Allegories are to the realm of thoughts what ruins are to the realm of things.

—Walter Benjamin

One part of what delights us today was the cause of his death.

—Charles Baudelaire on Edgar Allen Poe

Benjamin H.D. Buchloh
To the melancholic eye the world’sgear and active machinations disintegrate into hieroglyphs: enigmatic characters that decipher what is normally concealed from the individual involved in the acts of production. Contemplative stasis lays bare to the bone. Pictures and dramas of industrious cultural enterprise tend to become scriptural once the artist addresses his own discourse. Self-referentiality, in the true sense of the word, as an analysis of one’s proper material and historical condition of discourse and production, results, as we witnessed with Duchamp, in the epistemological model and the lexical allegory; or, as in the case of Magritte, in the pictograph and in the rebus. The allegorical mode is dependent on yet another condition: that the objects of its analysis and representation, even though seemingly alive and vital, are in fact historically obsolete. If it seems that allegory saves things of the past from oblivion, it in fact also reveals the degree to which things of the present are encumbered by the past and obsolescence dominates present experience. As much as allegory makes reification its historical subject (of analysis, of memory) as much as it makes ideology its historicized material. In describing one of his procedures for the disarticulation and installation of objects, Marcel Broodthaers lists three essentials of allegory—the scriptural, the theatrical and the ruinous.

If one trusts the meaning of the inscription (Fig. 1, Fig. 2, Fig. 0), the object itself assumes the character of an illustration referring to a kind of sociological novel. These objects, the mirror and the pipe submitted to the same number system (or the cardboard-box, the clock and the chair) become interchangeable on the stage of a theatre. Their destiny is ruined.

This could be called the allegorical mode in the work of Marcel Broodthaers: a dialectician by virtue of his abandoned poetical past and his early artistic confrontation and friendship with René Magritte, as well as by his philosophical and political position (he studied with Lucien Goldmann, the disciple of George Lukacs), he perceived the functions of (his) art under the contemporary conditions as those of a perpetually renewed reflective criticism of ideology, or, more precisely, of the ideology of art. He recognized the last and only political validity of a 19th-century social role model, precisely within the boundaries of that paradox: that of the artist who operates within a highly determined institutionalized space, which claims as its crucial difference from all other social activities its social and political autonomy—the avant-garde.

Born in Brussels in 1924 (the year of the publication of Breton’s First Manifesto of Surrealism) Marcel Broodthaers, in contradiction to frequent misperception, was not a second generation Surrealist in the line of Breton.

In fact, as early as 1947, he joined a group called “Le Surréalisme Revolutionnaire” founded by members of the International European COBRA Movement: Pierre Alechinsky, Philippe Dotremont and Joseph Noiret. This group violently attacks the dominance of André Breton’s esthetic, social and political positions which they consider reactionary. One of the first manifestos of this group, published in Brussels on June 7, 1947, Pas de quartier dans la révolution, carries the signatures of René Magritte, Marcel Maran, Paul Nougé, Louis Saulnier, members of the first Surrealist group in Brussels, as well as that of Marcel Broodthaers and other newcomers. The manifesto states the incompatibility between Surrealism and the revolutionary principles of the Communist Party, which was declared the only valid revolutionary force. Only in the early 50’s does Broodthaers cancel his membership in the Belgian Communist Party, but as late as 1974 his criticism against Breton’s Surrealism is still virulent.

A close look at the work eventually makes his distance from any attempt at a premature solution of the contradictions between art and politics more apparent, but a programmatic statement of his, replying to the question as to whether he could be situated in a Surrealist perspective, should clarify the problem from the beginning. By denouncing a quote from Breton’s Second Manifesto of 1930, Broodthaers proclaims:

I know this by heart: “Everything makes us believe that there exists a position of the mind from which life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, that which can be communicated and that which cannot, the high and the low cease to be perceived as contradictions.” I do hope that I have nothing in common with this state of mind.

If anything, it would be his persistent sense of contradictions that could be called the most prominent feature in Broodthaers’ thoughts and statements and, of course, in his work. The sheer variety of operational modes and material categories of his art offers a spectacle of contradictions and inconsistencies in itself: objects, paintings and drawings, so-called environmental installations and at least two happenings, books and prints, photos and films, writings and typography.

Two of the most significant contradictions and oppositional paradigmatic shifts of Modernism from the first decade of this century are at the center of Broodthaers’ allegorical methodologies, and they have determined his biography of the poet-turne-
painter in an almost exemplary fashion: the visual and material object assuming the status of an epistemological model (Duchamp's Readiness concept) and the linguistic sign becoming the object of semiotic and poietical decomposition (de Saussure and Dada), and depending on them, in painting, (the Magritte of the late '20s). When Tristan Tzara in his Dada Manifesto (Dada No. 3, Zurich, December 1918) announces: "We will like a furious wind tear apart the laundry of clouds and prayers and we will prepare the grand spectacle of disaster, the big fire, decomposition," it should be apparent from his metaphors of clouds and prayers that this decomposition will be addressing first and foremost the realm of the superstructure—esthetic ideology in particular.

From the very first work of Marcel Broodthaers as an artist in 1964 (as opposed to his preceding poetical works, which included a film called A Cinematographic Poem In Honour Of Kurt Schwitters, 1957)—when he decided to sink up to the middle in plaster the almost complete edition of his last volume of poetry, a "found volume of poetry" as he called it, entitled Pense Bête (Think Stupid Animal)—the perspective of his artistic investigation is clear. Broodthaers was not just analyzing transitional problems arising from making poetry into object, or the quasi-magical act of making an object/image a model of analytical thoughts that essentially questions its own discourse and production; more precisely, he focused on the historical and political scandal that is concealed in the seemingly neutral esthetic struggle between the categories. His announcement, accompanying his first exhibition in 1964, makes this point clear:

I have asked myself as well whether I could not sell anything and become successful in life. It's quite a while already that I am good for nothing. I am forty years now... the idea to finally invent something that is in oneself crossed my mind and immediately I went to work. What was it? Actually, it was objects.4

And, from a different angle of irony:

With the transition towards the visual arts I wanted to turn my back on poetry. Symbolically, I wanted to free poetry from its ivory tower and therefore I threw it into the wet plaster to make a kind of sculpture out of it... 3

The choice of plaster and the process of having casts made or immersing found objects in that white material which takes the life out of the object as much as it objectifies life, is, in the art activities of the early '60s, neither original nor accidental. The plaster cast as a highly mechanized mode of production seems to solve the conflict between the apparently insurmountable presence and dominance of the mechanically reproduced object (in everyday reality and therefore, since Duchamp, logically in the esthetic discourse) and the equally strong human urge to dissolve that domination by the object and liquidate its presence through individual gestures of painting and sculptural invention. This conflict, essentially that between reification and primary process, is concretized and incorporated in various cast works, like Duchamp's Poids De Toucher, 1947, and his nude-cast in the final work Etant Données, 1947, in Piero Manzoni's achromatic
objects and paintings of 1959 which feature objects like bread-rolls that have been dipped in karo; Yves Klein's plaster-cast portraits. 1962; and, of course, in American art, Jasper Johns' paintings like Target With Plaster Casts, 1955, and, most obviously, the work of George Segal from the early '60s. Broodthaers was living in Paris and working as a free-lance writer for a news agency. His first encounters with American Pop Art date from 1963 when he saw exhibitions at the Sonnabend Gallery. His accounts of that experience reflect the ambiguity of his response to an art of recently rediscovered objects that inform his subsequent work.

In Paris in 1963, the first show that I saw was that by George Segal. I was shocked. Therefore I decided to write about the Segal exhibition. I took a flamboyant critical position against this kind of art—one should not forget that our generation had an artistic background which was essentially surrealist and somewhat mystique.

And later:

How I became successful? Quite simple. I only followed the footsteps in the artistic sands that were left by René Magritte and Marcel Duchamp and the very fresh ones by George Segal, Roy Lichtenstein and Claes Oldenburg.

and, even more obviously polemical in his essay "Like Butter in a Sandwich":

It is evident that if the intellectual muscle fails to function the whole place is overwhelmed by the violence of the attitude. Pop Art is an attitude of the spirit of our times; or rather, the tragicality.

But, simultaneously, we can find statements by Marcel Broodthaers in regard to Pop Art that seem to contradict his critical skepticism. He acknowledges Pop Art as a major influence on his own work:

There are only two ways to explain these blatant contradictions: either they are examples of an almost mindless opportunism which, after all, is not such a rare feature in the symptomatology of the artist as social character, or they are phrased in that mode of speaking which the English language identifies as "having one's tongue in one's cheek," a psycho-physiological gesture of refusal to substantiate physically, to commit oneself with the tool of speaking to what one says. This pattern of empty speech, which we have known as an esthetic tradition in French Dada and Surrealism, as blague, describes that narcissistic equilibrium of perpetual double negation that reflects and reveals the contradictions in mythical everyday thought and language—the deposit of ideology.

It is the mode of speech that has separated itself from life to contradict life that has separated itself from speech. In a poem called "Ma Rhétorique", published in 1966 (and later used as a sound tape in an installation that juxtaposed a tape recorded text repeated ad infinitum by Broodthaers with the chatter of a live parrot in its cage) Broodthaers confesses to that mode of speaking:

Moi Je dis Je Moi Je dis Je
Le Roi des Moulus Moi Tu dis tu
Je taulologue. Je conserve Je socloplogue.
Je manifeste manifetement. Au niveau de Mer des moulus, j'ai perdu le temps perdu.
Je dis je le Roi des Moulus, la parole des moulus.

Mussels, egg-shells, plaster casts, suitcases (the husk, the cast, the empty shell), are therefore, from 1964 up to 1967, the most attractive objects and materials for Broodthaers' accumulations, assemblages, and constructs. They seem to embody literal-
ily his prime concern; to distinguish the limits between outside husk and inside kernel, frame and body, the interaction between object and subject, or in more precise terms, the gradual transgressions from living dialectics to cultural reification that determine artistic production. The epithet “King of Mussels” is the grotesque but perfectly accurate description of that artistic role, and its empty mode of narcissistic speech mirrors its surrounding reification, yet it is condemned to continue these passive, pointless, powerless gestures. Again, Broodthaers’ own statements are as ambivalent as they are precise:

Mussels, eggs, graceless objects without any content other than the air. Only their shells which obviously express their emptiness. We have to look at the base of things. With my words I deliver reality to you.  

In the very same volume of poetry that Broodthaers cast in plaster to transform it into his first object/sculpture, Perse Bête, we find poems that deal with the very phenomenon:

“The Mussel”
This trickster has avoided the molt of society by casting itself into its own proper mold. Therefore it is perfect.

Or in “The Medusa” (jelly fish), another animal poem in the same volume, “the jelly fish is perfect, no shell, nothing but body.”

Material and primary process are obviously analogous phenomena and similarly, functional language on its primary level of discourse is analogous to the aesthetic practice of poetry (as opposed to its secondary, mythical level of ideological appropriation).

Broodthaers perceives the various processes that lead to plastic material concretion as processes of reification, commodification and ideological appropriation. These are the criteria that determine the object-nature of the work of art under capitalism—its shell, its mold, its framework, its form of institutional circulation and commercial distribution is understood as a hidden mode of alienation and domination. This paradoxical nature of the visual arts and their present day reality (as opposed to Broodthaers’ fiction of an artistic past where production and reception were primarily determined by the historical process of political enlightenment and the formation of individual consciousness) is concretized in the dialectical status of his very first work, the sculpture Perse Bête, with which he enters that discourse and which will, from 1964 onwards, be developed with ever increasing acumen and poignancy. He later commented on this work, which terminated his failure as a poet and began his career as an artist:

...for me, this book is an object of interdiction... Here you cannot read the book without destroying its plastic qualities. I believed that this concrete gesture would have confronted the viewer with this interdiction. But very much to my surprise the viewer reacted in a totally different manner than I had expected. Nobody was curious to read the text, not knowing whether they were looking at interred prose, or poetry, sad or pleasant. Nobody was affected by the interdiction.

The transition from language to object, the object-language of art, and art’s conceptualization to the status of language are the critical points of Broodthaers’ investigation. If material concretion, objectification within the discourse of art, has become impossible without being simultaneously appropriated by the ideology of the cultural industry, and thereby made to support and affirm the very same socio-political conditions that it originally set out to negate, then the discourse itself has to be critically negated. The paradox and dilemma, however, is that this critical negation itself has to assume the status of the object-
discourse into which it inscribes itself. Unless it wants to accept the idealist fallacy that Broodthaers perceived in music of so-called Conceptual art, the final refutation of language under the pretense of liberating the art discourse from its object status. This very same negativity of the objects in Broodthaers' work then entails and ensures their essentially allegorical character as they radically deny any material and formal anticipation and solutions that the visual-plastic discourse traditionally seems to suggest. As allegorical rhinoceros they negate the contemporary ideological life of objects and, at the same time, are reminiscent of their past material potential. Broodthaers' position seems to take into account Adorno's criticism of avant-garde art practices:

Even within radical art there is still so much falsehood, because by anticipating construction of genuine historical potentiality, in fact art neglects to construct it.17

Broodthaers aligns himself within that iconoclastic tradition which denies not only the validity of art's anticipatory vision but, more precisely, insists on revealing the political dependence and ideological determination of an avant-garde practice that perceives itself as acting in a realm of neutral autonomy. One of the key concepts of Modernism has been the idea that the painter operates within strictly self-referential and esthetic parameters, and that means, since the turn of the century, non-representational perceptual and spatial parameters. This tradition of the neutral perceptual, psychological and/or phenomenological approach in three-dimensional visual phenomena has one of its 20th-centuries origins in Cézanne, and this concept is at the center of Broodthaers' criticism. His often seemingly absurd and obscure statements (that may appear redundant like an eccentric confusion of art history) start to make sense if one looks at them as a critical reading against the grain of art history's self-prescribed historical neutrality.

For example:

I am neither painter nor writer. What really interests me is tignes. I am not interested in Cézanne and his apples.19

Or, when talking about his films:

In the publicity for this programme (films at Brussels, December 1972) there have appeared the words “essential complement to his visual art” and elsewhere “experimental films.” These do not seem to me appropriate to describe the films which I wish to show. It is not cinematographic art . . . It is no more and no less than something to talk about like a picture by Messier or Mondrian . . . these are just films.20

In Broodthaers’ terminology, which appears to be as eccentric and idiosyncratic as it is radically negating and criticizing the ideas of aesthetic ideology, this concept of pure plastic art and the neutrality of its spatial operations and containers is potemically embodied in the term “The Conquest of Space.” One of his very last works, accomplished shortly before his death in 1976, a tiny book (25 by 38 mm) featuring the black silhouettes of the geographical political shape and the names of nations from America to South Africa in alphabetical order, bears this title: La Conquête de l’Espace: Atlas for the use of artists and military.21

This mock stratagem demarcates precisely the degree to which avant-garde practice, adhering to the confusion that its determinations are exhibited in a historically neutral space, becomes all the more the object of ideological mythification, or more accurately, generates and constitutes that very myth which covers the conditions whose existence and impact it denies, in its claim for aesthetic autonomy. “The Conquest of Space,” the massivity and concretteness of the latent ideology (i.e., socio-economical and political interests behind the apparatus of the cultural industry) proportionally generates the formal abstraction and neutrality of accredited autonomous space. This is the base or underlying apparatus that Broodthaers had in mind when, contemplating the mussels, he requested “that we look at the base of things.” Moreover, the seam between this base and its permanent transitions into the secondary language of myth concealing that base is the line of Broodthaers’ dialectical esthetic critique. His concept of space is historically concrete and determined by the political and ideological functions which the work of art assumes in its cultural extrapolation; his concept of form is that of form-determination in Marx’s sense of circulation-form (which implies that objects are determined by their commodity-form), and in regard to esthetic production means that the work is defined by both the institutional framework that guarantees the work’s semblance of autonomy as well as its distributional principles, its circulation-form of cultural commodity. Broodthaers’ critique is therefore directed dialectically at both the institutionalized autonomy of the avant-garde practice and its historical inefficiency as well as the commodification status of the avant-garde products and the distributive and institutional framework governing it. Numerous statements by Broodthaers make clear that he was systematically addressing these issues in his work:

Essentially the subject is denied by its use as an operational means for the conquest of space, even if one claims to be engaged only in semantic research or a quest for the Holy Grail. The subject is a type of fraud it is only considered on the level of thinking.22

Or, a few years later:

If space is really the fundamental element of artistic construction (either in form of language or in form of materials) I would have to oppose it with the philosophy of what has been written with a certain common sense . . . The constant search for the definition of space serves only to cover up the essential structure of art—a process of relocation. Every individual, perceiving a function of space, and even more so if it is a convincing one, appropriates it either mentally or economically . . . Space can only lead to paradise.23

Broodthaers’ versatility in imbuing visual signs with historical material concretions and including their full range of their inherent dialectics (the contradictions of the reality, from which they arise as ideological meaning as well as their own contradictory nature in shaping and determining that reality and our reading of it) is puzzling. No sign seems to have the same meaning twice, no semiotic element or function is secured. No wonder then that the rebus, the riddle that challenges the reader’s vision and dictates read-
ing to the eyes with the pleasantness of children's games, has been one of Broodthaers' favorite strategies to decipher the interdependency and interaction of fragmented language and reified imagery that constitute the discourse of art as ideology. In one of these works, which he conceived as a cover design for the English art magazine *Studio International*, children's alphabet blocks are assembled on the front page to form the line: FIN(E) (ARTS)--the letter e having been substituted by the image of the eagle and the letter a by an ass, thus making the sentence into another pun on the perpetual renewed proclamation of the end of the arts. That this work is again a polemical statement on certain forms of Conceptual art prevailing in the early '70s becomes even more apparent when we look at the back of the same magazine where a paid advertisement, designed by Broodthaers for a commercial gallery, appears disguised as art (or vice versa). The advertisement employs again the same alphabet blocks in no apparent order. Images (horse, zebra, watch, dog, umbrella) alternate with alphabetical letters and numbers. Each cube carries a handwritten caption which results in the following sentence: "éléments du discours ne peuvent servir l'art, une faute d'orthographe cachée vaut un fromage" (elements of discourse cannot serve art—a hidden orthographer's mistake is worth a cheese). The same attitude had been voiced by Broodthaers in a theoretically more explicit aphorism which again was part of a cover design for an art magazine. The text read "View, according to which any artistic theory functions as an advertisement for"
the artistic product, whereas the artistic product functions as an advertisement for the powers under which it was born. There is no other space, but this space (according to which it is, etc.).

A series of works, begun in 1968, concomitant with the foundation of the Musée d’Art Moderne—département des Aigles—section XIXth século and concluded around 1971, when Broodhaers began a new type of textually arranged typographical "paintings," screened on traditional canvases, is entirely based on the rebus principle. These pictures, printed and embossed plastic sheets (65 cm by 120 cm) look like the predecessors—or afterimages—of advertisements giving hints of the period of transition from private manufacture to organized enterprise. Their outdated "factory-style" (material, production, typography) situates them with that of the Duchamp readymades and they share with them the secret attraction and delusion of dysfunctional objects that seem to bespeak a more humane past stage in the development of the means of production. Broodhaers called them poèmes industriels. As they shift between vision and reading they balance between object and sign. Hybrids between ideogram and typogram their function is to simultaneously perform and deconstruct the ideological and the esthetic sign. The epistemological relevance on the level of the integration of language into art is comparable to that of Duchamp’s in regard to objects in the Readymade concept. In Broodhaers’ poèmes industriels it becomes apparent that language, under the extreme pressure of its collective abuse as a means for oppression and exploitation, can only function as poetry if it disintegrates into its own alienating elements and transposes them to the individual word more than just the serialized, objectified language of concrete poetry that marked Broodhaers’ original formal position and practice as a poet.

In Broodhaers’ poèmes industriels the syntactic structure, consistent with the development of poetry since Dada—Tzara and Schwitters in particular—has been fragmented and stripped to the discrete semantic unit, the enigmatically purposeless word. The lowest, most subversive and functionalized elements of syntax and grammar—the punctuation marks—suddenly disappear to be liberated from their roles and assume a gregarious visual importance in their own right, the disproportionately enlarged commas or acute accents, for example in the plaques Cinéma I and Cinéma II. They appear to be floating in the typographical field like mechanically produced clouds from a factory chimney, whereas the blown-up periods as marks of punctuation and order in Cinéma I take on the faces of clocks with their hands at noon in the identically cast, but differently screened relief-plaque Cinéma II. This work Modele, in both plaques identical as a quote from an industrial commodity, underlines the "patented" nature of objectified language. The same act of typographical liberation happens to the enlarged exclamation mark in the plaque Tiraas illimitis, 1969, where the rhetorical sign is juxtaposed with an unidentifiable flag (whose missing center stripe suggests that the exclamation mark was cut out of its body) and the embossed words (an alphabetical enumeration of the centers of political student revolts at that time; Amsterdam, Berlin, Nanterre, Paris, Milan, Brussels) remain blind-stamped letters, whereas the periods separating them are printed in color. The most complex of the plaques is the first, bearing the title Museen enfant non admis (children not admitted). Again, as in the Cinéma signs, the name of the institution of cultural industry is centered in a white rectangular field. The four lines of text, blind-stamped, with the exception of the conspicuously black periods, commas, acute and circumflex accents that seem to float randomly like amoebas (lado poles more precisely) over the field, read as follows: "A form, a surface, a volume, subservient, an open angle, hard fishbones, a director, a female servant and a cashier. All clay long, until the end of times."

This is a listing of the essentials of the institutionalized and rigidly ordered hierarchical space of avant-garde culture from which life has been banned and has vanished. The haunting melancholy of this still life of hardly visible white words is Surreal juxtaposition of elements of metonymy and metaphor. (Metonymy, in the sense that the historically isolated and dislocated elements of a purely formal discourse of plasticity in art form, surface, volume, and open angle are disqualified as subservient and pointless in comparison to the power of the political structure that dominates them—represented by "director and employee" and the economic order. Metaphor, as in the blank and hard skeleton of a dead fish, a true still-life element from the iconographical tradition of vanitas representations, which seems to be materially concretized and reflected in the blank white surface of the originally produced plaque and colorless letter relief.)

It is left open whether the fishbone metaphor relates to the obsolete elements of a formalist artistic discourse, or whether it refers to the abstractness of the governing power structure, or whether it quite simply stands for the vanished life and therefore has its humorous dialectical complement in the phrase that prohibits children access into the realm of fiction. The bottom line of the relief adds the equivalent notions of time experience to the object experience of the still life: the sepia idem of the perceptually identical toute la journée and jusqu’à la fin des temps coalesces presence and future into an abstraction of spatialized time, where there is no room for development and growth, change and dialectical flux, continuum and memory.

To the same degree, however, that Broodhaers reveals the historical nature of esthetic reality in its contemporary practices of cultural institutionalization and commercial reification (as seemingly hermetically closed systems that do not allow for any movement or dialectical change, nor any interaction with the essentially political nature of historical reality), to the very same degree, does he insist on a dimension within human experience that subverts and rejects the stasis and passivity of reification.

The very act of reading itself achieves the potential of an emancipatory move inasmuch as it destroys the domination of the object over the subject, as it liberates the language and the individual’s conscience from the limitations and limits of interest and function. It is at this point that the frequent image of children’s alphabet cubes or awkwardly drawn or painted, scattered, individual, single, discrete letters from the alphabet become transparent as the hieroglyphs for the new reading lessons (he once summarized a whole group of these works in an exhibition under the title: Apprendre à lire [learn to read]), the new alphabet for a new history lesson that would still have to be learned by mankind.

The formal and material transformation of the alphabet as the basic condition of radically (in the true sense of starting from the root of the word) changing our material apprehension of the world is at the origin of the typographical revolution that accompanies the major movements in 20th-century art: El Lissitzky, for example, in his comments on the design for a new book for children, Of Two Squares, stated:

... by reading, our children are already acquiring a new plastic language, they are growing up with a different relationship to the world and to space, to shape and to color; they will surely also create another book.

In Marcel Broodhaers’ vision, one that has been broken by the unaltered conditions of bourgeois capitalist life, this new alphabetical order is perceived dialectically as both more emphatic in its application and more pathetic in its avowed skepticism: this would be an A.B.C.D.E.F... of diversion, an art of diversion... G H I J K L M N O P R S T U V W X Y Z... To forget: to sleep, semely, well thinking. New horizons shape themselves, I see new horizons approaching me and the hope of another alphabet (see catalogue).

The deadpan statement ("see catalogue") that crudely terminates the visionary and divinatory promises becomes even more grotesque as a negation of such Utopian euphoria when one actually discovers that the catalogue pages that Broodhaers is referring to are simple reproductions of typesetters’ font-schemes and font-sample sheets that exemplify various typesfaces by spelling The Fine Art of Printing in various sizes.

When one realizes that these ready-made typographical schemata are a contribution to a catalogue of so-called Conceptual art, the work’s dialectic comes full circle. It insists on the collective historical necessity for the "new alphabet," as it denies the validity of the individual artist’s premature solutions by denouncing them as being susceptible to cultural and ideological appropriation—because they are esthetic decisions, as opposed to material, political ones—and by negating them in the deadpan confrontation with the font-schemes of basic typography. It is on those grounds as well, that one has to understand why Broodhaers’ extremely developed sense of the meaning of typography leads him to a typographical design in his numerous books and prints, as well as in his paintings and films, that assumes the mask of a conservative classicism. Obviously, for the reasons indicated above, he could not align his usage of written language with the revolutionary typography of Dada and Constructivism. By negating their validity for his own work and its historical context, however, he continued all the more to insist on the original subversion and poietical potential of the new alphabets and their typographical conception.
this is Part I of a two-part essay. Part II will deal with the major museum installations by Marcel Broodthaers, and will appear in the forthcoming issue of this magazine.

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All quotes from Marcel Broodthaers' writings are translated from the French by Benjamin H.D. Buchler.

3. Lebeer, op. cit., p. 64.
6. Ibid., p. 70.
7. Ibid., p. 70.
9. Ibid., p. 80.
10. Ibid., p. 80.
11. Ibid., p. 80.
12. Ibid., p. 80.
13. Ibid., p. 80.
15. Ibid., p. 80.
16. Ibid., p. 80.
17. Ibid., p. 80.
18. Ibid., p. 80.
19. Ibid., p. 80.
20. Ibid., p. 80.
21. Ibid., p. 80.
22. Ibid., p. 80.
23. Ibid., p. 80.