise). Cunningham's choreography, following Cage, sometimes takes the form of tossing a coin to determine what shape the jump will take, and what is shaped is not only a bodily movement but the time and space in which the movement occurs, a shape that exists only for an instant and will never occur again. On other occasions Cunningham's dancers improvise their movements. This is not artlessness: since the dancers are superbly trained, their movements cannot help being dance (as if a dancer could no longer merely move). But their movement is exhausted in the performance of it; it is what Deleuze and Guattari call a *haecceity*, a singularity like five o'clock yesterday evening.<sup>50</sup> There will be other five o'clocks but not that one. Fried says: "The success, even the survival, of the arts has come increasingly to depend on their ability to defeat theater" (AO139); "Art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theater" (AO141). So once more the history of art comes to an end.<sup>51</sup> In the 1970s performance art followed Minimalism by doing away with the production of objects altogether.<sup>52</sup> The idea was in part to see whether one could create an art that could not be bought or sold. This was already the goal of Dada and the (or some) Surrealists. One can think of the New York of the 1970s as a recuperation of Dada the way the New York of the fifties and sixties was a recuperation of Duchamp. True to the spirit of the age but also to the spirit of Artaud, Bataille, and perhaps before them all, Alfred Jarry, certain performance artists probed for an absolute stopping-point, as when Chris Burden had himself shot in the arm with a pistol or when Orlan had her face surgically removed, with the surgery being simultaneously telecast to several places around the world.<sup>53</sup> Here is an end-of-art story to end all end-of-art stories, as if art were crossing over into Bataille's underworld of mutilation, sacrifice, and suicide. In its obsession with extreme situations, performance art belongs to the history of Surrealism, or at all events to Artaud's kind of theater as "an area in which there are no precise rules," except for one: "Without an element of cruelty at the foundation of every spectacle, the theater is not possible" (OC118/AA251). Imagine cruelty as a condition of theater (this was already the insight of the Jacobean stage—think of Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* in which someone pours hot grease on the foot of Ursula the Pig Woman). Bataille, who knew Artaud slightly, once went to hear him speak:

A few years before I had attended a lecture he gave at the Sorbonne.... He talked about theatrical art, and in the state of half-somnolence in which I listened I became aware that he had suddenly risen: I understood what he was saying, he had resolved to personify the state of mind of Thyestes when he realized that he had devoured his own children. Before an auditorium packed with the bourgeoisie (there were hardly any students), he grasped his stomach and let out the most inhuman sound that has ever come from a man's throat: it created the sort of disquiet that would have been felt if a dear friend had suddenly become delirious. It was awful (perhaps the more so for being only acted out) (AM43).

**LA COMMUNAUTÉ DÉSCŒVRÉE.** The avant-garde work emphasizes the theatricality that is arguably a condition of all art. One could put this in a slightly different way. In the avant-garde the production of the work cannot be separated from the formation of the group, and vice versa: in the case of the Surrealists, for example, the group is the work—"Surrealism," Blanchot says, "is and has always been a collective experience" (E198/ICo8)—but a work in the sense of Nancy's *communauté désœuvrée* rather than on the order of Socrates' "city of words" or in Aristotle's conception of politics as an extension of the logical form of friendship (which is also the form of the proposition: friendship follows the logic of identity rather than the relation of alterity).<sup>54</sup> Benjamin in his essay on the Surrealists emphasizes the primacy of ecstatic experiences over the production of works: "anyone who has perceived that the writings of this circle are not literature but something else—demonstrations, watchwords, documents, bluffs, forgeries if you will, but at any rate not literature—will also know, for the same reason, that the writings are concerned literally with experiences, not with theories and still less with phantasms."<sup>55</sup> The group always has the structure (and often the historical location) of a *Bohème*: a non-productive community that does not hang together, which does not last, and whose floating center is the performance (the exhibition, the reading, the happening, and more generally the *scene*). Its population is Baudelairean in the sense of nomadic; it exists like a Deleuzian "war machine."<sup>56</sup> Its distinctive modes of

communication are gossip, collaboration, the quarrel, and the inevitably short-lived review. In his memoir, *The Black Mountain Review*, Robert Creeley recalls Ezra Pound's advice: think of a literary review as something around which you gather people, not a box to put them in.<sup>57</sup> Its solidarity is the solidarity of theater, where theater should to be understood in Artaud's sense in which the distance between performers and spectators narrows to zero—Artaud pictures his audience as a crowd in the street, a porous, exposed, Nietzschean audience whose ancestor is the Dionysian community: “We are eliminating the stage and the auditorium and replacing them with a kind of single site, without partition or barrier of any kind, which will itself become the theater of the action. A direct communication will be reestablished between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and the spectator, because the spectator, by being placed in the middle of the action, is enveloped by it and caught in its crossfire” (OC114-15/AA248). The “Futurist moment,” as Marjorie Perloff has shown, is a moment of theatricality whose principal form is the manifesto, “a new literary genre” designed to work like a political intervention rather than as a work of art.<sup>58</sup> The idea is to alter the art world and not simply to find one's place in it or merely take it over as is. Futurism (whether Italian or Russian) defines the original difference between avant-garde aesthetics in general and the formalist aesthetics of high modernism (as in Greenberg's and Fried's “modernism”): the artist's task is to create a new environment and not just new objects. Indeed the one is the condition of the other, because the avant-garde environment (the Cabaret Voltaire is the locus classicus) works like an anarchic space in which any innovation—indeed, anything at all—can take place. (“Do Whatever” is the rule of Duchampean modernism, according to Thierry de Duve [KD327].) In *My Futurist Years* Roman Jakobson gives a moving and often funny account of the way he was swept up into just such a space created by Majakovskij and Xlebnikov, whose collection of poems and manifestoes, *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste* (1912), was one of the texts that inspired Jakobson to become a linguist specializing in the study of poetic language. Of course Jakobson tried his hand at poetry and at writing manifestoes, and he collaborated with Majakovskij and Xlebnikov on many projects, but the moral of his story is that one doesn't have to be an artist to belong to an

art world; the idea is to experience it—and the experience is of social transformation (inhabiting a new world): “The evenings of the Futurists brought together an amazing number of the public: the Large Hall of the Polytechnic Museum was completely packed! The public’s reaction to them was various: many came for the sake of scandal, but a broad segment of the student public awaited the new art, wanted the new word (by the way—and this is interesting—they weren’t particularly interested in prose. This was a time when readers... thought that the main thing was poetry, and that poetry had a genuinely new word to say. Apart from these large public evenings there were many closed groups, circles, and private gatherings, where the main place was allotted to the new word).”<sup>59</sup> In his study of the poetic communities of North Beach in San Francisco, the poet Michael Davidson gives perhaps the best account we have of how deeply poets like Allen Ginsberg and Jack Spicer invested themselves in the formation of such communities, and how poetic subjectivities (like Davidson’s own) took shape within such formations.<sup>60</sup> Imagine an aesthetics whose goal is not so much the creation of the work as the creation of a form of life that produces poets. (“An author who teaches writers nothing, teaches no one,” says Walter Benjamin.)<sup>61</sup> As Michael Davidson suggests, this would be something like a utopian aesthetics or a political imaginary in which, among other things, poetry and art would no longer be required to justify themselves (before whom?) in order to exist. No apologies, no regrets. Imagine poetry as a given—freed from the Socratic exigency that lovers of poetry must come to its defense. Poetry presupposes a culture of the gift in which responsiveness and acceptance—as well as, to be sure, exposure and risk—are what make reality inhabitable. It presupposes what Nancy calls community: being together or being-in-common in which “we are not a ‘being’ but a ‘happening.’” (“Finite History” [BP157]). The poet David Antin captures something of this in one of his talk-poems, “what it means to be avant-garde”:

and i

did the best i could    under the circumstances    of being  
 there    then    which is my image of what an artist does and  
 is    somebody who does the best he can    under the  
 circumstances    without worrying about making it new or

shocking because the best you can do depends upon what you  
 have to do and where and if you have to invent something  
 new to do the work at hand you will but not if you have a  
 ready-made that will work and is close at hand and you want  
 to get on with the rest of the business

then youll pick up

the tool thats there a tool that somebody else has made  
 that will work and youll lean on it and feel grateful  
 when its good to you for somebody elses work and youll  
 think of him as a friend who would borrow as freely from you  
 if he thought of it or needed to because there is  
 a community of artists who don't recognize copyrights and  
 patents or shouldn't except under unusual circumstances  
 who send each other tools in the mail or exchange them  
 in conversation in a bar<sup>62</sup>

**LANGUAGE WRITING.** Much of the most memorable poetry written in North America during the past half-century has sometimes gone by the name of "Language Poetry," or L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Poetry, after the journal L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, edited by Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews between 1978 and 1981. Language Poetry looks very much like the longest-running literary movement of the twentieth century. Its poets are flourishing thirty years after the fact. This may be in part because Language Poetry is not an aesthetic concept; strictly speaking it is not a concept at all but a family name. No description of formal features or tendencies could define the term; it is not a kind of ism but simply a number of large, diverse, and fluid interactions among poets centered in San Francisco and New York but also embracing Canada and Great Britain, with filiations extending into Eastern Europe and Australia (and translations into, among other languages, Chinese.) Like the Surrealists the Language Poets share practices rather than views. What makes them a group is their involvement with one another in a variety of activities from poetry readings to literary criticism to publication in a surprising number of journals, anthologies, web sites, and thoroughly non-commercial books of poetry published by an array of small presses (Figures, ROOF, Sun & Moon). Individually they do very different things, but they do so within the framework of

social interaction highlighted above all by the poetry reading. Charles Bernstein writes:

Readings are the central social activity of poetry. They rival publishing as the most significant method of distribution of poetic works. They are as important as books and magazines in bringing poets into contact with one another, in forming generational and cross-generational, cultural and cross-cultural, links, affinities, alliances, scenes, networks, exchanges, and the like.... The reading is the site in which the audience of poetry constitutes and reconstitutes itself. It makes itself visible to itself.... I would turn around the familiar criticism that everyone at a poetry reading is a poet to say that this is just what is vital about a reading series, even the essence of a poetry reading. For poetry is constituted dialogically through recognition and exchange with an audience of peers, where the poet is not performing to invisible readers or listeners but actively exchanging work with other performers and participants.... The poetry reading is an ongoing convention of poetry, by poetry, for poetry.<sup>63</sup>

23

Bob Perelman writes: "The performances, pieces, and talks on poetics that took place frequently during the initial stages of the formation of the language group were communal events, casual, intense interactions that took place in lofts and art spaces. But they were not only addressed to immediate participants: they were also recorded. However contingent and trivial some of the remarks were, those tapes were aimed at entering and redefining literary history."<sup>64</sup> One could also say they were aimed at *appropriating* literary history, specifically the history of poetry, as if to keep it from coming to an end. The crucial point seems to be that among Language Poets it is a given that the extension of the concept of poetry cannot be closed by a frontier. Language poets are widely dedicated to conceptual investigations in poetics and poetic theory and to formal experimentation as a way of keeping the limits of what counts as poetry unsettled or controversial. Sound poetry and concrete poetry are perhaps not so much limits as horizons that face each other across a vast poetic circus. In any event the spirit of

Language Poetry is essentially that of the anarchist group: the idea is to create and maintain a space in which (granting historical conditions) anything is possible. What informs Language Poetry is in any case historical rather than theoretical. These poets are deeply self-consciousness of what one might call their situation at “the end of history.” They understand themselves as belonging to (*and essentially responsible for*) a specific tradition made up of William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, Charles Reznikoff, Louis Zukofsky, Jackson MacLow, the Black Mountain Poets, Allan Ginsburg and the Beats, as well as the avant-garde groups that San Francisco and New York continue to make possible. Historical self-awareness is a distinctive feature of the Language Poets—whence their idea, derived from Mallarmé but given a particular turn by William Carlos Williams, that poetry is an exploration of language in all of its formal, material, and semantic dimensions, and in particular in its historical conditions of existence within an array of social and economic contexts. A great many of these poets hold the view that poetry is not simply another species of discourse, a particular way of using language that can be contrasted with other discursive genres (philosophy, science, law, everyday speech), but is simply a condition of *language as such*, so that what counts as a poem will depend as much upon how we listen to language in the world around us as upon our capacities as speakers or writers. There is as much poetry as music in the noise of the world. It is interesting to know that the motto of “language as such” originated among the Russian Futurists that so intoxicated Roman Jakobson.<sup>65</sup> But for the Language Poets language is invisible to linguistics. It is accessible only at the level of experience and participation (street level, or at the level of theater) and not at the level of formal description.

**THE HETEROCLITE ENTITY.** Hence the concentration among Language Poets upon the idea of poetry as a mode of performance, where the emphasis falls, among other places, on how a poem (or how language) makes its appearance.<sup>66</sup> We can think of this emphasis as a modification of the modernist thesis that a poem is made of words but is not a use of them. This is not just an intensification of the thesis but (as in Blanchot’s poetics of *désœuvrement*) a bending of it away from the idea of a poem as something made (an artifact). The point to understand is that performance is

not something added to something made; it is what is made—the thing itself. This is because the temporality of the poem is not of something present but of something that interrupts the present by taking shape there. In one of his talk-poem, “durations,” David Antin calls attention to the two modes of existence of his “work”:

as a performer im an improviser    so i dont know  
 exactly what im going to say when i begin    though ive  
 thought about talking of particular things    and when ive  
 finished talking i may still be interested in something ive  
 said and i may want to think about it again    and sometimes  
 i'll want to look at it and transcribe it and maybe even  
 publish it    in a more or less extensive form that hangs  
 pretty close to the original talk or the sense of it  
 even when ive extended it    because im much less  
 interested in revision and polishing than in the difference  
 between print and performance (wim65)

The difference between performance and print is, for Antin, analogous to the difference between poetry and works (that is, objects) of art: “most people / in art schools are interested in making objects,” that is, “objects of duration.” Such objects don’t interest Antin. To say why they don’t he recalls a visit of his to the Louvre in which he hunts up mainly the paintings of low-profile artists while trying very hard (but failing) to avoid the Mona Lisa tour. On his way out he passes one of Rembrandt’s self-portraits:

as i passed the rembrandts on the way out i  
 stopped for a moment to look once again at the self portrait  
 with the palette in his hand and the turban tied around his  
 head    which looks more like a painters cloth to protect his  
 hair    and an expression that suggests some kind of comment  
 on the object of painting its meaning and perhaps its duration  
 a comment that looks to me like the beginning of a very  
 rueful jewish grin that expresses something of my own  
 disdain for the idea of duration (wim72)

What are “objects of duration”? They are evidently not just things that don’t get thrown away—unlike Duchamp’s Readymades,

which we know of chiefly from photographs or replicas; they are cultural icons like the Mona Lisa, and also of course like Rembrandt's self-portraits; but the Rembrandt that catches Antin's attention is a self-interrupting icon (like the one in John Ashbery's *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*). As a self-portrait it incorporates—one could say: perpetually interrupts—the performance of its composition. The expression on Rembrandt's face is a moment of *désœuvrement*—unworking—inserted into the work. An *entretemps*. Naturally one thinks about whether the same is true of the Mona Lisa's smile. We underestimate the difficulty of such smiles with respect to aesthetic experience as a disinterested event. At any rate Antin reads Rembrandt's face as a "rueful Jewish grin that expresses something of my own / disdain for the idea of duration." I want to say that this disdain of duration expresses the fundamental anarchism (one could call the anti-principle principle: the *désœuvrement*) of Antin's poetics (and of the avant garde, of performance art, and of Language Poetry). The idea is to produce an event in which the work takes place without taking final form; it materializes without becoming objectified or even finished. The poem in this respect is a singularity, a *haecceity* that can be communicated through a *partage* of voices but which can no longer be identified on its own as a thing set apart from the community that assembles in its company. John Cage remarked on the ability of Robert Rauschenberg's paintings to escape the fixity of painting despite being made of paint, not to mention canvases stretched on a frame and hung on a wall, for all the world objects of art: "Over and over again I've found it impossible to memorize Rauschenberg's paintings. I keep asking, 'Have you changed it?' And then noticing while I'm looking that it changes. I look out the window and see the icicles. There dripping water is frozen into an object. The icicles all go down. Winter more than the others is the season of quiescence."<sup>67</sup> What's the principle here?

10" The principle called mobility-immobility is this:  
 every thing is changing  
 but while some things  
 are changing  
 others are not.

20"

eventually those  
that were  
not

30"

changing  
begin suddenly  
to change (S154)

27

The principle (mobility-immobility: *désœuvrement*) is that the work of art belongs to an unstable environment (historicity is internal to its essence); it cannot be sealed off from this environment because it is, whatever else it is, an event that happens simultaneously with everything else taking place in the ongoing places it traverses and which, indeed, it works to form. (Recall Celan's figure of the poem: *Unterwegssein* ["Der Meridian," GW3:186/CP34].) There are no unaccompanied works of art. Poets and audiences of poetry are clandestine companions of poems that travel from one environment to another. To be sure, we are trained in school to transform works of art into aesthetic phenomena by bracketing them—Gadamer calls this "aesthetic differentiation" (WM81/ TM85). But the poem cannot be differentiated as a one-time thing that gets picked up now and again by the isolated reader. On the contrary, as Peter Middleton suggests in an essay on "The Contemporary Poetry Reading," the concept of the poem needs to be radically socialized: "Instead of thinking of the poem as something that moves around being variously interpreted, read aloud, published in different forms, and generally provoking distinct interpretations, we might be better to think of it all as a large heteroclite entity, that mixes texts, people, performances, memories, and other possible affines, in a process that engages many people, perhaps only briefly, over a long period of time, whose outcomes are usually hard to see, and which has no clear boundaries, not the page, the reading, the critical study."<sup>68</sup>

**COMMUNITY WITHOUT MYTH.** Thierry de Duve regards modernism as a utopian project that failed (KD191). A hundred years of in-your-face rhetoric has (he thinks) left modernity—the alienated, rationalized world of industrial-technological capitalism—

unchanged. (This is a universal disappointment at the end of the century: art, like politics, is unredemptive.) Says de Duve: the art world, especially in New York, is thoroughly commercialized—a market institution if there ever was one—and painters mostly work alone (KD191-92). As a self-professed “man of ’68” (KD288) de Duve longs for community (KD462). But probably not a poetic community, since such a community does not fit anywhere along the axis between libertarian-communitarian or liberal-socialist categories. The poem as a “heteroclite entity” is anarchic on the model of *partage*: as a formal object the poem is always in excess of itself—ecstatic: journeying outside itself and absorbing its surroundings into itself as it goes. Why not think of this as the historical mode of existence of the poem, whose self-identity is not a logical *ipseity* but entails the multiple communities that it generates through those whom it fascinates? Nancy points out that literature is not myth—on a certain romantic, functionalist, nationalist notion of myth as a unitary narrative that gathers a whole people into a totality. Whereas myth (in this certainly erroneous sense) produces communion—heterogeneous people united as in one voice—literature is serial in its production, a sharing or division of voices: its unity is not organic, that is, as Nancy puts it, it is “articulated” rather than “organized,” where “articulation is only a juncture, or more exactly the play of a juncture: what takes place where different pieces touch each other without fusing together, where they slide, pivot, or tumble over one another, one at the limit of the other—exactly at its limit—where these singular and distinct pieces fold or stiffen, flex or tense themselves together and through one another, unto one another, without this mutual *play*—which always remains, at the same time, a play *between* them—ever forming into the substance of a higher power of a Whole” (CD188/1C76). So one could say that, unlike romantic myth (or ideology, law, or philosophical rationality), what poetry produces is not a totality or a unitary community but a series or tradition of communities whose sociality, if I have it right, is theatrical and performative rather than civil, economic, or even ideological.

NOTES

1. Werner Jaeger says: "Hesiod is a poet because he is a teacher." *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, trans. Gilbert Highet (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939, I, p. 74; and also example, Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 105-6.
2. "Vox Clamans in Deserto," *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes, et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 239. Hereafter BP. 29
3. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), pp. 141-42.
4. *Ion*, 533d-534e. It is worth noting that Socrates identifies lyric poets as particularly Dionysian: "So it is with the good lyric poets: as the worshipping Corybantes are not in their senses when they dance, so the lyric poets are not in their senses when they make these lovely lyrics. No, when once they launch into harmony and rhythm, they are seized with the Bacchic transport, and are possessed [*katexomenai*]*—*as the bacchantes, when possessed, draw milk and honey from the rivers, but not when in their senses" (534a; Lane Cooper trans.)
5. Maurice Blanchot, *L'espace littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p. 28; *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), p. 32.
6. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Le partage de voix* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1982), pp. 62-65 (hereafter PV); "Sharing Voices," trans. Gayle Ormiston, *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context: From Nietzsche to Nancy*, ed. Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), pp. 234-35; (hereafter SV). See Walsh, *The Varieties of Enchantment*, pp. 3-36; and esp. Eric Havelock on "The Psychology of Poetic Performance," *Preface to Plato*, pp. 145-64.
7. See Maurice Blanchot, *La communauté inavouable* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1983), pp. 18-19; hereafter CI; *The Unavowable Community*, trans. Pierre Joris (Barrytown, New York: Station Hill Press, 1988), p. 7; hereafter UC: "It is striking that Georges Bataille, whose name for so many of his readers signifies the mystique of an ecstasy or the non-religious quest for an ecstatic experience, *excludes*... 'fusal fulfillment in some collective hypostasis' (Jean-Luc Nancy). It is something he is deeply averse to. One must never forget that what counts for him is less the state of rapture where one forgets everything (oneself included) than the demanding process that realizes itself by bringing into play and carrying outside itself an existence that is insufficient [unto itself], a movement that ruins immanence as well as the usual forms of tran-

- scendence.” Blanchot’s text is a response to Nancy’s “La communauté désœuvrée,” *Alea*, no. 4 (1983). Nancy’s *La communauté désœuvrée* (Paris: Christian Bourgeois Editeur, 1986), responding to Blanchot, contains a revised and enlarged version of “La communauté désœuvrée” plus two additional essays, “De l’être-en-commun” and “L’histoire finie.” The English translation, *The Inoperative Community*, cited below, adds two more, “L’amour en éclats,” or “Shattered Love,” and “Des lieux divins,” or “Divine Places.”
8. Maurice Blanchot, *La question la plus profonde*, *L’entretien infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p. 28; hereafter EI; “The Most Profound Question,” *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 21. Hereafter IC.
  9. *La communauté désœuvrée*. Nouvelle édition revue et augmentée (Christian Bourgeois, 1990), p. 22; hereafter CD; *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 6. Hereafter INC.
  10. *Preface to Plato*, p. 96: “Plato’s account remains the first and indeed the only Greek attempt to articulate consciously and with clarity the central fact of poetry’s control over Greek culture.” See Giorgio Agamben, “The Most Uncanny Thing,” *The Man Without Content*, trans. Georgia Albert (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 4-5: “Plato, and Greek classical antiquity in general, had a very different experience of art [from our modern conception], an experience having little to do with disinterest and aesthetic enjoyment. The power of art over the soul seemed to him so great that he thought it could by itself destroy the very foundations of his city; but nonetheless, while he was forced to banish it, he did so reluctantly, ‘since we ourselves are very conscious of her spell.’ The term he uses when he wants to define the effects of inspired imagination is  $\theta\epsilon\iota\omicron\varsigma\ \phi\omicron\beta\omicron\varsigma$ , ‘divine terror,’ a term that we, benevolent spectators, no doubt find inappropriate to define our reactions, but that nevertheless is found with increasing frequency, after a certain time, in the notes in which modern artists attempt to capture their experience of art.”
  11. *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Anchor Books, 1956), pp. 55-56. See Martin Heidegger, “Rapture as Aesthetic State,” *Nietzsche: The Will to Power as Art*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), I, pp. 92-106.

12. *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), IV, 1, pp. 146-47. Hereafter GS. "One-Way Street," *Selected Writings*, I: 1913-1926, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 486-87.
13. Benjamin, GS.V.1, p. 369. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 290 (hereafter AP).
14. See *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1989), pp. 125-26 (hereafter TM):
 

The true being of the spectator, who belongs to the play of art, cannot be adequately understood in terms of subjectivity [i. e., as a disengaged cognitive subject], as a way that aesthetic consciousness conducts itself. But this does not mean that the nature of the spectator cannot be described in terms of being present at something.... Considered as a subjective accomplishment of human conduct, being present has the character of being outside oneself. In the *Phaedrus* Plato already described the blunder of those who take the viewpoint of rational reasonableness and tend to misinterpret the ecstatic condition of being outside oneself, seeing it as a mere negation of being composed within oneself and hence as a kind of madness. In fact, being outside oneself is the positive possibility of being wholly with something else. This kind of being present is a self-forgetfulness, and to be a spectator consists in giving oneself in self-forgetfulness to what one is watching. Here self-forgetfulness is anything but a privative condition, for it arises from devoting one's full attention to the matter at hand, and this is the spectator's own positive accomplishment.
15. This distancing factor by which an audience is constituted is already conceptualized ironically in the *Ion* when Socrates gets Ion to confess that he (Ion) watches the Dionysian effects that his recital of Homer produces in his audience (535d-e). In Plato poetry is already integrated into a culture of rhetoric.
16. Trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 468. See also Max Weber, "The Chinese Literati," *Sociological Writings*, ed. Wolf Heydebrand (New York: Continuum, 1994), pp. 122-50, esp. pp. 135-36.

17. See the "Dialogue on Poesy," *Theory as Practice: A Critical Anthology of Early German Romantic Writers*, ed. & trans. Jochen Schulte-Sasse, et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 181.
18. *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp. 31-32, 50-51. Compare Hegel: "The *philosophy* of art is therefore a greater need in our day than it was when art by itself as art yielded full satisfaction. Art invites us to intellectual consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing philosophically what art is." *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), I, p. 13.
19. See Charles Bernstein, "Optimism and Critical Excess (Process)," *A Poetics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 151; hereafter p.
20. See Blanchot, "The Athenaeum" (1C51-59); and also his essay on René Char, "The Fragment Word" (1C07-13). *Désœuvrement* is not an easy term to translate, since it is a word for an event in which something does not take place. "Unworking," "worklessness," "uneventfulness" are some of the possibilities. For Blanchot *désœuvrement* means that writing is not a mode of production but an experience of the interminability of writing: writing without *arché* or *telos*. It belongs to the family of Bataille's *dépense* or non-productive expenditure.
21. The break-out of painting is arguably earlier—perhaps, as Giorgio Agamben suggests, when people begin collecting paintings and hanging them in galleries. See "The Cabinet of Wonders," *The Man Without Content*, pp. 28-39. Agamben's interest is in that moment when the artist or poet is no longer simply a craftsman working with his material but becomes a unique subjectivity, a special mode of inwardness in whose work the spectator can no longer see a reflection of himself but rather experiences an alienation, a "being-outside-himself" (p. 37).
22. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. by Phillip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), p. 40.
23. See *The College of Sociology, 1937-39*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). Hereafter c.s. See Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, esp. pp. 12-16, on Bataille's experiments in community during the 1930s, starting with his experience of Surrealism as a group project. Later Bataille would write: "the force of conviction animating [André Breton] allowed him to bring together a number of people whose names today are known everywhere—not by external ties of action, but by more intimate ties of passion. It was

- André Breton who rightly recognized that a poet or painter does not have the power to say what is in his heart, but that an organization or a collective body could. This 'body' can speak in different terms from an individual. If painters and poets together took consciousness of what weighed on poetry and painting, anyone who speaks in their name must plead that it is the vehicle of impersonal necessity." "Surrealism and How It Differs from Existentialism" (1947), *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*, trans. Michael Richardson (London: Verso, 1994), p. 60. Hereafter AM.
24. *The Guilty*, trans. Bruce Boone (Venice, California: Lapis Press, 1988).
25. See "La notion de dépense," *La part maudite* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit), p. 28; hereafter PM; "The Notion of Expenditure," *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), pp. 118; hereafter VE. To be sure, all ecstatic communities have an ambiguous relation to the social order in which they are contained—armies are the most emphatic example. But one should think of armies not so much as disciplined orders in which everything is regulated by command but as packs or bands that a state cannot finally keep under control. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, "1227: Treatise on Nomadology: The War Machine," *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 351-415.
26. See Steve McCaffery, "Writing as a General Economy," *North of Intention: Critical Writings, 1973-86* (New York: Roof Books, 1986), pp. 201-21.
27. See Bataille, *L'expérience intérieure* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), p. 147; *Inner Experience*, trans. Leslie Anne Boldt (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), p. 94.
28. See Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, p. 5.
29. GS.I.2.614-8; *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohm (London: Verso, 1973), pp. 113-17; hereafter CB.
30. "Projective Verse," *The Human Universe*, ed. Donald Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 59. Hereafter PV.
31. Compare Louis Zukofsky, "A Statement for Poetry [1950]," *Prepositions: The Collected Critical Essays* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), p. 23: "The best way to find out about poetry is to read poems. That way the reader becomes something of a poet himself: not because he 'contributes' to the poetry, but because he finds himself the subject of its energy."

32. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), p. 152:

Schoenberg's instinctive mode of reaction is melodic; everything in him is actually "sung," including the instrumental lines. This endows his music with its articulate character, free-moving and yet structural down to the last tone. The primacy of breathing over the beat of abstract time contrasts Schoenberg to Stravinsky and to all those who, having adjusted better to contemporary existence, fancy themselves more modern than Schoenberg. The reified mind is allergic to the elaboration and fulfilment of melody, for which it substitutes the docile repetition of mutilated melodic fragments. The ability to follow the breath of the music unafraid had already distinguished Schoenberg from older, post-Wagnerian composers like Strauss and Wolf, in whom the music seems unable to develop its substance according to its intrinsic impulses and requires literary and programmatic support, even in the songs.

33. *Olson's Push: Origin, Black Mountain, and Recent American Poetry* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1978), p. 39.
34. Stephen Fredman, *Grounding American Poetry: Charles Olson and the Emersonian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 52-57. Fredman says that "the Black Mountain poets functioned as a kind of mystery sect, particularly between the years 1950, when Olson and Creeley began corresponding and Cid Corman started *Origin*, and 1970, when Olson died. As the leader, Olson encouraged a host of others to join this community of resistant poets. Thus, a group of writers formed around such centers as Black Mountain College, *Origin*, and *The Black Mountain Review*: Olson, Creeley, Duncan, Corman, Denise Levertov, Edward Dorn, Paul Blackburn, Joel Oppenheimer, Fielding Dawson, Michael Rumaker, Hilda Morley, John Wieners, Larry Eigner, Jonathan Williams, Le Roi Jones, Gilbert Sorrentino, and others. In the course of this twenty-year period, a second wave of projectivist writers appeared and intermingled with the first; of a larger number that could be mentioned, the following writers maintained a more or less strict adherence to the projectivist doctrine during at least some of this time: Robert Kelly, Theodore Enslin, Kenneth Irby, Jerome Rothenberg, Clayton Eshleman, Edward Sanders, David Bromige, Richard Grossinger, Ronald Johnson, and Armand Schwerner" (p. 55).

35. Quoted by RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art 1909 to the Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1979), p. 79.
36. (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1972), pp. 334-67 ("A New Black Mountain").
37. Goldberg, *Performance*, p. 82. See Duberman, *Black Mountain*, pp. 350-58.
38. Duberman, *Black Mountain*, p. 380.
39. *The Black Mountain Book: A New Edition* (Rocky Mount, North Carolina: North Carolina Wesleyan Press, 1991), pp. 178-79.
40. See Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), p. 375; hereafter KD: "Something unprecedented in the whole history of art surfaced in the sixties: it had become legitimate to be an artist without being either a painter, or a poet, or a musician, or a sculptor, novelist, architect, choreographer, filmmaker, etc. A new 'category' of art appeared—art in general, or art at large—that was no longer absorbed in traditional disciplines." In "Why Are There Several Arts?" Jean-Luc Nancy seems to contest de Duve. See *The Muses*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 1-39. Cf. Stanley Cavell, "A Matter of Meaning It" (1967) on the work of Anthony Caro, whose sculpture is no longer sculptured, thus depriving us of criteria for determining what we are looking at. This is the modernist project, which leaves us in the dilemma of always having to discover anew the conditions that enable us to accept something as a work of art, in which event the possibility of fraudulence, Cavell says, is henceforward always internal to our experience of art. See *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 188-90.
41. Trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), pp. 205-7.
42. "Art and Objecthood" (1967), *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 120. Hereafter AO.
43. *Ästhetische Theorie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973), p. 212; hereafter AT; *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 141. Hereafter AET.
44. See Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *The New Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1973), pp. 72-73. See also Arthur Danto, "Works of Art and Mere Real Things," *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 1-32. Thierry de Duve has a good chapter on this matter in *Kant After Duchamp*, pp. 199-279 ("The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas").

45. "Experimental Music," *Silence* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), p. 12. Hereafter s.
46. Perhaps not so new. In an important footnote Fried remarks on "the deep affinity between literalists and Surrealist sensibility.... This affinity can be summed up by saying that Surrealist sensibility...and literalist sensibility are both *theatrical*" (AO145).
47. See Marjorie Perloff on Fried's separation of art from theater, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Guerre, Avant-Garde, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 109-11
48. See *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 492-99.
49. See Artaud, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard), IV, "La mise en scène et la métaphysique," pp. 40-57, and "En finir avec les chefs-d'œuvre," 89-100; hereafter OC; *The Theater and Its Double*, in *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), esp. "Mise en scène and Metaphysics," pp. 227-39, and "An End to Masterpieces." pp. 252-59; hereafter AA. Interestingly, Fried describes the encounter with the Minimalist "object" as if it were a not-altogether-friendly encounter with another person. The Minimalist work does not just sit there; it is aggressive. It confronts the beholder, who is warned not to come any closer but to stand back or give ground. The experience is "not entirely unlike being distanced, or crowded, by the silent presence of another person; the experience of coming upon literalist objects unexpectedly—for example, in somewhat darkened rooms—is disquieting in just this way" (AO128). As if Minimalist art were not just theater but "theater of cruelty."
50. "1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible....," *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 261: "There is a mode of individuation very different from that of a person, subject, thing, or substance. We reserve the name *haecceity* for it. A season, a winter, a summer, an hour, a date have a perfect individuality lacking nothing, even though this individuality is different from that of a thing or a subject. They are haecceities in the sense that they consist entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected."
51. See Arthur Danto, "The End of Art," *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 81-115. For Danto, however, art comes to an end, not when it turns into theater, but when it is "transmuted into philosophy," that is, when the work just is the theory that constitutes it: "Now if we look at the art of our recent

- past...what we see is something which depends more and more upon theory for its existence as art, so that theory is not something external to a world it seeks to understand, so that in understanding its object it has to understand itself. But there is another feature exhibited by these late productions which is that the objects approach zero as their theory approaches infinity, so that virtually all there is at the end is theory, art having finally become vaporized in a dazzle of pure thought about itself, and remaining, as it were, solely as the object of its own theoretical consciousness" (p. 111). Compare Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Vestige of Art," *The Muses*, pp. 81-100.
52. See Henry Sayre, *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde Since 1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 1-34; and Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973).
  53. See Chris Burden and Jan Butterfield, "Through the Night Softly," *The Art of Performance: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock and Robert Nickas (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1984), pp. 222-39; and Parveen Adams, "Operation Orlan," *The Emptiness of the Image* (London: Routledge, 1991), esp. p. 145.
  54. The Surrealists were always a plurality in which, in Nancy's words, "different pieces touch each other without fusing" (1NC76). In *The Unavowable Community* Blanchot remarks on the aleatory character of André Breton's group: "There it is: something had taken place which, for a few moments and due to the misunderstandings peculiar to singular existences, gave permission to recognize the possibility of a community established previously though at the same time already posthumous: nothing of it would remain, which saddened the heart while also exalting it, like the very ordeal of effacement that writing demands" (UC21).
  55. GS.11.1.297. *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: Verso, 1979), p. 227.
  56. A "war machine" is like a pack, band, or gang: "it seems to be irreducible to the State apparatus, to be outside its sovereignty and prior to its law: it comes from elsewhere." See *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 352.
  57. Robert Creeley, *Was That a Real Poem & Other Essays*, ed. Donald Allen (Bolinas, California: Four Seasons Foundation, 1979), p. 17.
  58. "Violence and Precision: The Manifesto as Art Form," *The Futurist Moment*, pp. 80-115.

59. *My Futurist Years*, ed. Bengt Jangfeldt, trans. Stephen Rudy (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1992), pp. 4-5.
60. See Michael Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-century* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989).
61. "The Author as Producer" (GS.II.2.696); *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), p. 233.
62. *what it means to be avant-garde* (New York: New Directions, 1993), pp. 46-47.
63. "Introduction" to *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, ed. Charles Bernstein (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 24. See Ron Silliman, "The Political Economy of Poetry," *The New Sentence* (New York: Roof Books, 1987), and Charles Bernstein, "I Don't Take Voice Mail: The Object of Art in the Age of Electronic Technology," *My Way: Speeches and Poems* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 73-80, esp. p. 76.
64. *The Marginalization of Poetry: Language Writing and Literary History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 14.
65. See Marjorie Perloff, "The Word as Such: L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Poetry in the Eighties," *The Dance of the Intellect: Studies in the Poetry of the Pound Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 215-38.
66. See, for example, Steve McCaffrey, "Voice in Extremis," *Close Listening*, pp. 162-77. See Marjorie Perloff, "'No More Margins': John Cage, David Antin, and the Poetry of Performance," *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 288-339; and Stephen Fredman, "The Crisis at Present: Talk Poems and the New Poet's Prose." *Poet's Prose: The Crisis in American Verse*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 136-49.
67. "On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work" (S102).
68. *Close Listening*, p. 294.