

MA THESIS REPORT

JAKUB HOVORKA: SHAPES OF WRITING IN MODERN AMERICAN POETRY AND ART:
ASHBERY, ANDRE, TWOMBLY

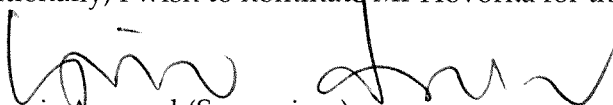
This thesis engages with the work of three important writers/artists of the post-War period—John Ashbery, Carl Andre and Cy Twombly—and treats the increasingly contented issue of the relationship between visual/textual semantics: how word compositions function as visual object and how visual objects signify textually. This topic has been recently addressed by, among others, Chris Funkhouser, Marjorie Perloff, Barrett Watten and is a central concern in the theorising of contemporary poetics (from concrete and visual poetry, field composition, neoflux, to digital and new media poetics).

Mr Hovorka's choice of subjects is insightful—particularly Cy Twombly, who is of great (if often unstated) importance for many experimental poets in Britain and America during the 1980s; and Carl Andre, whose work is rarely addressed in relation to poetics, but whose "constructivism" is close to the work of Barrett Watten and the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets. Mr Hovorka's treatment of their oeuvres and of the theoretical frameworks surrounding them is impressive. The overall scope of his research points towards a further elaboration by way of a larger, more expansive project, and clearly offers itself as a topic for a doctoral dissertation.

I have a few "questions," of a theoretical nature.

In *The Truth in Painting*, Jacques Derrida examines, among other things, the function of indexicality in art. Indeed, indexicality may be said to be central to this book, originally conceived under the title "The Truth in Pointing." Derrida is here, as elsewhere, concerned with a certain "materiality" that impinges upon even the most abstract, symbolic, or conceptual forms of art; a materiality that equally impinges upon the assumed indexicality of such work: we might think here of Twombly's scribbles, or the masonry assemblages of Andre. In your thesis you touch upon the question of minimal signification: the zone between pointing and meaning, so to speak. There is an implication here that a certain type of art/poetry implicitly addresses a foundational question of semiotics, and that it has continued to do so even as philosophy (after Derrida) has retreated from this question. It seems to me that Derrida (and some others) are not only theorising this notion of minimal signification (or rather, the genesis, the possibility of signification) but pointing, as it were, towards a poetics of "signifying materiality." Certainly "materiality" has been a term widely applied to innovative poetry after Ashbery. I am wondering if you would care to comment upon this?

In any event, I am more than satisfied that this thesis deserve a grade of excellent; additionally, I wish to nominate Mr Hovorka for the Mathesius Prize.



Dr Louis Armand (Supervisor)

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