

Wolman in the Open

Frédéric Acquaviva

If there is one figure that confirms Duchamp's 1961 hypothesis that the great artist of the future would come from the underground, in the sense of being clandestine, it has to be Gil J Wolman.

But how does one present the work of someone who is not just another outsider, but one of the essential players in the transformation of the arts in the second half of the twentieth century, a man who wrote, 'relating the work has no relation to the work, bring it back to life, it's dead'?

By his own account, Wolman was, in quick succession, a journalist at *Combat*, a member of the Communist Youth, a captain on the canal barge *Rose Bayadère* anchored in Paris, a knitter, an African hunter in occupied Germany, a poet at the CNE, a trafficker in the kasbah in Algiers, a trucker near North Cape and a barman in Pompeii. But the story that interests us here is quite different. It's the one that he sums up as follows: 'Wolman, born in 1929, met a few people, took part in a few events, did a few things.'

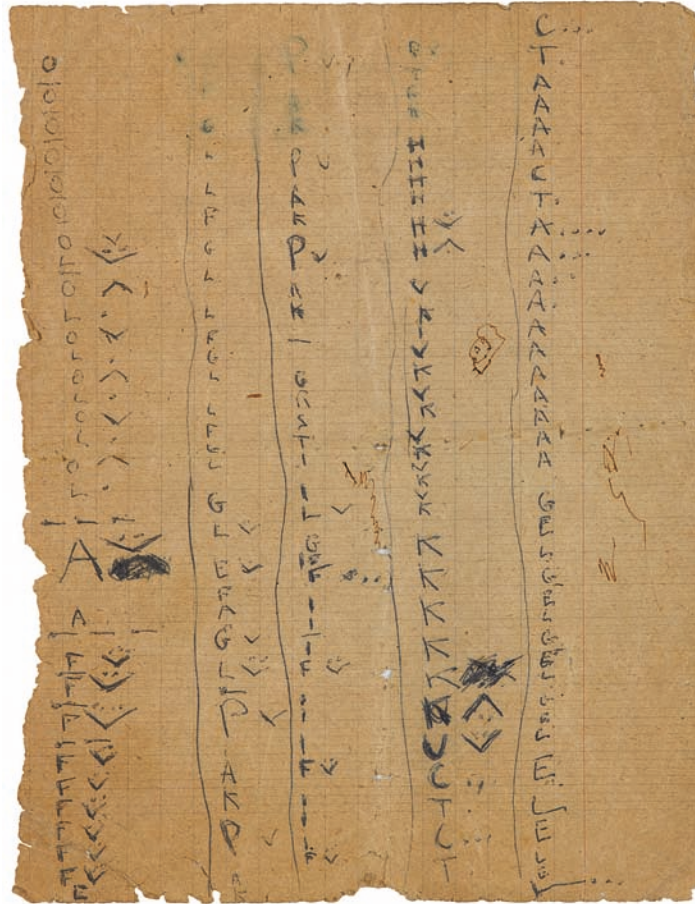
Lettrism

On 23 August 1945, Isidore Isou (1925–2007) arrived in Paris from his native Romania. He had chosen the French capital as the setting for a new avant-garde, Lettrism, which he launched with a series of scandalous events in the company of Gabriel Pomerand, starting in January 1946.

Isou advocated the total surpassing of all fields of culture. In 1947 he published a first manifesto, *Introduction à une nouvelle poésie et à une nouvelle musique* (published by Gallimard). This new poetry would be based exclusively on letters and on body noises, carefully noted down by means of a new sound alphabet. At the intersection of music and poetry, this poetry without meaning, without semantics, would go well beyond earlier presentiments coming from Dada by virtue of its theoretical profusion and the many works that were created over the previous decades while heralding sound poetry. Such was the importance of the body and sound in these new propositions.

At the age of sixteen, François Dufrêne (1930–1982), having heard a few *lettries* on the radio, became the group's youngest member. In 1950 the group was joined by Maurice Lemaître (born in 1926), Jean-Louis Brau (1930–1985) and Gil J Wolman (1929–1995).

Wolman met Brau in 1949, shortly after the latter had founded his poetry magazine *Transit*, which one only need flip through to realise just how much



Gil J Wolman, notation for *mégapneumies*, 1950

certain encounters can change things: those early poems seem banal and antithetical to that for which he is known today. Fortunately, the two friends attended François Dufrêne's first recital at the Maison des Lettres in Paris and discovered Isou and Lettrism, the movement they would soon join.

In 1950 Isou had already evicted André Breton in an extraordinary pamphlet, written a *Traité d'économie nucléaire* prophetically subtitled *Le Soulèvement de la jeunesse*, rewritten the history of the novel and its metagraphic sequel *Les Journaux des Dieux*, published, in addition to an autobiography and a manual of erotology that had won him a promotional stint in prison, two books on the foundations of his poetry, and sketched the first Lettrist drawings in which *writing* becomes art.

Aged 25, Isou was a public figure who challenged moribund Surrealism and stood as the only guarantor of the historical avant-gardes. He embodied a new spirit, and did so with limitless ambition, attracting everyone who was anyone.

When Wolman joined him, Isou, who worked systematically using a *pre*-defined programme, was planning to revolutionise the cinema, which is something that he manifestly did with his film *Traité de bave et d'éternité*, a piece he shot and edited all through 1950 and then showed on the fringe of the Cannes Film Festival on 20 April 1951, arousing the interest of a young sixth-former from Cannes, Guy Debord.

Isou's theoretical advance and his unpredictable personality created a certain gap between him and his other comrades, despite the fact that they were pretty much the same age.

It was precisely within this distance that Wolman took up his position, constructing himself through Isou's dynamic concepts, while re-appropriating and amplifying them, before eventually turning away.

Mégapneumie

After a short phase, in which he tried out a few classic Lettrist poems, Wolman performed his first bravura action, the *mégapneumie*, that is to say, a poem of great breath or vigour, a mega-breath. The breath in fact became the structural element after the disintegration of the vowels and consonants. The result was a striking form of *physical poetry* of which, in 1950, Wolman offered a few examples at a recital at the Tabou (attended by the Lettrist elite: Isou, Pomerand, Lemaître, Brau, Dufrêne, etc.) and at La Rose Rouge, the fashionable clubs of the day.

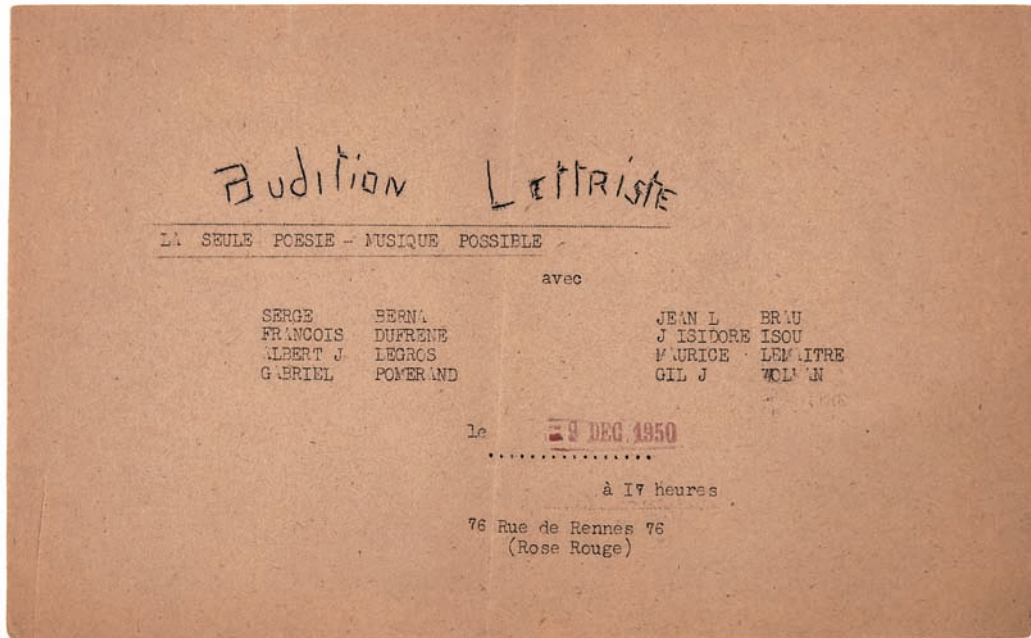
His theories, which were also meant to be ironic in relation to Isou, if not to himself, were published in the first issue of Maurice Lemaître's legendary review, *Ur*, in December 1950.

Wolman was indeed the first person to claim an original name for his own creation, one different from those forged by Isou. Lemaître would later follow him in this with his *syncinéma* and Dufrêne with his *crirhythmes*. In this way Wolman clearly asserted both his position and his originality.

Wolman, whose complex body of work combines poetry, writing, collage, pictures, films and videos, could have been simply a poet. Instead he is the multidisciplinary artist *par excellence*, someone whose inventiveness ranged from medium to medium.

Like Ghérasim Luca, who put on only fifteen recitals but was a striking performer of his poetry, Wolman ultimately gave very few poetic performances, recorded only a limited number of *mégapneumes* and brought out only a limited number of records. But he was active throughout his life and did enough to be one of the major representatives of this new poetry. For he had managed to define its essence, reducing poetry to the breath and the noises of the body. This was not the breath of the lyrical poet – who was getting decidedly wheezy in those postwar years – but a brutal and quintessential reduction, like Antonin Artaud crossed with Isou.

An eminently experimental and therefore creative figure, Wolman made use of whatever came to hand. He was casual about his means of production,



Invitation card to a Lettrist audition, La Rose Rouge, Paris, 1950

always preferring simplicity ('the simpler it is, the more beautiful it is'). His *mégapneumes* were thus not tape-recorder poetry (of the kind advocated by François Dufrêne, and then by Henri Chopin and Bernard Heidsieck), but poetry that, while it could be performed – orality was essential to this poet who only published his first book at the age of fifty –, was recorded without any reworking, like raw material. Keeping away from the tendencies that he had helped bring into existence, such as the sound poetry championed by Chopin, or even groups such as Polyphonix, with whom Dufrêne often performed, for his work in this area was in a sense complete: the *mégapneumes* were gradually distanced as his plastic work took on a new magnitude.

L'Anticoncept

In 1951, having lent his voice to Isidore Isou's *Traité de bave et d'éternité* and having written the introductory poem to Lemaître's *Le Film est déjà commencé*, Wolman, aged only 22, made a 35 mm film, *L'Anticoncept*, that propelled him into this creative eternity ('I am immortal and alive,' we hear him say). If it is amazing to hear a work whose title seems in advance of Henry Flynt and his *Concept Art* (1961), if not of the Conceptual art of the sixties, it is important to grasp the concept, for this is work that seeks to be just as anti-conceptual as Lettrism was in killing the concept in order to musicalise language. There is no image in this film, except flashes of white circles alternating with complete black, the whole thing projected on a helium balloon by way of a screen. The hour-long sound track is performed by Wolman throughout (unlike Lettrist films of the period) as he experiments with recorder speeds to produce sound results that are surprising even today. If the films of Isou (total separation of sound and image) and Lemaître (integration of viewers in the action) are aesthetically linked by what are called *ciselantes* (chiselling) images, Wolman's film introduces a rupture into what is already a rupture in the history of cinema, setting the example for Debord's 1952 film *Hurlements en faveur de Sade*, which is also devoid of images and alternates black and white (the film is indeed dedicated



Portraits of the Lettrists, *Ion*, 1952

to Wolman) and François Dufrêne's *Tambours du jugement premier*, which has neither screen nor film (the film is read *in situ*).

Subversive because of its absence of images, *L'Anticoncept* was banned by the censors and Wolman found himself under pressure from the laboratories to pay his debts.

People often speak of those who fought to obtain the vote or to establish charters of human rights. We should also be aware of our debt to pioneering artists, those who opened the way for the *Nouvelle Vague* and for experimental cinema, and then to the total democratisation of the act of filming, via video and digital technology.

Just like the physical poetry present in the sound track, this film seeks to provoke a physical reaction on the part of beholders who, even with their eyes closed, perceive the flashes of light. There is no need here to emphasise the pre-flicker effect, which would become one of the stereotypes of underground cinema, or even to relate the visual part of the film to the *Dream Machine* conceived by Brion Gysin a decade later.

In 2003 technical measures were taken in France in order to limit the unwanted effects of this flicker effect, which suggests that, even if censorship were lifted (which it seems not to have been), the film would be banned once again for purely sensorial reasons.

In April 1952 the script of Wolman's film was published in the magazine *Ion*, bringing together nearly all the Lettrists and, with them, Guy Debord, who had just arrived in Paris.



Gil J Wolman
HHHHHH (Un homme saout en vaut deux)
1952

The Lettrist International

In May and June 1952, Wolman was in Belgium with Debord. They decided to found the Lettrist International, which soon rejected the Lettrism of Isou and Lemaître (Pomerand had by now left the group and stopped making avant-garde work).

As for Dufrêne, he and Marc'O published a magazine that took its title from Isou's book *Le Soulèvement de la jeunesse*. This was where Yves Klein and Jacques Spacagna, among others, would publish their first texts. They then moved on towards Ultralettrism (a term coined by Raymond Hains), an ephemeral movement also joined by Jacques Villeglé and Robert Estivals, before entering the ranks of the Nouveaux Réalistes as *Affichistes* (artists working with torn posters).

When Charles Chaplin came to Paris on a promotional tour on 29 October 1952, Jean-Louis Brau and Gil J Wolman managed to force their way through the police cordon and throw insulting tracts at the idol. This event, of which Isou disapproved, led to the publication of the magazine *Internationale Lettriste (II)* (where Serge Berna, one of several participants in the 'Notre-Dame scandal' on 9 April 1950, was also active), the first action of which was to exclude Isou.

Four issues were published between 1952 and 1954. This magazine was followed by the newsletter *Pollatch*, from 1954 to 1957.

With Brau, who was worried about art and aesthetics, which he did not want to leave in the hands of Isou-Lemaître (in 1952 Isou painted his series of 37 canvases entitled *Les Nombres* and made the nine metagraphic photos of *Amos*, while Lemaître continued his *Canailles* series), Wolman made a first

internationale Lettriste

Il faut Recommencer La Guerre en Espagne



Voilà déjà quinze ans que Franco s'accroche au pouvoir, saill cette part de notre avenir que nous avons laissé perdre avec l'Espagne. Les églises que nos amis ont brûlé dans ce pays sont reconstruites, et les bagnes refermés sur les meilleurs de nous. Le Moyen-Age commence à la frontière, et notre silence s'affermi. Il faut cesser d'envisager cette situation d'une manière sentimentale, ne plus laisser les intellectuels de gauche s'en amuser. C'est uniquement une question de force. Nous demandons aux partis révolutionnaires prolétariens d'organiser une intervention armée pour soutenir la nouvelle révolution dont on a vu récemment les podaroms à Barcelone, révolution qui devra cette fois ne pas être défigurée de ses fins.

Pour l'Internationale Lettriste :
P.J. Borlé, Bull D. Brau, Hadj Mohamed Dahou,
Guy-Ernest Debord, Gaëtan M. Langlais,
Jean-Michel Mension, Gil J Wolman.

Dimensions du Langage

Le récit se poursuit dans tous les sens. Après les premières ébauches de l'écriture négraphique, une expression illimitée s'offre à nous, très au-delà de l'explosion verbale que James Joyce a menée à bien.

Écrit avec des photos et des fragments de journaux collés sur des bouteilles de rhum, le roman tridimensionnel de G.-E. Debord, HISTOIRE DES GESTES, laisse au gré du lecteur le suite des idées, le fil perdu d'un labyrinthe d'anecdotes simultanées.

Les « NOUVELLES SPATIALES » de Bull D. Brau trouvent la composante des vecteurs de la dynamique conceptuelle. Les lettres cinématiques préfigurent le caractère ontologique de la réversibilité du concept, « il s'agit de décomposer les lettres qualitatives qui sont le corps même du concept, au-delà de leur ordre accidentel d'assemblage ». (Brau)
Gaëtan M. Langlais mettant en présence les différents paragraphes de JOLIE COUSETTE avance vers celui de nos résultats sans doute le plus décisif pour l'avenir de la communication : le détournement des phrases.

Principes d'un Théâtre Nouveau

Notre camarade Hadj Mohamed Dahou, dont on n'a pas oublié la courageuse intervention à propos des massacres de Sétif, achève actuellement dans le sud-algérien sa pièce LA MITE QUI NE S'ATTACHE QU'À LA LAINE DES ORPHELINS, bouleversement total de la représentation théâtrale, où la phrase est considérée comme unité scénique.

Tout article publié engage la responsabilité de l'ensemble des collaborateurs de ce numéro.
Internationale Lettriste N° 3.
Aout 1953.
50 francs.
Directeur-Gérant : B.-D. BRAU.
Rédacteur en chef : G.-E. DEBORD.
1, rue Racine - Paris (6°).
Dépôt légal 3^e tri, 1953
Imp. Spéciale de l'Internationale Lettriste

Pour en finir avec le Confort Nihiliste

Nous savons que toutes les réalités nouvelles sont, elles-mêmes provisoires, et toujours trop peu pour nous suffire. Nous les défendons parce que nous ne nous commissions rien de mieux à faire; et parce qu'est, en somme, notre métier. Mais l'indifférence ne nous est pas permise devant les étouffantes valeurs du présent; quand elles sont garanties par une Société de prisons, et quand nous vivons devant les portes des prisons. Nous ne voulons à aucun prix participer, accepter de nous taire, accepter.

Ne serait-ce que par orgueil, il nous déplaît de ressembler à trop de gens. Le vin rouge et la négation dans les cafés, les vérités premières du désespoir ne seront pas l'aboutissement de ces vies si difficiles à défendre contre les pièges du silence, les cent manières de SI RANGER.

Au-delà de ce manque toujours ressenti, au-delà de l'inévitable et inextinguible dépendance de tout ce que nous avons connu, perdante, nous sommes. Toute forme de propagande sera donc bonne.

Nous avons à promouvoir une insurrection qui nous concerne, à la mesure de nos revendications. Nous avons à témoigner d'une certaine idée du bonheur même si nous l'avons connue perdue, idée sur laquelle tout programme révolutionnaire devra d'abord s'alligner.

Guy-Ernest DEBORD.

Allez-y voir vous-mêmes

Après « L'Anticoncept » (Wolman), « Hurlements en faveur de Sade » (G.-E. Debord) et « La Barque de la vie courante » (Brau), l'Internationale Lettriste tourne actuellement quatre nouveaux films : FAUT MAVOIR CE MEC et ORAISON FUNÈBRE, de Gil J Wolman. LA CITADELLE, de Bull D. Brau. LA BELLE JEUNESSE, mis en scène par Guy-Ernest Debord, assisté Gaëtan Langlais.

Acte Additionnel à la Constitution d'une Internationale Lettriste

« Au début de juin, le « cercle international de recherches esthétiques Paul Valéry » avait organisé un dîner Bagatelle une séance contradictoire au cours de laquelle l'on devait présenter sa défense. L'Internationale Lettriste refusa l'engagement le débat et fit lire la déclaration intrinsèque, cependant qu'un piquet d'intervention interdisait l'entrée de la salle à l'Hôtel Bazar de l'Assommoir.

Nous refusons la discussion qui nous est proposée maintenant. Les rapports humains doivent avoir la passion pour fondement, sinon la Terreur.

En se plaçant délibérément sur le terrain de la basse police, l'aidore l'on a rendu tout dialogue impossible.

Nous avons reconnu la valeur de sa critique des arts, mais en suspectant ses mobiles mystico-giratoire.

Les problèmes dépassés que tente de remuer ce sous-kafka des urinoirs ne nous détourneront pas de notre but : un bouleversement définitif de l'Esthétique et, au-delà de l'Esthétique, de tout comportement.

Pour l'Internationale Lettriste :
Bull D. Brau, Guy-Ernest Debord,
Gaëtan M. Langlais, Gil J Wolman.

Totem et Tabou

Présenté le 11 février 1952 et immédiatement interdit par la Censure pour des motifs demeurer vagues, le premier film de Gil J Wolman « L'ANTI-CONCEPT » n'a pu être revu, depuis même en exploitation non commerciale.

Ce film qui marque un tournant décisif du Cinéma est défendu au public par une Commission composée de pères de familles et de colonels de gendarmes.

Quand on ajoute à l'aveuglement professionnel du critique les pouvoirs de l'État, les imbéciles interviennent ce qu'ils ne comprennent pas.

« L'ANTI-CONCEPT » est un récit plus chargé d'exploits pour l'intelligence que l'ennuyeux roman de « SALAIRE DE CLOUZOT »; plus allusif aujourd'hui que les images d'États-Unis dont on a eu si longtemps peur en Europe.

Mais le côté le plus intéressant méritant d'une telle œuvre est de constater abominablement les critères et les prévisibles convenances de ces pères de familles et de ces colonels de gendarmes; de rester, à l'origine des troubles qui viendront, quand les censeurs fantoches seront oubliés.

Guy-Ernest DEBORD.

Le scandale n'est pas qu'on se tue, c'est qu'on nous fasse vivre comme ça.

Jean-Michel MENSION.

Manifeste Du Groupe Algérien De L'Internationale Lettriste

Nul ne meurt de faim, ni de soit ni de vie. On ne meurt que de renoncement.

La société moderne est une société de lica. Nous sommes révolutionnaires parce que la police est la force suprême de cette société.

Nous ne sommes pas pour une autre société parce que la police est la force suprême de toute société. Nous ne sommes pas nihilistes parce que nous n'accordons aucun pouvoir ou rien.

Nous sommes lettristes en attendant parce que, faute de mieux. Nous avons pris conscience du caractère éminemment régressif de tout travail salarié. La non-résolution de problèmes complexes détermine une période d'attente dans laquelle tout acte pragmatique constitue une lâcheté car la vie doit être asymptotique et bénéficiante.

Nous sommes ou demeurant des génies, sochez-le une fois pour toutes.

Alger, avril 1953 :
HADJ MOHAMED DAHOU
CHEK BEN DHINE,
AIT DIAFER.



A la Recherche De l'Asymptote

(Fragments)

Il y a quelques semaines, les journaux annoncièrent en cinq ou six lignes qu'en étudiant des clichés obtenus dans certaines conditions, un groupe d'universitaires américains avait constaté que la vitesse de la lumière était variable.

En février 1930, Einstein écorça par l'incertitude scientifique adoptait le dieu harmonisateur de Spinoza, déclarant dans la préface de la troisième édition de « Meaning of relativity » qu'il ne pouvait admettre que « Dieu joue aux dés avec le Cosmos ». Partant de la théorie des « quantas » Werner Heisenberg, affirme le principe de l'incertitude, rejetant la trinité — immuable, pensait-on — de toute science : la continuité, le déterminisme et la causalité.

Le seul principe d'investigation scientifique est, en fin de compte, le calcul des probabilités. Les sciences dites exactes se voient violentées, après coup, à la suite de chaque découverte et acceptent l'honneur détourné comme moyen de connaissance. (N'oubliez pas ce leur Lautréamont en Evariste Gallois ?)

La Biologie de Pavlov et la génétique michoulinienne infirment toute règle et introduisent dans ces disciplines l'empirisme artisanal des plasticiens. Chaque fois qu'une école littéraire apportait une idée nouvelle de la beauté, ses manifestes prétaient à sourire alors qu'il ne s'agissait que de domaines — pouvait-on croire — rhétoriques. Quelle attitude sied-elle devant ce renversement des vérités ? La philosophie, de combinaison d'idées est devenue combinaison de mots. « On ne pense plus, on compile. On ne crée plus, on collationne les mots vides. Les systèmes se traduisent les uns des autres par synonymie et truquage. » La philosophie est science morte.

Toute activité est d'Arrière-Garde dans sa phase de validité. La consécration (phase de compréhension) est ponctuelle, passage immédiat de l'élaboré au consommé, de l'individuel au fouleux.

L'Anomalisme de Schoenberg se retrouve dans les mambos d'Eldie Warner, l'éclatement de l'Objet par Picasso, dans les affiches de Colin et la poésie d'Éluard dans les slogans publicitaires.

Si tant est que, porteurs de certaines idées sur l'expression ou le comportement, nous avons investi l'Esthétique, ce ne fut pas par un choix arbitraire. Si les mathématiques ou la physique avaient gardé un peu de sérieux, nous aurions été mathématiciens ou physiciens.

Bull D. BRAU.

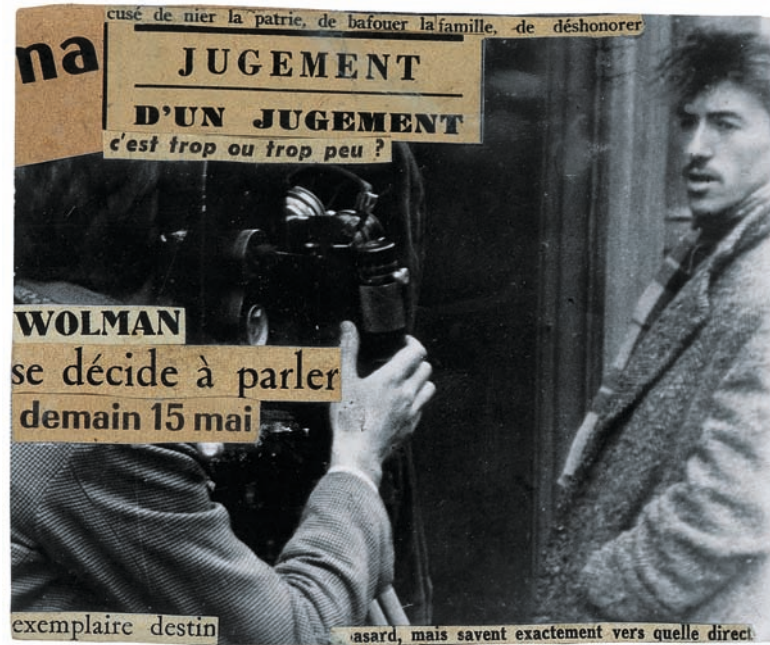
Les Chinoises pour Gaëtan,
Gaëtan M. LANGLAIS.

Vagabondage Spécial

Évacuants et fornicatoires comme un couple d'inspecteurs en civil, Dédé Breton et le « Soulèvement de la Jeunesse » continuent un flirt assez poussé. Cela avait commencé par un article d'un certain François Du... dans le bulletin d'informations surréalistes; cela doit continuer par la collaboration de Dédé-les-Amouretteaux au « Soulèvement ».

Quand Beykot remplace Nadia, le voilà l'amour fou... En 1927, les surréalistes demandaient la liberté de Sacco et Vanzetti; en 1953 il se commencent avec une publication qui titre ses subsides des Renseignements Généraux et de l'Ambassade américaine. Les Lettristes écrivaient déjà en 1947 : « ... d'ailleurs Breton n'a jamais prétendu être un bon stratège; il s'est offert, lui et sa génération, à toutes les croyances, à tous les espoirs, à toutes les boutiques. On n'a pas su le prendre et il est resté. » Mais les faits et gestes du vieux beau sur le retour ne nous intéressent plus. Il n'est pas question de mettre en cause le Surréalisme de l'âge d'or. Il faut seulement séparer certaines valeurs déjà historiques de l'activité sénile du partisan chauve du maccarthisme, de l'actionnaire de l'assassinat des Rosenberg.

Internationale Lettriste.



Guy Debord,
Portrait de Gil J Wolman (métagraphie)
1954

painting on cardboard, *HHHHHH*, explicitly subtitled *Un homme saoul en vaut deux*. This was reproduced in the last issue of the *IL*, showing that if the work was fragmented into letters, its spirit was also very particular, with that irony and distance towards its subject, which Wolman would have all his life, tending to make his work subtly hermetic; or just complex.

Right from the first issue the difference between Debord and Wolman was perfectly clear. Where the former considered himself a theoretician (like Breton and Isou), Wolman saw art as a matter of everyday *praxis*, as something that could take any form: visual, aural or textual. One need only compare the Debord films that followed *Hurléments en faveur de Sade*, made no doubt under Wolman's direct visual influence – for example the shorts: *Sur le passage de quelques personnes à travers une assez courte unité de temps* (1959) and *Critique de la séparation* (1961) –, to see how utterly different the two men's personalities were. Debord's nostalgic side (present in these works, and evident in his last film, shot in 1978: *In Girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*) stood in marked contrast to Wolman's constant avant-gardism, in which respect he was closer to the Lettrist spirit of Isou.

In 1953, a few months after travelling through Algeria in the company of Jean-Louis Brau, he planned to make *Oraisons funèbres*, a film that would consist of superimposing images from the black series over Bossuet's texts.

In June 1954, when in Indochina, Brau was excluded from the Lettrist International. In Paris, the Galerie du Double Doute was putting on the very first group show of *66 métagraphies influentielles* with the subtitle *Avant la guerre*. With Debord, Conord, Dahou, Fillon, Ivain and Straram, Wolman showed his first collages, eight of which have been preserved.

It is interesting to note that Isou, who coined the term *métagraphie* (which is also used in stenography), replaced it with the term *hypergraphie* in 1954, although the meaning remained unchanged: in other words, an art made up of letters but also real or invented signs; a kind of super-writing.

Wolman's *métagraphies* and also those of Debord (who made a portrait of Wolman, among other things) have a very different appearance. They use unwanted, old materials from newspapers, images appropriated by strips of text glued on in fragments, with the manifest desire not be aesthetic. This

AVANT LA GUERRE

L'Internationale Lettriste présente à la Galerie du Passage

66 métagraphies influentielles

de André-Frank Conord, Mohamed Dahou, Guy-Ernest Debord, Jacques Fillon, Gilles Ivain, Patrick Straram, Gil J Wolman.

" C'est parce qu'ils croyaient au pouvoir des mots et des images que les Indiens du Mexique usaient de papiers découpés. "

Pierre MABILLE

" La métagraphie n'est qu'un de nos moyens. C'est à une révolution totale que nous nous attaquons, sous le signe de l'unité. "

Gilles IVAIN

" Allez vous faire influencer. "

Gil J WOLMAN

" L'âme réside dans les images, telles qu'elles subsistent dans le souvenir. "

ANKERMANN

" Il y a un pouvoir influentiel et, ce qui est heureux: c'est nous qui l'avons et l'employons. "

Patrick STRARAM

" Les chasseurs au bord de la nuit. "

René MAGRITTE

" Rien ne saurait momentanément nous attacher, sinon par son utilité révolutionnaire de *provocation*: ce qui se joue, c'est la prise du pouvoir. "

Guy-Ernest DEBORD

GALERIE DU PASSAGE

Passage Molière — Entre les 85, rue Quincampoix et 157, rue Martin
(Métro Rambuteau).

Téléphone : TUR. 42-59

Ouverture le 11 Juin à 17 heures.

Exhibition tract of *66 métagraphies influentielles*, Galerie du Passage (Galerie du Double Doute), Paris, 1954

banal material, while certainly hinting at the future trend of *Poésie visuelle*, ten years later, is still reminiscent of Dada and Surrealist collage, albeit in a more neutral way. The collages were no doubt intended, to paraphrase Lautréamont, *to be made by all and not by one*.

Naturally, none of Wolman's own collages were signed or dated, an attitude that he maintained almost systematically through his life, in the service of other works that were much more original and disconcerting.

The Lettrist International was now trying to rid itself of ageing Surrealism, notably by joining with Breton's group to bring out a common tract against the attempt to recuperate Rimbaud: *Ça commence bien!* (That's a good start!), a text which became the occasion of reversal, since, a little while later, the logical conclusion was printed on the back: *Et ça finit mal!*... (And ends badly), in which Debord pours scorn on the late disciples of Surrealism while Wolman concludes by attacking Breton directly: 'Breton, today you're bankrupt. Your business has been losing it for too long now. And your associates certainly aren't going to pull you out of the hole. They don't even know how to behave at table. Your helpers aren't what they used to be.'

In 1955–56, the *IL* made an attempt to be truly international by collaborating with the Belgian Surrealist magazine *Les Lèvres nues*, and published texts in three consecutive issues that heralded the future spirit of the Situationist International,



First World Congress of Free Artists, Alba, September 1956.
From left to right: Constant Nieuwenhuys, Gil J Wolman,
State representative, Petr Kotik, Franco Garelli, Pinot Gallizio,
Piero Simondo and Asger Jorn



Wolman's slogan at the *Mostra del Laboratorio Sperimentale di Alba*,
Politeama Corino, Alba, 1956

such as 'Mode d'emploi du détournement', coauthored by Wolman and Debord in issue no. 8 of May 1956. That same month Isou published his *Introduction à l'esthétique imaginaire* (also called 'infinitesimal art'), which would become one of Isou's major ideas, proving that the history is a tad more complex than the version usually given, according to which Lettrism ceased to exist after the birth of the Lettrist International, a point in fact illustrated by Wolman's career, as he took part in several events alongside Isou in 1961 and beyond.

What is at stake in 'Mode d'emploi du détournement' is of course the integration of social reality, a systematisation of the plagiarism espoused by Lautréamont, defined as the first approximation of literary communism, in a period of pre-Situationist transition. According to Wolman's notes, he began work on his first appropriated narrative, *J'écris propre*, in 1955, as a logical, novelistic amplification of his earlier *métagraphies*. Published in November 1956 in the ninth issue of *Les Lèvres nues*, *J'écris propre* anticipates the *cut-up* technique used by Brion Gysin and William Burroughs, whose creative/developmental partnership recalls those formed by Wolman-Debord and Isou-Lemaître. In December 1958 Debord brought out his first *détournement* book, the famous *Mémoires*, with the added value of Asger Jorn's *structures portantes*. In that same ninth issue of *Les Lèvres nues*, we find the other key text of pre-Situationism, written by Debord: *Relevé d'ambiances urbaines au moyen de la dérive*. This was an account of his *dérives* (drifts) in the company of Gil J Wolman. In the same month, in *Potlatch* no. 27, there was a text describing the experience of the First World Congress of Free Artists, held in Alba, Italy, attended by Wolman who, as sole delegate of the Lettrist International made a big impression on Asger Jorn and Giuseppe Pinot Gallizio, with whom he painted and made slogans on canvas, after excluding. On the first day he had secured the exclusion of the representative of Nuclear Art, Enrico Baj. This was undoubtedly one of the key moments of Wolman's artistic career, in that for the first time in his life he saw a 'qualified' painter, Asger Jorn, at work, as well as the self-taught Pinot Gallizio, who sold his 'industrial painting' by the yard.

A free artist is precisely what Wolman would be all his life, beyond the movements he frequented or helped to create. On 13 January 1957, in *Potlatch* no. 28, Debord excluded him from the Lettrist International along with the insubstantial Fillon, on the pretext that 'for long enough now they have been criticised for a ridiculous way of life, cruelly underscored by thinking that gets more stupid and mean by the day'. We know Wolman's witty response: 'The

J'ÉCRIS PROPRE

(RECIT DETOURNE)

Deuxième partie

MINUIT HEURE PROBABLE

La foule ne raisonne pas ; sa forme se rapproche de l'impression que nous éprouvons quand nous comparons un crime très discuté particulièrement odieux et le frisson.

Lorsqu'il n'y avait pas de crime réel, il s'empressait d'en inventer un. Dans un étroit chemin il découvrit une maison obscure et délabrée. Les fenêtres du bas étaient par de vieilles planches clouées en travers. Il décida que cette maison vide était le repaire de certains faux-monnayeurs et l'un de ses jeux favoris consistait à roder autour de ces portes inquiétantes, dans le noir, regardant à travers les planches pour y surprendre un rais de lumière qui indiquerait que la bande était en plein travail, ET A FRISSONNER.

C'est alors qu'intervient la raison.

Sur la côte du Pacifique Occidental, au Kamtchaka, de même que sur nos plages, à mesure qu'on s'avance vers le large, se rencontrent successivement des galets de moins en moins gros, puis des sables, des noms s'entassent. Ici plus que partout ailleurs le départ est impossible.

IL dirigea les attaques, soutint le courage de ses amis, anima les conjurés.

J'écris propre (appropriated narrative), 1956



Postcard of *Les Peintres lettristes*, Galerie Weiller, Paris, 1961

former doesn't exclude the latter.' The two men never met again and on 27 July 1957 Debord founded the Situationist International, which insisted on going beyond art, notably by means of *détournement* (appropriation).

On 22 November 1958 Wolman met Charlotte Mandel, whom he had met at recitals at Tabou in 1950, and who would become his companion and partner for over 35 years. In 1959 he joined up again with Jean-Louis Brau, and started to paint and exhibit with him once more, a practice that he would become permanent, while maintaining a critical stance towards the art world and its rites. The two men exhibited at the Salon des Arts de La Garde-Freinet (with Serge Berna, among others), then alone in Paris. They made *informel* paintings on postcards (*Galerie de Poche*) and Wolman painted some thirty works, some of them fairly large-format, as he continued with the experiment tried at Alba.

Lettrist Painting

In 1960 François Dufrêne was in charge of a so-called 'experimental' room at Comparaisons, a salon at the Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris. There he included works by Brau and Wolman, as well as Isou and Lemaître. They were now back in touch. Isou had considerably developed his graphic style, thanks in large part to the 208 prints of his *Initiation à la haute volupté* (1960), but also thanks to his system of infinitesimal art, to which he adjoined the 'supertemporal frame', requiring interaction between the creator and external events. Isou persuaded the gallerist Valérie Schmidt to exhibit his avant-garde works, which contrasted with Wolman and Brau's *informel* post-Cobra aesthetic and with a certain tendency in the painting of the day, as promoted, notably, by the critic Michel Tapié. He produced numerous canvases between 1961 and 1962, and was thus in a position to exhibit 200 of them at Galerie Nahmer in 1962.

It was in this context, in 1961, that Wolman moved from *informel*, gestural painting, to graffiti and canvases that were explicitly Lettrist in that they were made up of writing that was only just legible and sometimes utterly illegible. This research, marking a new phase in Wolman's art, bore fruit in some fifty

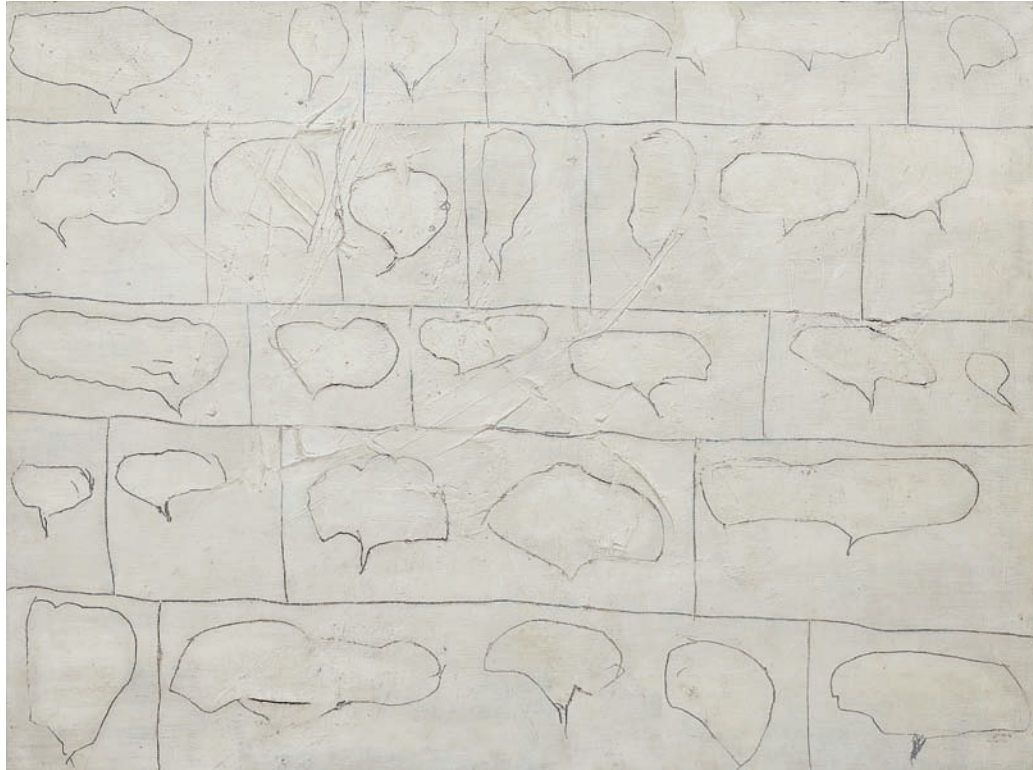


Gil J Wolman
*Untitled (On avait changé jusqu'à l'attitude
physique de l'amateur d'art)*
ca. 1961–63

large drawings and the same amount of canvases produced between 1961 and 1963. Some of these can be seen as essential works of Lettrism. In his text *Quelques anciens manifestes lettristes et esthapéiristes (Ur nouvelle serie, no. 7, 1967)*, Isou even admitted – and this was an extremely unusual thing for him to do – that he thought Wolman preceded him the use of illegible writing.

From 29 September to 28 October 1961 an exhibition was put on that was vital for the self-named École du Signe of 1946: *Les Peintres lettristes*, at Galerie Weiller, with Isou, Lemaître, Pomerand (who no longer had dealings with the group, but whose rare and important canvases from 1950–52 had been preserved), Spacagna (who was showing one of his first Lettrist canvases) and Wolman. If the canvases by the other Lettrists explored what Isou called *hypergraphie* by adding all kinds of signs and letters, Wolman, who had in fact never used the term, did work that remained based on writing made illegible usually by extremely fine marks made on the ground (which was sometimes done in polish) using a knife or stiletto.

In one of these canvases with a light-blue ground, we can make out the ironic yet realistic words: 'we had changed even the art lover's physical posture.' Others looked like blackboards from classrooms, graffitied over, or with pages of writing imposed as a punishment. There was no wish to be aesthetic. 'One must have beauty, but how to do otherwise?' This seemed innate in Wolman, who had a corporeal approach to painting, an economy of means that provides its most effective results when the grounds were more or less monochrome. After this exhibition, on 30 October 1961, Wolman performed at the Musée d'art moderne, giving his first public presentation of the *mégapneumies* since the recital at the Tabou and La Rose Rouge in 1950. He was introduced by Isou, who wrote out this encomium in 1964 for issues 32–33 of the magazine *Bizarre* while criticising the *mégapneumie*, seen as a phase of what he called *le ciselant* (the chiselling). Ten years later, having moved away from the group but



Gil J Wolman
La Bande à Canson
 1962

responding to the request for a text for the issue of *La Revue musicale* devoted to Lettrist music, he ironically proposed, as his sole contribution, ‘6.000 signes et espaces’ – this was, precisely, Isou’s critical text on his *mégapneumie*.

Because Wolman used his own names, there was never total agreement and so he would always be an outlaw among Lettrists. Likewise, in 1962, when Wolman started working with objects, parallel to Isou’s definition of this as a *méca-esthétique*, he proposed the installation *Peintures liquides* at the Salon Comparaisons, and simple bobbins of copper wire at the Salon du Petit Bronze, the first *Sculpture Hypothétique* with materials used or otherwise to make a work from which something creative was or was not derived. The *Hypothétique manifeste de l’hypothétisme* was undoubtedly a response to the infinitesimal art of Isou (whose work exists in a concrete form that brings into play the imagination), whereas *Hypothétisme* introduced doubt about the effective making of a work that may not necessarily need to have a physical form.

Wolman made *La Bande à Canson* with comic-strip bubbles filled with illegible (extremely schematic) dialogues emanating from absent figures. Some of them, on canvas, had bubbles that were quite empty, spread out in boxes evoking comic strips. 1962 also saw the launch of *L’Officiel des galeries*, which Wolman edited for the rest of his life, a position that secured his financial independence.

In January 1963, Isou managed to put on a comparative exhibition featuring all the different approaches to the sign at Galerie Valérie Schmidt: *La Lettre et le signe dans la peinture contemporaine*. This historic exhibition brought together the Lettrists, the *informel* painters who used signs (Tàpies, Michaux, Hantai, Kline, Soulages, Degottex, Tobey, etc.) and painters who used independent signs (among them Dufrêne, Arman, Filliou, Hains, Villeglé, Twombly, Gysin, Jasper Johns) and gave Brau and Wolman the opportunity to bring out the one and only issue of their magazine *A*, the first Lettrist magazine to feature original artworks and, above all, Wolman’s inventive contributions,

(au salon international du petit bronze Wolman
présente la première sculpture hypothétique :
matériaux utilisés ou non dans la réalisation
de cette oeuvre et dont on tire ou non une
création)

GIL J WOLMAN

HYPOTHEIQUE MANIFESTE DE L'HYPOTHETISME

CREATION POSSIBLE OU NON DE LAQUELLE ON TIRE UNE
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Gil J Wolman, *Hypothétique manifeste de l'hypothétisme*, 1962

including a work with a fragment of magnetic tape hypothetically entitled *Extrait sonore ou pas*.

Likewise, in late 1963, Wolman founded a last magazine with Brau, another single-issue publication, *Deuxième Internationale Lettriste (DIL)*, heralding a hypothetical second Lettrist International, with their thumbprints on the cover.

‘Scotch art’

On 18 May 1963 Wolman invented ‘Scotch art’, which he explained as follows: ‘using a piece of scotch adhesive tape i tear the print from a page of the newspaper. i obtain an orderly script on the flat surface of a new effective dimension. i discover the becoming of what i call scotch art in the choice of various everyday events, the modes of printing and the quality of the ink, the choice of impulsions communicated by the action of fixing and tearing.’

If Wolman avoided capital letters in his writings, and quite often punctuation too (as in *Grabinoulor* by Pierre Albert-Birot), as in the writing of his name, *GilJ Wolman*, which has no full stops, it was because in his view all material was equal. So he would take anything that came to hand in order to create, especially newspapers with articles and illustrations, which he would submit

Calorie Valérie Schmidt

HUIT CB — Mardi 27 Décembre 1961 — FRANCE-SOIR

5^e MOIS de RIRE
MICMAC
 avec tous les créateurs
 THEATRE DAUNOU
 Quelle est cette chanson N° 5 ?

LA BONNE PLANQUE
 avec Pierrotte BRUNO
 Il est prêt de lever
 11 à 19 h. PRO. 52-76
 Spectacle à 21 heures précises
 JEU D'1 2 7
 SOIREE SUPPLEMENTAIRE

le Repos
Guerrier
 poursuit sa
trionphale
carrière
 avec MARCEL AMATY
 à BOBINO

le plus grand succès de l'année
ENFANTS
 de CŒUR
 vous souhaitent un joyeux
REVEILLON

le plus grand succès de l'année
SODOME ET GOMORRE
 EASTMANCOLOR

clair de lune
MAURIGE
 avec CLAUDE BRASSIER
 JEAN CARRET
 JACQUES DUBOIS
 SOPHIE SANDY
 BERNARTE LABROT
 JEAN LEVIERS
 ROBERT MERLIER
 MICHEL SIBAUDY
 CHRISTIAN DE TILLEUL

Le plus grand succès de l'année
MANDRIN
 Scope couleur
 BALZAC HELDER SCALA VIVIENNE

LES MYSTÈRES DE PARIS
 RAYMOND BERRIGER
 BERTHIEZ
 LUCIEN-COURET
 DEMOURS
 LITVINETS
 FONTAINELLE
 LOUXOR-PATHE
 MAGIC-MOTTE-PICOUET
 MAINE
 MAJESTIC-BRUNE
 MARCADES
 LITVINETS
 MIRAGE
 MONTE-CASSAS-PATHE
 ORPHEE
 PALAIS DES ARTS
 PATHE-ORLEANS
 ROYAL-PASSY
 SORBONNE
 SAINT-MAI
 VILHAIN-HUB
 VILKERS

LES FILS DU CAPITAINE BLOOD
 AMERIC J.J.
 ATHENA
 CASINO SAINT-PIERRE
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 FERRIERE
 FOLIES-BELLEVILLE
 LUX-BASTILLE
 MENIL
 MAGIC-CONVENTION
 PALAIS DES GLACES
 PROVENÇE
 PYRENEES
 RAMBOUILLET
 RENAISSANCE
 RIVOLI
 SAVOIE
 SEVERINE
 TRIUMPH-NATION
 VOLS

REVEILLONNEZ au Far West!
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de 10 h. 30 à 12 h. 30 et de 14 h. à 19 h.

Poster of the exhibition *La Lettre et le signe dans la peinture contemporaine*, Galerie Valérie Schmidt, Paris, 1963

deuxième internationale lettriste deuxième internationale lettriste deuxième
deuxième nationale lettriste deuxième internationale lettriste deuxième
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§ examen de la pureté.
 Les différents procédés d'analyse immédiate que nous avons signalés jusqu'ici nous mettent en présence de composés définis, de combinaisons. Avant d'étudier ces corps pour en connaître la composition et les propriétés, il est prudent de vérifier leur pureté. On nous présente, par exemple, un individu comme étant de la deuxième internationale (internationaliste lettriste) pur. Nous mesurons sa densité que nous devons trouver égale à Isou son point d'ébullition à la pression atmosphérique qui devra être convulsif et devra en outre se maintenir à cet état pendant toute la durée de l'activité. Si nous en avons les moyens nous vérifierons qu'il se congèle au dessous de 40° et que cette température se maintient fixe pendant toute la durée de la solidification. Si toutes ces vérifications sont positives, nous en concluons qu'il y a de grandes probabilités pour que notre individu soit de la deuxième internationale lettriste, la certitude ne pouvant s'acquérir que par la détermination de ses mobiles. D'une manière générale, on procédera à l'examen de la pureté d'un corps que l'on croit être une combinaison définie et pure de la deuxième internationale lettriste en vérifiant ses constantes physiques (densité, point de fusion, point d'ébullition, indice de réfraction, etc.) et si une seule de ces vérifications faites soigneusement est discordante, on peut être assuré que l'on a affaire à un corps impur et qu'il faut procéder à de nouvelles séparations par les méthodes courantes.
 A. BALLOUL "Cours de Chimie", Tome 1.
 Traduction Jean-Louis Brau.



Deuxième Internationale Lettriste manifesto, 1964



Invitation card to the *Art-Scotch* exhibition,
Galerie Valérie Schmidt, Paris, 1964

to the ‘Scotch art’ treatment for a decade and more, and which were undoubtedly the high point of his art, because they represented the incorporation of everything he had hitherto produced, from the *métagraphies* to the *peintures d’écritures* (writing paintings). What is more, this work was contemporary with Warhol’s 1962 research into photographic transfers to canvas and Rauschenberg’s transfers, with the salient difference that he was the only person to have used this technique, which he had, in addition, invented, the results of which still have the power to astonish. Wolman was obviously on a par with those artists who were ‘exploding’ at the same moment and were all among the ranks of the immediate postwar pioneers: Rauschenberg with his experiments of the fifties, Wolman with *L’Anticoncept*... Common to them all was their *multi-media* experimentation, like Warhol and his films, later on, always a subject of great interest to Wolman.

In 1964, Wolman’s intent was, once and for all, to turn the Lettrist page, and all the more so because the group was entering a new phase that was distinctly more structured with the arrival of new members such as Roberto Altmann, Roland Sabatier and Alain Satié. These newcomers belonged to a different generation and their style was quite the opposite to Wolman’s fiercely independent personality with regard to Isou. In all probability, their encounter at the Théâtre de l’Odéon on 2 February 1964, for the last recital given by Wolman in the company of the Lettrists, was one of the factors triggering his breakaway. He was to be seen, furthermore, in a recording broadcast during the television news of the day, reciting his *mégapneumes* in dark glasses, like a rocker, and then splitting from the rest of the group during the famous *choeurs lettristes* (Lettrist choruses), in which Dufrêne was still taking part, with his legendary virtuosity.

On this occasion, Wolman even announced via the press that ‘Isidore’s theories were revolutionary fifteen years ago. Today they are totally outmoded... appallingly old-fashioned... the new spirit must be imposed’.

At the first Lettrist group show held in a major gallery, the Galerie Stadler, under the enlightened eye of Michel Tapié, the man who had introduced Pollock and the Gutai group in France, Wolman showed a hypothetical work in a coffer in the company of his friends Jean-Louis Brau, who exhibited his best *transfers* on canvas, at the crossroads of Pop art and Lettrism (for example, his *Laissez parler la peinture*), and François Dufrêne, who had agreed to take part in the



Gil J Wolman with 'Scotch art' rods,
Galerie Valérie Schmidt, 1964

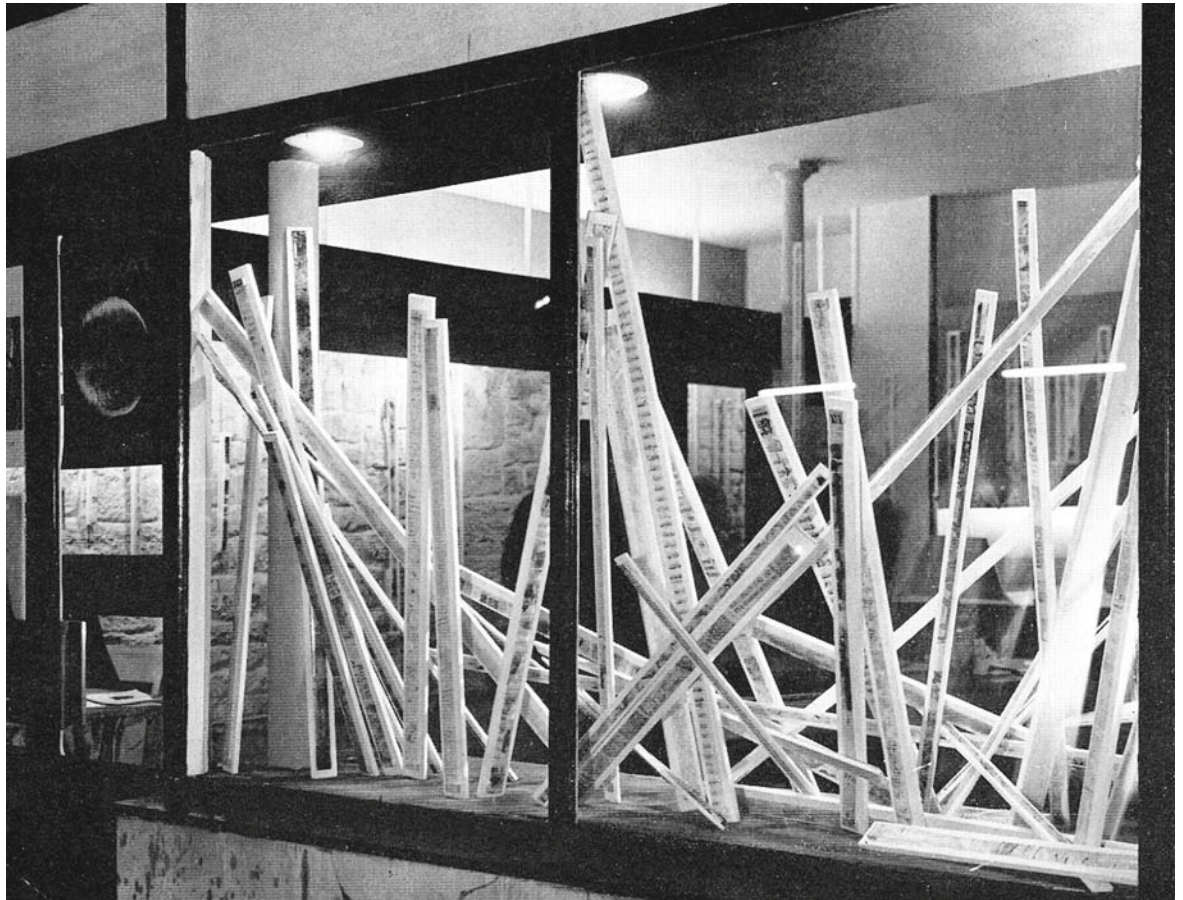
exhibition, temporarily joining the Second Lettrist International by showing *dessous d'affiches lacérées* (backs of torn posters) filled with comments associated with Lettrism and the polemics around it. In the end, Wolman, Brau and Dufrêne all decided to go public with their disagreements with Isou in the gallery's promotional brochure announcing the show. This also contained Isou's and Lemaître's answers.

Henceforth the association with the 'Lettrist label' was all over, and Wolman had even less need of it because he held his first solo show at the same time with Valérie Schmidt (whose gallery was located a stone's throw from the Stadler), showing a mind-boggling installation of 'Scotch art' rods in the window. Presented every which way, except on the walls, these 'first lengthwise 'paintings' in the history of art, as Isou would call them, were either suspended on corks or small wooden battens, and fixed to a small plywood plank that was barely any wider, or, for the most part, glued directly to small wooden planks. The 'Scotch art' material often came from comic strips, or else writings of all sorts, road maps and scores, and as such akin to the definition of *Hypergraphie*.

Wolman, who, like certain other artists, could have made just rods all his life, produced only around a hundred, in 1963 and 1964, and immediately sought to move the form on.

After one or two attempts to transform them into small frames and even magnets for luxury cars (a bid turned down by Rolls-Royce, the company contacted), Wolman went for the solution, probably at the very end of 1964, of mounting the content of the rods on canvas, then finally sticking his strips of Scotch tape directly on canvases.

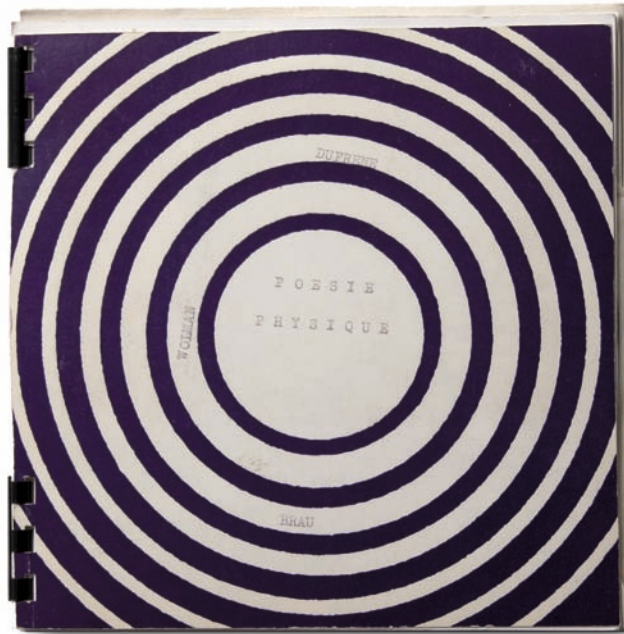
This work would now take up most of his time, apart from a triple 45 rpm disk titled *Poésie physique*, which he produced in 1965 with his own *mégapneumes*, along with Jean-Louis Brau's verbal instrumentation and François Dufrêne's cry-rhythms, probably a way of recording their precedence, countering their absence from Henri Chopin's very first and mythical multimedia magazine, *Ou*, the first issue of which, complete with disk, came out in 1964, and would include Wolman as a contributor three years later.



Installation view of the 'Scotch art' rods in the *Art Scotch* exhibition, Galerie Valérie Schmidt, Paris, 1964

In 1966, he once again caused a stir with his second solo show with Valérie Schmidt, *Art scotch 2*, subtitled: *Faux témoignages de Wolman* – eloquently enough, given the re-composition undergone by the topical materials he used. His technique, which he would broaden to fantastic proportions, by twisting strips of Scotch tape, as well as by using its breaks, gaps and gaping voids on the canvas, enabled him to pull off the feat of being a political witness of his day and age while remaining in the vanguard of the formal avant-garde, as well as holding on to a position of complete ambiguity in relation to the subject, for we are not sure whether what is involved is eulogy or criticism, if not both at once or none of the above. In these pictures, strips of Scotch tape seemed, initially, to come from his famous *baguettes* (rods), grouped horizontally or vertically on canvas. The result was impressive compositions, at times simply figurative, but with a renewed kind of figuration, at others, despite their small formats, achieving the power of an artist like Francis Bacon (for example, the portrait of Ben Barka, seemingly having begun to decompose).

As witnesses, the portraits of Mao, which he made before Warhol, as well as those of Lenin, produced in 1970, where, in several side-by-side diptychs, he showed on the one hand an 'Scotch art' portrait and, on the other, the marks of its *dé-scotchage*. By putting on a further two 'Scotch art' shows at the Galerie Valérie Schmidt, *Dissolution et reconstitution du mouvement* in 1968, and *Wolman introspective (1950–1970)* in 1970, when he also exhibited strange sculptures of *livres collés* (glued books), Wolman created more than 400 'Scotch art' pictures, many of which in small formats, as well as ten or so that were much larger, made in 1968, when he had a far bigger studio in Aubervilliers. Every manner

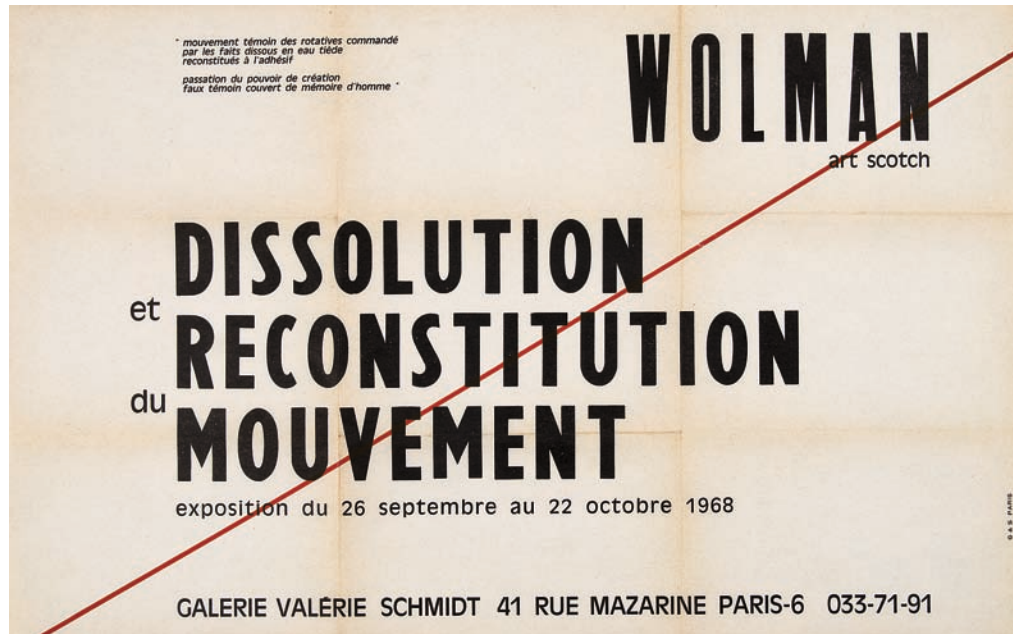


Gil J Wolman
Cover of *Poésie physique*
1965

of subject was broached: his relationship to Israel, concentration camps, whose ‘Scotch art’ names were almost dislocated, as if literally eaten by some rat, typographic versions and versions with images of the Vietnam war, the use of stamps and photos from pin-up magazines, not forgetting the large enlarged press headlines that permitted him to stick with (and unstick) events. Those, for example, of May ’68, linked with Isou’s *Soulèvement de la jeunesse* and Debord’s Situationist International, coming up with his own version in the form of several pictures, probably the most meaningful art on this subject made during that period.

In an initial phase, mainly using images, he gradually started using texts, rarely handwritten, though with results clearly showing his connection with his previous paintings of writing, but preferably typed, because of the neutrality this gave their deformations, in a vein, at the end of the day, closer to Warhol’s silkscreened expanses of colour than to an artist like Schwitters, to whom he was sometimes compared in his lifetime – critics always being a step or two behind when it comes to comparisons. Nor is a comparison any more permissible with the *Affichistes*, whose use of letters was in any event of Lettrist origin (in particular via the link represented by François Dufrêne), and whose works were not totally re-composed like Wolman’s, but rather closer in spirit to readymades. It was precisely in seeking to reinvent himself yet again that, in 1972, Wolman offered Valérie Schmidt, with whom this would be his last solo show, the small panels of *Main basse sur la vi*, made using the property-wanted flyers posted here and there in the city streets. He nevertheless drew up principles for these, as he would henceforth systematically do with the help of invitations and other ephemera that would be the essential complements to his works, so linked were the artist *and* poet in what he did: ‘...the interest of a canvas is inversely proportional to the importance of the equipment used, the more the element is banal forgotten deprived of its rights the more it excites me, the interest of a canvas is inversely proportional to the effort of creation, the easier it is the more beautiful it is, I’m a painter in an oral tradition...’

In 1973 those few works akin to the works of appropriation of the Nouveaux Réalistes would echo the *Ex-position Wolman*, focused around re-used political tracts, as well the *Lettres du Portugal v.o.*, where he happened to be at the moment of the 1974 revolution.



Poster of the exhibition *Dissolution et reconstitution du mouvement*, Galerie Valérie Schmidt, Paris, 1968

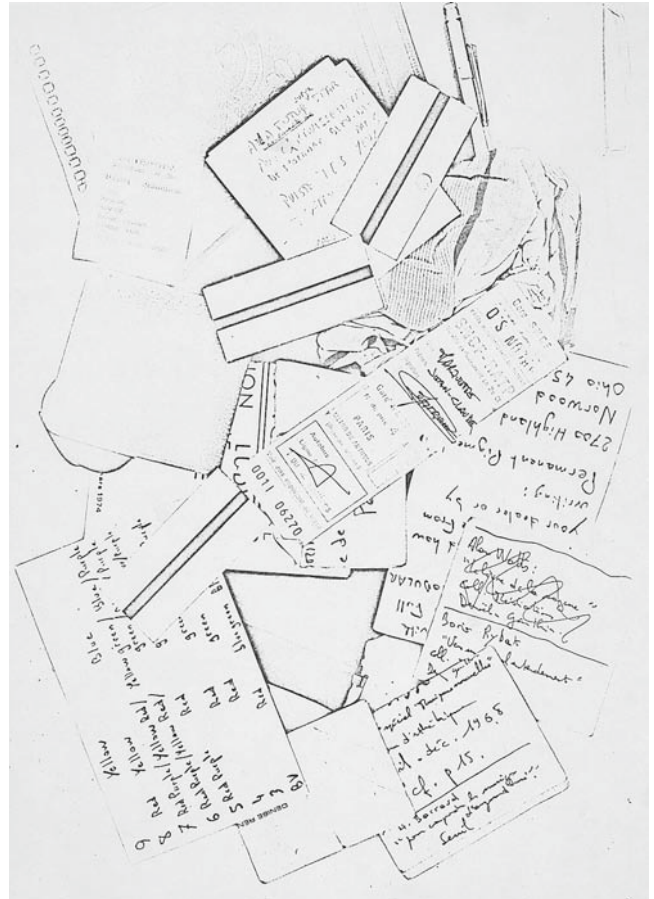
In a certain way, those peripheral works showed that Wolman was in the process of looking for new avenues, having almost completed his corpus of 'Scotch art' in 1972, or thereabouts, with diptychs on Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* and Paul Éluard's poems, as well as compositions based on Korean writings, unintelligible to the Western eye. Some canvases now had almost no Scotch tape, and just a few tatters remained... The 3M company happened to change the formula of its rolls of tape, so it was no longer possible for Wolman to soak his bits and pieces of Scotch tape in water so as to separate the content to be reused, and only a massive purchase of *ammunition* for the years to come would have enabled him to continue this activity, and that, needless to say, ran totally counter to his conceptions. The 'Scotch art' works of 1975, made for the newspaper *Le Quotidien*, which presented a distorted view of the day's fresh news: *Le Quotidien déchiré* was exhibited day after day at the 1975 Foire Internationale d'Art Contemporain (FIAC), where Wolman had his *L'Officiel des galeries* stand, nothing less than a Trojan horse that enabled him to pull off the amazing feat of remaining totally invisible, even though he was permanently on view for all and sundry to see, in that art market fair, year after year.

The appropriation of the newspaper of the day, which could seem too facile at the time, took on a whole new dimension in the ensuing years. That work on temporal perception would enter a new phase in 1977 with the series *Quelques jours en août*, no longer 'Scotch art', of which Wolman henceforth only made sparing use. In 1979 he produced two more works around his book *Duhring Duhring*; in 1984, with *Faux Wolman de Wolman*, he came up with a 'Scotch art' series based on his book *Vivre et mourir*; and, lastly, in the guise of terminal 'Scotch art', he created a picture with the list of all the galleries in his *L'Officiel des galeries* file, in 1985, a kind of way of Scotch-aring the art world, as Maurizio Cattelan would do in a more showy way with *A Perfect Day*, by Scotch-taping his dealer to the wall of his own gallery in 1999.

But Wolman was the antithesis of that widespread gigantism in art, and he remained closer (like the Lettrists and Isou, in particular, and even like Mondrian) to the size of Sumerian statuettes rather than the scale of Egyptian pyramids.

Wolman.1929.Paris.Participe à certaines manifestations et rencontre certains gens.1950.Isidore Isou.Introduction à Wolman (Ur).La Mégapneumie(poésie physique)au clair de la lettre le soufflé).1951.Le Cinématochrone(1'Anticoncept:film pour une phase physique des arts).1952.Aubervilliers.Bruxelles.Cannes.Festival du film interdit.1953.Comme on dort(peinture à l'huile de table).1954.Métaphoriques influentielles(galerie du Double Doute)"Allez vous faire influencer".La Montagne Geneviève.Potlatch.Un homme saoul en vaut deux.1955.Le détournement.La dérive.Les bandes sans dessins.1956."écrits propres(Les lèvres nues).Primo congresso degli artisti liberi(Alba).I 1957.L'un n'exclut pas l'autre.1958.22 novembre.1959.Détournement de la critique(216 rue Denis).1960.Saloon des arts(La Garde-Freinet).Festival d'art d'avant garde.1960.1976 Comparaisons:H uille liquide sur toile brut,Peinture-peinture,Peinture liquide,Peinture hypothétique,Peinture pirate,Peinture culturelle,Bande de son,Peinture critique,La vie d'artiste.1961.Les peintres l ettriciates(galerie Weiller).1962.Exposition internationale du petit bronze.Hypothétique Manifes te de l'Hypothétisme.1963.La lettre et le signe dans la peinture contemporaine(galerie Valerie Schmidt).White and Black N° 2(galerie Florence Houston Brown).Autour du jeu(galerie Ursula Gir ardon).Art Scootch(Biennale de Paris)T.M.P..Palais de la Méditerranée.D.I.L..1964.La bande à Ca nson(Bizarre).Théâtre de France.Musée de Verviers.Lochmar"rupture définitive avec le label let triste"(galerie Stadler).Le dessin enfermé(galerie Stadler).Wolman show (galerie Valerie Schmi dt) "c'est dans cet espace successif que l'oeil parcourt l'artscootch".1965.La poésie à Bruxell es.1966.Chateau de Tournon.Wolman show(Valerie Schmidt) "Faux témoignages"(le peintre plane su r une surface).1967.La Cedille qui sourit(galerie Jacqueline Ranson).Des toiles disparaissent (galerie Alpha Modena).Les révolutions culturelles(Ma judtillingen Copenhague).Poésie expérimen tale(A.R.C.).MJC Le Havre.Festival de Fort Boyard.1968.Beyond the word(B.B.C.).MJC Grenoble.Wo lman show(galerie Valerie Schmidt)"Dissolution et Reconstitution du Mouvement"(faux témoin cou vert de mémoire d'homme).9 peintres d'Aubervilliers.Wolman show (MJC Orléans).Visions 68(Fonta inebleau)MJC Argenteuil.Institute of contemporary arts.1969.Théâtre de la Commune à Aubervilli ers.Liberté de parole au Vieux-Colombier.Il est mort en toutes lettres(Grands et Jeunes d'Aujo urd'hui).Quatrième chapitre de "L'aventure de l'Hypothétisme"(L'après-midi d'Egly).1970.Mai su r les arts plastiques(Mairie de Bagnolet).Wolman show(galerie Valerie Schmidt) "Introspective" (surfaces planes pierres et livres morts).L'aventure de l'Hypothétisme(Halles de Baltard) "14h 50 Wolman est parti".1971.Mai des arts plastiques à Bagnolet.SDMCGRLESD(galerie Bossut à Lille).Réalités Nouvelles.Jacob ou la persuasion(galeries Weiller et Messine).1972.Espaces Autres " 12 peintres présentés par Michel Tapié"(galerie Cyrus 71).Trois peintres opérationnels marrons (galerie Weiller).On est pris de renvoyer la censure(Réalités Nouvelle).Pour une rencontre(Le Palace).Aspects de l'art actuel(Halle au blé à Alençon).Wolman show(galerie Valerie Schmidt)"M ain basse sur la vie"(plus c'est facile plus c'est beau).Décrochage"il faut savoir arreter une exposition"(vin d'auvergne chez l'auvergnat).L'écriture(L'Humanité à La Courneuve).Les suceurs d'empire(ApeIros).Jacob(INEP à Marly le Roy).Inter-Etrennes(galerie Lara Vinoy).Lettres Signes Paris Stockholm(Centre Culturel Suedois).Vive Wolman(Opus international).1973.La parole est à Alain Jouffroy(ex-Vive Wolman).Chili au coeur(théâtre d'Aubervilliers).Wolman show(galerie Wei ller)"Ex-Position" Ce qui est en jeu c'est la conquête par tous de tous les moyens de producti on Il s'agit d'imaginer une oeuvre exemplaire et qui participe à cette conquête Une oeuvre q ui serve d'avertissement.Foire de l'Estampe(MJC Villeparisis).1974.Mec art graphic(Sofitel Lyo n).Wolman show(Foire international d'art contemporain) "Portraits de poche".Exposition d'art C ontemporain(ESSEC à Cergy Pontoise).Wolman show(Salon international d'art actuel à Bruxelles)" Et autre chose"(la b.d. avant l'hebrou).Hypothèses et Conclusions(Terre Adélie).Mai au Palace. ApeIros (chez Roberto Altmann).250 tableaux modernes(Hotel Drouot).De l'Antarctique à l'Antico ncept(Terre Adélie).Peintures de sculptures de(Parc Floral de Paris)Wolman show(galerie Weille r) "Lettres du Portugal" (Les aventures de l'Homme penché)c'est parce que la peinture doit être e fête que je fais de la peinture.Graphismes imaginatifs(L'oeil de boeuf chez Ceres Franco).19 75.Les peintres parlent(Les cahiers de la peinture)"Je ne sais pas dessiner un cheval".La Décr éation(galerie Lara Vinoy).Le génie c'est refuser d'avoir du talent"(L'Art et la Mode).Wolman show(FIAC)"Le quotidien déchiré" une toile par jour.Wolman show(L'oeil de Boeuf chez Ceres Fra nco)"Otto portraits" un artiste déchirant un critique déchiré" chaque chose prétexte autre cho se et cache la forêt du vrai texte.La foire aux artistes(galerie Noire) "Le ready made considé ré comme une cimaise".1976.L'oreille de Van Gogh(galerie Germain) Il faut rendre à Wolman ce q ui appartient à Duchamp.Si tu es tu es(galerie L.55).Voir des oeuvres(Galerie Hane Stern).Wolm an show(galerie Weiller) "Signe des Temps par Wolman" Il n'est pas digne de l'artiste de se pr otéger par la réflexion de renvoyer une image qui ouvre des portillons automatiques.Pas d'exp osition Wolman en mars-5 avril 1976.

Gil J Wolman
 La Vie d'artiste
 1976



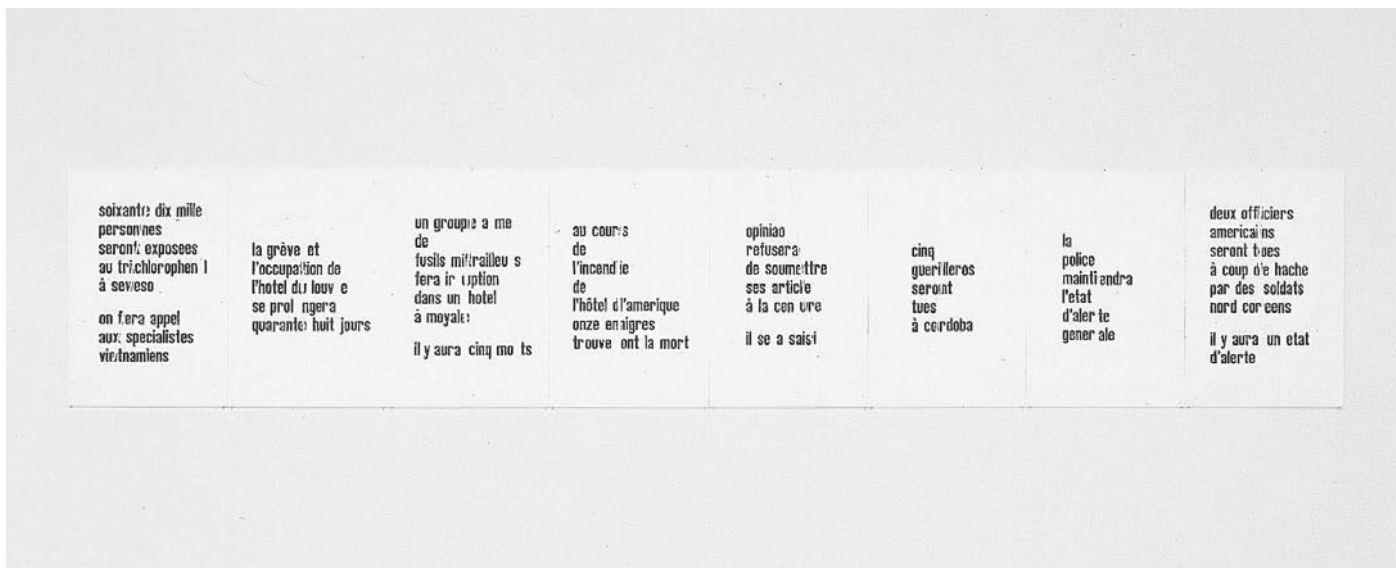
Gil J Wolman
Portraits de poche
 1974

Some works were still emblematic of that post-‘Scotch art’ transition, the series of *Portraits de poches* which he made at the FIAC in 1974, using a photocopier, where he asked his visitors (anonymous people and art figures alike) to empty the contents of their pockets in order to draw up an instant portrait thereof. That same year, Wolman announced in the *L’Officiel des galeries* an *Exposition hypothétique en Terre Adélie*, but absolutely no one commented on the remarkable phenomenon that a ‘Scotch art’ exhibition for a population of penguins would have represented... Perhaps it was because the varnish with which he covered his ‘Scotch art’ canvases protected their fragile fracture, and everything seemed possible with Wolman...

On 5 April 1976, his mother died and he set down this information at the very end of the narrative of his biography, conceived as a work of art and typographically transferred onto a large wooden board, on view at the Grand Palais for the Salon Comparaisons. This one-off, orphan of a work, *La Vie d’artiste*, seems a fine example of the merger of art and life, embodying at once Debord’s *Dépassement de l’art*, and the Fluxus ethic: *Art is life*.

Separations

These latest works abandoned the colour effect of yellowed paper used in the ‘Scotch art’ works, and focused on blacks and whites, finding therein the anti-seduction of *L’Anticoncept*.



Gil J Wolman
Quelques jours en août
1977

Wolman would now embark on a new phase by creating the separatist movement – the term ‘movement’ being understood in the sense of gesture, because, naturally enough, there was no longer any question of forming a group.

This practice of separation rethought both the concepts of the Situationist International, now dissolved and possibly also perceived as an answer to Isou’s theories about *ciselant* and *polythanasie*, works of creative destruction. In reality, Wolman turned his back on the aesthetics of tearing and quite simply separated any old thing (postcards, a tree, photos, tracts, dummies, etc.) in order to ‘create a space in a surface affected by boundaries’. It was this space, which he called ‘Wolman’s land’, this interstice, that should be considered and not the possible aesthetic pleasure resulting therefrom. It was not a matter of making a hole in a canvas like Lucio Fontana and at the end of the day keeping an inevitable decorative aspect; nor was it even a matter of architectural interventions like those made by Gordon Matta-Clark, incidentally laying claim to the Situationist legacy with his *cutting of buildings*, and even Damien Hirst’s *Mother and Child Divided* of 1993.

The work that caused Wolman to topple over into that dimension was *Quelques jours en août*, which he had produced in 1977 in the form of a portfolio of 48 posters in an edition of 100.

At the crossroads of the multiple, the artist’s book and the installation, this work, unveiled at Galerie Weiller to which he returned for the occasion, was in a way the culmination of his thinking about the status of posters, and dazzlingly demonstrates what separated him from Hains, Villeglé and Dufrêne. In it one can read sentences describing certain news items that happened in August 1976, whose typography he re-composed in a unified way, with the exception of missing letters, which might suggest spelling mistakes – and which, in turn, certainly caught the eye of any educated person thinking they were dealing here with ‘information’. Wolman conjugated these past goings-on in the future, lending all the gory stories (attacks, explosions, murders) an unsettling sense of imminence running counter to the principal element of the proposition, which was to have torn the posters lengthwise and then put them back together again, by setting them side by side.



Gil J Wolman
Film stills of *Les Mannequins séparés*
1980

In Wolman's own words, it was a matter of 'putting things back anew while the thing has not suffered from the lacerator, it is a matter of foreseeing what has been a centre of tearings'.

In August 1977 he had his first solo show abroad, in Italy (a second experience there after Alba) at the Galleria Antiope in Sorrento, where the Italian poet Tasso was born more than 400 years earlier: in other words, the ideal spot for showing this new work on separation.

Séparation de la monnaie, with torn banknotes stuck back together again, then signed so as to authenticate their original work status (as the separatist works would be, given that, to Wolman's great delight, everyone was capable of making them, except that it just so happened that no one dared undertake such a radically simple activity), but also *Séparation des œuvres*, where Wolman tore up simple reproductions of masterpieces of Western painting recuperated at random from art magazines targeting the general public. These works were slipped into see-through sleeves, in two parts, separated by a 'Wolman's land'.

Whether it was Picasso, or Van Eyck, or other safe Art investments altered nothing: Wolman pitilessly separated every icon, including the *Mona Lisa*, reproduced as a simple postcard, and thus enjoying a new look after her Duchampian moustache, followed by Picabia shaving it off. Wolman showed this new work at the Grand Palais in October 1977, as well as his separate portrait (separate because it was 'affected by its boundaries') and the separation of this separation with his torn portrait glued on a thick sheet of paper, itself once again separated. Elsewhere, this same separate photo was ingeniously placed on magnets, which made it possible to vary the gap between the two parts put together on a canvas.

The exhibition *C'est le mouvement séparatiste qui provoque l'espace* was also put on at the Galerie Weiller in May 1978, with a series of separated photographic prints glued to battens, which meant they could be freely arranged on the wall. The separatist movement thus seemed made up of this strange gallery of not easily recognisable characters, given that the photographic portraits were negatives, and as a result it became difficult to tell Freud, Marcel Proust and



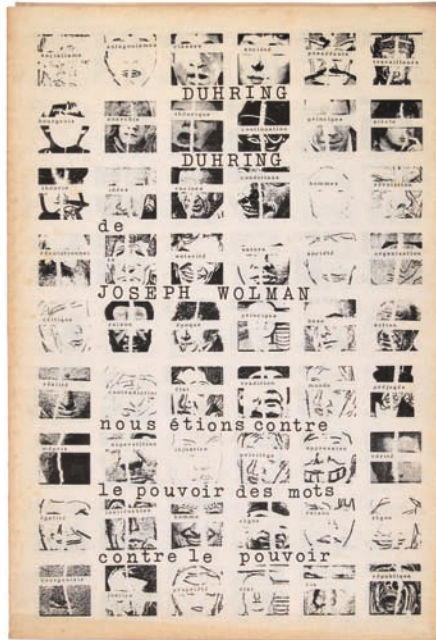
Gil J Wolman
Le Mouvement séparatiste
 1977

Maria Callas apart from the head of an Egyptian statue. An ‘Scotch art’ work was similarly separated, like a vestige of a bygone era.

In 1978, at the FIAC, at the stand held by his new gallery run by Jacques Spiess, he showed a single work, *L’Arbre séparé*, which contained on one of the parts of its sacrificed trunk a warning in the form of a small panel announcing a *Constat d’échec* (Declaration of Failure) in a language where Heraclitus seems to meet Wittgenstein: ‘1 separating is introducing a space, 2 into a surface affected by its boundaries...’ This work today exists in a state that differs slightly from its initial one, given that it survived an arson attack that slightly darkened the inside of the trunk, the part, it so happened, indicating the ‘Wolman’s land’ markers. In a moment of nice historical irony, a promotional card played up its merits with a quotation from the gallery owner Ralph Ledermann who saw in the proposal ‘the most profoundly moving work I have seen since Marcel Duchamp’s *Large Glass*, it too damaged, as indeed was Wolman’s very earliest work dating from 1952: *HHHHHH (Un homme saoul en vaut deux)*.’

In 1979, aged 50, Wolman brought out his first book, published by gallerist Nane Stern, *L’Homme séparé*. For the occasion, the gallery also exhibited a plastic version in 29 frames with the texts written in ink on separate and overlaid sheets of tracing paper, in order to disturb the reading, as in his old Lettrist works, albeit in an altogether different way. This emblematic Wolman work showed once more that he was thinking simultaneously as a poet and as an artist.

In October 1979, he exhibited all 64 plates of *Duhring Duhring*, an appropriation of Engels’ *Anti-Dühring* text, from which he excerpted a few words – nouns,



Gil J Wolman
Cover of *Duhring Duhring*,
Paris, 1979

individually enclosed in transparency mounts and arranged at regular intervals on the separate images of the heads of miscellaneous characters. In passing, they included Isou, mixed with Brezhnev and heads drawn by Wolman, thus defined by the noun associated with them, except that the same photos recurred in a changed order and with different words. Once again, Wolman simultaneously produced this large coloured wall fresco and a black-and-white version on cheap paper; a book with a tabloid or punk fanzine look about it, quite the opposite of the small edition of 150 of *L'Homme séparé*. Keen for the book to be widely distributed, he printed an edition of 5,000. Nearly all these copies were, destroyed in the act of arson committed on 28 November 1980 in the Galerie Speiss warehouse, where *L'Arbre séparé* was also in storage. Paradoxically, the work that had been promised a wide distribution would once again be 'underground'.

With that book, Wolman created the concept of his *Éditions Inconnues* (unknown editions), which he would use until the end of his life to print his texts that could not find a publisher; this he did in small quantities directly with his computer and printer. This was the case with *Duhring Duhring*, which was rejected by Gallimard, Le Seuil, Buchet/Castel, and Les Éditions de Minuit...

In 1980, with Weiller, he exhibited a series of *Décompositions*, based on the process used in *Duhring Duhring*. Two of these works were titled *Histoire de l'Internationale Lettriste*, and under the transparency mounts we find photocopies of letters then being sent to him by Guy Debord, as well as separate tracts from that time.

At the end of that year, Wolman had his first solo exhibition, *S'en sépareré*, at Galerie Lara Vincy, although the gallery been showing him regularly in group shows since 1972, the year of his last exhibition with Valérie Schmidt; the 'Scotch art' gallery owner. *S'en sépareré* proposes playing at being 'art people rather than people with values' by separating the signature from the work, because the Wolman portrait came with a cheque bearing the artist's signature, which the owner could pay into a bank to recover his stake, while duly cancelling the work's commercial value.

In 1981, he embarked on a series of videos, one of the most unusual of which is still *Le Drame discret de Mitterrand*, which he produced in real time by using a

tape recorder to record his channel-hopping from one station to another, switching between two evening programmes: Luis Buñuel's *Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* and the broadcast of François Mitterrand's accession to the presidency of the French Republic. *Détournement* was no longer the fact of adding a sound or a commentary over an existing and different image; this time it worked in the spectator's time and memory, with apparent cuts of TV 'snow' between each hop, bothersome for eyes accustomed to a sterile montage, but strangely conjuring up the 'Wolman's land' of separatist activities.

In October 1981, Spiess organised *Rétrospective: Wolman* at the Grand Palais during the FIAC, presenting in particular his *Mannequins séparés* as well as the very successful monograph *Wolman résumé des chapitres précédents*, the first anthology of his œuvre, based on the reversal of critiques, a procedure that Debord would use the following year in *Ordures et décombres déballés à la sortie du film 'In Girum imus nocte et consumimur igni'*, published by Champ Libre in 1982.

The first printing of this monograph would contain a *Déchet d'œuvre*, sheets of paper guillotined and put in plastic sleeves, a procedure that culminated in *W La liberté*, exhibited at Galerie Spiess in 1982. Guillotined texts as different as *The Bible*, erotic Japanese writings and works by Artaud, squeezed between plastic, enabling the various textual debris to move about, and all the more so because the bits and pieces were fitted into square frames, which thus had no definite sense.

Jean-Louis Brau and François Dufrêne attended the opening, and Wolman met the latter at the Centre Pompidou on 17 November 1982, for a performance with the premonitory title: *Dufrêne et Wolman parlent sans doute et se taisent peut-être*, just a few days before his artist-friend François Dufrêne's brutal death. To Dufrêne he dedicated two versions of a video titled *Le Poète interrompu*, mixing the soundtrack of the messages on his answering machine, with, in particular, Dufrêne's very last message, together with either the blurred image of a television surmounted by a cover, or by the working equipment for his separatist works.

Other videos had been made that year: *L'Anticoncert* and *Bartok*, films extending the divergent Lettrist cinema with the separation of sound and imagery



Gil J Wolman
Déchet d'œuvre, in the first printing of the book
Wolman résumé des chapitres précédents
 1981

that was nothing other than the recording of his own visual works, while the sound was a radio syntonisation or a deliberately painful improvisation on an out-of-tune piano.

Version française ou le Cinéma et son double had more to do with *détournement*, through the juxtaposition of the dubbed French version of *Johnny Guitar* and the filming of a *Décomposition* based on a recent trip to the USA.

In 1984, Wolman brought out *Vivre et mourir*, published by Spiess and Nane Stern, his first real book of writings, which would prompt him to call himself a *décrivain* or 'de-writer'. In it he worked on word separation, but so as not to give the impression that this was a writer's work, he immediately produced a few 'Scotch art' pieces, describing himself as *the forger of the artist he once was*.

The following year, Jacques Spiess brought out a new book by Wolman consisting of appropriations of articles from the newspaper *Le Monde*, in the tradition of *J'écris propre*, and titled *Fin de communication*.

Then, in 1985, Jean-Louis Brau died.

Seeing from Memory

Wolman's last creative years would see him carrying on his research, especially into notions of time and memory, in an increasingly hieratic way.

In 1987, Wolman produced some *Peintures cachées*, one or two with separate cardboard boxes glued on canvases found in flea markets. Here, however, we are closer to homeless people's makeshift shelters than to Rauschenberg's work on cardboard boxes.

That same year, he exhibited two series of pictures arranged on the wall, fixed by their edge, making it impossible to have an overall view and impelling the spectator walk around the picture. It was the time taken to view the work that was separate. This series, *Haute vie*, exhibited with Spiess in 1987, was made up of black-and-white photocopies glued onto different sized panels of *dérives* made with Charlotte Wolman within the strict boundaries of the *département* of Haute-Vienne. In it we see fragments of panels with the names



Gil J Wolman
Cover of *Haute vie*
Paris, 1987

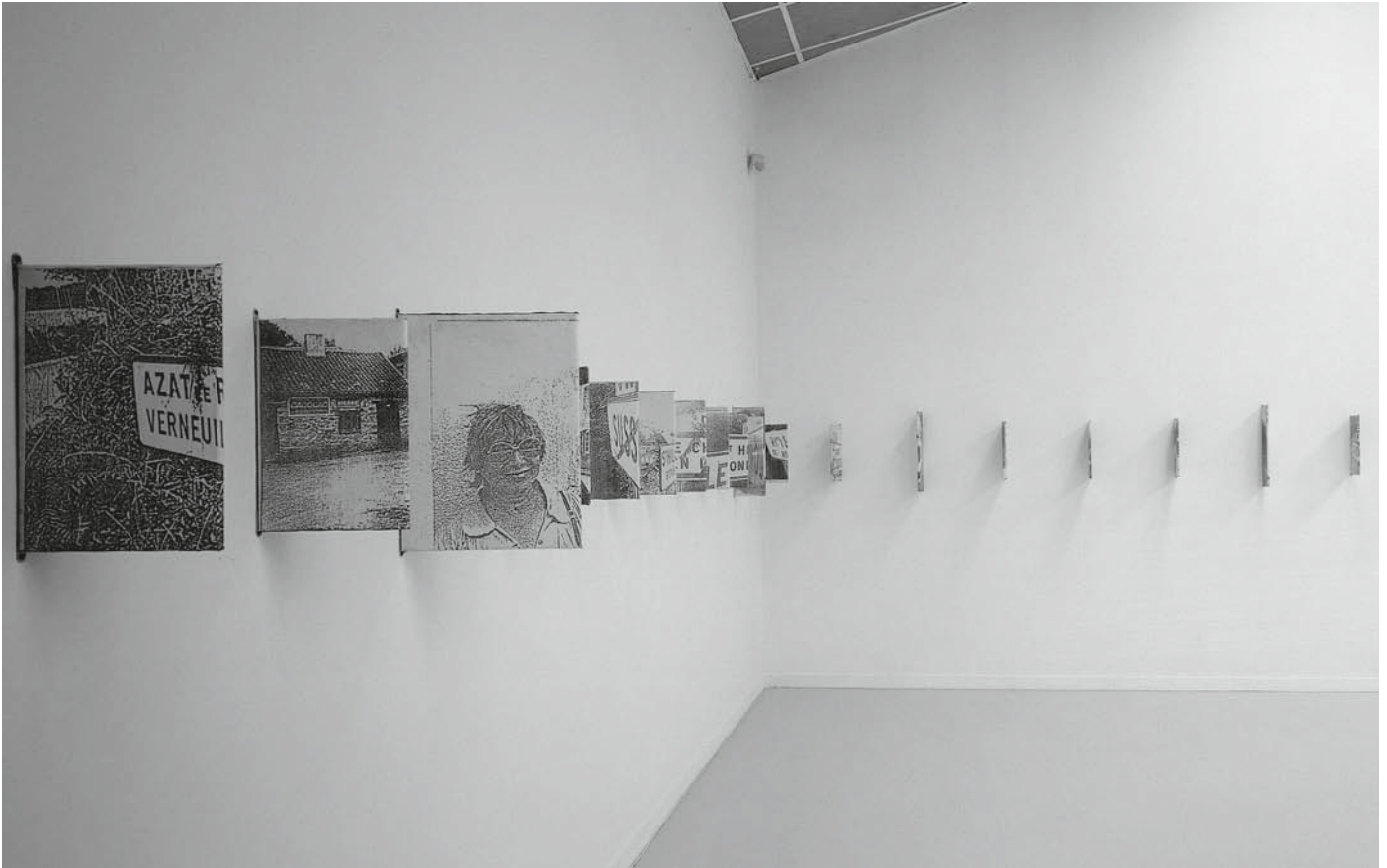
of bordering villages. These panels separating two zones can also be seen as the pursuit of the separation that, in the final analysis, Wolman tackled throughout his life, whatever his aesthetics, because he separated the breath from vowels and consonants in the *mégapneumies*, the image from the soundtrack in *L'Anticoncept*, if not the glue contained in the rolls of Scotch tape used for his 'Scotch art'.

The second series to be exhibited in this aggressive, because novel, way, was *Interruption manifeste*, where, this time around, by reversal (*retournement*), Wolman questioned the very status of the work of art.

In alternately choosing reproductions of recognised painters, like Monet and Van Gogh, or else real paintings found in flea markets, with no aesthetic value, and hideous in their worthlessness, or, again, a copy by a Sunday painter of a Dalí picture, or even one of his old pieces of 'Scotch art' sacrificed for the occasion, Wolman put them all on the same level. For it is not a matter of appreciating their content but of grasping the phenomenon of interrupted viewing of these pictures cut out and glued back on to wood.

On this occasion, with his *Éditions Inconnues*, he published a small booklet, *Le Sens perdu de l'interruption*, where, inside – a noteworthy fact because it could go totally unnoticed – each of the copies included a visibly handwritten Wolman signature, but one that on much closer inspection turned out to be a mere reproduction, playing on the value and notion of originality.

In 1988 *Les Commentaires* separated the subject of blank canvases, whose content (a poetic, Wolman-style text) was engraved on a plaque associated with each picture and exhibited below them.



Installation view of *Haute vie* (1987) in the exhibition
Les Ex-positions, Frac Bourgogne, Dijon, 2001

The year after, at the Grand Palais, he showed his *Peintures fermées*, which were the visual opposite of the *Séparations*, because a white surface covered the thus masked work and only revealed a single vertical streak while keeping the name of the painter censored.

When *L'Anticoncept* was shown in the USA in 1989, Wolman proposed an appropriation of his own film during its screening in Boston. *L'(Anti)spectacle de l'Anticoncept* was the spectacle of the auditorium watching *L'Anticoncept*, which, moreover, does not change the viewing of the film in any way, given that it is a sound piece and that the flashes of light can be seen from the projection booth, while, at the same time, in the case of a later screening of this new film, being the mirror of the audience supposed to be watching the watchers.

Here it is not the beholders who make the work but those watching those who are watching. Another version was made in New York in 1990, thus becoming his last film: *L'Anticoncept à New York*.

In 1991, he exhibited the series *Peintures dépeintes* at Éric Fabre's Galerie de Paris. These unprepared works were simply placed on the floor, signed and dated on the back, while, as artworks, he exhibited books bearing the same name as the series of paintings, for which they provided a fitting textual complement, somewhat following the principle of the horoscope.

Wolman broadened this type of subject dissociation, and at the 1991 FIAC he organised an *Appel à témoins, pour une peinture de tradition orale*, where, in front of everyone, he burnt his exhibited works, so that they would only exist through the memory of (false) witnesses, who could nevertheless take away a book that gave, for the record, the titles and dimensions of the works reduced



Gil J Wolman burning his exhibited works in
*Appel à témoins, pour une peinture de tradition
 orale*, FIAC, Paris, 1991

to ashes. The Galerie de Paris put on another show, focusing this time on a single work, *Les Inhumations*, which could be viewed solely by appointment, and in which Wolman appropriated an old medical book by erasing certain data (as he would do in his *Tableaux préparés* produced in that same year), but equally associating it with some poetic comments.

On 8 November 1994, he put on a last performance, improvising a *mégapneume: Demandez l'humanité*, on television, for the opening of the exhibition *Hors limites* at the Centre Pompidou.

On 30 November, Guy Debord – who had earlier sent him Alice Becker-Ho's book, *L'Essence du jargon*, in an envelope with his address written on the back – committed suicide.

On 16 December Wolman went to Galerie Satellite, which was putting on *L'Entre-temps*, his new solo show that was merely the act of appropriating the time between one exhibition being taken down and the next one being put up. After the space of the separations, 'Wolman's land' became the space between two exhibitions.

In January 1995, Éditions Allia published his last book, *Les Inhumations*, following on from *Peinture dépeinte*, preceded by a short text, 'Les Inhumations', referring to the work shown in 1993 at Galerie de Paris. For once, a professional publisher and not a gallery was bringing out one of his books. Wolman felt impelled to have the words 'this is not a book' printed on the cover.

The last solo show put on by Wolman, now suffering from a lymphoma, was titled *Voir de mémoire*, and, on 20 February 1995 at the Centre Pompidou, invited visitors to recall the works of Schwitters by looking at the labels temporarily in

place after the canvases had been taken down in the *Kurt Schwitters* exhibition. This very last artistic proposition, which was meant to be re-enacted at Galerie de Paris in April, but was cancelled when the gallery closed, neatly symbolises the career of this special artist who was too far ahead of his time, or rather, as Edgard Varèse underscored in his day, too ahead of his time in a world that was late, and was forced, in a thoroughly beautiful creative gesture, to imagine his future exhibition that he was in the process of attending.

On 5 July 1995, Wolman died in Paris, *immortal and alive*.