Poetry Center in London. Most of the contributions use type or calligraphy as a graphic medium similar to Letterist work, typewriter art, or micro-graphia. For example G. Norwicha’s creates the image of folding shapes from a micrographic description of landscapes. These types of work appear together with the works concerned with official forms of communication. Peter Myer in the premiere issue of the assembling (no. A, 1971-1972) includes his “Boredom of the Motorist” with graphic street signs inside comic-strip thought-balloons.

Neither merely satirical nor dismissive of bureaucratic performance, these appropriations of officialdom are a loving parody that work through these procedures and signs in a way similar to the way the British Mods wore traditional white collar business clothes. The mods would wear the suits common to mid-level managers and bureaucrats; from a distance they looked as if they were on their way to work; a passerby might smile at the nice young man. The Mods pushed this tidy, respectable look to an extreme. They would tuck in their blazers or sweaters. This obsessive neatness bordered on paranoia. In a similar way, these postal-like stamps, corporate identities, networking procedures imitate the trappings of bureaucratic performance to the point of absurdity.

**Typographic Experiments**

There is a direct historical link from the Bauhaus and Constructivist concerns and strategies to the Concrete Poetry movement and, then, to the concrete and visual poetry that appears in many assemblings. In fact, concrete and visual poetry is a common and
perhaps defining characteristic of many assemblings. The importance of concrete poetry in assemblings is most obvious in the assemblings Ponto (49) and Ponto-Orum 10 (51). Ponto, produced in Brazil, introduced “process poetry” as a variant of concrete and visual poetry in its premiere issue on “revista de poemas de processo” (edited by Rua Almirante). Almirante attacks “discursive poetry,” as well as earlier versions of concrete poetry that still used words. He goes on to explain that concrete poetry has now surpassed its original stated goals and strategies. In that sense, he sounds much like the critics of concrete poetry’s actual effects versus their intended claims. Yet, the process poets still recognize the shift accorded by the concrete poets, and vow to continue the fight begun by those poets against “linear” writing. The process poets highlight the importance of surprise and improbability to the concrete poets. Again, those earlier structural Modernist poems hold a different message for poets looking for inspiration than for historians looking for definitive explanations. Wlademir Dias-Pino’s article “Limit Situation: Distinctions and Consequences,” in an issue of Ponto-Orum 10 (51), also explains these poems. These poems stress the process involved and “not words.” That process involves “visualization” for “graphic documentation.” These purely graphic poems avoid both the structure of linguistics (no words) and the aura of author (non-expressive of emotion). Dias-Pino concludes that the “process poem is anti-literature in the sense that true mechanics seeks motion without friction or electricity seeks a perfect isolator.” If that explanation strikes some as stiff and not perfectly clear, then the poems of invented symbols and montages of symbols and images will also

“Process poetry builds on the advances of Concrete Poetry and moves that tendency toward visual conceptual games, scores, and activities.”
probably appear slick, mechanized, and non-expressive. Process poetry builds on the advances of Concrete Poetry and moves that tendency toward visual conceptual games, scores, and activities. Although these poems are not yet scores, they do suggest a secret code system waiting for a reader to interpret or play. The “process” can refer to the process of interpretation; the reader as writer-performer has to try out these strange code systems.

In the early 1970s, the French Letterist group began producing the assembling Jerimadeth (50). In the 1972 issue (of 50 copies), the boxed volume includes contributions on loose folded card-stock. Monique Goldschmidt and Fredric Studeny compiled this issue that includes contributions by Isidore Isou, Pierre Jouvet, Maurice Lemaître, and Alain Satie. Maurice Lemaître’s hieroglyphic contribution on memory highlights the object-oriented approach to language the Letterists advocated. This type of thing-code system overlaps with the Fluxus boxes and kits as well. In that similarity with Fluxus, Lemaître’s “L’Aide-Mémoire: Eléments mnémotechniques pour un conte oral à faire” (1971) (“The Memory Aid: mnemonic techniques for the telling of a story”) (50) begins with a mailing label, on a separate page, with the title as the destination and the sender as the author’s name. The hieroglyphic poem is on one page. It includes photos, photocopies, pieces of pages and bank checks, and actual objects (a piece of twine and three matches). On the left hand corner are two coins (a two-franc piece and a one-franc piece); in the upper center of the page is a fragment of a page
describing Horror films cut into a shape resembling the Hebrew letter Aleph or maybe the Greek symbol for Pi. The right-hand corner includes a mug shot photo of the author either holding his breath or pouting his lips and a capsule (Sonpal). The center of the page includes a painted circle, the three matches, the knotted twine, and half of the author’s card including his address. The last third of the page is filled with a “voided” bank check; it is a “blank check” signed by the author and worth 1 million francs. What story is this rebus trying to light in the reader’s imagination? The images do not make a linear argument as in phonetic writing systems, but the images do hint at some kind of signification, and some kind of story. The relatively few elements involved encourage the reader to ponder the problem. The analogy between these systems of exchange or counting systems (coins, checks, knotted twine, and lots of match-sticks) hint at some story about keeping track or exchanging. Perhaps this is the story of Letterism told in its most appropriate and unforgettable style.

The Letterists’ manifestoes advocate the destruction of all artworld systems and even language itself down to the letter (a kind of joke on traditional rhetoric — breaking down language into its parts).9 Their artwork uses carefully constructed printed materials best described in the tradition of beauty and aesthetics rather than the anti-aesthetics or neo-dada sensibility that they explicitly advocate. The assemblings reject an “anything goes” attitude; instead, they introduce the concept of an (alternative) aesthetic beauty born from the shattering of worn-out forms of communication. The Letterists often used détourned (see footnote 1) pictures of nude women with script cover-

9/See the special issue of Visible Language, “Lettrisme: Into the Present,” Vol. 17, No. 3 (Summer 1983), guest editor Stephen C. Foster, which features manifestoes and essays by Isou and the other calligraphically-oriented Letterists.
ing parts of the image in order to prove that given the opportunity of “improvisation Lettriste,” cursive writing is more attractive than the nude female body; the eye supposedly follows the writing rather than the female form.

The Letterists sought a poetic form that could dispense with words entirely because words suffer from mechanization and rigidity. They believed that words choked inspiration. The only solution was to give free improvisational reign to the twists and turns of the serifs and curves usually suppressed when writing serves linguistic ends. They literally ripped words apart to free the visual extravagances of writing from linguistic communication. Because they wanted to destroy this kind of meaning-making, there work often looks more like visual art than visual poetry. In practice, the Letterists focused on both the materiality of writing and on the objects and materials that might make a new alternative language system. New alphabets and symbols appear frequently in their work as do objects and photographs used as part of some unknown hieroglyphic system.

The assemblings included in this exhibition have an important place in the future of artistic experimentation and the extension of the concept of art to include social sculpture. A social sculpture does not merely comment on the production of art, but also on the production of specific types of social networks. As a forum for this extension, assemblings might be remembered as the transition into, and kit-like instructions for, the quintessential art and literature of the twenty-first century: networked art.
“INSERT” by Henry Targowski contributed to AH. (48)