

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

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|--------------|--|
| 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> |

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| 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.
ISOU 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.