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“Not to Place the Message Completely on One Side Alone, Neither Image Nor Text”
Marcel Broodthaers and the Materiality of Poetic Language (1924-1976)



Marcel Broodthaers, *Chez votre fournisseur (Le Vinaigre des aigles)* (1969)
Enamel on vacuum-formed plastic relief. 82.5 x 119.5 cm

“Je veux inventer la stupéfaction, dit-il, et disparaît avec son idée”.
Marcel Broodthaers, *Le lézard*, in *Pense-Bête*, 1963-1964

“Amoureux des mots, des lettres, il en fait des objets et des images.
Il laisse l’alphabet inventer des formes, les mots les classer, les phrases les rythmer”.
Jean Dypreau, *Le Corbeau et le Renard*, 1967

Key figure of the European counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s, Belgian poet and artist Marcel Broodthaers (1924-1976) places language (poetic, visual, pictorial, cinematic) at the core of his poignant and allegorical subversions creating a world of thermoformed texts, written objects and screen alphabets in which *Baudelaire peint – Magritte écrit* (1972).

Inspired by nineteenth-century art (David – Ingres – Wiertz – Courbet) and with the aim to “grasp reality as well as that which reality conceals” (M.B., 1972), Broodthaers' work engaged with literary paintings, visual poems and poetic objects “guilty in the sense as language and innocent in the sense of language as art” (M.B., 1974). Writer of eagles, zodiac animals and “perfectly shaped jellyfish”, the artist painted rooms of words, dedicated films to Kurt Schwitters and made the image of *Un Coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard* by Stéphane Mallarmé (1897) redefining the critical, aesthetic and conceptual possibilities of art in association with groundbreaking forms of intermediality including poetry, paintings, artists' publications, photography and cinema.

Under the aegis of La Fontaine, René Magritte and Marcel Duchamp, mistrustful of the Conceptual Art and Institutional Critique and convinced that “there are no Primary Structures apart from the language that defines them” (M.B., 1968), Broodthaers calls into question the “auratic status of art objects under the reign of the culture industry” (Buchloh, 1987) and reflects on the controversial relationship between ideology and power, exhibition contexts and audiences, society and museum:

“the colossal mirror in which man, finally contemplating himself from all sides, and finding himself literally an object of wonder” (Bataille, 1930).

In the same years in which Joseph Beuys explained to a dead hare the meaning of some paintings hanging in a room (*Wie man dem toten Hasen die Bilder erklärt*, 1965), Daniel Buren staged *Exposition d'une exposition, une pièce en 7 tableaux* (1972) and Wolf Vostell installed the first version of *Endogene Depression* (1975) in a room of the Sprengel Museum Hannover with turkeys, cement and televisions, Broodthaers utilized “the object as a zero word” (M.B., 1974) and performed the transformation of art into commodity fetishism dedicating the most irreverent and obstinate work of his life, the *Musée des Aigles* (1968-72), to a predatory bird, the eagle i.e. “the messenger of Jupiter whose multiple heads recount the history of arms as an aspect of art” (M.B., 1974).

Without losing sight of the theories and movements of the international artistic neo-avant-garde (from minimalism to postmodernism, from pop art to Art and Language), and in order to prompt a dynamic and interdisciplinary debate on the issues, the intervention aims at reconstructing and assessing the pivotal role of written, visual and spoken language in Broodthaers' interartistic practices (poems, artists' books, installations, films, open letters, objects): starting from the collection of poems *Pense-Bête* (1963-64), through the multimedia work *Le Corbeau et le Renard* (1967-68), up to the analysis of the *Poèmes industriels* (1968-72) entitled *Chez votre fournisseur (Le Vinaigre des aigles)* (1969), *Téléphone* (1968) and *Multiplié illimité* (1968).

Signed and certified by Piero Manzoni “œuvre d'art authentique et véritable” at the Saint-Laurent gallery in Brussels (1962), Marcel Broodthaers wrote in 1975: “My alphabet is painted. All of this is quite obscure. The reader is invited to enter in this darkness”.

Key-words: Marcel Broodthaers; Neo-Avant-Garde; Poetry; Artists' Publications; Intermediality; Interdisciplinarity.

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