

Art | Theory | Criticism | Politics

OCTOBER

42

BROODTHAERS

*Writings, Interviews,
Photographs*

edited by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh

*essays by Rainer Borgemeister,
Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Yves
Gevaert, Michael Oppitz, Birgit
Pelzer, Anne Rorimer, Dieter
Schwarz, and Dirk Snauwaert*

*bibliography by Marie-Pascale
Gildemyn*

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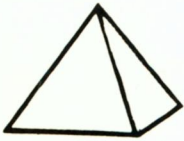


FIG.1

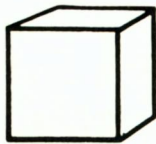


FIG.2



FIG.3



FIG.4

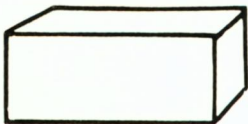


FIG.5



FIG.6



FIG.7

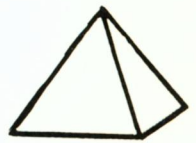


FIG.8

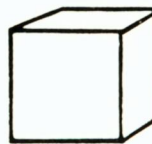


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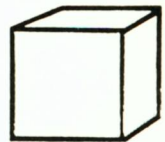


FIG.10



FIG.1

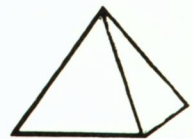


FIG.2

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*Back cover: Marcel Broodthaers. Untitled Poem.
1966–68. Frontispiece: Marcel Broodthaers. Pipe et
Formes Académiques. 1969–70.*

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Introductory Note

Just over a decade after the death of the Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers in January 1976, his work appears to be confronted with the alternatives of oblivion or academic exhumation. At the same time, it seems almost impossible to avoid the consecration implied in a commemorative project such as this one. But neither oblivion nor canonization, neither margin nor center are appropriate to Broodthaers's work. And while this project must assume responsibility for whatever consequences it might engender, elevation of Broodthaers to the status of master, and the personal cult that such status often generates, would be the least appropriate reception of the work.

While the original impulse to edit this issue was occasioned in part by the tenth anniversary of Broodthaers's death, it also originated in the desire to counteract both the work's obscurity and the falsification inherent in its art historical institutionalization. Moreover, it was our desire to have Marcel Broodthaers's work reconsidered (or rather, since it is all but unknown in the United States, to suggest it for a first consideration) in relation to currently dominant cultural practices and their respective capacity and willingness to reflect upon their discursive, institutional, and economic status.

With the canny clairvoyance of the materialist, Broodthaers anticipated, as early as the mid-1960s, the complete transformation of artistic production into a branch of the culture industry, a phenomenon which we only now recognize. A pessimist of the intellect, he foresaw that the radical institutional critique of his late '60s peers would end in a mere expansion of the field of exclusively spatial, plastic, and aesthetic concerns. He equally distrusted the contestation of the commodity status of the work of art by language and theory alone. Broodthaers's work thus seems all the more appropriate for consideration now that the "rediscovery" of conceptual art has become a strategy for the launching of a new generation of artistic products, and that the mimicry of the language of political critique is seamlessly fused with that of artistic product promotion. After all, the publicly performed act of strategic cooptation, the utter triumph of the commercial over the "political," was in and of itself the most thrilling advertising coup of the past aesthetic season. It is in the light of this situation that we should perhaps

consider Broodthaers's almost phobic resistance to incorporating elements of a language of political instrumentality into his own artistic production. Nevertheless, he defended such practices concretely and specifically when the need to do so occurred.

Evidently it would require the genius of a Jacques Offenbach, with whom Broodthaers occasionally proclaimed affinity, to address a situation in which art investors and speculators become founders of their own contemporary art museums, curators of their own exhibitions, and writers of their own catalogue copy. Or a situation where the reverse is also true, in which the art historian and the museum curator—once assumed to perform a public and independent function—are reduced to institutional management of private art investment. Thus we witness the transformation of one of the last remaining institutions of the bourgeois public sphere—the art museum—into the site where state and private power, ideological and economic interest are culturally legitimized, while the myth of public cultural experience is maintained. It therefore seems appropriate to reconsider at this time both the rigorous critique of the museum that Broodthaers's work performed and the critical potential of the seemingly conservative dimension inherent in Broodthaers's melancholic contemplation of the loss of the museum's historical function.

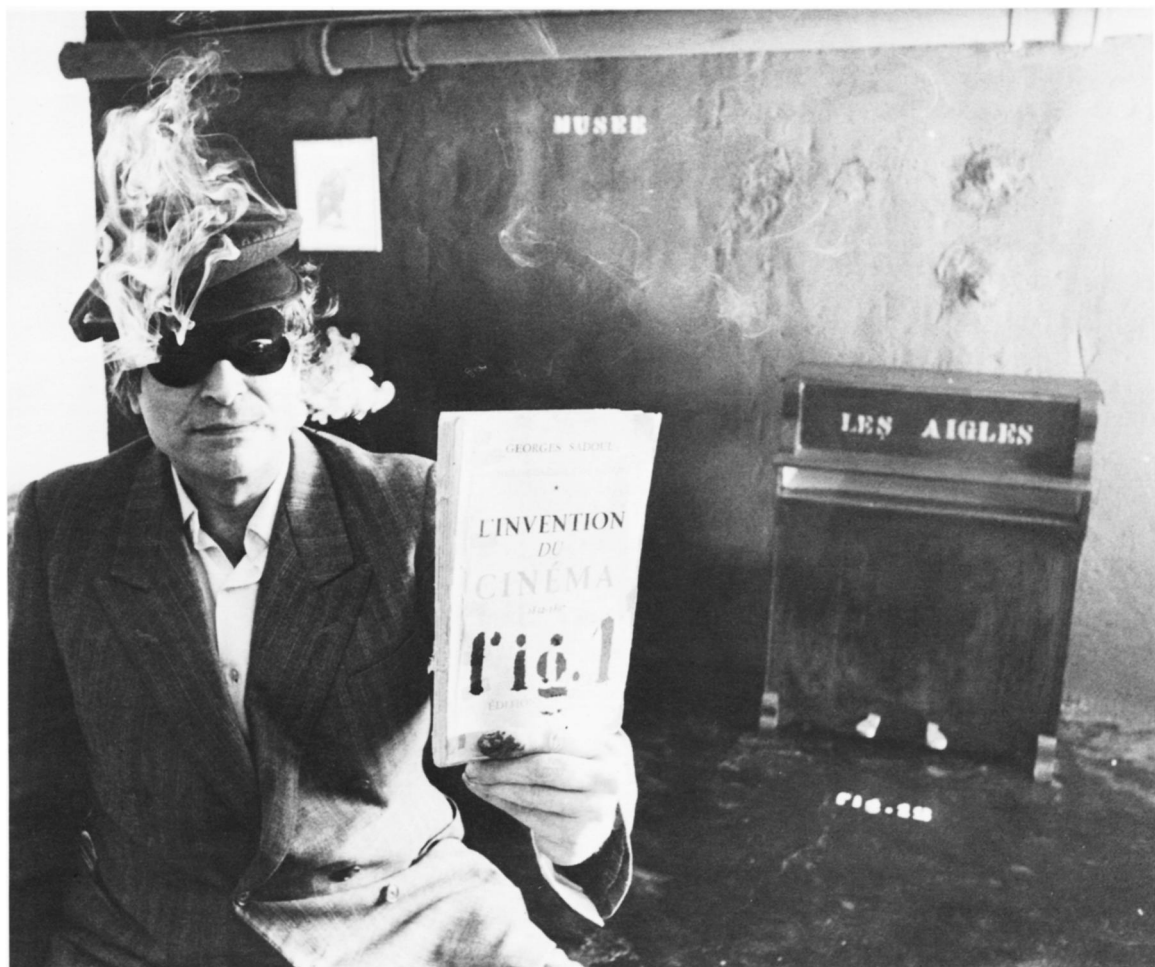
*

This project has been a collaborative effort of many individuals, to whom I express my gratitude. First of all to Maria Gilissen, Marcel Broodthaers's widow, who gave most generously of her time for consultation, and who allowed us to publish both previously unpublished and untranslated texts and photographs by Marcel Broodthaers. Maria Gilissen's constant challenge of simplistic and falsifying readings of Broodthaers's work have been a tremendous source of learning for me. The four editors of *October* enthusiastically supported this project from its inception, and I wish to thank each of them for their many contributions. Annette Michelson's special knowledge of French has been invaluable in editing a collection in which most of the material was translated from that language. Rosalind Krauss's editorial advice was especially helpful in the preparation of my own contribution. I most want to thank Douglas Crimp, with whom I have worked closely on every detail of this project, and whose extreme editorial care and competence made this issue what it is.

I am obviously indebted to the individual contributors, who are present with their work. But I am indebted as well to a number of individuals who have helped in many ways to make this project possible without appearing in the table of contents, in particular Yve-Alain Bois, Marie-Puck Broodthaers, Terri Cafaro, Denis Hollier, Nan Rosenthal, Gerd Sander, and Cathy Scott.

BENJAMIN H. D. BUCHLOH

*Marcel Broodthaers in his Musée d'Art Moderne,
Département des Aigles, Section Cinéma, Düsseldorf,
1971. (Photo: Joachim Romero.)*



Il nous ont dit
Ne Tuez pas et ils
méritaient la mort.
Aimez Votre prochain.

Ils ont dessinés
des poutres entre les A et sur les T
Ils ont fait des images
Ils ont dit que nous étions des enfants,
Ils nous (ont) empêché de lire les textes,
car il n'y a pas une ligne qui ne les condamne.
Les belles lettres
ça bouche les yeux,
Ils ont mis du Jazz dans mon langage
Et le jazz, c'est de
l'ouate. Silence! Silence!
Enfants et poissons
ils vont nous jeter à la mer
ils vont nous jeter en prison
Ils n'ont plus de visages.

Untitled Poem

translated by PAUL SCHMIDT

They said to us
Thou shalt not kill and they
deserved to die themselves.
Thou shalt love Thy neighbor.

They drew rafters
inside the A's and on top of the T's
They made images
They told us we were children,
They kept us from reading the texts,
since there is not a line which does not condemn them.
Belles lettres
plugs the eyes,
they filled my language with Jazz and jazz
is cotton stuffing. Silence! Silence!
Children and fishes
they will throw us into the sea
they will throw us into prison
They have lost their faces.

Nous sommes à la fin d'un juillet humide,
j'ai le besoin de découvrir l'azur qui serait
mystique. Je me remémore les
bleus que j'ai vus chez les Anciens,
sur plus d'un manteau de la vierge, et
le bleu lointain qui sert de ciel inaltérable
aux scènes conventionnelles de la Passion.
Ces azurs de théâtre que j'ai
voulu sonder et dont il me reste
en mémoire
le véritable souvenir, celui d'une matière
traitée parfaitement. Azur, lieu
informe des constructions, Golgatha et Tour
de Babel, Matière.
La première étape
de la plupart de mes voyages fut l'antique
rêverie, approximation aussi
approchée et aussi éloignée de la *fulgurante*
idée à son point de départ que pendant
sa course à son point d'arrivée,
sommeil ou extase, repos de l'idée. L'image
courant après l'image, solitude provoquée
par un refus plus [profond].*

Azure

translated by JOHN SHEPLEY

We've come to the end of a wet July,
what I need is to discover a mystical
azure. I remember the
blues I've seen in the Old Masters,
on more than one mantle of the Virgin, and
the distant blue that serves as inalterable sky
for conventional scenes of the Passion.
Those theatrical blues that I
wanted to plumb and of which the true memory,
that of matter
perfectly handled, has stayed
in my mind. Azure, formless
construction site, Golgotha and Tower
of Babel, Matter.
The first stage
of most of my journeys has been the ancient
daydream, an approximation as
close to and far from the *brilliant*
idea at its point of departure as during
its flight to its point of arrival,
sleep or rapture, the idea's repose. Image
in pursuit of image, solitude provoked
by a more [profound]* denial.

*The word *profound* is crossed out in the original manuscript.

Questions de *peinture*

La peinture de Franz Hals est-elle
faite d'une matière empoisonnée?
Et celle de Goya?
Chacun traitant le visage humain
d'une manière subtile.
Ces tableaux ont-ils un parfum pervers
comme l'éloge monstrueux dont
ils sont victimes?

Est-ce au critique qu'il faut
adresser ces questions?
Ou à l'organisateur d'expositions?

Questions of *Painting*

translated by JOHN SHEPLEY

Is the painting of Frans Hals
done with poisonous matter?
And the one of Goya?
Both treating the human face
in a subtle manner.
Have these paintings a perverse odor
like the monstrous praise of which
they are victims?

Is it to critics that one should
address these questions?
Or to the organizer of exhibitions?

Art poétique

Le goût du secret et la pratique de l'hermétisme, c'est tout un et pour moi, un jeu favori. Mais ici, je veux dévoiler les sources de mon inspiration, cette fois, abandonnant toute pudeur.

Les ouvrages juridiques, souvent, excitèrent mon imagination. La place que le mot y occupe est une place nette. L'ambiguïté du Droit tient sans doute à l'interprétation du texte; à l'esprit et non à la lettre.

Le mot dans les codes brille comme un solitaire. Eh bien, voilà qui me passionna depuis que je sus lire. Passion dangereuse, passion obsédante dont voici un résultat maigre, quelques poèmes détournés de leur nature de gens et de choses.

Voici un extrait de mon livre de chevet:

Selections from *Pense-Bête* 1963–64

translated by PAUL SCHMIDT

Ars Poetica

A taste for secrecy, hermetic practices, for me they're all one, and a favorite game. But I mean to cast shame aside and reveal my sources of inspiration.

Works of jurisprudence have often excited my imagination. Each word in them has its place, a very precise place. The ambiguities of law surely derive from differing interpretations of the text, from the spirit and not from the letter.

Words in statutes shine like diamonds. So there you have it, a passion of mine since I first learned to read. A dangerous passion, an obsession, whose meager results you have here, a few poems deflected from their natural state, from people and from things.

Here is a selection from my bedtime reading:

Le Porc

Ces morceaux précieux

cotelettes jambons tête

foulard en porcelaine

oreilles sur le groin de l'étal. . .

Je lis dans tes yeux minuscules un livre enfantin.

Pork

Precious morsels

chops hams head

porcelain collar

ears on the snout of the counter. . .

I read in your tiny eyes a children's book.

Le Perroquet

On appelle les renforts.

On tire. Il riposte à coups de brumes.

Déjà il crie d'un autre monde.

Il se gonfle. Il va passer.

(Il répète vive la liberté)

The Parrot

Reinforcements are sent for.

They open fire. He responds with an attack of fog.

Already he screams from another world.

He inflates himself. He will pass on.

(He repeats *vive la liberté*)

Le Cancrelat et le Boa

Enfin, je vois clair en moi-même. J'ai peur d'être vu.

Je suis un boa,

c'est la chose la plus terrible qui puisse arriver à un serpent.

The Cockroach and the Boa

At last I see through myself. I'm afraid of being seen.

I am a boa,

it's the most terrible thing that can happen to a snake.

Le petit doigt

Verre à pied.

Il s'est renversé. Il fait le clown.

Le bœuf.

Sur la langue, il fait le funambule. Il réussit.

Les asticots.

Ils se coupent en quatre. Ils n'arrêtent pas de se couper.

Le lézard.

Je veux inventer la stupéfaction, dit-il, et il disparaît avec son idée.

The Little Finger

Stemware.

Turning over. Clowning around.

The Ox.

Tightrope walker on a tongue. And good at it.

Maggots.

They subdivide. And never stop.

The Lizard.

I want to invent amazement, he says, and vanishes with his idea.

L'Index

Pense-bête.

Je fais carrière dans le marbre, j'ai de la veine.

La maison.

Où Tranche-Montagne creuse l'abîme, elle fait son trou.

Les chiens.

Celui de mon maître était remarquable. Un vrai chien aveugle.

L'eau.

Tout ce qu'elle étreint est plus petit qu'elle.

The Index Finger

The House.

Where Captain Courageous hollows his abyss, the house holes up.

The Dogs.

My master had a remarkable one. A real blind dog.

Water.

Everything it embraces is smaller than itself.

La Moule

Cette roublarde a évité le moule de la société.

Elle s'est coulée dans le sien propre.

D'autres, ressemblantes, partagent avec elle l'anti-mer.

Elle est parfaite.

The Mussel

This clever thing has avoided society's mold.

She's cast herself in her very own.

Other look-alikes share with her the anti-sea.

She's perfect.*

* Translation by Michael Compton. Broodthaers's play on the difference between *la moule* (mussel) and *le moule* (mold) is lost in English. On the preceding two pages, the verse "Pense-bête" is left untranslated, as none of its word play can be captured in English.—ed.

La Méduse.

Elle est parfaite

Pas de moule

Rien que le corps

Grenade sortie de sables.

Baiser pur où les lèvres ne s'abîment.

Mariée. Toujours mariée en paroles éclatantes.

Cristal du mépris enfin précieux, ce crachement vague, vague.

The Jellyfish

It's perfect

No mold

Nothing but body

Pomegranate set in sand.

Kiss of lips unspoiled.

Bride. Always a bride, in dazzling terms.

Crystal of scorn, of great price at last, gob of spit, wave, wavering.

Investigating Dreamland

MARCEL BROODTHAERS

translated by PAUL SCHMIDT

(first version)

A chair. Sitting down in a chair. Not moving (photographic surveillance). Not letting the inner delirium show. Get well, that's what you have to do. Get rid of whatever has a form. Certainty. The end of the world. Fill yourself with terror, top to toe.

I spent my vacation practicing immobility. Sitting in a chair puts you into a void. A device for thinking about writing. Three months later I'd built up enough vertigo to justify a breath of air. (I got up.) I'll never write another line, I said to the Future. The lines in my hand will have to do. They're already written down.

Like the phantom of Mallarmé, whom I could not understand, I've now become a tourist. City light captivated me, such beautiful images. Finally I went back to bed, and I sleep there now. I make movies (make a scene) as a spectator. Do you have to pay to get in? Is my freedom worth a question like that? (Money won't ever matter between us, neither will politics, no politics, please, except the chair.)

It's too early in the season. It's hot. The season begins with a torn moon. In that old engraving, the clouds are torn. And the moon looks torn too. Sometimes I talk to it to prove I'm still alive, like pinching yourself. The life I lead changes from moonrise to moonrise. The moons have me cornered in this narrow sector, a street of some kind. My life as city. Nothing being built, for the moment. Everything stays the way it is.

(second version)

A chair. Sitting down in a chair. Above all, not moving. Not letting the inner delirium show, any movement brings it on. (Must get rid of this illness, mustn't think. Get rid of whatever has a form once and for all. Certainty. The end of the world.)

I spent my vacation practicing immobility. Sitting in a chair puts you into a void. A device for thinking about writing. Three months later I'd built up enough vertigo to justify a breath of air. (I got up.) I'll never write another line, I said to the Future. The lines in my hand will have to do. They're already written down.

Like the phantom of Mallarmé, whom I could not understand, I'm a tourist. City light captivated me, such beautiful images. Finally I went back to bed and I sleep there now, in black and white. I make movies (make a scene) as a spectator. Do you have to pay to get in? Is my freedom worth a question like that?

Death is seductive, I say to my English governess, who also is. Do you think so . . . I talk to her just to prove I'm still alive, like pinching yourself. If I don't say anything, she talks to me, just to let me know she's still alive. The fact is we don't have anything to talk about.

Three years ago, I knocked at the door of O. Dominguez.

1960

Gare au défi*
Pop Art, Jim Dine, and the
Influence of René Magritte

MARCEL BROODTHAERS

translated by PAUL SCHMIDT

First, let's think back to the ensembles by George Segal shown last month at the Sonnabend Gallery in Paris. This exhibition was the high point of "nouveau réalisme" and "pop art," which are so much talked about at the moment. Figurative art, perhaps, but so stripped down that it seems to fall into a special void. Segal's figures are crude casts of human beings caught in moments of everyday life. One man bends over the shining glass top of a pinball machine. Another sits on a crummy bench, holding a cheap china mug. The pinball machine and the mug are real objects. They are products made in a factory, not in an artist's studio. Nothing is to be expected from Segal's figures. Where do they come from? Why do they seem to threaten so? What strange lunar world produced them? I cannot say that they express terror without revealing my own terror. In this case we do not transcend the level of the found object, or rather that of invention. Such an extraordinary invention that it cancels out all the powers of imagination—or, on the contrary, sets them free. That depends on the viewer's tendencies. The result is the same. The viewer has no other point of comparison than himself. This is Narcissus triumphant. This is black humor, so black it blinds us. This is, in fact, a lot of things at once.

Segal comes out of the American universe, like Jim Dine, whose work will be shown at the Galerie Aujourd'hui in Brussels beginning in November 1963. It's tempting to compare our city and a middle-sized American city, Boston for instance. Those towers rising against the sky . . . We didn't build them just for the birds. I mean that the show comes to us here appropriately. Jim Dine is also a child of delirium. This gallery space—narrow, perhaps too secretive—is just what he needed.

Although they by no means specialize in the genre, the Galerie Aujourd'hui has occasionally shown artists for whom black or absurd humor is the essential ideal. For example, the Italian Piero Manzoni, with his tubes of perfume carefully displayed in glass cases, or his paintings made of pliable mineral wool. Manzoni is dead, I mean physically. He died young. Is there any connection between this premature death and his chosen artistic stance? The humor he employed is clearly no easy position. And if that was the cause, then we have

* The untranslatable title appears to be a Belgian idiomatic expression, meaning "Beware! Defiance!" It possibly refers to Louis Aragon's essay "La peinture au défi."

Marcel Broodthaers and René Magritte, 1968. (Photo: Maria Gilissen.)



some serious questions to ask of the art world—of the world in general. Manzoni will certainly be listed in the book of terrors of the twentieth century. Also the Frenchman Arman, who is, thank God, in good health. We remember his accumulation of objects in glass-covered boxes; manometers, dolls' heads, all intended for some industrial museum or other.

Beginning November 16th it will be Jim Dine's turn. He will be showing large-scale paintings with a kind of shelf attached, something like a mantelpiece. One is a painting of a bowler hat, and (stroke of genius!) on the shelf is a real bowler hat. Only not quite, because it is covered with a layer of paint (black), and it seems to have stuck. Casual, burlesque, American features that evoke film comedy. His means are rather sparse, elementary, but still pictorial. This bursts the limits . . . although the road to hell (certainly) has none.

There is a label for these Americans who fly in the face of harmony and good taste. Pop art, it's called. Pop is an abbreviation for popular, although this art is far from deriving its power from popular or folk sources. Pop art is a blow-up of a soft-drink bottle, also a can of soup painted with photographic precision. Pop art originates in pamphlets, in provocation, in poetry. It hurls a curse, and calls down insult and contempt upon itself in return. In a recent issue of *L'Express*, Pierre Schneider had this to say about Pop art: "The person who created this art—these paintings that make you laugh with scorn or that turn your stomach—the person whose only means of expression lie in choosing among the consumer goods someone else proposes to him—that person is you."

All these artists continue to work on the road to hell that was begun by dada—another international movement. Very well then, long live dada, long live dadapop, long live Jim Dine.

Marcel Duchamp and Kurt Schwitters, especially the latter, however destructive their intentions may have been, produced work that belonged within the rigorous domain of the plastic arts. So we cannot look to them, or to Max Ernst, for the original source of this "unfortunate" movement. Let us rather look to René Magritte, a Belgian who remained within our narrow frontiers, but who certainly influenced and determined the course of this entire artistic movement now flourishing in New York. Magritte denies the aesthetic nature of painting (which does not prevent him, almost in spite of himself, from creating some beautiful paintings). *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* is the title of a painting as enigmatic as the smile of the Mona Lisa. It is very well known in New York. All of Magritte's paintings are very well known in New York. Magritte is famous. Still faithful to his initial purpose, he continues to elaborate a poetic language aimed at undermining that upon which we depend.

Jim Dine's life-size bowler hat is, I imagine, intended as a salute to Magritte. Does all this need an explanation? Is there any other explanation than the context of a world devoted to advertisements, overproduction, and horoscopes?

To be *bien pensant* . . . or not
to be. To be blind.

MARCEL BROODTHAERS

translated by PAUL SCHMIDT

What is Art? Ever since the nineteenth century the question has been posed incessantly to the artist, to the museum director, to the art lover alike. I doubt, in fact, that it is possible to give a serious definition of Art, unless we examine the question in terms of a constant, I mean the transformation of art into merchandise. This process is accelerated nowadays to the point where artistic and commercial values have become superimposed. If we are concerned with the phenomenon of reification, then Art is a particular representation of the phenomenon—a form of tautology. We could then justify it as affirmation, and at the same time carve out for it a dubious existence. We would then have to consider what such a definition might be worth. One fact is certain: commentaries on Art are the result of shifts in the economy. It seems doubtful to us that such commentaries can be described as political.

Art is a prisoner of its phantasms and its function as magic; it hangs on our bourgeois walls as a sign of power, it flickers along the peripeties of our history like a shadow-play—but is it artistic? To read the Byzantine writing on the subject reminds us of the sex of angels, of Rabelais, or of debates at the Sorbonne. At the moment, inopportune linguistic investigations all end in a single gloss, which its authors like to call criticism. Art and literature . . . which of the moon's faces is hidden? And how many clouds and fleeting visions there are.

I have discovered nothing here, not even America. I choose to consider Art as a useless labor, apolitical and of little moral significance. Urged on by some base inspiration, I confess I would experience a kind of pleasure at being proved wrong. A guilty pleasure, since it would be at the expense of the victims, those who thought I was right.

Monsieur de la Palice is one of my customers.* He loves novelties, and he, who makes other people laugh, finds my alphabet a pretext for his own laughter. My alphabet is painted.

All of this is quite obscure. The reader is invited to enter into this darkness to decipher a theory or to experience feelings of fraternity, those feelings that unite all men, and particularly the blind.

1975

* Monsieur de la Palice is the character of a French folk song who pronounces truisms. A typical *lapalissade* would be "Two hours before his death, he was still alive."—ed.

An Interview with Marcel Broodthaers by the Film Journal *Trépiéd*

In 1957 Marcel Broodthaers made La Clef d l'Horloge, an eight minute, 16 mm film about the work of Kurt Schwitters. In 1967 he made Le Corbeau et le Renard, a seven minute color film that was shown at Knokke, although the selection committee had turned it down.*

Trépiéd: M. Broodthaers, your curriculum vitae shows that film is not your only activity. Could you tell us then what film means to you?

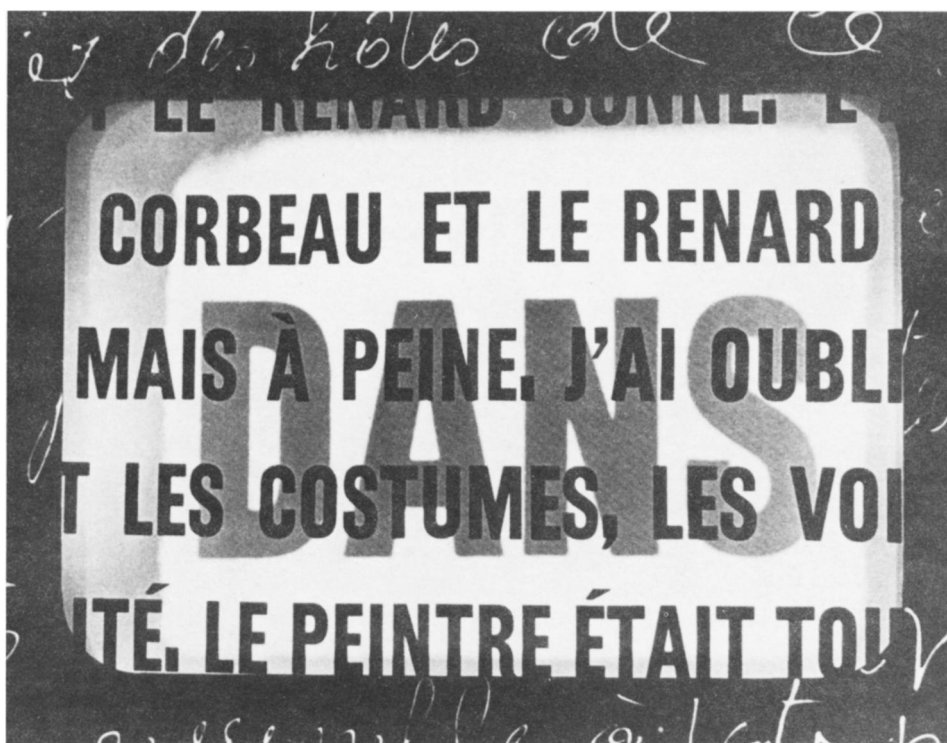
Broodthaers: Before I answer, I'd like to say that I am not a filmmaker. For me, film is simply an extension of language. I began with poetry, moved on to three-dimensional works, finally to film, which combines several artistic elements. That is, it is writing (poetry), object (something three-dimensional), and image (film). The great difficulty lies, of course, in finding a harmony among these three elements.

Trépiéd: How did you manage to find that harmony in *Le Corbeau et le Renard*?

Broodthaers: I went back to La Fontaine's text and transformed it into what I call personal writing (poetry). I had my text printed and placed before it various everyday objects (boots, a telephone, a bottle of milk) which were meant to form a direct relationship with the printed letters. It was an attempt to deny, as far as possible, meaning to the word as well as to the image. When I'd finished shooting, I realized that once the film was projected onto a regular screen, I mean a plain white canvas, it didn't exactly give me the image I had intended to create.

There was still too much distance between object and text. In order to integrate text and object, I would have to print on the screen the same typographic characters I had used in the film. My film is a rebus, something you have to want to figure out. It's a reading exercise.

* The International Festival of Independent Film, organized by Jacques Ledoux, Director of the Royal Belgian Film Archive, and held every seven years.



Marcel Broodthaers. *Le Courbeau et le Renard*.
1967. *Printed Projection Screen*.

Trépiéd: So it's not a classic film, or a commercial film, more like an experimental film. Perhaps an "anti-film"?

Broodthaers: Yes and no. An anti-film is still a film, just as an anti-novel cannot quite help being both book and writing: my film expands the domain of the "conventional" film. It wasn't designed primarily or at least exclusively for a movie house. In order to see and be able to understand the total work I wanted to create, the film must not only be projected onto the printed screen but the viewer must also possess the text. I suppose you could call my film a kind of pop art. It's a "multiple," the kind of thing that has recently been talked about as a means of assuring widespread distribution of art. That's why it will soon be shown in a gallery, where they have printed more than forty copies of the screen and the book. It will be sold as a work of art, each example of which will consist of a film, two screens, and an enormous book. It's an environment.

Trépiéd: You are clearly not interested in the general public. How do you envisage the artist's role?

Broodthaers: Whether he knows it or not, every artist today is engagé. The problem . . . is to be consciously engagé . . . authentically . . . — not to become the object of others' engagement. The seeming engagement of people like Godard and others disturbs me. An artist in Europe no longer has a definite function that he can either accept or reject. His success or failure is merely a matter of chance. He remains marginal to society. This is particularly true in Belgium, where it's clear there is only contempt for the artist. In any case, Belgium has offered the artist no useful support, no support, I mean, that would help him escape the tyranny of chance.

Trépiéd: Where would you prefer to live?

Broodthaers: In the United States, the most advanced industrial country, the country that sent us, among other things, the Living Theater, which I believe will be an influence on all artistic creativity from here on. That is, of course, an artistic opinion, not a political one.

Trépiéd: What are your plans for the future?

Broodthaers: To incorporate more reality into what I do, and to make a film about Vietnam, based on written signs. Nothing like that has been shown at Knokke lately.

Trépiéd: Do you think there is still any future for film?

Broodthaers: I don't believe in film, nor do I believe in any other art. I don't believe in the unique artist or the unique work of art. I believe in phenomena, and in men who put ideas together.

TEN THOUSAND FRANCS REWARD

1. Objects

Do objects function for you as words?

I use the object as a zero word.

Weren't they originally literary objects?

You could call them that, I suppose, although the most recent objects have escaped this denomination, which has a pejorative reputation (I wonder why?). These recent objects carry, in a most sensational manner, the marks of a language. Words, numerations, signs inscribed on the object itself.

Did you, at the beginning of your activity, follow so definite a direction?

I was haunted by a certain painting by Magritte, the one in which words figure. With Magritte, you have a contradiction between the painted word and the painted object, a subversion of the sign of language and that of painting so as to restrict the notion of the subject.

Do you still value any objects?

Yes, a few. They are poetic ones, that is to say, they are guilty in the sense of "art as language" and innocent in the sense of language as art. Those, for example, that I shall describe to you.

A tricolored thighbone entitled *Fémur d'Homme Belge*. Also an old portrait of a general that I picked up in a flea market, I forget where. I made a little hole in the general's tight mouth and inserted a cigar butt. In this object-portrait, there is a fortuitous tonal harmony. The paint is brown, sort of pissy, and so is the cigar butt. Not just any cigar would suit any general's mouth . . . the caliber of the cigar, the shape of the mouth.



Marcel Broodthaers. Painting and Object. 1970.

Would you call it the art of portraiture?

I prefer to believe that it acts like a pedagogical object. The secret of art must, whenever possible, be unveiled—the dead general smokes an extinguished cigar. So, counting the thighbone, I've made two useful objects. I wish I'd been able to do other pieces as satisfying to me as these. But I distrusted the genre. The portrait and the thighbone seem to have the strength to make a dent in the falsity inherent in culture. With the thighbone, nationality and the structure of the human being are united. The soldier is not far behind.

There are many shells, mussels, and eggs in your work. Are these accumulations?

The subject is rather that of the relationship established between the shells and the object that supports them: table, chair, or cooking pot. It's on a table that you serve an egg. But on my table, there are too many eggs, and the knife, the fork, and the plate are absent—absences necessary to give speaking presence to the egg at the table, or to give the spectator an original idea of the chicken.

And the mussels—a dream of the North Sea?

A mussel conceals a volume. When the mussels overflow the pot, they are not boiling over in accord with a physical law, but following the rules of artifice whose purpose is the construction of an abstract shape.

Does this mean that you are close to an academic system?

It is a rhetoric that thrives on the new dictionary of received ideas. I don't so much organize objects and ideas as organize encounters of different functions that all refer to the same world: the table and the egg, the mussel and the pot to the table and to art, to the mussel and to the chicken.

The world of the imaginary?

Or that of sociological reality. It is that for which Magritte did not fail to reproach me. He thought I was more sociologist than artist.

2. Industrial Signalizations

The plaques made of plastic—do they correspond to this sociological reality?

I thought using plastic as a material would free me from the past, since this material didn't exist then. I was so taken with the idea that I forgot that plastic had already been “ennobled” by its appearance on the walls of galleries and museums under the signature of the nouveaux réalistes and American pop. What interested me was the warping of representation when executed in this material.

They were published in editions of seven?

I myself was responsible for the edition, since no gallery would assume the risk of bringing them out at that time. To make them I did get some help from the private sector.

What about the language of these plaques?

Let's call them rebuses. And the subject, a speculation about a difficulty of reading that results when you use this substance. These plaques are fabricated like waffles, you know.

Are these plaques really all that difficult to decipher?

Reading is impeded by the imagelike quality of the text and vice versa. The



Marcel Broodthaers. Rue René Magritte Straat. 1969.

stereotypical character of both text and image is defined by the technique of plastic. They are intended to be read on a double level—each one involved in a negative attitude which seems to me specific to the stance of the artist: not to place the message completely on one side alone, neither image nor text. That is, the refusal to deliver a clear message—as if this role were not incumbent upon the artist, and by extension upon all producers with an economic interest. This could obviously be the beginning of a polemic. The way I see it, there can be no direct connection between art and message, especially if the message is political, without running the risk of being burned by the artifice. Foundering. I prefer signing my name to these booby traps without taking advantage of this caution.

What kind of simpletons do you catch with your plaques?

Well, those who take these plaques for pictures and hang them on their walls. Although there's no proof that the real simpleton isn't the author himself, who thought he was a linguist able to leap over the bar in the signifier/signified formula, but who might in fact have been merely playing the professor.

3. The Figures

Do you situate yourself in a surrealist perspective?

This one I know by heart: “Everything leads us to believe that there exists a state of mind where life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, no longer seem contradictory.” I hope I have nothing in common with that state of mind. With *Ceci n’est pas une pipe* Magritte did not take things so lightly. But then again he was too much Magritte. By which I mean that he was too little *Ceci n’est pas une pipe*. It is with that pipe that I tackled the adventure.

Can you give an example?

You can see in the Mönchengladbach museum a cardboard box, a clock, a mirror, a pipe, also a mask and a smoke bomb, and one or two other objects I can’t recall at this point, accompanied by the expression Fig. 1 or Fig. 2 or Fig. 0 painted on the display surface beneath or to the side of each object. If we are to believe what the inscription says, then the object takes on an illustrative character referring to a kind of novel about society. These objects, the mirror and the pipe, submitted to an identical numbering system (or the cardboard box or the clock or the chair) become interchangeable elements on the stage of a theater. Their destiny is ruined. Here I obtain the desired encounter between different functions. A double assignment and a readable texture—wood, glass, metal, fabric—articulate them morally and materially. I would never have obtained this kind of complexity with technological objects, whose singleness condemns the mind to monomania: minimal art, robot, computer.

The nos. 1, 2, 0 appear figurally. And the abbreviations Fig. poorly in their meaning.

Is this the condition for your feeling at ease with yourself?

What reassures me is the hope that the viewer runs the risk—for a moment at least—of no longer feeling at ease. Be sure to visit the Mönchengladbach museum.

But suppose the viewer gets confused, and sees there an expression comparable to that of the nouveaux réalistes of the 1960s?

My early objects and images—1964–65—could never cause that particular confusion. The literalness linked to the appropriation of the real didn’t suit me, since it conveyed a pure and simple acceptance of progress in art and elsewhere as well. Given that, however, there’s nothing to prevent the viewers

from getting confused, if that's what they want. I do not assume good faith in my viewers or readers—or bad faith either.

Did you begin with an elaborated vision of your project?

I have no idea what my unconscious may have fabricated, and you cannot make me put it into words. I have fabricated instruments for my own use in comprehending fashion in art, in following it, and finally in the search for a definition of fashion. I am neither a painter nor a violinist. It is Ingres who interests me, not Cézanne and the apples.

Why haven't you made use of books or magazines? There are many such means of information available.

As it happens I can more easily apprehend conceptual or other data through the information provided by the specific product (especially my own) than through its mediating theorization. It's much harder for me to grasp things and their implications by reading books—except when the book is the object that fascinates me, since for me it is the object of a prohibition. My very first artistic proposition bears the trace of this curse. The remaining copies of an edition of poems written by me served as raw material for a sculpture.

A spatial object?

I took a bundle of fifty copies of a book called *Pense-Bête* and half-embedded them in plaster. The wrapping paper is torn off at the top of the “sculpture,” so you can see the stack of books (the bottom part is hidden by the plaster). Here you cannot read the book without destroying its sculptural aspect. It is a concrete gesture that passes the prohibition on to the viewer—at least that's what I thought would happen. But I was surprised to find that viewers reacted quite differently from what I had imagined. Everyone so far, no matter who, has perceived the object either as an artistic expression or as a curiosity. “Look! Books in plaster!” No one had any curiosity about the text; nobody had any idea whether this was the final burial of prose or poetry, of sadness or pleasure. No one was affected by the prohibition. Until that moment I had lived practically isolated from all communication, since I had a fictitious audience. Suddenly I had a real audience, on that level where it is a matter of space and conquest.

Is there a difference between audiences?

Today the book of poems in new forms has found a certain audience, which is not to say that the difference does not persist. The second audience has no idea what the first is interested in. If space is really the fundamental element of artistic

construction (form in language and material form), then, after such a strange experience, I could only oppose it to the philosophy of writing with common sense.

What does space conceal?

Isn't it like a game of hide-and-seek? * Of course, the one who's hiding will always say he's somewhere else, and yet he's always there. And you know he'll turn around and catch someone. The interminable search for a definition of space serves only to hide the essential structure of art, a process of reification. Any individual who perceives a function of space, especially a convincing one, appropriates it mentally or economically.

What are your political ideas?

Once I'd begun to make art, my own, the art I copied, the exploitation of the political consequences of that activity (whose theory can be defined only outside the domain where it operates) appeared ambiguous to me, suspect, too angelical. If artistic production is the thing of things, then theory becomes a private property.

Have you ever made art engagé?

I did once. They were poems, concrete signs of engagement since without compensation. My work in those days consisted in writing as few as possible. In the visual arts, my only possible engagement is with my adversaries. Architects are in the same position whenever they work for themselves. I try as much as I can to circumscribe the problem by proposing little, all of it indifferent. Space can only lead to paradise.

Is there any difference between the plastic arts and a disinterested engagement?

. [Silence].

At what moment does one start making indifferent art?

From the moment that one is less of an artist, when the necessity of making puts down its roots in memory alone. I believe my exhibitions depended and still depend on memories of a period when I assumed the creative situation in a heroic and solitary manner. In other words, it used to be: read this, look at this. Today it is: allow me to present . . .

* In French, "Loup, est-tu là?" (Wolf, are you there?).—ed.

Isn't artistic activity—let me be precise: I mean in the context of a circulation in galleries, collections, and museums, that is, whenever others become aware of it—isn't it then the height of inauthenticity?

Given the chosen tactics—to engage in territorial maneuvers—it is perhaps possible to find an authentic means of calling into question art, its circulation, etc. And that might—although it is unclear no matter how you look at it—justify the continuity and expansion of production. What remains is art as production as production.

In such a game of roulette, how do you keep from losing your bet?

There's another risk, no less interesting, to the third or fourth degree. And you don't have to get burned: that is. . . .¹

4. *The Figure of the Eagle*

This sort of claim to embrace artistic forms as far distant from one another as an object can be from a traditional painting—doesn't it remind you of the encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table?

A comb, a traditional painting, a sewing machine, an umbrella, a table may find a place in the museum in different sections, depending upon their classification. We see sculpture in a separate space, paintings in another, ceramics and porcelains . . . , stuffed animals. . . . Each space is in turn compartmentalized, perhaps intended to be a section—snakes, insects, fish, birds—susceptible to being divided into departments—parrots, gulls, eagles.

In 1968, the Musée d'Art Moderne in Brussels, with its packing crates once used for shipping works of art, bearing inscriptions and marked with places of destination—wasn't this the Section XIX Siècle, inaugurated with an address by Dr. J. Cladders of Mönchengladbach?

The wanderings and transformations of this museum have been documented in different publications. The Düsseldorf version in 1972² defined its course. The *Section des Figures* grouped together paintings, sculptures, and objects with a provenance from numerous museums. Each piece was accompanied by a label saying "This is not a work of art"—whether the object was a Sumerian vase with a provenance from the Louvre, a totem from the British Museum, or an advertisement cut out of a magazine (each piece depicted an eagle).

1. 10,000 francs reward to any reader who can replace the dots with a suitable formula.
2. With the support of Karl Ruhrberg and Jürgen Harten and the Kunsthalle administration.

“This is not a work of art” is a formula obtained by the contraction of a concept by Duchamp and an antithetical concept by Magritte. It allowed me to decorate Duchamp’s urinal with the emblem of an eagle smoking the pipe. I think I underlined the principle of authority that has made the symbol of the eagle the colonel of art.

Does this museum continue to avoid becoming a work of art, a pipe?

“This is not a work of art”: the formula is a Figure 0. Each piece in the exhibition in Düsseldorf was a Figure 1 or a Figure 2. Every new stage of this museum enters this rudimentary system in the same way. Let’s go back to what we described above, where a cardboard box becomes the equivalent of a mask, etc. There is a mirror decorated with an eagle—a late eighteenth-century antique—which belongs to a museum association in Ghent. An official mirror, if that’s the phrase, which reflects the virtual image of those eagles whose multiple heads recount the history of arms as an aspect of art. This is the mirror of misunderstanding [*contresens*]. Even though Jupiter’s messenger perches on top, it’s a trick mirror.



Marcel Broodthaers. Object. 1973.

Finally, of which museum are you the director?

Of none at all, unless I were able to define the role and the contents of a museum whose statutes could no longer be read about in the adventures of Forton's *Pieds-Nickelés* or in that painting by Bosch which describes how stones were removed from the heads of those suffering from melancholy.

(Nowadays the scientific tool has replaced the hammer in the hands of the Paracelsuses of the sixteenth century.)

The Musée d'Art Moderne would then be the museum of meaning. It remains to be seen if art exists anywhere else than on the level of negation.

MARCEL BROODTHAERS

after an interview by IRMELINE LEBEER, 1974*

translated by PAUL SCHMIDT

* This interview was originally published in French, and Flemish translation, in *Marcel Broodthaers: Catalogue/Catalogus*, Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts, 1974.

Marcel Broodthaers: A Portfolio of Photographs

The Clown Popov, 1958.

The Poet Marcel Lecomte, 1966.

Untitled, 1959.

Georges Simenon, 1959.

A Feature of the Magritte Residence, 1967.

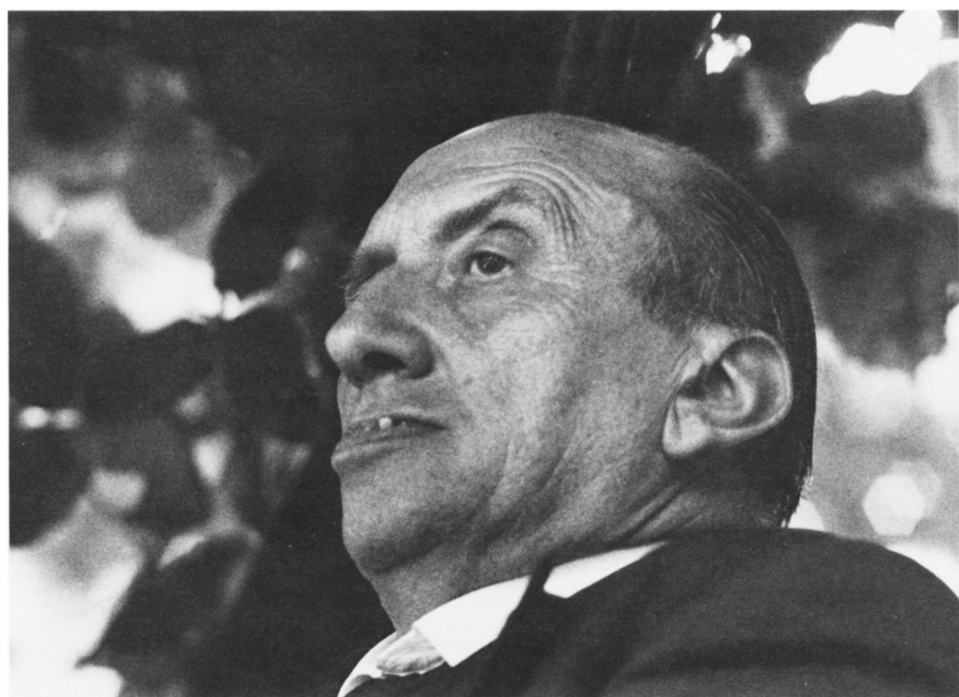
René Magritte, 1967.

On a Dutch Beach (La Gran Marca Mundial), 1958.

From 1958 until 1974 Marcel Broodthaers photographed in Brussels and on his journeys, sometimes in order to illustrate his articles for various magazines and journals. He also employed photography to portray his friends or to complement and parallel his own poetic and artistic ventures.

All photographs are courtesy of the estate of Marcel Broodthaers and were generously provided by Maria Gilissen and the Gerd Sander Gallery, New York.—ed.

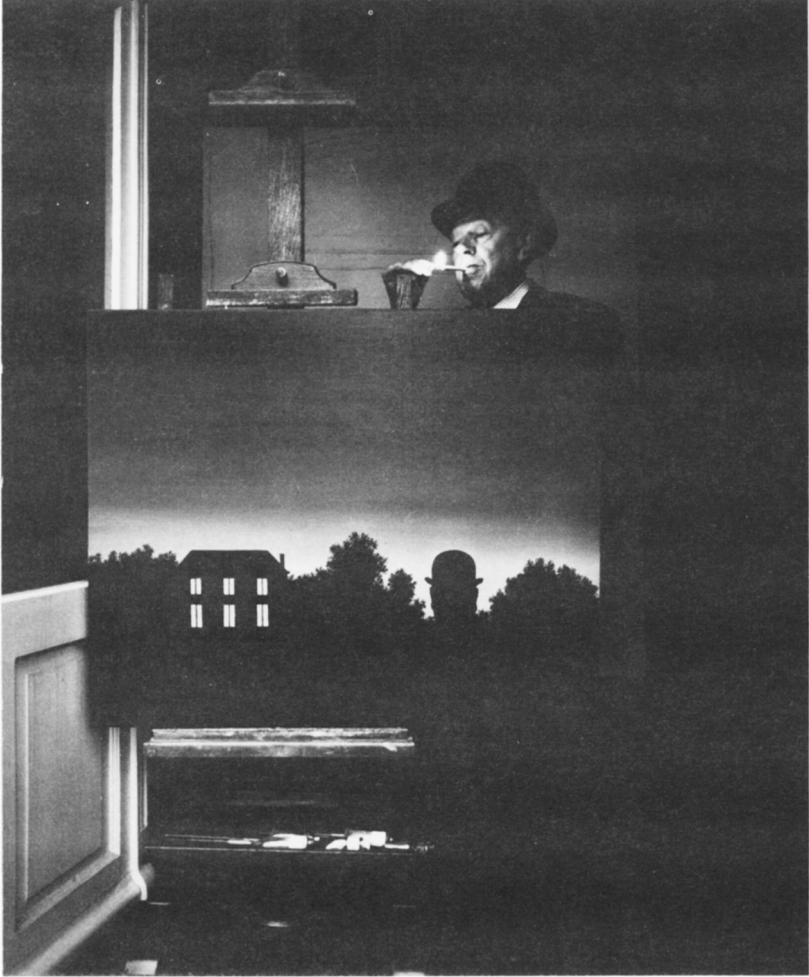














“Look! Books in plaster!”:
On the First Phase of the Work of
Marcel Broodthaers*

DIETER SCHWARZ

*Art is fraud! And he [Mallarmé] explains
how one is only an artist during his working
hours, by an act of will. Things look the
same to everyone, the bus in the street,
etc. . . .*

— Berthe Morisot, Paris, 1885–86

The artistic oeuvre of Marcel Broodthaers, produced from 1963 to 1976, can be divided into three phases, each relating to the other critically, and at the same time, each providing a commentary on the development of contemporary art. Each phase of this work, beginning with its onset in his departure from a twenty-year career as poet, and continuing from one phase of his artistic practice to the other, is marked by works of particular significance.

The first phase, from 1963 to 1967, is begun with the publication of the book *Pense-Bête*,¹ through which Broodthaers formally transformed his status as a poet.² Although the poems included belong to the context of what Broodthaers had been writing at the beginning of the 1960s, particularly in the prose poems of the zodiac cycle of *La Bête Noire*,³ they were no longer issued within an exclusively literary context. Only a small number of books were sold and most of the known copies were actually changed by Broodthaers, who partially or entirely covered certain pages with colored papers. Thus, literally unfurling itself

* An expanded version of this essay is currently under preparation and will be published in the near future.

1. Marcel Broodthaers, *Pense-Bête*, Brussels, 1964. (See *Marcel Broodthaers, Catalogue of Books 1957–1975*, Cologne, Galerie Michael Werner; New York, Marian Goodman Gallery; Paris, Galerie Gillespie, Laage, Salomon, 1982, no. 4.)

2. The poetic activities consisted of three volumes published at an earlier date and publications in journals influenced by Belgian surrealism, such as *Le Ciel Bleu*, *Le Surréalisme Révolutionnaire*, and *Phantomas*.

3. Marcel Broodthaers, *La Bête Noire*, Brussels, 1961.

through space as the reader turned its pages, the book acquired the character of an object.

Mostly, however, within the first phase of his work, one encounters the production of assemblages with eggshells and mussels whose appearance seems at first glance to resemble the works of nouveau réalisme. Frequently Broodthaers also employed the photographic techniques for paintings and objects that had become known in the context of European and American pop art. During these years Broodthaers also engaged in public discussions or in events he himself organized—events situated somewhere between lecture and happening⁴—and he published critical essays on pop art. In 1967 Broodthaers presented all of his works created up to this point in a first “retrospective,” in his exhibition *Court-Circuit* at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels.⁵

The second phase, 1968 to 1972–73, consists of two groups of parallel works. In 1968 Broodthaers initiated the Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, located in his own apartment, in existing museum spaces, and within the framework of a major exhibition of contemporary art (*Documenta V*, 1972). In the context of this fictitious museum, Broodthaers organized exhibitions, published books, disseminated open letters to friends, critics, and institutions (“Section Littéraire”), and produced films (“Section Cinéma”). The other group of works that developed during these years can be identified with the title *Théorie des Figures* and can be considered as a rhetorical analysis of the then dominant discourse of art.

Functioning as the hinge between the first and second phases of his work is *Le Corbeau et le Renard* (1967), consisting of an installation, a book, and a film, and paying homage to La Fontaine. While, as an ensemble of various elements, this object employs the means of the first phase, it also points forward to the exhibition concepts of the Musée d'Art Moderne period.⁶ Accordingly, the two eagle presentations in Düsseldorf and Kassel in 1972 form the conclusion of the second phase of work and announce the third and last phase—which is devoted to a series of retrospective exhibitions under the concept of décor—while marking at the same time the transition from the *Théorie des Figures* to the speculations on the alphabet.⁷

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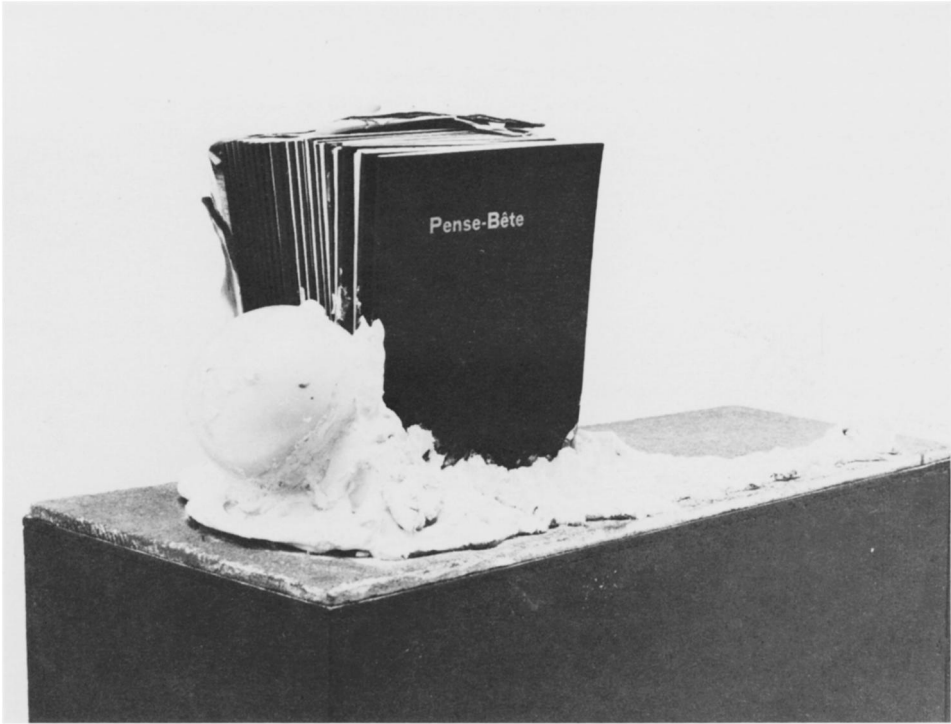
4. Unfortunately these events are only documented by a few photographs.

5. *Court-Circuit*. Marcel Broodthaers, Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts, April 13–25, 1967 (catalogue with checklist).

6. *Le Corbeau et le Renard*, Wide White Space Gallery, Antwerp, March 7–24, 1968 (pamphlet).

7. From the first presentation of the *Jardin d'Hiver* on the occasion of a group exhibition in the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, January 1974, to the large exhibitions in Brussels, Basel, Berlin, Oxford, and Paris, 1974–5.

"Look! Books in plaster!"



Marcel Broodthaers. Pense-Bête. 1964.

In his first exhibition (1964) at the Galerie Saint-Laurent in Brussels,⁸ Broodthaers exhibited, among other objects, a sculpture consisting of the remaining copies of his book *Pense-Bête*; these books, partially still bundled together in the original wrapping paper, were inserted into a base of plaster that barely covered their lower half, allowing them to be removed with ease from the assemblage object. This plaster pedestal extends from the book bundle across a wooden base serving as the support for the assemblage to hold at its other end a plastic ball that Broodthaers had inserted into the soft material. The surface of the plaster is not smooth, but marked by the impressions of fingers. On the whole the work gives the sense of being improvisatory.

But the statement made by this work is certainly not to be understood as autobiographical reminiscence. Broodthaers knows that the personal record can function, as well, as the perfect rhetorical instrument. One can assume, therefore, that the following note is a deliberately placed clue from which to construct

8. Brussels, Galerie Saint-Laurent, April 10–24, 1964.

an original point of departure for his production. "Eighteen months ago," he wrote, "I saw in Paris an exhibition of plaster casts made by [George] Segal. That was the point of departure, the shock that led me to go as far as to make my own works."⁹ In another essay Broodthaers describes his impression of Segal's work more precisely. "Segal's figures are crude casts of human beings caught in moments of everyday life. One man bends over the shining glass top of a pinball machine. Another sits on a crummy bench, holding a cheap china mug. The pinball machine and the mug are real objects. They are products made in a factory, not in an artist's studio. Nothing is to be expected from Segal's figures."¹⁰

Segal's sculptures both conceal their subjects and work against the grain of the reduplicative nature of the casting process. Broodthaers, at one and the same time, continues this idea of concealment in a literal manner (by placing his books with their wrapping into the plaster), yet insists on the condition of the multiple. There the books stand as saleable objects disseminated in packages and not as unique objects produced by means of the plaster cast. The plaster pedestal serves many functions at once: it arrests the mobility of the books and negates their existence as objects of consumption; it establishes a relationship with older artistic practices as implied in the material of plaster itself; it denies the work's relation to the tradition either of the readymade or the surrealist "poetic object," since in these cases access to the object would not be withheld in such a manner. In contradistinction to the readymade, which is selected by its "author," being thereby instated as an aesthetic object, the poems of *Pense-Bête* remain part of a literary discourse, for the author's "statement" is obviously, by its means of presentation (book and typography), inscribed within an existing cultural tradition.

In an ironic gesture Broodthaers feigned surprise when he commented subsequently on the fact that the spectator did not recognize the books as real objects and did not even attempt to appropriate them by reading:

Here you cannot read the book without destroying its sculptural aspect. It is a concrete gesture that passes the prohibition on to the viewer—at least that's what I thought would happen. But I was surprised to find that viewers reacted quite differently from what I had imagined. Everyone so far, no matter who, has perceived the object either as an artistic expression or as a curiosity. "Look! Books

9. "Marcel Broodthaers par Marcel Broodthaers," *Journal des Beaux-Arts*, no. 1086 (1965), p. 5.

10. Marcel Broodthaers, "Gare au défi! Le Pop Art, Jim Dine et l'influence de René Magritte," *Journal des Beaux-Arts*, no. 1029 (November, 1963). This and all subsequent quotations are from the English translation published in this issue, p. 33. I assume that Broodthaers describes here George Segal's sculpture *Gottlieb's Wishing Well*, 1963 (private collection, Brussels) and *Woman in a Restaurant Booth*, 1961–62 (Collection Hahn, Cologne). A photograph by Broodthaers depicting the first work appeared as an illustration to the essay "Les loisirs humiliés ou les appareils à sous," by Roger Caillois in *Journal des Beaux-Arts*, no. 1035 (1963), p. 1.

Marcel Broodthaers. Otto Hahn voisinant un moulage de Segal. 1965. (Altered photograph published in Phantomas, nos. 51–61.)



in plaster!" No one had any curiosity about the text; nobody had any idea whether this was the final burial of prose or poetry, of sadness or pleasure.¹¹

Broodthaers's plaster pedestal locates itself between the object and the viewer and cannot easily be resolved as an artistic object. Within the field of representation, the pedestal is neither an elegant presence nor a substitute for the writing that is no longer accessible. Yet like that writing, the pedestal, in its demand for interpretation, introduces a symbolic order into the scene. Broodthaers criticizes Segal for the fact that his work remains on the level of the found object or of artistic invention, and he thereby places Segal within the legacy of Breton's surrealism. "In this case we do not transcend the level of the found object," he commented, "or rather, that of invention. Such an extraordinary invention that it cancels all the powers of imagination — or, on the contrary, sets them free. That depends on the viewer's tendencies."¹²

A photograph by Maria Gilissen shows Broodthaers while he arranges the critic Otto Hahn in the position of a Segal figure and places his arm as the double of that of a figure.¹³ He thereby asserts that the function of critical contemplation is a simple identification with the art object; criticism is thus defined as tautology. But even so, this photographed arrangement also opens a new reading that is not tautological, since it allows for a comparison between the actual and the artificial figure. In the same manner, the sculpture *Pense-Bête* permits a comparison between the real and its imitation, since the real object is only partially concealed and is thus still visible, in part.

The real situation created by the sculpture, as it articulates the positions of both the art object and the viewer, differs from the operations of the readymade. Even as it inserts an ordinary object into an aesthetic context, the readymade renders invisible its own concealment of the real object as an object of art. By contrast, the plaster pedestal in Broodthaers's sculpture offers a material frame that invites a reading against the abstract frame of the art context. Not only does Broodthaers employ a strategy similar to that of Magritte, he also explicitly acknowledges the latter's importance in his essay on pop art, asserting that Magritte was the most influential figure in the development of the art of the early 1960s, his own work included. "René Magritte," he wrote, is "a Belgian who remained within our narrow frontiers, but who certainly influenced and deter-

11. Marcel Broodthaers, "Ten Thousand Francs Reward" (after an interview with Irmeline Lebeer), in *Marcel Broodthaers*, Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts, 1974. This quotation is from the English translation in this volume, p. 44. Segal's plaster sculptures, by contrast, establish a mediation between the spectator and the industrially produced object by standing in for, or in relation to, typified human situations. Their character as commodities is therefore negated, since the objects appear as the usual accompaniments of human beings.

12. Broodthaers, "Gare au défi," p. 33.

13. *Otto Hahn voisinant un moulage de Segal*, in *Phantomas*, nos. 51–61 (1965), p. 303.

mined this entire artistic movement now flourishing in New York. Magritte denies the aesthetic nature of painting."¹⁴

In executing a work such as *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*, Magritte gives to the very craft of painting a quality of quotation, cloaking it in the representational idiom of billboard realism. Mentioning this painting in his essay on pop art, Broodthaers points out that Magritte, in contradistinction to the aesthetic concerns of Schwitters and the surrealists, operates in terms of the question raised by the incommensurability between a real object and its representation. But while Magritte's question is entirely directed at the semiotic problem, Broodthaers expands it into an economic and social reflection. Therefore he does not choose simply any object that might serve as an illustration of the problem—such as a pipe—but an object to which he is linked both biographically and economically: the remaining edition of his book of poems.

*

By far the largest group of works of the period 1963–1967 is comprised of the assemblages of mussels and eggshells, which would seem at first to resemble the production of the nouveaux réalistes. The structure of the accumulation of identical or similar objects—each one corresponding to the other—produces a tautological effect: within this mass, the elements can form neither paradigm nor syntagm. But Broodthaers criticized the latent quality of rarefaction vested in the accumulations of the nouveaux réalistes, since the frame within which these accumulations were set—their exhibition-container—imbues the objects with a semblance of autonomy:

The manner in which these objects are presented is such that we have to talk about works with an artistic character, but ones that are directly connected by a sort of umbilical cord that links them to a reality that everyone experiences. Because everyone, after all, goes to the big department stores; everyone witnesses the industrial accumulations that our age produces. Only the Restany movement is rather quietly assenting to the forms of modern civilization. Almost a glorification. They are looking for a new aesthetic, tailored to the civilization in which they live.¹⁵

In Broodthaers's works mussels and eggshells are attached to supports or placed in containers to which they relate in a naturally evident manner, both container or support always being explicitly present. Mussels, for example, can be accumulated in a cooking pot and protrude way beyond the rim, but they can

14. Broodthaers, "Gare au défil," p. 34.

15. Jean-Michel Vlaeminckx, "Entretien avec Marcel Broodthaers," *Degré Zéro*, no. 1 (1965), n. p.



Marcel Broodthaers. Le Problème noir en Belgique.
1963.

also simply cover the surface of a desk. The eggshells can be found in eggcups, vases, baskets, in wooden display cases, or on a table. At the same time, both mussels and eggshells might appear on supports corresponding to traditional pictorial formats, such as rectangles or tondi.

On the occasion of his first gallery show—in 1964—Broodthaers summoned his viewers by means of the text of his exhibition announcement, which declared the start of his artistic activity to be an act of economic reflection and not the search for new forms of expression (“I, too, wondered if I couldn’t sell something and succeed in life”). Henceforth he based the production of his work on this declaration, one that functions as a program and not an interpretation. But along with this declaration one should also take note of the emblem that he placed at the entrance to this exhibition. Again it was an assemblage with plaster, containing a printed text in calligraphic letters and ten eggshells arranged in three rows of three, with one left as an individual exemplar. The printed text reads, “For a glorious future of artistic behavior.”¹⁶

Through the rhetoric of the assemblage, eggshells and lines of text are here

16. *Moules Sauce Blanche*, 1966. (See *Marcel Broodthaers*, Cologne, Museum Ludwig, 1980, No. 21.)



Marcel Broodthaers. *Pour un haut devenir du comportement artistique*. 1964.

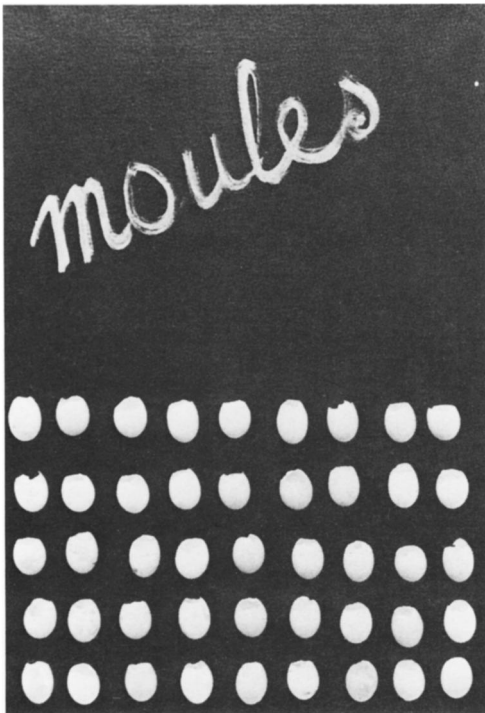
placed in a certain condition of equivalence. For just as the visual effect of the calligraphic flourishes invests the text with a certain tradition and dignity, the arrangement in rows resembling textual lines gives to the eggshells the status of discursive objects. But this equivalence does not work toward an aesthetic or logical condition of tautology. Rather, it addresses the mutual insufficiency of both the written and the visual presentation.

The incorporation into this work of an essentially alien pictorial language allows Broodthaers to construct here a representation of that pictorial language in a manner similar to that by which the arrangement of Otto Hahn, as the double of a Segal figure, had created an apparent tautological relationship between spectator and work. This mimicry seems to have functioned effectively, since Broodthaers was taken, at least for a period of time, as a Belgian pop artist.¹⁷ The fact that his early career was based on this fundamental misconception — in the same way that in his later years Broodthaers was misperceived as the guardian of the “aura” of the museum — seems to confirm rather than contradict his conception of criticism.

17. This would also be exemplified by the early presence of one of his works in the pop art collection of Dr. Hubert and Marie-Thérèse Peeters, Bruges. (See the catalogue *Three Blind Mice. De collecties: Visser, Peeters, Becht*, Eindhoven, Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, 1968.)

For example, Broodthaers plays with meaning's double senses in his 1966 announcement for his exhibition at the Galerie Cogeime in Brussels, where what he lays claim to can be read either as the production of a commodity or its mythical transcendence. "I return to matter. I rediscover the tradition of the primitives. Painting with eggs. Painting with eggs." This sloganlike reference to that older tradition of painting, in which manually ground pigments were suspended within a base of egg yolk, is simultaneously undermined here by a flatfooted literalness: painting with eggshells. Broodthaers's "egg" paintings consisted of tiny fragments of eggshells painted onto a primed canvas, or of rows of painted eggshells arranged on the surface of a canvas. This kind of deception operating within the cultural codes of meaning is further evidenced in this first phase of Broodthaers's relation to the object, as for example in the painting *L'Erreur*, where we see several rows of eggshells inscribed with the title "Moules."

The medium that Broodthaers seems to develop for this first stage is, then, that of a rhetoric that will deprive us of our certainty of being ably to verify a statement's truth. If traditional rhetoric, the rhetoric of presence, has always been the art of convincing, Broodthaers's rhetoric is that of an implosive absence.



Marcel Broodthaers. L'Erreur. 1966.

Open Letters, Industrial Poems

BENJAMIN H. D. BUCHLOH

The participation of a hitherto ignored people in the political life of France is a social fact that will honour the whole of the close of the nineteenth century. A parallel is found in artistic matters, the way being prepared by an evolution which the public with rare prescience dubbed, from its first appearance, Intransigent, which in political language means radical and democratic. . . . Such, to those who can see in this the representative art of a period which cannot isolate itself from the equally characteristic politics and industry, must seem the meaning of the manner of painting we have discussed here. . . .

—Stéphane Mallarmé, “The Impressionists and Edouard Manet”

During the twelve years that Marcel Broodthaers declared himself an artist, he produced a wide variety of internally coherent, if elliptical, groups of work. One such group, identified by him as *Industrial Poems*,¹ from the period 1968–70, has gone practically without critical comment. While no more (nor less) hermetic and enigmatic than his other work, these would, by their very identification as “poems,” seem to offer access to what motivated Broodthaers to transform, in 1964, his lifelong profession as a poet and to engage henceforth in the production of visual objects.

1. According to Maria Gilissen, Broodthaers so identified these works only once, on the occasion of their first exhibition in 1968.

Yet by their simultaneous identification as “industrial” these poems also seem, at first glance, to link Broodthaers’s work with that fundamental assumption of modernist thought to which Mallarmé refers in the passage cited above. This is the assumption that an inextricable dialectic links the advancement of the artistic forms of a society to the advancement of its technical means, and that the transformation of the hierarchical structures of a social totality necessitates the transformation of aesthetic hierarchies. As a consequence, it was further believed at the outset of modernism that the participation of the masses in the social production and political life of a state would inevitably lead to their participation in the development of radically different forms of perception. These assumptions formed the basis for the modernist insistence on the absolute contemporaneity of subjects, materials, and procedures, as they did for the critical negation of the work of art as a *unique* object.

But Broodthaers’s decision to identify his poems as “industrial” cannot possibly be connected to this position of the “modernist artist.” Broodthaers, after all, no longer permitted the naive incorporation, within his work, of those structures attesting to the impact of industrial modes of production upon artistic practice. And further, he criticized the way a seemingly progressive and provocative structural simplification of the work betrays, precisely, the dominance of technology’s rationalism and instrumentality. Thus, since, in his view, this reduction only affected the design surface of the object or its compositional or serial structure, Broodthaers castigated the procedure as a “singleness [which] condemns the mind to monomania: minimal art, robot, computer.”²

It seems that from the very beginning of his work as an artist he viewed the heroic embrace of advanced technology by visual culture with considerable scepticism. After all, Broodthaers had only recently witnessed this putatively utopian synthesis of artistic and social production in the work of the *nouveaux réalistes* and the American pop artists of the early 1960s, and he suspected the work to be the result of both a misunderstanding of modernity and an extreme simplification of its artistic legacy. “The literalness linked to the appropriation of the real didn’t suit me,” he wrote, “since it conveyed a pure and simple acceptance of progress in art . . . and elsewhere as well.”³

But from the highly enigmatic and esoteric character of his work, it is clear that Broodthaers did not build on the other modernist foundation mentioned by Mallarmé either, namely, the impact of the “participation of hitherto ignored people in . . . political life” and its consequences for the modes of contemporary artistic reception. In Broodthaers’s work from the mid-’60s onwards, rarely, if ever, do we find an explicit reference or claim to the political nature of his

2. Marcel Broodthaers, “Ten Thousand Francs Reward” (after an interview with Irmeline Lebeer), p. 43 of this issue.

3. *Ibid.*

artistic endeavor, nor do we see him deploying artistic strategies which, qua strategies, materials, or mode of distribution, would already constitute an assault on the separateness of the aesthetic in favor of an explicitly political conception of art production. While he employed almost all of the late '60s and early '70s forms of distribution, thus, in the context of conceptual art in particular, calling into question the status of the work of art as a unique, auratic object (the book, the film, the print, and the plaques), he also criticized that form of supposedly democratic distribution that spread during the 1960s: the "multiple." Looking upon the multiple with great scepticism, he almost always limited his own editions to relatively—often artificially—low numbers. The only "public" art form that Broodthaers really allowed himself was the open letter, paradoxically addressed, in most cases, to an individual, or to "friends."

Broodthaers's frequently voiced scepticism toward the concept of "progress in art and elsewhere as well" thus not only raises doubts about his commitment to the modernist idea of artistic contemporaneity, its inherent progressiveness, but it also has to surprise those who associate him with the legacy of '60s political and cultural critique. Since the 1940s, Broodthaers, the poet, had been connected to the radical left wing of the Belgian surrealist movement,⁴ and Broodthaers, the artist, had participated in the cultural revolution of the student movement of May '68. He had, for example, been present at the temporary occupation of the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels ("my museum originates from that date") and he had been affiliated with the Brussels circle around Lucien Goldmann, the disciple of Georg Lukács (Broodthaers refers to one of his books as resulting from his participation in Goldmann's seminar).⁵

Nonetheless, Broodthaers seems to have distanced himself generally from all the progressivist aspects of the modernist credo, both those stated in the guise of a devotion to contemporaneity and the artistic emblems of a scientific or technological modernity, and those defining themselves through explicitly political perspectives and actions. As a consequence, his work has been frequently accused of remaining ultimately within the domain of the poetic, of being a "literary" practice—a quality for which the work is reproached even now by many "professionals" of the visual. It is an accusation which Broodthaers invoked

4. On November 15, 1945, Broodthaers participated for the first time in a gathering of Belgian surrealists along with Pol Bury, Achille Chavée, Paul Colinet, Christian Dotremont, Marcel Marien, Louis Scutenaire, and others. (See "Lettre de Chavée à Magritte et Nougé," in Marcel Marien, ed., *L'Activité Surréaliste en Belgique*, Brussels, Editions Lebeer-Hossmann, p. 342.) In 1947 Broodthaers signed the manifesto "Pas de quartier dans la révolution," along with René Magritte and Paul Nougé, and in 1948 he published two poems ("Projet pour un film," and "Trois poèmes de l'île déserte") in the journal *Le surréalisme révolutionnaire*.

5. Marcel Broodthaers, *Charles Baudelaire: Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes*, Hamburg, Editions Hossmann, 1973. The actual reference reads, "This book has its origin in a seminar by Lucien Goldmann on Baudelaire, which took place in Brussels during the winter of 1969–70 and to which I was invited to participate as an *artist*."

certaines galeries
prenant 75%.
Ce que c'est ?
En fait, des
Marcel
Broadthaers
Galerie St Laurent
rue D...
Du 10...
Verni...
vend...
de 6

Moi aussi, je me
suis demandé si
je ne pouvais pas
vendre quelque
chose et réussir
dans la vie. Cela
fait un moment
déjà que je ne suis
bon à rien. Je suis
âgé de quarante
ans.

L'idée enfin
d'inventer que
chose d'insincère
me traversa
l'esprit et je me
mis aussitôt au
travail. Au bout
de trois mois, je
montrai ma
production à l'h.
Edouard...
le propriétaire
de la...


Saint-Laurent.
Mais, c'est de l'art,
dit-il
et...
oserai
volentiers tout ça.
D...
lui...
Si je prends
quelque chose
il prendra 30%
Ce sont, para...
des conditions
normales

les lucifera minivelle

voluntarily and upon which he commented with amusement: “This denomination [literary] has a pejorative reputation (I wonder why?).”⁶

Yet, paradoxically, it was with a public demonstration of the burial of the literary (the remainder of the edition of his last volume of poetry) that Broodthaers’s work as an artist began, and it was in the erasure or suspension of reading and the displacement of the literary that some of his most important works (operating under the cover of books) would subsequently be accomplished.⁷ This fact alone should indicate that Broodthaers’s work—while clearly taking a position of critical negation with regard to the progressive and political implications of modernism—can certainly not be reclaimed for a conservative critique of contemporary visual culture from the perspective of the literary.⁸ And this is true even though the often extremely stylized appearance of Broodthaers’s work might mislead naive viewers into the assumption that the elements of mourning and melancholia deposited there act to deplore the loss of a nineteenth-century bourgeois culture embodied in institutions like that of the museum—the museum, of course, constituting one of the centers of Broodthaers’s critical contemplation.

On the occasion of his first exhibition, at the Galerie Saint-Laurent in Brussels in 1964, Broodthaers published a by-now notorious and frequently quoted statement in which he draws a facetious connection between the commodity and the commonly held suspicion that all art is inherently fraudulent. This is contained in the statement’s hint that it took only three months to produce the work for his first exhibition as an artist, and that he did not even suspect himself of having produced art until his future dealer told him so:

I, too, wondered if I couldn’t sell something and succeed in life. I had for quite a little while been good for nothing. I am forty years old. . . . The idea of inventing something insincere finally crossed my mind and I set to work at once. At the end of three months I showed what I’d done to Ph. Edouard Toussaint, the owner of the Galerie Saint-Laurent. “But this is art,” he said, “and I will gladly show it all.” If I sell something he’ll take thirty percent. These, it seems, are

6. Broodthaers, “Ten Thousand Francs Reward,” p. 39.

7. The work under discussion is *Pense-Bête* (1964), which is described in great detail in the essay by Dieter Schwarz in this issue. For the subsequent examples of this crucial strategy, I am thinking here of Broodthaers’s work *Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard*—published as a book in 1969 and extensively described and discussed by Birgit Pelzer and Anne Rorimer in their essays in this issue—and the later work *Pauvre Belgique* (1974), which is the subject of Yves Gevaert’s essay in this issue. In order to avoid repetitive descriptions, I refer the reader unfamiliar with these works to those essays.

8. For an example of this interpretation of Broodthaers’s critique and its reclamation for a conservative ideology, see Michael Compton, “Marcel Broodthaers,” in *Marcel Broodthaers*, London, The Tate Gallery, 1980, pp. 13–25.

normal conditions; some galleries take seventy-five percent. What is it?
In fact, only some objects!⁹

This definition of the art object as “something insincere” sets one of the many parameters of Broodthaers’s future investigations: a continuous reflection on the status of the (art) object under the universal reign of commodity production, once the object had lost the credibility of its modernist, utopian dimension. For Broodthaers the work of art no longer operated in terms of its inherited — quintessentially modernist — dialectic: to be simultaneously the *exemplary* object of all commodity production and the *exceptional* object which denied and resisted the universality of that reign. Instead, in the final subsumption of artistic production under the reign of the culture industry — and that is the “industry” that the *Industrial Poems* actually address — the work could now only engage in the destruction of that dialectic. This advent of the culture industry — as we have witnessed it in the past decade — was predicted by Broodthaers with a prophetic clarity that, at the time, made him appear a cynical pessimist in contrast to his peers of the late 1960s and early ’70s, who produced an art with a progressivist spirit.

If, therefore, the title *Industrial Poems* refers at all to the industrial and political conditions mentioned by Mallarmé in his essay on Manet, it addresses a much more specific condition: that of aesthetic production emerging as one industry among others in the culture of the spectacle. It was precisely in its disavowal of the complete disintegration of the aesthetic, in its refusal to recognize the radically altered historical circumstances which had irreparably affected all material and structural conditions of the art object itself, that Broodthaers detected the profound insincerity of the work of art:

I doubt, in fact, that it is possible to give a serious definition of art, unless we examine the question in terms of a constant, I mean the transformation of Art into merchandise. This process has speeded up nowadays to the point where artistic and commercial values have become superimposed. And if we speak of the phenomenon of reification, then art is a special instance of the phenomenon, a form of tautology.¹⁰

More precisely, it seemed impossible, under these circumstances, to reemploy the definitions of the pictorial and plastic object that had been developed at the

9. See exhibition announcement *Marcel Broodthaers*, Brussels, Galerie Saint-Laurent, 1964. The exhibition announcement was printed over reproductions of fashion advertisement pages.

10. Marcel Broodthaers, “To be *bien pensant* . . . or not to be. To be blind,” p. 35 of this issue.

height of modernism. Thus, Broodthaers recognized, from the very beginning of his artistic career, the necessity of differentiating the specific conditions which determined the conception of modernist strategies from those determining his own work and that of his peers. He criticized the assumptions behind pop art and nouveau réalisme that promoted the simple continuation of artistic paradigms and strategies originating in dada, voicing his doubt about the validity of this as early as the mid-1960s. One hears this in a 1965 interview:

One could find the origin of pop art in dada, but society has changed to such an extent since then that any comparison would inevitably draw us into some kind of confusion with dada and surrealism. I think rather that pop art is an original expression of our times, or better yet, our actuality. Pop art did at first develop in American society. American life presents a character—due to the industrial factor—which invades absolutely every aspect of private existence. In America nothing happens any more on the level of individual life. American life consists of a whole series of disavowals which build up, neutralize themselves, and finally annihilate completely the pleasures of existence which a human being normally possesses. I might as well admit that the same phenomenon occurs in Europe.¹¹

Consequently, the use of language in Broodthaers's *Industrial Poems* differs programmatically from the artistic and poetic rediscoveries of the cubo-futurist *Parole in libertà*, *Zaum*, or Schwitters's *Ursonate* in the work of the *lettristes* of the 1940s or the concrete poets and Fluxus poets of the late '50s and early 1960s.

The double inversion of Broodthaers's "writing" was that, on the one hand, it seems to engage in precisely that modernist strategy of hermetic resistance by which the visual or linguistic sign constitutes itself to refuse the visual or sensual data which the viewer demands, this refusal operating in the semantic disguise of the construction of an anomic object.¹² But at the same time, Broodthaers's writing seems equally determined to investigate the process of reification that the visual sign undergoes when it is transformed into that modernist object of artistic withdrawal and resistance.

Echoing Sartre's designation of Mallarmé as "the prophet who announces our century," Broodthaers, in the mid-'60s, identified the latter as the fountain-head of contemporary artistic projects within the medium of language. Broodthaers was, of course, referring to the way Mallarmé's work spatializes the

11. Jean-Michel Vlaeminckx, "Entretien avec Marcel Broodthaers," *Degré Zéro*, no. 1 (1965), n.p.

12. The social breakdown and fragmentation referred to by the term *anomie* is used here in its linguistic dimension to indicate the object's withdrawal from systems of communication, its self-imposed condition of muteness and silence.

semantic and lexical elements of language on the page. And that spatialization, although it was at least partially motivated by a desire for the semblance of an absolute autonomy of the textual, achieved that autonomy only at the price of an artificial anomie resulting from the destruction of meaning and the erasure of memory from the semantic axis of language. This insistence on the autonomous physicality and pure semiotic presence of functionalized speech acts and commodified objects transformed the very opponent of reification — poetic language — into mute plasticity and objecthood.

Broodthaers's "I, too, wondered if I couldn't sell something" seems to travesty a 1912 statement by Guillaume Apollinaire, who declared, on his invention of spatialized poetic language (the calligram): "And I, too, am a painter." Yet one does not believe that, even in the case of Apollinaire, this proclamation reflects merely an ambition to rival his painter friends whose projects he would soon define in *Les peintres cubistes*, nor that it was generated by what academic fantasies have again and again described as a new strategy to abolish genre boundaries and poetic categories. Rather, it seems that Apollinaire was already attempting to accommodate the fact that the very modes engendered by these conventions of meaning-production were threatened and destroyed by factors outside of poetry and painting, factors which Walter Benjamin described twenty years later: "Now the letter and the word which have rested for centuries in the flatbed of the book's horizontal pages have been wrenched from their position and have been erected on vertical scaffolds in the streets as advertisement."¹³

Thus our questions regarding Broodthaers's work, and the *Industrial Poems* in particular, should first of all address the external factors determining his redeployment of these earlier modernist strategies, in particular those of fragmentation and erasure. For these are strategies which — while of central importance and universally present in the work of the dadaists — would have clearly acquired different functions in Broodthaers's reflection on the current conditions of artistic production.

Broodthaers's suspension of the *Industrial Poems* between both language- and object-production and their mutual cancellation distanced his work from that critique of the commodity status of the aesthetic object formulated in late '60s conceptual art, which abandoned traditional pictorial and sculptural materials and procedures in favor of a transformation of art into linguistic definitions.

*

13. Walter Benjamin, "Zentralpark," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp, 1977, vol I, 2, p. 658.

Deletion and Erasure

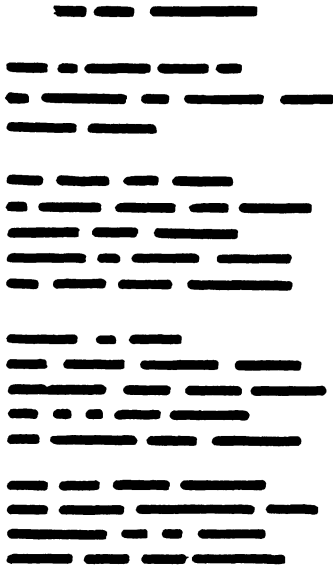
The white spaces indeed take on importance, are initially striking; ordinarily versification required them around like silence . . . I do not transgress this measure, only disperse it. The paper intervenes each time an image, of its own accord, ceases or withdraws, accepting the succession of others.

—Stéphane Mallarmé, “Préface” to *Un coup de dés*

Semantic deletion and visual erasure—the undermining of the legibility of linguistic marks—emerged to give plastic autonomy and an objectlike presence to the elements of typography, but did so *through language*, in the name of an opposition to the universal domination of objects. Thus, ironically, in its very battle against reification, poetry was caught performing a mimicry of that very



Man Ray. The Ridgefield Gazook, March 31, 1915, pp. 2-3.



Left: Man Ray. *Untitled Poem*. Paris, May 1924.

Man Ray, Paris, mai 1924

Right: Louis Aragon. *Suicide*. 1924.

process and thereby became absorbed in the same anomie it opposed. Triumphantly acquiring the status of an object—a spatial and plastic force to match and overcome that force of spatialization that language had acquired in its mundane usage in newspaper typography and advertisement—poetry became mere *chose*, simply one object among other objects. Its powerful presence as a spatial construct was acquired at the price of a loss of narrativity and representation, temporality and referentiality. Poetry had to revoke the wealth of experience which the semantic dimension of language seemed once to have offered its readers and which the visual and spatial dimension now refused through acts of rigorous deletion and erasure.

The third of the major heuristic assumptions about the elimination of traditional semantic functions is that the purification of the pictorial or linguistic signifier would in and of itself accomplish an act of resistance against the positivist and instrumentalist subjection of language to meaning and communication. This belief is still operative even in deconstructive criticism, as evident, for example, in Geoffrey Hartman's question:

Can Derrida's analysis justify a massive displacement of interest from signified to signifier? More precisely, from the conceptualization that transforms signifier into signified to those unconceptualizable qualities of the signifier that keep it unsettled in form or meaning. Is the force of the written sign such that every attributed meaning pales before the originary and residual violence of a sound that cannot be fully inscribed because as sound it is already writing or incision . . . ?¹⁴

14. Geoffrey Hartman, *Saving the Text: Literature/Derrida/Philosophy*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981, pp. 119–120.

SUICIDE

A b c d e f

g h i j k l

m n o p q r

s t u v w

x y z

Louis ARAGON.

Fragmentation

We read in two ways: a new or unknown word is spelled out letter by letter; but a common, ordinary word is embraced by a single glance, independently of its letters, so that the image of the whole word acquires an ideographic value.

—Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*

Concomitant with the strategies of deletion and erasure, the strategy of fragmentation succeeds in the abolition of meaning in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century advanced poetry. Like its strategic allies, it is riddled with the deficiencies of the spatial liberation's dialectical counterpart: it finds itself merely in the cul-de-sac of the alphabet's infinite permutational and combinatory possibilities. Not unlike the problems faced by the nonrepresentational painters of that same generation, when the abolition of representation and referentiality opened up the abyss of infinitely arbitrary chromatic and compositional permutations, linguistic reduction—the reduction of the syntactical structure to the lexical unit, that of the lexical unit to the phonetic element, and that of the phonetic element to the individual letter—allows for a spiritual flight into an infinity of combinations which will rapidly lead to impasse. The nature of this—as Louis Aragon had anticipated in his 1924 poem *Suicide*—is the mere restriction, mechanistic rehearsal, and infinite repetition of the given terms, namely, the twenty-six letters of the alphabet. This nightmare of reduction was to come

to pass at the hands of successive generations of “language administration” carried on by the bureaucrats of concrete poetry, during the postwar period.¹⁵

A wide range of explanatory schemes has been devised by literary critics and art historians to account for the meaning and function of these strategies of fragmentation and erasure in both modernist literature and painting. These extend from the merely mimetic to the concept of allegorical language and the hypothesis of a primary semiotic experience which these strategies supposedly initiate. It seems to have mattered little to most historians that similar or identical literary techniques not only operated contemporaneously to perform diverse, if not opposite functions, but also in totally different political, social, and ideological environments (the revolutionary Soviet Union, fascist Italy, bourgeois Paris, and protorevolutionary imperial Berlin, to mention only the most obvious examples). At the same time it is argued that, for example, the fragmentation of the futurist poem was primarily mimetic, since it is supposed to stage the new perceptual and auditory conditions of urban life in advanced capitalist, industrialized nations on the level of syntax and grammar, on the level of the word and the phoneme themselves. Thus fragmentation is seen to repeat, within linguistic practice itself, the very type of experience to which individuals were now increasingly subjected. The fragmentation of language thus performed not only the depletion of meaning, but also—as has been widely discussed, in particular in the reading of futurist poetry as an assault on traditional linguistic usage—has performed an imitative function in which the heroic condition of modern life, its technological accomplishments, could be captured. Speed of movement, compartmentalization of time into smaller and smaller units, simultaneity of vision are—as we have repeatedly been told—the perceptual and cognitive experiences that the fracturing of syntactical and semantic continuity mimetically reproduces.¹⁶

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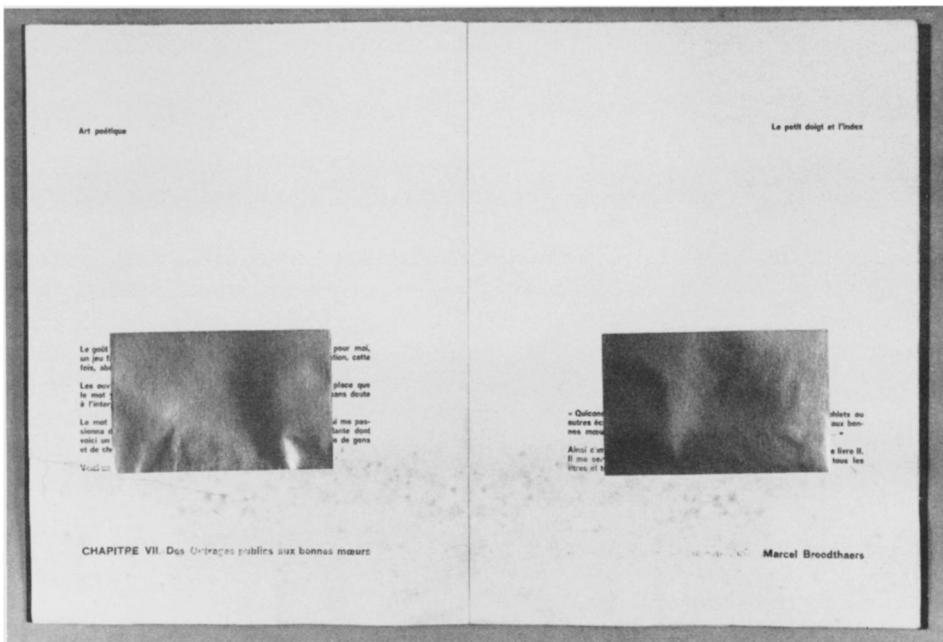
Broodthaers’s exhibition announcement for the Galerie Saint-Laurent recapitulates these strategies of erasure and fragmentation and transposes them into an unforeseen context (the world of art advertisement) and it anticipates in many respects the typographical style and design of many of his subsequent works, in which the typographic and visual conventions of both high art and mass cultural magazines are incorporated into the larger scheme of a reflection on the generation and reification of meaning.

15. The historical reality of this parallelism would, for example, be corroborated by the fact that one of Europe’s best-known concrete poets, the Swiss, Eugen Gomringer, was also the first and certainly one of the most competent authors to write on Joseph Albers. See Eugen Gomringer, *Joseph Albers*, New York, Wittenborn, 1967.

16. For a recent overview of the various interpretative models, see Willard Bohn, *Aesthetics of Visual Poetry 1914–1928*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Printed on both sides, the announcement uses a set of found advertisement images from a fashion magazine. After rotating them forty-five degrees, Broodthaers then spread a grid of evenly distributed type across the two pages, a grid that bars the reading of the advertising information and generates a reading of his self-advertisement as an artist.

In another but equal way, what was possibly the most important work in this exhibition—the result of Broodthaers's spectacular act of destroying the remaining parts of his last volume of poetry in 1964—assumes different qualities in the perspective of that historical situation which made it abundantly clear to him that the strategies of the dadaists and their post war followers faced bankruptcy or academicization. Before he decided to insert the remaining edition of his last volume of poetry into plaster, he had already transfigured that volume by superimposing rectangles of colored monochrome paper onto the poems inside the volume, thus prohibiting the reading of those poems. This erasure anticipates the procedure that Broodthaers would apply four years later by transforming the lines of Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés* into the black bands which appear simultaneously as erasures and as elements of increased visual emphasis and spatial presence.

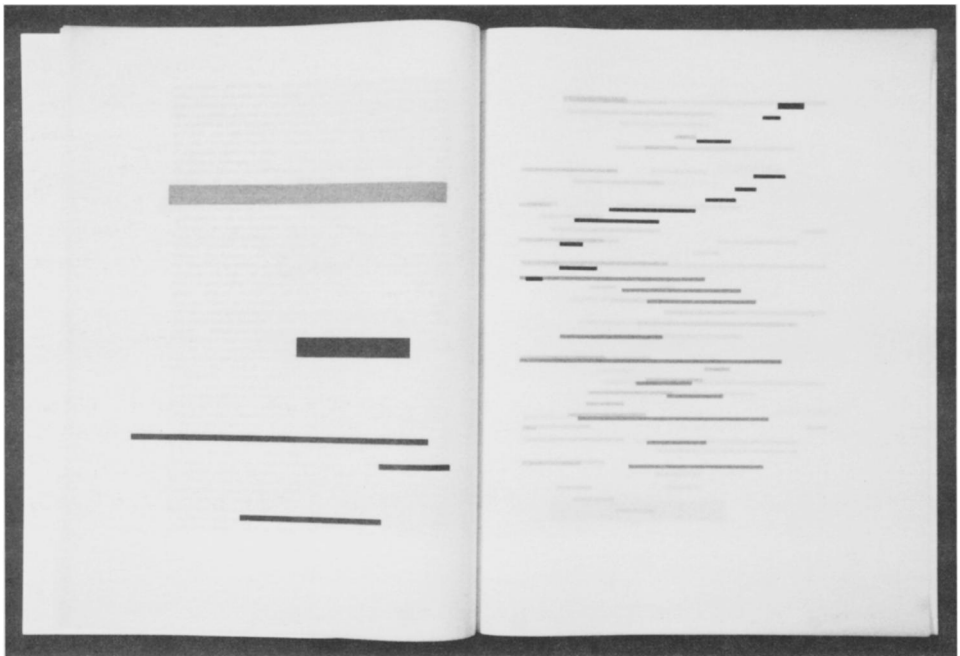


Marcel Broodthaers. *Altered pages from Pense-Bête*. 1963–64.

The chromatic squares and rectangles collaged by Broodthaers onto the surfaces of his poems perform both functions—that of erasure and that of fragmentation—simultaneously, since in many instances they leave the beginning and the end of a verse readable, while in others they conceal the text in its entirety. Occasionally the paper is only fastened at the top and can be lifted like a curtain if the reader is curious enough to do so.

But it seems that these visual erasures of the poems in *Pense-Bête* did not satisfy their author as sufficient to the task of annihilation of the poetic text, since he decided shortly thereafter to reduplicate this process of erasure on yet another level. This new form of objectification occurred when he embedded the remaining copies of the edition in a plaster base, thus adding to the process of semantic destruction by preventing the book from being opened and read at all. The extent to which the semantic and lexical dimension of the poetry is annihilated paradoxically increases the plasticity and presence of the artifact. Since this paradox was so extensively addressed by Broodthaers, one might speculate that it, indeed, motivated his decision and that he considered it to be quintessential to the problematic nature of contemporary art production.

In a (presumably fictitious) interview with Richard Lucas, a small Brussels



Marcel Broodthaers. *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*. Image (translucent version). 1969.

publisher and art dealer, Broodthaers facetiously poses the question, “Is there a profound relation between art and merchandise?” He then goes on to say that he had decided to write in order “to make dedications and to establish this relationship between art and commodity. In fact, there is a special kind of writing to abolish certain problems.”¹⁷ As is so often the case with Broodthaers’s statements, what this “special kind of writing” and what these “certain problems” could possibly be remains enigmatic. Can we suppose that Broodthaers’s own writing practices, his *Industrial Poems* in particular, were designed to assume these functions?

The group of works entitled *Poèmes Industriels* were begun in 1968—before the foundation of Broodthaers’s key work, the Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles—and continued with interruptions until 1970. As a whole this group exemplifies these visual and textual strategies—even though present in Broodthaers’s work from the very beginning—in their most differentiated and developed form. Broodthaers himself has extensively commented—as we will see—on a variety of aspects of these works, in particular their manufacturing technology, the meaning of that technology, and the historical context in which the choice of this procedure situated itself. But he has, to my knowledge, not commented upon the generic title of the group.

To present Marcel Broodthaers as though he were an “artist” who imprints texts on plaques made of plastic, and thus to show his importance with regard to other artists, would mean to inscribe oneself into the existing cultural order. To say that through his voluntary confusion of all categories (painting, poetry, sculpture, cinema, etc.) Broodthaers eludes these very traditional cultural classifications, opposing them theoretically and practically at the same time, is not sufficient either.

—Alain Jouffroy

This text appeared on the occasion of the first exhibition of the plaques, announced by Broodthaers as an exhibition of “limited and unlimited editions of industrial poems,” and addressed on the announcement—as with several of his open letters—to “my friends.”¹⁸ Officially this exhibition was presented by a

17. Marcel Broodthaers, *Vingt Ans Après*, Brussels, R. Lucas, 1969, n.p.

18. Alain Jouffroy, untitled text, Paris, Librairie Saint-Germain des Prés, October 29, 1968,

department of the Musée d'Art Moderne that seems to have operated only on this occasion, identified by Broodthaers in the announcement as the *CAB.INE.T D.ES. E.STA.MP.E.S.* The spelling of the department's name subjects the familiar term of artistic categorization to the very process of fragmentation that classification itself exerts on the objects of its discursive order. In this case the fragmentation achieves what one could call a phonetic metonymy, since the actual semantic totality of each word is left intact while phonetic units are isolated and foregrounded, establishing a momentary semblance of rupture within the semantic function. But immediately restored to reexert its presence, this function effects a reading that—against the appearance of rupture—produces a recontainment within both the discursive and the institutional orders.

While Alain Jouffroy's statement, reverberating with the radical language of May '68, seems dated, it nonetheless indicates the extent to which opposition to traditional artistic categories was then viewed as an actual instance of critical resistance to wider cultural roles and functions. Further, it signals the degree to which such linguistic operations actually concretized and implemented the critical and political ambitions of that moment. Six months earlier these ambitions had been stated more programmatically still, in one of the manifestos issued during the May 30, 1968, occupation of the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels. This pamphlet, most likely coauthored by Broodthaers, thus predates both the production of the first plaques and their exhibition. It states that the Free Association (as the occupiers identified themselves) "condemns the commercialization of all forms of art considered as objects of consumption."¹⁹

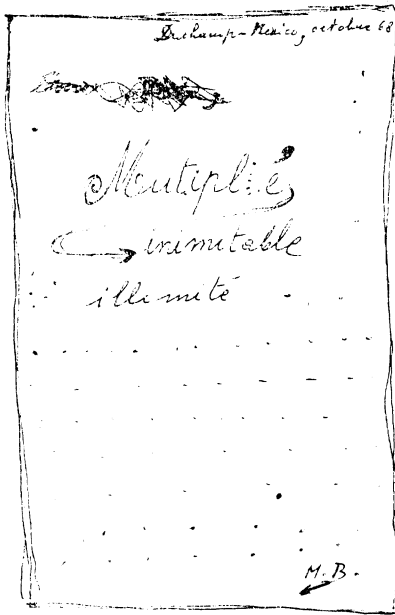
Once the occupation of the Palais des Beaux-Arts was concluded (as a result of negotiations), this tone of political condemnation receded. In what we must assume to be at one and the same time one of the last manifestos issued by a former occupier of the Palais des Beaux-Arts (even though still dated "Palais des Beaux-Arts, June 7, 1968") and the first of the "open letters" written and signed by the artist Marcel Broodthaers (addressed "à mes amis"), we read the introductory statement:

Peace and silence. A fundamental gesture has been made here that throws a vivid light on culture and on the ambitions of certain people who aspire to control it one way or the other: what this means is that culture is *an obedient, malleable matter*.²⁰

published in connection with the first exhibition of the *Industrial Poems*. Subsequently published in excerpts on the exhibition announcement, *BROODTHAERS*, Berlin, Galerie Gerda Bassenge, 1969, n.p.

19. See facsimile reproduction of manifesto, dated May 30, 1968, in *Museum in Motion*, s'Gravenhage, 1979, p. 249.

20. Marcel Broodthaers, Open Letter, Palais des Beaux Arts (Brussels), June 7, 1968, addressed "A mes amis," reprinted in *Museum in Motion*, p. 249 (italics added).



Librairie Saint-Germain des Prés -
 184 Boulevard Saint-Germain
 Paris 6ème - Mardi 29 octobre 68 à 18h.

Librairie
 St Germain des Prés -
 184 Boulevard Saint-Germain

Mardi 29 ~~à~~ octobre 68 à 18 h.
 Exposition de tirages limités et
 édités de poèmes industriels.
 Et d'un livre-film. Le Cabinet
 et le Renard.

A mes amis,
 M. O. S. É. E. D. A. R. T.
 CABINET D'ES. ESTAMPES.
 Département des Arts - M. Broodthaers

Marcel Broodthaers. Sketches for exhibition announcement, Librairie Saint-Germain des Prés, Paris, 1968.

This letter then ends with the rather surprising remark:

And another word for those who have not participated in these days [of occupation of the Palais des Beaux-Arts] and who have despised them: you don't have to feel that you sold out before having been bought, or hardly. My friends, I cry with you for Andy Warhol.

Written three days after the attack on Andy Warhol's life on June 4, 1968, by Valerie Solanis, this letter gives no reason to doubt the sincerity of Broodthaers's compassion for Warhol. Yet by this time Broodthaers had also considerably modified his earlier optimistic views on pop art so that he would have thought of Warhol as a typical example of the artist who had chosen exactly the opposite road: that of a complete embrace rather than political contestation of those conditions which the occupiers of the Palais des Beaux-Arts had still attempted to oppose, if not actually to change. To the same degree that it had become obvious to Broodthaers that those conditions would have to be accepted as inescapable once the decision had been made to shift from the political to the artistic, Warhol's role and his strategies of pure affirmation warranted increasing suspicion and critique.

It seems then that for Broodthaers the inevitable subjugation of artistic practice to the commodity form, and its product's strict congruence with that form (later he would call the work of art "the tautology of reification"), required an equally strict elimination of all aesthetic illusion (the illusion of rupture and of transcendence, that of pleasure or of political critique, above all that of poetic liberation). But in one respect Broodthaers sets up a crucial distinction between his own attitude and that of most of his (American) peers: this destruction of aesthetic illusion does not imply a parallel destruction of the dimension of critical negation in artistic practice. Such negation, first of all, would contest the continually renewed aesthetic claims that the artistic construct had actually transcended its economic, its discursive, or its institutional boundaries; and second, it would attack the work's continually renewed pretenses to provide anything but the reification of either an image or a theory of transgression. Thus in an explicit critique of his conceptualist peers, Broodthaers would later come to say, "If artistic production is the thing of things, then theory becomes a private property."²¹

The second open letter, signed by Marcel Broodthaers, and again addressed "à mes amis," is dated "Kassel, June 27, '68." Consisting of three sections, two of which were soon to become the texts of the first two *Industrial Poems*, the third text, the actual letter, provides a correction to the letter of June 7. It requests:

In my letter of June 7, '68, it should not read: "You don't have to feel that you sold out before having been bought." Rather, it should read: "You don't have to feel that you sold out after having been bought." This is only to content everybody's ass and everybody's father. My friends, who is Warhol? And Lamelas?²²

Obviously, as in so many subsequent cases, Broodthaers's literal reversal of a position he had just pronounced does not derive from an attitude of irony (in 1972 he would disqualify "irony as so much straw"). Rather it constitutes the public performance of an opportunistic revision of a moralistic position that had come to appear as no longer tenable. Broodthaers recognized this element of opportunism as an inextricable condition of adaptation to the reality of artistic production. Thus the letter's revision of a critical and radical belief, still held until just before the public recantation, performs the very contradictions inherent in the transition from political thought to artistic practice, or, as he would phrase it shortly thereafter, "If the work of art finds itself under the conditions of fraudulence and falseness, can we still call it a work of art? I have no answer to this."²³

21. Marcel Broodthaers, "Ten Thousand Francs Reward," p. 45.

22. David Lamelas, an Argentinian artist and filmmaker who lived at the time in London, had become friendly with Broodthaers during his visits to Antwerp and Brussels in 1968.

23. Marcel Broodthaers, quoted by Johannes Cladders, in "Befragung der Realität: Bildwelten Heute," in *Documenta V*, Kassel, 1972, p. 162.

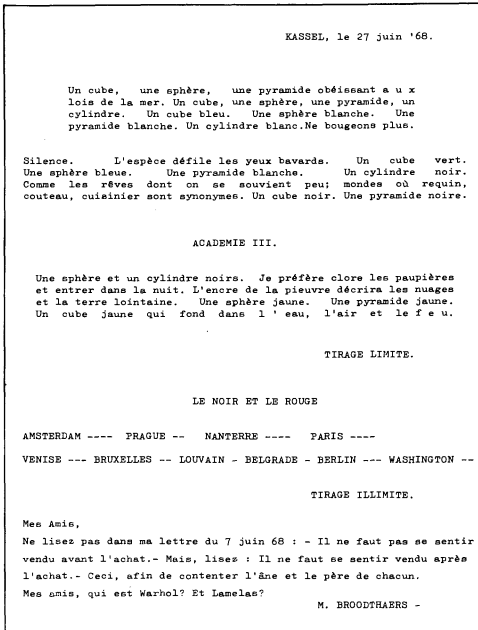
The other two texts in the open letter, titled “Académie III” and “Le Noir et le Rouge,” actually became the texts of two of the first plaques to be produced by Broodthaers in the following months. Both texts were, however, to be slightly modified in their transition from “open letter” to “painting” (as Broodthaers would later identify the plaques).²⁴ “Académie III” was changed to *Académie I* for the black (negative) version of the first plaque, while *Académie II* became the title for the white cast of the otherwise exact replica of the negative version. Each of these was produced, as announced in the open letter, in a “limited edition” (seven copies), thus opposing from the outset the delusory and mythologizing claims—typical of the late ’60s and early ’70s craze for the “multiple”—of a democratization of the art object by means of its merely technical replication.

Yet there was one exception to the principle of producing these embossed plastic reliefs in an edition of seven copies, a principle that governed all of the thirty-odd plaques that followed in the course of the next two years. This, “Le Noir et le Rouge,” already conceived and announced in the public letter as “tirage illimité,” was in fact the only plaque to be produced in an unlimited edition. In its transition from the “open letter” to the art object, this text not only lost the pregnancy of its literary and political title, but was subjected to another slight modification. From the series of cities listed in the letter, certain names were deleted. Conceived to name the cities where the radical political movements of the late 1960s had either originated (as in Amsterdam, Berlin, and Nanterre) or where they subsequently found their internationalist expansion (as in Brussels, Milan, Venice), the text drops four cities—Belgrade, Louvain, Prague, Washington—from its actually produced version as plaque.

The dateline of the second open letter by Broodthaers indicates that he no longer writes from a (recently occupied) traditional art institution, but from the opening of an international art world event: Kassel’s *Documenta IV*. This—needless to say—was an exhibition that did not include artists such as Marcel Broodthaers.²⁵ What it did represent, however, becoming instantly notorious for

24. Marcel Broodthaers, commenting on his plaque *The Goose*, writes, “‘The Wing and the Goose’ or ‘The Goose and the Wing,’ depending on whether one looks from the left or from the right. 1. The Goose: the painting is white like the feathers of a goose. The letter types are clumsy to imitate the bird’s walk, besides, the wing is placed clumsily between the commas. Did this painting in white plastic make those who produced it think? In order to understand this question, one must know that this type of image depends directly on an industrial technique, on skilled labor. 2. This ‘painting’ is black; the goose has become a wing and the commas have only retained the appearance of commas. In reality they are the indication of a blue dream running along the text. Dream of the goose lost in a blue and stupid world. I would add that my ‘paintings’ are not worth much—not that they are not worth anything. But they are meant for people who prefer paintings to money; unless a change occurs and causes my prices to rise.”

25. While Broodthaers did not participate in *Documenta IV*, he was present at the opening, since he was represented in a group show organized by a gallery that had recently begun to support his work (The Wide White Space Gallery of Anny de Decker and Bernd Lohaus). On the occasion of the opening, several galleries had organized an exhibition of work by contemporary artists in the Hotel Hessenland in Kassel. As had been the case at the opening of the Milan triennale earlier that year, the



Left: Marcel Broodthaers. *Open Letter. Kassel, June 27, 1968.*

Right, above: Marcel Broodthaers. *Académie II. 1968.*

Right, below: Marcel Broodthaers. *Tirage illimité (Le Noir et le Rouge). 1968.*

doing so, was a peculiar synthesis of pop art on the one hand and late modernist abstraction on the other. This latter was presented in an immense range of reductivist geometric variations (“Post-Painterly Abstraktion” is the title of one of the catalogue essays), with examples from such diverse sources as the Americanized Bauhaus sequels of Joseph Albers and their Swiss counterpart, Lohse, to the op art of Bridget Riley and Victor Vasarely, and the newly emerged American contributions to that tradition in—to European eyes in the late 1960s—the stunning guise of minimal art represented by the works by Andre, Baer, Bell, Flavin, Judd, Lewitt, and Stella.

The titles of the other three catalogue essays clearly indicate the spectrum of the art world’s concerns at the time: “Probleme der Pop Art,” “Op Art und Kinetik,” and “Graphics and Objects: Multiple Art.” With hindsight it is then easier to understand why Broodthaers would have written the following text for his open letter from *Documenta*, and why this text would constitute his own first contribution to the galaxy of mechanically produced art objects.

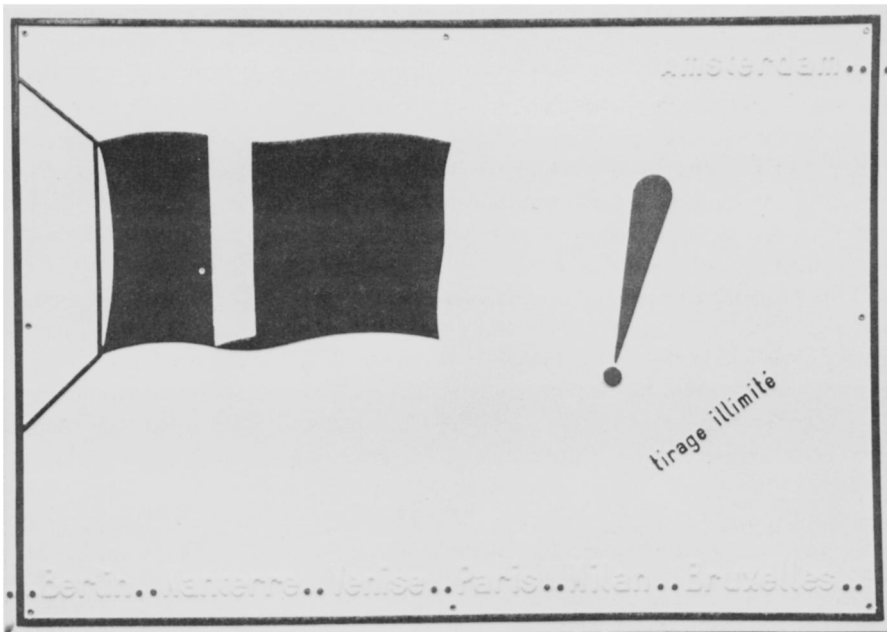
opening of *Documenta IV* was perceived as a traditional enterprise of the cultural establishment and was accordingly accompanied by active protests from numerous members of the German extra-parliamentary opposition, political activists, artists, and students. For a good documentation of these events and the spirit of “anti-Documenta” protest, see Friedrich Wolfram Heubach, ed., *Interfunktionen*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1968), a journal that was actually born in that situation of cultural protest against the domination of the exhibition by mainstream institutional and market interests.

un cube, une sphère, une pyramide obéissant aux lois de la mer. un cube, une sphère, une pyramide, un cylindre, un cube bleu, une sphère blanche, une pyramide blanche, un cylindre blanc. Ne bougeons plus.

Silence. L'espèce défie les yeux bavards. un cube vert, une sphère bleue, une pyramide blanche, un cylindre noir. Comme les rêves sont on se souvient peu; mondes où rêcher, courtes, assisleront synonymes. un cube noir, une pyramide noire.

Académie II

une sphère et un cylindre noirs. Je préfère clore les paupières et entrer dans la nuit. L'éclore de la pierre écrite les nuages et la terre d'écrouler. une sphère jaune, une pyramide jaune, un cube jaune qui fond dans l'eau, l'air et le feu.



A cube, a sphere, a pyramid obeying the laws of the ocean. A cube, a sphere, a pyramid, a cylinder. A blue cube. A white sphere. A white pyramid. A white cylinder. We will not make any more moves. Silence. The species marches on with jabbering eyes. A green cube. A blue sphere. A white pyramid. A black cylinder. Like the dreams one hardly remembers; worlds where the shark, the knife, and the cook are synonyms. A black cube. A black pyramid. A sphere and a black cylinder. I prefer to close my eyes and walk into the night. The squid's ink will describe the clouds and the distant earth. A yellow sphere. A yellow pyramid. A yellow cube that melts in the water, the air, and the fire.

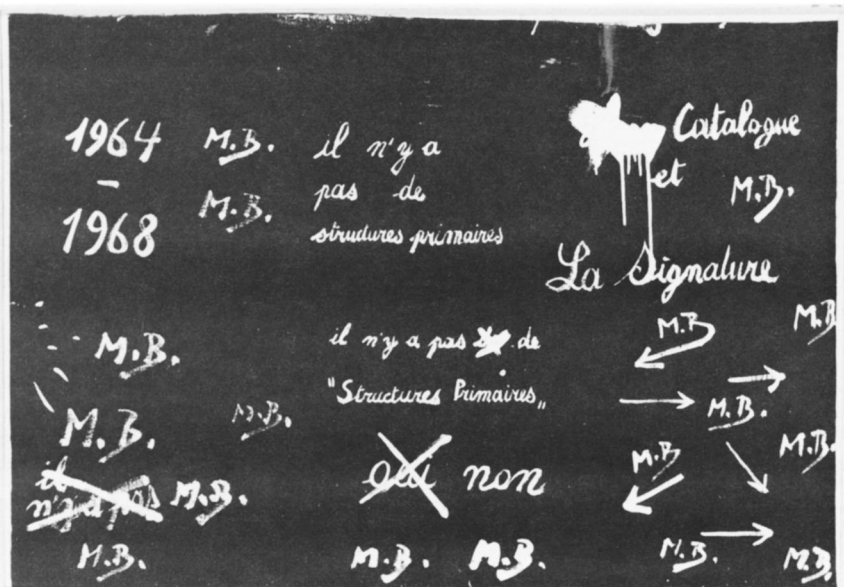
It would thus seem that the plaques, both as a type and a category of Broodthaers's work, correspond to the condition of their historical moment. This occurs in every detail of their textual and visual form, as well as in their material and their process of production. Displacing the political pamphlet or agitational handout, they replace the direct and instrumental language of political polemic and communication with that of the allegorical speech of art about art; and they assume the guise of an advertising device announcing its own status as discursive aesthetic object. But the plaques also insist that the elimination of critique and communication is enforced by the imposed transition from the realm of the political to that of the cultural. It is this suspension of the political that Broodthaers perceived to be the necessary condition of the process of aestheticization. In his analysis this suspension occurs at the very moment of the transition from language to visual object, a moment which the plaques embody in every single feature.

The technical process of their manufacture (a standard and relatively primitive process of vacuum forming a sheet of plastic over a mold/relief of wooden letters and fiberboard cut-out shapes) seems perfectly to have accommodated Broodthaers's needs. It is in these plaques that he finally overcomes all references to cubo-futurist and dadaist typography. This break takes place both at the level of their avant-garde aesthetics and of their various strategies, dispersed and internally contradictory as they had appeared in the pages of the traditionally formatted poetry book or in the guise of collage—the single-sheet, “auratic” original. The casting process not only allowed for a complete integration of typographic and formal elements in one continuous surface, but also destroyed the redeeming features of that negative white space that the traditional page format and the ground of the collage or montage still had to offer. Thus, erasure of language in these panels results as a “natural” consequence of their fabrication in a casting process where language appears literally blinded (blind-stamped), and where it acquires the status of the relief at the cost of readability. Poetic text, artistic object, discursive classification, and institutional demarcation are all literally made “of a piece,” and of one material; in their final format they are framed

as mere advertisement and, in their final form, they are contained as mere object (another art commodity). It is this homogenization (with all its losses of functional difference or of experiential specificity), that these plaques accomplish more than any of his earlier works, even though, as we have seen, the necessity for these strategies is already fully recognized in 1964 in the sculpture *Pense-Bête*.

Obviously the strategies that Broodthaers employs in these plaques indicate a full awareness of previous pictorial devices as they had been developed in the late '50s and early '60s in both Europe and the United States. But monochromy and serial repetition, as these would have been known to Broodthaers from the work of Piero Manzoni, for example, acquire radically different qualities and functions in the blinding of the text of the *Industrial Poems*. Similarly, quasi-mechanical casting, the quintessentially anti-artistic process (at least since Duchamp's late work), which had been widely assimilated in the work of artists of the early 1960s, operates here in an inverted manner. Broodthaers's provocative literalness, turning this industrial process back onto itself rather than projecting it onto the aesthetic object, uses casting to resist the aestheticization of technology.

It would seem, then, that since 1968 Broodthaers's work was increasingly motivated by a desire to contest these aesthetic practices on their own territory and their own terms. In order to perform this successfully, his own work had to engage in a mimicry of those dominant stylistic fashions that rapidly emerged



Marcel Broodthaers. Il n'y a pas de structures primaires. 1968.

and succeeded one another after the mid-1960s. The inherently mythical nature of art production, with its constantly renewed claims to have provided cognitive innovation and pleasure while actually prohibiting recognition of the conditions of its own restriction: to the specialized visual object, to the commodity, to ideological affirmation and class legitimation—all this becomes the explicit target of Broodthaers's analytic and mythoclastic project after 1968.

Inevitably such an approach required various rhetorical strategies: not only that of mimetic paraphrase and elliptical allegory, but also that of an immediate and instrumental use of language, of polemical commentary on the artistic production of his peers. Thus in an open letter of April 1968, mailed in response to an invitation to an international group exhibition in Lignano, Broodthaers already distances himself from a range of contemporary stylistic currencies:

At first I displayed objects of everyday reality—mussels, eggs, pots, and advertisement imagery. This point of departure inscribed me within the context of nouveau réalisme and sometimes that of pop art. . . . Today when the image destined for current consumption has assumed the subtleties and violences of nouveau réalisme and pop art, I would hope that definitions of art would support a critical vision both of society and of art as well as of art criticism itself. The language of forms must be united with that of words. There are no “primary structures.”²⁶

In what had become his typical strategy of publicly contradicting (or correcting, or updating) himself, Broodthaers soon forwarded another letter to the organizers of the exhibition, this dated August 27, 1968. Extensively quoting his earlier letter, he comments upon his statements, arguing,

Today, in August, I would have preferred to have the word “repression” printed rather than “consumption,” even though the two terms have a tendency to be confused with one another. Current events

26. Marcel Broodthaers, Open Letter, Brussels, April '68, mailed to the Swiss-American art journal *Art International* and published in the catalogue of the exhibition *Lignano Biennale 1*, Lignano, 1968. Broodthaers is obviously referring to the title of the exhibition *Primary Structures*, organized by Kynaston McShine (Jewish Museum, New York, 1966), which would subsequently serve for a while as a stylistic identification for postminimal and proto-conceptual painting and sculpture. The then—at least in Europe—common confusion and/or simultaneity of the various artistic practices with which Broodthaers would have felt himself to be confronted is evidenced in the title of an exhibition running parallel to *Documenta IV* (1968) titled *Primary Structure, Minimal Art, Pop Art, Anti-Form* (Galerie Rolf Rieke, Kassel, June-September 1968). In 1968, presumably at the time of this letter or slightly later, Broodthaers would have also painted the rather polemical canvas with the same title *Il n'y a pas de structures primaires* inscribed in white on a black field along with an accumulation of dispersed signatures and the two words *signature* and *catalogue* and the dates “1964” “1968.” Both the erasures in the painting (here they are performed by overpainting and crossout marks) and the even distribution of the text over the panel make the painting appear to be a direct parallel, if not anticipation of the plastic plaques emerging at that time or shortly thereafter.

generate new synonyms. . . . There are no “Primary Structures.” . . . I forgot to justify this assertion. That is evident because half of it is missing. This is not the moment, dear friends, to conclude by confessing to you that on 999 days out of 1,000, I am exposed only to boredom.²⁷

In this concluding remark, with its deliberate enigma concerning “Primary Structures” (what could figure as their other half in Broodthaers’s thinking: secondary myth?), and its peculiar exaggeration (the 999 days of boredom), Broodthaers once again implicates the newly emerging strategies of conceptual art in his constant critical but elliptical paraphrase. The moves toward extreme spatial and temporal expansion and the recourse to systematic ordering and serialization, typical of the work of many artists of the late ’60s and early ’70s in the context of conceptual art (for example, Stanley Brouwn’s *1 Step to 10,000 Steps*, Alighiero e Boetti’s *The 1,000 Longest Rivers*, On Kawara’s *1,000,000 Years*, or Hanne Darboven’s accounting procedures of years and centuries) find their polemical paraphrase and deliberate trivialization in Broodthaers’s literalist approach and his commonsensical pose.

If these artists incorporated the conditions of a totalizing administration—of the “totally administered world” as Adorno has called it—into the very structure and material principles of their work (creating a period style of the index card and the looseleaf binder, of the xerox machine and the filing cabinet, of the typewriter and the telex), to develop one of the most significant and authentic aesthetic changes of the postwar era, Broodthaers, the dialectician, replied to this aestheticization of bureaucray with the bureaucratization of the aesthetic. Thus on September 7, 1968, twenty days before the actual opening of his first fictitious museum, Broodthaers issued another open letter, claiming it to have originated from the “Cabinet des Ministres de la Culture” in Ostend (the Flemish North Sea bathing resort and fishing port, and the least likely place in Belgium for the offices of the ministers of culture to be found). He signs this letter not yet as director of the newly founded museum—a role he will assume shortly thereafter—but with the signature of an accessory: “For one of the ministers: Marcel Broodthaers.”

This letter announces to the “customers and the curious” the imminent opening ceremony of the Département des Aigles of the newly founded Musée d’Art Moderne, and it promises to let “poetry and the plastic arts shine hand-in-hand.” The letter concludes with the statement, “We hope that our formula ‘disinterestedness plus admiration’ will seduce you.”²⁸

Once again this letter contains a second textual element which is clearly

27. Marcel Broodthaers, Open Letter, Lignano, August 27, 1968.

28. Marcel Broodthaers, Open Letter, Ostend, September 7, 1968, in *Museum in Motion*, p. 249.

separate from the letter itself, an accumulation of words, serially repeated and placed in a strict eight-line, eight-column grid. The “poem” can be read either vertically in columns, which would imply the eightfold repetition of each term, or it can be read laterally in lines of nine words each, repeating the group *objet métal esprit* three times. Five of these eight lines from the open letter later appeared in identical form on one of the plastic plaques, this, presumably the third of the series, produced in late 1968 and titled *Téléphone*. Two additional lines of text appear in the plaque and the ideogrammatic rendering of a telephone repeated seven times forms another line. The juxtaposition of these elements provides an example of what Broodthaers might have had in mind when he spoke of the shining appearance of poetry and the plastic arts joining hands.

The two additional lines of text are repeated once each and are combined with a third line of the word accumulation *objet métal esprit* (which is now repeated only twice rather than three times as in the open letter), visually forming what at first glance might appear as a three-line verse of a poem. The lines from the plaque that now accompany the word accumulation already found in the open letter read:

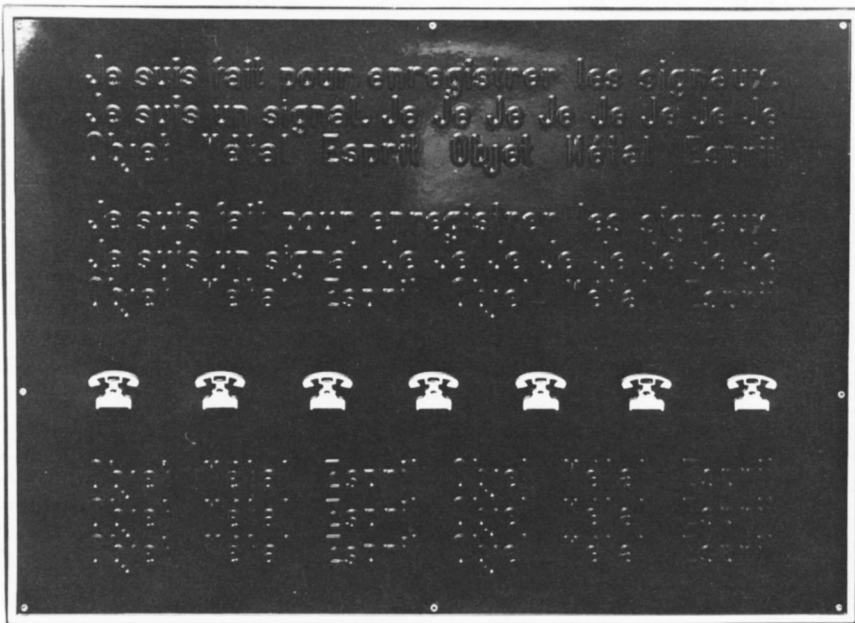
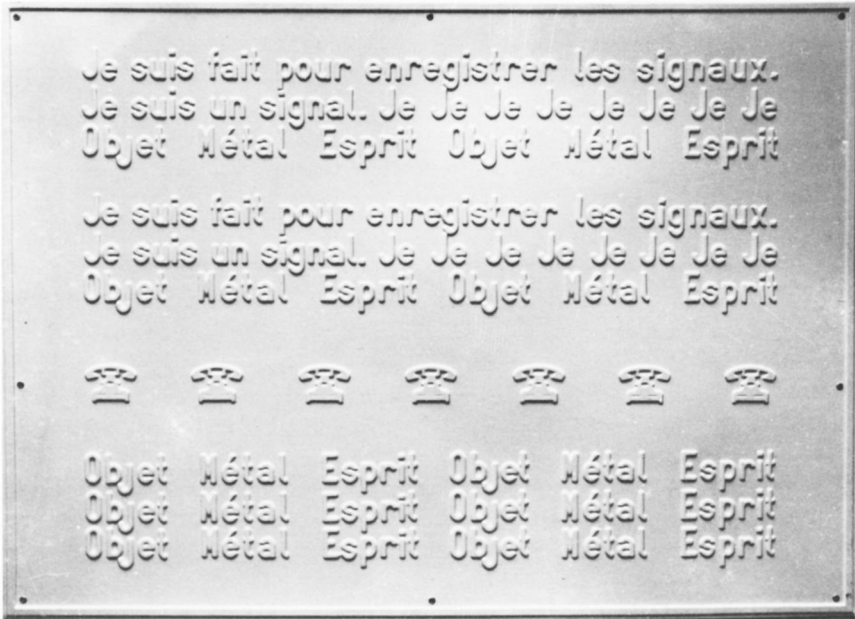
I am made to register signals.
I am a signal. I I I I I I I I

The French *je*, repeated eight times, registers as a fragment of the continuously reiterated *objet*, and this again functions as what I have called a phonetic metonymy, establishing a dialectical relationship between *je* as the particularized syllable of the word *objet* and the word *objet*. Furthermore, the version of the open letter as *Industrial Poem* incorporates yet another element from an even earlier open letter, written from the Palais des Beaux-Arts, which states: “What is culture? I write. I have taken the floor. I am a negotiator for an hour or two. I say I. I reassume my personal attitude. I fear anonymity. (I would like to control the meaning [*sens*] of culture.)”²⁹

At first glance offering itself as an unquestionable declaration of artistic intent, this statement becomes increasingly contradictory when considered within its historical context, namely, a situation of collective political action that

29. Marcel Broodthaers, Open Letter, Palais des Beaux-Arts (Brussels), June 7, 1968, in *Museum in Motion*, p. 249. The French original reads, “Qu’est-ce que la culture? J’écris. J’ai pris la parole. Je suis négociateur pour une heure ou deux. Je dis je. Je reprends mon attitude personnelle. Je crains l’anonymat. (J’aiderais contrôler le sens de la culture).” The line “Je dis je” appears first in a poem of 1966, entitled “Ma Rhétorique,” published in a small catalogue on the occasion of Broodthaers’s first exhibition with the Wide White Space Gallery in Antwerp (See Marcel Broodthaers, *Moules Oeufs Frites Pots Charbon*, Antwerp, 1966, n.p.) It is in this catalogue, as well as in the special issue of the magazine *Phantomas* (no. 62 [February 1966]), that one can see earlier examples of text-accumulations by Broodthaers that fully abandon the formats of his earlier poetry in favor of serially structured, visual and textual grids consisting of three or four nouns only—repeated over and over—anticipating the textual formats of the *Industrial Poems*.

Marcel Broodthaers. Téléphone. 1968. (Above: positive; below: negative.)



had just been negotiated into adaptation and pacified silence. In this event, what saying *I* and resisting anonymity guaranteed was, precisely, the accession to pacification. It was through this compromise that the movement of cultural practice as a continuous activity of reconciliation emerges. At the same time it is in the act of speech that the subject as an instance of resistance is constituted, as it is within language that the dominant mythology of the visual object can be dismantled. Accordingly, the meaning and place assigned to the *je* in the plaque *Téléphone* are obviously shifting, and can relate to the three terms *objet*, *métal*, *esprit*, either in succession or all at once. The *je* can alternately refer to the telephone (“I am made to register signals”) or to the plaque as a sign in and of itself (“I am a signal”), to the *je* of the speaker or to that of the reader.

Broodthaers has repeatedly emphasized that the model of language upon which he would like to base his work is that of direct, communicative action among individual subjects, thus going beyond his emphatically reiterated demand that language be joined to the (visual) objects of artistic production. Thus, for example, in the next open letter, written and published in Düsseldorf on September 19, 1968, eight days before the opening of the Musée d’Art Moderne, he states, “I feel solidarity with all approaches which have objective communication as their goal.” Or again, a little over a year later in a letter to David Lamelas, he writes, “How I tend to defend a sense of reality rather than theory or dream.” But it is in the second part of the statement in the earlier letter that the dialectical nature of Broodthaers’s reflection upon instrumental language and communicative action becomes apparent. This emerges when he instantly negates the historical possibilities of this kind of language, except for those that would originate, “[in] a revolutionary critique of the dishonesty of those extraordinary means that we call ours: the press, the radio, television in black [sic] and color.”³⁰

Paradoxically, it is in this very same letter, where the revolutionary critique of mass-cultural and ideological domination is defined as the goal of an approach to “objective communication,” that the Museum is first explicitly presented and that the Département des Aigles appears for the first time on the letterhead. In manifest contradiction to the claim for a political critique of mass-cultural representations, the Museum is presented with the following descriptive statement:

MUSEUM . . . a rectangular director. A round servant . . . A triangular cashier . . . A square guard . . . To my friends, people are not admitted. One plays here daily until the end of the world.

This is the text that then serves as a basis for the next *Industrial Poem*, entitled

30. Marcel Broodthaers, Open Letter, Département des Aigles, Düsseldorf, September 19, 1968, in *Museum in Motion*, p. 250. It is perfectly possible that the typo at the end of the letter—the omission of the letter “o” from “*en couleur*,” generating “*en culeur*”—is a deliberate pun, as is the term “*télévision en noir*” (instead of “*noir et blanc*”).

Marcel Broodthaers. Museum. Enfants non admis.
1968. (Above: positive; below: negative.)

Une forme une surface un volume , serviles .
Un angle ouvert • Des arêtes dures ,
Un directeur une servante et un caissier .

MUSEUM
enfants non admis

... toute la journée , jusqu' à la fin des temps .

Une forme une surface un volume , serviles .
Un angle ouvert • Des arêtes dures ,
Un directeur une servante et un caissier .

MUSEUM
enfants non admis

... toute la journée , jusqu' à la fin des temps .

Museum (1968)—the plaque most clearly establishing the parallelism between the plaques and the museum fictions.³¹

Again the modifications between the two versions of the text illuminate the categorical differences between the two presentational modes and the different conceptions of language deployed in them. The statement “People are not admitted”—ringing with connotations of class and politics—is changed in the plaque version into the more grotesque and authoritarian “Children are not admitted.” The list of the geometricized administrative roles is equally modified. Broodthaers obviously decided that the plaque version required a text whose appearance would seem more devoted to serious reflection on visuality and plasticity than the rather comical conflation of the language of abstract geometric form with the language of administration. The listing of the quintessentially modernist terms of visual neutrality—“a form a surface a volume”—is suddenly concluded with the unexpected qualifier “servile,” a term simultaneously setting up a link with the subsequent listing of the institutional and administrative functions, which reads, “a director a (female) servant and a cashier.” And the statement “One plays here daily until the end of the world” is reduced to the laconic “all day long until the end of time.”

The open letters, both embodying and practicing Broodthaers’s conception of language as active exchange and direct communication between subjects, attest to this from their very line of salutation. Generally addressed “Chers amis,” this term is occasionally changed or, when accompanied by a “Cher monsieur,” it appears in parenthesis. This occurs when the letter addresses an institution or art official, comically indicating that already in the mode of address a discursive alteration is entailed: made inescapable once the shift into the institutional level of aesthetic reception has occurred. In opposition to the open letters, the *Industrial Poems* incorporate those transformations to which language is subjected in the process of aestheticization: while claiming to be a language of rupture and transgression, and thus of communicative action, it consistently ends up in institutional containment, all the more so since the disavowal of that containment is the condition of its transgressive appeal (“we hope that our formula ‘disinterestedness plus admiration’ will seduce you” is Broodthaers’s phrase).

It is this awareness that distinguishes Broodthaers’s textual and visual constructs from the legacies of the avant-garde texts that they, at first glance, seem to resemble. They are texts which always already know that “[they will not] escape their structural basis (as avant-garde texts, in the guise of which they will enter

31. In a statement from 1968, Broodthaers comments on the proximity of the plaques to the museum fictions. “The atmosphere of this museum,” he writes, “is also that of the plastic panels. These plaques (85 × 125 cm), fabricated in the manner of industrially produced signs, occupy the border between object and image. According to their mechanical production they seem to deny their status as art objects, or rather I should say, they tend to prove art and its reality by means of ‘negativity.’ These plaques express irrelevance; they refer to something other than themselves” (*BROODTHAERS*, exhibition announcement).

into the analogical series of one of the general textual modes); nor will they escape from their ideological basis (they will always speak the language of the archetype, either for or against it); nor will they escape their institutional basis (they will be read—even after their posthumous destination—from the perspective of the institution).”³²

It was this awareness of the peculiar condition of the avant-garde text that warned Broodthaers specifically against the general enthusiasm with which language was being incorporated into the works of conceptual art at the very time he was conceiving his *Industrial Poems*. And I assume that it is partially in response to this development that Broodthaers added another section to his museum, the section from which a number of open letters originated, as of October 31, 1969.

Thus the first letter from the “Section Littéraire,” addressed in English to a conceptual artist, begins with the reversal of the first of Sol Lewitt’s “Sentences on Conceptual Art,” so that it reads, “Conceptual artists are more rationalists rather than mystics . . . etc. . . .”³³ What follows in the letter is perhaps the most pointed critique of the conceptual movement to be articulated by one of the artists whom art history has already relegated to that movement. Once again staging the ritual of a public self-correction, Broodthaers negates the validity of a statement that he had submitted as his original contribution (“to be presented on the level of the page”) to the first major European exhibition of conceptual art:

Let us imagine, in the meantime, dear Sir (dear friends) the real text and the reality of the text as a single world. And its roads, its seas, its clouds, as if they were those of liberty and justice.³⁴

Now he suggests the following correction:

In one of my last letters, of August 25, still under the aegis of the nineteenth century and sent to the organizers of an exhibition in Leverkusen, instead of . . . “its roads, its seas, its clouds, as if they were those of freedom and justice,” read “. . . its roads, its seas, its clouds, as if those of repression and absence.” Because the reality of the text and the text of the real are a long way from forming a single world.³⁵

32. Charles Grivel, “Production de l’intérêt romanesque. Un état du texte,” *Approaches to Semiotics*, no. 34 (1973), p. 64.

33. Sol Lewitt’s “Sentences on Conceptual Art” were first published in the English journal *Art-Language* (vol. 1, no. 1 [May 1969], pp. 11–13), and shortly thereafter in the catalogue of the exhibition *Konzeption-Conception*, in which Broodthaers participated. The original sentence read, “Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists.”

34. Marcel Broodthaers, Open Letter, Brussels, August 25, 1969, submitted as a contribution to the exhibition and catalogue *Konzeption-Conception*, Städtisches Museum, Leverkusen, Schloss Morsbroich, 1969, n.p.

35. Marcel Broodthaers, Open Letter (to David Lamelas), Brussels, October 31, 1969, identified as originating from the Musée d’Art Moderne, Section Littéraire, Département des Aigles.

As of 1969 the “Section Littéraire” seems to have taken on the function of questioning the validity of precisely that art practice where the reality of the text and the text of the real appeared to have found their synthesis. Broodthaers’s allegorical impulse in the “Section Littéraire” simultaneously devalidates and conserves. Even as it contests the legitimacy of the historical avant-garde text in the present, it historicizes present practices by linking them to their modernist origins. And at the same time it recognizes and conserves the original and immutable radicality of that legacy. This impulse generated one of Broodthaers’s most important book projects, the transformation of Stéphane Mallarmé’s *Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard* into a version subtitled *Image*. In this intervention Broodthaers erases the text of the poem and replaces it with spatial configurations of the poem’s original linear sequence and typographical variations, which he identified as the poem’s “traces” [*sillons*].

Undoubtedly one of Broodthaers’s central works, this book parallels the plaques—in its attitude toward the textual legacy of the avant-garde, in its treatment of language and visual plasticity, and in its allegorization of conceptual art. Once again it is commented upon in an open letter, dated December 2, 1969, and issued on the occasion of the opening of Broodthaers’s exhibition “Exposition Littéraire autour de Mallarmé” at the Wide White Space Gallery in Antwerp.³⁶

Why? Without doubt, I once encountered Magritte, long ago, and he invited me to contemplate this poem. So, I forgot it; I contemplated it . . . today, I make this Image. I say farewell. A long period of life. Farewell to all, to the men of letters that are deceased. The dead artists. New! New? Perhaps. Excepted. A Constellation.³⁷

Though disguised as personal commemoration (and certainly originating in it), and as farewell, the sincerity of this homage is belied by the deliberately unacknowledged Mallarmé quotation at the end of the explanation of his project. Like the activities of the “Section Littéraire,” it serves once again as an allegorical commentary upon the aesthetic practices of the present. In exact reverse of the claims of conceptual art, Broodthaers’s visualization of textuality now goes as far as presenting Mallarmé’s *Un coup de dés* in a special edition of twelve copies in which the spatialized version of the poem has been engraved into anodized

36. The frequently used abbreviation for this gallery, WWS, served Broodthaers as the basis for an additional pun in the announcement of his exhibition, which he subtitled “Marcel Broodthaers at the Deblieu—deblieu/S,” simultaneously mocking the European craze for all (art) things American, as well as the fashion to present galleries as disinterested, neutral, and efficient agencies of the ventures of contemporary art, indicated through names such as MTL, Art and Project, Modern Art Agency, Wide White Space.

37. Marcel Broodthaers, Open Letter, Antwerp, December 2, 1969. René Magritte presented a copy of Mallarmé’s *Un coup de dés* to Broodthaers at the beginning of their friendship in the mid-1940s.

aluminum, literally reifying and deliberately commodifying the original poem's insistence on its linguistic and visual autonomy. While conceptual art disavowed both its historical origins (in the quest of the avant-garde text for an absolute self-referentiality) and its contemporary dilemma (in the text's radical denial of objecthood, which nonetheless remains bound by institutional and economic frames of mediation), Broodthaers's objectified textuality foregrounds these conditions.

After four years of existence, Broodthaers's fictitious museum was officially closed by its founder and director in 1972 as his contribution to *Documenta V*. On this occasion yet another "Section" was opened and a final open letter issued under the auspices of the Musée d'Art Moderne (all subsequent open letters were simply issued by Marcel Broodthaers). Published by the "Sections Art Moderne et Publicité," the letter justifies the closure of the Musée d'Art Moderne because it has—as the letter argues—passed from a "heroic and solitary form to one bordering on consecration due to the help of . . . the *Documenta* exhibition. It is only logical that it would grind down in boredom."

Then the letter continues to elaborate on the newly added "Section Publicité"—which in fact consisted of an installation of documents and frames, photographs and catalogues, and several of the plaques—arguing,

It seems a little premature to describe the intentions that have guided me in the realization of the section "Public Relations." Since its image coincides with that of the advertising section of the catalogue of *Documenta* it will help me to avoid a long speech. Once you busy yourself with art, you will always fall from one catalogue to the next.³⁸

Broodthaers's remarks remain at least partially cryptic, since, although the catalogue of *Documenta V* does contain a section that documents and analyzes advertising, it does not reproduce any imagery reminiscent of Broodthaers's work. By contrast, the catalogue section "Political Propaganda" begins with three pages of eagle images which could have been borrowed from Broodthaers's catalogue for the "Section des Figures," the exhibition staged earlier that year by Broodthaers at the Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf.³⁹ But these pages have in fact been inserted by the editors of that section "in the manner of Broodthaers." More important, though, is Broodthaers's remark that "once you busy yourself with art you always fall from one catalogue to the next." For this serves as a renewed critique of the conceptualists' declaration that supplements, such as catalogues and exhibition advertisements, are not only legitimate carriers of artistic infor-

38. Marcel Broodthaers, leaflet published by the Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Sections Art Moderne et Publicité.

39. For an extensive discussion of the Düsseldorf exhibition, "Section des Figures: The Eagle from Oligocene to the Present," see the essay published here by Rainer Borgemeister.

mation but also egalitarian forms of art distribution. While it is not clear at this point which of the plaques actually figured in the “Section Publicité” of *Documenta V*,⁴⁰ and even though one of them actually carries the inscription “Musée d’Art Moderne Dt. des Aigles Service Publicité,” it is certain that some of them appeared in the installation—as one supplement among others (photographs, frames, catalogues)—that officially closed the series of Broodthaers’s museum fictions.

While Broodthaers was clearly reflecting on the role that these disavowed supplements play in the constitution of the artistic construct and its readings, he opposed their transformation into actual works with all the vehemence of his annihilating humor. For Broodthaers, the problematic status of the auratic original—emerging as high art from a history segmented by class and its standards of differentiation and sublimation—could not be resolved by a mere abolition of high art’s object and commodity form. While the experience embedded in the objects of that past and its legacy had to be defended against the desublimation of the present, the consciousness of the present as one of political conflict had to be defended against the artistic promises of an instant resolution of these contradictions. Finally, when it comes to the question of whether or not supplements such as the plaques in Broodthaers’s production could actually be considered as works of art, he turns around and calls them “booby traps” and identifies those who take them for paintings as “simpletons”:

[The plaques] are intended to be read on a double level—each one involved in a negative attitude which seems to me specific to the stance of the artist: not to place the message completely on one side alone, neither image nor text. That is, the refusal to deliver a clear message—as if this role were not incumbent upon the artist, and by extension upon all producers with an economic interest. . . . I prefer signing my name to these booby traps. . . .

And when asked what kind of “simpletons” he intended to catch with these traps, he replied:

Well, those who take these plaques for pictures and hang them on their walls. Although there’s no proof that the real simpleton isn’t the author himself, who thought he was a linguist able to leap over the bar in the signifier/signified formula, but who might in fact have been merely playing the professor.⁴¹

40. Etienne Tilman’s assumption that all of the plaques were exhibited at *Documenta V*, actually forming the “Section Publicité,” is incorrect, according to Maria Gilissen.

41. Marcel Broodthaers, “Ten Thousand Francs Reward,” p. 42.

The Exhibition at the
MTL Gallery in Brussels,
March 13–April 10, 1970*

ANNE RORIMER

LE PERIQUET

~~Vive la liberté ! Vive la liberté d' expression !~~

~~xx~~

~~Toutxx~~

*Let us imagine, dear Sir (dear friends), the
real text and the reality of the text as a
single world. And its roads, its seas, its
clouds as if they were those of liberty and
justice.*

— Marcel Broodthaers, letter from
Brussels, August 25, 1969, published
in the catalogue *Konzeption-Conception*

The recent acquisition of *MTL-DTH* by the Musée national d'art moderne
in Paris makes available a central, though little known work by Marcel

* The help of Maria Gilissen has been invaluable in the writing of this essay. I am also indebted to Yves Gevaert for bringing the MTL work to my attention and for sharing his many insights; to Stefan Germer for his ideas about the work; and to Cora Rosevear for her editorial comments. In addition I wish to thank Bernard Blistène and Cathérine David for their assistance while studying the work at the Musée national d'art moderne, Paris, in 1986.

Broodthaers.¹ With one exception,² the work had not been exhibited since 1970, when the artist first assembled its various components for the small space of the MTL Gallery in Brussels, then located at 48, rue Armand Campenhout. The accompanying catalogue in French, Flemish, and English both documents the exhibition and plays a significant role in the work itself. An inscription on the gallery window, together with a seven-minute color film projected on the inside of the same window on the final day of the exhibition, are also integral parts of the work that now exists apart from its original setting.

When invited to exhibit at MTL by the founder of the gallery, Fernand Spillemaeckers, Broodthaers apparently arrived at the appointed time not with finished drawings, paintings, or sculptures, but with personal files that pertained mainly, though not exclusively, to his earlier practice as a poet.³ For the exhibition he made a selection of typed or hand-written poetry manuscripts and other texts, together with various verbal or visual notations, jottings, scribbles, and scrawls. The resulting installation thus consisted essentially of a display of already existing writings and notes for work in progress.

No documentary photographs of the 1970 installation were taken. In the catalogue, however, Broodthaers lists the contents of the exhibition and, having divided the selected items into four separate groups that give the work its organizational structure—parts A, B, C, and D—specifies the manner of their placement within the space. Of the sixty-seven manuscripts and drawings included, nineteen belong to part A, thirty-two to parts B and C, and sixteen to part D. According to the catalogue, part A, comprised of three sub-divisions, “forms one piece measuring 300 × 81 cm presented horizontally [lying on tables] and protected by plexiglas.”⁴ Parts B and C, also under plexiglas, are to be shown on the wall. Arranged side by side about an inch apart, the drawings and manuscripts form a double row, one above the other, of sixteen pages of equal size, each section measuring 62.5 × 200 cm (approximately 2 × 6½ feet). The catalogue identifies the pages on view within each of these three groups by individual titles. Although “having the same characteristics”⁵ as the contents of the first three sections, the catalogue specifies that the sixteen items belonging to part D must be kept in a closed file folder during the course of the exhibition. Only the folder is visible, not the sheets of paper within it.

1. *MTL-DTH* was installed in 1986 as part of the changing display of works in the museum's collection. The work's title, which links the name of the gallery with the middle three letters of the artist's name, was assigned to the work after the initial gallery exhibition (see the list of one-person exhibitions in *Marcel Broodthaers*, London, Tate Gallery, 1980, p. 109).

2. The work was included in *André Beullens, Marcel Broodthaers, Amadeus Cortier*, Ghent, Museum Van Hedendaagse Kunst, 1977.

3. In conversation with Isi Fizsman, June 1986. Fizsman acquired the work in 1970. For other works by Broodthaers in his collection, see *Marcel Broodthaers, Oeuvres majeures, provenant d'une collection privée à Anvers*, Brussels, SPRL Yves Gevaert, two parts, 1984, 1986.

4. *Marcel Broodthaers. MTL 13/3/70 – 10/4/70*, Brussels, MTL, 1970, p. 7.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Having thus detailed the contents of the exhibition, the catalogue further explains: “The exhibition also comprised, on the window of the gallery and readable only from the inside, a reproduction of the invitation card. On March 30th it was replaced by elements from the biography of the artist, this time readable from the outside.”⁶

The film, which Broodthaers projected on the last evening of the exhibition, is based on the text from the invitation card that was reproduced on the gallery window. The various components of this work—the texts and drawings arranged under plexiglas or enclosed in a file folder, the inscription on the inside of the gallery window, and the film—comprise, “by special demand of the artist,”⁷ an aesthetic unit.

Broodthaers’s decision to present an assortment of manuscripts at different stages of completion, interspersed with sketchily rendered drawings, represents an unprecedented move, with ramifications for the MTL exhibition as a whole. Significantly, the exhibited pages were not framed, either individually or in their separate groups, and thus retained their informal and open-ended character. With a few exceptions in part A, all the pages are of equal, standard size, 21 × 27 cm (approximately 8½ × 11 inches), as the catalogue states. The individual sheets vary occasionally with regard to paper type and age. Pages of differing quality, texture, weight, or color suggest production over a period of years rather than at a single “moment of inspiration.” The texts, combining typing and handwriting, are full of additions and deletions, indeterminate markings, and an intermittent use of colored pens or magic-marker.

Of the fifty-one pages of drawings and manuscripts, approximately thirty are poems by Broodthaers, most of them about living creatures. The majority of the poems refer to insects, fish, birds, or mammals, forming within the MTL work a kind of bestiary. Upon close attention to the specific pages, one finds texts relating to Broodthaers’s published poems as well as unfamiliar ones, also in the state of being reworked. One does not know, for example, what might have become of “La Torpille” (“The Torpedo Fish” or “Electric Ray”) (C1).⁸ Partly typed, partly handwritten, it states: “With glaucous eye, she visits her sisters aligned like capital letters / alongside the torpedo boat whose name is / covered with shells. To whom must she / remit the urgent letter, signed—initialed—by three stars?”⁹ Near the center of the page, but not associated with the lines of the poem, “le téléphone” has been written several times and deleted with magic-

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

8. The indication “C1” refers to the listing of manuscripts in the MTL catalogue, as do all such indications that follow the text.

9. “Elle visite, l’oeil glauque, ses soeurs alignées comme des majuscules / à bord du torpilleur dont le nom est / couvert de coquillages. A qui doit-elle / remettre la lettre urgente, signée [or, alternatively, “paraphée] par — ~~***~~ — trois étoiles?” (Translations of French texts in the MTL installation are my own, with the assistance of Judith Cousins.)

marker—perhaps a response to an actual interruption or else another idea.¹⁰ In any case, the viewer does not know if Broodthaers developed this agile passage about the torpedo fish any further. Drafts for another poem, “La Sole,” appear twice, in parts A and C (A, 3a; C10). Although slightly fuller, the text in the first part resembles that in the latter. One learns that since this paper-thin fish is not cumbersome it may be laid on the chest to palpitate, where, before dying, it cures ailments of the heart.¹¹

About half of the MTL poems, excluding “La Torpille” and “La Sole,” can be found in Broodthaers’s volumes of poetry *La Bête Noire*, 1961, and *Pense-Bête*, 1963. Both books belong, as their titles elliptically imply, to the long literary tradition of the bestiary.¹² “Le Porc” is the only text that corresponds almost exactly to its published form (C5). In other published poems one might recognize a single line that has been extracted from the working manuscript and remains nearly intact. Thus, as concerns “Le Lama,” one can trace the opening line in *Pense-Bête*, which reads “It descends a pile of mountains on the other side of paradise,” to the last three lines describing this animal among the MTL drafts (A, 3h). The word *paradis* (paradise), it may be noted, has been substituted for *monde* (world).¹³

Further textual comparisons and correlations are possible with regard to, among others, “Le Perroquet” (“The Parrot”), “Le Vautour” (“The Vulture”), “L’Araignée” (“The Spider”), “Le Serpent de Mer” (“The Sea-Serpent”), and “La Baleine” (“The Whale”). The texts have been partially or almost totally transformed, or else they have been transferred from one subject to another. For example, words used to define “L’Anémone de Mer” (“The Sea-Anemone”)—ironically, “She is perfect”—in the MTL text applies to both the mussel and the jellyfish in *Pense-Bête* (C14).

The bestiary, traditionally a commentary on human nature and society, allows Broodthaers to invest the work with a humor that is alternately biting, sarcastic, and sardonic. The single line of the text for “La Baleine” (“The Whale”), for example, illustrated by a letter *B* lying down, encapsulates whatever might be said about personal and global shortsightedness: “The whale has no idea of immensity” (C4).¹⁴ The poems metaphorically describe a social hierarchy. The sea-serpent lodges in a sigh at the end of the earth,¹⁵ while the spider has the

10. Another MTL manuscript (A, 3f), a poem entitled “Le Poète (suite),” consists of the following two lines: “Renseignements: Bureaux du silence dominant. Lettres, menaces” (“Information: Office of dominating silence. Letters, threats.”) and crossed out “Principe: Téléphoner—téléphoner—Télé—Téléphoner—Téléphoner?” The telephone is an important object in a number of works by Broodthaers.

11. “C’est un poisson peu encombrant. Si vous souffrez du coeur, / laissez la palpiter sur votre poitrine jusqu’à ce qu’il / meure. Et vous serez guéri.”

12. A *pense-bête* is a mnemonic device, like a string around your finger.

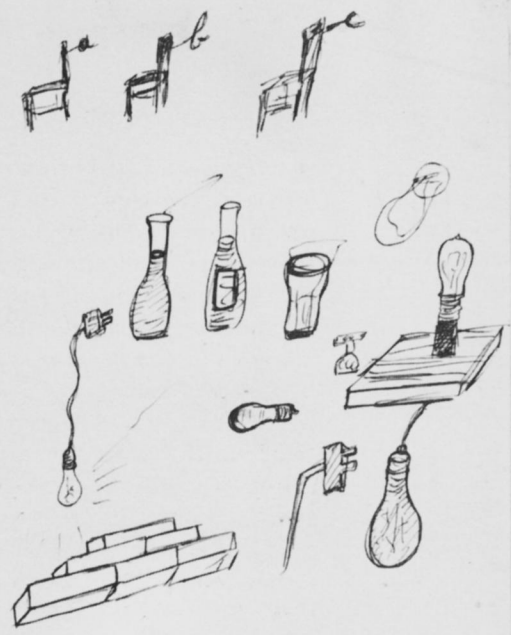
13. “Il descend une pile de montagnes au revers du paradis” (or “monde”).

14. “La Baleine n’a aucune / conscience de l’immensité.”

15. “Je me repose dans un soupir. / Ah, c’est le bout du monde” (C13).

h i n
h i s
a b s
a d a b n

n b c
d e f
g h i k l m n o p q r s t u
v w x y z



L'ARAIGNEE



*longue
motorielle*

Est-elle pleine cette nature ~~de~~ ?
Nuit blanche dépeçée au long de filie innombrative, tout comme
libre de tout spectacle, toiles et cordages. Le jour s'y fait
au travers des pattes ~~aplaties~~, clair et obscur.
Sensation de vol plutôt que de marche.
Certitude de corps perdu ~~et~~ de bien.

Cosmos. Cela ?
Mais comme une mouche muselée.
Mais comme un ~~jeu~~ à la langue ossuée.

longue
avec une soie,
calculat



LE FERROQUET

On ne pourrait lui faire dire, ce que l'on n'a pas dit.
Il répète tout dans une langue de bête originale. *Je*
Je suis entêté, c'est de mon caractère. Je suis content.
Je prends la parole.

LE VAUTOUR

~~Il est au milieu des niches de toit.~~ *Il vole au milieu des*
niches de toit.
Sa place est marquée par une croix blanche et de signe de l'infini.

Il ne chante pas comme on ne chante pas dans les coupe - gorges.

~~C'est mon caractère.~~

Il vole au milieu des niches de toit
Il ne chante pas

LA TORPILLE

Eile visite, l'oeil glauque, ses oeurs alignées come des ^{magnumes} ~~bestes~~
noirs de son propre-aisne d'écriture-^{à l'air} es d'un torpilleur dont le nom est
et le prème est ^{comme de conuilles} ~~soin~~ ^{à qui dit-elle} ~~soin~~
remette la lettre urgente ^{graphes} ~~graphes~~ ~~graphes~~ ~~graphes~~ ~~graphes~~ ~~graphes~~ ~~graphes~~ ~~graphes~~

***?
trous etails



LE SPERMATOZOIDE

Ressemble-t-il à quelqu'un de connu ? X?
N'est-il qu'un masque de l'ombre
ou le corp, ~~masque~~ ~~masque~~ d'un acrobate ?
Cet innocent n'a jamais tué personne.

LA SOLE

~~Si vous souffrez du coeur,~~
Laissez le palpiter sur votre poitrine jusqu'à ce qu'elle seure.
Vous serez guéri. ~~C'est un poisson~~

LA MIE

C'est un poisson peu encombrant. Si vous souffrez du coeur,
Laissez le palpiter sur votre poitrine jusqu'à ce qu'elle seure.
Et vous serez guéri.



Crew ites

LES CRUSTACES

Je torture	J'ai été torturé	Je torturerai
Tu torture	Tu as été torturé	Tu tortureras
Il torture	Il a été torturé	Il torturera
Nous torturons	Nous avons été torturés	Nous torturerons
Vous torturez	Vous avez été torturés	Vous torturerez
Ils torturent	Ils ont été torturés	Ils tortureront

Que je te torturasse	Que nous nous torturassions
Que tu me torturasses	Que vous vous torturassiez
Qu'il se torturât	Qu'ils se torturassent

Il faut les cuire
C'est dans les aquariums les qu'on les recueille
Cris ? ~~la suite des crustacés~~
Ils font se même bruit ~~qui accompagne le mâchonnement~~
des convives aux glorieuses tables. ~~Raissons~~
Cris ~~de~~ ~~de~~ ~~de~~ sont difficiles, ~~Il faut les~~
~~écouter.~~

le Crustacé
le Hébécide
Il mange droit
le ~~change de couleur~~
Dernier message.
image télégramme.
s.o.s. Boudes des

L'ARAIGNEE ET LE MOU

NORMAN

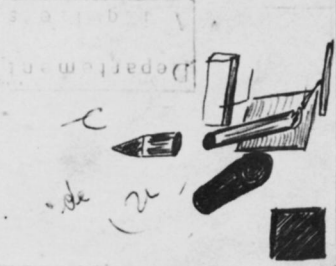
L'ARAIGNEE ET LE MOU ~~signe~~

L'araignée habite un soufflé de mouche, ce logement lui vaut beaucoup moins qu'une aile de poulet. Sur le même fil, habite le mou. L'un mord et l'autre pique.

~~Elle se tresse plus que le soleil~~
~~Il se tresse plus que le soleil~~



Le matin siffle son chien le vent. Est la semaine sèche sur le même fil de lierre, de ~~arbres~~, d'arbres. Le soleil siffle des ~~arbres~~,
~~arbres~~



La Baleine



La baleine n'a aucune
conscience de l'immensité.

LA HAIE

Elle sort le son lit bleu. ^{et} elle s'accoude à la balustrade des gorgones, ^{le regard conté, elle} un instant encore, pour rêver à l'espadon qui lui déchira le coeur. Elle se détourne. Elle meurt au milieu des larmes du gulfstream. Elle plane comme un mouchoir.

~~À sa queue, l'épaule de gulfstream s'écroule~~
~~poêle~~ Elle s'enfonce dans l'écume enflamme. ~~Elle s'enfonce~~ Elle s'enfonce.

LES ~~MAKERS~~ BATEAUX

MANÈRES
Mangez-vous les uns les autres.
La mer éclate, ils sont faux.



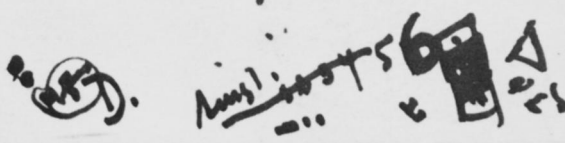
L'AN E

Un coup de pied à mon épaule, un coup de pied à mon énon,
un coup de pied à mon éne.

Et sur une patte il tient encore debout ^{de} ~~bleu~~ ^{de} ~~général~~ ^{de} ~~général~~
~~général~~

LE SERPENT DE MER

Je ne repose dans un soupir. Ah, c'est le bout du monde.
Ah, sur l'eau trouble, je vois un ^{galerie pour} ~~concreto~~ ^{de} ~~Dieu~~, ^{qui s'effrite} ~~qui c'est~~
triste de ne pas exister. ^{longue} ~~avec~~ ^à ~~sa~~ ^{place} ~~pour~~
~~chaque de ses~~ ~~pour~~ ~~de~~ ~~faire~~ ?
Je n'en suis rien. Je n'y suis pour rien.
~~L'aut est~~



Le Chien

Il erre dans le sang, se frotte d'huile, et se lave le visage
Ses yeux sont noirs et ses oreilles en carton. Il est
indolent sans aucune peur. Tous

Il se frotte d'huile et se lave le visage
Ses yeux sont noirs et ses oreilles en carton.



La Vache

~~Elle se frotte d'huile et se lave le visage~~
~~Ses yeux sont noirs et ses oreilles en carton.~~
~~Il est indolent sans aucune peur.~~

POULES

Le calcul de la poule, ~~si est pas et mauvais~~

1750
500
375
-45225
-47500

Le calcul de la poule, ~~si est pas et mauvais~~

1250
750
275
-45325
-47500

Le calcul de la poule, ~~si est pas et mauvais~~

1750
350
500
175
-45325
-47500

Ce type sans mémoire / le sang coule / Change de lit de mort sans
changer.) Le tigre se désespère, journal et rougeur. Le tigre tue
prompt à prêter un morceau de jabon/ Le sang coule là où régnent les
nuages/ La forêt marche au pas cadencé/ C'est le néant/ Adieu l'univers.
Pas de certitude/ Le sang coule/ Le matin sèche/ Le tigre se désespère/
~~Siffle~~ Siffle, ~~non~~ chien/ Le tigre tue/ C'est la semaine sainte/
La forêt marche au pas cadencé/ Il pleut des mouches/ Pas de certitude/
C'est le jour des mortes/ " La semaine sainte" chuchotent les araignées
Frères et Soeurs se racontent leurs rêves. Il fait chaud/ ~~il pleut~~
~~il pleut des mouches hurlantes/ Pleut le jour des mortes/~~



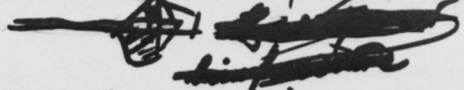
LE FIGOIGUENIER

Le regard paraît limpide au travers des lunettes d'écaille.
C'est un directeur, la tête ronde et le sang froid.
Quand il nage, l'artifice de son corps. C'est bien un homme suivi
de l'ombre d'un poisson. C'est là

-Votre sentiment, s'il vous plaît, Monsieur: ~~pas la peine~~

~~Il se frotte d'huile et se lave le visage~~
~~Ses yeux sont noirs et ses oreilles en carton.~~

(quel objet risqué dans la main, pour servir comme des
vagues, n'est-il pas? et nous avons peur de son)



Il déclare qu'il aime /
fut toujours des années
lors qu'il peut reconnaître d'
ses souvenirs s'enfoncer
s'enfoncer alors par la route
qu'il adora les poissons, ~~elle~~
et que c'est une ~~nostalgie~~

better fortune of living in the breath of a fly; however insubstantial this dwelling might be, it costs less than the wing of the chicken.¹⁶ As regards the structure of the MTL work, however, Broodthaers has not organized the textual elements themselves in a hierarchical way, whether they concern lowly crustaceans (C11) —whose conjugation of the verb *to torture* is full of mistakes— or the clever crow — who, while counting the stars, discovers two more.¹⁷

Three sheets of the text entitled “Cosmos” (A, 3d; B14; B15), a poem called “L’Appeau” (“The Bird-Call”) (C15), and two separate pages with various penned phrases and a line of numerical calculations (A, 3g; B16) relate in some measure to a prose poem published in the Belgian literary review *Phantomas* in 1966 in an issue devoted to Broodthaers. Whereas the *Phantomas* page is complete in itself — insofar as it has been sanctioned by publication — the MTL pages divided between parts A, B, and C illustrate tentative ideas, alternative combinations of words, and possible alterations. As in the case of the other MTL texts, Broodthaers grants the viewer a glimpse of his working process. Trial and error and revision, the traces of decision-making, are made visible.

Thus, it is those very procedures that are generally disguised in and by public presentation of art that provide the content of the MTL pages. In the itemized listing of the catalogue, Broodthaers takes pains to describe the entries as typed (“t. d. = texte dactylographié”), handwritten (“manu. = manuscrit”), crossed out (“rat. = raturé”), or written over (“surch. = surchargé”). In featuring these operations, Broodthaers not only foregrounds the mental and physical activities of his working procedures, but also parodies the descriptive minutiae of catalogue entries for traditional artworks.

The pictorial imagery of the MTL manuscripts — whether on separate sheets or included on pages with text — appears arbitrary, whimsical, if not indecipherable, and, like the written texts, not completely resolved. Many of the pages contain what appear to be mere doodles, attributable to free association, perhaps with the mind focused elsewhere. Although possibly destined for later use, the pen-and-ink outlines of chairs, bottles, and light bulbs on one sheet (B2); or of tic-tack-toe, a camel, a gun, a mustachioed figure with pussy-cat head, along with an isolated boot treading vertically up the page on a ridge of little flowers, on another (B13), elude the search for logical connections or specific messages. Perhaps the uninhibited linear scratches of the pen on another page, combined with intensely rendered squiggles, represent, in the spirit of the bestiary, the path of an insect (B5). Listed as “dessin filiforme, encre de chine,” a purposely pretentious designation, this “line” drawing in Chinese ink assumes the role of

16. “L’araignée habite un souffle de mouche, ce logement vaut / beaucoup moins qu’une aile de poulet” (C3).

17. “C’est en décomptant les étoiles que nous nous aperçumes qu’il / y en avait deux en plus” (C7).

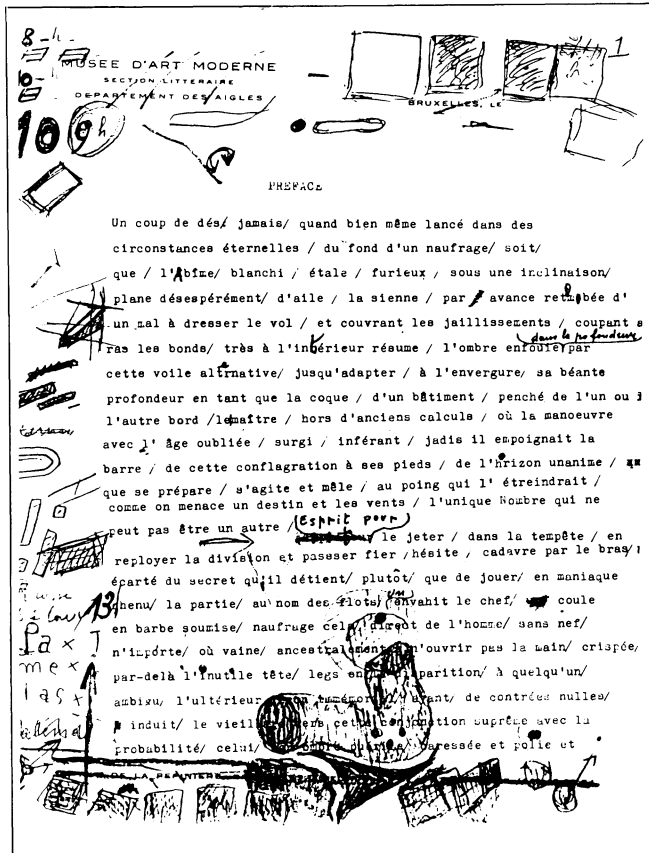
the finished piece once it has been set within the work, despite the fact that, in a more traditional context, the artist might have discarded it.

The drawings are open to interpretation while at the same time, paradoxically, their meaning lies in the impossibility of assigning them a precise definition. For example, an organic, architectural form with windowlike shapes suggests the meandering of the pen more than it does any resolute, structural conception (B4). Broodthaers entitles it simply “dessin encre de chine.” The title assigned by Broodthaers to a page with a list of unrelated, handwritten words accompanied by dots and arrows further suggests the nature of the drawings (B7). In the catalogue this particular page receives the description, “Perturbation manu. encre de chine illustré de signes, taches de café.” *Perturbation* heads an askew columnar succession of words as follows: *hausse / hier / filtre / mettra / aussi / passée / territoire*. The separate words bear meaning as individual elements only, attendant on later insertion into a structured, verbal context. Complete in and of themselves they form a random list whose further purpose is not articulated. The coffee stains incurred accidentally during the working process would seem to mock traditional media such as sepia while undermining the drawing’s potential preciousness, since in conventional circumstances they would ruin its value.

As if to appease the historian seeking to explain artistic production with documentary evidence, Broodthaers has included with his own writings a hand-copied portion of the text of La Fontaine’s “Le corbeau et le renard.” The insertion of this text renders a special service within the piece, appealing as it does to the viewers’ immediate sense of recognition. While the viewer responds to the extreme familiarity of the verse, possibly memorized in childhood, the artist recognizes its creator, whose fable forms the basis of several of Broodthaers’s major works as well as of his poems. By directly appropriating text from “Le corbeau et le renard,” Broodthaers reaffirms the dependence of originality on artistic precedence and borrowing. Since La Fontaine’s lines, fixed in the popular mind, do not relinquish their own authenticity when they are integrated into another work in another century, they permit Broodthaers to situate his work within the broader context of his cultural tradition. Resting on the assumption that one text generates the next, the MTL piece entertains, as part of its own internal content, the idea of individual authorship as appropriation.

The first five pages identified in the MTL catalogue (A, la-e) pertain to *Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard*, Mallarmé’s final poetic achievement of 1897, published in 1914. Two of these pages, both filled with handwritten notes, testify to Broodthaers’s esteem for the poetry of Mallarmé and to his contention that “Mallarmé is at the source of modern art. . . . He unwittingly invented modern space” (A, 1c).¹⁸ Although the manuscripts are not complete, both

18. “Mallarmé est à la source de l’art contemporain. . . . Il invente inconsciemment l’espace moderne.”



Marcel Broodthaers. MTL-DTH. 1970. (Detail of part A.)

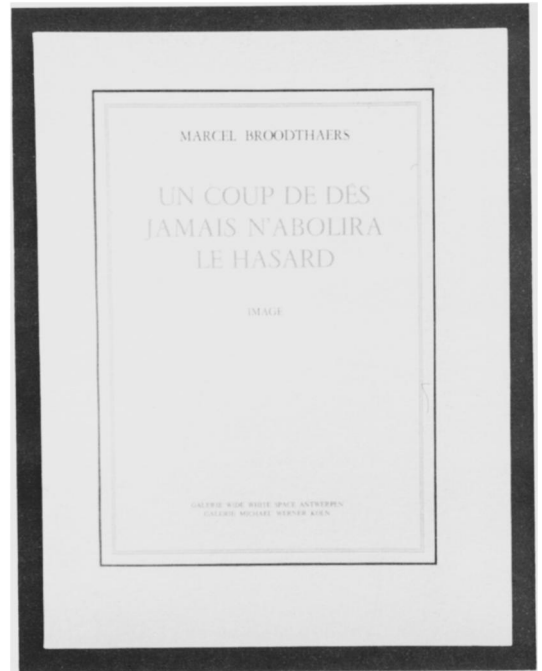
ending abruptly with unfinished sentences, Broodthaers's regard for Mallarmé is definitive. He writes, if only as a note to himself:

*A throw of dice. This would have been a treatise on art. The last in date, that of Leonardo da Vinci, has lost some of its consequence, since it accorded too much importance to the plastic arts and, one senses today, to his masters [the Medicis?]*¹⁹

Mallarmé figures preeminently in a work of 1971 entitled *Ma collection*, and Broodthaers reiterates: "Stéphane Mallarmé, whom I see as the founder of contemporary art."²⁰ The two MTL texts elaborate upon this claim, maintaining

19. "Un coup de dés. Ce serait un traité de l'art. Le dernier en date, celui de Léonard de Vinci, a perdue de son importance car il accordait aux Arts Plastiques une place trop grande et on le devine aujourd'hui, à ses maîtres, [les Médicis?]"

20. See *Amsterdam, Paris, Düsseldorf*, New York, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1972, n.p.



Marcel Broodthaers. *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard. Image.* 1969. (Cover and preface, translucent version.)

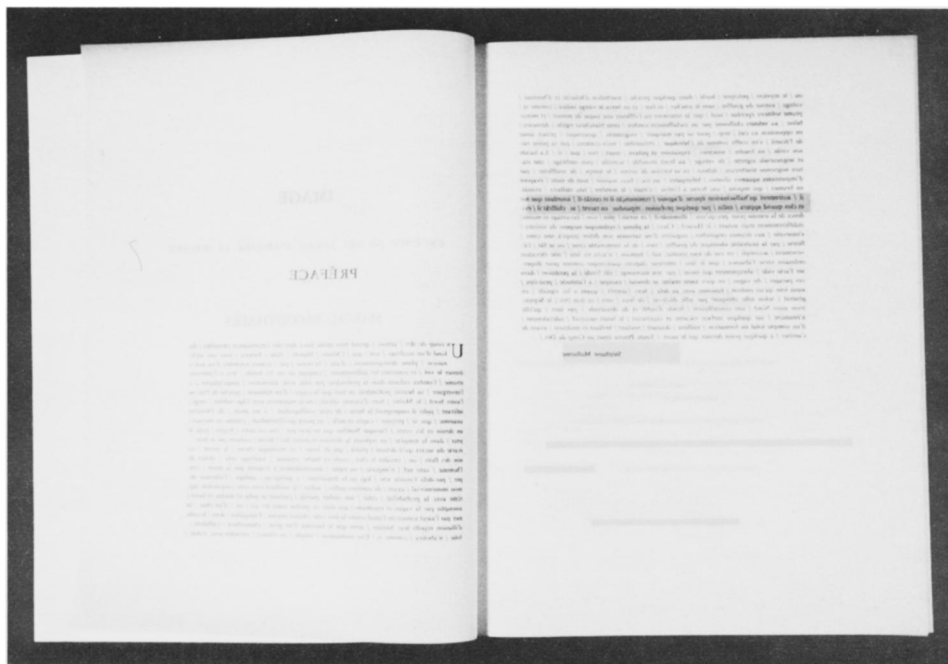
that “the thought of Mallarmé ends in two tracks—1, Space—and 2, Image joined in a single mind” (A, 1c).²¹ As part of the work they accord a theoretical basis and historical consequence to Broodthaers’s effort, bracketing the cultural context for his own aesthetic operations involving word and image, language and space.

Broodthaers’s book *Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard. Image* transports Mallarmé’s poem to another plane. In an open letter from Antwerp announcing the publication of this book, Broodthaers alludes to the long period of gestation that led to its realization, from a meeting with Magritte—who gave him a copy of Mallarmé’s poem when he was still in his teens²²—to the publication of the book more than twenty years later. In this letter Broodthaers recognizes his own departure from precedent and his arrival at something new: “Nouveau! Nouveau? Peut-être. Excepté. Une Constellation,”²³ to quote Broodthaers literally quoting Mallarmé.

21. “La pensée de M. aboutit à 2 voies—1, L’espace—& 2, L’Image réunie dans son seul esprit.”

22. According to the artist’s widow, Maria Gilissen, in conversation, May 1984.

23. “New! New? Perhaps. Excepted. A Constellation” (Marcel Broodthaers, Open Letter, Antwerp, December 2, 1969, sent on the occasion of the exhibition *Exposition littéraire autour de Mallarmé or Marcel Broodthaers à la Deblieu—deblieu/S*, Antwerp, Wide White Space Gallery, 1969).



As the title of Broodthaers's version of *Un coup de dés* implies, the thirty-two page text is an image of Mallarmé's poem, a translation of the irregular typography and layout of its text into purely visual terms. In his book, Broodthaers obliterates the words and renders the text of each page as a series of solid, horizontal, black linear rectangles. Proportioned to the size and scale of the printed words and placed in the same relationship on the page, the rectangular units exactly match Mallarmé's linear sequence of words and phrases. Long or short, wide or narrow, they anchor themselves in relationship to one another and to the page so as to form a succession of diverse linear configurations.²⁴

The semantic and lexical functions of Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés* are not abandoned in Broodthaers's work, but resurface as the preface, a conventionally printed rectangular block of type, while the actual preface by Mallarmé is omitted. Three of the five MTL manuscripts associated with *Un coup de dés* contain most, though not all, of Broodthaers's typescript for this preface, along with a draft of his specifications for different editions (A, 1a–b; e). He has used his

24. See Marcel Broodthaers, *Catalogue of Books 1957–1975*, Cologne, Galerie Michael Werner; New York, Marian Goodman Gallery; and Paris, Galerie Gillespie, Laage, Salomon, 1982, pp. 24–27.

“museum” stationery,²⁵ but has crossed out its heading, “Musée d’Art Moderne / Section Littéraire / Département des Aigles,” as an ironic gesture to the personal rather than the institutional nature of his venture.

The MTL pages prefigure the publication of Broodthaers’s *Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard*. *Image* and directly relate to the preface of this book. Within the MTL piece they offer a prelude to the final resolution of an idea, in this case Broodthaers’s re-fusion of word and image within an entirely new “constellation.” His untidy preliminary drafts bear witness to the mental and physical processes contributing to the final manifestation of a thought. Within the confines of the MTL work, the text of Mallarmé is particularly significant, since it is considered one of the most forceful statements about “a thought in its genesis and life.”²⁶

Witty references to the ardors or pitfalls of artistic production, with underlying economic innuendo, appear among the MTL pages. Three lines for a poem entitled “Copyright” warn the reader to beware of the piracy of the snake and the blindworm: “The eel, already a commodity / before it escapes the slippery hands of the fisherman. / Beware of fakes—of the snake and the blindworm” (B6).²⁷ The poem “Poules” is about the mathematics of hens (C9). Their sums, shown under a line which reads “Le calcul de la poule” three times, add up to 47,500. Although the addition is not correct in any of the three columns, the reader of the poem cannot help but appreciate their mental endeavor, not to mention what one assumes to be the number of eggs—an overwhelming creative and potentially remunerative achievement. Also acknowledged is the loss of time. “J’ai perdu mon temps,” written in large letters across the center of the page (B16), suggests Broodthaers’s poem of 1966, “Ma Rhétorique,” which contains the line “J’ai perdu le temps perdu.”²⁸ The obvious reference to *A la recherche du temps perdu* alludes, through association, to the very process of association.

The diversified and previously disconnected sheets of paper, fragments spanning more than a decade of Broodthaers’s activity, would not, in and of themselves, answer to the definition of “art.” A page of hand-colored animals, for instance, seemingly stenciled by or for a child (A, 2e), or a sheet of lightly penciled letters, arranged both alphabetically and randomly in equal rows, some

25. See Broodthaers, *MTL*, p. 5: “Besides the realizations in the galleries [sic]: Since 1968 I am custodian [director] of the Museum of Modern Art—Department of Eagles. In different forms it has been open to the public in Brussels, at own home [sic], in Antwerp, at A307089 ant [sic] at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf.”

26. Wallace Fowlie, *Mallarmé*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1953, p. 220.

27. “L’anguille, déjà une marchandise / avant qu’elle ne s’échappe des mains fuyantes du poissonnier. / Méfiez-vous des contrefaçons—, du serpent et de l’orvet.”

28. This is the speech of mussels, in which meaning has been lost. See *Moules, oeufs, frites, pots, charbon*. Marcel Broodthaers, Antwerp, Wide White Space Gallery, 1966, np. The text is quoted and discussed in Anny De Decker, “Marcel Broodthaers,” *Museumjournaal*, vol. 21, no. 2 (April 1976), p. 50; and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Marcel Broodthaers: Allegories of the Avant-Garde,” *Artforum*, vol. XVIII, no. 9 (May 1980), p. 54.

within the faint outline of a pipelike form (B1), would not, conventionally, be considered appropriate for exhibition on their own. Within the context of the work, the one pertains to basic image-making processes while the other portrays the links of formulation before a statement has “taken shape.”

The MTL manuscripts, on the one hand, rely on the principle of authorship and, on the other, answer to the authority of the exhibition space. Two years after the MTL exhibition Broodthaers wrote in the catalogue for his Düsseldorf exhibition *Der Adler vom Oligozän bis heute*:

Whether a urinal signed “R. Mutt” (1917) or an *objet trouvé*, any object can be elevated to the status of art. The artist defines the object in such a way that its future can lie only in the museum. Since Duchamp, the artist is author of a definition.

Two facts will be brought into focus here: that in the beginning Duchamp’s initiative was aimed at destabilizing the power of juries and schools, and that today—having become a mere shadow of itself—it dominates an entire area of contemporary art, supported by collectors and dealers.²⁹

In the MTL installation, Broodthaers treats his personal, open-ended manuscripts as though they were final, almost like readymades.³⁰ At the same time, the objects’ placement within the exhibition context emerges as one of the central conditions of the work. Without the sanction of the art exhibition, whether commercial gallery or museum, the MTL pages would not be read as elements of a work of art, but simply as autographs and documents. Broodthaers’s preliminary notes or sketches, often for finished or published writings, provide the material for another work of art. His decision to expose his working files in turn exposes the power of the place of exhibition to elevate, by virtue of cultural expectation, the otherwise unshowable to the status of art for public exhibition.

Whereas the drawings and manuscripts in full view concern authorship and the process of production, the closed file folder, which contains sixteen more items—part D of the enumerated exhibition contents—concerns the process of reception. As one participant in this process, the critic, according to Broodthaers, rather than imparting insights to a “blind”³¹ public, “passes

29. Marcel Broodthaers, “Methode,” in *Der Adler vom Oligozän bis heute*, Düsseldorf, Städtische Kunsthalle, 1972, vol. I, p. 13. For a discussion of Duchamp’s work in relation to institutional and cultural contexts, and as background for Broodthaers, see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “The Museum Fictions of Marcel Broodthaers,” in A. A. Bronson and Peggy Gale, eds., *Museums by Artists*, Toronto, Art Metropole, 1983, pp. 45–56.

30. Evidence of the artist’s hand, eliminated by Duchamp in the readymades, is restored by Broodthaers in this work, although only further to defy traditional expectations regarding draughtsmanship, composition, or personal touch.

31. Marcel Broodthaers, “Adler, Ideologie, Publikum,” in *Der Adler vom Oligozän bis heute*, p. 16.

through the image” and also “through discourse,”³² presumably having neither seen nor expressed anything. “At the present time,” Broodthaers elaborates elsewhere, “inopportune linguistic investigations all end in a single gloss, which its authors like to call criticism.”³³

In a 1975 interview Broodthaers maintained that the reduction of criticism to the function of marketing was the cause of its demise.³⁴ Ten years earlier, writing about nouveau réalisme and pop art, he had paired the critic with the merchant by remarking, “In fact, the characteristics of these schools are defined by the critics themselves (and also by the dealers).”³⁵ And for an MTL Gallery publication several months prior to his exhibition there, he declared, “The aim (the end) of criticism is also entirely commercial.”³⁶ It is the artist, however, who “always holds in reserve the card that will disturb the game.”³⁷

The closed file folder—one such card—reverses expected exhibition practice by deliberately concealing its contents. The folder comments both on the prerogative of the artist to select and make choices and on the preconceptions of the viewer. By means of the closed file, Broodthaers pokes fun at the critic’s compulsion to look everywhere for hidden meaning. They are not unlike the inspectors in Poe’s “Purloined Letter”³⁸—a story well-known to Broodthaers—who never succeed in locating the incriminating evidence because they are blinded by “their own ideas”³⁹ and by their ingenious, scientific methods (applied to the wrong case). Similarly, the presence of the folder containing additional manuscripts frustrates the viewer, who either has not seen what looks like art in its traditional form or who seeks obscure references and relationships while missing what is there. In an ironic and contradictory manner, the closed file plays with the idea that searching for hidden meanings beneath the surface tends to conceal the obvious.⁴⁰ Also, the fact that Broodthaers has deliberately withdrawn a number of his drawings and texts from sight but included them unseen in the exhibition emphasizes that what is at issue is not their individual *contents* so much as their particular *use* in the exhibition context.

In an additional and equally unprecedented gesture, Broodthaers fore-

32. Quoted from the text for one of *Four Drawings for “Studio,”* 1974, illustrated in *Marcel Broodthaers*, Cologne, Museum Ludwig, 1980, p. 93, cat. no. 99.

33. Marcel Broodthaers, “To be *bien pensant* . . . or not to be. To be blind,” p. 35.

34. S. Rona, “C’est l’Angélu qui sonne,” *+—0*, vol. IV, no. 12 (February 1976), p. 19.

35. Marcel Broodthaers, “Comme du beurre dans un sandwich,” *Phantomas*, vol. XII, nos. 51–61 (December 1965), p. 296.

36. Marcel Broodthaers, “A MTL ou à BCD,” *MTL Magazine*, 1970, n.p.

37. Broodthaers, quoted in Rona, p. 19.

38. See Marcel Broodthaers, “Notes sur le Sujet,” in *L’Angélu de Daumier*, Paris, Centre national d’art et de culture Georges Pompidou, Musée national d’art moderne, 1975, vol. II, n.p.

39. Edgar Allan Poe, “The Purloined Letter,” in Philip Van Doren Stern, ed., *Edgar Allan Poe*, New York, The Viking Portable Library, 1985, p. 452.

40. The MTL catalogue mentions in addendum no. 2, p. 14, that this exhibition “a reçu le prix de la critique,” deliberately (?) mistranslated as “received the critic’s price” rather than “prize.”

grounds the role of the place of exhibition in the process of artistic reception. Filling the rectangular frame of the gallery window with text, he partially obstructed the view to and from the street. The inscription, readable from *inside* the gallery, duplicated the text of the gallery invitation, advertising, in French and Flemish, the name of the artist, the name and address of the gallery, and the date of the show. By integrating supplementary information into the exhibition proper, the inscription, like the closed file folder, plays with the traditional conventions of separating what is put on view from that which, to all intents and purposes, is hidden. By including the window inscription in the MTL installation, Broodthaers sheds light on the involvement of the *place* of reception in the *process* of reception. By inscribing the gallery window with painted letters and facing its street-side message inward, he turned standard exhibition procedure around. In this way, he drew the surrounding gallery enclosure into the work, aiming its own publicity directly at itself and incorporating the interior exhibition space into the piece. By means of the inscription, with all of its public and typographical finality, Broodthaers succeeds in literally displaying the exhibition space as the point of intersection between art's production and reception.

The planned change, on March 30, of the text from inside to outside of the window and from the information on the invitation to excerpts from the artist's biography, as mentioned in the catalogue, did not actually occur. The catalogue explains in an addendum:

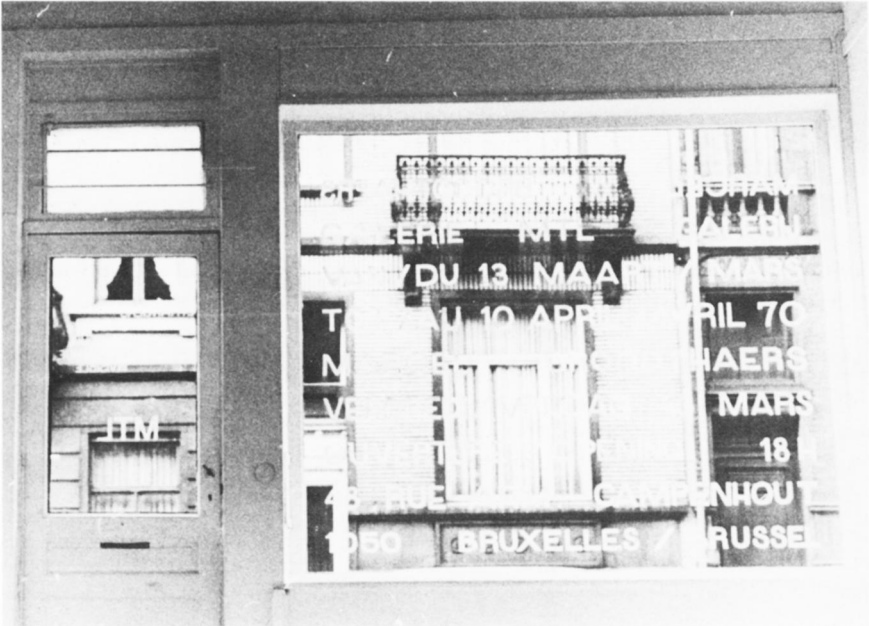
The idea of replacing the inscription (which repeated the text of the invitation) by a résumé of the artist's biography has become useless for the following reasons: While the catalogue was being printed, the artist was able to realize an earlier project: a film on the letters of the shop window.⁴¹

Although he had reserved the option to consider the gallery window as a billboard on which to advertise his biography—an ironic aside regarding the tactics of promotion based on the artist's persona—Broodthaers chose instead, by way of the film, to define the gallery window as the interface between one reality and another, between the interior and exterior of the exhibition space.

A second invitation, with the photograph of the window inscription taken on the night of the opening, was mailed to announce the projection of this film on the final day of the exhibition. According to the catalogue, Broodthaers painted the inside of the gallery window white for the occasion in order to utilize it as a screen. The letters painted on the window while the exhibition was in progress were the subject of this film, which Broodthaers had made earlier. During the daytime sequence the letters appear against the background of the houses opposite the gallery, the cars in the street, and the occasional pedestrian

41. Broodthaers, *MTL*, p. 13.

Marcel Broodthaers. Window installation. MTL-DTH. 1970. (Photos: Maria Gilissen; nighttime view used as announcement for film screening.)



passing by. At night, the glass of the gallery window, dimly reflecting the buildings, serves as a darkened backdrop for the letters. The letters of the window text are activated as the camera approaches, moves across it, and concentrates successively on various sections of the lettering, such as “DTH” from the middle of Broodthaers’s name (with wry reference to the meaningless initials of the gallery’s name).

Within the film, the letters of the inscription assume a concrete form separate from their use in words, and thus “disconnected from their meaning.”⁴² Having been dissociated from the information they collectively convey, they take on an independence as pure figuration. Meanwhile, the film transforms the former reality of the street beyond the windowpane into an illusionistic image that is visible from the inside of the gallery in place of the once transparent window. Whereas the street becomes a photographic fiction by day and a reflected illusion by night, the flat words and letters, released from their responsibility as signifiers, acquire a self-sufficient presence and reality of their own. While the MTL film refers directly to the tradition of pictorial perspective, it dispels the mere transparency of language, which, observed “through” the window, is presented against the background of the “realistic” street.

Although rooted in the time and place of its original realization, the work may be transplanted elsewhere. As spelled out in the catalogue, “the whole (drawings, manuscripts, pieces under cover, inscription, film) constitutes . . . one single piece.”⁴³ Upon termination of the exhibition, the MTL film became an essential component of the work. In its documentary capacity, the film, along with the painted inscription indicating when and where the first exhibition occurred, sets the work as a whole into temporal perspective, since it comprehends the inevitability of changing external frameworks within its structure. Anticipating eventual release from the artist’s control, the work builds in—and carries with it—recognition of the contradiction between the supposed finality of an artistic production and the indeterminate nature of its ensuing reception.

Full consideration of the MTL installation demands attention to its catalogue, which is an integral part of the work and reflects upon the relationship between the artist, the work, and the receiver. In addition to providing a record of the original installation, it supplies the guidelines for the work’s re-creation after it has left the artist’s charge. Of special note are the inclusion of two medical certificates and the publication of a later addendum relevant to the work’s purchase.

On the first page of the catalogue, in the form of a letter to the exhibition

42. *Ibid.* Broodthaers left the following unpublished instruction for the projection of the film: “The street traffic is suddenly observed through the painted letters of the shop window. The film only makes sense if it is projected at exactly the same place, if the projector occupies exactly the same place as the apparatus that took the images” (1970).

43. *Ibid.*

organizer, Broodthaers requests the publication of “a résumé of my biography, because it expresses the variety of structures in which I have been taken,”⁴⁴ as well as reproductions of two medical certificates, which he included in the exhibition. One of the certificates represented Broodthaers’s (non)participation in the somewhat earlier group exhibition of conceptual art, organized by Michel Claura, *18 Paris IV.70*; in the handwriting of a Dr. A. Renard, it states, “I, undersigned, doctor of medicine, certify that the actual health of Mr. Broodthaers Marcel does not require any special medical aid and that he can start again taking a normal job. Brussels, 15-1-70.”⁴⁵ The doctor of the second certificate asserts, “I, undersigned, declare that Marcel Broodthaers’ health makes it impossible for him to have any normal professional activity from 2-3-70 to 4-4-70.”⁴⁶ Broodthaers remarks on the absence of critics willing to comment on his substitution of a medical certificate for artwork in the Paris group exhibition — despite his good health — or to compare the meaning of this certificate with the one “describing a morbid state of health, causing incapacity to do a normal job,” that accompanied the production of “an abundance of works of art” for the MTL exhibition.⁴⁷

Broodthaers’s medical certificates speak in terms of a “normal job” or “normal professional activity.” But, of course, they contradict the “normal” state of affairs, since good health would hardly be expected to cause the artist’s absence from a group show, nor would ill health insure productivity. The certificates, furthermore, differentiate the “normal” worker from the artist. Taken for granted as routine procedure with respect to employees not reporting for work, they give the impression of being a kind of joke when connected with an art exhibition.

By means of these certificates Broodthaers examines attitudes which distinguish so-called normal work from artistic work within the contemporary social structure. He underlines the fact that certificates for the validation of artistic activity do not exist, although attempts to evaluate the artist based on biographical data are essential to most exhibition catalogues. Broodthaers satirically questions the possibility of diagnosing the artist in conjunction with the creative process, implying that subject remains separate from the personal life history or health of its creator, who nonetheless is a “subject” of society. Rather, he intimates, society is at issue, and needs examining within the parameters of art, not the individual artist.

After the close of the exhibition, Broodthaers inserted “addendum 3” into

44. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 11. See also *18 Paris IV.70*, Paris, 1970, pp. 54–57.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 12. According to the MTL catalogue, the certificate was not part of the work; see p. 13.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 2. Broodthaers also writes in “Notes sur les intentions,” “Do we summon up here the cultural references of the day, Sainte-Beuve and Hippolyte Taine, for example?” The reference is to nineteenth-century attempts to explain creativity scientifically in terms of biological or social factors.

the catalogue. This addendum concerns the sale of the work to a private collector in Brussels. He writes to the gallery owner:

Dear Sir,

I'm glad to learn that you have sold the piece in 4 parts (A, B, C, and D) described in the exhibition catalogue. I would have you know that I guessed as much; moreover, with the aim of promoting your enterprise, I made a personal transaction with your client. The object of this transaction was a box that you know well, the same one that was slated for the trash when after long procrastination (see attached note) we took a selection of manuscripts and drawings from it.⁴⁸

Continuing, Broodthaers entertains the hope that the purchaser respect the work as a single entity — manuscripts, drawings, inscription, and film — and also asks that a box, containing the remaining manuscripts and destined for the garbage, become part of the entire enterprise.

The subsequent inclusion of the box offers a final ironic touch to the MTL work, as the use of the word *enterprise*, with its commercial overtones, suggests. Broodthaers's view of art as a commercially based activity is a prime factor in his work. "The aim of art is commercial," he declares, adding, "my aim is commercial too."⁴⁹ In his text, "To be *bien pensant* . . . or not to be. To be blind," Broodthaers elaborates on this opinion:

What is Art? Ever since the nineteenth century people have been asking that question of the artist, as well as of the museum director and the art lover. I doubt, in fact, that it is possible to give a serious definition of art, unless we examine the question in terms of a constant, I mean the transformation of Art into merchandise.⁵⁰

The box of rejected manuscripts, most likely stored in the back room of the gallery before eventual disposal, was to enter the MTL work as part of its transfer from dealer to collector. The box would accompany the piece outside the limits of the exhibition space as an allusion to the work's original, unassembled state, which had no intrinsic value prior to the artist's choice of specific manuscripts and drawings. Through his later decision to incorporate the otherwise valueless box into the work as part of the sale, Broodthaers accentuated the fact that the creative enterprise, following the process of selection, evolved into a commercial venture.

An exhibition at the MTL Gallery two years later, in 1972, with the subtitle "L'art comme l'art de vendre" ("Art as the Art of Selling"), functions virtually as

48. Broodthaers, *MTL*, addendum 3, May 11, 1970. The box to which Broodthaers refers has since been lost.

49. Broodthaers, "A MTL ou à BCD," n.p.

50. Broodthaers, "To be *bien pensant*," p. 35.

a codicil to the earlier exhibition. Along with two photographs of the gallery's facade—one of the windows taken from the inside, the other taken from the outside with the window closed—the exhibition featured a catalogue, in a limited and signed edition, that was, to all intents and purposes, a reprint of the 1970 MTL catalogue. In addition, Broodthaers used pages from the same catalogue in negative for his print *Tractatus Logico-Catalogicus*, a print that poses as a philosophical tract. The second, almost identical catalogue reinforces the first, proving that a supplementary component of one work can become another, separate—and saleable—work by means of exhibition, authentication, and exclusivity.⁵¹

Broodthaers envisioned the artistic enterprise as a critique of itself and of the supporting structures in which it subsists. In an open letter from Lignano, in whose biennial of 1968 he participated, Broodthaers took the opportunity to amend his introduction to the catalogue. He asks that the word *consommation* be replaced by the word *repression* in his statement as follows:

Today, when the image destined for current consumption has assumed the subtleties and violence of nouveau réalisme and pop art, I would hope that definitions of art would uphold a critical vision of both society and of art, and of art criticism itself. The language of forms must be united with that of words.⁵²

His hope for the union of the language of form and that of words underlies his desire to release the artwork from its status as a fixed material object, which, like any other commodity, is sustained by the commercial system without being questioned. In the MTL work, he accomplishes this union by substituting his own writings for traditional visual representation.

The MTL work redefines the previous relationships between word and image, poetry and object, language and art, and thus succeeds the innovations of a preceding generation of artists. A manuscript among its pages (B11) takes the artist's own critical and historical position into account as part of the work. Presumably an excerpt from a longer draft of handwritten thoughts, it begins at the top of the page with point number six: "There are no primary structures apart from the language that defines them. I mean that an artist does not construct a volume. He writes a volume."⁵³ Claiming language as the basis of reality and thus the fundamental unit of any construction, Broodthaers identifies the painted words of Magritte as a major source of his art: "The art that I

51. I am grateful to Nicole Daled and Herman Daled, who acquired this work from the MTL Gallery, for clarifying the piece for me.

52. Marcel Broodthaers, Open Letter, Lignano, August 4, 1968. With regard to the word *consommation*, Broodthaers explains, "I would have preferred the printing of repression rather than consumption, since there is a tendency to confuse the two terms."

53. "Il n'y a pas de structures primaires autres que celle du langage qui les définit. Je veux dire qu'un artiste ne construit pas un volume. Il écrit un volume."

support is rooted in the word paintings of Magritte. . . .⁵⁴ Whereas Magritte had detached the meaning of a word or phrase from the painted image, liberating the former from the latter, Broodthaers frees language from its subordination to the painted surface, bound by its edge. He draws from the lessons of Magritte and others, who devoted themselves to an exploration of the verbal in relation to the visual. But, continuing their pursuits, he severs the former ties between writing and painting, as well as between poetry and object, to give language a material validity of its own.

While stressing the autonomy of language, the MTL piece negates the neutrality of space. Item number eight of the same manuscript page corresponds to published statements in which Broodthaers denounces purely spatial concerns. "Space," he notes, "is an invention of critics. And the modification of space? Each time an innovation moves on there is an important modification of space. Space is the mantle of the blind."⁵⁵ Preoccupation with space alone obscures material reality, in Broodthaers's view, by cloaking, instead of provoking, critical perception of the social and cultural forces that influence the nature of seeing. Broodthaers sees space not merely in its aesthetic dimension but also in political terms, that is, as territory.

Two short texts, casually handwritten on file folders designated by the letter *M*, further articulate Broodthaers's critical stance.⁵⁶ In the first text, of 1969–70, Broodthaers muses about the work of Magritte, inquiring, rhetorically, as to whether it takes into account the place of its exhibition — specifically, the casino at the resort town of Knokke, where Magritte painted a mural and where his 1962 retrospective was held:

The décor by Mag[ritte] at the casino of Knokke, the game room. The ball of the roulette wheel is a die with thirty-six sides. The sea beyond, near the walls, reality and dream unconscious of the poem by Mallarmé. This social place [is] like the concretization of thought. Idea of complete alienation, the readers or the players are blind, deaf. (See former text.) Is there the image of a die in the work of Magritte?⁵⁷

Providing supplementary embellishment to the space, Magritte's decorations are subordinated to the game. Unlike the work of Broodthaers, Magritte's paintings

54. "L'art que je soutiens s'enracine dans les tableaux d'écriture de Magritte. . . ."

55. "L'espace est une invention des critiques. Et la modification de l'espace? A chaque déménagement d'une nouveauté il y a une sérieuse modification de l'espace. L'espace est le manteau des aveugles."

56. These texts were brought to my attention by Maria Gilissen in June 1986 because of their relevance to the MTL work.

57. "Le décor de Mag. au casino de Knokke, / La Salle de jeux — / La bille de la roulette est un dé à 36 faces. / La mer au-delà, proche des murs, réalité et / rêve inconscients du poème de Mallarmé. / Comme la concrétisation, ce lieu social, de / la pensée. Idée d'aliénation complète, / les lecteurs ou les joueurs sont aveugles, / sourds. (Voir ancien texte) / Y a-t-il l'image d'un dé dans l'oeuvre de / Magritte?"

do not respond to their immediate circumstance. They do not attempt to challenge the game of chance or the game of art, in which the players, moreover, are blind.

The other brief notation summarizes Broodthaers's attitude toward language as the common ground of reality and art. The text, which reads like a how-to-write-a . . . lesson from a child's instruction book, amusingly fuses social behavior—what should or should not be done—with the physical formation of letters as plastic elements:

If you stick a leg (downstroke) on the letter *o* by tripping it up (by hooking its foot), you will have the letter *a*. That means that the leg should not cut the oval nor should it be longer. The leg must have the same slant as the oval.⁵⁸

In his own shorthand Broodthaers compresses the complex thought motivating his production, namely that the artist, through the reality of language itself, might eventually mold society by giving language new form.

Attentive to the potential of “making and remaking things one is tired of, but sell well,” Broodthaers affirmed in an interview, “I actually want to criticize society and culture with each piece.”⁵⁹ The MTL work literally points to its visible surface while it reveals the invisible side of its structure. On the most superficial level, arrows dispersed throughout the manuscripts and drawings serve in a factual, self-referential manner to demarcate the surface of the work. On a deeper level, the economic forces of the cultural system, not on the face of the work but fundamental to its support, emerge, since the manuscripts and drawings automatically accrue artistic value through the agency of the exhibition space. The MTL texts and the gallery context hinge one upon the other as the contents of the exhibition simultaneously define and are defined by the encompassing physical and social framework. Moreover, the poems that contain moral judgments—for example, “Le Spermatozoïde,” which reads, “Does it resemble someone known? X? . . . This innocent never killed anyone” (C2)⁶⁰—are brought into relief within the fabric of the total artistic construct.

The significance of the MTL work rests on the relationship between the ongoing process of individual artistic production and the materialization of this process in the form of a cultural product. Like Broodthaers's other installation works it examines the nature of art in terms of its value in a consumer culture

58. “Si vous collez à la droite de la lettre *o* un jambage avec crochet de pied vous aurez la lettre *a*. Cela veut dire que le jambage ne doit pas être dépassé. Le jambage doit avoir la même pente que l'ovale.”

59. Quoted in Ludo Bekkers, “Gesprek met Marcel Broodthaers,” *Museumjournaal*, vol. 15, no. 2 (April 1970), p. 67 (translation by Alma Koppedraijer). For an elaboration of this statement, see M.-P. Gildemyn, “The Critical Posture of Marcel Broodthaers,” *Bulletin of the Archives and Documentation Centers for Modern and Contemporary Art*, vol. 13, no. 23 (1985), pp. 23–26.

60. “Ressemble-t-il à quelqu'un de connu? à X? / . . . Cet innocent n'a jamais tué personne.”

where painting or sculpture function as objects for collection, exhibition, or spatial décor. A reflection of and upon both the artistic process and the existing art display system in their reciprocal interaction, the MTL work aims at preserving the viability of art in its poetic capacity to analyze itself and open its situation to question. Purposefully avoiding definitive conclusion within its exhibited content, it asks for consideration of what factors determine a work's completion and underscores the critical role of art within the social sphere.

Marcel Broodthaers. MTL-DTH. 1970. (Detail of Part A.)



DIRK SNAUWAERT

translated by KAATJE CUSSE

The development of Marcel Broodthaers's work was discontinuous, paralleling shifts in the art of the 1960s and '70s. Yet, even though Broodthaers's images often fluctuated in relation with changing trends and fashions, functioning as a commentary upon them, several themes recurred, one of which was the letter or number: painted, written, printed.

As a poet Broodthaers had dealt with such material in the building of a text. Remaining a poet throughout his artistic career, he continued to be engaged with letters and numbers—written or printed, positive and negative.

First used in late 1966, the designations "Fig. 1, 2, 3 . . ." persisted through the last works. Broodthaers used this designation in large ensembles (for example, *Théorie des Figures*), in his books (*Charles Baudelaire. Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes*), in slide projections, films, and drawings.

In tracing Broodthaers's beginnings as an artist, we are led to the works with eggshells, mussel shells, and mason jars with photos, but in them he avoided using the objects as coded symbols, that is, as elements with fixed meanings. Stripped of their quotidian function, they were given a new meaning within an art context. Yet, to prevent them from being seen within a particular aesthetic perspective (that of Duchamp's readymade), he respected their specific qualities. Broodthaers carefully selected his objects for their characteristics as frames, molds, and voids. Presenting them only in confrontation with one another, he constructed a discursive relation without recourse to words.

Obviously Broodthaers's manner of working and his frequent references lead one to Magritte, who also juxtaposed instantly recognizable everyday objects with one another, thus obtaining new, unknown situations and undermining each object's conventional meaning. In "Words and Images" Magritte wrote, "The vague figures have a meaning as necessary and perfect as the precise ones."¹ Under this sentence is the drawing of an undefinable figure next to that of a

1. René Magritte, "Les mots et les images," *La Révolution Surréaliste*, no. 12 (December 1929), p. 32.

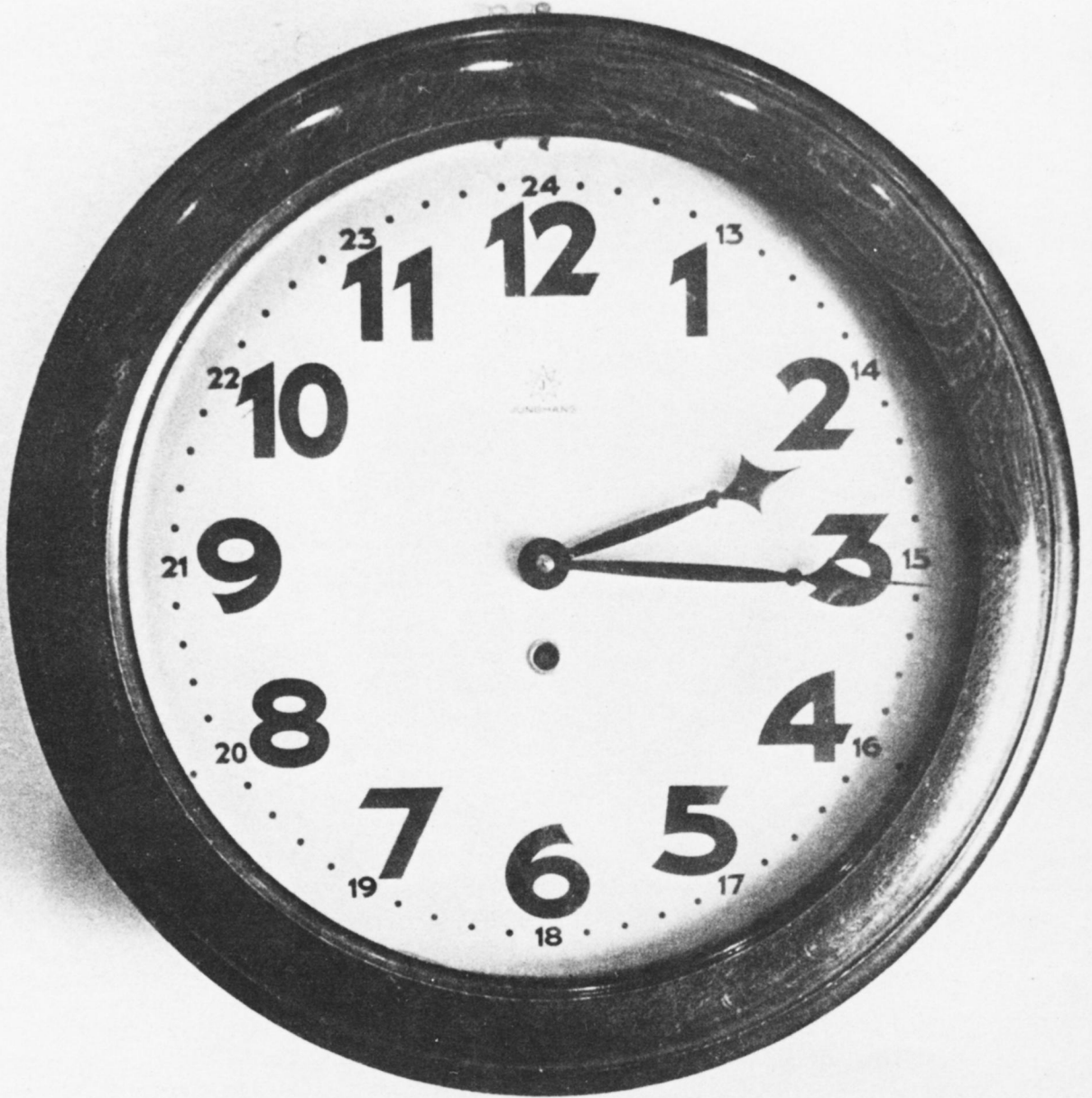
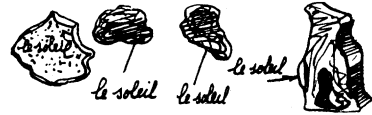
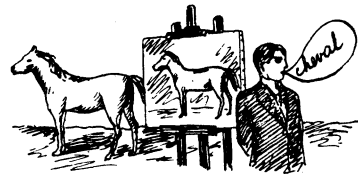


fig 12

Une forme quelconque peut remplacer
l'image d'un objet :



Un objet ne fait jamais le même office que
son nom ou que son image :



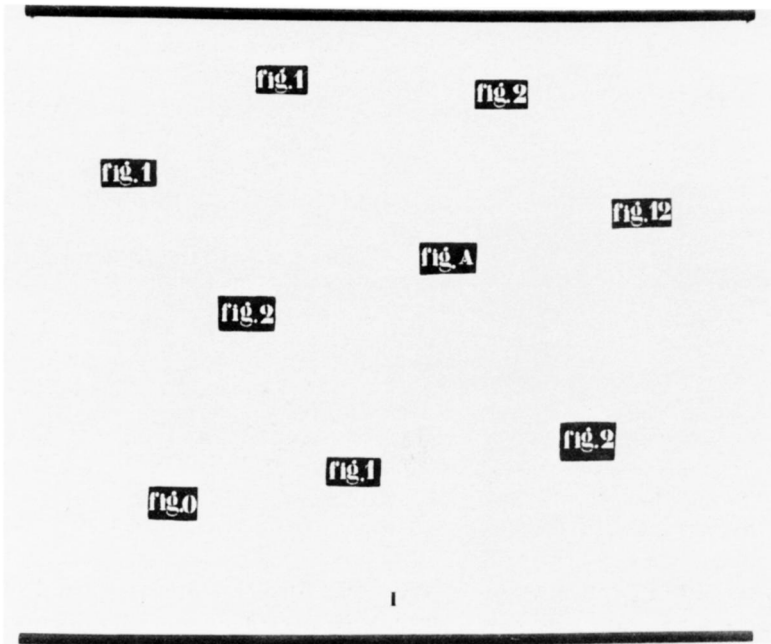
René Magritte. "Les mots et les images" (detail), *La Révolution Surréaliste*, no. 12, 1929.

cube. In the other propositions of "Word and Image," Magritte used the terms *object*, *image*, *form*, *word*, and *name*, along with the term *figure*. It appears that the latter can be considered a summary of all the others. This enables us to define the word *figure* as "picture," "image," or "gestalt."

Even though Broodthaers generally used words with varied and ambiguous meanings, his usage of *figure* might be elucidated as follows: it applies to the stage of observation when things are on the point of being named, when the object is about to be connected with a concept. *Figure* thus implies seeing, observing, but not yet explaining. Unlike the symbol, which is recognized and defined within a discourse, the figure is open and unconstructed. In this respect it corresponds to a work of art, which is open and ambiguous as well, and operates by evading definition. Figure cannot be reduced to a single meaning. The figure tends toward the real, while the symbol originates through a visual sign. Figure implies emphasizing the unstructured experience of the object. Broodthaers's inscription "Fig." indicates the position of an object between observation and translation into an image.

Broodthaers used the inscription "Fig." in the manner of a didactic system with pedagogical ends, a system which originates in encyclopedias and dictionaries, where it is used as the link between a symbol (often geometric) and a word, or between an illustration and the caption below it: fig. 1 refers to this, fig. 2 to that, and so forth. In Broodthaers's case the image or object is not linked by a caption with the "fig." indication. He varied the numbers 0, 1, 2, 21, or the letters A and B, but never in a systematic, clearly readable way.

You can see in the Mönchengladbach Museum a cardboard box, a clock, a mirror, a pipe, also a mask and a smoke bomb, and one or two



Marcel Broodthaers. *Théorie des Figures* (detail). 1971.

other objects I can't recall at this point, accompanied by the expression Fig. 1 or Fig. 2 or Fig. 0 painted on the display surface beneath or to the side of each object. If we are to believe what the inscription says, then the object takes on an illustrative character referring to a kind of novel about society. These objects, the mirror and the pipe, submitted to an identical numbering system (or the cardboard box or the clock or the chair) become interchangeable elements on the stage of a theater. Their destiny is ruined. Here I obtain the desired encounter between different functions. A double assignment and a readable texture—wood, glass, metal, fabric—articulate them morally and materially. I would never have obtained this kind of complexity with technological objects, whose singleness condemns the mind to monomania: minimal art, robot, computer.

The nos. 1, 2, 0 appear figuratively. And the abbreviations Fig. poorly in their meaning.²

This statement, Broodthaers's only programmatic commentary on his use of the "Fig." inscriptions refers to the *Théorie des Figures*, an ensemble of objects

2. Marcel Broodthaers, "Ten Thousand Francs Reward," p. 43.



Marcel Broodthaers. *Ma Collection*. 1971.

that was exhibited in the Mönchengladbach Museum in 1971. *Théorie des Figures* is a central example of a series of works that includes the installations *Pipe et Formes Académiques* (1969–70), *Ma Collection* (1971), *Section des Figures* (1972), *Fig. A*, *Fig. 2* (1972), the film *Le Poisson* (1971), the book *Charles Baudelaire. Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes* (1973), and the room *Figures-Figuren* in the exhibition *Eloge du Sujet* (1975). The ensemble *Théorie des Figures* represents the “Section Cinéma” (originally installed in a basement in Düsseldorf in 1970) of the Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles. It served there as the décor of a room, painted black, in which Broodthaers’s films were projected onto a screen also stenciled with regularly spaced “Fig.” inscriptions.

In what is possibly the earliest example, the drawing *Brusquement*, 1966–67, Broodthaers combined the “Fig.” inscriptions with a red and a blue square, varying the inscribed symbols “Fig. 1” and “Fig. 0” with the squares, marked “Fig. 1” and “Fig. 2” respectively. After a break, Figs. 1 to 6 follow. In the plaque *Pipe et Formes Académiques*, Figs. 1 to 10 appear under stereometric forms and the pipe, just as in *Ma Collection*, where Figs. 1 to 24 are placed under the

photographs of catalogues. Not until *Théorie des Figures* did Broodthaers use “Fig. 12,” and a little later “Fig. 21” and “Fig. A.” The reference system becomes gradually more complex, from the interchanging of 0 and 1 to the combining of 12 and 21, and the introduction of another sign system through the letter A. The oppositional relation 0/1 gives way to the enumeration of different meanings.

Suzanne Langer claims that a fundamental principle is at the basis of human reason: the capacity for symbolization.

Symbol is understood in its double meaning: on the one hand as it is used in mathematics and logic. There, symbols are distinguished from facts. Mathematical constructions are symbolic constructions; they only have a meaning within the mathematical system of numbers. The use of symbols is based on convention. In the psychological and philosophical sense, on the other hand, symbol indicates the human imagination where the meaning-structure produced through reflection on a first fact is transposed onto a second fact, the symbol. This process is based on analogy.³

The varying use of the numbers in relation to the symbols in dictionaries and encyclopedias is based on this process of analogy.

Pipe et Formes Académiques took a radical stand against this reductionist method by contrasting geometric figures to a symbol from a different domain: Magritte’s pipe.

The idea that the structure of the world can be understood through a reduction to geometric structures is a position that, in the nineteenth century, had a certain currency. The “Fig.” inscriptions seem to come straight from manuals of the nineteenth-century drawing methods of Riz-Paquot, Guillaume, Darches, or Malaval.⁴ Manuals (also illustrated with drawings and “Fig.” inscriptions) taught a way of drawing based on straight lines in order to instill a sign language meant for daily use—both for industrial design and for aesthetic ends.

Around 1968 a wave of American minimal art arrived in Europe. Broodthaers defined his position against this movement in works such as *Il n’y a pas de structures primaires* (1968). Several minimal artists used simple geometric forms (*formes académiques?*), which they arranged in serial or modular sequences. At the end of the statement quoted above, Broodthaers makes a facetious and provocative connection between minimal art and the robot’s and computer’s forms of artificial intelligence. The “thinking” of a digital computer allows only for mutual relationships between 0 and 1 (whereas Broodthaers left 0 and 1 after

3. Suzanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1942, p. 24.

4. See Molly Nesbit, “Ready-Made Originals: The Duchamp Model,” *October*, no. 37 (Summer 1986), p. 163.

Brusquement for 0, 1, 2, 12, 21, A). Factual data are reduced to numerical combinations which, serially, can vary endlessly. Minimal art seemed to have reduced itself to formal models, conforming only to an internal logic.

Broodthaers moved beyond the principle of a merely formal and binary relation by presenting his "Fig." inscriptions in relation to actual objects or images. His combinations of numbers refer to a complexity in patterns of thinking, a frontal attack on the binary principle (0, 1) which introduces simplicity and stability into a domain as complex as the structure of human representation.

According to Broodthaers the instability of his use of the abbreviation "Fig." makes the viewer uncomfortable.⁵ And it is precisely the meaning of the word *figure* that opens onto a description of Broodthaers's approach to the objects.

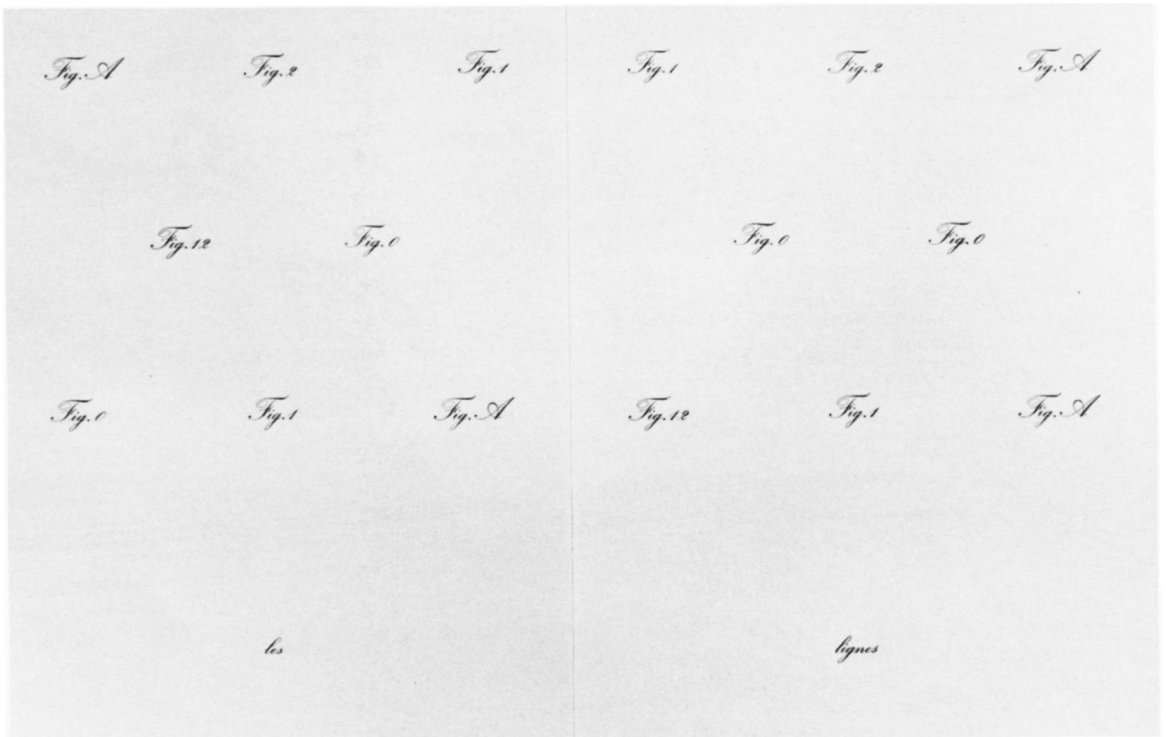
As discussed above *figure* indicates the distance between the moment of seeing and the transformation into a symbol. Thus in the ensemble *Théorie des Figures*, objects remain defined by their function, texture, and form, while at the same time they become discursive objects in the context established by the inscriptions. To the extent that they become legible, they appear to lose their qualities as objects. The repetition of the same inscriptions disturbs norms of reading. (In at least two instances "Fig. 0" is used to identify what is obviously a key reference within the series of discursive inscriptions. Thus, in *Ma Collection*, 1971, it applies to a photograph of Stéphane Mallarmé. And in *Section des Figures*, 1972, "Fig. 0" identifies the only object in the exhibition that does not represent an eagle, an anonymous landscape painting depicting a castle. Broodthaers assigned a caption to the painting taken from one of his earliest poems, "O, mélancolie, aigre château des aigles.")

The book *Charles Baudelaire. Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes* is one of Broodthaers's most hermetic works. On its first page, Baudelaire's poem "La Beauté" appears with one of its verses, "Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes" ("I hate the movement which displaces the lines"), printed in red. The page is inscribed "Fig. 1." At the bottom of each of the following pages, where one would expect a caption, the next word in the sequence of the verse appears. By contrast, the field of the page, where one would expect image or text, contains an evenly distributed series of "Fig." inscriptions. "La beauté" appears again in its entirety on the final page, this time with "les étoiles," printed in red, replacing "toutes les choses" in the penultimate verse.⁶ This page is inscribed "Fig. 2."

5. See Marcel Broodthaers, "The Figure 0," text read on the occasion of the projection of the film *La clef de l'horloge*, at the Mönchengladbach Museum in 1971.

6. The last stanza of the poem reads "Car j'ai, pour fasciner des dociles amants, / De purs miroirs qui font toutes choses plus belles: / Mes yeux, mes larges yeux aux clartés éternelles!" ("Since, to hypnotize my enslaved lovers, I have pure mirrors that magnify the beauty of all things [or "the stars" in Broodthaers's version]—my eyes, my vast eyes filled with eternal light!").

Marcel Broodthaers. Charles Baudelaire. Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes. 1973.





Marcel Broodthaers. *Untitled (recto/verso)*. 1973–74.

Broodthaers's conclusions regarding his theory of figures are perhaps best summed up in two later statements. On the back of two numbers cut out of cardboard, a 0 inscribed with "Fig. 0," "Fig. 1," "Fig. 2," and "Fig. A"; and a 1 in the form of a smoking chimney, he wrote: "A theory of the figures would serve only to give an image of a theory. But the Fig. as a theory of the image?" (1973–4). And in a text used as the cover of a magazine in 1972, he wrote:

View

according to which an artistic theory will function for the artistic product in the same way as the artistic product itself functions as advertising for the order under which it is produced. There will be no other space than this view according to which, etc. . . .

Approved by

Marcel Broodthaers⁷

7. Marcel Broodthaers, *Interfunktionen* (Cologne), no. 11 (Fall 1972), cover.

Section des Figures:
The Eagle from the Oligocene
to the Present

RAINER BORGEMEISTER

translated by CHRIS CULLENS

Shortly before Duchamp's death, Marcel Broodthaers opened the Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section XIXème Siècle (Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles, Nineteenth-Century Section) in his Brussels apartment.

The invention of the Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, which took the immediate form of an arrangement of crates, post-cards, and inscriptions—this invention, a jumble of nothing, shared a character connected to the events of 1968, that is, to a type of political event experienced by every country.¹

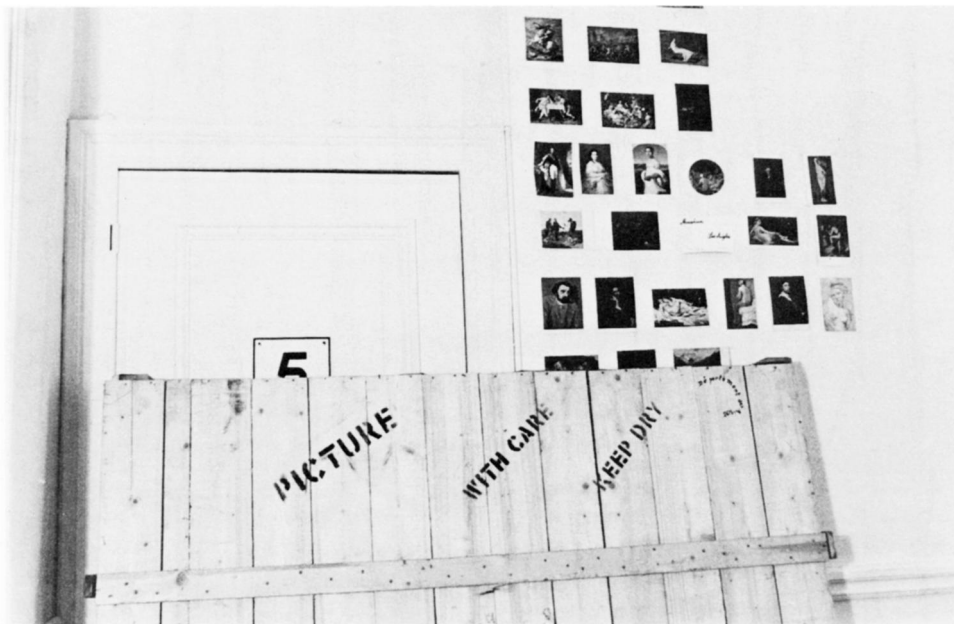
This installation, intended to question the museum institution's role in representing artistic life in society, remained in place for exactly a year. For its opening, Broodthaers invited Johannes Cladders, director of the museum in Mönchengladbach, to give the inaugural address, which was followed by "a serious discussion concerning art and society."² Broodthaers described this event in a letter dated two months later:

The Département des Aigles of the Musée d'Art Moderne, Section XIXème Siècle, was in fact inaugurated on September 27, 1968, in the presence of leading representatives of the public and the military. The speeches were on the subject of the fate of Art (Grandville). The speeches were on the subject of the fate of Art (Ingres). The speeches were on the subject of the relationship between institutional and poetic violence. I cannot and will not discuss the details, the sighs, the

1. Marcel Broodthaers, in a conversation with Jürgen Harten and Katharina Schmidt, unpublished manuscript issued as a press release on the occasion of the exhibition *Der Adler vom Oligozän bis heute* (The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present) at the Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf, in 1972.

2. Michael Compton, in *Marcel Broodthaers*, London, Tate Gallery, 1980, p. 18. As a museum director, Dr. Cladders was one of the foremost supporters of advanced art, both American and European, of the late '60s and early '70s, organizing exhibitions of the work of such artists as Carl Andre, Joseph Beuys, Daniel Buren, and Blinky Palermo. The inaugural address, usually by an art historian or critic, or a politician, is a traditional feature of European museum and gallery openings.

Marcel Broodthaers. Musée d'Art Moderne,
Département des Aigles, Section XIXème Siècle.
1968. (Photos: Maria Gilissen.)



high points, and the repetitions of these introductory discussions. I regret it.³

With this enterprise, Broodthaers began a new and complex work, characterized during its existence by its appearance in a particular location and its subsequent disappearance, only to resurface with a new section at another time and place. He followed this strategy in order to elude the fate of traditional works of art, which nonetheless occurred in the course of the one-year installation: Broodthaers's Musée d'Art Moderne began to have an autonomous existence as an artwork, independent of the events to which it owed its conception.

Broodthaers's museum was founded on the basis of neither a permanent collection nor a permanent location. It appeared in the following guises: the initial "Section XIXème Siècle," installed in Broodthaers's Brussels apartment (1968); "Section Littéraire," also at the apartment (1968–70); "Section XVIIème," Antwerp (1969); "Section XIXème Siècle (Bis)," Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf (1970); "Section Cinéma," Düsseldorf (1971); "Section Financière," Galerie Michael Werner at Kunstmarkt, Cologne (1971); "Section des Figures (Der Adler vom Oligozän bis Heute)," Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf (1972); and "Section Publicité, Section d'Art Moderne"; and "Musée d'Art Ancien, Galerie du XXème Siècle," Documenta V, Kassel, (1972). The various installations, presented at intervals, represented an object that was itself nonexistent. Broodthaers's museum was a fiction, existing as memory and idea, especially insofar as most of the exhibited artifacts—especially those shown at the Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf—had to be returned to their lenders.

The exhibition at the Städtische Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf, from May 16th to July 9th, 1972, bore the title "Section des Figures." As the symbol and name of Broodthaers's museum department—the one aspect of his museum that remained constant—the eagle was displayed here as a multifaceted cultural and historical object. The show contained 266 individual examples, not including the accompanying series of slides. Pieces were loaned by forty-three international museums, as well as by several private collectors and dealers. The list of museums itself demonstrates the range of collections and their geographical dispersion: West Berlin's Antiquities Museum, Art Library, Museum of Applied Art, Museum of Islamic Art, and Print Collection; Frankfurt's Federal Postal Museum; the Ingres Museum in Montauban; the Museum of the American Indian in New York; Vienna's Museum of Military History; the ethnography department of the British Museum; as well as museums in Brussels, Paris, Cologne, and Munich. All lent objects representing eagles. But in spite of the implications of the show's ironically pedantic title, it was not, in fact, a thematic exhibition. The eagle was, instead, the object of a method. Broodthaers had no more intention of establishing a fixed meaning for this symbol than of tracing its historical evolution. The

3. Marcel Broodthaers, Open Letter, November 29, 1968, addressed "Chers amis."



Marcel Broodthaers. Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section des Figures. 1972. (Photo: Maria Gilissen.)

fact that the eagle was already symbolically overinvested was simply the precondition for his experiment. Indeed, Broodthaers was careful to ensure that no single item in the exhibition achieve symbolic dominance over the others.⁴ This accumulation of aquiline objects constituted an arbitrarily established cross-section of the various lending institutions' collections.⁵ Broodthaers assembled them unsystematically, with the help of the Kunsthalle's directors Jürgen Harten and

4. This particularly affected the choice of emblems of the Third Reich. Broodthaers avoided large, imposing items, making do instead with such unspectacular selections as postage stamps, not in order to downplay the significance of the eagle under fascism, but rather to prevent the exhibition from focusing too exclusively on this single one of the eagle's symbolic uses.

5. I call the selection arbitrary because, from the outset, there was no desire for a systematically and comprehensively inventoried collection. Although organized around a particular idea, the selection was ultimately the result of a more or less coincidental discovery of relevant items. See Broodthaers's remarks on arbitrariness: "Chance doesn't allow itself to be contained, it really doesn't. Chance is finally the only ray of light that falls on an undertaking such as this one. It liberates and at the same time lets one progress more or less casually, so that in an unexpected way one becomes aware of what one has taken on" (in Düsseldorf exhibition press release).

Karl Ruhrberg. The exhibition brought together diverse objects of widely dissimilar age and from every corner of the globe. Pictured on antique vases or fragments thereof, on everything from furniture decoration to large-scale temple sculpture (the heaviest piece was a stone eagle's head, 100 by 120 cm); in prints and paintings, myth and fable; from the winged wheels of the railroad to the emblem of the German Life-Saving Association; as an emblem on an American Indian priest's vestments, an eagle-shaped helmet on a suit of armor, an Eagle-brand typewriter, or a comic-strip character—all the eagles featured in the exhibition, regardless of their material or ideal value, were positioned solely in accordance with the best means of presenting them within the available space.

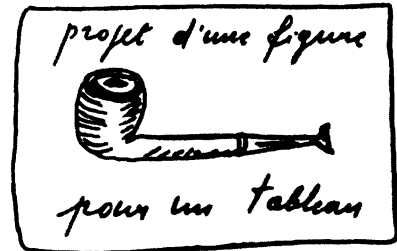
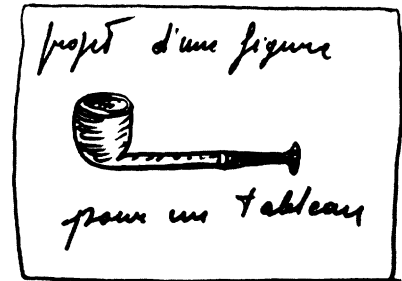
Some of the pictures hung alone, others were arranged one above another or in groups. Books, periodicals, single sheets of paper, photographs, labels, and emblems, together with pieces of jewelry and small sculptures, were laid out in showcases; sculptures, vessels, and utilitarian objects whose size did not require that they be freestanding were housed in tall, two-tiered glass vitrines placed along the walls.

There was neither an immediately recognizable systematic order nor chronological or geographical sequence, although categories and classifications remained partially discernable. Present-day eagles found themselves next to historical examples (for instance, a plastic kite in the shape of an eagle next to a nineteenth-century parade banner), military eagles occupied a vitrine together with objects of natural history (thus: the trumpet ornament of a dragoon regiment alongside three preserved eagle eggs with their scientific labels). The historical entity "eagle" was traced as an erratic process of transformation, and thus it seemed as if the exhibition was organized around the fundamental aspect of distance.⁶ That distance was reinforced through the presentation itself—at once didactic, provocative, and exquisite—as well as by means of the black, 5 × 5 cm plastic labels affixed to each piece, each of which was incised in white with the catalogue number and, on the lower portion, the sentence "This is not a work of art," in German, French, and English alternatively.

*

The two catalogue volumes, for whose editing and design Broodthaers assumed responsibility, must be viewed as an integral part of the work. At the beginning of the first volume, in the section entitled "method," Broodthaers singled out the two predecessors to whom he felt himself indebted in specific ways—Duchamp and Magritte—and dedicated a page to each. In the middle of the upper half of the page, each of their names appears in capital letters above a

6. "The distance between the form and the meaning, between the morphology and the semantics . . ." (Pierre Restany, "Das Adler-Spiel," in *Marcel Broodthaers*, Cologne, Museum Ludwig, 1980, p. 28).



Marcel Broodthaers. *Projet d'une figure* (detail). 1971.

photo of one of their works: Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) and Magritte's *La trahison des images* (1929), whose calligraphic inscription reads "Ceci n'est pas une pipe."

Magritte's pipe shows up frequently in Broodthaers's drawings, in the plaques of 1967–72, or as an actual pipe in the work *Théorie des Figures*, executed at the museum in Mönchengladbach beginning in 1971. One example: in a drawing from 1974, beneath the outline of a pipe, the calligraphic inscription "Début de la Sagesse" appears.⁷ The beginning of wisdom, the first attempt at understanding: for Broodthaers, this phrase refers not only to Magritte, but also to Mallarmé, whom he considers the "father of contemporary art."⁸

With the assertion "This is not a work of art" Broodthaers returns to Magritte's idea from the late '20s. He uses his eagle synopsis as a point of departure once again to raise the question of the interrelation of the image, the object, and its name, or more precisely, its meaning. Magritte had no hesitation in using painting in his attempt "to make the object apparent"⁹ as a means of demolishing "the stature of bourgeois myths," since the "real value" of things (as

7. From the six-part work *Berlin-Berlingot*.

8. "A casual assertion, which at least presupposes a current definition of contemporary art" (Marcel Broodthaers, letter to Jürgen Harten, in *Kunstjahrbuch 3*, Hannover, 1973, p. 63). See also Mallarmé's poem "La pipe."

9. René Magritte, *Écrits complets*, Paris, Flammarion, 1971, p. 343.

opposed to their exchange value) depends on their “capacity for liberating revelation.”¹⁰ In contrast to Magritte but drawing the consequences of his work, Broodthaers made the actual objects the material of his method—relating in this respect to Duchamp. Thus Broodthaers’s appreciation of Magritte cannot be considered unqualified: In an “Imaginary Interview with René Magritte” he offered the painter a suggestion:

What would you think of no longer regarding your paintings necessarily in conjunction with their titles, which—as you’ve often explained—simply seal the viewer’s incomprehension and displace the work into an intellectual realm where it is rendered completely unavailable to any common interpretation? What about, instead, rediscovering the events of life, of society . . . in short, of reconstituting the vanished reality surrounding your works? From then on they would appear as witnesses to the present, and not as poems.¹¹

The last word is to be understood pejoratively, for Magritte himself had differentiated sharply between poetry (which was important to him) and poems, “a word suitable for designating what Goffin and Floquet [two minor, conservative scribblers] produce.”¹² Broodthaers accordingly concluded the interview on an ironic note, Magritte having rejected his suggestions as being mere sociology, which didn’t interest him: “There are a lot of bowler hats in your paintings. Why?—Oh, right.—In what phase of your life did the bowler leave an impression? Do you have a childhood memory related to a bowler?”

Magritte’s conception of similitude culminates in truth defined as the equivalence of representation and object. Consequently, an idealist strain appears to run through his thought. In the section on method regarding Magritte, Broodthaers merely laconically proposes reading Michel Foucault’s *This Is Not a Pipe*. Foucault emphasizes the painter’s anti-Platonism, insofar as Magritte focuses on a series of equivalences—images without originals—in contrast to any notion of an idea/copy hierarchy, to which Magritte, in his static conception of an essential truth of things, ultimately if not directly remained attached.¹³

Regarding Duchamp, the following appears in the section on method:

Whether a urinal signed “R. Mutt” (1917) or an *objet trouvé*, any object can be elevated to the status of art. The artist defines this object in such a way that its future can lie only in the museum. Since

10. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 728–729.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 354.

13. Magritte’s closeness to Platonic thought emerges clearly in various passages from his writings: “Judging by an object’s shadow, one cannot say with certainty what it really is” (p. 255). “We can understand that the creator has given rise to existence without being forced to attribute existence to the creator . . .” (p. 327). “To make things visible would ultimately be analogous to proof of the existence of the universe, the recognition of a supreme secret” (p. 343).



Gerhard Richter. Adler. 1972.

Duchamp, the artist is author of a definition.

Two facts will be brought into focus here: that in the beginning Duchamp's initiative was aimed at destabilizing the power of juries and schools, and that today—having become a mere shadow of itself—it dominates an entire area of contemporary art, supported by collectors and dealers.¹⁴

In accordance with Duchamp's assertion that salable works of art were readymades, which he therefore no longer needed to sign,¹⁵ Broodthaers resorted to objects that already occupied an assured place in the museum. Objects

14. Marcel Broodthaers, "Methode," in *Der Adler vom Oligozän bis heute*, Düsseldorf, Städtische Kunsthalle, 1972, vol. I, p. 13.

15. See Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp*, New York, Grove Press, 1959, p. 53.

recognized as works of art—Hans Burgkmair’s *Grand Imperial Eagle* (1507), Adolf Menzel’s illustration for Grün’s poem “Zingsvogel” (1843), Arnold Böcklin’s *Freedom* (1891), Gerhard Richter’s *Eagle* (1972), Ingres’s eagle studies (1819), Antoine Wiertz’s *Revolt of Hell* (undated), and Magritte’s *Fanatics* (1955), to mention only the best-known—as well as the many anonymous pieces, could be considered as reciprocal readymades. But for Broodthaers the question involved something other than Duchamp’s ironic suggestion of using a Rembrandt as an ironing board. He categorically negated the identity of these artifacts as works of art in order that they might once again appear as simple objects. Broodthaers thereby inverted Duchamp’s gesture, especially insofar as these objects, due to both their symbolic weight and the fact that they had previously been displayed as museum objects, already possessed the mythical status with which Duchamp had to invest his readymades.

The museum collection, with its quantitative profusion opposed to the qualitative singularity of individual works, was addressed by both Malraux and Valéry. In Valéry’s view, each of the exhibited works in a museum’s collection implicitly demands the others’ disappearance: “What an intrinsic contradiction this assemblage of self-sufficient but mutually exclusive marvels poses, each repelling the other most when they most resemble each other.”¹⁶ Later, in his discussion of the imaginary museum, Malraux refers to the leveling effect of art reproductions. And it was precisely this erasure of all distinctions that would allow the super-personal forces of art to emerge.¹⁷ Merleau-Ponty traces this mistaken conception to Malraux’s unrestrained individualism: “Once art has been secreted within the most hidden depths of the individual, the ties apparent between the works themselves can only be explained in terms of a general fate that governs them all.”¹⁸ It is this sort of individualism that, to a great extent, characterized Duchamp. Even though he refused to remain consistent in his personal attitude and negated the Platonic idea of art, the dilemma of his position becomes apparent in light of Merleau-Ponty’s objection. It appears impossible for an artist to postulate an idealist attitude without subsuming the general conception of art to that idea, as the reception of the readymades subsequently confirmed.

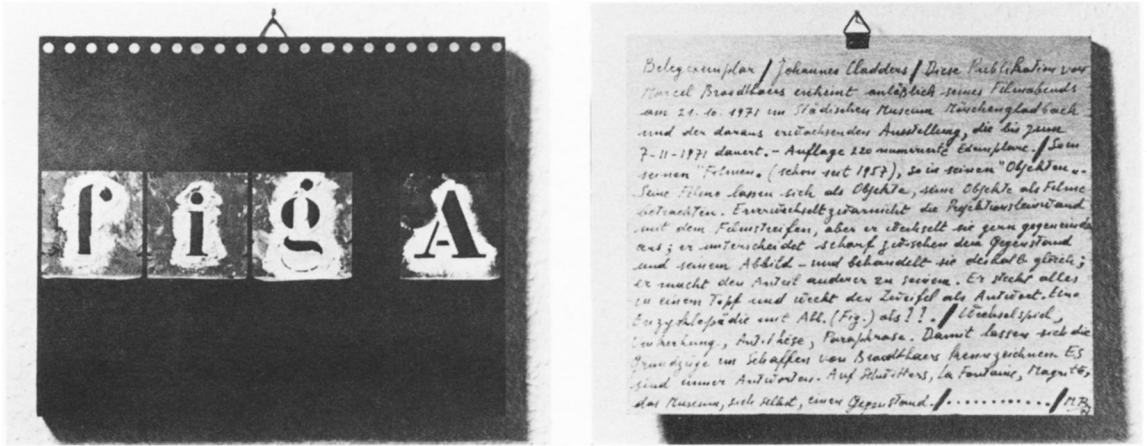
Broodthaers’s recognition of the latent idealism of both Magritte and Duchamp is elliptically stated in an interview:

“This is not a work of art” is a formula obtained by the contraction of a concept by Duchamp and an antithetical concept by Magritte. It allowed me to decorate Duchamp’s urinal with the emblem of an eagle

16. Paul Valéry, “Le problème des musées,” in *Pièces sur l’art*, Paris, Maurice d’Arantière, 1931, p. 153.

17. See André Malraux, *Museum without Walls*, in *The Voices of Silence*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series XXIV, 1978, pp. 18–46.

18. Quoted in Edgar Wind, *Art and Anarchy* (1963), Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1985, p. 137.



Marcel Broodthaers. Figure A (recto/verso). 1971.

smoking the pipe. I think I underlined the principle of authority that has made the symbol of the eagle the colonel of art.¹⁹

*

Broodthaers's experimental eagle exhibition is involved with a series of reversals. They apply both to the individual objects and to the place and manner of their presentation.

On the back of a work of 1971 entitled *Figure A* Broodthaers wrote (copying a paragraph of a catalogue preface by Johannes Cladders):

His films can be seen as objects and his objects as films. He doesn't mistake the screen for the filmstrip, but he willingly exchanges them for each other; he distinguishes sharply between the thing and its image—and therefore treats them the same; he turns the part of others into his own. He throws everything together and poses doubt as the answer. An encyclopedia with illustrations (Fig.) as ?? / fluctuation, reversal, antithesis, paraphrase. In this way, the basic features of Broodthaers's work can be characterized.²⁰

19. Marcel Broodthaers, "Ten Thousand Francs Reward," p. 47.

20. See *Marcel Broodthaers*, London, Tate Gallery, 1980, cat. no. 85. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh provides the following characterization of Broodthaers's point of departure: "The sign potential of objective reality and the potential objectivity of signs, both basic epistemological questions into the nature of art and its historical conditioning, became the starting point of Broodthaers's work"



Marcel Broodthaers. Three Eagle Eggs with Labels.
1972. (Photo: Joachim Romero).

Broodthaers claims here to have drawn a clear distinction between the object and its image, on account of which he paradoxically treats them the same way. Let us apply this contention to the eagle exhibition. Broodthaers does in fact treat the objects as representations of the eagle that is the subject of the exhibition. For example, one item, the three eagle eggs, together with their scientific label, is also shown as a photograph, and is consequently listed in volume I of the catalogue under two different numbers—a discreet hint that in the catalogue the actual object and its photographic reproduction can only appear as identical representations. Only the different numbers indicate that one of them is an image of a photograph and the other an image of an actual object. In the catalogue the first and the second copy (the photograph of the object and that of the photograph) appear to be identical, an example of the gradual distantiation from the original within the exhibition itself, the very principle upon which it is based.

Analogous with this procedure, Broodthaers alludes to the then current practice of art as a concept appearing in a catalogue. “Under these circumstances, is culture still important? In my opinion, the answer is yes, especially when it places thought within a frame of reference that can help the individual protect himself against the images and texts communicated by mass media and advertising, which shape our codes of behavior and our ideology.”²¹

(Buchloh, “Formalism and Historicity: Changing Concepts in European and American Art,” in *Europe in the Seventies*, Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago, 1977, p. 98).

21. Marcel Broodthaers, Düsseldorf exhibition press release.

In this sense Broodthaers “deprives [the aquiline objects] of their mythical surplus value,”²² of the ideological connotations they tend to posit as ahistorical, natural, and eternal—due to the references they make to the fictive or actual qualities of the real eagle—in order to function simultaneously as information and affirmation. Insofar as Broodthaers presents them in a series that, while finite, can potentially be infinitely extended, he obliterates the founding term of the series, the *patron*, to use Foucault’s term.

The specific character and historical dimension of each individual work is foregrounded through three fundamental displacements of the traditional and consciously maintained ordering systems: (1) the exhibition follows no chronological order, but instead organizes the objects according to their requirements and potential for presentation; (2) the viewer is confronted with a morphology of the eagle, a morphology determined by the particular route the individual visitor follows through the exhibition and articulated across chronological and geographical discontinuities, abrupt leaps that are also conceptual leaps; and (3) the objects are all related at the level of subject matter, yet fall into diverse categorical relationships. These factors in turn give rise to the possibilities of new combinations. In Broodthaers’s own words, the exhibition is only a proposition.

Because of the arbitrary selection of the exhibition’s components, as well as their widely differing geographical and temporal origins, the individual objects necessarily remain separate from one another. Whereas in their original collections they may be thrown together solely on the basis of being assigned the same classification according to the established terms of cultural and intellectual history—which is how the art museum functions—in Broodthaers’s experiment they are withdrawn from this system and, by virtue of their common subject matter, enter into previously unknown combinations. The old order, the apparently self-evident taxonomy of cultural specimens, has been fractured. The principle of classification that formerly contained them has been exposed as a fiction. Its place is taken—but undogmatically, merely as an example, with no claims to permanence—by another equally fictional order, but one that is clearly dependent on the subject, “heterarchical,” not hierarchical. Not only is the idea of what constitutes art revealed as a lie, or at any rate a fabricated truth, but the fundamental system of our culture, the rules that govern the demarcation of the system’s subdivisions, are interrogated in relation to their hierarchical structure. And this occurs because Broodthaers takes that which is responsible for the loss of the historical dimension, the museum itself, as the subject of the work.

To talk about my museum means discussing the ways and means of analyzing fraud. The ordinary museum and its representatives simply present one form of the truth. To talk about this museum means speaking about the conditions of truth. It is also important to find out

22. Michael Oppitz, “Eagle/Pipe/Urinal,” p. 156.

whether or not the fictional museum casts a new light on the mechanisms of art, the artistic life, and society. I pose the question with my museum. Therefore I do not find it necessary to produce the answer.²³

The traditional museum exists as an institution born of and subsisting upon the encyclopedic order of knowledge. In this sense, it has “no other task than to make catalogues, inventories, and to watch out for small unfilled corners in order to conjure up there, in close ranks, the creations and the instruments of man.”²⁴ This inventorying produces a leveling of the objects qua objects insofar as they are allotted their place in accordance with the conventional epistemological disposition and thereby are made available as the objects of a certain order of knowledge. Moreover, as “aesthetic specimens,” they assume the isolation characteristic of the peculiar, the splendid, or the curious.

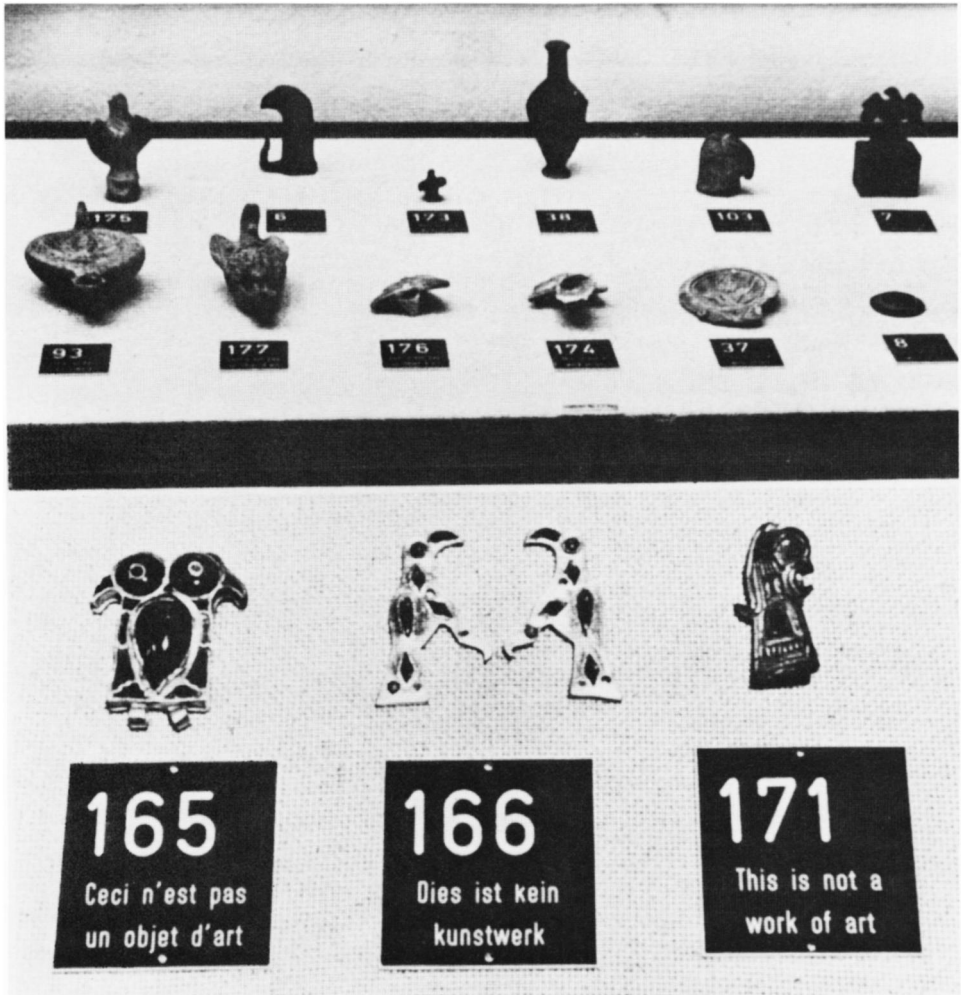
If this provides the general frame of reference for his analytical method, Broodthaers directs his attention specifically to the art museum as an exemplary link in the system of cultural institutions.

Since, following Malraux’s speculation, any work of art within a museum can be compared to and replaced by any other, insofar as they are all embodiments of art as such, the art museum assumes a function that runs parallel to that of the *patron* of the aquiline objects. This is why Broodthaers can claim that his “fictive museum takes its point of departure from the identity of art and eagle.”²⁵ It makes the objects assembled within it representatives of its own ideological premise, of an abstract idea of art that remains unarticulated, concealed behind the various approaches to the presentation of art. Applying Barthes’s formulation, the museum transforms its objects into components of a metalanguage by appropriating their meaning, that is, by depriving them of the specificity of their own value systems, such as their history, geography, morality, and so forth. It does this in order to subsume them under a concept that is at once historically determined and intent upon imparting its own knowledge and its own history. Within its own sphere, the museum subjects its objects to a silent but efficient and overpowering commentary. It asserts that all these artifacts, however dissimilar in period, place, and attitude, still have one attribute in common, that of being art. “This is not a work of art”: Broodthaers confronted the silent claims of the site with this outspoken commentary. Moreover, the commentary does not exist within the limited framework of a painting, as in the case of Magritte, but instead in an actual situation. A further difference is that it does not function to negate the identity of a concrete object, but rather that of a

23. Marcel Broodthaers, in an interview with Johannes Cladders, in *INK-Dokumentation 4*, Zurich, 1979, p. 32.

24. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers, New York, Hill and Wang, 1972, p. 65.

25. Broodthaers, Düsseldorf exhibition press release.



Marcel Broodthaers. Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section des Figures (details). 1972. (Photos: Maria Gilissen.)

categorical concept. And finally, the statement is affixed not to the object to which it applies, but to the walls, or inserted into the display cases where the individual objects also find themselves. It is part of the same space that likewise houses the flags, garments, vessels, sculptures, tapestries, devotional and utilitarian objects, paintings and prints, books and knick-knacks of the exhibition.

The fundamental fate of objects preserved and displayed in museums consists of being “works of art.” Precisely at the site that confers this designation upon its objects a priori, Broodthaers’s labels deny this status to all of the aquiline objects indiscriminately, including those already regarded as “real” works of art.²⁶

The demonstrative pronoun *this* refers, first, to every one of the objects to which the label is applied. No aspect of the object distinguishes it per se as a work of art. It only acquires this definition subsequently, by means of an affirmation that is assigned to it from the outside. The positive definition as work of art subsumes the object in an order that effaces its identity and uniqueness: relieved of its actual existence, it is elevated to a category that cloaks it in a new, self-evident, universal identity, but thereby occludes the specificity and materiality binding it to its own period and place of origin. The sentence “This is not a work of art” therefore fractures the discursive foundation on which the objects in the museum rest. In addition, it restores to these objects their concrete particularity by disrupting their self-evident status as museum objects.

Secondly, *this* refers to the sentence in which the *this* appears, which, in and of itself, is not a work of art either.

Thirdly, *this* applies to the sentence and the object taken in conjunction, even though they are spatially separate. Their connection, determined by the mandate imposed by the *this*, traverses precisely that space that formerly functioned as the mute guarantor of the work’s definition, and whose guarantee has not been suspended. That space, which unites label and image/object, forfeits its power of consecration, its power of conferring upon the things displayed within its preserve the surplus value acquired by the art object. In place of the former unity of site, and in light of the loss of that site’s sanctioning capacity, the irreversible differences of the elements emerge. If “this is not a work of art,” whether object, or label and object together, then this site is no different from any other site, and any given exhibited object is as much a mere thing as the label that, by virtue of its proximity to the object, has entered into a formal relationship with it. In this reading, the *this* disrupts the existing order.

26. That the labels are reproduced in the second volume of the catalogue under or on the illustrations may be a play on Malraux, who said in reference to photographic reproductions of works of art, “In the process they have lost their properties as *objects*; but, by the same token, they have gained something: the utmost significance as to *style*. . . . Figures that in reproduction lose both their original significance as objects and their function (religious or other), we see . . . only as works of art and they bring home to us only their makers’ talent” (Malraux, pp. 45–46). To avoid that self-delusion here, once again, the qualification “this is not a work of art.”



Bernd Kirch. Taxidermic Scene: An Eagle Hunting a Rabbit. (Photo: Maria Gilissen.)

This, ceci, dies—all of them in relationship to the aquiline objects—do not add up, even taken as a totality, to a work of art, given that, as part of the fictive Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section des Figures, it meets neither the criterion of permanence nor that of the indivisibility of the work, since after the dismantling of the exhibition, it dissolves into its disparate elements. Engraved 266 times in plastic, the reiterated *this* asserts its own independent material existence in the form of a series of identical statements. The series confronts the museum with its persistent negation, refusing to place the eagle at the disposal of the museum as an instrument for its legitimation, without at the same time appropriating the exhibited objects to which the series refers.

Broodthaers confronted two fictions, that of the eagle and that of the museum. Just as the entire Broodthaers museum pretended to represent something that itself did not exist, so the works in an actual museum represent an idea whose origins are as apocryphal as the idea itself is dubious.

Broodthaers created the “situation of a fiction” from which an impulse to change might emerge. “The actual effect of the exhibition consists in the fact

that we ultimately gain, through the encounter with fiction, a stronger consciousness of reality—but a mental reality, obviously.”²⁷ “With the help of a fiction like my museum it is possible to grasp reality as well as that which reality conceals.”²⁸

While, since Mallarmé, discussion has revolved around investigating the relationship between things, Broodthaers concentrated on the relation between cultural artifacts and their negation through art and myth. The double fiction of the Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section des Figures, in which the eagle of the museum department's name assumed the principle role, corresponds to what Barthes called an “artificial myth.”²⁹ This served Broodthaers's purpose of reversing all the definitions and overdeterminations of the aquiline objects to a degree zero, a point, however, at which they could not remain, as he well knew. For the greatest threat to even this parodistic enterprise³⁰ is posed by that very process of recognition that Broodthaers's work initiated. He therefore ended his activities as director of the Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, four years after its founding.

Founded in Brussels under pressure of political events, this museum now closes its gates on the occasion of Documenta. By then its heroic and singular form of demonstration will be assimilated and find confirmation by the exhibitions that could be realized in the Düsseldorf Kunsthalle and at Documenta.³¹

27. Broodthaers, Düsseldorf exhibition press release.

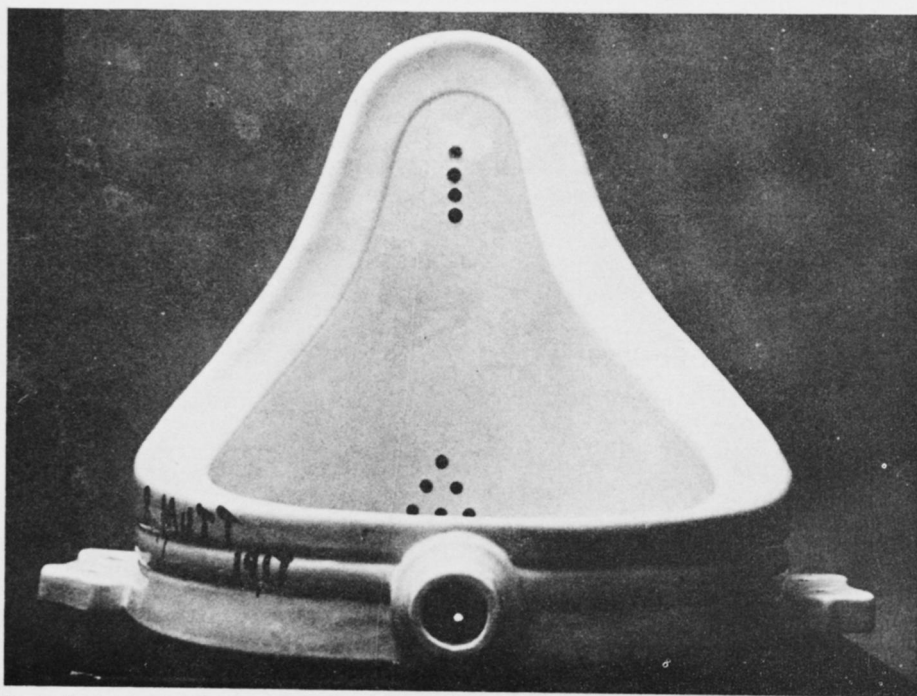
28. Marcel Broodthaers, “Section des Figures,” in *Der Adler vom Oligozän bis heute*, p. 19.

29. “Truth to tell, the best weapon against myth is perhaps to mythify it in its turn, and to produce an *artificial myth*: and this reconstituted myth will in fact be a mythology. Since myth robs language of something, why not rob myth? All that is needed is to use it as the departure point for a third semiological chain, to take its signification as the first term of a second myth” (Barthes, p. 135). For an earlier discussion of Broodthaers's museum fictions in relation to Barthes's concept of an artificial secondary myth, see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Marcel Broodthaers: Allegories of the Avant-Garde,” *Artforum*, vol. XVIII, no. 9 (May 1980).

30. “On the one hand it [Broodthaers's museum] plays the role of being a political parody of artistic ideas and on the other hand that of an artistic parody of political events” (Marcel Broodthaers, “Section des Figures,” pp. 18–19).

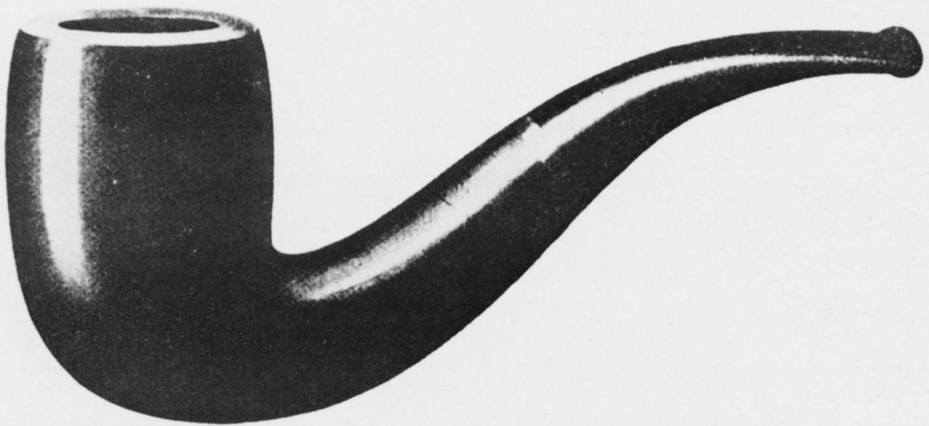
31. Marcel Broodthaers, quoted in *Heute Kunst*, no. 1 (April 1973), p. 20. The reference is to Documenta V, which took place in 1972.

DUCHAMP



Springbrunnen, 1917

MAGRITTE



Ceci n'est pas une pipe.

Der Verrat der Bilder, 1929

193

Ceci n'est pas
un objet d'art

70

This is not a
work of art

210

Ceci n'est pas
un objet d'art

133

Ceci n'est pas
un objet d'art

231

This is not a
work of art

82

This is not a
work of art

68

This is not a
work of art

72

Ceci n'est pas
un objet d'art

194

Ceci n'est pas
un objet d'art

100

This is not a
work of art

242

Dies ist kein
kunstwerk

97

This is not a
work of art

191

Ceci n'est pas
un objet d'art

207

Ceci n'est pas
un objet d'art

233

This is not a
work of art

192

Ceci n'est pas
un objet d'art

67

This is not a
work of art

146

Ceci n'est pas
un objet d'art

72

Ceci n'est pas
un objet d'art

116

Ceci n'est pas
un objet d'art

a.k.

Dies ist kein
kunstwerk

a.k.

Dies ist kein
kunstwerk

H.C.

Ceci n'est pas
un objet d'art

H.C.

Ceci n'est pas
un objet d'art

Eagle/Pipe/Urinal

MICHAEL OPPITZ

translated by CHRIS CULLENS

There is no need for Marcel Broodthaers's objects to struggle to assert their claim to mythical status, for they already possess it—on two levels, in fact.

First, because they are indeed exhibited as museum pieces; second, because, as signs, they already bear a heavy symbolic burden. The eagle, in whatever form it is encountered, is after all strongly invested with emblematic, mythological significance. It variously connotes strength, virility, rigor, freedom, authority, aspiration toward the absolute. Put another way, the eagles Broodthaers puts on display all operate on the symbolic level (this is even true of the stuffed eagle, expressing as it does a certain ideology of nature), and to the extent that Broodthaers refers us to this, he connects the eagle back to a first level of natural/objective speech.

By identifying the symbolic presence in every conceivable eagle, Broodthaers engages in an incessant defusing of the eagle's mythic power. The mythical character of the domineering German imperial eagle is tamed, for example, by placing the national emblem in conjunction with the pale imitations of the DLRG, the ADAC, and the DFB (the German Life Saving Association, the German Soccer Leagues Association, and the German Automobile Club). In many cases, particularly those belonging to the sphere of common contemporary usage, the eagle exhibition's oppositional pairings reveal for the first time that these birds are truly mythical creatures. The series of German product logos demonstrates this most clearly. Caught within the net of cross-references evoked by the sequence of the arrangement, the bird loses the mythical aura of its traditional plumage.

This is one result of the principle of serialization. It is an effect we could call mythoclastic. A second effect, already hinted at, consists of the suspension of the hierarchy, in effect, among the objects themselves.

Every exhibited eagle becomes as important as any other, at least during the moment of observation. The running caption, "This is not a work of art," is almost, therefore, superfluous. It functions as a continually struck keynote, reasserting the methodological intention underlying each object. No object

stands by itself; each serves as an element of the demonstration, one piece within the whole mosaic, and not itself a whole.

A curious double effect, then. Inasmuch as Broodthaers does not exempt any of the individual exhibits from being subordinated to his total concept, he deprives all of them of their mythical surplus value. He liberates the artifacts from their traditional overdetermination by redeploying them as the coequal instruments of his enterprise.

The methodological impulse of the exhibition is reinforced through the foregrounding of viewing positions. The first area contains a picture in which no eagle at all is to be found (see cat. no. 0!); the second exhibits a Japanese brush drawing together with the glass door behind which it customarily hangs, a combination of work of art and utilitarian object (a curtain). And, in the third room, a sack of sand acts as an eye-opener: as though simply left lying there, it upsets the decorum of the glass cabinets around it. *Ceci n'est pas un objet d'art*. This is a visually realized process of thought through which the circuit to Magritte is shorted.

With his rebus, Magritte placed painting on the level of Saussure's linguistics. Saussure had observed that the linguistic sign does not bring together a thing and its name, but rather a concept (signified) and its verbal representation (signifier). Magritte transferred this insight to the visually perceived sign, which does not unite an actual object (pipe) with its representation (the image of a pipe), but instead likewise juxtaposes a concept and its visual representation.

What Magritte could not protect against was the eventuality that, as the visual formulation of this theorization, his picture acquired a significance within art history that accelerated its apotheosis as a mythical object (art work: treason of the pictures). According to its creator's intentions, the picture of the pipe functions on the level of objective/natural language, which serves to mean what it says. If the image nonetheless somehow slips over into the metalinguistic dimension, then this is an effect that was as unintentional in Magritte's case as it was intentional in Duchamp's.

Both of them, the pipe and the urinal, are now cherished fetishes, endowed with just that aura which Broodthaers withheld from his objects, the eagles. His semioclastic optics, forcefully imposing itself onto and through the exhibition's visitors, penetrates the mythical, or metalinguistic level. Broodthaers annuls it.

Recourse to the Letter*

BIRGIT PELZER

translated by RICHARD MILLER

Marcel Broodthaers's work documents, in every respect, the singular circumstances of its production. In a letter of 1973, Broodthaers noted: "As for the notion of establishing some direct relationship between literature and the visual arts, I'm afraid I've begun by choosing Mallarmé's *Le Coup de Dés* as a subject!!!"¹ An open letter written in 1969, at the same time as the presentation of Broodthaers's book *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard. Image*, evokes both the Mallarmé poem and Jacques Lacan's *Ecrits*, containing one of the rare direct quotations to be found in Broodthaers's texts:

Actually many references. . . . Lacan too. *Ecrits* . . . in a Mallarméan total. The last paragraph, p. 892: "The sole absolute utterance was stated by whom it may concern: namely, no throw of the dice in the signifier will ever abolish chance—for the reason, let it be said, that no chance exists except as a linguistic determination, in whatever aspect we combine it, automatism or encounter." *Qui de droit: Letters Stolen from the Alphabet*.²

If the structure of Broodthaers's work appears at first glance to be fundamentally dispersive in its reliance upon multiple systems of reference, a particular correspondence can nevertheless be perceived between the respective approaches of Broodthaers and Lacan. Both were haunted by the problematic inherent in the nature and functioning of language, in the writings of, among others, Mallarmé and Edgar Allan Poe. To delineate such a problematic of the relation of art and language, I wish to examine a series of open letters written by Broodthaers beginning in 1968, and, in so doing, to draw upon the ideas of Lacan.

* I wish to thank Isi Fizman, Yves Gevaert, and Anne Rorimer for helping me collect the letters and documents for this text. My special gratitude goes to Caroline Van Damme for her insight into the subject and her theoretical contribution.

1. Marcel Broodthaers, Letter to Catalano, London, July 8, 1973, in *Marcel Broodthaers*, Cologne, Museum Ludwig, 1980, pp. 15–16.
2. Marcel Broodthaers, Open Letter, Antwerp, December 2, 1969, addressed "Chers amis."

Broodthaers states that his work is intended “to restrict the notion of the subject.”³ We shall see that, in fact, its correlation with language leads him to the question of the subject and the loss of the real, to a concrete implementation of the notion that, to be represented, a thing must be lost. In the interview “Ten Thousand Francs Reward,” Broodthaers strongly brings out the relationship between object and word: “I use the object as a zero word.”⁴ That zero word, around which other signifiers cluster, sets up an order of absent units, an empty form of spatial language. For Broodthaers, “objects carry, in a most sensational manner, the marks of a language. Words, numerations, signs inscribed on the object itself.”⁵ At the outset, he says, he had been “haunted by a certain painting by Magritte, the one in which words figure.”⁶ Broodthaers would return to this question of the function of the sign by radicalizing it. He would alter the fate of the object and its meaning by playing a spatial game reminiscent of the sudden “pounce” involved in games like hide-and-seek, games in which something is always elsewhere, while still always present.⁷ The sign separates itself from the object; it can have a trace function. And the trace is precisely that which leaves the object behind.⁸

The signifier, as part of language, appears as a sign that does not refer to an object, or even to a trace of an object, but rather to another sign. Articulated with other signifiers, by whose absence it is structured, the signifier creates the texture of discourse. Broodthaers therefore proceeds by creating relationships. He plots the connections of discourse. Images, objects become the transcription of the words themselves, a writing created by the equivocal exchange between absence and opacity. Thus, *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*. *Image* joins obliteration to obstruction.⁹

Put another way, the important thing is not the accumulation of objects (shells, eggs, mussels, French fries, pots, charcoal), but the play of presence and absence of a given object in relation to some other object. The subject is caught in this relationship of negativity. Broodthaer's work emphasizes such “necessary absences.”¹⁰ With this language of negation he denies any notion of the synthesis

3. Marcel Broodthaers, “Ten Thousand Francs Reward” (after an interview with Irmeline Lebeer), p. 39 (originally published in French and Flemish in *Marcel Broodthaers: Catalogue/Catalogus*, Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts, 1974).

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

8. Jacques Lacan, *Séminaire III. Les psychoses*. 1955–56, Paris, Seuil, 1981, p. 187.

9. The book by Marcel Broodthaers, in which the spatial arrangement and type sizes of Mallarmé's text are reproduced with purely graphic elements, was published in 1969 by the Wide White Space Gallery, Antwerp, and the Michael Werner Gallery, Cologne. The edition comprised 100 numbered copies, 10 on anodized aluminum and 90 on tracing paper, and 300 unnumbered copies. See *Marcel Broodthaers, Catalogue of Books 1957–1975*, Cologne, Galerie Michael Werner; New York, Marian Goodman Gallery; and Paris, Galerie Gillespie, Laage, Salomon, 1982, pp. 24–27.

10. Broodthaers, “Ten Thousand Francs Reward,” p. 40.

of the subject and positions himself in direct opposition to any theory of an autonomous, strong, reality-adapted ego. His work shows that the subject “figures poorly in its meaning,”¹¹ that it is caught up, for example, in the network of social relations that play out the symbolic representation with which the subject is charged vis-à-vis. . . . Broodthaers exposes this tension through an extreme awareness of the function of speech and of the ensuing distribution of sites which a symbolic system can freeze. His letters reveal a questioning of practice, the issue of discourse. The process is indicative of how, through the play of words, paradigms of power are established. Power is based on a certain articulation of words. Bearing in mind Lacan’s analysis of the four discourses,¹² I shall attempt to show that Broodthaers’s position is derived from each of them. Indeed, from where are we speaking? Whence? With what effect in reality?

This traffic between language-subject-reality is polarized by the question of truth and falsehood. I shall return to the role of the signifier insofar as it participates in the two laws that underlie all language, the laws of condensation and displacement. “Leap[ing] over the bar in the signifier/signified formula,”¹³ Broodthaers was to work on the figures of metaphor; maintaining the bar,¹⁴ the figures of metonymy. They form the basis of his rhetoric, his strategy.

*

In *L’invitation pour une exposition bourgeoise*, in Berlin, a year before his death, Broodthaers stated,

Everything depends on a definition, and it is a fragile one; what becomes of it when, in the final analysis, we deck out the speaking or painting artist in ceremonial robes? To be invited means to partake in official life. Here in Berlin I feel like a diplomat.¹⁵

The final effect of definition, its fragility, its fate in the game of official representation, the very question of name and subject—it is this which guides Broodthaers’s work. His procedure continually zeroes in on the fact that the subject is a site of structural incorporation of language, that the subject is so deeply inserted within language that language turns back upon it.¹⁶ If to speak

11. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

12. The discourses of the master, the university, the hysteric, and the analyst. See Jacques Lacan, *L’œuvre de la psychanalyse*, unpublished seminar of 1969.

13. Broodthaers, “Ten Thousand Francs Reward,” p. 42.

14. Jacques Lacan, “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud,” in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, Norton, 1977, p. 164.

15. Marcel Broodthaers, “Das Wort Film,” in *Invitation pour une exposition bourgeoise*, Berlin, Nationalgalerie, 1975, p. 12.

16. Broodthaers’s first artistic proposal “bears the trace of this curse.” The sculpture *Pense-Bête* consists of a package of fifty unsold copies of a collection of his poetry, half set in plaster. See “Ten Thousand Francs Reward,” p. 44.

itself forces the subject to resort to words, that engagement with language implies the subject's division. The speaking subject does not coincide with itself. It is represented by words or, more precisely, by the signifier. "My Rhetoric" utters itself thus: "Me I say I Me I say I The King of Mussels? . . ." ¹⁷

Now, if the *that* in whose name one speaks always occupies a privileged place in the discourse, this *that* also puts into play the infinite, articulated series of signifiers. The signifier signifies nothing of itself, nor can it signify itself; it is structured to confront other signifiers. Broodthaers was to ring all sorts of changes on this nonidentity of the thing with its inscription.

He was to go even further with regard to the law that governs this system of positional coherence, the law according to which signification, never localized in one point, always retroactive, always shifting, is bound to the sequence of the words. And since signification, thus dependent on a play of differences, is a vanishing point, since meaning is designed to mislead, Broodthaers was to continue to bring out the function of the signifier in the principle of noncorrespondence and of the network that controls it. But he was, above all, to indicate its essential function: to designate the subject's place, a place that is firmly fixed in Lacan's formula, "A signifier represents a subject to another signifier." ¹⁸ This representation of the subject can be fleshed out only by specifying the place it occupies vis-à-vis other representations. By lining up under one signifier, the subject is relegated to another—which forces it into a position of being governed by the signifier—reduced to being its "servant."

Broodthaers was to question that position. His work certifies the rules under which the signifier moves, drawing the subject after it, into a variety of sites. The combinatorial of signifiers establishes the logic of exchange. Given that such a signifier modifies the subject's mode of representation, Broodthaers's work was to play with those various modes as well as with the elements of the *scena* within which they are inscribed. ¹⁹

With regard to the place of the subject, in a text Broodthaers wrote at the age of twenty-two, "Le rêve d'un jeune homme malheureux ou l'anarchiste anodin" ("The Dream of an Unhappy Youth, or the Anodyne Anarchist"), he already said, "If some slyboots were to ask me what I do in life, my response would be: 'Broodthaers, director of Broodthaers, attention press!'" ²⁰ As he embarked on his visual work, he restated this problem of the subject's being

17. Marcel Broodthaers, *Moules Oeufs Frites Pots Charbon*, Antwerp, Wide White Space Gallery, 1966. (The word *moule* in Broodthaers's usage constantly shifts among its various meanings, "mussel," "mold," and, as in this case, "dope"—ed.)

18. Jacques Lacan, "Position de l'inconscient. Au congrès de Bonneval. Reprise de 1960 en 1964," in *Ecrits*, Paris, Seuil, 1966, p. 840.

19. The gamut of functions taken on—from poet to visual artist, photographer, filmmaker, collector, historian, director of a fictional museum, and, finally, the organizer of exhibitions of his own work—spells out the major stages of his artistic career.

20. In *Le Salut Public* (Brussels), no. 3 (1945), p. 4.

represented through some positional articulation. Classifying himself in a declarative statement, at age forty, under the signifier “artist” involved the explicit putting in place of this split:

Of course I now have a job, and I’d have a hard time getting out of it. In my naiveté, I actually believed that I could put off choosing a profession until my demise. How have I been trapped? . . . Yes, now, like all artists, I’m an integral part of society.²¹

Here, Broodthaers is emphasizing the effect of the signifier that determines the subject. Its trajectory includes the basic discontinuity between the subject of the act of uttering (*énonciation*) and the subject of the statement (*énoncé*). Broodthaers’s numerous interventions thus display the *mise-en-scène* of the subject in its statement, a *mise-en-scène* that is able to figure the gap between it and the act of uttering itself, an act which, notwithstanding appearances, is not homogeneous with the promotion of the statement.

This is the displacement at work in his open letters and elsewhere. Begun in 1968, these letters announce and confirm the founding of the Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles. They also appear under the rubric of its “Section Littéraire.” These “official” letters, mimeographed and distributed, play with the institutional code and its insignia. They wittily manifest their self-awareness by superposing a certain number of ostentatious signposts—letterheads, titles, file numbers, nominal lists—that play with changing addresses and telephone numbers indicating the museum’s location. Broodthaers summons himself and others at a distance that he simultaneously ratifies and annuls. Thus, even a private letter dated January 1, 1970, announces: “I’m not there, but all the same I am,” and concludes, “My dear Claura, my (true) ambitions are local. My dear Michel, in the end one isn’t just one’s own stooge. One cares for oneself. M.B.”²²

Who is this “I” who asserts, in one form or another, that it is itself? Broodthaers plays with the grammatical particles which support the subject’s self-assertion within discourse. He does so, however, the better to emphasize that if the “I” figures both in the statement and in the act of uttering, the “I” of the act of uttering nevertheless remains elusive, enigmatic. Broodthaers thereby underlines “the false evidence upon which the ego seizes to display its existence.”²³ He exposes here—as he was to do elsewhere, for example in his work on signatures—the structure of misrecognition that underpins narcissism, and especially that narcissism through which artists defined by their social role legitimize themselves. The ego’s self-display on the parameter of fiction is in particular

21. “A la galerie aujourd’hui: Marcel Broodthaers par Marcel Broodthaers,” *Journal des Beaux-Arts*, no. 1086 (April 1, 1965), p. 5.

22. Marcel Broodthaers, Letter addressed to Michel Claura, Brussels, January 1, 1970. (Claura is a lawyer who has also worked as an art critic and freelance curator in Paris.—ed.)

23. Jacques Lacan, back cover note for *Écrits*.

MUSEE D'ART MODERNE
SECTION LITTERAIRE
DEPARTEMENT DES AIGLES

BRUXELLES, LE 1^{er} janvier 70

Mon cher Claura,

Je n'y suis pas, mais j'y suis
quand même

Bonne nuit!

Comment contrôler la culture et
le métro? Les poètes et la vie
et les philosophes (Barthes, Venturoli,
Leibniz et enfin Descartes) j'oublie
Hallerme (un poète). Et Solles (
?) Mon cher Claura, mes
ambitions (reelles) sont locales -
Mon cher Michel, ^{me} ^{me} finalement

ANCIENNE ET NOUVELLE ADRESSE :

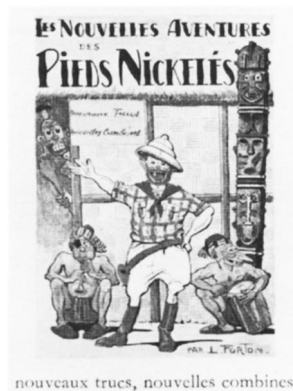
0, RUE DE LA PEPINIERE, BRUXELLES 1 (BELGIUM)

TELEPHONE (02) 22 00 54

de parler de soi-même. Ou s'en va. M.B.

an attempt to delimit the act of uttering by the statement. But they do not really overlap; the uttering is irreducibly in excess of the statement. It is in the very act of significant articulation that the subject constitutes itself, but, as Broodthaers emphasizes, no sooner has the subject emerged through language than it loses itself in its truth by being merely represented therein.

At his first exhibition in 1964 Broodthaers announced: “The idea of inventing something insincere finally crossed my mind and I set to work at once.”²⁴ The stakes seem obvious: to operate on the basis of the rift itself. What, indeed, can the subject possibly prove if not its own insincerity? Especially in this instance, where the fraudulent game of official culture, its existence as *trompe l’oeil*, tends, *de facto*, to simulation and faked authentication. In 1965, as an introduction to comments on pop art in the magazine *Phantomas*, Broodthaers ironically returned to the question of the convincing testimonial, to the usefulness of



“bad faith” in art and its employment by the art lover, the collector, and the creator, respectively:

In art exhibitions I often mused. . . . Finally I would try to change into an amateur. I would revel in my bad faith. . . . Since I couldn’t build a collection of my own, for lack of even the minimum of financial means, I had to find another way of dealing with the bad faith that allowed me to indulge in so many strong emotions. So, said I to myself, I’ll be a creator.²⁵

As a result he was to place his work under the aegis of three comic-strip scoundrels, the *Pieds Nickelés*, with the caption “New Tricks, New Schemes.”²⁶

24. Marcel Broodthaers, Exhibition announcement, Galerie Saint-Laurent, Brussels, 1964.

25. Marcel Broodthaers, “Comme du beurre dans un sandwich,” *Phantomas*, nos. 51–61 (December 1965), pp. 295–296.

26. The *Pieds Nickelés*, or *Nickel-Footed Scalawags*, are something like our *Katzenjammer Kids*.

Broodthaers was indicating that the subject appears only in the instance of speech, for the time of its representation. As soon as presence is inscribed, it becomes representation. But as soon as there is inscription there is failure. One of the properties singular to language is its manifestation of the presence of a real on behalf of the absence of that real as such “through the word—already a presence made of absence—absence itself gives itself a name.”²⁷ Stressing the negativity of his discourse, Broodthaers, following Mallarmé, indicates that if the function of language is not to designate the object, but rather to invoke it, that is, to evoke the object in its absence, that evocatory function applies to the subject as well. In his imaginary interview of 1967 with Marcel Lecomte, Broodthaers asks, “Do you have a philosophy of absence?” in order to elicit the reply, “For me, absence is simultaneous with presence.”²⁸

Yet something cannot be represented in the signifying articulation, something is lost through its insertion into language. The very investigation into the definition of the subject as an effect of the signifier led Broodthaers to the perception that there exists something else, outside language, that is of the order of an arresting of signification. This uninterpretable thing partakes in the register of the real. Thus, the subject is divided not only by the signifying chain but also by encountering the real and the objects that substitute for it. But that real, outside language, does not wait because, always already there, it has always achieved its effects at the moment they appear—which is why it is not able to be spoken. The real is nothing other than this belatedness of every language, of every image, with regard to its precedent cause.²⁹ If, therefore, the relationship to the real is never other than our awareness of its loss, its surest designation will be in the nature of a misrecognition, as Broodthaers was continually to indicate. And primarily by confronting the dividing lines and connections of a logic of exchange, defined by discourse insofar as it functions as social linkage.³⁰

Broodthaers attempted to work out the nature of the relationships of subject, language, and the real by examining, in the complexity of their precise interaction, the elements implicit in any discourse, that is, a system of circulation following a set order of mobile terms and fixed places.³¹ We recall that such mobile terms are: a divided subject; that in the name of which it speaks; the

The adventures of this gang—Croquignol, Ribouldingue, and Filochard—by L. Forton were published beginning in 1908 in *L'Épatant*. Broodthaers used their vignette in the catalogues of two of his exhibitions: *Catalogue/Catalogus*, Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts, 1974; and *L'Angélu de Daumier*, Paris, Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne, 1975.

27. Jacques Lacan, “The Function of the Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis,” in *Écrits: A Selection*, p. 64.

28. Marcel Broodthaers, “Interview,” *Phantomas*, nos. 68–72 (July 1967; published on the occasion of the death of the poet Marcel Lecomte), p. 84.

29. See Cathérine Clément, *La psychanalyse*, Paris, Librairie Larousse, 1976, pp. 59–60.

30. Jacques Lacan, *Séminaire XX. Encore*, Paris, Seuil, 1975, p. 21.

31. See Gérard Wajeman, *Le maître et l'hystérique*, Paris, Navarin, 1982, pp. 10–32.

articulation of knowledge thence put into motion; and the real, presented each time through its substitutes, objects. These four terms revolve around four points of reference. Indeed, a certain relationship to the fixed points exists in all discourse: the site of the agent of the discourse vis-à-vis the other, and the site of truth vis-à-vis production.

Even prior to speech there exists a certain number of stable relationships within which speech inscribes itself. Consequently, in any speech one assumes a position, one “takes place.” So that the effect of the statement is changed according to the site from which it is uttered. For example, as agent, Marcel Broodthaers, museum director.

On the other hand, any speech includes an address, an other. It sets up a relationship between two sites, that from which the speech is emitted and that toward which it is directed. By the very fact of having assumed speech, discourse lays the foundation of power. It was these sites that Broodthaers was to examine, particularly in the open letters.

If there is action, then there is effect. The effect of this action is what produces discourse: production.

A fourth site must be inscribed, the moving force behind any speech process: truth, for truth is split off from what is spoken, split off from production. If the speaker, obedient to his speech, does not possess the truth of what he is saying, then to speak will always be to install oneself in this site of semblance. Broodthaers was to note that this site plays a great part in a certain imperative of facts, not because facts are the hard, solid nucleus inaccessible to the discourse, but, on the contrary, because facts occupy the site of the semblance that enables the discourse to occur and to stand.³² In fact, Broodthaers clearly indicated the suspect ideology — so propitious to the market economy — of “nothing but the facts, no speeches!” by emphasizing that a discourse can buy or sell anything, if, and only if, that thing has a position in, is sited in, a discourse. “There are no facts save for the fact of discourse.”³³

It is within this framework that we can examine Broodthaers’s reflection on the demagoguery that fashion and commerce produce politically, the former being only the staging of the laws of the latter, in art as elsewhere. Indeed, the whole rhetoric of law and fact developed by fashion is commensurate with the capricious and tyrannical arbitrariness of its decrees.

Further, the elements of discourse are not in a random relation.³⁴ Above all, as the agent gives this or that element a privileged position commanding the unfolding of the discourse, we find ourselves caught in a geometry of specific positions. The agent’s place can be taken by:

32. See Jean Clavreul, *L'ordre médical*, Paris, Seuil, 1978, pp. 70–71.

33. Jacques Lacan, Seminar of January 13, 1971, quoted in Clavreul, p. 74.

34. See Clavreul, pp. 158–172.

- that on whose behalf we are speaking — the discourse of mastery (discourse of the master);
- the signifying articulation thereby put in motion — the discourse of the capitalization of knowledge (discourse of the university);
- the divided subject — the discourse questioning mastery (discourse of the hysteric);
- or the real — the discourse indicating the difficulty of any possible relationship between the discoursing subject and the real that its discourse tends to create or embody (discourse of the analyst).

Broodthaers's position reflects each of these polarities.

*

Thus, for example, an open letter from Lignano dated August 27, 1968, takes the path of the discourse of mastery that constitutes signs as signifiers:

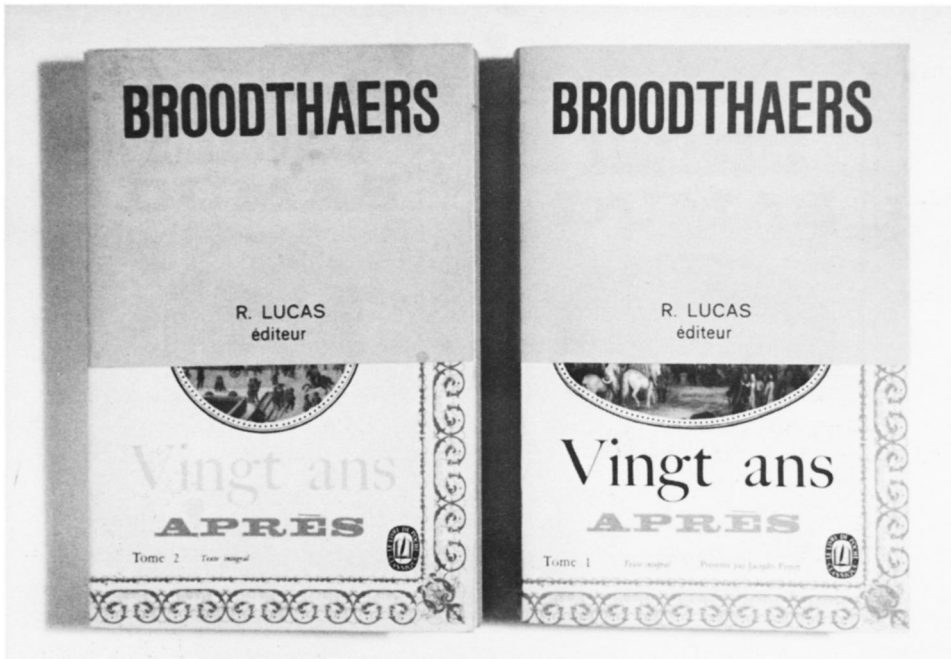
Yes, artistic practice leads to a series of recognitions. Since '67 I've been using photographic canvases, films, slides, to set up relationships between the object and that object's image, as well as those that exist between the sign and the signification of a particular object: writing. Today, when the image destined for current consumption has assumed the subtleties and violences of *nouveau réalisme* and pop art, I would hope that definitions of art would support a critical vision both of society and of art, and of art criticism itself. The language of forms must be united with that of words. There are no "primary structures." Marcel Broodthaers, April '68.³⁵

The discourse of mastery derives its specificity from the constitution of the signifier. It proceeds from an already ordered, itemized knowledge that has been subjected to the articulation of meaning. Its strength resides only in its coherence. It is marked by the withdrawal of subjectivity, which remains present but has no effect on the discourse's intelligibility. The discourse of mastery wishes to reduce the disorders of subjectivity in order to reintegrate them into its own order. Thus, Broodthaers claims to speak for objectivity. He claims that he is "in agreement with all the attempts aimed at objective communication."³⁶ Yet the order of discourse produces an object. Inserted into a signifying ensemble, that object delimits and takes the place of the real, becomes a substitute.

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35. Marcel Broodthaers, Open Letter, Lignano, August 27, 1968, no address.

36. Marcel Broodthaers, Open Letter, Düsseldorf, September 19, 1968, addressed "A mes amis."



Marcel Broodthaers. *Vingt ans après*. 1969.

Now just as there is a discourse that produces knowledge, so there is a discourse that contains knowledge as knowledge, cumulative, collected, to be transmitted. Here we come to Broodthaers's remark, in his role as an art-market strategist, on the logic of a mode of production and its paradoxical complicities.³⁷ In the interview accompanying his "publication" of Alexandre Dumas's *Vingt ans après*,³⁸ answering the query as to why he has just written a book, Broodthaers replies, "To write dedications and to establish the art/commodity relationship. For in fact there is a special kind of writing for dealing with certain kinds of problems."³⁹ In assuming management functions, Broodthaers mimes the actual

37. In this connection, see Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp, 1983, vol. I, p. 486: "Baudelaire was fortunate to be the contemporary of a bourgeoisie that was not yet prepared to make use of the type of asociality he represented in order to make him an accomplice of domination. The integration of nihilism into its apparatus of domination was reserved for the bourgeoisie of the twentieth century."

38. *Vingt ans après* is a work of 1969 by Broodthaers that consists of the two-volume 1961 pocketbook edition of Alexandre Dumas's novel of that title presented with a hot pink paper wrapper around each volume. The wrapper displays in large type the name Marcel Broodthaers. Attached to the flyleaf of the first volume is an interview with Marcel Broodthaers by Richard Lucas, the publisher of this "book." See *Marcel Broodthaers: Catalogue of Books*, pp. 22–23.

39. Interview with Marcel Broodthaers by Richard Lucas.

organization of exchange relationships and, consequently, the dissymmetrical, noncompensated interaction by which power establishes, structures, and administers its constraints. Broodthaers was to denounce the material ascendancy of power and its symbolic accumulations by using, with an “excess of zeal,”⁴⁰ its own weapons to defeat it. The project of the Musée d’Art Moderne, upon which, under the sign of the eagle, he was to work from 1968 to 1972, embodied this tactic of reversal. Broodthaers expressed his intention in a letter to Herbert Distel about the latter’s project for a compartmentalized, “episodic” museum of drawers, in which Broodthaers refused to participate:

As far as I’m concerned, it is a question, to put it concisely, of emptying out the notion of the museum and . . . the symbols (such as the eagle) that have served to establish it. In a general way, I deny artistic value as an exhaustive value based on a “different” language, when in fact the definition of artistic activity occurs, first of all, in the field of distribution.⁴¹

By definition, the museum is the designated site for the study, classification, conservation, collection, and the valorized presentation of objects set in a historical filiation—the repository of the paradigms created by the secular industry of discourse. In his house in the rue de la Pépinière in Brussels, “the capital of counterfeit,”⁴² Broodthaers displayed empty packing crates for transporting artworks alongside postcards of nineteenth-century paintings (Ingres, Delacroix, David, et al.). He placed all of this under the sign of the eagle, with particular reference to the museum’s division into departments and sections. Elsewhere he stressed that the figure zero was designed to reveal “the principle of authority that has made the symbol of the eagle the colonel of art.”⁴³ That symbol would reach its culmination at the Düsseldorf exhibition of 1972, *Der Adler vom Oligozän bis heute* (The Eagle from the Oligocene to the Present). This *Section des Figures* consisted of objects from the most diverse origins, each representing an eagle and accompanied by a label stating “This is not a work of art,” a statement derived by conflating concepts of Duchamp and Magritte.⁴⁴ Thus, on the basis of an inversion embodied in a double negative, Broodthaers was to make the museum a tool for a specific reflection on art.

40. Marcel Broodthaers, Letter to Jost Herbig, London, May 20, 1973, in *Marcel Broodthaers*, London, The Tate Gallery, 1980, p. 26.

41. For a description and reproduction of Herbert Distel’s Museum of Drawers, see the exhibition catalogue for *Documenta V*, Kassel, 1972.

42. Marcel Broodthaers, “Un poète en voyage . . . à Londres,” *Journal des Beaux-Arts*, no. 937 (May 19, 1961), p. 10. (The word Broodthaers uses is “contrefaçon,” which means counterfeit or forgery, but refers specifically to the Belgian practice of piracy in the book trade during the nineteenth century. See Yves Gevaert, pp. 183–195.)

43. Broodthaers, “Ten Thousand Francs Reward,” p. 47.

44. *Ibid.* See also Marcel Broodthaers, “Methode,” in *Der Adler vom Oligozän bis heute*, Düsseldorf, Städtische Kunsthalle, 1972, pp. 11–15.

Invited in 1969 to participate in the exhibition *Konzeption-Conception* in Leverkusen, Broodthaers submitted a photograph with a description of his fictive Brussels museum, and added the following remark:

I'm only half pleased with this photograph because I doubt the value of this document as a true account of this museum, which, above and beyond a décor, represents for me a situation, a system defined by objects, by inscriptions, by various activities like this present one of writing to you. . . . If this museum is a specific reflection on art, what does this letter mean above and beyond the simple communication that exists between us?⁴⁵

Questioning the institution, Broodthaers also questions the operational reality of a value system and the social relationships it stabilizes—based on what consensus? in the name of what control?

The cumulative, hierarchical discourse of the museum resides in its rejection of any new signifiers that cannot be inserted into an already itemized and catalogued order. Institutionalized knowledge builds a barrier against the new. Furthermore, it is part of the order of capitalization which extends into that of consumer goods. The discourse of capital, as an accomplished form of the discourse of the master, sustains itself through segregation founded in the artificiality of differences.⁴⁶ Here we come up against the law of commodities that regulates the forms of fashion—as the return of the same behind the mask of the new—whose link to art Broodthaers was constantly to emphasize. We also come up against the exclusion of the innumerable and unmanageable remnants that make of the artist a ragpicker and grant him at best a “politics of leftovers.” Seeing to it that these leftovers disappear, detail by detail, establishes the ambiguity of the role in which the artist is caught up. Broodthaers’s ambivalent and basically critical stand vis-à-vis nouveau réalisme originates in this recognition.

In 1975, in the catalogue for his exhibition *Le Privilège de l'Art*, under the title “To be *bien pensant* . . . or not to be. To be blind,” Broodthaers wrote:

What is Art? Ever since the nineteenth century people have been asking that question of the artist, as well as of the museum director and the art lover. I doubt, in fact, that it is possible to give a serious definition of art, unless we examine the question in terms of a constant, I mean the transformation of Art into merchandise. This process has speeded up nowadays to the point where artistic and commercial values have become superimposed. And if we speak of the phe-

45. Marcel Broodthaers, Open Letter, Brussels, August 25, 1969, addressed “Cher Monsieur,” in *Konzeption-Conception*, Leverkusen, Städtisches Kunstmuseum, Schloss Morsbroich, 1969, np.

46. See Angel Enciso, “Ségrégation et discours du capital,” statement made at a meeting of the Ecole de la cause Freudienne, Namur, January 29, 1984.

nomenon of reification, then art is a special instance of the phenomenon, a form of tautology.⁴⁷

The cycle of exchange takes the form money-commodity-money. If capitalism is characterized by the extension of the commodity form—as an abstract, regulating power—to the whole gamut of human relations, the object is nothing but the intermediate stage between two sums of money, even where its movement is designed to compel belief in the value of use value, which is nothing other than exchange value. As a commodity, art too is tributary to a logic of profit and thus to a specific disproportion, which operates in both directions, between the value represented by a work and the payment for that work. There is a tendency to mask that disproportion with the play and counterplay of contradictory myths of an equally fiduciary value supported solely on a constantly varying esteem that is dependent on the vagaries of the market. Thus, the discourse that contains and creates knowledge is justified by the enjoyment of the goods that knowledge supplies. But this discourse includes its own bankruptcy.⁴⁸ Even aside from all the gathered remnants, it produces a subject caught in division. Indeed, in this case the subject is divided by offering its labor power, either for the goods of consumption or for the accumulation of knowledge.

Shortly after the creation of his museum, Broodthaers, in a letter dated September 28, 1968, wrote to his friends questioning his function:

My crates are empty. We are on the brink of the abyss. Proof: when I'm not there, there's nobody. So? Carry on with my functions? Is the museum system in as great jeopardy as the gallery system? . . . I'm in danger. I refrain from offering you explanations that may expose me to an additional danger.

Broodthaers continues his letter under the heading “politics,” commenting on the inaugural ceremonies:

The speeches were on the subject of the fate of Art (Grandville). The speeches were on the subject of the fate of Art (Ingres). The speeches were on the subject of the relationship between institutional and poetic violence.⁴⁹

During the 1970 exhibition at the MTL Gallery, Broodthaers similarly emphasized that the subject does not figure in its own discourse, particularly when it accumulates, without producing a division:

Guardian of myself and others, I really no longer know where to turn.

47. Marcel Broodthaers, “To be *bien pensant* . . . or not to be. To be blind,” p. 35.

48. Broodthaers dismantled his museum during the art fair in Cologne in 1972 “for reasons of bankruptcy.”

49. Marcel Broodthaers, Open Letter, November 29, 1968, addressed “Chers amis.”

Département des Aigles

Paris, le 29 novembre 1968.

Chers Amis,

Mes caisses sont vides. Nous sommes au bord du gouffre. Preuve: Quand je n'y suis pas, il n'y a personne. Alors? Assumer plus longtemps mes fonctions? Le système des musées serait-il aussi compromis que celui des galeries? Cependant, notez que le Département des Aigles est encore indemne bien que l'on s'efforce à le détruire.

Chers amis, mes caisses sont superbes; ici un peintre célèbre, là un sculpteur connu; plus loin une inscription qui fait prévoir l'avenir de l'Art; Vive l'histoire d'Ingres! Ce cri résonne au fond de ma conscience. Cri de guerre. Je suis en péril. Je renonce à vous donner des explications qui m'exposent à un péril supplémentaire

P o è m e

Je suis le directeur. Je m'en fous. Question ?
 Pourquoi le faites-vous ?

P o l i t i q u e

Le département des aigles du musée d'art moderne, section XIX^e siècle, a été effectivement inauguré le 27 septembre 1968 en présence de personnalités du monde civil et militaire. Les discours ont eu pour objet le destin de l'Art.(Grandville). Les discours ont eu pour objet le destin de l'Art.(Ingres). Les discours ont eu pour objet le rapport entre la violence institutionnalisée et la violence poétique.

Je ne veux, ni ne peux vous exposer les détails, les soupirs, les étoiles, les calculs de cette discussion inaugurale. Je le regrette.

I n f o r m a t i o n

Grâce au concours d'une firme de transport et de quelques amis, nous avons pu composer ce département qui comprend en ordre principal:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1/ des caisses | |
| 2/ des cartes postales | "surévaluées" |
| 3/ une projection continue d'images | (à suivre) |
| 4/ un personnel dévoué. | |

Chers amis, je suis désolé du trop long silence dans lequel je vous ai laissés depuis mes lettres datées de

Je dois, pour l'instant, vous quitter.Vite, un mot d'affection,

votre Marcel Broodthaers.

P.S.Mon ordre, ici, dans l'une des villes de Duchamp est peuplé de poires; on en revient à Grandville.

Correspondance: Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles,
 30 rue de la Pépinière, Bruxelles 1. Tél.02/12.09.54

I am no longer able to serve all these interests at once . . . especially since the market (which has already suffered greatly) is currently subject to change by unforeseen pressures. . . .⁵⁰

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Writing to Lea Vergine, Broodthaers mentions the paradox and his attitude toward it: “Artistic matters are like a platform on which I take up space but from which I feel I have nothing to say. (And it would really be a pity if I were mistaken, which my highly interested friends keep trying to convince me I am.”⁵¹ By making evident this “artistic platform” and its complicity with the dominant culture, Broodthaers is once again questioning the role of the artist, “the laborer of luxury,”⁵² and the instrumentalization of his engagement in market relations. Even as an accomplice, the artist “always holds in reserve the card that will disturb the game.”⁵³ Thus, for example, he can question the site from which knowledge speaks. The place Broodthaers occupies here in his discourse is the one that marks the disjunction between knowledge and its object, knowledge’s impotence when it comes to mastering the object. Thus the relationship of criticism to the “model of revolt, the intense poetic model” represented by Rimbaud, cannot, according to him, be anything other than a “fundamental lie.”⁵⁴ The model of discourse brought into play here is specified by the position of the subject caught in its subjectivity, demanding that one recognize it as the effect of a language whose contents are specific and unpredictable.

In his first open letter, written during the occupation of the Brussels Palais des Beaux-Arts in 1968, Broodthaers was already stressing the dilemma of subjectivity, which must designate itself as such, and which thus—disappearing beneath the signifier that identifies it and resurfacing only in the form of that disappearance—has to place itself at a point where the fate of its discourse must be problematic:

Calm and silence. Here, a fundamental gesture has been made that sheds a brilliant light on culture and the aspirations of some to control it—on both sides—which means that culture is an obedient material. What is culture? I write. I have taken the floor. I am a negotiator for an hour or two. I say I. I reassume my personal attitude. I fear anonymity. (I would like to control the *meaning* [sens] of culture.)⁵⁵

50. Marcel Broodthaers, Open Letter, Brussels, February 1970, addressed “à MTL ou à BCD.”

51. Marcel Broodthaers, Open Letter, London, November 15, 1973, addressed “Chère Madame,” in Lea Vergine, *Il corpo come linguaggio*, Milan, Prearo, 1974.

52. “C’est l’Angélu qui sonne” (interview with Marcel Broodthaers by Stéphane Rona), +–0 (Brussels), no. 12 (February 1976), pp. 18–19.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

54. In *Phantomas*, no. 62, special Broodthaers issue (February 1966), np.

55. Marcel Broodthaers, Open Letter, Brussels, June 7, 1968, addressed “A mes amis.”

A special relationship exists between the discourse of mastery and the discourse that challenges it: controlling the “meaning” of culture presupposes questioning the “falsity inherent in culture.”⁵⁶ To the question “Of which museum are you the director?” Broodthaers was eventually to give the laconic reply: “Of none at all” — at least insofar as the institution is but the mirror of power, of its weapons, and, thus, of meaning contraverted (*contre-sens*).⁵⁷ In the same interview Broodthaers let it be known that things would be different if the artist were able to take into account what the discourse of mastery is unable to articulate, what it does not want and cannot hope to know. “The Musée d’Art Moderne would then be the museum of meaning. It remains to be seen if art exists anywhere else than on the level of negation.”⁵⁸

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The question remains. The problem still involves the bringing into relation of the divided subject and the real. How can we proceed from the nucleus of this problem? In 1969 Broodthaers ended his letter to the organizers of the *Konzeption-Conception* exhibition with these words: “Meanwhile, let us imagine, dear Sir (dear friends), the real text and the reality of the text as a single world. And its roads, its seas, its clouds, as if they were those of freedom and justice.”⁵⁹

Two months later Broodthaers used an open letter to rectify this statement:

In one of my last letters, of August 25, still under the aegis of the nineteenth century and sent to the organizers of an exhibition in Leverkusen, instead of . . . “its roads, its seas, its clouds, as if they were those of freedom and justice,” read “. . . its roads, its seas, its clouds, as if those of repression and absence.” Because the reality of the text and the text of the real are a long way from forming a single world.⁶⁰

Thus, the real remains unattainable. The final exhibition, *L’Angélu de Daumier*, was to be, primarily, a reconstitution of the first museum established in Brussels. But Broodthaers did not follow it through. “While creating it, I stopped the whole thing. In place of the museum, there was a perfectly petit-bourgeois ground-floor apartment with words floating around in it.”⁶¹

*

56. Broodthaers, “Ten Thousand Francs Reward,” p. 40.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

58. *Ibid.*

59. Broodthaers, in *Konzeption-Conception*, np.

60. Marcel Broodthaers, Open Letter, Brussels, October 31, 1969, addressed to David Lamelas (an Argentine artist and filmmaker, at that time living in London, currently living in Los Angeles).

61. Broodthaers, “C’est l’Angélu qui sonne,” pp. 18–19.

PARIS DÜSSELDORF AMSTERDAM

at the occasion of the opening of an
exhibition at the Guggenheim
Museum on Oct. 5, 1972, in which I
am taking part among the Düsseldorf
artists. - [Marcel Broodthaers]

Düsseldorf, 28th Sept 72

Dear Beuys,

It's been a long time that I sent you an open letter
(June 1968) - Today I should like to write to you
again. This time, however, I can do without that
device. Too often these open letters are spoilt by
polemics or made obsolete by changing circumstances.

In a dilapidated Cologne slum tenement which was
itself difficult to discover I found a letter. I deciphered
it - dust and rain had wiped out some words here,
entire phrases there.

As the paper on which I could hardly read Jacques
Offenbach's signature had yellowed to the
chemical corrosion caused by these pollutants it was
now so frail I deemed it wise to copy the letter.
Yet I kept to the hand-written form to show upon
the written honour of my handwriting that this
letter is truly genuine.

Marcel Broodthaers M.B.

Cologne,

Dear Wagner,

I just put the finishing touches to the "Grande Duchesse de Gerolstein". How far I am from Tristan and Isolde! And know that I shall move even farther. $\text{B. F.} - - - \text{g} \dots \dots$

$\text{F.} \dots \dots \text{TTTTT} \dots \dots$ and $\dots \dots \text{B.}$

The one and the other What proficiency is going to say about it? Maybe doubts are looming large Will,

1848 in 1849. Your essay "Art and Revolution discuss magic politics which you must surely be aware of. The politics of magic? of beauty or of ugliness? Messial

In this struggle against the degeneration of art the musical drama would thus be the only form capable of uniting all the arts. I can hardly go along with that confident of yours, and at my rate I wish to register my disagreement if you allow a definition of art to include one of politics and magic

My dear Wagner, our relations have become strained. I dare say this will be the last message I am sending you. (note: from the letter found in Cologne it transpires that Jacques Offenbach in the end did not send it off.)

King Louis II had Hans H. sent away his castles. His Majesty prefers you to this specialist of compositions for the flute.

I can understand - if it is a matter of artistic choice. But is not the enthusiasm that His Majesty displays for you motivated by a political choice as well? I hope this question doesn't disturb you as much as it does me. What ends do you serve, Wagner? Why? How? Miserable artists that we are!

Vive la Musique.

Jacques Offenbach

P. S. A copy of the octavo volumes of Staudhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* (Paris. Levauxsieur. 1839) with notes in Offenbach's hand lay also in the rubble on the floor. No chair, no table. That was all there was in that attic. These relics I preserve with care.

M. B.

This relationship to the real is inseparable from the question of truth, truth that cannot be constituted as such other than through language and which, founded on a structural lure, can speak itself through the very mechanisms of its encoding: allusion, elision, ambiguity, denial. This mysterious dimension of truth, the need for which cannot be apprehended (since man adapts perfectly to nontruth), imposes itself by bringing into play two laws of language, metaphor and metonymy. Clearly, these laws form the basis of most of Broodthaers's operations. One of his letters attests to their interconnected, dissymmetrical use. It is an open letter in the form of a "found letter" addressed to Joseph Beuys in 1972.⁶² By means of metaphor, it includes a letter from Jacques Offenbach to Richard Wagner. Here Broodthaers realizes a transposition of meaning, the more so in that he published it—under the power-questioning title "Politics of Magic?"—in a Düsseldorf newspaper, the *Rheinische Post* of October 3, 1972, with reference to an earlier correspondence with Beuys in 1968, all to denounce the exclusion of Hans Haacke's work from the Guggenheim Museum. A comparison to Poe's "Manuscript Found in a Bottle" and "The Purloined Letter" is unavoidable:⁶³ to the play of decoy and obliteration in the circulation of letters, to the play of deciphering, of the erasure of signature and titles by time and decay. The open letter creates a detour, a journey, both by its destination and by its appropriation. It is equally impossible not to evoke the characteristics of the signifier as analyzed by Lacan in his seminar on "The Purloined Letter": literality, destination, topology, and materiality.⁶⁴

What in fact gives Broodthaers's letters their validity? Is it their address? No, because they went from hand to hand, in mimeographed form or in the pages of newspapers. The letters are not correspondence. The choice of the epistolary process seems a contradictory way merely to produce a monologue. The letters seem to be appealing to another reader. However that may be, they represent Broodthaers vis-à-vis. . . . It matters little whether the receiver understands the text or not; indeed some of them are highly enigmatic, even when literalness is operative.

If the letter's address is of little importance, what is its destination? In Poe's story, there can be but one: it is destined for the person to whom it cannot be delivered without losing its power, namely the king it is betraying. Lacan says that the king is the figure of the subject. One of his seminar's conclusions is that a letter always reaches its destination. In his open letters Broodthaers masterfully

62. Marcel Broodthaers, *Magie*, Paris, Editions Multiplicata, 1973.

63. Broodthaers refers to both of these Poe stories in the catalogue *L'Angélu de Daumier*: "This is the explanation of this exhibition, preceded by a searching commentary in the linguistics mode. First, the wicker trunk in the foyer of the hôtel. It contains my messages entrusted by the state of another hemisphere. They are hidden following the principles in 'The Purloined Letter' and 'A Manuscript Found in a Bottle'" (Marcel Broodthaers, "Notes sur le sujet," in *L'Angélu de Daumier*, Paris, Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne, 1975, vol. II, np.).

64. Jacques Lacan, "Le séminaire sur 'La lettre volée,'" in *Ecrits*, pp. 11–61.

figures the subject and its relationship to the different manifestations of its awareness.

All letters establish specific relationships to place. In Poe's tale, the letter is searched for everywhere and cannot be found. With Broodthaers, letters find their own way. He demonstrates how the signifier that insists on attaining its subject must always make a detour.

In Poe's tale, notwithstanding the fact that the police search everywhere for the letter without being able to find it, it is still there in the minister's house. But the letter that was there was not the one the police were looking for, since the minister had turned it over and altered its appearance to some degree. The letter was there and not there; it was there, but not identical to what it had been, to itself. Similarly, Broodthaers's open letters participate in the principle of non-identity that governs the signifier. Broodthaers's work—from the mussels to the parrots—emphasizes again and again that the signifier's materiality resides in its repetition, as such in its own nonidentity.⁶⁵ Broodthaers's work concerns the eccentric position of the real subject vis-à-vis the subject represented by the signifier, using the very postulates of the signifier's composition set forth in the two laws of metaphor and metonymy. In the letter to Beuys-alias-Wagner we find a sliding of the effect of meaning subjected to the contiguities of the signifier. But that infinite displacement can be halted by being caught and held in a metaphor.

Metaphor has no principle of equivalence.⁶⁶ It is an illusion to consider metaphor on the model of analogy, as an abridged or latent comparison. Replacement is not made on the basis of similarity between referents. On the contrary, a new meaning is created through the elision of a signified, as in the phrase "tricolored thighbone" to describe the thighbone of a Belgian: "The nationality and the structure of the human being are united. The soldier is not far behind."⁶⁷ The metaphor cannot be explicated by the resemblance between things; the metaphor posits an identification, but metaphorically, by identifying all the possible intersignifications without allowing for a complete inventory, since none of them can close off the series of similarities.

Broodthaers was to play with the illusion that the gap between the related terms is closed, whereas it only serves to mask the already figured, already indeterminate nature of that relationship. He operates, therefore, on the basis of

65. The book was the object that fascinated Broodthaers, for it is "the object of a prohibition." Thus, referring to his *Pense-Bête*, he says, "Here you cannot read the book without destroying its sculptural aspect. It is a concrete gesture that passes the prohibition back to the viewer—at least that's what I thought would happen. . . . No one had any curiosity about the text. . . . No one was affected by the prohibition" ("Ten Thousand Francs Reward," p. 44). Another example is Broodthaers's book *A Voyage on the North Sea* (London, Petersburg Press, 1973) whose pages, according to the book's admonition, are to remain uncut.

66. See Alfredo Zenoni, "Métaphore, métonymie dans la théorie de Lacan," *Cahiers internationaux de symbolisme*, nos. 31–32 (1976), pp. 187–198.

67. Broodthaers, "Ten Thousand Francs Reward," p. 40.

the irreducibility of the signifying substitution per se. Which enables us better to understand his attempt to radicalize Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* and his total rejection of the vice of idealism in surrealists such as André Breton. Broodthaers's procedures materialize the evidence that the metaphor subverts, in principle—the discourse of designation, of definition. “The secret of art must, whenever possible, be revealed—the dead general smokes an extinguished cigar.”⁶⁸

Like metaphor, metonymy takes the place of an expected word and produces an effect of meaning: thus, *Entre deux Mers se dressait le Château Margaux*.⁶⁹ But whereas the metaphoric word is transplanted from one chain to an indeterminate other, the metonymic word has been separated from the same chain and relies on already codified ways of talking about the real. “I don't so much organize objects and ideas as organize encounters of different functions that all refer to the same world: the table and the egg, the mussel and the pot to the table and to art, to the mussel and to the chicken.”⁷⁰ It is because reality is caught in a net of references that things can be mutually metonymized, that we can say less in order to say more, utter incidentals for essentials, a thing for its opposite. Here all art consists in presenting a thing as an effect, an envelope or trace of something else. “But on my table, there are too many eggs, and the knife, the fork, and the plate are absent—absences necessary to give speaking presence to the egg at the table.”⁷¹ Because things are metonymized, allusively indicated, they acquire a status that they would not have if they were named outright. Whence the relationship to censorship, internal and external, of this “rebus” language, and speculation on the difficulty of reading.⁷² “Like little-remembered dreams, worlds in which shark, knife, cook are synonymous.”⁷³ In a general way, Broodthaers uses the fact that all things, caught up as they are in a net of signifying contiguities, mutually make one another incomplete, since there is continual reference from one to another, and that reference cannot be halted. Put another way, every context can always function as lacking what is not uttered.

Broodthaers was to make great use of this metonymic contextual valence, which can be exploited to signify substitutively any presence whatsoever. The very fact of referring enables us to figure what is constantly lacking. But there must still be a metaphor to halt the metonymic drift in order to note the thing

68. *Ibid.*

69. “Château Margaux stood Entre deux Mers” or “Château Margaux stood between two seas.” A play on the names of two Bordeaux wines and districts, this is the title of a work by Broodthaers of 1974 consisting of three wine bottles—white, green, and white respectively—inscribed “mer,” “château,” “mer.”

70. Broodthaers, “Ten Thousand Francs Reward,” p. 41.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

72. *Ibid.*, pp. 44–45.

73. Marcel Broodthaers, Open Letter, Kassel, June 27, 1968, no address.



Marcel Broodthaers. Entre deux Mers se dressait le Château Margaux. 1974.

lacking on the basis of which all things can be spoken. “And, similarly, I understand . . . that there was nothing in the world to avert the falling-off in the realm of curios except recourse to some absolute power, such as Metaphor.”⁷⁴

Just as Mallarmé, in “La déclaration Foraine,” linked the play of metaphor to the art of quackery,⁷⁵ Broodthaers, like a saltimbanque with nothing to show, constantly reveals the loss with which he is contending by drawing upon an arsenal of artistic means and market strategies. As for that loss—and we do not know its nature, nor do we know the nature of the link with it—his method strangely mingles the work of mourning and that of distantiation, both bearing simultaneously on art and on politics. His alphabets seem to be learning to spell the elements of the situation in which he acts. By relying upon the functioning of a negation, upon its ambiguity and upon his own one-upmanship, Broodthaers marks out the subject’s fate to be an exclusion internal to itself, subsisting in the operation of effacement *per se*.

Thus it is also the case that by not being expelled by our throats, this shred of discourse condemns each of us—in order that its fatal sentence be uttered—to make of ourselves its living alphabet. Which means that at every level of the dance of one’s own puppet one needs to borrow some elements so that their sequence will attest to the existence of a text, without which the desire that passes through it would not be indestructible.⁷⁶

Brussels, January 1987

74. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris, Gallimard, Pléiade, 1945, p. 281.

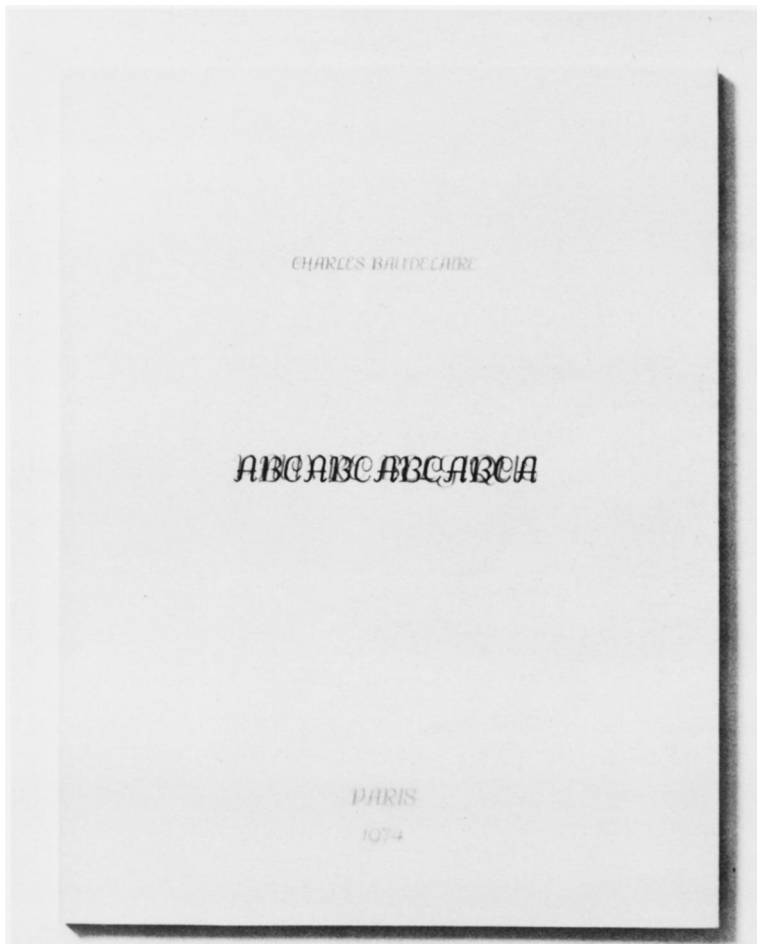
75. See Octave Manonni, *Clefs pour l’imaginaire*, Paris, Seuil, 1969, p. 258.

76. Jacques Lacan, “La psychanalyse et son enseignement. Communication présenté à la société française de philosophie en la séance du 23 février 1957,” in *Ecrits*, p. 446.

*Pauvre Belgique: “An Asterisk
in History”*

YVES GEVAERT

with the collaboration of EMILE VAN BALBERGHE
translated by JOHN SHEPLEY



*Marcel Broodthaers. Charles
Baudelaire. Pauvre Belgique
(cover). 1974.*



Cham

A Bruxelles, M. Trotman rencontre un grand nombre de compatriotes proscrits par le code pénal et réfugiés soit-disant politiques.

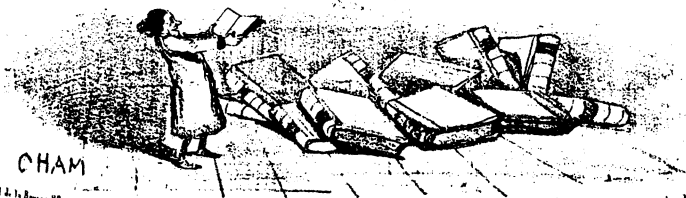


En sortant de table M. Trotman s'aperçoit que sa montre et sa bourse se sont réfugiés dans la poche de son voisin.

CONTRE FACON
BELGE



Pour se consoler, il achète Balzac, Hugo, Dumas, Eugène Sue, à 30 cent! le volume.



CHAM

Char. Rivari N° 1, la Bourse 23

Imp. J. Rivari & C.

Mais, rentré chez lui, il trouve que la moitié des pages manque et que l'autre est illisible.

Brussels, a provincial capital, wrote Jules Renard in his journal. Capital of piracy in Balzac's time, Brussels today is a transient town where the jukeboxes blare "Rien de rien." Between life and death, dreamers vanish bewitched. This town, one of the most unconscious in the world, repels. . . . Urban development threatens the shade of Charles Baudelaire at the Hôtel du Grand Miroir.

—Marcel Broodthaers

Marcel Broodthaers, in Journal des Beaux-Arts, no. 937 (May 19, 1961).

Brussels, much noisier than Paris. . . . The pavement, irregular; the flimsiness and reverberations of the houses; the narrowness of the streets; the wild and exaggerated accent of the people. . . . Few sidewalks, or interrupted sidewalks (the result of individual freedom, pushed to the extreme). No life in the streets. . . . No displays in the shops. Strolling, so cherished by peoples endowed with imagination, impossible in Brussels. Nothing to see, and impossible thoroughfares.

—Charles Baudelaire

Baudelaire, Oeuvres complètes, p. 1321.

Five lectures at the Cercle Littéraire et Artistique [of Brussels] on Delacroix, on Gautier, and on Les paradis artificiels. Middling success, fees lower than what he had been promised. It is then that the poet begins taking notes with a view toward a pamphlet attacking Belgium. . . .

Ibid., p. xxvii.

There is this to be said for doing a sketch of Belgium, that at the same time one is doing a caricature of French stupidities.

—Charles Baudelaire

Ibid., p. 1317.

Great merit in doing a book on Belgium. It means being entertaining while speaking of boredom, instructive while speaking of nothing. . . . Just as twenty years ago in France we celebrated the freedom, glory, and happiness of the United States of America! Similar foolishness with regard to Belgium.

—Charles Baudelaire

Ibid.

Baudelaire and Pauvre Belgique

"Tired of his countrymen's lack of understanding and their mistrust, tired also of being pursued by his creditors,"¹ Baudelaire leaves Paris on April 24, 1864, for Brussels, "where he hopes to find a publisher for his complete works. He stays at the Hôtel du Grand Miroir, 28, rue de la Montagne."² He is forty-three years old. From a city in the throes of reorganization and urban and demographic expansion — first with Rambuteau under Louis-Philippe, then with Haussmann during the Second Empire — he arrives in a capital that, apart from Léopold I's Palais Royal, with its grounds and immediate surroundings, had completely preserved the look of a provincial town with an almost medieval urban fabric. In 1846, the population of Brussels was barely 123,000, while that of Paris in 1851 was 1,400,000. The great transformations achieved in Paris by vistas and perspectives, as well as the exposure of monuments in the medieval city, were not to become a reality in Brussels until the reign of Léopold II, after his father's death in 1865; they were often to be inspired, and sometimes even carried out, by French architects in the fashionable eclectic style of the time.

"Dissatisfied with the first results of his stay in Belgium, irritated at rediscovering in this country only what he had run away from in France, Baudelaire at first, in early June 1864, tried to draw on his disappointing experience for a series of 'Lettres Belges' to be published in *Le Figaro*. But the letters broadened . . . , the subjects (politics, religion, provinces, etc.) requiring serious study kept multiplying, his hatred intensified, and in order to appease it at leisure, he needed more than letters: he needed a book. *Pauvre Belgique* was born on June 16, 1864. The idea for the 'Lettres,' however, was never abandoned, and accordingly as his lack of funds grew more painful or his fear prevailed . . . , Baudelaire decided to publish a series of articles in the form of letters, separate from his book, or postpone this publication until his return to France. Such was the origin of one of the most violent attacks that a writer had ever undertaken to launch against an entire nation."³ But beginning in 1866, Baudelaire's health deteriorates. Early in February, he "consults his mother and his friend Asselineau about the physical disorders that each day are becoming increasingly acute."⁴ In July 1866 he is brought back to Paris, and dies "in his mother's arms"⁵ on August 31, 1867. In the end, *Pauvre Belgique* remained in the state of notes, which were not to be published in their entirety until 1951 by the publisher Conard.⁶

1. Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, text established and annotated by Y.-G. Le Dantec, edition revised, completed, and introduced by Claude Pichois, Paris, Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971, p. xxvii.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 1734.

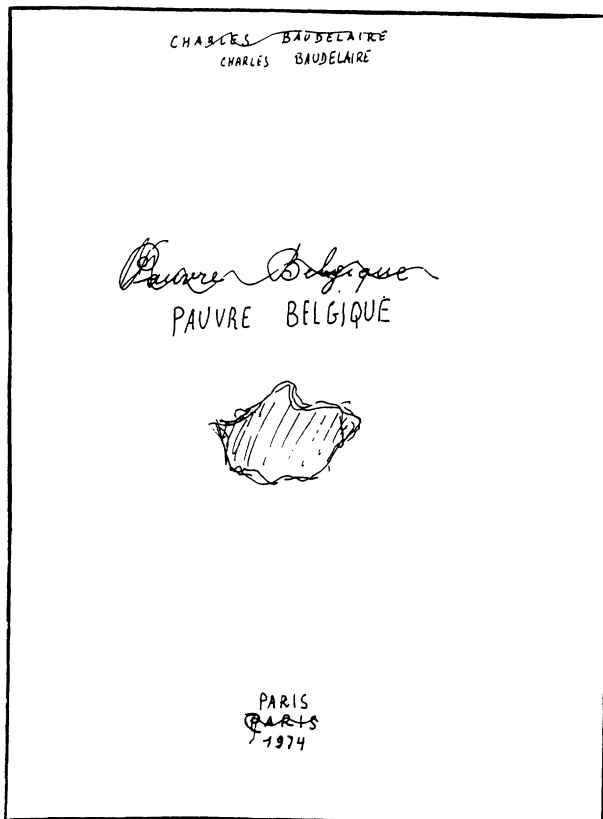
4. *Ibid.*, p. xxviii.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Charles Baudelaire, *Pauvre Belgique*, text edited by Jacques Crépet and Claude Pichois, Paris, 1951.



Vignette reproduced in Jean-Jacques Launay, "Le charme discret de la bibliophilie (Auguste Poulet-Malassis)," in Bulletin du Bibliophile, 1979, p. 387.



First project of cover. Drawing in blue ink.

JUSTIFICATION DU TIRAGE

Il a été tiré de cet ouvrage, pour le compte de
Herman Daled, d'Yves Gevaert et de Paul Lebeer,
44 exemplaires sur papier d'épreuve protégés par une couverture
en carton mince et une jaquette transparente
dont 4 marqués de A à D et 40 numérotés de 1 à 40,
signés et datés par l'auteur.

EXEMPLAIRE 6

Bruxelles, le 26 septembre 74. H.D.

Colophon of the book.

The Anecdote

The idea for a book by Marcel Broodthaers about *Pauvre Belgique* dates—if my memory is correct—from the spring of 1974. Paul Lebeer, prime mover of the Hossmann publishing house in Hamburg, and I were partners in the venture. The first serious discussions took place in June 1974 at the Dom Hotel in Cologne, where Marcel Broodthaers was staying for a few days in order to present his film *Eau de Cologne 1974* at the Melville Paris Pullmann cinema (the dates are not mentioned on the poster he published on the occasion of this event organized by his Société des Musées et des Images). Paul Lebeer was with us that day. Random conversation. Marcel Broodthaers put forth such ideas as the use of the vignette of Poulet-Malassis, publisher of *Les fleurs du mal*: a badly perched chicken (*poulet mal assis*). We finally decided on the cover for the text: "Charles Baudelaire / Pauvre Belgique / Paris / 1974," and on the vignette, to be placed beneath the title, the map of Belgium surrounded by three lines in the colors of the French flag, which Broodthaers sketched with his own hand. The typeface he recommended was Bâtonnet (the exact term is Grottesque). The content would consist—but here there was no decision about just how—of quoted extracts from *Pauvre Belgique*.

In the copy of Baudelaire's works that had belonged to Broodthaers,⁷ one indeed finds numerous pencil marks in the margins drawing attention to words, sentences, and even whole paragraphs that might eventually have served for the projected book. In the end, none of the fragments he had marked was used. In fact, preoccupation—both on the part of the artist and the publishers—with these extracts created an obstacle to the execution of the book in relation to the principle of the cover itself, already designed, where the map of Belgium was surrounded by a line with the three French colors. Indeed, the tautology of the cover and the subject of Baudelaire's text led to an impasse that served only to enhance Baudelaire's aura and strengthen his ruthless judgment of Belgium. This at least is the feeling I retain from my memories of those conversations. The project was thereupon stalled for weeks, and a certain inertia overcame the artist—who was moreover absorbed in his exhibition at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels—to the point where it had to be dropped.

It was probably at the end of August that I set up a meeting between Broodthaers and a mutual friend, Herman Daled, a total stranger to the original plan, in order to relaunch the project. It was on this occasion that for the first time the idea was broached of omitting entirely any extracts from *Pauvre Belgique*. The book seemed finally to take on form and meaning. Toward mid-September, *Pauvre Belgique* came off the presses of the Laconti printers in Brussels, quite a surprise since Broodthaers had not consulted any of the publishers again. For his last-minute participation, Herman Daled was listed as a copublisher.

7. Pléiade edition.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

PAUVRE BELGIQUE

PARIS

1974

Front cover.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

PAUVRE BELGIQUE

NEW YORK

1974

Back cover.

Broodthaers and Baudelaire

While Stéphane Mallarmé's thought can be said to underlie the work of Broodthaers, it is nevertheless the figure of Charles Baudelaire that he most explicitly evokes. In 1970, he made a film lasting only seven minutes—perhaps one of his most enigmatic—that bears the title *Un Film de Charles Baudelaire: Carte Politique du Monde* and whose theme, treated in fictional form, is the voyage undertaken by the poet in 1841 and 1842 to the islands of Mauritius and Bourbon (now Réunion).⁸ Two years later, in 1972, he executed a series of nine pictures typographically printed on canvas, which he exhibited under the title *Peintures littéraires*, on the occasion of the exhibition "Actualité d'un bilan," organized in Paris that same year by Yvon Lambert. In the catalogue, he published a three-page "Complément indispensable" to this series of pictures.⁹ Charles Baudelaire served as the subject of one of them, *Charles Baudelaire peint*. In 1973, Hossmann in Hamburg published his *Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes*, the subject of which is Baudelaire's poem "La beauté." In 1974, and for the last time, two of Broodthaers's works derived their inspiration from the poet. He published a print *Comédie-Comédie* whose subject is the Hôtel du Grand Miroir, where Baudelaire stayed during his time in Brussels,¹⁰ and finally *Pauvre Belgique*.

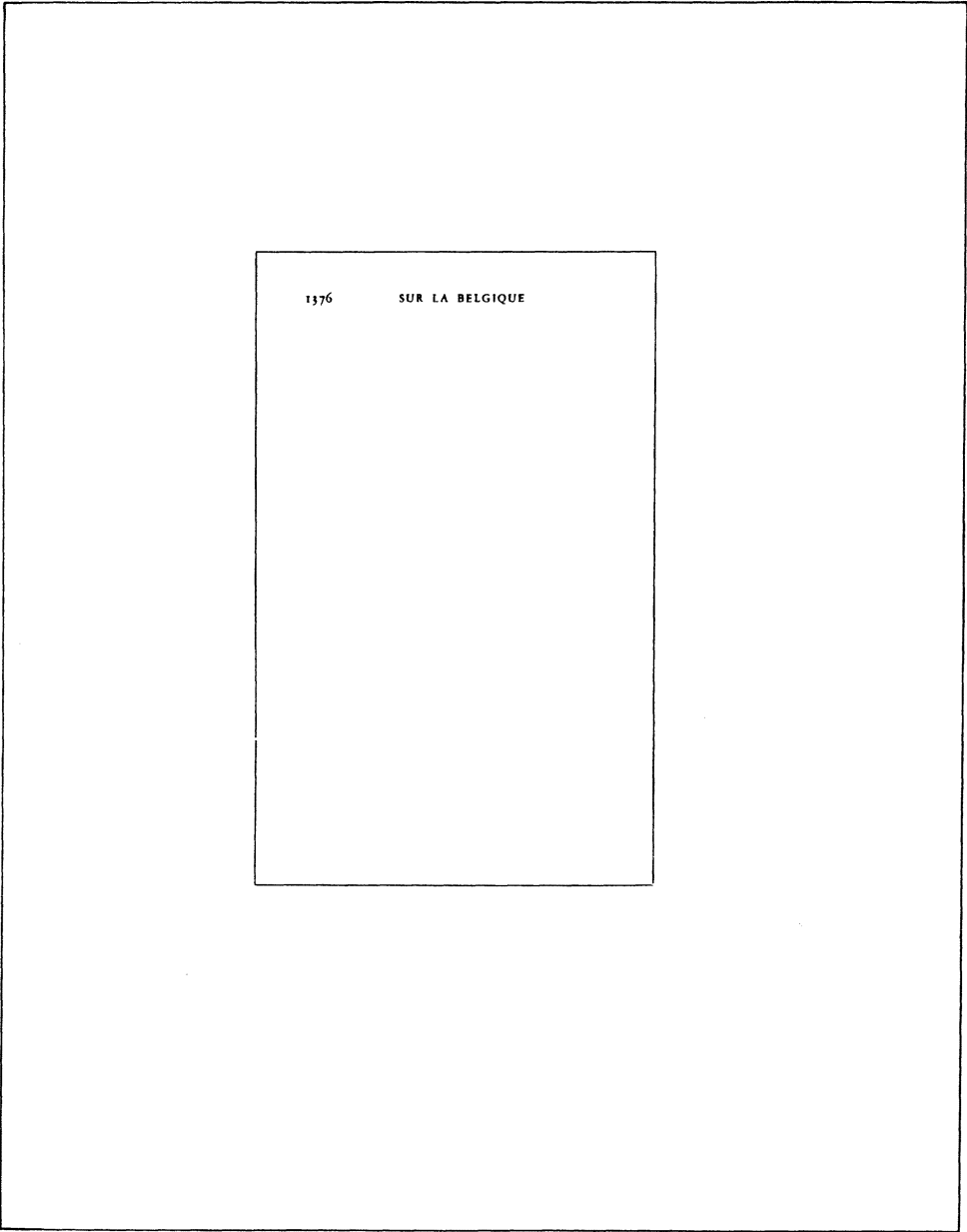
The Book

A sewn volume of 152 unnumbered pages of wood-pulp paper of the kind known as newsprint and generally used for printing proofs, 325 × 250 mm in size, composed of nineteen signatures of eight leaves sewn and glued to the cover. Cover of thin white cardboard. On the front of this cover, printed by letterpress in black ink in Aigrette type: CHARLES BAUDELAIRE (16 point) // PAUVRE BELGIQUE (36 point) // PARIS (24 point) // 1974 (24 point). On the back of this cover, printed symmetrically in the same type and sizes: CHARLES BAUDELAIRE // PAUVRE BELGIQUE // NEW YORK // 1974. The inside of the covers is left blank except for the mention "Copyright: Marcel Broodthaers" at the bottom of the back. A jacket of tracing paper folds over the cover. On the front and back of this jacket, exactly covering the title PAUVRE BELGIQUE, in the same type and of the same size as the latter, thus making it unreadable while the other printed elements on the cover show through, are printed the letters: ABCABCABCABCA.

8. Armin Zweite, "Anmerkungen zu einem Film von Marcel Broodthaers," in *Marcel Broodthaers: Catalogue*, Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts, 1974, pp. 14–16.

9. In Yvon Lambert, ed., *Actualité d'un bilan*, Paris, 1972.

10. Published by Multiples, New York.



A page of the book.

Pages [1]–[2]: blank.

Page [3]: facsimile in red and black, surrounded by a thin black line, of the front of the jacket of the edition of Charles Baudelaire's complete works published in the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade.

Page [4]: blank.

Pages [5]–[147]: resetting, printed in offset, of pages 1315 to 1457 and using the same type as the text of *Pauvre Belgique* published in the Pléiade edition, but keeping only the title of page 1315 (SUR LA BELGIQUE), the heading of page 1317 (PAUVRE BELGIQUE), and for the other pages the running heads (SUR LA BELGIQUE - PAUVRE BELGIQUE) and page numbers, to the exclusion of all other elements. Each page is framed by a thin black line indicating the original format of the Pléiade edition, with the exception of the blank page of the latter (p. 1316), which is also left entirely blank, that is to say without a border. The layout is classical. As for a reimposition, that is to say, a modification of forms in order to print them on larger paper, Broodthaers uses a large format (quarto). The justification of the text of the Pléiade edition is no longer that of the text itself, but the format of the page, indicated by Broodthaers by a border measuring 167 × 104 mm., is printed on a page 325 × 250 mm., leaving an upper margin of 66 mm., a lower margin of 93, an outer margin of 81, and an inner one of about 65. There does not seem to have been any particular significance in the proportion of this layout, but simply a common printers' practice.

Page [148]: facsimile in red and black of the back of the jacket of the Pléiade edition surrounded by a thin black line.

Pages [149]–[150]: blank.

Page [151]: note by Marcel Broodthaers and colophon.¹¹

Page [152]: blank.

NOTE

*L'on ne peut définir ce livre comme une contrefaçon
telle qu'elle fut d'usage courant chez les éditeurs bruxellois
pendant la période romantique.*

*Si contrefaçon, il y a, elle se trouve être une référence
dont la forme particulière renvoie aux polémiques actuelles
dépassant un cadre géographique précis.*

C'est tout au moins, ce que j'ai visé.

Marcel Broodthaers

11. "One cannot call this book a pirated edition such as was the common custom of publishers in Brussels during the romantic period. If piracy there is, it turns out to be a reference whose particular form is a reflection of present controversies that go beyond a precise geographical framework. That at least has been my aim." For colophon "justification du tirage," see facsimile above.

Authors' rights are today so taken for granted that one has forgotten the discussions they aroused not so very long ago. The extraordinary development of the book-sellers' trade at the beginning of the nineteenth century had given the question a scope previously unknown. Each country was concerned at first with national authors; but the rights of foreign authors were not recognized and regulated, from country to country, until sometime later. The first Franco-Belgian agreement on this subject was signed only in 1852.

In the wake of the Vienna treaties, in the absence of any international regulation of authors' rights, Belgium, being detached from France, was able to reprint French books freely without paying any royalty. "Belgian piracy," in its time, provoked very heated debates in the legislatures and newspapers. Today it is generally unknown. Few people remember the curious look of a Belgian bookstore at a time when the presses of Brussels reproduced the newest works of French literature at low prices and distributed thousands of copies throughout the world.

—Herman Dopp

Herman Dopp, La contrefaçon des livres français en Belgique 1815–1852, Louvain, 1932 (Université de Louvain, Recueil de Travaux . . . , 2nd series, 26), p. v. We might point out here that several pirate editions (contrefaçons) were the actual originals of certain works: they are accordingly called préfaçons.

The most notorious case is that of Balzac. See Paul Van der Perre, Les préfaçons belges: Bibliographie des véritables originales d'Honoré de Balzac publiées en Belgique, preface by Fernand Vanderem, Brussels and Paris, 1941.

It would be an A.B.C.D.E.F . . . of entertainment, an art of entertainment. . . . G.H.I.J.K.L.M.N.O.P.Q.R.S.T.U.V.W.X.Y.Z. . . . To forget. To sleep, serene, right-minded. New horizons take shape. I see new horizons coming toward me and the hope of another alphabet.

—Marcel Broodthaers

Pamphlet published by Marcel Broodthaers on the occasion of the installation of the first version of his Jardin d'Hiver, Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts, 1973.

Broodthaers and Piracy

The reference to piracy (*contrefaçon*) is not new in the numerous books conceived by Marcel Broodthaers. As early as 1969, in *Vingt ans après*, he salvages as they are the two volumes of Alexandre Dumas published in the popular Livre de Poche paperback edition, which he wraps with a fluorescent red band bearing his name and that of R. Lucas, director of the New Smith Gallery in Brussels, while taking care to hide the name of Alexandre Dumas.¹² Also in 1969, he publishes Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*, under the author's name of Marcel Broodthaers, with the subtitle "Image" instead of "Poème," while following very closely the layout and typography of the cover of Mallarmé's original edition published in 1914 by the *Nouvelle Revue Française*. He carries perfection to such a point that he adheres exactly to the same pressrun as the original edition.¹³ In these two cases, one cannot speak of piracy in the proper sense of the word, but rather of quotation.

In the book we are concerned with, Broodthaers makes explicit reference to the notion of piracy in his note on page 151, reproduced above, while challenging it from a strictly material point of view. Indeed, he extends the notion of imitation "to present controversies that go beyond a precise geographical framework."

In examining his book more closely, especially the cover, which from the start played a primary role in the creation of the work, one notices that only the name of Charles Baudelaire appears on it, and not his own. Underneath is the title, *Pauvre Belgique*. Things become complicated with the name of the place of publication: first *Paris*, on the front, then *New York*, on the back; and with the year: 1974 for both.

An intrinsic part of the cover and inseparable from it is the jacket, on which Broodthaers prints four times the first three letters of the alphabet plus the letter A, completely covering the title *Pauvre Belgique* and thus making it unreadable. This move cancels the significance and all the connotations that one might attribute to Belgium as defined by Baudelaire.

Concealing the title with Broodthaers's ABC's not only performs the function of a metaphorical signature, but also refers inevitably to the notions of Paris and New York placed back-to-back in competition. Would Baudelaire's Belgium in the year 1864 serve then as sublimation, by connoting Paris and New York in the year 1974 of the designation that forms an integral part of the cover (Poor Paris, Poor New York)?

The inside of the book — by reproducing only the jacket and titles of the Pléiade edition — would then serve only as a pretext for the historical compari-

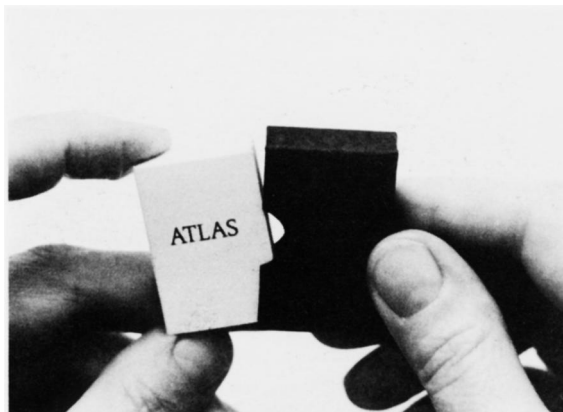
12. Marcel Broodthaers, *Catalogue des livres / Catalogue of Books / Katalog der Bücher 1957–1975*, Cologne, Galerie Michael Werner; New York, Marian Goodman Gallery; Paris, Galerie Gillespie, Laage, Salomon, 1982, pp. 22–23.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 24–27.

It is a question of finding the point where the image and the imaged, the identification and nonidentification of some planes of reality with themselves, cease to be perceived contradictorily as though the notion of a high and a low constituted only a single asterisk in history.

—*Marcel Broodthaers*

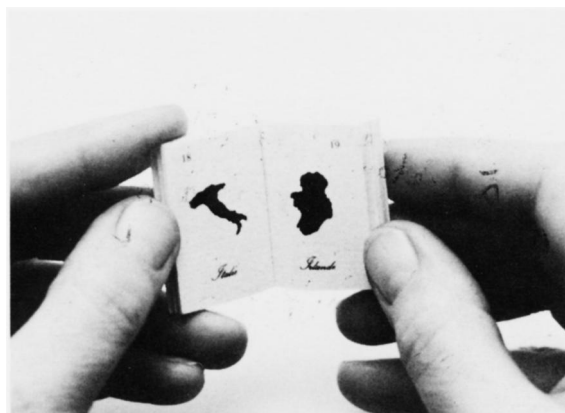
In Actualité d'un bilan, p. 37.

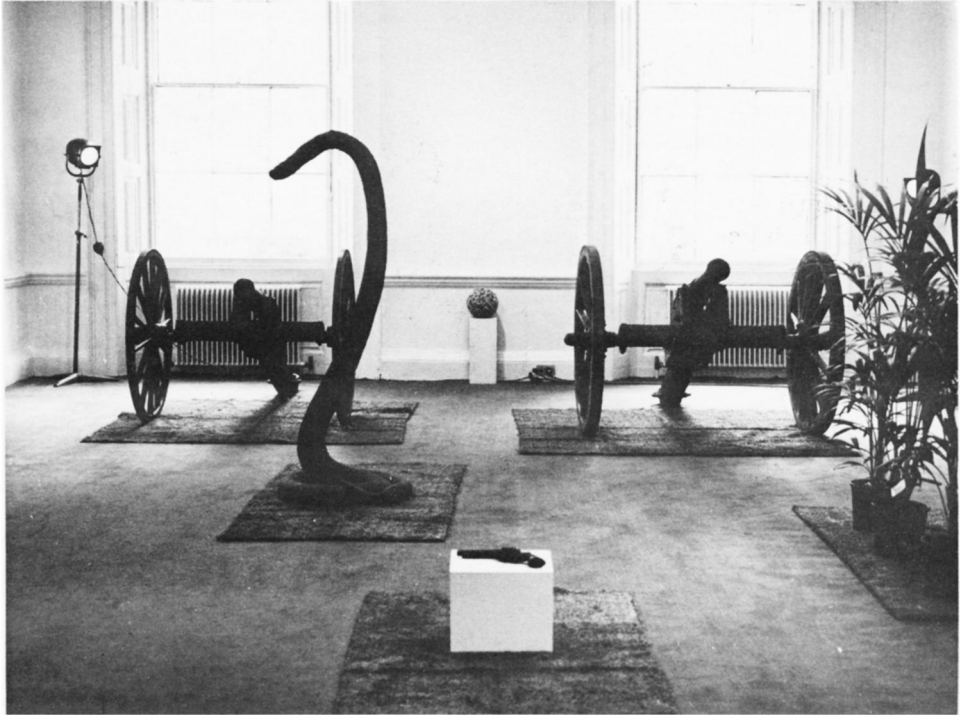


son of a problem connected by Baudelaire with Belgium and which, by the elimination of the text, would recover its relevance in terms of Paris and New York. In other words, through the resurrection of a cultural conquest achieved by Belgium solely through the mercantile practice of literary piracy whose intellectual source was in Paris, we are asked to compare the cultural radiation of New York, commercially forged on the basis of European borrowings.

The final phase of Broodthaers's thought might be said to be embodied in his *Atlas*, published in 1975 and bearing the suggestive title *La conquête de l'espace: Atlas à l'usage des artistes et des militaires* (The Conquest of Space: Atlas for the Use of Artists and the Military).¹⁴ It is a tiny book containing the silhouetted maps of countries reproduced as though they were all the same size.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61.





XIX Century

Two photographs by Maria Gilissen of Décor (A Conquest by Marcel Broodthaers), installed at the ICA New Gallery in London in 1975. The note identifying the work and the letter addressed to Alain Jouffroy in January 1976 were written by Marcel Broodthaers on the back of the second photograph.



XXth Century

These two photographs concern an exhibition entirely conceived as a “Décor” and assembled from rented objects. It took place in 1975 in London (Institute of Contemporary Art, New Gallery) shortly before the one in Paris.

Mon cher J.

A bientôt. Je suis fatigué comme la mort. Je vais d'ailleurs quelques jours en Allemagne (un hôpital) où la tradition fait que l'on laisse cette mort “plus douce que la dent du coq” au vestiaire en sortant. Il faut connaître le Truc.

Amitiés à Adriana.

Marcel B.

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MARIE-PASCALE GILDEMYN

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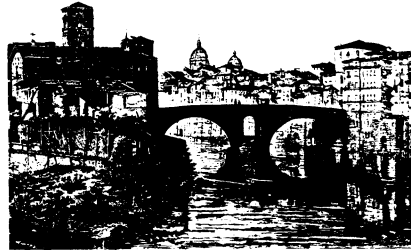
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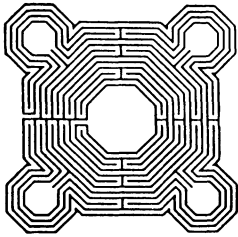
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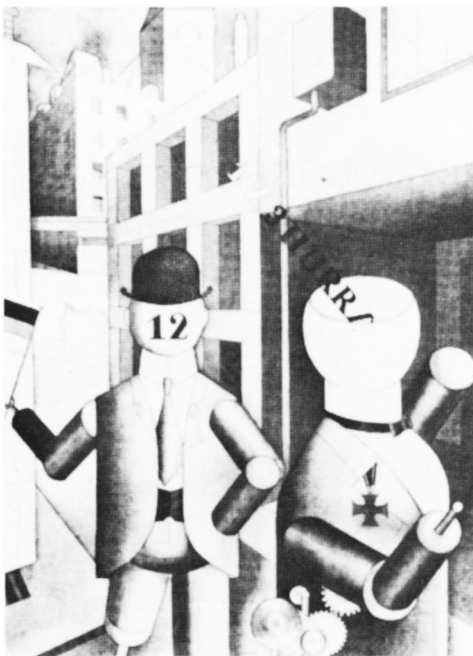
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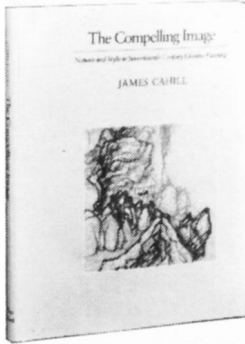
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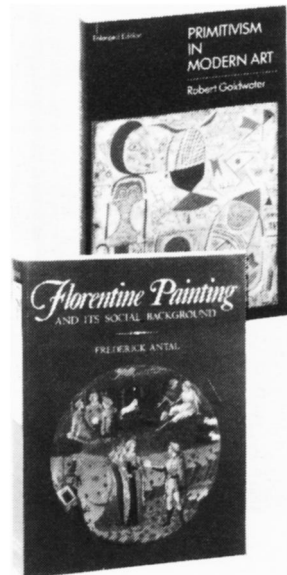
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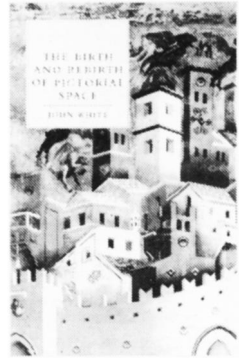
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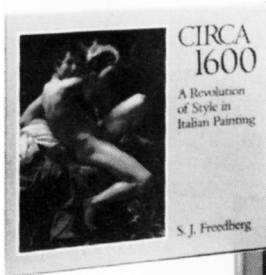
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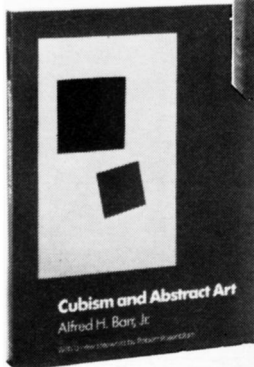
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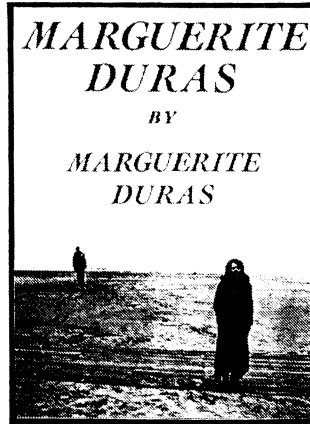
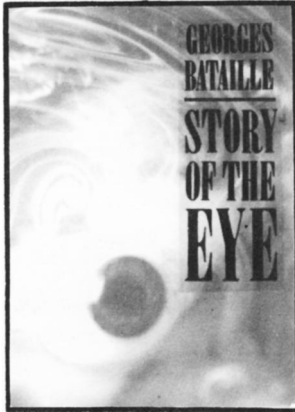
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