



International Symposium

Embodied Words

Concrete and Visual Poetry in Italy and Belgium in the 60s and 70s

Italian Cultural Institute, Brussels

May 24 – 25, 2018

Press Release

“Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses. . . And to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life.”

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1953

Stemming from Italian and Russian Futurism, German Dadaism, French *Simultanéisme* and *Lettrism*, the analytical reflection on language and the dialectical tension between words and images have deeply informed art and literature in the second half of the twentieth century. Fostering a total intermediality, whose trespassing dynamics integrates “theater, photography, music, painting, typography, cinematographic techniques, and every other aspect of culture, in a utopian ambition to return to origins” (A. Spatola, 1969), the international experiences of Concrete and Visual Poetry have critically re-elaborated the great history of the Avant-Garde, radicalizing the controversial relationship between verbal and figurative arts.

Conceived and organized by **Maria Elena Minuto** and **Dalila Colucci**, *Embodied Words* aims at reconstructing and evaluating a unique chronotope of the artistic and literary Neo-Avant-Garde, focusing on Italy and Belgium in the Sixties and Seventies, whose original exchanges led to the production of fundamental anthologies, art magazines, and *livres d'artiste*. Publications such as *Poëzie in fusie. Visueel Konkreet Fonetisch* (1968), *Lotta Poetica* (1971-75), *Il Libro 1968-1971* (1971), and exhibitions like *Sound Texts Concrete Poetry Visual Texts* (1970) and *Artist's Books, cento libri d'artista cento* (1978) are just a few examples of this rich *corpus*, still largely unexplored. How have these exceptional works radically renewed the semiology of the book and the substance of poetry? How did the intellectual contacts between the two countries spread and fueled the revolution of and on the artistic and literary language? What is it that connects and divides the theoretical and formal elaborations arising from such dynamics with respect to Pop Art, Fluxus's experimentations, and Conceptual Art?

The contributions of art historians and literary critics, enhanced by the presence of some of the protagonists of that time, will thus focus on the entanglements and the specificities at the very core of Poetic Concretism and Visuality: the materiality of writing; the ability to read words and images as manifestations of a single thought; the pursuit of a metalinguistic dimension; the speculation on the relationships among art, literature, and ideology. From Paul De Vree's *De Tafelronde* to the intersemiotic experiments carried out by Emilio Villa and Martino Oberto, from Alain Arias-Misson's *Poèmes publics* to Vincenzo Agnetti's *de-écritures*, this conference rediscovers a poetic and artistic universe of extraordinary reach, “to feel with ears and eyes” (A. Lora Totino, 1972).

Information and contacts

May 24, 15.30 – 18.00 / May 25, 10.00 – 18.30

Open to the public

Language: English

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UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO
DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE AND ENVIRONMENT



Embodied Words Concrete and Visual Poetry in Italy and Belgium in the 60s and 70s

In March 1964, the Brussels-based experimental magazine *Phantomas* published a small idiosyncratic anthology, entitled “Poésie italienne de la nouvelle avant-garde.” Martino Oberto, who had edited the selection with his wife Anna, introduced its transformative criteria in verse: “...il s’agit alors d’une extraction nouvelle du mot avant-garde / manifestation projet termes du NOUVEAU / ... bien au-delà de l’expérimentalisme quand il s’agit / de trouver de structurer tous les matériaux toutes les techniques / au-delà de la métrique dans un but de manipulation, / dans le faire, à l’intérieur du processus...”^{*} Oberto urged for a reevaluation of the Italian Neo-Avant-Garde, which had been swiftly reduced to the highly-visible Gruppo 63 and to its demystification of communicative codes; he called instead for more integrated cognitive and aesthetic processes, based on the manipulation of all materials and techniques. It was, in other words, the radicalized combination of the analytical reflection on language and the dialectical tension between verbal and visual arts that nourished the anthology, which included, besides the *Novissimi*, some of the main representatives of Concrete and Visual Poetry of the time: Mario Diacono; the Turinese circle of *antipiugù*; and ‘five independent poets’ (i.e. Emilio Villa, Aldo Braibanti, Carlo Belloli, Corrado D’Ottavi, Ugo Carrega). Trying to change the limited perception of the Italian Neo-Avant-Garde from a foreign stage was a brilliant move, not only capable of triggering a compelling international discourse, but bound to open an interstitial, ideal space for the appraisal of the most daring poetic/artistic innovations of the century. Over the subsequent decades, a dense web of exchanges between Italy and Belgium followed, leading to the interaction of Italian experimental groups (based in Florence, Turin, Milan, Naples, and Genoa) with poets like Alain Arias-Misson and Paul De Vree, both of whom attended festivals and public readings organized, among others, by Eugenio Miccini and Lamberto Pignotti. De Vree also established friendship and correspondence with Adriano Spatola, Arrigo Lora Totino, Maurizio Nannucci, and Franco Verdi, partnering with Sarenco in the editing of *Lotta Poetica* (1971-75) and *Factotum-Art* (1977-79). Synergetic anthologies, artists’ books collections, and exhibits – such as *Poëzie in fusie. Visueel Konkreet Fonetisch* (1968), *Il Libro 1968-1971* (1971), *Sound Texts Concrete Poetry Visual Texts* (1970) – came about; while Concrete and Visual researches, practices, and publications independently developed by the two countries upheld this fruitful network, offering important means of translation and cross-borders distribution of different works.

Conceived and curated by **Maria Elena Minuto** and **Dalila Colucci**, *Embodied Words. Concrete and Visual Poetry in Italy and Belgium in the 60s and 70s* aims at reconstructing and evaluating a unique chronotope of the artistic and literary European Neo-Avant-Garde, alongside its rich *corpus* of books, documents, and *ephemera*, still largely unexplored. Keeping in mind the crucial roles of both Italy and Belgium in redefining the imaginative and critical possibilities of poetry in association with groundbreaking forms of intermediality (involving typography, painting, photography, cinema, music, and theater), we would like to draw the attention of art historians and literary experts on a few pivotal questions. What are the most relevant phenomena of Concrete and Visual Poetry in Belgium and Italy during the 60s and 70s? How have they radically renewed the semiology and the aesthetics of the book, transforming the substance of poetry? How did the creative and intellectual contacts between the two countries spread and fueled the revolution *of* and *on* the artistic and literary language? What is it that connects and divides the theoretical and formal elaborations arising from such dynamics with respect to Pop Art, Fluxus’s experimentations, and Conceptual Art? How did Italy’s and Belgium’s editorial choices differ from those of other countries, such as Britain, France, the Netherlands, and the United States (represented, for example, by the art magazines *Art-Language*, *Ou – Cinquième saison*, *Integration*, and *Avalanche*)?

We welcome papers which will address either distinctively Belgian or Italian examples of Visual and Concrete poetical relevance or significant cases of their rich interaction, with the objective of shedding light on the entanglements and specificities at the very core of their hybrid roots: the materiality of writing; the ability to read words and images as manifestations of a single thought; the pursuit of a metalinguistic dimension; and the speculation on the relationship among art, literature, and ideology.

^{*} “OM raisons métaculturelles, sens d’un choix, criterium.” *Phantomas* 45/49 (March 1964): 13.

WORDS LIKE LEAVES
ARE SPELLBOUND IN THE AIR...
STICKY AND SUGGESTIVE

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Istituto Italiano di Cultura di Bruxelles
An International Symposium organized by Maria Elena Minuto
(ENAG, KU Leuven) and Dalila Colucci (Harvard University)

Thursday May 24, 2018

- WELCOME
- 15h30 **Paolo Grossi** | Director, Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Bruxelles
- CONCRETE AND VISUAL POETRY IN ITALY AND BELGIUM IN THE 60s AND 70s
- 15h45 **Maria Elena Minuto** | ENAG, KU Leuven
Performing the Words. The Italian and Belgian Co-authored Artists' Publications
- 16h15 **Jan De Vree** | M HKA, Antwerp
Discontinuity and Coherence: Some Tendencies in the Poetry of Paul De Vree
- 16h45 **Artists in Conversation I**
Nico Dockx and Maurizio Nannucci
Every Book Hides Another Book
- 17h15 Discussion

Friday May 25, 2018

- RE-CODING LANGUAGES, INTERSECTING IMAGES, CONCEPTUALIZING MATTER. ITALIAN EXAMPLES
- Chair: **Iliaria De Seta** | Université de Liège
- 10h00 **Jeffrey Schnapp** | Harvard University
How to Read an Illegible Book
- 10h30 **Giorgio Zanchetti** | Università degli Studi di Milano
"Signatures of All Things I Am Here to Read." Foresight of Conceptual Art in Martino Oberto's Works and Writings
- 11h00 Break

- 11h15 **Cecilia Bello Minciocchi** | Università degli Studi di Roma "La Sapienza"
Intersection of Codes: Visual Poetry and Multilingualism in Emilio Villa
- 11h45 **Andrea Cortellessa** | Università degli Studi "Roma Tre"
Vincenzo Agnetti's de-écritures
- 12h15 Discussion
- 12h45 Break
- 14h00 **Artists in Conversation II**
Alain Arias-Misson and Jan De Vree
Alain Arias-Misson. Floating Words – Angelical Bodies
- 14h30 Discussion
- 15h00 Break

VISUALITY ON DISPLAY. THE ITALIAN AND BELGIAN ART OF PUBLISHING

Chair: **Bart De Baere** | M HKA, Antwerp

- 15h30 **Johan Pas** | Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Antwerp
Labris in CRAP
- 16h00 **Dalila Colucci** | Harvard University
Re-Visualizing Italian Neo-Avant-Garde: the Case of Phantomas
- 16h30 Break
- 16h45 **Dirk De Geest and Bart Vervaeck** | ENAG, KU Leuven
Paul De Vree and De Tafelronde as Advocates of Both a Global and Local Poetics of Visuality in Literature
- 17h15 **Rosanna Gangemi** | Université Libre de Bruxelles / Université Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3
Mirella Bentivoglio, Tomaso Binga, and Ketty La Rocca: the Materialization of Language in Italian Visual Poetry
- 17h45 Discussion and Conclusions