



**Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of
Criticism: Approaching the Living Theatre,
Happenings/Fluxus, and the Black Arts Movement
(Theater: Theory/Text/Performance)**

Mike Sell

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Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism: Approaching the Living Theatre, Happenings/Fluxus, and the Black Arts Movement (Theater: Theory/Text/Performance)

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Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism: Approaching the Living Theatre, Happenings/Fluxus, and the Black Arts Movement (Theater: Theory/Text/Performance) Mike Sell *Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism* looks at the American avant-garde during the Cold War period, focusing on the interrelated questions of performance practices, cultural resistance, and the politics of criticism and scholarship in the U.S. counterculture. It develops three case studies: the Living Theatre's influential production of Jack Gelber's *The Connection*, which subverted the historical and political assumptions of the War on Drugs, utilized cutting-edge jazz both formally and thematically, and inspired a generation of artists and activists to rethink the nature of community and communication; the earliest American performance art, namely the Happenings and Fluxus events, which responded in astounding ways to the avaricious movements of Cold War capitalism; and the Black Arts Movement, which brought about practical and theoretical innovations that effectively evade the conceptual categories of Euro-American philosophy and historiography.

Mike Sell's study is groundbreaking in its consideration of the avant-garde in relationship to a crucial but rarely considered agent: the scholar and critic. The book examines the role of the scholar and critic in the cultural struggles of radical artists and activists and reveals how avant-garde performance identifies the very limits of critical consideration. The book also explores the popularization of the avant-garde: how formerly subversive art is eventually discovered by the mass media, is gobbled up by the marketplace, and eventually finds its way onto the syllabi of college and university courses. *Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism* is a timely and significant book that will become a standard reference for scholars in the fields of avant-garde literary criticism, theater history, critical theory, and performance studies.

"A provocative exploration of relations between the historical avant-garde and Cold War vanguard art and theatre. Sell's compelling historical and cultural narrative shows how the connections between the two exist at a very deep level of radical politics and aesthetics--an amazing concoction of rigorous scholarship, interdisciplinary learning, and progressive theorizing."

--Michael Vanden Heuvel, University of Wisconsin, Madison

"One of the most sophisticated, engaged, and engaging studies of the avant-garde in the United States that I've read--an important study that will raise the bar not only on scholarship of the Black Arts Movement, but on U.S. avant-gardism generally."

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