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

Tvary psaní v moderní americké poezii a umění:
Ashbery, Andre, Twombly

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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I declare that the following MA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned.

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I would like to thank my supervisor Louis Armand, PhD. for his help and assistance in writing this thesis.

I would also like to thank my mother for her patience and faith in me while I was preparing and writing it, and I dedicate this thesis to her.

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Fig. 1 - Hans Namuth, *At Work on Stones* (1958),
black and white photograph (Web: Buffalo.edu)

Clement Greenberg's Vision

In 1940, American formalist critic Clement Greenberg, who would in the following years become one of the most prominent voices defining and prescribing the directions of the visual arts, wrote his essay "Towards a Newer Laocoon," a radical re-interpretation of the history of art and a defence of the new American painters in terms of their turn towards the "proper" medium of painting. Providing a genealogy of this development in painting, whose origins he traces through the Cubists and the early avant-gardes back to the Impressionists, Greenberg sees all the arts – poetry, music, painting and sculpture – as moving away from a state of "confusion of the arts,"[1] where each art imitates the effects of the others, towards a newly found "purity":

> Guiding themselves, whether consciously or unconsciously, by a notion of purity derived from the example of music, the avant-garde arts have in the last fifty years achieved a purity and a radical delimitation of their fields of activity for which there is no previous example in the history of culture. The arts lie safe now, each within its "legitimate" boundaries, and free trade has been replaced by autarchy. Purity in art consists in the acceptance, willing acceptance, of the limitations of the medium of the specific art. [...] The arts, then, have been hunted back to their mediums, and there they have been isolated, concentrated and defined. It is by virtue of its medium that each art is unique and strictly itself. [2]

[1] Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Perceptions and Judgments 1939-1944*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988) 23.
[2] Ibid. 32.

For Greenberg, each art has its particular essence that resides in its inalienable medium and should produce effects solely through exploring or questioning of this medium - what he later comes to define as Kantian self-criticism in the arts[3] - and not through imitating or borrowing the techniques of the other arts. Above all, he argues against the intrusion of "literature" and "subject-matter" in the arts, because these divert attention from the medium and are a source of illusions.[4] He founds his thesis on the contemporary developments in American painting and on artists like Mark Tobey, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Clifford Still and many others, who turn towards the material medium of painting, that is, towards "the flat surface, the shape of the support, [and] the properties of pigment," creating visual or physical effects by banishing illusionism and representation that characterized past art.[5] For Greenberg, Modernism and Modernist art is "the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to characterize the discipline itself – not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence."[6] While the medium of painting and sculpture, according to Greenberg, is "physical" and seeks "above all else to affect the spectator physically," in poetry "the medium is essentially psychological and sub- or supra-logical,"[7] it is language aimed at "infinite suggestion."[8] To mix the two would be a regression, a confusion of the arts.

Greenberg's "Newer Laocoon" not only alludes to G.W. Lessing's eighteenth-century treatise *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Poetry and Painting*, but is one of the most recent texts in a critical tradition that seeks to delimit the arts, particularly what has been called the Sister Arts of poetry and painting, by establishing firm boundaries between them and allocating each art a proper territory for its development. As in the case of Lessing, Greenberg's essay is not simply a description of a particular moment or a trend in the arts, but a visionary text that seeks to prescribe for the arts their appropriate fields in the present and in the time to come. Not only does Greenberg find in each art a pure essence that it should strive to develop but he envisions the arts as independent of each other, as ivory towers separate both from life and the other arts. The only cross-border influence he allows is the one of music, because music serves as an ideal guide for the other arts towards their purity.[9] His vision though seductive in its analytical reasoning and dogmatic judgments has, however, been put in question by the inter-artistic developments in the succeeding years and decades, as

[3] Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," 10 Aug 2010 < http://digilander.libero.it/contemporarea/Testi/greenberg_62>.
[4] Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," 25.
[5] Greenberg, "Modernist Painting."
[6] Ibid.
[7] Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," 33.
[8] Ibid. 34.
[9] Ibid. 32.

Modernist insistence on separate arts has given way to Postmodern crossovers between the arts.

Inter-artistic Crossovers

Since the late 1950s, American avant-garde arts show a growing *rapprochement* between poetry, music, painting and sculpture which stands in sharp contrast to Greenberg's concept of purity. Not only is there collaboration of diverse artists from across the fields in single works but also the respective media – the verbal and the visual - of each art are being increasingly used in combination and juxtaposition to each other within individual works. This movement across the borders and limits of the arts was already embraced in the interdisciplinary methods of teaching at the Black Mountain College, North Carolina, in the early 1950s, where lecturers included poet Charles Olson, painter Robert Motherwell or composer John Cage and where many of the representatives of the new avant-garde have studied – Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly or Jonathan Williams among many others. In the arts themselves, one can find early examples of collaboration in Frank O'Hara and Larry Rivers's lithographs *Stones* (1957-58) which combine poems and figurative drawing and on which, as Hans Namuth's photo shows (fig. 1), the artist and the poet worked simultaneously. The reader or viewer of these lithographs – the distinction between the two becomes increasingly hard to establish with these works - is thus presented not only with two different signifying regimes within one work but is also in the presence of two minds who respond artistically to one another. Collaboration becomes even more frequent with the revival of Performance Art, bringing together figures as diverse as artist Rauschenberg, choreograph and dancer Merce Cunningham and composer John Cage in the 1960s.

With the advent of Pop Art, Conceptual Art, Concrete Poetry and Fluxus in the 1960s the distinctions between the realms of the arts become less and less clear-cut as regards the use of media, and so does the distinction between pop culture or kitsch and high art. Robert Morris's 1961 *Box with the Sound of its Own Making* – a bare wooden cube in which a cassette recorder plays the sound of its construction by the artist – can be seen as emblematic of the new turn towards "multimedia" in single works because it combines the spatial effect of a sculpture with the "opposite" medium of sound. In poetry itself there is a movement towards exploring the possibilities of using words and texts visually, for example in Mary Ellen Solt's *Flowers in Concrete* (1966), in Aram Saroyan's one-word poems in the collections *Aram Saroyan* or *The Rest* (1967-70) or in Steve McCaffery's large-scale map of letters and words *Carnival* (1967-75). The act of reading is re-conceived as looking at words

or playing with them on the paper, and Aram Saroyan, using diction that reminds one of Bob Brown's revolutionary rhetoric from *The Readies* (1930), says:

> [...] new poetry isn't going to be poetry for reading. It's going to be for looking at [...], I mean book, print culture, is finished. Words disappeared in sentences, meaning, information, in the process that is reading (a boring, very boring moving of the eyes) [...][10]

In the visual arts, on the other hand, a painting or a sculpture is no longer restricted to, or regarded as, producing solely a physical sensation in the viewer by using abstract or figurative forms but functions increasingly as a statement, commentary or a text in its own right. It is to be read and seen as a sign or a structure of signs. If it employs words and text, these are not subordinated to the image as a part of representation or allocated some separate site – a parergon – within the work, from which they describe or comment on it, nor do they merely stress the flatness of the picture, but become a central part of the sought effect. The artist thus may become a rhetorician. To name just a few examples, John Baldessari's canvases from the late 1960s – *Tips for Artists Who Want to Sell* (1968) or *What Is Painting?* (1968) - use words to make ironic statements or a satire directed at the whole concept of art, its criteria of value and its production methods; in Joseph Kosuth's *Clear Square Glass Leaning* (1965) the four words are self-referentially inscribed on four clear square glass leaning panels; and Roy Lichtenstein's reproductions from comic books – *Whaam!* (1963) or *Ohhh ... Alright* (1964) - often play with banality, cliché and fragments of narratives that mock the viewer's quest for meaning (see fig. 2).

In the context of sculpture and earthworks, it is primarily Robert Smithson who works with the idea that making sculptures is analogous to linguistic operations. His drawing *A Heap of Language* (1967), which is usually interpreted solely as visual poetry, may be read also as a representation or a diagram showing that similarly to language physical materials or earth is composed of different strata of articulation and coding. Pop artist Robert Indiana subjects a single word "LOVE" to infinite connotative variations by painting it in different colours and producing it in different materials during a period of about twenty years. In Scotland, Ian Hamilton Finlay, in his *Little Sparta*, turns poetry into sculpture and place, and a garden into a book or a text – "for reading" instead of "for walking" seems to be the instruction at the entrance as words are brought into a direct relation not only with the material on which they are inscribed but with the surrounding countryside. In yet another

[10] Quoted in Mary Ellen Solt, *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1970) 57-58.

way, one can mention Allan Kaprow's site *Words* (1961), where visitors literally walk between words written on large sheets of paper. The private space of reading becomes public. In these works, the media of language, image and spatial objects are neither excluding nor subordinating one another, but are used in a mutually complementary way. As Dick Higgins, one of the members of Fluxus, writes in his manifesto from 1966, the concept of the medium has become obsolete and is exchanged for "intermedia,"[11] each artwork can become a space where different media and signifying regimes can be juxtaposed and combined in search of new effects.

Fig. 2 - Roy Lichtenstein, *Ohhh ... Alright* (1964)
(from Web: worldgallery.co.uk)

Despite these developments the differences between the arts of painting, sculpture and poetry are not collapsed or made irrelevant, rather the artists show a growing awareness of the unavoidable "impurity" or heterogeneity present in all media and all arts. As W.J.T. Mitchell writes in his *Picture Theory* there are no pure or proper media, "all media are mixed media, and all representations are heterogeneous."[12] To use Greenberg's distinction quoted above, painting does never affect solely in physical terms but also psychologically or suggestively, and poetry always heightens the reader's physical experience of language as a material. Even the spatial and temporal distinction between poetry and the visual arts is not absolutely valid because sculptures and paintings are experienced in time, the viewer explores them alternately in detail and from distance or as he moves around them to see how they work in space. A

[11] Dick Higgins, "Statement on Intermedia," 10 Aug 2010 <http://www.artpool.hu/Fluxus/Higgins/intermedia2.html>.
[12] W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 5.

canvas is never a pure surface of colours that appeal to the eye unmediated but a surface that is always coded, always written over, in a way which is not different from language. As Mitchell, assuming Jacques Derrida's position, writes in his book *Iconology*, an image is "but another kind of writing, a kind of graphic sign that dissembles itself as a direct transcript of that which it represents, or of the way things look, or of what they essentially are."[13] The differences between the arts and media are thus not some fixed absolute limits but rather certain flexible sets of configurations that can be foregrounded by including words in paintings or by emphasizing the visuality of words. Instead of confusing the arts, these developments in painting, sculpture and poetry are but a continuation of the questioning of the nature of the arts as Greenberg envisioned it more than a decade earlier, except that this time it proceeds through a more open attitude between the arts themselves. The arts are no longer ivory towers, and it is doubtful if they ever really were, and "autarchy" is replaced once again with "free trade."

The Subject of the Thesis

In this context of evolving relationships between the arts, this thesis asks the questions: How can writing be conceived in connection with the visual arts? What shapes can writing take? What new effects it can produce and what strategies of reading it calls for? Rather than mapping the whole artistic milieu, all the practices and works in the period from the 1950s to 1980s or even further and putting together either a history or a textual museum, the thesis is a secant drawn through the different arts and diverse relationships between them. It limits itself to three artists/poets in whose work the visual and the verbal, poetry and art, come together in different forms or shapes. These three artists/poets are poet John Ashbery, Minimalist sculptor and poet Carl Andre and painter Cy Twombly. Each of these artists has brought language or writing in a particular work or within several works into a close relation with its other, either painting or sculpture, and imagined a way of writing in close proximity to this art. John Ashbery's poetry, particularly the 1962 collection *The Tennis Court Oath*, can be read as inspired by Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art, Carl Andre's poetry is defined by its relation to Minimalism in sculpture, and Cy Twombly's paintings which include poems and writing can be either seen as graffiti, fragmented texts or as concrete poetry. All these artists/poets take writing and language to a kind of limit, to a point of exhaustion as a carrier of meaning or referential medium in the traditional sense, but instead of turning words into nonsense or meaninglessness, they point towards new ways how meaning can be read in the

[13] Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986) 30.

space of writing in analogy to art. The thesis attempts to map the relations and similarities that are invoked in these works and to analyze how meaning is re-conceived and generated.

Even with these three artists and poets no attempt is, however, made at offering exhaustive interpretations or consideration of all their works over the years, from the 1950s, when all three of them started to write or paint, to the present moment, which has seen some of their most recent works. Instead certain moments, developments or works are identified, isolated and analyzed in detail. The thesis is not a single journey, an unfolding of a single argument, but insofar as the artists are different it is a tracing of three paths and relationships in which art and poetry meet in the period from the 1950s to the 1970s.

In the first chapter "Abstraction and Realism," the thesis focuses on Ashbery's collection *The Tennis Court Oath* (1962) as a painterly poem that alludes to and uses a number of techniques and approaches that have come to characterize modern art and have been used by artists as diverse as Robert Motherwell, Franz Kline or Robert Rauschenberg. The chapter therefore considers the relationship between the poems and techniques as action painting, collage, erasure, grids, rejection of representation and play with ambiguity. Similarly to Rauschenberg's combines from the 1950s, the poems are seen as texts that have been freed from any speaker or lyric subject and turned into pure textuality where all possibility of meaning resides in the reader's work with them.

In the second chapter "Repetition and Variation," the thesis turns to Andre's use of repetition both in poetry and sculpture in the early 1960s as a way of exploring their relation and the different or similar effects it produces. Repetition is interpreted as one of the primary strategies of Minimalism and as a way of exploring nuances and variations between what may at first sight appear as identical objects or units. Andre's development from lyrical poetry to repetitive sonnets is considered in connection with his progression from expressive sculptures into more structural pieces. I see in his work a movement towards treating words as purely visual or vocal intensities, where meaning is externalized onto the surface of words. The chapter is concluded with a brief discussion of his sculptures as organized around linguistic structures and of his use of literality both in poetry and sculptural practice.

In the third and shortest chapter "Pictures to Be Read," Cy Twombly's paintings and drawings from the 1970s are read "against the grain," that is, as examples of Concrete Poetry in the visual arts. Twombly's works on paper from this period are seen as inviting the viewer to play with the arrangements of letters and words in order to find new relationships and new meanings. The word is here transformed by Twombly into a visual form or arrangement, where colour and shapes of letters and writing become signifying.

The Place of the Thesis

The thesis envisions its place within contemporary critical discourse that seeks to interpret or analyze art and poetry/literature in their relation to each other. This discourse has in recent years been on the rise both in literary theory and in art history as interdisciplinary approaches have become more and more relevant for the study of literature and the arts. One could mention in this respect works like W.J.T. Mitchell's *Picture Theory* and *Iconology*, which seek to elucidate the relationships between texts and visual media, or a whole genre of ekphrastic and painterly interpretations of poems, which have proliferated in the last decades, or works like Simon Morley's *Writing on the Wall*, which relates the history of writing in the visual arts. This thesis does not claim to be equal to these wide-ranging and often defining texts, but it sees itself as situated on the border between literary criticism and art history/theory in the same way as these texts are.

Personal Note

My interest in the crossovers between the arts has been first aroused in Stephen Cheeke's seminar "Writing for Art" held at Bristol University, England, in 2006, where the topic of ekphrasis in past and contemporary poetry was discussed. It was at this time that I first formulated the subject of my thesis as the encounter between poetry and painting. Since then I have been drawn, however, more and more to the other intersections where the arts meet, to visual poetry and to paintings using words. The conception of the thesis then evolved into a much larger work that sought to analyze visuality in poetry, ekphrasis and painterly poems, and writing in art as three separate chapters. This project has, however, proved overambitious and due to time and space constraints I have been forced to make a shorter study of the topic as it can be found in three individual artists/poets. It remains to be hoped that despite a certain fragmentariness, these short interpretations and analyses will suggest a more broader insight into the realm of inter-artistic crossovers in the period between the 1950s and 1970s.

Abstraction and Realism:
John Ashbery's *The Tennis Court Oath*

> I have lost the beautiful dreams
> That enlisted on waking,
> Cold and waiting. That world is a war now
> The portable laugh eclipsing another place
> The warrior's bonnet holds sand.[14]
> - John Ashbery, "The New Realism"

A Statement of Intent

> I attempt to use words abstractly, as an abstract painter would use paint. (I have perhaps been more influenced by modern painting and music than by poetry.) ... As with the abstract painters, my abstraction is an attempt to get a greater, more complete kind of realism.[15]

This "statement of intent" written by John Ashbery, as John Shoptaw quotes it in his book *On the Outside Looking Out*, was printed on the cover of the first edition of his collection *The Tennis Court Oath* (1962) without the poet's approval and was "suppressed" from subsequent editions.[16] The reasons for this suppression may be only surmised: Ashbery may have thought it too hasty an admission of inter-artistic influence, or an analogy that he came to believe did not really work, or perhaps as giving justification to the negative criticism which the collection generated among the more conservatively-minded literary critics. The reactions of the reviewers certainly were hostile, and one could quote Harold Bloom, whose dismissal of the poems based itself primarily on the analogy between poetry, painting and music and on Ashbery's rejection of literary tradition:

> Poems may be like pictures, or like music, or like what you will, but if they *are* paintings or musical works, they will not be poems. The Ashbery of *The Tennis Court Oath* may have been moved by De Kooning and Kline, Webern and Cage, but he was not moved to the writing of poems.[17]

Whatever the reason for this suppression, the statement shows that at least for some time Ashbery desired not to make paintings with words, as Bloom puts it, but to imagine a language or writing that would operate analogously to some of the contemporary trends in the visual arts. His poems are an attempt to free poetry from restrictive forms, from the

[14] John Ashbery, "The New Realism," *The Tennis Court Oath*, The Mooring of Starting Out: The First Five Books of Poetry (New York: Harper Collins, 1997) 118.
[15] Quoted in John Shoptaw, *On the Outside Looking Out: John Ashbery's Poetry* (Harvard University Press, 1995) 45.
[16] Ibid. 45.
[17] Quoted in Liz Kotz, *Words to Be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2007) 103.

conventions of the speaker and lyric subject. Although one could interpret the poems from *The Tennis Court Oath* also in terms of John Cage's, Morton Feldman's and Anton Webern's experiments in music, or strictly within the confines of poetry, I propose to take Ashbery's statement literally and to analyze some of the strategies that operate in these poems in terms of similarities to techniques and concepts in contemporary art.

Modern literary criticism provides two tools or concepts for reading poems in the context of the visual arts. The first, which has recently undergone a revival of interest, is the concept of ekphrasis. Ekphrasis as a rhetorical figure dates back to antiquity, when, as James A.W. Heffernan explains, it denoted a "vivid description,"[18] but in the course of history its meaning has changed significantly and at present it is used by Heffernan, W.J.T. Mitchell and Stephen Cheeke primarily as a "verbal representation of visual representation."[19] This definition is broad enough to include both poetry and prose about paintings, images and photographs, and for example Cheeke's book *Writing for Art: The Aesthetics of Ekphrasis* includes an analysis of art historical texts as instances of ekphrasis.[20] An ekphrastic poem always addresses and describes a specific image or visual work, either an imaginary one as in John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" or a real one as in Percy Bysshe Shelley's "On the Medusa by Leonardo da Vinci," and through this description "deliberately foregrounds the difference between verbal and visual representation – and in so doing forestalls or at the very least complicates any illusionistic effect."[21] Ekphrastic criticism is thus an interpretative strategy which points out differences that come into play when verbal art encounters visual representation often with reference to larger cultural and ideological values. Although many of Ashbery's poems address themselves directly to concrete paintings, for example his later "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," which has proved to be one of the favourite texts for ekphrastic critics, or his "The Double Dream of Spring" and "Why Sneeze?" in which the relation between the original work and the poem is ambivalent due to lack of description, his poems from *The Tennis Court Oath* generally do not – the only exceptions being the title poem and "To Redouté" where again ekphrastic reading is impossible, because the connection between the paintings and the poems is highly ambiguous – and cannot be seen as examples of the genre.

[18] James A.W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004) 191.
[19] Ibid. 3.
[20] Stephen Cheeke, *Writing for Art: The Aesthetics of Ekphrasis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).
[21] Heffernan, 191.

The second concept or genre, which is of a more recent origin, is a "painterly poem," defined by Michael Davidson as a poem that "activates strategies of composition equivalent to but not dependent on the painting."[22] Although Davidson uses the concept of the painterly poem solely in discussing texts addressed to specific paintings (O'Hara's "On Seeing Larry River's *Washington Crossing the Delaware* at the Museum of Modern Art" and Ashbery's "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror") with the aim of reintroducing temporality of reading by the artist into the static representation implied in ekphrasis, the concept can be used also in interpreting poems that make no explicit reference to paintings, but employ techniques or attitudes that bear resemblance to a certain movement, school or style in the visual arts. Examples of this strategy of reading can be found in Fred Moramarco's analysis of poems by Frank O'Hara and Ashbery in the context of Abstract-Expressionist action painting[23] or in Marjorie Perloff's interpretation of Gertrude Stein's poems and prose in analogy with the Cubistic works of Pablo Picasso and Marcel Duchamp's Dada.[24] To write about painterly poems is to create and draw relations and analogies not necessarily between two objects – a poem and a painting – but between diverse ways of making that share certain telling similarities. It is to make connections between the arts and implicitly to invoke the tradition of the Sister Arts. In contrast to ekphrastic criticism as practised today, the painterly poem is a comparative interpretation.

The following discussion will therefore approach the collection as one large painterly poem with reference to contemporary American art scene. The poems reflect many of the trends and directions that characterized American art in the 1950s – from Abstract Expressionism to Robert Rauschenberg's prelude to Pop Art. In interpreting them as painterly, however, I do not aim to say that they are paintings or to reduce them to some fixed origins in the visual arts and say that this and this painting can be seen in its structure or must have inspired Ashbery in writing it, rather I want to trace certain similarities that exist in between the poem and the visual arts. I propose to see this collection as an intersection of several diverse techniques and aesthetics, a site of different readings. Accordingly, the poems can be interpreted as action poems in analogy with action paintings of Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, as acts of erasure suggestive of Rauschenberg's

[22] Michael Davidson, "Ekphrasis and the Postmodern Painter Poem," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Autumn 1983) 72.
[23] Fred Moramarco, "John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara: Painterly Poets," *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Sep. 1976)."
[24] Perloff, however, does not use the term "painterly poem and very probably would disagree with this reading of her interpretation. Marjorie Perloff, "Poetry as Word-System: The Art of Gertrude Stein," *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

erased picture, as a transformation of pop culture into art or as a collage of heterogeneous materials in the context of Rauschenberg's combines from the late 1950s. Its fragmented surface is not only resonant with contemporary art techniques, but, as will be argued below the poem represents an important moment in American poetry, a turn from interiority to exteriority, from transparency to opacity, from poem as a self-contained object having a unity in a speaker or lyric subject to poem as an open surface of the text.

The Milieu of Painters

Although this chapter does not seek to locate Ashbery's poems in specific paintings, but rather in the experimental field that contemporary art represented, it is still useful to note Ashbery's personal connection with artists and his long-term interest in art. Besides writing essays and reviews for diverse art magazines, Ashbery himself confesses in one of his lectures that his original desire was to be a painter, but he turned to poetry instead,[25] a paradox that may well be echoed in the opening lines of Frank O'Hara's tongue-in-cheek poem "Why I Am Not a Painter?" No other poet from the 1950s and 1960s - except Frank O'Hara, who worked as a curator at the Museum of Modern Art - moved and wrote in such a proximity to the developments in painting. The milieu of painters represented in the early 1950s New York by the Abstract Expressionist artists like Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock or Franz Kline and by younger painters like Michael Goldberg and Larry Rivers, among many others, made, as Fred Moramarco suggests, a friendly and "generous audience" for the New York poets like Ashbery, O'Hara, James Schuyler or Kenneth Koch who felt isolated from the more traditional poets writing within the academic New Criticism and from the Beat poets.[26] It provided the poets with a sense of belonging and a sense of shared interest, and the paintings by these artists inspired them with a new freedom, with possibilities of liberating poetry from restrictive forms. Ashbery confirms this view when he recollects:

> The artists liked us and bought us drinks and we, on the other hand, felt that they – and I am speaking of artists like de Kooning, Franz Kline, Motherwell, Pollock - were free in their painting in a way that most people felt was impossible for poetry. So I think we learned a lot from them at that time, and also from composers like John Cage and Morton Feldman, but the lessons were merely an abstract truth – something like Be yourself – rather than a practical one – in other words nobody ever thought he would scatter words over a page the way Pollock scattered his dribs, but the reason for doing so might have been the same in both cases.[27]

[25] Ashbery, "Poetical Space," *Selected Prose*, ed. Eugene Richie (Manchester: Carcanet, 2004) 211-212.
[26] Moramarco, 440.
[27] Shoptaw, 45.

The influence of the contemporary painters on Ashbery was, however, more significant than he here admits; if it was not a practical influence in terms of telling the poet how to use words, it was a conceptual one affecting the way how he conceived poetry may be written. As David Bergman suggests, the influence was a kind of "[c]ross-polination" which "might produce monsters, but it could also produce beautiful hybrids that defy conventional categories."[28] Although Ashbery's relationship with Pop Artists and Minimalists of the 1960s was not as close as the one with Motherwell, Pollock, De Kooning and Rivers, most probably due to his five-year long stay in Paris, France, as an art editor for the *New York Herald Tribune* and also to a general change in atmosphere in the arts, his collection of reviews *Reported Sightings* shows that he remained keenly aware of the new developments in the arts both in Europe and in America.[29]

The Tennis Court Oath

The Tennis Court Oath is Ashbery's second collection of poetry, following *Some Trees*, and can be seen as the poet's radical re-appraisal of the direction his work was taking at that time. Ashbery himself came to regard it later as more of an experiment, or a digression, than a serious work:

> I didn't want to write the poetry that was coming naturally to me then ... and I succeeded in writing something that wasn't the poetry I didn't want to write, and yet was not the poetry I did want to write. For me, this was a period of examining my ideas about poetry – sort of tearing it apart with the idea that I would put it back together.[30]

But this should not deprive it of interest and value. Compared to *Some Trees* or *Rivers and Mountains*, the differences in Ashbery's use of language, form and sources in these poems are very marked. Whereas in the earlier and later collections, meaning is often elusive, slipping away from the reader's grasp, leaving behind a sense of ambiguity and indeterminacy, in *The Tennis Court Oath* meaning appears to be rendered impossible right from the beginning by the abandonment of syntax as an organizing principle, by fragmentation and by juxtapositions or concatenations of diverse and contrasting words or segments of texts. Disruptiveness and heterogeneity are the two characteristic qualities of this work. The lyricism and day-dreaming of *Some Trees* is gone and an urban nightmare of disjunction and chaos sets in: "Swarms of

[28] David Bergman, "Introduction," *Reported Sightings: Art Chronicles 1957-1987* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991) xii.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Quoted in Kotz, 111.

bulldozers / Wrecked the site [...].”[31] Flowing and intricate syntax, metaphors, similes and self-parodies give way to scraps of narrative, fragments of phrases and abandoned words. The speaker’s voice is disrupted by a lack of continuity and by combinations of the incongruous, occasionally turning into a hysteric stammer: “When he’d had he would not had he of [...];”[32] speech is obliterated by the noises of machines and technology: “The roar of the engine, of course, / rendered speech impossible [...]”[33] - a statement that can be read against the desire for speech-driven poetry as it is present for example in William Carlos Williams or in Charles Olson. Words are not contrasted solely in their meaning, as would be the case of oxymoron, but also in terms of their functions in language as materials: “the clean fart genital enthusiastic toe prick album serious evening flames.”[34] The personal pronoun “I” in these poems, as David Shapiro writes, is not the “I” “of a persona but of a piece of newspaperesse or newspaper, or a part of a story pasted, as it were, upon the poem.”[35] The pronouns and characters – Ronald, Mr. Bean, etc. – are here only cardboard figures without any personal qualities or psychology. A complete sentence is a rare occurrence, a fitting punctuation mark or a capital letter is an accident rather than a rule. Even the visual composition of several of the poems and particularly of “Europe” is no longer a unified, compact form on the page because lines are ruptured, truncated and words dispersed:

25.
She was dying but had time for him –
brick. Men were carrying the very heavy things – dark purple, like
flowers.
Bowl lighted up the score just right

26.
water
thinking
a

27.
A notice:

The blank spaces are places of erasure, where the reader feels the palpable absence or omission of other words, but cannot supply the gaps with his imagination. In “Europe,” the

[31] Ashbery, “New Realism,” *The Tennis Court Oath*, 122.
[32] Ashbery, “How Much Longer Will I Be Able to Inhabit the Divine Sepulcher,” *TCO*, 78
[33] Ashbery, “Europe,” *TCO*, 132. Quotations from “Europe” are marked by numbers of sections in the text.
[34] Ashbery, “Leaving the Atocha Station,” 89.
[35] David Shapiro, *John Ashbery: An Introduction to the Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979) 55-56.

disorder stands in sharp contrast and tension to the "pure ordering principle"[36] represented by the numbers that dissect the sequences of words and text into separate but irregular units. Compared to the words, the numbers are static, unchanging and inflexible, running through the pages like a vertical axis around which the words revolve. They suggest an order, a sequence, but not a narrative progression. The poems do not lead to conclusion or revelation. "Time, progress and good sense"[37] are suspended.

Abstract Paintings and Abstract Words

In the above-quoted statement of intent for the collection, Ashbery writes that he attempts to use words "abstractly" in order to achieve "a greater, more complete realism." This use of the words "abstraction" and "realism" within the same sentence may at first appear as a contradiction, because abstraction in art is generally thought to stand for a rejection of realism, but in the context of modern art the relation between the two terms is re-conceived. Robert Motherwell's "Personal Statement" from 1945, in which he seeks to explain the underlying aesthetics of his painting *Personage (Autoportrait)* (1943), offers a useful elucidation of these ideas. In this brief text, Motherwell draws a distinction between representation and "non-representation," whereas "representational pictures [...] abstract from reality" because even in their most lifelike verisimilitude they can never capture the outside objects in their fullness, non-representational painting gives up the idea of representing the world and by using non-mimetic forms seeks to become "an event in the world," a real thing rather than an imperfect copy.[38] Thus, for Motherwell and the other abstract artists as well, representational art uses realism as a tool but arrives only at abstraction, while non-representational art uses abstraction to arrive at realism as a result.

The American abstract artists of the 1940s and 1950s – Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, to name just a few - no longer perceive their work as a representation of the outside world, nor as a result of imagination, of a pre-conceived idea or feeling that the artist paints on the canvas but as a product of the "interaction between the artist and the medium,"[39] determined by the two bodies responding to each other. Motherwell, in this respect, calls the medium "a living collaboration."[40] The meaning of the canvas is thus always in the present moment of the artist's work and not in the past or outside of it. As art

[36] Kotz, 115.
[37] Ashbery, "Leaving the Atocha Station," *TCO*, 88.
[38] Robert Motherwell, "Personal Statement," *The Writings of Robert Motherwell*, ed. Dore Ashton and Joan Banach (Berkeley and London: University of California, 2007) 46.
[39] Motherwell, "A Process of Painting," *The Writings of Robert Motherwell*, 214.
[40] Ibid. 215.

critic Harold Rosenberg, who was the first to call the new art "action painting," writes, the distinction between "art and life" is "broken down:"

> The painter no longer approached his easel with an image in his mind; he went up to it with material in his hand to do something to that other piece of material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter. [41]

Although the idea of an unpremeditated work is inevitably a fiction, because even the approach to the canvas without an "image" in the "mind" is already a premeditated step, it provides a useful perspective on the new painting. This attitude assumed by the artist introduces into the making of the work an element of chance and spontaneity, whether it is one of Motherwell's not knowing what and how he will paint or of Pollock's drip paintings where the amount and spread of the paint is difficult to be foreseen. For the viewer of these paintings, the meaning also resides in the present moment of their experience, in the response they elicit from him rather than in referring to the outside world.

In order to follow in the footsteps of abstract art, Ashbery has to do away with representation and transparency. It is particularly the poem "Europe" that constantly reiterates its opacity and unintelligibility: "cannot understand" [s. 1], "ill page sees" [s. 6], "spoiling the view" [s. 11], "You cannot illusion" [s. 19], "wholly meaningless" [s. 30], "you can't understand" [s. 34] or "does not evoke a concrete image" [s. 85]. But to divest words of representation, of their power of signification, is next to impossible, unless one uses nonsense words like the Dadaists have done or David Melnick will do ten years later, but even then these nonsense words take on signification through resemblance to real words. Ashbery is aware of this and he proceeds by breaking the representational order present in syntax, by severing the connections between words, and by juxtaposing words and phrases coming from different registers, contexts or having incompatible functions in language. In doing so, he does not allow representation to take over and meaning is subjected to a constant process of deferral. One might even say that words and phrases used in this way function more like sources of affects or sensations that impress themselves on the reader's mind, rather than as bearers of meaning. The reader experiences different emotions without being able to point to their sources.

Similarly to the action paintings of the Abstract Expressionists, Ashbery's poems in *The Tennis Court Oath* do not create an illusion of an outside world, but are literal records of their own making, of the poet's manipulation of words and texts.

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[41] Harold Rosenberg, "American Action Painters," 20 July 2010 <http://www.poetrymagazines.org.uk/magazine/record.asp?id=9798>.

Terrain
Glistening
Doesn't resemble much the out of doors
We walked around[42]

Even though Ashbery apparently did not use chance operations in their construction as John Cage would do, they are a product of improvisation, of giving up control over the meaning of the resulting work. The meaning of these poems thus resides in the reader's experience of reading them and not in some signified outside of them.

The Art of Erasure

Reading through the poems in *The Tennis Court Oath*, particularly through "Europe" and "Idaho," the reader feels that he is in the presence of some prior text that has been violently mauled or cut up by the poet into a new form. Characters and snippets of narratives appear and disappear without any clue as to their meaning or resolution. This view is confirmed by Shoptaw who identifies the sources behind these poems as William Le Queux's children novel *Beryl of the Biplane*[43] and Hamilton Gibb's novel *Soundings*, and writes that other poems use cuts from newspapers and magazines like *Esquire* and *Life*.[44] In choosing popular novels and magazines as his source materials for writing poetry, Ashbery is one of the first writers, who turn to pop culture instead of "high literature" in their works and foresees the later developments in Pop Art with its reproductions of mass-produced representations. But Ashbery does not celebrate the world of the mass media, rather the contrary, the poems again and again speak of the danger to experience these media pose: "The newspaper is ruining your eyes." [s. 57], or:

Confound it
The arboretum is bursting with jasmine and lilac
And all I can smell here is newsprint[45]

The newspapers and magazines with their sterile and objective representations and misrepresentations of life are inimical and dangerous, and Ashbery's technique of cutting them up can be read as an act of imposing over them a personal gesture. Perhaps one could see a similarity in this respect between Ashbery and Abstract Expressionist painter Franz Kline, who in the early 1950s produced a series of untitled canvases, where the background is

[42] Ashbery, "America," 68.
[43] Shoptaw, 57.
[44] Ibid. 53.
[45] Ashbery, "The New Realism," *TCO*, 119.

pasted with newspapers or telephone directory pages (see fig. 3). These uniform prints are then painted over by Kline in thick black lines, which may suggest Oriental calligraphy and which contrast with the impersonal typography in their free gesturality. By cutting words and phrases from mass media and novels and re-arranging them on the page, Ashbery makes a similar gesture of revolt against their banality and prosiness.

Fig. 3 - Franz Kline, *Untitled* (1952)
(from Web: Museum of Modern Art)

However Ashbery's cut poems can be also read as an exploration into the minimum of writing that will suffice to produce poetic or semantic effects. In the literary context, the first example of erasure as a method of producing a new poem from a different text can be found in Ezra Pound's editing of T.S. Eliot's "He Do the Police in Different Voices" into "The Waste Land" in 1922 – but Pound refused to take credit as the author of the new work. In his 1931 *Gems*, Bob Brown used classical poems by Tennyson, Wordsworth and others erasing in them certain innocent words by crossing them out in a thick black line and thus led the reader to imagine more spicy and exciting words in the spaces. But in none of these works was erasure used as destructively as in Ashbery's "Europe" or "Idaho." Followers of Ashbery include the British artist Tom Philips, who in his book *A Humument* (1970) covered an original Victorian novel with colourful designs, always leaving only several words peering out, and Ronald Johnson's *Radi Os* (1977) that excises words from Milton's *Paradise Lost* and puts them in new configurations. Ashbery's treatment of the book has, however, a

contemporary art analogue in Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing* (1953) which might have influenced him. In an interview, Ashbery himself acknowledges that his use of erasures, ellipsis and "leaving out" may have been inspired by art:

> It's probably something that came from painting too. A lot of de Kooning's drawings are partly erased. Larry Rivers used to do drawings in which there are more erasures than there are lines. Rauschenberg once asked de Kooning to give him a drawing so that he could erase it. I got to wondering; suppose he did erase it? Wouldn't there be enough left so that it would be something? If so, how much? Or if not, how much could be erased and still have the "sense" of the original left?[46]

The problem of erasing words in texts in contrast to painting or drawing is that unless the original text is generally well known or unless the use of erasure is explicitly stated or made visible, words have an anonymous character and the act of erasure may remain invisible itself. In Ashbery's "Europe," it is therefore being constantly emphasized by the blank spaces between words and by the unfinished sentences and unresolved narrative situations:

> 18.
>
> I must say I
> suddenly
> she left the room, oval tear tonelessly fell.

Reading these words and segments the reader is made aware not only of what is there, but also of what is missing, the absence and blankness constantly confront his reading.

Despite the similarity in the use of erasure as a method of producing a new work in Ashbery's poem and Rauschenberg's picture, it is also important to note the differences. Whereas for Rauschenberg, as Mark Stevens and Annalyn Swan write, this was a highly personal challenge that was at the same time a "compliment" and a "symbolic" ritual of "Oedipal murder" because the older artist had to be met face to face and had to agree with the "sacrifice,"[47] Ashbery's choice of a largely unknown book for children from a second-hand stall is more arbitrary, although its repercussions – any text may be dissected and erased presenting a new effect – represent a similar portent for any concept of a literary canon. In Rauschenberg the erasure of another work is explicitly mentioned in the title and constitutes the conceptual aesthetic of the painting, but in Ashbery the reader does not learn about the source text without delving into critical interpretations, he can only infer but has no certainty.

[46] Moramarco, 454.
[47] Mark Stevens, Annalyn Swan, *de Kooning: An American Master* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 2004) 358-360.

Fig. 4 - Robert Rauschenberg, *Erased de Kooning Drawing* (1953)
(from Web: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art)

Last but not least, the graphic traces that remain in Rauschenberg's picture are a result of material resistance, of the thickness of De Kooning's charcoal and lead that could not be erased, but in Ashbery the words and phrases are a product of random selection. Thus, one may see also a difference between intentionality and unintentionality in the two works.

New Realism

In October 1962, Sidney Janis Gallery in New York opened an exhibition called "The New Realists," showing works by Robert Indiana, Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, James Rosenquist, Claes Oldenburg and other young artists both from the USA and Europe. These artists turned away from expressing the unconscious or their feelings to reproducing commercial design and items of pop culture. This movement from "high art" towards the mass-produced media may explain why many of the older Abstract Expressionists – Mark Rothko, Robert Motherwell, Adolph Gottlieb, with the exception of Willem de Kooning - resigned from the gallery. Ashbery who wrote a review for the exhibition, would have been aware of this new direction in art already from his stay in France, where the New Realists took to the stage a few years earlier than in America. In his review, Ashbery stressed that the new artists used simple objects "to create experiences which transcend the objects" and found in a "fire hydrant" a similar field of effects that was previously attributed to the "Mona

Lisa."[48] Ashbery's poems in *The Tennis Court Oath* can be seen as producing a similar effect, they question the nature of poetry as art and turn from poetry as expression of the poet's personality or of his feelings towards the impersonal objecthood of language. Rather than to Warhol or Lichtenstein, they are, however, similar to the works of Robert Rauschenberg, who can be described as an "early" New Realist or a predecessor of Pop Art.

The Grid

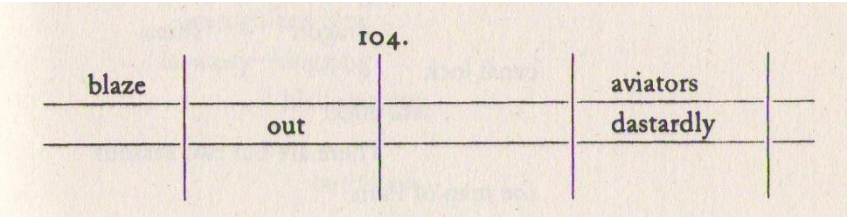

Fig. 5 - John Ashbery, "Europe"
(scanned)

In the poem "Europe" under section 104, the reader comes across another device that has been expressly borrowed by Ashbery from the visual arts and has no precedent in poetry – the grid. As Rosalind Krauss writes, the appearance and history of the grid in Western painting is synchronous with twentieth-century art from the Cubist dissections of objects into a series of planes through Piet Mondrian's analytic compositions in primary colours to Jasper Johns's number grids or the Minimalist grids which remind one of systems of coordinates:

> Surfacing in pre-War cubist painting and subsequently becoming ever more stringent and manifest, the grid announces, among other things, modern art's will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse.[49]

Its role in Ashbery's poem is no different, it does not introduce connections between the words within it, rather the contrary, it divides them and separates them from each other. The grid is, however, not a transitory device specific solely to the section 104, it can be seen as operating implicitly throughout the whole poem and many of the others included in the collection. The grid disables narrative and syntax and organizes words in juxtaposition or parataxis which is so characteristic for these poems. It makes words equal and co-present rather than subject to relations and to sequence.

[48] Ashbery, "The New Realists," *Reported Sightings*, 82.
[49] Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1985) 9.

Ashbery and Rauschenberg

Ashbery's poems from *The Tennis Court Oath* with their radical heterogeneity, which cannot be subsumed within a single reading without it either being too general or severely reductive of the works, suggest an affinity with Rauschenberg's combines from the late 1950s. Rauschenberg's canvases from 1955 to roughly 1961 are sites or inventories on or to which almost anything can be placed or affixed – a stuffed eagle or goat, a parachute, a comic book, a cravat or a chair – without any apparent order. If Greenberg stressed the flatness of the picture plane as the essential element of modern painting, Rauschenberg's canvases invade the gallery space, they are a combination of sculpture, relief and painting. Shoptaw sees Ashbery explicitly alluding to Rauschenberg's work in "Europe," when he writes "canvas the must spread / to new junk" [s. 16].[50] But other lines and words scattered through the poems could be also mentioned, as well as lines that may point to Rauschenberg's *Black Paintings* (1951): "The boards dark as night sea."[51] Allusions may also be found in Ashbery's "large 'S'" [s. 58] or the final abbreviation "N.F." [s. 111] which is being signalled by the lighthouse, these enigmatical letters, whose meaning is irretrievably lost and cannot be re-established, connect with Rauschenberg's cut and pasted letters, particularly his red letter "S" (*Painting with Red Letter S*, 1957) or with other words and verbal fragments that litter his combines and whose origin or meaning is untraceable.

What Ashbery's poems share with Rauschenberg's combines besides heterogeneity and collage, is the appearance of a conundrum or riddle in which the reader may assume the persona of a detective in search of sense. Reading through Ashbery's poems, the reader constantly tries to grasp at certain words or textual segments that appear to possess meaning, that could throw some light into the poem and explain it. This search for meaning, which dominated already the original novel used for "Europe," is intentionally dramatized by Ashbery also in the texts when he includes segments like:

> The judge calls his assistant over
> And together they try to piece together the secret message contained
> in today's paper. [s. 39]

or:

> Now he cared only about signs.
> Was the cigar a sign?
> And what about the key?[52]

[50] Shoptaw, 55.
[51] Ashbery, "Rain," *TCO*, 82.
[52] Ashbery, "They Dream Only of America," *TCO*, 63.

Every word and fragment may be a clue or a sign, but as reading progresses these clues are revealed to be false clues and the signs to be empty ones. There is no key that would unlock the poems for the reader. Decipherment or interpretation as a strategy of reading is being constantly sabotaged and meaning is always deferred. There is no "secret message" in the sense of a "dignified and paternal image" [s. 79] that could be decoded by the reader and that would hold the text in unity. More than with any other poetry it is impossible to pose and answer the question: "what are the poems about?" The traditional concepts, tropes and figures such as metaphors, metonymies, ambiguities or tension, which contemporary New Critics would attempt to deploy against the poems, are rendered largely irrelevant. The poems are neither structures nor verbal icons.

This play on decipherment and its impossibility is also present in Robert Rauschenberg's combines from the second half of the 1950s. In works like *Rebus* (1955), *Small Rebus* (1956), *Monogram* (1955-1959) and *Allegory* (1960), the titles expressively point to the works being a riddle or a puzzle containing some sense that the reader may find out by close reading of the heterogeneous elements juxtaposed to one another. Robert Hughes in his book *Shock of the New* takes the bait and reads *Small Rebus* as signifying "flight" because it includes "photos of a bee, a dragonfly, a mosquito, a fly's multicellular eye, and the Winds from Boticelli's *Birth of Venus*."[53] But Hughes can arrive at this reading of the combine only by reduction and omission of many other elements in the three canvases. Even if we take the two photographs of racing runners as also fitting with the theme of flight, this time understood as "run," how are we to include within it an election poster, a page from a comic book, a childlike drawing in pencil of a woman in the lower left corner or all the smudges of paint and scrawls that envelop them and that certainly do not play merely a decorative role to the theme of flight. Rauschenberg's combines function more like traps than rebuses, they resist the desire to posit or discover a single meaning that would explain them. They entrap reason and interpretation, one might even say that they mock it or parody it. And so do Ashbery's poems in the collection: "The book – a trap."[54] As Branden W. Joseph suggests, Rauschenberg's combine:

> is not a fixed or univocal arrangement or enchaining of signs, especially if we understand them as referencing a meaning that exists on another plane. Rather, a

[53] Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New: Art and the Century of Change* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005) 334.
[54] Ashbery, "Rain," 84.

> Combine is a multiplicity and each 'reading' is an actualization, a unique, contingent, and changeable act of reception.[55]

Ashbery's poems function similarly, their heterogeneity resists subsumption and makes them an inexhaustible source of new configurations and re-configurations. They are surfaces of words which each new reader may re-organize and re-connect in his own particular way without feeling constrained by some hidden sense that he has to observe or comply with. The reader is a bricoleur and his work is infinite.

Fig. 6 - Robert Rauschenberg, *Rebus* (1955)
(from Web: freedomblogging.com)

The similarities between Ashbery's poem and Rauschenberg's combines go further than heterogeneity and play with meaning. In his essay "Reflections on the State of Criticism" (1972), Leo Steinberg defines Rauschenberg's works as organized on what he calls a "flatbed picture plane," which differentiates them from much of both past and modern art.[56] Unlike majority of painting and art till the 1950s, which despite various disguises, according to Steinberg, still represent in their form and organization a man's view of the world, imitating his "erect posture," Rauschenberg's combines are "opaque flatbed horizontals":

[55] Branden W. Joseph, *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2007) 162-163.
[56] Leo Steinberg, "Reflections on the State of Criticism," *Robert Rauschenberg*, ed. Branden W. Joseph (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2002) 27.

> The flatbed picture plane makes its symbolic allusion to hard surfaces such as tabletops, studio floors, charts, bulletin boards – any receptor surface on which objects are scattered, on which data is entered, on which information may be received, printed, impressed – whether coherently or in confusion. The pictures of the last fifteen to twenty years insist on a radically new orientation, in which the painted surface is no longer the analogue of a visual experience of nature but of operational processes.[57]

Steinberg thus sees the new paintings or assemblages of Rauschenberg as carrying out "a shift from nature to culture" in the space of art.[58]

A similar shift occurs in Ashbery's *The Tennis Court Oath* where the text is being handled, cut apart and pasted rather than written. "The crushed paper heaps."[59] The poet is here not a writer but an administrative worker or clerk processing information, but instead of organizing them into order, he shuffles them around or throws them together seemingly without any sense of order. If Rauschenberg takes away the viewer's perspective from his combines, Ashbery eliminates the speaker and lyric subject. More than any poetry that has preceded it, including radical experiments in collage like W.C. Williams's *Paterson* or Pound's *Cantos*, Ashbery's poem "resists reconstitution into the transparent self-disclosing voice of the lyric subject."[60] It is literally a text, an open surface of words, that does not belong to any single person as his enunciation or an image of his consciousness, but is a "multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture."[61] One can say then, quite paradoxically, that Ashbery has arrived at the autonomy of text, of writing, through imitating the techniques of painting.

[57] Ibid. 27-28.
[58] Ibid. 28.
[59] Ashbery, "A White Paper," *TCO*, 87.
[60] Kotz, 112-113.
[61] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (Glasgow: Fontana, 1982) 146.

Repetition and Variation:
Carl Andre's Poetry and Sculpture

Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.[62]
Gertrude Stein (1913)

roseroseroseroserose
roseroseroseroserose
roseroseroseroserose
roseroseroseroserose
[...][63]
Carl Andre (1962)

The Place of Poetry in Andre's Work

> To talk about the link between my sculpture and my poetry: all I can say is that the same person does both.[64]
> - Carl Andre

When an artist works in two different arts or media, the question of their relationship – their position towards each other - inevitably arises. Are they independent of each other, moving in different directions, denying one another, or is one a model for the other? Andre's sculpture and poetry present an interesting case for analysis. Within the ten years between 1959 and 1969, from *Last Ladder* to *144 Magnesium Plates*, Andre's sculpture underwent an important development from vertical objects to flat surfaces, from "sculpture as form" through "sculpture as structure" to "sculpture as place,"[65] and from "figurality" to "literality."[66] Within the same period, as represented in his *Seven Books of Poetry* (1960-1969), Andre's interest in writing poems evolved from traditional lyric forms into collages, word patterns and poems based on mathematical paradigms: syntax as an organizing structure was replaced by arrangement of words as particles, texts became textures, verbs were abandoned for nouns and lines for grids. The present discussion will, however, focus mainly on Andre's use of repetition as an exploration into variation within the two media in the period from 1959 to 1965. Although to posit a comparison between the spatial art of sculpture and the verbal art of

[62] Gertrude Stein, "Sacred Emily," *Writings 1903-1932* (New York: Library of America, 1998) 395.
[63] Carl Andre, "On Painting and Consecutive Matters," *CUTS: Texts 1959-2004*, ed. James Meyer (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2005) 265.
[64] Andre, "Morris transcribed interview" (1975), *CUTS*, 214.
[65] According to Andre, the three figures, however, are not mutually exclusive, they refer to aspects found in varying degrees in any sculptural work. Andre, "Statement, Berkeley University Art Museum" (1979), *CUTS*, 191.
[66] The interrelation of these two terms in Andre's work from 1959 to 1960 is analyzed by Dominic Rahtz in "Literality and Absence in the Work of Carl Andre", *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 27 no. 1, 2004, 61.

poetry is always difficult, bordering on the impossible, and Andre is not always willing to acknowledge a relationship, I believe we can see in many of Andre's works a similarity in handling linguistic and physical materials. This is not to say, however, that words and bricks are the same, but that they can be used within similar patterns on a page or in a gallery room always producing different effects. Andre's poetry can be thus seen as imagining a language that could be written analogously to the way he works with sculptures. Both his sculptures and his poems arise from an experience of materialism of things and words, of their tactility and combinatory potential. As Andre says, "words do have palpable tactile qualities that we feel when we speak them, when we write them, or when we hear them,"[67] and his poetry is an attempt to foreground these tactile, sonorous and visual qualities on the page. Smithson's statements that "language is matter and not ideas – i.e., 'printed matter'" and that "language is built, not written" [68] are also relevant to Andre's use of words.

The relation between the two practices should not, however, be reduced to imitation, that is, to saying that his poetry imitates his sculpture or vice versa. Andre himself comes close to doing so in two statements on his work made in 1975 and 1992, when he defines poetry as "language mapped on an extraneous art" and goes on to suggest that at present it is the visual arts which play the role of the extraneous form for poetry.[69] These statements risk being taken literally as positing the relation between poetry and the visual arts in terms of a hierarchy between a model and a copy, where poetry would appear as the weaker art parasitically requiring a strong art to imitate. As Dominic Rahtz and Liz Kotz both suggest, the activity of "mapping" in Andre's work, however, is not going only in one direction, from poetry to sculpture. Instead, there is a "formal parallel" and "analogising one with the other,"[70] or as Kotz writes:

> In Andre's case, not only is language mapped on sculpture but the reverse is also true. Andre's use in sculpture of what he terms "clastic structures," employing "identical units of easily obtainable, everyday, functional materials" subject to continual arrangement and re-arrangement, could be seen to derive in part from his work with language. The early massing or gridlike poems of *Passport* (1960) and *One Hundred Sonnets* precede Andre's better-known sculptural work with analogous forms, and suggest that Andre's experience [in] handling and massing blocklike readymade words

[67] Andre, "Morris transcribed interview," *CUTS*, 214.
[68] Smithson, "Language to Be Looked At and/or Things to Be Read," *The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1996) 61.
[69] Andre, "Morris, transcribed interview" (1975) and "unpublished statement" (1995) both in *CUTS*, 212 and 215.
[70] Rahtz, 70.

> may have helped spur his subsequent move to arranging blocklike readymade industrial objects.[71]

For Andre, writing poetry and making sculptures are two separate practices each employing its particular medium – physical materials and language: "[...] I know that when there are words printed on the bricks I use, I always turn the words to the floor so that they cannot be read."[72] But the two media in Andre's hands are not mutually exclusive or hostile towards each other as Greenberg's modernist aesthetics postulated. Instead, his work with sculptures and arranging allows him to discover materiality of words on the page, and his experience with writing allows him to see sculptures as linguistic forms of articulation.

In the following discussion I will first try to elucidate the use of repetition in Minimalist sculpture generally and then focus on the development that occurred in Andre's poetry and sculptural work within the period 1959 to 1965 trying to show how they reflected (and differed from) each other and how he used repetition in words and physical particles to foreground literal materiality.

Repetition in Minimalism

From Frank Stella's stripe paintings through Andy Warhol's soup cans to Sol LeWitt's incomplete cubes, repetition – that is, the operation of placing next to each other identical or almost identical shapes or objects - is a major trope in modern avant-garde art, dominating not only the making of single works but operating also among series of successive works. Although repetition was often employed also by the Modernists - by Gertrude Stein in poetry and prose, by Erik Satie in music – it is in the 1960s Minimalist Art, the works of Robert Morris, Carl Andre, Donald Judd, Dan Flavin and to a certain extent of Robert Smithson, that use of repetition reaches a new climax unseen in the previous decades. Repetition becomes a fully developed method, a subversive *modus operandi* of the avant-garde's quest for the new, and results in works that appear as a rejection of art and skill, of the role of imagination or the artist in the creative process, of symbolism and representation. It is in this vein that Barbara Rose, in one of the first analyses of Minimalism, calls the new works as constituting "a negative art of denial and renunciation,"[73] and is echoed by Harold Rosenberg, who sees the works as reduction of art to the absolute minimum of the pure aesthetic effect, making an

[71] Kotz, 147.
[72] Andre, "Morris, transcribed interview," 214.
[73] Barbara Rose, "ABC Art," *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995) 296.

"empty art, correct and clean."[74] The Minimalist "mode of expression," Rosalind Krauss writes, is "the deadpan, the fixed stare, the uninflected repetitious speech."[75]

Although repetition may appear monotonous and easily exhausted as a compositional strategy, a simple comparison of the practices the artists employed reveals that their use of repetition was far from uniform both in terms of materials and of their configurations within the gallery space. In the period of the 1960s, Judd uses primarily shiny metal blocks placed on a wall with symmetrical spaces in between. Flavin specializes in fixing fluorescent tubes onto walls in different combinations, which then illuminate the whole gallery room. Morris employs large plywood and fibreglass polyhedrons, whose combinations or placement can be adjusted from one exhibition to another. Andre works with prefabricated and found materials like bricks, Styrofoam beams or metal plates which he organizes into regular and gradually more and more horizontally-oriented sites. In his *Glass Stratum* (1967), Smithson places glass panels on top of each other in diminishing order of size, making a stratified object, where transparency is turned opaque.

Fig. 7 - Carl Andre, *Equivalent VIII*, (1965)
(from Web: Saatchi Gallery)

The end-product of this strategy of repetition is a pure "order" that, as Judd writes in response to Stella's paintings, "is not rationalistic and underlying, but is simply order, like that of continuity, one thing after another."[76] This order is a pure syntax, an analogue of parataxis in language. Accordingly, Judd sees these new works as initiating a break both with painting and sculpture of the past, and proposes for them the names "three-dimensional work"

[74] Harold Rosenberg, "Defining Art", *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, 304.
[75] Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths*, 258.
[76] Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," 5 Aug 2010 < http://homepage.newschool.edu/~quigleyt/vcs/judd-so.pdf>.

or "specific objects."[77] All of these artists not only strip sculpture of complex shapes and organic forms, but also, as Rosalind Krauss writes, take away the "idea of a center or a focus," of "an interior space which much of the previous twentieth-century sculpture had celebrated."[78] They displace meaning from the center to the surface, or rather in between the surfaces of the objects and the site where they are located: "They are asking that meaning be seen as arising from [...] a public, rather than a private space."[79] Morris writes in this respect that the new sculptural object becomes "less *self*-important,"[80] and more "reflexive": "The better new work takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light, and the viewer's field of vision."[81] Instead of possessing meaning within itself, the work finds its meaning in the context of a particular site; as Andre writes, a sculpture is an object "differentiating" or defamiliarizing an environment.[82] Interestingly, he invokes Wallace Stevens's poem "Anecdote of a Jar" as an illustration.[83] The sculpture like the reflecting jar thus changes not only the space where it is placed but it undergoes change as well by this placing.

Although the sculptures may appear mechanic, automatic and static, the use of repetition without any additional joining or fusing of the individual objects establishes what Rose calls "a measured, rhythmic beat in the work."[84] Looking at Judd's golden metal boxes regularly distributed on the wall (*Untitled*, 1965), or Smithson's glass plates slowly rising from the floor but decreasing in size, the viewer experiences a sense of visual or spatial rhythm, of variation produced through repetition. This sense of variation is often further emphasized by fitting repetition into different patterns, that is, by using the same objects in slightly different ways next to each other within the same work (for example Morris's L-beams in *Untitled* 1965) or within different works from one exhibition to another. The viewer's encounter with the same thus becomes always different.

> To find variety in repetition where only the nuance alters seems more and more to interest artists, perhaps in reaction to the increasing uniformity of the environment and repetitiveness of a circumscribed experience.[85]

[77] Ibid.
[78] Krauss, 250-253.
[79] Ibid. 262.
[80] Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture II," *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, 234.
[81] Ibid. 232.
[82] Andre, "Taped Interview, New York, 1970," 185.
[83] Andre, "Statement, Berkeley University Art Museum," *CUTS*, 190.
[84] Rose 289.
[85] Ibid. 289.

Judd's alterations in colour of his boxes over the years, each time resulting in a new work, is one of the best examples of this change in "nuance." But so is Andre's constellation *Equivalents I-VIII* (1966) (see fig. 7), where the artist builds eight different spatial forms on the floor by using the same number of 120 firebricks. In Andre's works with bricks and metal plates the focus is not only on the large shape produced, but also on the grainy textures of the materials thus combined. The sculptures thus become "demonstrations of both variability and interchangeability in the use of standard units."[86]

Minimalist Writings

Despite the apparent bareness, blankness and hollowness of these shapes (or perhaps exactly because of these qualities), the Minimal sculptures generated a large amount of critical discourse, a whole plethora of words and labels that circulated around them. This contrast between the mute objects and the proliferation of writing about them was first pointed out by Rosenberg, who regarded Minimalism as essentially a critic's art:

> Minimal Art is Dada in which the art critic has got into the act. No mode in art has ever had more labels affixed to it by eager literary collaborators; besides being called Minimal Art, it is known as "ABC Art," "Primary Structures," "Systematic Painting," "Reductive Art," and by half a dozen other titles. No art has ever been more dependent on words than these works pledged to silent materiality. [...] The rule applied is: The less there is to see, the more there is to say.[87]

The discourse, however, was not only the work of the new art's advocates and critics, but also of the artists themselves, who in contrast to the preceding generations of painters and sculptors were extraordinarily articulate. Besides Morris's defining essays "Notes on Sculpture I, II and III," there are also Judd's statements and reviews, Flavin's remarks on the use of light, and artists' books by Andre, Smithson and LeWitt. As Craig Owens suggests, for these artists and sculptors, texts are no longer solely a space to expound or explain their work as was the case with the Modernists, but constitute "an alternative medium for aesthetic practice," they functioned as sites for producing new artistic works.[88]

This is particularly the case of LeWitt, Smithson and Andre, who must be credited with the revival of the genre of artist's book in the 1960s - a genre in which, as Marjorie Perloff defines it, "verbal and visual components [...] must have a significant relationship to

[86] Ibid. 289.
[87] Rosenberg, *Defining Art*, 306.
[88] Craig Owens, "Earthwords," *October* Autumn 1979: 127.

one another,"[89] instead of being merely decorative or illustrative. The history of the genre goes back to Blaise Cendrars's *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la petite Jehanne de France* (1913), to the books by Russian Cubo-Futurists in the second decade of the twentieth century, and to "deluxe" editions of "*livre d'artiste*," which Perloff differentiates from artists' books as works originating in the publisher instead of in the artists.[90] Whereas the first artists' books used text and images in a way that often emphasized indeterminacy between the text and the image, the new books by LeWitt and Smithson counterpoint text and image within a scheme of extreme rationalism, a Swiftean realism often passing into absurdity. While LeWitt's books combine colourful images of geometrical designs, brick walls and textures, with texts that play the role of explanatory notes to the represented procedures, in Smithson's essays like "The Domain of the Great Bear" (1966) and "Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space" (1966) the relationship is reversed and a heterogeneity of images encircles the texts like a halo or is juxtaposed next to them playing the role of footnotes on the margins of the page. The complex, condense layering of data through images and texts often leaves the reader with a sense of information overload or vertigo.

Andre's artist's books are collections of poems, re-published together as *Seven Books of Poetry* (written in between 1960-1969),[91] that differ from their past counterparts by omission of images, which appear only occasionally on the front page or at the end of the book. The only exception is his 1960 *Passport*,[92] where again the relationship between texts and images is one of heterogeneity and indeterminacy. The book is a Neo-Dada collage of poems, graphic and verbal designs, sketches and photographs put together without any sense of hierarchy or progression, narrative or perspective. Rather than a pass for travel, the book can be seen as an ironic Grand Tour, a record of imaginary journeys in the past and present of

[89] Perloff, "The Avant-Garde Artists' Book," 15 Aug 2010 < http://marjorieperloff.com/articles/artist-book/>.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Andre's poetry is notoriously unavailable for the general reader to get hold of, and at present there is no volume either of collected or selected poems in print. James Meyer's *CUTS: Texts 1959-2004* comes closest to offering any idea of what Andre's poems in the 1960s were like, but its scope and primary focus on Andre's critical statements and interviews do not allow more than a cursory look over the whole range of his poetry. In order to see Andre's *Seven Books of Poetry* (1969), which include poems analysed in the present chapter, the reader is thus left with no other option at present than to attend one of the several exhibitions of Andre's writings that occasionally take place in the USA and in Europe or to visit one of the few gallery libraries, for example Tate Library, London, where the books can be accessed. As Liz Kotz notes, Andre has been reluctant to allow reprints of his works and his insistence on direct experience of the originals has paradoxically led to greater and not always accurate copying and to reliance on descriptions, sins to which this chapter must confess inevitably too. In the following discussion, whenever a poem will be analyzed in detail, I will therefore either attempt to describe it or give a rendering of it as an image. However, because Andre's poems were typed on a typewriter and Xeroxed, it is impossible to reproduce the precise optical effect of the poems in the original collections and the images and quotations should be seen as only approximate. The reader is asked to use his or her imagination and try to imagine what the poems might look like in the original.
[92] Andre, *Passport*, Seven Books of Poetry (New York: Dwan Gallery, 1969) unp.

art and culture, collecting images and texts as passports used to collect customs stamps and visas at a time when geographical borders were still crossed and marked. The book includes photocopies of an actual passport jacket, official stamps, found and appropriated official texts, photographs of Andre and of Frank Stella's paintings, images of Byron and Goethe, of Lenin, Mussolini and Hitler, ancient coins, maps, a seating plan, a "Congressional Directory" page, photocopies of poems by Herman Melville and Rupert Brooke, a "*The New York Times*" title cascading across a page, a two of diamonds playing card and a variety of other materials and poems by Andre. It is a book of souvenirs, of trivia collected from the dumps of culture and art, from newspapers and advertising, erasing the differences between them and submerging them within the low visibility/legibility of a Xerox copy. There appears to be no rational and interpretative ground on which all of these fragments could be put in relation to one another.

All of Andre's seven books also differ from their past counterparts by deliberate rejection of the aesthetics of the book as a form. Similarly to several of Sol LeWitt's books, they look like instruction manuals, factory handbooks or records of a certain procedure: the texts are typed on a typewriter, Xeroxed and bound together by a spiral without any added embellishments or decorations. Even though they do not include images, Andre's texts often function visually and in reciprocally illustrative relation with his sculptures, and it is this relation between Andre's sculptures and his poetry that I now wish to turn to.

First Poems

> "Most versifiers follow the oyster, immuring the source of irritation in nacreous secretion. You would grind off the pearly layers to find the grit."[93]
> - Hollis Frampton on Carl Andre

Andre's poetry dates back to the primary school, when, as he relates to his friend, photographer, filmmaker and Poundian, Hollis Frampton, he wrote his first poem as a school exercise: "it was about the cherry tree that grew outside the window of my bedroom" and "was built around a conceit about confusing the falling white cherry petals in April for the white snowflakes of February."[94] His interest in the lyric form using syntax, speaker and rhetorical figures and alternating between "imitation of Eliot, Auden, etc." and "the chic, Gravesian New Yorker style,"[95] continued at least till 1959,[96] when he wrote his "First Five Poems," later included in the collection *A Theory of Poetry (1960-1965)*. These poems are a

[93] Andre, Frampton, "Twelve Dialogues" (1962-63), *CUTS*, 197.
[94] Ibid. 196.
[95] Andre, "Letter to Reno Odlin, June 17, 1963," *CUTS*, 192.
[96] Several of these pre-1959 lyric poems are included by Hollis Frampton in a catalogue to Gemeentemuseum exhibition of Carl Andre's works in 1969, but otherwise remain largely unavailable.

direct attack on the tradition of lyric poetry and signal a crucial departure for Andre. Each one of the poems consists solely of a single word typed in the centre of an otherwise blank A4 page:

green

five

horn

eye

sound [97]

As Andre explains to Frampton, these poems were for him a way to return to language as an impersonal and objectified medium, because they were cleansed of "conceit," "observation" and "sentiment," of the subjectivity of the poet, which Andre conceived as extraneous to language: "They began in the qualities of words."[98] It is as if in these one-word poems Andre has summed up the entire modernist and postmodern movement towards impersonal and objective poetry – Gertrude Stein, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, W.C. Williams, John Cage - and has gone beyond it, almost parodying it. By extracting words out of a dictionary and re-typing them in isolation, Andre revoked the role of imagination and self-expression in writing poetry and turned it into an act of self-absencing, of self-erasure, so characteristic of his sculptures. The nature of language for him does not reside in its spoken and written variations made by individual speakers, but in some external static and solid material, and his whole technique of verbal "cuts,"[99] of which the five poems were the first example, was an attempt to seize at this material – the "grit" of words - and bring it to light. When Frampton, with an understandable scepticism, asks whether "blue / six / hair / ear / light" could be also considered poems, Andre agrees; not even the method of extracting words is his "but belongs to whomever uses it."[100]

[97] The poems do not form a continuous sequence as the quotation implies, but are dispersed among longer poems throughout the collection. Andre, *A Theory of Poetry*, part of *Seven Books of Poetry* (New York: Dwan Gallery, 1969) unp.
[98] Andre, "Twelve Dialogues," *CUTS*, 196
[99] Andre's "cut" is an extraction of a word or a phrase from another text often determined by alphabetization or by a mathematical analysis, but Andre does not regard the text from which he appropriates as an original, it is only another cut done by another writer from other texts and language itself: "First is the relation between the cut I take and the whole stock of language and the second is the relation between the cut I take and the cut I make." Andre, "Letter to Reno Odlin, May 22, 1964," *CUTS*, 209.
[100] Ibid. 196.

According to Andre, every isolated word thus can be a poem because it returns to naming things: "Our first poets were the namers, not the rhymers."[101] The word as a name, for Andre, seems to be intimately connected with the thing or things it signifies, it is a poetic metaphor, in which a name and a thing come together and which diction and syntax pull apart into abstraction. While in sentences, like "I am a red pansy" (Andre's example), the meanings of individual words are shaped by the words next to them into a sense or what Andre calls a "super-referent" and thus are abstracted from their materiality, the reference of his one-word poems, according to him, remains anchored in things:

> My green is a square of that color or a village's common land. My five is 5 or: ... My horn is either on the brow of a rhino, or under the hood of a Cadillac. My eye is paired above my nose or founded in my psyche by punning. Sound is Long Island, even. But I have gotten rid of the overriding super-referent.[102]

The polysemy which already resides in the words does not upset Andre, on the contrary it is this ambiguity that he finds important and that the introduction of diction would suppress. The word in isolation is thus poetic for Andre, because it is close to things it refers to and at the same time includes within itself several contrasting references.

When listing the different meanings of "his" words, Andre omits to interpret them as verbs, and at least "eye" or "sound" could certainly be read as signifying actions. This omission of verbs or treatment of verbs as nouns becomes characteristic not only for Andre's poems but also for his understanding of poetry:

> Poems are made out of nouns, names. The two verbs of poetry are writing and reading. To supply the verb is the work of prose. To require verbs is the demand of poetry.[103]

For Andre, poetry is thus an anti-narrative, a static thing on the page, and demands of the reader to activate the words. Whereas Ernesto Fenollosa urged the use of strong verbs in poetry so that the words would move and do as if on their own accord, imitating the "temporal order" of nature,[104] Andre sees poetry as a field of thing-words or brick-words where the activity and movement is supplied by the reader. Many of Andre's poems share certain characteristics with Eugen Gomringer's conception of concrete poem as a "constellation" and

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[101] Ibid. 197.
[102] Ibid. 197.
[103] Andre, "Letter to Reno Odlin, August 26, 1963," *CUTS*, 203.
[104] Fenollosa advocated use of strong verbs in poetry in opposition to rhetoric or elaborate diction that inevitably obscures language. Ernesto Fenollosa, "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry," *Instigations* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1967) 357-388.

a "play-area" composed of nouns where the reader is invited to join the play.[105] But whereas in Gomringer's poems, for example "silencio" and "wind," the meaning arises as a kind of epiphany, which the arrangement of the words on the page instigates, in some of Andre's best works the focus is on the physical sensation of reading the poem. This difference can be illustrated by comparing Gomringer's "Silencio" and Andre's "Leverwords." In the first poem (fig. 8) the words "silencio" are arranged into a grid with an empty space in the center which the reader can interpret as an enactment of what the other surrounding words signify. The poem can be grasped in a single look and does not require reading, it is essentially a diagram.

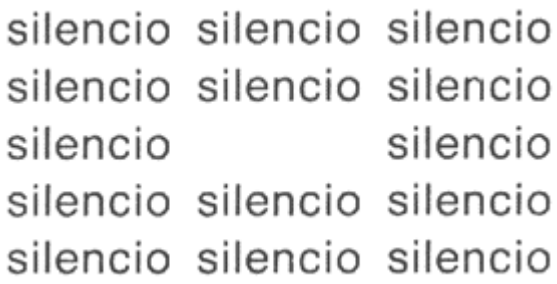

Fig. 8 - Eugen Gomringer, "silencio" (1953)
(from Ubuweb)

In Andre's "Leverwords," the meanings of the individual words are largely irrelevant, because sense of the poem is carried by the actual process of reading the poem line after line. The shapes of the words – in the original version they are typed on a typewriter and therefore of equal length – resemble bricks, or some other elementary building material, that the reader puts together. Reading here becomes a physical act of building or accumulating words as things, one after the other, and the first word is pushed further and further with introduction of a new word on each following line as if by employing a lever.

beam
clay beam
edge clay beam
grid edge clay beam
bond grid edge clay beam
path bond grid edge clay beam

reef
slab reef
wall slab reef
bead wall slab reef

[105] Eugen Gomringer, "From Line to Constellation" (1954), *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, ed. Mary Ellen Solt (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1970) 67.

cell bead wall slab reef
rock cell bead wall slab reef[106]

Once the words have been all read, the reader can reverse the process of accumulation and raising the first word by reading the poem vertically from left to right and eliminate one word from the bottom with each column, coming back to a single word again. What has been assembled can be also as easily taken apart, this jigsaw structure characterizes Andre's sculptures from 1959 onwards. "Leverwords" are thus a series of physical exercises, a process, rather than a conceptual diagram. It remains to be added that if the words in this poem resemble bricks by their equal length and by the way they are placed next to each other, they are not uniform and each has its specific graphic structure and sound. Read aloud one notices that Andre has produced a repetitive and rhythmical ordering of monosyllabic words, where vowels and consonants are in a constant play of variation and rhyming. Andre's poems are thus never solely visual works, they are also meant to be read and experienced by the ear. The sound rhythms they produce are difficult to point out, because they are not uniform and do not run through the whole poems, they come and go as new resonances and variations take their place.

Rather than reading "First Five Poems" on their own, they should be seen as an act of reduction performed by Andre in search of the smallest necessary particle that would suffice for re-making his poetry. This reduction of language to single words, particularly nouns, is one of the characteristics of Concrete Poetry, as Mary Ellen Solt defines it in her anthology,[107] and one could interpret Andre's poems in connection with this movement. However, it is quite an interesting fact that Andre himself never mentions other Concrete poets, who were practising similar techniques at the same time, and is left out of all the later Concrete anthologies; his works thus give the appearance that they were written down in isolation from the other Concrete poets and influenced solely by his sculptural works. Andre eliminates the sentence and stops with the word because it is the minimal graphic and vocal unit still possessing meaning, unlike a letter or a syllable, it is recognizable by the reader and possesses a certain tenacity and structure. The word for him becomes a principal structural and building unit:

> [...] my interest in elements or particles in sculpture is paralleled by my interest in words as particles of language. I use words in units which are different from sentences, grammatical sentences; but, of course, words always connect when they are placed

[106] Andre, "Leverwords" (1966), *CUTS*, 232.
[107] Solt, 7.

> together if they are not nonsense words. I have attempted to write poetry in which the sentence is not the dominant form but the word is the dominant form.[108]

By isolating it on the page, Andre must have realized that a word offers other ways of combining and using than inserting into sentences, into syntactical patterns of noun and predicate. The blank page around the words opened a field of possibilities for re-arrangement and re-plugging of words into diverse structures and fields of semantic, tactile and optical intensities. This movement towards reduction and re-appraisal of his work is also present in his sculpture done in the year 1959.

Subjecting to the Necessity of Material and Form

Andre's turn from lyric poetry towards particles of single words and from a lyric subject towards the impersonality of language within one year may appear rather abrupt and puzzling, if not read in the context of his sculptural work which underwent a similar transformation, namely from "form" to "structure," in the same year. In his first sculptures, *Chalice* (1958-59, destroyed) and *Last Ladder* (1959), Andre used his chisel to cut into found wooden blocks and contrasted the unworked, weatherworn surfaces of the timbers with the newly cut and symmetrical recesses. But later in the year Andre produced works that stand in sharp contrast to these totemic and symbolic forms. These new sculptures called *Pyramids* (1959, destroyed) were most probably, as critics agree, influenced by the stripe paintings of Frank Stella,[109] in whose New York studio at this time Andre worked. In paintings like *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor* (1959) (fig. 9) or *Die Fahne Hoch!* (1959), Stella derived "a pattern of stripes from the external, physical fact of the canvas's own shape."[110] The paintings thus become an expression of the formal relationships present in the canvas, and not of the artist. They turn upon themselves for a subject. Standing in front of these canvases, the viewer does not experience the drama of the "encounter" between the Abstract Expressionist artist and his medium, but rather a sense of absolute flatness and literality of the surface. This literality is produced by repeating the same movement of the brush again and again on the canvas, but as with the Minimalist sculptures the work is not static or uniform but suggests a regular rhythm. Moreover, the rudimentary regularity of these paintings is also evocative of some unknown pagan or primeval inscriptions, runes or symbols that cannot be deciphered.

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[108] Andre, "Morris, transcribed interview," *CUTS*, 214.
[109] Rahtz 67.
[110] Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1981) 262.

Fig. 9 - Frank Stella, *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor* (1959).
(from Web: Museum of Modern Art)

When Stella exhibited his works at the "Sixteen Americans" exhibition, Andre supplied the works with a short "Preface to Stripe Painting" (1959), in which he writes that the paintings proceed from formal necessity present in the canvas, rather than from some feeling of the artist or from his unconscious - the customary interpretations of Abstract Expressionist art - and that not being expressive, representational, or "symbolic," Stella's paintings are only self-referential and self-generating: Stella's "stripes are paths of brush on canvas. These paths lead into painting."[111] Stella's paintings differ from Andre's first sculptures in the way the artist subjects himself to the form and material he is working with. In Andre's sculptures the wood had to yield to his will rather than the artist, so to speak, to the wood. The shape of *Chalice* and the five recesses in *Last Ladder* were not determined by the material itself, but by Andre and are thus symbolic and expressive of the creative mind behind them.

This element of symbolism appears to have been revoked in Andre's *Pyramids* (see later re-creation titled *Cedar Piece*, fig. 10). Here, individual pieces of timber are arranged into layers where each timber and each layer determines the shape and position of the one following it by using notches in the same way as the canvas determined the direction of Stella's stripes. Combined together the wooden pieces make a vertical block dominated by a large protruding X pattern on all four sides. As Rahtz writes the work seems "mechanical" and self-generated:

[111] Andre, "Preface to Stripe Painting" (1959), *CUTS*, 267.

> Like the stripe paintings, *Pyramid* was made to appear as if its arrangement was merely mechanical, the result of an unthinking procedure of making based solely on the dimensions of its material constituents, which were predetermined by their 'real world' function as construction timbers. Inserted into an interpretative attitude to art dominated by form and expression, *Pyramid*, in its deflection of any formal or expressive criteria according to which it could be seen as the product of an imagination or even of a consciousness, must have appeared as if it itself had determined the procedure according to which it had been put together.[112]

This experience of the work must have been also reinforced by the number of these sculptures because there were at least eight or nine of them made at the same time. Not only is each *Pyramid* a product of repetition of the same particles, but the same pattern of construction is repeated eight or nine times on differently sized timbers, each time producing a slightly different version of the same structure.

Fig. 10 - Carl Andre, *Cedar Piece* (1960-1964)
(from Web: Artfactmetz)

These works thus show that Andre's interest turned from single forms or shapes towards combination of smaller identical particles into a larger pattern, and a similar change can be observed in his poems, for example in his "green" poem from *Passport*. The word "green," originally used on its own in "First Five Poems," is here repeated without any spacing in

[112] Rahtz 68.

between and forms a grid covering an entire A4 page (see Fig. 3). Analogously to Stella's paintings and Andre's *Pyramids*, the poem appears determined by the form of the page and by the lineation and even spacing of the typewriter, rather than originating in the "psyche" or imagination of the poet. If in "First Five Poems" the isolation of the word endowed it with certain ambiguity, an uncertainty of signification, in *Passport* the repeated word smothers reference under a surfeit of identical signifiers. The reader no longer reads the words, but looks at them; his eyes pass over the surface. Even though this surface is repetitive, it is by no means static or uniform, it teems with minute variations between the letters, and in the typewritten original there are also misprints and blurs produced probably by photocopying that further diversify the texture of the poem. Thus although the repetition in the poem seems to banish the artist from itself, the multiple misprints, alterations in pressure and distribution of the ink return the reader/viewer to his presence, to the body that has typed it in speed, repeating the same pattern of hits on the keys of the typewriter. These graphic variations produce an effect similar to a delicate mesh or fabric seen against the light, in some places the whiteness of the page appears to seep through while in others it is resisted and remains hidden behind the letters. It is also important to note that the visual appearance of the poem varies across individual editions and whereas the poem which is reprinted in James Meyer's *CUTS* is still rather regular,[113] the one at Tate Library is visually more diversified.

Grids

Andre's poems are always organized into strictly regular grids on the page determined by his use of a typewriter with even letter spacing: "A mechanical typewriter is essentially a grid and you cannot evade that."[114] Andre goes as far as to say that the grid is not an intentional product, something he desires to do, but an inevitable consequence of the instrument he uses.[115] This is of course a ruse on his part, another attempt to divest the work of his authorship. The typewriter always implies a grid arrangement, but as poems by Charles Olson or Larry Eigner show, it can be used for highly irregular and wide-spaced notations and scorings of perceptions or of the poet's breath. Andre foregrounds the grid arrangement to immobilize words and turn them into visual surfaces where the written form rather than the meaning becomes dominant. The technique is the same as in his sculptures, placing next to each other in close proximity and in regular blocks, but the effects are different.

[113] Andre, "green," *CUTS*, 195.
[114] Andre, "Cummings, 'Taped Interview with Carl Andre,' Smithsonian version," *CUTS*, 212.
[115] Ibid.

Fig. 11 - Carl Andre, “green” (from *Passport*, 1960)

Mechanical Sonneteer

While modernist and postmodern poetry is moving generally from traditional poetic forms into new forms dominated by free verse, Andre often returns to classic genres and structures and, as Rob Weiner writes, one can find in his work "sonnets, songs, odes, lamentations, operas, dithyrambs, [and] even novels."[116] Andre's use of these forms is never a matter of passive borrowing and the forms are often re-defined and re-made almost beyond recognition. The sonnet with its complexity in rhyming and meter has always been regarded as a self-contained and highly artificial form that closes language into a verbal artefact, and it appears that it is this closure and petrifaction of language what draws Andre to the sonnet in the early 1960s. Although he has included sonnets already in the earlier collections like *Passport* and *A Theory of Poetry*, it is in the sonnet sequence *One Hundred Sonnets (I ... flower)* (1963) that the form is explored most systematically, or rather that the form is used to explore words within it.

The book includes ninety-nine sonnets, each one of which is made of only one word repeated on all fourteen lines without spacing as many times as it takes to fulfil the requirement of ten syllables (the only exception is the word "I" which is repeated thirty times to give the poem a more regular shape). Because no attention is paid to preserving iambic meter or the traditional rhyme scheme (other than "aaaa"), the sonnet form is reduced to a spatial frame of 10 syllables x 14 lines. The resulting effect of this repetition is of a textural rather than a textual field.

eyeeyeeyeeyeeyeeyeeyeeyeeyeeye
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Fig. 12 - Carl Andre, "eye" sonnet (from *One Hundred Sonnets*, 1963)

[116] Rob Weiner, "On Carl Andre's Poems," The Chinati Foundation, 2 Jul 2010, <http://www.chinati.org/visit/collection/carlandre_robweiner.php>.

If Stella's stripes are determined by the shape of the canvas and by the other stripes, and Andre's *Pyramids* by the individual pieces of lumber, in Andre's sonnets it is the form of fourteen lines and ten syllables that determines the resulting appearance of the poem by generating words that fill it up. Andre's role is reduced to supplying one word for each sonnet, and the form organizes the words mechanically into a pattern. Instead of the content determining the form, it is the form which determines the content. Andre gives an illusion of renouncing his authorship of the sonnets in the same way that he does with the *Pyramids* and other sculptures from this time onwards, the forms appear to have constructed themselves out of their own volition or out of necessity.

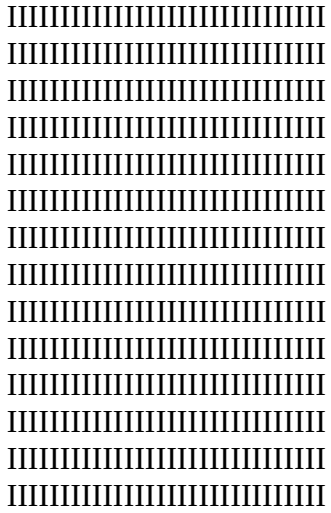

Fig. 13 - Carl Andre, "I" sonnet (from *One Hundred Sonnets*, 1963)

Unlike Gertrude Stein who repeated words within different sentences, beginning again and again with the same but differently, and produced a fluid melody and indeterminacy of meaning, in Andre's sonnets the technique of repetition is limited to single words and explores primarily their graphic shape. Andre flattens words into external graphic and visual surfaces, but these surfaces are again neither static nor uniform, they pulsate with variations and visual rhythms because each word combines within itself different shapes that are here played out against each other. Andre himself says of these works: "Painterly areas of various and contrasting values are generated."[117] Compared to the poem "green," the words have been typed with considerable care and precision, leaving no misprints or uneven distribution of ink behind. It is thus solely the words and their composition which generate the visual effect of the poem. In his letters and interviews, Andre says again and again that poetry "fascinated"

[117] Andre, "On Painting and Consecutive Matters," *CUTS*, 265.

him before he "could read by its look upon the page, by its plastic liveliness on the page compared to the dull gray clog of prose,"[118] and it is primarily in the sonnets that he turns to exploring the "plastic appearance"[119] of different words by repeating them in isolation from other differently shaped words. The sonnet sequence thus reads like a pattern book of diverse textural samples of written language, which explores the materiality and composition of individual words. Shapes, as well as sounds, of words are no longer interesting for Andre on their own, but as particles among other identical particles in the same way that a timber or a brick ceased to be interesting for him as a single form:

> [...] I don't pick up interesting shapes. I try to pick up the least interesting shapes I can find, the most regular or ordinary, because I'm not interested in the specificity of a shape if it's unique. Its specificity is fine as long as it's one of a set of identical objects.[120]

Many of the words included in the sonnets are certainly among the most ordinary and common in language; the first seven are personal pronouns, which are followed by parts of the human body, bodily fluids, vulgarisms, colours, basic numbers, chemical elements or materials and several other words describing elements of nature like "moon," "fish," and "snow."[121] The interest in the appearance of an object, a word or a brick, is brought up then by its multiplication within a set pattern, which foregrounds the shapes at the same time that it subsumes them into a larger surface. But in these sonnets not all shapes of words are perceived in the same way. Words like "eye" or "copper" reveal an inner structure or materiality, but the pronoun "I" which is so essential to every person's identity appears as an abstraction, an empty grid of ciphers. Furthermore, depending on their composition certain words tend to stand out and be easily identifiable within these repetitions, other words submerge, lose their identity and regroup according to certain symmetries between the shapes of letters into other words. Thus the reader looking at the "elbow" sonnet may see instead the word "bowel," in "chin" the word "inch" may come out and in "sand" there are the ubiquitous "sands/and/sands/and ...". Whereas in his sculptures, like *Equivalents*, the individual particles juxtaposed into a grid always remain solid and resistant, in writing words in close proximity Andre discovers certain fluidity between the graphic signifiers. Moreover, some of these sonnets can be also seen as invoking a pictorial resemblance between the word and what it

[118] Andre, "Letter to Reno Odlin, March 13, 1964," *CUTS*, 205.
[119] Andre, Frampton, "Twelve Dialogues," *CUTS*, 265.
[120] Andre, 'Cummings, "Taped Interview with Carl Andre," Smithsonian version,' *CUTS*, 100.
[121] Andre, *One Hundred Sonnets (I ... flower)*, part of the *Seven Books of Poetry*, unp.

denotes, thus in “wave” one can recognize an undulating surface of the sea and in “moon” the cratered surface of the moon.

When read aloud – like “Leverwords” they are meant to be also read – the effect of these sonnets is, however, completely different. The reader finds his voice locked into an incantation or a chant suggestive of some unknown primeval ritual. The sound is no longer melodious or musical as in traditional sonnets, but a stammer, a staccato or ricochet sound. Read in quick succession the words lose their identity and become more and more a sonorous material that no longer refers to some meaning outside of itself but constitutes a pure sonorous intensity. In this respect the poems bear certain similarity to Dadaist experiments with nonsense language as present for example in Kurt Schwitters’s use of nonsense words and seemingly arbitrary groups of vowels and consonants in his *Ursonate* (1922-1932).

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Fig. 14 - Carl Andre, “wave” sonnet (from *One Hundred Sonnets*, 1963)

Similarly to Minimalist sculptures both by Andre and the other artists, meaning in these sonnets does not reside inside, within the words, but on the surface in the visual variations that skim across the letters or in the vocal stammer produced. The word is not experienced by the reader/viewer as referential, as a bearer of meaning, but as a graphic mark on the page. If one of the constitutive features of a sign is its repetition, Andre has turned repetition against the sign and made it into new a sign of silence or of absence of signification. Looking at Andre’s poems, Robert Smithson writes in his “A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art”:

> Carl Andre’s writings bury the mind under rigorous incantatory arrangements. Such a method smothers any reference to anything other than the words. Thoughts are

> crushed into a rubble of syncopated syllables. Reason becomes a powder of vowels and consonants. His words hold together without any sonority. Andre doesn't practice a "dialectical materialism," but rather a "metaphorical materialism." The apparent sameness and toneless ordering of Andre's poems conceals a radical disorientation of grammar. Paradoxically his "words" are charged with all the complication of oxymoron and hyperbole. Each poem is a "grave," so to speak, for his metaphors. Semantics are driven out of his language in order to avoid meaning.[122]

For Smithson, the poems thus resemble tombs of reference, they are sites where meaning dies and is buried, and yet this effect is achieved through rhetorical devices like "oxymoron" or "hyperbole." This accords with Andre's conception of the word which goes contrary to its nature. It is an intensification or exaggeration of one of its aspects at the expense of the others. To treat a word purely as a mark or a material is inevitably to make a metaphor rather than to be literal.

Articulated Sculptures

Not only can one say that Andre's work with words is materialistic, reflecting his practice in sculpture, but also that his sculptural practice is at its basis analogous to linguistic operations. Following his *Pyramids*, Andre defines his works as "clastic" structures in opposition to "plastic" forms: whereas the "plastic," for Andre, signifies subordination of particles into a unified form, the "clastic" denotes free arrangement, where the individual particles preserve their identity and separateness, and at the same time combine into a larger piece.[123] Because Andre used no means of joining or fusing the particles, they are interchangeable and the sculpture can be at any time disassembled and re-assembled in a different form. In this combinatory and permutational structure Andre's works are suggestive of "double articulation" which was first defined by French linguist André Martinet in 1966. According to Martinet, a linguistic proposition or sentence is on the first level an articulation of minimal meaningful units, morphemes, which are on the second level composed of combinations of minimal distinctive units, phonemes.[124] Transferred from speech to the graphic space of writing, double articulation signifies a division of sentence into words and then a second division of words into letters. Because Andre's sculptures always employ found and prefabricated materials, they also involve two processes of articulation or making. On the first level, the individual particles – bricks, pipes, Styrofoam beams - were made through industrial production, in which Andre played no part and which used "meaningless" materials in order

[122] Smithson, "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art," *The Collected Writings*, 79-80.
[123] Andre, "Tuchman, An Interview with Carl Andre" (1970), *CUTS*, 142.
[124] André Martinet, *Éléments de linguistique générale*, (Paris: Librarie Armand Colin, 1970) 13-15.

to construct "meaningful" and conventional units suitable for further use. Andre always re-used these pre-made particles in the way a speaker or a writer re-uses pre-made words and by putting them next to each other into a larger form constructed his sculpture as a spatial proposition or a statement.

The analogy like any other analogy has its drawbacks and pitfalls, for example in the fact that unlike in language there is no way back from the sculpture towards the original material, but it can still be useful because it explains Andre's practice of working with particles. Andre's material particles resemble words in the way they can be recombined again and again into new propositions. A brief look over the history of Andre's work reveals that throughout his practice he continually returned to materials he had already used and re-configured them in the gallery space as one might write different sentences from the same words on a page always projecting a new meaning. In his *Equivalents I-VIII*, Andre showed that the same number of particles can be organized into eight different spatial propositions. In his *Pyramids* there were two possible ways of constructing the sculpture from the same materials by merely reversing their order. When in 1965 Andre's *Well*, a large structure composed of wooden beams, caused the floor of a gallery to collapse, Andre reacted quickly and re-articulated his beams into *Redan*, spreading them over the floor in a zigzag line and, as the name of the work suggests – it is "architectural term for a projecting fortification wall"[125] - the sculpture was an explicit response to the crisis. Also in 1965, Andre used Styrofoam beams to construct *Crib*, *Compound* and *Coin*, a large structure that made the viewer experience its volume by pushing him against the gallery walls, and a year later, as Inaba writes, Andre re-arranged these beams into a completely different work called *Reef*, [126] where the beams were placed one after another on the gallery floor. Under Andre's hands, sculpture is thus a work of permutation and articulation, and instead of being a permanent object it is a temporary proposition or a response, addressed to a particular event or to a particular space, and then disassembled, put into a box and taken away. Rather than having a fixed, interior meaning, the sculpture takes its meaning from the context in which it is used at a particular moment, in this sense Andre's work echoes Ludwig Wittgenstein's thesis that meaning is "use" and not an interior essence.[127]

The Absence of a Conceit Is a Conceit

[125] Jeffrey Inaba, "Carl Andre's Same Old Stuff," *Assemblage* No. 39 (Aug. 1999) 41.
[126] Ibid. 49-50.
[127] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2009) § 43.

Throughout his works both in poetry and sculpture Andre seeks to distance himself from the material he uses – to erase himself as the origin of the work and to let the work be literally what it is. By placing individual bricks or metal plates next to each other or on top of each other, Andre aims to express the physical properties for combination that are inherent in these particles on their own, they should thus represent only themselves as "they are." In his poetry Andre seeks a similar effect by avoiding the intrusion of conceits, observations and sentiments and by relying on the techniques of cutting, repetition and mathematical organization that give the appearance of having eliminated the author as a person who has something to express. Furthermore, by subjecting words to graphical and vocal repetitions he attempts to empty them of their meanings, their signification, and to turn them into physical realities placed on the page. Inadvertently, however, Andre's deliberate avoidance of conceits in poetry is also a conceit, and the literality of his sculptures is, as Rahtz writes, "a produced literality"[128] or "a rhetorical effect."[129] Andre strives for the reality of language and materials, the terms of their existence in themselves, by taking himself out of the process of their making, but his search is always already a movement away from language and things "as they are." His techniques and approaches are not annulments of the metaphorical and figurative but only different metaphors and conceits harnessing language and materials to a particular expression, one that speaks of the surrender of expression. Smithson's "metaphorical materialism," as Rahtz writes, "captures the paradoxical nature of Andre's enterprise, both as sculptor and poet – a materialism, or literalism, conducted at the properly metaphorical or figural level of art."[130]

[128] Rahtz 69.
[129] Ibid. 74.
[130] Ibid.

Pictures to Be Read:
Cy Twombly's Works

I never really separated painting and literature
because I've always used reference.[131]
Cy Twombly

Writing and Literature

Cy Twombly is the most literary painter in contemporary American art, perhaps even the only one who can be called by this epithet. He takes literature and writing for his subject without, however, making illustrations of literary works. From some of his earliest paintings and drawings like *The Geeks* or *Academy* (both 1954) to his most recent *The Rose* (2009), the viewer finds himself in the presence of writing, which may come in the shape of school blackboards, child's notes, toilet walls or manuscripts. Sometimes Twombly's writing reads as words or fragments from poems, at other times his writing is an abstract graphic line that unwinds or repeats itself over the expanse of the support without ever becoming fully legible. Rather than turning his back on the past, as Conceptual and Pop artists have done, Twombly treats the past – its myths and poetry – as a vast source of symbols and affects that can be tapped into and re-interpreted on the canvas. In this respect, he bears a resemblance to the poets Ezra Pound and Charles Olson, who sought to combine re-interpretation of the past with modernity. No other contemporary painter presents his viewers with such an extensive reading list in his works as Cy Twombly: quotations and allusions are made to the ancient poets Homer, Sappho and Virgil, to the English Renaissance poets Christopher Marlowe and Edmund Spenser, and to the nineteenth-century Romanticists and Symbolists like John Keats, Stephane Mallarmé and Paul Valéry. As Twombly says in an interview with Nicholas Serota, literature and poetry, for him, often play the role of an impulse, a stimulus, that gives him "clarity and energy" in painting.[132] Looking at his paintings and drawings, various names and analogies for these works come to mind - palimpsests, scrawls, doodles, scribbles – and critics have proposed others: Roland Barthes writes of Twombly's "graphisms" or inscriptions of the body,[133] Demosthenes Davvetas speaks of "erography" which is both "erotic" and an "erratum" made by the artist,[134] Rosalind Krauss sees Twombly's marks and words as

[131] Cy Twombly, "History Behind the Thought," *Cy Twombly: Cycles and Seasons*, ed. Nicholas Serota (London: Tate Publishing, 2008) 45.
[132] Ibid. 50.
[133] Roland Barthes, "Non Multa Sed Multum," *Writings on Cy Twombly*, ed. Nicola del Roscio (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2002) 88,
[134] Demosthenes Davvetas, "The Erography of Cy Twombly," *Writings on Cy Twombly*, 192.

"graffiti" signs, which are a defacement and vandalism of past painting,[135] and Louis Armand proposes that they can be seen in the context of "Athenian ostraka" or as an "archaelogical assemblage of fragmentary inscriptions."[136]

In this chapter, I propose to look at some of Twombly's drawings and collages from the 1970s as examples of concrete poetry in the realm of painting. These works are not satisfied with passive gaze and call for an active and participatory engagement of the viewer, who thus becomes a reader. Concrete Poetry as a movement has its origins in the 1950s and 1960s, when Twombly himself was starting to paint, but it is only in the seventies that the relationship becomes relevant as Twombly produces a series of works which rely almost exclusively on words, their shapes, colours and references. Among the Concrete Poets, it is the Swiss proponent Eugen Gomringer whose theory of concrete poetry is most useful in approaching Twombly's works. In his manifesto "From Line to Constellation," Gomringer defines the new poem as a "constellation":

> The constellation is an arrangement, and at the same time a play-area of fixed dimensions. The constellation is ordered by the poet. He determines the play-area, the field of force and suggests its possibilities. the [sic] reader, the new reader, grasps the idea of play and joins in. In the constellation something is brought into the world. It is a reality in itself and not a poem about something or other. The constellation is an invitation.[137]

Although Gomringer's own poems are influenced by advertising and traffic signs, seeking maximum communication and an unequivocal meaning in the shortest possible time, and use only uniform typography and words, the idea of a work of art as a "constellation" and a "play-area" for the viewer is present in Twombly's collages. The viewer is invited to recombine the individual words and pictorial forms, to note similarities and differences between their shapes and colours as signifying, and to interpret these works accordingly. Even Richard Leeman notes that for Twombly "language" is a "game" and that words are used as "anagrams," "hypograms," "paragrams" and "palindromes."[138] One might add to this list also pictograms, where the word conveys meaning through resemblance. His paintings are thus games in which the viewer may join. In the following discussion, I will try to show and analyze how some of his drawings from the 1970s can be read as concrete poems and how they employ certain literary devices.

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[135] Louis Armand, "Fifty Years of Works on Paper – Cy Twombly, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich," *Cy Twombly Info*, October 2004, 10 Aug 2010 <http://www.cytwombly.info/twombly_writings4.htm>.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Eugen Gomringer, "From Line to Constellation," *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, ed. Mary Ellen Solt (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1970) 67.
[138] Richard Leeman, *Cy Twombly: A Monograph* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005) 289.

Literary Spaces

Literary references to genres and specific works start to appear in Twombly's works roughly from the late 1950s, in drawings like *Poems to the Sea* (1959) and paintings like *Herodiade* (1960). This movement towards literature and poetry is accompanied also by use of a whole range of rhetorical or literary figures and tropes, which will remain present throughout Twombly's later works. First, there is the title which is an allusion to a literary text, mythology or a painting – frequently to all three at the same time, a general allusion to culture. As Barthes writes these titles are "a bait of a meaning to mankind, which is thirsting for one."[139] Second, there is irony, as the viewer turns his gaze from the gallery label onto the canvas and finds his expectations deflated. Filled with hopes of a grand subject, of a representation, that he will immediately recognize – even in the age of abstract painting we still expect a representation and presuppose recognition – he may find himself looking at a canvas that is almost empty except for what may appear as vain scribbles and rudimentary forms made by a pencil. Third, there is the text within the painting, and the text is not constituted solely by words but by the whole constellation and organization of pictorial and verbal forms in the painting which is read by the viewer in search for meaning. His initial hopes thwarted, he turns to analyzing the painting in detail, to a close reading or tracing of relationships and resonances. The text of the paintings is frequently ambiguous and resistant to reading by its apparent simplicity, which refuses to be subsumed into meaning. Fourth, the words in the painting are always quotations coming from other texts, from outside art. The frame of the canvas functions as quotation marks around the words separating them from language and from written sources. Fifth, a whole range of other tropes and figures like similes, metaphors, oxymoron, parodies, ironies and also dedications can be found enacted in the combinations of pictorial forms and words. Sixth, some of the paintings and drawings use a narrative or sequence because they are divided into a succession of canvases (this is particularly apparent in *Poems to the Sea* or *Hero and Leandro*, 1984-85). In the works that I am going to consider below one can clearly perceive Twombly using the devices of allusion to classical myths, irony, metaphor and allegory, the organization of words and forms into a text which is to be interrogated by the viewer.

Apollo and Mars

[139] Barthes, "Non Multa Sed Multum," 106.

The first two drawing-collages that I wish to focus on are *Apollo and the Artist* and *Mars and the Artist* (both 1975). Both of them are of equal sizes, almost one and half metre in height and one hundred and thirty centimetres in width. They consist of a large paper that functions as a support and two smaller sheets of paper which are pasted separately in the lower and upper halves onto it. In *Apollo*, the name of the god of music and the arts is written by crayon in large blue capital letters that are relatively regular in appearance in the upper half of the canvas. The letters hide behind themselves the name repeated once again, this time in pencil and with a curious transposition "OAPOLL." This upper paper includes further pencil drawings, a rudimentary diagram and several words, and is smeared with white paint producing grey and blue smudges. On the lower paper a lotus flower is drawn energetically and the word "artist" is written in pencil just next to it. One can thus connect the two together, the artist is the flower. The paper is again smeared in grey and blue smudges. The words "Arts," "poetry," "music," "infinite space" can be recognized from among the scribbled words circulating around Apollo as his attributes. In *Mars*, on the other hand, the scene is one of energy and sexuality. The planet which is signifies the Roman god of war appears thrice in the top left corner, each time increasing in size and visibility as if threatening and approaching nearer. Red and blue crayons seep through the white paint next to it. In the lower paper, the lotus flower and the word "artist" can be found again, although this time the flower is more fragile and tender, perhaps intimidated. Just above the lotus is the word "electrum" and two phallic shapes in green. The name "Mars," written in black, is on the right margin just above the lower paper. As Rosalind Krauss suggests, the letter "M" is separated from the other three letters by its size and by being smeared over, the remaining three letters "ars" can be therefore read both as the word "art" in Latin and as the English word "arse."[140] Leeman sees a further relationship operating between the letter "M" and the "W" of the flower's petals, the one is the inversion or reflection of the other.[141] Looking at these collages, Nicholas Cullinan writes:

> While Apollo represents a manifestation of this calming and rational aspect of Twombly's art, with cryptic annotations such as measurements and phrases [...], *Mars and the Artist* seems to link creativity with war.[142]

These two collage-drawings in their position towards each other have a literary antecedent in John Milton's poems *L'Allegro* and *Ill Penseroso*, where the speaker finds himself caught up between the goddess of mirth and goddess of melancholy. Here, Twombly is similarly caught

[140] Quoted in Nicholas Cullinan, "The Art of Assemblage," *Cy Twombly: Cycles and Seasons*, 152.
[141] Leeman, 292.
[142] Cullinan, 151.

up between the nobleness and aloofness of Apollo and the violence and carnality of Mars, a struggle which characterizes much of his works and which always gives them a certain ambiguity.

Fig. 15 - Cy Twombly, *Apollo and the Artist* and *Mars and the Artist* (1975)
(from Tate.org and Cy Twombly Info)

Venus and Apollo

In several of Twombly's paintings and drawings, the viewer is confronted solely with words, words that nevertheless impress pictorially as well as linguistically. This is the case of two "drawings" which were not only made in the same year as *Apollo* and *Mars* but also work in a similar way as a dialectic between two contrary figures. These are *Venus* and *Apollo*, the goddess of beauty and the god of art, two large drawings in pastel and pencil on paper. Each drawing is dominated by the name of a particular deity, "Venus" written in vermillion red and "Apollo" in violet and black. The lines of the letters are full of energy, as each one has been drawn several times, never completely over the original outline. Around the two names are lists of epithets and associations in pencil by which the two deities are also known, these function similarly to footnotes in relation to the name-images. Twombly in these drawings combines classical erudition with a certain clumsiness, slovenliness or negligence that is so charateristic of him. The dialectic here is not between two aspects of the masculine, or between two forces in the artist, but between the feminine and the masculine. It is not, however, a complete contrast, because the shapes of the letters echo one another across the

division and one can see that rather than treating the two figures as diametrically opposed, Twombly hints at a certain similarity or kinship between them. The only significant difference is the inclusion of the simple flower image in the Venus drawing which has no counterpart in the Apollo one and which again subverts the seriousness of the words.

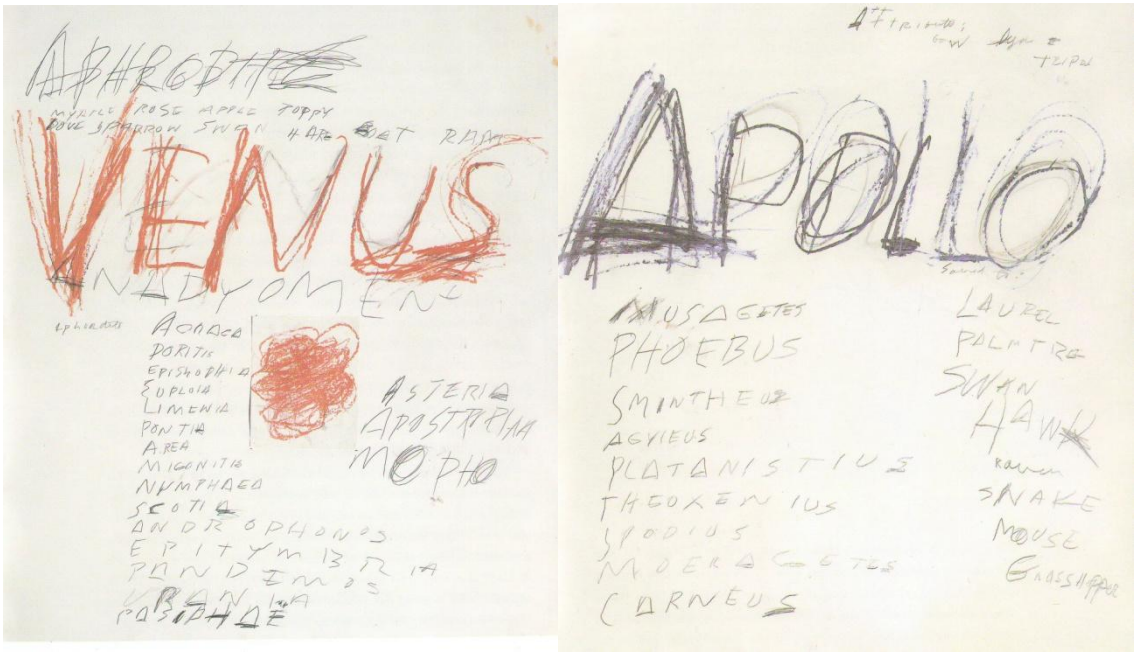

Fig. – Cy Twombly, *Venus* and *Apollo* (both 1975)
(scanned)

These two drawings appear as Twombly's attempts to make the gods themselves visible through listing all their appearances and forms in words on the paper, but words and names never evoke an image, no matter how many of them are written down, instead it is the words themselves that become visible. In these drawings, the visibility of words is foregrounded because the epithets are written in Greek, a language that is illegible to most viewers coming to the gallery. The drawings thus play on familiarity – represented by the names – and on strangeness or exoticism.

Narcissus

> As wax dissolves, as ice begins to run,
> And trickle into drops before the sun;
> So melts the youth, and languishes away,
> His beauty withers, and his limbs decay;
> And none of those attractive charms remain,
> To which the slighted Echo su'd in vain.[143]

[143] Ovid, "Book III," *Metamorphoses*, trans. Sir Samuel Garth, John Dryden, et al, The Internet Classics Archive, 30 July 2010 < http://classics.mit.edu/Ovid/metam.3third.html>.

In *Narcissus* (1975), we are again presented solely with words on a large expanse of paper. This time much of the paper remains blank except for the centre which is cut across by a horizontal line in pencil. Just above this line an inscription is made again in pencil. First there is the name "Narcissus," with the first letter "s" made much more visible than the other letters by repeating the movement of its writing. The name is followed by a possible quotation (although no source has been identified by me) rendered in handwriting which is enclosed in parenthesis: "He loved what went just out of him into himself again." Below the horizontal line the name "Narcissus" is repeated, but this time in a blue crayon in large letters which are smeared over by white oil paint and the blue dissolves in the white. The first letter "s" is here submerged in the white and hardly visible. The drawing thus appears to represent the Greek youth Narcissus as he bends over the fountain to see his image with which he fell in love. The reflected image is, however, different from its "model," not only is it much more spread over the page, reflection in water is never perfect, it is a weird mirror, but it is also more beautiful and pictorial than the original word. Furthermore, there is the change in the letter "s" which has been submerged in the paint. The reflected word thus speaks of difference, of imagination, of loss of identity, and also of transience. Narcissus does not fall in love with himself but with an imaginary picture of himself.

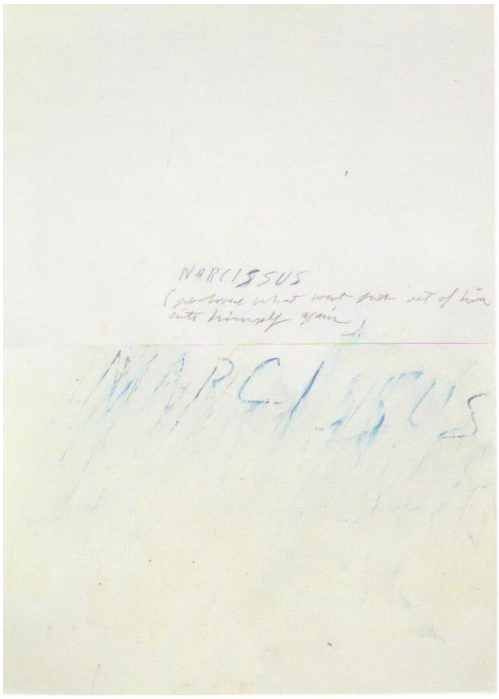

Fig. – Cy Twombly, *Narcissus* (1975)
(scanned)

Pan

The Greek god of nature and shepherds, Pan, appears in Twombly's works in various forms. He is there by implication whenever the god Apollo, his opponent in a music contest, is invoked by the artist. He is present in Twombly's sculpture of a shepherd's pipe from 1951, and he is also there as a general principle of metamorphosis, of transformation of words into images and images into signs to be read. A general description of Pan reads:

> Unlike his father Hermes, Pan never appears in purely human form but rather is always depicted with the horns, ears, and legs of a billy goat. His character, too, recalls that of a goat, because he is lustful and playful, a powerful, virile deity, irascible particularly when he is disturbed in his midday rest. Characteristic of him is his power to induce what we in modern parlance call "panic" – wild, irrational for [sic] that grips large masses of people and causes them to behave like frightened animals that suddenly bolt and run.[144]

All of these characteristics play a part in Twombly's collage *Pan* (1975). In this work, two papers are pasted onto each other, the first one, which forms the support, is smooth and prepared to be drawn on but remains blank – it is a stage where what Barthes calls the "event"[145] will occur; the second is rough and smeared with dirty hands. It refuses to be contained by the first and stretches further below it. On the first one, an image of two red and green leaves of rhubarb is pasted, the leaves crossing each other as if hiding something behind them. On the second, the name "Pan" is written pencil with the letters going upwards, pointing to the leaves. Further below the name are the word "panic" in parenthesis and a brown smear. By juxtaposing these two contrasting images, a name and a representation which might as well come from a book illustrating plants, Twombly creates a connection, an encounter between the two. Reading the name, the viewer comes to see in the rhubarb leaves a manifestation of Pan, either his horns or his hoofs crossed over each other. Pan, being himself half-goat and half-man, is here a metaphor or allegory, he is a figure that crosses over disparate realms, and brings them together without, however, abolishing their difference. This is what the word "panic" seems to signify. Traditionally, panic is the fear which the presence of Pan arouses in humans, but here it is an anxiety stemming from the crossover as the word or name appropriates the image. Even the gender, here, plays a part as a name or word is traditionally regarded as masculine and an image as feminine; the lustful god thus takes possession of the female image.

[144] Quoted in Schmidt, *Writings on Cy Twombly*, 159.
[145] Barthes, "Non Multa Sed Multum," 88.

Fig. – Cy Twombly, *Pan* (1975)
(scanned)

Orpheus

Another drawing that uses solely letters and words is Twombly's two-meters high paper work *Orpheus* (1979). Like Apollo, Venus and Pan, Orpheus is a recurring figure in Twombly's sculpture and drawing, and often can be traced back to Twombly's reading of Rainer Maria Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*. In this drawing, the viewer is first captivated by the large blank O situated in the upper half of the canvas. It is drawn in black crayon in a clockwise movement, pressed into the ground producing a thick line in sharp contrast to the surrounding whiteness. The shape is not regular, because there are traces where Twombly's hand slipped and wavered as it drew the line. It suggests a desire to make a portrait, the contour of the head as the starting point, but then this desire is abandoned and the shape is left blank, its inner space at the same time identical and contrasting with the blank surface that envelops it. Instead of filling it in, Twombly uses it as a letter, the first letter of the name "Orpheus." The other letters rendered in Greek script fall from it into the lower righthand corner, separated from one another not only by the blank spaces in between them but also by their different sizes. The "O" is thus a head, but also the first letter of a name, a portrait and a name are combined

into one. In classical mythology, Orpheus is, of course, the epitome of a poet and known particularly for the story of his attempted rescue of his love Eurydice from the underworld, but in Twombly's drawing a different connection seems to be invoked. After the death of Eurydice, Orpheus turned to the worship of Apollo and spurned Dionysus – the conflict between the two deities characterizes much of Twombly's own work - as a punishment a group of Maenads or Bacchanals attacked him and tore him to pieces. His head, as Ovid relates, was thrown into the river Hebrus flew singing with the current to the Isle of Lesbos:

> His mangled limbs lay scatter'd all around,
> His head, and harp a better fortune found;
> In Hebrus's streams they gently roul'd along,
> And sooth'd the waters with a mournful song.
> Soft deadly notes the lifeless tongue inspire,
> A doleful tune sounds from the floating lyre [...][146]

By separating the letters from one another and from the first "O," Twombly enacts this scene of the myth within a single word. The letters are torn and falling to the ground. The "O" is thus not only Orpheus's head but also the poet's mouth open in a song, and in the drawing the song is one of silence and death. The connection with the myth is reiterated also in a second word that is present in the canvas, although only faintly visible. It is the word "roam" rendered in light red or vermilion crayon under the letter "O." The colour suggests blood and the meaning of the word a journey, the passage of Orpheus's head on the water. But the word is also a homonymy of "Rome," where Twombly lives at this time, and in this way the ancient myth is linked with the present. This encounter between the past and present is also present in the intersection between the Greek name and the English word "roam."

[146] Ovid, "Book XI," *Metamorphoses*, trans. Sir Samuel Garth, John Dryden, et al, The Internet Classics Archive, 30 July 2010 < http://classics.mit.edu/Ovid/metam.11.eleventh.html>.

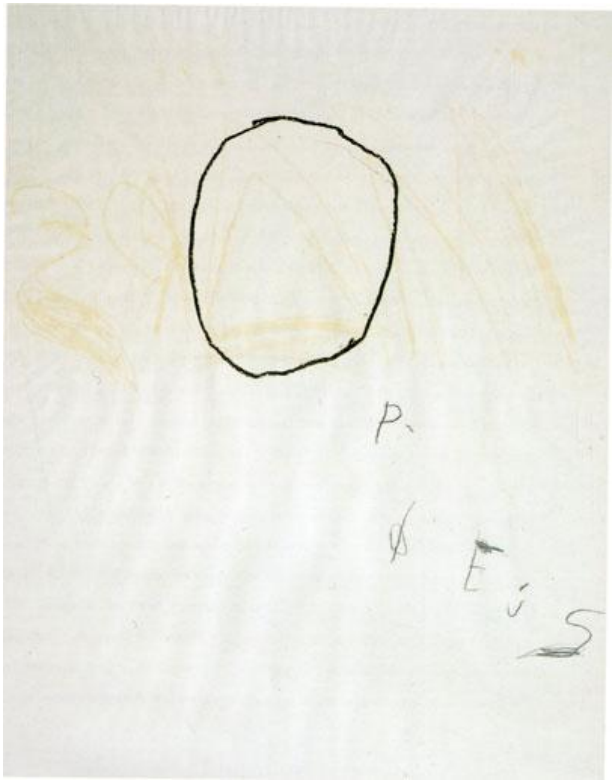

Fig. Cy Twombly, *Orpheus* (1979)
(Cy Twombly Info website)

Other works from the 1970s onwards could also be mentioned and interpreted as concrete poems, but for the present discussion I propose to stay with these few which all have their origin in Greek myths and particularly in Ovid's epic *Metamorphoses.* The poem is significant because it describes Twombly's works and techniques. His use of words can be also seen as an act of metamorphosis, of transforming words from symbols into icons or pictograms. Twombly is a Pan and a trickster, one who crosses over boundaries of different realms, of the visual and the verbal, with surprising ease and nonchalance.

Conclusion

The three artists/poets brought together by this thesis are radically different from one another not only in their vocations but also in their ways of writing and making. It is hard, and perhaps impossible, to unite them on a single plane. John Ashbery is a poet and his poetry as it is here presented in terms of its relation to Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art is one of disjunction, disorientation and dislocation, a space where relationships and orders are subjected to destruction and erasure. Carl Andre is a sculptor but also a poet whose works are characterized by repetition of basic materials and words in simple patterns, seemingly renouncing any creative role of the artist, and instead foregrounding the textures and shapes of things and words. Cy Twombly is a painter whose paintings and drawings employ writing and texts visually as shapes that carry meaning by their arrangement on paper or canvas. Unlike Andre and Ashbery, whose poetry is characteristic for materialism and impersonality, for being located in the present, Twombly's works distinguish themselves by classicism, romanticism and symbolism. Nevertheless, as I have tried to show, all three of these artists and poets take words and writing into close proximity of art, they re-conceive the process of writing poetry by analogizing it with painting, collage and sculpture. In so doing, they succeed in finding new effects of which language and poetry are capable and show that words can be freed from their referential function and made to work visually on the page. Together they represent an avant-garde movement in contemporary poetry and visual arts which seeks to redefine the role of words and the relationship between the individual arts. They show that words and writing can be freed from their representational roles and plugged into new structures, constellations and arrangements where meaning is produced in different ways and where reading is no longer "a boring movement of the eyes," as Saroyan has said.

The thesis is inevitably only a fragment, a brief look at the movement that has been taking place in the arts since the 1950s. A more extensive study is desired, one that would seek to analyze the relationships and intersections between the arts both on a more general, theoretical level and on interpretative level of the individual artists themselves. The phenomenon of writing in art and art as an inspiration or influence on writing has come to define twentieth-century situation in the arts, from the early European avant-garde movements of Futurism, Cubism, Cubo-Futurism, Dadaism and Surrealism to the more recent trends of Pop Art, Conceptual Art and Fluxus. Even present day experiments with visual poetry as it is practiced for example by Robert Grenier or on the Internet need to receive critical attention. It is a paradox that these works which belong among some of the most radical and experimental

art done today have received only marginal attention in literary theory and remain largely unknown to the general public.

Resumé/Summary

Diplomová práce „Tvary psaní v moderní americké poezii a umění“ se zaměřuje na analýzu psaného jazyka jako vizuálního a materiálního prvku v poezii a výtvarném umění v období padesátých až sedmdesátých let 20. století. Oproti předchozím směrům jako byl například abstraktní expresionismus ze čtyřicátých let, se toto období v americkém umění a poezii vyznačuje protínáním mezi slovem a obrazem a kombinací různých médií v jednotlivých dílech. Pop art, konceptuální umění, minimalismus, konkrétní poezie, Fluxus a happeningy jsou jen několika směry, které mají v šedesátých letech své kořeny a které částečně po vzoru avantgardních hnutí ze začátku dvacátého století vnímají umění jako spolupráci a kombinaci napříč různými formami a médii. Pokud o dvacet let dříve americký kritik Clement Greenberg hlásil, že všechna umění byla doslova „nahnána“ ke svým specifickým médiím – poezie k jazyku jako psychologickému médiu a výtvarné umění k plochému kanvasu jako fyzickému médiu, tak tato doba se vyznačuje nikoli překračováním těchto hranic, ale prozkoumáváním prostoru, kde se jednotlivá média protínají, a efektů, které toto protínání a kombinování může vytvářet. Médium jako náležitý prostor a nástroj každého umění je postupně vyměněn za intermédia. Slovo a psaný jazyk v této době již není vnímáno jako cizí výtvarnému umění, ale je otevřeně přijímáno. Tato práce si v tomto kontextu meziuměleckého protínání klade otázku: „Jakých tvarů nabývá psaný jazyk a samotná aktivita psaní ve vztahu k umění?“

Tato práce si neklade za cíl být historií či muzeem, být vyčerpávajícím souhrnem všech umělců, směrů a forem psaní v tomto období. Namísto toho vytyčuje pomyslnou sečnu skrze umělecké praktiky a směry a soustředí se na tři vztahy, jak jsou přítomny v díle třech umělců a básníků. Těmito umělci jsou John Ashbery, Carl Andre a Cy Twombly. John Ashbery je vnímán jako básník, jehož poezie se často odkazuje na soudobé malířství. Carl Andre je americký minimalistický sochař, který se však mino sochařství věnuje i psaní poezie. A Cy Twombly je malíř, jehož kanvasy od poloviny padesátých let do současnosti jsou místy, kde se psaní a poezie střetává doslova tváří v tvář. Tři kapitoly, které následují jsou tudíž interpretacemi třech rozdílných míst a vztahů ve střetávání poezie a výtvarného umění. Od každého z těchto umělců je vybráno jedno dílo nebo malá skupina děl z konce padesátých nebo ze sedmdesátých let a tato díla – texty, sochy nebo kresby - jsou posléze interpretována ve vztahu umění a poezie a se zaměřením na proměny v pojetí čtení a významu.

Kapitola první „Abstrakce a realismus“ je interpretací básní Johna Ashberyho ze sbírky *The Tennis Court Oath*, vydané roku 1962. Tyto básně jsou nahlíženy jako texty, které

využívají nebo odráží jisté strategie, techniky a koncepty přítomné v soudobém výtvarném umění od abstraktního expresionismu po pop art a koláže Roberta Rauschenberga. Úvodní podkapitola odkazuje na současný trend v literární teorii a kritice interpretovat poezii v kontextu umění. Dvě formy těchto interpretací jsou nastíněny a stejně tak dva žánry poezie: „ekfraze" a „malířská báseň." Zatímco ekfraze je báseň napsaná přímo s odkazem na určitý obraz a představuje básnickou interpretaci tohoto obrazu a často dramatizaci rozdílnosti slova a obrazu, malířská báseň je inspirovaná technikami a strategiemi malby a práce v určitém díle, stylu nebo hnutí a využívá jejich obdoby ve své formě. Ekfraze tudíž je hlavně dialogem o rozdílu mezi uměními a malířská báseň o podobnosti. Ashberyho básně jsou v této kapitole vnímány jako malířské básně. Kapitola dále nastiňuje Ashberyho vztah k umělcům jako byli Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock a další a jeho celoživotní zájem o umění. Sbírka *The Tennis Court Oath* je nejprve interpretována jako „akční báseň" v analogii na „akční malbu" z padesátých let a s odkazem na předefinování termínů jako jsou „abstrakce" a „realismus" v moderním umění. Pozornost je věnována především způsobu, kterým se Ashberyho básně snaží uniknout mimezi a mohou být vnímány jako básně, které používají slova hlavně jako citové vjemy nebo afekty. V další podkapitole jsou Ashberyho básně pojaty jako texty, ve kterých bylo nově použito vymazávání původního textu jako tvořivého postupu. Básně jsou přirovnány nejen k obrazům Franze Klinea ale i k Rauschenbergovu obrazu „Smazaný de Kooning." Následně, je pozornost obrácena k výtvarnému směru pop art, jehož příchod na americkou uměleckou scénu byl synchronní s publikací Ashberyho sbírky. Ashbery sám vnímal pop art kladně jako nový avantgardní směr, který obrací divákovu pozornost zpět k všedním předmětům. Jeho básně mohou být tudíž interpretovány v rámci pop artu jako odklon od básnického jazyka, který je stále definován osobností básníka, k jazyku objektivnímu. V následující podkapitole je Ashberyho poezie přirovnána k některým experimentům s koláží v díle Roberta Rauschenberga, obzvláště k jeho hře se smyslem a k různorodosti jeho forem, které znemožňují jakékoli celkové interpretační pojetí nebo rozluštění. Ashberyho básně, které se vyznačují také heterogenitou a fragmentárností, jsou v těchto rysech Rauschenbergově pracem velmi podobné. Je možné říci, že hledání smyslu je jedním z leitmotivů těchto básní, avšak smysl tu není něco, co by čtenář mohl vystopovat nebo rozluštit. Čtenář se musí pohybovat jako „bricoleur" a brát jednotlivá slova a „verše" a vytvářet z nich nová spojení. Smysl tedy není v těchto básních něco skrytého uvnitř, ale spíše tkví v reakci čtenáře a v jeho schopnosti s těmito básněmi operovat. Ashberyho básně se tudíž jeví jako autonomní text, který je koláží různých diskursů a registrů, který není sjednocen v autorovi nebo v lyrickém subjektu, ale pouze ve čtenáři, který jej čte.

Kapitola druhá „Opakování a variace“ se věnuje analýze poezie a sochařství v díle Carla Andreho v období 1959 až 1965, kdy se jeho dílo začínalo formovat do rysů, které jeho práci provází doposud. Tato kapitola vidí jako hlavní tvar nebo rys jeho díla a celého minimalismu v sochařství metodu „opakování,“ tedy používání stejných jednoduchých materiálů znovu a znovu. Úvodní část se věnuje „opakování“ jako obecné metodě v minimalistickém sochařství a popisuje jak tato metoda byla využívána Carlem Andre, Robertem Morrisem, Danem Flavinem, Donaldem Juddem a Robertem Smithsonem. „Opakování“ stejných materiálů pro tyto umělce nebyla cesta do monotonie, ale způsob jak objevit prostorový rytmus a variaci ve stejném nebo podobném. Podkapitola „Minimalistické psaní“ se snaží ukázat, že minimalismus byl obdobím, kdy se umělci a sochaři čím dál více obraceli k psaní a textům jako novém prostoru nejen pro obhajování svých děl ale také pro tvorbu novou. Zmíněny jsou umělecké knihy Sol LeWitta, Roberta Smithsona a hlavně Carla Andreho. Samotná interpretace Andreho poezie začíná pohledem na jeho „Prvních pět básní,“ ve kterých se Andre odklonil od tradičních lyrických básní k neosobnímu jazyku jako předmětu poezie. Jeho básně jsou srovnány s poezií Eugena Gomringera. V následující podkapitole je pozornost věnována vývoji v Andreho sochařské tvorbě mezi lety 1959 a 1965, kdy jeho sochy prošly podobnou proměnou jako jeho poezie, tedy od expresivních forem ke strukturám, které jsou výsledkem kombinování určitých základních materiálů. Tato díla se opět zdají být neosobní a mechanická. V těchto dílech je forma nahlížena jako nezbytný a nevyhnutelný důsledek předurčený samotnými materiály, které Andre neobměňuje a nijak neupravuje, pouze klade vedle sebe. Sochy jako *Pyramidy* nebo *Ekvivalenty* se tudíž zdají být produkty použitých materiálů spíše než uměleckou tvorbou. Andreho báseň „green“ a jeho sonety jsou interpretovány ve stejném kontextu jako básně, ve kterých samotný materiál nebo grafická kompozice určitého slova, psací stroj, velikost strany a sonetová forma hrají konstruktivní a určující roli ve výsledné podobě básně. Andre jako tvůrce je schován za opakováním a formálními prvky psaní. Tyto básně, které jsou tvořeny opakováním jednoho slova buď ve formě sonetu nebo po celé straně, jsou grafickými plochami, na nichž jsou rozehrány variace mezi tvary písmen a strukturami slov. Zatímco některá slova se ukazují jako odolná vůči těmto variacím, u ostatních se grafická identita slov rozpadá a jiná slova vyvstávají z těchto ploch na základě skrytých symetrií mezi písmeny. Slovo samotné jako nositel významu je tu vyprázdněno a smysl těchto básní je ryze externí prvek, který spočívá právě v proměnách a chování slova jako grafického prvku. Podobně jako je tomu u minimalistických soch, kde smysl nesídlí uvnitř těchto prací, ale v jejich vztazích mezi sebou a okolními prostory, tak v těchto básních je smysl definován vztahy mezi písmeny a grafickou

podobou slova. V závěrečné části je pozornost věnována Andreho sochařské práci jako artikulaci nebo permutaci, která je obdobná jazyku. Andreho sochy nemají pevný, permanentní charakter a pro každou výstavu musí být nově sestaveny, často v odlišné formě ze stejných materiálů. V tomto směru sdílejí jistou podobnost s lingvistickými permutacemi a mohou být nahlíženy jako propozice – obzvláště v souvislosti s Wittgensteinovou teorií smyslu jako užití. Konečná podkapitola se věnuje literalitě v Andreho tvorbě, která je zde vysvětlena nikoli jako popření symboličnosti, ale právě jako rétorická figura nebo metafora.

Kapitola třetí „Obrazy ke čtení“ se věnuje kresbám a kolážím Cy Twomblyho ze sedmdesátých let. Tyto kresby, které využívají převážně slov a psaní jako vizuálních prvků jsou nahlíženy jako příklady konkrétní poezie v malířství. Twomblyho práce se vždy vyvíjela v těsném kontaktu s literaturou a psaním a aluze na mýty a poezii jsou téměř všudypřítomné od konce padesátých let dále. V sedmdesátých letech Twombly vystavuje sérii koláží, které jsou inspirovány řeckou mytologií a *Proměnami* od Ovidia; tyto obrazy jsou portréty bohů a hrdinů, které využívají však převážně slov a jejich kompozice. Kapitola se snaží interpretovat sedm těchto koláží a ukázat, jak Twombly zachází se slovy, písmeny a tvary písma a jak tato manipulace utváří smysl v jeho kresbách. Tyto kresby jsou nahlíženy jako texty. Tato kapitola také identifikuje v Twomblyho tvorbě používání literárních figur, jako jsou metafora, ironie, aluze a další. Tato kapitola, která je nejkratší z celé práce, končí přirovnáním Twomblyho techniky k metamorfóze, k proměně slova v obraz nebo piktogram.

Závěr této práce stručně shrnuje rysy, ve kterých se tito tři umělci – jinak velmi rozlišní – shodují. Těmito rysy je osvobození slova od čistě referenční funkce, propojení psaní s uměním a nové pojetí čtení jako přístupu čtenáře k textu. Na úplný závěr tato práce volá po větším kritickém zájmu o fenomén setkávání poezie a výtvarného umění nebo vizuality v psaní, jelikož tento prvek byl jedním z nejvíce dominantních jevů moderního umění ve 20. století a v kontextu internetu a hypertextu bude i nadále hrát důležitou roli v budoucím směřování jednotlivých uměleckých směrů.

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