

VISIBLE LANGUAGE

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Special Issue

LETRISME: INTO THE PRESENT

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Merald E. Wrolstad, Ph.D., Editor and Publisher
P.O. Box 1972 CMA, Cleveland, OH 44106

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Editor's Foreword

In most instances a project's final form is what really matters. The achieving of it is forgotten as a mere means to an end, and it is, indeed, oftentimes highly unmemorable. Such is not the case with the present project, *Lettrisme: Into the Present*, which has relied on the participation and full cooperation of a number of fairly different enterprises. The "special" nature of this "special number" of *Visible Language* rests partly in its relationship to, and role within, other activities which taken as a whole have attempted to profile Letterism's diversity in its activities and its unity in its theoretical assumptions. Perhaps most notably this issue serves double duty as the catalog of the exhibition, *Lettrisme: Into the Present* (The University of Iowa Museum of Art, October 28-December 9, 1983), a major endeavor composed of approximately one hundred works. It also serves as the text or background for a symposium, film evening and performance series offered in conjunction with the opening of the exhibition. Finally, it presents the first lengthy discussion of the movement in English alongside selected translations of key theoretical texts.

The collaboration reflects far more than an attempt to share responsibility for the work involved. It reflects a certain requirement of the material itself. Letterism has operated and continues to operate between genre of work and between modes of presenting itself as a movement. It has, so to speak, placed itself outside the reach of distinct and operational places in establishment culture. In avoiding mainstream art support structures and in enforcing its historical isolation, Letterism has found it necessary to be its own archivist, its own museum, its own publisher and its own critic. One obvious consequence of this has been its lack of public visibility, especially in the English-speaking world. The Letterists' engagement in, among other things, literature, the fine arts, film, theatre, intermedia and various aspects of theory has made it difficult for any of the individual established disciplines to get a firm hold on the movement in its entirety. Thus, in spite of the historical depth of the movement and the importance of its innovations, the exhibition record of the group is spotty and oftentimes "in-house," their publications poorly circulated and rarely translated, and the critical literature on the Letterists rather fragmented. In trying to bring the movement better to light and in trying to clarify its aims usefully, I have tried to go further than offering *just* another exhibition, *just* another anthology of work or *just* the remarks of a few critics. Because of the very nature of the movement and because of the particular nature of its history, such an effort seemed to require all these things at more or less the same time.

Each of the parties involved in the project seemed to intuit that the project made sense *if* the rest was forthcoming. Thus, The University of Iowa Museum

of Art took on the exhibition of the visual artifacts of the movement, *Visible Language* provided sympathetic publication (analogous in many respects to the Letterist publications themselves) and scholars — suddenly finding themselves working in a focused but flexible context — the critical content.

I wish to offer my thanks to the many individuals who ultimately made such a unified approach to this subject possible. Iowa's Alternative Traditions in the Contemporary Arts (a program based in the University's School of Art and Art History) and its expert coordination by Estera M. Pollock provided me with the context out of which the whole project was formulated and offered. Robert C. Hobbs, newly appointed Director of The University of Iowa Museum of Art, well understood the potential and implications of such an enterprise and undertook his collaboration with the journal with considerable interest. In like manner, the editor of the *Visible Language*, Merald E. Wrolstad, saw the rich possibilities of a journal-produced catalog and lent his full cooperation. The scholarly expertise and advice of Professor David W. Seaman was crucial to the success of the project as was the guidance of artist/writer Jean-Paul Curta who, among other things, secured the support of the Letterists themselves. It was the cooperative basis of such a program that persuaded Ruth and Marvin Sackner (The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry) to lend the major part of the exhibition from their extensive collection, the work around which these combined events finally center themselves.

Stephen C. Foster

Letterism: A Point of Views

Stephen C. Foster

Letterism is, as were most manifestations of the avant-garde throughout the past one hundred years, sensitive to the pivotal role of language in the conduct of most of our activities. The twentieth-century crises in language were seen to affect human affairs broadly, just as crises in non-language affairs were ultimately traceable to the corruption of language. Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism offer obvious and important historical examples of twentieth century avant-garde movements committed to visual language experimentation. Based upon Isidore Isou's belief that the reconstruction of poetry required the deconstruction of words into letters, and that painting could be revitalized only through the introduction of the concrete characteristics of language, Letterism presents a subsequent but no less essential chapter in the continuing tradition of interaction between modern painters and poets. What the Letterists seek is nothing less than a total restoration of language, an *ur-language* composed of the most basic communicative functions. Common to the avant-garde in general is the Letterist conviction that any conventionalized language, by itself, is insufficient; therefore these artists engage, in the course of establishing as broad-based a platform as possible, in the visual arts, music, performance and theater, dance, film, architecture and the minor arts, in which they find an equivalent "plan of evolution" for art (Figure 1). For Isou, the evolution of art could be characterized by two phases, an "amplic" phase and a "Chiseling" phase. The first seeks its limits in its enlargement into other domains, the second, in its narrowing its researches to the "particles" from which an art may be developed anew.

HYPERGRAPHICS (formerly metagraphics): ensemble of signs capable of transmitting the reality served by the consciousness more exactly than all the former fragmentary and partial practices (phonetic alphabets, algebra, geometry, painting, music, and so forth. . . .)

— Lemaître, *Qu'est-ce que le Lettrisme?*

For the Letterists, the crisis in language lay primarily in its exhaustion, in the fact that everything that was done in its name was a "neo." The "particle" constituting the aesthetic mechanism for their new art was the letter in all of its value, richness and novelty. Initiated as a literary or poetic movement, Letterism's value in establishing creative footings in the other arts soon became apparent (Figure 2). Letterism has never become painting or music or poetry — nor have painting or music become Letterism — but the evolutionary phases of all these enterprises coincided at significant places.

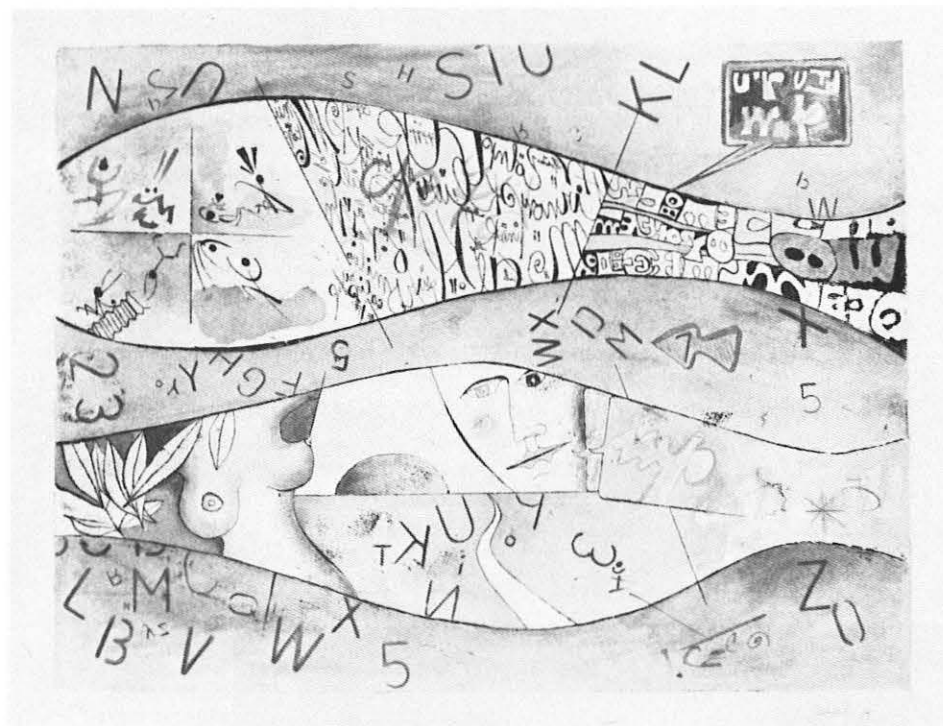


Figure 4 [44]. Maurice Lemaître, Untitled, 1974.
The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

For the first time with poetic Letterism and pictorial Hypergraphic Letterism, PAINTER AND POET are one and the same (because the genre has become the same.)

— Lemaître

From the beginning, Letterism has been the subject of heated debate. It is remarkable that the claims and counterclaims offered thirty-five years ago are still being offered today; this situation certainly reflects the skill of the Letterists' strategies in pursuing their avant-garde aims. One can claim, on the one hand, that Letterism has conceptually operated at the frontiers of art. The work in the exhibition clearly indicates that the Letterists' best work far exceeds in quality what the critics of the movement have thought. The movement has contributed something important. The very word "Letterism" has a kind of magic. As a concept, it compels and has created a mythical aura around itself. It has promoted itself energetically and has enjoyed significant French and international successes. Letterism was welcomed as the "new art" in the late forties and early fifties by individuals no less influential than Cocteau.

At the same time, one can maintain that the movement is relatively unknown, its influence rather limited, its principles and theory questionable or even absurd in some of its claims. Letterism's public posture is typically belligerent,

aloof and perhaps unwarranted by the facts. In spite of the Letterists' frequent attention to producing works of very fine quality, many of their works look to be "tossed off" in a way that the Dadaists, for example, would never have permitted of themselves. One suspects that instances of shoddy presentation of work and poor materials may reflect a presumed theoretical authority which has (from their own point of view) granted them license to take shortcuts in the work itself.

The following catalogue essays clearly reflect, and attempt to resolve, these apparent contradictions. Letterism is seen variously as a dogma, a transition between the "heroic years" of the early twentieth century avant-garde and the present, and as a case of historical shortfall. Zurbrugg (and through him, Chopin) takes the Letterists soundly to task from the position of one advocating and practicing in art/language areas with a different emphasis. Seaman's essay presents a detached and sympathetic approach — "as the years go by, the germ of inspiration seems more important than the elegance of presentation." Curtay, as the group's historian, is praiseful but in a balanced way reflecting both his past involvement in the group and his newer work in "body sound poetry." Devaux, in addressing Letterism, speaks as an insider with all the conviction of an evangelist. My own position favors looking at Letterism as more related in its aims to movements earlier in the century and in its formal devices to more recent developments. Its awkwardness can partially be attributed to members' attempts to establish a myth of total revolution (familiar to the earlier twentieth century) on a "factual" or theoretical basis formulated in the present.

In any event, no attempt has been made here to disguise the controversy. On the contrary, the cross-section of essays was composed deliberately with an eye not to sedating the questions but to clarifying them. It is my own conviction, as curator, that for the controversy to become constructive, the debate must be framed in its entirety.

At the same time, by virtue of the selective choice of works, the exhibition tries to combat the conventional perception of the movement through the unrelenting pressure of its dense and oftentimes difficult theory.

In spite of disagreement on certain levels, one can discern through the debate a belief, in even the fiercest critics of Letterism, that the early years of the movement were pivotal in the evolution of the post-World War II arts. Such conviction is based on the Letterists' radical perpetuation and expansion of language critiques that have been present, in one form or another, for half a century. Letterism evoked a myth of great power and made it the thrust of a conventionally composed and expertly executed avant-garde. Like that of most avant-gardes, its points of view on history were ambivalent. The movement perceived itself historically; that is, its significance was measured by its recognition of and seizing on a favorable position in a rather deterministically conceived historical scheme of things. Yet, Letterism vigorously (and typically) rejected its connection with history with a persistence and to an extent rarely encountered in other movements. The "arrogant isolation" referred to in the Seaman essay describes not only the Letterists' sweeping rejection of history

but also their rejection of a position in the history of the avant-garde and in French culture in general. They have refused to make alliances with other movements (their attacks on Surrealism serve as a case in point), and they resist identifying themselves with others working in the same basic areas.

Their comparative isolation aside, the Letterists have exerted a certain kind of influence; they have, in fact, created a myth. While it would be difficult to trace anything like a stylistic or even conceptual diffusion of Letterism to other individuals or groups, the movement, after the fashion of Dada, provided an important covering term for those working in visual language areas. Furthermore, and rather unlike most other language-oriented groups, their footing in language was taken as the basis of an infinitely expansive aesthetic not so unlike, in many of its features, the totalistic arts offered by Futurism, Dada, De Stijl and Constructivism. Like them, Letterism is positive, field-encompassing and even utopian in its outlook. Like them, Letterism, by formulating a world-view, requires our taking a serious point of view and deserves our respect. The museum goer, critic, historian or artist is here faced with a live and volatile situation with a long history. It is hoped that the exhibition will provide the reviewer the opportunity to engage in the issues.

Nicholas Zurbrugg quotes Isou as saying that "for my part, I introduced something to be explained" (Figure 5). That may be the last word.

Pietro Ferrua notes in the essay preceding the bibliography that several spellings occur in the literature: "Lettrisme," "Lettrism" and "Letterism." I have retained "Lettrisme" for the title of the exhibition to denote the movement's French origin but throughout the manuscripts have deferred to the individual authors' preferences.



Figure 5.
Isidore Isou,
1983.

Chronology

Jean-Paul Curtay

1942-1944 Isou, in Romania, formulates ideas of Lettrist poetry, Lettrist painting, chiseling theater and new aesthetics.

1945 Isou visits Ungaretti in Italy and finally reaches city of his dreams, Paris • Isou launches Lettrist movement with help of Gabriel Pomerand • First pamphlets against Poetry of Resistance (Aragon, Eluard).

1946 First Lettrist event (Salle des Sociétés Savantes) • Letterism becomes known world-wide after interruption of lecture on Dada by Michel Leiris at Vieux-Colombier Theater • First publication of *The Manifesto of Lettrist Poetry* • François Dufrêne and dozens of short-term adherents join Isou • First lecture on Lettrist painting by Jean Caillens (Salle de Géographie) • Lettrist drawings, paintings and sculptures are shown at Porte Latine Bookstore by Jean Caillens.

1947 Gaston Gallimard publishes Isou's two first books: *Introduction à une nouvelle poésie et à une nouvelle musique* and *L'Agrégation d'un Nom et d'un Messie*.

1948-1949 Isou and group try to change economic and political status of creative people and youth in France (with very little success).

1950 Jean-Louis Brau, Gil J. Wolman and Maurice Lemaître join Isou • Three metagraphic novels: *The Gods' Diaries* (Isou), *St. Ghetto of the Loans* (Pomerand), *Canailles* (Lemaître) • First publication of the *Outline for a Manifesto of Lettrist Painting* • Foundation by Lemaître of two periodicals, *UR* and *Front de la Jeunesse*.

1951 Jean Cocteau gives Isou's first chiseling film, *The Drivel and Eternity Treatise*, Avant-garde Award at Cannes festival • Lemaître produces *The Film Has Already Begun*, first performance film.

1952 *L'Anti-concept*, film by Gil J. Wolman • *Dawnsday Drums*, film by François Dufrêne • *The Current Life's Boat*, film by Jean-Louis Brau • *Screaming for Sade*, film by Guy-Ernest Debord • Marc 'O edits one-issue periodical on Lettrist film (*ION*) • Isou produces film where discussion on the film is the film (*Film Debate*) • Idea of super-writing presented by Isou in texts he dedicates to theater • Foundation of first dissident group, Lettrist International (Gil J. Wolman, Jean-Louis Brau, Guy-Ernest Debord, Serge Berna).

1953 Point du Jour Gallery shows Isou's *The Figures* • First painted photographs (*Amos*) • *Manifesto of Isouian Dance* (*La Revue Musicale*, no. 219) • Robert Mitterand sponsors publication of first volume of Isou's text on

theater (Bordas) • Dufrêne starts taping his "scream-rhythms" • *The Drivel and Eternity Treatise* shown in U.S.

1954 Palmes Gallery shows Lemaître's *Aphorismes et lettries hypergraphiques* • Isou writes several plays • Jacques Poliéri directs Isou's first play, *The Jugglers' March*, at Théâtre de Poche.

1955 Prismes Gallery shows works by Isou and Lemaître • Lemaître publishes his phonetic studies (*Bilan Lettriste*) • *Manifesto of Mono-lettrism* (Isou).

1956 *Introduction to Imaginary Art* (Isou) • First Festival of Avant-garde Art (Cité Radieuse, Marseille) • Meeting in Alba, Italy (Lettrist International, Imaginist Bauhaus).

1957 Foundation by Lemaître of periodical *Poésie Nouvelle* • Eric Losfeld shows hypergraphic works • Psychogeographic Congress in London (Debord) • Foundation of Situationist International by Debord.

1958 Columbia releases first Lettrist recording • Lemaître becomes editor-in-chief of main periodical on theater, *Paris-Théâtre* • Isou writes erotica (1954-1960).

1959 Weiller Gallery shows Lettrist painters for first time • Jacques Spacagna joins • First silent poems • Choreography by Lemaître (Théâtre Récamier, Théâtre du Tertre).

1960 Supertemporal Art • First supertemporal art show ("L'Atome") • First supertemporal film *Sup Film or The Idiots Hall* (Isou) • *Live Mobile* (Museum of Modern Art) and other meca-art works: food art, powder art (pulverist art), fire art (pyrist art) and speaking sculpture.

1961 Isou and Lemaître into painting • Lemaître exhibition (Mourgue Gallery, Paris) • Lettrist exhibition (Weiller Gallery, Paris) • Foundation of New Theater Club by Lemaître.

1962 Isou exhibition (Nahmer Gallery) • *Ragged TV* by Isou (Museum of Modern Art) • Drug art • Physiological art • Liquid art by Wolman • Art in the City • Anti-meca-art Manifesto (Hotel de Navarre) • *An Evening at the Movies*, film by Lemaître • Foundation by Lemaître of periodical *La Lettre*.

1963 Telex sculpture by Isou (Museum of Modern Art) • *The Great Chaos*, novel made of found objects by Isou • *The Diamond Law*, blank novel by Isou • Polyautomatism and Polythanas • Roberto Altmann and Roland Sabatier join • Letter and Sign in Contemporary Arts (Valérie Schmidt Gallery, Paris) • Lemaître exhibition (Connaître Gallery).

1964 Gallimard publishes Isou's Performance Art works for film and theater • First supertemporal body art work by Lemaître (Connaître Gallery) • Center for Aesthetic Research (Turin, Italy) publishes play by Isou (hypergraphic score) • Alain Satié and Micheline Hachette join • Lettrism and Hypergraphy (Stadler Gallery, Paris) • Intuitions and Formalizations (Torcato di Tello, Buenos-Ayres) • Foundation of periodical *Lettrisme* by Lemaître • Bibliography and performance of Dada and Surrealist Theater (Club du Théâtre Neuf at Conservatoire d'Art Dramatique).

1965 *Au-delà du Déclat*, hypergraphic film by Lemaître • *To Make a Film*, film by Lemaître • Ballets by Lemaître (Comédie de Paris, Semaine de l'Art Moderne) • Many exhibitions abroad: Between Poetry and Painting (ICA, Lon-

don); Lettrism and Hypergraphy (Kölnischer Kunstverein, Köln) and also Berlin, Munich, Hamburg and Turin • Roland Sabatier opens Center for Lettrist Research (periodical *CRL*) • Foundation by Roberto Altmann of periodical *Ô*.

1966 Lemaître introduces visual syntax inspired by comics • Retrospective at National Library • Meca-art show (3 + 2 Gallery) • Lettrist show (Stadler Gallery) • Lemaître exhibition (Rosenberg Gallery) • For first time Salon de Mai accepts a hypergraphic canvas • François Poyet and Jean-Pierre Gillard join • Sabatier's imaginary film, *The Proofs* • New Theater Club organizes evening of German Expressionist theater (Conservatoire National d'Art Dramatique).

1967 *De Gaulle et le Sexe*, novel of randomly cut clippings by Lemaître • Spacagna exhibition (Stadler Gallery) • Satié exhibition (L'Atelier, Toulouse) • Lemaître retrospective (Experimental Art Market, Paris) • Lemaître shows a canvas in U.S. for first time (Stanford Art Gallery, Palo Alto) • Roland Sabatier and Alain Satié organize Lettrist month in Toulouse (Centre Culturel) • Comic strip and narrative figuration (Decorative Arts Museum, Paris) • Italian and Russian Futurist Theater (New Theater Club, Conservatoire National d'Art Dramatique) • Hypergraphic narration (Riquelme Gallery) • Lemaître opens first café-cinéma (Le Colbert) and produces four films • Jean-Paul Curtay joins.

1968 *Manifesto for the Renewal of Architecture* • Opening of Lettrist and Hypergraphic Room at Paris Museum of Modern Art • *Cult Z: From Surrealism through Lettrism*, play by Curtay and friends (Theater of l'Épée de Bois, Paris) • Roberto Altmann publishes Bernard Girard hypergraphic short stories (*Ô*) • Lettrist photography exhibition (Maison pour tous Gallery) • Experimental poetry show (Florence, Italy) • *Modern Kunst I and II*, imaginary works by Sabatier (Kornfeld und Klipstein, Bern) • Lemaître's *Documents sur une femme de ma vie* is shown by William Rubin in Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage (MOMA, New York; L.A. County Museum, Los Angeles; Chicago Art Institute) • Isou, Lemaître, Altmann, Curtay and Gillard try to add clearer Lettrist inspiration to situationist references of May's events • Gérard-Philippe Broutin and Françoise Canal join • Films by Lemaître and Sabatier • Isou works on mathematics and psychology.

1969 Two hypergraphic novels by François Poyet, *Poésis* and *Champs panhellesiques* • Sabatier starts focusing on polythanas and realizes *The Buildings* • Lettrist exhibition (Stadler Gallery) • Hypergraphic Art and Its Applications (Ecole Estienne) • *L'Ascension du Phenix M.B.*, play by Lemaître (Biennale of Paris) • Films by Lemaître, Sabatier, Poyet, Broutin, Curtay, Gillard.

1970 Zenderoudi exhibition (Stadler Gallery) • Lemaître exhibition (Paringer Gallery) • The Salon de Mai dedicates room to hypergraphists • Foundation of *Lettrist Literary Review* by Satié (*RLL*) • Foundation of periodical *Creative Line* (*Ligne Créatrice*) by Jacqueline Tarkieltaub • Foundation of periodical *New Lettrist Generation* (*NGL*) by Curtay and Broutin • Tour of performances by NGL (Berreur, Broutin, Curtay, Gillard, Poyet) • International Festival of Imaginary and Supertemporal Art • Films by Isou, Lemaître, Sabatier, Hachette and Satié, *Not Like That* • Poyet creates new literary award, The Creative Goncourt.

1971 Lettrist, hypergraphic, imaginary and supertemporal photography (Fischbacher Gallery, Paris) • Antoine Grimaud, Pierre Jouvét and Woody Roehmer join • Films by Broutin, Sabatier • Curtay edits special issue of *La Revue Musicale* on Lettrist music • Jean Brown (Massachusetts) opens a Lettrist section in her archive.

1972 Clouds, Snow and Rain, Spacagna exhibition at Kieffer Gallery • *Some Hypergraphics I Could Have Made* (Sabatier) • Experimenta (Forum, Madrid) • Hypergraphic canvases tour Yugoslavia (Skopje, Beograd, Novi Sad) • Lettrist Week (Saint-Michel bookstore) • Lettrist festival (Le Ranelagh Theater) • Florence Villers joins • Films by Isou and Sabatier • Gabriel Pomerand commits suicide.

1973 Curtay discovers "integrative perspective" • Spacagna exhibition (Kieffer Gallery) • Hypergraphic exhibition (Space 2000, Brussels) • Hypergraphic exhibition (Visat Gallery, Paris) • Lettrist week (Theater Mouffetard) • Lettrist photo-writings (Centre International de Séjour) • Daniel Filipacchi publishes *From Impressionism through Letterism* • Antoine Grimaud and Pierre Jouvét show Lettrist works at Edinburgh Festival (Scotland) • Albert Dupont, Geneviève Tasiv and François Letaillieur join • Curtay organizes *Lettrism as Music* (Festival d'Automne) • Films by Isou, Lemaître, Sabatier, Poyet, Jouvét, Curtay.

1974 Hypergraphy Is No More Than a Recollection (Sabatier exhibition, Mony Calatchi Gallery, Paris) • The Art of Writing (Collective exhibition, Marseille) • Luciano Lattanzi shows retrospective exhibit on hypergraphy at Manzoni Gallery, Milan • Visat Gallery publishes collection of prints, *Les Hypergraphics* • George Fall publishes *Lettrisme et Hypergraphie* (bibli-Opus) • Seghers publishes Curtay's *La Poésie lettriste* • *Image*, film by Lemaître • *Not Well, Not Bad*, film by Sabatier.

1975 Lassitude, Detachment, Rejection (Sabatier exhibition, Studio M, Bamberg, Germany) • Series of personal exhibitions at La Guilde (Lemaître, Sabatier, Satié, Broutin, Grimaud, Villers, Dupont, Tasiv) • Festival of Vegetal Art (Le Ranelagh) • Publication of special issue of *Cahiers Imago* on hypergraphy • Isou starts working on physics, chemistry and medicine • University of Paris awards Lemaître an honorary doctorate for his works • Films by Lemaître and Sabatier.

1976 Isou exhibition (Weiller Gallery) • Dispersion and Flying Ideas (Sabatier exhibition, Krauthammer, Zürich) • Perspective, Perspective (Curtay exhibition, Studio M, Bamberg, Germany) • Les lettristes — école de Paris (Strunskaja Gallery, Zürich) • Pietro Ferrua organizes First International Symposium on Lettrism (Lewis and Clark College, Portland, Oregon) • Foundation by Albert Dupont of periodical *La Novation* • University of Paris awards Isou an honorary doctorate for his works • Films by Albert Dupont.

1977 Satié exhibition (Studio M, Bamberg) • Curtay exhibition on Chemical Origins of Life (Bossut Gallery, Lille) • Styles of Grimaud and Villers evolve towards hypergraphic expressionism • Isou gives copy of manuscript of his treatise on creative methods (*Crématique*) to National Library and releases first version of his novel *Jonas* • Foundation of Salon de la lettre et du signe •

Foundation of Salon Ecritures • Isou and Lemaître teach at University of Paris (Centre Saint-Charles) • Films by Lemaître, Sabatier and Dupont.

1978 Spacagna exhibition (Kieffer Gallery) • First exhibition of hypergraphic furniture by Satié (Salon Ecritures) • Mike Rose organizes hypergraphic exhibition in Germany • Films by Isou, Lemaître, Sabatier, Dupont, Hélène Richol • Curtay edits *Natural Spaces – Artistic Spaces* (± O, Genval, Belgium).

1979 Hypergraphic books (Kieffer Gallery) • *La Koriontina*, film by Broutin • *Théophanie*, film by Jouvét • Films by Lemaître, Sabatier, Dupont, Richol • Matteo d'Ambrosio organizes retrospective of sound poetry (Spazio Libero, Naples) • Foundation of Internazionale Novatrice Infinitesimale by Gabriele-Aldo Bertozzi (Rome).

1980 Representation, Sabatier exhibition (Centre d'Art et de Dessin) • The Centre Pompidou organizes retrospective week of Lemaître's films • Frédérique Devaux and Michel Amarger join • Curtay starts body sound art (first performances in Paris, London, Florence) • Tactile, olfactive and gustative films by Lemaître • Films by Sabatier, Poyet, Frédérique Devaux, Michel Amarger, Jean-François Sainsard, Hélène Richol • Foundation of Lettrist university, Leonardo da Vinci University • Ruth and Marvin Sackner start collecting Lettrist works for their Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry (Miami).

1981 The Letter and the Sign (Kieffer Gallery) • Lettrist section in Paris-Paris at the Centre Pompidou • Frédérique Devaux creates Salon Art Video • Michel Amarger takes direction of New Theater Club • Films by Lemaître, Poyet, Broutin, Devaux, Amarger • Curtay edits *Al di qua al di là della parola* (Berenice, Rome) • Curtay lectures and performs in the U.S.: Lettrism, abstract poetry and body sound art.

1982 Centre Pompidou invites François Letaillieur to organize Lettrist week, Présence du Lettrisme (films, poetry, imaginary art performance) • Centre Pompidou publishes *Lettrist Film 1951-1982* (filmography of more than 200 titles, many are performance films) • *Débandage*, film by François Letaillieur • Films by Lemaître, Devaux, Amarger, Catherine Tavernier, Stéphanie Courreau • François Dufrêne dies • Curtay tours U.S. again.

Letterism — A Stream That Runs Its Own Course

David W. Seaman

The great difficulty in situating Letterism in the context of modern art (poetry, music, cinema, etc.) is that it stands in such arrogant isolation. While avant-garde movements by their nature and definition reject the conventions of established forms, Letterism carries on a continual battle against society and other artists. The fact that there is some justification for the Letterists' claims to superiority does not help in this case because these artists are not widely known. It is impossible to determine the Letterist influence on artists who have never heard of them directly and perhaps only know the diluted adaptations of their principles and inventions.

Letterism leapt onto the stage in the 1940s — sometimes quite literally, as when Isidore Isou interrupted a Dada performance to read his own poems — and immediately claimed a place in the succession of artistic movements in the West. In the initial theoretical manifesto of Letterism, Isou traces the lineage from Baudelaire to himself, accepting a place of equal importance with Rimband, Mallarmé, Valéry, Jarry, Apollinaire, Tzara. These poets represent for Isou the watersheds of four different creative currents that lead fairly directly to him.

To understand the rationale that leads to this assertion, it is useful to review the evolution of art forms as outlined by Isou. Like a giant sigh, arts experience a period of expansion, taking in oxygen, sunshine and other nutrients which are transformed into rich lifeblood. Isou calls this phase *amplic*. (The problems of translating these terms will be discussed further on.)

For the art of poetry the *amplic* phase covers all its history up through Victor Hugo, or roughly until 1857, the moment when Baudelaire brought his "new shudder" to initiate the other phase of art.

The second phase is like a huge exhalation, the part of the sigh which signifies the consumption of all usable oxygen, expelling the carbon dioxide, muscles full of lactic acids and the brain fatigued. Isou calls this period in art the *chiseling* phase. Chiseling is the activity of artists who cut away at the accomplishments of the *amplic* phase.

As a first step Baudelaire replaces the poetry of narrative anecdotes with a plastic image; next Verlaine and Rimband reduce the poem to lines and words; Mallarmé and Valéry then chisel words into space and sound; finally Breton and Tzara complete the annihilation of words.

At this point Isou discloses the use of letters as meaningful particles smaller than words, and Letterism undertakes the culmination of the chiseling phase.

Two of the most interesting concepts in Letterist theory are those just presented: the idea of the *amplic* and *chiseling* phases, and the notion of the power of letters. The first of these has the strength of sweeping generalizations that allow people to organize their knowledge and feelings. Like the concepts of classicism/romanticism, apollonianism/dionysianism, male/female principles, and Eastern philosophy/Western philosophy, the *amplic*/chiseling dichotomy suggests all sorts of new critiques of art. As seen in Frédérique Devaux's essay on cinema, it can be applied to all fields of artistic endeavor, and it provides a basis for devastating attacks on those unlucky enough to be in the wrong phase. Of course even Letterism itself will experience both phases.

The reduction of language to its smallest particles — written signs, spoken syllables — is not a nihilistic gesture, for Isou has illustrated that these units, atoms of the language, retain an expressive force far greater than their size suggests. By comparing a series of visual compositions it is possible to recognize a hierarchy of signs that illustrates this principle: If an abstract work contains one natural, representational element, our attention is drawn to that object; in a representational painting such as a landscape, even the smallest intrusion of a human being becomes the focal point; and in a portrait any letters — for instance, on a tattooed arm — dominate the visual field. Letters are thus proposed as the most powerful elements to be used in any composition, whether poetic, pictorial, musical, or cinematic.

In post-war France it was not surprising that Letterism appeared as a form of nuclear fission, sometimes considered the atomisation of literature. The analogy held regarding Letterist tactics as well as its theory. The preferred manner of spreading the movement during the late 1940s and early 1950s was to pass out tracts, hold public meetings, and give readings at cafés. While the gloomy existentialists frequented the café Deux Magots in the Latin Quarter, Letterists wandered down to the Tabou to hear recitations by Gabriel Pomerand, one of Isou's earliest partisans.

Already the name Letterism had been pronounced in the right places. The Surrealists Aragon and Breton were initially friendly to the young poets of Letterism, offering assistance that was later repaid with violent rejection. The newspaper *Figaro*, which traditionally records the arrival of new artistic movements, had carried a favorable report on Letterism, and in 1947 the important publishing house of Gallimard brought out Isou's manifesto, "Introduction to a New Poetry and a New Music."

By 1950 it was possible to identify Letterism as a vigorous and obnoxious new artistic movement, striving through tactics that applied to the masses — radio programs, demonstrations, speeches — to take over the place held by Surrealism. There was a vital group of Letterist artists who had started a journal and set up their own press, and they had recognition value in the intellectual and artistic milieu of France.

Maurice Lemaître joined forces with the Letterists in 1950, and from that time on he and Isou became and have remained the principal figures in the movement. During the 1950s the possibilities of Letterist theory were explored

and exploited to their fullest. The original emphasis on sound poetry was extended to encompass visual poetry as well, and this domain has been especially well illustrated by Lemaître.

Isou and Lemaître developed an excellent collaboration, where the Roumanian initiated dozens of ideas that the Parisian elaborated and organized in presentable forms. After sound and visual poetry, it was cinema. Isou's *Treatise on Slobber and Eternity* won the prize for avant-garde cinema in Cannes, and Lemaître also turned his attention to politics and economics, becoming a model of the complete artist and creator which Isou had envisioned.

Aided by the new Journal *Ur*, founded by Lemaître, there were regular outlets for the voluminous production of Letterist texts, analyses, and critiques that came out during this period, mostly from the two ringleaders (Figure 6). Letterist notoriety was maintained through public recognition and the support of faithful defenders such as Jean Cocteau.

Cocteau had been instrumental in Isou's success at the Cannes film festival, and he was on the jury of a poetry prize that was considering Isou in 1956. The

Letterists supported Isou with a tract passed out at the restaurant where the jury was meeting. Cocteau did his best, but the vote went another way, and the Letterists responded the same evening, with yet another tract attacking the jury.

One of the opposing jury members was Louis Aragon, the surrealist poet who along with André Breton began receiving a barrage of criticism from the Letterists. There were two principal sources for the Letterists' antagonism. On theoretical grounds the Letterists felt that Surrealism had taken the material of the avant-garde (as illustrated in Dada, for instance) and carried it backwards toward Romanticism. The later accommodation of Aragon and Breton to modern conventional trends in France, particularly in Aragon's wartime lyrics, incited Lemaître to call them chameleons.

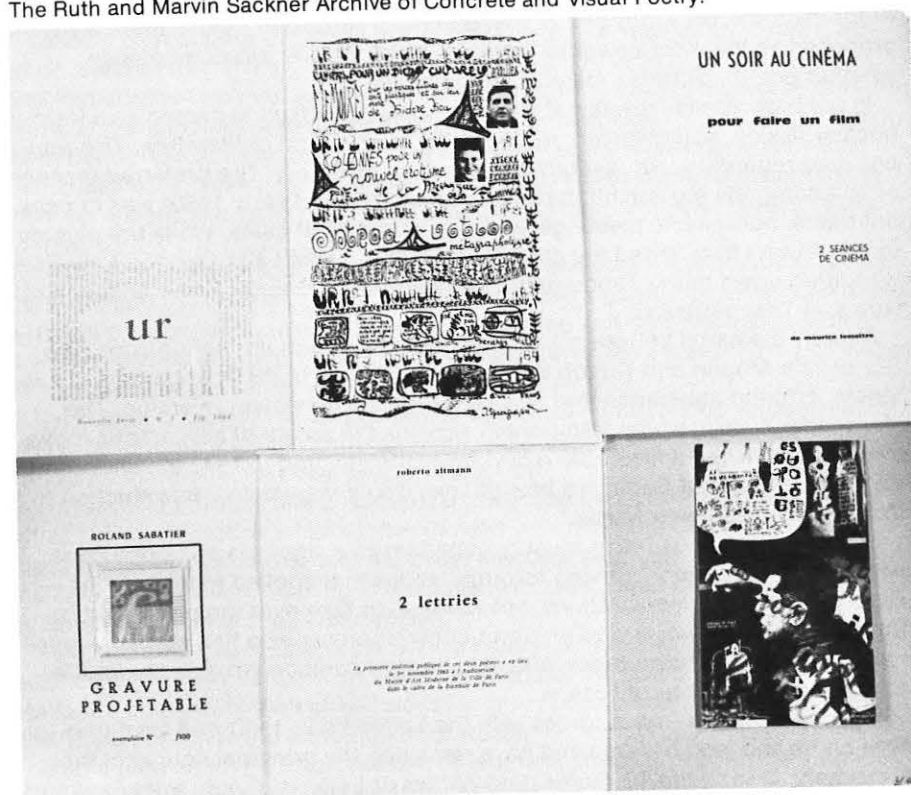
On the personal level, Aragon was seen as figurehead of the band of surrealists who failed to rally around the cause of the Letterists, abandoning them to the critics and, worse yet, to silence. Lemaître later recalled bitterly that Aragon was one of those most guilty of causing problems for the Letterist movement.

In replying to questions posed by Pietro Ferrua (in an unpublished manuscript, "Entretiens sur le Lettrisme," (1975-1982), Lemaître acknowledges a whole series of adversaries whom they attacked in articles, brochures, and tracts: Albert Camus, Jean Paulhan, Marcel Arland, Cioran, Aragon and Elsa Triolet, Paul Eluard, the painter Mathieu, actor and director Jean-Louis Barrault, Béjart and the Marseille Avant-Garde Festival, Charlie Chaplin, Alain Resnais, Jean-Luc Godard, and so forth. Sometimes the reason for the conflict is forgotten, and all that remains is a memory of acid words or an image of fleeing from the police after a demonstration.

The reason for these perpetual debates and confrontations, which includes a long-standing friendly quarrel between Isou and Lemaître themselves, is partly a firm belief in their own originality, and partly an investment in continuous revolution. Lemaître is very reluctant to admit comparisons with his predecessors, even when the influence seems warranted. For instance, his response to Ferrua's question about a Futurist technique that reappeared in Letterism was to question the motives of his interviewer. On the other hand, he continually accuses others such as Godard of plagiarizing Letterist ideas.

The Letterist idea of a continuous revolution is more defensible, if not entirely successful. It is related to a faith in youth, as evidenced by the formation of a Front de la Jeunesse, which followed Isou's treatise "The Revolt of the Young" (Figure 7). This is where the Letterists had already parted company with the aging Surrealists, and it led them to vigorous involvement with students in the uprisings of May 1968 (which the Letterists claim to have initiated through their theoretical writings of the 1950s). The Letterist commitment in this area has never flagged, and continues to be evidenced by their support of youthful collaborators and innovators, whom they publish in a series of ephemeral journals and exhibit in annual salons. While the goal of these efforts is to promote creativity, it is not always easy to detect any evolution from the original efforts of Isou and Lemaître.

Figure 6 [89]. *Ur*, new series, no. 3, 1964,
The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.



The original auditory emphasis of Letterism turned towards visual art with the development of metaprose texts and the hypergraphic painting of the mid-fifties (Figure 8). All these works contained a mixture of letters, signs, photos, and pictorial images. Although several one-person and joint exhibitions were held, critics were generally either scornful or silent about the works. This was partly due to the confusion produced by the Letterist mixture of genres. What might be called Letterist visual poetry was termed drawing or painting by the artists, but when Isou presented some to the curator of the Paris Museum of Modern Art, he was told they were documents, but not paintings.

Front^{de} la Jeunesse

Fondé en 1950 par Maurice Lemaître

REVUE DE L'UNION DE LA JEUNESSE ET DE L'EXTERNITE

mai 1968 Nouvelle série mensuelle Prix : 10 F

LA CRÉATION
AU POUVOIR!

L'UNION DE LA JEUNESSE
ET DE L'EXTERNITÉ
DANS LA
RÉVOLUTION DE MAI

Isou-Lemaître debate sharpened and Isou was even moved to compile bylaws which prohibited intra-Letterist violence.

Isou's movie *Treatise on Slobber and Eternity* was shown in the United States during the early 1960s, but even though the Fillmore ballroom in San Francisco was filled with appreciative hippies and beatniks for multi-media "happenings" that the Letterists claim to have inspired, the same audiences howled in derision at the real thing.

There were also exhibits of Letterist art in 1964 in Turin, Italy, and in Cologne, Germany. As was often the case, more sympathetic attention was given abroad than in France, where critics and spectators like nothing better than to

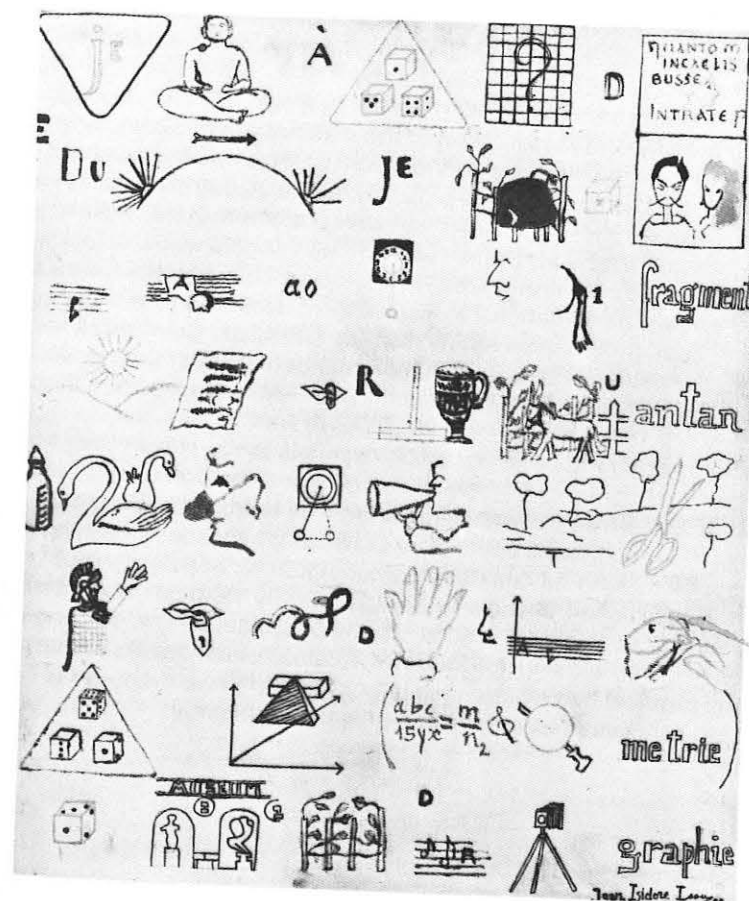


Figure 8.
Isidore Isou,
Les Nombres,
1952.

dissect and deride the exhibitions at hand. For both experts and the general public, this French critical dialogue with art is part of the enjoyment and the deep value of it.

In Jean-Paul Curtay's historical summary *La Poésie Lettriste* (Paris: Seghers, 1974), nineteen young artists merit being named in chapter headings for the decade of 1963-1973. The period was inspired by Lemaître's gathering and encouragement of disciples, bringing them into art shows and publications alongside himself and Isou. The new poets begin a more systematic development of the ideas the Letterist founders had inspired. Curtay himself, for instance, pursued the matter of giving a notation for all the sounds that a person can make, including finger-snapping, and other non-oral noises. This led eventually to his practice of "body sound art," which he has been performing independently of the Letterists since 1980.

When Stephen Bann's *Concrete Poetry, an International Anthology* appeared in 1967, it included no Letterist poetry or mention of it. Although in defining concrete poetry he places heavy emphasis on the visual text, he does allow for some performance-oriented poets such as Ernst Jandl. This makes the absence of the term Letterism even from his introductory essay a bit troubling. Soon afterward other anthologies presented visual poetry to the American reader: Emmett Williams published an *Anthology of Concrete Poetry* which expanded on the list of poets in Bann's volume, but still ignored Letterism. This was also the case with Eugene Wildman's *Anthology of Concretism* and Mary Ellen Solt's *Concrete Poetry: A World View*.

Concretism is a term elusive in its definition but generally applies to works of poetry in which the physical presentation of the material — phonetics, typography, etc. — contribute significantly to the meaning. This obviously should include Letterism, and its absence was probably due to a couple of outside factors. The first was simply that the mainstream of concretism had developed around some German, Brazilian, British, and American poets who became a standard for the concept. Gomringer, de Campos, and Finlay set the tone with their clear and elegant presentations. In France the closest example was Pierre Garnier, whose "spatialist" movement rivalled the Letterists. Garnier acknowledges a debt to the Letterists but is much more congenial about their interrelations, while the Letterists remain quite bitter and have attacked him in a pamphlet.

Another factor making the Letterists inconvenient is the quality of their texts. Isou himself had a tendency to scribble drawings that often drew the charge of infantilism, while Lemaître's canvasses could only be reproduced in photographs. The other French visual poets were producing handsomely printed paperbacks, such as Jean-François Bory's *Once Again*, or even expensive cut-out pages as with Julien Blaine's *La Sculpturale*. By contrast, the Letterists publish as quickly as possible and by the most economical means, so there is a predominance of cheap-looking, hand-drawn volumes on any Letterist bookshelf. Since the physical text claims such importance in these avant-garde movements, this careless presentation can only be detrimental.

Another problem for Letterism is that few of the theoretical texts have been translated. The First International Symposium on Letterism, organized by Pietro Ferrua and graced by the presence of Lemaître himself, did not result in widespread recognition for the movement. The proceedings of the symposium are available in photocopied form, but have not been published. Lemaître has recognized this problem himself, and circulates another publication called *What is Letterism?*, which includes translations from his own work and various articles in English gleaned from here and there. These translations highlight the difficulty in Letterist vocabulary: they have invented numerous neologisms that have no ready English equivalent, and sometimes appear to be wrong, mysterious, or silly in translated form. The major Letterist thesis about the *amplique* and *ciselant* phases of art is reduced to the clumsy rendering "amplific" and "chiseling." Elsewhere this is translated as "amplique" and "engraving." The *cinéma discrepant*, an important concept in Letterist cinema, is called "discrepant," which has no meaning to English-speakers, while "disjunctive," a more meaningful term, does not lead back easily to the original word. And Greek-based neologisms like "psychokladology" and "esthapeirism" have alchemist overtones that do not enhance the status of Letterism. The originality of invention thus confronts the conventional mind.

Letterism today still has life in France, where the salons and publications continue, and a small but dedicated faction of artists pursues the principles of Isou and Lemaître. Its founders have made every effort to transmit their ideas and enthusiasm, with only mixed success. What comes next?

There are several avenues of hope for the fortunes of Letterism. Lemaître made a point in recent conversations that the death of Aragon closes the era of Surrealism, leaving only one viable avant-garde movement intact. "Now people will have to recognize Letterism," he told this writer in January of 1983.

Another, more important reason for Letterist optimism is that their fundamental theories and inspirations have indeed contributed to the development of contemporary art forms. From the perspective of our slightly later historical moment, we can see the sequence of events that justifies Letterist claims. The direct contacts may be difficult to establish, but since the Letterists were so prodigious at publishing and dating their new ideas, it will be easy to give them credit for innovation and creation throughout the post-war period. The passage of time also softens the disappointment over some of the low production standards in their publications; as years go by, the germ of inspiration seems more important than the elegance of presentation.

Lastly, this present volume and the exhibition it accompanies provide the attention and exposure abroad that may be necessary to give Letterism its due in France. Lemaître despairs of recognition by the French public, and sees in the American academic world a more sensitive and serious audience. What remains to be seen is whether the young Letterists will pass out tracts decrying this effort as ossified institutional effrontery to their evolving avant-gardism. Long live the Letterist chisel!

Super-Writing 1983 — America 1683

Jean-Paul Curtay

Edited for publication in English by Gail P. Zlatnik

God is not an artist like the others. He invented the giraffe, the elephant, the cat. He does not have a style, in fact he keeps on experimenting.
—Picasso¹

While living with his parents in Romania during World War II, Isidore Isou was preparing himself — to invent neither the giraffe, the elephant, the cat nor different styles, but to invent new arts, new sciences, new philosophies. In 1942 at the age of seventeen he outlined the original basis for a new poetry, a new theater and a new aesthetics.² *Lettrism*, the new poetry, was launched in Paris at the end of the war; it consisted merely of letters gathered into verses without words.³

Although the verses bypassed dictionary entries, they “said” something, diffusely, through the sound of the phonemes and their rhythm in performance. Poetry took several strides away from books, literature, intellectualism, to become action — action for the performer and sensation for the listener. Following in the paths of the prophetic works of the Italian Futurists, the Russian Futurists, Hugo Ball, and Kurt Schwitters, Isou had founded an abstract poetry.

The young avant-gardist had reached his maturity through books. When the accelerated program of education provided for him by his father became insufficient, he had come to consider books as his foster parents. With Lettrism he was to betray them. As Mondrian, Kandinsky, and Malevich had abandoned the figurative object in the visual arts thirty years earlier to enter a universe of “diffuse” communication through direct sensation, so Isou envisioned forcing “meaning” back into the visual arts by centering them on objects extracted from books: letters, words, sentences.

Thus, at the age of eighteen, he outlined the theoretical basis for another field, Lettrist painting, in which sensitive games of color and rhythm would be played around writing.⁴ But this time, instead of “liberating” a field such as poetry from constraints by offering it a light-weight particle, the phoneme, mere sound matter, Isou tried to restructure a visual art open to the freedom of abstraction, by introducing heavyweight particles — elements of writing — made of directive form and meaning like the figurative object.⁵

For some years, until 1953, Isou did not really care to go much further than the presentation of his theories: “I am not a painter because I do not have

enough time to be a painter. With this shortsighted view of mine I see in front of me other fields which — it feels to me — require renewal more urgently.”⁶ Isou was aiming at shifting the basic ideas, what Thomas Kuhn calls the paradigms,⁷ of all the fields of art, science and philosophy that he could embrace. His purpose was to accelerate the evolution of a world he believed held for the first time a chance to step into a “terrestrial paradise.” This made him more eager to change the school system, the banking system, or the status of creative people than to achieve works of art. Thus, all he did as a “painter” from 1943 through 1947 was to transcribe his Lettrist poems on to sheets of paper, first in one color, with a few doodles and spots overlapping the text/score, later in several layers of different colors and finally on canvases. These Lettrist poems were obviously not the most “meaningful” (in the sense of having “transcendental edge”) that he could have used. But to him and to those who had begun to appreciate abstract poetry they were highly meaningful. In 1946-1947 these realisations, along with a few letters made of wire, were shown in Paris at the Porte Latine Bookstore, the Lettrist “headquarters” of those years.⁸

Gabriel Pomerand, Guy Vallot (a Romanian friend of Isou whose real name was Rodica Valeanu), and Roberdhay were the first three Lettrist painters. Both Guy Vallot and Roberdhay realized compositions close to lyrical abstractions, with letters running, flying or melting into a whirl of colors. Isou complained: “My friends looked like they did not trust mere letters; they blended them with spots and informal lines; they weakened them by reducing them to pretty compositions on overworked backgrounds. During our conversations I often shouted at them something like: ‘Why don’t you just write and give to the text a chance to appeal and move. Write “shit!” on the canvas! That’s enough.’”⁹ But rather than actually painting, to fulfill his obsessive wish Isou tackled another field: the novel.

Once again he wound up with a liberating paradigm shift. In 1950 he proposed to invite handwriting, drawing, color, collage, photography and even objects to come and dance on the page, turning the novel into a visual feast.¹⁰ Apart from the revolutionary look given to the book, this proposition triggered unusual phenomena. To replace the word “moon” in a sentence with a drawing of the moon (“pictoprose”) or a collage of a picture of the moon (“collaprose”) or a photograph of the moon (“photoprose”) allowed — potentially — direct depiction of “this” moon with attributes that depend in the traditional novel on adjectives and context. The context in the “metagraphic novel” could then play other games of color or form.

It seems to me that Isou, who loved books so much, showed more freedom in his creativity when he dreamt of a new novel than when he dreamt of a new poetry or painting. He who distrusted machines and would resist the use of the tape recorder in poetry a few years later proposed using record players to give sound to some novels, and bulbs and electricity to give them light. He even wanted them to release odors and perfumes. Houses, he wrote, could be transformed into mazes where strings of real objects would write the story. A whole city could also become a literary frame (*esthpolis*): the reader would have a

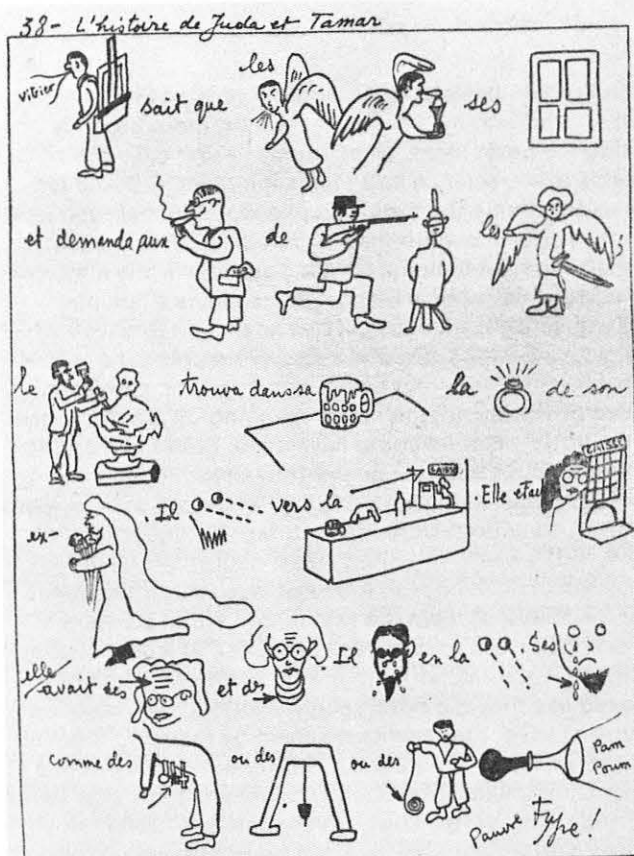
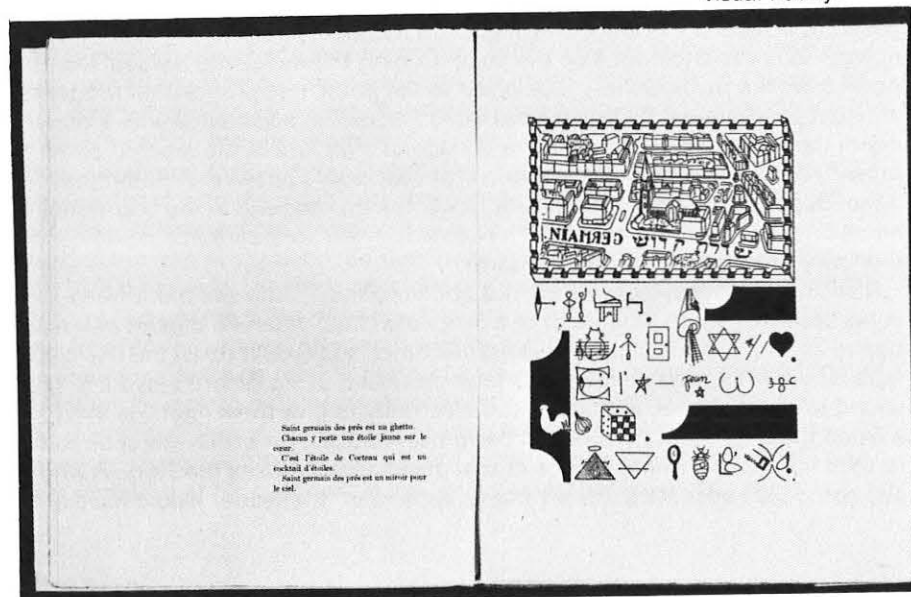


Figure 9 [30].
Isidore Isou,
from *Les Journaux
des Dieux*, 1950,
The Ruth and
Marvin Sackner
Archive of
Concrete and
Visual Poetry.

Figure 10 [56].
Gabriel Pomerand,
from *Saint
Ghetto-des-Prêts*,
1950, The Ruth and
Marvin Sackner
Archive of
Concrete and
Visual Poetry.



map to lead him/her to the successive locations where the "chapters" await. Plants and animals could participate in fiction too, in person. This luxuriant program would be the basis for the meca-art system, developed ten years later.

For the first time, the founder of Lettrism also took into account the possibility of different degrees of readability. The replacement of the alphabet by another system of signs, either alphabetic or syllabic or ideographic, either known (Braille, Morse, sign languages, flag codes, knots) or invented, would provide the reader with a ludic approach to the text to be deciphered. And the game could be made more sophisticated by mixing several systems, by using other known or specially devised techniques of mystorography (rebuses, enigmas, anagrams, cryptograms, cross-words) and by building palimpsests, several texts being printed on the same page.

Isou experimented with some of these possibilities in *The Gods' Diaries*, the first novel of its kind.¹¹ The style of both story and drawings is naive but the work on the whole is stunning and funny at the same time. The first forty pages display one text in blue. The following five pages, in which "God writes in Braille, because God is blind," are the result of an overlapping of two texts, one in blue, one in red. The last five pages display three texts in blue, red, and yellow, generating a merry jungle of signs (Figure 9). Unexpected encounters at the level of the small notations, and beautiful chance compositions of the whole page, remove the reader still further from conventional reading.

The rich and free merging of visual arts and literature envisioned by Isou in 1949-1950 under the name of "metagraphy" appeared fertile to many more people than the one proposed earlier with Lettrist painting, left almost unnoticed.

In 1949 Gabriel Pomerand composed and a year later published *Saint Ghetto des Prêts* (Saint Ghetto of the Loans), a novel in which the main character was the district of Saint Germain des Près. The right page displayed the magic of the mystorographic translation of the text, which was printed on the left page in regular words (Figure 10). Pomerand described his haunting vision of Saint Germain des Près by means of a strange hybrid wherein ideograms, rebuses, Hebrew alphabet, cuneiforms, and sign language intermingled. I found particularly appealing his "synthetic" rebus: *croirait* ("would believe") was represented by a cross (*croix*) drawn on the back of a ray (*raie*); *déniche* ("rummage") by faces of dice (*dé*) drawn on the roof and wall of a dog house (*niche*); *chaviré* ("overturn") by a cat (*chat*) whose tail had a form of phallus (*vit*) and whose behind bore a stave and the note D (*ré*). Pomerand also laid out the pages innovatively: in a maze, on a chess board, around or over a large figurative or abstract shape, and in white on a black background.

With *Canailles*,¹² a ten-page metagraphy, Maurice Lemaître introduced various narrative devices around an autobiographical story on the period of the war (Figure 11). A sequence zooming from the solar system to a photographic portrait of the author, through a drawing of the earth, maps of Europe, France, Paris and of the inevitable Saint Germain de Près district set the action's frame. Comic strip material was — for the first time, to my knowledge — made part of a work of art; in any case *Canailles* preceded the work of Oyvind



Above left
Figure 11.
Maurice Lemaître,
from *Canailles*,
Ur, no. 1,
Paris, 1950.

Above
Figure 12.
Isidore Isou,
Les Nombres
(IX), 1952,
private collection,
Paris.

Left
Figure 13.
Isidore Isou
Métaphysique Amos,
1952.

Fahlström, whom Lemaître visited in Sweden and who wrote the first articles on Lettrism and Metagraphy in the Swedish papers while he was still a surrealist; Gianfranco Baruchello; and Roy Lichtenstein, all of whom did it later and in very different ways.

Isou's move into the novel had left the gate of the visual arts wide open to the introduction of any type of sign. It became clear in 1952 that one could paint not only with the Latin alphabet of Lettrist painting, but also with all the other current systems of writing (Cyrillic, Hebrew, Arabic, Chinese), with all the ancient systems (cuneiforms, hieroglyphs), with invented systems, with symbols coming from science (mathematics, chemistry), with maps and even with figurative objects and abstract particles, integrated into a narrative structure. This new visual world, which could be developed on canvases or in books (and their expansions) was renamed "hypergraphy" or "super-writing."¹³

Because the following years were dedicated for the most part to film¹⁴ and to theater,¹⁵ Isou and his friends did not return to the visual arts before 1953. In 1953 Isou decided to be, after all, a painter too. He became one with *Les Nombres* and *Amos*.

In some of *Les Nombres* (The Figures), 36 canvases, each representing two stanzas of four verses in the form of rebuses, the "idea" appeared still stronger than the plasticity, but the naïve quality of the monocolored part of *The Gods' Diaries* found itself transfigured by surprising oppositions of colors (such as yellow writing on a violet background)¹⁶ (Figure 12).

The narrative sequence of *Amos* was developed in nine photographs:¹⁷ 1) the author's room (unkempt bed, book open on the table close to the window), 2) Isou combing his hair in front of a mirror leaning on the wall close to stacks of books, 3) the room with the unkempt bed from another angle, oriented towards the open door, 4) Isou in the street, 5) a view of the street, 6) Isou smiling, 7) (meeting) a woman (Figure 13), 8) a man (Maurice Lemaître), and 9) (the three friends walking) towards Saint-Michel square. The black and white prints were covered with a dense net of mysterious colored writings. A closer examination makes us understand that these Greek letters, political and religious symbols (Jewish, Christian, royalist, Communist, Nazi), tiny figurative elements (flower, human shape, tree . . .), and punctuation signs form an alphabetical system. One could try to decipher the text. But without having to read it literally, the veil of substitutive letters transforms the "reading" of the pictures through the parts left untouched, through the blocks of colors, through the contrasts of light and the various thicknesses of the strokes.

Slogans du groupe isouien by Maurice Lemaître¹⁸ realized a much tighter integration of photography and writing than *Amos*. Instead of substituting a letter for a note, as Isou had done in *The Gods' Diaries*, Lemaître substituted a phonetic sound for a note, a characteristic of all his writing systems to come.

In 1954 the Galerie Palmes showed a set of works by Lemaître: two large panels,¹⁹ canvases, a ceramic pot, plates,²⁰ a bas-relief and other objects covered with hieroglyphic and stenographic signs and other mysterograms. These works look like artifacts inherited from some remote civilization. Their writings have the peaceful, hieratic qualities of Egyptian art; they contrast with the corrosive, nervous, modern text written on *Amos's* sequential photographs.

By conjugating different modes of visual communication (writing, drawing, photography), super-writing effected a "semiotisation" of art, making clear that painting had to be read one way or another.

The paradigm had been different for artists such as Picasso and Braque, Paul Klee and Mark Tobey who had used writing, letters, signs, and symbols before hypergraphy; their works were seen as figurative or non-figurative. Only after the appearance of super-writing did critics begin to see signs on their canvases and to read them as "visual texts." Isou had thus shifted the paradigm of art. To paint had become to organize signs. This is what so many movements (concrete and visual poetry, pop art, *geschriebene Malerei*, situationist "art," semiotic art) and so many artists (Cy Twombly, Capogrossi, Tom Phillips, Jiri Kolar, Gérard Fromanger or Ed Ruscha) have since approached from so many different directions. Abstract painters such as George Mathieu and Hans Hartung, surrealist painters such as Max Ernst and André Masson, and neo-expressionist artists such as Penck and even Francesco Clemente have revitalized their art thanks to writings or symbols. Certainly text-as-art was announced by certain artists — Magritte, for instance — but in a very particular orientation. Isou alone, however, made it unambiguous and open to any orientation.

I believe that most of hypergraphy is still to come. Isou, Lemaître, the later hypergraphists and other artists who had no link to the Lettrist group but who worked with the same material have provided the field with only its primitive milestones. Figurative art lasted centuries because its elements, the objects reflected from reality, were numerous, fairly complex and most of all capable of carrying expression and formal findings (perspective, aerial perspective, chiaroscuro, and so on). Abstract art appears to be out of breath after a few decades, not only because of accelerated creative evolution but also because its material, required not to represent anything even though it could be made infinitely complex, is much less likely to relate to our concerns. Hypergraphy, offered as a way to manipulate any sign, and including figurative and abstract particles, presents an unprecedented potential for formal and expressive expansions.

But Isou, feeling compelled or preferring to outline still new creative areas, chose again to give up the growth of hypergraphy to other artists — reasserting, however, as often as he could, that he should be remembered as its inventor. In 1956 Isou declared in his "Introduction à une esthétique imaginaire" (Introduction to Imaginary Art)²¹ that one did not need to manipulate any real element to create art. He proposed that inaudible phonemes could be composed in ways to realize imaginary sound works. The first silent poems were performed in 1959.²² Invisible signs (infinitely small or infinitely big), of course, could also be the material of imaginary visual works. Finally, Isou came to believe that anything which was not seen as a concrete sign but as a surrogate particle for imaginary or "impossible" matter was entitled to represent the works of a fourth structure (after figuration, abstraction and hypergraphy) in art: "infinitesimal" or *esthapeirist* art (from *esth*, "aesthetics," and *apeiros*, "infinite," in Greek).²³

As the actual works had to take place in the mind, one of the most efficient ways to create them was to invite the public to see them through the ears, the nose, the skin, the tongue. Sounds, perfumes, tactile and gustative stimuli became, not the matter, but the "triggers" for this outlandish art.²⁴

We mentioned that as early as 1950, in *The Gods' Diaries*, Isou had proposed that perfumes, animals, electricity, the city, be part of a new fiction. But these propositions were concrete, were to be part of super-writing. The work would actually be built from perfumes, animals, electricity or the city. Isou called this concrete way of enriching art with new instruments "meca-art" (*méca-esthétique*).

A work can be seen as the production by instruments (brushes, colors and canvas, traditionally) of elements (figurative, abstract, hypergraphic or imaginary), organized in certain forms or rhythms (the characteristics of which make a style recognizable) in the direction of certain subjects or themes (among them the absence of theme or a-theme). Isou proposed that creativity extend independently the array of possibilities in each of these dimensions of any work: mechanics, elementics, rhythemics and thematics.

During the years 1960-1964, Paris was invited by the Lettrist group to celebrate art and creativity around a bewildering blossoming of meca-art.²⁵ In 1960 at the Museum of Modern Art Isou presented two works, one made of rice, cocoa, ropes, fur, and pieces of iron, and one canvas from which was hung a cage with a real bird in it.²⁶ (In the same show, Lemaître decided to hang a bird cage without a bird in it and to present it as an imaginary mobile).

Then Isou conceived of going even beyond imaginary art, to propose works which would never be achieved, works which would be worked on forever. The artist would offer open frames on which any person or group of persons (one particular family, for instance) or animals or natural phenomena would be invited to make contributions; these contributions could be required to employ certain types of particles, to be organized according to certain rhythms or to concern certain subjects. These works, named "supertemporal works" or "sup," in contrast with Allen Kaprow's Happenings, George Brecht's events or Hans Haacke's pieces, yet to come, had as their main characteristic not to be ever completable.²⁷ In fact, Isou permitted some works to be limited in time, but once this time limit was reached, the work lost its supertemporal status and re-entered the world of achieved, closed, frozen art.

But as we know now, Isou did not dwell long on the same idea. In the Hotel de Navarre, rue Gît-le-Coeur, he launched "anti-meca-art."²⁸ Absurd machines as anti-machines (this was certainly not Isou's most original idea), a gargoyle as anti-live mobile, colors as anti-colors ("violet? no! green! . . ."), emptiness as anti-instrument (without Yves Klein's philosophical/mystical overtones) — in brief, any negated instrument was proposed to generate art just as any acknowledged instrument had been proposed to do so.

The following year at the Museum of Modern Art, Isou returned to meca-art with a world wide connected sculpture — a telex machine churning out news from all over the planet.²⁹ Also in 1963, he established what he called the "integral equation" — the human, animal, vegetal, physico-chemical, cosmic and

mental resources from which meca-art could extract its instruments. By opening an envelope glued at the end of the booklet, one could get a handful of cigarette butts, matches, firecrackers, stamps, pages torn from school children's notebooks, clippings and other found objects spread on the table; this was *The Great Chaos*, Isou's last novel.³⁰ He called this new type of writing "polyautomatism." The purpose of polyautomatism was theoretically to offer a larger scope of randomisation than Dada chance methods, Surrealistic automatic writing and free association, and other types of spontaneous techniques, such as Jackson Pollock's dripping. One could improvise by choosing randomly the instruments and/or the elements and/or the rhythms and/or the subjects of the work, whereas a nonanalytical approach of spontaneous or random expression would lead to a smaller number of solutions. Even if one did not want to be "rational," polyautomatism could submit a richer array of alternatives to irrationality.

Pursuing his mapping of new creative skies in *The Diamond Law*,³¹ Isou devised yet another equation to attack and destroy art in an analytical method, similar to polyautomatism: polythanasyl.³² This time he gave up demonstrating his theory and simply offered the extreme solution of his formula: a completely blank novel. At the end of the sixties, polythanasyl became the favorite form of expression for the young painter Roland Sabatier.

Unexpectedly, Isou spent most of 1961 in painting Lettrist and hypergraphic works. Canvases like *Cheveaux* (a hybrid of *cheveux*, "hair," and *chevaux*, "horses") or *Tiger* (the word *tigre* stretched, elegantly slanted in yellow) represented a return to the primitive idea of Lettrist painting as Lemaître conceived of it in the mid-fifties with his mono-word works like *Joy* or *Atome*.

Figure 14. Maurice Lemaître, *Le Cabinet de l'amateur lettriste*, 1961.



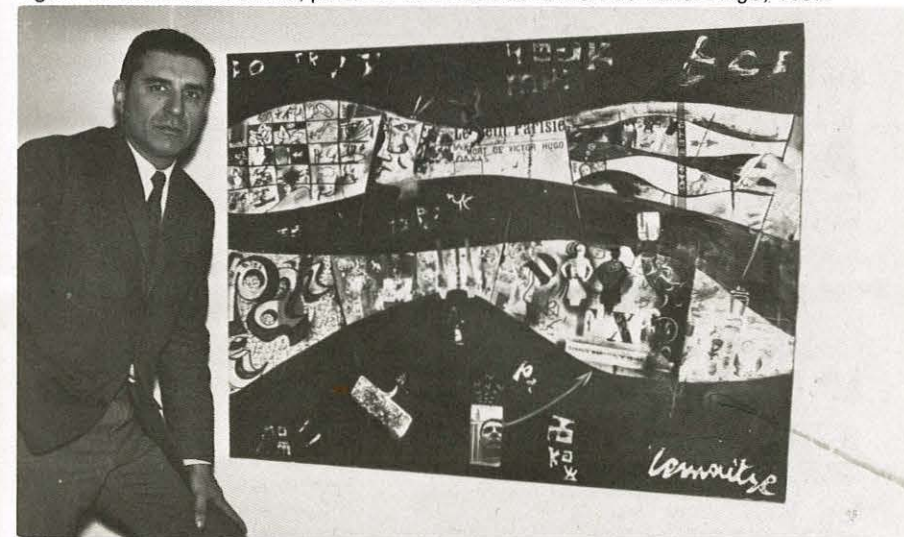
The same fever of painting seized Lemaître, who, in contrast to Isou, kept in touch with symbols (his invented phonetic alphabets) and used many different hues. Lemaître, who had in his poetry already tended toward a romanticist style, realized a less calculated, less systematic, more emotional ensemble of works. Through the selection of the material (words, sentences, pictograms, mysterograms, icons) and the intuitive mode of association, one can feel a quest for affective solutions where Isou was looking for rational solutions.

In the early sixties Lemaître began compounding the letters of his invented alphabets into figurative shapes in the manner of calligrams. He also compounded his different styles on one canvas as had Isou, but instead of having symmetry rule the synthesis, Lemaître let his intuition arrange the squares and the rectangles in a merry patchwork, as in *Le Cabinet de l'Amateur lettriste* (Figure 14).

Lemaître had to wait until the mid-sixties before he found a unifying and dynamic principle to shape the successively more heterogeneous but also more expressive and directly readable material of his works: a comic-strip syntax made of large wavy divided structures and of balloons. *The Self-Portrait of the Artist Speaking on the Art of Portrait* (1966) gathered an anthology of all the previous portraits realized by the painter into a huge balloon (Figure 15). Inside the balloon one finds a comic-strip sentence in the primitive form of the wavy structure which appeared in a mature version later in works such as *Story of Victor Hugo's Death* (1967).

Jacques Spacagna seems to have pushed some characteristics of Isou's styles of 1961 — a pseudo-stenographic cursive writing and organic patterns — to an intensity and a refinement never reached before in hypergraphic art.

Figure 15. Maurice Lemaître, pictured with *Récit de la Mort de Victor Hugo*, 1967.



After having limited his palette to black, white, silver and gold, and having nearly rejected straight lines, Spacagna played various deeply inspired games with his writings, sensuous and serene at times, incisive and violent at other times. The highly electric and magnetic qualities of the calligraphy oscillated — through speed and density games — in between the oriental and the occidental spirits³³ (Figure 16).

If Spacagna's walk was guided by the inner eye, Roberto Altmann's was a somnambulistic drift (Figure 17). A hypnotic myriad of small appendices, holes and arrows formed swarming little sign-cells which influenced each other's shape. The intense social, intellectual and love life of these little sign-cells was described in a magnificent hypergraphic comic strip in 1967.³⁴

Spacagna and Altmann were the first two hypergraphists to find their way to a single intuitive style which slowly evolved over the years. Roland Sabatier shifted several times to explore various formal possibilities in a way even more rational and systematic than Isou's. *Full Pages* (Pleines pages) in white on black associates letters (Latin or from various alphabets like Braille), syllables, lexical and ideographic signs (corresponding to one word) and phraseo-graphic signs (corresponding to one sentence) in a puzzle of pieces of messages and stranded components, like a large slice of memory, a hectic memory, containing more "bugs" than readable information (Figure 18).



Figure 16 [89].
Jacques Spacagna,
Untitled, 1964,
from *Ur*, new series,
no. 3, 1964,
The Ruth and Marvin
Sackner Archive
of Concrete
and Visual Poetry.



Figure 17.
Roberto Altmann,
Hypergraphic Epopea,
1967.

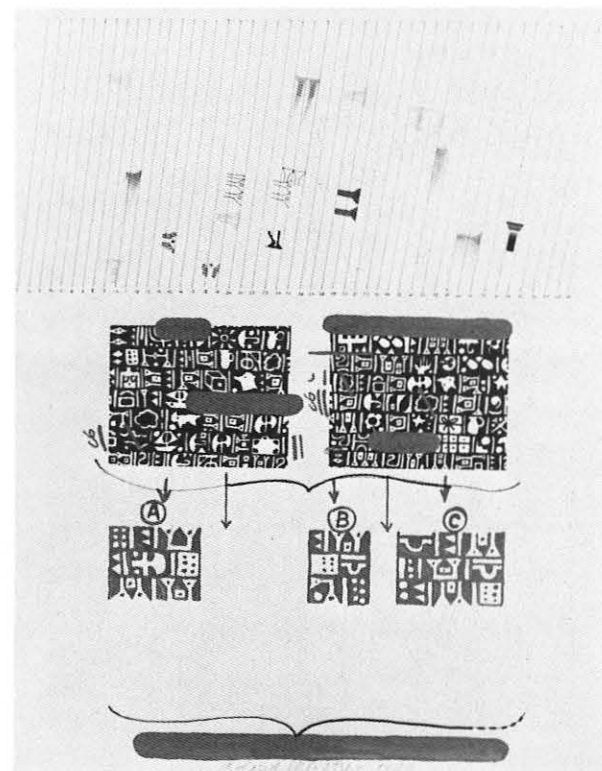
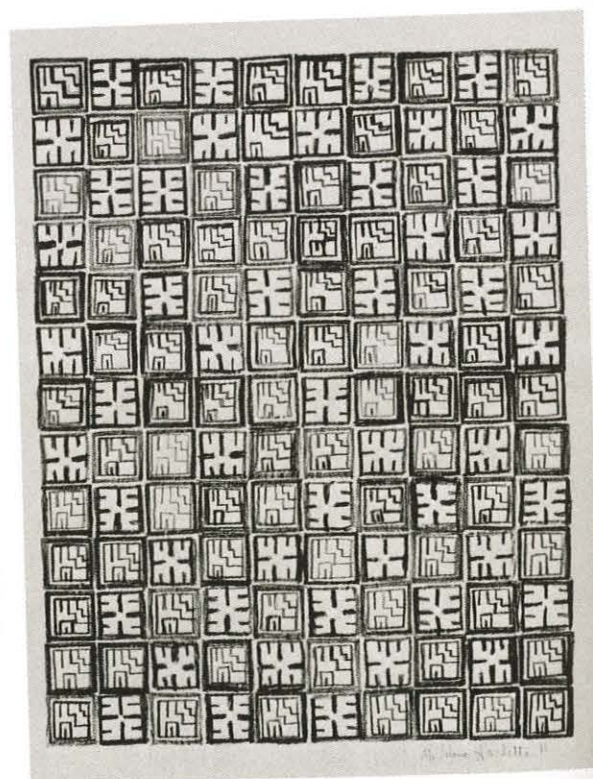


Figure 18 [81].
Roland Sabatier,
Hypergraphie corrigée,
1972, collection
of the artist.

Figure 19 [60].
Alain Satié,
"Ecce Homo,
roman hypergraphique
de Alain Satié,"
from *Revue Littéraire
Lettriste*, no. 1,
1970, The Ruth and
Marvin Sackner
Archive of Concrete
and Visual Poetry.



Figure 20 [16].
Micheline Hachette,
Van Gogh, 1976,
collection of
the artist.



Natural Sciences Reconsidered (Reconsidération des Sciences Naturelles) opposed with still more clarity a background of "noise" made of randomly spread objects and letters — over which Sabatier sprayed black paint — and cartouches of biological, medical or geographical schematic information. This rendering of the fragmented perception of knowledge was sometimes augmented by other, nonsensical, cartouches. In the booklet *For the Form*, a flot-sam and jetsam of words and images constitute a fake speech.³⁵

The most important among Sabatier's numerous styles, and one developed since 1969, was the "polythanasic style," a systematic analytical attack upon the hypergraphic work itself. This condemnation denied any relevance to the idea of painting, while the act of painting took the form of a sado-masochistic game wherein the painter physically tied, blindfolded, covered, scratched, tore or verbally distrusted, discarded, denied, laughed at or invited the public to distrust, discard, deny and laugh at his own work.

The graphic virtuosity of Alain Satié, who was educated as an industrial designer, helped him to construct a very personal vision of the Latin letters. He reshaped them into acrobatic forms, paroxysmally bent above each other. The movements of these boomerang letters was frozen into a jelly of "electronic" signs, securely fastened by delicate knots, only thin antennae succeeding in keeping their freedom.

Satié synthesized many human faces with his electronic-component-like signs, contrasting with particular care the highlights and the shadows. A fascination for the third dimension drove him finally to quit the canvas to cut his inscriptions and struggling letters into wood panels so that real shadows could project themselves onto the wall. He glued books and various objects onto canvases, where they formed colored suns, myriads of the tiny letter-pasta that one can use to make soup with (Figure 19). As did most of the previous hypergraphists, Satié anthologized his diverse styles in balanced compositions. He also approached imaginary art in an original way, offering various types of visual material for daydreaming by indicating on them precise spots as focus points for a sort of self-hypnosis.³⁶

Micheline Hachette modified her one style progressively, but always along the same line, a broken line with which she remodelled all the Latin letters first, then simplified and fragmented them and finally enclosed them in cubes (Figure 20). Her angular compositions were inspired more by Aztec than Cubist art. One of her first canvases was *Letter to Guatimozin* (1964); Guatimozin was the last Aztec emperor, whom Cortez tortured by fire to learn the secret location of his treasures.

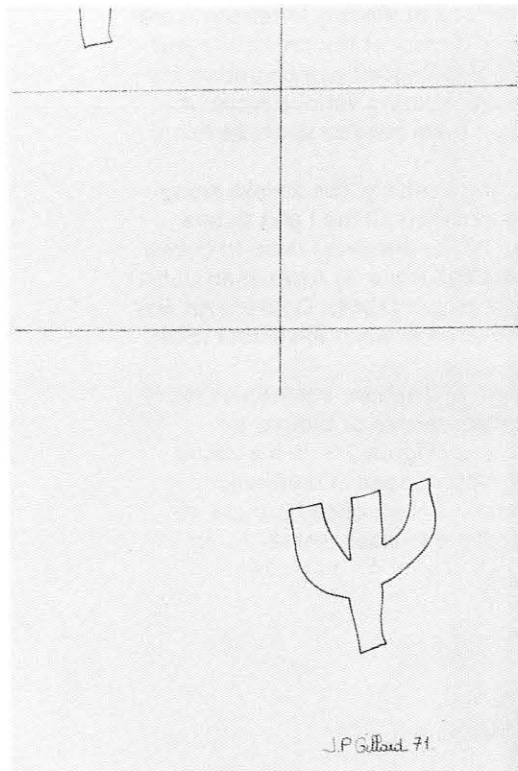
François Poyet's highly complex signs in folds and spikes, sometimes fern-like, sometimes exotic bird-like, formed curved sentences or blocks, in dialogue with diverse calligraphies or mere strains (Figure 21). In his visual novels the same signs stroke or hug nude women engaged in meditation. Poyet also appropriates the third dimension. He has composed baroque inscriptions with signs cut into thick styrofoam or into transparent sheets of plastic.

Right
Figure 21 [58].
François Poyet,
Untitled, 1981,
collection of
the artist.



Below
Figure 22 [3].
Jean-Pierre Gillard,
Untitled, from
Lettrisme et hypergraphie,
1972, The Ruth and
Marvin Sackner
Archive of
Concrete and
Visual Poetry.

Below left
Figure 23 [7].
Jean-Paul Curtay,
Homage to Bracelli II,
1974, collection
of the artist.



Jean-Pierre Gillard painted and printed and sculpted all his works with the same sign, the Greek letter *psi* (Figure 22). Beset with the question of the transition between the concrete universe and the imaginary universe, he made his sign travel from hypergraphy to infinitesimal art. One can see the *psi*, either two- or three-dimensional, disappearing partially by passing the border of the work, becoming mutilated or dissolving into liquids, finally disappearing completely.

After 1969 I based my work on four mystero-graphic alphabets which were meant to transmit, through the mere shapes of the signs, four different atmospheres: the first alphabet was made of cerebral Greek and geometric signs; the second was intended to suggest organization and life; the third evoked masks and strangeness; and the fourth, made of full pictographic icons, was meant to suggest materiality, pleasure, games, and freedom. In the first series I painted (*Logopées*), the thick signs were realized with the finger from the color squeezed directly out of the tube onto the canvas. The whole composition was arranged according to an iconic relation to the background. In 1971 I began a work of reflection on the relationships between two signs: proportions, orientations, distances from infinitely remote to contact, overlapping, coincidence, inclusion and composition (the two signs compose a third sign), which led me to express atmospheres through the rhythm as much as through the shape of the signs (Figure 23). To limit the interference of color I restricted my palette to blue, green, and white (sea/sky, country, foliage, mountain/snow) to which I added yellow when I introduced figurative components.

In 1973 I was looking for a unifying principle in super-writing equivalent to Italian perspective. "Perspective" means "to see through" — for figurative painting, to see a three-dimensional space through a two-dimensional surface (like a window pane). The illusion of a physical third dimension could not be as essential a principle for the art of signs as it had been for the art of naturalistic representation. The understanding that calligrams allow a figurative shape to be seen through a group of words provided me with a solution. Instead of composing only figurative shapes from words, one could compose any sign from any group of signs: figurative shapes could compose letters; abstract particles could compose letters; letters could compose letters; figurative shapes, figurative shapes, and this could be generalized, for compounded signs could again compose signs, and so on. In *Homage to Bracelli* small letters from the second alphabet were gathered in shapes of trees, the trees in shapes of fishes, and the fishes arranged in the form of a large B. In *Homage to Arcimboldo* small letters from the third alphabet were gathered — or distorted (letter fecundation) — into shapes of fishes, the fishes into shapes of trees and the trees into the form of a large A.³⁷

In 1978 I showed that the depths introduced by this "integrative perspective" in super-writing could relate not only to space and topography in a way different from classical perspective (for instance, to form the word "home" with doors, floor, ceiling, windows, fire places, arm chairs . . .) but also to time (for instance, to compose a portrait from portraits of the same person from birth to the present time, or to compose an adult frog from young frogs, themselves

composed of tadpoles) or to instruments (like Arcimboldo's portrait of a librarian with books).³⁸

In an early period Françoise Canal displayed strings of complex signs, each different from the other — garden signs or jewel signs inspired by Matisse. In a second period she restricted her material drastically to a single sign in two parts — playing fine games of proportion and situation, sometimes of composition (*Hypergraphic Nocturnes*) through its repetition. Over the years, as Canal took advantage of techniques of successive rubbings to produce transparencies, the associations became freer, the colors merrier and the subjects more closely related to life, as in *Hypergraphic Mornings* (Figure 24).

Gérard-Philippe Broutin was always fascinated with hieroglyphs and Russian formalism. When he started to paint, he naturally composed hieroglyphs in a formalist spirit. Eventually the genuine hieroglyphs were replaced with a hieroglyph-like mystero-graphic set of fruit and animal signs organized in sentences alternatively with plain words. In these hieratic compositions Broutin overlapped portraits and stone-like signs.³⁹ He also began playing with relationships of proportion, overlappings and inclusions of single signs until he made us share a new fascination for hyper-inclusions where, like Russian dolls, a sign contains a sign which contains a sign which contains a sign. Broutin ended up revealing an eerie universe of planes (pages of signs) rotating in space amidst large depositories of encapsulated and re-encapsulated hieroglyphs (Figure 25).

Like Lemaître but in contrast to Isou or Broutin, Antoine Grimaud entered painting with an affective quest in mind but tried first to conciliate rational leads and affective moves (Figure 26). His bird letters first appeared caged into squares, then liberated themselves to fly in flocks like flags. The birds were then invited to socialize with solemn split signs, chemistry symbols and later computer programs. At times rationality took over, boxing everything into cases in which humans and birds could only meditate; at other times they found a way out of their tight niches and ran and screamed and flew. In recent years they screamed heavy clouds of onomatopoeia and nightmare visions.

The art of Florence Villers evolved also through the years toward expressionistic super-writing. She began, however, with extremely formal compositions made of permutations of three signs, emphasizing positive-negative oppositions. Probably under the influence of a defective eye convergence which gave her a flatter view of the world than normal, and by which the space between the objects appeared to be as outlined as the objects themselves, she read the intervals between her signs as well as the signs themselves and developed a writing of "intersigns."⁴⁰ She expanded this intersign writing before discovering it was a classical Gestalt exercise. In recent years Florence Villers has swapped her geometric signs for human shapes and has them travel along accelerated trajectories, strongly suggesting emotional, often violent, releases (Figure 27).

In the last few years Albert Dupont has refined techniques and styles introduced by previous hypergraphists: he transformed sculptural signs (Lemaître), portraits composed with letters, words, sentences (Lemaître), superimposed

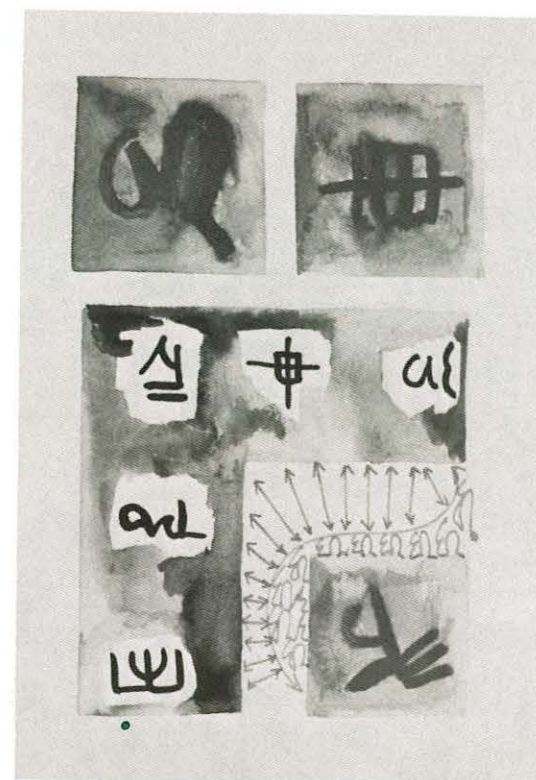


Figure 24 [33].
Françoise Canal,
Untitled, from
Trente Juin:
poème lettriste
polyautomatique,
1972, The Ruth and
Marvin Sackner
Archive of Concrete
and Visual Poetry.

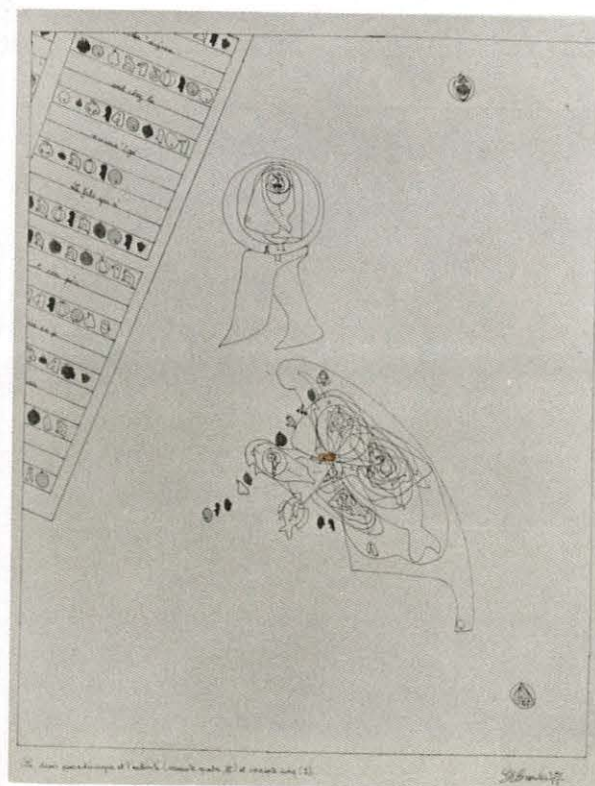
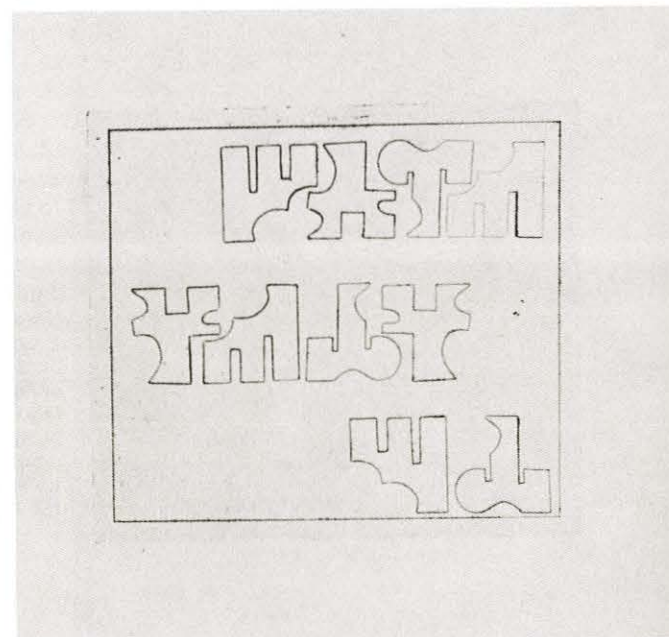


Figure 25 [6].
Gérard-Philippe
Broutin, *Le désir*
paradisique
et l'extrémité
(soixante quatre
et soixante
cinq I), 1977,
collection of
the artist.

Figure 26.
Antoine Grimaud,
Untitled, 1972,
collection of
the artist.



Figure 27 [94].
Florence Villers,
Ces quelques signes,
1974, collection
of the artist.



writings (Satié) into jungles over which only a few white readable words dominate, before inventing his own original and impressive style (Figure 28). Dupont traced his totemic signs into the thickness of the paper with a point, rubbing pastel colors over the relief so that they appear with a riveting intensity among the softest tints.

François Letaillieur's work revolved mainly around comic strips, in the original form of collages. The cut pieces form letters or large balloons. Even reduced to thin strips, the material maintains a surprising attractive power. One cannot escape trying to reconstitute the missing parts, so that Letaillieur's collages operate like venetian blinds on the windows of dreams.

What has been brought into cultivation by all these artists? Actually, only a very few patches of the continent "super-writing." The pioneers ran through;

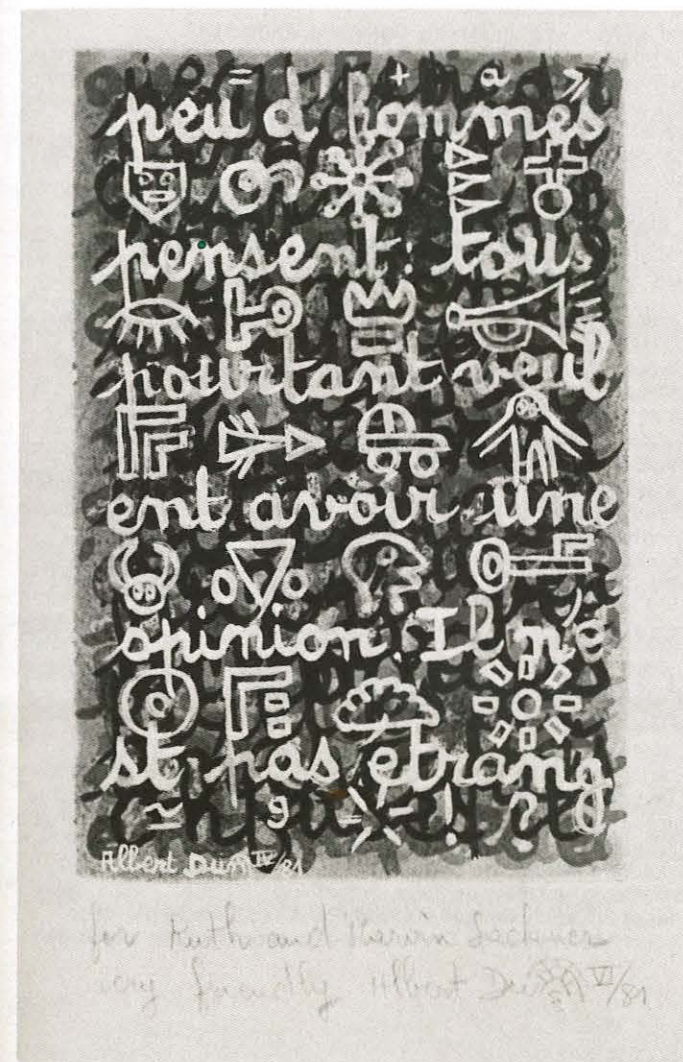


Figure 28 [13].
Albert Dupont,
Untitled, 1981,
The Ruth and
Marvin Sackner
Archive of
Concrete and
Visual Poetry.

here and there clumps were sown. Their efforts provide us with landmarks — "historical" canvases that often have the rawness of Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*. The artists who came after Isou and Lemaître began to harvest some splendid crops too. But, even without talking of meca-art, imaginary or supertemporal arts, if we consider the potential of the art of visual signs today, the striking variety of the known works undoubtedly confirms the vastness of the land. We find ourselves walking in the America of 1983. And all the recent explorations implemented in the budding fields of semiotics, visual symbolism,⁴¹ advertising, and nonverbal communication indicate its "magic" fertility: an exceptional power over our minds and hearts.

1. Françoise Gilot, *Vivre avec Picasso*, p. 40.
2. Isou, *L'Agrégation d'un Nom et d'un Messie*, Gallimard, Paris, 1947.
3. Isou, *Introduction à une nouvelle poésie et une nouvelle musique*, Gallimard, Paris, 1947. Also Curtay, *La poésie lettriste*, Seghers, Paris, 1974; and Curtay, "Abstract Poetry, Lettrism, Mouth Symbols and More" in Mary Ann Caws, ed., *Concrete and Visual Poetry*, forthcoming issue of *Dada/Surrealism* at The University of Iowa Press.
4. Isou, "Esquisse d'un Manifeste" in *Mémoires sur les forces futures des arts plastiques et sur leur mort*, Ur No. 1, 1950.
5. He called the form "symmetric edge" (*tranchant symétrique*) and the meaning "transcendental edge" (*tranchant transcendantal*).
6. In *Mémoires sur les forces futures des arts plastiques*.
7. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, 1970.
8. Georges Mathieu, still an expressionist painter, visited the Porte Latine Bookstore in the forties, before using calligraphy and becoming a "signist."
9. Isou did not escape some Dada clichés. *Les Champs de Force de la peinture lettriste*, Avant-garde, R. Altmann, Paris, 1964, pp. 31-32.
10. Isou, "Essai sur la définition, l'évolution et le bouleversement de la prose et du roman" in *Les Journaux des Dieux*, Aux Escaliers de Lausanne, Paris, 1950.
11. With some foreshadowings in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Stendhal's *La Vie de Henry Brulard*, Balzac's *Ursule Mirouet* . . . but it was only ten years later that novelists, artists and visual poets started book art and new fiction in the same direction. See today the Franklin Furnace Archive in New York, the Visual Studies Workshop catalog (Rochester, NY), Maurice Roche, Raymond Federman, Joëlle de la Casinière, Sophie Podolski, Steve Non, Paul Zelevansky, David Cole, Janet Zweig, Tom Phillips, Dieter Rot, Bern Porter . . .
12. Maurice Lemaître, *Canailles*, Ur no. 1, Paris, 1950. Reprinted in *Canailles*, Centre de Créativité, Paris, 1964.
13. Isou, *Fondements pour la transformation intégrale du Théâtre*, vol. II, 1952. I published it in 1970 ((CICK, Paris).
14. Isou, *Traité de Bave et d'Eternité* ("Treatise of Drivel and Eternity" and not of "Venom and Eternity" as it has been translated until now), 1951. Script published in Isou, *Oeuvres de Spectacle*, Gallimard, Paris, 1964. Lemaître, *Le Film est déjà commencé* (The Film Has Already Begun), 1951. Script published by André Bonne, Paris, 1952. The film is available through Northwestern Film Archive, Portland, Oregon. François Dufrêne, *Tambours du jugement premier* (Dawnsday Drums), 1952. Gil J. Wolman, *L'Anti Concept*, 1952. Jean-Louis Brau, *La Barque de la Vie Courante* (The Current Life's Boat), 1952. Guy Ernest Debord, *Hurléments en faveur de Sade* (Screaming for Sade), 1952. Debord became later the founder of Situationism. See also *Ion*, Paris 1952, the single-issue periodical containing Isou's "Esthétique du Cinéma" and texts on the films mentioned.

15. Isou wrote most of his *Fondements pour la transformation intégrale du Théâtre* after the notes gathered in Romania. First volume, Bordas, Paris, 1953; second volume, CICK, Paris, 1970.
16. *The Figures* were shown in 1953 at Galerie Point du Jour and Galerie Palmes. The text was published in *Ur* no. 2, new series, 1964.
17. *Amos* was reproduced in black and white in *Ur* no. 3, 1953, and *Arcanes*, Eric Losfeld, 1953. In their films Isou and Lemaître had already scratched, painted on, written on photographs (1951).
18. Lemaître, *Slogans du groupe isouien*, Ur no. 3, 1953.
19. Reproduced in *Canailles*, Centre de Créativité, 1964.
20. Reproduced in *Canailles II, III, IV . . .*, Centre de Créativité, 1968.
21. Isou, "Introduction à une esthétique imaginaire," *Front de la Jeunesse* no. 7, Paris, 1956.
22. Isou, *Oeuvres aphonistiques*, Avant-garde, R. Altmann, Paris, 1967.
23. I feel it is much simpler to keep calling it "imaginary art."
24. Conceptual art appeared nine years later with Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* (1965), with a more intellectual orientation (art as idea) and very different "solutions."
25. Isou, at the same time, designed a new hypergraphic novel, *Initiation à la haute volupté* (Aux Escaliers de Lausanne, 1960), a thriller blended with erotica and creative propositions. The patchwork style juxtaposed regular typography, hand writing, mystrography, figurative drawing overlapped with hand writings, calligrams, cartoons, Pomerand-like rebuses, pictograms.
26. *Concentré méca-esthétique intégral and Mobile vivant* (Integral Meca-art digest) and (Live mobile), Salon Comparaisons, 1960.
27. Isou, *L'Art supertemporel*, Aux Escaliers de Lausanne, Paris, 1960.
28. Isou, "Manifeste de l'anti-méca-esthétique généralisée" in *Pour une connaissance plus précise de la méca-esthétique et de l'esthépéirisme*, PSI, Paris, 1976.
29. Six years in advance of Hans Haacke's *Communication System UPI* (Howard Wise Gallery, NY, 1969). It is interesting to note that with the years the length of time needed by other artists to re-invent Isou's works diminished, because of the creative explosion of the sixties.
30. Each copy was different. Isou, *Le Grand Désordre*, 1963.
31. Isou, *La Loi des Purs*, 1963.
32. *Thanatos* means "death" in Greek.
33. See "Hypergraphie-voltographie" (1965), for instance, in *Lettrisme et Hypergraphie* (Fall, 1974, p. 43).
34. Roberto Altmann, *Geste Hypergraphique* (Hypergraphic Chronicle), Centre International de Création, Vaduz, Liechtenstein, 1968.
35. Roland Sabatier, *Pour la Forme*, Crean, Paris, 1969.
36. Figures also suggest an order among the spots. See Satié, "Manifeste du roman infinitésimal contrôlé et relance" in *Ecrit en prose* (PSI, 1971) and Satié, *Exemple a conseiller* (*Revue Littéraire Lettriste*, 1971).
37. Jean-Paul Curtay, *Perspective Perspective*, Studio M, Bamberg, West Germany, 1976. See also *A New Perspective System: Integrative Perspective*, forthcoming in Invisible City, San Francisco (first published in French, *± 0* no. 20, Genval, Belgium, 1978).
38. Curtay, *Les profondeurs figurative et hypergraphiques*, *± 0* no. 21-22, Genval, Belgium, 1978.
39. Gérard-Philippe Broutin, "Mes Bandelettes d'Eternité," in *l'Irreductibilité Lettriste*, no. 1, CICK, 1974).
40. In a quite different orientation, Irma Blank (in Milan) recently began painting the spaces between the words in meditative minimal rhythms, after she had put word rhythms in the forefront for years by systematically cancelling all the words from various printed texts.
41. Here "symbolism" means "iconicity" in Peirce's terms.

Approaching Letterist Cinema

Frederique Devaux

Translated by David W. Seaman

I

Like Romanticism and Surrealism, Letterism is an innovative school which brought unexpected gains of primordial importance, overthrowing all fields of art, philosophy, and science. The cinematic works of this movement are quite numerous and many of these creations have been repeated or dissolved into works of lesser importance by later imitators.

For the first time in cultural history, the Letterist movement distinguishes two distinct phases in the evolution of art: An initial moment of construction, edification, growth and expansion in its form and content. This phase, during which an art defines itself and spreads out, is called the *amplific* (amplique). Then the art in question enters the *chiseling* phase (ciselante), which is a time of concentration, deconstruction, withdrawal and disorganization to the point of its complete destructuration, destruction and death.

Like all other arts, film grew, tried out all its possibilities, and exhausted its forms and content thanks to the creations of innovators such as Lumière, Méliès, Griffith, Linder, Chaplin, Gance, Dulac, Buñuel, and so forth. In 1951, date of Isou's *Treatise on Slobber and Eternity* (Traité de bave et d'éternité), film first entered its chiseling phase. The contributions of this film are in four fundamental areas:

1) *In the editing* The author breaks once and for all with the traditions of synchronization (where the sound track has a specific relationship with the picture) and a-synchronization (where the sound has no direct connection with the picture but the meaning of what is said supports the picture in some other way), by creating what he calls *disjunctive editing* (montage discrèpant) by which the sound track runs completely independently from the picture, having no relationship to it and demanding to be considered as a thing in itself.

2) *In the picture* For the first time in the history of the seventh art, Isou presents planes that are intentionally devoid of interest, usually filmed from still photos. The author invades these planes with lines, scratches, and tears, all forms of intervention which are called *chiseling*. Thus, the chiseled picture is a photograph destroyed or attacked in its essence, its reproduction being impoverished or enriched by intervention directly on the celluloid.

3) *In the sound* The elements traditionally constituting the sound track — namely the ensemble of words, sounds and music — constituting henceforth a

thing in itself, has to justify itself by its own creativity, by stylistic research that can run from the grand, complex metaphoric and Proustian sentence to the Letterist poem composed of phonemes. It is *chiseled sound*, that is, a sound track developed on its own and benefiting from the contributions of prose and lyric poetry.

4) *In the story or subject* It is the first time that an author introduces into the film a new cinema manifesto and the reflection of the film on itself. Another innovation is that he includes in the film the main ideas of a revolutionary theory he has created: the revolt of the young, which unlike previous conceptions is concerned not only with the study of individuals who occupy a stable and secure function in society, but is also interested in the mass of *outsiders*, the "electrons" who represent the dynamic force of history.

In the chiseling period (characterized by disjunction and chiseling) Isou defines a certain number of esthetic stages: hermeticism, instinctivism, polythanasia, and polyautomatism.

II

The same year, 1951, Maurice Lemaître, who had been Isou's assistant for the *Treatise on Slobber and Eternity*, created the first syncinema show with a work *Is the Feature on Yet?* (Le Film est déjà commencé?) in which he extends certain of Isou's ideas, deepens others, and creates a new system of cinema made up of a new screen, audience participation and a crowd swirling around the auditorium.

Thus in *Is the Feature on Yet?* Lemaître increases Isou's chiseling with drawings, letters, numbers, representational or abstract signs which give a new concentration to the original image, saturating it and bringing to it an anecdotic dimension which goes beyond the simple narrative challenge printed on the film. This author also experiments with the audience's threshold of perception of the image by the spectator, introducing motionless sequences and quick clips into a chiseled picture which accelerates the sequence of pictures to its upper limits. And as with Isou, Lemaître's image is unsynchronized with the sound and follows a percussive editing that frees the sound from the picture.

This second film in the chiseling stage prolongs the philosophical self-reflection of cinema and continues the philosophical reflection on creation and its application to cinematic art; this reflection is introduced here as an existence in itself and is not as in Isou's work dissolved into the surrounding story. The emphasis is put on the importance, even the necessity of creative evolution. The work of art no longer is evaluated in relation to the psychology of its author; its value exists in the context of the development of the ideas.

Lemaître continues articulation of the theory, the revolt of the young, which borrows its creative foundation from Isou. Furthermore he introduces for the first time the infinite possibilities of scenarios and thereby destroys the unidimensionality of the customary scenario. And, as Pirandello had done for theatre, Lemaître introduces into the sound of the film the movements of the audience (provoked or spontaneous), the thoughts of the spectators (imagined or real), and all the possible criticisms of the movie itself which are no

longer there as stories but on the contrary attack the story itself. The creator introduces interior monologue, fragmented sentences, puns, destruction of words, Joycean figures of speech (and beyond). Lemaître also inverts the sound track of *Treatise on Slobber and Eternity* and obtains a series of inarticulate sounds (mechanical sound esthetics).

With Lemaître there are also creations of which he is the sole inventor: the conventional screen, heretofore simply a mechanism, is elevated to the rank of a star. It is not a matter of perfecting the screen but of making it the frame for the new esthetics. "The screen appears, draped in colored tapestries and hung with objects that stage hands will move around all during the film. At various moments heads, hands, and hats will be placed in front of the movie projector to veil the images."¹ In addition, Lemaître introduces for the first time in the history of cinema actors in flesh and blood in the movie theatre for a complete spectacle which inaugurates the syncinema show. From this point on spectators will be yanked out of their passivity, forced to act, no longer submitting to the hordes of images that conventional movies overwhelm them with. The role of the ticket seller is no longer just to sell admissions, he will now have the impromptu function of handing out our stupefaction; usherettes and sweepers have their lines too, as does the producer who used to stand out by his absence, and the director or film maker himself from now on is present on stage for his show.

Another innovation not lacking interest is that Lemaîtrean syncinema can use the whole universe in putting together the cinematic spectacle that is renewed in this manner, as was already instituted latently in Jean-Isidore Isou's *Journals of the Gods* (Les Journaux des Dieux): "The scale of pictoprose rising to cosmography, passing by way of collaprose, architectoprose and perhaps cineprose is up to you, metaprose writers."²

Finally, and above all, *Is the Feature on Yet?* is also a film to read, a "take out" film, since it was published in the spring of 1952 by André Bonne, finally allowing purses to open up to the renewed art of the screen.

III

In 1952 in the magazine *Ur*, Isou proposed an "Esthetics of Cinema" (Esthétique du cinéma) in which he outlines for the first time in the history of cinema the exact frameworks of the seventh art. Let us quickly recall them:

The "economic field" of the "environmental square" which is the area of exchange between the artist and the consumer, specifically in this case the movie theatre.

The "mechanical square" which is the material base on which an art is founded and constructed; in the cinema the camera and the film, for example.

The "esthetic square" defines the privileged moments, the quintessential characteristics of an art; the foreground and/or the Futurist or Surrealist school, and so forth. These are unique moments which preside over what could be called with a capital letter the mainstream of *Creation*, without which the world would be doomed to death.

The "story square" which is the material belonging to each author, the narrative content, what is said in a work.

Thus, any work which can properly and unequivocally be called creative is one which innovates in a new form. The mechano-esthetics makes it possible to recognize (and to record so one can avoid plagiarism) the creative evolution of innovative formal structures in any art.

This first part alone is enough to indicate the importance of this work written in a period which no longer knows what cinema idol to worship, which no longer really has an avant-garde and which had no other course than to depend nostalgically on the past, superbly illustrated by the creations of the 1920s and 1930s.

Chapter II of the *Esthetics of Cinema* opens on a new definition of cinema: Cinema is the art of "marketing reproductions" (emphasis added). The word reproduction must be noted here; cinema is distinguished neatly from painting in that it is not a representation but a reproduction (this step following the construction). The term reproduction implies the term *copy*, the idea that transforms representation into reproduction. Previously no one was concerned with the specific particle of cinematic art which is reproduction, while it is representation in the other arts. Thus there is a shift of disciplines between painting and cinema because of the difference in molecules. However, it is proper to associate film and photography because the differences between their molecules are minimal, photography being in fact "the first element of a collection of reproductions to which cinema offers its rhythms and ample periods."

Such an evolution occurs because, like all the other arts, film has two phases which have already been named: First is the moment of enrichment of "the element and of its stylistic combinations," film having like painting or fiction its great ample names (Griffith, Lear, Eisenstein, Man Ray, etc.). This is followed by the chiseling invasion which is "the period of destruction of the assemblages or the scattering of particles existing 'for themselves' in an art" and which begins for cinema with the film by Isou discussed above.

The following is a brief list of some of the innovations discovered by Isou and used in *Treatise on Slobber and Eternity* and mentioned in "The Isouian Transformation of Cinema":

Disjunctive editing or chiseling editing which makes the sound indifferent to the picture, permitting access to the constituent particles.

Chiseled reproduction: the film is deepened and destroyed by *chiseling*, which is the intrusion of narrative anecdotes on the printed film. To chisel the particle is "to purify the art of the image of all its ample gimmicks." By this process one returns to the particle itself, strips the film of its current polish, and thus fortifies the bases of cinematic art. The chiseling will become a coherent element without reference to the coherence or incoherence of the reproductions. "They permit the juxtaposition of the forms without worrying about the juxtaposition of the narration."

Henceforth, it will be necessary to speak of a "coherent word-track" and no longer of a "sound-track" that is still incoherent when one hears it without the reinforcement of pictures because it is made up of music, noises, and sentences that make no sense by themselves. The sound should no longer be the prisoner of the picture but should *expand* by itself in *disjunctive editing*. As with the picture, one will dig out the particle of sound in itself and make out of it a "scenario in itself."

Film is a special phenomenon of general culture and it is part of the effort of the total disruption of culture. People will be just as much interested in the improvement of the seats and publicity panels as in the means of projection, and people will consider that the problems of the refreshments and lights and applause can always "be asked in the *ecoesthetic field in a new way*" (emphasis added). Eco-cinematography is defined as the "discipline that considers the art of film as a branch of economics and its products simply as goods in a complete marketing cycle."

In the cinema, as elsewhere, the true creators stay out of the cycle of economic exchange. They are outsiders considered as such by those owning the movies theatres (well-off insiders). Isou therefore proposes to "introduce the mechano- and eco-esthetics into the esthetic apprenticeship," which would permit everyone to broaden his knowledge, responsibility and immediate practical opportunities, contrary to schools which strangle and dull students by an apprenticeship that is too long and incomplete, giving them a limited view of culture. To reeducate the public in a creative sense would require new movie theatres (Isou proposes a system of funding for new outside energies). While waiting for these developments, it is necessary to act, sending out tracts and making speeches in the traditional movie houses; agitators must accomplish a constructive economic propaganda effort.

In his Appendix, the author declares that cine-club debates will be the movies of tomorrow; that is, questioning about past works, at a time when cinema-as-art is dead, becomes the new fulfilling moment of cinema.

IV

In 1953 *Amos* or *Introduction to Metagraphology* (Amos ou Introduction à la Métagraphologie) by Isou appears. It is a film, a sketch taking off from the idea that cinema no longer has to use the traditional supports or mechanisms and can use as images simple photographs whose chiselings constitute a complete text in super-writing or *hyper-graphics*. *Amos* is the first hypergraphic film in the history of cinema. This work is also original in its subject matter because all poetry or literature is banished and only the philosophical domain is explored. Isou pursues here his "Romanesque cathedral," which started in 1950 in *Journals of the Gods* (illustrated the same year by Lemaître by plates in *Canailles*). From then on, cinematic creation appear as filmic prose, where the sound and the image constitute a new form of writing, a *super-writing*. Thus in 1965 Maurice Lemaître presents *Beyond the Trigger* (Au-delà du déclic), a work of cine-hypergraphics which illustrates all these ideas.

Next came the discovery of an integral mechano-esthetics where all existing materials, whether they have been used or not, as well as all past, future or as yet undiscovered materials can be employed for the edification of an art work in general and specifically in the composition of a film. Thus one can choose all imaginable materials, use all existing or potential supports, and make use of all tools for a cinematic work.

V

In 1956 the founder of Letterism published *Introduction to Imaginary Esthetics* (Introduction à l'esthétique imaginaire) wherein he claims that the arts must go beyond their customary particles toward the creation of opposing particles and end up with transfinite elements which exist so long as they allow one to imagine other non-existing or potential elements. These particles, which no longer have their own meaning (since they refer to a cinematic reality that is always something else), are called *infinitesimal* (like the mathematics of the same name) or *esthapeirist* ("art + infinity"). Thus in 1956 the experience of the cinema as it had been customarily thought of violently exploded, exceeding the most conventional boundaries of the tradition of the seventh art as it was known.

VI

In 1960, starting from the idea that a completed work is the negation of works yet to be done, the Letterist school proposed the *supertemporal setting* which is a mechanism specific to infinitesimal art. It amounts to an empty stage on which spectators are invited to exercise their potential talents and create works. This supertemporal work is open in an unending, infinite manner, "in vitam eternam," to all who wish to work on it and enrich the art work thus conceived with their own contributions, erasing or extending as much as they want the additions of people before them until the end of time. In that way each of the positive and negative changes that the audience has either thought of or enacted become discrete cinematic elements.

As we stated at the outset — and this is just one of many examples — numerous contributions of Letterism have been taken up, often recuperated and far too long diluted, hence faded, in later works which have fallen into the trap of pseudo-creation. For example, "happenings" repeat the idea of spectator participation in supertemporal art which was originally discovered by Isou.

And, coming back to this particular innovation, one can say that without calling it by this name, the Lemaîtreian syncinema showing already used this idea by invoking a "cosmos of performance" into the expansion of the idea of projection. And especially, as we noted above, Isou concluded his *Esthetics of Cinema* in 1952 by proposing that film-club debates should be considered as works in themselves, higher than the run-of-the-mill commercial series of the day. Without using this term, he inaugurated infinitesimal film, where the intrusions of the audience constitute all by themselves the invitational framework of the film. This framework opened by the Letterists, which goes beyond time, leads to three observations by Jean Cathelin: "This supertemporal framework is (a) profound, based on the complete and authentic formal work of the spectators, (b) restored to its place without mechanical trickery, and finally (c) integral, which is to say systematized in all branches of esthetics."³

Two years later, in 1962, Lemaître presented a new showing of syncinema, *An Evening at the Movies* (Un Soir au Cinéma), a work which its author qualifies as "what will later be called *partially supertemporal* or

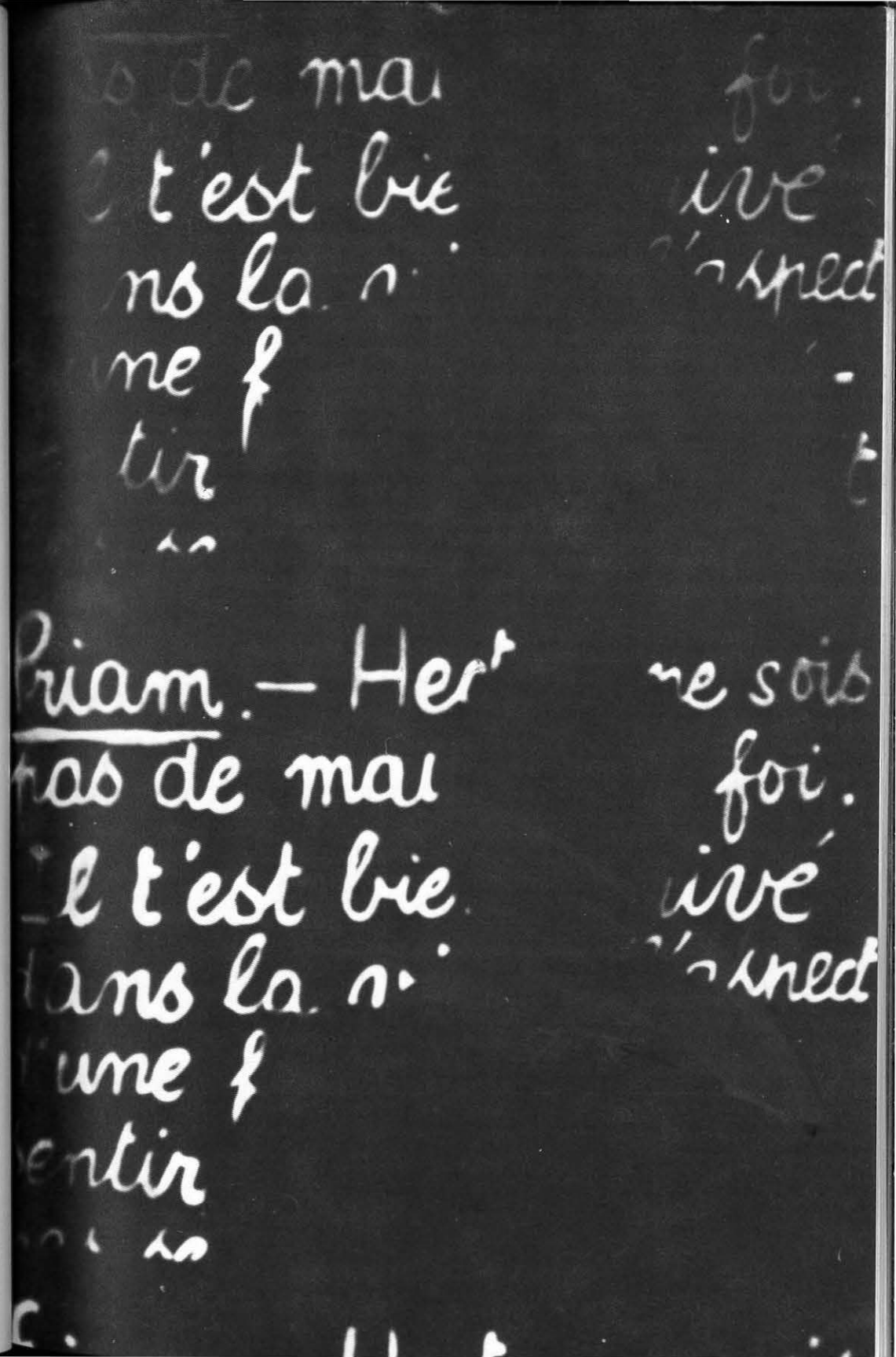
quasi-supertemporal,"⁴ asking spectators to be the screen (Figure 29). The image is projected on the bodies of friends and other spectators who make up a living screen. In the Café-Cinéma Colbert Lemaître also used tables stacked up in front of the screen so their formica tops served as a new projection surface. In 1963 the same author presented *To Make a Movie* (Pour faire un film), a supertemporal film which invites spectators to become film-makers themselves and bring together all the elements of the movie showing themselves — the hall, the projectors, the story, the actors, etc.

It is very important to note the work of Roland Sabatier in the field of chiseled cinema. In *Cinema Works* (Oeuvres de Cinéma) he brings together all the cinematic works that he produced between 1963 and 1982, where he never ceased to push to its farthest frontiers all the previously unexplored possibilities of hypergraphics, polyautomatism, polythanasia, and all the formulas of chiseling which he innovated.

These are, of course, only the main lines of the continuous creative work of a group that includes numerous filmmakers. In 1980 the Georges Pompidou Center in Paris held a Maurice Lemaître retrospective; in 1982 the same Center presented Letterist Cinema 1951-1982 with a little catalog enumerating some twenty filmmakers along with recent creations by Isidore Isou (*The Luminaries in the Darkness* [Les Illuminés des Ténèbres], 1982; *Initiation to High Voluptuousness* [Initiation à la Haute Volupté], 1982; *Jonas*, 1928); Roland Sabatier (*Let's Evolve a Little in Film and Creativity* [Evoluons un peu dans le cinéma et la création], 1972); Alain Satié (*Not That Way* [Pas Comme Ça], 1971); Gérard-Philippe Broutin (*The Koriontina*, 1979), and so forth, alongside the classics *Treatise on Slobber and Eternity* and *Is the Feature on Yet?*

In spite of a few showings in places such as the Cinémathèque Française (French National Film Archive) and the Georges Pompidou Center, very few critics have properly assessed the contributions of the Letterist movement; there are too many who still today make a mystery of these works and their copyright dates and pretend to be unaware that beyond current fads there exist quintessential movements anchored in the history of artistic (and scientific) disciplines to which the history of future artistic movements is indebted.

Figure 29. Maurice Lemaître, *Un Soir au Cinema* [still], 1962.



1. Maurice Lemaître, *Le Film est déjà commencé?* Paris: Editions André Bonne, 1952, p. 129.
2. Isidore Isou, *Les Journaux des Dieux*. Paris: Les Escaliers de Lausanne, 1950, p. 143.
3. *Why Isou Is More Important than Picasso* (Pourquoi Isou est plus important que Picasso), followed by *What Everyone Should Know about Letterist and Infinitesimal Painting* (Ce qui il faut savoir de la peinture lettriste et infinitésimale), 1962, reprinted in Isidore Isou, *From Impressionism to Letterism* (De l'impressionisme au Lettrisme). Filipacchi, 1974, p. 84.
4. Maurice Lemaître, *Super-Experimental Cinema* (Le Cinéma super-expérimental). Centre de Créativité, 1980, p. 23.

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The Limitations of Lettrisme An Interview with Henri Chopin

Introduced and Annotated by Nicholas Zurbrugg

The following interview with the French sound poet, Henri Chopin, was recorded in English, in Brisbane, at the end of Chopin's visit to Australia as the special guest of the Sound Art Festival held as part of the ANZART exhibition in Hobart, Tasmania, in May 1983.¹ Chopin is best known as a pioneer of European sound poetry (or poetry composed for and by the tape-recorder); as the creator of "typewriter poems"; as the editor and publisher of the review *OU*, which first systematically published LP records by European and American sound poets; and as the author of the first comprehensive history of sound poetry, *Poésie sonore internationale*, published in Paris in 1979.²

Chopin's reflections upon Lettrisme are particularly interesting precisely because Chopin was never a member of the Lettriste movement. Indeed, as Chopin has insisted upon many occasions,³ his allegiances are not so much to any one particular artistic movement, as to creativity — or movement — itself. As the Swedish composer and sound poet Sten Hanson has remarked, "Chopin is . . . a man who makes no compromise; he always speaks his opinion without any trace of diplomatic consideration,"⁴ and although such statements wielding "always" should always be taken with a pinch of salt, Hanson judiciously points to the ironic wit informing most of Chopin's judgments. In other words, Chopin's meditations provide a useful antidote to the more partisan effusions of such Lettristes as Roland Sabatier, whose enthusiasms for Isidore Isou's achievements recently culminated in his avowal that Isou is not only "le plus grand artiste surgi dans l'art moderne" ("the greatest artist to emerge in modern art"), but also "le créateur le plus important de toute l'histoire de la plastique" ("the most important creator in the entire history of the plastic arts").⁵ At the same time, Chopin's comments in the following interview provide an equally potent antidote to some of the excesses in Isou's own writings and observations. In the same issue of the Italian review *Berenice* in which Sabatier's eulogy of Isou appeared, Isou is quoted in an interview with Carmela Muscolo as avowing that "Le Futurisme n'a aucune importance historique" ("Futurism has no historical importance"), and that "ma création est une création internationaliste" ("my creativity is an internationalist creativity").⁶

As Chopin's remarks intimate, Lettrisme is perhaps itself at best a movement with a momentary historical significance, and is thus analogous in kind — if not in quality — to Futurism. And as Chopin also hints, Lettrisme never really

became the international movement that Isou wished it to be, and apparently believes it to be. Rather, it is perhaps most "important" as a peculiarly local, Parisian avant-garde movement, which in some respects prepared the way for subsequent international avant-garde trends, but which now appears to have been confined by both its *ideological* and its *technological* parameters.

From an ideological point of view, Lettrisme seems to have been unduly restricted by the consequences of the Lettriste protocol that Jean-Paul Curtay generously defines as the "propositions historiques" ("historical proposals") representing "le premier essai de réaliser un règlement éthique spécifique à un groupe d'avant-garde" ("the first attempt to formulate ethical regulations peculiar to an avant-garde movement").⁷ These proposals listed a number of Lettriste commandments; specified appropriate fines for bad behavior; and finally appear to have precipitated the kind of parochial in-fighting and purges that Vasco Noverraz conscientiously recorded in his report entitled "L'Année Lettriste 1956" ("The Lettrist Year 1956"). Here, Novarrez proffers such gems as his reference to a Lettriste exhibition in which only Lemaître sold a painting: an event which led to a quarrel between Isou and the rest of the group, which was only resolved when "Lemaître, agacé par l'attitude brouillon d'Isou et sa puérile vanité, trouva facilement un prétexte pour isoler un instant ce dernier" ("Lemaître, annoyed by Isou's argumentative attitude and by his puerile vanity, deftly found an opportunity to take Isou aside for a moment").⁸ Elsewhere, Novarrez lists those new members admitted to the group from Switzerland and from Paris, and similarly records that the group expelled Pierre-Henri Liardon (for "surrealist tendencies"); René Berger, Bernard Noël and Gabriel Pomerand (for "indolence and creative impotence").⁹ This is, admittedly, just one Lettriste report, and moreover, from the mid-fifties, when — according to Chopin's testimony — Lettrisme was past its prime. Nevertheless, such petty quarrels and prescriptions seem the very antithesis of the dynamic creativity that one would associate with the ideology of a more open-ended, *international* movement.

The technological parameters of Lettrisme are nicely foregrounded by Chopin's references to the ways in which the Lettristes appeared indifferent to the creative potential of either the tape-recorder or the typewriter. While Isou's ideological statements use such scientific and technological terminology as his reference to "une éthique atomique et électronique" ("an atomic and electronic ethic");¹⁰ and whilst Isou's "Open Letter to Frédéric Lefèvre" specified that Lettrisme would employ "La Radio — pour répandre la nouvelle musique lettriste" (Radio — to broadcast new Lettriste music), and "Les disques pour enregistrer notre musique et nos poèmes" ("Records to record our music and our poems"),¹¹ Lettrisme seems to have used the new, electronic technology of the Post-Modern era somewhat conservatively, as a means of mechanical reproduction, rather than audaciously exploring its potential as a means of mechanical production. Significantly, those Lettriste poets who used recording technology most creatively, as a means for both recording and orchestrating live improvisations — such as François Dufrêne and Gil Wolman — finally left the Lettriste movement in order to found Ultra-Lettrisme, and in Dufrêne's

case, in order to work among the more loosely grouped poets associated with sound poetry. As Chopin remarks, the Lettristes' apparent indifference to recording technology, and their emphasis upon *choral* performance, places their work in a strange watershed, just the wrong side of the technological revolution of sound poetry with its liberation of both abstract and semantic language within the recording studio.

It may seem churlish and ungenerous to quarrel with Isou's attempt to fragment language and liberate language by inventing new alphabetical signs, but in a sense these signs simultaneously demarcate both the triumph and the defeat of Lettrisme. On the one hand they triumphantly record Isou's effort to transcend conventional, alphabetical language, and constitute the most important verbal experiments since the phonetic poems of the Dadaists and the semantic juggling of Joyce. But, on the other hand, they restrict poetic innovation to an uncomfortably narrow semiotic system, which might at first appear advantageous when compared to purely alphabetical, phonetic poetry, but which seems singularly disadvantageous when compared with the rich sonic and semantic montages made possible by tape-recorded creativity.

In retrospect, then, it is scarcely surprising that poets like Dufrêne rejected the confines of Isou's Lettriste signs, in order to create more ambitious compositions with utterly abstract sounds orchestrated upon recording-tape. Similarly, it comes as no surprise to discover that Dufrêne also abandoned Lettriste materials in order to interweave the complicated puns and compressed semantic reverberations of his *Tombeau de Pierre Larousse*, a poem which at its best conflates Joycean wordplay with the joyous abstract declamatory style that Dufrêne had perfected during his work with the Lettristes. Subsequent refinements of abstract collages such as Henri Chopin's *audiopoèmes*, and subsequent elaborations of semantic collages, such as Bernard Heidsieck's *poèmes-partitions*, revealed the rich potential of Dufrêne's abstract and semantic explorations,¹² and anticipated Jacques Derrida's recent — and perhaps, belated — suggestion that such "writing machines" as the tape-recorder permit the most significant *extensions* of contemporary discourse.¹³

If Isou's new alphabetical signs both liberated the *sonic* potential of language and simultaneously restrained the sonic potential of language, by restricting its materials to a finite number of old and new signs, it might also be argued that these signs similarly limited the potential of *visual* language. Having rejected conventional alphabetical signs (or rather, having complemented conventional alphabetical signs with his own innovations), Isou appears to have neglected the creative potential of the typewriter, a machine whose fearful symmetry was particularly favored by the spatialist, concrete and visual poets in the late fifties and sixties, when it became the standard creative tool for a new, world-wide school of predominantly constructivist poets, who carefully juxtaposed geometrical clusters of abstract letters and words. In the hands of abstract poets like Dom Sylvester Houédard, the typewriter permitted a new, highly organized form of pattern-poetry (Figure 30); in the hands of a more semantic poet like Ian Hamilton Finlay, the typewriter's uniform typefaces allowed semantic repetition, spatial punctuation, and typographic pattern, to

combine to generate the new, verbal-visual energy of a poem like *ajar*¹⁴ (Figure 31).

A rapid glance at Jean-Paul Curtay's anthology, *La Poésie Lettriste*, indicates that very few Lettriste poets explored the creative potential of the typewriter. One exception to this rule, Micheline Hachette's *Poème cubiste*,¹⁵ confesses in its very title to "cubist tendencies" alien to the Lettriste aesthetic (Figure 32), and also, perhaps, liable to prompt its creator's expulsion from the Lettriste movement, in the manner of Pierre-Henri Liardon's aforementioned "surrealist tendencies."¹⁶ Rather than espousing the orderly, constructivist aesthetic beloved by concrete poets such as Eugen Gomringer and Max Bense,¹⁷ Lettrisme seems characterized by a more "primitive" and expressionist form of highly personal calligraphy and graphics, a tendency which at its most original culminated in the drawings of artists like Roberto Altmann,¹⁸ but which, as Chopin remarks, has often more in common with the relatively familiar, hand-drawn *calligrammes* of Apollinaire, or indeed, with the hand-drawn or painted *parole in libertà* of the Futurists, rather than inaugurating the radically new, constructivist poetics that seems the most singular innovation of concrete poetry¹⁹ (Figure 33).

It would seem, then, that Lettrisme is most important as a transitional phase between such pioneers of Modernism as the Dadaist and the Futurist poets, and such fully-fledged Post-Modern innovators as the visual and sound poets of the sixties. Perhaps the restrictions that Isou imposed upon Lettrisme and upon Lettriste poetry were as indicative of the difficulties of launching a new avant-garde movement in post-war Paris as they now appear symptomatic of a certain lack of poetic imagination. Coming in the wake of Surrealism, Resistance Poetry, and Existentialism, Isou's self-appointed task of establishing the identity and the integrity of Lettrisme must have been extraordinarily daunting.

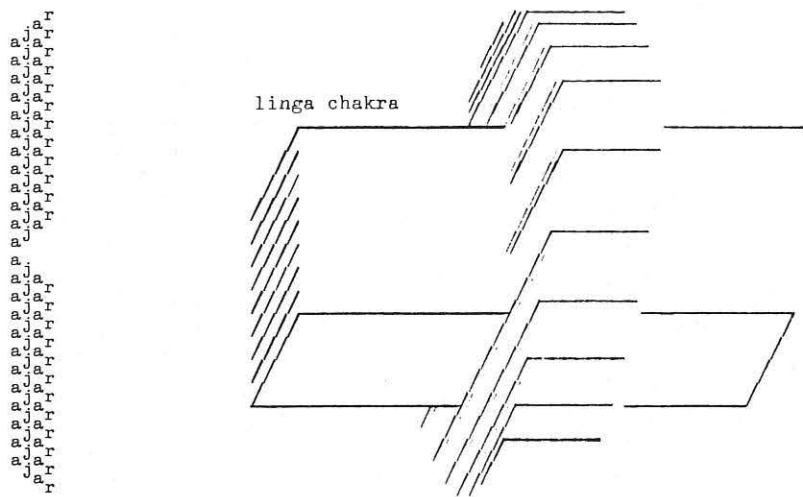


Figure 31. Dom Sylvester Houédard, *Linga chakra*, 1967.

Figure 30. Ian Hamilton Finlay, *Ajar*, 1964.

Nevertheless, with the advantages of hindsight, the rigors of Lettriste *protocol* and the ferocity of Lettriste *propaganda* seem far more impressive than Lettriste *poetry* itself. Yet despite the grotesquely inflated claims of Isou and his disciples,²⁰ Lettrisme still appears highly significant as a movement which pioneered and prompted much of the best work of the contemporary avant-garde.

In this respect, Lettrisme was indeed the success that Isou has recently claimed it to be. Asked by Carmela Muscolo if Lettrisme was dead, Isou convincingly and modestly replied: "Non, rien n'est mort qui a créé quelque chose . . . Et moi, j'ai apporté quelque chose à explorer" ("No, nothing dies when something has been created . . . And for my part, I introduced something to be explored").²¹ As Walter Benjamin remarks in *Illuminations*, the function of a great deal of avant-garde art is not so much to create a finished, definitive artwork, as to intimate new possibilities of creativity, and to create "a demand which could be fully satisfied only later."²² Isidore Isou's introduction of "something to be explored" offers this definition notable exemplification.

1. This festival, and sound poetry in general, are discussed in my article "'The Voice of Barthes' and the Possibilities of Sound Poetry," in *Anzart Hobart, 1983: A Survey*, a supplement to *Island Magazine* (Tasmania), No. 16 (September 1983), pp. 10-14.
2. Henri Chopin, *Poésie sonore internationale* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1979).
3. Refusing to co-sign Pierre Garnier's manifesto "Position 1 du Mouvement international," published in *Les Lettres*, No. 32 (1964), Chopin commented: "I am not a member of a movement but I am 'with' movement. I am movement." Quoted by Mary Ellen Solt, in Solt, "A World Look at Concrete Poetry," *Hispanic Arts*, I, No. 3 and 4 (Winter/Spring 1968), pp. 6-66, p. 34.
4. Sten Hanson, "Henri Chopin, the sound poet," *Stereo Headphones*, No. 8-9-10 (1982), pp. 15-16, p. 15.

Figure 32. Roberto Altmann, detail of *Fragments d'o*, circa 1970.



Figure 33. Micheline Hachette, *Poème cubiste*, 1966.



5. Roland Sabatier, "L'Oeuvre plastique et romanesque d'Isidore Isou," *Berenice*, 4 (November 1981-March 1982), pp. 30-49, p. 49. My translation.
6. Isidore Isou, quoted by Carmela Muscolo in "Interview d'Isidore Isou," *Berenice*, 4 (November 1981-March 1982), pp. 111-113, p. 112. My translation.
7. Jean-Paul Curtay, *La Poésie Lettriste* (Paris: Seghers, 1974), pp. 151-52. My translation.
8. Vasco Noverraz, "L'Année Lettriste 1956," *Poésie Nouvelle*, No. 1 (1957), pp. 19-21, p. 19. My translation.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 20. My translation.
10. Isidore Isou, "Les Conceptions éthiques du Groupe Lettriste ou Sur les conceptions nucléaires et les conceptions moléculaires de la morale" (1967), collected in Curtay, *La Poésie Lettriste*, pp. 357-61, p. 358. My translation.
11. Isidore Isou, "Lettre ouverte à Frédéric Lefèvre," collected in Curtay, pp. 57-8, p. 58. My translation.
12. Examples of Chopin's *audiopoèmes* appear on his LP recording *Audiopoems* (London: Tangent Records TGS 106, 1971), and on his LP *Henri Chopin* (Bruxelles: IGLOO Records IGL 012, 1983). Bernard Heidsieck's *poèmes-partitions* appear on his LP recording "Trois Biopsies" + "Un Passe-Partout" (Paris: Multi-Techniques, 1971). Chopin's and Heidsieck's work also appears on many other LP anthologies, including those of Chopin's review *OU*; those published by Flykingen Radio, Stockholm; and those included in Arrigo Lora-Totino's anthology *Futura Poesia Sonora* (Milano: Cramps Records 5204 001, 1978).
13. Jacques Derrida, quoted in an interview (of 1982) with Paul Brennan in "Excuse me, but I never said exactly so: yet another Derridean interview," *On the Beach* (Sydney), No. 1 (Autumn 1983), p. 43. Derrida comments: "I think that . . . we are living in the extension — the overwhelming extension of writing. At least in the new sense . . . I don't mean the alphabetic writing down, but in the sense of those writing machines we're using now (e.g. the tape-recorder)."
14. Dom Sylvester Houédard, *linga chakra*, collected in *Hispanic Arts*, I, No. 3 and 4 (Winter/Spring 1968), p. 211; Ian Hamilton Finlay, *ajar*, collected by Stephen Bann, ed., in *Concrete Poetry: An International Anthology* (London: London Magazine Editions: 1967), p. 142.
15. Micheline Hachette, "Poème cubiste," collected in Jean-Paul Curtay, *La Poésie Lettriste*, p. 226.
16. Vasco Noverraz, "L'Année Lettriste," p. 20.
17. Gomringer's and Bense's theoretical texts are collected by Mary Ellen Solt in *Hispanic Arts*, I, No. 3 and 4 (Winter/Spring 1968), pp. 67-70 and pp. 73-74. Examples of their poetry appear on pages 90-94 and 121-22.
18. Roberto Altmann's recent, relatively abstract calligraphy appears in *Apeïros*, No. 1 (1971), pp. 119-31; a sequence entitled *fragments d'Ø*, from which the following example of his work is taken.
19. For a discussion of this peculiarly constructivist aesthetic, see my article "Dada and the Poetry of the Contemporary Avant-Garde," in Richard Sheppard, ed., *Dada: Studies of a Movement* (Chalfont St. Giles: Alpha Academic, 1980), pp. 121-43.
20. Discussing Isidore Isou's *Introduction à une Nouvelle Poésie et à une Nouvelle Musique*, and perspicaciously evaluating Isou's ideas within the context of Futurism, Dadaism and Modernist literature as a whole, Eugene Jolas's excellent article, "From Jabberwocky to 'Lettrism,'" in *Transition Forty Eight*, No. 1 (January 1948), pp. 104-20, memorably deflated Isou's more megalomaniac pretensions, with the digression: "Isou is too young to have heard the great Polish pianist de Pachman who, when he had played a particularly brilliant passage before an adoring public, would turn and say for all to hear: 'Bravo, Pachman,'" (p. 118).
21. Isidore Isou, quoted by Carmela Muscolo in "Interview d'Isidore Isou," p. 113. My translation.
22. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins: 1970), pp. 219-53, p. 239. Translated by Harry Zohn.

N.Z. What were your impressions of Isidore Isou and the Lettriste movement?

H.C. Well, it's very complicated. Isou was very important in 1946 when he arrived in Paris and founded the Lettriste movement, alone. Isou's writings, such as his *Introduction à une Nouvelle Poésie et à une Nouvelle Musique*,¹ were very lucid. But when he produced poetry with letters (and these were part of a long tradition starting with Aristophanes, and continuing with writers of the sixteenth century and with the Dadaist movement), these poems were superficial. Because when Dadaist poets like Raoul Hausmann, Tristan Tzara and Kurt Schwitters created poetry without words, just with letters, it was like music. And for me, Isou's big mistake was his system of codification for Lettriste poetry — his alphabetical codification. He invented a new alphabet,² and Dufrêne was against it; he said: "We don't need a new alphabet, and we don't need the first alphabet." Gil Wolman said this too, and there was a war between Isou and Wolman and Dufrêne.

N.Z. In other words, Dufrêne and Wolman worked more "musically," and on tape, rather than simply writing poems with Lettriste words?

H.C. Wolman later, but Dufrêne, yes. But to return to Isou and to his movement: the first aspect of it was very very positive; the second one was absolutely negative, when he called André Gide "la vieille chienne" ("the old bitch").³ But it was very important just after the Second World War, Gide was very important at this period. And when Isou said in *La Dictature Lettriste* that we don't need versification, like Victor Hugo and Baudelaire and so on, it wasn't a big problem — the problem was to find a new word, a new civilization. And unfortunately, it seemed to me that Isidore Isou wasn't lucid about the new media. He couldn't understand anything about stereo, about tape-recorders and radio. It was a paradox. Isou was a very intellectual man: he said "I am against a poetry with words," but he used twenty or thirty volumes of words to express the Isou system! For me, the best Lettriste artist at this period was Maurice Lemaître. Lemaître was a painter, a sculptor and a very good editor and publisher. Isou produced just one Lettriste review, just one issue. Lemaître edited *Poésie Nouvelle* and *UR* — *UR* was a marvellous review! — with graphics by Man Ray, with Sabatier, with Spacagna, and so on — with François Dufrêne too! He was a great enemy of Dufrêne; there was always the same terrorism against the non-Lettristes!⁴ It was a pity! But he produced very very good reviews and portfolios. *UR* was published in the early fifties — and this review seemed absolutely perfect, and now it forms a monument to Lettriste graphics.

N.Z. Why did Lemaître stop publishing *UR*?

H.C. Well, for one thing he is now deaf, absolutely totally deaf, and Isou is very ill too.

N.Z. Was it just ill health that stopped them? Because in the mid-fifties there were a lot of new ideas; it seems curious that Lettrisme appears to stop in this period.⁵ Does its decline coincide with the emergence of "Ultra-Lettrisme"?

H.C. Well, when Dufrêne and Robert Estivals founded Ultra-Lettrisme it was against Isou, and it was very important in Paris. They founded *Grâmmes* review in 1958. Dufrêne left the Lettristes in 1953, Wolman in 1951. It is very strange, for me; Isou is egocentric, for him Isou is the world and the rest doesn't exist. Isou's idea was to produce poetry with calligraphics, after the *calligrammes* of Apollinaire, but he was without talent. Lemaître was much better, and young people, like Jacques Spacagna and Roberto Altmann, were very important for Lettrisme. But whereas, for example, sound poetry accepted the new media, and poets like Dom Sylvester Houédard, myself, and the Australian poet Alan Riddell accepted the typewriter — the machine — Isou and the Lettristes paradoxically stayed with the hand. . . .⁶

N.Z. With the hand-written and hand-drawn graphic?

H.C. Yes — always, always, without evolution, always, always, following Apollinaire.⁷ And Isou produced one system, identifying genius with Futurism, Dadaism, Apollinaire, Surrealism and Isou.

N.Z. How international was Lettrisme?

H.C. It was not international, absolutely not.⁸ The fantastic thing about Isou was that when he came to France in 1946 he couldn't speak French. Isou had a genius for learning French, but he had only one area in literature and poetry: French literature. You know his sub-heading in *Introduction à une Nouvelle Poésie et à une Nouvelle Musique* — "De Charles Baudelaire à Isidore Isou" — it's absolutely typical. He had no idea about Swift, about Lewis Carroll, about Joyce. He had the genius to produce a text about everybody, but it's always superficial.

N.Z. He seemed to be opposed to Hausmann.

H.C. He hated Hausmann. Isou never met Hausmann, but every week in the last period of Hausmann's life, he sent a letter to Hausmann saying "ordure, ordure, ordure" ("filth, filth, filth").

N.Z. And in his pamphlet entitled "Le Lettrisme devant dada," Lemaître similarly calls Hausmann "la plus grande lèpre de dada" ("the greatest leper of Dada"), and also attacks what he calls: "les escrocs de dada" ("the crooks of Dada"), specifically: "Huelsenbick, Heusmann, Gornier, Bem, Label, Chapin" — that is Huelsenbeck, Hausmann, Pierre Garnier, Ben Vautier, Jean-Jacques Lebel, and yourself, Chopin.⁹ Why did Lemaître and Isou attack you?

H.C. I don't know . . . because he hasn't any idea about sound poetry and the electric way. I've never seen Isou in a concert or a performance. He just decided that Chopin is nothing! And it was exactly the same for Dufrêne, when he said that Dufrêne was "une petite tête d'oiseau" ("little birdbrain"), because Dufrêne refused to follow Isou. It is very simple: I've never seen him in concert, never on the radio; he has no records, he ignores the *OU* records.

N.Z. He doesn't have your *OU* records?

H.C. No.

N.Z. Were the Lettriste group interested in other movements in Paris? Were they interested in the kinetic art of the South American artists there such as Soto or Le Parc? These artists seem to have influenced various concrete poets; indeed certain critics, like Weaver and Bann, went on to discuss "kinetic" poetry.¹⁰ Were the Lettristes similarly responsive?

H.C. No. It's just a group from Paris. Isou was just interested in himself. Isou was a great danger to the Lettriste movement. If the Lettriste movement is dead then the great mistake is Isou. But I'm very sorry — he was very lucid about the new poetry of the twentieth century. And Isou has had a long career: his first movement was in Rumania in the Fascist period, and after that the Communist party. He seems to be using the same "verbe" — the same language — as the Communist party.

N.Z. Could you explain that a bit more? Perhaps we could compare your early poetry, such as *Présence*, published in Lemaître's review *Poésie Nouvelle*, in 1957,¹¹ with some of the poems collected in Isou's *Introduction à une Nouvelle Poésie et à une Nouvelle Musique*, which came out in 1947. What do you think were the main differences?

H.C. Well, here in Isou's "Swing," it's a question of repetition with:¹²

Bambagoula,	Bambagoula
bambagoula	Bambagoula
bambagoula	Bambagoula

Or here, in "La Guerre," with:¹³

BIERLINE	staline
BIERLINE	staline
BIERLINE	staline
BIERLINE	staline
BIERLINE	staline
BIERLINE	staline
BIERLINE	staline
BIERLINE	staline

It's repetitive, and look here, earlier in this poem, for example:¹⁴

Deutschland
Deutschland
Deutschland

It's always an apology for the Nazi period. It's very strange. He is a very strange man. Don't forget, in 1947, after the war, he introduced *La Dictature Lettriste* (The Lettriste Dictatorship) — it was horrible.¹⁵ And here, look at that title, "Hâtez-vous de nous exauser pour" ("Make Haste To Exorcise Us") — his words follow the language of the Church,¹⁶ while my poetry is absolutely paganistic and is a precursor for my work after that. For example, these lines from "Regard Total" in *Présence*:¹⁷

avale
exprime
éponge
avale

exprime
éponge
avale
exprime
éponge

refer to my body, and to my research with the tape-recorder today.¹⁸

N.Z. I suppose one might say that your poem also uses semantic repetition.¹⁹ But as you've remarked, your words seem to anticipate the way in which your present work superimposes semantic and abstract, body sounds upon tape, rather than simply reiterating place names like "Berlin" and "Deutschland," and political names like "Lenin" and "Stalin."

H.C. One thing that always struck me is that Isou had no humor.

N.Z. He was too serious?

H.C. Oh, very serious. Look here, for example, at the end of "1917":²⁰

LENINE!
STALINE!
LENINE!
STALINE!
LENINE!

or here, at the beginning of "Calvaire":²¹

jésuischrist
JESUS CHRIST!
CHRIST!

It is very strange, he is not a consistent man. In 1952 he had a very big opportunity to present the Lettriste movement in public. It was at the Odéon Theatre, Paris; it was a very important meeting for him, and he was two hours on the platform, and he said, "You are plagiarists, rubbish, ersatz," to everybody, and, "I am the first one in the world!" — like that! For two hours! He never never read one Lettriste poem, absolutely nothing, because Isou had large ideas, and just ideas. He's not a poet, except for a short period, when he began the Lettriste movement.

N.Z. Well, his chapter headings in *Introduction à une Nouvelle Poésie* are certainly "large," referring to a "new poetry," a "new music," and a "new art."

H.C. It was his first research, and his only complete research. And after that, Lemaître said to me, "Would you like to join the Lettriste group?" and I said, "No, I'm not Lettriste." It was in this period that I started my work with the tape recorder.

N.Z. And did any of the Lettristes use the tape recorder?

H.C. Lemaître made a record, entitled *Maurice Lemaître présente le Lettrisme*, but with a choir, in 1958.²²

N.Z. Did you find it very interesting or very successful?

H.C. I thought one poem was very nice, it was Lemaître's "Letter Rock."²³

N.Z. It sounds a bit like jazz.

H.C. Yes, but with just the voice, just the voice.

N.Z. Well, there's something rather funny about the way in which Lemaître criticized Raoul Hausmann, saying that Hausmann couldn't be important because he never published a substantial collection of sound poems.²⁴ Because in much the same way, Isou's problem seems to be that he wrote pages and pages about Lettriste poetry, but he himself also never published a substantial record or tape cassette of this work.²⁵

H.C. Absolutely! Isou wrote a few poems between 1945 and 1955, perhaps, and the rest is absolutely nothing.

N.Z. What do you think about the Lettriste poems collected in Jean-Paul Curtay's anthology, *La Poésie Lettriste*?²⁶

H.C. Ah, I believe that slowly, after 1958, about the time when sound poetry appeared, when I was producing a few radio broadcasts in Paris, the Lettriste movement disappeared, particularly by about 1962, and young people like Jean-Paul Curtay produced big books, big anthologies, like *La Poésie Lettriste*. But curiously, Isou's movement stayed just in France, with a few people in Italy. It's strange, because Jean-Paul Curtay produced this large defense of Isidore Isou and Maurice Lemaître and company, but this book remained just a French affair. Because Isou's first idea, before 1950, was to produce an international Lettrisme — like the international of the French Communist Party — and Isou's dream was to produce an international poetry movement. But Isou was not capable of doing that — Isou is not a creator. But, I repeat, he was very lucid. When the Surrealist movement, the Futurist movement and the Dadaist movement disappeared, Isou was the first to read everything, and the first to say, "Futurism is over, Dadaism is over, we don't need that." And yet, it is very funny — when Tristan Tzara died, he said Tzara was the best poet of the first part of the Twentieth Century!²⁷ But anyway, it is certain that Isou has a place in the history of French literature: of that I'm absolutely certain, particularly for the period after the war.

N.Z. To turn back to the decline of Lettrisme, can you tell me a little more about François Dufrêne's reasons for leaving Lettrisme for Ultra-Lettrisme?

H.C. Ultra-Lettrisme was begun by Wolman, Dufrêne and Villeglé, who began the review *Grâmmes*. When it appeared in Paris, it was a very important review, and in 1958 its second issue published the *Tombeau de Pierre Larousse* by François Dufrêne in which Dufrêne attempted to find a new semantics, in opposition to Isou.

N.Z. So Dufrêne's movement into semantics was what made him different from Lettrisme? I'm thinking of such multiple puns as those integrated into such apparently abstract lines of the *Tombeau*, as:²⁸

palmBITCHolida palMOLiVOUD litvakayDA valadoLID aydaliDAY

H.C. Well, before that Dufrêne also worked with *crirhythmes*,²⁹ probably influenced by Antonin Artaud, when he composed *crirhythmes* without letters, with nothing, with just the voice.

N.Z. So in fact Dufrêne abandoned Lettrisme in two ways: firstly, by going abstract, into noises, and not letters; and secondly, by going into semantics with the *Tombeau de Pierre Larousse*. . . .

H.C. And with the *Cantate des Mots Camés*.³⁰ Dufrêne was a great poet, he produced very very good sound poems, he was a marvellous man. Dufrêne was a very important poet and, I suppose, Isou was jealous. Isou says always: "I am Isou, I am the best in the world." It is curious, because without Isou, the Lettriste movement would not exist, and with Isou, the Lettriste movement was destroyed.

N.Z. And what about Bernard Heidsieck? Did Isou have any influence on Heidsieck?

H.C. Heidsieck said, like me, that "Isou was important," but that he is no longer important. Heidsieck always defended Isou for the period between 1946 and 1952. Lettrisme was important in France then, but that's all. No, it's a pity that Isou founded a movement and then destroyed that movement.

1. Isidore Isou, *Introduction à une Nouvelle Poésie et à une Nouvelle Musique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947).

2. Isou invented — or defined — nineteen new sounds. These are listed, along with their characters, by Curtay in *La Poésie Lettriste* (Paris: Seghers, 1974), pp. 42-3; and are exemplified in a number of Isou's poems collected in *Introduction à une Nouvelle Poésie*, pp. 317-410.

3. Curtay discusses Isou's attacks on Gide in *La Poésie Lettriste*, pp. 31-4.

4. The "terrorism" of Lettrisme seems to have been directed against other, established writers, such as Gide (see footnote 3.); against erring Lettristes (see Vasco Noverraz's account of the expulsion of undesirables in "L'Année Lettriste 1956" in *Poésie Nouvelle*, No. 1 (1957), pp. 19-21); and against rival groups of poets. The Paris-based American poet Brion Gysin interestingly comments: "Yeah, well, in the Beat Hotel there were no more Surrealists, there were Lettristes beating at the door. . . . Lettristes were trying to be the successors to the Surrealists, learning their techniques of party organization — which they did very well — as a terrorist organization," and subsequently alludes to an occasion when the Lettristes interrupted a performance by Henri Chopin in Montparnasse (Brion Gysin, interviewed by Terry Wilson, in Gysin and Wilson, *Here to Go: Planet R-101* [San Francisco: Re/Search Publications, 1982], p. 55).

5. Arguably, the late fifties witnessed the birth of innumerable Post-Modern trends: Beat Poetry, Concrete Poetry, Sound Poetry, Kinetic Art, Pop Art, Computer Art, The New Novel, Magic Realism, and so on; most of which are usefully discussed in the "Changing Guard" issues of the *London Times Literary Supplement* of August 6, 1964, and September 3, 1964.

6. Examples of the "typewriter poems" of Houéard, Chopin and Riddell are collected in Alan Riddell, ed., *Typewriter Art* (London: London Magazine Editions, 1975). Other examples are collected in *Hispanic Arts*, I, No. 3 and 4 (Winter/Spring 1964).

7. Examples of Lettriste graphics appear in Curtay's *La Poésie Lettriste* and in Gérard-Philippe Broutin et al., *Lettrisme et Hypergraphie* (Paris: Georges Fall, 1972).

8. By contrast, Chopin insists that sound poetry — or *poésie sonore* — is international. Hence his first, dedicatory, paragraphs in *Poésie sonore internationale* conclude with the affirmation: "La poésie sonore est un voyage" (7) ("Sound poetry is a voyage").

9. Maurice Lemaître, *Le Lettrisme devant dada et les nécrophages de dada!* (Paris: Centre de Créativité, 1967), pp. 53; 27-28. Lemaître reviles Hausmann in similar terms, in his response to a questionnaire published in the "Raoul Hausmann et Dada" issue of the review *F*, No. 4 (1974), p. 30.

10. See Mike Weaver, "Concrete and Kinetic: the Poem as Functional Object," *Image*, No. 13 (November 1964), pp. 14-15; Mike Weaver, "Poésie Cinétique," *Les Lettres*, No. 34 (1965), pp. 12-17; and Stephen Bann, "Poésie Cinétique," also published in *Les Lettres*, No. 34 (1965), pp. 19-21.

11. Henri Chopin, *Présence, Poésie Nouvelle*, No. 1 (1957), paginated independently, pp. 1-32.

12. Isidore Isou, "Swing," *Introduction à une Nouvelle Poésie*, pp. 352-53; 353.

13. Isidore Isou, "La Guerre: première symphonie lettrique," pp. 361-410; 405.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 403.

15. See footnote 4, for reference to the terrorist tactics of this "Dictature."

16. Isidore Isou, "La Guerre," p. 392.

17. Henri Chopin, *Présence*, p. 23.

18. Chopin's work now quite literally records the sounds of his body, sometimes by the process of swallowing a small microphone. In this respect, the imperative "avale" ("swallow") is indeed prophetic of his later work with the tape recorder.

19. The function of semantic repetition in sound poetry (particularly North American sound poetry), is very interestingly discussed by Joseph F. Keppler in his article "Repetition in Aural Literature" in Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *Aural Literature Criticism* (New York: RK Editions, 1981), pp. 81-6.

20. Isidore Isou, "1917," *Introduction à une Nouvelle Poésie*, pp. 331-32; 332.

21. Isidore Isou, "Calvaire," *ibid.*, p. 333.

22. Maurice Lemaître, *Maurice Lemaître présente le Lettrisme* (Paris: Columbia E.S.R.F. 1171, 1958).

23. Maurice Lemaître, "Letter Rock," *ibid.*, and collected on Franz Mon's recorded anthology *Phonetische Poesie* (F 60 379, Luchterhand, Germany).

24. See Maurice Lemaître, *Le Lettrisme devant dada*, p. 53, where Lemaître comments that Hausmann "n'a pas trouvé le temps ni le désir de dédier un ouvrage distinct à sa découverte" ("neither found the time nor the desire to consecrate a complete work to his 'discovery'"). Lemaître reiterates this accusation word for word in his letter to the review *F*, No. 4 (1974), p. 30. My translation.

25. Isou's work appears on record in Arrigo Lora-Totino's anthology *Futura Poesia Sonora* (Milano: Cramps Records 5204 001, 1978); on the French EP anthology, *L'Autonomatopiek 1* (Paris: Georges Fall/Opus Disques, 1973), but otherwise, Isou has no substantial recordings.

26. Jean-Paul Curtay, *La Poésie Lettriste*, pp. 189-292.

27. Isou's comments on the death of Tzara are documented by Curtay, *La Poésie Lettriste*, pp. 327-36.

28. François Dufrêne, *Tombeau de Pierre Larousse*, first published in *Soulèvement de la Jeunesse* (March 1953), and republished in *Grâmmes*, No. 2 (1958), pp. 22-68. François Dufrêne discusses his own work, and that of other sound poets, in his article "Le Lettrisme est toujours pendant," *Opus International*, No. 40/41 (January 1973), pp. 43-63. An extract from *Tombeau de Pierre Larousse* appears on Lora-Totino's *Futura Poesia Sonora*.

29. François Dufrêne discusses his *crirhythmes* in his manifesto "Pragmatique du crirhythme," *Revue-Disque OU*, No. 28/29 (1966), unpaginated. Dufrêne's "Tripty-crirhythme" appears on record in the same issue of *OU*.

30. François Dufrêne's *Cantate des Mots Camés* is published on an undated and uncoded tape cassette, published by the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

Selected Theoretical Texts from Letterists

The following passages have been chosen to give the reader some primary contact with the sources of Letterism. The founder and most prominent figure is Isidore Isou, whose manifesto is included, followed by introductions to both the auditory and the visual dimensions of Letterism. The earliest of these dates from 1947.

Maurice Lemaître, principal apologist and organizer of the movement, has authored numerous explanations of the Letterist phenomenon; one of those, first published in 1952, is excerpted here. The third person is Jean-Paul Curtay, author of a book on Letterism and one of the still-active disciples; his essay from 1977 discussing his perspective system demonstrates the creative heritage of the original movement.

The Isou passages are translated by David W. Seaman, the Lemaître by Lowell Bair, and the Curtay by Luann Rosenthal. Edited by David W. Seaman.

ISIDORE ISOU

From *Introduction à une Nouvelle Poésie et une Nouvelle Musique*. Paris: Gallimard, 1947. (Excerpts)

MANIFESTO OF LETTERIST POETRY

A Commonplaces about Words

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| Pathetic I | The flourishing of bursts of energy dies beyond us.
All delirium is expansive.
All impulses escape stereotyping. |
| Still I | An intimate experience maintains curious specifics. |
| Pathetic II | Discharges are transmitted by notions.
What a difference between our fluctuations and the brutality of words.
<i>Transitions always arise between feeling and speech.</i> ¹ |
| Still II | The word is the first stereotype. |
| Pathetic III | What a difference between the organism and the sources.
Notions — what an inherited dictionary. Tarzan learns in his father's book to call tigers cats.
Naming the Unknown by the Forever. |
| Still III | <i>The translated word does not express.</i> |

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| Pathetic IV | The rigidity of forms impedes their transmission.
These words are so heavy that the flow fails to carry them.
Temperaments die before arriving at the goal (firing blanks).
No word is capable of carrying the impulses one wants to send with it. |
| Still IV | WORDS allow psychic alterations to disappear.
Speech resists effervescence.
Notions require expansion to equivalent formulas.

WORDS by their mechanism, fossilization, stability and ageing
Fracture <i>our</i> rhythm.
Assassinate sensitivity. ²
Thoughtlessly uniform tortured inspiration.
Twist tensions.
Reveal poetic exaltations as useless.
Create politeness.
Invent diplomats. ³
Promote the use of analogies
Substitute for true emissions. |
| Pathetic V | If one economizes on the riches of the soul, one dries up the left-over along with the words. |
| Still V | Prevent the flow from molding itself on the cosmos.
Form species in sentiments.

WORDS Destroy sinuosities.
Result from the need to determine things.
Help the elderly remember by forcing the young to forget. |
| Pathetic VI | <i>Every victory of the young has been a victory over words.</i> ⁴
Every victory over words has been a fresh, young victory. |
| Still VI | Summarize without knowing how to receive.
It is the tyranny of the simple over the long-winded. |
| WORDS | Discern too concretely to leave room for the mind.
Forget the true measures of expression: suggestions.
Let infrarealities disappear.
Sift without restoring. |
| Pathetic VII | <i>One learns words as one learns good manners.</i>
Without words and manners it is impossible to appear in society.
<i>It is by making progress in words that one makes progress socially.</i> ⁵ |
| Still VII | Kill fleeting evocations.
Slow down short-cuts and approximations. |
| SPEECH | <i>Is always vice versa for not being identical.</i>
Eliminates solitary individuals who would like to rejoin society.
Forces men who would like to say "Otherwise" to say "Thus."
<i>Introduces stuttering.</i> |

- Pathetic VIII The carpentry of the word built to last forever obliges men to construct according to patterns, like children.
There is no appreciation of value in a word.
- Still VIII Words are the great levellers.
- Pathetic IX⁶ *Notions limit opening onto depths by merely standing ajar.*
- Still IX Words are family garments.
Poets enlarge words every year.
Words already have been mended so much they are in stitches.
- Pathetic X People think it is impossible to break words.
- Still X Unique feelings are so unique that they can not be popularized.
Feelings without words in the dictionary disappear.
- Pathetic XI *Every year thousands of feelings disappear* for lack of a concrete form.
- Still XI Feelings demand living space.
How remarkable the poet's disheartened absorption in words.
Things and nothings to communicate become daily more imperious.
- Pathetic XII *Efforts at destruction witness to the need to rebuild.*
- Still XII How long will people hold out in the shrunken domain of words?
- Pathetic XIII *The poet suffers indirectly:*
Words remain the work of the poet, his existence, his job.

B Innovation I

Destruction of WORDS for LETTERS

- ISIDORE ISOU Believes in the potential elevation beyond WORDS; wants the development of transmissions where nothing is lost in the process; offers a verb equal to a shock. By the overload of expansion the forms leap up by themselves.
- ISIDORE ISOU Begins the destruction of words for letters.
- ISIDORE ISOU Wants letters to pull in among themselves all desires.
- ISIDORE ISOU Makes people stop using foregone conclusions, words.
- ISIDORE ISOU Shows another way out between WORDS and RENUNCIATION: LETTERS. He will create emotions against language, for the pleasure of the tongue.
It consists of teaching that letters have a destination other than words.
- ISOU Will unmake words into their letters.
Each poet will integrate everything into Everything
Everything must be revealed by letters.

POETRY CAN NO LONGER BE REMADE.

ISIDORE ISOU IS STARTING

A NEW VEIN OF LYRICISM.

Anyone who can not leave words behind can stay back with them!

C Innovation II: The Order of Letters

- This does not mean detroying words for other words.
Nor forging notions to specify their nuances.
Nor mixing terms to make them hold more meaning.
- But it does mean TAKING ALL LETTERS AS A WHOLE;
UNFOLDING BEFORE DAZZLED SPECTATORS MARVELS
CREATED FROM LETTERS (DEBRIS FROM THE
DESTRUCTION);
CREATING AN ARCHITECTURE OF LETTRIC RHYTHMS;
ACCUMULATING FLUCTUATING LETTERS IN A PRECISE FRAME;
ELABORATING SPLENDIDLY THE CUSTOMARY COOING;
COAGULATING THE CRUMBS OF LETTERS FOR A REAL MEAL;⁷
RESUSCITATING THE JUMBLE IN A DENSER ORDER;
MAKING UNDERSTANDABLE AND TANGIBLE THE
INCOMPREHENSIBLE AND VAGUE; CONCRETIZING SILENCE;
WRITING THE NOTHINGNESS.
- It is the role of the poet to *advance* toward subversive sources.
the obligation of the poet to *advance* in the black and burdened depths of the unknown.
the craft of the poet to open one more treasure-room door for the common man.

There will be a poet's message in new signs. The ordering of letters is called: LETTERISM.

It is not a poetic school, but a solitary attitude.

AT THIS MOMENT: LETTERISM = ISIDORE ISOU.

Isou is awaiting his successors in poetry!

(Do they already exist somewhere, ready to burst forth into history through books?)

EXCUSES FOR WORDS INTRODUCED INTO LITERATURE

There are things which are existent only in the strength of their name.
there are others which exist, but lacking a name are unacknowledged.

Every idea needs a calling card to make itself known.

Ideas are known by the name of their creator.

It is more objective to name them after themselves.⁸

LETTERISM IS AN IDEA THAT

WILL BE LAMENTED BY ITS REPUTATION

Letterics is a material that can always be demonstrated.

Letterics seeds already existing:

NONSENSE WORDS;

WORDS WITH HIDDEN MEANINGS IN THEIR LETTERS;

ONOMATOPOEIAS.

If this material existed before, it didn't have a name to recognize it by.

Letterics works will be those made entirely out of this element, but with suitable rules and genres!

The word exists and has the right to perpetuate itself.
ISOUE IS CALLING ATTENTION TO ITS EXISTENCE.
It is up to the Letterist to develop Letterism.
Letterism is offering a DIFFERENT poetry.
LETTERISM imposes a NEW POETRY.
THE LETTERIC AVALANCHE IS ANNOUNCED.
1942.

Characteristics of the New Amplic Phase in Poetry (Excerpt)

By emphasizing again the *sound value* of poetry, words in their printed form will not have any meaning that people need to labor over deciphering. Consonants will become empty, purely auditory, simple lines having physical meaning only in the listener's ears. By placing value on effects beyond their usual meaning (in words), poetry will create a new sensitivity. In the place of the cerebral beauty that was created in the chiseling style of poetry, one responds simply with direct *auditory understanding*. It is then a matter of discovering the unknown abundance of purely oral constructions; of untangling the intangible accents in vocabulary. Poetry is thus liberated from all prose (reading for meaning without regard for tones), to become an instrument of lyrical communication. Poetry realizes its mission which is precisely to broadcast local imperceptibilities and *applied suggestions*, because poetry was created by individuals who wanted to understand each other, sensing the linguistic vibrations against their palates. Verse is the result of a need to consider the phonetic effects produced in other people's imaginations.

Letterism intends to introduce this beauty, which is limited in the present system of oral communication by lack of rules and even of letters. This is why it is necessary to regulate the stability of auditory frequencies by constructing elements specially designed for the purpose. It is a matter of enriching the possibilities for denoting the changes that occur between sound values. These particles of language, still inferior and unexpressed, must acquire proper signs so that they can develop in their own category, the auditory.

On Recitation and the Reciter

Based on phonetic accents, the poem becomes dependent on the person *recruiting*. The return to what was valuable (sound) as compared to what was fallacious (signs) signals the final poetic route.

The author — or another person in the role of *performer, with a suitable voice* — leans on the expression and the linguistic inflections. A new manner of *reading aloud* is to be created, putting it in conflict with the *reader*.

In the chiseling period, the reader tended to meditate on the meaning, forced to *read internally*, focusing on what the author *wanted to express*. In the new amplic phase *external focus* is exalted, relying on the material, conceived by the *voice* and *vocal interpretation*. Poetry receives the stamp of *whoever reads it* and that person's *dramatic talent*, not of their *intellectual* understanding. In Letterism, effects are established by the *expression of the*

existing verse and by its coloring. This is just as in music, where the symbols on a score are devoid of meaning. The notes sound false when there is a correct understanding but an erroneous interpretation. Henceforth the poem remains in a book only in gloomy inactivity. It acquires its value in *performance*, and each repetition imprints its value on it. The written poem — impounded in words — has no more meaning than a dead letter.

From Claude Debussy to Isidore Isou (Excerpts)

The destruction of musicality by musicians themselves continues up to the *orchestra of pure and monotone sounds* created by Russolo. The Italian futurist no longer seeks to evoke any emotions. His effort was to work with the huge number of sounds that did not yet exist as music and to make them musical. It is against music apparently to call on mechanical means. But these sounds were prior to mechanics, in primitive shouts. His ensemble of *noise-makers is the anti-orchestra*. The howlers, groaners, cracklers, shriekers, buzzers, gurglers, shouters, whistlers, croakers, and rustlers who made up the *rumorharmonium* can be classified in the same shrinking pathway that is pushing back towards its origins: the *voice* and *noise*.⁹

In justifying this work, music today can be said to be in a phase of plodding in place. Just as with poetry, with music too people no longer know how to go forward nor what goal to go after in following this *golden line* which is the line of progress and artistic revolution. All that is needed now is to take the final step, which is the most difficult but the most substantial and rich in promise. *Take up the shout and the voice* which are at the origins of music as *the primordial elements of art*. After Satie, Schoenberg and jazz,¹⁰ the next step is easy.

The New Letteric Alphabet

1. A (alpha) = inhalation (hard).
2. B (beta) = exhalation (hard).
3. Γ (gamma) = hissing (whistling between the teeth like the sound of a snake).
4. Δ (delta) = rattling in the throat.
5. E (epsilon) = growling (like a dog about to bark).
6. H (eta) = grasping (hoarse sound) made with the windpipe by puffing up the belly.
7. Θ (theta) = sigh (made simultaneously by the windpipe, mouth, and nose).
8. K (kappa) = snoring.
9. Λ (lamda) = gargling (with the air vibrating between the tongue and the palate).
10. M (mu) = whimpering.
11. N (nu) = hiccough.
12. O (omicron) = cough, clearing the throat.
13. Π (pi) = belch.
14. P (ro) = clicking the tongue.
15. Σ (sigma) = farting sound (with the lips).
16. T (tau) = crackling (as if imitating the noise of an auto).
17. Y (upsilon) = spitting sound (a sort of poo-pah-pitooey together).
18. Φ (phi) = kissing (noisily).
19. Ψ (psi) = whistling (simple, not melodic).

1. A legal transcription can record the tergiversations of Feeling, by gathering its equivalents in Speech. A parrot always draws the same card.

2. The Dictionary — cemetery of grandiose crimes. Larousse — their history. [Larousse is the French Webster — trans.]

3. And there are still so many diplomats who seek — unsuccessfully — to merely insinuate.

4. Every word is just as stupid as the narration of melodramas.

5. The author has seen idiots lionized because of their witty words.

6. [The sequence of headings in the original is reversed from here to the end. — trans.]

7. The miracle of Jesus and of Sisyphus.

8. Ideas with proper names can have several fathers: those who have reared or adopted an idea, if they haven't given birth to it.

9. Jazz introduces chiseling musical victories to the masses, passed on from music to the crowd.

10. On this subject André Coeuroy writes: "A Negro song, a coon-song (sic), loses all its personality if it is sung by a caucasian. Negro music can not be transmitted in writing." (*It is therefore necessary to have another writing system than the notes used for instruments. What is needed is a writing system for the voice.*) "It is nothing without the style of performance." (*This vague idea must be transformed into a precise system by the proper signs.*)

ISIDORE ISOU

From *Les Champs de Force de la Peinture Lettriste* (Paris: Avant-Garde, 1964).

The Force Fields of Letterist Painting (Excerpts)

I recall quite well this period of experimentation which I passed through in a special way, thanks to a personal creative method: "doubts," "partial certainties," "perplexities," "disenchantments," "discoveries," "assurances;" in summary all those states of mind defined by an outmoded vocabulary and run over in a quick new way now come to mind.

I had been wondering how a letter could be *just as beautiful* as a figurative or non-figurative object in art, and how a work composed of Roman letters could touch or even overwhelm an ordinary viewer as much as the mass of works based on real "things" or qualities conventionally accepted in the minds of the refined.

For months at the beginning my whole concrete system consisted of *the most banal alphabetic writing*. This could naturally be raised up easily in theory — as was the case later with my first manifesto — by deep, provocative considerations or by metaphors, but in practice it was nevertheless limited to being a *printer's specimen book* or just *pages filled with words* — bound together by some theme, critical or poetic or whatever, which ignored my artistic effort.

No concern for the composition of the line of vowels and consonants, no care for the arrangement of sentences on the page, and naturally no interest in color — an easy and underhanded secondary value in my definition of painting — were present to disrupt my limited task as *scribe*, my arid research on the emotive powers of letters, pure letters, letters ripped out of all context, unimproved by extrinsic values.

For a certain period of time the only innovation came from my poetry, because instead of transcribing word-texts, I copied phonetic verses, which allowed me to put my arrangement in the middle of the page instead of filling up the whole page, isolating certain phonemes or clusters of phonemes according to the oral impulse, then adding some new signs from the Greek alphabet or my imagination, which corresponded to sounds that did not exist in the Roman alphabet.

Naturally when I exhibited these pages and called them "works of art" all I got was disdainful or knowing smiles, as if I had pulled off a good joke. Not only in Bucharest, but even in Paris the defenders of "figurative" and "abstract" modern art always assured me that these creations "were not paintings." . . .

Metaphysics or post-writing, encompassing all the means of ideographic, lexical and phonetic notation, supplements the means of expression based on sound by adding a specifically plastic dimension, a visual facet which is irreducible and escapes oral labelling. . . .

Even from my first metagraphic efforts — because examples can be found in *The Diaries of the Gods* and then more conclusively in the self-portrait and painted photos of *Amos* — I had noticed that when held up among former "objective" or "non-objective" forms my original form was stronger, since it assimilates all the others.

Experiments on "the test of forms" demonstrate that the particles of the Letterist domain are stronger and more important than the particles of the figurative and non-figurative domains.

If one places an abstract composition — which is simply a fragmentary purification of the former object — in (or alongside) a figurative structure, this second composition digests the first one — transformed into a decorative motif — and then the whole work becomes figurative. However if one places a letterist notation on (or beside) a realist "form," it is the first one which assimilates the second to change the whole thing into a work of hypergraphics or super-writing.

Pursuing the experiments on the "test of the force of elements" one can affirm that "a little bit," or "a few drops" of figuration placed anywhere on a canvas can transform an entire abstract mass into a figurative work and that "a little bit," or "a few drops" of Letterism placed anywhere on any canvas metamorphose a whole figurative or abstract composition into a Letterist work.

MAURICE LEMAÎTRE

From *Ur*, No. 3, Second Series, 1952. (Excerpts)

WHAT IS LETTERISM?

How an Art Evolves

The Letterists hold that arts are born, evolve, and die. In the life-course of an art there are two main phases:

(a) The first, called the *Amplic* (*amplique*) phase, is the period in which the art "swells" and in which public interest is high because it is constructed around *pretexts exterior to the art itself*: anecdotes (battles, epics, divine struggles), sentiments (romantic) or ideas (philosophical, social, etc.).

It should be noted in passing that the Letterists give only a secondary interest to the "message" (philosophical, political, etc.) of the artist because he rarely brings out a new one in his work. Pirandello's ideas on the self are developed better by the Existentialists; the Surrealists' (André Breton, Salvador Dali) dream psychology comes from Freud and Adler; Zola's social ideas from the economists of his time, etc.

But it remains true that the discovery of a new *esthetic technique* is the mark of the *creator* in an art. The producers, as opposed to the creators, are the artists who utilize this new technique to produce degraded works (Faulkner with regard to Joyce, e.g., or T. S. Eliot with regard to Stéphane Mallarmé), certain of which sometimes *appear* to be more important than the works of the creator himself.

The esthetic technique is only one of the three components of an art, the other two being an esthetic matter and an esthetic mechanism. . . .

(b) This second phase is called the *Chiseling* (*ciselant*) phase, and is the period in which the art turns in upon itself and changes its vision from external goals to goals of internal arrangement, proper to the art itself. Instead of concentrating his efforts on the presentation of anecdotes, sentiments or ideas, as in the *amplic* phase, the artist of the *chiseling* phase applies himself to the self-contained arrangement of the elements of the art. It is the period of the concentration of means and elements to the detriment of the "story"; it is the non-public, "outlaw" period of the art. The great mass of amateurs (spectators, listeners, readers) enter here only with difficulty (modern music, Symbolist or Surrealist poetry, Cubist, Surrealist or abstract painting), in spite of the efforts of an "élite" of connoisseurs.

At the end of the *chiseling* phase the art "dies" because, in spite of the persistent enjoyment of its masterpieces it no longer offers *new possibilities* of organization of the matter to the young personalities who want to affirm themselves in it.

Also, the later artists of the second phase pursue the art until they have reduced its matter to dust and thus return to the sources of the art. Joyce, e.g., exhausts the word and other constituents of prose. Schoenberg destroys tonality, and the abstractionists do away with the "representative" form. . . .

To come back to Letterism: applying these esthetic discoveries to poetry and music, the Letterists see in these two arts an exhaustion of matter and means of ordering. In other words, they consider that *poetry and music are dead for the creator*.

The Evolution of Technical Sensitivity

According to Isou, this is the third and most important progression in poetry. For a while, in the ampic period, the poet unfolded his story or idea within the limitation of rhyme. The chiseling condensation constrains him to offer the public (the listener become reader) only rare vibrations, subtle images and metaphors.

Within this phase three stages can be distinguished in the combat within the framework of the poem:

(a) *The plastic image* (Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine).

Words are thrown into a closed area. Things further and further separated are pushed into a space which is more and more concentrated. Objects foreign to one another are almost fused. The image has come out of this collision of dissimilar visual concepts. In the beginning the image was only the result of the blending of visible things.

(b) *The auditory image* (Mallarmé, Valéry).

But space continues to be reduced. The poet wants to put more and more into a verse of diminished volume. The objects are so piled up that there is no longer room to discern clearly.

Ineffable connections are traced among the elements of the poetic whole. Hallucinatory accents are perceived externally. "Apprehension becomes phonetic." There is a risk of becoming lost in similarities and in the clarification of connections. There is an *approximate* tone in poetry, a reaction towards the mysterious and the melodically insinuating. There is a flowering of the pursuit of the unfathomable, a preoccupation with the esoteric.

(c) *The "empty" notion*.

The coagulation of understandable elements reaches absurdity. The Dadaist period is absurdity frozen and indifferent. In this period the word-objects have only a semantic value. Words have lost their objects and seethe aimlessly, stripped of meaning. "We are going to work with empty notions." This position is striking when compared to other poetic forms. Surrealism is "emotional Dadaism". . . .

The Law of the Ampic and the Chiseling in Music

Even more sharply than in poetry, the ampic-chiseling distinction stands out in music. The entire musical period which goes from the beginning to Debussy is a phase of development in which the creator searches a feeling, an idea or a myth, which he attempts to give to the public in grandiose works.

Tschaikowsky's *1812*, Beethoven's *Eroica* or any of Wagner's operas, are long, massively constructed and architectonic like Victor Hugo's great poems.

With Debussy begins the Baudelairean period of music. It is no longer ideas, subjects, anecdotes or large pathetic operas which are presented, but *musical*

technique. Debussy begins to destroy great music by replacing it with nuances, by researching into variations and style.

Through Ravel, Franck, etc., chiseling music proceeds towards Igor Stravinsky, who represents the ideal of perfect chiseling, in that each of his measures is created rationally, each of his notes is paid for with an effort and represents a program.

With Schoenberg, Satie, Russolo, music goes further and further into the chiseling period. Schoenberg begins by impoverishing music by taking away melody. He cancels out what is most musical in music, i.e., tone and pitch, and contents himself with creating charms and moving the listener with rhythm, timbre and clashes among the instruments. . . .

The musical Dadaists (Erik Satie being the most famous) completely destroy all harmony, all rhythm, all musical continuity.

With Satie, e.g., a score is usually only a series of notes without order, a series which does not hold together and in which jokes and absurd gratings are mixed.

Russolo (an Italian Futurist) destroys what Satie has not, i.e., the musical instrument, music's last sin. He brings in new instruments which create other sounds: cracklings, rattlings, screeches, etc.

Thus everything which has been called music is eliminated in the name of music. "Pure" music, of course. The *object* of music, the *melody* (descriptive of anecdotes, sentiments, etc.) is neglected, rejected by statements like Debussy's "Music means what you put into it," Stravinsky's "Music means nothing," Schoenberg's atonalism. With the ironic entrance of Erik Satie, before whose works critics wonder if it is a question of "a real poverty or a voluntary impoverishment," the stage of music which makes fun of itself is reached. Satie has been despised or ignored by modern musicians because he puts composers' noses into the decomposed corpse of a dead art which they are trying to revive at any cost.

To this death of music and poetry, Letterism wishes to bring a solution, which we will now discuss.

Letterism is a total reconstruction of the poetic and musical branches, the pursuit of research in a *new art* using the sound notation of the human voice as its matter. This art must not be confused with poetry, either in its anecdotal content or in its formal realization, on the pretext that certain Letterist works, also use, for their transcription, phonetic symbols of the Roman alphabet.

Letteries (Letterist "poems" or "symphonies" must, like musical works, be heard. The arrangements of the letters (Roman letters, figures, various notation symbols) must be considered as a *notation*, analogous to the signs of a musical score. . . .

Letterism will conquer because it is the inescapable solution to the death of music and poetry. A new youth will develop Letterism in its rise to practical power because they need new materials with which to affirm their *new names*. Letterism will remain because it utilizes a matter never before really organized into coherent works. . . .

It is, of course, difficult to ask musicians to leave forever the art which has nourished so many generations. Only young artists eager to affirm themselves as original temperaments will be able to seize this new and unexplored field in time and establish themselves in it definitively. Today Letterism is one of the richest post-war artistic hopes.

JEAN-PAUL CURTAY

From *A New Perspective System: Integrative Perspective*, 1977. (Excerpts)

Rhythms

Traditionally, all the types of organization of figurative painting were complementary to a single central system, the perspective system as determined by Alberti. We know that this system evolved out of two main streams: that of mathematical representations of observable space (through projection) and that of the different techniques of artistic representation of space which ruled before the quattrocento theory.

However, our representations have evolved considerably. In physics the notion of absolute space has appeared narrow and incomplete since Einstein. In the field of mathematics, following Minkowski's four dimensional time-space, hyperspaces with an infinite number of dimensions have appeared.

These concepts led painters to reconsider the notion of perspective: Monet multiplied colored refractions (refraction is the first meaning of the word perspective) and dissolved space into light; the expressionists submitted space to forces that deform it (Van Gogh); finally the cubists destroyed figurative perspective by their analytical style (Picasso) and their synthetic style (Juan Gris).

Marcel Duchamp has gone further by looking for a fourth dimension through his work. The surrealists, after de Chirico, who offered reversed shadows, proposed absurd perspectives to the point of spatial delirium with Escher.

Cantor's work, however, going much further than this first reconsideration of space, led to the appearance of new mathematical and logical spaces: *the sets*.

This set theory is precisely what inspired my work which is directed to the discovery of new systems in hypergraphic art.

Let us draw a line around all the signs of a drawing and let us fill in this new outline until no trace of those elements is left. What is the result?

We obtain a new sign, most often abstract and complex.

Let us now do the opposite. Let us bring together many small signs so as to form a big, new sign. In this way we can obtain the profile, not only of abstract, but also of figurative elements or fractions of writing.

Calligrams, traditionally found in arabic writing, rediscovered by Apollinaire and diversified by Isou in 1960, who named them hypergraphic calligrams,

make it possible for us to represent the fourth system, the COMPOSITION SYSTEM.

Apollinaire created figurative objects out of words.

Isou has implicitly proposed to form any sign out of any other sign (*Initiation à la haute volupté* — 1960).

My research for hypergraphic systems has brought me to think about mathematical rhythms and esthetic forms. From this point of view I have been able to understand that perspective in Tuscan painting was a type of calligram: a composition of observable space by observable objects (if one gives up the idea of absolute space and adopts the Leibnizian notion of *space of relations*).

In other words, I have understood that Apollinaire's calligrams were not just calligrams (ideogrammatic poetry to the author of *Alcool(s)*), but also could lead to another figurative perspective forming observable objects out of observable objects. This had been felt by Arcimboldo in the 16th century.

I've also understood that Isou's calligrams were not just "plastic values" (which he left to a few drawings), but one of the future super-writing's systems: the HYPERGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE.

Composition is the fundamental operation of this system, called GENERAL PERSPECTIVE SYSTEM (fitting to any art).

We now know that the atom, which was supposed to be the indivisible particle, is only the reunion of moving particles (nuclei, electrons). Even mathematicians have come to the conclusion that the problem of continuity is unresolvable. Any continuity can be described as a discontinuity and vice-versa. Only the most useful explanation is chosen.

If we want to apply this principle to signs, we can represent any sign in a CONDENSED FORM (continuous) or in a COMPOSITE FORM (discontinuous).

In his last period, Kandinsky composed biological or closely related structures with abstract elements. Starting in 1965, after 15 years of artistic wandering, Maurice Lemaître centered his work on a composite form, his "undulatory phrase".

I shall call LETTER any condensed sign and PERLETTER any sign composed of other signs, which shall be called constitutive letters.

Also, a group of letters can form a perletter, which in turn with other perletters, can form a HYPERLETTER, and so on until we reach the hyperletter of the n^{th} degree (MULTI-COMPOSITION).

I created the name per-letter from the word per-spective, of which the etymological meaning is "vision through."

Figurative perspective permits one to see an observable space through a plane (the canvas being considered as a window).

Hypergraphic perspective permits one to see a scriptural space representing a mental space through any association of signs.

Integrative hypergraphic perspective, with its letters, its per-letters and its hyper-letters, should be a privileged instrument for the description of all evolution of which the central characteristic is precisely integration.

Researching Letterism

Pietro Ferrua

The main sources of Letterist material in this country are located at the Library of Congress, at Lewis and Clark College Library and at the Shaker Seed House in Tyringham, Connecticut.¹ At this moment the first two are not particularly concerned with acquiring more documents nor with cataloguing those they have, while the latter is not easily accessible. The interlibrary loan system is not of great help, since it cannot locate titles that are not fed to computer terminals or subject catalogs.² The scholar is therefore caught in a vicious circle, for he can only borrow titles which are known to him and for which he can provide data as complete as possible. Paradoxically, while the researcher has scarce sources available, at the same time Letterists have published (and still are) feverishly and have trouble in distributing their abundant production. Establishing a complete bibliography of Letterism is not our present scope and, anyway, it is not a task that an individual alone can fulfill (at least not in this nation, presently, although maybe in France and/or those other countries which still have full-time researchers or minimal teaching loads) but perhaps a long-range team endeavor. But this too could only be justified by a more effective need or interest of the academic community, at present nonexistent or very tame.

The following bibliography, however incomplete it may be, contains nevertheless the essential leads for more complete research. The entire issue would not be sufficient for a complete bibliography and, for reasons of space, we had to decide to eliminate many titles and also to renounce the critical approach,³ considering that the titles frequently speak for themselves. The criterion adopted is chronological, in order to put the movement in historical perspective. Most authors are (or have been) Letterist "militants," but we included also some exegetic elements. The sample of topics is representative of the wide interests of the Letterists, although we omitted, among others, works on aspects such as gastronomy, library science or style of furniture.

What strikes one in Letterism — as compared to most other previous avant-garde movements — is not only the prolificacy, but the vast range of subjects treated. There is a spirit of system that is rare in avant-garde enterprises, and a search for global solutions. If at the very beginning the word "Letterism" was self-explanatory as one dealt with words and poetry, it no longer suffices to describe theological, psychological or other branches of culture. This is why, with the passing of time, we see the appearance of new terms like "innova-

tion," "creatics," "kladology," etc., which better emphasize the evolution of Isou's thought; there remains no doubt that not only was he the initiator of the movement, but that he continues being its main motor and originator of all novelties, no matter how innovative some of his present (and former) followers have revealed themselves to be. It is still too early to weigh how important the influence of Letterists on the avant-garde at large has been (or is), but we know already how instrumental Isou's theories have been in inspiring Curtay (body sound music), Debord (Situationism), Chopin (audio-poems), Bertozzi (Internazionale Novatrice Infinitesimale), and others. While serving as a spark for the creation of a new synthesis, the Letterists have also tried to compromise with the establishment, running for public office in electoral campaigns (Lemaître), teaching in universities (Lemaître), founding institutes of higher learning (the Leonardo da Vinci University in Paris), postulating doctorates⁴ (the cases of Lemaître, Isou, and Sabatier in the humanities, and that of Curtay in the sciences). Recognition comes slowly for them, but Isou is already listed in the Larousse Dictionary, and the main monographs on contemporary arts or literature grant Letterism an ever-greater space. Its presence is not only witnessed by the numerous recent events (film retrospectives, art shows, video festivals, at the Beaubourg Museum and in Italy, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, and other countries) as well as by the arrival of a new breed of artists in their twenties (for example, Pierre Jouvett with his very polished films, the Richol sisters with their pictorial works, Michel Amarger, Frédérique Devaux and Gérard Broutin with their theatrical creations, Dominique Zelter and Denis Bidabé with their performances, and more). Despite the fact that its death has been pronounced several times, Letterism is still there, alive and well, and it is there to stay.

1. In subject catalogs one should be aware of the existence of several spellings: Lettrisme, Lettrism, and Letterism. Although I have used (and seen employed) the first two, in 1976 when the First International Symposium was organized, we opted for "Letterism" which could maintain the sound as well as show the etymology: Lett(e)r-ism.

2. Such a listing can be found at pages 152-162 of the *Proceedings* (see "Bibliography" under 1979) but needs to be updated.

3. See my own essay on the critical bibliography of Isou in the following list under 1980. Initial entries were much more numerous but were reduced by the editors for reasons of space and other considerations.

4. On the other hand, recent theses and dissertations have dealt with Letterism: Stephen Ruppenthal's at San Jose State University, Christina Weiss's at Saarbrücken University, Laura Marcheschi's at Napoli University, David Seaman's at Stanford University.

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1983 Sabatier, Roland. *Alphabets, aphorismes (et reflets extérieurs) sur "clefs du mystère" et sur quelques autres hypergraphies de Maurice Lemaître*. (Paris: PSI, 1983).

Exhibition Checklist

Dimensions are in inches and centimeters (in parentheses); height precedes width and depth. Listings are alphabetical by artist, author, or title of periodical. Ephemera (letterhead stationery) are listed last.

Roberto Altmann, Roland Sabatier and Jacques Spacagna

1 Dessins hypergraphiques de Altmann, Sabatier, Spacagna
[catalogue invitation to exhibition 7 December 1965-5 January 1966 and vernissage]. Handmade folder with graphics in mixed media by Altmann, Sabatier and Spacagna; number 9 of an edition of 20; 5-1/2 x 4-1/4 x 1/16 (13.4 x 10.8 x 0.2). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

Roberto Altmann

2 O: revue du Centre International de Création Kladologique. Vaduz, Liechtenstein, March 1968. Staple-bound pamphlet, 11-1/4 x 8-1/4 x 1/16 (28.6 x 20.9 x 0.2). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

Edouard Berreur

See catalog number 66.

Gérard-Philippe Broutin, Jean-Paul Curtay, Jean-Pierre Gillard, François Poyet

3 Lettrisme et hypergraphie. Paris, Editions Georges Fall, 1972. Portfolio with slipcase; booklet with text (unbound pages); inner portfolio with gouaches and ink drawings by Broutin, Curtay, Gillard, Poyet, et al.; number 48 of an edition of

Figure 34 [1]. Roberto Altmann, Roland Sabatier and Jacques Spacagna, *Dessins hypergraphiques de Altmann, Sabatier, Spacagna*, 1965. The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

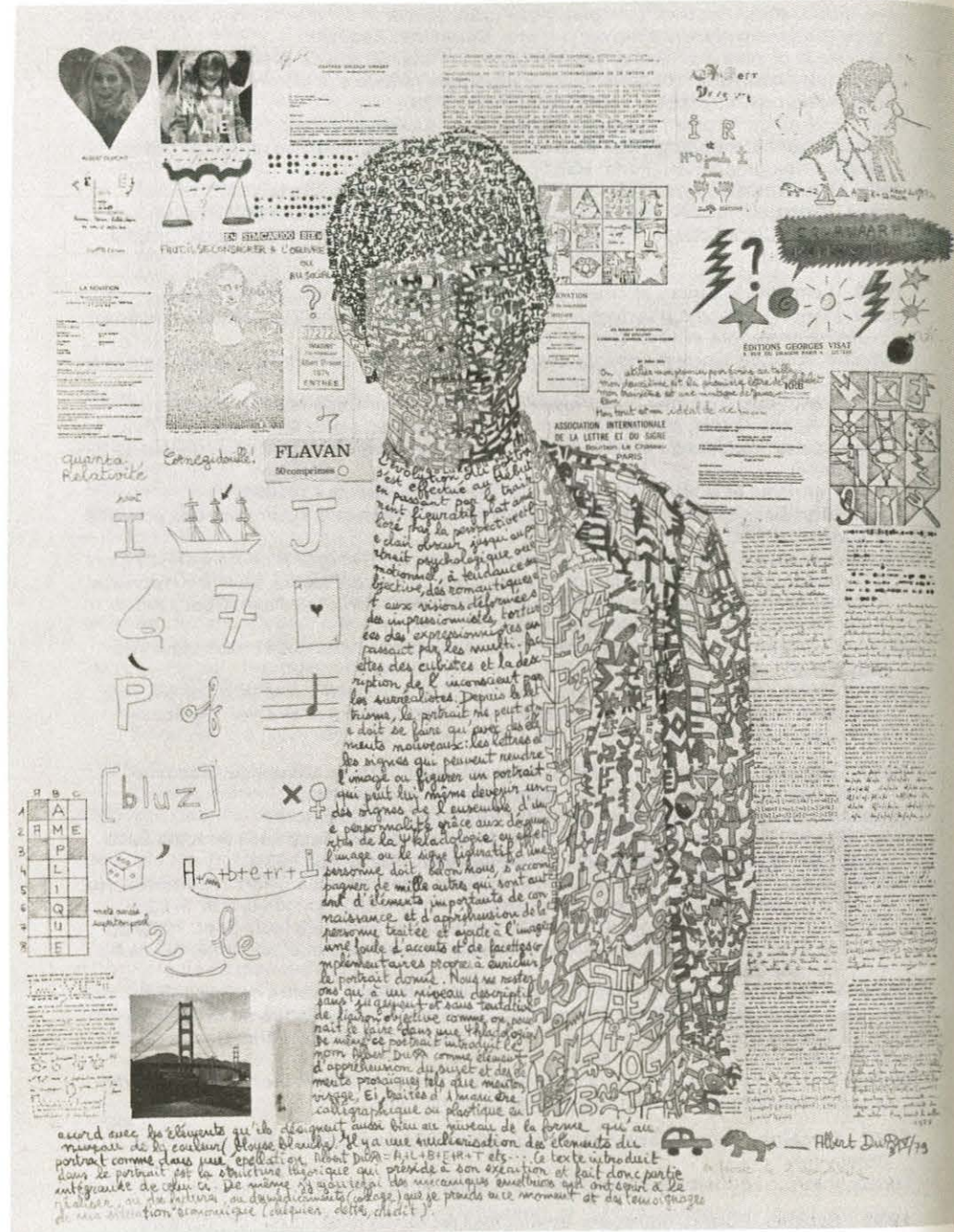


Figure 35 [10]. Albert Dupont, *Untitled [self-portrait]*, 1979. The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

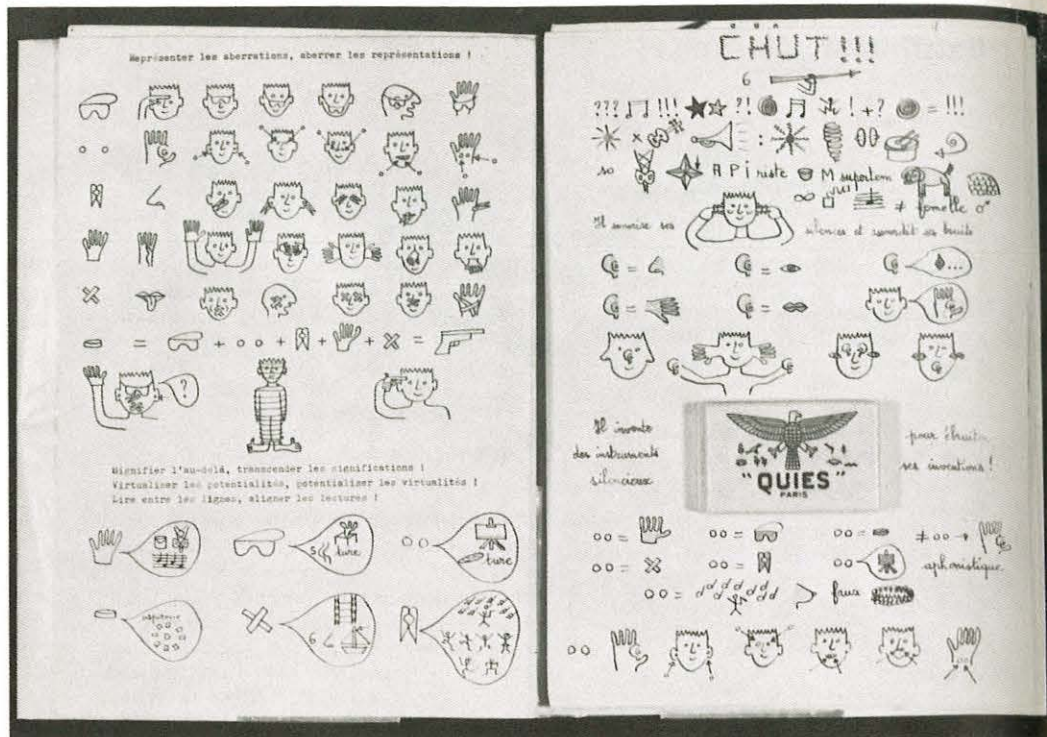


Figure 36 [11]. Albert Dupont, *Les sens interdits: nouvelle hypergraphique, anti-méca-esthétique, esthapéiriste et anti-supertemporelle*, 1980, The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

75; 11-5/16 x 7-5/8 x 1-7/16 (28.7 x 19.4 x 3.6). Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

Gérard-Philippe Broutin, Jean-Paul Curtay and Jean-Pierre Gillard

4 *L'irréductibilité Lettriste No. 1: Revue fondée et dirigée par François Poyet*. François Poyet, Director. Editions CICK, 1973. 8-3/16 x 5-5/8 x 3/16 (20.8 x 14.3 x 0.5). Lent by Stephen C. Foster.

Gérard-Philippe Broutin

5 *S.f. est resté dans le groupe, d'une part . . .*, 1976. Ink, 25-5/8 x 19-3/4 (65.1 x 50.2). Collection of the artist.

6 *Le désir paradisiaque et l'extériorité (soixante quatre, III) et soixante cinq (I)*, 1977. Ink and watercolor, 26 x 19-3/4 (66.0 x 50.2). Collection of the artist.

See also catalog numbers 24, 64, and 74.

Françoise Canal

See catalog number 74.

Jean-Paul Curtay

7 *Homage to Bracelli II*, 1974. Intaglio, 7-3/8 x 5-7/8 (18.7 x 14.9). Collection of the artist.

8 *Cygne kladologique*, 1976. Intaglio, 14-3/4 x 9-5/8 (37.5 x 24.5). Collection of the artist.

See also catalog numbers 3, 4, 22, 65, 73, and 74.

Myriam Darrell

See catalog numbers 72 and 74.

Albert Dupont

9 Untitled, 1977. Color intaglio, 16-5/8 x 12-1/2 (42.2 x 31.8). Collection of the artist.

10 Untitled [Self-portrait], 1979. Collage, mixed media on paper, 25-1/2 x 19-1/2 (64.8 x 49.5). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

11 *Les sens interdits: nouvelle hypergraphique, anti-méca-esthétique, esthapéiriste et anti-supertemporelle*, 1980. Slipcase, soft-cover handmade book object; unbound text and mixed media collages; number 4 of an edition of 30; 12-5/16 x 8-5/8 (31.3 x 21.9). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

12 Untitled, 1980. Acrylic on canvas, 51-1/4 x 38 x 1-7/16 (130.2 x 96.5 x 3.7). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

13 Untitled, 1981. Watercolor and gouache on paper, 5-7/8 x 3-7/8 (14.9 x 9.9). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

Ecriture: Revue des Etudiants du groupe 2 de l'U.V.

14 Number 2. Maurice Lemaître, Chargé de Cours. Paris, 1978. Soft-cover pamphlet, 11-3/4 x 8-1/4 x 3/16 (29.8 x 20.9 x 0.5). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

Front de la Jeunesse: Revue de l'union de la jeunesse et de l'exterme.

15 Maurice Lemaître, Directeur-Fondateur. Paris, May, 1968. Staple-bound pamphlet, 11-3/4 x 8-3/8 x 1/8 (29.8 x 21.3 x 0.3). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

Jean-Pierre Gillard

See catalog numbers 3, 4, 26, 65, 74, and 75.

Antoine Grimaud

See catalog number 27.

Micheline Hachette

16 *Van Gogh*, 1976. Crayon, 20-3/4 x 15-15/16 (52.7 x 40.5). Collection of the artist.

See also catalog numbers 20, 67, and 74.

Les Hypergraphies

Paris, Editions Georges Visat, 1974. Folio case with thirteen prints in mixed media; number 12 of an edition of 25; 27-5/8 x 21-3/4 x 1-1/8 (70.2 x 55.2 x 2.9). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

17 *Hypergraphie*, 1972. Isidore Isou. Etching and aquatint in four colors, 18-5/8 x 14 (47.3 x 35.6).

18 *Eau-forte et aquatinte au pressier et à l'imprimeur*, 1972. Maurice Lemaître. Color etching and aquatint, 18-1/2 x 14 (46.9 x 35.6).

19 *Hypergraphie polythanasée*, 1972. Roland Sabatier. Color etching and aquatint, 18-3/4 x 13-5/8 (47.6 x 34.6).

20 *Variations hypergraphiques*, 1974. Micheline Hachette. Linogravure in four colors, 19 x 14-5/16 (48.3 x 36.3).

21 *Arc-en-ciel*, 1972. Alain Satié. Etching and aquatint in six colors, 17-1/2 x 14 (44.5 x 35.6).

22 *Variation au mouton du premier Giotto Proust*, 1973. Jean-Paul Curtay. Linogravure in four colors, 18 x 15 (45.7 x 38.1).

23 *Fresque hypergraphique*. Jacqueline Tarkieltaub. Four-color lithograph, 14-1/8 x 18 (35.9 x 45.7).

24 *Métécisation géologique*, 1973. Gérard-Philippe Broutin. Color etching and aquatint, 17-3/4 x 14-1/8 (45.1 x 35.9).

25 *Trialdique*, 1972. François Poyet. Color lithograph, 18-1/8 x 14-1/4 (46.1 x 36.2).

26 *Psi*, 1973. Jean-Pierre Gillard. Color etching and aquatint, 18-1/2 x 14 (46.9 x 35.6).

27 *Hyperlithographie*, 1974. Antoine Grimaud. Mixed media in three colors, 17-3/4 x 14-3/8 (45.1 x 36.5).

28 *Hypergraphie*, 1972. Alain de la Tour. Two-color etching and aquatint, 17-5/8 x 13-5/8 (44.8 x 34.5).

29 *Signes*, 1972. Frédéric Studeny. Lithograph and gaufrage, 17-1/8 x 14-1/4 (43.5 x 36.2).

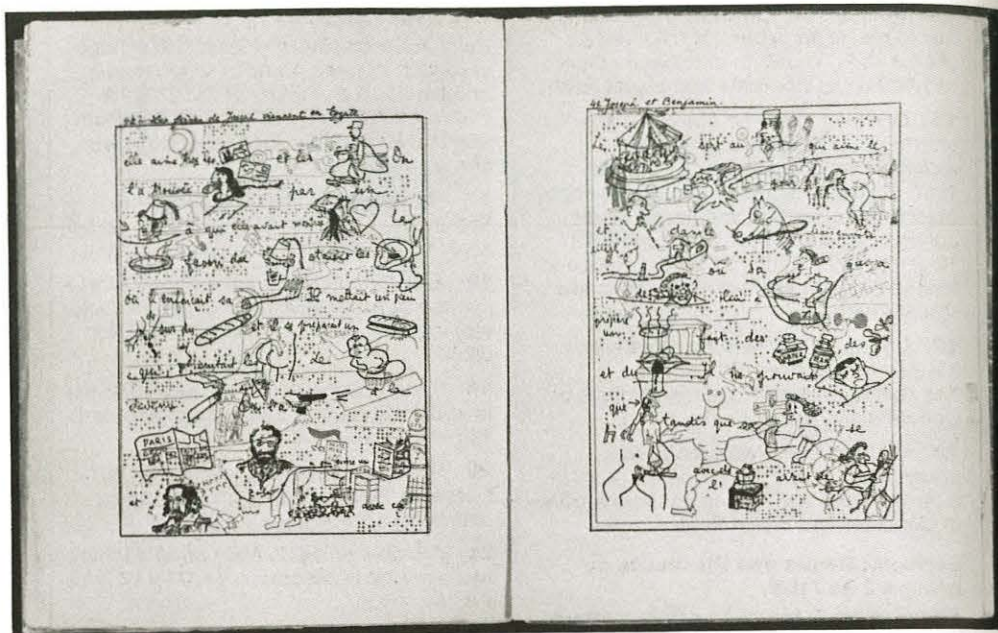


Figure 37 [30]. Isidore Isou, from *Les Journaux des Dieux*, 1950, The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

Figure 38 [31]. Isidore Isou, from *Initiation à la haute volupté*, 1960, The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

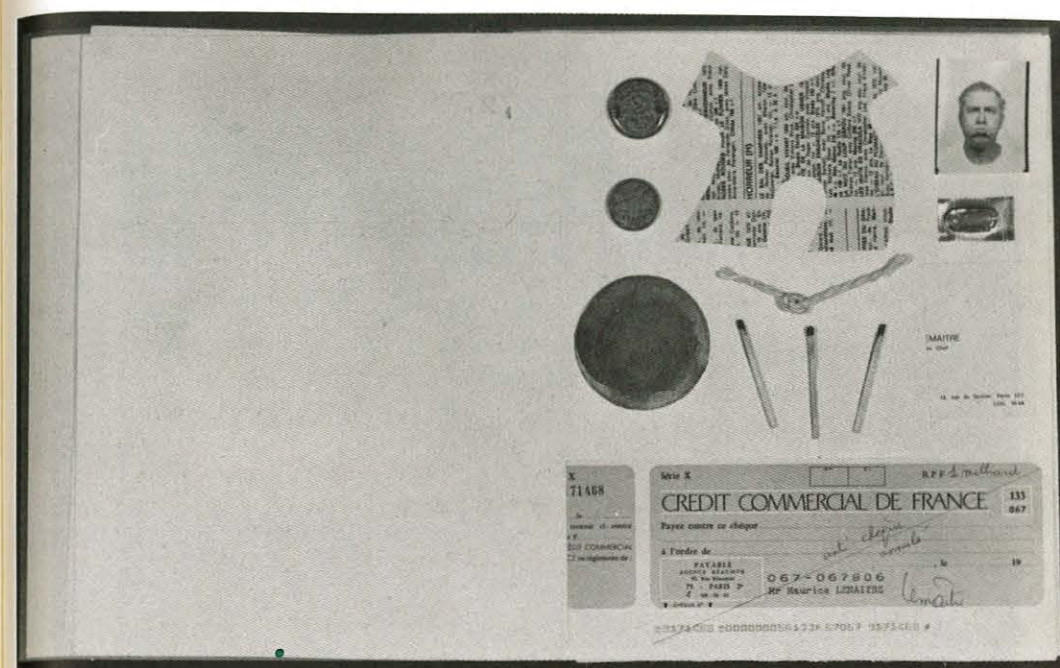


Figure 39 [35]. Maurice Lemaître, *Anti-chequè/annulé*, from *Jerimadeth*, no. 1, 1972, The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

(Jean) Isidore Isou

30 *Les Journaux des Dieux*. Paris, Aux Escaliers de Lausanne, Maurice Lemaître, 1950. Soft-cover volume, 9-3/8 x 7-3/8 x 7/8 (23.8 x 18.7 x 2.2). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

31 *Initiation à la haute volupté*. Paris, Isidore Isou, Aux Escaliers de Lausanne, 1960. Soft-cover volume, 7-5/8 x 5-5/8 x 1-1/8 (19.4 x 14.3 x 2.9). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

32 *La photographie ciselante, hypergraphique, infinitésimale & supertemporelle*. Collection PSI, 1971. Portfolio and slipcase, unbound pages; 20 original photographs by Isou et al. 13-1/2 x 10-7/8 x 1-7/8 (34.3 x 37.6 x 4.8). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

33 *Trente Juin: poème lettriste polyautomatique*. Collection PSI, 1972. Portfolio with unbound pages; hypergraphics in mixed media by Isou et al; number 9 of an edition of 20, signed by Isou; 13 x 10-1/4 x 5/8 (33.0 x 26.0 x 1.6). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

34 *Les véritables créateurs et les falsificateurs de Dada, du Surrealisme et du Lettrisme (1965-1973)*. Paris, Maurice Lemaître, 1973. Slipcase and soft-cover portfolio, unbound pages; number 16 of an edition of 25; signed by Isou with frontispiece by Lemaître; 12-1/8 x 9-3/4 x 2-3/8 (30.8 x 24.8 x 6.0). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry. See also catalog numbers 17, 61, and 71.

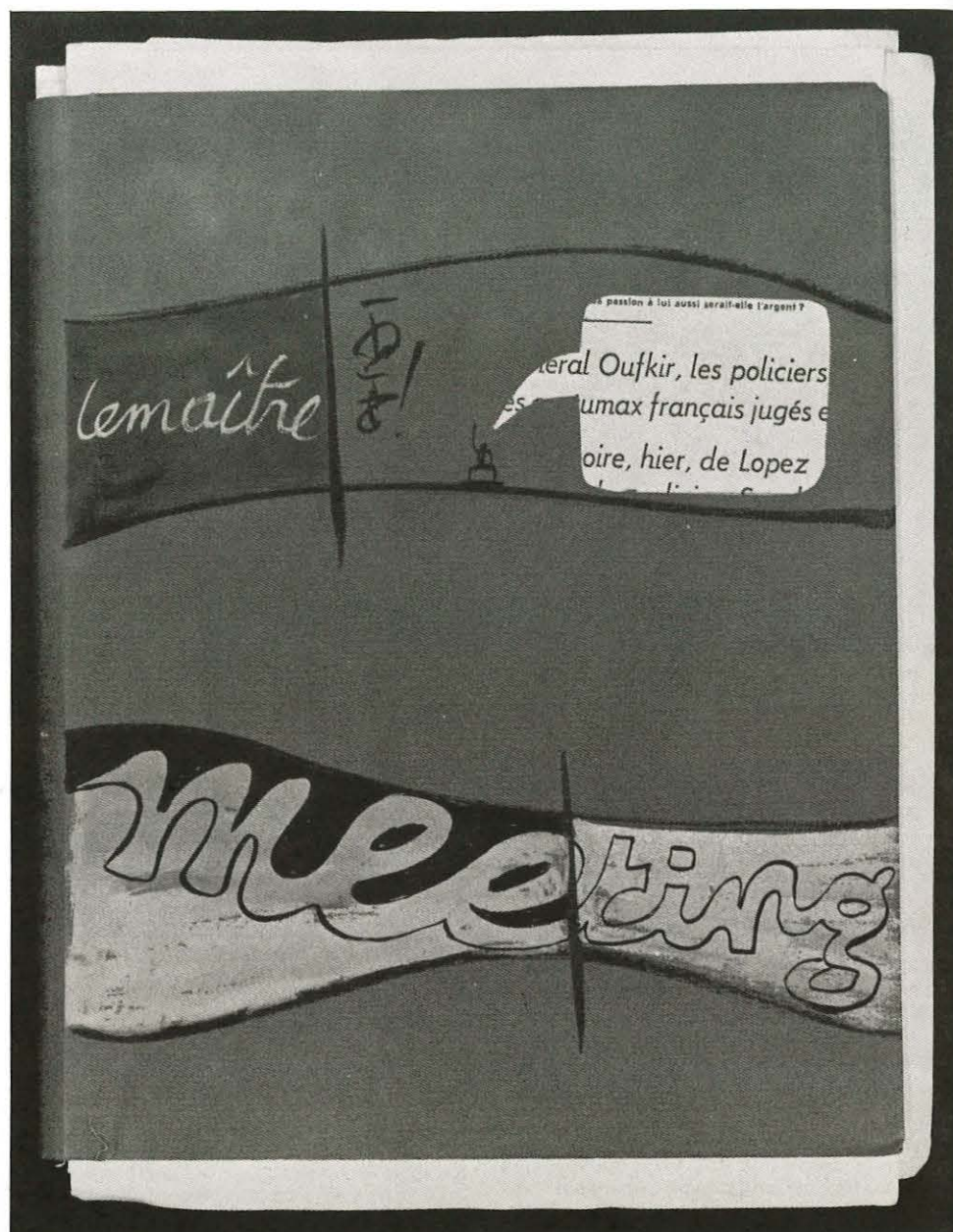


Figure 40 [40]. Maurice Lemaître, *Meeting* [maquette for edition of 18], 1966, The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

Jerimadeth

35 Number 1. Monique Goldschmidt and Frédéric Studeny, Direction de la Revue, Paris, 1972. Portfolio and slipcase with unbound pages; prints, drawings and assemblages in mixed media; number 19 of an edition of 50 signed by Goldschmidt and Studeny; 11-1/4 x 9-3/4 x 1-1/8 (28.6 x 24.8 x 2.9). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

Alain de la Tour

36 *Kakemono*, 1973. Paris. Accordion book, ink on Japan paper, signed by the artist, 7 x 4-5/8 x 1/2 (17.8 x 11.8 x 1.3). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

See also catalog numbers 28 and 74.

Maurice Lemaître

37 *Canailles: monographie supertemporelle*, 1964. Number 36 of an edition of 50, signed by Lemaître with original lino-gravure. *Canailles II, III, IV . . . : auto-monographie supertemporelle oeuvre de prodigalité esthétique*, 1968. Number 7 of a special edition of 20, signed by Lemaître, with works in mixed media, 1968. Paris, Lemaître, Centre de Créativité, 1968. Two soft-cover volumes in slipcase with hand-painted portfolio, 11-1/4 x 8-5/8 x 1-5/8 (29.1 x 22.5 x 5.1). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

38 *Canailles X ou les techniques de la gravure*, 1964. Portfolio with presentation page with text and colophon; two graphics, signed by the artist; number 14 of an edition of 20, 18-1/4 x 13-3/8 x 3/8 (46.5 x 33.9 x 0.9). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

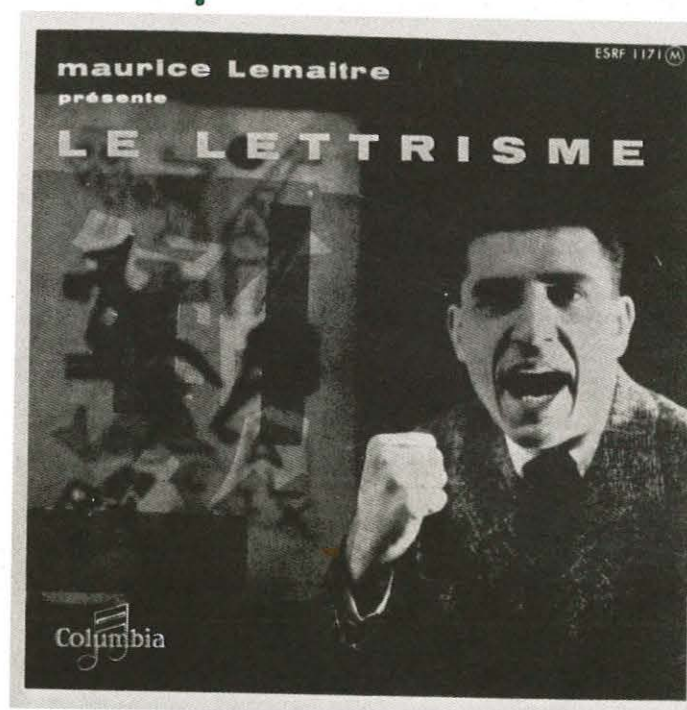


Figure 41 [42]. Maurice Lemaître, *Poèmes et Musique Lettristes*, 1971, The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

42 *Poèmes et Musique Lettristes* (special issue of *Lettrisme*, new series no. 24), August 1971. Folder with three records and text material, 10-5/8 x 8-1/4 (27.0 x 21.0). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

43 "Le premier et le dernier texte d'un prophète," "Poisson d'Avril 71," "Note sur votre bonheur" (*Lettrisme*, new series, no. 27, November 1971). Maurice Lemaître, 1971. Soft-cover portfolio with unbound pages and works in mixed media; number 13 of 20 in special edition, signed by Lemaître; 11-1/8 x 9 x 1/4 (28.3 x 22.9 x 0.6). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

44 Untitled, 1974. Intaglio, hand-colored, 14-3/4 x 19-1/2 (37.5 x 49.5). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

39 *La Lettre: Bulletin personnel d'option et d'information de Maurice Lemaître*, no. 14. Paris, January 1964. Staple-bound pamphlet, 10-3/8 x 8-1/4 x 1/16 (26.4 x 20.9 x 0.2). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

40 *Meeting* [maquette for edition of 18], 1966. Handmade portfolio with unbound pages; works in mixed media; includes statement of authenticity by Lemaître, 1981; 10-7/8 x 8-1/2 x 3/4 (27.6 x 21.6 x 1.9). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

41 *Meeting* (special issue of *Lettrisme*, new series, no. 11, July 1970) (Original edition, Paris, 1966. 1970 edition not signed by artist). Soft-cover pamphlet, 10-5/8 x 8-3/8 x 3/16 (27.0 x 21.3 x 0.5). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

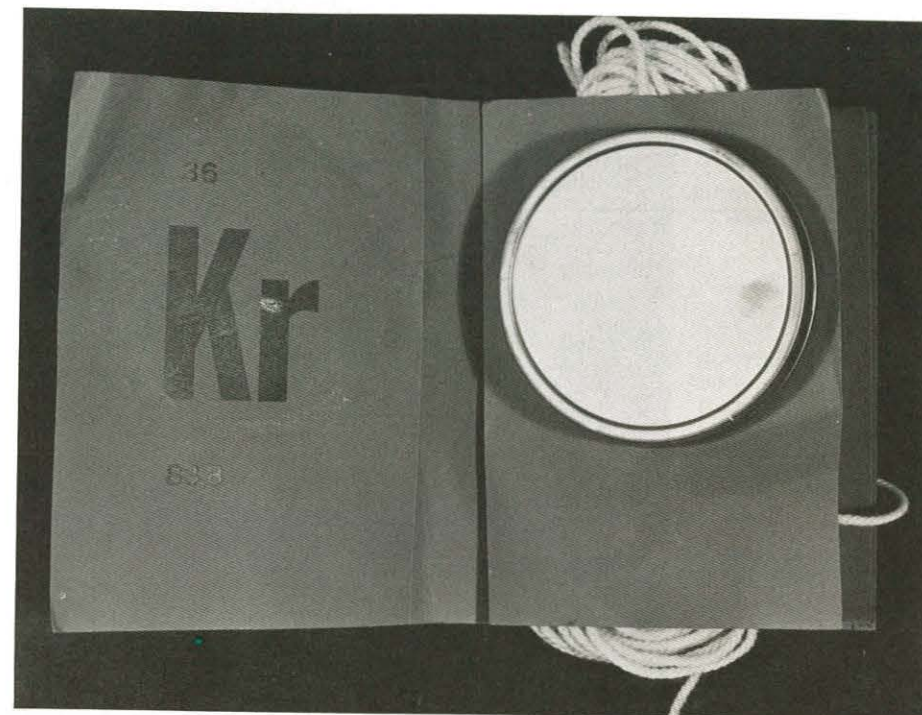


Figure 43 [49]. Pierre Juvet, from *Lettrisme*, no. 28, 29, 30, April-May-June, 1974, The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

45 *Le Création persecutée en France II* (*Lettrisme*, no. 4-5-6, 10th series). Directeur — Gerant Responsable: Maurice Lemaître. Paris, Le Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Le Collège de France, April-May-June 1981. Soft-cover volume, 11-3/4 x 8-1/8 x 1/4 (29.8 x 20.7 x 0.6). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

46 *Les diapos du Colbert*, 1981. Handmade portfolio realized in 3 copies, unbound pages, handwritten text, photographs; 11-7/16 x 8-3/4 x 2 (29.1 x 22.2 x 5.1). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

47 Untitled. Intaglio, hand-colored, 14-3/4 x 19-3/8 (37.5 x 49.2). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

See also catalog numbers 18, 59, 70, and 78.

Lettries et hypergraphies

48 Handmade folder with six works in mixed media by Roland Sabatier et al.; number 16 of an edition of 20; 6-1/8 x 4-5/8 x 1/4 (15.6 x 11.8 x 0.6). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

Lettrisme

49 Bulletin mensuel du Centre de Créativité. Geneviève Tasiv et Albert Dupont, Directeurs. Paris, 1974. Slipcase with hardcover portfolio and four soft-cover volumes, 13-1/8 x 9-5/8 x 3-7/8 (33.4 x 24.5 x 9.9). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry. Numbers 25-26-27 (January-February-March 1974). Number 16 of an edition of 20 with original work by Alain Satié. Numbers 28-29-30 (April-May-June 1974). Number 16 of an edition of 20 with original work by Pierre Juvet.

Figure 42 [46]. Maurice Lemaître, *Les diapos du Colbert*, 1981, The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

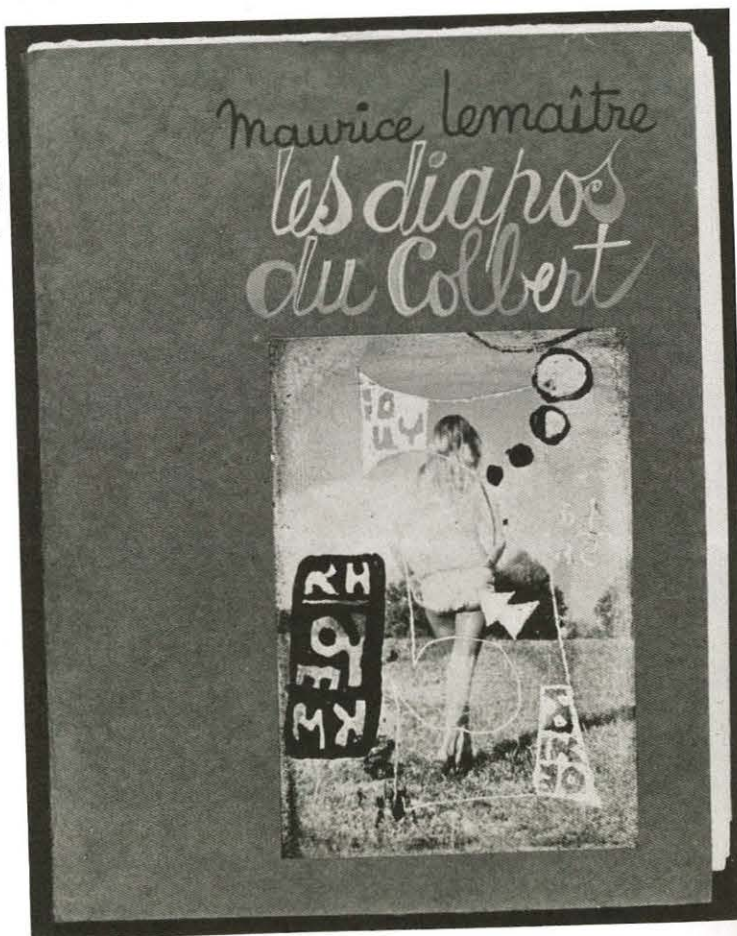




Figure 44 [50].
Isidore Isou,
Sorcellerie (Roman),
from *Lettrisme*,
no. 43, 44, 45,
July-August-
September, 1975.
The Ruth and
Marvin Sackner
Archive of
Concrete and
Visual Poetry.

Numbers 31-32-33 (July-August-September 1974). Number 16 of an edition of 20 with original work by Roland Sabatier.

Lettrisme

50 Bulletin mensuel du Centre de Créativité. Geneviève Tasiv et Albert Dupont, Directeurs. Paris, 1975. Slipcase with hardcover portfolio and four soft-cover volumes, 13 x 9-5/8 x 2-1/4 (33.0 x 24.5 x 5.7). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry. Numbers 37-38-39 (January-February-March 1975). Number 10 of an edition of 20 with original work by Patrick Poulard. Numbers 40-41-42 (April-May-June 1975). Number 10 of an edition of 20 with original work by G. Tasiv.

Numbers 46-47-48 (October-November-December 1975). Number 10 of an edition of 20 with original work by Albert Dupont.

Numbers 43-44-45 (July-August-September 1975). Number 10 of an edition of 20 with original work by Isidore Isou.

Ligne Créatrice: revue lettriste dirigée par J. Tarkieltaub

51 Number 5. Jacqueline Tarkieltaub, Director. Paris, September-October 1971. Staple-bound pamphlet with linogravure by Roland Sabatier, 11-3/4 x 8-3/8 x 1/8 (29.8 x 21.3 x 0.3). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

La Novation: revue du mouvement lettriste

52 Geneviève Tasiv et Albert Dupont, Directeurs et Fondateurs. Paris, Publication Tasiv, 1976. Slipcase with portfolio; bound volumes and unbound works in mixed media; each volume, number 10 of an edition of 20; 12-3/4 x 9-1/8 x 2 (32.4 x 23.2 x 5.1). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

Number 1, January-March 1976. Signed by Isidore Isou; with an original work by Albert Dupont.

Number 2, April-June 1976. Original work by Geneviève Tasiv.

Number 3, July-September 1976. Original work by Antoine Grimaud.

Number 4, October-December 1976. Original work by Roland Sabatier.

La Novation: revue du mouvement lettriste

53 Geneviève Tasiv et Albert Dupont, Directeurs et Fondateurs. Paris, Publication Tasiv, 1977. Slipcase with portfolio; bound volumes and unbound works in mixed media; each volume, number 10 of an edition of 20; 12-3/4 x 9-1/8 x 2 (32.4 x 23.2 x 5.1). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

Numbers 5-6, January-June 1977. Original works by Alain Satié and Françoise Canal.

Numbers 7-8, July-December 1977. Original works by François Letailleur, Geneviève Tasiv and Albert Dupont.

La Novation: revue du mouvement lettriste

54 Geneviève Tasiv et Albert Dupont, Directeurs et Fondateurs. Paris, Publication Tasiv, 1978. Slipcase with portfolio; bound volumes and unbound works in mixed media; each volume, number 10 of an edition of 20; 12-3/4 x 9-1/8 x 2 (32.4 x 23.2 x 5.1). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

Numbers 9-10, January-June 1978. Original works by Micheline Hachette and Alain Satié.

Numbers 11-12, July-December 1978. Original works by Sylvie Fauconnier and Florence Villers.

Poésie Nouvelle: bulletin du mouvement lettriste et hypergraphique et du soulèvement de la jeunesse

55 Second supplement to number 20. Maurice Lemaître, Directeur. July-August-September 1962. Single-staple pamphlet, 10-3/4 x 8-1/4 x 1/16 (27.3 x 20.9 x 0.2). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

Gabriel Pomerand

56 *Saint ghetto des prêtres*. Paris; O.L.B., Gabriel Pomerand, 1950. Soft-cover volume, 11-1/2 x 9 x 1/2 (29.2 x 22.9 x 1.30). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

François Poyet

57 Untitled, 1976. Watercolor and ink, 18-7/8 x 15 (47.9 x 38.1). Collection of the artist.

58 Untitled, 1981. Watercolor and ink, 21 x 17 (53.3 x 43.2). Collection of the artist.

See also catalog numbers 3, 25, 65, and 74.

Revue Littéraire Lettriste

Alain Satié, Directeur. Paris, Edition PSI. Posters, 23-3/16 x 17-3/4 (58.9 x 45.1). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

59 (Undated, unnumbered) "Le roman de Marcelle, roman hypergraphique et partiellement supertemporel de Maurice Lemaître."

60 Number 1, November 1970. "Ecce Homo, roman hypergraphique de Alain Satié."

61 Number 2, December 1970. "L'Hypergraphologie devant la société paradisiaque de Isidore Isou, suivi de Journal d'un Ecrivain."

62 Number 3, January 1971. "Les Concepts, roman hypergraphique a-moblie de Roland Sabatier."

63 Number 4, February 1971. "Je crie propre, journal hypergraphique de Jacques Spacagna."

64 Number 5, March 1971. "T Trop de P, roman de Gérard-Philippe Broutin."

65 Number 7, May 1971. "Gicopu, roman hypergraphique de Jean-Paul Curtay, Jean-Pierre Gillard, François Poyet."

66 Number 8, June 1971. "Jeu d'être, roman hypergraphique de Edouard Berreux."

67 Number 9, July 1971. "Conte pour Virginie, conte hypergraphique de Micheline Hachette."

68 Number 10, August 1971. "8 Brefs Romans, hypergraphiques, polythanasés de Roland Sabatier."

69 Number 11, September 1971. "Autoportrait, roman hypergraphique et supertemporel de Alain Satié."

70 Number 12, October 1971. "Les Existentialistes, roman à faire de Maurice Lemaître."

71 Number 13, November 1971. "Le roman réaliste et le extrait roman hypergraphique de Isidore Isou suivi d'un essai d'improvisation hypergraphique de Alain Satié sur ce texte."

72 Number 14, December 1971. "Traite du Jeu d'hyper, hypergraphique de Spacagna et Myrian Darrel."

73 Number 15, January 1972. "Balzac-bach, page hypergraphique en hommage à Balzac sur une rythmique empruntée à Bach par Jean-Paul Curtay."

74 Number 16, February 1972. "Collectif hypergraphique, roman collectif de Broutin, Canal, Curtay, Darrell, Gillard, Hachette, Latour, Poyet, Sabatier, Spacagna, Tarkieltaub."

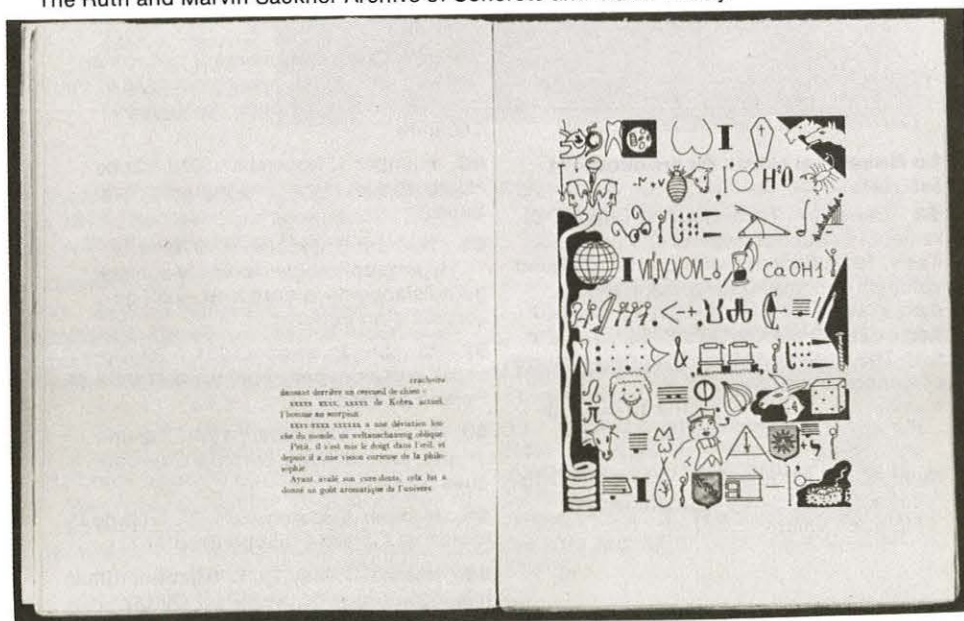
75 Number 17, March 1972. "Les mystères de Phi, roman hypergraphique de Jean-Pierre Gillard."

76 Number 18, April 1972. "Exemple à conseiller, roman infinitésimal contrôlé et relancé de Alain Satié."

77 Number 19, May 1972. "Exposition roman hypergraphique de Roland Sabatier."

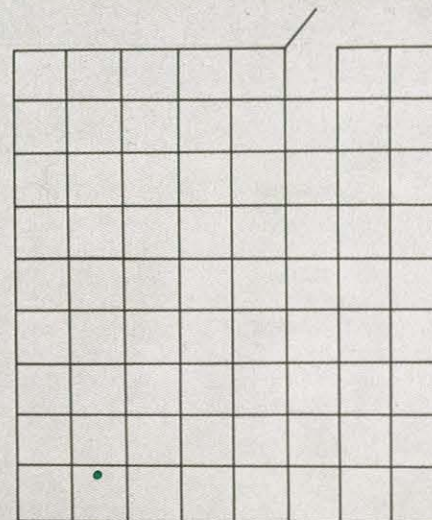
78 Number 20, June 1972. "Les Existentialistes II, roman à faire de Maurice Lemaître extrait."

Figure 45 [56]. Gabriel Pomerand, from *Saint ghetto des prêtres*, 1950, The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.



LES MYSTERES DE PHI

roman hypergraphique de jean-pierre gillard



ψ

DIRECTEUR ALAIN SATIÉ 96, RUE CHAUVELOT PARIS 15. EDITION PSI MARS 1972. N° 17

REVUE LITTÉRAIRE LETTRISTE

Figure 46 [75]. Jean-Pierre Gillard, "Les mystères de Phi, roman hypergraphique de Jean-Pierre Gillard," *Revue Littéraire Lettriste*, no. 17, March 1972, The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

Roland Sabatier

79 *PSI*, No. 1. Paris, 1966. Handmade portfolio with unbound pages; works by Sabatier et al. in mixed media; number 21 of an edition of 30; 11-3/4 x 8-7/8 x 3/4 (29.8 x 22.6 x 1.9). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

80 *Pour la Forme*, no. 4. Paris, Roland Sabatier and Ipergrafi, Ed. Crean, 1969. Staple-bound, 6-7/8 x 5-5/8 (17.5 x 14.3). Collection of the artist.

81 *Hypergraphie corrigée*, 1972. Drawing, collage, mixed media, 25-1/2 x 19-3/4 (64.8 x 50.2). Collection of the artist.

82 *Hypergraphie corrigée*, 1972. Drawing, collage, mixed media, 25-1/2 x 19-3/4 (64.8 x 50.2). Collection of the artist.

See also catalog numbers 1, 19, 62, 68, 74 and 77.

Alain Satié

83 *Cela Va Sans Dire*, 1971. Box (binder board) with four drawers containing hypergraphic objects by Lemaître, Sabatier and Spacagna and accordion book by Satié; box, 7-1/8 x 7 x 5-1/8 (18.1 x 17.8 x 13.0; each drawer, 3-1/4 x 3-1/4 x 5 (8.3 x 8.3 x 12.7). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

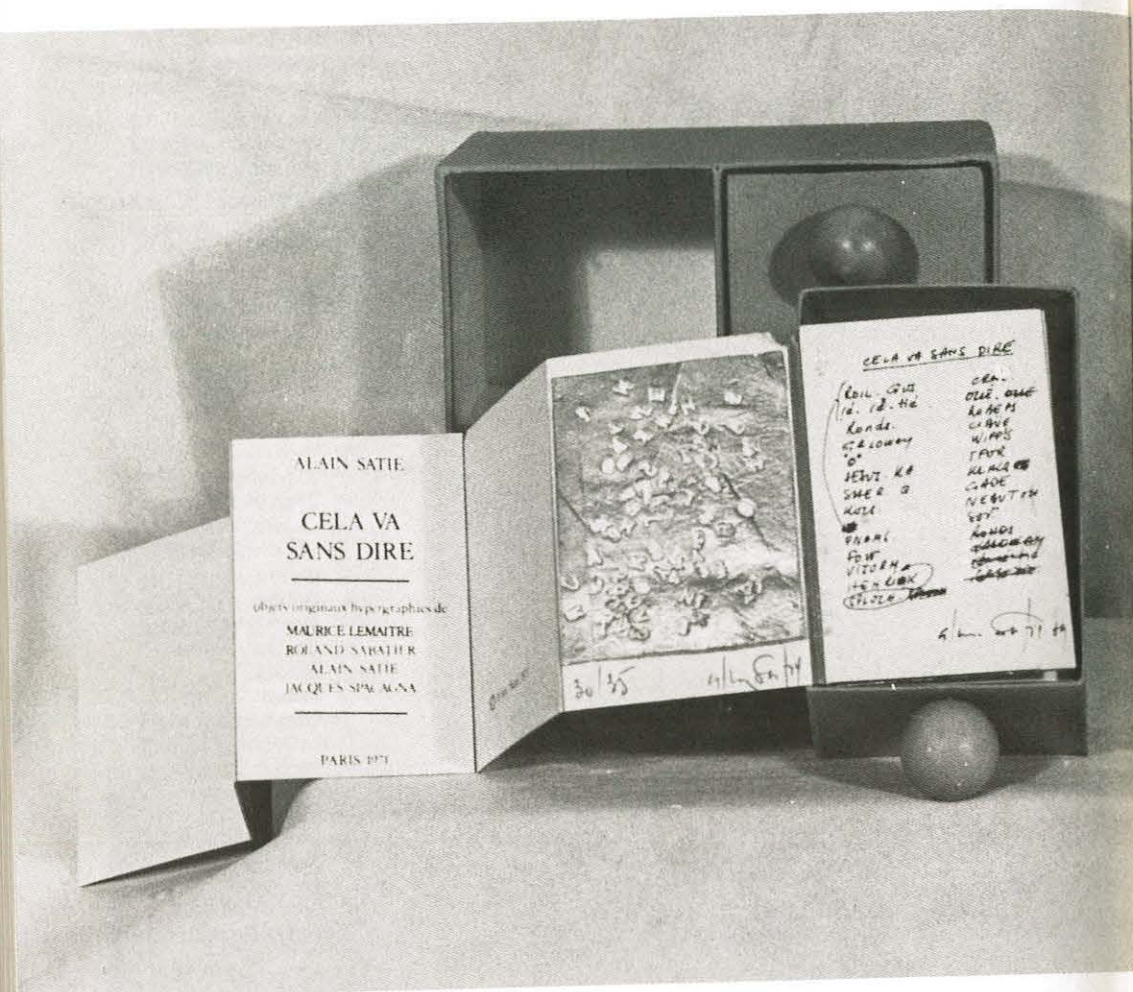


Figure 47 [83]. Alain Satié, *Cela Va Sans Dire*, 1971.
The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

84 *Ecrit en Prose ou L'oeuvre Hypergraphique*. Editions PSI, 1971. Soft-cover volume; original hypergraphics; number 17 of an edition of 30 signed by Satié, 8-1/2 x 7-5/8 x 1/2 (21.6 x 19.4 x 1.3). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

85 *Pour ainsi dire*. Paris, Collection PSI, 1971. Portfolio and slipcase with unbound pages; graphics by Satié et al.; number 20 of an edition of 40 signed by the artists;

13-1/4 x 10-3/16 x 7/8 (33.7 x 25.9 x 2.2). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

86 Untitled, 1978. Spray paint, 22 x 19-7/8 (55.9 x 50.5). Collection of the artist. See also catalog numbers 21, 60, 69, 71 and 76.

Jacques Spacagna

See catalog numbers 1, 63, 72 and 74.

c) **POTK** • 2 } hurle'
acrafopuresetemi •
1 temps

d) **MAMTS** } hurle'
acräpéhosupidi pour terminer
mettre la main
devant la bouche.
(polythanasie)
choeur : fre, dre, frouc, in IN - frouc (bis)

e) **XOTS** ter' (rapide et angoissé)
acrapijôtilikomimi
module

• = 1 seconde de silence

Figure 48. [85]. Alain Satié, *Pour ainsi dire*, 1971.
The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

Frédéric Studeny

See catalog number 29.

Jacqueline Tarkieltaub

See catalog numbers 23 and 74.

Ur

New series. Maurice Lemaître,
Fondateur-Directeur. Paris

87 Number 1, 1963. Slipcase and soft-cover portfolio; text, prints in mixed media; number 3 of an edition of 100, signed by the contributors; 11 x 8-5/8 x 5/8 (27.9 x 21.9 x 1.6). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

88 Number 2, 1964. Slipcase and hard-cover portfolio; text, prints in mixed media; number 3 of an edition of 100, signed by the contributors; 10-15/16 x 8-5/8 x 1 (27.8 x 21.9 x 2.5). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

89 Number 3, 1964. Slipcase, hardcover and soft-cover portfolios; prints in mixed media and photographs; number 3 of an edition of 100, signed by the contributors; 10-15/16 x 8-1/2 x 1 (27.8 x 21.6 x 2.5). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

90 Number 4, 1964. Slipcase and hard-cover portfolio; prints in mixed media, text, collages and photographs; number 3 of an edition of 100, signed by the contributors; 11 x 8-5/8 x 1-1/8 (27.9 x 21.9 x 2.9). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

91 Number 5, 1965. Slipcase and hard-cover portfolio; prints in mixed media, drawings and collages; number 3 of an edition of 100, signed by the contributors;

11 x 8-5/8 x 1-1/8 (27.9 x 21.9 x 2.9). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

92 Number 6, 1966. Slipcase and hard-cover portfolio; prints in mixed media, drawings, text, and collages; number 3 of an edition of 50, signed by the contributors; 11 x 8-5/8 x 1-1/4 (27.9 x 21.9 x 3.2). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

93 Number 7 [supplement to *Lettrisme*], 1967. Slipcase with hardcover portfolio; prints in mixed media, collages and text; number 6 of an edition of 40; 11 x 8-5/8 x 1-1/4 (27.9 x 21.9 x 3.2). The Ruth and Marvin Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry.

Florence Villers

94 *Ces quelques signes*, 1974. Intaglio, 6-3/4 x 7-1/2 (17.1 x 19.1). Collection of the artist.

95 Untitled, 1978. Mixed media drawing, 19-3/4 x 15-1/8 (50.0 x 38.4). Collection of the artist.

96 The exhibition also includes letterhead stationery from the following organizations: ADAL, Atelier de Décoration et d'Applications Lettristes (2 pieces); Paris-Théâtre, la Revue de l'actualité théâtrale dans le monde; Café-Cinéma-Théâtre le Colbert; Ur, La Revue de la lettre et du signe; FFCA, Fédération française des Compagnies et animateurs; Poésie nouvelle; Editions Maurice Lemaître; Club international de Poésie; Front de la Jeunesse; Lettrisme, La Revue de psychokladologie et de psychothéie; Théâtre neuf; Paris-Théâtre, Paris-Spectacles; Musée d'Art contemporain; Centre de Créativité.

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Courtesy of Isidore Isou: Figures 2, 9, 12, 13.
Courtesy of Roberto Altmann: Figures 3, 17.
Courtesy of Maurice Lemaître: Figures 11, 14, 15, 29.
Courtesy of Jean-Paul Curtay: Figure 5.
Courtesy of Antoine Grimaud: Figure 26.
Figures 30-33 provided by Nicholas Zurbrugg.

The Authors

Stephen C. Foster is associate professor of art history at The University of Iowa (Iowa City, IA 52242), director of the University's Fine Arts Archive: Dada Archive and Research Center, and series editor of *Studies in the Fine Arts: The Avant-garde* (UMI Research Press). His scholarly publications address topics as diverse as abstract expressionism, naive and visionary art, the avant-garde and Dada. In 1978 he curated the exhibition *Dada Artifacts* at the University of Iowa Museum of Art; he is curator of the current exhibition, *Lettrisme: Into the Present*.

Jean-Paul Curtay, composer, poet, visual and performance artist, was an active member of the Letterist movement from 1967 through 1974. He edited *La Musique Lettriste*, organized the first concert of Letterist music (Festival d'Automne, Paris), and wrote *La Poésie Lettriste* (Seghers, Paris). In 1979 he developed Body Sound Art, an art form composed of noises emitted by living organisms, and has since presented his lecture-performances in France, England and throughout the United States.

David W. Seaman is professor of foreign language and chair of the Humanities Division of Davis and Elkins College (Elkins, WV 26241). Author of *Concrete Poetry in France* (UMI, 1981), he continues his scholarly research on visual poetry and as film critic, poet and artist. He has maintained contact with the Letterists and exhibited his own work in their Salon de la Lettre et du Signe in 1980.

Frédérique Devaux is president of the Union des Jeunes Artistes et Plasticiens and edits *La Revue d'Histoire du Cinéma*, a journal founded by Maurice Lemaître. She is director of the International Avant-Garde Festival (F.I.A.G.), which sponsors an annual Salon of Art, Video and Cinema in Paris. Since 1980 she has been producing experimental films, several of which were included in the exhibition *Letterist Cinema 1951-1982* at the Georges Pompidou Center. Other of her Letterist works have appeared in numerous exhibitions.

Nicholas Zurbrugg is lecturer in comparative literature at Griffith University, (Brisbane, Australia). He has written on a wide variety of topics pertaining to experimental and avant-garde literature, including (as co-author with Rosemary Pountney) *York Study Notes on "Waiting for Godot"* (Longman & York, 1981). Serving as editor of the journal *Stereo Headphones* since 1969, Dr. Zurbrugg is presently concluding *Beckett and Proust*, a comparative study projected for publication in 1984.

Pietro Ferrua is professor of foreign languages at Lewis and Clark College (Portland, OR 97203). He has maintained an interest in Letterism since its early phases, and in 1976 organized the first international symposium on the movement. He has since been involved with Internazionale Novatrice Infinitesimal, a recent aspect of Letterism, and produced the film scripts *Ciao Lemaître* and *Sanremo Lettrista* and the multimedia show *Ode to Anarchy*. His scholarly publications include works on literature, history, film, philosophy and the avant-garde.

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