



Leningrad: American Writers in the Soviet Union

Michael Davidson, Lyn Hejinian et al

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Nonfiction. In August 1989, a new, independent organization of young Soviet writers hosted the first international conference for avant-garde writers to be held in the USSR since the Russian Revolution. "Summer School--Language, Poetry, Consciousness" was a grassroots attempt to harvest the fruits of glasnost, bringing together poets and scholars from Siberia to San Diego. Attending were four American writers, Michael Davidson, Lyn Hejinian, Ron Silliman, and Barrett Watten. Leningrad is their collaborative account of this extraordinary trip. A collection of poetic essays, it is a commentary on the intellectual revelations that result when post-glasnot Soviet and American intellectuals meet face to face. Some misunderstandings that arise are funny: one Russian asks the Americans if the Manson family is a TV show; some are surprising: when asked if she would like feminist literature from the states, a Russian woman requests the complete poems of Jim Morrison. While each group found inspiration in the other's avant-garde tradition, they had different definitions of what avant-garde was. American writers were testing their ideals of Western Marxism; the Marxists they had admired idealized American bourgeois democracy. Intellectually challenging, this collection is an unusual twist on the meeting of minds from across oceans.

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