

# History of the Lettrist International

## By Guy Debord<sup>1</sup>

1952

Presentation in Paris, at the ciné-club d'Avant Garde, of Wolman's film, *L'Anticoncept*. Battle between the lettrists and the public. Interdiction of the film by the censor. Publication, by the entire the lettrist group, of the only issue of the journal *Ion*. Lettrist tracts and interventions at the Fifth Cinematic Festival at Cannes. Arrest of a dozen demonstrators. Sabotage of the Congress of Young Poetry held at the Pedagogical Museum of the rue d'Ulm. The deployment of numerous police forces against the lettrists causes the retreat of a large number of the participants. In Brussels, Debord and Wolman arbitrarily found the Lettrist International. Presentation at the ciné-club d'Avant Garde of Debord's film, *Hurléments en faveur de Sade*. The audience interrupts the projection after only 10 minutes. The Lettrist International attacks a press conference held by Chaplin that presented the film *Limelight* and distributes copies of the tract *Finis les pied plats*. Exclusion of Jean-Isidore Isou and Maurice Lemaître, who, in the press, had disavowed the scandal. Publication of the first issue of the bulletin of the I.L.

1953

Mohamed Dahou joins the Lettrist International. Exclusion of Serge Berna, suspected of deviation towards literature. Foundation of the lettrist group in Algiers. In Paris, a lettrist [Pierre-Joël Berlé] who took nighttime walks in the catacombs is sentenced to a prison term for vagrancy and the theft of lead. He is acquitted on appeal, but excluded sometime later. Fights over several ideological issues. First systematic experimentation with dérives. Exploration of the Continent Contrescarpe. Discovery of the rue Sauvage. Exclusion of Jean-Louis Brau, who shortly afterwards joined the Indochinese expeditionary corps. Purge of a nihilist tendency within the International. Patrick Straram, who had joined the Lettrist International, is arrested. Found carrying a switchblade, he is illegally held for six days at the Dépôt, then for two months at the Ville-Évrard psychiatric hospital. He publishes a eulogy for the construction of situations in the bulletin put out by the patients locked up in this asylum.

1954

Under the pretext of drug trafficking, the police close an Arab bar in the Fifth arrondissement where the lettrists had their headquarters. The group engages in concerted metagraphical activity. Straram: *Quelque part Salt Spring*; Gilles Ivain: *Réflexions sur l'échec de quelques révolutions dans le monde, Tombeau du général Chine*; Debord: *Progression des lettrists au Coeur du Continent Contrescarpe*, etc. Partial demolition of the rue Sauvage undertaken by the Public Works department. Wolman organizes a metagraphic exposition at the galerie du Double Doute.

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<sup>1</sup> Transcript of a tape recording played on 6 December 1956 at the Tonneau d'or, a bar at which the lettrist group had its headquarters. Published in Guy Debord, *Oeuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), pp. 271-273. Translated from the French by Bill Brown, August 2024.

Exclusion of Gilles Ivain. Resignation of Patrick Straram, then in Canada, who had taken the side of the minority. Publication of the first issue of *Potlatch*. Several lettrists offer to fight in the Guatemalan civil war. Its unfortunate sudden ending prevents them from doing so. Collective publication of the surrealists and the lettrists concerning the official centennial of Rimbaud: *Ça commence bien!* The surrealists eventually withdraw from the violent intervention that they had proposed. [Publication of] *Et ça finit mal, faussaires*, lettrist tract concerning these incidents. Foundation of the Swiss group of the Lettrist International. Immediate dissolution of the group under the pressure of the Swiss police.

1955

Psychogeographical experimentation in Postman Cheval's [Idéal] Palais. Research into and discovery of the constructions in the Désert de Retz. Membership of Alexander Trocchi. Publication of the first psychogeographical studies. Debord: *Introduction à une critique de la géographie urbaine*; Jacques Fillon: *Description raisonnée de Paris*. In-depth study of a general situationist theory. Publication of *Pourquoi le lettrisme?*

1956

First exploration of the Chinese quarter in London. Publication of *Mode d'emploi du détournement*. First realization of psychogeographical maps. Lettrist participation in the Mouvement international pour un Bauhaus imaginaire. Resignation of the architect Max Bill, director of the école d'Ulm, due to attacks by the Mouvement. The Lettrist International issues a boycott order against the Festival de l'Art Avant-Garde held at the Unité d'Habitation Le Corbusier in Marseille. Complete failure of this reactionary event. Lettrist participation in the Alba Conference, where progressive groups from eight nations are represented. Adoption of the watchword unitary urbanism by that Congress. Wolman: *J'écris proper*, a détourned story. Debord: *Théorie de la dérive*.