

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 Polythanasie • 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, *Poïesis* and *Champs panhellesiques* • Sabatier starts focusing on polythanasie 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, 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 Hypergraphies 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, Morny 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 Hypergraphies* • 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.