Introduction
The Revolution Will Not Be Theorized

In other words, it is impossible to address this reading without first of all addressing the cultural code which refuses it, without first of all acknowledging that we are nothing but the products of this code, and that, in the course of our reading . . . , whether we like it or not, we are actually complicit, even in our desire to understand, with the various types of censure we might have set ourselves against to begin with.

—Marcelin Pleynet, "The Readability of Sade" (1968)

I think we can regard the past eighty or so years in the arts . . . not as a series of islands with names ending in *ism,* but as forming a still little-explored continent whose jagged coastline we have begun to leave astern without knowing whether the land is habitable.

—Roger Shattuck, introduction to Maurice Nadeau's
The History of Surrealism (1965 ed.)

The Birth of the Avant-Garde (Again . . .)

We live in an era of unprecedented avant-garde activity and equally unprecedented tactics for monitoring and policing it—and there's nothing especially new about that situation. The minuet of cultural innovation and improved security strategies has been a constant among artists, activists, bureaucrats, and moral pundits for almost two centuries. In academic studies of the avant-garde, the minuet of vanguard and cop has twirled to a very specific tune: the sad, often nostalgic strains of the eulogy. There is probably no other field of study that must contend so often with declarations that its object is defunct. To study the avant-garde, it seems, one must study the death of the avant-garde. Yet, with the kind of brutal irony that would have struck French symbolist and German Dadaist alike (not to mention Mark Twain), the death of the avant-garde has proven, once again, to have been declared prematurely.

The September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon office building were engineered by men described by their leader,

Osama bin Laden, as an "Islamic vanguard," and bin Laden himself has been profoundly influenced by a theorist of Islamic vanguardism little known to, and often misunderstood by, non-Muslims, Sayyid Qutb. Qutb's work fuses the Leninist model of party organization with indigenous Islamic models based on the Prophet's secret early work with the small community later to be known as Muhammad's Companions.[1] In November 2001, the work of another vanguard came to international attention (though, like bin Laden's crew, it had been working quietly for years behind the scenes): the "special forces" of the U.S. military, a strategic model directly descended from Napoleon's elite military engineering cadres, but with an understanding of the role of cultural factors (tribal loyalties, ethnic affiliations, etc.), of the dynamic of local tactics and global strategy, and of command-control-communication strategies that would have thrilled the Frenchman's generals.

As the news broke on the eleventh, I was preparing a lesson plan on Rachilde's *The Crystal Spider* (1892), an intensely violent symbolist play that deploys rapidly shifting verbal imagery and a horrific theatrical stunt (an anorectic young man crashes into a mirror, ripping open his throat) to undermine cherished institutions of the fin de siècle French bourgeoisie: masculinity, love, the family, money. At the same time Rachilde was writing her play, bombs were being dropped in urban centers across Europe by the intransigent wing of the international anarchist movement. The connection between avant-garde theater, drama, and performance and the bombing of banks and government buildings is no coincidence. Rachilde's salon was fluent in the language of cultural radicalism, a language that circulated freely among radicals of all ideological stripes. This sharing went beyond concepts and vocabulary. Much like the droppers of bombs, one of Rachilde's favored arenas for action was the spectacle of daily life, where she enjoyed a scandalous reputation as a transvestite, sexual experimenter, and free thinker. She shared the streets of Paris with more utilitarian compeers who effectively disrupted the superficial tranquility of urban life with nitrogen-compound bombs. Not surprisingly, when the crackdown on the terrorists began, Rachilde and her literary compeers, whether bomb throwers or not, sympathizers or not, experienced profound levels of harassment and oppression.

Reading Rachilde, bin Laden, and the highly trained young men of the U.S. Navy, Army, and Marines together, it becomes clear that the stage of the avant-garde has never been abandoned; rather, the spotlight has shifted. One of the aims of this book is to describe exactly how complicated the cultural terrain of the avant-garde was, is, and will be given the greater and greater intertwining of technology, subjectivity, and cultural production, an

intertwining enabled in part by the institutions of higher education and scholarship. Likewise, I hope to show, through careful examination of three avant-garde moments that demonstrate varied responses to the technical, cultural, and informational shifts catalyzed by the U.S./Soviet Cold War (1945–90), how the complexity of avant-garde activism, which experienced a profound intensification during the 1950s and 1960s, represents real limits to scholarly efforts to historicize and critique it. To invoke Donna Haraway, avant-garde activism, especially when it utilizes performance modes such as spoken word, theater, or dance, resists translation into a "common language in which all resistance to instrumental control disappears and heterogeneity can be submitted to disassembly, reassembly, investment, and exchange."[2]

In the 1960s, radical cultural production in regions around the globe took on forms that systematically and intentionally challenged the institutional and ideological foundations of liberal and authoritarian political regimes alike. However, unlike previous manifestations of the avant-garde imperative, these enjoyed the benefit of historical and institutional self-consciousness—in other words, an intimate knowledge of exactly how good academic criticism, scholarship, and pedagogy were at making sense of the challenge of the avant-garde, and exactly how good academic research was at devising techniques to battle existing avant-gardes (e.g., the development of surveillance technologies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison used to track down Che Guevara during his last guerrilla campaign in Bolivia). The birth of the field of avant-garde studies roughly coincided with the first two decades of the Cold War and was signaled by a rash of exhibitions, catalogs, retrospectives, changes in the curricula in art history and in literary studies, and the publication of three groundbreaking texts on the subject: Hans Magnus Enzensberger's "The Aporias of the Avant-Garde" (1962), the English translation of Renato Poggioli's *Teoria dell'arte d'avanguardia* (1968), and Donald Drew Egbert's *Social Radicalism and the Arts: Western Europe* (1970). The consequence of this abrupt spike in knowledge of the avant-garde was not a domestication of the avant-garde, but rather a translation into terms that made sense within institutional contexts that were witnessing increasing demand (and funding) for academic programs that could effectively integrate cultural production and technical innovation.

The nature of that translation can't be understood without attending to larger social, political, and cultural contexts. The politicization and commodification of daily life, the rise of a mass-mediated leisure society, the advent of social movements based in newly formulated or formerly denigrated social identities, the rapid rate of scientific discovery, and the development of new communications technologies implied to many that the idea

of an artist or an artistic community taking a stand against oppression and reflecting that stand in an aesthetic creation was, though not defunct, at least in need of extensive renovation. For critics and scholars who wished to keep the heritage of the avant-garde alive—who wished to vitalize the tradition of revolt, refusal, and subversion developed by naturalists, symbolists, Dadas, vorticists, lettristes, Blue Blousers, proletcult agitators, Communist poets and musicians, and others—but who didn't want to simply repeat the past, the need to invent new approaches, whether aesthetic or critical-scholarly, was imperative. One of the key practical and theoretical innovations of the period concerned the critical and scholarly communities themselves. The innovative period in avant-garde history we know now as "The 60s" was characterized by both the cultivation and the systematic sundering of communication lines between artists and the academic community of scholars, critics, and teachers.

By examining the efforts of cultural radicals during the sixties to open up or tear down oppressive symbolic, discursive, and institutional systems during a period of remarkable innovation and creation of symbolic, discursive, and institutional systems, we can learn much about the possibilities and limitations of similar efforts in our own times. That this period saw such rich and troubled relations between avant-gardes and academia makes it all the more relevant. Examining avant-garde performance and the limits of criticism in the 1960s, we can learn much about the role of teachers, scholars, and critics in the conservation, translation, and policing of avant-gardes. In a note attached to his essay "Cecil Taylor *Floating Garden,*" Fred Moten notes that critical method can easily devastate the progressive interrogation, destruction, and revision of a culture's symbol systems. Easily, but not necessarily. "The question remains whether and how to mark (visually, spatially, in the absence of sound, the sound in my head) digression, citation, extension, improvisation in the kind of writing that has no name other than 'literary criticism.'" The avant-gardes of the 1960s, in sum, took the foundational innovations of the historical avant-gardes (Dada and surrealism, in particular) to a new level—and did so with the assistance, both benign and malevolent, of academics. If, as Peter Bürger has demonstrated, the historical avant-gardes were the first to recognize and thematize the institutional conditions of art, the avant-gardes of the 1960s thematized institutions that Bürger himself fails to recognize: his own institutions, the institutions of criticism, scholarship, and pedagogy.

One of the assumptions of this book is that the avant-garde did not die during the 1960s, nor did it simply repeat the achievements and failures of the past in some kind of conceptually empty "neo" gesture, as Bürger and a

great many others contend. Quite the contrary, the avant-garde is still alive today and equipped with a self-consciousness informed by the kinds of penetrating critiques mounted against the avant-garde since the mid-1950s. Recent theoretical developments in the fields of literary studies, performance theory, theater history, and visual culture studies, along with social developments in conjunction with new musical forms (e.g., techno and hip-hop) and the increasing strength of global trade structures and actions against it confirm the vitality—if not the necessity—of radical cultural actions conceived within the historical and conceptual fields of the avant-garde. Such actions possess both the material and symbolic force to generate popular unrest, to change the terms of the social conversation, and to afford a conceptual and linguistic matrix conducive to affiliation, for both the Right and the Left. However, even today, after yet another round of police actions against youth in the name of parental authority and drug interdiction, after the symbolic actions at World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle and Genoa, after the collapse of the World Trade Center, and after the stunning successes of fundamentalist movements around the globe, the majority opinion of scholars and historians still weighs in on the side of the eulogists.[3]

Thus, many of the readers of this book will probably disagree with its basic assumption. There's good reason for this view. The past four decades of art, literary, and performance criticism have demonstrated at length that discussion of the avant-garde must inevitably confront disturbing subplots in its story: the implicit militarism of the term; its long acquaintance with misogyny, colonialist primitivism, and cultural imperialism; its inflated claims to originality; its promiscuity with Stalinism, fascism, radical-chic capitalism; its romance with the vanguard party model; and, finally, terrorism. Such criticism can't be dismissed, certainly, but if we admit the profound flaws inherent to the avant-garde model, what's the use of holding onto it? To answer this question, it's germane to examine a crucial period in the development of today's military-economic-cultural-technical situation. During the middle years of the Cold War, avant-garde individuals, groups, and movements consciously and systematically positioned both their work and the conditions in which that work was encountered by audiences in conscious relationship to art, literary, and performance critics and scholars and the institutions in which they worked. As part of this positioning, these new avant-gardes also considered the historical reception of their forebears.

The case studies that constitute this book will identify and examine the limits of criticism when faced with movements cognizant of the institutions of criticism. The subjects of these case studies are not meant to be viewed as

typical; quite the contrary. They can be viewed, however, as emblematic for the ways they effectively situate, thematize, and engage with the discourses and institutions of criticism, scholarship, and pedagogy. Critics, scholars, and teachers of the avant-garde during the Cold War—and in our own times—generally fail to recognize how lines of communication between the avant-garde and academic critics and scholars became the subject of critique, innovation, and subversion. There is an oddly disembodied quality to much commentary on the avant-garde, a refusal to consider the institutionality of that commentary even when dealing with avant-garde movements that made institutionality a central concern of their work. There are notable exceptions to this rule, which I'll discuss soon.

If Cold War avant-gardes purposefully complicated the methods and models of their critics and scholars, they also complicated understandings of the "political" during their times. The conjunction of institutional self-consciousness and rethinking of the political is not coincidental and not wholly a matter of choice. Cold War avant-gardes had to maneuver through a shifting landscape of social, economic, cultural, and technical reformation, a landscape that was shifting as the consequence of a purposeful, systematic attack by the government on older left-wing coalitions and organizations. Cultural radicals maneuvered across a rapidly growing art market bolstered by an academic system of critics, scholars, and teachers who were both knowledgeable of and sympathetic with the pre-World-War-II avant-gardes—and equally cognizant of developments within contemporary art (such as abstract expressionism).

Very few critics and scholars have taken seriously this complex interaction among the avant-garde tradition, the unique ideological and material conditions of the Cold War, the rise of the counterculture, the institutional impact of the counterculture, and the development of new critical and scholarly methods and disciplines. Only two critics contemporary with such developments did so and with a persistent focus on their own institutional positions: Marcelin Pleynet and Roger Shattuck, selections of whose work start off this introduction. Shattuck is correctly regarded as a foundational scholar of the avant-garde. *The Banquet Years* (1968) is a book whose critical methods are no longer in vogue, but whose blend of richly textured, urbane anecdote and sophisticated formalist analysis, organized around four key figures in the Parisian fin de siècle, is still required reading. Pleynet, on the other hand, was part of a key group in vanguard intellectual history whose methods are in many ways fundamental to contemporary critical theory. The *Tel Quel* group systematically shifted the way theoretical inquiry works in the field of cultural criticism and literary study. The critique mounted by

Kristeva, Derrida, Foucault, Barthes, and others in the journal's pages both presaged and salvaged the revolutionary moment of 1968, preserving in textual, theoretical form the situated struggle of vanguard communities.

Notably, both critics explicitly reject the methodological approaches of the eulogists; Shattuck by delving into anecdote, Pleynet into poststructuralist *écriture*. To the latter first. Well aware of the new avant-gardes outside his Paris office in 1968 and the new generation of critics and scholars traipsing through his office, Pleynet writes in the journal *Tel Quel* that any act of reading subversive or revolutionary art, literature, and theory will necessarily entangle itself in "multiplicitous articulations of textual contradictions" that must, inevitably, lead to the democratization of the reading process itself.[4] Bad news for the professional critic, for sure; after all, the democratization of reading tends to undermine the professional critic's authority, as Roland Barthes makes clear in his essay "The Death of the Author," published that same year.[5]

Pleynet revels in the revolutionary excess of the moment. Shattuck, on the other hand, plays ironically the role of disappointed colonialist in his introduction to the 1965 reissue of Maurice Nadeau's *History of Surrealism* (first ed., 1944). He portrays himself and his fellow historians of the avant-garde in an almost melancholy fashion, as if taking a glance back at a shadowy continent, ruing their failure to ascertain "the topography and resources"[6] of radical cultural movements that slowly, inevitably recede beyond the horizon. Unlike Pleynet, Shattuck is ultimately disappointed by his inability to map the radical cultural movements of the past, an inability he views as harming the progressive development of democratic society. The arguments, methods, and metaphors of these two are worth exploring at length, particularly given their commitment to irony. They allow us to see how critics in the sixties were limited by the conceptual, methodological, and institutional structures of their historical moment and geopolitical situation as well as how they were constrained by transhistorical, structural conditions that impact avant-garde scholarship and criticism at all times.

Pleynet and Shattuck help us understand that there are real stakes in the theorization of the relationships among the avant-garde tradition, the critic-scholar and her discourses, and the historical moment. This is why they both refuse to cross certain conceptual and representational boundaries in their essays. They help us to better understand that our critical and scholarly efforts, even at their most rigorous and rigorously self-conscious, can't see beyond certain horizons. Such limits are foundational to criticism and scholarship, and they can be easily exploited by those who oppose the individual critic-scholar or the institutions in which she works. When faced with

events, artworks, and situations that challenge the basic assumptions, methods, and institutional bases of criticism and scholarship, why would we expect to be able to overcome a degree of blindness or the necessity of using metaphors?

What are the specific limits of criticism identified, transgressed, or respected by Pleynet and Shattuck? In response to dominant methods and models used by his contemporaries to study the works of the marquis de Sade, Pleynet argues that anyone "reading the radical" inevitably finds herself in play with three demands, demands that transform even the most sensitive, sympathetic, and critical reading into an elaborate apology for conservatism. This conservatism isn't something one can simply avoid, Pleynet cautions—one can't simply decide not to be conservative in this respect. The very decision to play the game of criticism and scholarship means that we're willing to play by a certain set of institutionalized rules, some of which are explicit, some tacit. Pleynet addresses three of these limits: (1) the necessity of resolving contradiction, (2) the necessity of objective analysis, and (3) (a corollary of 2) the necessity of avoiding nonacademic entanglements with the subject. Given these limits, he asks, how can we ever read Sade? In fact, Sade can never be read in a noncontradictory, objective, impersonal way, Pleynet claims, since his writings purposefully and systematically hamper such an effort. As a consequence, Pleynet argues, Sade has never been released from the chains and towers of the Bastille, only now the prison has been replaced by a literary criticism that doesn't adequately account for the social, cultural, and economic implications of its own game rules. For Pleynet, a truly radical literary historian must read differently, must read not only the literature but the literary critic, too, especially if the critic wishes to support (as Pleynet does) on the level of academic discourse the street-level actions of the students who shut down France in 1968, the year his essay appeared in print. For those interested in being more than a belletristic capo, Pleynet concludes, there is a possibility of reading the radical, of releasing Sade from his chains. This way of reading would intensify the contradictions of the literature and ultimately democratize the conditions for critical reading, leaving the professional critic in the dust.

From the Bastille to the colony. Shattuck's essay gets us thinking in other directions; specifically, about other kinds of structural and institutional limits relating to the critic's emotional engagement with the topic and the institutions in which he works. Shattuck is no less aware than Pleynet of the challenge of radical art; however, he is more concerned with the question of memory and the nostalgic adoration that bourgeois culture feels for what it destroys. For him, surrealism is little more than a "promontory" that

extends from a kind of vast, unknown continent of subversive culture, a heart of darkness whose obscurity is defined as much by forgetting as by misunderstanding. Surrealism, he asserts, is threatened, first and foremost, by the forgetting of the conflicts, contradictions, and critical methods of the movement. This theoretical vacuum he hopes will be partly described by the book for which he's writing the introduction: Maurice Nadeau's *History of Surrealism,* the first on the movement, and the first to take seriously surrealism's rigorous reappraisal of art, theory, politics, and everyday life. If Pleynet criticizes the politically, methodologically, and unconsciously conservative critical establishment, Shattuck criticizes an emotionally conservative, overrational society bolstered by the objectivist methodologies of higher education. For him, surrealism's greatest accomplishments are to be found in very different territories, in humor, love, and other intense emotional experiences easily forgotten by the critic, scholar, and teacher.

Pleynet and Shattuck hint at a way of thinking about the avant-garde that differs significantly from those who argue that the avant-garde is dead or who carry on with its translation with no regard to institutional dimensions. Unwilling to consign the avant-garde tradition to the grave—and equally unwilling to consign the avant-garde to a radicalism limited to an internal debate about art and its institutions[7]—they hint at possibilities that have been largely ignored by avant-garde scholars and critics since their time. Shattuck notes that the idea that the avant-garde was "benign" and "reabsorbed" was a "common assumption" by 1964 (11). The irony is that this opinion was strengthened, not weakened, by the increasingly widespread presence of surrealism in American culture; for example, in galleries, art history courses, and advertising. He writes that "a new round of histories, studies, editions, and exhibits" of avant-garde works "makes it not easier but harder than ever to get a straight answer" about whether the avant-garde was still a viable concern. As a consequence, the heritage of surrealism as both a theoretical movement and a revolutionary expansion of humor and love was threatened, left behind in mystery. Shattuck warns us about the consequences of such a forgetting: "I happen to believe that real importance attaches to the estimate we now make of Surrealism. Like progressive education and pacifism, it lies close to the center of our immediate heritage; we ignore those matters at our own peril" (11).

Both Pleynet and Shattuck assume that historicizing the avant-garde raises questions about how critics, scholars, and the institutions in which they work relate to radical cultural movements in their own times. Again, we should note that this is a rare moment of self-reflexivity among the scholars and critics of the avant-garde; in my research, I've found only a few

critics who've demonstrated a similar self–consciousness, notably Renato Poggioli in *Theory of the Avant-Garde,* Paul Mann in *The Theory Death of the Avant-Garde,* and Kristine Stiles in her series of essays on destruction in art.[8] Most critics and scholars of the avant-garde seem to assume that they are neutral, disembodied observers of the event. Corollary to this assumption is another: that the avant-garde event is a discrete, bounded moment in the past. One reason for such assumptions is surely the close relationship of academics and the avant-garde, a relationship no more strong than in the 1940s and 1950s. The close relationship of artists and critics in the Cold War era helped to promote a sense of common esprit de corps. As a consequence, Gregory Battcock argues, the dominant art trends of the 1940s and 1950s were "a critic's art rather than an art of rebellion."[9] Battcock implies that critics aren't interested in rebellion; however, critics of the avant-garde, if not always interested in rebellion, have consistently focused on the question of politics, especially such crucial concerns as freedom of expression, thought, and action.

Nevertheless, the way such critical collaborations occurred was inevitably determined by the unique conditions of the Cold War. Robert Motherwell, who was not only an abstract expressionist painter but also a critic and historian of the avant-garde, pondered in 1944 the loss of certain social and political connections that had formerly sustained the avant-garde: "The artist's problem is *with what to identify himself.* The middle class is decaying, and, as a conscious entity, the working class does not exist. Hence the tendency of modern painters to paint for each other."[10] The critic and scholar are no less vulnerable to the problems of identification.

In distinct ways, Pleynet and Shattuck refuse to consign the avant-garde to the past and do so by engaging precisely with such questions of identification. Both insist that the radical past is also the radical present and a set of possibilities for the future. Both attempt to describe a way of thinking about the avant-garde that refuses to sew up all the loose ends. They maintain a certain openness and critical irony in their thinking about the avant-garde, an openness to the possibilities and limits produced by the breakdown of older identities anchored in preexisting affiliations among critics, artists, and social groups. How do they work within these possibilities and limitations? For both, the horizons of the avant-garde are best characterized as open, as open to *contradiction;* in other words, the avant-garde's revolt against the mainstream is multiplicitous, ambivalent, ironic, and excessive, never able to be fully captured by critique and scholarship. Unlike the artists described by Motherwell, there is a purposeful, positive-minded refusal of identification in these two essays. The reticence and caution of

these texts provide a liberating sense of failure, the kind of liberation that comes when we finally understand the limits of our tools.

How can contradiction be both a method and a limit? Pleynet affords one possibility, arguing (in line with Barthes, Kristeva, Derrida, and others who theorized the exemptions and excesses of *jouissance* and *l'écriture*) that texts by writers like Sade purposefully play on the border between the universalizing gestures of modernism and the singularity of fetishism and subversive "perversion," generating difficult questions about their and our societies, and sparking the search for utopia. While conservative critics consigned Sade's work to the limbo of history (e.g., he wrote in such-and-such a time and is relevant as an example of such-and-such a trend of that time) and individual style (the mark of his rugged singularity), Pleynet prefers to view Sade's work as a "series of questions which will not reduce its transgressive violence" (111). As a radical critic searching for new concepts and methods of critique, Pleynet argues that Sade's work is best understood as a representational strategy that is both modernist and countermodernist; best understood, in short, as embodied activity, as writerly performance. He quotes Sade: "The simplest movements of our bodies are enigmas as difficult to decipher as thoughts, for whoever thinks upon them" (115).

Coming from a very different political, institutional, and theoretical vantage point, Shattuck is less concerned with the contradictions of political action than he is with the unstable, fluid *emotional* charge of radical cultural activity, a charge that fits uneasily with traditional academic language and critical standards. He writes, "The two domains, then, to which Surrealism made a lasting contribution are love and laughter. Other activities of the group look less important now" (26). Though we might disagree with the latter part of that judgment, his focus on affective charge fulfills, no doubt, a necessity that he himself feels lacking in the intellectual environment of his times.

Quite explicitly, Shattuck writes his introduction in response to the success enjoyed by existentialist philosophy, its artistic offshoots in American higher education after World War II, and its role as a catalyst for "cool." Existentialism, Shattuck argues, has, due to its "imposing terminology and a certain high seriousness . . . already been coupled to the other coaches of intellectual history" (23). Neither academic circles nor the students who pass through them can give any space for "the disequilibrium and latent pressure" of surrealism's revolutionary love and laughter (23). Unlike Jean-Paul Sartre's insistent focus on intellectual synthesis, categorical clarity, and totalizing views of human life, surrealism refuses to synthesize ("not to obliterate or climb higher than the big contradictions, but to stand firmly upon them as the surest ground" [22–23]) and refuses to leave behind the

problems of emotional life, especially desire.[11] "Little wonder," Shattuck concludes, looking ahead to a discussion of love and laughter, "that [surrealism] has become one of the hardest lessons to present in the institutionalized arena of higher education in the United States" (23).

Both Pleynet and Shattuck assert that contradiction isn't something to be avoided; rather, it is a symptom of vitality, the mark of a latent radicalism that can put to question all aspects of life, including the life of the critic and scholar. They focus on contradiction in order to open space for a reconsideration of the avant-garde that can at once renovate the modes and methods of scholarship and criticism while at the same time keeping open the possibility of avant-gardism as a critical method even after scholarship and criticism has had their say. Pleynet paraphrases the Comte de Lautréamont's oft-quoted call for poetry to be made by all, but swings it in the direction of literary criticism: "To say of Sade that he is readable is to say that he is *still* to be read, and by all" (119). And that is the end of the essay—as if this kind of radically democratic reading can't be captured by an essay, not even in allegorical terms, only introduced, then left to continue on its own. Shattuck, we recall, considers surrealism to be as weighty an issue for his generation as progressive education and pacifism. However, surrealism, and by extension every avant-garde movement, recedes from the view of the critical and scholarly just as surely as love and laughter.

In both essays, we find an interest in playing around certain limits to the critical and scholarly methods and categories of their day, and a wise recognition that those limits can't be crossed, at least for the time being. The kind of playful reticence that we find in their work marks the virtuous failure of their projects, a virtuous failure to claim a way to represent in academic language the specific form that Sade and surrealism might take at the present time. The issue here isn't just ethical or methodological—both critics are aware of what's happening outside their windows. Unlike those who declared the avant-garde dead, Pleynet and Shattuck recognize something distinctly unprecedented happening around them, something that forces them toward an unprecedented level of critical self-reflexivity as they contemplate their subject matter. This self-reflexivity is due in part to the recognition that something is happening "out there," something more than a little aware of these dutiful, remarkable scholars.

The Conceptual Crisis of the Counterculture

In virtually all writings on the avant-garde during the first two decades of the Cold War, we discover an occasionally explicit but mostly tacit

acknowledgment of a crisis: a social crisis, a crisis of progressive artistic activity, a crisis of critical standards, a crisis of the critic's authority. To apply Shattuck's metaphor to the works of what must be considered a school unto itself, the Eulogist School of Avant-Garde Studies, we can detect an unmapped continent looming in the haze of discourse: the counterculture. What do I mean by "counterculture"? The answer is not easy, particularly since I want to keep in play the ways that Pleynet and Shattuck deal with the avant-garde (as contradiction, as emotionally charged subject matter). In other words, we need to be as conscious of the limits of concepts and categories as we are of the necessity for clarity of concepts and categories. However, before moving into that kind of self-conscious play, we can establish some common terms and concerns.

The writer who first coined the term *counterculture,* Theodore Roszak, explicitly viewed it as a categorical crisis for academic critics and scholars. This was why he was coining the term—it enabled him to write about something that didn't fit into the language of sociology. This crisis was due to the counterculture's unprecedented social, cultural, and historical being. Unlike previous radical communities and social trends, Roszak argues, the counterculture "arose not out of misery but out of plenty; its role was to explore a new range of issues raised by an unprecedented increase in the standard of living."[12] Not only were the conditions of revolt unprecedented (though "plenty" wasn't as widespread as Roszak would have us believe), but "the very weakness of conventional ideological politics in the United States led the counter culture to its unique insight" (xiii). According to Roszak, one of the most profound challenges posed by the counterculture was its systematic criticism of dominant theories of leadership and leadership training, a criticism that resulted in new organizational structures, some based on participatory democracy and decentered decision making. Demographic changes also produced new kinds of political identities and affiliations that put older analytical methods to the stake. For example, the increasingly right-wing tendencies of working-class organizations such as the AFL-CIO helped promote the development of political groups that focused on the specific needs of youth, students, minorities, and other communities excluded from the Cold War economic boom.

But the social and historical dimensions of countercultural exceptionalism, an exceptionalism not all historians are willing to accept, are not the most significant. As Shattuck implies, emotional experience and emotional intelligence played a significant role in the self-definition of countercultural communities. A perfect example of this kind of emotional, experiential self-definition would be the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee

(SNCC), an initially integrated organization that played a significant supporting role for Martin Luther King Jr's efforts in the southern United States during the early 1960s, a role played effectively and enthusiastically until 1965, when, outraged by the assassination of Malcolm X and under intense pressure from radical organizations such as the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), it split from the left-liberal King's organization and embraced a culturally radical Black Nationalism. Though the organization's move to nationalism was catalyzed by X's death and the pressure of RAM agent Askia Touré, the move had been prepared by the frustrating pace of nonviolent activism and party politics.[13]

It was also spurred by changes in the way members of the organization began to conceive identity, experience, and culture, issues that were not considered by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) as a significant strategic or tactical concern. In an effort to devise a more effective organizational structure and an equally effective recruitment strategy, many of SNCC's members began to focus on the assumptions implicit in SNCC's organizational structure and how those assumptions ran against the culturally specific ways of thinking about self, community, and progressive transformation that were gaining strength among the group's African American members. The conclusion was reached that the shape of the organization contradicted the experience of the majority of its members and of most of the people the organization served. As a consequence, in 1965, all non–African Americans were expelled from the group.

The expulsion was justified by the leaders of SNCC in terms germane to a discussion of the limits of criticism. In the corporately written "SNCC Speaks for Itself" (1965–66), we read: "The myth that the Negro is somehow incapable of liberating himself, is lazy, etc., came out of the American experience. . . . Any white person who comes into the movement has these concepts in his mind about black people, if only subconsciously. He cannot escape them because the whole society has geared his subconscious in that direction."[14] Fortunately, the writers expand their analysis beyond this fairly muddy notion of "subconsciousness." The impact of whites on the movement, they argue, is a complex one related to questions of "identification." The presence of whites, they write, impacts expression, hampers the development of leadership skills among African Americans, ensures the survival of paternalistic forms of racism (in humor, language, gesture), and limits the organization's cultural references and, therefore, its ability to galvanize the broadest possible African American community.

That said, the implications of the 1965 expulsion go beyond the simple rejection of older organizational and political models and into profound

issues surrounding institutionalized political movements, the articulation and revision of critical standards, and the strengthening or crossing of cultural boundaries. This lattermost issue, culture—that complicated, fluid, contradictory medium in which individuals and communities produce both themselves and their understandings of self—is the one that demands closest attention. The writers continue, "Too long have we allowed white people to interpret the importance and meaning of the cultural aspects of our society. We have allowed them to tell us what was good about our Afro-American music art, and literature. How many black critics do we have on the 'jazz' scene? How can a white person who is not part of the black psyche (except in the oppressor's role) interpret the meaning of the blues to us who are manifestations of the songs themselves?" They conclude, "We reject the American dream as defined by white people and must work to construct an American reality defined by Afro-Americans" (123). SNCC indicates with these comments that the organization was moving well beyond mere "ideological critique"; it was embracing new forms of political action oriented toward the specific cultural practices of "Afro-America" (not the "Negro") and against the modes of social and political interpretation they saw as hardwired into older leadership and strategic methods and organizations. What we see here isn't just the replacement of liberalism by a more radical political perspective (i.e., nationalism); the very notion of ideology and critique are being reformulated. The organizational shake-up of SNCC is emblematic of how countercultural communities sparked fundamental crises in the modes, methods, and categories of radical activism—and did so through new forms of cultural production. It is this dynamic relationship among methodological and categorical crisis, historical revisionism, and cultural production that will receive the bulk of attention in the case studies that follow.

The Counterculture and the Dialectics of Performance

Despite its inherent diversity and contradictoriness, and despite the presence of the kinds of firm boundaries of experience recognized and exploited by SNCC, there are shared structures that can give the critic and scholar some kind of through-line to follow, and perhaps help us to map general features of the social, cultural, and economic matrix in which the counterculture developed. Thinking about the counterculture in such a fashion—that is, recognizing both its plurality and its structural unity—takes one close to the project described by Fredric Jameson. He urges scholars and critics to assess the fact that the 1960s was an era that introduced innovative forms of

oppression as well as unprecedented tactics of liberation, "a moment in which the enlargement of capitalism on a global scale simultaneously produced an immense freeing or unbinding of social movements, a prodigious release of untheorized new forces." Jameson suggests that a "unified field theory" of the 1960s is possible only if we engage in "a properly dialectical process in which 'liberation' and domination are inextricably combined."[15]

One of the sites in which this kind of process can be seen in action is *performance*. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of performance to the development of the counterculture; in fact, it is often asserted (incorrectly) that the 1960s marked the birth of performance as a cultural dominant. Certainly, it is true that performance practices reflected a general concern with tactics as opposed to strategy (that is to say, with local action as the ground for a wider address of larger global issues). At the same time, performance was a method that enabled radicals to devise actions that could address simultaneously the structures of language, economics, politics, social institutions, cultural history, and the body. As both practice and discourse, countercultural performance addressed the need (1) to identify and disrupt existing social, cultural, and economic boundaries, (2) to systematically challenge existing discourses of experience, everyday life, and the politics of culture, (3) to produce new ways of thinking and acting that effectively valued aspects of experience, everyday life, and culture systematically excluded from the mainstream, and (4) to ground all of this in specific social and cultural situations. The Living Theatre, Happenings and Fluxus, and the artists and audiences of the Black Arts Movement—to name only the countercultures studied in the case studies that follow—founded their visions of social, cultural, economic, and historical transformation on a dialectical vision of performance that allows us to comprehend plurality and structure and disables us from welding them together into some kind of static, dialectically synthetic unity.

While many countercultural communities viewed performance in exactly this way—as a unifying, even universal, activity—they did so for distinct, essentially incomparable reasons and in order to address situated concerns. For Julian Beck and Judith Malina's Living Theatre, for example, the moment of performance cleared a conceptual and affective space in the claustrophobic market halls of imperialist capitalism. Despite their efforts to instigate a global anarchist revolution, their efforts to clear that space always depended on the specific audiences for which they performed, even as they absorbed greater and greater numbers of performance practices and traditions into their repertoire. Happenings and Fluxus events also privileged performance as the grounds for global community, but unlike the Living

Theatre, the artists and audiences of early performance art utilized performance not so much to destroy capitalism and capitalist bureaucracy as to divert, exploit, and ironize it. In events such as Allan Kaprow's *Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts* (1959), performance enabled a radical individualization of art by empowering the spectator as an active maker of the art event and by calling into question the ability of any one spectator to create sensible, coherent accounts of it. Performance was also highly valued as a unifying, global cultural practice and critical mode by the Black Arts Movement, the third case study herein, a movement indebted to the pan-African negritude and transnational anticolonial movements of the 1950s and 1960s. However, just as performance addressed for Black artists a range of political, economic, and cultural needs that were very different from those of the Living Theatre and performance artists (not least of which being the desire to radically challenge the Euro-American aesthetic tradition that gave rise to those groups), it also enabled Black artists to articulate a specifically African *American* ethos, an ethos anchored to the traditions, tones, and trickery of African American urban and rural neighborhoods.

Thus, we see both a unifying principle (performance) and a pluralistic basis (the local) when we comparatively examine cultural production among such groups. However, to further complicate matters, we must take account of the terminological issues surrounding performance, which seems to resist any unifying or totalizing definition. Thus, taking account of such practices may complicate Jameson's assertion that a "unified theory" of the counterculture can be achieved—except on a purely terminological level (which may be no small accomplishment). Countercultural cultural producers not only performed the cultural, political, and economic crises of the 1960s, they inaugurated a form of political activity that even to this day— and despite the efforts of dozens of performance theorists—has yet to be sufficiently described; it can never be fully "marked," to recall Peggy Phelan.[16] As French Happenings artist Jean-Jacques Lebel put it in an essay he hurriedly scrambled together during the 1968 occupation of the Odéon Théâtre de France, "Something has changed."[17] The tantalizing vagueness of Lebel's claim isn't just the consequence of the perennial difficulty caused when one analyzes a situation in process; rather, it is the consequence of a more dialectical process, one that demands metaphors such as Karl Marx's "vague immensity," Pleynet's "all," Shattuck's "unmapped continent," or the "fragmentary thought" advocated by the intellectuals surrounding the French journal *Arguments* (1956–62). Countercultural performance trends such as the Living Theatre, early U.S. performance art, and the Black Arts Movement (again, to name only those specific cases I discuss in these pages)

inaugurated what might be termed a "performance crisis," an explosion of staged activity that has permanently altered certain aspects of American culture and politics, constituted retroactively a cultural history that had previously existed only on the margins, and produced forms of cultural practice that can never securely enter critical and scholarly discourse. Countercultural performance highlights the limits of criticism.

One of the lessons the scholar and theorist of the avant-garde as a performance tradition must learn is that any theory of the avant-garde is, like Jarry's pataphysics, "the law that governs exceptions."[18] Such exceptions—such performative singularities—catalyze the productive failure of academic efforts to make sense of radical subject matter, but also open efforts to think about the avant-garde to new, more robust forms of diversity and difference. The American counterculture's revolt against bourgeois-liberal society, its singularly diverse matrix of performative events, is particularly hard to systematize. Stiles is therefore correct to "want to describe avant-gardes as plural, existing simultaneously, working in different media synchronistically in local, national, and international settings (each dependent on the context of their practices and politics), and functioning in different social configurations, at different times and for different purposes."[19]

The Limits of Criticism, Liberal Society, and the Performative Avant-Garde

Performance has been a long-lived tradition for the avant-garde, as RoseLee Goldberg demonstrated in 1979, the year the first edition of her pathblazing *Performance: Live Art 1909 to the Present* was published. But performance took on a fundamentally new and more extensive role during the first two decades of the Cold War; specifically, it challenged a vision of the avant-garde that focused on the art object and the objective standards advocated by formalist critics such as Clement Greenberg. The embrace of performance by the Cold War avant-gardes not only challenged critical standards, it compelled a rethinking—a critical remembering, if you will—of the avant-garde tradition as a whole, a rethinking of the basic concepts used to define it, and a rethinking of the methods needed to comprehend it. Goldberg writes, "It is interesting that performance, until that time [1979], had been consistently left out in the process of evaluating artistic development, especially in the modern period, more on account of the difficulty of placing it in the history of art than of any deliberate omission."[20] One reason for this forgetting is that the avant-garde has tended not to honor the kinds of categorical and institutional boundaries respected by its critics and scholars.

Goldberg argues that performance has served regularly as a critical mode *within* avant-garde movements:

> Such a radical stance has made performance a catalyst in the history of twentieth-century art; whenever a certain school, be it Cubism, Minimalism or conceptual art, seemed to have reached an impasse, artists have turned to performance as a way of breaking down categories and indicating new directions. Moreover, within the history of the avant-garde—meaning those artists who led the field in breaking with each successive tradition—performance in the twentieth century has been at the forefront of such an activity: an avant avant-garde.[21]

The problems raised by the intrinsic challenge of avant-garde performance practices are complex and not easily summarized. Goldberg writes that performance history can only "pursue the development of a sensibility. . . . It can only hint at life off the pages."[22] The problems are conceptual in nature, but they're also practical problems, problems that involve various kinds of ontological dilemmas, political judgments, and institutional affiliations; in other words, who is writing, publishing, and reading the pages. An example of such contradictory conceptual and practical dilemmas can be found when we turn to the difficulty faced by audience members who participated in Kaprow's *Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts,* the event that introduced the term *Happening* to art-world discourse. Divided into four groups and separated by semiopaque, sheet plastic room divides; gently assaulted by seemingly random lighting, sound, and performance effects; and continually teased into proclaiming interpretations about what was so clearly a "significant" event, Kaprow's audience members had to confront the fact that they were part of a moment that could never be credibly theorized, adequately criticized, or fully remembered. This notion will be discussed at greater length in chapter 2.

The confrontation of critical scholarship and the specific artistic manifestations of the Cold War avant-garde inevitably and unpredictably throw us into a looping network of lateral connections, unexpected lines of consideration, secret histories, and obscure but substantial conceptual connections—what I will later call a "reticulated terrain." Intensely distrustful of political compromise, cultural radicals during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s created profoundly contextual, intensely singular social, cultural, and economic practices that were intended specifically to outwit the institutions and progressive thinkers of liberal-bourgeois society, even those institutions and thinkers sympathetic to their programs. Among those sympathetic institu-

tions and progressive thinkers that I am most interested in were the institutions of higher learning and the scholars and critics enthusiastically shouldering the responsibilities of avant-garde revolt (e.g., the editorial boards of *Tel Quel* and *Partisan Review;* the chairs of art departments at Rutgers, NYU, Cal Tech, etc.; faculty advisers to radical campus groups; Black student unions and Black Studies collectives at Merritt College, San Francisco State University, Wayne State University, University of Massachusetts–Amherst; performers and scholars organizing performance studies groups; etc.).

Without in any way disparaging such activists, organizations, and institutions, it is vital that we be honest about the limits of action and vision. Even if scholars, critics, and teachers serve as a critical force within liberal democracy—whether for Right or Left—they were and are, in the end, no true friend of the avant-garde, which must be defined, in the end, as a radical, revolutionary cultural movement that works outside of parliamentary process and not merely an urge toward formal or conceptual experiment. Regardless of political belief, the scholars, critics, and teachers who study the avant-garde are, by and large, employees of higher education, academic publishing houses, and the system of galleries and auction houses that buy and sell the works of the avant-garde.

Again, the intent here is not to disparage scholars, critics, and teachers who actively engage with the avant-garde—the intent here is to criticize, not dismiss. Indeed, a history of the Cold War avant-garde can't be told without taking account of innovative educational institutions such as Black Mountain College, Antioch College, and the New School for Social Research, not to mention equally important programs within traditional institutions, of which the art department at Rutgers and the performance studies programs at NYU and Northwestern are perhaps the most significant. Just as surely, it would be impossible to write this book without the work of individuals who have challenged the institutions in which they work to secure a place for performance and performance studies in the humanities and social sciences (e.g. Richard Schechner, Lucy Lippard, Dwight Conquergood, Diana Taylor, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Craig Owens, Kristine Stiles, Jill Dolan). Nor are terms like "radical" and "revolutionary" used blithely. Rather, there must be recognition of certain limits and of the hazards of forgetting that there are always new historical, conceptual, and methodological possibilities.

The avant-garde is, by definition and for better *and* worse, an antiliberal, antiparliamentary trend, a trend rooted in the military tendencies of extreme ideological positions, positions that tend to be lumped crudely together in

terms of "Left" and "Right." The avant-garde is a cultural trend born in the radical ideologies and radical social movements of the bourgeois West, particularly those that favored the use of violent, nonparliamentary means to achieve their political goals.[23] That said, bourgeois-liberal governments and entrepreneurs have demonstrated, from time to time, support of the avant-garde in its less overtly political manifestations. One might think, for examples, of Napoleon III's reorganization of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and support for the Salon des Refusés against the royalist conservatives and academic traditionalists of mid-nineteenth-century France or publisher Henry Clare Luce's enthusiastic support for the American abstract expressionists during the 1950s. Though it has more often than not targeted the avant-garde as an enemy, bourgeois liberalism stands in a pretty fickle relationship to its radical wild child. In part, this is due to the quirky nature of liberalism. Liberalism is a tradition as fluid and flexible as it is hardy, a fact that inevitably complicates any effort to challenge it from Left or Right, inevitably pressing the challengers continually to take on new forms while maintaining, as best they can, some sense of historical continuity.

Anarchism, fascism, communism, mysticism, addiction, pacifism, religious revivalism, obscenity, and many other radical challenges have all played significant roles in the avant-garde's persistent, mutative attack on the cultural, social, political, and economic institutions of bourgeois-liberal society. The always-changing terrain upon which avant-gardes maneuver often pose individual groups against each other in interesting fashion—and occasionally against their own fundamental imperatives. For example, Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin both viewed their Dadaesque guerrilla performances as a way of radicalizing—if not altogether destroying—what is often called (after Guy Debord) the "society of spectacle." For Hoffman and Rubin's mythical organization Yippie! the ubiquity and vacuity of the mass media created endless opportunities for improvisational scandal and symbolic gestures; for example, throwing ashes in the eyes of utilities executives, or throwing dollar bills onto the floor of the New York Stock Exchange and inciting a stampede. Yippie! was itself the kind of mythic, spectral threat often manufactured by the media to generate public support for the harassment of nonconformists. For Rubin, the very impossibility of controlling the ways that countercultural acts were depicted by news organizations, administration officials, and professors was less a curse than an opportunity for mass revolt and anarchist collectivism. As he put it, "I've never seen 'bad' coverage of a demonstration. It makes no difference what they say about us. The pictures are the story."[24]

While certainly struggling within and against the politics of mass-medi-

ated spectacle, the Black Arts Movement theater collectives of Seattle, Chicago, Harlem, Miami, New Orleans, and other urban and academic centers addressed very different concerns from Yippie! and in very different ways—yet performance was part of the fabric of their revolt, too. Black artists and audiences were not interested in making spectacle for the sheer sake of spectacle (neither were they in anarchist collectivism); quite the contrary, they had goals in mind that were specific to their community, particularly the generation of empowering, radicalizing images of Blackness that could counter the racism of the mass media and the mainstream institutions of arts and cultural criticism. For the cultural nationalists who drew the theoretical and strategic map for the movement, performance enabled a critical blow against Euro-American understandings of politics, aesthetics, and community organization and was also a way of creating radical events that could effectively outmaneuver the "white eye" of the mass media. The need to create empowering representations and simultaneously control the interpretation of those representations separates the Black Arts Movement from the anarchist high-jinks of Yippie! The very notion of throwing away money would have deeply offended artists and audiences who had been systematically excluded from economic opportunity.

However, despite their differences, Yippie! and Black Arts performance both emblematize a general countercultural interest in local action and grassroots organizing; in other words, political activism outside the standard institutional structures and procedures of the bourgeois-liberal state. They share in what Rebecca Klatch has described as the counterculture's "common sense of generational mission and . . . shared revulsion . . . for the liberal managerial state."[25] Like their counterparts on the putatively less artistic terrain of political activism—one thinks of Rosa Parks's refusal to take her place on a bus or the right-wing Young Americans for Freedom rallying against centrist forces in the Republican Party—these groups utilized a range of new organizational, analytic, and communication methods both to address the failure of national and international organizations and to map the contours of local concern. In the case of the Black Arts Movement, for example, the effort to build theaters of, for, and by the African American community (1) stood in opposition to the systematic misunderstanding of that community by the white-controlled media and governmental and social service organizations, (2) refined a pan-African aesthetic that was already a significant presence in global culture, and (3) addressed in dramatic and theatrical form the specific legal, spiritual, and historical needs of the neighborhoods it served.

The necessity of tailoring oppositional action to local situations often compelled countercultural groups to significantly revise their own theory

and practice. As a consequence, groups often had to demarcate their own work depending on the context in which it was manifested. This is no more clear than in the case of the Otrabanda company. In 1969, Diane Brown and David Dawkins, armed with a well-thumbed copy of Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi,* assembled a simple, self-propelled raft out of oil drums, a hundred dollars' worth of lumber, and a few odds and ends of camping gear, then floated it down the river, where they discovered the small, almost forgotten towns that pepper the banks between St. Louis and New Orleans. This trip impressed upon the two the possibility of experiencing life and art together in a truly revolutionary way, marking their journey as an adventure in populist aesthetics. The validity of this adventure was further ratified (and globalized) when, in that same year, the Flemish playwright and director Tone Brulin was invited to give workshops at the school that Brown and Dawkins attended: Antioch College, a small, progressive school located east of Dayton, Ohio, tucked close by the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, and committed to cooperative education and participatory democracy. Brulin's work in the theater was deeply influenced by the "poor theater" of Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba, which attempted to purify the form of the techniques and traditions that undermined global brotherhood by stripping theater down to its bare essentials: the actor's body and the cleared performance space. Brulin's pared-down, technically rigorous, spiritually oriented techniques appeared to Brown, Dawkins, and the other members of the workshop to embody precisely what the impoverished communities along the Mississippi River needed. The troupe's commitment to the implementation of a true "people's theater" that would synthesize both the newest trends from Europe and the popular cultures of the river regions led quickly to some fairly significant critical success in Baltimore, Los Angeles, and New York.

The troupe was also led to some fairly unsettling conclusions about what constituted people's theater; specifically, that what counted as people's theater in Manhattan had a tough go on the banks of the Mississippi. In the summer of '73, the company decided to take their well-reviewed play *Stump Removal* to the river, supplemented by a preshow vaudeville act that would showcase the diverse talents of the members and serve to gather and warm up a crowd. Typically, the communities would be thrilled by the arrival of the raft and its sarong-clad, hippie-ish performers and show their usual, profound hospitality. However, when the preshow ended and the play began, audiences simply left, bored, befuddled, and usually offended. Otrabanda quickly dropped *Stump Removal* from the bill and were bereft of the most explicitly political aspect of their program.

Literally in midstream of their first river tour, the company had to

reassess their notions of what the people wanted and needed as well as their own need to do work that was socially significant. Their solutions are worth noting. Compelled to radically alter the experimental theatricals applauded in major urban centers and to drop overtly political references from their *River Raft Revue,* Otrabanda had to, in Ellen Maddow's words, "realize that a lot of content existed in the event itself. Here was a group of people, at first labeled 'hippies,' who turned out to be hard-working and dedicated to providing good entertainment to the towns."[26] First, they expanded their vaudeville intro so that it referenced local political concerns but in a form familiar to their audiences. Second, they established workshops so that their audiences could see how they transformed from "normal" people to performers. Lastly, they invented a bagful of participatory performance techniques. Otrabanda member David Dawkins found the changes ultimately positive: "What we were made a much heavier impact than our avant-garde experiments. [The rural audiences] always said we were just college kids. But we showed them that this is what we do for a living. This is our life. And that really energized them."[27]

As a consequence, Otrabanda stood in a position of empowering (if occasionally frustrating) ambivalence as an avowedly avant-garde group. This in-between state enabled them to be critical of a broader range of American cultural traditions, but never all at the same time. In Manhattan and Los Angeles, where the avant-garde was a deeply rooted tradition, the troupe turned its attention against the assumptions of that tradition. Where Grotowski's practices and theories were in the ascendant, Otrabanda criticized them. As Lloyd Steele noted in regard to the production of *Stump Removal,* "They have none of Grotowski's obsessive concern with the actor's inner truth; nor do they search in such fine detail for physical equivalents of the various states of mind; nor do they directly involve the audience in their deliberately 'old-fashioned' proscenium staging. Theirs is a 'poor' theater, but what they do on stage is somewhere between a happening and a children's show: a uniquely American form that tries as hard to be entertaining as it does to be enlightening."[28] Where Grotowski's innovations were too alien and the avant-garde barely a rumor, they turned to the local traditions of circus, vaudeville, religious revival, and puppetry—but in a way that challenged the traditional definitions of "entertainment" by turning the entertainment event into a community event.

We can break down this notion of localized vanguardism even further. Their annual shows at the Menard Psychiatric Center were most significant for their postperformance workshops in makeup technique, the success of which led the company to expose the backstage areas of their tent during

subsequent river tours. Demonstrating the ability to take on new identities and perform living in new ways constituted a significant intervention in the lives of the inmates. Otrabanda demonstrates to us the ways that performance's problematic synthesis of the local and the global renders even the individual counterculture mercurial, situational. Just as surely, we also see it pressuring individual countercultures to transform themselves in response to the distinct demands of context. As David Riley says, "The problem lies not with the performers' talents, which dazzle even befuddled spectators, but in their split ambition of wanting to be in both the vanguard of the people and the vanguard of their art."[29]

This long-lived dilemma of the avant-garde—to be advanced both technically and politically—was not a dilemma to be solved so much as a tension to be played within, resolved and dissolved, resolved again, and so on. Plurality, while not a universal within the counterculture, was a vital force within its avant-garde factions, trends, and communities. Often attacked, often derided, the commitment to and practice of plurality marks the counterculture as both an innovative, if late-born, trend within avant-garde history (the countercultural avant-garde as a "neo" avant-garde); but it also demonstrates a profound continuity with that history's often forgotten roots deep within the tradition of social activism and universalist pretense, an answer, however tentative and ephemeral, to the unanswered questions of liberty, love, and democracy that have been asked continually since the great bourgeois revolutions of the eighteenth century and that became all the more pressing during the two centuries of reaction that followed.

Performing Crisis

These unanswered questions have, in recent years, come to be asked in terms of performance and performativity. Clifford Geertz has described the diffusion of performance methods and concepts during the Cold War as "not just another redrawing of the cultural map—the moving of a few disputed borders, the marking of some more picturesque mountain lakes—but an alteration of the principles of mapping. Something is happening to the way we think about the way we think."[30] On a less sanguine note, Jon McKenzie argues that "performance will be to the 20th and 21st centuries what discipline was to the 18th and 19th, that is, an onto-historical formation of power and knowledge." Riffing off Michel Foucault's work on the development of penal systems in the liberal West, McKenzie argues that, like discipline, performance "produces a new subject of knowledge," one that is "constructed as fragmented rather than unified, decentered rather

than centered, virtual as well as actual."[31] As demonstrated by scholars from a range of academic disciplines, the concepts and vocabulary that define collective notions of community almost always define us as performers; that is, as individuals simultaneously obligated and enabled by the rules of decorum and standards of visible truth that help to constitute our sense of historicity and belonging. Normally, these rules and standards are so commonsensical that their performative nature is obscured. However, when such rules and standards begin to seem insufficient or illegitimate—as happened in diverse sectors of American society during the Cold War—then our sense of self, community, and history loses its patina of logic and righteousness. How we perform culture is put to the stake. Society suffers a kind of "performing crisis." In the 1960s, this crisis catalyzed the development of the new subject of knowledge described by McKenzie, though that subject was not always envisioned as fragmented, decentered, or virtual.

During such crises, officially sanctioned forms of artistic performance, which are in essence idealized forms of social consciousness, lose a sense of motivation. Thus, the performing crisis is mediated—made concrete—by the performance arts. At such moments, alternative theaters, performance communities, subcultures, and innovative performing arts tend to arise, bringing with them new visions of self, community, and history. In terms of theater, dramatic form, acting technique, stage-audience relations, the use of props, the significance of movement, acceptable kinds of content, the performance space, and other elements of the performance dynamic are often put to question. When the Living Theatre confronted the burgeoning War on Drugs in *The Connection,* they were not merely revealing a hitherto mis- or underrepresented reality. *The Connection* is not just a Bebop bastardization of Maxim Gorky's *The Lower Depths* (1902). By utilizing improvisatory jazz and a self-deconstructing, hyperrealistic performance methodology, they were hinting at new forms of subjectivity, new ways of communicating, new rhythms of self-transformation, and new models of community organization—the new mode and subject of knowledge described by Geertz and McKenzie. In this sense, the Living Theatre explored the ground described by Geertz when he writes, "What connects [the various disciplinary uses of performance] is the view that human beings are less driven by forces than submissive to rules, that the rules are such as to suggest strategies, the strategies are such as to inspire actions, and the actions are such as to be self-rewarding" (26). At the same time, their extensive borrowing from jazz performance techniques, drug literature, and Pirandello reflects a concern described well by Hal Foster: "Indeed, such art often invokes different, even incommensurate models, but less to act them out in

a hysterical pastiche (as in much art in the 1980s) than to work them through to a reflexive practice—to turn the very limitations of these models into a critical consciousness of history, artistic and otherwise."[32]

No account of performance can fully conceptualize the intensely experiential, contradictory qualities, the "what" and "where" that tend to trouble formal analysis. This is particularly true of performances that, as is the case in the three studies that follow, establish and cross multiple lines of demarcation, lines that, in Foster's words, press on us the crucial "question of avant-garde causality, temporality, and narrativity."[33] One of our more useful inheritances from the "hermeneutics of suspicion" (to recall Paul Ricoeur's description of the critical heritage of Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche)[34] is that it has impressed upon critics and scholars the fact that all aspects of culture can be considered political. Moreover, the specific political structures in question need not be easily ascertainable; rather the structures must be reconstructed via acts of interpretation—of critical performance. Of great importance to such suspicious ways of reading—of performing—the world as text is the idea that interpretations are always predetermined by the context in which interpretations occur. Scholars and critics perform within a "hermeneutic circle" that is very much like a theatrical stage, predisposed in specific, not always conscious ways toward the object of our concern, predispositions that profoundly shape our interpretations. As a consequence, the question of performance becomes increasingly important not only for avant-garde performers, but for the intellectual event of scholarship, criticism, and pedagogy. This was certainly recognized by Pleynet and Shattuck.

Foster also recognizes this dilemma when he acknowledges the weaknesses of the avant-garde model: "the ideology of progress, the presumption of originality, the elitist hermeticism, the historical exclusivity, the appropriation by the culture industry."[35] Yet he also points out that the avant-garde "remains a crucial coarticulation of artistic and political forms" demanding "new genealogies for the avant-garde that complicate its past and support its future."[36] This is a rich attitude to hold, all the more so when we turn to sites in which coarticulations and histories intersect in especially complicated ways. As Goldberg has demonstrated, a focus on performance is perhaps the single most effective way to produce complications in theory and practice. Performance enables us to understand political struggle in useful, concrete ways—and yet it also underlines the gaps that continually open in our efforts to understand, the openness that thought must have to the situation of political activism.

Erwin Piscator, who along with Vsevelod Meyerhold and Bertolt Brecht

can be tagged as a pioneer of self–consciously "political" theater, makes this point clearly when he describes the premiere of his 1924 production of *Flags*. The back projectors, the overtly didactic script, the strategic disjunctures of melodramatic form—all were, to use Piscator's metaphor, "shit."[37] Happily, the audience disagreed, finding the combination of proletarian hoopla and avant–garde shock both entertaining and energizing. This gap between Piscator and his audience's reactions will be a model throughout this book. As seen in the case of SNCC, Otrabanda, and the essays of Pleynet, Shattuck, and Roszak, it's difficult, if not impossible, to stabilize critical method and vocabulary in the face of the diverse communities that contribute to the performative event. In this sense, all theory can function as a form of forgetting, of bad memory (the irruption of hitherto unrecognizable genealogies), but potentially in a virtuous, productive way.

How can virtue be ensured? First, following Stiles, one must not utilize abstractions at the cost of the behavioral situations of the specific performance.[38] There are certain ways that text, performance, and theory play with and against each other in specific contexts, ways that necessarily result in the failure of explanation, historicization, and interpretation. Moments like these—Sade and surrealism both come to mind, but also such fleeting events as an exemplary performance of an otherwise desultory production of a play, a particularly apt inflection of a free-verse stanza, the *communitas* achieved during a fleeting minute of oratorical perfection, the mounting excitement of an jazz–jam finding new spaces in old standards, the high risk of a police line breaking, and even more individualistic moments like the taste of a madeleine soaked in linden tea or the particular conjunction of sights and sounds from a seat at a Happening—pull the scholar or critic forcefully into confrontation with a basic anxiety, as well as with an unparalleled opportunity to rethink how they think and how they relate experientially and intellectually to the subject of their analysis. Such moments enable one to reconsider the very act of scholarly consideration and its capacity to transform contradiction into platitude. Martin Heidegger noted that it is not when our tools work, but when they fail that the most far-reaching and self-critical analysis is enabled.[39] The failure of the tool is endemic to the moments with which this book is concerned.

One of the key functions of political performance, to recall Graham Holderness's *The Politics of Theatre and Drama,* is to identify the "political character of a cultural form," an identification that should trace "the politics of form—estranging, alienating, self-reflexive—and its politics of function—destabilizing the conventional relation between spectator and performance, disrupting traditional expectations of narrative and aesthetic coher-

ence," and so on.⁴⁰ Holderness is working a Brechtian approach here, but he boils Brecht's theories down a bit too thickly and spreads them a little too thin. Theorists must be careful not to allow the important work of identifying the politics of a particular cultural form to devolve into what might be called the "technical fallacy," that is, the belief that formal innovation is political innovation. The technical fallacy tends to render abstract the singular relationships of form and content that are manifested in specific performance contexts. Holderness is himself guilty of this when he generalizes Brecht's theories, thereby forgetting the cultural, material, and historical determinations of form, content, and moment that were the foundation of Brecht's probing work. Theoretical approaches to the politics of cultural production are especially prone to this fallacy, given the general tendency to equate theory with deductive method. Theory is a form of technology, after all, and since technology is always and forever available for appropriation, unless critics and scholars focus on the particular contexts in which technology is put to use, they will lose sight of the crucial issues relating to context, the issues reflected in, say, the struggles of Otrabanda and SNCC to devise tactics to energize and activate their audiences. In the three case studies of this book, the relationship of form, content, and critical knowledge always engages the politics of theorization.

Such situational qualities in no way impede political efficacy nor the effective use of theory, though it does complicate analysis. For example, Black playwright Ron Milner's domestic melodrama *Who's Got His Own* (1967) was almost universally recognized by his Black Arts colleagues as a politically efficacious play, even by critics like Larry Neal who were well versed in (and suspicious of) the avant-garde, the modernist dramatic tradition, and Brecht's critique of melodrama. However, according to Holderness's theory of formal alienation, Milner's play could only be considered reactionary. It is a realistic domestic drama that follows an essentially Aristotelian dramatic line and relies on coherent characters and identifiable, progressively complicated conflicts. However, the critical edge of the play is found not in its form, but in the specific forms of sharing it sponsored between audience and actors in the specific contexts of its performances. Witnesses to the first production of Milner's play at the American Place Theatre relate that white and African American spectators perceived the play in distinct ways. Wynn Handman remembers the absolute silence of whites and the continual, self-recognizing laughter of African American viewers. Because American Place was a theater-in-the-round, the spectators were not only able to respond in highly communitarian fashion, but could also recognize the differences in community response.⁴¹ They watched the

play and they watched themselves watching the play, no doubt responding to both spectacles. It was the performance situation, not the form (character, dialogue, dramatic structure), that defined the politics of performance.

Herbert Blau has commented on the technical fallacy—particularly the tendency to use Brecht as a prop to such fallacious thinking—within academic studies. He notes that innovative, activizing performance techniques often begin as truly avant-garde only to be "sterilized or neutralized, coterminous with technocracy."[42] André Breton would agree: "It is not by 'mechanism' that the Western peoples can be saved . . . it is not here that they will escape the moral disease of which they are dying."[43] I'm not just rehearsing here the old argument on co-optation of the avant-garde; this is an issue of effective tools being carried beyond the contexts and situations for which they were devised.

Teresa de Lauretis has addressed this issue, too, arguing that even the most politically committed analyses tend to endanger concrete considerations of political action. Speaking to the dilemmas surrounding a theorization of feminist film, she writes,

> The questions of identification, self-definition, the modes or the very possibility of envisaging oneself as subject—which the male avant-garde artists and theorists have also been asking, on their part, for almost one hundred years, even as they work to subvert the dominant representations or to challenge their hegemony—are fundamental questions for feminism.[44]

But she refuses to conflate technical innovation with the complexities of reception and the singular dynamics of performance-in-context:

> To ask of these women's films: What formal, stylistic, or thematic markers point to a female presence behind the camera? And hence to generalize and universalize, to say: This is the look and sound of women's cinema, this is its language—finally only means complying, accepting a certain definition of art, cinema, and culture, and obligingly showing how women can and do "contribute," pay their tribute, to "society."[45]

De Lauretis finally refuses the question of form altogether, characterizing the form/content debate as "fundamentally a rhetorical question," and urges us instead to direct our critical gaze "toward the wider public sphere of cinema as a social technology" (134). Doing this, she argues, we can begin to understand the audience as possessing its own differences—for de Lauretis,

"differences among women" and "differences *within* women."[46] De Lauretis pushes us to move beyond aesthetic questions to contextual issues, issues that may not possess any universal validity, but might be extremely potent. Stiles has also argued this point, warning us away from abstract consideration of radical*ism* to the description of radical acts.[47]

The courting of an audience and the establishment of situations for action were crucial concerns of most countercultural groups—an urge that places them at some distance from most pre–Cold War avant-gardes, which tended (with the exception of those affiliated with Popular Front organizations during the 1930s) to pursue an elitist line of development that is productively compared to the cenacle model that enjoyed widespread popularity in the late 1800s. Even if the cenacle model was rejected, more often than not the community for whom the avant-garde served as avant-garde (the working class, for example) was little more than a rhetorical mirage, a crutch for manifestos and aesthetic experiment. However, the counterculture tended to be profoundly committed to communication with the people they wished to help, not least because they were a part of that community. This kind of commitment and identity demanded new forms of avant-garde community and communication. Theodore Shank notes the impact of this concern on the organizational structure of one particular countercultural community, the theater troupe. He writes, "When an alternative culture and life-style began to take shape in the mid-1960s, another kind of producing organization came into being. In part it was a grassroots movement in that some of the participants did not come from the theatrical profession but were drawn to theater as a means of expression for their social and political commitment."[48] This kind of grassroots dynamic produced a number of unexpected problems for critics who wish to attend to the politics of form, problems that were hinted at by David Riley in his review of Otrabanda's first *River Raft Revue*.

The dilemma faced by the Cold War avant-garde—how to be in the forefront of art and the people—continues to be relevant for cultural activists in our own time. For example, Sue-Ellen Case has argued that the specific performance styles of Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver and the specific formal qualities of one dramatic text enabled Holly Hughes's play *Dress Suits to Hire* (1987) to be a "lesbian text."[49] However, when that play was staged outside a "lesbian spectatorial community" in Ann Arbor in 1988, assimilation and co-optation occurred, according to Case, because of the demands of a more heterogeneous audience and its diverse "horizons of expectations."[50] As a consequence, Case argues, the political needs of lesbians were being transformed into mere themes for "presses, ivy league schools, and

regional theaters . . . bedecking themselves with lesbian/gay themes and studies like wearing Liz Taylor's diamond."[51] Though sympathetic with Case's argument, Lynda Hart counters, "Depending upon whether a spectator is invested in the production of visible identities or whether she is looking at the performance and making identifications," the performance of lesbian subjectivity "is bound to be caught in the clash of conflicting desires."[52] Not unlike *Who's Got His Own, Dress Suits* is a lesbian text only in situation; taking a cue from Stanley Fish, one might argue that the "lesbian text" called *Dress Suits for Hire* does not *exist* at all.[53] Case's assertion is founded upon an a priori assumption of a particular, situational dynamic of performance and reception, a particular situation of text, performance, audience, and critic that she has hypostasized into a theoretical representation of the form/content relationship. In other words, she's committed the technical fallacy. As fallacious as it is, however, her criticism is no less worth attending to, even if we ultimately discover, following de Lauretis, that there are significant differences not only between the lesbian and nonlesbian audience, but also *within* the lesbian audience itself. In fact, Case acutely demonstrates how the critic can supply the language and concepts to describe how a group identity can be courted, reinforced, and transformed by a performance event carried out by a vanguard.

Like the "lesbian" text, the politics of countercultural performance are the creature of a situation. By "situation," I refer explicitly to the Situationist International's efforts to construct a political strategy adequate to the fact that all political analysis must ultimately answer to the singularities of practice, practice that occurs in a "unitary ensemble of behavior in time . . . composed of gestures contained in a transitory décor . . . a temporary field of activity favorable to . . . desires."[54] To the Situationists, the unity of theory and practice was inseparable from the "dynamization of elements" inhering in the specific context of activism. "Situation" also brings into play something along the lines of what Homi Bhabha calls the "third space," "which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious."[55] The effort toward such a third space can be detected in many countercultural performances, including those that, at first glance, seem to militate against the kind of instability and hybridity celebrated by Bhabha and other postmodernists.

One might cite the distinct political meanings of *Dutchman* when it was premiered in 1965 as an example of such a third space. The Cherry Lane Theatre production was a critical and financial hit; however, when the play was produced on Harlem street corners that summer as part of the Black

Arts Repertory Theatre/School's cultural offensive, it was deemed "racist" by the authorities and ultimately contributed to the reappropriation of the school's funding and, as a consequence, the school's demise. At the same time, the production enabled the self-identification of a community of African Americans who at one and the same time were appropriating the legacies of the Western Enlightenment and recapturing the history of the African diaspora.

Another example of a third space—this one more in line with the kind of decentered identity celebrated by postmodernists—would be drag queens such as Sylvia (Ray) Rivera, who played a significant role in the street fighting that broke out the night of Judy Garland's death, June 27, 1969, around Greenwich Village's Stonewall Inn. As Martin Duberman has it, "Sylvia didn't care much about definitions, which was precisely why she would emerge as a radical figure. She disliked any attempt to categorize her random, sometimes contradictory impulses, to make them seem more uniform and predictable than they were."[56] In the close confines of the Stonewall and the tangled Village streets surrounding it, such antipathy toward definition possessed enough explosive force to kick off the queer liberation movement.

Judith Butler, whose work affords one of the most complex and challenging articulations of performance (not to mention the "queer") as a critical mode and cultural practice, has much to say about the explosive force possessed by Rivera. It is precisely his/her problematization of gender (Duberman: "This was . . . why she decided against a sex change. She didn't want to be cast in *any* one mold")[57] that Butler would conceivably find most exciting, precisely because it refuses any stable relationship of form and content. Butler's writings persistently identify the conceptual instability introduced by performance into philosophy, political theory, and ethics. In *Gender Trouble,* Butler demonstrates that even the kinds of deeply rooted identities and experiences that motivated SNCC leaders to expel whites from the organization are ultimately strategic fictions. "From what strategic position in public discourse," she asks, "and for what reasons has the trope of interiority and the disjunctive binary of inner/outer taken hold? In what language is 'inner space' figured? . . . How does a body figure on its surface the very invisibility of its hidden depth?"[58] Butler's point is that a culture is composed of various kinds of institutionalized and socialized hermeneutic strategies, particular ways of interpreting or deciphering the body that congeal habitually, strategically, and behaviorally around certain pairings of signifier and signified, pairings that produce on our body's surfaces signs that produce, in turn, echoes of interiority. Performance precedes identity.

By conceiving objects, bodies, and institutions as always open to the disruptive potential of performance, she also acknowledges the deep gaps that can open between theory and performance. In a discussion of parody, Butler identifies a basic dilemma involved in any assertion that a particular performance technique is more or less radical than another.

> Parody by itself is not subversive, and there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony. A typology of actions would clearly not suffice, for parodic displacement, indeed, parodic laughter, depends on a context and reception in which subversive confusions can be fostered. What performance where will invert the outer/inner distinction and compel a radical rethinking of the psychological presuppositions of gender identity and sexuality? What performance where will compel a reconsideration of the *place* and stability of the masculine and the feminine? And what kind of gender performance will enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself in a way that destabilizes the naturalized categories of identity and desire?[59]

Butler leaves these questions unanswered—and for good reason. That odd syntactical knot "what performance where" opens the deconstruction of culture and cultural signifiers to a different kind of critical activity, a criticism that searches out not only the place and time of subversion, but also the place and time of the critic-scholar, a place and time that stand in highly problematic relationship to the place and time of subversion. This different kind of critical activity demands a proficiency in the methodologically distinct fields of anthropology, historiography, sociology, economics, theater historiography, literary analysis, and psychology. By refusing the notion that a particular relationship of form and content is inevitably, virtuously radical, Butler compels us toward recognition of the site-specific nature of performative politics—something recognized by Marcelin Pleynet and Roger Shattuck.

A general theory of countercultural performance is impossible if, by theory, we mean a universally applicable, logically rigorous description that can bridge the gap between the general and the specific. The specific kinds of disruption, subversion, identification, and rebellion produced within the "what" and "where" of countercultural performance must be approached not only with a range of disciplinary methods, but also an acute consciousness of the "what" and "where" of the methodological application itself. If

scholars, critics, and teachers wish to keep open the possibility of progressive aesthetic action, then the production, circulation, and reception of critical-scholarly work, the specific dynamic of power and knowledge in specific departments and educational institutions, and the larger social, economic, and cultural structures of our society must be recognized and, to whatever extent is useful, made part of the work itself. The technical fallacy should be identified in all its manifestations and counteracted by a properly performative perspective. It is precisely the failure to account for this perspective that doomed to failure that school of avant-garde scholarship and criticism which I've named the "Eulogist school."

The Strange Afterlife of the Eulogist School

Sarah Bey-Cheng reminded me once in conversation that everyone who writes about the avant-garde invents a new theory of the avant-garde, a theory that just so happens to perfectly explain the evidence and data that are cited and examined. Even admitting this kind of scholarly putting of wagon before horse, there are theories of the avant-garde that have proven pretty solvent: Lenin's theory of the revolutionary party, Butler's take on performativity, Bürger's institutional self-subversion, Maoist cultural revolution, the critical ethnography of the surrealists, Foucault's theory of the specific intellectual. These are all acute and effective descriptions of cultural radicalism in and against the West, descriptions that can work to unify avant-garde history in a way that is not totalizing or incapable of self-criticism, but nevertheless possess a degree of discursive coherence. The representation of the avant-garde that can ultimately be derived from the three case studies that follow is framed in and occasionally against these models and focuses particularly on how the avant-garde event exists not just in its moment, but occasionally as an ongoing crisis in thought, language, and institutions. In other words, it keeps in mind how a six-foot steel cube, a twenty-foot-tall puppet looming over an antiwar demonstration, or a five-bar moment of transformative jazz improvisation constitutes a situation or third space, an environment in which certain kinds of thinking, arguing, and acting take shape. Response to these kinds of events—whether in the moment of performance or in the performative writing of that moment—is itself part of that cultural situation, one that extends through time and space well beyond the original performance.

If we date the origins of the concept of the avant-garde somewhere between its proclamation by Henri de Saint-Simon in 1825 and the rise of "bohemia" in the 1830s and 1840s, we realize at one and the same time how

young the concept is and how hardy and adaptable it has proven as a set of concepts, strategies, and tactics poised against various trends within post-bourgeois societies. The avant-garde's peculiar variety of *probity* has proven pretty hardy, despite the voices and forces weighed against it.[60] True, the continuing vitality of the avant-garde is due to the fact that it has played, in Manfredo Tafuri's phrase, the role of "ideological prefiguration" for ideological and bureaucratic recuperation, giving its enemy both the imaginary and technical means necessary for it to overcome the immanent social, cultural, and economic crisis figured by the avant-garde.[61] However, I do not accept Tafuri's tacit assertion that, as prefiguration, the avant-garde is essentially dysfunctional. The interdisciplinary artistic works, theoretical pronouncements, and political acts of radical-minded painters, poets, performers, dancers, playwrights, sculptors, impresarios, hangers-on, fellow travelers, art dealers, museum curators, collectors, composers, and musicians have no doubt changed the way postbourgeois societies and subjects think and enact themselves, for better *and* worse. The vitality of the avant-garde concept, at a new peak marked by 9/11, speaks to the avant-garde's contradictory capacity to catalyze progressive or reactionary movement within the core principles of the modern era: freedom of expression and cultural, political, and economic self-determination.

As Paul Mann has demonstrated, the writing of the avant-garde's death always brings into play *theory,* which can be defined, following Daniel Herwitz, as a way of thinking that, "in the weak sense," describes how practice is "prefigured by complex beliefs of all kinds, ranging from religious beliefs to beliefs about science, theory of color, method, craft, and social welfare"; or, in a stronger sense, "are designed to engender thought about the concepts, expectations, and desires a viewer inevitably brings to the art encounter."[62] In this stronger sense, theory doesn't just settle accounts with the artwork; rather, it can open up new kinds of questions and new directions for artistic experiment and activism, or, on the other hand, close down such possibilities. Mann and Herwitz draw our attention to the necessary relationship of the avant-garde to the systematic, speculative abstractions that relate it not merely to the languages and issues of art, but to broader questions of philosophy, ethics, and politics. At the same time, they note that theory tends to foreclose on certain aspects of the avant-garde challenge. The avant-garde work, Herwitz explains, has traditionally been viewed as the illustration of a specific avant-garde theory, whether that theory is named naturalism, Orphism, *lettrisme,* COBRA, or something else. This dynamic of theory and work can be viewed as functioning within a distinctly Western tradition that views art as "demonstrat[ing] to the world

through its formal perfection the fact that extreme and ancient philosophical truths can and will be embodied in the world" (8).

This is no doubt a significant accomplishment, not one to be dismissed. Avant-gardes can be read in precisely such a fashion—and viewed as significant for embodying their truth. In fact, most eulogies of the avant-garde are ultimately eulogies for the unity of truth and art embodied, supposedly, by a specific moment or movement in avant-garde history. Yet there are, as Herwitz notes, other ways of viewing the avant-garde that can retain the logical rigor of theory but also take account of the concrete specificity of the avant-garde artwork. He wonders why we "find it crucial to contextualize artistic styles, to grasp who the princely recipients of such styles were, and whom such styles helped to marginalize. . . . Yet if we are rightly mistrustful of the veil of beauty, we are not equivalently mistrustful about the ease with which our theories explain what lies under the veil."[63] Herwitz explores the limits inherent to the urge to make theory and artwork fit clearly (an urge apotheosized in the conceptual art movement launched in the late 1960s) and wonders what remains after the work of theory has processed and pasteurized the challenge of the work: "[I]s there another dimension to the art, another set of intentions in it or ways of receiving the art which resist, ignore, overcome, or call into question the philosophical voice. . . ? The avant-garde is a mosaic of voices that exist in tension and partial contradiction. It is the specific configuration of voices that exist in tension and partial contradiction. It is the specific configuration of voices, rather than any one, which defines the richness, difficulty, intensity, and character of an avant-garde work."[64] The temptations of the "the" (as in "*the* avant-garde" or "*the* counterculture"), that definite article which propels thought into the thin air of abstraction, have proven very heady, drawing such notable scholars, critics, and avant-gardists as Irving Howe, Geörgy Lukács, Richard Schechner, Rosalind Krauss, Clement Greenberg, Robert Hughes, Irving Kristol, and Leslie Fiedler.

Critics, scholars, and (especially) teachers should never abandon the pursuit of concrete answers to the profound questions posed by avant-garde groups and texts. And it is appropriate at this point to qualify what might appear to the reader as an uncritical advocacy of plurality in the vein of popular understandings of postmodernism and difference that became current in the 1990s. The concept of the avant-garde is evacuated if it can't be used as a tool for critical debate oriented toward concrete issues, as a source for experimental thought, and as a standard by which to judge the political and aesthetic accomplishments of radical movements. Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock have noted just this, asserting that, as a "catch-all label," the avant-

garde has regularly served the role of a normative standard by which art and art criticism can be judged.[65] Stiles extends Orton and Pollock's argument to make sense of why avant-garde criticism and scholarship possess such a consistently utopian flavor; in other words, why critics have felt the need to use the avant-garde as a vehicle for their own social, political, and cultural ideals.

Even so, Herwitz's point about losing the specificity of the artistic encounter should not be dismissed. Thus, we are brought to perhaps the most important conceptual quandary of our day: How to commit to plurality without losing the ability to judge. Stiles has little patience with this kind of indirect idealism often manifested in work on the avant-garde, idealism she views as consistently erasing the specific qualities of the avant-garde artwork. Moreover, theories of the avant-garde have a tendency to "[deprive] multiple and simultaneous avant-gardes of their real contributions to (and in) real cultural, social, and political contexts, and [fail] to acknowledge their effective alterations of conventional ways of seeing and reenvisioning life."[66] Such oversights, Stiles continues, "account for some of the reasons that it has been so easy, so often, to proclaim the death of both *an* avant-garde and *the* avant-garde. Both views equally consign multiple avant-gardes to failure, either by constructing a fantasy of transformation within a utopic discourse of reform or—as in the case of Orton and Pollock's argument—by limiting radical observation and practice to narrowly defined 'new discursive frameworks'" (267).

I agree with Stiles that abstraction (the distinction she marks between radical*ism* and the radical) is a common cause of the repeated and repeatedly incorrect proclamations of the avant-garde's death. The specific problems the avant-garde poses to critical analysis (particularly in its performative manifestations) cannot be solved through abstraction, but only through rigorous examination of the specific "behavioral situations" that are left behind by historiography and critical theory.[67] It's not by coincidence that avant-garde artists and their communities embraced performance at the same moment that the critical establishments with which they engaged started writing eulogies. At the moment when the avant-garde dropped its pretensions to universality; stopped trying to make perfect objects for sale; embraced profoundly local dimensions of political, cultural, economic, and social subversion (i.e., performance); and instituted the critical demarcations I have described, critical establishments have tended to cordon it off and declare it dead. This was nowhere more true than in the 1950s and 1960s. Despite the often clear-and-present plurality of avant-garde action (and the reasonable assumption of less clear, less present vanguards), critics and schol-

ars were in virtually unanimous agreement that the concept of the avant-garde was dead. This unanimity in the face of growing plurality is itself worth investigating. What does it mean that high-ranking critics, scholars, and artists from left, center, and right should all come to agreement on such a problematic, challenging, inherently provocative topic—and why were they all drawn to writing obituaries of the avant-garde?

Matei Calinescu has argued that the avant-garde is at once a critical concept, an aesthetic (or counteraesthetic) practice, and a sociopolitical force. This well-rounded definition (one found also in the work of Susan Suleiman)[68] is one the case studies will stick close to, since it enables me to address simultaneously theoretical questions, situated sociopolitical struggle, and the concrete particularity of the avant-garde performance. More importantly, the definition allows these studies to incisively reflect on the unanimity of the Eulogists as the consequence of a shared set of critical and scholarly limits. Calinescu asserts that an avant-garde movement must maneuver on three fronts simultaneously: the theoretical, the political, and the material. This definition is, thankfully, responsive to the avant-garde's military and revolutionary origins, origins often forgotten (and with them, the notion of commitment to bettering the lot of the oppressed, marginalized, or disadvantaged), origins that compel us to consider theoretical questions inseparably from political and material questions.

The inseparability of those questions shouldn't be accepted uncritically, however; the inseparability itself demands careful theorization and the most determined, sensitive, and inductive consideration of the specific case. Calinescu asserts two principles that he believes encompass the theoretical, political, and material challenge of specific avant-gardes, but also enable him to retain the notion of the avant-garde as a unified tradition. The first assumption is sociopolitical, the latter basically metaphysical, and both are the heritage of a contradictory tendency within modernity. Firstly, the avant-garde is an innovative mode of *social antagonism* (this idea is taken in part from Poggioli's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*); in other words, it is a cultural force that struggles by cultural means to achieve in unprecedented ways specific social, economic, and political goals, goals that tend to be oriented in opposition to certain social groups and in support of others. Second, the avant-garde is a mode of cultural critique that redefines, both conceptually and experientially, basic concepts and cultural practices of *time,* particularly those associated with futurity (and its advent in the present) or with the present (and its representation as a temporal quality). In short, the avant-garde functions as a force that reshapes the very way we think about and produce history.

The implications of considering the avant-garde as a subversive social and philosophical mode of historical production should be explored at greater length by scholars and critics, who have, by and large, characterized the avant-garde's historical vision in fairly simplistic ways. As an example of how scholars might contend simultaneously with questions of social antagonism and historiographical production, we should turn to Walter Kalaidjian's *American Culture between the Wars: Revisionary Modernism and Postmodern Critique*. There, Kalaidjian writes that "criticism exploits historical framing to prop up disciplinary authority, institutional force, and canonical power."[69] It does this not so much through explicit commentary on a historical moment, the situational limits of critical knowledge, or through critiques of philosophies of history underwriting criticism and scholarship, but through reliance upon the technical fallacy, the freezing of subversive praxis into a limited set of specific techniques and critical standards. In his critique of scholarship on this crucial period in U.S. avant-gardism, Kalaidjian refers to the work of Cary Nelson, who convincingly argues that the history of American poetry during the period 1900–1950 as it has been written by critics and scholars is dominated by the standards and assumptions of formalism, a history that has effectively obscured the contentious reality of that period through "such reigning tropes [as] individual talent [that] have served to fix, regulate, and police modernism's unsettled social text, crosscut as it is by a plurality of transnational, racial, sexual, and class representations."[70] Kalaidjian demonstrates that the restoration of this unsettled, crosscut quality not only enriches our understanding of the politics of the avant-garde in general, but also restores the situation of specific avant-garde movements. Without such a restoration, critical and scholarly work ultimately mortgages the politics of the avant-garde to silence, obscures connections among avant-garde artists and movements of diverse place and time, and disables critical consideration of the institutions of criticism, scholarship, and teaching. In sum, a more situated understanding of social antagonism breaks open new possibilities for historical imagining.

Which brings us, again, to the Eulogist School, a critical trend that peaked in the 1950s and 1960s, but has remained a critical touchstone ever since. The debate concerning the supposed "death" of the avant-garde was carried on within some of the most prestigious journals and university departments in the United States, Germany, and France. Hilton Kramer, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Leslie Fiedler, Roland Barthes, and the so-called New York Intellectuals (Daniel Bell, in particular) all agreed that the avant-garde was dead as a social force and bankrupt as an agent of progressive action. One rarely finds such an ideologically diverse group of critics

agreeing on any topic. So why such unanimity? The question of historical imagination is at the heart of this trend.

The specific arguments of the Eulogist School differ in details and goals, but the conclusions of are surprisingly consistent with each other:

1. The avant-garde as a leading cultural antagonist is neutralized by the affluence-inspired tolerance of the post–World War II Western middle and upper middle classes (as Kramer argues),[71] which view the avant-garde not as shocking or subversive, but rather as a style, one among many. Complementing the flytrap insidiousness of the middle classes was the scandal of Stalinism, viewed by many as the logical outcome of Leninist vanguardism if not vanguardism tout court. This latter point was pressed by the so-called New York Intellectuals.[72] The chic middle class, the Moscow Trials, and haute couture cast the avant-garde tradition into disrepute and compelled avant-garde artists such as Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock into an aesthetic radicalism divorced from any but the most general, humanistic sociopolitical critiques.

2. The avant-garde as an historical force is fatally wounded by the weakening or co-optation of traditional social agents of historical progressivism with whom the avant-garde had allied itself and by the loss of critical criteria that could firmly establish the "advanced" nature of a particular trend. In other words, the avant-garde as the promise of futurity, of an enriched and cataclysmic temporality, is lost when it enters the Sargasso Sea of the Eisenhower era.

Needless to say, the argument that the avant-garde was dead was (and is) bound to culturally and historically specific understandings of historical transformation and social struggle and a disguised or unconscious utopianism of the sort Stiles has criticized.

Moreover, this situated, parochial utopianism was contingent on specific changes in the status of critics and scholars who were committed to the possibility of progressive cultural and social action after the war. In the case of the eulogists, the intellectual framework that had directed the great bourgeois revolutions and counterrevolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the political divisions that dominated the industrial era until around World War II seemed to falter irredeemably, casting not only the Left into jeopardy, but also the authority of the critic. The utopianism of the Eulogist School should be viewed, therefore, not simply as a misreading of the avant-garde, but as the consequence of a larger anxiety about the

fate of the working class as a progressive agent of history, the shape of history itself, and the possibility of critical perspective in a burgeoning, increasingly corporation-sponsored system of higher education. The announcement of the "end of ideology" and "the end of history" by Daniel Bell was the most explicit statement of the underlying ideological presuppositions of the Eulogists.[73]

The inseparability of theoretical questions from political and material circumstances is where we must turn our attention. Alan Wald has carefully charted the shifting fortunes of the vanguard model among progressive intellectuals in the United States. In his discussion of the politics of literary criticism during the 1940s and 1950s, Wald notes that the ideological movement of many formerly radical intellectuals into anticommunist liberalism was intimately connected to a series of significant changes in the structure of American higher education, changes that carried with them new understandings of intellectual leadership and critical authority. He notes that "the unprecedented economic prosperity of postwar America had provided enormous opportunities for them to pursue careers in the universities and in publishing, especially with the impeccable anticommunist credentials that they had earned through their activities in the American Committee for Cultural Freedom."[74] Wald further argues that this movement of radical intellectuals—former believers in the vanguard theories of Lenin and Trotsky—toward the political center was fundamental to the "taming" of the avant-garde tradition, a movement away from a "perception of [the avant-garde] as a means of sweeping aside bourgeois falsehood and hypocrisy in alliance with the proletarian revolution" and toward a basically ironic individualism.[75]

While irony was certainly a major part of this critical trend, the question of critical standards and critical authority was approached in a decidedly unironic fashion. Philip Rahv, in "American Intellectuals in the Postwar Situation" (1952), argues that intellectuals of his time were no longer committed to dissidence and revolt because of the exposure of Stalinism, the absorption of the avant-garde by the rapidly developing museum culture of the United States, the intellectual enervation of Europe, the rise of universities and think tanks, and material wealth. However, this lack of commitment to dissidence and revolt was not simply a symptom of ideological defeat or full pockets; quite the contrary, the "embourgeoisement of the American intelligentsia" made all the more important the revitalization of the avant-garde, not so much as a method to maintain the "shock of the new" (as Robert Hughes would later put it),[76] but rather as a way of staking out a place from which to develop critical norms and standards that

stood in explicit opposition to a range of political and cultural trends in the West (qtd. in Wald 110).

This effort to devise critical standards was complicated by the fact that the "embourgeoisement of the American intelligentsia" coincided with the embourgeoisement of the forward-looking American artist. Diana Crane notes that, during the Cold War, "the artistic role underwent a major transformation. While the organizational infrastructure for avant-garde art was changing, so was the social and occupational role of the artist."[77] Crane quotes Stewart Buettner, who asserts that, as early as the 1960s, the social function of the progressive artist made him "at home among the upper-middle class because they were members of the same class."[78] Artists became members of the American academic system and also benefited from the increasingly "large, varied, and complex" art world enabled by the rapid increase in the number of museums, corporate art collections, the population of art collectors, graduates from art schools, galleries exhibiting avant-garde work, and other kinds of art centers.[79]

What Rahv, Crane, and Buettner overlook is the fact that many intellectuals and artists did not—either by choice or by necessity—become members of the middle class nor enjoy the fruits of the expanding art world and its matrix of galleries, classrooms, editorial rooms, and cocktail parties. Women, minorities, and political radicals generally did not enjoy the benefits of the Cold War art boom nor the embourgeoisement that ensured artists and critics at least a minimal level of comfort and security. This hardly doomed them—though it did ensure that their work rarely would be seen by the elite audiences of the formalist avant-garde. If we entertain the fairly reasonable notion that the nature of social struggle and the socialized time of both production and historical imagination changed after World War II as a consequence of shifts in capitalist production techniques, new understandings of leisure, the infrastructural pressures of globalization, the diffusion of hitherto obscured ethnic and regional aesthetic and philosophical traditions (especially Tibet, Japan, and West Africa), and the partial absorption of the avant-garde by a rapidly expanding art market,[80] then the death-of-the-vanguard debate can be viewed (*should* be viewed) as the moment when the avant-garde tradition bifurcated, one wing entering into long-term détente with the burgeoning museum, gallery, and academic network in the guise of a theoretically radical modernism, the other disappearing from the field of vision opened by the critical, scholarly, and curatorial possibilities of that network. This bifurcation of the avant-garde into a theoretically accessible, institutionally commodious, nevertheless challenging, difficult modernism and a theoretically inaccessible, institutionally self-crit-

ical trend marks a crucial turn in avant-garde history. Out of the latter trend emerged the leaders, theorists, and participants of the new social movements of the counterculture, movements that could not be adequately described, to recall Roszak again, by older modes of ideological critique.

In sum, some cultural activists, excluded from an art world and an academic discourse in which a particular tendency of the avant-garde enjoyed the fruits of Cold War prosperity, countered both the theoretical and the political assumptions of art world and academia and sought out new aesthetic forms, new social content, and new ways to produce, distribute, and consume art. While they accurately assessed the fate of one trend of the avant-garde, the eulogists ultimately did not consider the idea that an avant-garde could retain the sociopolitical and temporal responsibilities of older vanguards while stepping beyond the Christian, technophilic, and bourgeois understandings of social struggle and time that were the hallmark of such vanguards and the critical establishment that gathered around their corpses during the 1950s and 1960s.

There's a temptation here just to counter the Eulogists à la Samuel Johnson and kick an empirical stone across the floor. And there are plenty of stones to find scattered around the feet of the eulogists: El Teatro Campesino, Otrabanda, the Diggers, the San Francisco Mime Troupe, Women's Experimental Theatre, the Destruction-in-Art movement, the Black Arts Movement, Yippie!, the Living Theatre, the minimalists—these are only a few of the progressive communities that fought for political, economic, and social change during the 1960s and fought for such change in terms that reflected the unique conditions and lessons of the Cold War era. Such groups challenged the theoretical, sociopolitical, and material-aesthetic assumptions of their times and places, but also produced innovative methods for addressing these assumptions, methods that were cognizant of the critique of vanguard thought mounted by the liberal intelligentsia. However, relying on empirical evidence—and empirical methods—isn't going to get scholars very far since that would imply that they can simply overcome failure through an improvement in method. In fact, empiricism only raises the chances of new kinds of critical blindness since it inevitably papers over the critical limits defined by Pleynet and Shattuck: contradiction and emotional implication. Taking these limits into account, studies of the avant-garde can do something a bit a more subtle: view the Cold War avant-garde as a pluralistic tendency, part of which moved beyond the conceptual categories with which the critical establishment could identify, critique, and summarize. By doing this, avant-garde studies can avoid repeating an error first identified by Herwitz in *Making Theory/Constructing Art:*

"the belief that there exists a transparent relationship between theory and [the art object] it defines or explains."[81]

The belief in transparency is, to say the least, hardly useful for understanding the counterculture, which continually demarcated lines of vision and blindness both within and against the tradition of the avant-garde. Again, if avant-garde studies do not wish to consign the pluralistic, contradictory, contentious nature of politics and the problematic qualities of philosophical-historical speculation to the dustbin, then it needs to move beyond the isolated question of form and, instead, contend with the social and economic strategies of specific countercultures. For example, even the supposedly simplistic, broad-stroke style of agitation-propaganda drama—the very apotheosis of the mimetic tradition of art that was so roundly scourged by critics during the Cold War—was, during the 1960s, staged in social and economic situations that redefined the very form of "propaganda."

Such a redefinition of an older form by the pressures of a specific performance context is effectively demonstrated by Yolanda Broyles-González in her history of El Teatro Campesino, a book that not only considers the social, cultural, and historical contexts of the group's performances, but also systematically challenges the reception of that group's work by the American critical establishment, a reception that is, according to Broyles-González, "chronological, text-centered, and male-centered."[82] By revealing the Teatro's work as a "multifaceted cultural renaissance" that affirmed "an alternative social vision that relied on a distinctly Chicana/o aesthetic," she is able to dislodge the Teatro from a critical framework that has read *actos* such as *Las tres uvas* (1966) as simplistic repetitions of theatrical techniques perfected by European radicals (xi, 3). Focusing on communal creation and the oral traditions of Mexican working-class culture, Broyles-González challenges the received interpretations of the empirical theatrical and textual evidence. Rather than just repeating the techniques of Proletcult and Blue-Blouse (and yet without rejecting them), the Teatro *actos* reference a rich, complex tradition of clowning, oral performance, and historical consciousness among the Mexican working classes.

Broyles-González's book addresses two kinds of scholarly failure; first, the persistence of prejudicial views; second, the failure to perceive the complexity of the topic's situation. Ideally, scholars and critics of the avant-garde should be able to avoid both prejudice and oversimplification. However, the vanguards explored here seem to push precisely into such limited perspectives, into the politics of demarcation, a strategy upheld by radical groups around the globe at the time, groups that utilized symbolic actions to

press their enemies into revealing the bases of their power. Calinescu helps clarify the nature of this strategy and the tricks it plays on scholars. While Calinescu is a card–carrying member of the Eulogist School, the particular conceptual "blocks" in his work are different from his colleagues'. According to Calinescu, the avant-garde has always been a mode of modern cultural production that can never move beyond its own crisis. If the avant-garde has "died," it is the consequence of a postmodern age that seems enamored, if not downright addicted, to crisis; the crisis that is the avant-garde can no longer claim to be innovative nor antagonistic. Calinescu makes a decisive move here; the avant-garde reveals its fundamental form only at the moment of its death, and that death is not a disappearance or death, but a *crisis*.

Calinescu is not unaware of the avant-garde's bias against critics and academics—again, he spends a good deal of time discussing the avant-garde as a creature and cultivator of "crisis." And indeed, "crisis" is an appropriate term to use, if one remains attentive to the fact that a crisis is not a crisis if one can simply step outside of it and judge it from afar. A crisis is no crisis if it can be made easy sense of. A crisis is an imminent movement that marks, after the requisite unsettling and reconfiguring of social institutions, language, aesthetics, and so forth, the birth of new criteria. What happened to the avant-garde in the 1950s was an example of the avant-garde's noncontemporaneity with the present. In other words, the Cold War avant-gardes represent a categorical and practical critique that challenged the institutional and conceptual conditions that allowed recognition of their work among scholars, critics, gallery owners, and the like. What died in the 1950s and 1960s (keeping in mind that critical and aesthetic traditions never really "die," but rather become "historical") was not the avant-garde, but a theory of the avant-garde developed within (and indebted to) the social, economic, and political upheavals in French middle-class society during the 1870s that profoundly altered the nature of the modern European bourgeois democracy.

The renovation of the practical and metaphysical tendencies of the avant-garde in the late 1950s does not, however, render moot the categories; rather, it compels critics and scholars to think dialectically, to question the *particular* limits of supposedly *general* categories of antagonism (progressive politics) and time (historical philosophy). This is one of the peculiarities of human thought; though its content may be emptied out, the form of a thought can persist. In this sense, we might consider the crisis of the avant-garde as an illustration of the notion that the conceptual problems of an earlier age can return at a later stage of historical development, thus revealing

the inadequacy of answers that had seemed sufficient to an intervening age. Contradictions have a way of coming back when least expected. Though the theoretical and practical situation of the avant-garde will change, we can still hold onto certain concepts, certain problems, certain kinds of probity.

In the avant-garde movements that developed outside the formalist mainstream during the first three decades of the Cold War, the rejuvenation of antagonism and progressivism came as a consequence of intensive debate concerning the very nature of social antagonism and historical imagination. For example, in certain separatist feminist vanguards in the late 1960s, the refusal to distinguish particular men from patriarchy in general opened a range of tactical actions hitherto unrealized as well as a set of representational principles with which to guide and critique such actions. In addition, the new avant-gardes carried on internal debates concerning time as a critical category that could undermine or destroy dominant temporal structures. For example, the Christian eschaton and the ahistoricality of American commodity culture were favored targets of the Muntu group that helped pave the way for the Black Arts Movement. In other words, though radical feminist organizations and the Muntu group—to cite just two examples—would not agree on a common antagonist nor on a common understanding of time and history, they would absolutely agree that those were the right subjects of theory, criticism, and action. The models differ, but the concerns are largely the same.

In fact, the tools needed to conceptualize the new avant-gardes were being forged even as the Eulogists were tapping nails into their coffin. The avant-garde in the late 1950s was not lacking in critical self-appraisal and self-justification—the vanguards of the period are notable for their impressive theoretical range and acuity—but such appraisal and justification were not wholly from within the world of art and letters. In a sense, the Cold War vanguards simply continued a classic avant-garde tradition. As Herwitz writes, the avant-garde "has been obsessed with its own theoretical self-formulation" (1). If subsequent generations of artists and scholars are "the inheritors of the avant-garde's theoretical norms" (1), then surely they may entertain the possibility of rejecting such norms; in the most simple terms, the avant-garde has always rejected norms. This was certainly the case in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. The philosophical, aesthetic, and sociological grounds for the revision of the avant-garde had been prepared by rebellious sociologists such as C. Wright Mills and Betty Friedan; politically committed writers of prose and poetry such as Norman Mailer, Allen Ginsberg, and Gwendolyn Brooks; and performers such as Allan Kaprow, the dancers and choreographers of Judson Church, and the Living Theatre, all

of whom had been systematically excluded from the prosperity of the Cold War art scene.

All of these patiently and courageously confronted the failure of the avant-garde theory that had worked so well prior to the Cold War—but without losing sight of the continued necessity of vanguard action. And all confronted the ambiguities, uncertainties, and political failures of their own disciplines. Mills's resuscitation of utopian critique in *The Causes of World War III* and "Letter to the New Left"; Friedan's analysis of patriarchy (the "problem without a name" that Friedan would christen "The Feminine Mystique") as organized around maintaining the ignorance of the disempowered; Mailer's "The White Negro" and its scandalous analysis of the role of sex, violence, and racial stereotypes in social subversion; Ginsberg's use of sexuality as the grounds for the self-identification of a community and its counterhistorical project in *Howl;* Brooks's unraveling of traditional poetic modes as a lever against racism (most notably in "A Bronzeville Mother Loiters. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon"); the Judson Church's exploration of everyday gesture and antinarratival dance; Kaprow's simultaneous embrace of Deweyan pragmatism and Pollock-inspired exploration of the limits of spontaneous gesture; and the Living Theatre's 1959 production of Jack Gelber's *The Connection*—all of these exorcised the spirit of the avant-garde from the body that had trapped it after the war. Or, to use Marx's metaphor, all of these helped the kernel of innovative antagonism to burst out of its conceptual and sociopolitical husk. New content filled an old category.

One significant innovation: the avant-garde perished as a *general* category and entered a phase of intensive *particularity* in order to maintain its efficacy as an antagonistic cultural force that could withstand an increasingly flexible, increasingly "hip," anti-Stalinist capitalism—as well as a critical establishment that, under the impact of decades of modernist experiment, had grown to understand the avant-garde as essentially no more than a stylistic choice (to do otherwise was to become complicit with Leninism and, according to the logic of the time, Stalinism). In this sense, these new avant-gardes were part of a more general shift in the role of the intellectual that Michel Foucault has described as a shift to the "specific" intellectual (who possess "a much more immediate and concrete awareness of struggles")[83] from the older notion of the "universal" intellectual. This bifurcation of the avant-garde marks a crucial turn in avant-garde history. These same individuals and communities became the leaders, theorists, and participants of the new social movements of the counterculture, movements that could not be adequately described by older modes of ideological critique.

The Theory Death of the Theory Death of the Avant-Garde

It is Paul Mann who has drawn the most focus to this challenge and made it clear that unless scholars and critics of the avant-garde confront such limits—such "pataphysical" exceptions—their work is necessarily incomplete if not downright naive. *The Theory Death of the Avant-Garde* has received little to no attention in publications on the avant-garde. For example, Mann's book receives no mention in Arnold Aronson's *American Avant-Garde Theatre,* one of the more recent publications on cultural radicalism in the United States. This is a significant oversight in what I find to be an otherwise interesting and useful book, an oversight that ultimately undermines Aronson's effort to theorize and historicize concepts that are fundamental to the avant-garde: aesthetic antagonism, broadened cultural participation, and political progressivism.[84] Much as is the case with Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde,* the book that first drew critical attention to the question of the avant-garde's relationship with the institutions of art and the categories of critical appraisal, no scholarly book on the avant-garde can proceed responsibly without addressing itself to the problems articulated by Mann.[85] *Theory Death* has initiated a Copernican revolution in avant-garde studies, dislodging the scholar from his supposedly unmoving position in the center of avant-garde history. After Mann, no critic can assert that the avant-garde is defunct without pursuing the most rigorously self-critical analysis of his or her own critical terms, categories, and methods. A discussion of the possibilities and limitations of Mann's book will allow me to describe the specific methods I'll be using in the case studies that follow.

Mann's book begins with a discussion of the strategies that the aesthetic-avant-garde has used throughout its century-and-a-half-long history to present itself to its various audiences: critics, art collectors, the general public, the communities they wish to empower. This focus on rhetorical strategy allows Mann to move in two unexpected directions: (1) toward the economics of avant-garde subversion and (2) toward its discursive structures. This move demands more than a simplistic understanding of the economic or of institutional discourse; the economics of his analysis concerns more than the production, distribution, and circulation of objects; specifically, it concerns the larger question of *value* and how value comes to be ascribed to and understood by producers and consumers. One crucial aspect of the avant-garde's challenge to value is its polemical intervention in the discourses of art, politics, and history.

Thus, the question of discourse—and discursive intervention—allows Mann to overcome the gaps among politics, economics, and culture, the

very gaps that hamper Calinescu's analysis and demarcate Pleynet and Shat-tuck's. Why, he asks, have the avant-garde and its critics been so obsessed with death? To address this continuing obsession, Mann describes the key terms and rhetorical structures of avant-garde discourse—and the gaps that exist within the terms and structures. He asserts that the avant-garde is the center of a discursive economy of "reviewing exhibition, appraisal, repro-duction, academic, analysis, gossip, retrospection" (5–6). This "will to dis-course" inevitably mortgages the challenge of the avant-garde to the stable, mutually agreeable standards of discourse itself. He concludes that "the tele-ology of the avant-garde can no longer be reduced to a thematics of success or failure, of revolt or complicity, of truth or illusion, of sincerity or hoax, of existence or non-existence" (3).

However, though we can't reduce the avant-garde to success or failure, we can address "whether the avant-garde has left anything vital behind; whether there is something vital about the death itself."[86] At the same time, we can attempt to trace "the hypothetical totality of such exchanges, will-ing or unwilling, voluntary or conscripted, voiced or even suppressed" of the discourses surrounding a specific avant-garde.[87] This tracing would allow us to see not only how the challenge of the avant-garde entered into the discourses of bourgeois-liberal society, but also address the ways that such discourses marginalized or attempted to erase aspects of that challenge. "In the end, one will also find that something is always missing from dis-course, always omitted, denied, concealed, lost, skipped over, ignored. Per-haps only in this missing residuum is the death of the avant-garde belied."[88] This crucial step in Mann's analysis presses him to engage in a different kind of critical writing, to understand that "the problem of the avant-garde is . . . essentially a critical one: how to enter its field without falling . . . into every trap of representation: how to write without merely manufacturing another or even better theory for circulation, another history for exchange" (93). This is achieved in part by the consciousness that something has been left out, perhaps the most vital aspect of the avant-garde

How Mann makes sense of this "residuum" is what I find most intrigu-ing but also most frustrating about his book. Mann convincingly argues that "there is no such thing as an extrinsic study of the avant-garde: all studies operate within a common if manifold discursive field, all share that field with their subject, and all must therefore represent their own sites within it" (8). Since it is impossible to step outside the discursive economy of the avant-garde, any attempt to map that field will necessarily be "anamorphic," a mapping that is distorted in the interests of the mapmaker.[89] This places the work of the critically minded scholar in an in-between state, at once a

producer of discourse and a product of discourse. Mann articulates this state in terms that will be familiar to those versed in the strategies of deconstruction:

> Those for whom there is no satisfactory answer to the first and last question posed by this essay: what is the status of your own text in the white economy of discourse? Here the history of the avant-garde has been above all the genealogy of that question. . . . Only those willing to remain in the death of the avant-garde, those who cease trying to drown out death's silence with the noise of neocritical production, will ever have a hope of hearing what that death articulates. (141)

There are "two deaths then"—one circumscribed by critical talk and writing, the other disengaged; "after death one should go up in smoke or go underground" (143).

How does one hear what the death of the avant-garde articulates if it is only articulated in a "residuum," in the faded remnants of smoke or invisibility? This is not a question that can be answered by Mann due to the limits of his book; specifically, its dogged pursuit of deconstructive readings of critical discourse. However, political art can do more than simply dissipate or disappear and this can be made sense of without falling into the trap of separating practice from theory or radicalism from discourse.

Mann is honest about the limits of his analysis, noting that he is not concerned "with testing the objective, historical accuracy or inaccuracy of any given taxonomical set so much as with exploring the complex dialectical relations that obtain between event and comprehension, movement and definition, action and representation" (9). In other words, *Theory Death* is neither an aesthetic nor a sociological study; rather it is an exploration of critical discourse and its economies (5–6). And this is why he cannot answer the question he asks, because the relations between an event and its comprehension is itself an event and the perspective of discourse is not the only perspective from which to assess events. As Mann notes, there are "no neutral histories; in fact [there is nothing but] a history of resistance to such histories" (9). The trope of death is not "precisely a critical phenomenon but a crisis induced by the disruption of operational relations and differences between [the avant-garde and criticism], the absorption of each by the other and of both by the economy that once maintained them" (32–33).

The limits of Mann's book are, in brief, wrapped up with the fact that it is a *theory* of theory death; thus, it too necessarily suffers a theory death. Though the kind of absolute resistance symbolized by the silences, smokes,

and undergrounds in *Theory Death* is a crucial, vital strategy of the avant-garde, there are other ways to carry the responsibilities of the avant-garde tradition. Moreover, there are ways to tell the story of the death of the avant-garde that can enable us to understand the contours of a specific avant-garde situation without dominating that situation or stifling the challenge of the specific avant-garde. How so? Certainly not by attempting to reconstitute the conceptually defunct distinctions between theory and practice. A brief summary of the methods that can add a bit of color to the "white economy" should be instructive.

First, we can turn to performance history and attempt to articulate the specific gaps (the "what" and "where" of performance) that open among the various participants in the performative moment of the avant-garde event. This approach is the dominant one in my case studies. As the reader will discover, a pluralistic methodology is at work in the case studies that follow, one that blends a variety of approaches, but always within specific contexts and concrete encounters of audiences and art. Though a wide range of theories are used, these theories are always utilized in an inductive fashion. Rather than impose a theory on the work deductively, the attempt is to draw connections and contextualize the ways that various printed texts (plays, theoretical explanations, newspaper reviews, memoirs, scholarly studies, etc.) made (and continue to make) sense of avant-garde events that occurred during the Cold War. A crucial part of this approach is the careful mapping of critical/scholarly limits, constitutional gaps in our ability to write history.

Not unlike the approach of the New Historicist, the case studies attempt to address "the writing and reading of texts, as well as the processes by which they are circulated and categorized, analyzed and taught, are . . . reconstrued as historically determined and determining modes of cultural work," and so on.[90] Concurrently, attention will be paid to the "theoretical indeterminacy of the signifying process and the historical specificity of discursive practices—acts of speaking, writing, and interpreting."[91] Exemplary of this is my approach to Happenings and Fluxus events. The processes by which early American performance art was transformed into a historical and theoretical object were consciously and continuously interrogated by the artists themselves and incorporated into the aesthetic event, as is described in relation to Kaprow's *Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts*.[92] As a consequence of this incorporation of criticism into the event itself, any attempt to historicize or theorize such events immediately and irresistibly enters into forms of discourse that challenge basic critical standards, forms that embrace edgy emotional states such as fetishism or demand infantile modes of subject-object interaction.

A second way that the limits of Mann's book can be overcome is by anchoring the discursive economy of a specific avant-garde in the particular social and material contexts in which books, journals, and other texts about the movement were produced, distributed, and consumed. In this respect, Mann's analysis of the avant-garde's discursive economy is ultimately too abstract, a theoretical white economy rather than a material, multicultural economy. By attending to the specific contours of specific economies as they obtained in specific times and places, we can make better sense of how the interrelated social, economic, and aesthetic struggle was waged. In the second half of the case study of the Black Arts Movement, for example, the editorial work of Ed Bullins is examined in order to understand how this emblematic Black Nationalist articulated a Black aesthetic in a range of writing and reading economies (i.e., radical political collectives, prestigious academic journals, national and little magazines, theater programs, etc.). The concrete limits and possibilities of such an articulation available to Bullins concretely impacted the theoretical articulation and practical enactment of the Black Arts. Such economic constraints and potentials demanded a high degree of irony from anyone who attempted to make "Blackness" visible; in the case of Bullins's editorial work, we witness rhetorical forms of double consciousness that allow him to make use of a radical aesthetic, ethical, and cultural system that shares in no way with the Euro-American tradition of philosophy or aesthetics yet depends fundamentally upon the technological and linguistic foundations of Euro-American power in order to survive. There is a residuum here, without a doubt, but it is a very specific residuum related to very specific ways of reading.

Lastly, we can recognize that discursive economies, like all economies, are hierarchical and based on the differential inclusion and acceptance of various producers, distributors, and consumers. There is a troubling tendency in Mann's book to portray the discursive economy as a unified, centered economy, a "white economy," to recall Mann's own metaphor. We should note that Mann himself states that he intentionally refuses to "explore heterologies of gender, class, ethnicity, etc." (141); however, some heterologies can't be easily included in the discursive logic of "theory death" that dominates the field of avant-garde studies and the limited avant-garde it has supported and critiqued. As self-conscious as *Theory Death* is, it ultimately relies on a definition of economics that separates out the concrete political nature of economic life, including the situational nature of production, exchange, and consumption. That which doesn't enter into discourse isn't doomed to silence, smoke, or the underground. In fact, by writing fairly traditional (read "empirical") counterhistories,

scholars and critics can create a place in existing histories, curricula, syllabi, and the like for the formerly ignored or forgotten—can, in short, move beyond the "hypothetical totality" of discursive exchanges toward a more concrete sense of how such exchanges intersect or fail to intersect with other exchange systems. Rather than equate the avant-garde with silence (what exists outside discourse but silence, except maybe the wordless cry of Brecht's Mother Courage?), we can explore how, in Kalaidjian's words, "reigning tropes . . . have served to fix, regulate, and police modernism's unsettled social text, crossed as it is by a plurality of transnational, racial, sexual, and class representations."[93]

Readers will find this kind of counterhistory throughout the case studies. The obscured history of the War on Drugs surfaces in the discussion of Artaud, theatrical cruelty, and jazz. The Black Art Movement's uneasy relationships with the avant-garde tradition shed light on aspects of the history of Black radicalism systematically excluded from existing histories of radical culture. The "white economy" of critical and scholarly discourse is white not only in the sense that it flattens out and homogenizes difference, transforming plurality into the even conceptual planes of book and journal pages. When attention is focused on the poetics of drug experience, the destabilizing forms of memory and desire inspired by early American performance art, or the West African aesthetic of *muntu,* crucial forms of subversion can be discovered that don't fit into such an economy in part because the languages at our disposal are oriented to very different kinds of values. In such cases, the exclusion from discourse is homologous to other forms of exclusion and is, therefore, hardly to be celebrated in terms of smoke and invisibility.

To conclude, Mann's book signals a crucial development in avant-garde scholarship and criticism, a development that can push us beyond the stale dichotomies of the Eulogist School. His recognition of the primacy of discourse in the struggle of the avant-garde advances on the work of theorists such as Bürger, Poggioli, Calinescu, and Suleiman by addressing the economy of theory itself. However, this economy can never be addressed in the abstract; as those who suffer from the depredations of economic exploitation know, economy is never abstract. As I hope to demonstrate in these case studies, the limits of criticism must always be tracked to specific social, economic, and cultural situations in which the avant-garde and the theorist encounter one another. This situation-oriented approach enables a better understanding of avant-garde criticism, scholarship, and pedagogy's ambiguous role in the culture wars born in the great bourgeois and colonial revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and persisting

through the globalization crises of our own fin de siècle. The failure of theory—and with it, the failure of other aspects of scholarly method, including the discovery of credible evidence, objective argument, clear criteria, and so on—is a sign that the object of theory may have evaded our grasp, but in doing so signaled to us the limits of our imaginations and the unconscious elitism of our institutional positions.