

## Lettrism

simulacra and spectacle leads to the satirical erosion of MIMESIS' most basic categorical and ontological distinctions, between subject and object, living and dead, the real and the represented. A weakening of symbolic form combined with projections of liminality are symptoms of this theme. Archetypal writers in this vein include Djuna Barnes, Samuel Beckett, Wyndham Lewis and Mina Loy. A sense of loss of faith, myth and reassurance, pervades their writing. But what makes this loss idiosyncratic for Late Modernism is its ironic, wholly desublimated handling. NIHILISM for the Late Modernists is cause for mirthless laughter not forlorn sobbing. This is no more evident than in Beckett, where even the very contours of consciousness and self-identity are a lost illusion. Indeed the ironic snicker of the Beckettian universe encapsulates the philosophico-rhetorical core of Late Modernism, its relation to High Modernism and its successive filiation, POSTMODERNISM. In the absence of basic certainties, of a minimal moral, spiritual or ontological ground from which to stake one's position, perceptions or opinions, even sobbing or howling are presumptuous. Self-reflexive laughter presents the broadly postmodernist knowledge that nothing is certain and that nothing can be done about it.

### READING

Miller, Tyrus (1999) *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Sophie Vlacos

## LETTRISM

Lettrism, or Letterism, was a multimedia AVANT-GARDE art movement originating in 1940s Paris which explored the visual and sonic thresholds of language, focusing especially on invented language systems in which letters were assigned new values, and incorporating new phonetic and pictographic symbols. The movement was founded by the Romanian artist and poet Isidore Isou with Gabriel Pomerand in 1945, and was spearheaded by Isou and a shifting group of associates throughout the 1940s to the 1960s and beyond. In 1951–2 this group included Maurice Lemaître, François Dufrêne, Gil J. Wolman, Jean-Louis Brau, Guy Debord and others. Lettrism was heavily indebted to DADA and SURREALISM, though Isou saw the movement as formally revolutionary. Notwithstanding its late status in relation to many European avant-gardes, Lettrism predicted many of the concerns of CONCRETE POETRY, and also spawned various offshoots,

## *Little magazines*

many of which achieved greater notoriety than the movement itself. In 1952 Debord, Wolman and others split from the group around Isou to form the Lettrist International, later incorporated into the new movement of Situationism in 1957. In the early 1950s Wolman, Dufrière and Brau started performing vocal compositions which moved beyond the phoneme-based sound structures of Lettrism, thereby inaugurating 'Ultralettrism', a key movement in SOUND POETRY in the 1950s–1970s.

### READING

Bohn, Willard (2001) *Modern Visual Poetry*. Newark, DE and London: University of Delaware Press.

Foster, Stephen C. (ed.) (1983) *Lettrisme: Into the Present*, special issue of *Visible Language*, 17: 3.

Greg Thomas

## **LITTLE MAGAZINES**

One of the main venues for the publishing of modernism across literature, music, drama and the visual arts. Many little magazines were also major textual examples of modernist practice, displaying EXPERIMENTATION and innovations both of form and content. Variations upon the format of the modernist little magazine not only appear across Europe and the United States but can also be located across the world, indicating the global nature of such publications. However, it is only relatively recently that researchers in modernist studies have begun to seriously analyse the role and significance of the magazines themselves, rather than quarrying them merely for the work of famous contributors or interpreting them solely as the vehicles of their editors. Scholars have long known that, for example, James Joyce's *Ulysses* was partly serialised in *The Little Review* (1914–29) before book publication in 1922 or that T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* first appeared in October 1922 in the British magazine *The Criterion* (1922–39; also edited by Eliot) and in the same month in the American magazine *The Dial* (1920–9), both prior to the book publication of the poem two months later. However, reading such classics of modernism within the pages of magazines opens up these familiar texts to surprising links and associations with the rich and varied material found elsewhere in the periodicals: reading *Ulysses* in *The Little Review* (from March 1918 to December 1920) means one is reading a different textual object than the book as published by Shakespeare & Company. Little magazines are increasingly being viewed as among the primary texts