

WORDS ARE ALWAYS SERIOUS

by Matthias Klos, 2013

In the 70's of the last century Seth Siegellaub was pleased that conceptual works could be transmitted by telephone from one continent to another. Communication was decisive for Conceptual art; language was work and distribution in one. Through language and the immaterial appearance of the work material work is also criticised as sellable goods. The critic and author, Lucy Lippard called these characteristics the "verbal strategies" of Conceptual art.

The enthusiasm for the speed of transmission has now changed to a sceptical attitude towards data exchange always and everywhere. Today language and communication has become a catalyser for the creation of value for goods and services. Therefore the retreat into immaterial language is not suitable for the critique of consumption and goods. It is therefore exciting when today someone has started to analyse the deviation of the nucleus of language using conceptual strategies in order to understand the root of the matter. Without being romantic the artist, Ulrich Nausner looks at the connections and meanings of language today from the perspective of a Post Conceptual artist. He is free from the connotations of a conceptual mainstream that wanted to avoid the goods character of art by shifting the work into language.

In his series, "Liebste Marie ..." Nausner was concerned with the question of how poetic potential could be channelled into an economic system. Obviously the art market is also such a system, yet Nausner wanted to work with on the felt origin of money through poetry. How can you bring an art work to a bank, that settles into the core business of this institution, and remains there as a permanent poetic fragment, without selling it to the bank? Ulrich Nausner astutely recognised that which banks work with, namely "Kies", which in German are small stones, but also a metonym for money, due to their quantity. Nausner composed a poem in 10 lines about this rhetorical trope and took it to the bank, where he opened a savings account in the name of each line. "Für Liebste Marie (Kies)", in 2011, he opened ten savings accounts with names like "wie's dich durchfließt" (how it flows through you) or "in jeder schicht" (in every layer) with the minimum deposit of five euros. The artist is now the author of 30 savings accounts that are inserted as lyrical savings into the balance sheets of various banks.

This kind of minimal intervention should not be misunderstood as a humorous search for a niche for modest, small plants of poetry. Nausner is interested in the application of language as an element, which constructs structures and has a real impact on our lives. When you read "I'm lovin' it", you know immediately who or what is meant. This is a "Claim", a very functional, short piece of poetry that immediately offers a concrete image.

Memorable and ephemeral at the same time. This memorable ephemerality is a high value in an economic context, which is why "Claim", is the sign of language for a piece of land that a company wants to protect in order to dig. Through the use of a claim and its repetition, the imaginary piece of land, the recognition of a company and its product increases. This is an extremely lucrative poetic art, which produces language subliminals to attract us with their promises, in order to gain our attention and our money. It is difficult to avoid them. When we use these short sentences or when we remember them, even just ironically, it is never quite clear whether we have succumbed to an advertising strategy or are even if we using something that isn't permitted. Should you use "I'm lovin' it!" in private, you may have a problem with copyrights or you are collaborating unintentionally in an advertising campaign. Applied poetry can create this dilemma as it is connected to monetary additional value.

What can one do to oppose the unchecked expansion of this kind of target-oriented poetry? “To Claims, you can only answer with Reclaiming”, Ulrich Nausner says and, “When poetry is used in advertising, than you can only answer with better poetry.” He was inspired to write his Reclaims by the so-called language branding of the hamburger-fryers from Oak Brook in Illinois, USA. The well-known word order undergoes a poetic transformation in six lines. The “lovin” is changed in this process to “movin” and allows for the emotion of an active agent. The Reclaim is then printed as a text onto a door mat. This presentation is a barb at the practise of having door mats with printed logos on them at the entrance of companies to catch the dirt, in order to not only keep the building cleaner but also to bring the visitor when they step into the real property they are also in an ideational area. The simple door mat soon becomes slippery carpeting, stumbling blocks, or even a flying carpet. Firms like Disney, Ford, UPS, H&M and those with the hamburgers with their product poetry became the inspirational source for the Reclaims.

The verbal strategies of Conceptual art were once the attempt to produce works that simultaneously avoided any economic value. The renunciation of any material presence seemed to be an effective method last century. Today the immateriality of a product has become an advantage for its economic value and has become an all round matter of course. The dematerialisation of art today is no longer a critique, but rather a clever strategy with few resources to create a work of art. Ulrich Nausner’s commitment given to words and language is not a strategic consideration but rather trust in language. The materiality of Nausner is an important component and carrier of meaning just because of its profane appearance. He is a language worker, who plays vigilantly with the ephemeral value of language and connects it carefully with the material. He is very aware that this ephemeral continuum of language encompasses us and forms our world, and that this does not allow a careless combination of words and their appearance.