Åke Hodell

Art and Writing in the Neo-Avant-Garde

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ABSTRACT

Johan Gardfors, *Åke Hodell. Art and Writing in the Neo-Avant-Garde.* Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden 2017. Dept. of Literature, History of Ideas, and Religion. Language: English. ISBN 978-91-88348-88-3.

*Åke Hodell and the Art of Illegibility* provides the first in-depth discussion in English of the concrete poet and neo-avant-garde artist Åke Hodell’s works from the 1960s. Throughout the study, Hodell’s artistic practice is contextualized by way of comparison with examples from the earlier avant-gardes, as well as with contemporaneous writers and artists, indicating how the avant-garde and modernist legacies are preserved and transformed in the works of Hodell. The dissertation is a case study that unfolds against the background of the expanded field of the 1960s, for which a core issue is that of the relation between the different arts. Simultaneously as institutions such as Moderna Museet, Fylkingen and the electronic music studio EMS provided spaces for ‘open art’ in Stockholm, functioning as important catalysts for Hodell and his colleagues, the question of intermediality is manifest on the level of the work. Through analysis of Hodell’s early works, the present study demonstrates how a tendency towards dissolution of the different arts is paralleled by an emphasis on their respective materialities, and indicates the artistic practices of illegibility and linguistic reduction as a point where the ambiguous relation of the arts come to the fore. The study examines how Hodell’s artistic project is realized throughout various mediums and forms, and shows how his printed works open up a space between poetry and visual art, while they simultaneously highlight the medium of writing. Within this framework, the dissertation traces how writing becomes a means of representing subjectivity in several of Hodell’s early works. The study characterizes Åke Hodell’s artistic practice through its turn towards materiality, conceptuality and performativity. While this shift should be understood as a reaction against modernist ideals, the resulting procedures are ultimately connected to values of expression, subjective experience and conveyance of meaning in Hodell’s work, which hence is shown to rely on the fundamentals of the tradition it appears to overthrow. The present dissertation thus situates Hodell at a moment of transition, in which the radical turn towards the materialities of the artistic mediums co-exists with an idiom of subjective expression, and in which conceptual and performative procedures are paralleled by an ethico-political pathos. In sum, the present study provides an examination of the works by an artist who has been remarkably absent from the international discussion of the neo-avant-garde, while it also contributes with perspective on how we can understand the specificity of writing in relation to the permeability between the arts that characterized the neo-avant-garde.

Key words: Åke Hodell, neo-avant-garde, concrete poetry, illegibility, archive, conceptual writing, materiality, visual poetry, text-sound-composition, intermedia, technology and writing.