

# Wesleyan University Press

## Press Release

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## Bridging Social Construction and the Avant-Garde

Can experimental art and social context be understood together, or does the development of the one necessarily deny the other? Can one understand the formal innovations of the avant-garde through the models proposed by cultural studies, or are the two irreconcilable?

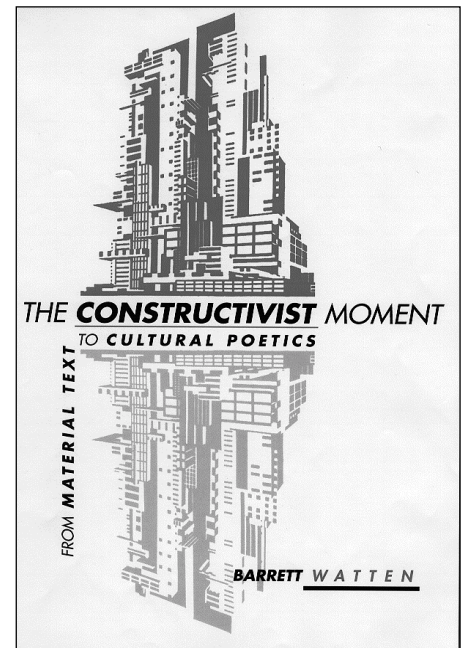
In a powerful new study, *The Constructivist Moment: From Material Text to Cultural Poetics*, renowned avant-garde poet and theorist Barrett Watten locates the nexus for this convergence between form and culture in the tradition of constructivist aesthetics. For Watten, constructivism, seen broadly as a foregrounding of the principles of formal construction in literature and art, reveals how aesthetic practice can transform the social materiality of its time, thus demonstrating the reciprocal relationship between innovative art and its cultural context.

*The Constructivist Moment* delivers a series of highly original approaches to reading artistic form within cultural context by interrogating the principles of its formal construction. Topics range from 1920s Soviet constructivism to 1960s conceptual art in New York, the formation of the Language School in the 1970s, and the surfacing of Detroit techno in the 1990s.

Alternating between close readings and theoretical discussions that range from Lacanian psychoanalysis to Russian Formalism to Zizekian ideological critique, it presents a series of insightful revisionist accounts of innovative art through the methodologies of cultural studies. Finally, it reveals the ways in which the avant-garde, in its foregrounding of "negativity," proposes a "horizon of possibility, an imagination of participation, a totalizing vision" for society that can yield new forms of perception and new models for positive future action.

**Barrett Watten** is Associate Professor of English at Wayne State University and the author of *Total Syntax* (1985), essays on avant-garde poetics. He was the editor of *This* (1971-82) and co-editor of *Poetics Journal* (1982-98). Recent collections of his literary work include *Frame (1971-1990)* (1997), *Bad History* (1998), and, forthcoming, *Progress/Under Erasure*.

*We would appreciate receiving two copies of any review of this book that appears in your publication.*



### ***The Constructivist Moment***

***From Material Text to Cultural Poetics***

by Barrett Watten

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