

**Experimentalism  
as Reciprocal Communication  
in Contemporary American Poetry**

John Ashbery, Lyn Hejinian, Ron Silliman

Elina Siltanen  
University of Turku

John Benjamins Publishing Company  
Amsterdam / Philadelphia

# Table of contents

Series editor's preface	VII
Acknowledgements	IX
CHAPTER 1	
Introduction	1
1.1 The poets, their contexts, and readers	6
1.2 Reading conspicuously	19
1.3 Prospectus	26
CHAPTER 2	
<b>"What makes you think this is a voice?": Reading presence and the self</b>	<b>29</b>
2.1 From the New York School to Language Writing: Against the single voice	31
2.1.1 Modes of presence: The New York School and confessional poetry	32
2.1.2 Constructing the self: Language Writing and the workshop lyric	38
2.1.3 "Authenticity" / "sincerity" and Ashbery, Silliman and Hejinian's Postmodernism	42
2.2 Possibilities for multiple presences: Redefining defining the self	49
2.2.1 Pronominal indeterminacies in Ashbery	50
2.2.2 "Attention is all"? Silliman's disrupted presences of the self	58
2.2.3 "The self as a relationship": Hejinian writing (her)self	66
2.3 "There is no 'I' as such": Escaping the self	73
CHAPTER 3	
<b>"Do you see how it posits you the reader?": Reading in a community</b>	<b>77</b>
3.1 Collaborative writing and collective reading	80
3.1.1 The New York School: Towards a collective voice	80
3.1.2 Language Writing collaborations: Collectivity and strangeness	83
3.2 Hard work: Becoming a reader	89
3.2.1 Making reading communities	91
3.2.2 "Joining" a reading community	97
3.2.3 Poetic address: Collaborating with readers	103
3.3 Reading to escape the self	109

CHAPTER 4

<b>“What of a poem that told you what it did...?”: Consciousness of poetry</b>	<b>115</b>
4.1 Unidentifiable writing: Poetry and criticism	117
4.2 Poetic inquiries: Critical readings in and of poetry	119
4.2.1 “new / Criticism”: Dialogic art-critical discussion in Ashbery’s “Litany”	121
4.2.2 “Normal chores of verse”: Theory-consciousness and constructedness in Silliman’s “Ketjak” and “Ketjak2”	129
4.2.3 “A language of inquiry”: Hejinian and the discourse of poetry	137
4.3 The experimental poem as an intersection	143

CHAPTER 5

<b>“Pending panic of sense”: Reading everyday communication in experimental poetry</b>	<b>149</b>
5.1 “Gazing at the stars”: Particularity and commonality	153
5.1.1 “Coming from the same place”: Commonality and context in writing about the everyday	156
5.1.2 “This is not repetition”: Iteration and commonality	162
5.2 A sense of the idiomatic	168
5.2.1 “Transparent and needle-pure”: Ashbery’s everyday clichés	170
5.2.2 “You spill the sugar when you lift the spoon”: Everyday life turned idiom in Hejinian’s writing	173
5.2.3 “Cannot shut / revolving door”: Silliman’s idiomatic insistence	176
5.3 <i>Happily</i> : Chance and the unexpected in the everyday	180

CHAPTER 6

Afterword	187
References	195
Index	207