

The Urgency of Community: The Suturing of Poetic Ideology During the Early Years of the
Loft and the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics

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Photographs

1: Photograph of entry to Target Performance Hall at the Open Book in Minneapolis.
Taken June, 2009. Rebecca Weaver.

Introduction: What The Work Is

“Well, while I’m here I’ll
do the work—
and what’s the Work?
To ease the pain of living.
Everything else, drunken
dumbshow.”

—Allen Ginsberg, from “Memory Gardens,” 1969

“At 7 a.m., Watching
The Cars on the Bridge

Everybody’s going to work. Well,
not me. I’m not
going to work.”

—Jim Moore, *The New Body*, 1968/75

In the late 1960s, “work” and the “work” of poetry took on consequential and complicated meanings for these two poets. Ginsberg, who co-founded, with Anne Waldman, the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics in 1974 at Naropa Institute (the first Buddhist Institute in the West), positioned “work” in his poem “Memory Gardens” as easing the pain of living for others through artwork.¹ The work is poetry work, for Ginsberg; for the purposes of this project, we might also interpret the “pain of living” as the pain of living as a poet in the 1960s and 1970s. Written upon Jack Kerouac’s death on October 21, 1969, the poem commits to the work of poetry in the face of endings. Kerouac’s death signaled the end of a friendship and signaled the end of a great literary relationship and era. This era represented for Ginsberg a kind of innocence, easy means of travel and sustenance, and easy relationships with other poets. It indicated a life way around and in literature and poetry, a lifestyle that was less and less feasible as the 1960s rolled over into the 1970s. Though he was still five years away from the founding of the Poetics School, Ginsberg’s pain of living as

a poet grew increasingly acute as the 1960s drew to a close. For this poet, healing from a car accident suffered earlier in the year, dealing with problems on his Cherry Valley, New York farm, grappling with the IRS over Vietnam taxes, and still grieving Neal Cassady's death (in 1968), Kerouac's death heralded and foretold the end of a literary lifestyle he and so many of his Beat and New York compatriots struggled to maintain after the heyday of the Beat era subsided.

For Ginsberg and his fellow poets, this closure meant that they had to find a new way to keep "doing" poetry in the face of the seismic changes they had helped foment in the 1960s. One of these changes occurred in the nature of work. In Moore's poem, "work" takes on the negative connotation of labor as traditionally configured in mainstream American culture, involving commuting, suits, and an eight-hour day, and working "for" a company instead of for the betterment of humanity. The poem thus rejects traditional lifestyles and markers of maturity. Moore wrote this poem at the Iowa Writer's Workshop in 1968 and became famous for it within the Twin Cities literary community just a few years later. He read it often for events at The Loft, whose members shared an intimate knowledge of the sacrifices that the rejection of mainstream models entailed. The Loft's work on behalf of poetry enhanced a communal economics that supported the poets, encouraged a dismantling of an academic poetic hierarchy (Loft students became teachers and vice versa), and eschewed mainstream cultural values in favor of putting the work of reading and writing, of community building around poetry, first.

I put these two poems together as a way of pulling from the skein of this meditation the idea of what work, and the work of poetry, meant to two groups of poets in the 1970s: those who formed the nuclei of The Loft (founded in Minneapolis in 1974) and the Jack

Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics (also founded in 1974 at Naropa Institute—now University in Boulder, Colorado, and hereafter referred to as the “Poetics School”). For the poets and poetic history that I study, “work” necessarily takes place within communities constructed around poetry: these communities enabled the “work” of poetry, such as readings, classes, gatherings, and publications, and enabled the poets within them to concentrate on that work rather than on making a living. These communities did another sort of work on behalf of poetry itself in the 1970s: they provided a place for poetry and poets to thrive, literal places where poets could gather, read, and write, but also metaphorical places where the work of poetry, the “easing” of the pain of living, could be fostered and sustained.

It needs to be said here that as these poets were re-fashioning the idea of “work” toward poetic ends, their experiences intersected with larger cultural revisions of and conflicts over the nature of waged and non-waged work, specifically as it applied to gender. This was more visible in the case of the Loft, when the matter of who was doing what kind of work (and what recognition or remuneration she was getting for it) became an issue during a funding crisis—an event I discuss in detail in chapter 3. The recuperation of value for non-waged work, in the narratives of these communities, was thus as contentious as it was countercultural.²

One of their largest targets of critique was mainstream poetry. These two communities deployed a very necessary critique of poetry as practiced by the New Critical poets and critics in postwar years who solidified their bases of influence within American university English departments (at Vanderbilt, Kenyon, Princeton, the University of Minnesota, and Louisiana State), prestigious magazines (such as *Poetry*, *The Kenyon Review*, and

The New Republic), high-profile reading series (including the famous series at the 92nd Street Y in New York) and critical studies and textbooks, such as Robert Penn Warren and René Wellek's *Theory of Literature* (1942) and Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks' *Understanding Poetry*, which was first published in 1938 and underwent its fourth printing in 1976. This textbook was so influential that many poets and critics experienced New Criticism's formidable influence as rather monolithic. The poetry scene on the Lower East Side of New York in the 1960s certainly included poets who tried to enter into these more privileged poetic sites of the academy, but because of the way these sites of power were configured, they often had a difficult time succeeding (or found themselves alienated when they had). The "Age of Criticism" ushered in by the New Critics in the 1940s and 1950s depended upon a critical establishment that pretended to enjoy a diversity of approach, but in reality, did not brook divergent methods of criticism. Many poetry scholars, such as Jed Rasula, Christopher Beach, Michael Davidson, and Cary Nelson have argued that the influence of New Criticism's (or "Criticism, Inc.," as Rasula calls it) was so pervasive and so hegemonic that it took decades to even begin to dismantle.

Poets did this work not through petitioning for recognition by New Critics, but by establishing their own sites of recognition and reception. As Daniel Kane has shown in *All Poets Welcome: The Poetry Scene on the Lower East Side in the 1960s*, the poets who formed the Poetics School community in the 1970s developed their own "reverse economy," in the words of Pierre Bourdieu, by generating their own cultural capital. Instead of relying on influential others to value and judge their poetry, they created their own value system for it. Through a network of self-directed reading series at bars and coffee shops, little magazines printed on a shared mimeograph machine at Saint Mark's Church in the Bowery on the

Lower East Side, and informal gathering spaces at lofts and apartments, the poets of the Lower East Side created their own spaces and terms for poetry. The value of their artistic production was not monetary or academic; rather, the capital they created had value in a gift economy (wherein reciprocity was a currency) whose structure these poets designed and maintained for themselves. Many poets involved in the scene attributed great inspiration and motivation for their work to the 1960 publication of Donald Allen's anthology *The New American Poetry*. For Allen, the poets in the anthology showed "one common characteristic: a total rejection of all those qualities typical of academic verse . . . These poets have already created their own tradition, their own press, and their public. They are our own avant-garde, the true continuers of the modern movement of American poetry."³ The cultural pendulum, however, started to swing back to the right after the revolutions of the 1960s, and the economic structures that supported poetry's counter-cultural affiliations and practices started to break down as the US economy simultaneously contracted and globalized.

Communities that formed around poetry in that decade therefore had to use the organizing skills and rhetoric gained in the political struggles of the 1960s. These were struggles many of these poets linked in practice and in explicit terms to their writing, in new ways, enabling them to respond to the urgency of maintaining and sustaining their poetic work within communities and within a changed public sphere.⁴

Many of the people involved in the two communities that are the object of my study were also involved in the social and cultural struggles of the 1960s and linked their poetry explicitly to those struggles. Just as the Poetry Project at Saint Mark's shared time, space, and resources with social justice and anti-war activists and art projects, in the late sixties and early seventies, many poets connected to The Loft were involved in protests in Saint Paul

and Minneapolis against the war. The political and moral defeats of 1968, such as the continuing escalation of the war in Vietnam, the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bobby Kennedy, the police response to protests at the Democratic National Convention, the trial of the Chicago 7, and international events such as the Russian crackdown in Prague that Spring gave pause to a number of activists who embraced the ideologies and practices defining the sixties. The final blow to these activists' aspirations came in 1972 with the bombing of Haiphong Harbor, student riots all over the country (including at the University of Minnesota), and the defeat of George McGovern. These defeats made clear that the exuberant strategies for political change, such as love-ins, sit-ins, and be-ins were no longer workable any more. The defeats also made clear that the ideals of the new decade needed to be supported by practices that enabled those ideals to thrive.

Also motivating these changes were new limitations on political organizing put in force by conservative elements within the Nixon administration. These elements strove to permanently end Sixties-style protests for good in the U.S. through legal means. With the establishment of the Trilateral Commission and the stepped-up use of the "incitement to riot" provision in the Civil Rights Law of 1968, Johnson and Nixon both were provided with legal tools to stop organizers. The Chicago 7 were the first anti-war and civil rights demonstrators to be tried under these provisions. Samuel P. Huntington, a political scientist hired by the newly formed Trilateral Commission to study democracy in the U.S. in the sixties, proposed that the 1960s was a decade wherein the governing balance swung too far to the side of democracy. While the idea of democracy was to be encouraged, too much of it in practice would create the problems and demands recently endured in the 1960s.⁵ "An excess of democracy" became a theme in these operators' minds as they strove to enact

legislation preventing the type of mass protests so prevalent in the 1960s. In addition to new legislation and extra-legislative efforts,⁶ local, state, educational, and federal authorities applied existing statutes and regulations concerning fire codes, attendance rules, cabaret laws, and other rules not originally designed for the suppression of mass political dissent to do just that.

Thus it makes sense that in one of the most interesting developments of the 1970s, when these two poetic communities emerged, there was a change in emphasis from political transformation to personal transformation. Andreas Killen and other historians of the 1970s would call this a “new, radical kind of individualism.”⁷ Significantly, this new turn inward coincided with an explosion of experiments in communal living and a new focus on community-building. The new focus was seen as a method for social change, including communities constructed explicitly as such by poets in order to do the work of poetry. In addition to the two I study here, other poetic communities that started in the 1970s included: Poetry for the People in Berkeley, the community of poets around the Grand Piano coffee shop in San Francisco, the Nuyorican poets in New York, the poets of Bolinas, California, and the community of poets who gathered around Folio Books in Washington, D.C.

To understand the complex ways in which poetry communities operated in response to the social and political realities of the seventies, I take the concept of “suture” from feminist film theory. In feminist film theory,⁸ viewers of classic cinema are “sutured” into dominant ideology (usually about gender) by the way that a film—its shots, its specular focus, its treatment of characters—portrays characters and responds to its viewers’ expectations. Many traditional films will “rupture” a viewer’s expectations (of gender behavior, ideological expression, and narrative sequence, for example) only in order to

“suture” or “seal over” that rupture later in the film and thus reinforce the relevant dominant ideology. While the concept of suture is primarily understood as a foundational theory for feminist media praxis, I want to bring it into poetry studies and expand its use to thinking about poetry and poetry communities in the 1970s. I am aware, however, of suture’s negative consequences. Kaja Silverman, reviewing the history of the term and its movement from psychoanalysis to cinematics, cites Daniel Dayan, and takes care to connect ideology to suture. That is, suture ensures ideological coercion by “sealing over” the traces of ideology so that it appears natural or given within a particular culture. She further connects this to Althusser’s discussion of ideology, saying that his “means of production” would likely include “the apparatuses of cinematic enunciation.” We are “enunciated” as subjects, interpellated into the dominant ideology, the existing symbolic order. When a film disrupts that order, Silverman says, it challenges our subject positions and our ideals of coherence and fullness. But, and this is the crux of her argument, the disruption, the rupture, is carried out only in order for suture to “subsequently reaffirm that order.” It “rearticulates the existing symbolic order” as a kind of “salvage activity.”¹⁰

Many feminist theorists, especially feminist film theorists, thus rightly read suture as a mechanism obliterating differences in gender or sexuality, allowing ideology to take hold. Thus, feminist activists are urged to question and resist suture’s negative ideological effects in film and in culture. Yet as Silverman and others point out, no one exists outside of ideology, and thus we are never safe from the effects of suturing. We must instead understand that interventionary practices make us aware of the ideologies into which we are sutured and more capable of choosing the weave of our own political and social fabrics. For me, therefore, a necessary dynamic of groups is their fashioning of a shared and powerful

ideology into which they suture their members. In these ways, suture produces bonds that connect participants by mending breaks and ruptures between and within marginalized groups and by providing a common set of ethics and goals. In these communities, suture responds to a continual process of internal and external ruptures. This process contains no teleology, and suture is never total, never completed; it often leads to the next rupture.

While there have certainly been times when suture has reinforced dominant poetry ideologies (within mainstream culture, such as New Criticism in the 1950s) there are also places where suture has worked on behalf of intervention caused by the dismantling of those same dominant ideologies by poets and poetry activists. They have worked to rupture, and then to create spaces where a new suturing or reconciliation can aid in future interventions. The 1960s saw a great deal of disruption in poetry. Interventionist poets upended publishing hierarchies by forming their own presses. They challenged mainstream public images of poets and poetry and challenged academic ideas of readings and performances. They contested modernist notions of single authorship through collaboration and the notion of the poem as a bounded and finished text by re-writing their poems as they performed them. They re-invented spaces for poets to live in and work on behalf of poetry, and they worked to erase the New Critical boundary between poetry and political or social activism. Partly as a result of their work, and partly as a result of larger historical and cultural forces, new poetry schools or organizations challenged the academy's role in teaching poetry, independent presses and organizations challenged the institutionalization and marketing of poetry, and urban decay and gentrification made the living conditions of poets harder, heightening the tensions between making a living and being a poet.

The trauma of these changes and events of the 1960s carried over into the next decade, as poets were forced to figure out how to keep doing their work in the new environment that many of them had struggled to create. They had to find working answers to questions such as: now that the publication of poetry has been democratized to a certain extent, what responsibilities does that include? Can we “make good” on the political promises of the decade within our poetry communities and coteries by having our leadership, reading series, and publications reflect the political and social gains of the Sixties? How can communities of poets enable and assist poets in living as poets without other forms of income? Can communities of poets maintain the political ethos of a more democratic poetry landscape in the face of gentrification, an increase in government arts funding (and the requirements of being accountable for that funding), and institutionalization? These questions create others weighing on the poetry scholar and forming the impetus for my study: if being a poet meant something different in the 1960s than it did in the 1970s, what accounts for that change? How did the radical individuality of the 1970s influence poets, and how did that individuality appear within the context of simultaneous and multiple experiments in community? How did changes in media, specifically applied to art and artists—in some cases, the beginning of the star system in the arts—affect the reception of poetry outside of communities that included some of those stars? How did media changes affect interactions within those communities?

In order to survive, the poets needed to find not only answers to these questions, but also methods of answering and modes of discourse that provided answers over time and that allowed them to build their lives around doing the work they wanted to do. Poetry was a lifestyle in which poets could fit the other tasks of their lives, such as working for enough

money to eat and to pay rent. They also subsidized their literary lives, including putting on readings, publishing their work, running presses, magazines, bookstores, reading at political protests, and traveling across the country and world to meet other writers with meager earnings. This could be done on part-time salaries from jobs available in metropolitan areas during the 1960s. Rent was cheap, and being part of a community of like-minded poets meant that resources were shared and that even more cash could go toward literary endeavors.

But the larger cultural and poetic landscapes shifted in the 1960s. The responses that followed did not have to recreate the methods and strategies of the past, but something had to be done with the remnants of the old methods, with the tatters and rags scattered around on the floor: could they be stitched together in a new way that would allow the poetic and political work of the counterculture to continue? Could intervening upon received ideas about what poetry looked and sounded like and its role in politics be continued in such a way that did not evacuate the tough questions?¹¹

Some of the most interesting and fruitful ways that poets attempted to answer these questions, to reconcile the work they did in the 1960s with the work that needed to be done in the 1970s, and the ways they influenced the poetic present, was within communities formed during the 1970s. “Community is one of those words—like ‘culture,’ ‘myth,’ ‘ritual,’ ‘symbol’—bandied around in the ordinary, every day speech, apparently readily intelligible to speaker and listener, which, when imported into the discourse of social science, however, causes immense difficulty.”¹² These words, written by ethnographer and social theorist Anthony P. Cohen, could not ring more true to students of poetic communities in the U.S. Like other such porous and transferable words, people often think they “know” a poetry

community when they see it. Yet, as happens in social-science discourse, the term “poetry community” can cause confusion in poetry studies that focus on poetry within or among a range of groups including communities, schools, and institutions. For, as Cohen says, such terms can prove “highly resistant to satisfactory definition . . . perhaps for the simple reason that all definitions contain or imply theories, and the theory of community has been very contentious.”¹³ Thus, when literary scholars such as Maria Damon, Christopher Beach, Michael Davidson, and Daniel Kane discuss poetry communities, they speak of *specific* communities, using their contingent, convenient definitions of community that work well for the purposes of their studies. Yet none of these definitions of “poetry community” seem easily transferable to other and future studies. “Community,” while having been used often as a term in poetry studies, has been relatively unexplored *as a theory* in poetics studies. In many ways, this usage is clear and appropriate, as these studies have not been concerned with the meaning of the term, but rather its use to them as scholars of the poetry of particular groups.

It would serve us well, however, to think about the theory of community as applied to scholarship on American poetry, because, just as was the case in the social sciences in mid-century, “community” is becoming a greater focus of scholarship in poetry studies. Cohen’s remark that satisfactory definitions of the term “community” continue to elude scholars could not be more pertinent now, for the reason he stated (that many definitions imply—but do not state directly—a theory), and also for the reason that it has gained such currency lately. The concept of “community” had been in use for roughly two hundred years, but it gained wide-spread relevance as a concept in early 20th century social science. It is no coincidence that its traditional usage referred to small, rural, close-knit social groups

that became threatened by industrialization, urbanization, modernization, and population mobility. In fact, a nostalgic tone around the term and its use has been a marker of community studies throughout much of the field's history. Social scientists and theorists of community such as Ferdinand Tönnies, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber differentiated between relationships within rural communities and relationships within modern and urban societies. They saw relationships in traditional communities as close-knit, overlapping, and derived from rank and inheritance, dispersed within the interaction of daily lives. To them, relationships in urban areas as less likely derived from traditional agrarian practice than from contractual or legal interactions between strangers. In 1887, Tönnies called these two kinds of community formations "gemeinschaft" and "gesellschaft" to distinguish between their divergences, and many community theorists have read such a loss of intimate communal relationship as progressive, evolutionary, and / or historical.¹⁴ But as Cohen points out, social scientists' work continued to display signs of grief about the supposed loss of community.

Cohen argues that the dichotomy between *rural* and *urban* is unnecessary and limiting. While the work of the Chicago School (from which many of these social scientists emerged), is important for its pioneering theories of social change and development, Cohen ultimately finds its theory of a causal relationship between the fragmentation of social life in the city and the fragmentation of individuals into roles, as well its emphasis on a rural / urban split, both unsupported by the literature and "psychologically naïve." Individuals are capable of reconciling the multiplicity of roles within a city—there is clear evidence of communities within cities—and "people map out their social identities and find their social orientations among the relationships which are symbolically close to them."¹⁵ They create community by

using symbolic markers and symbolic vocabulary to demarcate the relationships that fold them into the communities they choose.

Cohen's intervention into theories of community is to focus on "the symbolization of community." He focuses on how what we call communities are formed on boundaries that are marked and created through symbols, which consist of a wide range of rituals and other emblems. These rituals need not be ostentatious or formal but can be everyday actions that symbolize the boundary—the entry and exit point—of a community. While he stresses the need to avoid creating rigid definitions of community, Cohen does affirm that one of its major aspects is as "an entity to which one belongs, greater than kinship but more immediately [*sic*] than the abstraction we call 'society.' It is the arena in which people acquire their most fundamental and substantial experience of social life outside the home."¹⁶ One learns what the community means through one's perception of its boundaries, and through its juxtaposition to other communities. People understand and experience community through their orientation to its symbolism, to its symbolic vocabulary, and they learn "to be social" using that vocabulary. Importantly, the symbols are what a community shares, though they may not share the *meaning* of those symbols.

This is a crucial part of Cohen's concept. It is not important, he says, that members of a community all agree on a common meaning of a particular symbol, but it is vital that they share the symbol itself. The symbols they share form the boundary of the community: when the members of a community stop sharing those symbols, the community changes. For example, The Loft originally billed itself as "A Place for Poetry." As such, it organized itself around the symbol of poetry; poetry became one of the primary sutures of its boundary. Soon after, the Loft expanded its purview into including other forms of writing

such as fiction and creative non-fiction, and became “A Place for Literature.” The boundary moved and the community changed.

In other words, the boundary is the site of suture—the boundary sutures members within a community by using symbols. “The attachment of community thus inheres in their attachment of commitment to a common body of symbols. Much of the boundary-maintaining process . . . is concerned with maintaining and further developing the commonality of the symbol.”¹⁷ Symbols, like language, do not give us meaning, but rather, give us the capacity to mean, and communities maintain their boundaries through developing this capacity for meaning, a capacity for interpretation. This interpretation relies on some amount of subjectivity on the part of a community’s members, with each individual responding idiosyncratically to the group’s symbols. But this slippage is not a bad thing. In fact, the “imprecision, inexactitude of match, ambiguity” of community members’ individual and idiosyncratic usage of the symbol keeps it flexible and responsive to varying needs.¹⁸

The flexibility of the symbols enables the boundaries of communities to keep their distinction from other communities active, and this is how their boundaries are made clear. The boundaries mark off elements that differ. The boundaries are not permanently fixed; Cohen stresses that all of these relationships are contingent and ever-changing. In fact, his theory makes space for communities that may not share many symbols, but usually define themselves in opposition to each other, to join together in defense of symbols they *do* share, in opposition to other communities that do not share those symbols. Because the symbols are so flexible, they allow a great deal of diversity *within* the community regarding the meanings and resonances of a given symbol, yet that symbol can still appear publicly to other communities as generally unified, and the community itself can appear as securely sutured

within the boundary. The complexity with which the members receive the symbols is not evident on the outside, where the symbols seem simplified. For example, both of these communities shared the goal of democratizing access to poetry, but individual members had different visions of that process. Likewise, they both shared the value of anti-academicism, but that value would come to have very different meanings for the two communities (and for their individual members) in the years to come.

Combining Cohen's theory of the symbolic construction of community with the theory of suture is quite useful to my work on the early years of The Loft and the Poetics School at Naropa, for it allows me to theorize, discuss, and investigate the "work" of these two communities in the following ways. It allows me to investigate how they established and maintained boundaries; how they dealt with the difficulty of community being taken as fixed and monolithic (when in reality there's much less stasis homogenization); how they navigated the transition from geographic bases to symbolic bases, and how they modified their boundaries in the face of other pressures.

For the outward presentations of the Loft and the Poetics School, poetry itself was a central value and organizing principle. Making a place for, transmitting, and promoting poetry were all symbols of both of these communities. Their stance as outsiders, as anti-institutional, was highly valued, and it helped them define themselves in addition to the political symbolism they shared.

Internally, while members shared the symbols, each had his or her own interpretation of the meaning of those symbols and the ways he or she felt sutured within the boundaries. For example, both the Loft and the Poetics School embraced the symbol of anti-academicism. For the Loft, this meant an informality that prized spontaneous

exchanges of poetry, or poets reading while sitting on couches, over more academic reading conventions taken from the model of academic lecture. At the Poetics School, anti-academicism took on more aesthetic shades as the poets there, especially Waldman and Ginsberg, worked to carry the torch of Donald Allen's *New American Poetry* into the 1970s.

When people involved in these communities debated the worthiness of the symbols themselves, such as when members of The Loft debated the usefulness of anti-institutionalism during their arguments over accepting an institutional grant, the strength of that suture was weakened. To simplify one of Cohen's points: when a community's symbol changes, the community's nature changes; when the importance of a symbol of community is questioned, as was the symbol of the Poetics School's relationship to the religious side of Naropa was during the "Great Naropa Poetry Wars," then the community's nature itself is put into question, and a rupture occurs. I explore this in much greater detail in the second chapter. This is a non-interventionary, non-intentional rupture that came from both the outside and inside. This sort of rupture differs from the poetic and cultural disruptions these communities encouraged and assisted. This split is different because it is not one they chose. It did not serve their purposes, and it threatened real harm to their cohesiveness as a group.

Examining how these two poetic communities constructed themselves symbolically and how they constructed their identities allows me to identify the major aspects, formations, and arguments at The Loft and the Poetics School in their early years. Through analyzing their symbolic construction, their symbolic boundary-making, and the changes their major goals and values have undergone, the questions after the breaches of the 1960s (as listed above) might be at least tentatively answered. This new way of reading poetry

(“poetry as that which happens in relationship”) sees communities and poems as sites of continual rupture and suture.

Communities were the worksites for poetry, and for these two communities, that meant poetry in connection to social change. One of the most interesting elements of the 1970s was the simultaneous occurrence of “new, radical, individualism” alongside experiments in communal living. But while some historians may read this as a strange contradiction, I suggest that the two worked together, not only in the larger culture, but in poetry communities as well. When the efficacy of large-scale protests diminished in the early 1970s, those interested in furthering social change found a new method of doing this work within communities. If we can read the immense social changes that happened in the 1960s as ruptures (corresponding to the metaphor of tears in the fabric of society), then we can read activism as a way of creating and sustaining communities of like-minded groups of people. Political transformation evolved into personal transformation and communities provided space and encouragement for those who were suffering countercultural burnout and for poets who wanted to continue the work of poetry in nurturing environments.

Communities in this sense were suturing mechanisms, but they were so without purging community or poetry of their oppositional impulse—and they used values as their connective tissues. Poetic communities created suture so that the poetry could continue to rupture the dominant culture against which they were organized. While there may have been a strong sense of exhaustion within the counterculture after the 1960s, forming communities around shared symbols of activism and poetry was a feasible way to carry forward the work of the counterculture. As these communities grew and evolved, they had to decide which initiatives were worth pursuing and which were not, and over time these decisions created

conflict. Yet the need to create communities, which Anne Waldman has described as “exchanges based on the work itself,”¹⁹ made the sort of suturing these communities performed rather appealing to the poets who formed or joined them.

Intentional disruption within the communities often happened via poems. Sometimes, a recitation of a favorite poem such as Moore’s was a ritual that brought a community together by reminding it of its values. Sometimes the community was a “safe space” for poems whose structure or content violated received ideas of poetry or politics, or that which made some members of an audience uncomfortable, as with Amiri Baraka’s reading at Naropa in 1978. In the 1978 documentary of the Poetics School, *Fried Shoes, Cooked Diamonds*, Amiri Baraka introduced his poem “Afro-American Lyric” by saying that “No writer or artist wishing to serve the people can ever uphold, justify, or fail to attack capitalism, racism, or women’s oppression.” Allen Ginsberg, narrating the film, quipped, “He’s going to declare a revolution now! How should I react to this?” and then the film flashed to Ginsberg looking very nervous as Baraka spoke.²⁰

For USAmerican poets at the beginning of the 1970s, these countercultural communities that valued poetry and poetry activism provided methods of continuing the work of poetry, of “easing the pain” of living as poets. The poetry communities of the Poetics School and The Loft are thus exemplary communities to study. Their work in, around, and on behalf of poetry, or their professionalization²¹ of that work, re-positioned poems as products of and for communities. They gave us a new way to read poetry as always already within and of community. I see this work of poetry not unlike the way that Jane Tompkins saw the cultural work of fiction in her book *Sensational Designs* (1985). Working primarily on neglected texts from the 19th century (such as Harriet Beecher Stowe’s

Uncle Tom's Cabin), Tompkins conceives of them as “attempts to redefine the social order . . . they offer powerful examples of the way a culture thinks about itself, articulating and proposing solutions for the problems that shape a particular historical moment.”²² As such, these texts are designed not for eternal canonicity and interpretation against a universal standard, but instead are meant for this work, as “agents of cultural formation.”²³

It is thus important for USAmerican poetry scholars interested in questions of the 1970s to study the work—not just the poetry of, but the work *around* poetry—of poetry and communities of that time. Studying poetry-in-community is richer than the traditional academic (and highly New Criticism-influenced) book on one poet or three poets on a theme. A poem-in-community, to use Barthes’ idea, is an interstice in the matrix of texts; each poem is a community of symbols, people, places, references, texts, histories—a sort of temporary autonomous zone. Asking “Where does this poem come from, and to what is it directed?” instead of “is it any good?” is a more fruitful engagement with the work. This study is thus an activist study of how these communities read, wrote, and worked with poetry. Poems thus do work, as poems, within their communities: they create a particular language that invites the reader or listener in. The communities I study argued for this way of reading, receiving, using, presenting, and pressuring poetry, and this way of reading became a major mechanism through which they sutured their boundaries, the boundaries that separated them from New Critical practices inside and outside the academy. The social and historical conditions of the 1970s aided in creating an environment wherein the attitudes about poetry that had changed so much in the 1960s were nurtured in communities. This allowed poets to work with poetry in ways different than previously possible.

The Loft and the Poetics School formed communities whose boundaries were constructed around the work of poetry, their desires for poetry, and their uses for poetry. In other words, these were the pressures they placed on poetry. But the symbols of a community undergo doubling here, because many poems construct their meaning with symbols. Sometimes language itself is positioned as a symbol, and other times, the language more traditionally adheres to the signifier/signified pattern of poem construction often found within traditional lyric free verse (for example, a deer representing the human condition).

My project explores this work of dealing with the differing pressures placed on poetry in a number of areas: the interconnections between the socio-historical circumstances surrounding these communities, their performances and embodiments of poetry (and poetry-in-community), how they funded their work (and became accountable to funding sources), and moments of crisis or ruptures that made visible their desires and tensions. In other words, none of these aspects of poetic communities happens in isolation from one another; my work is part of a critical discourse in USAmerican poetics studies that rejects traditional models of poetry scholarship focusing on biography or close-reading techniques of a few poets or works. Rather, the emerging scholarship investigates discourses, communities, and institutions in USAmerican poetry. By highlighting the correlation between the poetics, theories, and practices of The Loft and the Poetics School in the 1970s, I articulate their poetic and communal commonalities as well as provide insight into the complexities of poetic communities in the U.S. and their exchanges with audiences, the larger poetics landscape, and their effects and lessons on the current field of poetry in the US.

My work thus connects to and participates in the recent turn in USAmerican poetics studies to studies of poetic communities. Michael Davidson discusses the importance of historical, political, and cultural contexts to an aesthetic of community in *The San Francisco Renaissance* (1989). Exploring the community of poets in and around San Francisco during the postwar years, including poets Robert Duncan and Jack Spicer, Davidson seeks to find in the “enabling fictions” of the San Francisco Renaissance sources or origins of contemporary tensions in American poetry.²⁴ Such enabling fictions include the “romantic ideology,” an idea he adapts from Jerome McGann to explain a poetics that “valorizes aesthetic and psychological issues without considering the political and historical backdrop against which these theories were formulated.”²⁵ Contemporary poetry, Davidson contends, bases its reading of itself on the myths formulated by this ideology, even at the same time that moments such as the Gallery 6 reading displayed a mixing of widely differing aesthetics, and the separate aesthetics mattered less than the spirit of camaraderie and “fellow-feeling.”²⁶ Yet Davidson asserts that the critical dismissal of some of those aesthetic values, especially its more populist thrusts, becomes one of the enabling fictions of “place, politics, and poetics” that the San Francisco Renaissance used to sustain itself.²⁷

Davidson’s book is an important part of the textual lining of my work here, as I also seek to explore the possibilities of “the sustaining fact of community—the circles, salons, and bars in which artists could invent out of the earthly city a heavenly city of fulfilled potential,”²⁸ and for the narratives that help suture communities. In the particular cases of The Loft and the Poetics School at Naropa, the “heavenly city” began in the earthly cities of Minneapolis and Boulder, but the poets found that the heavenly community was irrevocably tied to the earthly in the form of the institutions these communities would become (or

become part of). It is this liminal space in the founding years that interests me, precisely because it is on the horizon, the blurry margin, of so many different possibilities. In the years from their founding to their more currently recognizable forms as institutions, the poetic communities of The Loft and the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics were on that blurry margin, sure of heart, but unsure of shape, and my goal here is to explore that liminal space, the boundary upon which they created suture.

This is a goal I share with Christopher Beach, whose book *Poetic Culture: Contemporary American Poetry Between Community and Institution* (1999), seeks to delineate the poetic changes from the years after 1950 to the turn of the current century, focusing on what he sees as a reified split between New Critical practices and the practices of the New American Poetry,²⁹ made more concrete with more and more rigid institutional structures. In his last chapter, Beach traces trends in contemporary American poetry that he believes will influence future American poetics. Most important of these is poetry being broadcast in a variety of new media (audio files, internet video) and poetry's abandonment of its reified position in print and culture.³⁰ While this is engaging, I find most exciting about our shared venture the question of how we got to where we are, even though and I have different questions. He is interested in larger questions of American poetic culture, while I am more specifically interested in two communities' historical specificity *within* that culture as manifested around and through their evolution and development in the 1970s.

Beach's definitions of community and institution, and his sense that they are interdependent, are useful. I find many of his definitions applicable to my project, especially "community" as a group with shared interests, goals, orientations, or backgrounds, ranging from the local and locally specific to the national and internationally aesthetic. Beach defines

“institution” as a social organization structured by a force outside the immediate control of poets themselves and often at the service of more than their private needs: universities, magazines, publishers, literary organizations, granting agencies, and writing colonies. Beach distinguishes the two by level of bureaucracy; communities rarely have much, while institutions have a great deal.³¹ This has to do with the contexts and agendas of institutions. Communities, for him, often are a “mediating link” between persons and institutions, but because of that “in-between” status, they risk commodifying their cultural capital. I argue further that communities were and are “mediating links” between poets and their publics.

Taking a different turn with the idea of community is Maria Damon’s *At the Dark End of the Street: Margins in American Vanguard Poetry* (1993), wherein she theorizes social outsider-ship as necessary to generating avant-garde poetry. While it is important to note that Damon does not believe that oppressed people *necessarily* create avant-garde art, her overall point is that those on the margins of society—homosexuals, those who have been institutionalized, women, Jews, and poor people—are in a more amenable position (than those privileged in the mainstream) to write non-traditional poetry. They are outside of certain ideological sutures, a position that privileges their view of the fabric. While social outsider-ship can create a *de-facto* community, Damon notes the centrality of time and place to the formation of poetic communities that support the work. For example, in her chapter on Jack Spicer and Robert Duncan, Damon situates the very different work of these two poets within the emerging gay political awareness, political repression, cultural flowering, and poetic experimentation happening in San Francisco during the post-war years. Poetry *is* community for these poets; their lives as poets intersect with their day-to-day lives. For the Poetics School and The Loft, the experience of outsider-ship would have been familiar.

Many individuals in these communities benefited personally from the gains of the civil rights and countercultural movements of the sixties and seventies, and many of them fought in those struggles. As such, they were outsiders. Additionally, within these communities, their poetic orientation to the world made them outsiders from a mainstream American culture that mistrusted artists and countercultural lifestyles.

Recently, Daniel Kane has argued strongly for reading poetics as necessarily within community: a form of communal poetics not only concerned with dispersal and support, but also excited by the possibilities of collaboration. He has emphasized this sense of poetry community, poetry-in-community, and communal poetics as having developed in the readings at the cafes and in readings and classes at the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church in The Bowery in New York City. Collaboration occurred not just between poets but also between poets and their larger audiences, often including interruption and commentary during live readings, and often creating the poem as a partner of direct political action. Kane's book *All Poets Welcome* traces the history of the "other tradition" in one of its major centers, the Lower East Side of New York City in the 1950s and early 1960s. The Poetry Project at St. Mark's was a gathering point for the community of poets galvanized around the oppositional project of Donald Allen's anthology. Readings at the Poetry Project consciously mocked the social and performative conventions of traditional poetry readings. The readings-as-performances (rather than as delivery or lecture) encouraged a spontaneous and improvisational aesthetic within the poetry itself, contributing to often raucous, celebratory, and unscripted contributions. These practices were carried into the West—to Bolinas, California, where many of the poets from the Lower East Side spent time, mostly at Joanne Kyger's house, as well as into Boulder— and into the 1970s by many of the Poetry

Project and scene participants. In many ways, my project here is inspired by Kane's request to future scholars at the end of *All Poets Welcome* to continue the work of theorizing later sites of poetry-in / poetry-as community in the "other tradition." Writing about the practices and evolutions of the reading series at the Poetry Project in its earlier years, he says: "in many ways, this book is an invitation to future writers to explore the effects that the still-running Poetry Project reading series had on significant poetic social phenomena of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, including . . . the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, founded by Anne Waldman and Allen Ginsberg."³² The Poetics School and the Loft share in these effects—directly, by sharing people, or indirectly, by taking up the Poetry Project's (as well as similar communities') challenges to poetic orthodoxy and spreading that challenge and that work geographically. It is thus quite important that the two communities I study are in the Mid or Mountain-west. The geographical spread from the coasts of new poetry practices reflected a more general spread of the counterculture, but more importantly, allowed for a melding of their poetry work with the work of local poets. This collaboration helped both communities survive and grow.

My project not only takes the next step in the evolution of poetry community studies from the coasts forward, but I see it also as an evolution from the studies discussed above. All of them participate in the turn toward questions of communal, economic, historical, and political contexts and social and communal forms of poetry. This participation creates an opening for scholars like me, who, in addition to close reading and literary analysis, use a variety of strategies, such as methods from history, the social science of communities, anthropological fieldwork, and the economics of fringe venues and publications. My research for this project included "participant observation" during the

Summer Writing Program at the Poetics School in Boulder, long-form interviews of at least twenty poets, archival research, art history scholarship about funding and artistic capital, and readings in cultural theory, social science, and urban studies. I also have experiential knowledge gained from years as a member of a number of poetry / literary communities, as well as experience in working for literary organizations. Pierre Bourdieu's work, though rarely mentioned in this book, has heavily influenced my thinking about cultural production, artistic capital (I use “poetic capital” here), and artistic and social change.³³ This multi-valenced work allows me to raise questions that have not been asked before about poetry and community (such as: what was the effect of governmental arts funding on poetry in the U.S. in the 1970s?) and to theorize how poetic communities work to suture their members and their audiences into their desired poetic ideologies.

Such theorizing of poetry-in and poetry-as community must attend to the pressures different communities placed then and now on poetry. In returning to the “work” discussion with which I began this Introduction, we might think of the work (the professionalization and the business of poetry) that these communities did as developing methods to discern (and ultimately choose) between the different pressures they placed on poetry. As a consequence (and partly, a necessary condition) of their growth and survival, poets within poetic communities eventually had to decide which pressures to keep applying to poetry and which to drop. The Loft and the Poetics School shared some of the pressures they placed on poetry, such as the defiance of traditional authority, community building, anti-academicism, poetry as shared purpose, and poetry in service to social justice. The Poetics School also pressured poetry to reflect a sense of poetic genealogy, to unite politically the community, and to reflect a sense of aesthetic stake-holding. In less pointed

ways, the Loft asked poetry to express the alternative life-paths of its members, to speak for their anti-institutionalism, and to connect them to civil rights struggles and the larger counter-culture.

What appeals in terms of these particular poetic communities' histories is the highly intricate ways that their history is intertwined with the larger narratives about politics, culture, and poetic histories in the 1970s. The decade of the 1960s changed so much in the US that the 1970s is a fruitful area of poetry scholarship because of the specific changes poets in the seventies had to deal with. This is not to say that we should read the poetry of the 1970s simply as refracted texts of this historical period. Rather, in the large arguments about interpreting and teaching and reading poetry, the historical, social, political, and cultural contexts of that poetry's generation and creation should be taken into account as meaning-making for that poetry and these poets.

Also, it is important that these two communities' own social dynamics reflect the larger culture's questions about gender and leadership, but also gender and literary hierarchy, organizing, and tradition. Significantly, in their early years, both of these communities were led by strong women, and would likely not have survived without them. Anne Waldman worked closely with Allen Ginsberg as the Poetics School co-director, sharing leadership, administrative, and teaching responsibilities, skills she developed as the Director of the Poetry Project at Saint Mark's until the mid-1970s. Since Ginsberg's career demanded that he travel so much and so far during the early years of the Poetics School, Waldman was often responsible for much of the day-to-day running of the school as well as the visionary work of planning its future.

Marly Rusoff's own trajectory as independent bookstore owner and community organizer modeled the do-it-yourself spirit of the 1970s, as well as her awareness and skill at getting the Loft governmental funding within two years of its founding. She brought prolific organizational brio to an informal group of poets who gathered at her store. The women involved in the group were also veterans of feminist, anti-war, anti-poverty, and racial justice work, and modeled consensus-based decision making and pedagogy. They taught and took classes and became some of the most visible members of the organization.

While poetry scholarship (and more generally, literary and cultural US scholarship) could be greatly served by a plethora of community histories, oral histories, and ethnographies of poetic and artistic communities that began in the 1970s, it is not my purpose to do this with the Loft or the Poetics School. I am less interested in the straight historical narratives of these communities than I am in how these communities' specific histories changed our conceptions of the work of poetry, and my work has this concern at its heart. It is important, however, to discuss briefly the urgent points of each community's immediate and specific history. I begin in Chapter 1 by historicizing the beginnings of each of these communities, highlighting the political, cultural, and social milieus in which they participated, their founding missions, and their very early years. Alongside this history, I read some poems by founders and early participants, arguing that the poetry and the community are more closely related than by solely geographic space—their relation is an interstice of many pressures. I briefly discuss the different communities from which the Loft and the Poetics School drew many of their members. All poetry and artistic communities feed each other, with poets circulating between them constantly, sharing lessons and strategies and behavior.

However, some of the most illustrative ruptures involving these communities were those not intended by them, but forced them to respond anyway. The second chapter, “Some Horrible Yaargh: The Failure of Poetry as A Suturing Symbol at The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, 1975-1980,” examines the series of events that came to be known as the “Great Naropa Poetry Wars.” A 1975 incident with the poet W.S. Merwin at a Buddhist retreat, an event sponsored by the umbrella organization that administered Naropa Institute and the Poetics School (the Poetics School was fairly autonomous), became a flashpoint for a number of competing tensions about poetry and poetry’s place in the national conversation and in conversation about directions of the New Left after the 1960s, about the politics of funding, and how that all got conflated with this incident. As a major break in whatever consensus non-traditional poets of the 1960s might have managed to create in order to continue their work, this crisis had far-reaching effects. How the poets connected to the school dealt with it is very telling.

The third chapter examines major crisis for the Loft, when a dispute among its board members erupted over accepting money from a corporate foundation. This argument highlighted competing desires for the community on the part of its organizers: the ability to survive (for which they needed money), the ability to remain independent from funders who might want to dictate how the money was spent, and the ability to pay those who worked on the Loft’s behalf. The meetings and letters around this event are highly illustrative of the various tensions these poetry communities felt at moments where those tensions would conflict. This chapter also undertakes an historical analysis of how governmental and private arts funding in the U.S. affected the poetics, politics, and cultural capital of the Loft and (similar communities) from the mid 1960s to the early 1980s. Many constituents, such as

audiences, fellow poets and writers, interested and non-interested publics, government and private funding officials, would demand that these communities justify their work. They were being held to account for aesthetic ideals, political ideals, budgets (toward poetic, educational, social, or political ends) and funding sources. As the chapter demonstrates, the politics of funding—who gets funded and why—has a great deal to do with the evolution of these communities. Accountability questions made them defend their methods and goals to people within and outside of their boundaries. In other words, having to account for why they needed money and what they did with the funding they received changed them as organizations, and sometimes these defenses would erupt into arguments about those values.

While the U.S. government had sporadically funded art and artists throughout its history, there was a lack of official arts policy until President Lyndon B. Johnson's founding of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1966. The resulting increase of government funding of art in the late 1960s and early 1970s was unprecedented (and never matched since). From 1966 to 1974, funding for the National Endowment for the Arts grew from \$2,898,000 to \$21,102,000, an increase of more than 7 times its original size.³⁴ The nationalistic and corporate motives for arts funding and the effects of its increases on artists and art communities in the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s has been studied by scholars such as Lucy Lippard, Chin-Tao Wu, and Donna M. Binkiewicz; however, there is a paucity of similarly critical analysis of the funding's effects on poets and poetry communities during that time. Arguments caused by financial accountability were often intentional, as communities sought out new sources of funding.

In fact, these moments of instability are most illustrative for my purposes here, for during them, members of the communities are forced to commit to specific symbols, beliefs,

and goals. This inevitably meant leaving some predilections and goals behind. It is not so much that the performances or embodiments of the community's values strove to present a unified front, but rather that in those unstable times, in an era of questions about direction and values, community identity was inherently unstable. I find these moments of rupture, when contradictory pressures are placed on poetry, deeply compelling.

Finally, in the conclusion, I open out this discussion to more general and current questions about poetry and community. I discuss other poetic communities and issues of contemporary poetry worthy of study, such as a recently published group autobiography of another poetic community of the 1970s (the "Grand Piano" poets); a recent conference on "Rethinking Poetics;" a local regional book festival, the "Women's Poetry list-serv;" and other versions of current poetic community. These different visions of community problematize questions of poetic community in the 21st century—asking readers to identify applications of community and suture to American poetics scholarship and to remove the zero-sum language that tends to characterize discussions of poetry and poetic capital. I end with inevitable questions that I hope other poetics scholars will undertake in considering questions of the work and worth of poetry and poetry-in-community. I hope to establish community as a more viable way of poetry organization and conception than the division of poetry into "schools" that was so useful in the 1960s (which I discuss more in the 4th chapter). I suggest that the most valuable way of meeting poetic desires in the U.S. in the 21st century is to work within, among, or through poetry communities, or, to use a phrase coined in the 1970s, to "think globally and act locally."

Chapter 1. Doing Poetry: The Movement, The Counterculture, and What Happened Next

The pressures placed on poetry in the late 1960s and early 1970s, before the formation of the Loft and the Poetics School, were nothing but contradictory. Each of these communities emerged from poetically, politically, historically, and locally specific contexts that shaped how they responded to the world. Many of their members had been active in the anti-war and countercultural movement at the height of the Vietnam War. In his book *The Movement and the Sixties: Protest in America from Greensboro to Wounded Knee*, historian Terry Anderson defines “The Movement:”

Movement, then, was an amorphous term that changed throughout the decade, but nevertheless there were some common aspects about it and its participants. Activists questioned the status quo, usually feeling that it was unjust, and then they responded. Todd Gitlin of Students for a Democratic Society stated, “The Movement didn’t simply demand, it *did*.” Some activists did by action: Put your body on the line! Protest! Others did by the “great refusal,” repudiating the morals and values of the older generation. Some shifted back and forth, but generally speaking those in the movement rejected what they considered was a flawed establishment.¹

Because the Vietnam war continued until at least 1975, as did the protests, there was no clear distinction between action and refusal, hope and doubt, though by the early 1970s, massive-scale protests became less effective as a weary populace grew inured and desensitized to them. This was owing in large part to the active suppression of dissent and the U.S. government’s pressure on mainstream media outlets to downplay protests and actions.

Icons of the Movement and the counterculture were dying of drug overdoses, getting burned out, and leaving public life altogether. Many of these activists were hounded by COINTELPRO (the U.S. government's domestic counter-intelligence program) and other federal agencies. In some cases they were killed, as were Fred Hampton, Mark Clark, and George Jackson of the Black Panthers. Hampton and Clark were killed in Hampton's apartment in Chicago in 1969, and Jackson was killed during a prison escape attempt in 1971. On May 5, the day after the Kent State Massacre, when four college students were gunned down by National Guardsmen during a peaceful protest against the Vietnam war, the grand jury overseeing the Chicago Black Panthers case threw out the indictments against the special police unit accused of killing Jackson and Hampton.² Even Tom Hayden, an organizer of the protests at the 1968 Democratic National Convention (one of the "Chicago 7)," was "badjacketed" (accused by an undercover federal operative of being an undercover federal operative), and the American Indian Movement (AIM, started in Minneapolis in 1968) fell apart after federal "plants" within the organization sowed dissent and violence, as part of the federal "12 point plan" to demobilize the New Left.³ The sense of disillusionment about creating a new society from the ashes of the mainstream, oppressive, and war-prone American society was growing. Communities in all forms in the 1970s became a way to re-group (literally and spiritually) after the 1960s, and to continue the commitment to change and activism in a less destructive and more constructive and sustainable way.

In addition to dealing with the aftermath of the changes brought on by the Movement and the disillusionment resulting from some of its failures, communities such as the Loft and the Poetics School had to make compromises between their embrace of

countercultural values and their need to survive (and grow) as organizations and navigate the new historical, cultural, and economic landscapes of the 1970s. Many aspects of the counterculture surfaced within these communities. First of these was the perception that poetry was a necessary part of the counterculture: poetry was countercultural by its very nature, the poets argued, but could also be put to use in achieving the larger goals of fighting mainstream culture. Their poetics very consciously opposed the “official verse culture” of the times, as practiced by New Criticism, whose hegemony within the academy and culture had been damaged—but not destroyed—by the poetic activism of the 1960s.

The second aspect of the counterculture that appealed to these communities was anti-institutionalism. That is, institutions were seen as stifling, oppressive, and slow to change. Yet, these communities found that they had to balance their antipathy toward institutions with a need to organize, schedule, and publicize their work if they were to survive and grow. They needed to find ways to have their nontraditional life paths and refusals of mainstream culture not get in the way of their survival. They had to decide how to maintain their identities as outsiders while interacting successfully with the mainstream culture in order to keep doing the work. Non-traditional religious practice, including Buddhism (primarily Tibetan and Japanese Buddhism) was embraced by some of these communities not only to distance themselves from a culture that used Christianity as an excuse for warmongering and oppression, but these new beliefs and practices provided a spiritual foundation for their work, as sometimes problematic as those new practices would turn out to be.

The praxis and theories of feminism were also important elements to these communities’ growth, development, and decisions. Feminism provided these communities

with models of change as driven by small and localized communities wherein the personal was the political. Both the Loft and the Poetics School had strong female founders, and this fact shaped their approaches to the work, which meant that there were often conflicts within these communities between idealism (a commitment to aesthetic or countercultural purity) and pragmatism (a willingness to compromise that purity in order to achieve other goals). They both expressed and enacted a critique of privilege (as they saw it expressed in exercises of poetic capital) and of received ideas about who wrote, published, and proclaimed poetry.

Finally, these two communities had to figure out how to deal with money—how to get it, keep it, and spend it. While there was a lack of substantial or consistent funding for the arts until 1966, these poets did not need much to survive. Their relationship to mainstream economic structures and practices was part and parcel of their countercultural lives; they practiced a “gift economy” wherein labor and material were freely exchanged between artists and communities and when necessary, and sold for money to those outside of these exchanges. Also, it was a period of expanding economic growth, so there was relative prosperity until the early 1970s. As I discuss later, recessions, energy crises, gentrification, and other urban problems of the 1970s forced them to change their lifestyles. At the same time, the increase in private and governmental funding in the late 1960s made more money available for artistic work. These communities, however, found that the questions of accountability raised by that funding (and its givers) were tricky indeed. In the following sections, “The War, The Movement, The Fallout,” “From Disillusionment to Community,” “Counterculture, Anti-institutionalism, and Poetry, Oh My!” “Buddhism,” “The News of Feminism,” and “Money, Poetry, and Community” provide historical,

aesthetic, cultural, and economic contexts for the emergence of these two communities in 1974.

The War, The Movement, The Fallout

The Vietnam war's effect on all parts of the culture is a necessary consideration in how we see the beginnings of the Poetics School and the Loft. While historians differ about whether 1968 or 1973 was the end of the Sixties,⁴ 1973, the year preceding the founding of the Loft and the Poetics School, was an important year for political and anti-war activists. Just before the November presidential elections of 1972, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger declared that "peace is at hand," boosting support for President Richard Nixon against the anti-war candidate George McGovern (who lost badly in November of 1972). On January 15, 1973, Nixon announced the suspension of military action in the region, raising hopes that after more than a dozen years, all Americans fighting in Southeast Asia could come home and that the war might finally be over. The policy of Vietnamization (more broadly known as the Nixon Doctrine, where American troops built up the indigenous troops' materials and strength) had mixed results. The Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnamese troops, ARVN for short) had slowly gotten stronger and they were able to force the Vietcong to pull back in the winter, but morale and discipline within American ranks was precipitously worsening, with more incidences of fragging, drug use, and desertion during the three years (1969-1972) of the policy.

Later in 1973, however, the peace accord signed in Paris in January seemed endangered, and the White House was said to be considering a spring offensive of combined American and ARVN troops intended to break up the Ho Chi Min trail (the main supply

route of the North Vietnamese army). This news prompted Congress, now with Democratic majorities in both houses, to pass the Case-Church amendment, prohibiting military action in Vietnam past August 15, 1973. Also that year, American Prisoners of War, some of whom had been in captivity in the notorious prison nicknamed the “Hanoi Hilton” for more than five years, came home to a greatly changed culture. Many of them, such as Senator and later presidential candidate John McCain, ascended to political stardom by condemning the changes—sexual liberation, long hair, disrespect for authority—that occurred had in the culture since their capture. These men, feted in events such as a White House gala and followed by media almost everywhere after their return, were symbols of an America to which some conservatives fervently wished to return (in their nostalgia for an idealized past), because as military heroes, they embodied manliness, dedication, and sacrifice.⁵

Conservatives calling for more political suppression of anti-war protestors and activists used these returned POWs as exemplary citizens to contrast with the hippies and anti-war activists who attempted to tear down the political and cultural system. The protestors’ anger at the war and the administration’s behavior had grown even more pitched after the publication of the *Pentagon Papers* in 1971. Daniel Ellsberg, a former State Department worker, smuggled them out of State Department offices and gave them to the *New York Times*, which published them serially. Not only did the *Pentagon Papers* detail the missteps of three administrations during the long war in Vietnam, they displayed the extent to which each administration covered up its actions or blatantly lied about them to Congress and the American public. Ellsberg became an instant hero to the anti-war counter culture,⁶ but an enemy to the Nixon administration. It ordered its operatives, the “White House Plumbers,” to burglarize Ellsberg’s psychiatrist’s office in the hopes of finding something to

tarnish Ellsberg's reputation. This burglary and a botched burglary of the Democratic National Chairman's office at the Watergate hotel in Washington, D.C. were only two episodes of a large number of illegal, secret, and paranoid actions (including increasingly desperate cover-ups) that became known as the Watergate scandal and led to President Nixon's resignation in the fall of 1973. On the legacy of Watergate, Bruce J. Schulman has remarked that it "added fuel to a widespread cynicism about politics, politicians, government itself as a collective good."⁷

While there may have been cynicism about the government and large institutions, activism continued as a method through which dissatisfied citizens attempted to change their world. Political protest and literary activism worked in tandem on the Lower East Side of New York in the sixties and seventies. This was a friendly, inexpensive place, filled with artists, poets, rent and stapling parties, and comradeship, where everyone seemed to be working together to build a better world through art or poetry or activism, and sometimes these were all the same thing. This conflation was most clearly expressed in the activities at St. Mark's Church in the Bowery. Long a bastion of liberal activism and a leader in arts and culture (cultural luminaries and artists such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Isadora Duncan both spoke at the church, and poet W.H. Auden was a member), the church formed a logical center for the countercultural scene that developed during the sixties. Michael Allen, a visionary and dynamic rector from 1959 to 1970, ushered in a new era of artistic and political activism. It was the home base of the Lower East Side's poetry scene (the Poetry Project started in 1964, with Allen's help), Theater Genesis and Danspace began there, and anti-war activists (such as the Motherfuckers) worked out of the church. The poetry scene was lively and vibrant with a thriving number of coffee shop venues and bars and alternative reading

spaces.⁸ The poetic, artistic, social, and countercultural activity occurred in conjunction with and alongside of the anti-war protests occurring all over New York City in this decade. In addition to the major marches, activists burned draft cards in front of recruiting stations, numerous protests occurred in Central Park and at the various campuses all over the city, and many groups sprang up to tap the burgeoning energy of newly empowered minorities and those concerned with furthering the Movement.⁹

Political and cultural protests in most major cities, including the Twin Cities, contributed to the fevered atmosphere of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Ed Felien, who was married to Loft founder Marly Rusoff during the seventies, was active as a student anti-war protestor and was later a radical alderman for the Dinkytown (the Loft's first neighborhood) precinct of Minneapolis, adjacent to the University of Minnesota. In April 1972, after Nixon announced that the U.S. would bomb the port of Haiphong, the University experienced its largest protest of the era. That month, protestors marched daily on campus and took part in protests at the Honeywell plant five miles away from campus, demanding that both entities stop supporting and creating resources for the war. In May, after the announcement that Haiphong's harbor would be mined to prevent the North Vietnamese from transporting troops and materials, the on-campus protests grew. While there had been other protests on campus throughout the war and unrest throughout the cities in the 1960s, the protest of 1972 was comparatively huge. Its main action lasted for about a week and involved the National Guard and the "Tac Squad" of the Minneapolis Police force. Numerous barricades were built on the streets around campus, student protest leaders, including Felien, marched on the Governor's mansion in Saint Paul, and even the University hospital suffered damage when the police shot a smoke bomb toward a group of

protestors on Washington Avenue. Throughout the following months, student and other anti-war protest groups continued their activism, in the form of smaller protests, teach-ins, and involvement in elections.

As Loft Board member and poet Patricia Hampl has observed, “The Vietnam war did not end until May 1975, so we were in a political protest culture in those early years.”¹⁰ Saint Paul and Minneapolis were not immune to protests, unrest, and activism in the late sixties and early seventies. Martin Luther, King, Jr. gave one of his last speeches to a crowd at the Saint Paul campus of the University of Minnesota in 1968. There were numerous anti-war and movement protests all over the region, as well as racial unrest in different neighborhoods in the cities. The counterculture evolved and developed throughout the area as many artists, writers, and activists moved to Minnesota in the late 1960s and early 1970s, drawn in part by Minnesota’s generous non-profit environment (discussed further in chapter 3).

Speaking in 1884 about the experience of living through the American Civil War, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., remarked: “We have shared the incommunicable experience of war. We have felt, we still feel, the passion of life to its top. In our youths, our hearts were touched with fire.”¹¹ Even though this comment was written about the American Civil War in the previous century, its sentiment resonates with the early years of the Loft and the Poetics School. Both communities had members or associates involved with Poets Against the War. Robert Bly spent two years in the Navy in the 1940s, lived in New York for a time, and came back to Minnesota to begin a number of publishing ventures, including a magazine of translations (*The Fifties* and later, *The Sixties*) and the Minnesota Writers’ Publishing House, a cooperative press based on an apprentice system. He was a friend to many poets of both

communities, a mentor to many young Minnesota poets, and one of the more flamboyant examples of a protesting poet. He strongly opposed the US's actions in Southeast Asia, and started Poets Against the War in 1966. When he was presented with the National Book Award in 1969, he spoke against the war and invited a group representing the War Resistance to join him onstage, where he handed his award money to them. Many poets coming of age in the seventies shared the “incommunicable experience of war” without having fought in it. While none of the early Loft board members were veterans (the late Minnesota poet Bill Holm, a Vietnam veteran and poet active in the scene, cited the Loft as integral to his recovery from the war¹² and Jim Moore was jailed for being a draft resister), they were all affected by it. Part of their sense of urgency was to try to communicate that experience, or more precisely, its aftermath and its effects on the country. Since they no longer trusted received narratives about the inherent goodness of America or its leaders or the inevitability of the “good life,” they had to recreate, through art and activism, the world that they wanted to live in. The war and the Movement were crucibles out of which emerged new combinations, new ways of life, thought, activism, poetry, and community.¹³

From Disillusionment to Community

One of the most important aspects of the 1970s was the turn to community, from self described “communes” or “new towns” that sprung up all over rural America in the 1970s, to the communal living experiments in abandoned or run-down buildings in cities, and to communities that formed throughout the country around one set of issues or experiences. Many “poetry communities” formed in this way. Part of the activists’ fervor for doing the work of creating and sustaining poetry communities came from the skills and

training and passion that many members of each group had in previous political activism. For both the Loft and the Poetics School communities, poetry activism was political activism, as poetry was a viable response to and intervention in political life. This was more clearly the case with the Poetics School, as it believed that poetry acts on its own. But poetry was more than a transcription of political content for both of these groups. It did not just record political sentiment; it helped poets enact those beliefs. In her introduction to the anthology *Beats at Naropa* (2009), Waldman looks back over the beginning of the poetics school and explicitly connects it to political activism and grounds its beginnings in a particular political climate:

It was 1974, the summer before the last American troops left Vietnam. The country was weary of the war. Visible protest had gone on for years. Images of the bloody carnage were not being censored or screened as they had been during World War II and Korea, and as they are once again. The promise of the Sixties, which once seemed so close, appeared out of reach. Deaths from drug and alcohol excess were legion. People were looking for alternatives to political rhetoric and the horrors of the war. Many of us in the artistic and political counterculture had begun to feel that our confidence that our protests would result in a saner more holistic world had been naïve. We were still committed to activism, but instead of just protesting, we became more centered on creating discrete cultural alternatives to the status quo.¹⁴

One cannot underestimate the political consequences and effects of the Vietnam War on the country or on these two groups of poets. “The promise of the Sixties” included not only the promise that mass political action and protest could change the politics of Washington and

stop the war, but that other areas of national, political, and domestic life would become more flexible and accepting of difference, provide more sexual and personal freedom, more equality, better treatment of the planet, and more avenues of personal expression and exploration.

But this promise was compromised by deaths and the repression of activism (discussed above), which dampened some exuberance and made those left behind weary and stressed, contributing to the disillusionment. Waldman emphasizes that many people were looking for alternatives to mainstream political behavior in all its forms, in all its political color. Political speech itself was exhausted and suspect. This search echoes the general movement of the political Left from the liberalism of the 1950s and 1960s to the radicalism of the late sixties. Some of these liberals were converted 1920s and 1930s Stalinists and Marxists, part of the “Old Left” who worked for change within existing structures, whereas the radicals of the 1960s “New Left”¹⁵ preferred to abandon or destroy existing structures and instead build altogether alternative structures in their search for meaning and direction.¹⁶ These became the “discrete cultural alternatives” in the 1970s of which Waldman speaks.

These alternatives could (it was hoped) avoid the mistakes of previous institutions that had already caused so much disillusionment. For example, Watergate demonstrated that governments and institutions (old structures) in general really could not be trusted, that they would lie, cheat, and steal to keep themselves in power and to maintain the status quo. The lesson was that there was no sense in working within institutions for real political change, and it was best to get out of town and start one’s own semi-autonomous community, protected from right-wing zealots, government spies, and a non-understanding, unfeeling, and hostile culture. So Waldman’s disappointment in the failure of the “naïve” goals for

which she and others strove in the 1960s was born out of hard and wrenching experience.

Ginsberg himself expressed disappointment about how the 60s ended in violence, not in real change.

A couple of accidents and health problems slowed this icon of the counterculture only temporarily during these years. While Ginsberg continued to work for liberation and to end the Vietnam war, he publicly expressed misgivings about how the Movement had failed to reach its goals, saying that his and others' activities in the late sixties may have prolonged the war:

It may have been the refusal of the Left to vote for Humphrey, that gave us Nixon. So that might be the karma of the Left, because of their anger, their excessive hatred of their fathers and the liberals, their pride, their vanity . . . our vanity, our pride, the excessive hatred. It may be that we have on our karma the continuation of the Vietnam War in its worst with more killing than before.¹⁷

Ginsberg shared this disappointment with a great many on the Left as the sixties turned into the seventies, and many wondered what the next step was. As mentioned previously, many activists turned their energies and skills toward forming alternative communities, including a good number and range of spirituality-based groups.

These communities provided antidotes to the change in atmosphere of urban places in the 1970s. Conditions in New York in the early seventies little resembled the fun, energy-driven scene of the 1960s on the Lower East Side. In 1971, Anne Waldman wrote in her welcome to readers of *Another World* (the second Poetry Project anthology) that she often wondered “what we’re still doing in the Big City—it’s a downright hassle sometimes.”¹⁸

Despite the hassle, she reassured readers that if poets were in the community, the Poetry Project would be there. Yet this open complaint about the hassle of living in the city in 1971 demonstrates the extremes to which her life and those of her compatriots were affected by the changes in the city.

High-profile poets were leaving, and the climate was evolving. Ted Berrigan served as a maestro for the scene by encouraging younger poets, participating in many different readings, editing, and teaching at the Poetry Project. But he left the city for a teaching job at Iowa in 1968, and others left for the West coast (primarily San Francisco) or for jobs elsewhere. The mood in the East Village changed from liberated and free-wheeling to cautious and wary. An increase in violent crime (and its perceived potential), the city's continual efforts at "cleaning up" the area through crackdowns, and political violence made the Mecca of a poet's paradise on the Lower East Side much less attainable. Writing to friend and fellow poet Bernadette Mayer in 1970 after the Weather Underground headquarters near St. Mark's was accidentally bombed, Waldman, who knew one of the women hurt in the explosion, exclaimed: "NY is crazy. The 11th St. incident is really strange & creepy . . . our generation. And the other bombings! Spoke to folks in NY who say it's a state of emergency."¹⁹ The state of the city, combined with the changed political climate of the whole country after 1968 and Nixon's election and the ongoing war, in addition to the mounting economic difficulties, must have made Chögyam Trungpa's invitation to Waldman and Ginsberg to travel to Boulder for the first summer session of Naropa Institute (and the Poetics School) in 1974 seem a godsend, as Waldman might have wondered how to keep the interconnected communities intact in the face of external pressures.

Ginsberg's immediate community during this time was a bit older than Waldman's, consisting primarily of his Beat friends, both the dead and the living. His poem "Sad Dust Glories," written in the fall of 1974 just after the summer session, was dedicated to the dead (Neal Cassady and Jack Kerouac, two of his closest friends, died in 1968 and 1969, respectively). "You were here on earth, in cities—/ where now? / Bones in the ground, / thoughts in my mind."²⁰ This stanza begins the poem, noting the conceptual gap between the physical presence these friends once had and the spiritual, disembodied presence they have now in Ginsberg's remembrances. Written in the fall as he and Peter Orlovsky struggled to finish their cabin adjoining Gary Snyder's land in the Sierra Mountains,²¹ "Sad Dust Glories" traverses the landscape with a mood that vacillates over 11 sections. In strikingly lyrical fashion, Ginsberg shows in the imagery his longing for an eternal, or for the return of the "heavenly" city they once shared:

Teacher
bring me to heaven
or leave me alone.
Why make me work so hard
when everything's spread around
open, like forest's poison oak
turned red
empty sleepingbags hanging from
a dead branch.²²

The plaintiveness of the request to the teacher to leave him alone and not make him work so hard exposes some feeling of spiritual crisis for Ginsberg at this time. Why, he asks, work so

hard when the world holds so much potential for pain? “Turned red” gestures toward the effects of poison oak on one’s skin: it creates a red inflammation that spreads far from the initial point of contact once oil from the plant is touched. It is generally a severe infection that can last for up to two weeks (like poison ivy, its leaves turn red in the fall). Taken literally or figuratively, the “malaise” of the 1970s (a term made famous five years later in reference to President Carter’s “crisis of confidence” speech), represented by poison oak, is “spread around,” Ginsberg perceptively notes, ready to infect everything that comes into contact with it.

Unlike Ezra Pound’s famous, modern, and anonymous petals on a “wet, black bough,”²³ “empty sleepingbags hanging from / a dead branch” indicates a loneliness for the beings or bodies which will fill those bags once more. They are hanging there precisely because they are being used; people hang their sleeping-bags during the day to dry and protect them from curious bugs and animals. The image of hanging “empty sleepingbags” indicates daily interaction with the world’s vagaries and gifts that his dead compatriots can access no longer, and the image also echoes images of body bags from the war. Ginsberg and Snyder still lived and participated in community in the earthly city while striving through meditation and commitment and practice to access the heavenly city.

“Mugging,” from late 1974, shows his disillusionment with the very earthly city of New York—his neighborhood on the Lower East side, where he and Peter Orlovsky had lived together since the mid-sixties. Ginsberg was mugged one night by a gang of boys who took his wallet and watch, and the poet described the scene afterward:

Whole street a bombed-out face, building rows’ eyes & teeth missing

Burned apartments half the long block, gutted cellars, hallways’ charred beams

Hanging over trash plaster mounded entrances, couches & bedsprings rusty after
sunset²⁴

Moloch is the city in this poem, gesturing toward Ginsberg's famous indictment poem "Howl" ("What sphinx of cement and aluminum bashed open their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination? / Moloch! Solitude! Filth! Ugliness! Ashcans and unobtainable dollars! Children screaming under the stairways!"²⁵) with a damaged face and scars of New York City's internal battles. These included rising tensions between police and beleaguered neighborhoods, between long-time residents and new arrivals, and the rental and land politics that encouraged the whole-scale abandonment of buildings and neighborhoods rather than their rehabilitation.²⁶ "O hopeless city of idiots empty-eyed staring afraid,"²⁷ this city is quite the earthly city, farther away from the heavenly city of poetry and community than it ever had been. In addition to the very real issues of crime and decline in quality of living, there is also the sense of something more behind Ginsberg's disillusionment. The people have changed, too. Years of poverty, crime, and substandard living conditions have changed the neighborhood from a friendly poor bohemia to one of many plagued neighborhoods of New York for the next 20 years. Where once this part of the city was a haven for poor artists who survived by being part of networks and communities of mutual support, more and more neighborhoods became havens of crime and lawlessness, driven by relentless poverty and the despair and violence spawned by it.

Ginsberg's disillusionment was not confined to the city and its denizens, however. The mid-1970s saw him fret over multiple horrors of U.S. operations in Vietnam and at home, especially in regard to what he saw as the corrupting influence of corporate power over civil government. "Who Runs America," written in the air between Denver and Dallas

in 1974, clearly affirms his belief that commercial companies who destroy the planet run America through lobbying dollars. In a lament that eerily applies to the recent BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, Ginsberg expresses deep sadness and anger over the pollution caused by the pursuit of oil upon which American citizens and companies and industry are so clearly dependent:

Oil brown smog over Denver
Oil red dung colored smoke
level to level across the horizon
blue tainted sky above
Oil car smog gasoline
hazing red Denver's day²⁸

From the privileged vantage of the airplane window, Ginsberg is able to see what many on the ground do not see: the accumulated effects of pollution in Denver, which was the city of his early dreams, site of the fruition of his relationships with Neal Cassady and Jack Kerouac, and of many scenes in Kerouac's novels *Dharma Bums* and *On The Road*. While humans cannot very well imagine the long-term effects of their current actions (it is difficult to see in geological time frames) some are able to get glimpses of this knowledge, as in the case of Ginsberg looking out the plane window down at Denver (a plane fueled by the very oil on which he comments).

But in the plane, and four years after Nixon's creation of the Environmental Protection Agency, Ginsberg did not excuse himself from the consumption of the oil—he was, after all, on a plane—the OPEC oil embargo of 1973 made the public quite aware of the risks of dependence on oil. In a style typical of his during the 1970s, Ginsberg catalogs

the sources of oil, the energy companies that traded in it, and how embedded oil was in America's life: "Oil millions of cars speeding the cracked plains / Oil from Texas, Bahrain, Venezuela Mexico / Oil that turns General Motors."²⁹ As he became more committed to meditation practice, Ginsberg's poetry reflected this practice in its catalogs, as he lists items without attaching sentiment to them, as if the naming is lament enough ("noticing without attachment" is an integral element of Buddhist meditation). Naming names is an important element of the counter culture and the Movement. Cultural and governmental practices of the 1950s and early 1960s depended on secrecy and conformity: do not be different, do not let anyone know if you are different, do not voice objections, and do not name names. Ginsberg's poetry from the 1950s and 60s could be read as a rejection of the cultural and political values of secrecy, so naming those people or companies involved in nefarious activities, such as corruption and pollution, is an important act. "Who Runs America?" is a damning and disillusioning list.

This pausing, naming, and reflecting took place all over the country. In the Twin Cities in the 1970s, the sense of disillusionment about the war and progress of the New Left coexisted alongside the continued work on progressive causes and the arts. In *Take the Streets*, his reminiscences about the 1972 University of Minnesota campus protests, Ed Felien remarked that while it was clear that the peace movement had an impact and that its message was clear, civil disobedience had "sputtered and stalled" by that summer, mirroring what happened in many scenes across the country. "What is the next step?" was a question that he and many other protestors asked, and the question of how to proceed became more urgent because of its lack of clarity and the activists' distrust of existing institutions. "There

is no reliable and trustworthy political party or organization that could serve as the instrument of change.”³⁰

Thus many of these activists found the urgency of community more pressing. Harry J. Elam, Jr., in *Taking it to the Streets: the Social Protest Theater of Luis Valdez and Amiri Baraka*, states that the urgency of the 1960s drove groups to organize around their shared goals and beliefs. He uses the term “urgency” to describe a sociological / psychological condition that underlies social antagonism. For him, the “spontaneous explosions of rage” and the “burgeoning mood” of the times created a climate wherein “urgency is an invisible but discernable factor in the emergence of radical social struggles. *Urgency* conveys the idea that the frustrations of the disenfranchised have reached crisis proportions; untenable circumstances have pushed oppressed people to the boiling point.”³¹

Elam’s formulation of urgency connected to social antagonism needs some extension if it is to be applied to artistic communities of the 1970s: there is also urgency *after* social antagonism because those involved needed to keep acting, to answer the “now what” question. Activists involved in radical social struggles needed not only to celebrate the deconstruction of institutional power, but also to apply that energy and enthusiasm to the ongoing project of building a better world.

The urge to change remained, even as activists realized that their own strategies needed to evolve if they were to enact lasting and meaningful political, artistic, social, and cultural transformation. One of the major differences between activism in the 1960s and activism in the 1970s is that in the 1960s, the number and size of large political and social protests were unprecedented. In the 1970s, that number dropped precipitously because of active suppression (as previously mentioned), but it also dropped as more and more activists

focused on local and community-based issues and actions, and as individuals sought inner transformation within communities. Schulman, writing about the changes in political activism from the 1960s to the 1970s, points out that these activists “had found in radical political commitments not only vehicles for political protest but the foundations for meaningful lives: a beloved community and a participatory democracy, but Sixties radicals found it easier to build new homes for themselves than to rebuild American political culture.”³²

Counterculture, Anti-institutionalism, and Poetry, Oh My!

These new homes took the form of communities and communes, which spread all over the United States during the 1970s. Each had specific values and goals unifying their members for the work of the community. For some who became part of these communities in the 1970s, this was poetry. Poetry was countercultural by its very nature, they argued, but it also assisted in the larger goals of fighting mainstream culture. As discussed in the introduction, communities suture their members into poetic ideology. They do so through their use of suturing symbols on their boundaries. A community holds symbols in common, and it agrees that these symbols are important to the community, though members may differ on what exactly the symbols mean. Both the Loft and Poetics School deeply valued the anti-institutional and anti-oppression work of the counterculture in the 1960s. I use “anti-oppression” as an umbrella term for all of the different components of the Movement that often (but not all the time) worked together to undo an oppressive power structure. Many poets in New York, Boulder, the Twin Cities, and elsewhere believed that poets and writers were by default against oppression, and were “open.” They did not see the difference between oppression of themselves as poets (and as outsider poets) and the

oppression of racial, sexual, ethnic, and economic minorities. This belief in an achieved harmony may have been idealistic and naïve of them, perhaps even ignorant. Their moments of racial, class-based, or sexual blindness should not be excused, nor should their fumbling from the idealized sentiment of “everyone’s welcome” to forming concrete action plans for including a range of non-white, non-heterosexual, and non-male voices and perspectives. However, by the seventies were the “day after,” the beginning of the huge project of dismantling prejudice and oppression.

The political protest culture of the 1960s and early 1970s connects with the urgency of community for poets because a major part of protest is its critique of power, held by institutions. The major thrust of the critiques of the 1960s is that institutions were only interested in perpetuating their own power, even if they began as somewhat neutral or even as benevolent forces. Poets knew on some level that those with cultural capital strove to keep it, which is why they felt it was crucial to form groups legitimatizing their own capital. Many people focused on building alternative spaces and communities because, after all of the struggles of the 1960s, they continued to find institutions intractable, unmovable, and unshakeable.

It is hard to overstate the importance of Donald Allen’s 1960 anthology, *The New American Poetry*, on the poetry scene of the 1960s on the Lower East Side of New York, where a great change in the poetic culture and poetic institutions was catalyzed. Edited by Allen (previously editor of the *Evergreen Review*, Grove Press’ journal), *The New American Poetry* was largely responsible for defining the opposition between two of the major “camps” of American poetry: “mainstream” poetry and “avant-garde” or the “new” poetry. Including poets from many “schools,” such as the Beats, the Black Mountain poets, and the New York

School, Allen put his poets in direct conflict with the poetry in *New Poets of England and America*, published in 1957 and edited by Donald Hall, Robert Pack, and Louis Simpson (with a preface by Robert Frost).

Allen's main organizing principle was to present a "strong third generation, long awaited but slowly recognized"³³ that is, third in the "true modernist tradition" that began with Pound, Williams, and H.D. Allen's modernism was distinguished from that espoused by Hall, Pack, and Simpson, and as theorized in Robert Penn Warren's and Cleanth Brooks' 1938 textbook *Understanding Poetry*. Warren, Brooks, and Allen Tate's version of Modernism was inextricably linked with that of British poetry. They highlighted Eliot, Auden, and Frost as standard bearers. Jed Rasula, in speaking of the "anthology wars" during this period, breaks down the difference between the two along a couple of lines. First is that of formalism, which the New Critics valued and the New American Poets rejected. Second was poetics—the New Critics and their favorite poets rejected explicit statements of poetics in favor of a treatment of poetry as "natural" and "transcendent," whereas Allen's poets explicitly embraced poetics and poetic theory.³⁴ The New Critics held that statements of poetics or poetry which entertained such statements were "raw" versions of poetry or poetic thinking that more mature, refined, and talented poets evacuated from their "cooked" poems and criticism.³⁵

Donald Allen focused on the transmission of the new poetries (through small magazines and readings) "as [they have] emerged in Berkeley and San Francisco, Boston, Black Mountain, and New York" and how this group of poetries, as discussed in the introduction, "has shown one common characteristic: a total rejection of all those qualities typical of academic verse. Following the practice and precepts of Ezra Pound and William

Carlos Williams, it has built on their achievements and gone on to evolve new conceptions of the poem. These poets have already created their own tradition, their own press, and their public. They are our own avant-garde, the true continuers of the modern movement of American poetry.”³⁶ In other words, these poets rejected the closed forms and closed contexts of the poetry encouraged by Tate and the rest of the New Critics. The poetry in the Allen anthology was experimental in both form and subject matter. For example, Allen Ginsberg’s work emphasized a focus on colloquial and profane language and content, breaking from traditional cultural values in his open and frank discussions of drug use, homosexuality, and Beat culture. New Criticism worked within established systems of literary and academic power to determine “acceptable” poetry, which was supposed to be condensed, allusive, based on highly concentrated images, ahistorical, impersonal, and linguistically dense and florid.

Yet many poets on the Lower East Side in the 1960s saw poetry as fluid in its ability to transmit and comment upon their daily lives, poetry as an occasion (rather than description thereof), and poetry as both result and instigator of social and artistic relationships. The ability to quickly copy and distribute poetry, initiated by technological revolutions in printing, first with mimeograph machines and later with Xeroxes, supported poetry-as-relationship, both within the immediacy of the neighborhood and with poets and readers across the country who received the new magazines.

Importantly for Donald Allen and many of his contributors, poems were not distinct and separate works of art; they were texts that spoke directly to the context of their engenderment. The poetry in the anthology also spoke directly to the political and social contexts of the time. Rather than aiming for transcendence beyond the current, the “new”

poetry took place within it and established a relationship with it. Charles Olson's "Projective Verse" essay was highly influential on the community of poets on the Lower East Side, as it helped establish an aesthetic ideal (Anne Waldman calls this the "outrider aesthetic.")³⁷ It established this new aesthetic through an emphasis on breath as the main propellant of poetry, both on the page and in voice. Combined with his sense of the poem as a "field," Olson's focus on breath encouraged poets to "keep it moving, citizen," to keep the pace and length of lines going.³⁸ Ted Berrigan and fellow poet Ron Padgett read the anthology repeatedly and Padgett unfavorably compared the Hall, Pack, and Simpson anthology to *The New American Poetry*, saying that he did not feel any connection to *New Poets of England and America*.³⁹

As Daniel Kane has shown in *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s*, about the poetry scene and gift economy of the Lower East Side of New York, the set of interlocking communities within the "scene" was largely dedicated to another set of poetic practices from those of the academy, which was a powerful official poetry institution during these years. The readings on the Lower East Side "served as self-consciously inscribed meeting grounds, think tanks, and community spaces for poets working outside the mainstream of contemporary American poetry."⁴⁰ Not only did the readings serve the function of dissemination, but they provided places for community building among and between poets. This provision has importance when considering that for mainstream contemporary poetry, the legitimate meeting spaces were mainly in academia or in influential New Critical literary publications.

A number of presses contributed to the excitement of these "meeting grounds" in the early 1960s. Grove Press's reputation for publishing such scandalous and aesthetically

adventurous texts as *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Tropic of Cancer*, and *Naked Lunch* contributed to the sense of an “outlaw” community outside mainstream poetics, mainstream venues of publication and dissemination, and mainstream moral values.⁴¹ As the poetry of the Lower East Side gained more visibility through mimeo magazines such as *the Floating Bear* and *Fuck You / A Journal of the Arts*, and as readings at coffee shops such as Le Metro and Les Deux Magots became increasingly popular, local officials focused on the area. They objected to the alternative morals of these groups, their loud and anti-social behavior, and their anti-establishment and anti-market practices. The editors of both *the Floating Bear* and *Fuck You* were arrested on obscenity charges (in 1964 and 1965, respectively), and local officials began to enforce “cabaret laws” which, like their predecessors in the jazz districts of the city, were used to crack down on large and potentially unruly crowds. This outlaw status helped the poetry scene establish an identity defined in part by its sense of otherness, and gave the poets the drive to keep the reading scene active, despite the city’s persecution. In 1964, a number of elements combined to form the Poetry Project. Michael Allen at St. Mark’s collaborated with sociologists at the New School for a grant to fund activities for “alienated youth,” and this grant helped consolidate the reading series at the church, forming the Poetry Project.⁴²

Kane grounds the counter-cultural poetics of the 1960s in the community and politics of the Lower East Side, framing poetry as a communal effort. Mimeographing—the ability to copy and distribute poems quickly—changed the relationship between poems and readers; instead of magazines being official sites of appropriate transmission and reception, the mimeo magazines destabilized and radicalized poetic presence through sociability. They also decentralized distribution. Whereas Randall Jarrell’s “Death of the Ball Turret Gunner”

relied on a universally held notion of the sublime and the lyric subject (“I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters. / When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose”),⁴³ poems such as Anne Waldman’s and Ted Berrigan’s collaborative poem “Memorial day” depends on the community for its creation (rather than on the exclusion of community upon which the traditional individual lyric depends). It is a sprawling and long poem that posits the dead as part of the community that surrounds the poets in their daily activities and interactions: “they speak to us / with sealed lips / information operating / at the speed of light // speak to us.”⁴⁴ Berrigan and Waldman wrote the poem together for a 1974 reading at the Poetry Project, and the reading was typical of the community’s practice; they blithely chatted while introducing the poem and traded lines in a way that obscured authorial origination. This dialogue reinforced the importance of community over individual authorship, and the poetry reflected this value. The Lower East Side was a center for such formation, and due to the experimental nature of the poetry being produced there, the community was largely ignored at the beginning by major presses and mainstream poetry avenues.

Kane asserts that the readings-as-performances (rather than as delivery or lecture) encouraged a spontaneous and improvisational aesthetic within the poetry itself, contributing to often raucous, celebratory, and unscripted contributions. He cites the examples of John Wieners’s misreading a word in a poem and then immediately asking the audience whether the original word or the misreading would work better, inspiring a long conversation about semiotics, and a Kenneth Koch reading that was famously interrupted by a man firing a gun loaded with blanks at Koch in the St. Mark’s sanctuary.⁴⁵

Anne Waldman and Allen Ginsberg, as co-founders of the Poetics School at Naropa and veterans of the St. Mark's community (Waldman ran the Poetry Project for 10 years), used this tradition to create the public image of the Poetics School. Materials from the founding of the school emphasized the importance of public readings and performances for their students, and each student was required to read on at least one Monday night (the night reserved each week for student readings).⁴⁶ Required rituals and community gathering points, these readings provided cohesion to the Poetics School community and offered showcases for its residents and guest teachers, as well as providing a very visual symbol of the community's poetic ideologies. For Waldman and Ginsberg, poetry worked actively in the world, so readings and performances embodied this activity better than the solitary printed text.

Additionally and importantly for Waldman and Ginsberg and many who attended or taught in the Poetics School in the 1970s, the voicing of poetry was inextricably linked to the Buddhist practice of the sponsoring institution. It was easy to progress or evolve from Olson's poetic focus on breath to the meditative practice of attentiveness to body and breath that serious Buddhist meditation practice requires. The heightened focus on spirituality also supported these poets' continuing commitment to the poetics of political action and community. It was through a faith practice that values all life forms and a commitment to non-violence that also heightened the urgency, for these poets, of "expedient means" and "right action," two very important principles of Buddhist practice. Sometimes referred to as "skillful means," the first emphasizes study and practice at one's vocations and / or avocation, leading to "right action," which a Buddhist practitioner uses to try to ease suffering in the world, without attachment to any particular result of that action. One does

not know how one's effort will be received or reacted to; the point is to act.⁴⁷ For both Waldman and Ginsberg, poetry and activism were “skillful means” and “right action,” in their quest for community.

Anne Waldman's background and poetics suited her quite well for work as director of the Poetry Project and as a poet within the community. Her third poetry collection, *Giant Night* (1970), is an early example of her commitment to performance as part of the generative work of poetry. Many of the poems in this collection reflect a concern with immediacy, building and sustaining relationships, and the daily rhythm, struggles, and processes of living and writing on the Lower East Side. The poem “Dear Miss Waldman” uses a series of poetic tropes common to the poetic practice of her colleagues, including a poetics based in communal ties and events, performance as compositional method, call and response, and an emphasis on formal expansiveness over narrative density. It also participates in an ongoing dialogue outside the poem.

In the space of seven pages, the poem's contents concern the subjects of aesthetic creation; poetics; intertextuality; national, international, environmental and local politics; the body; drugs; city life; love; sociability; and history. Formally, the poem is visually spacious and disjointed, depending on a dialogic call-and-response structure that moves from left to right and back over the page. The rhythm is quick and depends on a series of vocal changes that range from formal conversation to meditation to street language to shouts of pain. “It occurred to us / you might consider reviewing some poetry,” the poem begins, ostensibly a repetition of a formal letter sent by a literary publication to a “Miss Waldman” requesting her to review poetry for them. But the clarity of the letter and the purpose of the poem are exploded by the next line: “water, for example.” The introduction to the poem destroys its

proposed original coherence with a string of sounds and an ejaculation. There is no end-stop to the line, only a continuance of the space of the poem to the next line some spaces down: “an elegie: Going to Bed,” and more stanza-break space, “ah ah ah ah ah ah ah // if you stay here—O stay!”

Readers get lost with a speaker on the subway and in the milieu of the city (“go this way go that,” an echo of her mentor Frank O’Hara’s common poetic trope “I do this, I do that”) and then arrive in a moment of the past, with a grandmother who speaks in an apparent drug flashback. Participating in a dialogue that is ongoing but also outside the poem, a practice Waldman deploys throughout much of her early work and in *Giant Night*, the poem moves from consideration of messy desks (“a lot of things are better / than messy desks”) to politics in the guise of a Cuban youth parade. The specter of the traditional messy desk of the poet, the work contained in the object, fades before the political vision of the phalanx of Cuban youths, thus breaking down the authenticity of a poem meaningful and contained unto itself by letting those elements and the reader in:

actually, there is a connection
if you think about it
Still thinking?
Right on!
was the salutation at the end of a letter I received today⁴⁸

Pieces of correspondence, working as texts in and outside the poem, place this poem as one in / of many texts, in a relationship with other writers. The poem’s power is generated within the community.

Thus, Waldman's poetry, like that of much of the first and second-generation New York School poets, uses a particularly immediate style at once exegesis and development of the immediate context of its production. Not only did Waldman's skills (and energy) as an arts administrator serve her well as she went to Naropa, so did her actual poetics, a poetics that became even more clearly focused on spirituality and community after 1974, when she and Ginsberg moved to Boulder.

Thus the poetic and reading styles of these communities in their early years were meaningful indicators of their values as poetic communities. In 1978, the combination of politics and poetry was on display at a protest against the military industrial complex. Standing on railroad tracks just 12 miles south of Boulder, Colorado, Beat poet Gregory Corso, wearing a large blue knit hat at a jaunty angle, read this famously satiric epistle "Bomb" to an audience at the Rocky Flats Nuclear Weapon Production Facility in August of 1978.

O Bomb I love you

I want to kiss your clank eat your boom

You are a paean an acme of scream

a lyric hat of Mister Thunder

O resound thy tanky knees

BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM

BOOM ye skies and BOOM ye suns

BOOM BOOM ye moons ye stars BOOM⁴⁹

The audience smiled and rocked to the rhythm; some stood, some smoked, some couples held each other and laughed and others wandered and talked. Some in the audience were

even so loud as to draw a comment from Corso, who interrupted himself to shout to someone on his right: “Shut up! You, Glen . . . You’re fucking me up!”⁵⁰ Begun in the post-war years, Rocky Flats produced material for hydrogen bombs, and after a series of leaks and contamination events were divulged in 1970 (one event was the discovery of radioactive waste particles in the Denver air), public outcry against the plant began to build. Continual protests, often involving arrests of demonstrators blocking railroad access into the plant, increased in the late 1970s and early eighties, eventually resulting in the plant’s closing and clean-up. Corso, a visiting poet at the Poetics School, joined fellow poets Allen Ginsberg, Anne Waldman, and Peter Orlovsky at this August 1978 protest, organized by the Rocky Flats Truth Coalition, a coalition of Naropa students, Boulder activists, and concerned area residents. Poets read and sang, activists including Daniel Ellsberg spoke, and Buddhist priests chanted while police carried limp protesters to waiting police buses. The fluidity of the situation, as well as its do-it-yourself nature, was part of the protest.

The do-it-yourself culture already established in the co-op and music scenes in the Twin Cities encouraged the democratic and anti-institutional leanings of the poets who formed the Loft. The area is known as an incubator of a vibrant music community, with most of the attention on the 1980s and 1990s. Yet music activism of the sixties and seventies not only greatly influenced the city’s wider artistic environment, but had a wide influence on the national folk music (and pop music) scene as well, Bob Dylan serving as the most eminent. During the brief time that he lived down the street from Rusoff’s bookstore, he was going to concerts and open mikes around the corner and across campus, listening to the likes of Koerner, Ray, & Glover, a folk trio specializing in acoustic blues and folk songs. Their emphasis on this music deeply influenced Dylan, who took that sound with him when

he went to New York in 1961. The do-it-yourself culture of folk shows and music in the Twin Cities provided an example to the poets who began to do the same thing in the 1970s. The musicians played for tips at coffeehouses and bars such as the Extemporé on Cedar, the 10 O'clock Scholar near campus, and the Viking Bar on Riverside, a long-time center for local musicians (only recently closed down). After a few years of playing for tips, some of the musicians formed a co-op that eased promotions, concert management, and dealing with bar and coffeehouse owners to negotiate terms and pay. Food co-ops were very active in the area, as the Twin Cities were home to one of the largest and most advanced co-op movements in the country.

In the 1970s, this notion that artists, musicians, poets, and other countercultural activists could pool their resources and know-how caught on powerfully. The counterculture was a do-it-yourself culture that said that artists need not wait to be discovered, but that they could discover themselves without waiting for institutions or the establishment to grant access to rights and privileges. The folk scene in the Twin Cities thus created its own cultural capital and methods for distributing it and growing it. One of the more famous outgrowths of this is the highly regarded indie-folk label Red House Records, which owes its beginnings to the music scene of the 1970s and 1980s.

From music to politics, these poets' lives were touched with fire. Just across the street from Marly Rusoff's bookstore, where a post office and other stores now stand, was the site of a major local protest. The local Dinkytown community of bohemians, artists, small business owners, and students protested the planned 1970 opening of a Red Barn, a fast-food restaurant in a barn-shaped building. The opening of the franchise in Dinkytown necessitated tearing down the older brick building recently vacated by a local business.

Neighborhood activists occupied the vacant building on April 1, 1970, and over the next month, the impact and size of the protests grew. Seventy people were arrested at the Dinkytown site alone, and similar unrest happened across campus at another Red Barn, including a car crashing through the front window during one protest. The chain eventually withdrew its plans to build in Dinkytown.

Other neighborhoods near the University of Minnesota experienced unrest and protests. The Cedar-Riverside neighborhood across the Mississippi river from the East Bank of the campus was a long-time home to musicians, hippies, and artists living cheaply in what was known as “Snustown” (a reference to the snuff tobacco used by Norwegian immigrants who established the neighborhood in the early 1900s). Their neighborhood coalition, already experienced at fighting establishment interests over the routing of Interstate 35W through the south side of the neighborhood in 1970, turned their attention that year to the planned construction of Riverside Plaza, a massive concrete apartment building based on the principles of Brutalism and Modernism and featured prominently in the opening to later seasons of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. The protests (lasting throughout the next three years) were ultimately unsuccessful, for the complex was finished in 1973 and razed blocks of old housing stock (in addition to blocks demolished by the University during its expansion into the West Bank in the 1960s). Riverside Plaza, which has served for years as a new home to thousands of immigrants and new citizens from Southeast Asia, and most recently from Somalia, was originally conceived as mixed-income housing for the city, a constant source of tax revenue, unlike the communal houses and crash pads the city destroyed by eminent domain.

This was a fervent atmosphere for the explosion in poetry activity that took place in the early seventies as the scene gave rise to communities of poets that challenged the hegemony of New Criticism in Minnesota. Michael Dennis Browne, a poet originally from England, moved to the Twin Cities in 1971 to teach in the University of Minnesota English department, a bastion of New Critical influence. John Berryman, James Wright, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren, among others, were some rather large stars in American poetry, and most of them contributed to the history and legacy of New Critical power at Minnesota.⁵¹ Previous to arriving in Minneapolis, Brown had taught at Columbia (and attended some events at the Poetry Project) and at Bennington, after receiving his Master's degree and teaching for a year at the Writer's Workshop in Iowa. He began teaching contemporary poetry writing and studies at Minnesota and frequented Marly Rusoff's bookstore, where he and Rusoff hatched the idea of having a writer's club meet there. Many of the poets who formed communities and reading series (such as Mary Logue and David Wojahn, who ran the "World Famous Poets" series) in the Twin Cities poetry scene in the 1970s credit Browne's classes, where many of them met, with inspiring them to write poetry and to form community. He encouraged a familial camaraderie, "collectively sitting around the family table" in his classes that carried over in his zeal for the work of the Loft.⁵²

In November of 1971, the Women Poets of the Twin Cities was established by women frustrated by the lack of women poets reading or speaking in the Twin Cities. Though it had a short tenure of just a few years, this loosely organized group gave a number of very well attended readings, including one to benefit the Minneapolis Rape Crisis center. Some of its members became leaders in later Twin Cities poetry communities. Phebe Hanson, Caroline Marshall, and Trish Hampl all served on the board of the Loft. Caroline

Marshall and Jenné Andrews developed the Smith Park Reading Series, which paired older writers with younger writers in a sort of guild format, where mentoring could occur between the poets. Smith Park hosted popular readings in the Varsity Theater in downtown Saint Paul, and after-parties at either Marshall's or Andrews' apartment (next door to each other on Summit Avenue) were legendary. A broadside series celebrating the readings documents the breadth of poets who participated in the readings, from nationally famous (Robert Bly and Meridel Le Sueur), to locally famous poets such as John Rezmerski, Freya Manfred, Jim Moore, and Wendy Knox.

Andrews and Marshall carried this idea outstate with their "Minnesota Poetry Out Loud"⁵³ project, where poets traveled in a "mini Chautauqua tour"⁵⁴ to different parts of the state, giving poetry readings and classes anywhere there was room, at potlucks, bars, and even a swimming pool. The poets, including Phebe Hanson, Bill Holmes, and Marshall, read to wildly diverse audiences in their effort to evangelize on behalf of poetry. Marshall has remarked that MNPO was about "exposing people to poetry . . . There was an outreach, we were kind of aggressive in our first outing with Poetry Out Loud . . . here were these poor little kids up against the fence in the swimming pool!"⁵⁵ MNPO lasted for five years, until both Andrews and Marshall went on to different projects.

Poets in the Schools (which changed its name to Community Programs in the Arts and Sciences—COMPAS—in 1974) tried to continue Minnesota Poetry Out Loud after the departure of Marshall and Andrews, but its main focus was on its educational programming, and the reading series eventually faded out in favor of other programs. Poets in the Schools was part of a national movement begun in 1968 by New York School poets such as Kenneth Koch and other poets closely connected to the Poetry Project who were concerned with the

lack of poetry education in public schools. In the Twin Cities, PIS created a venue for poets to meet each other and get paid to be poets. Poets visited schools and read to and taught students about poetry. Poets from all around the state of Minnesota met every year at the Landmark Center in downtown St. Paul for conferences, sharing ideas not only about what they were doing in schools, but in the activities of other members of the poetry scene. One result of this effort was the two volumes of *25 Minnesota Poets*, the anthology that helped establish the viability of the scene.

A number of magazines highlighting the work of Twin Cities and Minnesota poets as well as that of new and established poets from all over the country helped to energize the scene. *Dacotah Territory's* editor Mark Vinz called the literary energy and activity within the region part of a national “great literary flowering” due in part to the explosion of small presses and magazines. Vinz founded the magazine in 1971 to counter what he saw as a tendency on the part of Midwestern readers to “take their cues from far away and thus overlook much of what was in their midst.”⁵⁶ The magazine, published in Fargo, had editorial help from Tom McGrath and Robert Bly and contributors such as William Stafford. Other magazines such as *Lamp in the Spine* (discussed later in this chapter) and *Moons and Lion Tails* (1973-1977) had somewhat similar evangelistic projects. *Moons* collected poetry from all over the country and the Midwest (Number 4, from 1976, included work by David Ignatow, Mary Logue, Robert Bly, Candace Clayton, and Stephen Dunn), as well as reviews and essays, in effort to “encourage and stimulate the appreciation of modern poetry as one of the most dynamic and accessible of the contemporary art forms.”⁵⁷

Moons, edited by H. Schjotz-Christensen and Jim Perlman, was the precursor effort to Holy Cow! Press, which Perlman began so that poets would have more room for their

work than a literary journal was able to provide.⁵⁸ It was one of the very few Midwestern literary presses publishing poetry in the 1970s, and for thirty-five years, has been an established and well-respected press. The same goes for Coffee House Press, which Allan Kornblum began as The Toothpaste Press in West Branch, Iowa, with a second-hand letter press on which he printed chapbooks and broadsides (including *Countries* by Anne Waldman and Reed Bye). In 1977, Kornblum and his wife traveled to Saint Paul to participate in the Twin Cities' first book fair (which became the Great Midwestern Bookshow in 1981), and, based partly on their experience, of meeting other small press publishers and bookstore owners (such as David Unowsky from Hungry Mind Books), they moved to the Twin Cities in the early eighties and founded Coffee House.⁵⁹

As with the New York poets, Twin Cities poets such as Moore were trying to understand what poetic work meant in the seventies. As shown in the introduction, Moore's "At 7 a.m., Watching the Cars on the Bridge" demonstrates the Loft's attitude toward the work of being a poet and creating space for poets. As such, it is a poem of community. It plays with the notion of "work" as traditionally configured in the culture and makes of not going to work an inherent value instead of a bad character trait. By rejecting conventional life-ways, Moore and other early members of the Loft had to create their own work and write their own lives. Moore, who spent a year in prison for refusing to fight in Vietnam, came back to the cities in 1971, but did not find much for young writers. He and others took classes at the University of Minnesota from writers such as Allen Tate and John Berryman and James Wright, but these were not writing classes, they were lecture-based literature classes. Many of Tate's class sessions, Moore remembers, consisted of just the

poet reciting poems from memory.⁶⁰ As beneficial as this was for a young poet to hear, it did not satisfy his yearning for a countercultural writing community.

While challenging official verse culture in their poetics less explicitly than the St. Mark's poets did, Loft members' poetic work promoted community building. In some ways, the Loft's readings shared values with New Criticism, such as the primacy of the lyric subject and poems as finished works primarily intended to be conveyed through writing.⁶¹

However, the community practice of the Loft contrasted those values in important ways by valuing community over individual achievement and in being fiercely anti-academic.

Although the 1970s saw a huge increase in the number of Creative Writing programs within universities, writers and writing programs were subject to a great deal of suspicion and contempt in the academy. Thus, those on the outside vilified the academy as part of the "official culture." Events and classes at the Loft encouraged a type of camaraderie and democratic community that many members felt was lacking in the Twin Cities area previously.

Moore, in an essay for the final issue of *Lamp in the Spine*, the magazine he co-edited with his partner and fellow Saint Paul poet Patricia Hampl from 1971 to 1974, said that poets are "a reminder of everything the official culture seeks to repress."⁶² Throughout his essay, Moore continually uses the term "official culture"⁶³ as a contrast to what he and other poets were doing. Written as the first classes at the Loft were getting underway, Moore's essay is an argument for the outsider status of the poet, for both the curses and gifts of the poet as a perpetual outsider who provokes the mainstream culture and provides alternatives to it. He combines the work of poetry writing—its way of creating a new language and a "new way of thinking"—with the need for poets to gather together and to form the kinds of

connections seen in other repressed groups.⁶⁴ He and his confrères created and sustained these connections within the poetic communities of the 1970s, through small-press publishing and readings.

One cold night in 1975, in a renovated fire station used as a performance space near the Dinkytown area of Minneapolis, Moore jumped up, bushy hair waving with the motion, and gleefully recited “At 7 a.m., Watching the Cars on the Bridge” to the raucous applause of about 40 people seated on the floor around him. The event was “A Sampler of Minnesota Poets,” a fund-raiser for the newly created Loft and a celebration of Buddha’s birthday. Most of the audience sat crossed-legged or on knees, in the center of the room, while some sat in chairs against the wall. The seating arrangement was a rough circle, with many of the audience facing each other. The poets who read were somewhat scattered throughout this arrangement. The audience and poets were dressed in 1970s student style, with a preponderance of sweaters over button-up shirts.⁶⁵ Poets including Phebe Hanson, Michael Dennis Browne, and Robert Bly took turns rising from the floor and reading or reciting poems that somehow engaged the theme of “sudden changes.”

The Loft’s and Poetics School’s performance and embodiment combine the elements of subculture that Dick Hebdige theorizes in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, primarily conjuncture and specificity. Re-tooling Gramsci’s terms for his examination of British punk in the 1970s, Hebdige theorizes conjuncture as the intersection of a number of contexts. Specificity is an intentional communication from a group to the larger culture, a communication motivated by the values that inform that smaller group’s behavior.⁶⁶ The specificity of practice often signifies a refusal of the values of the mainstream culture. For example, punk teens often wore safety pins not on mended or worn clothing as a form of

thrift or modesty, but in their skin, to provoke outrage through their deviation. For Hebdige, it is the specificity of practices that signifies the group's refusal within the conjuncture / interstice of its specific economic, political, and cultural contexts. These practices are the symbols of the community.

According to Hebdige, these subcultures are not isolated from, but engage with the "larger system of industrial culture." It is this "communal and symbolic" engagement on the part of these dissenting communities that allows them to create their own subculture. They "cobble" together a mix of the conditions and styles available to them at specific points in history and geography. They use these "styles" to construct subcultural identities that separate them from the larger culture and that explain the community to itself. So the reading styles of the Loft and the Poetics School in their early years were meaningful indicators of their values as poetic communities because they worked as symbols.

In comparison to traditional modes of poetry performance, the Firehouse and Rocky Flats readings were not all that radical in the range of poetry presentations with which many contemporary readers are likely familiar. In fact, given the rise of slam poetry, performance poetry, and spoken word (and popular media's broadcasting of these orally-based poetics' most iconic images), these two examples might sound fairly quaint. As described by Lesley Wheeler in *Voicing American Poetry*, academic poetry readings tend to use a number of academic conventions taken from the model of academic lecture, such as a podium for the reader, the audience seated in orderly rows of chairs, and a lack of dialogic reciprocation between audience and speaker.⁶⁷ The Poetics School's and the Loft's readings—the work of making poetry public—clearly demonstrate how they defined their communities' goals and aesthetics in the early years. Their readings, which stood in contradistinction to the typical

traditional academic reading, worked to create spaces of representation for promoting specific visions of community to members and audiences and for negotiating the complex situations of poetry and politics in the 1970s. Unlike the quasi-religious and reverent setting of traditional poetry readings wherein polite audiences quietly listened to a single author delivering timeless beauty in a calm voice from a podium, readings at the Loft and the Poetics School noisily (and sometimes chaotically) brought their own version of beauty into community. Poetry was thus a creation of and for the community, and this was a major difference between these communities and more mainstream and official poetry institutions.

Readings at the Poetics School and at the Loft in the early years embodied this anti-institutionalism and attempted to suture members into their respective visions of the work of poetry (marking the interior and exterior perceptions of the communities), as well as continue the work of social, cultural, and institutional rupturing their founding members valued. Each community sought to embody and to transmit through its work the goals and values of the community, even though some of these messages were at times unintentional. These performances sutured audiences into the communities' value structures.

They also telescoped the values (and tensions about those values) of these communities and what they desired from poetry and their audiences. For the Poetics School at Naropa, political activism was linked explicitly to poetry, in that poems themselves could be active resistors to war, racism, and oppression. Changing the form of poetry and poetry performance could change the world—this was active work. At the Loft, poetic practices enhanced a communal economics that supported the poets, a dismantling of traditional poetic hierarchy (where students became teachers and vice versa), and conventional ways of

life were eschewed in favor of putting the work of reading and writing, of community building, first.

Buddhism

As a commentator on Kornblum's blog noted, many believed that establishing presses and magazines was a countercultural and political act.⁶⁸ This countercultural vision included the exploration of non-Western belief systems. Bruce Schulman points out that the 1970s were a time of a "great awakening" in spirituality, especially in non-western religions and philosophies. For many members of Western countercultures, this turn to non-Western religions was one of a number of avenues they explored for escaping mainstream culture, often in communities dedicated to that exploration.⁶⁹ While for some, Buddhism was a passing interest in the service of self-exploration, many, like Waldman and Ginsberg, took committed and life-long vows of Buddhist practice.

For Waldman, community was not a by-product of her work at Naropa; it was the point, a goal in and of itself. This was a value for Waldman since her early days, when she was introduced to Buddhism at her Quaker secondary school.⁷⁰ She carried this value with her as she assumed the directorship of the Poetry project in 1966. But soon, the intimate sense of community that Waldman and others had constructed at the Poetry Project became harder to maintain as the organization began to institutionalize (it needed to accommodate more poetry classes, develop grant-writing strategies, and organize its various publishing enterprises). People were leaving the city, getting tired of its "hassles." The trinity of community, poetry, and spirituality has always guided Waldman's work. She has remarked that her personal Buddhist view sees her work "as a kind of spiritual practice . . . that's hard

to talk about,” always asking “what is the spiritual commodity—what’s the value, how are things valued in this work that we do?”⁷¹ There is the “work” of poetry, and there is, to use another of Waldman’s phrases, the work of “making the world safe for poetry.”⁷² She has added spiritual capital to cultural capital. For Waldman, spiritual practice includes community practice. That is, in mainstream Christian configurations of faith practice, one’s expression of one’s faith is separate from the acts that one does as inspired by that faith—these are separate activities. Waldman sees activism not just as an expression of faith, but a direct engagement of it and point of access to it. Practicing her faith is not just meditating and chanting, but creating sacred community. It isn’t so much “faith” as it is “practice” in Buddhism. The concept of “faith” in traditional theistic religions involves a set of beliefs that operate in a system of practice that enforces and supports those beliefs. But “practice” in the sphere of Buddhism is the goal itself. It is not so much about what you believe, but about what you notice you believe. Of course there are certain tenets of Buddhism that come out of the practice, such as: suffering happens, and attachment causes suffering. Part of practice is about learning to let go of attachment while at the same time working to do good.

Thus, building and sustaining community is an important part of practice for Waldman and an important part of being on a Buddhist path. She calls this a vow: “I took a vow early on to never give up on poetry or on the poetic community—to serve as votary to this high and rebellious art.”⁷³ Community, as mentioned in the introduction, mediates a poet’s public life. This is spiritual work for her, beyond comradeship and fellow-feeling (which are good things by themselves). She believes that it is only within community that poetry has a point and that it survives. Poetry does work in the world, but only in the world,

in the midst of and in cooperation with people. For Waldman, unlike for the New Critics, poetry does not exist as separate from the contexts that create it, and therefore, some of the contexts themselves deserve attention and need to be preserved, created, and sustained.⁷⁴

During the time that Waldman was running the Poetry Project, Allen Ginsberg was traveling through Europe, the Middle East, and India with Peter Orlovsky, learning more about Buddhism, Hinduism drugs, and meditative practices. Over the roughly two years that he and Orlovsky spent in India, Ginsberg was introduced to and began to practice rudimentary yoga and Buddhism. While he did not seriously commit to Buddhist practice for another decade, his time in India learning and practicing was foundational and essential. He traveled extensively within and outside the United States, giving readings, doing research, participating on panels, and becoming more and more involved in the growing anti-war movement and in defending his friends and colleagues from bogus drug charges or infringements on their free speech. Ginsberg worked hard on behalf of other poets, including those whose performance and gathering spaces were being threatened in New York in 1964. His fame grew, and in the late sixties, Ginsberg looked for places where he could retreat from the public life he had created for himself as such a staunch defender of poetry, sexual freedom, drug experimentation, peace, and countercultural expression. In 1968, he bought a farm four hours away from New York City in an attempt to wean peter off of drugs, and soon bought his other rural property in Northern California.

Ginsberg met Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche,⁷⁵ the founder of Naropa Institute, in 1970, when he stole a taxi from the monk in New York City. The two of them did not really talk until 1971, when they found themselves at the same social events, and that year, Ginsberg took formal Buddhist vows with Trungpa as his meditation teacher. By 1972, their

discussions included the intellectual groundwork necessary to fulfill Trungpa's vision of Naropa, an institute combining Buddhist practice with other arts, such as poetry, dance, and music. Ginsberg was immediately taken with the Tibetan Buddhist monk, even though he had heard a number of unpleasant rumors about him. Reputed to be an alcoholic and a womanizer, Trungpa was also reputed to be a first-rate teacher of meditation with the pedigree of having rigorously trained and studied in the highest doctrines in his lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. His lineage is often called the "mishap lineage," and he used what he called "crazy wisdom" in his reliance on unconventional teaching methods to break through Western materialism. He did not fit received notions of monasticism, either: he used western marketing methods to build his meditation centers, and he openly got drunk and slept around. He was the first Tibetan to attend Oxford, and he started the first meditation center in the West (in Scotland). He was eventually forced out of that center, however, and he then came to Canada and America, where he founded many more centers, including Kharma Dzong in Boulder, the site of a famous 1972 poetry reading when Trungpa made fun of Robert Bly as he read with Gary Snyder and Ginsberg.⁷⁶ Despite the rift in his literary friendships that this reading caused, Ginsberg signed on and committed to personal vows as well as to building the Poetics School at Naropa. Much more about Trungpa and the first five years of the Poetics School will be discussed in the next chapter.

The News of Feminism

The spiritualism and interest in Eastern mysticism prevalent among some poets developed in parallel with feminism, one of the key concerns of which—evidenced by such books as *When God Was a Woman*—was the patriarchal ideology of traditional Western

religions. Feminism was another important element in the Loft's and the Poetics School's countercultural identities. That is, feminism was an explicit value for them. Both Waldman and Rusoff were strong leaders at the beginning, and the leadership of each group consistently included women. Many of the early leaders of the Loft held leadership positions in other communities, such as Women Poets of the Twin Cities. Their commitment to and practice of feminism allied them firmly, though not unproblematically,⁷⁷ with leftists and activists.

At Naropa, feminism took on a more clearly aesthetic edge, as can be seen in the poetics of Anne Waldman, whose actual aesthetics rejected traditional forms of poetry and injected a feminist consciousness not only into content, but into structure as well. Waldman's famous poem "Fast Speaking Woman" is such a poem, as it expresses in content and form Waldman's exploration of the space of womanhood. Repetition and an estrangement to the work distinguishes it from traditional poetry, because, in homage to Olson's poetic dictum "keep it moving, citizen" (Waldman was heavily influenced by Olson) the poem moves speedily through the difference versions of womanhood. By repeating the phrase "I'm a _____ woman," with each line a different sort of woman, for example,

I'm a shouting woman

I'm a speech woman

I'm an atmosphere woman

I'm an airtight woman

I'm a flesh woman⁷⁸

Waldman opens, through the space of this chant-poem, a space wherein "woman" can become redefined. This poem was inspired by the chants of Maria Sabina, a South

American curandera (folk healer) in the 1970s,⁷⁹ and Waldman sees poems as magic spaces where work—the political work of feminism, or the work of healing a sick fellow poet, as in her poem “Billy Work Peyote”—is accomplished.

For Loft poets Moore and Hampl, feminist politics got expressed and articulated through the 1970s feminism that asserted that the personal was political. Both have said that they were highly influenced by this idea as humans and as poets. Writing in his biographical note for *25 Minnesota Poets*, Jim Moore lauded feminism for how it “revealed and developed connections between the personal and the political,” and how feminism was crucial to his own development as a poet: “it has shown me a way out of the isolation and resultant self-pity that has played such an important part in the writing of contemporary male poets.”⁸⁰ This vivified the daily details of Moore’s and others’ poetry in a way that took on a political edge—i.e., their poems are open to interpretation with a specifically feminist lens that “reads” the images and details in their work as part of a politically feminist paradigm (and reads isolation as putatively male). The practice of feminism can be a practice of poetry as well—if one of the grounding theses of feminism is that privilege should be questioned—in not only feminism’s results, but also its mechanisms, then the same can be true for poetry in the world. The Loft could, in this sense, be likened to a poetic version of a “feminist consciousness-raising rap group”⁸¹ that emphasized collective and collaborative decision making and leadership, where process was emphasized over product, and where access to poetry, like access to knowledge or power, was democratized. In the Loft, however, feminism was not used as an aesthetic critique. The Loft poets were less aesthetically adventurous than those at the Poetics School, so unlike Waldman, who tried to take political,

feminist, and religious forms into her work, the poets at the Loft were using forms that already existed within their community to express feminist sentiments.

Hampl and Moore articulate the importance of a political feminism to the suturing of community. Hampl states that “There wasn’t much in terms of community for writers in 1974 and that specifically in terms of the very early days of what became the Loft, we were galvanized not only by the idea of a community for writers, per se, but about the fact that there was still nowhere around where people were teaching the books and writers we felt were important or teaching even classic works in ways that took into account the newly hatched points of view that were so thrilling at the time.”⁸² Those “newly hatched points of view” made them re-evaluate their received notions of gender, race, economics, and other social and cultural institutions. The feminist texts Hampl speaks of (many by Virginia Woolf, for example) were important because they urgently spoke to these writers about the current political and social climate, even though many of these texts (such as those being recovered and rediscovered by feminist scholars in the seventies) were written decades or centuries before.

Hampl and Moore honored this recovery in their choice of title for the magazine *The Lamp in the Spine*, begun when they were in transition between the Writer’s Workshop in Iowa and Saint Paul in 1971. Taking from Woolf’s idea of the “lamp in the spine” to mean a fuller sense of the imagination than the “hard little electric light” of the intellect, the editors hoped that their magazine would thus critique the Enlightenment male intellectual values and the gendered split between the academic and creative impulses. Hampl and Moore felt that *Lamp* was a place “for poetry and politics—politics understood in the broadest possible terms because of course, as poets, we thought the notion that ‘the personal is political’ was a

terrific slogan—whatever it meant!”⁸³ Combining the galvanization of second wave feminism with political and literary activism proved a potent brew for this little magazine.⁸⁴ *Lamp* ran nine issues between 1971 and 1974. The last issue was published in the summer of 1974, just as the Loft began to form. Many in the Twin Cities scene read the magazine, and its contributors ranged from the local to the international, including Michael Dennis Browne, Miroslav Holub, Tom McGrath, Pablo Neruda, Jenné Andrews, and Albert Goldbarth.

“The personal is the political” is an oft-used description of the forms that politics took in the 1970s: by situating politics within the person and her life story, and sometimes, within her body, an activist could bring global or national poetics and politics to the local situation. That is, they related women’s personal stories to the more abstract themes of political movements and goals. Making the personal political bridged lived experience to wider political action. This was a key tenet of sixties and seventies feminism—often theorized and acted upon in the women’s “rap groups” where individual women shared their personal experiences with a sympathetic group. Often the moderators of such groups sought, in the different recitations of these personal experiences, key themes or evidence of underlying political structures that influenced individual members’ lives.

For Hampl and Moore, poetry was this forum. Both cite the influence of feminism on their thinking as poets, and their editorship of the magazine bears out this influence. Their practice distinctly differed from the poetry being advocated at the podiums of the University of Minnesota, which, as previously mentioned, was a major center of New Criticism. The politics and practice of poetry at the university contributed to Moore’s and Hampl’s feelings of discontent, as it required a de-historicizing and de-contextualizing of

poems, cleaving them from any current (or past) political associations. Emphasizing the work above all else, New Criticism as expressed from its positions of power depended on the privilege of a position untouched by history or politics, and giving women the power of being muses only.⁸⁵

The poet Phebe Hanson, member of the Women Poets of the Twin Cities and later of the Loft, rejected the “privilege” of being sealed off from history, and she rejected woman’s relegation to muse-dom. Her poems in the first volume of *25 Minnesota Poets* demonstrate a quiet grappling with feminist concerns in the context of daily life. “Missing Lips” is one of a number of Hanson’s poems from these years that show a fascination with the mouth—perhaps some larger metaphor for political woman’s new-found ability to speak.⁸⁶ Hanson’s positioning of the lips as unruly daughters who refuse their mothers’ rules and warnings illustrates a generational divide that Hanson likely saw played out within her own social circle. In her biographical statement for *25 Minnesota Poets*, Hanson states that she was a fairly typical housewife of the 1950s, settling in to “bring up babies, bake bread, take care of foster children, work in the peace movement, go to League of Women voters meetings, and teach Sunday school.” But that lifestyle changed when she engaged with feminist thought and politics: “Then I read *The Feminine Mystique*, learned to drive a car, went back to the U (University of Minnesota), got a teaching job . . .”⁸⁷ Independence as seated in the car, getting one’s own source of money—these were the markers of a new life for women who made these choices. In “Missing Lips,” the speaker of the poem consistently tries to wrangle her lips into “proper” behavior that will keep them from getting into any sort of trouble. In “Tower Shower,”⁸⁸ (“a heard poem”), the speaker of the prose poem (overheard in an apartment elevator building) complains about the ingratitude of the young.

Readers discover at the end of the poem that the speaker is the bride's mother-in-law-to-be, but the most interesting element of Hanson's poem is the way that it elucidates generational and class difference. "We were taught to be nice" might be the summation of the complainer's statements in the elevator. Young women these days are not, is the implication, and if the content of the harangue was about anything but the young woman's impending nuptials, Hanson and her readers might have written this off as just another generational gripe. But because it involves marriage, that ritual and cultural institution which (up until the 1960s) was the only way for white, middle-class women to achieve adult status in this culture, the mother-in-law's complaints take on a darker tinge.

Wedding "gifts" are no longer "appreciated" as they used to be: "No respect for grownups at all. She just tore the paper off. No respect. It didn't used to be that way. I can remember showers I've gone to where the girl was so grateful and sweet and opened the presents carefully . . . But there's so little respect for anything anymore. Just take what you can get and don't bother to thank anyone."⁸⁹ The gifts of a wedding shower in the 1950s were the "gifts" of marriage that hold the woman captive within and dependent on a relationship legalized and sanctioned by the state. Married women who worked were still in the minority in the middle class, and most of the women who did work gave up working once they got married. Hanson uses this moment of overheard conversation as a space to meditate on the differences between generations of women.

Caroline Marshall, a friend and colleague of Hanson's (both leaders in Women Poets of the Twin Cities and Minnesota Poetry Out Loud) saw poetry as a space for writing a kind of community news.⁹⁰ Like Hanson's poetry, the sort of community news in Marshall's poetry has to do with the consequences of the new choices that feminism has presented to

individual women. In “I Dream the Divorce is Final,” the speaker of the poem goes to a family friend’s for coffee and finds her mother’s friends clucking and cooing over her recent divorce. The community of women, upon hearing about the split, have gathered around the speaker. They have gathered to express their sympathy, to “take her in” as the hostess does when she arrives at the door. The women tell the speaker how sorry they are for her, her daughter, and her mother, implicating in three generations the damage that the divorce of one has wrought. The speaker seems to know this as she watches the women watching her. Again, demarcating a difference of generations (these are her mother’s friends, not hers), she sees them look at their pocket mirrors, but they do not see the speaker’s “pink wings or the rhododendron breaking through the branches.”⁹¹ They do not see, in other words, the images of liberation emerging from her body or from the world. Again, like Hanson, Marshall comments on what must have been an incredibly painful experience: the judgment (expressed in this poem by clucking) of her by the older women and the split of history between them. No wonder poetry becomes both news and ritual.

Money, Poetry, and Community

The economics of the majority of the 1970s were dictated in large part by international and domestic events of 1973. October 16 of that year was the beginning of the oil embargo that caused a recession for the rest of the year. The OPEC countries cut off their supply of oil to the U.S. in retaliation for the U.S.’s support of Israel during the Yom Kippur war. This energy crisis (not to be confused with the energy crisis of 1979, triggered by the Iranian revolution), combined with the stock market crash of 1973-74, had persistent economic effects in each sector of American life, affecting college admission rates,

employment statistics, and inflation. In addition to the emotional effects of the end of the post WWII boom, the crashes and crises of the early to mid-seventies stripped the resources of an already economically beleaguered populace. The economic downturns of the 1970s played a big role in the waning of the Movement, in addition to the persecution mentioned earlier. For poets, what the recession and economic sickness meant was that it was much harder to simply live as poets without some sort of external support, usually in the form of an unrelated job, until grant money from the National Endowment for the Arts became available. Because of Johnson's Great Society programs, the NEA enjoyed huge increases in funding for all arts in the late 1960s and 70s.

However, these infusions of grant money for the arts could not stop the general direction of the economy. The urban economy that had worked so well for artists in the 1960s began to break down as large economic factors began to influence neighborhoods like the Lower East Side in New York and Dinkytown in Minneapolis. City administrations shifted tax bases, and cheap, run-down buildings became either gentrified (forcing out low-rent paying artists) or complete slums where artists could not live safely. Cities enforced stricter cabaret codes in alignment with local, state, and national drives aimed at discouraging mass protests and civil disobedience. Cities tried to make it harder for communes and community houses to exist, as they decreased tax revenue.

Lewis Hyde, who grew up in Minnesota and attended the University of Minnesota with some of the Loft members, expressed ideas especially prescient to the economic situation of artists in the 1970s. Originally published in 1982, *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World* is a classic among artists for its articulation of the gifts and problems for artists who live in market economies. "Every modern artist who has chosen to labor with a

gift must sooner or later wonder how he or she is to survive in a society dominated by market exchange.”⁹² Thus it is rare when an artist can sequester herself entirely away from the prevailing economic system. “Choosing to labor with a gift” precludes other forms of activity, especially financially dependable ones in a market economy where one sells products *and* time.

Avoiding for the time being some of Hyde’s more essentializing and romanticizing ideas about non-white cultures that operate with gift economies, we can see how some of his arguments apply to how the Loft and the Poetics School saw themselves and to how they wanted others to see them. He says that within artistic communities, which he classifies more generally as gift economies and cultures, “unlike the sale of a commodity, the giving of a gift tends to establish a relationship between the parties involved. Furthermore, when gifts circulate within a group, their commerce leaves a series of interconnected relationships in its wake, and a kind of decentralized cohesiveness emerges.”⁹³ Such gifts in a poetic community would likely include poems (delivered via voice or print), performances, food, labor, income-generating work, a place to crash, use of technologies such as a phone or a mimeo machine, grant money / applications, publication credentials, help with rent, clothing exchanges, artistic laborers, transportation, writing partners and feedback, editors, performance and work space, audience, comradeship, mentorship, books and magazines (like a lending library), babysitting, domestic labor, publicity, exposure, access to other artistic production, and collaborators.⁹⁴ These exchanges are important to these two communities because the ethos of the gift economy distinguishes them from other communities. Ethnographer Victor Turner has argued that Ginsberg and the Beats embraced the refusal of transactional interactions as a symbol for their community; they “‘opt out’ of the status-bound social

order and acquire the stigmata of the lowly, dressing like ‘bums,’ itinerant in their habits, ‘folk’ in their musical tastes, and menial in the casual employment they undertake.”⁹⁵ In part rejection of the capitalist mainstream, and in part driven by necessity, the “gift economy” enabling the trade of art and work in these communities allowed them to define their own value (and the value of the work) in a method distinct from the mainstream culture.

Hyde asserts that the difference in the means of exchange demarcates boundaries between members and non-members. Artistic communities needed to maintain their identities as gift economies within market economies and in interactions with that market economy. Hyde uses the example of Jews in medieval Europe, who lent money to their co-religionists for free, but charged gentiles and others a fee for the same service. This system allowed them to maintain the strength of their community thresholds while providing the necessary flexibility to interact with the outside world. “It was also the law of the gate—it marked the difference between loan and gift, between outsider and insider.”⁹⁶ The boundary of a community is the place where proper behavior toward gifts is taught. For example, if a broadsheet of poetry is given as a gift, then the recipient is part of the community. If asked to buy the broadsheet, the purchaser is an outsider. Gifts establish and maintain these bonds, while commodity trade alienates people from one another.⁹⁷

Gifts were also a crucial method by which artistic communities justified the money they received as artists. A grant is free money, unlike a loan. It is rewarded based on merit, not in anticipation of repayment with capital or labor. One of the other significant aspects of the 1970s is the previously mentioned increase in National Endowment for the Arts money. Aside from the considerable monetary boost the NEA funding gave many writers, it provided an affirmation of the value of art and artists to the culture. Historian Donna M.

Binkiewicz has argued that President Johnson and others saw the NEA as a way to further America's Cold War ambitions on a cultural rather than political level, whereas others (such as Nixon) saw the money as a way to placate irascible and trouble-making artists who might otherwise spend their time protesting.⁹⁸

The NEA boost also acknowledged that art and art making had power and importance in the life of the country. While backers of the increased funding hoped to demonstrate that the US was a mature and worldly country, it also provided hope to those who saw the expansion of money to the arts as a progressive victory in which art was valued as viable political and cultural speech. One of the important results of this new funding, in terms of how these decisions would change the communities, was that these communities had to apply for and administer this money. There were no governmental grants for political organizing, so if people in these communities had experience with money, it was from private sources or donations, and no one donation covered a whole budget. Being accountable to new funding sources was new territory for these poets, and it made them painstakingly evaluate the sorts of relationships they wanted to engage in with potential funders as well as those to whom they sold labor or services. Grants from the private or public sphere made these communities ask numerous questions they might have not really wanted to, such as: if the Loft accepted a grant funded in part by a competitor to Rusoff's bookstore, was it endorsing that competitor? If the Poetics School accepted a grant from the NEA, did that mean it was tacitly endorsing other actions by the government, or that the behavior of the administrators and poets would be more closely scrutinized? Did accepting a grant from an organization mean that the Loft or the Poetics School had to align itself with

the goals or beliefs of that organization? Is it worth being countercultural in a culture that is now giving people money to make and evangelize art?

As previously discussed, these poets' relationship to mainstream economic structures and practices within the American market economy partly defined their identities as countercultural. Yet the compromises forced by the positive and negative economic changes of the seventies modified this relationship: it was not so clearly oppositional as it had been. In the coming years, the Poetics School and the Loft faced crises that brought these questions and conflicts into sharp relief. How they answered the questions and dealt with the conflicts changed these communities irrevocably, and these changes are the subject of my investigation in the second and third chapters.

Chapter 2. Some Horrible Yaargh: The Failure of Poetry as a Suturing Symbol at The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, 1975-1980

“Vajracharya Trungpa! Don’t mention the naked poet at the Halloween Party!”
—Allen Ginsberg, “Elephant in the Meditation Hall,”
Cosmopolitan Greetings: Poems 1986-1992

After accepting Trungpa’s invitation to build a Poetics School at Naropa Institute, Allen Ginsberg and Anne Waldman traveled to Boulder in preparation for Naropa’s first summer session in 1974. Although the materials to build the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics were scarce (they had to wait a month or two for a desk and for their own office), Ginsberg and Waldman brought with them more than a decade of organizing, teaching, publishing, networking, and poetic-community-building-experience. Most importantly, they brought with them the community ties they built through that work in New York, San Francisco, and throughout the country. These were ties to the poets who embraced the New American Poetry discussed in the Introduction and the previous chapter. The New American Poetry was an interventionist and oppositional poetics, and many of the groups included in that loose confederation of poets took as their conscious aim the dismantling of New Criticism through experimentation with poetic form and language, through democratization of poetic capital, and through political action as poets in the New Left (sometimes including politics as thematic content in poems).

The poets in this network considered themselves the larger community of the Poetics School (outside of the smaller circle of poets who regularly taught there, such as Anselm Hollo, Clark Coolidge, Diane DiPrima, Lew Warsh, Bernadette Mayer, and Jack

Collom), as continuing the legacy of the New American Poetry was a goal of Waldman's and Ginsberg's work there.¹ These poets were friends and friendly fellow activist-poets, correspondents, students, publishers, editors, and anthologists of the smaller circle. Despite considerable stylistic, political, and personal differences between poets and schools within this broader group, they had managed to sometimes work together on the goals mentioned above during the 1950s and '60s. But their ability to overcome the differences lessened after they reached some of their major goals and they had to face new and different realities as poets and poetry activists in the 1970s.

This chapter analyzes the differences produced by the varying answers and approaches to the following questions: could poetry and poetry-in-community be accomplished as it was in the 1960s (and was this desirable)? Was political activism still a valid activity for poets as poets (not just as citizens)? Were schools as defined in the 1960s (New York School, Black Mountain School, the Beats, etc.) still useful and feasible? Should poetry be explicitly linked to activism? What was poetry's role in the counterculture, and what should that role be in the future? In the conflicts that gave rise to these questions, and that came to be known as "The Great Naropa Poetry Wars" (described in detail below), I see a series of discordances, frictions, and schisms within the community of poets associated with the Poetics School in the years between 1975-1980. This series of events highlighted the already present struggles over the definition and ownership of oppositional poetic projects, thus forcing these poets, in sometimes very painful moments, to make the suturing symbols of their communities more specific. This chapter argues that what happened during these years illustrates how communities are constantly forced to suture in the face of competing aims and goals. They do continue to function, as in the Rocky Flats protest

discussed in chapter 1, despite the ruptures, but they are changed. I am not after a simple distinction between stasis and dynamism as played out in the evolution of these two communities, however; I see in this “limit case” the more subtle, yet no less important, implications of the lessons learned. Those lessons have to do with the ease by which communities formed and broke up in the 1960s and 1970s, and what that says about the general times—i.e., a widespread rejection of received narratives of friendship, family, romance, religion, and authenticity, etc. in favor of new (and sometimes frustrating) embraces of ambiguity or a lack of firm commitment to any one set of ideologies or life ways. The lesson is that sometimes it took painfully clear statements of ideologies—statements that excluded certain values and certain people who would not agree with those values—for communities to grow and work. Another lesson learned in the Great Naropa Poetry Wars is that felicitous fellow feeling—deep regard one may have for another—may not be enough to hold people within a community when its goals go beyond the encouragement of that felicity. The experiences of the seventies taught that the images of togetherness and unity on goals common across different groups of minorities or activists so prevalent in the sixties—images that may or may not have had a basis in reality—did not reflect the realities of the decade. While unity might have been easily accomplished in some circumstances, the history of these years made that fairly impossible. A quite nefarious example of this was the FBI’s sabotaging of the relationship between different groups working for African American rights in Chicago.² Divides that had been evident all along, such as that between straight and gay women within the feminist movement, devolved into factions, including in one famous incident when the lesbian writer Rita Mae Brown and a

number of other women resigned from the National Organization for Women because of its leadership's distancing of itself from lesbianism and from gay rights.

This chapter has a historical element in that it highlights the various issues that threatened the unity of the Loft and the Poetics School in this particular period, e.g. religious doctrinarism and fears about conformity, hierarchies within poetry circles, the intervention of money and the resulting celebrity system, and deference to or affiliation with particular poets. During the 1960s, the symbol of "oppositional poetics" or "poetry" in general may have been enough to hold these poets together, long as they did not examine or attempt to define that opposition more closely. I argue that the Great Naropa Poetry Wars forced them to do just that. Because these tensions and schisms and questions were always present, the symbol of oppositional poetry would have broken down anyway, though likely not quite as spectacularly. This point is often elided in recitations that focus on the sensationalism of the story. The Great Naropa Poetry Wars became a chimera that obscured the real problem, which is how "poetry" ultimately failed to suture these poets into a lasting community.

A great deal of writing about the original incident that involved Trungpa, W.S. Merwin, and Dana Naone (and the subsequent events) appeared in literary reviews, popular-interest magazines, reports, and letters, during the five years immediately following the incident, but no one performed a scholarly study of what the events meant to poetry, even though they were collectively called "poetry wars." After the 1980 publication of Tom Clark's *The Great Naropa Poetry Wars*, which collected some reports, interviews, and letters, there was a precipitous drop-off in writing about the events until the late 1990s, a fact I discuss later. While the Beats and those connected to them have received increased critical attention over the last decade, the amount of poetry scholarship on the Beats or those they

influenced (such as Anne Waldman) is still relatively small, and to my knowledge, there is no scholarly study that treats the Great Naropa Poetry Wars as a problem of poetry. There is one that treats Trungpa's behavior during the Merwin / Naone Incident (as well as other incidents) as a problem of theology.³ This chapter reviews the literature about the event from that time period and is the only scholarly treatment of the Great Naropa Poetry Wars. In what follows, I describe the original incident and read the written reactions to it as documents of poetry and community.

In the fall of 1975, the poet W.S. Merwin and his partner, the Hawaiian poet Dana Naone, traveled to Snowmass, Colorado, to attend Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche's⁴ Intensive Training Seminar. Trungpa, while head of Naropa Institute (begun in 1974 and including Buddhist meditation training and dance, art, writing, and psychology classes), ran a series of advanced Buddhist retreats. Trungpa's religious lineage (a conjunction of two Tibetan Buddhist lineages, Kagyu and Nyingma) was one of "crazy wisdom," or the "mishap lineage," which Ginsberg characterized as "alchemizing shit into roses,"⁵ and which Trungpa used to break down the preconceptions that many of his Western students brought with them. Larry Sutin, in his history of Buddhism in the West, has remarked that "crazy wisdom" and "spiritual materialism" are two of the most oft-repeated phrases used in referring to Trungpa's teachings. "Spiritual materialism" referred to what Trungpa noticed as the Westerner's proclivity to hoard spiritual attainments as he would hoard capital, and this became one of Trungpa's most well-known teachings. "Crazy wisdom" was Trungpa's method of trying to reach enlightenment through pain and through unexpected and unconventional behavior—in other words, he saw that many misconstrued Buddhist practice as an escape from human pain, and so in his teachings (having undergone these same

teachings himself as a young monk-in-training), he strove to avoid pabulum by using unorthodox methods, such as squirting inattentive meditation students with a water gun.⁶ In Sutin's words, "One did not practice Buddhism to evade the realities of human existence," and Trungpa was the spiritual descendent of Marpa the Translator, who used emotional and physical extremes to teach his followers, including Milarepa, the most famous of Tibetan masters.⁷

In many ways, Trungpa was just the right person to start the first Buddhist university in the West. He had *savoir-faire* with Western notions of business and marketing (he probably could not have written *Spiritual Materialism* without this knowledge). He combined it with the skills of a teacher, easily transmitting principles of Tibetan Buddhism and franchising its meditation centers. He created an easily recognizable "brand" for the work of his Vajrahadtu and Shambhala organizations, and this innovation opened him to criticism. In addition to his unconventional pedagogy, many were uncomfortable with how well and how quickly he attracted students. Not only were his marketing methods deemed unseemly by Buddhist purists and some onlookers, but it is likely that many of his critics were mad at him for not fitting the cultural stereotype of the docile, wise, and quiet monk. Trungpa was a handsome young man who liked to drink and have relationships with many different women. His critical reception was complicated. On the one hand, some of Trungpa's critics had a hard time accepting how well he adapted to the Western world. On the other hand, those who might have had some experience with different Asian cultures or Buddhists might have been prone to idealize him, provoking a much more virulent reaction than the first because of the way that Trungpa so adamantly violated these racialized stereotypes. "Crazy wisdom" did not concur with their notions of ancient, sage, mysterious, and gentle wisdom

from the East—as though Asian monks were somehow immune to Western personality problems like lust and violence.⁸ It is hard to ignore the racism in these reactions to Trungpa, which I discuss later in this chapter.

Born in a hut in Tibet, Trungpa was discovered by Tibetan Buddhist monks and taken to be raised as a lama in training. Like the Dalai Lama, Trungpa escaped Tibet in 1959 (around age 20), and eventually left India for Oxford. After being the first Tibetan to do graduate from Oxford, he founded the Samye Ling meditation center in Scotland, one of the first Buddhist meditation centers in the West. He attracted many adherents and Western friends, among them poet Robert Bly, who visited Trungpa in Scotland and helped with a translation of Trungpa's book on meditation. In 1969, in a major mishap, Trungpa blacked out and crashed his car into a joke shop, permanently paralyzing his left side. After the accident, he renounced his monastic views and no longer kept secret his appetites for alcohol or women, remarking that he realized that he “could no longer attempt to preserve any privacy for myself, any special identity or legitimacy. I should not hide myself behind the robes of a monk, creating an impression of inscrutability which, for me, turned out to be only an obstacle.”⁹ This conversion, while liberating for his own practice, turned out to be an obstacle for many of his students and fellow monks in Scotland, and he was eventually forced out of his leadership position at Samye Ling.

In 1970, he and his new English wife moved to the U.S., and Trungpa established meditation centers throughout the U.S., beginning with Tail of the Tiger (now Karmé Choling) in Barnett, Vermont, and Kharma Dzong in Boulder, Colorado. He also taught a class through the University of Colorado in Boulder, and before long, he had many students and followers and friends, including poets upon whom he called to do fundraising readings

for the retreat centers. In 1972, Trungpa, Ginsberg, Robert Bly, and Gary Snyder did a benefit reading in Boulder for the center there. Trungpa was visibly drunk (and drinking still) during the reading. As Robert Bly read and interspersed his poems with talks on subjects relating to the poems, Trungpa, performing his own “drunken dumbshow,” put a gong over his head and banged it repeatedly. When the poets finished reading, he apologized to the audience for the poets, saying “I’m sure they don’t mean what they said . . . we didn’t mean to lay a trip on you . . . please forgive us.”¹⁰ Ginsberg was bemused and puzzled by the incident, but Snyder and Bly were more upset, and it caused a fissure between Bly on the one side, and Trungpa and Ginsberg on the other, that became a chasm a few years later during the Great Naropa Poetry Wars.

In early 1975, Merwin mentioned to Anne Waldman that he was interested in expanding his Buddhist training, and she suggested that he come to Naropa to investigate its offerings.¹¹ He and Dana Naone traveled Boulder that summer, and Merwin informally participated in some of the activities of the Poetics School. While there, Merwin became acquainted with Trungpa and asked if he and Naone might attend the intensive training seminar to be held in Snowmass that September. The couple had not completed any of the prerequisite trainings, and so at first their request was denied, but Merwin prevailed upon Trungpa, who eventually acquiesced.

As the training progressed through September and October, Merwin and Naone participated selectively in the training exercises and group activities, specifically in some of the chants used during meditation. These chants contained some violent imagery, and owing to Merwin’s background as a pacifist and peace activist (through which he met and became friends with Allen Ginsberg) he felt that he could not recite those chants. This selective

participation created some distance and tension between the couple and some of their fellow seminarians. For Halloween, Trungpa threw a party to celebrate the end of the second stage of training and the beginning of the intense third and final stage. It was a costume party: come as your neurosis. Merwin and Naone stopped briefly at the party and decided to retire early. Trungpa arrived later and asked after the couple. On discovering that the couple had already left for the evening, he asked students to invite them back down to the party, but the couple declined. Trungpa then ordered the students to bring the poets down from their room, even if by force. Merwin and Naone locked and barricaded their doors, and the seminary students managed to get in by breaking their glass patio door. Merwin engaged in fisticuffs and broke a bottle to use as a weapon. When he realized that he had drawn blood, he surrendered, and Merwin and Naone were taken to Trungpa.

Trungpa insulted the couple and they argued back. Trungpa tried to get Naone to agree with his argument that because the two of them were Asian, they had access to wisdom that white people did not. She refused and turned the discussion toward war, and Merwin joined in. Trungpa instructed the couple to strip, as he had ordered other revelers to strip previously that evening. Naone and Merwin refused, and he ordered his students to strip them. Merwin and Naone fought the students who attempted to strip them, and Naone asked students to help her. A student stepped in to help, Trungpa attacked him, and eventually the pair was stripped naked and left standing in the room. After Trungpa stripped himself and ordered everyone else still clothed to disrobe, Merwin and Naone left the party. A few days later, they met with Trungpa and stayed for the rest of the training (another three weeks), but left before the next big party.¹² Over the years, many who heard this story have

wondered why they stayed after such treatment. In an interview with the Investigative Poetry students, Merwin explained their decision to stay:

(Trungpa) asked us to stay on. I said the decision must be Dana's, since I thought she had had much the worst of it. He urged her to please stay. Said there would be no more incidents; "one landmark was enough." We had talked it over, of course, and we did so again, in front of him. We'd come to study the whole course; we'd taken it (as he knew) seriously; we wanted to finish what we'd begun, and not be scared off. The last lap, about to begin, was the famous Tantric teachings. We said that if we stayed, it would be with no guarantees of obedience, trust, or personal devotion to him. He said alright [*sic*]; so did we, and we shook hands.¹³

They stayed through the end of the training, but left soon after, declining to attend the end-of-training bash.

Over the next five years, events related to and written about the Merwin / Naone Incident at Snowmass came to be known as "The Great Naropa Poetry Wars." They highlighted the frictions evident in the changes in attitudes among poets, in hidden tensions (subsequently laid bare) lurking underneath the amicable relationships of poets who had some investment in the success of the poetics school, in decisions the poets were forced to make because of these rupturing events, and in how these events altered or created persistent perceptions about Naropa and the Poetics School. Some of these perceptions included views of the poets as being in thrall to a religious dictator, poets sacrificing "poetry" to Buddhism, the school putting students and poets in danger, and the school creating a "star

system” of poets. Those perceptions did damage in the effects they had on the way the school was run and it damaged relationships among poets otherwise friendly to the community. They caused a shift in goals (aesthetic, poetic, institutional, political) and directions. While poetry might have worked as a suturing symbol for a short time, the instability created by different definitions of poetry, as well as contradictory pressures placed upon it, was too much for it to stand.

The major issue raised by the Great Naropa Poetry Wars is how a personal conflict between a couple and a Buddhist teacher became a conflict among prominent poets about poetry in the U.S. in the 1970s. Its failure to suture ethically or in a healthy way is itself a conundrum: the statement that the events of September 1975 at Snowmass had nothing to do with poetry is technically correct. It is also true, however, that the “Poetry Wars” had everything to do with poetry and who gets to define it and use it as a symbol. It was important because it demonstrated the failure of poetry as a symbol. The conflicts show that poetry, by itself and without qualification or further definition, failed because such arguments are too much for the relatively thin symbol to bear. The strains on this community during 1975-1980 show that “poetry” is never a good enough symbol for long-term community cohesion beyond first meetings of the poets involved. The Great Naropa Poetry Wars brought to the surface the definitional struggles about poetic projects connected to political projects in the late 1960s and early 1970s (as explained in the previous chapter). They created ruptures in the larger poetic community of which the Poetics School at Naropa was a part. While Anthony J. Cohen theorizes that people within a community do not need to share the meaning of a particular symbol as long as they share the symbol itself, that symbol actually has to be specific enough to be a symbol on its own. These vaguely

defined or unspecified symbols can sometimes work as suturing symbols for a short time. If they continue to be unspecified, however, they eventually fail to hold people in community, no matter how abiding the desire to keep them undefined and unspecified and thus welcoming to a maximum number of people.

The Poetics School community of the 1970s was a community of values, to use David Ulrich's historical formulation of communities. Cohen's and Ulrich's theories dovetail nicely here. A "community of values" depends not on proximity but on values that different members hold in common; they are expressed in the symbols and stories the communities use to define themselves to its members and to people outside its boundaries. These would be Cohen's symbols, but the salient point is that the *values of the community* are the important suturing mechanisms; more communities of the future will be communities of values rather than communities based on proximity. Geographical proximity is less important than in other communities. Ulrich creates an important historical distinction between the two types of communities:

Proximity allowed community members to share purpose, monitor process, and govern behavior . . . Today, boundaries based on values may be more common than the boundaries based on geographic proximity. Proximity focuses on what is seen; values focus on what is felt. Proximity assumes the importance of physical presence to share ideas; values create emotional bonds and the ability to share ideas easily across great distances.¹⁴

Though Ulrich wrote this in 1998, it is interesting to consider that many poetry communities have been communities of value for a long time, regardless of proximity, and in many cases, in contradistinction to proximity. Proximity was key to the New York School,

the lake district Romantics, and poets of the San Francisco Renaissance. However, proximity is not sufficient, as members of any community need to have more in common than airspace. While proximity helped to cement and develop those values, much of community building—in the traditional way that we are used to thinking of poetry communities as schools—happened through print, in correspondence, magazines, and books.¹⁵ The Poetics School at Naropa was a less traditionally proximal community than was the Loft in the beginning, and the poets of this community were (and are) many of the poets who taught there but who were also friends, publishers, and supporters of the poets actually in Boulder. Many of them came from other previous and concurrent communities (see chapter 1). The Poetics School at Naropa had a national history of oppositional poetics (primarily Beat) that helped establish a publishing and reading-circuit network throughout the country.

What the Great Naropa Poetry Wars show is that “poetry” alone could never have been a successful suturing symbol for these poets. Many poets, despite desiring otherwise, know this. It is important to point out here that the very anxiety about the great weakness of “poetry” as a symbol is what creates the need to invest in the name “Great Naropa Poetry Wars.” The very weakness of the symbol creates the conditions for its placement at the center of the conflict. Effective, healthy suturing brings members into a community and expresses that community’s values clearly to those within and outside of it. Unhealthy suture, on the other hand, “covers over,” hides, an event, rendering it unspeakable, as is shown in the epigraph from Ginsberg.

But before the publication of the Tom Clark’s *The Great Naropa Poetry Wars* in 1980, a book that attempted to summarize the Merwin / Naone Incident and related events, there

was a great amount of discussion about the event by seminary students and by poets connected to the school or to Merwin and Naone. Robert Bly publicly mentioned the incident frequently after hearing about it, including discussing it with Naropa students at a famous reading in Boulder on May 16, 1977. Before that reading, however, he made his reservations about the project and work of the Poetics School quite clear in an interview in *East / West* journal in 1976:

Allen Ginsberg is a lovely man, but to offer Jack Kerouac's School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa is absurd. The whole idea has nothing to do with Buddhism at all. They are teaching daydreaming, not poetics . . . If Naropa wants a teacher of poetry, they should look for someone who is almost invisible, who isn't a well-known man or woman . . . Buddhism can't be taught in the presence of celebrities . . . [students] go to Naropa Institute and there they are presented with Anne Waldman and the star system. It's a mistake.¹⁶

Bly conflates a great deal here: first, he complains that the Poetics School was trying to teach Buddhism, when he thought that poetry should not have anything to do with Buddhism (or any sort of religion), and neither can it be taught through a poetry curriculum. Then he complains that the people they have brought in to teach are celebrities, and that this recruitment gets in the way of teaching Buddhism. He criticizes celebrity culture in general, and celebrity poets specifically, demonstrating a frustration with the larger American superficial culture and people's attraction to celebrity. Bly's critiques here suggest that he was irritated by what he saw as a lack of poetic propriety.

It is true that Anne Waldman and Ginsberg were quite well known as poets—both were featured in national general-interest magazines¹⁷—but it is not true that they were trying

to teach Buddhism. They were teaching under the aegis of a Buddhist institution and tried to teach poetry in a way that reflected Buddhist principles. Bly did not see the distinction. He failed to understand that neither Ginsberg nor Waldman claimed to be teaching Buddhism, but Bly's own discomfort with poet-celebrities (though he himself was and is such a poet) made him confuse the poets' public status with mistaken ways of teaching Buddhism, implicitly faulting Trungpa's own celebrity status. Rather, the school was all about teaching poetry, and poetic celebrity was a by-product of the activism that generated the school.

In an April, 1977 letter to Bly, Waldman takes issue with many of Bly's assertions: "The poets have never claimed to be expounding Buddhism, the emphasis hasn't been on me & the 'star system' . . . I've felt so much hostility from your end."¹⁸ Bly, Ginsberg, and Waldman were all previously friendly, and members of this wider community, and therefore, the hostility Waldman read in Bly's interview must have come across as fairly wrenching. They had all lived in New York in the 1960s, and they knew many of the same poets. They deeply respected each other's anti-war work.

When Bly arrived in Boulder for the 1977 reading, conflict was brewing. Many in the audience were likely familiar with his comments about the school in *East / West*, and many had likely heard that at his readings, he recited versions of the Snowmass story. He began this reading by discussing the use of alchemy to think about emotions and politics. In a characteristically rambling exposition, Bly moved from speaking of sulfur, which he related to anger, to a discussion of a meditation organization that insisted on working with the poor, and came around to some criticism of Trungpa. He told a very incorrect version of the Merwin story (many dates and details were wrong). After this incorrect iteration, he said that

Ginsberg came to see him in Minnesota “the other day” (likely during Ginsberg’s April 1977 trip to do a benefit reading for the Loft in Minneapolis) to ask him to tell Len Randolph, then head of the National Endowment for the Arts’ Literature Division, that Bly was not attacked at Naropa with a beer bottle (a rumor going around U.S. literary circles, and which many surmised was the reason the Poetics School’s N.E.A. grant application was turned down). Bly told the audience that he was willing to do this, but wanted some reciprocation from Ginsberg:

I said to Allen, Did you do anything for Merwin? He said: “Well, I did tell Trungpa that he should apologize.” And I said to him, unless you apologize to Merwin publicly and tell Trungpa I’ll never talk to you again as long as you live. He said “well . . .” (inaudible whisper here, by Bly), so I said to him, so what is this community of poets, the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics? What happened to that? (audience applause). So I think my way in my own feeling this, this Kerouac School is doomed, it’s doomed. It’s doomed if not for that brutality, it’s doomed for their refusal . . . to defend Merwin, to have anything to do with the community of poets.¹⁹

Bly attempted to hold Ginsberg (and by extension, everyone involved with the Poetics School) accountable for what Trungpa did to Merwin and Naone. Here, it is clear that for Bly, allegiance to poetry was the first priority, and poets who forsook that for allegiance to something else (such as a religious guru or community) shirked their responsibility to their fellow poets. In the same vein as the poetry journalists and commentators discussed later in this chapter, Bly believed that there was a unified “community of poets” who should be responsible, capable, justified, and beholden to each other. In Bly’s world, poets were

special, and many of the poets that he knew were connected through the publishing and reading networks mentioned above. When Bly asked “What is this community . . . What happened to that?” he was really asking quite another troubled question: why didn’t Merwin’s and Naone’s status as poets protect them, and why didn’t it garner an immediate apology from those in charge of the Poetics School?²⁰ Bly himself confused the boundaries here: he spoke of the Kerouac School as a community, but then held it accountable for refusing “to defend Merwin, to have anything to do with the community of poets.” But, in his view, who exactly was the community? Bly seemed to say that there was a larger community in which the Poetics School participated, and that it was this larger community who was damaged by what happened to Merwin and Naone. This larger community now, through Bly and other sympathetic critics of the Poetics School, held Ginsberg, et al. accountable for what happened to their poet-allies.

Bly’s confusion was emblematic: what happens when poets who have been allies in poetic, cultural, and political battles suddenly square off against each other in person or in print? How do communities deal with fractures caused by events such as this? Bly implied that there was a larger community to which the poetics school belonged and to which it was responsible, but he may have confused the school with Ginsberg, a common oversight. Bly’s speech was confusing and provocative enough that the audience questioned him—some asked about basic details of the Merwin / Naone Incident while others challenged his version of the story and what it meant. After a few moments of this exchange, Bly stated his belief that the Poetics School was “another Iowa Workshop. Narrow.”²¹ In telling the audience why he refused to come teach at the Poetics School, he said that he asked Ginsberg: “Who are you teaching? The same little, small group again,” qualifying this with

lists of different poets he would like to see teaching there that haven't been asked. "So that whole women's movement is really left out . . . when students come from around the country you give 'em that same stuff again. Jack Kerouac and Philip Whalen's a wonderful person. But that's not the issue; they're giving them a slight, narrow jerk like this of American poetry . . . It's serious, so I said to Allen, if you would ever hire someone that you didn't know it would be wonderful."²² While a continuance of his *East / West* critique of the school's reliance on a star system, this riposte also expressed Bly's annoyance at the exclusivity he saw operating at the Poetics School. It was not the community he wanted it to be.

The reading ended with Bly discussing Ginsberg and Trungpa again, saying that "it's the responsibility of Trungpa and the people around him, to call a public meeting and describe exactly what happened." Bly said that people have spread terrible rumors, and that the story had spread all over the country. It could, he pleaded, be put to rest with a clear statement: "it's so much better to have it in the open. It's a grief, and it's a grief for all of us, that violence between us."²³

In this entangled response to the audience's statements and questions, Bly demonstrated the excruciatingly complicated nature of the situation and of the personalities and work involved. Bly himself noticed the damage that rumors about the Merwin / Naone Incident wrought among poets. While the "violence" he spoke of might refer specifically to what happened to Merwin and Naone, he might have been speaking more generally about the rupturing of ties among poets that the Great Naropa Poetry Wars caused. His sense of grief about the situation was real and palpable. "Grief" is an extraordinarily expressive word in this context, as it indicates loss: Bly likely grieved the loss of the connections he once had

to many of the poets involved in the Poetics School. He grieved the loss of what may have been a more unified sense of poets who, like him, were committed to the interventionist poetics discussed previously.

One of Bly's criticisms was how celebrities were made out of individuals. That is, he was concerned with how big personalities, such as Allen Ginsberg (as a major "Beat" figure) and Anne Waldman contributed (even unwittingly, as did he) to a star system. He criticized Waldman and Ginsberg for being big personalities in a "narrow" school. If the school was to be Buddhist in the way that he thought it should have been, where the evacuation of the ego and of one's individual personality was the primary goal, then they would not have had anybody recognizable teaching there. This dictum raised a tension between his vision of community as poets working on behalf of poetry and the Poetics School's very real need to draw on its Beat connections to recruit students in order to keep the school going.

Bly wasn't the only poet talking about what happened between Merwin, Naone, and Trungpa at Snowmass in 1975. Throughout the next two years, the story circulated through the Naropa campus and through the community of poets connected to the writing school. During the same summer that Bly predicted the doom of the Poetics School, Ed Sanders, poet, lead singer of The Fugs, writer of *The Family*, an expose of Charlie Manson, and owner of a famously counter-cultural bookstore in New York City, was invited by Waldman and Ginsberg to teach a Summer '77 class on "Investigative Poetics." He had investigative experience, which he used to become a forerunner in documentary poetics. He asked the class what they wanted to investigate, and they chose the Snowmass story (perhaps in response to the communal curiosity about the events). The class produced a report entitled *The Party: A Chronological Perspective on a Confrontation at a Buddhist Seminary*, which the class

originally decided not to publish. The Naropa administration did not interfere with the investigation, though Trungpa refused to be interviewed. The unpublished report started to circulate among poets across the country, and the calls to publish became more intense over the next year. In December 1978, Sam Maddox, the editor of *Boulder Monthly*, for which Tom Clark worked as a reporter and columnist, offered to publish it. The class re-voted later, and in early January, Sanders reported that the majority of the class now favored publication. On January 30th, 1979, Sanders signed the contract.

Sanders prefaced the report with an explanation of the class's research and compilation process, and he absolved the Naropa administration of any interference with the process. *The Party* is a quilt of interviews of Snowmass participants, Naropa students, and Poetics School participants (teachers, students, and administrators) such as Anne Waldman. The interviews were organized by theme, with titles like "Anne Waldman Suggests Naropa to Merwin, New Year 1975," "Merwin at Naropa as Buddhist Student," and "Merwin and Chanting at Seminary." *The Party* was offered by Sanders and the "Investigative Poetry Group" as an oral history of the Merwin / Naone Incident and related events (beginning with the 1972 Bly, Ginsberg, and Snyder reading), and it included a set of appendices including a transcript of the 1977 Bly reading, letters to the interviewers from Merwin and Naone, an organizational chart of the Naropa administration, and Ginsberg's list of different poetic influences within the Poetics School. *The Party's* stylization of itself as an objective or neutral document posited that it presented just the facts without analysis. Yet, try as they might, the authors could not avoid the fact that this was a text looked to for answers to the questions about poetry and community raised by the conflict among Trungpa, Naone, and Merwin and reactions to it. While it sought to portray, in Sanders's words, "what actually

transpired,”²⁴ and used tropes of journalism to accomplish this, it ultimately failed to be journalistically objective. It betrayed this aim even in its own contents, for the different “oral histories” differ in their versions of the events and their meaning, depending on how sutured within particular communities each respondent felt.

In March of 1979, a short version of *The Party* went to print in the *Boulder Monthly* (the unabridged version was published later by Ed Sanders) along with an interview of Ginsberg by Tom Clark and Ed Dorn entitled “When the Party’s Over: An Interview with Allen Ginsberg.”²⁵ Commentators such as Eliot Weinberger have made much of this interview, as it is one of the few places in which Ginsberg spoke publicly about the incident and the Sanders report outside of one explicit and several veiled references in his poetry. The interviewers (always referred to as Q, for “questioners”) asked Ginsberg about the effect of “Spiritual Obedience,” a recent *Harper’s* article by Peter Marin that discussed the Poetics School and the Buddhist community. Ginsberg felt that it stoked “universal paranoia,” and it was like “reading your marriage troubles in the newspaper.” The interviewers referred to their previous conversation with Ginsberg in which he earlier remarked that incident might teach something. Ginsberg clarified, saying that the implications of the incident would take decades to work out—it was like a “very long historical situation.” The interviewers then asked whether the “incident that generates this whole thing” was a political metaphor for resistance to authority, a point they clearly wished to emphasize, while Ginsberg tried to frame the incident as a conflict over privacy as understood in a marriage relationship or in the relationship between a Buddhist teacher and pupil. Giving up some privacy, he said, is “the purpose of that relationship . . . if privacy is defined as egocentricity, selfishness or psychological secrecy.”²⁶ But the interviewers kept

returning to the political issue—submission—and its applicability to something identified by Sanders (and later by Peter Marin) as a part of American culture that needed to be studied.

They wanted Ginsberg to justify the situation as he saw it, as a student of Trungpa's, especially as someone who had done the sort of training that Merwin and Naone attempted, and as an administrator of the Poetics School. Ginsberg replied that as Trungpa's student, it was hard for him to discuss what goes on in the seminary training because it was not something to be discussed in public; it felt very "delicate" to him. As the administrator of the Poetics School, he agreed to the interview in order to make clear that the incident had nothing to do with the school. However, he sometimes felt paranoid that because of his own personal relationship with Trungpa, he had "seduced the entire poetry scene and Merwin into this impossible submission to some spiritual dictatorship."²⁷ Furthermore, he said that he'd avoided dealing with the situation up until this point because he did not "want to open up some horrible yaargh,"²⁸ where he discovered details about Trungpa he did not want to know, in the way that a child does not want the specifics of his conception.

Ginsberg's biographers have noted his private anguish over the whole affair. His loyalties were divided between the continuance of the school and his reticence to say anything about his teacher or Naropa as a whole. He discussed this confusion in letters, including in a letter to Merwin where he apologized for making disparaging remarks about Merwin's poetry in comparison to Trungpa's.²⁹ In his journal, Ginsberg expressed confusion about his own position in the story: "now why am I stuck with the accusation of a fixed identity as Trungpa's sucker? Am I?"³⁰ The interviewers tried to focus on this perception, though they emphasized that they did not hold him responsible for what happened to Merwin and Naone. Their tone toward him during the interview contains an odd mix of

respect (for his work as a poet, activist, and head of the Poetics School), accusation (that he was trying to explain the incident away), and curiosity (how could a free-speech campaigner like Ginsberg submit himself to Trungpa's authority?). Ginsberg's answers in the interview ramble, a trait closely related to his style of cataloguing in poems. In these catalogues, sometimes the only relation of successive items to each other is that they are in the same poem. The magic of his poems is that the power of their meaning is in accrual, accumulation, rather than in the precisely weighted and calculated relationships of images to each other. He brings many different and seemingly unrelated things into his poems, rather than carefully constructing them in the way that poetry favored by the New Critics might. His answers to the interview questions resembled this poetic practice. His interviewers had a hard time keeping him on track, but their own motives as interviewers pushed and pulled the interview as much as Ginsberg's wandering answers did.

In 1980, Tom Clark published *The Great Naropa Poetry Wars*, a long essay attempting to frame the Merwin / Naone Incident and successive events as a question of poetics and ethics on the part of the Poetics School, Ginsberg, the NEA, and Naropa Institute as a whole. The title is likely derived from Bob Callahan, a small press publisher (Turtle Island Press), and a literary activist with California's branch of PEN and the Before Columbus Foundation (founded 1976). Angered by the events of 1975, Callahan asked poets to disassociate themselves from the Poetics School by signing a petition stating that they refused to teach there. As Callahan told Clark before the publication of *The Great Naropa Poetry Wars*, the events divided poets into party lines: "It became a poets' war—poets at war with one another."³¹ Because of his political and small-press work, Callahan might very well have been an ally of Ginsberg's were it not for the Merwin / Naone Incident.

Clark begins the book by relaying a short history of Buddhism, focusing on its monarchical and violent survival in Tibet and discusses some of Trungpa's biography, such as his escape from Tibet to India, his travel to England, his migration to Canada and the US, and his reputation for drunkenness and womanizing. Clark's structuring of Trungpa's story indicates unease with the power of Trungpa's lineage and the ways that Trungpa used American marketing skills to increase his landholdings and numbers of followers. This unease transforms into a conflation of Trungpa's Buddhist training with the work of the Poetics School. "Poetry" or "poems" are mentioned only a dozen times in the short book. The first mention refers to Trungpa's practice of traveling with an armed guard. After mentioning disputes between Trungpa and the Dalai Lama, Clark states: "no wonder the Dalai Lama stays away from the Rockies. Trungpa's army carries guns that shoot poems. To a Tibetan paraphysician, those are more dangerous than bullets."³² Clark describes Robert Bly's visit to Trungpa in Scotland and the 1972 reading, raising Merwin's refusal to chant and Bly's connection of the Merwin / Naone incident to the Poetics School.

Clark posits *The Great Naropa Poetry Wars* as a historical document that traces the Merwin events at Snowmass, along with what he and others saw as a cover-up of the incident by the Naropa administration. Clark fails throughout most of his 43-page essay (the rest of the book collected correspondence and interviews with people at the Poetics School and elsewhere) to explicitly state his own stake in this matter, but he is simultaneously very willing to believe in a Buddhist anti-democratic conspiracy. This former ally of Ginsberg now distrusted the poet's faith in Trungpa, and his comments at the end of the essay betray a thinly-veiled racism: "The poets [by which he seems to include everyone associated with the school] have chosen metaphysics, magic, and the mumbo-jumbo of a spiritual kingdom ruled

over by a witty Oriental whose unashamed contempt for democratic institutions is starting to invade their poetics.”³³ Clark provides no examples of any aesthetic connection between Trungpa’s administration and Ginsberg’s or Waldman’s poetry, but for Clark the symbol of a “pure” poetry, the symbol he wished would primarily suture people together, was threatened by Trungpa’s “mumbo jumbo.” In other words, he was concerned that Ginsberg and the rest of the Poetics School chose “metaphysics and magic” over poetry. His use of the imagery of invasion speaks to his fear that the symbol of “poetry” was at risk of being contaminated or dominated by a force foreign to it, making it less capable of holding people together.

The poet, essayist, and translator Eliot Weinberger shared those racist fears. In “News From Naropa,” originally published in *The Nation* in April 1980, Weinberger reviewed Clark’s book and *The Party*. While Weinberger compliments Clark’s *The Great Naropa Poetry Wars* as the first full history of the controversy, he thinks it was “unfortunately full of wild rumors dropped in wisecrack style.”³⁴ Weinberger compares stories about Trungpa to other current stories about spiritual leaders and their excesses and abuses in the 1970s as though Trungpa was just another leader in a long succession of leaders who took over “poetry” for their own ends:

Trungpa’s best-known follower is Allen Ginsberg and those who have taught under his auspices include many of the best writers, artists, composers, and academics in the land. Whereas most of the recent crackpot pantheons can be shrugged off as cults appealing only to dopes and the doped, the tale of Trungpa is difficult to ignore. What is happening in Boulder, in an embryonic form, seems to be an Oriental redecoration of homegrown

American fascism: The Dharma Bums playing *It Can't Happen Here*.³⁵ And as George Orwell wrote in 1946, “A writer’s political and religious beliefs are not excrescences to be laughed away, but something that will leave their mark even on the smallest details of his work.”³⁶

The warning is clear: don’t let poetry become a victim of religious fascism. Referring to Sinclair Lewis’ 1935 book *It Can't Happen Here*, Weinberger connects a narrative about easily rooted, homegrown fascism to the Beats, who for Weinberger represent a typically American superficial appropriation of Buddhist ideas. This superficial understanding, Weinberger warns, could prohibit the Beats from anticipating and avoiding fascist behavior. He distinguishes between illegitimate cult figures and the legitimacy of Trungpa’s Buddhist line, but he does not feel that Trungpa’s religious legitimacy excuses the poets from getting caught up in the power struggles initiated by the monk. In Edward Said’s study of Orientalism, “the Orient is seen as separate, eccentric, backward, silently different, sensual, and passive,”³⁷ and Weinberger’s word choices (“crackpot,” “cults,” “dopes,” “Oriental redecorating”) betray his underlying racism. This impression is further enhanced by his comparison of the Great Naropa Poetry Wars to the American Revolution.

He calls the Merwin / Naone Incident “the Lexington & Concord of what became a spiritual-literary war,” underscoring his anxiety about poetry’s power as a herald of American ideals by contrasting the “monarchical” behavior of Trungpa with the freedom loving heroes of white America’s history. He discusses the incident’s quick acquisition of mythical status within the poetic communities involved, and surmises that its status had to do with the archetypal elements present: a mad king, a mob, thugs, an enraged protector, and a nude couple as emblems of resistance. “It is the stuff of nightmares, complete with its ideologies:

fascism, sexism, racism.”³⁸ Weinberger is quick to seize upon the literary and mythic symbols of the story as he heard it, as well as their racially frightening implications.

“Hangovers from the party,” Weinberger wryly quips, “continued through 1979.” According to Weinberger, a petition for poets to formally disassociate from the Poetics School began to circulate after the *Boulder Monthly* articles appeared, but was “a flop: even those who loathed Trungpa refused to attack Ginsberg’s baby . . . Flak flew throughout the year.” These potential signers, despite loathing Trungpa, were still too sutured within a communal boundary whose values were more important than their dislike of Trungpa. Weinberger compares the medievalism of Trungpa and Buddhism to the medieval European church (especially its lusty and abusive monks), and quotes Merwin and Kenneth Rexroth on the damage done to Buddhism in the US. He then asks, with a jab at Ginsberg through mocking *Howl*: why, of the hundreds of Buddhist masters now in the US, “has Trungpa alone so successfully captured some of the best minds of the generation?”³⁹

He answers via an explication of Leftist artistic and intellectual anger at America after Vietnam and during Nixon’s presidency. Quoting Ginsberg’s critique of American democracy in the Clark / Dorn interview—its hypocritical nature, its conflation with Christianity—he interprets Ginsberg’s disgust at the failure of Leftist goals of the 1960s (many of the poets connected to the Poetry School shared these goals) as a yearning for violent change. Despite Ginsberg’s anti-war, civil rights, and free speech activism, Weinberger sees Ginsberg’s battles not as enlightened, but as an elitist “quirky incarnation of an aristocratic line” that rehashes Pound’s wish for a restoration of an old order. “He believes that Trungpa, like the pope, is infallible, that the Merwin / Naone Incident⁴⁰ was not a mistake, but a lesson the meaning of which he is not wise enough to decipher. His

interview with Tom Clark is, with the Pound radio speeches, the most depressing transcript in American letters.”⁴¹ To Weinberger, Naropa flourishes as a sign of Ginsberg’s refusal to see his own fallibility, and the Poetics School’s given mission is obscured by Allen Ginsberg’s allegiance to Trungpa.

Ishmael Reed presented a more complicated response than Weinberger to the events in his article “American Poetry: A Buddhist Take-Over?” in the Spring, 1978 issue of *Black American Literature Forum*. He took care to warn Anne Waldman against deeper involvement with Trungpa and he listened attentively to Michael Brownstein (Waldman’s then-partner, fellow poet, and sometimes Poetics School administrator) when in Boulder to investigate “the scene.” On one hand, Reed was their partner in furthering an oppositional poetics, and he recognized the Poetics School’s commitment to anti-oppression work, but he worried about the school’s survival in the hands of the crazy monk.

He accuses the poets from the Poetics School’s feeder communities in New York, San Francisco, and Bolinas (feeder communities of Naropa) of being insular in their practices and overly white-European in their aesthetics, when there was a neglected “true” heritage of Latino and Black poetics in Boulder and California just waiting to be accessed and recognized. Reed’s comments put the Poetics School on the middle of a strained (and often, only barely articulated) conversation about the place of race in poetry organizations and activism. On the one side are Trungpa’s critics who display racist fears for the safety and purity of the poets at Naropa, and on the other, critics such as Reed who critique the Poetics School for not having any poets of color as instructors. That is, he complains that the community’s boundaries were too narrow to allow for poetic and racial difference. He quibbled at length with Waldman’s February 1977 assertion in a *Time* article that “Naropa

was fast becoming the center of American Poetics.”⁴² Reed neglects to quote her next sentence, which tempers and explains the previous one: “It has the most diverse collection of accessible poets around.”⁴³ While Waldman likely meant that poetic diversity (not racial diversity) was represented, Reed makes a larger structural argument about the consequences of institutional racism as demonstrated by the lack of poets of color at Naropa. Not by any stretch of the imagination could Ginsberg and Waldman be considered racist, and Reed does laud them for their efforts (Amiri Baraka and the Nuyorican poets were guests during the Poetics School’s 1978 summer session). But like many well-meaning countercultural organizations that came out of the sixties and that had racial equality and diversity as a goal, it took them longer than they anticipated to reach that goal.⁴⁴

Other speakers within communities of color, such as Amiri Baraka, did not see Trungpa as a good influence. Reflecting on those years in a recent interview, he stated that while he had a deep respect for Ginsberg’s poetry activism, he and others in the poetry community worried about Trungpa’s religious and institutional influence over the Poetics School. Baraka was not enamored with Tibetan Buddhism or the examples of it he saw at Naropa and he was leery of Trungpa’s influence over Ginsberg.⁴⁵ This conflict between caring a great deal for the work of the school and worrying about Trungpa’s effects on its integrity among observers was so strong as to spur Reed to convene a meeting among like-minded poets in Seattle in 1977 to discuss the “Boulder situation.” Underneath this complaint, however, lay the desire to remain within the larger community, which motivated him to act on its behalf.

Reed’s reading of the events at Snowmass was influenced by some wrong information—such as a story about Merwin being beaten by Trungpa’s guards—a failing he

shared with many who had heard of them in the spring of 1977 (the class report did not begin to circulate until later that year), and Reed reflected the tendency for the uninformed version to get fixed in the imagination of American poets. Among Reed's concerned literary comrades was Bob Callahan, who called the Poetics School "merely the St. Mark's Project gone west."⁴⁶ It was not new, in other words, or really native to the region to which it moved, but in saying this, Callahan displays ignorance of the contributions to the early community by local Boulder poets such as Jack Collom. Reed and Callahan see an opposition between the Naropa poets, echoing Bly's "star system" critique. Reed says that the Poetics School's interests seem to revolve "around a constellation of 1950s personalities" whose "experiments" had been picked up in the larger culture, and communities of working, poor, and multi-cultural poets who, Reed felt, had been ignored in the media hype around the Beats.

While criticizing Naropa, Reed carefully complimented Anne Waldman's work but worried lest she become "Guinevere in somebody's fairy kingdom,"⁴⁷ a literary, sexist and patronizing remark that undercut her agency and highly influential role in the founding and running of the Poetics School. As metaphor, she would have represented "lady poetry," needing to be saved by "native" poets from the clutches of a crazed drunk monk. Reed's own ambivalence about the project of the Poetics School, even after all this critiquing of its racial and class failures, emerges near the end of the article: "I'm convinced that Gallup (Dick Gallup, another teacher and sometimes-administrator of the Poetics School) and Brownstein are earnest, (we can assume he means "earnest" in their beliefs about the worth of the school) and based upon the works I've read I believe Boulder to be an important center. Sympathetic critics ask them only to examine their relationship to an official religion

with its Abbots and its Hierarchy.”⁴⁸ Sympathetic critics, such as Reed, were those who shared some poetic values with the community they critiqued. Sharing some values and rejecting others created the sort of ambivalence mentioned above.

Reed was like many of his peers in this sentiment—respect for the work that Ginsberg and Waldman were doing in continuing to dismantle the power structures of New Criticism and the academy, work they had done for years, in addition to generally Leftist activism, but also wary of their school’s connection to the suspicious character of Trungpa, and also what they saw as its aesthetic preciousness and whiteness. The monk’s behavior was a rupture in this case; if the project of dismantling New Criticism was a suturing symbol that Reed shared with the Poetics School, the character (as in written symbol) of Trungpa disrupted the unity of that symbol. The boundary of community was ruptured by what Reed and others thought he represented. The “sympathetic critics” had a hard time reconciling the good work of the Poetics School with the dysfunction of Trungpa, and they feared that Trungpa’s behavior and bearing would rupture the already tenuous sutures of the community.

In February 1979, Peter Marin published an article in *Harper’s* (“Spiritual Obedience: The Transcendental Game of Follow the Leader”)—the first national broadcasting of the Merwin/Naone Incident outside of strictly poetic or Buddhist circles. The administration of Naropa—rather than the Poetry School, Ginsberg pointed out later—had invited Marin to teach there in the summer of 1977. He kept a journal on his experience and later turned it into an article. Marin attempted to explain what he saw as a predilection in (mostly) young middle-class white Americans toward needing to be obedient, resulting in a tendency to join cults.⁴⁹ Marin begins his article with a story about a poet friend of his who joined the Divine

Light Mission and completely submitted his life to its master, the Guru Maharaj Ji. At the time of Marin's writing, the poet was looking for a way out. This story illustrates Marin's belief that a generation of people disappointed in the failures of the 1960s were so isolated and alienated that gurus who demanded unconditional submission appealed to their "better instincts" of fraternity and fellow-feeling.

Marin viewed Naropa from this standpoint. While careful to specify that Trungpa's Vajrahadtu organization (the organization sponsoring the Seminary in Snowmass) was legally separate from Naropa, Marin makes his distrust of Trungpa's whole organization quite clear throughout the article. He critiques what he sees as a "feudal, priestly tradition transplanted to a capitalist setting,"⁵⁰ and reads what happened to Merwin and Naone as a lamentable, yet predictable, result of a number of tensions that coalesced on Halloween night in 1975. He views Trungpa's followers as "survivors of the Sixties" who were "wounded and in pain."⁵¹ What most bothered Marin was their attempt to "explain away" the events of Halloween 1975. He carefully says that this attempt indicates current American culture: these followers had been taught to accept Trungpa's sort of authority by their own upbringings, and thus they could not see anything he did as a mistake.

After reiterating the story as told in *The Party* (he'd seen it before it was published), in a comment near the end of his article, Marin himself points to the literariness of the events and their symbolic aftermath:

It would be possible, of course, to pass off all of these events as unimportant, as a kind of roughhousing that got out of hand, or a momentary drunkenness with embarrassing consequences. Or it would be possible to tell the story in a more dramatic way, stressing the almost literary

symbolism of the details—the shattered glass, the cries of Fascist and Hitler, the naked lovers exposed and vulnerable, surrounded by guards, and the gradual transformation of the “innocent” onlookers into passive participants. Certainly there are almost mythic elements in the story, and that is the quality it seems to retain not only for those directly involved, but also for many of Trungpa’s followers, who cannot quite stomach the event, and for whom it has a shadowy and continual presence, like a bad conscience they cannot quite dispel.⁵²

Each version of the story had its own consequences. The story could have been inconsequential in the grand scheme of other stories about gurus (he points out that he thought Trungpa was mostly mild). That it involved a famous poet is beside the point in this telling. The consequences of telling the story in this way are that it would ignore its lessons about the American susceptibility to spiritual obedience. The literary and mythical reliance on symbolism, the “shadowy and continual presence,” is the power of the symbols created by the story. These symbols create the myth—the power of the story that reaches beyond a straightforward relation of its facts.

That the Merwin / Naone Incident involved three poets (Merwin, Naone, and Trungpa⁵³) at a Buddhist seminary but not at the Poetics School or its faculty is meaningless, for the meaning and consequences generated by the mythic qualities of the event and its reiterations affected people in the real world, especially those such as Anne Waldman, who had to deal directly with its consequences, including strains on friendships, as evidenced in the letter she wrote to Robert Bly in the Spring of 1977.

She began with a gesture of friendship (“I’m looking forward to your reading in May”), and demonstrated willingness to be in community with him. She uses that as a transition to her sense of confusion over some of his other statements that troubled her sense of community with him:

Just been listening (again) to your Notes on Physic Growth on KCFR with great pleasure, it makes me wonder how you can feel so at odds with some of the things going on at the Poetics School here. The poets have never claimed to be expounding Buddhism, the emphasis hasn’t been on me & the “star system.” The reading series is a very small part of what’s been going on—the teaching, the lectures by particular poets on their specialties (much like yours) is the core of the program. We aren’t trying to churn out career poets! I’ve felt so much hostility from your end—I’ve heard tales of your badmouthing this place all over the country . . .⁵⁴

Confused by how he seemed so unforgiving to a community that included his friends, she responds to his comments by defending the work of the Poetics School and also shows her level of distress at his hostility. Had they not already been in a friendly relationship based on common poetic work and goals, Waldman could not have written this letter. The distress was likely repeated every time a poetic commentator spoke about the Great Naropa Poetry Wars.

The distress became a thematic element in Waldman’s poetry, as shown in “Why I Meditate: A Reply for Allen Ginsberg” from her 1985 poetry collection *Skin, Meat, BONES*. “Why I Meditate” is a list with the anaphora “I sit” at the beginning of each line. It begins

with these two lines: “I sit because I am wing’d with awe / I sit because the poetry scene got sour in America in 1980.” “Wing’d with awe” is a line in Pound’s “The Return,”⁵⁵ about defeat in battle (he quotes Hopkins’ appropriation of Homer) and the devastation of war. In light of Pound’s fascism and the frequent use of the term fascism during the Great Naropa Poetry Wars, Waldman’s appropriation of awe is quite poignant: it demonstrates a knowledge and honoring of poetic legacy at the same time that it commits to undoing the negative effects of war, international or poetic.⁵⁶ Sitting (the Buddhist practice of meditation, usually in cross-legged position) is an appropriate response to either. That Waldman directly refers to the Great Naropa Poetry Wars is made clear in the penultimate line of the poem, “I sit because I deserted the poetry wars.”⁵⁷ Mocking the terminology used to describe conflicts, tensions, and ruptures between poets,⁵⁸ Waldman “meditates” on the decision to leave those conflicts, to disengage; she will not continue the cycle of conflict.

While it is evident from the texts above that plenty of poets knew about the Merwin incident and were talking about it, the publication of *The Great Naropa Poetry Wars* in 1980 made knowledge of the events, and the commentary about them, much more widespread. In many ways, the book was a final, culminating, and damning last word. In his appendices, Clark yokes the Merwin / Naone Incident with National Endowment for the Arts individual grants for literature, implying that allies of the Poetics School on the NEA board were complicit in the school’s perceived unethical behavior, and this implication strained relationships even more.

In Buddhism, the ego gets in the way of being at peace, and we will often hurt others to strengthen our egos. In “Why I Sit,” Waldman seems to want to evoke the Buddhist wish for diminishment of ego. As with many other poems of Waldman’s at this period in her

work, chants, especially those involving repetition, are prevalent inspirations and models for her poems. Thus it makes sense that a poem about meditation—which sometimes is aided by the use of repetitive chants that force the practitioner to focus on breath and the mouth rather than the internal ego—would be a meditative chant. Many chants are repetitive but also have some sort of progression or evolution as the chant goes on, in lines 3-5:

I sit because Milarepa did

I sit because Padmasambhava buried the Bardol Thotrol in the Gampo hills & gave
endless transmission to discover how death is liberating

I sit because Yeshe Tsogyal appeared in a dream & showed me her cervix like an
ocean

I sit because the Dakinis dance over my forehead

I sit because thoughts chase thoughts.⁵⁹

In the third line, Milarepa, taught in the tradition of Naropa, for whom the Institute is named, appears as a model for herself as she deals with current and future struggles of the school. Yet Milarepa is a complicated character: as a young man, he, his sister, and his mother were tossed out into the street after his father died and his uncle and aunt took Milarepa's father's money and land. Milarepa's mother scraped money together to send him to sorcerer school so that he would learn enough black magic to come home and get revenge on everyone who had made his family suffer. He got his revenge by killing many townspeople (and his extended family) in a storm, and later, by conjuring up a storm to destroy their crops. Soon after, he regretted these acts of revenge and was sorrowful and anguished for many years. He spent a great deal of this time repenting and patiently working for Marpa (a student of Naropa's), who treated him badly but eventually trained him in

meditation practice working toward Enlightenment. He attained Enlightenment in his lifetime by his incredible devotion to meditation practice, a feat only a few have accomplished, and he wrote many poems. Here Waldman links herself not only to the mission of the school, but also to a long historical lineage of teachers within a particular religious tradition. That she emulates a religious leader who struggled with feelings of anguish over a brutal history while he devoted himself to practice is telling; indeed, she was not “evading the realities of human existence” through meditation, but living with them.

Not only does the poetic structure in this poem resemble and discuss meditation, it is itself a meditation on the thoughts chasing other thoughts in Waldman’s life, and “Why I Meditate” marks a moment of decision in her life about the stances she took in helping to administer the Poetics School. As the years passed, and as other issues (such as whether the Poetics School would continue to be funded and how it would change when Naropa Institute would become accredited as a college) became more urgent, the Great Naropa Poetry Wars receded into the background. Yet its effects were not forgotten.

In 1990, three years after Trungpa’s death, and seven years before his own, Allen Ginsberg wrote “Elephant in the Meditation Hall”:

Yes all spiritual groups scandal the shrine room
What about San Francisco Roshi and the board director’s wife
What about high limousine expense accounts in Moscow?
What about the late Rajneesh & poisoned gefilte fish in Oregon?
.....
Remember a strange Mongolian Russian fruitcake Lama in Polk Gulch Bay Area?
Vajracharya Trungpa! Don’t mention the naked poet at the Halloween party!

And the whispered transmission regent died of AIDS (disciple a straight guy sick
they say)⁶⁰

This is Ginsberg's last and most direct poetic comment on the Great Naropa Poetry Wars since 1979. Nothing so overt had appeared in earlier poetry, such as "Reflections at Lake Louise" and "Cosmopolitan Greetings," where references were veiled. The imperative tone of "Don't mention the naked poet . . ." is mocking; it is that sort of expression used when comparing by degree. That is, Ginsberg mocks the sense that speaking about an evil deed done in the past may somehow invoke the evil again, but if the scandals above are mentioned, the line reminds, then the Merwin/Naone/Trungpa scandal needs mentioning too. He also mocks the sense that to mention the scandal would be to invite back the negativity that surrounded the school because of the scandal, when the school has done so much work to get past 1980. Though there is not much evidence to suggest that the event changed poetry production for Ginsberg or anyone else involved on a large scale, biographers have theorized that the stress of dealing with the Great Naropa Poetry Wars had an effect on how much—but not what—Ginsberg wrote.⁶¹

As far as scandals go, some of those preceding it in the list in the poem above are much worse, but they did not affect Ginsberg and his livelihood as the Trungpa scandal of 1975 did. It affected his livelihood because it endangered the school's reputation, and this danger could affect who came as students and teachers. If not enough of either arrived, the school would be forced to shut down. After the huge increases of art funding in the 1970s, the early 1980s ushered in an era of austerity for all non-profit arts organizations. Ginsberg's worry about the financial viability of the Poetics School was justified, and the scandal amplified that worry.

But in 1990, this had all passed; what would be the purpose of writing it now? Ginsberg placed the scandal of the Halloween 1975 conflict in the context of other religious scandals, making it seem less extraordinary by comparison. The 1990 message is that no religious community is perfect, that no religious leaders are immune to the temptations of power. It also puts the Merwin / Naone scandal into context of other larger (and perhaps destructive to more people) scandals, such as homelessness in New York, the extra-legal activities of the CIA, the S & L debacle, and political assassinations. These happen all the time, Ginsberg argues in the poem, but are hardly noticed among the population or among poets. He argues that the emphasis on the Merwin / Naone Incident is misplaced when compared to these other more horrible things, including the dramatic example of Trungpa's successor, Ozel Tendzin. He was HIV positive, but did not disclose this to his sexual partners, two of whom are now infected.⁶²

The title plays on the phrase "the elephant in the room" (used to refer to an issue or problem that affects everyone in the room but that everyone is hesitant to speak openly about), the poem lists numerous scandals committed by various religious leaders or their followers. The first line, an affirmative statement, states that all spiritual groups are prone to scandal regardless of religion, and that all leaders of spiritual groups can be tempted by power and lust. This first section lists a few such leaders, using the anaphoric "what about" as an interrogative pointed to the reader or to his interlocutors. "What about" the teacher / leader of a San Francisco-based Zen Buddhist community who conducted a romantic affair with one of his congregants, or Osho Rajneesh, a free-love guru whose followers attempted to poison residents of The Dalles, Oregon, so they might take over the local government, and other examples of spiritual leaders who have taken advantage of the trust placed in them

by their followers? Ginsberg demands. The “what about” construction is an argumentative style that attempts to widen the frame of the discussion and appeal to a shared sense of values with the reader. In other words, Ginsberg argues, if you think that the Merwin / Naone Incident was a scandal, then you must also agree that these other items are scandals of the same (or higher) degree. If the topic is scandals involving religious leaders, with a specific focus on Trungpa, then Ginsberg, using the examples of other scandalous religious leaders, demands that his interlocutors treat the topic even-handedly. He is reasoning by comparison: if we are to condemn Trungpa, then we must also condemn these other spiritual leaders.

Elephants in Buddhism symbolize mental strength, and so it could be that Ginsberg is trying to remind readers and members of the community that we all need to be smart and work hard, even in the meditation hall. Lastly, Ginsberg’s raising of the Great Naropa Poetry Wars after all these years is a form of suturing by rupture, a common poetic move that Ginsberg and his compatriots used to great effect in the 1950s and 1960s. Continuing its usage, Ginsberg raises the conflict here in almost nostalgic fashion; to those who know, the “naked poet” is Merwin, and those who know were in or near the Poetics School community during the scandal and its aftermath. During the last years of his life, Ginsberg’s poems increasingly reflected on his past and the pasts of his friends and fellow poets. This poem may have been a gesture of affection and nostalgia toward the community that once was.

For those not in the know, the Great Naropa Poetry Wars rarely garner attention in the present save for occasional brief mentions in some articles, blogs, or websites that discuss the incident, such as a 1995 *New York Times* profile on Merwin, Levi Asher’s “When

Hippies Battle: the Great W. S. Merwin/Allen Ginsberg Beef of 1975,”⁶³ various blogs on Harriet (through the Poetry Society of America), and a 2008 Vassar student-documentary by Kate Linhardt, *Crazy Wisdom: The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics*.⁶⁴ In the documentary, two current students refer to “rumors” and “controversies” regarding Trungpa and the school’s history, but they never clarify what they are referring to, nor do viewers hear Linhardt (silent throughout) ask any specific questions. This interview style never makes the particulars of these “controversies” clear, either in voice-overs or text screens. What is clear is that the subjects are responding to Linhardt’s prompts. For example, Steven Taylor, a poet, musician, Ginsberg’s friend and accompanist, long-time teacher in the Poetics School, a student there in the 1970s, and member of the reconstituted Fugs, refers to something that “rocked the poetry community . . . a cultural clash involved in what is essentially a monarchical arrangement coming to an ostensibly democratic nation.”⁶⁵ All viewers see is a cut from a current student (saying that while he had heard “stuff” about Trungpa, the most important thing to him was the idea of crazy wisdom) to Taylor, sitting outside and facing someone just off-camera. Taylor’s first words are: “it rocked the poetry community.”

“The Great Naropa Poetry Wars” ruptured the sense of community in and around the Poetics School, forcing poets involved in this community to decide where they would place their allegiances. They realized, heartbreakingly so, that what they thought was this wide ranging community was not much of a solid a community at all. It also raised issues of personality, stardom, and allegiance, questions whose answers demanded a deeper exploration than the larger loose affiliations could stand. Before that year, it was easy for poets practicing the “New American Poetry,” including members of the different schools

that Donald Allen codified in his anthology, to be tied loosely together in a symbolic community whose clearest and most immediate physical manifestation was in the Poetics School at Naropa. Unfortunately, because of the vagueness of that symbolism and the non-specific symbols on the boundary of the community, people within the larger alliances would have differing versions of what that community was supposed to look like and do over time, as we find within literary networks and scenes. In true Cohenian fashion, they agreed on symbols that were big enough to hold them all as long as they did not examine them too closely. Once they did, and once they realized that they actually had different values, they no longer belonged to that community.

When conflicts such as this arose, members and potential members of communities were forced to decide whether they could uphold the values of the community (as clarified by the conflict). In the case of the Poetics School and the “horrible yaargh” of the Great Naropa Poetry Wars, poets who thought they were part of a large and dispersed community that included the Poetics School realized that they were not part of a community, but an extended network that was not as cohesive as they originally thought. There were many competing pressures applied to the smaller Poetics School community from the outside and the poets realized that a community had to choose between pressures. In the case of the Loft in Minneapolis, which hosted Ginsberg in April 1977 (his reading raised about \$2000 for the Loft) the pressures that forced the community to change came from the inside.

Chapter 3: Funding Verse Versus Phony Affinities: the Funding Crisis of 1977-78 at the Loft

“We were part of a counter culture, I think that you can’t underestimate that—this (the culture of the corporation) was a materialistic, commodity driven culture, and there’s nothing that’s farther off on the edge than poetry. It [the Loft] was really an organization founded by and with and for poets . . . I actually had a conversation with a woman from the Dayton-Hudson board, she cornered me at a party, and she said “I can’t believe how ungrateful you people are—we just want to help you! You’ve got to grow up, you have too many poets on the board, you can’t have an organization run by poets. You have to have business people—look at the board of the Guthrie, look at these other boards. You’ve got to have people who can bring money in.” They didn’t like the idea that we had a board full of poets. They gave us \$1500 and tried to change the nature of the board.”

—Marly Rusoff, Loft Founder¹

Here is an improbable scene: a board member of a major corporate foundation confronting the founder of a small poetry non-profit. It is in this uncomfortable scene of contact and in all the moments leading up to it, that we see vividly staged the precise contours of the politics in alternative communities in the post-Vietnam era were forced to operate. This cocktail party conversation is a symptom of a much larger set of concerns that emerged in this era, concerns brought on by the increasing involvement of corporations and governmental institutions in the practice of art, in the work of poetry. Here Marly Rusoff, the founder of the Loft, expresses disbelief at what is essentially an experience of

misrecognition. She cannot recognize herself in the comments made by the Dayton-Hudson member. “We were,” she insists, “part of a counter-culture.” How could this foundation board member not recognize or understand that? How, Rusoff seems to be asking in this instance, could she not see that the Loft was a community of people pledged to a different set of goals and priorities, namely poetry? Why would the board member from Dayton-Hudson expect the Loft to assimilate into a corporate culture and adopt its methods without question? For the businesswoman’s part, the behavior of the Loft Board was inexplicable. After all, the group had formed a board (common in non-profits, which are required to work on a corporate model) applied to her foundation for money, and had been rewarded with that money, but ultimately (foolishly, from her perspective) rejected the gift after learning of its conditions for acceptance. Clearly, in the board member’s mind, poets and money did not mix.

This chapter examines the Loft funding crisis of 1977-78 (the larger context of this conversation between Rusoff and the woman) as a case study of what was happening to various degrees within other poetic communities, arts communities, and activist communities of the 1970s. It is a useful example of how these communities wrestled with numerous competing pressures and tendencies brought into relief and conflict during these crises. It reveals how the decisions these communities made, both those made voluntarily and those made under pressure, affected their futures, and how the process of that decision-making, in response to different economic, personal, artistic, cultural, gendered, or institutional tensions, changed these communities in fundamental ways. The Loft’s financial woes in the 1970s involve a funding crisis that forced members to question their political goals, their view of themselves as outside the commodity culture in which they lived, and to

debate the effects of accepting corporate sponsorship. This chapter studies the complex gender and identity politics through which poetry communities defined the concept of work. Questions for the Loft included: if we abjure financial remuneration for poetry, if we reject capitalist logic, are we then consigning poetry to a feminized position within capital—a position where work goes uncompensated?² What, ultimately, is the work of poetry worth, and who makes that decision?

The Loft presents an engaging case study because its financial crisis emblemizes similar crises happening in poetry communities across the country. Also, the Loft has not received the critical attention it deserves. To my knowledge, only one scholarly study of the Loft exists, but it focuses on the Open Book's (the Loft's current and permanent home) role in revitalizing an urban neighborhood of Minneapolis.³ Likewise, very little critical attention focuses on the poetry of the early Loft members. The work of these poets deeply impacted the literary landscape of the Twin Cities, Minnesota, the region, and beyond, and many of these poets are still active as poets, teachers, and editors in the Twin Cities and throughout the country. The Loft's organization and survival serves as an example to numerous literary communities throughout the country who look to the Loft for guidance, and while members' personal stories of the Loft's beginnings exist in print, and numerous journalistic articles tell versions of the origin story, this literature does not consider the Loft in relation to larger poetic and cultural trends of the mid-seventies, an important historical moment in which the radicalism of the 1960s began to change in response to political, social, and economic exigencies. Nor does it see the Loft as a poetry community to be theorized in order to chart the mechanics of poetic community structures and to see how communities of this era simultaneously defined and re-defined poetry and activism and social change.

Specifically, I argue that the concept of “social change” was constantly renegotiated in artistic communities such as the Loft through the following tensions: 1) the legacy and influence of feminism and “women’s work”; 2) the perceived and desired value of artistic work and the opposing demands of cultural and economic capital; 3) the professional work of writing and establishing oneself as a writer while balancing that work with the other more mundane work of a poetry community; 4) the identity of the community to its members and to its publics and funders; 5) funding and where to get it, to whom that funding makes the community accountable—how much it needs, and whether the funding source conflicts with the mission or identity of the community; and 6) the tensions around literary service given freely by members, when or whether it is appropriate to pay someone for that work, and whether capitalization of that work is gendered.

In what follows I describe in greater detail the Loft’s financial crisis at the end of the seventies. I show not only the conflicts that emerged from that crisis, but also how those conflicts were resolved so that even as the poetry community changed dramatically in those years, it was still recognizable as such to its members. As with the case of the Poetics School at Naropa, these members were sutured into its new self-realization. Although the story of the Poetics School is useful for establishing the principle of the different pressures placed on the boundary of one community from the *outside*, the story of the Loft’s funding crisis of 1977-78 shows us the principle of differing pressures from the *inside* that artistic communities of the 1970s grappled with.

I discuss the poetics of early members of and influences on the Loft (including poems by James Wright, Margaret Hasse, and David Wojahn) and I situate the Loft within a larger economic trend in the arts, one articulated by such scholars as Donna M. Binkiewicz

and Chin Tao Wu, who trace the funding and corporatization of art in the US, starting with the significant economic shifts of the seventies. The Loft has a particular significance because, as a product of the Midwest, it had a distinctive mix of resources and aesthetics to draw upon for support and for constituencies to engage. Thus its attempts to deal with severe economic pressures took on a specific and contingent blend of pragmatism and idealism that enabled its survival into a fourth decade, a blend I discuss later in the chapter.

This mixture of pragmatism and idealism also appears in the poetry of those connected with the Loft, which is often a poetics of connection and friendship. As the poetics of the Poetics School were a poetics of community, so were those of the Loft. Like the poets on the Lower East Side, the poets of the Loft were affected by their landscape. The landscape of New York City is primarily urban, whereas while the Twin Cities area is a large metropolis, it is not as big as New York. The sociability of the poetics of the Lower East side, and later, the Poetics School poets, was derived in part from the physical closeness of their environment. On the Lower East Side, people walked everywhere and so there was a sociability to the street. Poets ran into each other all the time, going to and from their homes or work or the Poetry Project or coffee shop. They brought this sociability with them to Boulder, where though they drove more because the cityscape of Boulder is a bit more spread out than parts of New York, their offices and some of their living spaces were in downtown Boulder, a proximity which allowed for walking. But in the West and Midwest, one is part of the natural landscape in a way that does not seem to happen in New York. The West and Midwest also have less formality in personal relationships, but for different reasons from that of the Poetics School: in the West and Midwest, one has to be

ready to engage the land and its climate at any minute, a persistent imperative rendering superficial interactions less relevant than surviving the climate.

It could be argued that the Midwest had a poetics of intimacy in the face of a harsh climate. Intimacy between friends is shown in the ways the Loft poets dedicated poems to each other, not unlike the New York School poets, in how they wrote about one another, and how they discussed personal topics in a revelatory way within a poetics emphasizing literary friendship and community. Later, this vision of community as a community of friends caused tension with the vision of the institution the Loft was becoming. This poetics of friendship differs from the poetics of sociability that Daniel Kane has identified as important to the community of poets on the Lower East Side of New York. Poetry there had immediacy to it that the Loft did not often have; part of its cachet was to comment on events in almost real time. At the Loft, however, poets emphasized intimacy over immediacy. For example, “High School Boyfriend,” by Loft Board member Margaret Hasse, shows a lyrical subject speaking directly, intimately, and quietly. “You are hometown / you are all my favorite places / from the last summer I grew up in” the speaker begins, addressing a former lover met while visiting her hometown. The freight of the word “hometown,” in addition to the phrase “you are all my favorite places” are carried by the following line that indicates maturity gained after the lovers have parted, after the intimacy was broken. The speaker has changed, is visiting from the city, encounters the lover (“of course it was inevitable”), and in the same moment of encounter, realizes the inevitability of distance:

and find you
pumping gas,

driving truck,
measuring lumber,
and we'd exchange weather talk,
never to be able to break through words
and time to say simply:
"Are you as happy
as I wanted you to be?"⁴

This voice is direct, lyrical, serious, and intimate, and the poem covers a great deal of temporal space, moving back and forth between the past, the present, and the imagined future. Time is sped up and collapsed into the poem, into an intimate moment. This version of temporality contrasts with that of the immediacy of poets of the New York School. Ted Berrigan, a leader of the scene in New York, modeled what Paul Hoover calls his "everydayness" after Frank O'Hara, a first-generation New York School poet and mentor to many of the poets on the Lower East Side. Berrigan's poem "Sonnet XXXVI" is dedicated to O'Hara, and begins in the immediate present, by expanding and slowing one minute so that it fills an entire poem:

It's 8:54 a.m. in Brooklyn it's the 28th of July and
it's probably 8:54 in Manhattan but I'm
in Brooklyn I'm eating English muffins and drinking
pepsi and I'm thinking of how Brooklyn is New
York City too how odd I usually think of it as
something all its own . . .⁵

The poem's twenty-three lines "happen" in a minute, but expand that immediate minute to include a wide range of cogitation and awareness. The expansion slows time down, creating the space for observation of "thoughts following thoughts,"⁶ what the speaker is eating, and the speaker's surprised reaction to his own revelations. The lack of punctuation and traditional line breaks conveys a breathlessness reflecting the pace of life in New York.⁷ Even though Boulder is not New York, many of the poets who came to teach at the Poetics School brought some of that aesthetic with them and blended it with elements from their landscape.

Landscape is part of the reason for the difference in temporality between these two different sets of poets. Minnesota native David Wojahn's work, like the work of such other well-known Midwestern poets as Robert Bly, James Wright, and Tom McGrath, is the poetry of isolated community, much like the communities valued in Tonnies' theory. In Wojahn's early work, he and his friends were poets together within a landscape that demanded its recognition on the page. Even in cities, the landscape of Minnesota is much less compact than on the East Coast. These poets shared many poetic tropes (for example, the land is a sentient character in poems) with the more Western poets with whom they were friends and of which they were students, such as Richard Hugo, Theodore Roethke, William Stafford, and even Beat poet and Ginsberg's friend Gary Snyder. The particular regionalism of the work of these poets in the 1970s had partly to do with local and regional cultures blending or jarring with a nationwide culture emerging from the 1960s.⁸ These young Midwestern poets' relationship with the land and climate actively worked to shape their poetry.

As David Wojahn has emphasized, this 1970s emergence of a Midwestern school was distinct from the earlier sort of regionalism that relied on old-fashioned formal

constraints and Victorian-formal language. “There was really a sense that there was a Midwestern voice in American poetry that was starting to emerge. It was not the same sort of regionalism that’s as dead as a passenger pigeon kind of stuff that was promulgated in the early 19th century. There was something that seemed to be an almost Midwestern school.”⁹ The old regionalism to which he refers was a sort of celebratory boosterism that used old forms to celebrate nostalgic regional content and was a grafting of the Victorian hearthside poems and poetic forms of the Northeast onto the Midwest. Wojahn’s and the Loft’s poetry differed by using a more open form—reflecting the difference, perhaps, in actual landscape—and was more open in content. Other writers saw this as well. Mark Vinz (editor of *Dacotah Territory*), reflected on this aesthetic, and how the vitality of the scene was “nurtured by the decentralizing power of the small press movement itself”¹⁰ in the country’s regions between the coasts. While he was opposed to the sort of “closed off” regionalism that smacked of “boosterism,”¹¹ Vinz and the other editors sought to broadcast the variety of work happening in the “Dacotah Territory,” the part of the country bordered by the Rockies, the Great Lakes, Canada to the North, and Oklahoma to the South—in other words, the Great Plains area of the Midwest. But they did not limit their output to this region. They made sure that theirs was in some senses a regional magazine, but it was a region that welcomed others in, others who could bring something new to the discussion.

This welcoming is a very important aspect of the Midwestern poetry Wojahn and Vinz discuss. One aspect was openness to newcomers and the ideas they bring, encouraging a sense of connection through poetry. Characterized in general as “Midwestern resourcefulness,” this openness to new strategies and ideas worked well in the poetry and poetry publishing. Vinz connected the growth of the small magazine scene in the 1970s with

the flowering of these communities. While writing about the 1960s, Daniel Kane makes this connection as well in his chapter on the mimeo revolution on the Lower East Side. The quickly printed small magazines and broadsheets fostered a sense of lively community among the poets there. It allowed them to participate in the community by commenting on its happenings and by publicizing their events. In some cases, magazines, rather than physical places, were the primary meeting ground for some communities, as they connected geographically distant poets who shared similar aesthetics and attitudes. This magazine-as-meeting-ground was particularly important to Midwestern poets who longed for something distinctively Midwestern, and who longed, as Vinz put it, not to “take their cues” from a national culture spreading from the coasts.

Wojahn believes that the poetics of the Loft and of the Midwest evokes or expresses a sense of community. “If you were somebody like me growing up in Mahtomedi [outside of St. Paul], and you are first starting to read poetry, and you’re reading Eliot and Stevens and people who seem to be so grandiose and imperious and lofty then you discover James Wright, and you discover that he writes about the very landscape that’s around you, that was just a revelation. That was a kind of awakening that a lot of people who formed that community in Minneapolis and Saint Paul in the 1970s had, that sense that, yeah we could do it, too.”¹² The large “we,” the poets from the Midwest, “we” who were not grand, imperious, or lofty, “we” who come from this landscape and culture, could also write powerful and relevant poetry and “make it new.” The physical landscape is indeed an element, but Wojahn’s comments reinforce the importance of the other landscape that Wright and Bly and others attended to. That landscape was interpersonal; poetry spoke to relationships between poets, between poets and their landscapes, and between poets and

their culture. Communities depend on relationships among members for the constant negotiation about values and symbols that form the boundaries and identities of communities, and poetry by some early Loft members reflects this sense of relationship and connection.

In “Elegy for James Wright,” Wojahn describes a trip that he and Peter Mladnic, another local poet and member of the Loft board, took in the late 1970s. They were both young poets during this time, immersing themselves in poetic influences. The poem takes place after they had been drinking during the 4th of July, and they decided to drive to Rochester to relive James Wright’s poem “A Blessing.” This poem of Wright’s, written in 1963, is a favorite poem in the Midwest.¹³ It celebrates the natural landscape and its animal inhabitants. In a vernacular tone treading between the meditative and the somber, Wright’s speaker sings the beauty of two ponies who step out of the trees to greet him and his friend (Bly), on their way back to the Twin Cities after visiting friends in Southern Minnesota: “Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota, / Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass. / And the eyes of those two Indian ponies / Darken with kindness.”¹⁴ Trespassing, the friend and the speaker “step over the barbed wire” and approach the ponies, so compelled by the animals’ beauty and kindness that they risk personal injury to get to the animals. Placing love and loneliness closely together in the poem (“They bow shyly as wet swans. They love each other. / There is no loneliness like theirs”), Wright moves this poem out of the bucolic mode into something more modern and sophisticated: a tone that makes room for the beauty of the world, its obstacles, and its complex emotions of grief, loss, and hardship. The speaker glorifies the beauty of the pony who approaches him and nuzzles his hand, and in a

classic moment of the “Midwestern School” of the 1960s, the action of the poem brings the speaker to a sudden change marked by imagery very different from the setting of the poem:

And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear

That is delicate as the skin over a girl's wrist.

Suddenly I realize

That if I stepped out of my body I would break

Into blossom.¹⁵

James Wright, though years gone from Minnesota by the time that Wojahn and Mladnic made their pilgrimage, deeply influenced the young poets of the Twin Cities. His work combined many of the elements swirling in the atmosphere of the place: a deeply grounded native sense of language and poetry, combined with the influences of poets such as Bly, who traveled and translated extensively and came home with new poetic elements that he folded into his work. Wright's poem not only involves friends taking a journey and taking a risk together, sharing a moment that is revelatory (a favorite sort of poem for many), but it evokes the poetics of the Midwest at that time. Largely through Bly's influence, “Deep Image” poetry became rather popular in Minnesota. While there is some dispute about its origins and correct usage,¹⁶ its influence was, in a word, deep: largely lyrical, these poems often ended with a revelatory moment, expressed in a profound and often striking image.

Wright, born and bred in the Midwest, lived in different parts of the region throughout much of his short and stormy life. His work tended more toward the confessional as he lived in Minnesota, and he and his good friend Bly (and the young poets who followed their example) turned the work of the poetic examination of the self to the work of finding oneself as poet within a landscape, often in a literal or metaphorical

landscape.¹⁷ Wright left Minnesota in 1966 (he had arrived in 1957 to teach in the University of Minnesota English Department) for New York, but he left quite an impression on the younger poets of the Twin Cities and beyond. His work, influenced by his friendships with John Berryman¹⁸ and Robert Bly and by the translations of writers such as Pablo Neruda and Georg Trakl, changed drastically during the 1960s. His first volume of poetry, *The Green Wall* (1957) was fairly traditional in meter and structure. But in 1963, his collection *The Branch Will Not Break* marked the new direction in startling ways. His line lengths varied tremendously (compared to *The Green Wall*, where line lengths within individual poems were fairly standard), and the diction resonates with consistent thematic sounding of the depths of the solitary figure in the landscapes of city and country. In “Lying on a Hammock at William Duffy’s Farm In Pine Island, Minnesota,” one of Wright’s most frequently anthologized poems, the speaker watches the natural landscape in the stillness of dusk. “I lean back, as the evening darkens and comes on. / A chicken hawk floats over, looking for home. / I have wasted my life.”¹⁹ In this new poetry, Wright abandoned his previous dependence on classical references, opting instead for a saturation of horses, prairie, urban blight, birds, holes and caves, darkness, water, and trees. The chiaroscuro of light and dark, ugliness and beauty inside and outside of people, moves apace from poem to poem, and this tone still resonates in the work of Minnesota poets today.

Wright died in 1980, after David Wojahn had moved to Arizona to pursue a Master’s of Fine Arts Degree in Writing. Wojahn’s “Elegy for James Wright” (first published in *Poetry* 1981) is a poem of intense homage in the way of an apprentice to a master at the same time that it is a poem of current friendship based on poetry.

Now there’s no returning

to sullen Ohio or Minnesota; now the pairs
of salt and pepper and Indian ponies
grazing April fields
by Milbank on the South Dakota border,
their delicate spring coats ashimmer,
do not and never will exist.²⁰

The tone here is personal; Wojahn addresses Wright directly in the title and uses images and variations of lines from Wright's work, establishing a common base of poetic reference. The tone also establishes a bond of sympathy, as the death could be seen as a form of release for the elder poet, who suffered from manic depression and alcoholism throughout his life. Wright's poems speak of his native Martin's Ferry, Ohio with a tone that is at times sad, angry, frustrated, scared, and elegiac. The character of the locale is often sullen in Wright's poem, demanding from the populace an unrelenting and punishing amount of toil and sacrifice. But horses also appear frequently, playing the roles of interlocutor, reminder, comforter, and muse.

Wojahn's next stanza changes the scene to his current geography in the poem, Southern Arizona, "an hour's drive from Mexico," where there is "no such event as spring" with a rain that obscures any trace of horses. Spring is not an "event" in Arizona as it is in Minnesota; in Minnesota spring tends to thrill the populace with what seems its sudden and forgiving emergence. "And who'd go back to Minnesota? / Is there any field where those horses / all the summer could graze, / almost human the way its grasses breathe?" The question the younger poet makes out of his own birthplace is another connection to the older poet because of his deep ambivalence toward his place of origin. But there was

something lost in leaving, and Wright could answer, if he still lived, if he was “here”: “I think if you were here you’d tell me,” a line that is its own stanza.

Wojahn’s poem is an homage not just in its content of remembering a fellow and older / influential poet, but in the poem’s structure as well. That Wojahn took so much care in this elegy points to the concerns for community at the Loft. The importance of relationship with both the dead influential poet and the current friend poet is evident in the following stanza. “I remember drinking / all afternoon with Peter / in St. Paul on the Fourth of July. / That summer we wrote *dark* in notebooks” Echoing “Blessing” and Wright’s frequent use of variations of “dark” and “beautiful,” this poem, like “Blessing,” enacts a moment of friendship, a moment paying homage to an older and influential friendship. It also refers to a line of Wright’s from “The River Down Home:” “Blind hoboos sell American flags / and bad poems of patriotism.”²¹ Wojahn and Peter (Mladnic), two young poets who are part of the counterculture, do not celebrate the holiday by watching patriotic parades or picnicking with family, but by drinking and driving and re-enacting a scene from a favorite poem.

Referring to Wright’s poem “I was Afraid of Dying” (which appears just before “A Blessing” in *The Branch Will not Break*), the young poet revels in the ponies, earth, trees, and grass that a favorite poet of his once trod through and touched.

Gently we inched the singing
electric fence to greet them.
.....
I wanted to lie down
right there forever in the saw grass,

among those cantering satellites.

I thought then I would never

again be afraid of dying.²²

Like Wright's poem, Wojahn's poem begins in the natural world, but ends up in philosophy.

As an elegy, it pays homage to the original poem, but it moves to a different place at the end.

"I believe we did it" is not just a line expressing amazement at accomplishing the reproduction of a famous poetic event, but it could be read as an expression of poetic connection, something incredibly valuable to these poets. They will find and touch the ponies even in a world where barbed wire fences are replaced with modern electric fences.

This sense of connection to mentor poets and fellow poets was often nurtured by bookstores. In 1971, Marly Rusoff and her business partner, William Savran, founded the bookstore on 4th street in Dinkytown, just a few blocks West of the East Bank of the University of Minnesota. The store had an uncommonly large poetry section which many poets in the area, including Michael Dennis Browne, Jim Moore, Patricia Hampl,²³ and Robert Bly, started to frequent. In 1973, Rusoff coaxed Robert Bly into reading some of his work aloud in the store, and the impromptu event was so much fun that Rusoff considered holding more readings. In 1974, Savran sold his stake in the store to her, she rented the space above the bookstore to expand, and she approached Jim Moore (who'd been looking for a place to hold a poetry workshop) and Browne about the idea of having a "poets' guild" where classes would be taught and poets could "hang out." Moore taught the first class soon thereafter.²⁴ Late that year, the rent on the space above the bookstore became too much for Rusoff to afford by herself, and the "poets' guild" decided to sell memberships and officially to incorporate (with non-profit status) as the Loft in 1975, and held a

membership kick-off party. At least 80 members signed up and Garrison Keillor provided musical entertainment in one of his first-ever variety shows. In the Fall the Loft applied for a Minnesota State Arts Board grant (funded by the National Endowment for the Arts) and received \$1,730 to hire Sue Ann Martinson, an editor and member of literary and activist communities of the Twin Cities, to be its coordinator.

Over the next year, the Loft sponsored many events in addition to classes, including story hours for children. It launched the first volume of the *25 Minnesota Poets* anthology, and a Christmas reading. The income from membership, class fees, and reading donations was not sufficient to pay for the space above the bookstore, so in 1976, the Loft moved into the upper part of a duplex on 13th Avenue around the corner from Rusoff's. It then relied almost completely on volunteer labor from board members to keep the organization going. Martinson was paid a very small amount, lived in the extra room at the duplex, and used the Loft phone. She even surreptitiously made copies for the Loft while she worked part-time at an arts supply store.

Her work as coordinator included maintaining member contact information, coordinating reading and class times and spaces, answering the phone, copying and distributing flyers for events, dealing with funds from class and membership fees, getting mailings out the door, and compiling the newsletter. Her "work" enabled the poetic "work" of the male poets who, subsidized by the Loft, taught and wrote poetry, a division of labor that created conflict as the community searched for additional funding. The arts board money to pay Martinson was running out, as were the monies allocated to and generated by the Loft's other activities. In January 1977, the Loft Board (whose members at that time included John Minczeski, Jim Perlman, Jim Dochnik, Candy Clayton, Sue Ann Martinson,

David Wojahn, Marly Rusoff, and Caroline Marshall) met to generate ideas for funding and to discuss the future of the organization. One idea generated at the next meeting in February was to hold a fundraiser poetry reading by a “big-time poet,” and Rusoff and others pursued Allen Ginsberg to read in April 1977. At the same time, the board members continued to discuss how fast the Loft was growing and how they might manage that growth, as well as how they could pay for it.

This discussion was spurred in part by Martinson’s increasing frustration with her duties as coordinator in the Spring of 1977. In a letter she wrote to the Board on May 31 of that year, she complained about the diversity of expectations placed upon her and the varying duties she was expected to fulfill, stating that she was “running for the Loft morning, noon, and night.” When she asked for help, she expected to get it, but had not been getting that volunteer help from the board. In addition to the “great ideas” that meetings generated, she needed “a little more support in carrying those ideas through.” In practical terms, she meant cleaning, answering the phone, completing mailings, being responsible for publicity, coordinating classes (and the money for them), and other random duties. While she was paid to be a part-time coordinator, she remarked, it sometimes felt as though some people “tend to be a bit high-faluting and treat me like a secretary or slave, instead of a coordinator.”²⁵ Martinson’s letter highlights not only the worth of volunteer labor, but also the worth of female labor in a countercultural setting. This is a feminist tension, for it explicitly demonstrates how the division between abstract or pure ideals and the pragmatism necessary to achieve those ideals is often gendered. That is, men on the “front lines” of countercultural movements were often supported by women working (and expected to stay) in the background.²⁶ The history of the Loft demonstrates how arts communities in the

1970s continued this practice and how it created tensions between artistic / philosophical purity and practicality.

Wally Seccombe, in “The Housewife and Her Labour Under Capitalism,” has demonstrated that the rise of industrial capitalism in the 19th century divided labor by gender (whereas previously a whole household was involved in general production, the rise of factories split production between the “home” and the “workplace”) with women getting the worst part of the deal. While men theoretically had the right to publicly contract for the exchange of their labor for pay, women had to negotiate for capital in private with their husbands, without the benefit of labor law.²⁷ While Martinson’s situation was not equivalent to that of the 19th century housewife’s, there are parallels between the housework women have done for centuries that have enabled men to go into the world and “work,” and the tasks done by women in arts and political organizations in the 1960s and 70s that enabled artistic and political activism to get done primarily by men.

Martinson and her Loft compatriots in the seventies shared progressive and countercultural political views. Martinson left the Loft in the early eighties, however, because the Loft accepted a grant from Honeywell (which provided bomb-making material to the armed forces). Since the 1980s, Martinson has worked for a number of anti-war organizations; she currently works at the Minneapolis branch of the Non-Violent Peace Force. Yet her previous jobs and experiences with arts funding, as the editor for the journal *Sing Heavenly Muse: Women’s Poetry and Prose* (begun in 1977) and as an organizer for the Great Midwestern Book Show (a small press and writer’s festival that took place in Minneapolis in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s) directed her responses to the Loft’s funding crisis. Her own biography exemplifies the conflicts between politics and professionalization in which the

Loft found itself embroiled at this time, and it reflects how pragmatism was a very important aspect of feminist leadership.

Conversations about the Loft's tensions and its future—as a professional poetry outreach organization or as a gathering place for politically inflected poets—continued throughout the early part of the year, including a “reorganization meeting” in June of '77. The Loft board decided in September of that year to pursue money from private institutions, including the Dayton-Hudson and Jerome Foundations, both based in the Twin Cities. The Dayton-Hudson Foundation was the philanthropic arm of the Dayton-Hudson Corporation (now known as the Target Foundation and the Target Corporation). Dayton-Hudson owned a number of stores, including Dayton's Department Store, Hudson's Jewelers, Target, and B. Dalton Booksellers. The Jerome Foundation was founded by Jerome Hill, a member of the prominent Hill family, which made its money from railroads and lumber. Jerome Hill was a visual artist, filmmaker, and composer who founded the Avon Foundation in 1964 (the name changed to the Jerome Foundation after his death in 1972) to fund new artistic works in Minnesota and New York.

Members of the Loft board expressed several reservations about applying to private foundations, including “being stuck” with having to go back to the foundations and ask for money every year (a possibility many did not want to entertain). They also worried about the possibility of being “psychologically pressured” into pleasing the funders *du jour*. Eventually, however, the members decided they had no other choice but to apply: “due to our present bank balance \$50, we have to seek out new funding sources.”²⁸

The board wrote an application to the Dayton-Hudson Foundation in October 1977, and learned soon after that the Loft had received a matching grant for \$1500. The board,

though having unanimously agreed originally to pursue the money, rejected the grant in December once the conditions for accepting the grant were known. According to Rusoff, the foundation required that posters advertising Loft events display the phrase “sponsored in part by a grant from B. Dalton Booksellers” on the bottom of the poster;²⁹ moreover, the grant was a matching grant requiring the Loft to solicit matching funds from other businesses. Many on the board were already suspicious of the foundation’s corporate ties, and Rusoff (who one member described as “hitting the roof” when she heard about the board’s acceptance of the Dayton-Hudson money) objected to taking the grant, as the conditions could undermine her bookstore and other locally-owned businesses. B. Dalton’s, as a subsidiary of Dayton-Hudson, had the cash flow to survive economic uncertainty and had been scouting the Dinkytown area for a location from which to access the college market (and thus directly compete with Rusoff & Co.).

Reading the quotation that began this chapter again, it is not hard to see why a local bookstore owner would resist having to advertise events at her bookstore with publicity carrying the imprimatur of a competing and (soon to become) behemoth chain. Rusoff herself has remarked that they were not angry over taking corporate money in general, but that they were angry about crediting B. Dalton, about putting “that one line” on their posters. The implication of Rusoff’s statement that the Loft was an organization founded by and for poets is that poets are not part of this larger “commodity-driven” culture, and, as outsiders, were not about to trade their beliefs for money. They might take money from a corporation, but would not trade their integrity as artists for that money. However, the woman from the Dayton-Hudson board who cornered Rusoff likely saw the poets’ behavior much less romantically: their vision of themselves as idealistic dreamers holding the values of

the 1960s must have struck her as childish and immature. They were naive poseurs playing at the adult game of corporate and non-profit organization building, a game for which they were sorely under-skilled and overly-idealistic. “This is serious,” the woman might have said, “you have a Board, you have applied to a foundation for funding, and now you reject the money? What is wrong with you?” The implication is that poets (given the image they have cultivated about themselves as countercultural), unlike business people, lack the skills or the vision required to make tough monetary decisions to ensure their future growth and success. Their inability to “grow up” and make adult choices has put them in this position. This is what they got for cheering when Jim Moore (who worked as a teacher and editor) declared “not me. I’m not going to work.”

After all, the Dayton-Hudson Foundation had priorities and a clear idea about how to meet them. Their funding choices were specific and pointed. In their 1977 report, *Dayton-Hudson Corporation and Community Giving*, subtitled “Community / People: Their Problems • Their Opportunities • Their Innovations • Their Solutions,” the Foundation emphasized that giving was a part of its corporate philosophy, specifically funding those “organizations and programs which enhance the quality of life in Dayton-Hudson communities, making them better places in which to live, work, and to do business. . . Dayton-Hudson supports the arts because a rich cultural environment helps ensure a high quality of life for all citizens. The humanizing influence of the arts is of growing importance in this age of urban congestion and social uncertainty.”³⁰ William A. Anderson, Chairman of the Dayton-Hudson Board and the company’s CEO during this time, wrote this statement in the booklet that detailed the Foundation’s giving for the year, and it deserves as close a reading as any poem, for it demonstrates the strange and competing thrusts of arts activism

and funding during these years. Anderson was a member of what was then known as the “Five-percent Club,” a group of Minnesota corporate heads and C.E.O.s who committed to using five percent of their profits to charity (usually through foundations). The club had existed in various iterations since the early 1900s, when the founder of Dayton’s was a member, and contributed to the perception of the area as extraordinarily generous in its corporate giving and support of non-profits. Such a tradition of sustained and organized corporate giving in a local area was not normal. It was so notable that John D. Rockefeller III called the Twin Cities “The Emerald City” when he visited the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce on June 30, 1977.³¹

Corporate giving in Minnesota, as Judith Martin and Joseph Galaskiewicz have argued, has always stemmed from a range of motivations, including altruism, gratitude, regional loyalty,³² particular interest in an area (such as music or education), and the image of the corporation. When looking at the Dayton-Hudson Foundation’s motivations for giving, it is easy to see these different motivators. While they genuinely wanted to enhance life in local neighborhoods (they “adopted” Minneapolis’ Whittier neighborhood in the 1980s) enhancing the quality of life in Dayton-Hudson communities also meant enhancing those communities wherein people could buy Dayton-Hudson items. If their lives were enhanced (beyond the basic needs of food, housing, and transportation), they would have the disposable income and aspirations with which to buy. Better living, better working, better buying and selling: this is the post-war ideal that the executives of Dayton-Hudson embraced, despite the looming recessions. Anderson shares his view of “the humanizing influence of the arts” with private foundations, government granting organizations, and universities all over the country during this decade. Its logic was the primary motivation for

congressional support of the National Endowment for the Arts. “Urban congestion” and “social uncertainty” are real specters in the minds of corporate foundation board members (and government officials) who were based in large cities in the 1970s. Even though it was the 1970s, unrest continued to exist. That urban congestion and social uncertainty are conditions that needed attention and could be ameliorated by art says much about the forces and desires that drove corporate funding in the 1970s. These funders believed in the soothing power of art, not in its provocative power. Taking their cue from the narratives around the establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts—where the humanizing effect of art was touted as part of the Great Society—philanthropic wings of organizations sought to include themselves among the benefactors of the Great Society, as they would directly and indirectly benefit from such an association.³³

In his book *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention Since the 1980s*, art historian Chin-Tao Wu focuses on the effects of corporate intervention and philanthropy in the arts, specifically on how tax codes have granted double advantages to corporate art giving since the 1970s. His exhaustive and one-of-a-kind study includes surveys and interviews with many corporate heads, foundation chairs and staffers, museum curators, gallery owners, and artists. Wu notes that while corporations had been fairly passive participants in art as silent funders in the first half of the twentieth century, they later started to assert control over more than the sums of money they gave. “Using their economic power, modern corporations . . . successfully turned art museums and galleries into their own public relations vehicles, by taking over the function, and by exploiting the social status that cultural institutions enjoy in our society.”³⁴ Associating themselves with high art allows them to be thought of as part of high culture. This association not only benefits the personal fortunes,

images, and relationships among these companies' top executives, but it indirectly (through considerable tax benefits) monetarily benefits the corporation itself by providing it with an image of generosity, community values, and in some cases, hipness.

While Wu focuses on corporate giving and the visual arts, and even though the visual arts have traditionally received more money than the literary arts,³⁵ his arguments and observations are highly pertinent to my discussion of the Dayton-Hudson grant to the Loft. To put it bluntly, while the corporate sponsorship of literature is not so visible as it is with the visual arts (sponsorship logos above museum doors, logos on programs), the presence of corporate funding of literary arts is marked. "Alert to their symbolic standing in people's (consumers') minds, companies utilize the arts, replete with their social implications, as another form of advertising or public relations strategy,"³⁶ Wu asserts, noting that they use this cultural capital to pursue cultural *and* economic ends. Thus, when a grant from Dayton-Hudson to the Loft required that its subsidiary B. Dalton Books be named as a sponsor, the corporation achieved quite a coup: it received symbolic capital as a generous company and advertising for its own business, a rival of the sponsoree.

The Loft Board's mistrust of corporations and private philanthropy speaks to an unarticulated sense of nervousness about such motives, including the suspicion that art that benefits the government and corporations does so through a range of mechanisms. As mentioned previously, Donna M. Binkiewicz has argued that while the growth of the N.E.A. had less to do with art's purported humanizing effects in society than the United States' need to demonstrate its cultural superiority during the Cold War, the belief that giving artists money might pacify them and keep them from protesting was a genuine motive on the part of Endowment supporters. Binkiewicz contends that Nixon hoped that his huge increases to

the N.E.A. budget would pacify antiwar protestors and reward “model youth” who created art rather than protest.³⁷ It also served to place artists in the tricky position of being complicit in the actions of the government, rendering future claims of anti-institutionalism less valid to some hearers. Accepting money from corporate or governmental organizations brings one into relationship (at worst, a subservient relationship and at best, a working one) with the funders, and this is a more complicated position from which to protest those organizations.

Yet even before the large-scale controversy that resulted in massive funding cuts in the NEA in the 1990s, Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter all worked in the 1970s to decentralize the power of the NEA by granting state and local arts organizations (such as the Minnesota State Arts Board) more responsibility. They also focused on encouraging more private giving to the arts. Matching funds were part of the NEA’s program since it began in 1965, a condition that allowed for its majority passage in Congress. No more than 50% of any project can be funded by an endowment grant. Ford demanded that artists being funded by the NEA get at least three private or matching dollars per NEA dollar. One can make the argument that the NEA is responsible for the sub-industry and career of grant-writing that has sprung up in the last few decades, and it is not surprising that corporations followed this model.

It is likely that the old and new members of the Loft Board were aware of these new developments in arts funding. As the Loft’s money continued to dwindle into the winter of 1977-78, the board kept meeting and trying to find a way to survive. Sue Ann Martinson’s response to the rejection of the Dayton-Hudson money by the board, and the resultant conversation in the early months of 1978, provides a window through which we can see the

tensions previously mentioned playing out. Martinson accused the board of being “political” and demonstrating a lack of concern for her position by rejecting the Dayton-Hudson money. In describing her opposition to the “political” nature of the Loft conversation, Martinson wrote on Jan. 2, 1978 to the Loft Board: “I am opposed to the idea of the Loft as a political organization (as a non-profit organization, under the category of education, it cannot be political without being illegal). The Loft is ‘A Place for Literature and the Arts,’ not a political structure or platform, and should be organized around that tenet, or it is misrepresenting itself.”³⁸ Her statement illustrates a fundamental division in her mind between the advocacy of leftist literary politics and sound business practice. Her previous work, activism, and literary organizational experiences directed her very pragmatic response to the Loft’s funding crisis, and this response was a feminist argument, for it asked that her work of keeping the Loft going be just as valuable as the teaching and reading of poetry.

At a meeting on the issue in early 1978, the board considered questions about how the funding might affect the Loft’s size and mission (without capitulating to possible demands of the foundation’s “good old boys” and “phonies”), and whether the Loft would survive without the grant. Minutes of the meeting show the struggles among the board between a resistance to joining art with capitalism and the equality brought about by considering “women’s work” as valuable within the marketplace. The money question was also a harbinger of other questions such as whether to get bigger and “give up” things, or to keep the Loft “intimate and hospitable.” One member asked: “is the only choice between these two? Whether or not we want to be a small supportive group or get larger and educate the community about poetry and lit? How can the Loft remain a place of informal

gathering?”³⁹ Unable to resolve the crisis in one meeting, they decided that everyone should write a letter to the board in preparation for a special meeting.

The crucial question about which they wrote letters was ultimately one of identity: could the Loft remain true to its countercultural goals, and should the Loft maintain its “exquisite intimacy” or become a larger, professional outreach / education organization? John Minczeski, a founding member, wrote in his January 9 letter to the board that the Dayton-Hudson funds were “bad conscience money,” and he resisted soliciting money from other Dinkytown businesses [a condition of the matching grant], because “any list of sponsors (provided by the foundation) would have to include Team Electronics and B. (ugh) Dalton (to show the public that these businesses are good old boys after all).”⁴⁰ Minczeski tells the story:

Marly heard we got the grant and went through the roof. I was president of the board at this time and felt that there was no way we should support them, because they were going to drive her store out of business. Back then, it was wonderful—we had our hangout after all, which was Marly’s dream! So all these different kind of centers (meaning poetry networks)—everybody knew everybody else, and Marly kind of did it out of (the fact that) she thought it’d be cool!⁴¹

For Minczeski, taking the grant meant giving support to Dayton-Hudson and its subsidiaries. “Marly’s dream” of a “hangout” for poets was threatened by having to accept these conditions and to professionalize. Even though the Loft had since moved to the duplex around the corner, members still felt a deep attachment between the Loft and the bookstore, not just in sentiment, but in common goals as well. They saw the fate of the bookstore and

the fate of the Loft as intertwined within the counterculture. The bookstore was a symbol sutured into the identity-producing boundary of the Loft in those days; it stood for independent business' struggle against corporate behemoths. Its openness to people just "hanging out" stood for poets' and artists' countercultural resistance to the norms of work and maturity, and it stood as a place for the celebration of poetry and the written word.

But change within and without produces tensions, especially when it is clear that a community must grow in order to survive. The question for the Loft was whether it could grow in its outreach and size so that, using the funding and people-power raised by the programming, it could keep doing the work of poetry—readings, classes, and other poetry events. Would any sort of growth, carefully managed or not, decrease the power of the symbols that currently meant so much to the Loft's identity? Board member Jim Dochniak's letter to the Loft Board, on Jan 16, 1978, reflected these tensions about expansion.

The money brings out the difficult issues of expansion, etc. Will the grant work against the already fuzzy image we have in the writing community and the larger community? Will the grant cause a certain alienation? Does it mean supporting B. Dalton at the expense of Marly? Would taking the grant help us to get closer to the "people"? Like a fuzzy poem I feel we are unclear about who our audience is . . . and it is political whether we like it or not.⁴²

This position is in part a direct response to Martinson's letter, because unlike her, he believed that all poetry and related activity is political, so every choice a poetic community makes is political. He expressed some of his own queasiness about the work of the community. Not too long after this time at the Loft, Dochniak left the Board and became

the editor of *Sez*, a “multi-cultural review,” in response to his frustration about what he saw as the Loft’s overwhelming whiteness and exclusivity. Poetry, for him, was political in that it could help advance political goals of the oppressed and work to end social injustice. At this moment, however, this meaningful symbol, as well as others, were unclear and somewhat weak, making the boundary—the identifiable edge—of the community “fuzzy.” He identified very clearly that the Loft’s growth had already created some instability in how it presented itself: Was it a political and countercultural entity, or was it an outreach organization? Dochniak has said that during the time that he was on the board, the most important meeting was over whether or not to accept the Dayton-Hudson grant. “That thing brought us to an incredible moment of moral and artistic—scrutiny, angst—all of it . . . I don’t believe Marly was for it—she knew what would happen. I voted to take the money now—we don’t have to take it the next time.” Taking the money now would have spared them from immediate financial ruin, buying them time to figure out the next step they could take to survive. Today, indicating that this belief may have been naïve, and raising the specter of the drug wars in urban environments, he has learned that once an organization gets funding, it is hard not to ask for it again:

well, it’s like the drug dealer on the corner—where the first one’s free, and it’s been that ever since . . . with the Loft years ago, the foundation people said ‘well lookit, you know, why don’t you move the Loft into a community with a better demographic, where there’s more income, these people in Wayzata maybe don’t want to drive to Minneapolis, they’re scared to.’ These granters can really effect the direction of a grantee . . . they can make suggestions, and they will . . .⁴³

Dochniak felt that the funders believed they could change the behavior of those they funded. And they could. As I discuss later in this chapter, the Loft now has satellite campuses in the suburbs of the Twin Cities. Like Rusoff, Dochniak argued that the money from these funders came with strings attached: if they gave the money, they could hold the Loft accountable. In Rusoff's case, the Dayton-Hudson Foundation Board member was suggesting that Rusoff change the board by inviting businessmen to join, as the Guthrie Theater did in the 1960s, a point Minczeski makes in his letter of January 13, 1978. Saying that the Loft might want to be careful about how much it's growing, he warned that "we have to keep on guard to keep the Loft from becoming a caricature of the Guthrie. Twelve years ago, according to a Rockefeller report, the Guthrie was producing plays by local playwrights."⁴⁴ His perception was that the Guthrie, by adding corporate board members, grew so big that it no longer served as a lab for local dramatists and actors, but chose instead to feature nationally touring shows and more recognizable actors, directors, and playwrights.

Rusoff strongly opposed such corporatizing measures, as she observed that these foundation boards were made up of business owners who wanted to burnish their images among the buying public. As the wife of a city alderman (Edward Felien, the war protestor from chapter 1), Rusoff was invited to a lot of these board functions. "These were all people with a lot of money who had no commitment to the neighborhood; they took these positions as a way to say 'I sit on boards, I support the community;' but they really weren't people who understood the community, but they took them as honorary things—they liked to say to their friends that they were on boards, and that's what they wanted to do with the Loft, they wanted to be able to say, 'Oh, I sit on the Loft board.'"⁴⁵ Rusoff's interlocutors demonstrate the principle Wu discusses, namely, that members of the corporate elite sought

out artistic board positions to gain cultural—and thus economic— capital in addition to the tax incentives garnered by their donations.

The Loft Board voted 6-4 on January 16, 1978, to take the \$1500 from the Dayton-Hudson Foundation. Sue Ann Martinson characterized the resistance of the board to taking the money as partly generational: “we were coming out of the late sixties and early seventies, coming out of that era where the corporations were not trusted,” and the mentality was not to trust anyone over 30. She understood, though ultimately disagreed with, the resistance to the sacrifices anticipated in the decision to take the Loft money. Her words illuminate the anxieties, promises, frustrations, and consequences of arts funding in the 70s. “Once you get 501c3 status, then they start putting certain stipulations on you and expecting you to behave in certain manners, and you’re expected to have boards, and it’s a non-profit, but the non-profit is a corporate model . . . I still think that they wouldn’t have survived without it. You can only have volunteer staff for so long.”⁴⁶ The ideological fervor might die off, in other words, when the activists burned out, and thus these people would have to be paid to stick around and keep doing the work of these organizations. Marly Rusoff herself had to back away from the day-to-day operation of the Loft so that she could focus on keeping the bookstore open. She eventually sold it to a worker and became a book representative for a national press. She is now a successful literary agent in New York City, but she often visits her friends and family in Minnesota and occasionally attends events at the Loft’s new location.

The Future Was An Open Book

A distance of about one and a half miles separates the first Loft's location at 1301 4th Street from the site of its current location at 1011 Washington Avenue South, across the Mississippi River and to the west, in a part of Minneapolis recently "renewed," owing in no small part to the decision of the Loft to partner with three other literary organizations (Milkweed Press, the Minnesota Center for Book Arts, and a branch of Ruminator Books) and renovate an old factory building for its new and permanent home. The complex is called the "Open Book." The geographical distance is small, but the cultural distance between what the Loft was and what it is now is huge. While the Loft's founding ethos of community remains intact in much of what occurs at the present location and its satellite locations in the suburbs, time travelers would be hard-put to recognize the current Loft had they just visited the Loft of the late 1970s.

The Open Book re-vamped what used to be a warehouse on the south side of the Mississippi river, an area of Minneapolis (just north of the Metrodome) populated by factories, old vacant buildings, the Liquor Depot, and bars to the East, close to the West Bank campus of the University of Minnesota. Garth Rockcastle,⁴⁷ who had also renovated a previous habitation for the Loft (in what is now the Playwrights center on Franklin Avenue), undertook the renovation of this building, including designing offices for Milkweed and the Loft administration, a coffee shop on the lower level, separate but accessible spaces for the bookstore and the Minnesota Center for Book Arts, classrooms, and writers studio spaces. While he had to insert walls to separate out the smaller rooms, many of the Loft's large spaces feature exposed brick and wood. The center of the Open Book is a staircase, designed by MCBA instructor Karen Wirth, between the first and second floors, in a loose

spiral with translucent pieces of plastic flanking the sides. These plastic pieces have words written on them, to the effect that when visitors ascend the stairs, they feel as though they are walking up the spine of a book whose pages are slowly unfurling.

At the top of the stairs, visitors can head to the right for a classroom, forward into the library of literary magazines, beyond that, to the writers' studios, and another classroom, or to the left, into the most open part of the current Loft. There is a shelf with magazines and announcements for readings, a number of moveable chairs to be arranged as patrons need, and an open space in front of the main Loft offices. If one continues to the left, he or she enters the narrow foyer to the Target Performance Hall, a large reading space named after the corporate funders who underwrote a major portion of the rebuilding. In fact, the Target logo greets all entrants to the space, as they are forced to turn left or right upon entering the foyer:



1. Target Performance Hall, Open Book Center, Minneapolis.
Rebecca Weaver, 2009.

The Loft now has about six full-time staff members, a yearly budget of approximately 3.5 million dollars, and an endowment begun in 2000 with a million-dollar endowment challenge grant from the Ford Foundation. Writers pass through the hallways and meet in the coffee shop on the first floor, next to a grand window that looks out onto Washington Avenue

South and its new shops and condominiums. During most of evenings at the Loft during the reading season, readings take place in the Target Performance Hall, and audience members often mingle with students in Loft classes before the readings. On June 3, 2010, the Loft celebrated its 35th anniversary with a packed evening. First Jocelyn Hale, the current Director, gave a report on the Loft's fiscal health and highlights of the year. This reporting is annual, but Hale and the Board decided to make the annual meeting a public party to celebrate the anniversary. As she gave her report and presented the Loft's strategic plan for the next decade, a screen alternated between images of Loft classes and events and slides indicating annual income and costs, much as at annual shareholders meeting. Her report ended with an affable reminder that the Loft is a non-profit and that it would benefit from every donation. After Hale spoke, a representative of Graywolf press introduced the anthology *A View from the Loft*, collected from the 35 years of the Loft Newsletter. Kate DiCamillo, a literary star in the Twin Cities in recent years, read her national, award-winning essay. A former student (and now teacher) at the Loft, DiCamillo has published a number of highly-regarded children's books, one of which has been made into a movie.

The night was celebratory and lively, but I could not help thinking what a difference it was from what the Loft used to be. Phebe Hanson, Marly Rusoff, and other early Loft members were there, and they mingled with photographers, videographers, former Loft students and teachers, and members of the larger literary community, including representatives from local presses and journals. The event itself was sponsored by Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, an investment firm. The back of the program especially thanks a number of private foundations, including the Target Foundation.

It is worth wondering whether the Loft Board of 1977-78 could have imagined such a night as this, and whether the current Loft would be the result of their agonizing decision to take the Dayton-Hudson money. Did they suspect that the Target sign would greet every single audience member at a reading sponsored by the Loft? Did they suspect that annual membership meetings would look like this—a throng of well-dressed board members (many of whom own local businesses or who have contributed a great deal of money to the Loft), representatives of the Loft's corporate funders, literary luminaries, and members of the Twin Cities' literati, chomping on appetizers and sipping wine? Did they think that by taking the money from Dayton-Hudson, they were beginning a relationship that would last for 35 years, a relationship wherein the Loft would have to go to the foundation every year and ask for money? Not just ask, but prove themselves as worthy of the money? Did the Dayton-Hudson foundation board members have an inkling of what the Loft would look like all these years later, and in fact gave the money because they realized the way that this relationship would serve them over time? Did they know the extent to which their faith in the Loft's project would be rewarded?

There is no way to know these answers, but I raise them because an element of the meetings about whether to take the grant in 1977-78 was the fear that the Loft as it was would have to change. This change would come out of the things they had to do to make themselves accountable to these funders. They had to demonstrate their worth, which they found quite distasteful, as it was anathema to their position within the counterculture. They did not want to talk about themselves in language that reduced their activities to monetary value; they believed that what they did was inherently valuable. They wanted to believe that there was something artistically pure about not having to ask for the money, or to make their

organization accountable to anyone but its members. Joseph Glaskiewicz's study of corporate giving in the Twin Cities from 1979 to 1981 makes this very point: "non-profits (who ask for money) must manipulate the referents of legitimacy. One of these is the organizational goals that reflect the values of the dominant society."⁴⁸ But survival without that funding, without that accountability, was so uncertain that they eventually had to compromise.

Did they compromise too much, as poet Mark Nowak thinks? Does their funding status preclude more edgy aesthetics or contents, for fear of alienating potential mainstream funders? Mark Nowak intimated as much in his 2001 article "Open Book, Case Closed: The Democratic Paradox of Minnesota's New Literary Center," an article that created quite a stir in the Twin Cities after its publication. Nowak was a member of at least a couple of Twin Cities literary communities during from the early nineties to 2009 (when he left to become the Director of the Rose O'Neill Writer's House at Washington College), and was active in the scene, editing and publishing *Xcp: Cross-Cultural Poetics*, co-editing an anthology of Native American Poetry, *Visit Tepee Town*, and publishing three books of poetry with Coffee House Press. He also taught literature and creative writing at St. Catherine University in Minneapolis and St. Paul, worked with the National Writer's Union, and taught a series of writing workshops at Ford Manufacturing plants in Minnesota and South Africa.

Nowak, observing the interior of the Open Book just as it opened in May of 2000, likens the interior to the front door of an exclusive suburban housing development. He sees in the Loft's physical surroundings something less clean and open than un-inclusive and uncritical. In describing a video of the opening night gala (at which partygoers were charged \$100 each), Nowak states that it "displayed just how far this nation's institutions still have to

go to transform their neoliberal, ‘inclusive’ multiculturalism into truly open, questioning, critical, and often painful discussions on racism, gender inequity, privilege, and related issues.”⁴⁹ His two major moves here are to 1) describe the Open Book (into which he places the Loft) as an institution and 2) to accuse it of using “neoliberal” multiculturalism to avoid the more painful discussions he would rather see it participate in. Nowak’s essay is in dialogue with the work of theorist Chantal Mouffe, who says that many democratic institutions run the risk of succumbing to conservative and corporate domination because they opt for consensus rather than question and critique. He obviously sees this tendency at the Open Book, describing its four founding organizations (the Loft, Ruminator Books,⁵⁰ Milkweed Press, and the Minnesota Center for Book Arts) as participants in a “corporate merger.”

In his perusal of the bookstore’s shelves, he looks unsuccessfully for texts of critical theory (the word “theory” has been replaced by “appreciation”), and books by poets “pushing the envelope on the active engagement of politics, cultural studies, and aesthetics in their works,” or journals doing that work or engaging in cross-cultural or class-based dialogue. In the Loft course listings for the Summer and Fall of 2000, Nowak is disappointed in the curriculum’s lack of critical (in the larger political sense of the word) class topics. Out of about 100 offerings, “not one of which includes—as its central feature—race, gender, class, ethnicity, etc. The Loft aesthetic either erases or strictly subordinates these issues to ‘higher order’ aesthetic categories or concerns such as ‘The Sonnet,’ ‘Creative Flow,’ ‘Line Breaks’”⁵¹ Here Nowak demonstrates the main operating mechanism of the theory of this project: that constituents of a poetic community-cum-institution will put pressures on a community or an institution for it to uplift certain values

above others. As a member of the larger Twin Cities' literary network, and recognizing that the Loft is a very influential player within that network, Nowak criticizes the Loft for emphasizing depoliticized aesthetic concerns and advocates that it instead make issues of class, race, gender, and sexuality “central figures” of courses:

The inclusive, multicultural model then (in token fashion) makes sure these aesthetic categories *include* one writer—and almost always one—from each ethnic or cultural group . . . In the model I'm arguing for, issues of race, gender, ethnicity, etc. would become as central in our conversations, debates, and workshops, and classes as the literary categories and forms themselves. If organizations like the Loft *truly* believed in the importance of classes and workshops that addressed the goal of living, one day, in a pluralistic society where racism, sexism, etc. are greatly reduced or eventually (in a perfect world) eliminated, I would hope that among their 100 plus class offerings at *least* several dozen would focus, centrally, on these issues.⁵²

In many ways, he sounds like Jim Dochniak, the early Loft member who warned that the Loft was not connecting well enough to communities of color and labor writers in the Twin Cities in the 1970s. Nowak also sounds a little like Andrei Codrescu, who bemoaned what he saw as the “class spirit” consensus that seemed to happen in American poetry in the 1970s. Codrescu, writing in the introduction to *Up Late: American Poetry Since 1970*, says that poets seemed to be giving up the productive debates about poetic values and social values in poetry for a sense that everyone got along.⁵³

I would like to parse Nowak's conditional above (“If the Loft truly believed . . .”). It is a jab, a spur, challenging the Loft to make a commitment to teaching classes that

“addressed the goal of living, one day, in a pluralistic society.” But is it right to ask such a thing of such a place, when that place never explicitly stated that one of its goals was to free the world of gender, race, and class bias? The Loft’s beginnings are in the countercultural and anti-oppression work of the 1960s. This work gave the early Loft members the skills to organize as well as the inspiration to work for poetry (and by working on behalf of poetry, they believed, they could change the world for the better through providing greater access to poetry). However, one of the lessons learned from arts organizing in the 1970s is that no one organization can do it all, no matter how progressive its members are. Were the founders of the Loft (and also, the Poetics School) naïve and overly idealistic in thinking that creating “a place for poetry” had a direct impact on the social and economic ills surrounding them in the 1970s? Can we acknowledge this while being grateful for their verve?

Nowak is idealistic in his critique; which, while necessary, does not attend to some matters of practicality. How might young teachers at the Loft (many with M.F.A. degrees from schools in the area) approach such content, when they have not been trained in it? And whose responsibility is it to train them in critical race, gender, and class studies? As Nowak mentions in his essay “Neoliberalism, Collective Action, and the American MFA Industry,” products of American creative writing graduate programs are prepared to support that system when they graduate, by participating in its exercises of power, visibility and economics, and conversely, not prepared to do this activist, critical pedagogy for which Nowak argues. Rightly or wrongly, they would protest (many have, privately, to me) that they are writers and writing teachers who likely skew politically to the Left, but who perhaps have not found a way to teach a writing class that incorporates critiques of the dominant power structure.

Such pedagogical methods do indeed exist, but few, if any, writing programs (from where the Loft gets many of its instructors) use them.⁵⁴ I'd like to raise another major point that Nowak does not: whether or not the teachers use critical pedagogy, what would the students expect? Taking a class at the Loft is completely optional, and what gets taught at the Loft is driven by student choice, unlike what happens at many universities, where students can pick from a range of options to fill core requirements. Instructors propose classes and the Loft board select course proposals those they feel will have a good number of students. However, if not enough students sign up for an approved class, the class is canceled. The choices many Loft students tend to make reflect a white, middle class, theoretically uninformed humanistic vision of the value of writing, which assumes that by taking the time and energy to read and write instead of watching TV, one will be a better person, with expanded horizons, and capable of self-examination, inquiry, and reflection. This will in turn allow one to act for good in the world, including in anti-oppression work.

Many students of the Loft find in this an appetizing aspiration, and many arrive for their classes there with such a notion in mind. Is the Loft responsible for this mindset? No, western cultural ideology about writing and art and literature is. Can the Loft Board undo some of this ideology, an ideology that existed in the minds of its founders (whose connection to anti-oppression work through writing was less removed than the current Loft's is now)? Yes it can, at the risk of losing a lot of their students and corporate funders, and only if a majority of the board members decided to undo the Enlightenment ideology. What is not clear from Nowak's essay is whether he believes it is the teachers' or the board's or the students' responsibility to embrace critical pedagogy, and it is not clear what his solutions to the problem he has identified are.

Many instructors do make a concerted effort, some aided by critical theory, to address issues of race or class or gender and to go beyond the tokenism about which Nowak complains. Many of them believe, to quote Sharon Olds, that “writing is only half-action,” which is commonly taken to mean that one can write poetry, even poetry that addresses or enacts particular social issues, but that writers also actually need to go out into the world and act—volunteer, donate money, or organize, on behalf of their beliefs. Their students, like much of whatever section of mainstream culture there is that still reads (and which is still heavily influenced by New Critical beliefs about politics, history, and writing) sees political action and writing as separate activities.

Upon reflection, it strikes me that Nowak would have gotten along quite well with the early members of the Loft in the 1970s, who, like Nowak, believed that poetry was countercultural, and that by providing a place for it to be read and taught, they were being true to their goals as products of the counterculture. They could not have anticipated that while poetry is in some quarters still countercultural, “writing” and the teaching of it is an industry beholden to capitalist logic and humanistic ideology as many of its corporate funders are.

The Loft is no longer a small countercultural community, but an institution. As such, it provides space and resources for communities to develop, in much the same way that the Poetics School, as part of an academic institution, actively fosters community among its students and faculty. Many read this development as the natural evolution of communities that do not die, but what happens when countercultural *communities* become *institutions* that, by virtue of their daily work of survival and maintenance, efface their own oppositional origins? The next chapter explores this relationship between community and

institution and the conflicting desires that attend them. What are the lessons we can take from the choices poetry communities made in the 1970s?

Chapter 4: We Were Never Cool: Lessons Learned for Organizing Poetic Community in the 21st Century

“Consciously or not, our desires keep redefining our sense of who we are. Desire is how we take our place in the causal matrix of space and time . . . whatever the desire, of the solution actually leads to happiness, the desire is skillful.”

—Thanissaro Bhikku, “Pushing the Limits: Thanissaro Bhikkhu on Desire, Imagination, and the Buddhist Path”

“At the same time, no amount of skepticism does away with desire which, if it is the destiny of a signifying organism, is fashioned, but neither produced nor erased, by the specific cultural order which gives rise to our doubts. Love thus occupies a paradoxical position in postmodern culture: it is at once infinitely and uniquely desirable on the one hand, and conspicuously naive on the other.”

—Catherine Belsey, “Postmodern Love: Questioning the Metaphysics of Desire”

Buddhist teachers such as Thanissaro Bhikku acknowledge that desire causes suffering and that we should work to decrease its effects (and many non-Buddhists can identify this as a main tenet of Buddhism). Desire never completely goes away. Bhikku stipulates that we can, on our way to nirvana (complete happiness and lack of any desire), skillfully apply the desire that will always be with us to ease suffering. Catharine Belsey, in her article “Postmodern Love,” intervenes in a very old debate within Western metaphysics about the difference between love and desire. While it is not my goal here to participate in that debate, I am struck by the resonances between her thesis that postmodern desire is a tangle of skepticism and idealism and how skillfully applied desire in Buddhist practice is a compromise between idealism and practicality, or to use Belsey’s terms, between desire and

fulfillment. This is a useful way of discussing poetry and community (and poetry communities) now. It is useful because the question of community in USAmerican poetry continues to be debated. These debates are not only about what poetry communities and poetry-in-community might look like, but what poetry communities can or should do. Among these tasks are organizing the work of poetry, mediating between poets and publics, and providing places wherein desires around and for poetry are debated and addressed.

Over the last few years, a number of studies have focused on the idea of poetic community or studied particular communities of poets. A psychologist has studied community formation at live poetry readings in San Diego,¹ three recent studies have examined avant-garde poetic community through paratext or pedagogical practice,² and others have focused on specific scenes and communities.³ These do similar work to mine, in that they are studies of particular and specific poetry communities. Mine differs in its focus on the journey of two USAmerican poetry communities from their origins in the 1970s. Specifically, how the Loft and the Poetics School engaged the cultural, historical, and poetic changes of the 1960s so that they could find a way to keep doing the work of poetry and community in the 1970s and beyond.

This provisional conclusion, by taking three recent examples of attempts at or discussions of organizing poetry through community, asks questions that I hope will illustrate the struggle over differing desires for and of poetic communities now. The three examples are: the *Grand Piano Series*, written by 10 members of a poetry community centered around the Grand Piano coffee shop in the 1970s, online discussions about a recent conference on “Rethinking Poetics,” and a recent regional book festival. These diverse visions of community are different from, but also indebted to, the work of communities

from the 1970s such as the Loft and the Poetics School at Naropa. Both the Poetics School and the Loft found ways to carry on with the work of poetry, despite conflicts, disagreements, and struggles that arose over members' varying visions of the missions of those communities after the cultural and poetic shifts of the 1960s. They provided lessons and warnings for scholars who study community as a primary method by which US American poetry in the 21st century can be organized. Even so, poetic communities must now face different questions about money, technology, publishing, organizing, and growth.

The last item on the list regards the decisions that many communities eventually face, i.e. whether to grow and direct their attention outward. In order to turn outward, communities must institutionalize and make themselves recognizable as organizations capable of reaching out. They need to formalize some of their practices, and this formalization can increase distance between members, as their relationships within the institution are professionalized. Instead of looking inward at each other, they look outward as a unit. The Loft's funding crisis was the moment where this institutionalization began to happen, because the Loft's members committed to being accountable to something outside of themselves (funders), thereby changing the relationships and goals of the organization.

This change of relationship and goals is inevitable; the community around the Poetics School at Naropa in the 1970s was different from the communities within and connected to it now. As a school in the formal sense, it has always had to navigate a tricky passage between behaving as an intimate nurturer of community among its students and as an educational institution capable of fulfilling certain academic and administrative requirements of its home institution—an accredited university—in order to survive. The “school” now demands from its constituents some behaviors that would have been

unthinkable demands of the community back then, such as formal instructional accountability of its professors and codes of conduct for students, who, except for visiting students in the summer program, are degree-seeking students in the university. Its community life is thus much different, as is the Loft's, which is now less a community itself (as discussed in the previous chapter) than an institution that fosters community among its members, faculty, and students.

Another form of differentiation between the poetic communities of the 1970s and current poetry communities is the sort of mediation that poetic communities do for their members. Then, part of the suturing work they did (how they “moved on” after intentional poetic or cultural ruptures) was to mediate the stakes of becoming a public poet, primarily through democratizing poetic capital. That is, through publishing, giving readings, and creating gathering spaces for members, the Poetics School and The Loft defined and supported the value of their own poets' cultural production outside of the value granted to mainstream poetic establishments. Despite the fact that there are still centers of poetic influence in universities and publishing venues, the landscape of USAmerican poetry is much more democratic than it was in the 1960s. This is due in no small part to the work of poetry activists in the 1970s. But that work, as it took place within communities, did not come without a cost. As discussed in Chapter 2, the symbols of anti-war, leftist, and anti-New Criticism activism were not strong enough to hold poets in a community once some of those activist goals were accomplished. In other words, many connected to the Poetics School in the 1970s had to come to terms with the fact that the community they thought they were in was no longer feasible as a community. The case of the Loft demonstrated that the turn

toward being accountable to entities outside an immediate community can force that community to change in rather uncomfortable ways.

This is when a community stops being a community. In a community, most of the suturing symbols point inward, as the community is accountable only to its own members. Christopher Beach, in his book *Between Community and Institution*, has defined an institution as “a form of social organization structured by some force outside the immediate control or jurisdiction of the poets themselves, and usually in the service of something other than their own private needs.”⁴ In an institution, most of the symbols on the boundary are directed outward. That is, the suturing force in a community is mostly directed inward and around the edges of the circle, reinforcing its knowable symbols. Institutions direct most of their energy outward, projecting a version of the institution to those whom it would like to draw in.

Some communities (perhaps on their way to institutionalizing) now emphasize the priority of community-organized poetry over poetry as organized by the binaristic (avant-garde vs. mainstream) thinking that has characterized so many discussions of major thrusts and movements of American poetics during the last 60 years. Many communities provide space for all sorts of writing and they also relieve the anxiety of writing to, within, or outside of a binary because “community” makes binaries useless, as the focus is on maintaining the community. Thinking about communities as organizing principles of American poetry frees poets from reducing every poetic interaction with poets who have different aesthetic tastes to an epic struggle over the rights to claim particular nationalistic poetic legacies.

Not that the concept of poetry communities is immune to misrecognition, misuse, and contradictory desires—to repudiate negative versions of community and to desire ideal

community in the next moment—in fact, I discuss these contradictions and misrecognitions below. Today, in a historical moment when anyone can publish a poem, find feedback and readers online, or conduct a reading at a local coffee shop, poetic communities are still important. The politics of their meditation are not quite as monolithic as they were in the 1970s, when they were concerned with the democratization of poetic mediation; what poetic communities do now is establish and suture members into themselves and their ideologies, and extending from that, into a local ecology of communities, scenes, networks, and institutions. Many communities and communities-cum-institutions, including the Poetics School and The Loft, participate in local, regional, and national poetic ecologies where related or friendly poetic organizations share resources, workers, and poets.

Independent actors can and do engage with larger local ecologies, but cannot really get deeply involved until they are embedded within a community. Unlike during the 1970s in Minneapolis and Saint Paul and countless other cities, where young poets sought and were forced to create their own permission (and thus democratize poetic capital) to be poets and give readings, anyone can now give a reading in a bar or coffee shop or public square. Such a reading recently occurred at Cahoots, a Saint Paul coffee shop, where Ian Campbell read poetry (the reading was titled “Affliction”) pertaining to his experience of coming out as gay within a conservative Christian family. The audience consisted of just his friends and family, curious coffee drinkers, and four poetry students sent by their instructor to report on local poetry readings. Matthew Metzdorf (one of the students) engaged Campbell in an email conversation about his influences and inspirations. Campbell expressed to Metzdorf that “poetry is an individual exploration, and the work of other poets, though they may be interesting to critics, has no bearing on an individual’s poetic expression.”⁵ While this may

strike many as fairly naïve and theoretically uninformed, this belief is not uncommon among writers who do not belong to a writing community. This is fine, unless writers such as Campbell want to be recognized by other poets as a poet, that is, if other poets want to read or listen to his work. If he does want this recognition, he needs to involve himself in a community that already exists or create one that mediates his and the other poets' relationship to a potential audience for his poetry.

Yet even among poets who have some sort of community, that community's significance to the work of poetry is not often recognized (and in fact is played down) because to do so would admit the social as an influence. Despite the advances made during the last 40 years in dismantling the romantic ideology of the individual author, such as Campbell, the ideology still holds sway in many poetic arenas. Jed Rasula, in *The American Poetry Wax Museum*, asserts that the refusal of the collective is a "familiar syndrome in American poetry to deny the poetic efficacy of collective action; to insist on the integrity of the heroic ego; and to mistrust anything that smacks of the committee room. These have been disabling denials because they set impossible demands upon the individual, as well as discounting the facticity of social reality."⁶ Despite claims to the opposite, poets' public lives are mediated by community, even though those lives might be constructed as individual. While Rasula's examples are from 40 years ago, his criticism still applies.

Because New Criticism was so invested in the poem as the product of a single, Romantic individual, anything that smacked of community or communitarian or collective value was evacuated by the anthologizing process and by the typically American denial of collective efficacy. This hypocritical hyper-vigilance resulted in years of sterile boundary maintenance, which Rasula calls it a "cordon sanitaire." The boundary maintenance was

perpetrated by a community of poets with a very clear idea of poetic value, with at its heart, ironically, the Romantic individual. The New Critics and other related poetic groups policed and sanitized the boundary so much that useful theories about poetic community and institution did not get much attention until the institution of New Criticism began to break down in the sixties and seventies.

One group to vigorously embrace collective writing, poetic community, and social theory in the 1970s was the Grand Piano poets, a group of poets based in San Francisco at the Grand Piano coffee shop between 1975 and 1980. Their work is often called “Language poetry,” after the journal L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E published their poetry in the late seventies and early eighties. Ten of these poets have recently finished *The Grand Piano Series*, an “experiment in group autobiography.” This group self-history is consistent with their sustained project of self-promotion and advocacy for their version of poetic and critical history, and as such is an example now. In the fall of 2010, the last installment of the Grand Piano series was published and celebrated with readings throughout the U.S., including a reading in January 2011 at the Modern Language Association Annual Convention, where five of the ten poets read together.

The series documents in print the history of a community, as written by its members, rather than by historians long after the principals have gone. In the words of Robin Tremblay McGaw, “The Grand Piano is itself a veering off and an investigation and a playing or experimenting with the materials of language, history, textuality and temporality, the personal and political, poetry and community. It is also a project that participates in the articulation of its own accounting for literary posterity.”⁷ This accounting is rare in communities that do not institutionalize, because institutionalizing involves composing an

official version of the history of the institution, for it depends on that articulated narrative of history. Part of the *Grand Piano's* goal is to set the tone for that very articulation; this community is still trying to frame its own reception. In this defense, we can see current issues emerging.

One of the elements is a defense of their work as valid poetic practice, as a poetic practice they believe is more ethical than the official verse culture they very clearly opposed then and oppose now. "Official Verse Culture" was a term coined by Charles Bernstein in a speech to the Modern Language Association in 1984 to describe the exclusion of a range of experimental poetics by the academy and by mainstream publishing venues. The *Grand Piano* authors who continue to work against the mainstream versions of poetry are Barrett Watten, Carla Harryman, Kit Robinson, Ron Silliman, Rae Armantrout, Steve Benson, Tom Mandel, Lyn Hejtinan, Bob Perleman, Ted Pearson, and Kit Robinson. The series is structured democratically in that each installment begins with a different author, and there is not a prescribed content. But "language poetry" was not just these ten who have now concretized the origins of their communal experience and practice of language poetry as they did it in San Francisco in the years between 1975 and 1980. In fact, at conferences and in publications, there is some argument about who was and was not a language poet; Clark Coolidge is often seen as a progenitor, as is Bernadette Meyers, and Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein are also seen as part of the New York branch (none of these are included in the group of ten). Language poetry was thus in some ways always a community of values over proximity, while the *Grand Piano* poets began as a proximal community, as most of these people lived near each other, co-wrote, and co-organized events such as talks and readings.

Early in the series, community and desire are intertwined as a theme. The project is, in the words of Ted Pearson, a “dispersion of authorship (and a disabling of authority) that all might release their multiple selves, their constructions of those selves in their multiplicity, into a further multiplicity of calls and responses to a community of memory and enduring desire, here reconvened as a community in dispersion, eventuated by time and by the demands of life beyond the page.”⁸ Pearson’s essay in Part I is an exemplary meditation on desire as enacted by community, the desire to act with others on a common project or a common set of goals. But these desires were not always unanimous or harmonious, as Pearson describes: they were “collectively recognized desires, often contending and contentious desires, by no means uniformly shared or realized.”⁹ Pearson posits these desires as necessarily happening in community, “in the company of others, at the equipoise of a barely perceptible continuum of desire, an ultra-low frequency hum of desire, a possible, if only possible, locus in an otherwise discontinuous world.”¹⁰ If nothing else, this is a valid reason for community in poetry—our world is discontinuous and it does not make sense, and it rarely allows us to make sense of our own lives within it. Desire, skillfully applied to the maintenance of poetry and community, becomes this locus.

Barrett Watten, in his essay in Part 2, makes this sense of discontinuity apparent in his essay. “The war was over, there was no celebration, there was only time ahead to build on its lessons. There was no money, and few agreeable jobs . . . in the next five years, 1976 to 1980, we would need to make up an entire decade in compensation for the time taken from us.”¹¹ They did this making up in the context of a community that provided the support—material, intellectual, and emotional—for the work and for poetry. Further, Watten speaks of poetry: “poetry was the site of our intensity, waiting for confirmation and

release . . . ”¹² Intensity and poetry, intensity and community; desire can be all of these things.

As Pearson asserts, desire can be a reaction as well: the Grand Piano poets’ community-building was a reaction to the “triple canopy of cold-war ideology, nuclear threat, and the mendacity of ‘those in authority.’”¹³ Community became a friendlier shelter and barrier against these threats for the poets who resisted them. This community in particular formed around the poem as a way clearly to acknowledge the linguistic breach that opened in the previous decades between what “those in authority” said and what they meant. For these poets, the only option, the only choice, was openly to display that breach in their work.

They were, of course, different from those poets who did not wish to display this breach of language, and this difference was carried into the future by the next generation of poets. However, the next generation was more skeptical, or, as Belsey would say, postmodern in their desires for poetry. This successive generation has always lived with (and accepted as a fact of life) this breach. Generational difference and the conflicts it raises were on display at a conference in June, 2010, put on by the Columbia-Penn Poetics Initiative, which announced that:

We are convening a three-day conference at Columbia (June 11-13, 2010), ‘Rethinking Poetics’ . . . It is our sense that the practices of poetics are in danger of becoming pro forma and that a focused, skeptical examination of basic assumptions will be most useful. Terms continue to be used routinely in circumstances that increasingly call for nuanced or even fundamental change. What does "materiality of the signifier" mean in the era of data mining or platform instability? What does

"news" mean? How useful are current periodizations? Such questions can be multiplied.¹⁴

The criticisms of the usefulness or ethics of such an undertaking were immediate and searing, appearing online as soon as the conference announcement was posted. Many commentators believed that the conference was useless, as it involved many of the same people who had been promoting and theorizing an alternative poetics (such as Language poetry, or the New American poetry) to official verse culture since the sixties and seventies. The implication was that those who had participated in the revolutions of the 1960s and 70s could not rethink poetics, as they were still fighting the old wars. Two of the conference organizers, Ron Silliman (one of the Grand Pianists) and Charles Bernstein, are well known as vehement critics of official verse culture. The other question that arose was whether it was possible to “rethink” poetics, as poetics is something that cannot be planned or proscribed. Comments asserted that the conference was just a rehashing of old goals and beliefs, not a rethinking of those assumptions within poetics studies. Many who attended the conference posted comments and questions and opinions to their blogs or Facebook pages—the newest form of poetic community—during the conference, and many of these comments, especially from the younger poets in attendance, were critical of the entrenched nature of the proceedings, and they were bothered by a continual reification of the binary of “us v. them,” or, an avant-garde poetics against official verse culture, still highly dependent on the Romantic ideology and typically valued in the current creative writing industry.

Jed Rasula identifies the complex pressures placed on poetry by a diverse set of actors: “Having now absorbed the ancient discipline of rhetoric, with all its *topoi*, tropes, figures, commonplaces—and having been elevated to the status of one of the branches of

learning by Bacon, and one of the means of knowing by Kant—poetry in the post-romantic phase is expected to accommodate radically conflicting claims and demands,”¹⁵ affirming the sense that many have about the current state of poetry, which is that there is an incredible number of approaches to teaching poetry, organizing poetry, writing poetry, transmitting poetry, and organizing poetry. All too often discussions about these differing desires devolve into reductive judgments about the “worth” of certain kinds of poetry.

Thus, it makes sense that commentators on American poetry will invoke community as an antidote to some of the more destructive tendencies visible in places where large poetry scenes and networks are discussed. Yet even those commentators who see faults in the organizing impulses behind the Rethinking Poetics conference commit the error of desiring to see community where it does not exist. In one of his blog posts about the conference, Flarf¹⁶ poet and conference panelist K. Silem Mohammad raised these very issues. “Is there a coherent or even usefully diffuse ‘we’ within contemporary poetry? Should there be? Or has even experimental poetry splintered into different communities with aesthetics and objectives that are irrelevant or even antithetical to each other?”¹⁷ His emphasis on experimental poetry as previously exceptional in its perceived cohesion (*even* experimental poetry) raises an assumption that he and others elide in their commentaries: that the loosely affiliated groups of experimental poets should be more cohesive because of a shared history of opposition to official verse culture (and their shared experience of oppression by it).

If experimental poetry has splintered, Mohammad asks, “what are the divisions that mark these different communities? Are they academic/non-academic? Generational? Stylistic? Something else?”¹⁸ Critics may wonder, now that the lines of difference are much

less clear (and much more mobile), and who “we” are changes with every situation—how definitive or strong are those lines? In his criticism of the conference, Mohammad uses the word “community” to refer to a non-existent “we” multiple times, but only sometimes distinguishes between “communities” and “subcommunities.” He means the divisions he lists above as these “subcommunities,” but there is considerable slippage in his use of these terms (“subcommunities” demarcates parts of a larger community). Whatever communal impulses drove the organizing and oppositional advocacy of the “experimental” poetics dissipated or moved as soon as those espousing such poetics started to refine and modify their desires for community. While those energies may have been present and adequate to the task of defining that large community at that moment (a specific historical moment wherein cohesion served to advance certain goals, such as the dismantling of the New Critical hierarchy), moments always pass, and the question of “what now” is always answered by further defining and strengthening the symbols of the particular community.

But “Experimental” poetry is not specific enough as a suturing symbol, because it can mean so many things to so many poets, as evidenced by the responses to “Rethinking Poetics.” There are experiments with authorship (Flarf), language-centered writing, form (concrete poetry), performance (Performance Poetry and Slam) content, culture, sound, and reception (to name just a few). This slippery usage of the term *community* is fairly common in such friendly environs, not just in blogs, but in books as well. Others confuse it with friendship. Mohammed consistently confuses “movement” with “community,” which is problematic, for while a “movement” (such as “the Movement” of the sixties) has some concentrated effort toward a goal, is usually quite large and contains various interest groups

who may be in the movement only as long as their goals are met. Mohammed participates in the very sort of binary reification that Rasula deplors:

As far as I can see, the current experimental poetry community, as represented both by the participants in the Rethinking Poetics conference and by those who have been commenting on it before, during, and after its proceedings, is full of exactly the same kinds of prejudicial conflicts and bad-faith rapprochements (I was, two days ago, accused by someone, perhaps justly, of being myself an "accommodationist") as those that mark the mainstream/experimental schism. Sometimes the conflicts are dramatic and pronounced, sometimes they're sublimated, but we all know they're there.¹⁹

On one hand, Mohammad is chastising (rightly so) the “experimental poetry community” for falling into the behavioral patterns usually reserved for behavior between the two major “camps” of poetry and for ignoring the conflict within the “movement.” The problem is that this behavior engages in nostalgia, an uncritical desire for a (brief) time wherein “experimental poetry” might have been somewhat cohesive,²⁰ and for a vision of community where people cared so strongly for poetry that they had “wars” over it. As Mohammad himself notes, this cohesiveness does not exist now, as demonstrated by the behavior at the conference. It is also important to note that a movement is not a community. Once the goals of the movement are met, once the intentional ruptures are made, the impetus bringing everyone together disappears. Everything has shifted, and the communities who participate in movements need to move on. The work toward the goals of the movement is no longer needed. Mohammad comes to this realization eventually:

Maybe we shouldn't expect that "poetics" can be the coherent and cordial object of discussion across subcommunities which are, after all, often defined by the radical difference of their poetics from each other. Maybe the best we can hope for in the way of mass convocation--if we must have mass convocation--is a provisional and occasional space of conviviality in which we recognize each other as driven by a related passion (e.g., for "poetry" considered in the broadest sense), but make no attempt to reconcile, define, or even discuss our incompatible poetics. Something, that is, like the AWP.²¹

What would it mean not to expect "poetics" to have coherence outside of "provisional and occasional" spaces such as at the Associated Writing Programs' Annual Convention, which draws together thousands of writers, writing teachers, publishers, magazines, and writing students? For Mohammad, this is a double-sided question. On Facebook posts and in other commentaries, many at the Rethinking Poetics conference expressed distaste for the "conviviality" of AWP, not only for its sometimes cozy relationship with the capitalist industry of "Creative Writing," but because many of them suspect that the conviviality is superficial. Keith Tuma, a poet and critic connected to many at the conference, has remarked that even though sites such as AWP disavow competition, there is a hierarchy of institutional influence operating at most levels of poetry production.²² Part of the forced conviviality is driven by the "Can Poetry Matter" debates that erupt every few years, and by the desire of many different poets to have poetry matter more in the culture than it currently does.

But the young poets who were too young to experience poetry or poetry-anthology wars have never known poetry to matter much. They have taken the strategies, forms, and

approaches to poetry that the older generation developed and have applied them to their own current work without knowledge of or care for the political goals and implications of these strategies, including a postmodern wariness of commitment to one side or another of a binary (or to a binary at all). Most of the major interventions in the culture they have grown up with have been technological, not poetic. In some of the conversations about rethinking poetics or in the negative effects of a poetic binary, one of the consistent themes is that this binaristic bad behavior contributes to poetry's lack of status within USAmerican culture. This deep anxiety seems to be the foundation of a lot of poetry criticism. Yet many in younger poetry circles, perhaps cynically, take as a given that, in the words of poet Ruth Kohtz, "poets were *never* cool."²³ They do not trust the desire for poetry to have a national impact, and this raises some difficult questions. What might it mean to let go of humanistic claims and goals for poetry? Or to be skeptical of the desire for poetry to save USAmerican culture?

These poets are unwilling to commit unequivocally to just one community—the realities of jobs and publishing work against that—and they do not necessarily see all of those outside of their home or primary communities as negative others, as a "them" opposed to an "us;" "poetry" is one among a range of options for creative work available to the youngsters. This is why seeing differences in USAmerican poetry as differences between communities, who differ more or less along a varying range of concerns and methods, reflects the behavior already in evidence on the part of these younger poets.

This behavior can be seen in larger regional networks / scenes / literary ecologies. The question of whether community can exist in a larger network or scene is valid, for is it possible to label a city-wide literary group as a community? Might we see it as an ecology

consisting of a number of interconnected communities, authors, and institutions? On an autumn Saturday in Minneapolis, the Twin Cities literary scene converged on a community-college plaza in downtown Minneapolis for the 11th annual Twin Cities Book Festival, sponsored and organized by *Rain Taxi Review of Books*. Nearly 6,000 people circulated throughout the venue during the day, attending readings and panels, congregating, and moving throughout the rows of tables dedicated to journals, presses, organizations, MFA programs, media outlets, and individual authors.

The Twin Cities Book Festival is an object lesson of the local ecology of poetry in the Twin Cities, made up of a number of interconnected communities and networks, including schools (such as Hamline University and the University of Minnesota's M.F.A. in Writing Programs), local and regional presses, magazines, literary organizations, institutions such as the Loft, media groups and sponsors of the fest (including Minnesota Public Radio and two local magazines), literacy organizations, and different writing communities connected to these different organizations and institutions. The marquee authors flown in for the event mingled with authors published by local and regional presses, readers, critics, volunteers, and unpublished authors. Many of these writers are deeply involved in the different communities at the bookfest, and are usually involved in multiple literary or artistic communities and organizations at a time.

Another group of authors is present at the bookfest. These are unpublished authors but who are not involved with any literary community. They are often very naïve about how publishing works or what the differences are between literary journals and presses. They are often surprised by the specificity of submission guidelines and they quite often operate with uninformed fantasies about getting their work published, fed by media coverage of atypical

publishing success stories.²⁴ While the relationship between writers and a reading public is much more democratized now, communities are still necessary, for they mediate that relationship. Involvement in a writing community disabuses beginning writers of their naïve fantasies, many of which they have received through previous education that valorizes the Romantic ideology of poetry, such as that of the solitary genius working alone on universally transcendent and beautiful poetry. Communities train writers in how to research what different presses and journals publish, and in the correct behavior for submitting work and for talking with editors. Or, some communities form as do-it-yourself (DIY) communities that create their own presses, magazines, or reading series to engage the public.

But who are these “publics”? And which communities? What about the slippage of terms? Is it correct to refer to a “Twin cities Literary Community?” Eric Lorberer, the Editor of *Rain Taxi* and the Festival Director, celebrates the Twin Cities’ “dynamic literary culture”²⁵ and also refers to a “Twin Cities community,”²⁶ while the bookfest program refers to the “Twin Cities Literary scene.”²⁷ Why the use of so many different terms? What is it about the literary activities, groups, and everything else literary in the Twin Cities and the greater region that lends itself to such chameleon-like terminology? Could we see the book festival as expressing an ecology in which many poetic and literary communities work interdependently and share resources and workers and poets? Lorberer himself has called the scene an ecosystem: “the book festival is a way to gather that ecosystem in one room for a day.”²⁸

But is this conception of the Twin Cities literary scene (and, by extension, other similar regional / urban scenes) just wishful thinking? Is it, as Lorberer has argued elsewhere, a bunch of organizations, communities, individual authors, and institutions

“doing their own things” parallel to, but not in cooperation with, the other literary beings in the Twin Cities and region (which he cites as the reason he started the bookfest and the Twin Cities Literary Events Calendar)?²⁹ Sue Ann Martinson and others have remarked that one of the bookfest’s precursors, the “Great Midwestern Poetry Bookshow,” (discussed in the first chapter) involved this very sort of cooperation. Perhaps the atomization that Lorberer has experienced within the current Twin Cities scene³⁰ is a result of the competitiveness of governmental and private arts funding. Not only do many granting organizations privilege the individual author over the community,³¹ the application process results in otherwise friendly organizations being pitted against each other for an ever-shrinking share of arts funding.³² The GMBS, occurring in the late 1970s, might have occurred too early for its members to deal with or feel the full effects of the new funding regime instituted by the grant process.

Yet there is some cooperation within the current scene / ecology; two or more institutions or presses often partner to bring a “big name” author to the Twin Cities. It could be that those in charge of the organizations see the “scene” differently than do the younger writers who carom between tables at the bookfest. There are poets—often younger than those who run the organizations, and perhaps therefore unexposed to the competitiveness of grant applications—who do work together and trade and share resources, advice, material, and labor. For example, editors of a small and now defunct litmag just donated their printing press to a recently arrived poet who is starting a chapbook series. Like Mohammed, these younger generations are more skeptical of the desire for aesthetic school-based community—they are willing to rent, but not buy.

Could it be that younger poets / writers see such an ecology differently from Lorberer? Perhaps it is their naïveté or lack of experience at running a literary organization in a major city, but when observed at the Book Festival, they seem to move easily between different organizations with different goals. They bounce between working for *Rain Taxi*, working a litmag table, talking with colleagues from the different schools they work at or are students in (sometimes the same place), or running errands for different organizations.

In a 1998 *Rain Taxi Review of Books* interview, Eric Lorberer asked Anne Waldman whether it is good or bad that “poetry schools” as an organizing principle of American poetry is now defunct. Waldman was not sure about this proposition, focusing instead on what she saw as a move away from “schools” altogether. She used the term “New Independents” to acknowledge a “younger generation that is thinking for [themselves] and not so qualified by the trends and practices of the last decades, yet smart and savvy and informed by them.”³³ The function that “schools” performed was organizational, and in many circles, the division of the schools was broken down along a rough binary between the mainstream and the avant-garde (as previously demonstrated). The “new independents” are younger poets and poet-scholars who eschew traditional “poetry school” affiliations for buffet or bricolage or sampling approaches which loosen the boundaries and membranes of these schools so that they may enter and leave at will—gathering instead at their own and short-lived, adaptable, and mobile points of intersection, which move along with them and which they adapt as needed. They have transferable skills, including publicity, technology, interpersonal skills, teaching, editing, copy-writing, grant-writing, leadership skills, event planning, do-it-yourself methods, and bureaucracy. They use these skills and familiarization

with different professional languages to move around between communities and within networks and scenes.

There is a real sense of exhaustion on the part of this generation with the political stakes of a binary construction of avant-garde vs. traditional or mainstream poetry, as it sometimes plays out in the loci of poetry—organizations, academies, institutions, reading spaces, or conferences. Waldman can express a more contemporary view of US American poetry than others in her generation, likely because of her extensive teaching. However, perceptions of poets who had been involved in the events of the 1960s and '70s differ distinctly from the perceptions of younger contemporary poets about their respective generations' approaches to poetry and to social responsibility. At stake for the new independents is a rejection of binary and political construction of poetics. While there is considerable discussion and angst over who should be aware of such a binary politics, importantly, the notion of the choice itself is often rejected.³⁴ This rejection is a direct outcome of the choices many poetry communities from the 1970s made to survive. They had to skillfully apply their desire for poetic community, and sometimes this application meant compromise and practicality if they wanted their communities to survive and grow.

To reject the political stakes of a binary is not to de-politicize poetry; it means that while the younger generation might find the fidelity or loyalty to schools somewhat laughable / old-fashioned, they most importantly find it untenable in current educational, institutional, political, and economic conditions. In other words, a young poet, usually with an M.F.A. in hand, competing with thousands of others, would likely not turn down a job offer at a school or press because his or her aesthetics do not match up with the organization's (whether it would be offered is a different and important question).³⁵ And

those organizations are now more concerned about those transferable skills that the poet brings—teaching, editing, and marketing high among them—rather than the poet’s aesthetic preferences. Preference is now a more useful and accurate term than allegiance; in the 1960s and 70s, allegiances mattered. Allegiances mattered because they sutured poets within a community that supported their work, emotionally, aesthetically, and often materially through space to hold readings, spaces for audiences, and collaborative living situations that made for cheap rent and communal material survival. It was both an aesthetic of community (in the sense that community is performed) and a communal aesthetics. Certainly there were variances among individual poets within communities, but what brought them together were shared preferences and approaches to poetry, preferences and approaches that were often defined through oppositionality to another set of preferences or approaches.

Neither Beach nor Rasula nor Mohammad, while acknowledging the problems with thinking in binaries or argumentative points to be scored, is willing to throw out aesthetic considerations altogether. Why should they? Of course aesthetic questions are important. There is aesthetic valuing in every poetry community. For example, when members of the Women Poets of the Twin Cities or the Poetry Project organized readings, they picked poets whose work they liked. Where at Naropa the aesthetics were driven from an experience of aesthetic injustice, in that Ginsberg and Waldman worked so hard on behalf of the “outrider” aesthetic because it was so blatantly shut out of universities and magazines, the Loft worked less on behalf of its aesthetic (the new Midwestern school influenced by Bly and Wright) than on behalf of poetry itself getting heard and read in the first place. The arbitrary nature of all this varied valuing, the seeming unconcern for narratives about the

beautiful or universal, can be mind-boggling. However, acceptance of the validity of the diversity of value within and between poetic communities is crucial because while arguments about the beautiful or universal can be useful spurs to community creation, they are not useful for maintaining, sustaining, growing said communities, or for fulfilling desires for community.

Communities provide the space for this diversity, because they really cannot afford polarity. They cannot afford polarity within the community, of course, but cannot afford it outside, either. They can start with it, but ultimately, polarity does not really help them retain members. Polarity is combative at its core, not cooperative. Polarity depends on a vision of individuals duking it out in public arenas, as Cary Nelson has described: “the collapsing of modern poetry’s wild diversity into a hypostatized combat between literary titans mirrors the most simplistic of 1950s North American political world views. It resembles the ideological strategy of those who promoted a vision of a world contest between freedom and communism, the United States and the Soviet Union, with most of the world’s diverse cultures simply invisible to us.”³⁶ In other words, the ideological strategy of seeing literary or poetic conflict as combat between literary titans is ultimately a damaging strategy, just as “communism vs. the free world” is. It renders invisible poetry that does not conform to one side or the other of a strict binary, or poetry that uses many traditional and avant-garde strategies of writing,³⁷ and most importantly, it renders invisible the hours and hours of labor performed in communities and organizations that make any poetry space and work possible. It also holds discussions of current poetry hostage to outmoded political models.

The movement from partisanship to community does not mean that differences of aesthetic or approach or practice need to be smoothed over and dysfunctionally sutured when one enters a community of poetic practice. What communities do that partisan groups do not is preserve as valid and legitimate poetic difference *while working on the work around the work*. I mean that communities account for—make room for—differing poetic practice without vilification of the variances. In the words of Victor Turner, whose work on symbols and community is often favorably compared to Cohen’s, these communities practice “*communitas*,” a more flexible space of immediate relationship than that provided by “*structure*,” which happens within institutions.³⁸ The development and evolution of poetics communities in the 1970s illustrates the move from an emphasis on the defense and statement of particular poetics (as Rasula discusses) to a move from enacting those practices within community. At the Loft, that meant adding prose-writing courses to appeal to more potential students and funders; at the Poetics School, it meant aligning the Poetics School’s course offerings more with traditional academic standards. These changes do not entail a wholesale abandonment of aesthetic commitment, but they do mean a shift in priority from the clear assertion of aesthetic goals to a strong commitment to the building and maintaining of community, sometimes at the expense of an unconditional commitment to a certain aesthetic. Surely some grieve this loss, but many accept it as a skillfully applied pragmatism borne by the changes of the 70s, in these communities and in communities like them. The work of community-building and of promoting a certain type of poetry do not have to be mutually exclusive.

Technology not only enables poets to publish and find each other easily, but can aid in developing the “provisional” and flexible moments of community that Mohammad

described (with room for necessary structural critique of the institutions that make up the creative writing industry). The “Women’s Poetry” (Wom-po for short) List-serv is an illuminating example of such a community. It started in the 1997 as email became more widely accessible and took advantage of the new technologies to foster community among women poets and feminist-friendly poets and scholars who were geographically distant. Originally begun as a safe space for women who felt discriminated against by other list-servs (most notably the Buffalo poetics list-serv), Wom-Po’s membership is now fluid and wide ranging. It relies on a shared experience of women’s under-representation within poetry publishing, study, and advocacy. It evolves and change as new members join and other members leave. The daily discussions change according to who has the time and energy to post, and it clearly welcomes newcomers. Sometimes smaller groups of poets meet on the list and form new communities, but the list-serv remains alive and is an active space wherein the work of poetry and poetry community gets done.

While it does not provide physical space for poets to gather, it provides opportunities for poets to meet each other and discuss common concerns. For example, the “Wom-po” breakfast is a gathering at the Associated Writing Programs Annual Convention where members of the list-serv gather to catch up on personal and professional news, to meet in person other Wom-pos they may only know by name or email exchange. The list-serv is a space of constant contingency and fluidity; it gains its strength not in defending purities or in calcifying boundaries, but by using its boundaries and definitions as generative interstices that enable, activate, and articulate the work.

And what is the work to be done? To ease the pain of living: fund poetry creation, teaching, and broadcasting at schools, in the media, within specific neighborhoods, and on

national stages. In Waldman's words, to "make the world safe for poetry," The early Loft members and the early Poetics School folks established the mechanisms by which the "new independents" can participate in that work.

God Bless 'em

While it might be justifiable to claim that the younger generation of poets does not appreciate the work of their countercultural elders, and while those who struggled so hard to build and maintain communities and other spaces for poetry deserve to be recognized, it might also need to be said that hewing to old lines of poetry division does not aid the younger generation in this recognition. One day in June of 2007, during the second week of the Summer Writing Program at the Poetics School, a week dedicated to the legacies of *The New American Poetry*, I was napping in one of the campus's common rooms, just off the main drag of the summer writing program's events. I drifted in and out of a light sleep in the sun, hearing bits of conversation from people passing by the window or passing through the room. Eventually, a conversation on the other side of the room lifted me out of the sleep—it was a group of two or three very young SWP students—likely first or second year regular students at Naropa University. One of them said something to the effect of "God, I'm so tired of them going on and on about this book—what is it, the new poetry or whatever?" "Yeah," one of them answered, laughing, in a tone one takes to placate the grandparent who drones on endlessly about his war stories, "it's pretty funny. They're all really into the Beats, it's like crazy!" They all laughed and walked out of the room.

That they did not get the message about how important the Allen anthology was to the oppositional project of poetry their teachers have lived to promote and protect raises a

lot of questions. Did a failure of suture happen somewhere between these students' acceptance to the program and their attendance at this reading? Do they just not care, unlike their elders, that poetry was never cool? In the same way, are young instructors at the Loft so unaware of its countercultural beginnings that a fight over a corporate grant seems silly to them? Or is poetry so cool, is its countercultural status so appropriated by commodity culture (and therefore less "purely" oppositional), that they cannot understand a time when poets fought over it?

I choose to read their ignorance somewhat optimistically, as progress. Of course young poets need to be aware of the history of USAmerican poetics and of the work that their teachers have done to expand the field for a diverse range of poetry. But can raising this awareness of history and progress be accomplished in such a way as to make room for young poets' provisional and skeptical approaches to community and poetic value? Belsey speaks of the role that fantasy plays in the construction of desire: "the same bodies, differently imagined, differently interpreted, generate different effects." Our fascination with particular bodies, she asserts, stems from the values that we invest in those bodies.³⁹ Could we then see flexible poetry communities as bodies into which poets might invest realistic fantasies about the work and worth of poetry?

Notes

Introduction

¹ Ginsberg, Allen. "Allen Ginsberg: 'I'm banned from the main marketplace of ideas in my own country.'" Interview by Matthew Rothschild. *The Progressive* August, 1994. Retrieved online 3/22/2011: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1295/is_n8_v58/ai_15667756/.

² Many feminists, such as Margaret Benston and Wally Secombe, were thinking about how the work that women traditionally did within the home was classified as non-waged, and therefore, without a name. Benston, in her classic 1969 essay "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation," asked how women's special relation to the means of production might be revised so that they could become a vital part of class analysis. Thanks to Ed and Joan Griffin for these connections and citations.

³ Allen, Donald. ed. *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. Xi.

⁴ Kit Robinson, reading at the University of Minnesota recently, remarked that the 1970s were the hangover from the 1960s. To extend the metaphor, the 60s were a time of wild expectations, drunken trysts with community and idealism. The 1970s were a reckoning with those promises, propositions, and proposals—what were the made promises, and what could we keep?

⁵ Crozier, Michel; Huntington, Samuel P.; Joji Watanuki. *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission*. New York: NYU Press, 1975. 113. The phrase "too much democracy" is often used to summarize the authors' arguments.

⁶ For early examples of these efforts, see Boykoff, Jules. *Beyond Bullets: The Suppression of Dissent in The United States*. Edinburgh: AK Press, 2007. 29.

⁷ Killen, Andreas. *1973 Nervous Breakdown: Watergate, Warhol, and the Birth of Post-Sixties America*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2006. 9.

⁸ Silverman, Kaja. "Suture," in *The Subject of Semiotics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.

⁹ Silverman, 215-16.

¹⁰ Silverman, 221-4.

¹¹ See Andrei Codrescu's introduction to *Up Late*, where he complains of a "class spirit" in 1970s American poetry that made everyone forget about the useful and exciting arguments.

¹² Cohen, Anthony P. *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. London: Tavistock, 1985. 11.

¹³ Cohen, 11.

¹⁴ For a good history of the Community Studies field, see: Bell, Colin and Howard Newby, eds. *Community Studies: An Introduction to the Sociology of the Local Community*. Studies in Sociology series, ed. W.M. Williams, Vol. 5. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1971.

¹⁵ Cohen, 26-27.

¹⁶ Cohen, 15.

¹⁷ Cohen, 16.

¹⁸ Cohen, 17.

¹⁹ Waldman, Anne. Interview with the author. Boulder, CO. June 27, 2007.

²⁰ Allione, Coztanzo. *Fried Shoes, Cooked Diamonds*. Mystic Fire Video, 1980 / 1989.

²¹ As differentiated from the sort of professionalization that scholars such as D.G. Meyers discuss in (*The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880*).

²² Tompkins, Jane. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press (1985). xi-xii.

²³ Tompkins, xvii.

²⁴ Davidson, Michael. *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. 1.

²⁵ Davidson, 2.

²⁶ Davidson, 4.

²⁷ Davidson, 6.

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- ²⁸ Davidson, 15.
- ²⁹ Beach, Christopher. *Poetic Culture: Contemporary American Poetry Between Community and Institution*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999. 171.
- ³⁰ Beach, 170.
- ³¹ Beach, 5.
- ³² Kane, 186.
- ³³ See Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1993.
- ³⁴ Americans for the Arts, Publications 2010. National Endowment for the Arts Yearly Appropriations History 1966-2005.

Chapter 1

- ¹Anderson, Terry. *The Movement and the Sixties: Protest in America From Greensboro to Wounded Knee*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (1995). iv.
- ² For more details about the Chicago Black Panther case, see Boykoff, Jules. *Beyond Bullets: The Suppression of Dissent in the United States*. Oakland: AK Press (2007). 53.
- ³ Boykoff, 126.
- ⁴ See Killen, Andreas: *1973 Nervous Breakdown: Watergate, Warhol, and the Birth of Post-Sixties America* and Bruce J. Schulman: *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics*.
- ⁵ For more on “Operation Homecoming” and the “P.O.W. cult,” see Killen, Andreas. *1973 Nervous Breakdown: Watergate, Warhol, and the Birth of Post-Sixties America*. New York: Bloomsbury (2006). 95-101.
- ⁶ Ellsberg was recently arrested at a protest in D.C. over the war in Afghanistan.
- ⁷ Schulman, Bruce J. *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics*. New York: Ad Capo Press (2002). 48.
- ⁸ This is a brief summation of Daniel Kane’s incredibly helpful and lucid history of the arts and activism of St. Mark’s and the Lower East Side. See Kane, Daniel. *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s*. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press (2003). 123-126.
- ⁹ Anderson, Terry H. “Days of Decision” in *The Movement and the Sixties: Protest in America from Greensboro to Wounded Knee*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press (1995).
- ¹⁰ Hampl, Patricia. “Re: Some Beginning Questions.” Letter to author, April 10, 2010. Email.
- ¹¹ Holmes, Jr., Oliver Wendell. “In Our Youth Our Hearts Were Touched With Fire.” (An address delivered for Memorial Day, May 30, 1884). <http://people.virginia.edu/~mmd5f/memorial.htm>. 1/4/2010.
- ¹² Holm, Bill. “Remembrance,” in *Moonlit Bridge: Celebrating Literature, Legacy, and the Loft*. Event Program 10/26/2007. Minneapolis: Loft Literary Center (2007). 10.
- ¹³ Anderson, 413.
- ¹⁴ Waldman, Anne. “Introduction” in Waldman, Anne, and Laura Wright, eds. *Beats at Naropa: An Anthology*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press (2009). 11.
- ¹⁵ The term “New Left” was coined by C. Wright Mills in a 1960 essay entitled “Letter to the New Left.” See Mills, C. Wright. “Letter to the New Left.” *New Left Review*, No. 5, September-October 1960.
- ¹⁶ While there is some confusion among historians—see Schulman, Killen, and Anderson—about the use of these terms, the difference in relationship to institutions and structures seems to be the prevailing method of definition.
- ¹⁷ Morgan, Bill. *I Celebrate Myself: The Somewhat Private Life of Allen Ginsberg*. New York: Penguin (2006). 455.
- ¹⁸ Waldman, Anne. “Welcome *Another World*,” in Waldman, Anne. *Another World: A Second Anthology of Works from the St. Mark’s Poetry Project*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill (1971). Xxi.
- ¹⁹ Waldman, Anne. Letter to Bernadette Mayer, March 14, 1970. Qtd in Kane, Daniel. *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s*. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press (2003). 180.
- ²⁰ Ginsberg, Allen. *Collected Poems 1947-1997*. New York: HarperCollins (2006). 626. (hereafter referred to as Ginsberg CP)
- ²¹ Morgan, 501.
- ²² Ginsberg CP, 629.

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- ²³ Pound, Ezra. "At a Station in the Metro," in Allison, Alexander W., et. al., eds. *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*. Third Ed. New York: Norton (1983). 963.
- ²⁴ Ginsberg CP, 634.
- ²⁵ Ginsberg, Allen. "Howl," in Barry Miles, ed. *Howl: 50th Anniversary Edition*. New York: Harper Perennial (2006). 6.
- ²⁶ There were neighborhoods in New York, especially in the South Bronx, where landlords burned their broken down, red-lined buildings after stripping them for materials. See Wynn, Terry. "South Bronx rises out of the ashes: grass-roots efforts, government funds revitalize NYC community." NBC News: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6807914/> (updated 1/17/2005). 2/15/2011.
- ²⁷ Ginsberg CP, 636.
- ²⁸ Ginsberg CP, 636.
- ²⁹ Ginsberg CP, 636.
- ³⁰ Felien, Ed. *Take the Streets!* Minneapolis: Southside Pride (2008). 137-8.
- ³¹ Elam, Harry Jr. *Taking It To the Streets: The Social Protest Theater of Luis Valdez and Amiri Baraka*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press (1997). 24.
- ³² Schulman, 78. The term "Beloved Community" is from Martin Luther King, Jr.' speech, "Non-violence: The Only road to Freedom." "Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives." <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=1426>. 5/9/2011
- ³³ Allen, Donald (ed.), *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960*. University of California Press: Berkeley (1999). Second Ed. xi.
- ³⁴ Rasula, Jed. *The American Poetry Wax Museum: Reality Effects, 1940-1990*. Refiguring English Studies, Ser. 4. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English (1996). 223-225.
- ³⁵ Rasula, 223-225.
- ³⁶ Rasula, xi.
- ³⁷ Waldman, *Beats*, 13.
- ³⁸ See Olson's Essay "Projective Verse" in the poetics section of *New American Poetry*.
- ³⁹ Kane. n. 30, 213.
- ⁴⁰ Kane, xiii.
- ⁴¹ Kane, 13-19.
- ⁴² Kane, 120-129.
- ⁴³ Jarrell, Randall. "Death of the Ball Turret Gunner," in Allison, Alexander W., et. al., eds. *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*. Third Ed. New York: Norton (1983). 1166.
- ⁴⁴ Waldman, Anne. *Journals and Dreams*. New York: Stonehill Press (1976). 161.
- ⁴⁵ See Kane.
- ⁴⁶ Anne Waldman Papers, Special Papers Collection, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. This requirement is still in place during the school's Summer Writing Program.
- ⁴⁷ Thanks to Maria Damon and Nathan Thompson for clarification of these principles.
- ⁴⁸ Waldman, Anne. *Giant Night*. New York: Corinth Press (1970) 19.
- ⁴⁹ Corso, Gregory. "Bomb," in <http://plagiarist.com/poetry/234/>. 2/16/2011.
- ⁵⁰ Allione, Coztanzo. *Fried Shoes, Cooked Diamonds*. Mystic Fire Video, 1980 / 1989.
- ⁵¹ It must be noted that some of these poets did establish friendships with some of the Loft and younger poets.
- ⁵² Browne, Michael Dennis. Interview with the author, November 26, 2008.
- ⁵³ The Minnesota Poetry Out Loud of the 1970s was different than the National Endowment for the Arts and Poetry Foundation's Poetry Out Loud, which is a national poetry recitation contest.
- ⁵⁴ Marshall, Caroline. Interview with the author, June 2010.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵⁶ Vinz, Mark. *Dacotah Territory: A 10 Year Anthology*. Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies (1982). 3.
- ⁵⁷ Schjotz-Christensen, H., and Jim Perleman. *Moons and Lions Tails*. Number 4. Minneapolis: Permanent Press (1976). Back cover.
- ⁵⁸ Sramek, Jean. Interview with Jim Perlman, on the *MNArtists.org* website. October 18, 2004. <http://www.mnartists.org/article.do?rid=50769>. 2/14/2011.

⁵⁹ Kornblum, Allan. "A Couch, Spaghetti, and a Salad: How Bookfairs Brought Coffee House Press to the Twin Cities, and the Literary Community We Found Here." Coffee House Press Blog, editor Allan Kornblum. <http://www.coffeehousepress.org/blog-posts/a-couch-spaghetti-and-a-salad/>. Web. 2/01/2011.

⁶⁰ Moore, Jim. Interview with the author. 11/08/2007.

⁶¹ in contradistinction to Barthes' "text" which is always an unfinished "field" of discourse. See "From Work to Text," in Barthes, Robert. *The Rustle of Language*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1986. 57.

⁶² Moore, Jim. "Why I'm Quitting the *Lamp in the Spine* and Why Poetry is Essential to the Revolution," *Lamp in the Spine*. Vol. 9, Summer / Fall 1974. 1.

⁶³ This is a predicting echo of Charles Bernstein's "Official Verse Culture" speech at the MLA in 1984. See Bernstein, Charles. "The Academy in Peril: William Carlos Williams Meets the MLA," in *Content's Dream: 1975-1984*. Los Angeles: Sun & Moon (1986). 244-251.

⁶⁴ Moore, *Lamp*, 6-7.

⁶⁵ Mike Hazard, *A Sampler of Minnesota Poets*. Saint Paul: Center for International Education (1976).

⁶⁶ Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Methuen & Co., Ltd. (1979). 102.

⁶⁷ Wheeler, Lesley. *Voicing American Poetry*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press (2008). 128.

⁶⁸ Augustine, Steven. Comment on Coffee House Press Blog. December 29, 2010. Web. <http://www.coffeehousepress.org/blog/>. 2/01/2011.

⁶⁹ Schulman, 246-249. See also Tom Wolfe's essay on the religious and spiritual movements of the era: "The "Me" Decade and the Third Great Awakening."

⁷⁰ Kane, 153.

⁷¹ Waldman, Anne. Interview with the author. 6/26/2007.

⁷² Roark, Randy. "Interview with Anne Waldman," in *Vow to Poetry*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press (2001). 122.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ "Rinpoche" is a common honorific that follows the names of Buddhist teachers. It literally means "precious one."

⁷⁶ I discuss this reading and Trungpa in more detail in Chapter 3.

⁷⁷ I discuss this further in the third chapter.

⁷⁸ Waldman, Anne. "Fast Speaking Woman," in *Fast Speaking Woman: Chants and Essays (20th Anniversary Edition)*. San Francisco: City Lights Press, 1996. 3.

⁷⁹ The poem explicitly quotes Sabina, leading some to charge Waldman with misappropriation of indigenous work. She answers this charge in a preface to the anniversary edition of *Fast Speaking Woman*.

⁸⁰ Moore, Jim. Biographical note. In Yassner, Seymour, Ed. Dir. *25 Minnesota Poets*. Minneapolis: Minneapolis Public Schools. 1974. 52.

⁸¹ Such as depicted in Wendy Wasserstein's play about feminism over three decades, *The Heidi Chronicles*.

⁸² Hampl, Patricia. "Re: Some Beginning Questions." Letter to author, April 10, 2010. Email.

⁸³ Hampl, April 10, 2010.

⁸⁴ I do not use the term "little" to mean "little" in size or consequence; "little magazine" was a common term during the 1960s and 70s used to refer to the explosions of literary magazines at that time, which had small print runs, ephemeral and often immediate subject matter, and usually very short lives.

⁸⁵ In what seems an unintended irony, the University of Minnesota's undergraduate literary journal was recently re-named *The Ivory Tower*. It had this name in the 1970s, when garrison Keillor and Patricia Hampl were its editors. (Thanks to Ed Griffin for this information).

⁸⁶ Luce Irigaray's *Lips Speak together* was published in 1977, after this poem.

⁸⁷ Hanson, Phebe. Biographical note. *25 Minnesota Poets*. 36.

⁸⁸ Hanson, Phebe. "Towers Shower," in *25 Minnesota Poets*. 39.

⁸⁹ Hanson, 39.

⁹⁰ Marshall, Caroline. Biographical note, in *25 Minnesota Poets*. 59.

⁹¹ Marshall, 60.

⁹² Hyde, Lewis. *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World*. 2nd Ed. New York: Vintage (2007). xviii.

⁹³ Hyde, xx.

⁹⁴ Also see Victor Turner's *Ritual and Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, for "Communitas" and "Liminality" vs. Institutional "Civitas." Thanks to Maria Damon for this note.

⁹⁵ Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Hawthorne, N.Y.: Aldine De Gruyter (1995). Paperback Edition (2nd). 112.

⁹⁶ Hyde, 143.

⁹⁷ Hyde, 79-86.

⁹⁸ Binkiewicz, Donna M. *Federalizing the Muse: United States Art Policy and the National Endowment for the Arts 1965-1980*. Chapel Hill: Univ. North Carolina Press (2004). 172-3.

Chapter 2

¹ This is still the case, as the Poetics School holds a summer session week dedicated to the legacy of the New American Poetry every few years.

² Boykoff, 124.

³ See Sandra Bell. "Crazy Wisdom," Charisma, and the Transmission of Buddhism in the United States." *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (October 1998). 55-75.

⁴ "Rinpoche" is a common honorific that follows the names of Buddhist teachers. It literally means "precious one."

⁵ Morgan, 485.

⁶ Sutin, 315.

⁷ Sutin, 45 and 311.

⁸ Jerryson, Michael. "Monks with Guns." Reprinted in *Utne* May-June 2010, 68.

⁹ Sutin, 307.

¹⁰ Investigative Poetry Group, *The Party: A Chronological Perspective on a Confrontation at a Buddhist Seminary*. Woodstock, N.Y.: Poetry, Crime, & Culture Press (1977). 14.

¹¹ Investigative Poetry Group, *The Party*. 18.

¹² My iteration here is very basic; many have told this story with more detail in more places, including Tom Clark, Eliot Weinberger, Larry Sutin, and countless websites. I relay a very bare version here for a reason, which is to illustrate the separation between the event and its subsequent suturing and mythology.

¹³ Merwin, W.S. "Letter from William S. Merwin to Investigative Poetry Group," in *The Party*. 88.

¹⁴ Ulrich, David. "Six Practices for Creating Communities of Value, not Proximity." *Community Voices: Academic, Work, and Public Readings*. Ed. Martha Muth. New York: Pearson-Longman (2004). 222.

¹⁵ See further argument in Chapter 1.

¹⁶ Goldman, Sherman. "Robert Bly on Gurus, Grounding Yourself in the Western Tradition, and Thinking For Yourself: An Interview." *East / West Journal* Aug. 1976. 11.

¹⁷ Both had been interviewed at least once by *Time* magazine.

¹⁸ Waldman, Anne. "Letter to Robert Bly," April 13, 1977. Robert Bly Collection, Manuscripts Division, University of Minnesota Libraries. Accessed April, 2010. Special thanks to Mark Gustafson for drawing my attention to this letter.

¹⁹ Bly, Robert. Reading in Boulder, May 16, 1977. Investigative Poetry Group, *The Party*. 104-6.

²⁰ Bly barely mentioned Dana Naone as a poet in this discussion; when he does mention her, she is "Merwin's Girlfriend."

²¹ *The Party*, 107.

²² *The Party*, 108.

²³ *The Party*, 109.

²⁴ Sanders, Ed. "Introduction," in *The Party*. V.

²⁵ Clark, Tom, and Ed Dorn. "When the Party's Over: An Interview With Allen Ginsberg." In Clark, Tom. *The Great Naropa Poetry Wars*. Santa Barbara: Cadmus Editions (1980). 41.

²⁶ Clark and Dorn, 53.

²⁷ Clark and Dorn, 54.

²⁸ Clark and Dorn, 42.

²⁹ Clark, 68.

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- ³⁰ Sutin, Lawrence. *All is Change: The Two-Thousand-Year Journey of Buddhism to the West*. New York: Little, Brown (2006). 312.
- ³¹ Clark, Tom. *The Great Naropa Poetry Wars*. 40.
- ³² Clark, 7.
- ³³ Clark, 43.
- ³⁴ Weinberger, Eliot. "Dharma Demagoguery." *The Nation*. April 19, 1980. 470.
- ³⁵ Not, I think, a reference to the Frank Zappa song (while "freak out" may be an appropriate term, there is simply more to the novel's correspondence with the story Weinberger tells).
- ³⁶ Weinberger, 28
- ³⁷ Sered, Danielle. "Notes on Said's *Orientalism*." <http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Orientalism.html>. Fall 1996. Web. Accessed 2/14/11.
- ³⁸ Weinberger, 33.
- ³⁹ Weinberger, 38.
- ⁴⁰ Weinberger and others call the events at Snowmass the "Merwin Incident," perhaps because Merwin was the more recognizable poet, but I use the "Merwin / Naone Incident" because Naone was equally involved.
- ⁴¹ Weinberger, 40.
- ⁴² Reed, Ishmael. "American Poetry: A Buddhist Take-Over?" *American Black Literature Forum*. Vol. 12, No.1 (Spring, 1978). 4.
- ⁴³ "Education: Precious Master of the Mountains," *Time*, February 14, 1977. Web. March 2, 2010.
- ⁴⁴ This applies to the Loft, also, which I address in chapter 3.
- ⁴⁵ Baraka, Amiri. Interview with the author, 4 / 30 / 2008.
- ⁴⁶ Reed, 4.
- ⁴⁷ Reed, 11.
- ⁴⁸ Reed, 11.
- ⁴⁹ For widespread anxiety about cults (driven in large part by the Patty Hearst saga), see Killen, 120-123.
- ⁵⁰ Marin, Peter. "Spiritual Obedience: The transcendental Game of Follow the Leader." *Harpers*. February 19, 1979. 47.
- ⁵¹ Marin, 56.
- ⁵² Marin, 52-3.
- ⁵³ He was a practicing poet; Ginsberg wrote the Introduction for his poetry collection *First Thought Best Thought: 108 Poems* (1983).
- ⁵⁴ Waldman, Anne. "Letter to Robert Bly."
- ⁵⁵ Pound, Ezra. "The Return," in Axelrod, Steven Gould, Roman, Camille, and Thomas Travisano, eds. *The New Anthology of American Poetry: Modernisms, 1900-1950*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press (2008). 266.
- ⁵⁶ The exploration of the causes, consequences, and damages of war have been a major project of Waldman's for the last 20 years; she recently finished her series IOVIS: a poetic study of war making, to "transmute war through language."
- ⁵⁷ Waldman, Anne. "Why I Meditate," in *Skin Meat, BONES*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press (1985). 55.
- ⁵⁸ I find distressing the amount of times that imagery of war is used to describe these tensions.
- ⁵⁹ Waldman, *Skin, Meat, BONES*. 55.
- ⁶⁰ Ginsberg, "Elephant in the Meditation Hall," *Collected Poems 1947-1997*. New York: HarperCollins (2006). 984.
- ⁶¹ Morgan, Bill. *I Celebrate Myself: The Somewhat Private Life of Allen Ginsberg*. New York: Penguin. 524-526.
- ⁶² See Sutin, 314-315. Tendzin died of AIDS in 1991.
- ⁶³ Asher, Levi. <http://www.litkicks.com/MerwinNaropa/>. Accessed 3/3/10.
- ⁶⁴ Linhardt, Kate. *Crazy Wisdom: The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics* <http://vimeo.com/6822663>. Vassar College Senior Thesis, 2008. Accessed 3/3/10.
- ⁶⁵ Linhardt.

Chapter 3

¹ Rusoff, Marly, and Hanson, Phebe. Interview with the author. 2 / 9 / 2008.

² Lewis Hyde has remarked in *The Gift* that certain professions associated with service are traditionally undercompensated.

³ Markuson, Anne. "The Urban Core as Cultural Sticky Place." Henckel, Dietrich, Elke Pahl Weber, & Benjamin Herkommer, eds. *Time Space, Places*. Berlin: Peter Lang Verlag, 2007.

⁴ Hasse, Margaret. "High School Boyfriend," in Yassner, Seymour, Ed. Dir. *25 Minnesota Poets, #2*. Minneapolis: Minneapolis Public Schools (1977). 167.

⁵ Berrigan, Ted. "Sonnet XXXVI," in Hoover, Paul, ed. *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology*. New York: Norton (1994). 279.

⁶ This phrase is reminiscent of Waldman's line "I sit because thoughts chase thoughts." Waldman and Berrigan were friends and collaborators.

⁷ And of Berrigan's life, in particular; he had a frenetic lifestyle fueled by drugs, mainly speed.

⁸ As an aside, this blending is responsible for a lot of the conflicts between the members of the counter-cultural "back to the land" movement of the 1970s and the natives of that land, in that urban culture was often conflicting with rural culture.

⁹ Wojahn, David. Interview with the author, 7 / 26 / 2010. I think he means the early 20th century.

¹⁰ Vinz, Mark. *Dacotab Territory: A 10-year Anthology*. Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1982. 3.

¹¹ Vinz is likely echoing Minnesota native Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street*, his famous satire of the Midwest.

¹² Vinz, 3.

¹³ "A Blessing" was handed out in a special-edition broadside at "Celebration of Midwest Poetry," a recent event co-sponsored by the Poetry Society of America and *Rain Taxi Review of Books*, held at the Open Book on 14 May 2010.

¹⁴ Wright, James. "A Blessing," in *Above the River: The Complete Poems*. Boston: Wesleyan University Press, 1990. 143.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ There is contention over the ownership and use of this term. Daniel Kane describes Jerome Rothenburg and Mark Kelly who coined the term "Deep Image" for an issue of their magazine, being irritated with Bly for recycling the term for his own ends. Certain Bly scholars leave out *Trobar* altogether: http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a_f/bly/bushell.html

¹⁷ The landscape often works as an objective correlative.

¹⁸ Mariani, Paul. *Dream Song: The Life of John Berryman*. 410. Thanks to Amy Jordan for this insight.

¹⁹ Wright, James. "Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota, in Parini, Jay, ed. *The Columbia Anthology of American Poetry*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press (1995). 643.

²⁰ Wojahn, David. *Ice House Lights*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1982. 13-14.

²¹ Wright, James. "The River Down Home," in *Above the River*. 172.

²² Wojahn, "Elegy for James Wright."

²³ She publicly goes by Trish, which she started in the 70s when she was co-editor of the MPR magazine with Patricia Monaghan in the 1970s.

²⁴ A number of poets interviewed for this project have remarked that they were the first to teach a class at the Loft, but the documentation from those years indicates that Moore's class was the first.

²⁵ Martinson, Sue Ann. "Letter to the Loft Board," May 31, 1977.

²⁶ See Terry Anderson for women in the Movement and their fight for equality within organizations such as SNCC and SDS. 313-317.

²⁷ Seccombe, Wally. "The Housewife and Her Labour Under Capitalism." *New Left Review*. Number 83 (1974). 4.

²⁸ "Loft Board Meeting Minutes, 3 June 1977." Loft Archives, Minnesota State Historical Society Library.

²⁹ Rusoff-Hanson interview

³⁰ Anderson, William A. "Community / People: Their Problems • Their Opportunities • Their Innovations • Their Solutions," in *Dayton-Hudson Corporation and Community Giving*. Minneapolis: Dayton-Hudson Foundation, 1977. 3.

³¹ Galaskiewicz, Joseph. *Social Organization of an Urban Grants Economy: A Study of Business Philanthropy and Nonprofit Organizations*. Orlando: Academic Press (1985). 236.

³² Regional ties played an important role in Minnesota's corporate giving climate. When outsiders started to buy up local companies in the 1980s, Minnesota's corporate giving community fought hard to keep the leadership of those companies within the giving circle. My thanks to Judith Martin at the University of Minnesota for providing this background and insight. Also see Galaskiewicz, Joseph. *Social Organization of an Urban Grants Economy: A Study of Business Philanthropy and Nonprofit Organizations*.

³³ For more on this, see Binkiewicz, Donna M. *Federalizing the Muse*. 74-75.

³⁴ Wu, Chin-Tao. *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention Since the 1980s*. London: Verso, 2002. 2.

³⁵ This preference is at least expressed in governmental funding, as shown by the total amount of money for the Literature and the Visual Arts Programs of the National Endowment for the Arts, sample years 1974-1981.

³⁶ Wu, 2.

³⁷ Binkiewicz, Donna M. *Federalizing the Muse: United States Arts Policy and The National Endowment For the Arts, 1965-1980*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. 172-3.

³⁸ Martinson, Sue Ann. "Letter to the Loft Board," 2 January, 1978. Loft Archives, Minnesota State Historical Society Library.

³⁹ It is interesting that getting larger and educating the community are tied together in this comment. This is reminiscent of Beach, where he says that a poetic community (in the letter "community" means the larger population of the Cities) transitions from community to institution when its concerns are not directly about poetry. The need to educate or to do outreach means that member's activities are not primarily reading and writing and listening to poetry, but are teaching and creating curriculum and advertising.

⁴⁰ Minczeski, John. "Letter to the Loft Board," 13 January, 1978. Loft Archives, Minnesota State Historical Society Library.

⁴¹ Minczeski, John. Interview with the author, 11 / 29 / 2007.

⁴² Dochniak, Jim. "Letter to the Loft Board," 16 January, 1978. Loft Archives, Minnesota State Historical Society Library.

⁴³ Dochniak, Jim. Interview with the author. 2 / 7 / 2008.

⁴⁴ Minczeski, "Letter."

⁴⁵ Rusoff-Hanson interview.

⁴⁶ Martinson interview.

⁴⁷ His wife, Mary François-Rockcastle, is a Loft alum and is currently the Dean of the Graduate School of Liberal Studies at Hamline University, where many veteran and current Loft teachers work or take classes.

⁴⁸ Galaskiewicz, 147.

⁴⁹ Nowak, Mark. "Open Book, Case Closed." *Workers of the Word, Unite and Fight*. Palm Press, 2005. 1.

⁵⁰ Ruminator Books' branch in the Open Book, and soon its other branch in Saint Paul, closed its doors in 2004. The space has since housed an art gallery and a design firm.

⁵¹ Nowak, 2.

⁵² Nowak, 2.

⁵³ Codrescu, Andrei. *Up Late: American Poetry Since 1970*. New York: Four Walls, Eight Windows (1989). Xxii.

⁵⁴ See Amato, Joe, and H. Kassia Fleisher. "Reforming Creative Writing Pedagogy: History as Knowledge, Knowledge as Activism." *Electronic Book Review*, 2001.

Chapter 4

¹ See Vernon, Jenifer Rae. *Making Community With the Deep Communication of Popular Live Poetry in San Diego, California at the Millennium*. Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences. Vol 69(9-A) 2009.

² See Vanderborg, Susan. *Paratextual Communities : American Avant-garde Poetry Since 1950* (2001); Nicholas, Tessa Joseph. *Imagining community: Individual Influence and Group Cohesion in American avant-garde Poetry and Poetics*. Proquest Dissertations And Theses 2008; Willner, Evan Matthew. *Immanent Communities: The Epistemological Challenge of Twentieth-Century Experimental Poetry*. Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences (67:11) 2007.

³ See Zitomer, Rachel T. *In Celebration of the Ephemeral Contemporary Poetry Communities Beyond Institutions in Albany, New York*. Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences (67:6) 2006; and Gray, Timothy. *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim: Creating Countercultural Community*. Iowa City, IA: U of Iowa Press, 2006.

⁴ Beach, 5-6

⁵ Metzdorf, Matthew. "Ian Campbell Poetry Reading," May 6, 2010.

⁶ Rasula, 275

⁷ Tremblay-McGaw, Robin. "Hive and/or the Dark Body of Friendship: A Response to The Grand Piano: An Experiment in Collective Autobiography" http://www.asu.edu/pipercwcenter/how2journal/vol_3_no_2/alerts/mcgaw.html. Web. Accessed 2/11/2011

⁸ Pearson, Ted. *Grand Piano*, Part I, 63.

⁹ Pearson, Ted. 68.

¹⁰ Pearson, Ted. 65-66.

¹¹ Watten, Barrett. *Grand Piano: An Experiment in Collective Autobiography, San Francisco, 1975-1980*. Part II. Detroit: Mode A, an Imprint of This Press (2007). 12.

¹² Watten, GP II. 13

¹³ Pearson, Ted. *Grand Piano: An Experiment in Collective Autobiography, San Francisco, 1975-1980*. Part IV. Detroit: Mode A, an Imprint of This Press (2007). 92.

¹⁴ "Rethinking Poetics" Conference Announcement. www.rethinkingpoetics.wordpress.com. Web. April 12, 2010.

¹⁵ Rasula, 482

¹⁶ the Flarf group of poets are influenced by the Language poets, in their focus on de-centering authorship and foregrounding the construction of "sense" in language.

¹⁷ Mohammad, K. Silem. "Rethinking Poetics: Some Post-Conference Thoughts. *Lime Tree*. Blog. June 16, 2010. <http://lime-tree.blogspot.com/2010/06/rethinking-poetics-some-post-conference.html>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Robinson, Kit. "Note." *Grand Piano: An Experiment in Collective Autobiography, San Francisco, 1975-1980*. Part VIII. Detroit: Mode A, an Imprint of This Press (2009). 110.

²¹ Mohammad.

²² Tuma, Keith. "After the Bubble," *Chicago Review* 55: 3. Web. humanities.uchicago.edu/orgs/review/55-3_Tuma.pdf. 101.

²³ Kohtz, Ruth. Interview with the author. 2 / 17 / 2011.

²⁴ In this, they are like their counterparts who blog their creative work, as Joe Amato has noted, to "get it out there." They are different from the bloggers in their attendance at the bookfest.

²⁵ White, Linda. "No Cigar, But Lots of Books: Self-published Authors Carpe Diem at the Twin Cities Book Festival," *Twin Cities Daily Planet*. October 13, 2010

²⁶ Twin Cities Book Festival website. [Http://www.raintaxi.com/bookfest/past.shtml](http://www.raintaxi.com/bookfest/past.shtml). Web. 2/3/2011.

²⁷ Twin Cities Book Festival Program, 2010. Print.

²⁸ Huyck, Ed. "Hailing Rain Taxi for Years of Service," *City Pages*. September 17, 2008.

²⁹ Lorberer, Eric. Email to author. November 2, 2010.

³⁰ Lorberer, Eric. Email to author. November 2, 2010.

³¹ Robinson, Kit. *Grand Piano: An Experiment in Collective Autobiography, San Francisco, 1975-1980*. Part VIII. Detroit: Mode A, an Imprint of This Press (2009). 102.

³² The Target Foundation announced in November of 2010 that they were discontinuing arts funding in favor of shifting more assets to organizations that promote literacy.

³³ Waldman, Anne, in Eric Lorberer, "Grasping the Broom More Tightly Now: The Rain Taxi Interview," in Anne Waldman: *Vow to Poetry: Essays, Interviews, and Manifestos*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2001. P. 258

³⁴ In a way, this attitude is similar to those expressed within queer or transgendered theory: some in these fields, such as Kate Bornstein, reject mainstream models of only two genders in favor of a model that embraces multiple genders, a sort of polygenderism connected to polysexuality. In poetry land, this could be poly-verse-alism.

³⁵ "Rethinking Poetics" Conference Announcement. www.rethinkingpoetics.wordpress.com. Web. April 12, 2010.

³⁶ Nelson, Cary, as quoted in Rasula, 360.

³⁷ See, for example, Swenson, Cole: Introduction to *American Hybrid: A Norton Anthology of New Poetry*, reprinted in *The Writer's Chronicle* Vol. 41. Number 4 (February 2009): 60-65. Print.

³⁸ Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Hawthorne, N.Y.: Aldine De Gruyter (1995). Paperback Edition (2nd). 113.

³⁹ Belsey, 688.

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