

Exergue 1

Deconstruction's Dramatis Personae

Let us space. The art of this text is the air it causes to circulate between its screens.

(Jacques Derrida, *Glas*)¹

These few words of Jacques Derrida open a potentially huge field of discourse: a spooling thread of thought and writing, of performing and creating, with no beginning and no end, joined together by an absence that rejects the centre—a centre, though, whose gravitational pull can be so irresistible that escape can seem a hopeless ambition. Maybe if we stay in the outer atmosphere, if we keep circulating between the screens, perhaps... But a spooling thread may not be the most helpful image here, for a thread, usually, has a start and an end, even when it is tied to form a circle. The air between the screens cannot have a beginning or an end; there is no final resolution, and no Hegelian *Aufhebung* here either, so... what now? Perhaps one should think, instead, of a walled city, or a labyrinth, with pathways but no centre, for this city's pathways only connect to the outer wall and interconnect with other pathways: they do not lead to a focal mid-point, an *origin*, a *centre*. And there is no entrance or exit either: this city is sealed, a totality, but new pathways will always form across its territory, for this circulation is infinite, yet structurally it is finite, and its contents shape its form as its form shapes its contents.

The aim of this thesis is to probe the relationship between deconstruction, as explicated in the work of the French-Algerian philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), and music that allows certain affordances to the performers (and composers): a certain *undecidability*, then, through the indeterminacy of notation, or the use of improvisation, or the importation of outside elements into the 'event,' or any combination of these. We might think of deconstruction as a method for analysis, a challenge to metaphysics, a way of questioning, of worrying at something; a way of opening a field up to the broadest spectrum of analytical interpretation that we can imagine. But could we also, for example, 'do' deconstruction as we perform: perform deconstructively? Could we experience deconstruction as both performers and listeners, or even as users? Are there methodologies that can be drawn from Derrida's work to inform analytical and performance strategies in the realisation of these scores? And how do deconstructive approaches in other fields, such as poetry, art and architecture, play into this discourse? Indeed, should deconstruction even be applied to fields outside of writing? Derrida thinks that it should: 'I would say that the idea that deconstruction should confine itself to the analysis of the discursive text—I know that the idea is widespread—is really either a gross misunderstanding or a political strategy designed to limit deconstruction to matters of language. Deconstruction starts with the deconstruction of logocentrism, and thus to want to confine it to linguistic phenomena is the most suspect of operations.'² Further to this, Derrida makes the point that the surface that carries the text, whether physical or spectral 'paper,' also carries within it a much larger and more complex field of performative actions pertaining to

¹ Derrida, 1986, 75.

² Brunette & Wills, 1994, 15.

sound, voice and body:³ 'Paper echoes and resounds, *subjectile* of an inscription from which phonetic aspects are never absent, whatever the system of writing. Beneath the appearance of a surface, it holds in reserve a volume, folds, a labyrinth whose walls return the echoes of the voice or song that it carries itself; for paper also has the range or the ranges of a voice bearer.'⁴

Returning to the opening quotation: if a text, (Derrida's *screens*), 'causes' the air to circulate, there would seem to be a desire (whether voluntary or involuntary—it makes no difference), to connect, to move towards (and away from) other texts. In other words there is a desire for other screens, for other spaces, and it is this yearning for the air that circulates, that allows a sometimes seemingly disparate group of figures to coalesce for a moment in the illusory confines of this project (thesis as archive), which is composed of my own screens (texts) and influenced by and connected to the screens of others: to become my *dramatis personae*. The texts form a circulating figure, talking to one another through the air that connects them, through performance, through para-notation, through intersection, interpenetration and superimposition, through the play of the trace; but what or who is circulating, and between which screens, remains to be seen, or heard.

A thought on *screens* before journeying any further: we can project onto a screen, we can hide behind one, and we can see through them and not be seen, like Derrida's visor wearing spectre.⁵ They are partial, permeable, undecidable barriers; nets in which we can cache our own desires (our ghosts) or become tangled with the fears of what might be to come, or what might have been; enveloping shrouds that allow us to be projected onto and obscured. Sometimes these screens may even be imaginary. Perhaps screens are texts (including musical scores), and consequently they have custodians, signatories (for we should be wary of using the word 'author' here)? And those custodians and screens link to others, back and forth through the air that circulates between: writer to writer, composer to composer, composer to performer, singer to accompanist, musician to musician, performer to spectator, sound to sound, performer and spectator to the event space, architecture, the environment... The list goes on; the air, or the play of the trace, between the screens touches everything, it would seem. So, let us circulate, let us question.

Works and Composers

Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928-2007) *Pole für 2* (1969-70)

For two players (unspecified) and sound engineer, duration indeterminate.

John Cage (1912-1992) *Four*⁶ (1992)

For four players (unspecified), duration 30 minutes.

Hans Joachim Hespos (b.1938) *Weißschatten* (2017)

For soprano and piano, duration 11 minutes.

Clare Lesser (b.1971) *Metatechnic* (2018)

³ 'hands, eyes, voice, ears', Derrida, 2005, 44.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Derrida, 2006, 124-125.

For any number of unspecified players, with or without electronics, duration indeterminate.

First circulation

(*As I am absent, only the map is real*⁶)

(Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Questions*)

You might justifiably ask ‘why these scores?’; for the domain is a large one, encompassing non-standard notation, improvisation and the disruptive potential of importing outside material, or material over which the performers have no control. Parameters of exclusion were established early in the project precisely to limit the scope of the domain, although traces of the excluded are ever present in the background, and certain choices were made about what to include, applying the following criteria:

- 1) the scores must contain at least some graphic or non-standard notation
- 2) they must have some element of intervention or disruption to the written text or score, whether provided by the performer or imported in from ‘outside’ the immediate, physical performance space (e.g. radio/recordings, etc.)
- 3) they should be drawn from a reasonable time frame: nearly fifty years’ worth of music is presented in the portfolio
- 4) they must be practically achievable: every performance has been documented in film and/or sound at least once
- 5) they should be new works for me as a performer—this portfolio should not be a curatorial exercise of personally well-known repertoire.

Text scores were excluded as belonging to another (and very substantial) domain, although two of the works under consideration (Stockhausen’s *Pole* and Hespos’ *Weißschatten*) do have extensive text content, opening them to another layer of deconstruction. The works above fulfil all of these criteria.⁸

Regarding notation: the chosen works all feature some form of non-standard notation. *Pole* combines (graphic) plus-minus notation with extensive text instructions; *Four*⁶ has (empty) time bracket notation⁹ and minimal instructions; *Weißschatten* utilises standard and non-standard notation and has very extensive text instructions in the form of separate glossaries and performance directions written on the score itself; and *Metatechnic* is a purely graphic score, with no text

⁶ Jabès, 1991, 60.

⁸ Previous to this project I had performed *Four*⁶ once before, and I had performed *Spiral* (one of *Pole*’s antecedents) before. The other works were new to me.

⁹ *Four*⁶ is the only example of time bracket notation in Cage’s work where the performers have *almost* total control over the contents of the time brackets. Cage retains control over the *placing* of freely chosen individual sounds—that is, in which time brackets they appear, drawn from each performer’s lexicon of twelve sounds (ten for player one). *Four*³, also known as *Beach Birds* or *Extended Lullaby*, has some points in common regarding notation and layout, although there is a firmer authorial hand present, since both instrumentation (1 or 2 piano(s), 12 rainsticks and violin or oscillator) and time bracket ‘actions’ (1. silence, 2. rainsticks, 3. sine wave, 4. excerpts from *Extended Lullaby*) are prescribed in the score.

instructions at all. Although there is a long history of the use of graphic, non-standard, and indeterminate notation in music (up to the present day),¹⁰ and although all of the examples under scrutiny are part of this tradition, this ghostly trace, the question under consideration here is the affordances that such notational systems allow—in other words, their effects on performance. How does the ‘undecidable’ space between notation and realisation operate in these works, and how does this affect the relationship between the performer and the composer?

The wildcard is a concept which Derrida explores in ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’ in the discussion of Thoth’s relationship to his father, Ra. Derrida says: ‘Sly, slippery and masked, an intriguer and a card, like Hermes, he is neither king nor jack, but rather a sort of *joker*, a floating signifier, a wild card, one who puts play into play.’¹¹ If we ever even thought we knew what would happen next in a performance, or we thought we knew what we were ‘doing,’ the presence of the wildcard, the jester, the surprise, soon cures us of that. The wildcard then, is an agent of change, but whether as disruptor, maintainer of tension or reliever of turmoil remains to be seen. And here the ‘wildcard’ is the genus under which I shall subsume different species of outsiders—entities who can redirect the journey, who can divert us from the path we thought we would take, carrying their ghosts, their secrets, with them, coming back to haunt us. These outsiders include live radio (and static) during performance, the portable archive (in the shape of both radio and recordings), the ghostly, damaged archive, and time looping. All of these are, of course, more undecidables; their presence disturbs and disrupts, brings into question authorship of the ‘event,’ and again re-opens the performance to the play of the trace.

Our screens then, so far, are four scores (and their composers); our circulation is how we react, interact and interpret, how we perform, and what we draw from being temporarily beached upon the thresholds of other screens (screens that follow, screens that are yet to come), how these other screens react to each other; how they ‘talk’ to the first four.

Philosophy

Second Circulation

The second circulation flows around the works of Jacques Derrida. There are a vast number of writings to choose from, produced during a prodigiously prolific career, but I will limit this study to the following main themes and the texts that are associated with them: undecidability and aporia; the play of the trace and thereby the disruption of presence; hauntology; and the archive. Derrida seems particularly well suited to indeterminate music, for his entire ‘programme’ deals with challenging and probing the tenets of classical metaphysics. He is quite clear from the outset that it may not even be possible to effectively challenge or replace metaphysics, but the attempt will be made through deconstructive processes as applied to philosophy and literature, art, architecture, politics and broader cultural concerns. However, he barely mentions music anywhere. There are odd, fleeting glimpses, a line here or there (e.g. *Specters of Marx*, *The Truth in Painting*, *The Work of Mourning*, *Paper Machine*), and *Cinders* was to be paired with Karlheinz Stockhausen’s *Stimmung* in

¹⁰Maybe its best-known flowering was during the 1960s and 1970s when many composers were systematically exploring notation’s possibilities. Examples of such scores, many of which are now ‘standard works,’ include pieces by Berio, Cage, Stockhausen, Haubenstock-Ramati, Takemitsu, Cardew, Logothetis, Berberian, Kagel, Brown, Feldman, Wishart, Hespos, Bussotti, Pousseur, Leo Smith, Sjukur, Baes, Schnebel . . . For further information, see: Erhard Karkoschka, *Notation in New Music* (1972).

¹¹ Derrida, 2004, 97.

its original presentation, but music seems to have been an area that Derrida, by and large, avoided. How does our circulation work here then? Why would our circulation even pass through Derrida's screens?

I suggest that the circulation is justified because the challenge to metaphysics goes hand in hand with a challenge to fixed notation—that is, a notation that elicits in performance, more or less, what is printed on the page, what is expected by the composer (with all the obvious areas of uncertainty in interpretation that are built into *any* language system, all of which are open to deconstructive approaches).¹² And any composer who uses such systems of notation, would (rightly or not) consider themselves as the author of the work notated, taking into account their differences in background, training, stylistic and compositional preferences and so on. Since deconstruction relishes the perplexity created by undecidability, and undecidability is one of the requirements for (or side effects of, one could say) the disrupting of presence, spatial or temporal,¹³ then undecidable, indeterminate music—in which the composer and performer relationship is fluid, where questions of authorship and origin are brought to the foreground, where the notation not only allows, but demands collaboration in the creative space between the two, and demands performance decisions made in the 'moment', not solely as part of a pre-planned programme—would seem to naturally coinhabit a domain where deconstruction already unfolds itself.¹⁴ If we add to this group musical works which import 'foreign bodies' (which cannot ever really be considered *foreign*, as that would be to deny the play of the trace, and to deny the archive)—but let's call them bodies over which the performers and composer have little or no control—ghosts perhaps, then we will have another disruptive element. Another element whose inclusion positively engenders *aporia*, opens the musical field up to an infinite number of referents and revenants, and opens it to hauntology in its full metonymy.

Architecture, Literature, Art and Music, Art

Third Circulation

Now to the final circulation, the circulation that takes in fellow travellers and correspondents—interested parties, parties who operate deconstructively in other fields, whose operations seem to offer a clue to deconstructive readings and experiences of music. These parties are linked, back and forth, to all the other players in the circulation, to all of the other screens, although some presences appear to be more ghostly than others—blurred superimpositions, they are whispers in the reeds of memory.

¹² There is no reason why deconstruction cannot work effectively with any musical style from any historical period.

¹³ The disruption of presence refers to the overturning of binary oppositions; instances where the second clause is subordinate to the first.

¹⁴ Derrida was always at pains to point out that deconstruction was categorically neither a method, nor a system, but a way of experiencing, for example, texts. Derrida said that 'deconstruction is not, in the last analysis, a methodical or theoretical procedure. In its possibility as in the experience of the impossible that will always have constituted it, it is never a stranger to the event, that is...to the coming of that which happens.' Derrida, 2006, 111.

As every finite extent of space is infinitely divisible (since every space can contain smaller spaces), can an infinite collection of spaces then form a finite space?

(Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction*)¹⁵

I'll begin with architecture, with the 'circulation' of structurality, the heterogeneous event space, the virtual building and the temporary autonomous zone. Is the circulation largely one of shared deconstruction, or is there a stronger connection here? A link is Parc de la Villette in northern Paris during the 1990s and its director, Bernard Tschumi (b.1944).¹⁶ Tschumi invited Derrida to participate in the project, developing one of the garden spaces and pairing him with the architect Peter Eisenman.¹⁷ The relationship between Tschumi and Derrida is an important one, bringing each into the other's orbits, hybridising architectural theory and practice with philosophical enquiry. The relationship which grew out of the project generated a lengthy correspondence (also involving Eisenman) and other notable publications as its screens.¹⁸ Tschumi's extensive experience as both practising architect and architectural theorist¹⁹ (including on deconstructive readings of the subject) makes this work eminently suited to being cross-programmed with music, for music and architecture have a certain shared affinity with forms and structurality, and deconstructive readings of architecture have a similar affinity with undecidable music, 'music' that is, that is fluid in content, structure or even place of performance, music that occupies undecidable spaces that wait for events to happen. Tschumi is particularly concerned with architecture's virtual (ghostly) possibilities, the potential for intersemiotic readings of architecture, the potential for architecture as radical critique; the making of undecidable spaces, of events, disjunctions, and challenges to form. So Tschumi questions the very foundations of architecture, its metaphysical supports.

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Look at the word and how it lives.

Look at words and how they live.

And then listen.

(Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Questions*)²⁰

Literature: how does Edmond Jabès (1912-1991) find himself in this circulation? He appears, again, in Derrida's own writings, in his musings on the written word and the nature of the book,²¹ the nature of poetry, where 'the right to speech coincides with the duty to interrogate. The book of man

¹⁵ Tschumi, 1996, 54.

¹⁶ Parc de la Villette was Tschumi's first major built project.

¹⁷ A far from congenial experience for either of them.

¹⁸ Publications include Jacques Derrida, *Point de Folie—Maintenant l'architecture* (1986) and Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenmann, (Jeffrey Kipnis and Thomas Leiser (eds), *Chora L Works*, (1997).

¹⁹ See, for instance, *The Manhattan Transcripts* (1994) and *Architecture and Disjunction* (1996).

²⁰ Jabès, 1991, 64.

²¹ Derrida, J., 'Edmond Jabès and the Question of the Book' in *Writing and Difference*, 2001, 77-96.

is a book of question.²² Jabès (with Derrida) systematically questions how the word works, how it *lives*, in the same way that we, as performers, question how our words, our scores, our notation, live— how they live *in performance*. In both cases deconstructive approaches are applied in one field and then to another, to closely examine how the nature of the book and the nature of the score, or how the writer/composer and the reader/performer, circulate. Jabès' mode of writing, in common with much modernist and post-modernist literature, reveals an obsession with questions; the combination of fragments, of song, of letters with lost pages, erasings, obliterations, conversation, of sayings and soundings, questions ideas through the medium and concept of the book, what Richard Stamelin calls 'the endless, discontinuous, fragmented... and always interrogative discourse that forms and unforms, constructs and deconstructs the book.'²³ If deconstruction teaches us anything, it is to seek questions not answers, and Jabès embraces the hidden (or not so hidden) instances of aporia, of perplexity or undecidability present in writing, probing how writing can oppose itself,²⁴ bringing us full circle, back to Derrida and the supplement.

And Derrida's work is not confined to an ossified archive, a sealed tomb of outdated philosophical musings on language, but continues to evolve—to *defer*. Derrida and Jabès' obsession with fragments, erasings, and unreliable or corrupted transmissions finds a new voice in the works of Mark Fisher and Stephen Prince, where hauntology takes on a new post-Derridean life, evolving from its usage in Derrida's *Specters of Marx* into the worlds of pop culture, 'otherly pastoralism,' nostalgia for lost futures, folk horror, film as found object and mode of communication for the (sometimes sinister) 'nanny state,' the liminal and the oneiric, in Fisher's *Ghosts of My Life* (2014) and *The Weird and the Eerie* (2016), and Prince's multimedia project *A Year in the Country* (ongoing from 2018) which encompasses music, text, art and film in online, compositional, sound and book manifestations.

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...it's an interesting record because it's not fixed. It changes as it gets damaged and these changes become part of the composition... These damages will break up the linearity of the original and keep you aware and conscious of the fact that you're listening to a record...²⁵

Art-and-Music: what is 'art and music' as a singular concept supposed to mean in this context?²⁶ In this particular instance it refers to the work of Christian Marclay (b.1955), an artist who works with sounds, a musician who doesn't play 'instruments,' in any regular sense of the word, but who problematises the archive (one of Derrida's key concerns)²⁷ through the act of collecting, and, by extension, through the performative potential of the archive—in Marclay's case, through the performative potential of recordings as living objects rather than sound that is frozen or embalmed. Thus the temporal and spatial dimensions of recordings are called into question (operating in the

²² Derrida, 2001, 81.

²³ Stamelman, R., in Jabès, 1991, ix.

²⁴ Jabès, E., *The Little Book of Subversions*, 1996.

²⁵ Criqui, 2014, 55.

²⁶ I use the separatrix deliberately here.

²⁷ See Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 1998, and Derrida, *Cinders*, 2014. See also Exergue 2 for further discussion of the archive.

same way as the radio in *Pole* and time loops in *Metatechnic*): recordings are open to accruing their own histories through scratches and marks, as in *Record without a cover* (1985/99). The hisses and pops, the ‘ghosts’ in the sound, become part of the ‘new’ performance potential of the record, while the commodification of the recorded performance itself, and, by extension, music in a wider sense (i.e. the record) feeds into broader narratives of capitalism and culture.²⁸ By allowing the archive, or the record in this instance, to have a living presence (either in performance or as undecidable artwork in the forum of the interactive exhibition—yet another case of the archive undermining itself), the archive becomes no longer merely a vehicle for a nostalgic remembrance of the past, but rather part of a dynamic promise of, and to, the future. As Derrida says of the archive:

The question of the archive is not, we repeat, a question of the past. It is not the question of a concept dealing with the past that might *already* be at our disposal or not at our disposal, *an archivable concept of the archive*. It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow. The archive: if we want to know what that will have meant, we will only know in times to come. Perhaps. Not tomorrow but in times to come, later on or perhaps never.²⁹

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Drawing has always been more than drawing...To put things squarely, in rough angular strokes, and to square drawing, so to speak, here are some lines to follow: *to draw or design, to designate, to sign, to teach* (“*einseigneur*”).³⁰

Art: postmodern modes of practice and thinking inform the work of our last three fellow travellers, Simon Hantai (1922-2008) and Valerio Adami (b.1935), both friends and associates of Derrida, and Jasper Johns (b. 1930), friend and associate of John Cage. I’ll begin with Adami, circulating with Derrida through correspondence, through texts (screens) in *The Truth in Painting*, *Figure nel Tempo*, and *Institut du Dessin*, to mention but three examples, and through the portrait of Derrida (and cat) that Adami painted in 2004.³¹ Adami’s highly stylised images, saturated with colour and surrounded with thick black outlines (cloisonnism or, for Derrida, *passee partout*) are frequently associated with the pop art movement, although the sense of movement, even of trembling (*solicitation*), created through the use of superimpositions gives his work a certain flavour of analytical cubism as well.³² Both his heavily fragmented, multi-layered approach to the creation of narrative and complex emotional meaning and his frequent use of writing in (and sometimes *as*) drawings and paintings were of interest to Derrida, who devoted his essay “+R(Into the Bargain)” to Adami’s works. In particular, this essay considers themes of ‘the letter and the proper name *in painting*, with narration, technical reproduction, ideology... among other things and still in painting,³³ ‘but also the constraints of the signature, of writing, and even, taken into account here, of deletion [*riture*]³⁴

²⁸ See also Derrida’s *Archive Fever*, 1996, and *Specters of Marx*, 2006.

²⁹ Derrida, 1998, 36.

³⁰ Derrida, 1996, 92.

³¹ Derrida’s portrait is composed of three superimposed images of his face. It was displayed in the exhibition ‘Paintings of Perplexity’, Forsblom Gallery, Helsinki, 2007. (Ferraris, Tega & Trione, 2012, 302)

³² <https://www.wikiart.org/en/valerio-adami/gottfried-keller-ritratto-1986>

³³ Derrida, 1987, 10.

³⁴ Derrida, 1987, 156.

principally through a discussion of the two preliminary sketches for *ICH* and *CHI* (*CHIMERE* when shown as a pair, as a whole), known as ‘Studies for a Drawing after *Glas*.’ These studies and the final work are also pertinent for their probing of margins, edges, and surfaces, and the intrusion of writing onto (into) the surface image—indeed, the foregrounding of writing as artwork. *CHIMERE*, being painted on both the back and the front, challenges the recto/verso binary opposition of classical art and also echoes the medieval diptych. During the 1970s Adami increasingly explored domains outside pure painting (if there is such a singular domain) in his artworks, including politics, philosophy (hence the link with Derrida), mythology and literature, as exemplified by his extensive series of portraits of cultural figures. The example linked to below shows the Swiss artist and author Gottfried Keller (1819-1890), whose alignment to literary realism is hinted at through the inclusion of the calf which Keller is carrying in the image.³⁵ Thus, Adami represents a postmodern, even deconstructive, approach to the domains of art, not so much through the concept but rather through narrative and the passage of time, of *figures over time* indeed.

Correspondence, ‘the letter,’ misinterpretation, communication that has been derailed, themes of writing painting and painting writing, themes of texture and the undecidability of background and foreground, back and front—all these circle again (they have already circled), this time to Simon Hantaï (1922–2008).

Folding, scrunching, tying, plying the exposed surface area with paint—Pliage (shown in the image—linked below—of Hantaï during the composition of the *Meun* series)³⁶ the technique that would inform all of Hantaï’s work from the early 1960s onwards,³⁷—brings canvas into the foreground: it is no longer *just* a surface to paint on, but becomes a material in its own right. Pliage deconstructs (again) the recto/verso opposition (in that the texturing processes affect both sides of the canvas), opens up the idea of canvas as ‘object’ (like in the work of Jasper Johns), and results, in Hantaï’s work, in a highly abstract and extreme fragmentation of the colour field. The colour field can emphasise either the colour(s), as in *Mariale* (1960), or white, as in the series known as *Les Blancs* (1973–74), or both, depending on the viewer’s perception.³⁸ The chance element of the fold determines the work, making it a secret work until it is revealed, when its ties and knots are undone; only then will we know what has occurred *in* the canvas. The wildcard returns, it seems, and throws into doubt the ‘authorship’ of the painting. It disrupts presence: who is the author here? The fold, or Simon Hantaï? And what if the canvas were abandoned (sometimes for decades) and then worked? What if it reworks an earlier painting, as with the *Catamurons* and *Panses* (1963–65), where the surface becomes almost impenetrable? What if the canvas was buried? An abyssal archaeology perhaps?

Écriture Rose (1958–1959)—painting as writing, writing as painting, inking the skin of the canvas, cutting a mArk[hē].³⁹ Hantaï’s fascination with painted writing first appeared in the 1955 work *Sexe-Prime. Hommage à Jean-Pierre Brisset*, and found one of its most intense manifestations in *Peinture*

³⁵ <https://www.wikiart.org/en/valerio-adami/early-morning-1984>

³⁶ <https://nonsite.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Hantaï-in-studio-Meun.jpg>

³⁷ Pliage is a dominant technique in the series *Mariales* (1960–62), *Catamurons* and *Panses* (1963–65), *Meuns* (1967–68) and *Tabulas* (1973–82).

³⁸ This calls to mind the presence of static in Stockhausen’s *Pole*. Background ‘noise’ is now foreground ‘event’, a space out of which other sounds emerge as well as being an ‘event’ in its own right. It also recalls the double bind of auditory hallucination: patterns that do not *actually* exist form within the static; the mind *makes* them form coherent structures.

³⁹ Derrida, 1998, 1.

(*Écriture rose*), in which the microscopic writing (Hantaï spent a year copying out various religious texts) is inked in four different colours that create the illusion of the colour pink. These works play on illusion or the potential for misunderstandings; they probe the relationship between writing and painting, and they probe writing's place within the domain of painting. Like folding and texture, this question occupied Hantaï for several more decades; it directly concerns Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy in *La connaissance des textes—Lecture d'un manuscrit illisible*,⁴⁰ the collection of correspondence (1999–2000) that accompanies the genesis of Hantaï's written⁴¹ (although illegible), scrunched, folded, highly textured canvas that forms the cover image for Derrida's study of the philosophy of touch, through the work of Jean-Luc Nancy.⁴²

As Hantaï and Adami both problematise surface and the spectator's gaze, so too does Jasper Johns. His examinations of everyday objects (flags, numbers, light bulbs) appropriated and placed into new contexts (as in *bricolage*), his desire to test pre-conceptions, to exploit the inherent undecidability of the artwork, and his challenges to the canvas itself as object (as in Hantaï's work) bring Johns into our circulation. Johns explored the possibilities of collage through the addition of objects to the canvas, such as other canvases, sometimes face up, sometimes face down, (*Canvas*, 1956 and *Souvenir 2*, 1964⁴³), coat hangers (*Coat Hanger*, 1959) and plates (*Souvenir*, 1964). Problematising the drawing (the sketch)—which now comes into being *after* the painting, not before—using unusual painting media, such as sculpt-metal or lead (*Flag*, 1969), using unusual 'canvases,' such as plastic (*Bushbaby*, 2005⁴⁴), obsessively reworking earlier materials (and other artists' works—e.g. *Between the Clock and the Bed*, 1989, which reimagines Edvard Munch's work of the same name), especially through his huge series of prints, and exploring the mobile colour field (you could almost say 'writhing,' or even 'writing') in the grey and white paintings—all of these bring Johns' work into the orbit of deconstruction. Johns deconstructs the nature of the painting itself and, with it, the moment of reception, stating:

I am concerned with a thing's not being what it was, with it becoming something other than what it is, with any moment in which one identifies a thing precisely and with the slipping away of that moment⁴⁵

Johns' fascination with transmutation brings the wildcard back (again: it was always already there). We may think we know what a thing is, what is going on, what a sound is, but that certainty in the moment will be whisked away: as the grasped certainty becomes as ashes falling through our hands, the certainty is actually an *undecidable*. We can be certain only that we are uncertain.

⁴⁰ Éditions Galilée, 2013.

⁴¹ Hantaï wrote out texts by Jean-Luc Nancy and Derrida to form the cover art.

⁴² *Le Toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy (On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy), Éditions Galilée, (2000).

⁴³ <https://4.bp.blogspot.com/-VhvvYexzhmU/V2ue9uJ9gcl/AAAAAAAAfXs/F2E5S0KMRtorvKqayfDgF13iCCrn9i5-wCLcB/s1600/Souvenir%2B2-1964.jpg>

⁴⁴ http://www.sienese-shredder.com/2/jasper_johns-bushbabies.html

⁴⁵ Quoted in Garrels, 2012, 100.

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