Henri Michaux, poet-painter

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Henri Michaux's trip to the Far East in 1930-1931 became a point of departure for his career-long inquiry into the relation between language and image which led him to combine the poetic and the pictorial as a way to relieve tensions within his divided self. For over sixty years, the Belgian-born (1899-1984) poet-painter created text-only, image-only, and over twenty text-and-image works. The merging of language and image in Michaux's text-and-image projects breaks down divisions between these two arts and consequently moves away from G. E. Lessing's separation of the arts. This departure from the modernist view of literature and art positions Michaux as a transitional figure: as a practitioner between arts, cultures, and period styles. Just as Michaux's divided self came together to a certain degree from his creative work, so too did his work obtain a unity of the poetic and the pictorial that blended into one kind of expression. Although Michaux combined words and images to explore the self, this activity led to the parallel development of Michaux as a poet-painter and to a merging relation between the verbal and the visual.

This dissertation explores Michaux's transformation into a hybrid artist and the works he produced between 1922 and 1984. The initial chapter approaches the biographical features contributing to Michaux's career as a poet-painter and how mixing media was essential to his practice. The following chapter frames the relations of words and images in a theoretical context, focusing on Lessing's separation of the sister arts and on W. J. T. Mitchell's opposing

view, in which he considers language and image not as separate forms of expression but instead as overlapping forms. This framework serves as the methodology for approaching Michaux's corpus and this analysis situates his mixed-media work in relation to writers and artists like Guillaume Apollinaire and René Magritte. The final chapter presents case studies of the verbal-visual overlap in Michaux's text-and-image projects and his poetic inquiry into his own visual art and that of other artists. These constructions illustrate the diversity within Michaux's work while showing the unity within his text-and-image corpus.

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PREFACE

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INTRODUCTION

When Henri Michaux (1899-1984) slipped, fell, and broke his right arm on ice near his hotel in Valberg, a ski resort in the Alpes-Maritimes, he had to rely on his left arm, a part of his body from which he felt alienated. It was at this moment, in 1957, when he came to realize that he was made of two distinct sides. Michaux recalls his accident in "Bras cassé"[1] (1962), which led him to reflect on the numerous divisions he saw within himself, particularly because he was "un vrai droitier" (*OC,* III, 859). Although his accident frustrated him, it led him to make important observations about himself; he initially remarked that his left arm was "sans style, sans animation, sans formation, sans affirmation comme sans force" (*BC, OC*, III, 859). In addition, he observed that the body perceives doubly through what Michaux calls "une stéréovision" or "vision corrigé, ou vision critique" (*BC, OC*, III, 860). The combination of faculties creates an ability to be critical, contradictory, and to perceive doubly as a result of having, for instance, two eyes and two hands. This kind of perception forms "des stéréo-impressions" which are "impressions conjuguées de l'homme droit et de l'homme gauche," in other words, mediated by the left and right hemispheres of the brain (*BC, OC*, II, 860). These combinations form a "stereo-esthésie," a faculty Michaux lacked when he did not have the use of his right arm (*BC,*

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[1] "Bras cassé" was first published in *Tel Quel*, printemps (1962): 3-15 and it was later published by Fata Morgana in 1973 and again by Gallimard in *Face à ce qui dérobe* (1975), a text that resides under the rubric of Michaux's mescaline writings. The texts in this latter work explore experiences and observations related to the self.

OC, III, 860). Temporarily missing this double aesthetic, Michaux felt—for perhaps the first time in his life—unified: he was no longer "ce double, contradicteur," that is, he was *not* divided between "l'homme de droit et l'homme de gauche" since his right arm was injured (*BC, OC*, III, 860). While Michaux had felt alienated from his left self, after spending a certain amount of time with "l'homme de gauche" and without a double aesthetic, he began to understand his feelings of alienation within him. Instead of rejecting the left self, as he had initially begun to do, he accepted it and even found pleasure in the experience of being a lefty: "Je tenais à entretenir sa [la main gauche] différence. Sa personnalité, il fallait la faire mieux sortir, s'établir. Danse de la main gauche. Mime de la main gauche. Style de la main gauche. Quel plaisir!" (*BC, OC*, III, 877).

Michaux's "chute," breaking his right arm, confirmed to him that there was a division between the left and right in the self; however, this encounter with the separations within the self also led him to realize that there was a "ménage gauche-droite" (*BC, OC*, III, 878). Importantly, he notes, "L'ensemble droite-gauche, une des nombreuses divisions de l'être, division à garder qui est aussi réunion" (*BC, OC*, III, 878). The co-existence of the two selves is thus a dual relation, one full of tension between the right and left, and another: one that creates a union of the two parts which ultimately forms a whole.

<p style="text-align:center">*　　*　　*</p>

For over sixty years Belgian-born Henri Michaux created text-only, image-only, and over twenty text-and-image works. After publishing his first text, *Chronique de l'aiguilleur* (1922), Michaux

moved to Paris in 1924 in a "self-imposed exile."[2] In Paris, he discovered visual art after visiting a Surrealist art exhibition where the works of Paul Klee, Max Ernst, and Giorgio Di Chirico inspired his first graphic experiments. While Michaux did not associate with the Surrealists, his desire to create non-mimetic, non-representational art finds its roots in this movement. Michaux's earliest artwork suggests his desire to explore visual art in combination with language and his early paintings, *Alphabets* (1927) and *Narration* (1927), merge textual forms and image as does *Un poulpe ou une ville* (1926), a painting that experiments with how language indicates meaning in visual art.

Beyond the influence of the Surrealists and his earliest experiments with text and image, Michaux's voyage to the Far East in 1930-1931, namely to China, introduced him to a kind of language that fused words and images. Michaux viewed Chinese calligraphy as a language that was natural, beautiful, and expressive. Most importantly, he saw that Chinese calligraphy was simultaneously verbal and visual. Michaux's fascination with this unified form of the poetic and pictorial led in part to his text-and-image projects in which he brought together words and images. In *Arbres de tropiques* (1942), Michaux created a series of trees whose line and form recall the way in which Chinese calligraphy is drawn, and later, in *Peintures et dessins* (1946), Michaux combined a series of his graphic art with poetic fragments, in an attempt to fuse words and images. Beyond these projects, the 1950s represents a period when Michaux's verbal-visual works integrated shapes and forms inspired by what he saw in the Chinese written language. Michaux's *Mouvements* (1951), the first project for which he created signs ("signes") and

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[2] Rigaud-Drayton refers to Michaux's move from Belgium to France this way in "Henri Michaux: 'Belge, de Paris'," *Modern Language Review* (2002): 36.

symbols resembling Chinese characters, combines images drawn in ink with a poetic text. The publication of this work marks a pivotal moment in Michaux's career as a poet-painter since from this point forward, he continued to create these kinds of juxtapositions until the year of his death, in *Par des traits* (1984), demonstrating a lifelong need to combine language and image.

While Michaux found painting to be a liberating form of expression compared to writing, he did not privilege one art over the other. While the debate between words and images dates to the Ancients, this rivalry is not manifest in Michaux's work. Instead of pitting language against image, as did the Belgian Surrealist René Magritte in his word-object paintings such as *La Trahison des images* (1929), Michaux combined them in complementary combinations. In this way, Michaux's use of these forms of expression moves beyond what G. E. Lessing argued for in his seminal text *Laocoön: An Essay upon Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766) which prepared for the modernist view of literature and art.

Lessing views the sister arts, poetry and painting, as separate, and his work establishes divisions between them based on their ability to represent truth and beauty. In doing so, he organizes the arts in a binary division. Key to the poetry and painting separation are the distinctions Lessing makes between the temporal and spatial arts; he sees painting as an art of space whereas he sees poetry as an art of time. He explains:

> I argue thus. If it be true that painting employs wholly different signs or means of imitation from poetry,—the one using forms and colors in space, the other articulates sounds in time,—and if signs must unquestionably stand in convenient relation with the thing signified, then signs arranged side by side can represent only objects existing side by side, or whose parts exist, while consecutive signs can express only objects which succeed each other, or whose parts succeed each other, in time (1969, 91).

Following Lessing, the painter is limited because all of a painting's elements must be compressed into a single event whereas the poet is not limited in this way since a poem can

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develop sequentially, over time. Further, Lessing divides the sister arts explaining that painting can only imitate reality whereas poetry represents truth, and he considers painting as silent poetry and poetry as a speaking picture. Through these kinds of distinctions, Lessing divides these arts into mutually exclusive categories.

Along the lines of Lessing's view of the arts as divided was Michaux's initial view of his split self. Michaux's text-and-image works move beyond Lessing's separations: they break down forms thus bringing together words and images. Michaux's work consequently suggests the postmodern tendency of border crossing in which the sister arts overlap. Scholars of postmodern picture theory, such as W. J. T. Mitchell, introduce new interpretations to the modern view of the sister arts as separate. For instance, in *Picture Theory,* Mitchell suggests the phenomenon of border crossing between the arts, outlining relations he calls: "image/text," "imagetext," and "image-text" which designate three different kinds of word-image relationships (1994, 89). These formations explain some of the ways in which words and images come together in Michaux's work, helping position his constructions in a context that describes combinations instead of the divisions in Lessing's classifications. Considering the views Lessing and Mitchell present, Michaux is most accurately defined as a transitional figure, between the modern and postmodern period. Similar to the divisions within the self, between Belgium and France, the Far East and West, language and image, his self and other, Michaux combined words and images in pursuit of unity and reconciliation of the self. In doing so, he created verbal-visual combinations in which the arts that were previously seen as separate now overlap.

*   *   *

Patterns in critical studies of Michaux address his career as a poet and a painter as far back as the 1940s. This trend in the scholarship continues to explore Michaux's two bodies of work; however, in many instances these studies divide the work of the poet-painter, considering either his poetry or his visual art. In *Découvrons Henri Michaux* (1941), André Gide compared Michaux to other writers who also painted such as Hugo, Baudelaire, Laforgue, and Apollinaire. Although Gide identified him as both a poet and a painter, contemporary analysis of Michaux did not address him as a mixed-media artist but instead as a poet or a painter. Michaux's *Entre centre et absence* (1930) was the first of numerous future works in which he juxtaposed words and pictures. From the 1930s onward, Michaux regularly and consistently created text-and-image projects though studies of his work did not reflect his practice in both arts. René Berelé's 1946 monograph, *Henri Michaux*, focuses primarily on Michaux's writing, but it also includes reproductions of a variety of Michaux's graphic art. Following Gide's observation about Michaux as being both poet and painter; Bertelé's monograph arguably could have influenced much of the future research on Michaux; however, a vast majority of studies address his literary works with much less focus on his mixed-media projects.

The critical writings in the 1970s present a series of original studies on Michaux and start to approach the dual nature of Michaux's work. *Ruptures sur Henri Michaux* (1976) edited by Roger Dadoun, and Virginia La Charité's *Henri Michaux* (1977), are works that investigate the interrelationships between the verbal and the visual in Michaux. Dadoun's text includes a collection of five studies on Michaux that focus on the "énergétique" in his poetry through a linguistic analysis of Michaux's texts. Each essay takes a somewhat narrowly focused thematic approach to one aspect of Michaux's work. La Charité's work goes further because she identifies Michaux as a poet and painter, but she states that if she were to select "one term which

best describes the complexity of Michaux the artist, I [she] would unhesitatingly choose *poet*" (1977, preface). La Charité's text explores the idea of unity related to Michaux and how Michaux "the man, the painter, and the poet are bound together" (1977, preface). La Charité therefore begins to establish a link between Michaux the poet and Michaux the painter.

The following decade represents a new inquiry into the linguistic component of Michaux's texts. Laurie Edson's *Henri Michaux and the Poetics of Movement* (1985) is unlike many of the other critical writings on him because it takes neither a chronological nor a thematic approach to his work. Edson's work identifies the idea of movement as a feature characteristic of Michaux's corpus, both in his writing and painting. She explores movement in Michaux's titles as well as in his different texts, for instance, in his travel journals and the experimental work with mescaline he created in the 1950s. Edson's approach demonstrates that Michaux's projects go beyond the "world of écriture" and highlights a pattern in Michaux's work as "a dynamic tension and continual movement between opposites" (1985, 6). Another text to emerge from this period, *Passages et langages de Henri Michaux* (1987) edited by Jean-Claude Mathieu and Michel Collot, treats Michaux's work in a way similar to Dadoun's collection. The text includes essays on Michaux by authors such as Jean-Michel Maulpoix, Pierre-Jean Founau, and Roger Dadoun. The thematically organized texts investigate verbal and visual elements in Michaux's work. For instance, Founau's essay "La dérive des signes" approaches Michaux's work from a linguistic and visual perspective. This work also includes a short selection of visual art that highlights the focus on both the verbal and visual components of Michaux's body of work. In *The Double Cipher: Encounter between Word and Image in Bonnefoy, Tardieu and Michaux* (1991), Adelia Williams explores "the dichotomy reinforced throughout the Western tradition by such figures as Lessing, Kant and Gombrich between figurative and semantic fields"

and her study calls Michaux's verbal and visual works into question, analyzing them through theories of language and representation (Williams, 1991, 149).

Two of the most recent publications on Michaux, Jean-Pierre Martin's biography, *Henri Michaux* (2003), and Robert Bréchon's biography on Michaux the poet, *Henri Michaux: la poésie comme destin* (2005), focus on what Michaux kept incredibly private: his life. Martin's biography is the first comprehensive work to document chronologically Michaux's life and his works in an over 700-page text. Bréchon's biography considers Michaux in a different way since the author says that thanks to Martin as well as Raymond Bellour's work on the three-volume *Oeuvres complètes* in the Pléaide edition (1998, 2001, 2004), "je sais tout" (2005, 7). Bréchon takes a more personal and intimate look at Michaux's poetry but says that "je ne dirai presque rien du peintre Henri Michaux" (2005, 8). Bréchon addresses Michaux the poet, thus viewing him as a poet and a painter and not as a poet-painter. Most recently, in her monograph, *Henri Michaux: Poetry, Painting and the Universal Sign* (2005), Margaret Rigaud-Drayton concentrates on Michaux's quest for a universal language whose impetus came from Michaux's voyage to the Far East in 1931. This trip serves as Rigaud-Drayton's point of departure in an investigation of the poet-painter's search for a "universal language" and she argues that Michaux's dream of "universal signs" led to "his articulation of the self and its relationship to verbal and visual signs" (2005, 8-9). Her study, which concentrates on Michaux's desire to create a universal language, was an attempt to "reintegrate" in his works "both the world and his own split self" (2005, 8). Her work thus explores Michaux's search for identity. While these studies consider Michaux's poetry and visual art, they address movements and styles within Michaux's verbal-visual corpus. The goal of this project is to move beyond separations related

to style and to explore the transitional moments in Michaux's career as poet-painter that mediated tensions within the poet-painter and between words and images.

<center>*   *   *</center>

Just as Michaux's realization of "l'homme droit" and "l'homme gauche" moved toward an understanding of the potential unity within the self, so the act of juxtaposing words and images relieved tensions in the word-image struggle. Michaux's trip to China became a point of departure for his career-long inquiry into the relation between words and images; it was indeed an experience that never left his mind, body, or soul. The merging of language and image and of the poet and painter break down divisions within them and consequently move away from Lessing's separation of the arts. This departure from the modernist's view of literature and art positions Michaux as a transitional figure: as a practitioner between arts, cultures, and period styles. Just as Michaux's split self has reconciled to a certain degree by his creative work, so too did his work reflect a unity of the poetic and the pictorial that blended into one kind of expression. Although Michaux combined words and images to explore the self, this activity led to the parallel development of Michaux as a poet-painter and to a meaningful and merging relation between the verbal and the visual.

This dissertation explores Michaux's transformation into a hybrid artist and the works he produced between 1922 and 1984. The initial chapter approaches the biographical features contributing to Michaux's career as a poet-painter and how mixing media was essential to his practice. The following chapter frames the relations of words and images in a theoretical context, focusing on Lessing's separation of the sister arts and on W. J. T. Mitchell's opposing

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view, in which he considers language and image not as separate forms of expression but instead as overlapping forms. This framework serves as the methodology for approaching Michaux's corpus and this analysis situates his mixed-media work in relation to writers and artists like Guillaume Apollinaire and René Magritte. The final chapter presents case studies of the verbal-visual overlap in Michaux's text-and-image projects and his poetic inquiry into his own visual art and that of other artists. These constructions illustrate the diversity within Michaux's work while showing the unity within his text-and-image corpus.

1.0   THE TRANSITION TO POET-PAINTER

> Il écrit, mais toujours partagé.
> -   Michaux[3]

1.1   Transitional Beginnings: From Belgium to the Far East

Though little time separates Henri Michaux's first texts (1922) and paintings (1927), he was considered a poet long before he was considered a painter.[4] It was not until 1937, the year of Michaux's first painting exhibition at the Gallerie Pierre in Paris, that he gained recognition as an artist. This year marks a pivotal moment in Michaux's life when he enters into the art world, and from this point forward, he regularly and publicly exhibited his graphic art. Even as Michaux painted more frequently, he never abandoned words, or writing; yet his experience with writing caused him to question language and his relationship to it. As a result, Michaux brought words and images together in an attempt to experiment with language, in the hope that these two forms of expression would produce an experience different from writing or painting alone. By

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[3] *Quelques renseignements sur cinquante-neuf années d'existence* (1958) (*OC*, I) cxxxii.
[4] The Centre Georges Pompidou held a retrospective exhibition of Michaux's artwork in 1978 which began in Paris continued to New York and concluded in Montreal. The exhibition catalogue organizes Michaux's artwork in 21 sections that are sequenced chronologically and by medium and technique. See the catalogue by Alfred Pacquement and Agnès de la Beaumelle, *Henri Michaux* (1978): 11.

combining the two media in over twenty projects, Michaux's poetic and painterly practices can be seen in an original framework when analyzed comparatively. In this way, Michaux departed from two separate careers as poet and as painter and developed into what I shall call a poet-painter.

As Michaux's poetic career progressed, his frustration with language troubled him more and more, and in much the same way his rejection of his native Belgium became increasingly stronger as time elapsed. Michaux physically left Belgium but never completely—that is, Belgium and his Belgian identity consistently appeared in his writings from early in his career to its end. Along the same lines, Michaux distanced himself from writing through painting yet never completely. Whereas Michaux's frustration with Belgium led him to leave his native homeland, his difficulty with language is something he would struggle with for the rest of his life. Nevertheless, Belgium and writing impacted doubly his career as a poet-painter.

Michaux's conflicted identity is arguably the result of the way in which he claims to have entered into the world, during a turbulent period. He describes it this way, "J'ai toujours subi l'occupation. Dans le ventre de ma mère, je suis entré en résistance. J'ai toujours pensé que l'Autre était un camp de concentration en puissance" (Martin 2003, 350). The irony of Michaux's statement is that his time in the south, in the so-called "Free Zone," ruled by the Vichy government, made him recall his homeland during his childhood during which Belgium was occupied by Germany in 1914 (Martin 2003, 341). At this time, in 1940, Michaux and his wife, Marie-Louise Ferdière, (born Termet) had moved to Lavandou. This region in the south of France was a refuge, in particular, for artists (Martin 2003, 339). Michaux missed Paris—the action and movement of the city—and he felt trapped in Lavandou (Martin 2003, 347).

During Michaux's time in the southern region of his adoptive homeland, he met René Bertelé. The great paradox of this encounter is that Michaux's confinement in Lavandou led to an acquaintance that would later liberate Michaux from certain aspects of language, which he felt restricted his freedom of expression. Bertelé would eventually work with Michaux on a number of his text-and-image projects, which in a way freed Michaux's creative talent and his inner conflicts with writing, language, and identity. Nevertheless, Michaux's entry into the world, his childhood in Belgium, and his period in the south of France together resulted in Michaux's continuous existence in an "occupied zone." Michaux's poem "Je suis né troué," published in his travel journal *Ecuador* (1929), refers similarly to his hatred of his native land (*OC*, I, 189). He exists in a rebellious state and lives "contre" his family and Belgian ancestors. Even after living outside Belgium for more than a decade, Michaux's disgust for his homeland remains fresh in his mind. In the *postface* of *Plume précédé de lointain intérieur* (1938), Michaux writes:

> J'ai, plus d'une fois, senti en moi des 'passages' de mon père. Aussitôt, je me cabrais. J'ai vécu contre mon père (et contre ma mère et contre mon grand-père, ma grand-mère, mes arrière-grands-parents); faute de les connaître, je n'ai pu lutter contre de plus lointains aïeux (*OC*, I, 662).

The Belgian's profound desire to distance himself from his family and his violent hatred of them resulted in a continuous effort to separate himself from them. During Michaux's young adulthood he comes to realize that Belgium and his nationality make him feel inexplicably displaced in his own country. Much later in his autobiographical text-and-image work, *Émergences-résurgences* (1972), he writes, "Dans mon enfance, sans comprendre, sans communiquer, distant, je considérais les gens autour de moi, leur agitation dénuée de sens, leur intranquillité" (*OC*, III, 549). This feeling of alienation was what eventually caused him to leave Belgium.

In *Plume précédé de lointain intérieur*, Michaux transposes the misfortune he associates with his Belgian nationality to Plume, the central figure in the text. Plume, who is eternally culpable, has no control over how people treat him and does not react; Michaux writes, "Plume est toujours l'accusé qui n'a rien à ajouter…qui ne sait pas très bien de quoi il est coupable, mais en accepte fort bien la conjoncture parce qu'il se sent *un coupable-né*" (Bertelé 1975, 59). Plume and Michaux remained detached from their worlds; Michaux's nationality was beyond his control, and he made every effort to dissociate himself from it while Plume "does not intervene," because he is "not really human" (La Charité 1977, 42). Consequently, Michaux situates himself on the periphery of his country and feels at a great distance from any homeland (Bréchon 1959, 52). His feeling of alienation can explain his particular case as a "Belge devenu Français" and as a figure who rejected his bourgeois social class and at the same time was rejected by it (Bréchon 1959, 52). In his autobiographical text, *Quelques renseignements sur cinquante-neuf années d'existence*[5] (1958), Michaux refers to both his German and Spanish ancestry and his Ardennais father and Walloon mother, which "emphasizes the hybridity of his ancestors" while at the same time it shows "Belgium's tangled national past through his [Michaux's] family tree" (Rigaud-Drayton 2005, 21).

While he was still living on Belgian soil, Michaux began to correspond with Herman Closson[6] (1901-1982), a Belgian writer, as early as 1917. In a letter dated October 23, 1922 to Closson, Michaux spoke of being named as "attaché au greffe du Sénat," however he goes on to say "sinon Paris…" if the position in the Sénat did not come to be (1999, 50). Two years later,

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[5] Henceforth *Quelques renseignements.*
[6] Michaux's correspondence with Hermann Closson began in 1917 while his correspondence with Franz Hellens dates to 1922 and that with Robert Guiette to 1923. For further reading see Henri Michaux, *À la minute que j'éclate: quarante-trois lettres à Herman Closson.*

in 1924, Michaux moved to Paris in a "self-imposed exile."[7] At this point, Michaux was in

contact with Jean Paulhan and writing material for *Cahiers du Sud* and so Michaux's initial entry

into Paris was thus one centered around literary endeavors.[8] While Michaux settled in Paris—for

Michaux this means moving from hotel to hotel—his Belgianness maintained a strong presence

in his Parisian existence. Although he rejected his social class and nationality, his Belgian roots

never vanished from his writings in spite of his profound desire to leave Belgium behind

(Rigaud-Drayton 2002, 46). After leaving his homeland, Michaux traveled as a form of

rebellion; he travels "contre," as he writes in the *Quelques renseignements*:

> 1929.
>> Il voyage *contre*.
>> Pour expulser de lui sa patrie, ses attaches de
>> toutes sortes et ce qui s'est en lui et malgré
>> lui attaché de culture grecque ou romaine ou
>> germanique ou d'habitudes belges.
>> Voyages d'expatriation (*OC*, I, cxxxiii).

By using "il" to refer to himself, Michaux places distance between himself as a writer and

himself as the protagonist in his text. This practice was not unusual in Michaux's writings, in

particular those that were text-only works. Similarly, one of Michaux's earliest poetic works,

"Glu et gli," published in *Qui je fus* (1927), violently attacks his nationality:

> mais à un autre la parole
> 'je suis de la famille de l'accusé'
> Oui! je te suis bien pareil, papier,
> toi et moi dominés et salis, victimes de notre éternelle
>   anémie
> un rien a passé, un rien, et cela marque sur nous

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[7] Rigaud-Drayton refers to Michaux's "self-imposed exile" in "Henri Michaux: 'Belge de Paris'," *Modern Language Review* 97.1 (2002): 36-46.

[8] In his correspondence, Michaux writes to Closson "Maintenant j'écris des poèmes, des poèmes abstraits un poème doit être complètement abstrait-- -- (un mot concret même pris au figure est à rejeter) Mes poèmes sont insituables et rigoreusement émotionnels." This indicates Michaux's shift to abstract language and poetry (1999) 59.

il n'est pas bon pour moi qu'on sache combien j'ai été
  sali
il n'y a pas un corridor où je n'ai été sali
tous, tout et toujours, et mes propres muscles tournés
  contre moi
et dans ma peau, en moi-même, aussi,
d'immenses nappes de silence et d'hostilité
(*OC,* I, 111-112).

Michaux sees himself as a victim of "la famille de l'accusé" and he focuses closely on his ancestry, his family, and heavily on himself. Michaux perceives his very own flesh and blood in opposition to his body when he writes, "mes propres muscles tournés contre moi" (*QJF, OC*, I, 112). Although writing initially allowed Michaux to "expatriate himself," [9] his national identity continued to trouble him outside Belgium after he moved to France. Not only did he refuse any association with Belgian writers, but the idea of even being classified among them was unacceptable. According to Martin, Michaux said, "J'ai décidé d'être français, c'était et aussi surtout: j'ai décidé de ne plus jamais être rangé parmi les écrivains belges" (2003, 507). In other words, Michaux chose deliberately to be French, and by adopting this nationality his French identity allowed Michaux to distance himself from Belgium and Belgians. For this reason, Michaux, above all, did not want to be considered among writers, notably Belgian ones. Furthermore, in 1934 Michaux "categorically refused to have anything to do" with an anthology of Belgian poetry in which some of his poems were published in a 1931 edition (Riguad-Drayton 2002, 36). Michaux thus rejected Belgium and his Belgianess and the French language became inextricably linked with this nationality Michaux despised. [10] This can explain his personality as

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[9] Jean-Pierre Martin addresses the role of exile in Michaux's writing. For a further discussion, see Jean-Pierre Martin, *Henri Michaux, écritures de soi, expatriations*.

[10] The French language, however, did not disrupt his relationship with France in the same way as it did with Belgium arguably because Michaux discovered his enthusiasm for art and artists in Paris. Since Michaux engaged in both literary and artistic production in Paris, Michaux's

a writer which was habitually reclusive—in addition to refusing to have his work included in Belgian publications, he was less engaged in writing communities in France—while his painterly behavior was to be more social, quite possibly because Michaux the painter was *born* in France.

Even before Michaux began to write poetry, linguistic conflict was present in his native land. The year before Michaux was born, Belgium passed *La loi De Vriendt-Coremans*,[11] a law that established Flemish as the second official language of the nation, alongside French; and the law required all legislative acts to be bilingual. The legislation that took place during Michaux's childhood came at a turning point in the linguistic framework of the nation (Martin 2003, 36). Belgium's law requiring both languages placed this small, singular country between turbulence and colorfulness and between two languages: one that is rough—Flemish—and the other, a highly correct language—French—that insists on good usage (Martin 2003, 16). As a result of Belgium's internal conflict between two languages that seem to mutually exclude one another grammatically and phonetically, Michaux's battle with Belgium was soon transformed into one with language. The law arguably provides another explanation for Michaux's use of language and his experimentation with other forms of expression. On the one hand the law imposed a strict regulation, limiting the use of language, while on the other hand it forced a cohabitation of

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participation in graphic representation shifted his perception of the French language to a more acceptable form of communication, as long as it was linked to art.

[11] Martin describes the linguistic legislation in Belgium in his biography on Michaux; he writes, "Depuis 1898 (un an avant la naissance de HM), la loi De Vriendt-Coremans a placé le flamand au rang de seconde langue officielle à côté du français et imposé le bilinguisme dans les actes législatifs. Auparavant, une loi du 15 juin 1883 avait fait du néerlandais la langue véhiculaire dans les athénées et les écoles moyennes du pays flamand. Lorsque le roi Albert Ier fit une entrée solennelle dans sa capitale, le 23 décembre 1909, parcourant à cheval l'itinéraire consacré par la tradition, il évoqua dans son discours 'l'amour du sol natal, l'amour de la famille, l'amour du travail', prêtant son serment d'inauguration dans les deux langues officielles, le français et le flamand. Stefan Zweig, dans un livre sur Émile Verhaeren, écrivait en 1910 : 'Les Germains parlent en français et les Français sentent en flamand'" (2003) 36-37.

different forms of communication that will be present in Michaux's text-and-image works. In the way that Belgium became a bilingual nation, Michaux developed into a hybrid artist: this dual endeavor is partially the result of the national battle with language turned inward.

Despite Michaux's on-going struggle with language, the French language, in particular, became a means of expression that existed in its own occupied zone. Language existed as a battleground of expression and Michaux's early writings and his later texts consequently reflect a preoccupation with the French language. This fixation is manifest most notably in his early writings "de façon obsessionnelle"; Michaux's poem, "Traduction," in *Qui je fus*, underscores his continuous struggle with words and language (Martin 2003, 67). In another text in *Qui je fus*, the first seven lines of the poem "Glu et gli" experiment with language, and Michaux uses many words not found in French:

> et glo
> et glu
> et déglutit sa bru
> gli et glo
> et déglutit son pied
> glu et gli
> et s'englugliglolera (*OC*, I, 110)

Michaux's use of neologism in "Glu et gli" on the one hand demonstrates a certain playfulness with language while on the other a defiance of it and arguably an attempt at creating words and phonemes not found in French. Michaux's invention of words morphed from "glu" and "gli" form sounds not found in French; instead, they related more to Flemish. Michaux's early poetry thus attempts to form language by means of words and sounds that he invents. The terms he spawns from "glu" and "gli" reflect an attempt to create words that belong to a unique system of language that the poet-painter himself invents. These linguistic constructions indicate that Michaux is *en route* to his own experiment with language. It similarly suggests that Michaux

searched for originality in language as an escape from it. In much the same way, Michaux's graphic work did not rely on realistic depictions or representational art; instead his plastic representation takes on the form of an unrestricted, original, non-specific, and non-Belgian means of expression. In short, his artwork relies on abstract forms that relate more to representations of feelings and emotions than to physical objects that exist in nature or those created by man.

In the 1950s, in an attempt to escape from language, Michaux experimented with literary and artistic creation through drug experimentation. His first mescaline experiments date to 1954 and his earliest publication based on his use of the drug, *Misérable miracle. La mescaline* (1956), was the first of five projects reflecting the effect of the hallucinatory substance[12] on his writing and art. Michaux created a total of five mescaline projects including *Misérable miracle*, *L'Infini turbulent* (1957), *Paix dans les brisements* (1959), *Connaissance par les gouffres* (1961), and *Vents et poussières* (1962). All of them, except *Connaissance par les gouffres,* are text-and-image works. Michaux's mescaline period on the one hand underscores the need to escape and travel through the use of drug experimentation while on the other hand it shows Michaux's curiosity for altering the mind and its affect on language and art.[13] In a conversation with Alain Bosquet about his mescaline writings, Michaux said that:

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[12] Mescaline is an alkaloid derived from mescaline buttons which have intoxicating and hallucinatory properties. Prior to Michaux's experiementation with the drug, Aldous Huxley used the drug and describes his experience with it in *The Doors of Perception*.

[13] In 1886 Ludwig Lewin published the first systematic study of the cactus (Huxley 1954) 9. "*Anhalonium Lewinii* was new to science. To primitive religion and the Indians of Mexico and the American Southwest it was a friend of immemorially long standing" Huxley (1954) 9. Huxley wrote that when mescaline is administered in what he calls "suitable doses," "it changes the quality of consciousness more profoundly and yet is less toxic than any other substance in the pharmacologist's repertory" (1954) 9-10. One of Huxley's motivations for taking the drug, along with Michaux, was because as Huxley puts it, "Words are uttered, but fail to enlighten.

> J'ai essayé…dimanche dernier, d'écrire sans mescaline ce que
> j'écris avec elle. Je me suis rendu compte que la littérature est
> une tricherie. Au plus, c'est une traduction. Quand je dessine,
> au contraire, cela vient de la moelle et du muscle : pas besoin
> d'être articulé. […] La peinture, c'est du cinéma, de la joie, des
> vacances (1990, 374).

While the poet-painter is able to escape certain realities during his mescaline experiments, his struggle with language remains real and intense. Painting, however, takes on a visceral quality; it comes from marrow and muscle and allows for sheer expression (Martin 2003, 528).

The idea that language operates as a form of translation deeply frustrated Michaux and contributes in part to his rejection of the concept of Western language. Michaux saw language as a form of communication that passed through a filter—thoughts cannot be communicated through language while maintaining the essence of an idea. In this way, language is a device that alters meaning and consequently communication. Michaux's realization that literature is a lie ("tricherie") relates to his conception of language, which is that language and meaning are disconnected from the body, from marrow, and muscle. Unlike painting, which comes from within the self, language exists in an exterior space and it lacks a personalized connection to its

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The things and events to which the symbols refer belong to mutually exclusive realms of experience" (1954) 13. Huxley identifies four primary effects of mescaline when taken under supervision: (1) "The ability to remember and to 'think straight' is little if at all reduced" (2). "Visual impressions are greatly intensified and the eye recovers some of the perceptual innocence of childhood, when the sensum was not immediately and automatically subordinated to the concept. Interest in space is diminished and interest in time falls almost to zero." (3) "Though the intellect remains unimpaired and though perception is enormously improved, the will suffers a profound change for the worse. The mescalin[e] taker sees no reason for doing anything in particular and finds most of the causes for which, at ordinary times, he was prepared to act and suffer, profoundly uninteresting. He can't be bothered with them, for the good reason that he has better things to think about." (4) "These better things may be experienced (as I experienced them) 'out there,' or 'in here,' or in both worlds, the inner and the outer, simultaneously or successively. That they *are* better seems to be self-evident to all mescalin takers who come to the drug with a sound liver and an untroubled mind" (Huxley, 1954) 25-26.

creator. Michaux similarly expresses this idea in the introduction to a collaborative text-and-image work he did with Zao Wou-Ki, *Lecture par Henri Michaux de huit lithographies de Zao Wou-Ki*[14] (1950). Here, Michaux articulates his difficulty with books and writing as a means of communication; he introduces his poems on Zao Wou-Ki's lithographs by writing:

> Les livres sont ennuyeux à lire. Pas de libre circulation. On est invité à suivre. Le chemin est tracé, unique.
> Tout différent le tableau: Immédiat, total. À gauche, aussi, à droite, en profondeur, à volonté.
> Pas de trajet, mille trajets, et les pauses ne sont pas indiquées. Dès qu'on le désire, le tableau à nouveau, entier. Dans un instant, tout est là.
> Tout, mais rien n'est connu encore. C'est ici qu'il faut vraiment commencer à LIRE (*OC*, II, 263).

In Michaux's text in his collaborative work with Zao Wou-Ki, the poet-painter goes further and defines a painting as something to be read and that lends itself to an unlimited number of interpretations unlike writing, its sister art, whose "chemin est tracé" and more importantly the path is "unique" (*LMH, OC*, II, 263). Michaux's conception of painting relies on a dual process of reading and viewing a visual representation. Visual art is thus simultaneously a temporal, sequential, and spatial art.

Despite Michaux's difficulty with language, he must paradoxically reject language by using language. Michaux articulates his profound desire to distance himself from written words in *Émergences-résurgences*. He puts it this way:

> Des mots? Je ne veux d'aucun. À bas les mots.
> Dans ce moment aucune alliance avec eux n'est concevable (*OC*, III, 568).

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[14] Henceforth *Lecture par Henri Michaux.*

Michaux's obsession with words results in a poetic refusal of them. Later, in *Poteaux d'angle* (1981), Michaux criticizes the practice of writers:

> Plus tu auras réussi à écrire (si tu écris), plus éloigné tu
> seras de l'accomplissement du pur, fort, originel *désir*, celui
> fondamental de ne pas laisser de trace.
> […] Écrivain, tu fais tout le
> contraire, laborieusement le contraire! (*OC*, III, 1067).

Michaux's description of writing as a laborious exercise underscores his difficulties with this form of expression. Throughout his career, he will struggle with idea that writing is a more difficult means of expression; however, the act of creating—be it in writing or painting—is most important for Michaux. If the process of writing were entirely unfulfilling, then Michaux would not have engaged in it. In his texts, he ranks the act of painting as superior to that of writing. For instance, he criticizes his own poetry and that of other poets whereas he endorses art and music as an acceptable means of expression (Martin 2003, 643-644). Nonetheless, Michaux will continue to struggle with language; as Vera Dickman puts it:

> Language, nevertheless, was a battlefield which was to preoccupy him for sixty years of his life. His frustration with the limits of language as code, its inadequacy for communication with animals, or with human beings speaking a different or even the same tongue, gave rise to his quest for a universal language capable of crossing all barriers, of truly communicating (1999, n. pag).

Paradoxically, as Michaux's relationship to writing became despairingly difficult and strained, his relation to painting became more and more natural and necessary. Just as Michaux presents writing and painting as mutually exclusive, opposing forms of expression, the poet-painter himself existed as a divided individual. If Michaux sees poetry and painting as separate activities, then he positions himself between two forms of expression and in two separate careers. His body of work, conversely, brings together the verbal and the visual and consistenly affirms

Michaux as a poet-painter. These two activities thus caused Michaux's split self to begin to mend.

Michaux's relationship with language also finds its roots in his voyage to the Orient. Similar to his "self-imposed exile" from Belgium, where he distanced himself conceptually from words and Western expression, his trip to Asia in 1930-1931 played a key role, notably in the development of Michaux's graphic sensibility. Michaux's trip to the Orient and his contact with the ideogrammatic language led him to discover a linguistic system in which text and image came together on paper. In the case of Michaux, his experience in the Far East and its influence did not point to "a rejection of a painting tradition, nor a descent into voluptuous sensuality, but a channel of enquiry" (Douglas 1999, n. pag). In addition to Michaux's fascination with the Chinese language, he began to see clear differences between Eastern and Western thought. As Robert Bréchon wrote:

> La pensée occidentale est une pensée gratuite, une pensée *pour penser*, alors que Michaux attend d'elle la possession de l'être. L'art occidental est un art *pour se distraire*. C'est donc l'ensemble de notre culture traditionnelle qu'il récuse avec violence. […] En Chine, une sagesse qui *touche le fond*, prend les choses par le plus bas et donne à l'homme une *souplesse* qui lui permet de passer sans douleur à travers les difficultés et les contradictions. Il découvre, dans les littératures et la musique, la lenteur de l'esprit oriental, qui aime la répétition, les enchaînements, les ensembles ; pensée qui chemine au lieu de conclure, amasse au lieu d'analyser, incomplète, irrégulière et ouverte comme la vie. Il découvre l'art chinois qui ne cherche pas à représenter, mais à signifier… (1959, 89-90).

Bréchon's characterization of the Orient relates Michaux's experience with the beauty and gentle nature of the Far East. Edward Said explains that for Europeans (of Western experience), the "Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (1978, 1). Said's characterization of the Orient, in which images of the "Other" are rooted relates closely to Michaux's identification with the

Far East, in particular because of the poet-painter's profound association with this culture. Michaux felt this Otherness everywhere but in a land that was actually home to the Other. For this reason, Michaux found the Eastern mind fascinating—particularly its literary and musical production. Both language and music, for Michaux, were rooted in a natural and organic process intended to suggest meaning and Michaux's identification with this kind of expression differed from what he experienced in Western literature or art. Michaux's interest in China and the Far East not only focused his research on language but it also brought him closer to the reasons why writing frustrated him. In fact, the debate between language and art electrified Michaux; writing was often terribly intolerable for him for "la simple raison que du sens se fait jour" (Bellour 1986, 177). Simply put, the way in which language communicated frustrated him; he writes in *Passages* (1950):

> J'étouffais. Je cre-
> vais entre les mots. […]
>   Mots, mots qui viennent, expliquer, commenter, ravaler,
> rendre plausible, raisonnable, réel, mots, prose comme le
> chacal (*OC*, II, 340-341).

The agenda of words in Western language was problematic for Michaux; he did not want to rely on such a limited scope of communication governed in such a way that words expressed a particular meaning based on a set of given rules. The idea of a system of grammar, syntax, and a vocabulary that worked together to convey meaning was highly limiting to him. According to Michaux, Western language served to "expliquer," "commenter," and most notably to "rendre plausible" (*OC*, II, 340-341). Western language thus functions in highly specific, administrative ways. It does not posssess the beauty, subtility, nuance, or spontaneity he experiences in artistic expression.

In addition to Michaux's close relationship with painting, he became fascinated with music. For him, music is not a prefabricated means of expression; it is not governed by words and consequently does not belong to a closed system of language the way writing and words do. Art and music played an integral role in Michaux's plastic creation and are the subject of many of his written texts immediately following his trip to the Orient and years later. In addition to the music, theater, and painting of China and India, of which Michaux was an admirer, the moral and psychological climates of these civilizations entered into Michaux and his art as well (Bertelé 1975, 35). Much like his fascination with Eastern art, Michaux truly appreciated music and improvised on the piano and African drums—for Michaux; however, music did not possess qualities of a language the way painting did and so he did not rank music with painting because he did not esteem it to be a "complete" language (Bellour 1986, 78).

Michaux's discovery of the Far East proved to be one way of distancing himself from the restrained and constricted nature of Western language and thought. Though his feelings about the closed nature of Western language systems remained unchanged, his new understanding and perspective allowed him to operate *between* words and pictures. Michaux began to mimic the pictographs and characters that fascinated him in the Orient. Through the use of his own original "signes," visual characters that mimicked Chinese calligraphy but that were not a formal language, and his combinations of text and image, mixing media became a way for him to travel back and forth between the Far East and the West, word and image, while allowing him to construct his own world linguistically and visually. This experience created a space in which he could be transient, nomadic, and travel between writing and art. Michaux the poet-painter remained a divided individual but his experience in new physical territories led him to turn

inward and explore his inner world though his original verbal-visual juxtapositions of words, signs and characters in order to construct an "utopique méditation"(Pacquement 1993, 288).

1.2   The Question of Writing and Painting

Despite the conflict and division Michaux experienced in his life, combining writing and art ultimately enabled him to redefine his world. His impetus for writing came from his reading of Lautréamont three years before moving to Paris. Michaux claims in a letter to Franz Hellens to have begun writing on the 9th of March 1922 (Dickman 1999, n. pag). Although he intially began with writing, plastic art figured in his early texts, and Michaux experimented with painting before becoming fully engaged in art. In fact, Michaux claims in a letter to Jean Paulhan to have begun painting in gouache on the 1st of January, 1936 which he calls the "the day of his *Eurêka,*" and to have found his method of painting (*OC,* I, 1299; Dickman 1999, n. pag.). In reality, Michaux began painting in the 1920s, but it was not until his *Eurêka* that he engaged regularly in the creation of plastic art.

Michaux's texts and graphic work are extremely diverse in style and medium. He wrote prose, poetry, aphorisms, theater, journals, and essays while in art he worked with watercolor, gouache, oil, and ink. Although Michaux's relationship to and perception of each medium is different, he claims to paint and write in the same way; he explains "Je peins comme j'écris. Pour trouver, pour me retrouver, pour trouver mon propre bien que je possédais sans le savoir" ("Sur ma peinture" *OC*, II, 1026). Michaux's writing and painting goals are therefore one in the same, and the process is most important to him. In this way, Michaux's process tends toward alienation and disintegration while it results in a reconconciliation of words and images. This

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reconciliation is thus a means of communication and a form of expression that allows Michaux to express ideas through verbal and visual combinations. On the one hand Michaux's variety of work fits into a modern framework, while on the other, the way in which he coupled art and writing situates him in a more postmodern one. Michaux's written works and graphic art seem fragmented but this fragmentary character is in effect what defines his style and results in a varied, unified body of work. For this reason, Michaux's poetry appears to be modern following Hugo Friedrich's explanation. Friedrich sees modern poetry as a medium of "disorientation, disintegration of the familiar, loss of order, incoherence, fragmentism, reversibility, additive style, depoeticized poetry, bolts of annihilation, strident imagery, brutal abruptness, dislocation, astigmatism, alienation" (1974, 8-9). This description of modern poetry characterizes the very nature of Michaux's work.

In writing, Michaux's goal was not to produce a book as in painting his goal was not to create a work of art (Bréchon 1959, 28). As a result, his texts often lack a sense of unity or coherence since Michaux did not write with a particular end product in mind but rather each text seems to be created by proliferation—his paintings for instance begin with a spot ("une tache") that develops into an image, a visual word or a rhythm that eventually takes over the page (Bréchon 1959, 28). Michaux's work thus takes form through a progressive sequence of repetition in which one element repeats, builds on the previous, and repeats again in a slightly changed form and can be seen most notably in *Mouvements*[15] (1951) (Fig. 11-14). *Mouvements* demonstrates similarly coherence not only among the individual elements—the poetry and the

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[15] *Mouvements* first appeard in 1951 in the Gallimard collection "Le Point du Jour." The poem "Mouvements" was later published in *Face aux verrous* but without the drawings. Another edition of the poem was published in 1982 with the 1951 text. Finally in 1992, the text and images from *Mouvements* were reproduced together in *Face aux verrous* in Gallimard's collection "Poésie/Gallimard." See also (*OC*, II) 1222.

art—but also between the two. The poem and Asian-like characters maintain unity of form, shape, style, and meaning both individually and in relation to each other. Michaux's need for movement, in particular his need to travel, is fulfilled by verbal and visual creation. In *Passages*, Michaux characterizes perfectly his method; he writes, "J'écris pour me parcourir. Peindre, composer, écrire: me parcourir. Là est l'aventure d'être en vie" (*OC*, II, 345). Writing, painting, and composing are ways for Michaux to escape the static through movement (Bréchon 1959, 99). Mixing media allowed Michaux to integrate and unify rather than to divide his body of work (Bréchon 1959, 99).

Just as Michaux's double-oeuvre appears to be fragmentary, so the life of the young poet-painter developed in a series of mis-endeavors. The multiple events and attempts to find his *chemin* explains Michaux's fascination with Lautréamont's Maldoror. The year Michaux discovered Lautréamont closes a chapter on a series of failed endeavors in his young life. After preparing his first year of medical school in 1919, Michaux skipped the exam and abandoned medicine. The following year, he enlisted as a sailor; but when his vessel went on strike because of poor nourishment, he was unable to find another position and had to return to land. Michaux describes his return to civilization this way:

> 1921,
> Marseille.
> La grande fenêtre se referme. Il doit
> se détourner de la mer.
> Retour à la ville et aux gens détestés. Dégoût. Désespoir
> (*QR, OC*, I cxxxii).

Michaux deplored the idea of returning to Europe and furthermore he refers to this period of his life as the "Sommet de la courbe du 'raté'" (*QR, OC*, I, cxxxii). The cycle of abandon, failure, and "ce vide de la vie" breaks when Michaux discovers Lautréamont (Martin 2003, 79). In

Quelques renseignements, he describes his reaction to Lautréamont's *Chants de Maldoror* (1869)

this way:

> 1922,
> Bruxelles.
> > Sursaut… qui bientôt
> > déclenche en lui le besoin, longtemps oublié,
> > d'écrire (*QR*, *OC*, I, cxxxii).

It is also the year that Michaux leaves Belgium definitively (*QR, OC,* I, cxxxii). Importantly,

Michaux's discovery of Lautréamont marks the first time he identifies with another person.

Until this point, Michaux relentlessly rejected his nationality and all that came with it. His

excitement for Lautréamont identifies an enthusiasm for another person—albeit a fictional one,

Maldoror—while he develops an interest in writing as a result of his reading. Martin puts it this

way:

> Nul doute enfin qu'Henri s'est exalté, a lu Lautréamont avec enthousiasme et emportement, qu'il s'est identifié à cet écrivain à nul autre pareil, comme lorsqu'on se lit quelque chose qu'on a toujours rêvé d'écrire et que l'on se dit : c'est ça, c'est exactement ça. Maldoror, c'est moi. Tout le reste est littérature" (2003, 81).

Michaux's fascination with Lautréamont may be due in part to what these two very private

figures had in common.

Born Isidore Ducasse (1846) in Montevideo, the young writer adopted the pseudonym of

"comte de Lautréamont" in 1869. Fragments of Lautréamont's life appear in his written work

but they were less present in his *Chants* and in his poetry (Lautréamont 1990,11). Divided in

certain aspects of his life, Lautréamont was a split individual in much the same way as Michaux.

Both studied Latin and found an escape in it, and their use of language and originality while

evoking visual images through a text dominates their works. In much the same way as

Lautréamont created imaginary geographies in his *Chants de Maldoror*, so too did Michaux

construct purely invented lands in a number of his written texts. The question of how Michaux stumbled upon Lautréamont remains a mystery since the book was virtually impossible to find and Michaux was at sea when it was republished in 1920. Martin speculates that Michaux obtained a copy of this text in a bookstore in Brussels or perhaps a friend of Michaux gave him the book (2003, 80).

In addition to identifying with Lautréamont, Michaux admired the strangeness, freedom, and grandeur of Maldoror (Bréchon 2005, 251). Certain autobiographical elements Michaux presents in his *Quelques renseignements* appear to be rooted in or at the very least bear a close resemblance to Lautréamont's Maldoror. In the third poem in his *Chant premier* Lautréamont writes:

> [3] J'établirai dans quelques lignes comment Maldoror fut
> bon pendant ses premières années, où il vécut heureux; c'est
> fait. Il s'aperçut ensuite qu'il était né méchant: fatalité extraor-
> dinaire! Il cacha son caractère tant qu'il put, pendant un grand
> nombre d'années…" (Lautréamont 1990, 69).

The way Michaux characterizes his own childhood in *Quelques renseignements* appears to recall Lautréamont's description of Maldoror's, notably when Lautréamont describes Maldoror's childhood as "né méchant: fatalité extraordinaire!" (1990,69). Michaux says he was born in an occupied zone, in a land he hated that remained present in him the rest of his life. Further, in various instances in his *Quelques renseignements*, Michaux describes his private existence in the following ways, "Sa façon d'exister en marge," "Secret," "Retranché," and Michaux describes further his life as, "Honteux de ce qui l'entoure…honteux de lui même…de n'être que ce qu'il est, mépris aussi pour lui-même…" (*OC*, I, cxxix-cxxx). The self-loathing nature of both Michaux and Maldoror appears to be what led them to be reclusive, and most of all, it demonstrates their shared characteristics of the self.

Just two years after discovering Lautréamont, Michaux's enthusiasm for writing transformed quickly into a feeling of disillusionment with words with which he was never entirely comfortable as he says, "Il écrit, mais toujours partagé" (*QR*, *OC*, I, cxxxii). As a result of his long career in writing, Michaux is therefore a paradox, and thus a poet despite himself (Maulpoix 1984, 106). Michaux himself supports this very idea when he writes in his introduction to *Peintures* (1939) entitled "Qui il est." Michaux writes that:

> Ses livres: *Qui je fus, Ecuador, Un barbare en Asie, Plume,*
> *La nuit remue* l'ont fait passer pour poète.
> Il peint depuis peu" (*OC*, I, 705).

Furthermore, he introduced himself to people he did not know as "un mauvais écrivain" (Mihailovich-Dickman 2001, 9). At this point, Michaux begins to engage more actively in painting in addition to writing but disregards his accomplishments as a writer. When Michaux writes in his *Quelques renseignements* that "il écrit, mais toujours partagé," this is a direct reference to his Belgian identity—to the idea of Michaux as a figure divided by his nationality and his language. The split self is a recurring theme in Michaux's work; as a poet-painter, he is divided between verbal and visual expression and at the same time split between culture of the Far East and the West.

Although he continued to write, Michaux's use of language was not motivated by a final product, and moreover he did not write "pour l'effet ni pour épater" (Mihailovich-Dickman 2001, 11). It was rather the desire to "transform reality that drove Michaux to write" (Mihailovich-Dickman 2001, 10). Unlike his paintings that he commented on, he rarely spoke of his literary technique except in *Passages* (Bréchon 1959, 113). In this text, Michaux explains that, "Dès que j'écris, c'est pour commencer à inventer" (*OC*, II, 291). *Passages* leads to some of Michaux's reflections on his literary endeavors which Martin describes as fundamental

reflections that are very rare for a writer who does not want to be one (2003, 480). Michaux's comments on his writing techniques and practices are similar to *Émergences-résurgences*, describing his painting career and methodologies.

Michaux's early writings contain the seeds of Michaux the painter. *Cas de folie circulaire* (1922), for example, Michaux's first published text, includes a chapter called "Origine de la peinture" and his first paintings and drawings date to 1925-1927.[16] Two of his early India ink works, *Alphabet* (1927) (Fig. 1) and *Narration* (1927) (Fig. 2), show evidence of an exploration into language through art. His multiple lines, signs, and characters juxtaposed within the frame of a table-like drawing begin to identify, organize, and define components of a language. These two paintings also indicate his desire to explore another form of expression, art, in addition to creating another language. Both titled paintings executed in 1927 can be "read" from both left to right and top to bottom, thus containing characteristics of Western and Eastern languages. These paintings, most notably *Alphabet*, are equally reminiscent of hieroglyphic characters. In the lower section of this work Michaux painted symbol-like signs that appear to suggest objects through images. Furthermore, he develops multiple figures constructed of symbols in a progression thereby demonstrating how these symbols morph into new but similar forms, in much the same way that a written and spoken language develops and operates. *Narration* conveys linguistic and visual cues and in the five lower "lines" of text and image. Here, a similar pattern of signs develops from left to right but this progression does not convey

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[16] "Dans ces œuvres encore rares et éphémères, on pressent, tant du point de vue des techniques utilisées (encre de Chine, aquarelle, dessin à plume, huile) que du répertoire formel (affleurements, ambiguïtés de la figure), les gestes très divers qui seront caractéristiques de son œuvre peint… Il est frappant aussi de voir à quel point le souci de la peinture et du dessin innerve avec précision plusieurs textes de Michaux, avant les années 1936-1937 où il se met vraiment à peindre et à dessiner." ("Notice" *PE*, *OC*, I) 1299.

as distinct nor direct a set of visual signs as *Alphabet* (Fig. 1). Appropriately, as its title suggests, *Narration*'s characters form a continuous narration whereas *Alphabet* reads from symbol to symbol in a less narrative construction. *Narration*'s components are less accessible on an individual level, yet the painting's visual elements point to a progression that results in a linguistic grouping of signs in the lower section of the painting. Along the same lines, the poem "Glu et Gli" also dating to 1927, can be compared with *Alphabet* and *Narration*. Both the poem and graphic works suggest the creation of a language, in their experimentation with sounds and words in the poem and the signs and symbols in the paintings. In these works, Michaux practices a similar technique: he attempts to form language through the creation of new words and art that appears to be rooted in language. The elements from *Alphabet* and *Narration* will figure in Michaux's text-and-image works where he develops the symbols, signs, and characters into complete language-like signs juxtaposed with prosaic and poetic texts.

ALPHABET

Figure 1. *Alphabet* (recto), (1927)

Figure 2. *Narration* **(1927)**
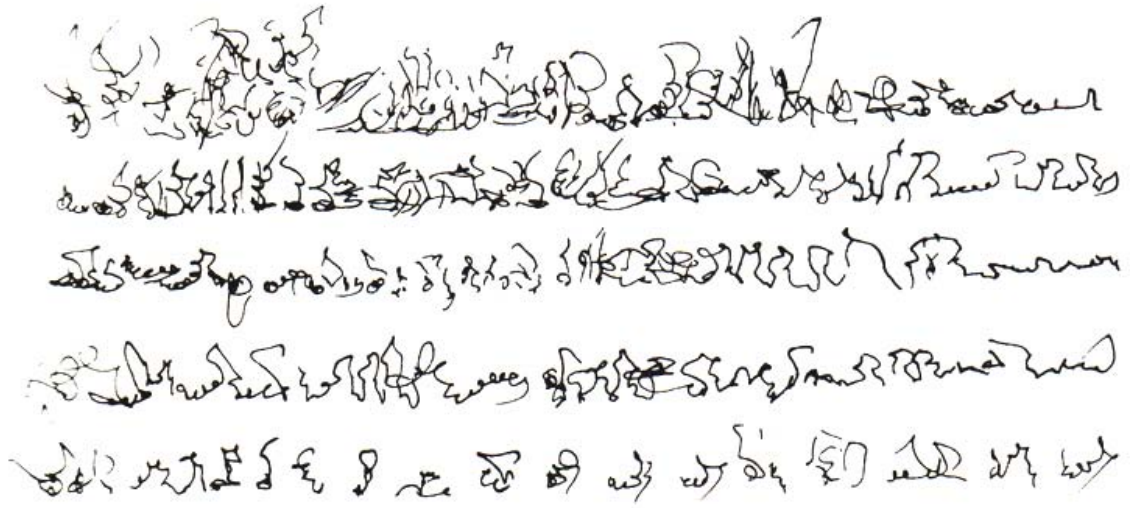
Figure 3. Detail of *Narration* **(1927)**

In late 1925 Michaux visited a Surrealist exhibition at the Gallerie Pierre in Paris which presented works by Max Ernst, Jean Arp, Paul Klee, Man Ray, Joan Miró, Pablo Picasso, Georgio Di Chirico, André Masson, and Pierre Roy (Martin 2003, 148). The paintings by Klee, Ernst, and Di Chirico particularly affected Michaux, and he describes his reaction to their work as an "Extrême surprise" (*QR, OC*, I, cxxxii). Considering his claims that until then "il haïssait la peinture et le fait même de peindre," it is here that Michaux effectively had his first *Eurêka* (*QR, OC*, I cxxxii). It can be argued that this first exhibition was at once his discovery of non-representational painting while at the same time it was the moment when Michaux's view of artists and art went from "haïssait" to "extrême surprise" (*QR, OC*, I, cxxxii). It can be argued further that this exhibition was his impetus for active engagement in painterly practice and activity which he describes in *Émergences-résurgences* this way, "La peinture tout à coup à vingt-six ans me parut propre à saper mon état et mon univers" (*OC*, III, 646). What Michaux retained from these three painters were not representations of the world as it existed but rather the memory of Egyptian hieroglyphics that suggests the myth of an "écriture-peinture"; this

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memory of an "écriture-peinture" works its way into Michaux's body, soul, mind, and artistic practice (Martin 2003, 148). Two years after the exhibition at the Gallerie Pierre, Michaux began painting, and in 1927 he experimented with numerous media such as pen and ink, watercolor, Chinese ink, and oil (Martin 2003, 150). He began his "Alphabet," arranging invented forms of writing on the pages, in an attempt to create an experience *beyond* that of literature (Martin 2003, 150). Similarly, Michaux's interest in creating an alphabet reappears in *Peintures et dessins* where he executed several detailed drawings representing his idea of an alphabet (Fig. 4).
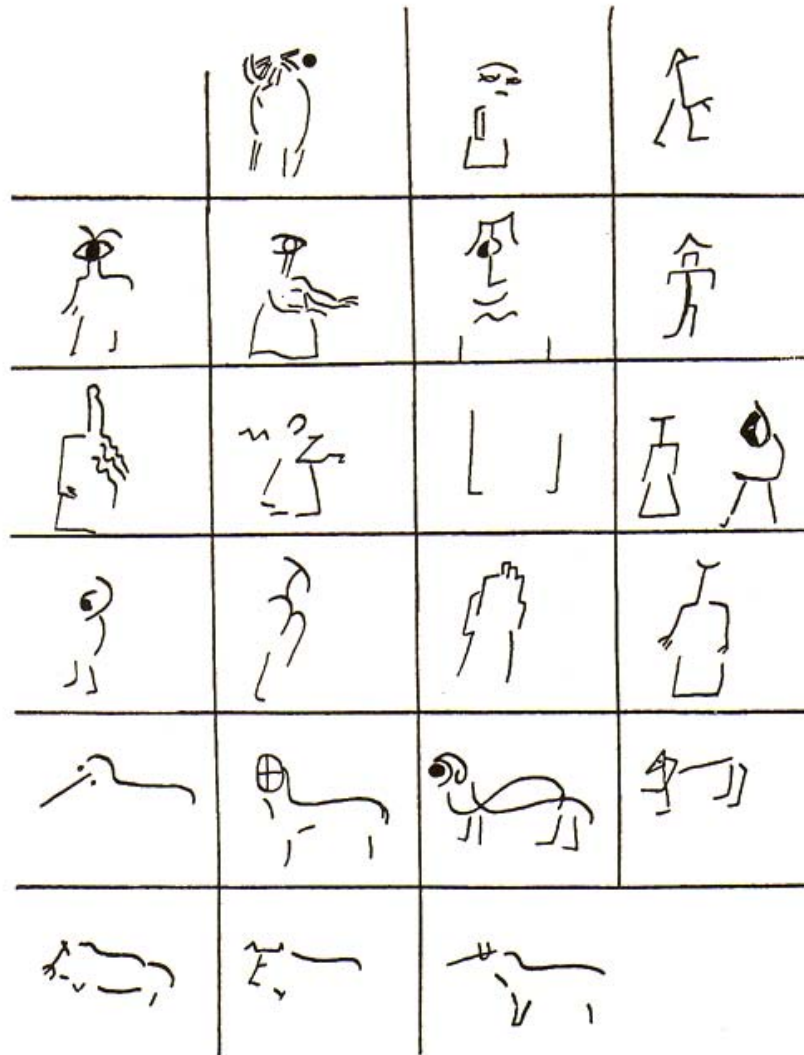
Figure 4. *Alphabets* **(1943)**

Later, in 1939, two years after Michaux's first exhibition, André Gaillard showed Michaux's work to André Masson who said, "Depuis Victor Hugo on n'avait pas vu cela" (Martin 2003, 161). Masson's experience with Hugo's visual art led him to conclude that like Hugo, Michaux was also a practitioner of two arts.

Michaux's experience with the works of Klee, Ernst, and Di Chirico showed him an example of an overlap between literature and the arts and more precisely an instance of the text and image colliding. Di Chirico's work specifically recalled Lautréamont. As Robert Hughes puts it:

> …Chirico's images seemed to be the pictorial equivalent of the phrase from Lautréamont's *Songs of Maldoror* which, more than any other, summed up the Surrealist idea of beauty—a beauty of strangeness born of unexpected meetings of word, sound, image, thing and person (Hughes 1991, 221).

Michaux's fascination and identification with Lautréamont consequently brought him closer to painting through Di Chirico. Klee's works introduced Michaux to the notion of line and its use in art that established a more intimate relationship between writing and painting. After his first exposure to Klee's painted works, Michaux celebrated the use of line and its many patterns in Klee; the free-flowing lines in Klee's paintings unleashed Michaux's desire to paint (Pacquement 1993, 296).

While Michaux was not part of the Surrealist movement, his word-image combinations can be compared with what practitioners in this movement were doing with verbal-visual combinations. René Magritte's word-object paintings illustrate the Surrealist use of language. In these works he placed language and objects in opposing positions. As a result, his paintings point to a gap between what an image and what a word signify. By pitting words and objects against each other in a number of examples, Magritte manages successfully to detach words from pictures and images from language. In this way, his word-object paintings question how language signifies. While Michaux's mixed-media works share similarities with Surrealism, the motivation behind such combinations separates Michaux from the practitioners of this movement. Michaux did not attempt to undermine language, but leave it behind. Michaux

managed to distance himself from language through his discovery, in particular, of Klee's work. Unlike his experience with writing in which "le chemin est tracé," an artistic work does not dictate a specific message (*LHM, OC,* II, 263). As a result of his exposure to these three artists, Michaux realized that the combination of different media on paper provided him a form of expression he could not duplicate with writing or painting alone.

As Michaux's interest in plastic art developed, he became more engaged in the painterly world through exhibitions, and his first exhibition in 1937 can be considered a renaissance or "acte de naissance" (Martin 1994, 412). Michaux believed that he came to art later in life; he explains, "Moi aussi, un jour, tard, adulte, il me vient une envie de dessiner, de participer au monde par des lignes" (*ER, OC,* III, 545). His engagement in it was rejuvinating. Along the same lines, he explains that "Je commençai tard. Tard je m'aperçus de mon manque. Adulte, je continuais toujours à aller et venir…" ("L'interrompue," *OC*, III, 1400). Similarly, Michaux's renaissance was an event, a new endeavor, as opposed to the experience of painters like Ernst and Magritte who were practically born painting (Rey 2001, 28). Michaux however, was able to have a second life as a result of his experience as a visual artist, he says, "je me sens jeune" whereas "je suis vieux avec l'écriture."[17]

Klee made little or no distinction between the act of writing and drawing, and in his text *Théorie de l'art moderne,* he wrote "*Ecrire et dessiner* sont identiques *en* leur fond" (1985). Hughes explains that:

> …many of his [Klee's] paintings are a form of writing: they pullulate with signs, arrows, floating letters, misplaced directions, commas, and clefs; their code for any object, from the veins of a leaf to the grid pattern of Tunisian irrigation ditches, makes no attempt at a sensuous description, but instead declares itself to

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[17] Letter from Michaux to Aline Mayrisch from June 20, 1937. Correspondence located in the Archives nationales du Luxembourg.

be a purely mental image, a hieroglyph existing in emblematic space" (1991, 306).

Klee's unrestricted use of line to create a "mental image" in an "emblematic space" can be compared to Michaux's experience and perception in the Orient. The literature, art, music, and theater in the Far East subtly suggest ideas and thoughts rather than naming explicity. Michaux believed that Klee's use of line followed this method and relates directly to what Michaux will discover first-hand in the Orient.[18]

Klee's use of line and his hieroglyphic constructions led Michaux to write two texts on how lines operate. The first, "Aventures de lignes," (1954) published in *Passages*, is a text which Michaux wrote as a foreword in Will Grohmann's book, *Paul Klee*. In this text, Michaux describes how lines move, intersect, meet, multiply, and exist in Klee's painting. Michaux's discovery of Klee not only influenced his painting but also his writing. Michaux articulated his thoughts on art through poetry and various other texts, often in the form of fragmented comments that ultimately formed an extensive collection of writings related to visual representation. For instance, his text "Lignes," published in *Moments* (1967) demonstrates Michaux's continued fascination with lines. He describes their movements, physical characteristics, personality, and the spaces they occupy as:

> Échappées des prisons reçues en héritage, venues non
> pour définir, mais pour indéfinir, pour passer le rateau sur,
> pour reprendre l'école buissonnière, lignes, de-ci de-là, lignes…
> (*OC,* III, 730).

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[18] In his *Quelques renseignements*, Michaux notes that his discovery of Klee, Ernst, and DiChirico was in 1925 and his trip to the Orient was in 1930-1931 (*OC*, I) cxxxii-cxxxiii.

Unlike Klee however, Michaux draws a distinction between language and image. In "Lignes" he put lines in their own category where they exist independently of other media:

> D'aucune langue, l'écriture—
> Sans appartenance, sans filiation
> Lignes, seulement lignes (*M, OC*, III, 731).

Despite Klee's impact on Michaux, he says in *Émergences-résurgences*, "Je ne veux apprendre que de moi…Je ne veux non plus rien 'reproduire' de ce qui est déjà au monde" (*OC,* III, 549). Klee's influence on Michaux is undeniable in a comparison of works by the two artists (Fig. 5-6). In particular, Michaux's series of Asian-like characters recall Klee's use of line in *Le Petit est de sortie* (Fig. 5).

Figure 5. Paul Klee *Le Petit est de sortie* (*Der Kleine hat Aussgang*) (1937)

Figure 6. *Untitled Mouvements* (1951)

Michaux's composition reflects Klee's painting more than simply in his use of line. The floating

signs constructed of lines convey a feeling of movement, reflecting both Klee's title, *Le Petit est*

de sortie, and Michaux's, *Mouvements.* Both Klee and Michaux use a variety of lines to create

character-like signs in action. Thsee compositions contain a similar character located in the

upper left; Klee's resembles a thickly drawn primitive stick figure while Michaux's figure

delicately dances on the page. Both figures draw the reader/viewer to a similar focal point in the

upper left-hand section of each work. The thickness of line in this quadrant of the image leads

the viewer's eyes down through the center of the image to the bottom right-hand corner in which

Michaux's figures thin and disperse while Klee's begin to float away. Despite Klee's impact on the poet-painter, Michaux's profound appreciation of and association with Asian writing and art later eclipses Klee's influence.

Michaux found painting to be a form of communication that was less restricting than language. He paints not to reject writing, but to experience a form of expression other than words. One of Michaux's principal difficulties with writing is that for him it lacks "*rusticité*" (*ER, OC,* III, 549). In other words, writing was not simple and direct and its regulated grammmar lacks a certain simplicity and purity that were key to creative, and above all, original expression. Likewise, Michaux associates this lack of "*rusticité*" particularly with French more than with other languages notably due to its strict rules of good usage (*ER, OC,* III, 549). As a result, Michaux turned away from writing in order to liberate himself from "la glu du langage et de l'emprise de la syntaxe" and consequently he "s'est élancé dans la peinture" (Maulpoix 1984, 124). The distance Michaux placed between himself and writing suggests that he was related more directly to art than to literature and that "this act [painting] furthermore paved the way to a freer, more personal road to interpretation" (Hubert 1978, 62).

Michaux painted for numerous reasons. He painted as a way of freeing himself from his world and also to experience the "absence de mots: le silence" (Mihailovich-Dickman 2001,11). He was able to escape from any text and "laisser vivre en soi une voix simple et primitive qui ne doit rien à cette obligation du sens qui naît dès le moment qu'on parle" (Bellour 1986, 280). The meaning associated with a particular word and verbal construction maintained an oppressive power in Michaux's sense of language. The tyrannical dominance of language interfered with the creation of original expression and this tyranny of meaning is in part why Michaux turned from writing and gravitated toward painting. His ability to communicate without the constraints

of a prefabricated language or a "laborious word-factory" demonstrates the artistic freedom Michaux associated with plastic representation (Broome 1977, 129). His experience as a painter was spontaneous and uninhibited, unlike that with language which came to represent a pre-established, imposed and obligatory, form of communication.

In various instances throughout his texts, Michaux articulates his particular relation to painting. The first example comes from *Émergences-résurgences*. He begins this text:

> Né, élevé, instruit dans un milieu et une culture
> uniquement du 'verbal'
> je peins *pour me déconditionner* (*ER, OC*, III, 543).

In this example, Michaux's conception of the dominance of language and the "verbal" accounts for his feeling of oppression by language. Belgium's socio-linguistic status at the time of Michaux's childhood underpins Michaux's stress of the "verbal" when he writes about "une culture uniquement du 'verbal'." It appears that painting is a reaction to words, language, and the verbal culture in which he was raised. Indeed, painting acts as a substitute for writing and it can also serve to decondition. The act of painting was an experience that allowed Michaux to break patterns and to be original, in contrast with the way he felt about language. In this way, Michaux paints to distance himself from conditioned responses; he could move his body differently and the purely physical experience of painting was new to him.

In addition to the physical experience of painting, Michaux also saw painting as an act that was less affected by civilization than writing. He saw painting as a form of communication that was always in a beginning stage. Michaux says that, "Dans la peinture, le primitif, le primordial mieux se retrouve" (*ER, OC,* III, 550). The poet-painter's fascination with the simple, unsophisticated characteristics of what he experienced as a painter led him to form a deep association with the kind of non-representational painting typical of his graphic work. At

the same time the idea of the simple, and the rustic relates painting to the idea of an "écriture-peinture" reminiscent of Egyptian hieroglyphics because "le primitif" relates to a state of newness and "le primordial" to an original creation or an early stage in development. The intersection of the primitive and the primordial in painting can been seen in *Alphabet* and *Narration* and "Glu et Gli" where the rudiments of a verbal *and* visual language begin to take form on paper—the formation of a new nomenclature. The ability to create new forms explains Michaux's interest in the primitive. Just as he rejects representational art and does not want to reproduce what already exists, so too are primitive forms of expression rough and rustic. They contain rudiments of line and form that the artist can shape. To further illustrate his reason for painting, Michaux writes in *Émergences-résurgences*:

> J'ai peint afin de rendre le monde plus
> 'marquant', tout en refusant le 'réalisme' des
> conduits, et des idées. J'ouvrais ainsi d'un côté,
> tenant fermé l'autre.
> Des *signes*, ma première recherche.
> C'est le monde *réduit*, au maximum (*ER*, *OC*, III, 644).

This explanation shows how Michaux creates his own world through painting, specifically through his "signes." The "signes" published in *Mouvements* are juxtaposed with text whereas in two other works, Michaux created "signes" independent of a text where he reduced "le monde…au maximum." In another passage from *Peintures*, Michaux explains that:

> On change de gare de triage, quand on se met à peindre. La fabrique à mots,
> mots-pensées, mots-images, mots-émotions disparaît, […]
> Étrange émotion aussi quand on retrouve le monde par une autre fenêtre.
> Comme un enfant il faut apprendre à marcher. On ne sait rien.
> Nouvelles difficultés. Nouvelles tentations (*OC*, I, 705).

Here, Michaux explains that he feels young as a painter; it is because he discovered and rediscovered the world through visual representation. The absence of words linked directly and immediately to thoughts, images, and emotions in painting allows him once again to decondition

himself and view his surroundings from a different vantage point. In "Faut-il vraiment une

déclaration?" (1959) Michaux humorously comments on why he paints:

> Faut-il vraiment une déclaration? Ne voit-on pas que je peins
> pour laisser là les mots, pour arrêter la démangeaison
> du comment et du pourquoi ? Ce serait parce que je verrais
> clairement ceci ou cela que je dessinerais ? Nullement. Au
> contraire. C'est pour pourvoir être embarrassé à nouveau (*OC*, II, 1029).[19]

This text summarizes why Michaux paints while the others illustrate how painting functions as a

form of therapy, as a discovery of the original, as a way of constructing a personalized world,

and as a means of distancing himself from words and language. This text speaks to the same

ideas but goes further. Here, Michaux does not seek a clear interpretation of what he paints;

instead, he wants to be put in an awkward situation again. In this way, he can experience

spontaneity, the unexpected, which for him, were fulfilling experiences.

Indeed, Michaux felt a "sentiment de frustration profonde" in writing (Maulpoix 1984,

106). Despite this frustration, he continues to use language, as he writes in *Émergences-
résurgences*, "J'endors mon désir. Je fais quelques voyages. La source de l'écriture n'est pas

tarie, se rappelle à moi" (*OC*, III, 547). Like many writers and artists, Michaux not only needed

conflict to progress but to be in touch with his own suffering and that of others to be creatively

inspired (Mihailovich-Dickman 2001, 11-12). His lifelong battles drove his textual and visual

creations, and he passed from one medium to another, selecting the one that best suited his needs

at a given moment. He says he paints in order to "me rejoindre; afin de me joindre à quelque

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[19] Michaux wrote this text for the gallery catalogue for his exhibition at the galerie Daniel
Cordier (Paris) 21 October – 21 November 1959. Michaux's text appeared in four fragments in
the catalogue and was juxtaposed with ink drawings, gouaches, and mescaline drawings (*OC*, II):
1377.

chose qui m'appelle" whereas "l'écriture laisse à part, inaffecté; afin aussi de me joindre d'une autre manière à ce monde…" ("…Peindre" *OC*, III, 1400).

1.3   Travel, Writing, and Painting

In an attempt to escape the harsh realities of his life, Michaux desperately sought to discover another world. Throughout his life, he looked to situate himself in an intermediary space, be it in an actual, physical space or in a metaphysical one. Travel became a means of escape from one world to another and a way for Michaux to develop new visions of the self that he formed through creative expression. Text and image in Michaux's writing and painting shaped a relationship that mirrored Michaux himself, that is, his mixed-media combinations reflected his physical and psychological state. These interrelationships between language and art parallel the poet-painter's existence *between* text and image while at the same time they also refer to his lifestyle, one which was in a continuous state of transience, resulting from an overwhelming, lifelong need to travel and be in transition.

Travel and adventure figure in Michaux's poetry just as they do in his painting, and both creative acts liberated him from the confines of his world. In Michaux's mind, "Les poètes voyagent, mais l'aventure du voyage ne les possède pas" (*PAS, OC*, II, 307). Travel, like painting, was a liberating experience for the poet-painter; it allowed him to be elsewhere, as he so often was, yet it did not impose a way of living or, more importantly for Michaux, a daily routine. The freedom and lack of system paradoxically created its own system: one in which the

poet-painter could remain elsewhere and maintain his own routine. Much like travel, painting was a way to move one's body in a different way, through physical gestures that formed lines, spots and images—painting was a type of travel that did not require a train, airplane or boat—but it allowed Michaux to simulate the experience of travel through art, notably by means of physical gesture and emotion, escape into the act of creating visual art (Martin 2003, 444).

Painting allowed Michaux to travel and led him to the gateway of another world: a visual one. When Michaux traveled to the Orient, he did not speak the language and relied on physical gestures, body language, and visual cues to communicate.[20] This means of communication—not uncommon to the foreign traveler in a land of another tongue—is likely what led to his fascination with Chinese art. As a result, Michaux's visual acuity paradoxically developed from a lack of verbal communication with the natives. This experience can be said to have had two primary effects on the poet-painter. First, it established balance in Michaux's world dominated by language and his experience with language during his childhood. Second, it forced Michaux to focus entirely on what he perceived with his eyes resulting in a profound association with the visual aspects of the culture in China and furthermore his desire to emulate them in his art.

In *Quelques renseignements,* Michaux speaks of three important travel experiences. The first he characterizes as "son premier départ" (*OC,* I, cxxx). Michaux's first departure, his study of Latin, separates him from others and importantly "le transplante" (*QR, OC,* I, cxxx). He begins to understand the feeling of Otherness and will later explore this position through travel,

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[20] Rigaud-Drayton notes that Michaux's idea to rely on gestures and body language to communicate in the Far East was not in fact reliable. She explains, for instance, that, "Indians, as it turned out, did not gesture much. How was he [Michaux] to understand their gestures if they refused to move? To make matters worse, his own gestures appeared to be incomprehensible to those around him. Waving his arms in a sign of impatience, he found that not only did the Indians to whom he was addressing himself not understand that he was in a hurry, but they did not seem to register that he had gestured to them" (2005,1).

writing, and painting. During Michaux's subsequent voyage to Turkey, Italy, and Northern Africa (1929), he traveled "contre." This trip was an escape from his family and his Belgian ancestry. Feeling alienated in his own country, he traveled against his family and he did so in search of a place where he would not experience such a strong feeling of Otherness. Michaux remained relatively unchanged by his early adventures in Ecuador (1927) and those in 1929 in comparison with the third and final trip he describes in *Quelques renseignements* as "Enfin *son* voyage"[21] (*OC,* I, cxxxiii). Michaux's voyage to the Orient not only profoundly affected his life and lifestyle, but also his body of work. It was the trip to the Far East in 1930-1931 that effectively oriented him (Martin 2003, 217). As a result of this adventure, he became a poet who intensely questioned systems of language and in particular, the French language. He was furthermore a painter whose artistic practice, technique, and methodologies emulated those of Asian artists and whose painting illustrated a close visual relationship with the signs and characters of the Chinese ideogrammatic language system.

Curiously, Michaux's existence in Paris resembled his behavior while traveling. He did not spend important amounts of time in any one place, hotel, or apartment until later in his life. If Michaux settled in one place, then he would risk growing roots, establishing habits and becoming familiar, which for him, would have been unconscionable (Martin 2003, 134). Conscious of his fear of settling which he called "la manie de la 'bougeotte'," Michaux's lifestyle in Paris was one in which he moved from hotel to hotel in a nomadic state (Martin 2003,

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[21] Michaux's trip to the Orient was his most important experience outside of Europe until this point, Bréchon notes, "Contrairement aux voyages en Amérique et même au Moyen-Orient, assez vite oubliés, ce voyage-là va le marquer pour toujours. C'est un bain de spiritualité qu'il prend en Inde, un modèle esthétique qu'il trouve en Indonésie, une nouvelle idée, très ancienne, de l'intelligence qu'il voit à l'œuvre en Chine" (Bréchon 2005) 47.

134). In this way, Michaux was a figure concerned with the concept of "devenir" rather than "revenir" such that he moved quickly through his written works with little revision and rarely modified his paintings (Martin 2003, 646). Michaux wrote in *Émergences-résurgences* that:

> Je ne délibère pas. Jamais de retouches, de
> correction. Je ne cherche pas à faire ceci ou cela ;
> je pars au hasard dans la feuille de papier,
> et ne sais ce qui viendra (*OC*, III, 575).

Michaux's poetic-pictorial practice thus reflects the nature of his inner being.: A figure who was not settled—in all senses of the term—such that he needed to be in motion to go forward. In much the same way that Michaux moved from hotel to hotel, his painterly practice relied on the same kind of movement. In both cases—in life and in art—Michaux sought spontaneity. Thus, art was a type of travel; Michaux could escape at any moment through the creation of visual art. As a result, Bréchon remarks that Michaux is not a poet, rather he is becoming one and furthermore that his development as a poet never stops (2005, 235). The need to move and travel became manifest in Michaux's work and this need continued to be present throughout his career. He writes of his need to travel in *Vents et poussières* (1962):

> J'ai pourtant tellement besoin de voyager. Ah, si je
> pouvais vivre en télésiège, toujours avançant, toujours en
> de nouveaux pays, progressant sur des espaces de grand silence… […]
> Est-ce voyager ce que je fais? Qu'est-ce alors que tous
> mes déplacements? Rien, rien qui m'intéresse (*OC*, III, 177).

Michaux relates "avançant," "progressant," "voyage," and "déplacement" thereby linking the idea of motion, action, and progress. In this way, Michaux could not stop—he needed to explore and advance. In *Façons d'endormi, façons d'éveillé* (1969), Michaux writes, "Je suis plutôt en évolution, au moins en progression, donc 'dans le trajet'" (*OC*, III, 466). In a number of cases, Michaux explains his desire for action and travel which, both physically and emotionally, was

his only means of coping with his troubled existence. Both literature and art fulfilled this overwhelming need for movement and were thus a form of therapy.

Ecuador (1929) and *Un barbare en Asie* (1933), two of Michaux's travelogues, both reflect his experiences in foreign countries. In addition to these unconventional journals, he composed several other travel journals that reflect a series of imaginary adventures. The three imaginary travel texts, *Voyage en Grande Garabagne* (1936)*, Au pays de la Magie* (1941), and *Ici, Poddema* (1946) comprise the collection entitled *Ailleurs* (1948). Michaux's mescaline texts *Misérable miracle, L'Infini turbulent, Paix dans les brisements, Connaissance par les gouffres*, and *Vents et poussières* can also be considered imaginary travel journals since he writes to escape, to explore, and to experiment through the use of mescaline, but does not actually travel as he did in *Ecuador* and *Un barbare en Asie*.

Situated between Michaux's actual travel adventures and his imaginary ones, those based on his use of mescaline and other hallucinatory drugs, is his collection of works *L'Espace du dedans* (1944). *L'Espace du dedans*[22] is the only anthology that Michaux conceived and the 1944 edition includes an important selection of texts that represent Michaux writer, artist, and traveler. The collected works in *L'Espace du dedans* point to Michaux as a poet-painter through the various verbal and visual works in the anthology. The collection and its concept are highly important to the idea of Michaux as poet-painter rather than poet or painter for several reasons. First, Michaux reconsiders his earlier works, most notably *Qui je fus* and *Ecuador*. In general, Michaux did not reevaluate his writings or paintings and very rarely did he edit his works. This collection thus provides an example of Michaux returning to his work and consequently judging

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[22] The texts in the 1944 edition include: *Qui je fus* (1927), *Ecuador* (1929), *Mes propriétés* (1930), *Un certain Plume* (1931), *La nuit remue* (1934)*, Voyage en Grande Garabagne* (1936)*, Lointain intérieur* (1938), *Peintures* (1939), and *Au pays de la Magie* (1941).

it. Second, Michaux assembled this collection of works with the intention of publishing it, and thus presenting himself as a writer, whereas in the past, his behavior as a literary figure was reclusive to such a degree that he did not always intend to publish his work. The intention of publishing and publicizing his work also points to a more public display of his literary creation and consequently a more social existence. This existence is arguably a result of his painterly behavior which was more social than his writerly personality. The poet-painter thought of his texts through the mind of Michaux the painter or the poet-painter. Third, four of the texts included in *L'Espace du dedans*: *Qui je fus*, *Ecuador, Voyage en Grande Garabagne*, and *Peintures*, demonstrate Michaux's progression from being one type of writer to another and furthermore to becoming a painter. These texts reflect Michaux as formerly Belgian in *Qui je fus*, as traveler in *Ecuador*, as explorer in *Voyage en Grande Garabagne* and finally, as poet-painter in *Peintures*. Fourth and finally, this collection is of notable importance concerning the "réception et l'image" in the work of Michaux (*OC*, I, 1329). The publication of this anthology came after Gide's 1941 lecture on Michaux and before René Bertelé's 1946 book, opening up a new channel of inquiry into Michaux and a reconsideration of this enigmatic and nomadic figure (*OC*, I, 1329).

The collection *L'Espace du dedans* in particular reconciles many of the divisions in Michaux the poet and Michaux the painter; namely, Michaux as a "Belge de Paris," as a figure experimenting with language and art of the Far East and West, as a traveler in both real and imaginary spaces, and as a poet-painter constructing text-and-image works. In Michaux's works subsequent to *L'Espace du dedans*, he regularly included various combinations of painting, drawing, and visual art in his texts. However, he did not conceive of a text and then the images or the images and then the text; instead, he wrote and painted to suit his particular mood or

feeling, often bringing together words and images that he produced at different times. For this reason, Michaux's text-and-image works operate as a single entity. In this way, his mixed-media projects are not fragmentary but unified. Later, he assembled his work, but not always with the vision of a final text-and-image product in mind. His methodology relates more closely to Surrealist practices in which creation was an automatic process but indeed it demonstrates his poet-painter practices since his work came together in an intuitive manner rather than through a preconceived idea of the final project or as a result of returning to a work to illustrate it.

Like Michaux's experience with travel, writing and painting become a way for Michaux to explore the self and those around him. Michaux includes his meditations on this subject in *Peintures et dessins* (1946), notably where he says, "J'aimerais aussi peindre l'homme en dehors de lui, peindre son espace" (*PD, OC,* I, 863). Similarly, he writes, "Moi, ce que je voudrais, c'est *peindre la couleur du tempérament des autres. C'est faire le portrait des temperaments*" (*PD, OC*, I, 860). Michaux captured emotion through visual representation in painting. Despite his non-representational depictions, his visual art nevertheless possesses a visceral quality that does in fact communicate a profound feeling of emotion. Two of Michaux's later Asian-inspired works, *Saisir* (1979) and *Par des traits* (1984), express this deep sense of emotion through images. These works convey rapid movement through visual signs that in effect evoke emotion. Along the same lines, in "En pensant au phénomène de la peinture" Michaux writes, "Ce n'est pas dans la glace qu'il faut se considérer. Hommes, regardez-vous dans le papier" (*PAS, OC,* II, 321). Michaux's interest in exploring the self and man resides in the realm of the literary and the artistic experience, perhaps just as much as in real, physical acts of travel. By means of verbal or pictorial expression, Michaux uses paper as a tool for exploring the human psyche.

In *Ecuador* and *Un barbare en Asie* Michaux explored the self through writing. He did not execute paintings or drawings to go with his two travel journals but the visual exposure to the exotic lands later played an unmistakable role in his art. *Ecuador*, Michaux's first travel journal, is not considered one of his best works but rather "un cahier d'esquisses, une recherche inquiète du 'vrai' voyage" (Thibault 1990, 487). Bréchon describes this journal as "un ours mal léché" (2005, 22). The unconventional construction of *Ecuador*, its fragments, lack of consistent dates, times and places—Michaux generally indicated a date but at times would simply write "Mardi," "Lundi (21? février)," or even "Un peu plus tard"—does not follow the rules governing the genre which furthermore generally includes description (Thibault 1990, 487).

Michaux's trip to Ecuador was his first extended "escape" from the European continent though his stay in this country proved to be a difficult one. He was particularly disillusioned with having to depend on his hosts for transportation and experienced a feeling of confinement, not being able to come and go as he pleased, a lifestyle he was accustomed to in Paris. Michaux describes this country in this way:

> Hostile, mal habitable, L'Equateur se présente paradoxalement comme un pays très dur et comme une terre friable, aussi inconsistante que l'intériorité du voyageur qui y pose le pied, jamais en paix, toujours en marche, contraint de faire en lui-même son chemin, éboulé et perdu en soi autant que sur ce sol hostile (Maulpoix 1984, 61).

Michaux's experience in Ecuador, a country he characterizes as divided, resembles his own personality and split self. Although he did not feel particularly at home in Ecuador, it is important to question whether Michaux would experience a feeling of belonging in any setting, Asia being the one exception. Based on his experience in the Far East, *Un barbare en Asie*, suggests that Michaux felt like a stranger and out of place, but quite the contrary—he identified profoundly with this region.

Unlike *Ecuador*, Michaux's second travel journal, *Un barbare en Asie,* took the form of an observational text in which he reflected on the peoples of the Far East (Thibault 1990, 487-488). In the way that *Ecuador* can be considered a "faux journal" in that it does not adhere to certain rules of genre for the travel journal, *Un barbare en Asie* can similarly be considered an "anti-récit" because "le temps du voyage y est effacé" (Martin 1994, 375). *Un barbare en Asie* explores what Michaux experienced first-hand during his trip: Asian culture, art, music, theater, and people. While in the Far East, Michaux played more the role of explorer or anthropologist than that of a writer. By creating written portraits of what he observed in the Far East, Michaux developed a collection of visual and textual research of his experience in China which he then incorporated into his texts and images. In short, during his trip to Asia, Michaux observed whereas in Ecuador he took a more introspective route in his travel experience and writings. As Martin explains: "Le journal, [*Ecuador*] c'était se regarder voyager, mais aussi se mettre sous le regard d'un lecteur qu'on prenait à témoin" (2003, 169). Both journals, however, share a similar structure because neither *Ecuador* nor *Un barbare en Asie* are organized or premeditated works based on a specific project (Roudaut 1998, 39).

In a similar way, Michaux's experience in Ecuador resembles Plume's experience while traveling:

> Plume ne peut pas dire qu'on ait excessivement d'égards
> pour lui en voyage. Les uns lui passent dessus sans crier
> gare, les autres s'essuient tranquillement les mains à son
> veston. Il a fini par s'habituer. Il aime mieux voyager avec
> modestie. Tant que ce sera possible, il le fera (*PLU, OC*, I, 625).

Michaux also preferred to travel with "modestie." Most important to Michaux's literary and artistic endeavors was the opportunity to travel and to do so continually and despite any

difficulties while *en voyage*, Michaux, like Plume, appreciates the freedom and opportunity to travel and will continue to do so:

> Mais il [Plume] ne dit rien, il ne se plaint pas. Il songe aux mal-
> heureux qui ne peuvent pas voyager du tout, tandis que
> lui, il voyage, il voyage continuellement (*PLU, OC*, I, 626).

In the way Michaux reacted to discovering Klee, Ernst, and Di Chirico, his voyage to the Orient redefined the terms and conditions by which he conceptualized art: Michaux's second *Eurêka*. By 1937 Asian art arguably played a more influential role than Klee or other Surrealist artists (Broome 1977, 131). In *Émergences-résurgences*, Michaux speaks of the profound effect Chinese art had on him:

> Mais c'est la peinture chinoise qui entre en moi,
> en profondeur, me convertit. Dès que je la vois, je
> suis acquis définitivement au monde des signes et des lignes
> (*OC,* III, 548).

These "signes" captivated Michaux to such a degree that he converted—in a psychological and spiritual way—to Chinese calligraphy's fusion of language, art, line, and sign. This transformation becomes Michaux's practice in literature, art, and life; reflecting on his relationship with the Far East, he writes:

> L'Asie, maintenant loin, revient, me submergeant
> par moments, par longs moments.
> Les pays où a compté souverainement 'la Paix
> Profonde' ne m'ont pas quitté. Envahissement
> profond. Envahissement-retard. Résurgence" (*ER, OC*, III, 548-549).

The effect China had on the poet-painter was both immediate and long-lasting. His initial reaction to the language at first influenced his own conception of word and image and later formed his practice.

In addition to incorporating the visual characteristics of Eastern art, Michaux adopted the materials used in Oriental writing and painting: pen, ink, and paper (La Charité 1977, 90). By employing the materials used in both writing and painting, Michaux's technique began to merge into mixed-media works through a practice that brought materials from the different arts together. Michaux's fascination with Chinese expression is likely the result of the way the artist conveys meaning, which Michaux saw as subtle instead of explicit (Bréchon 2005, 54). In *Un barbare en Asie*, Michaux says, "La *peinture*, le *théâtre* et l'*écriture chinoise*, plus que toute autre chose, montrent cette extrême réserve, cette concavité intérieure…" (*OC*, I, 364). What Michaux liked so much about Oriental art was this subtle, implicit way of conveying meaning. Chinese art and language appeared to be more closely related to one another than Western art and language. Asian art often incorporates calligraphic writing and in this way the two forms of expression operate in a similar context. Conversely, Western art and language have traditionally existed separately since the Middle Ages. As a result of Michaux's experience in the Orient, the texts he composed following his trip do not relate directly to his "pensée orientale,"[23] but nonetheless include identifiable elements of it. Michaux's trip converted him in such a way that the Orient would never leave him. Martin believes that down deep, Michaux was half-Chinese or half-Indian (2003, 434). He identified so profoundly with these cultures that he adopted cultural habits and techniques of Asia's creative methodology in his own practice as a mixed-media artist.

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[23] Bréchon refers to Michaux's "pensée orientale" in the context of Michaux's perception of Oriental culture (2005) 293.

Not long after his return from Asia, Michaux worked more intensely with language and images and in 1939 he published his first text-and-image work, *Peintures*.[24] *Peintures* includes a series of sixteen paintings on black backgrounds. Referring to himself in the third person, as he does in *Quelques renseignements,* he says, "Michaux peint curieusement sur des fonds noirs, hermétiquement noirs. Le noir est sa boule de cristal" (*PE*, *OC*, I, 706). Stylistically, these paintings do not reflect strong influences of Oriental art, but the "fonds noirs" on which Michaux painted are reminiscent of Chinese and India ink. Moreover, these "fonds noirs" allow Michaux to see in his "boule de cristal" which recalls his relationship with the Orient and his inherently introspective nature, his impulse to look within. Michaux's desire to juxtapose text and image is realized in this work (Pacquement 1993, 16-17). Similarly, his graphic work, *Arbres des tropiques* (1942)*,* incorporates elements of his voyages, yet not in an obvious, direct way but rather in the composition of the tropical trees he created in this work. Michaux's eighteen trees, painted as separate compositions, evoke elements of the South American jungle removed from their natural surroundings and presented as individual portraits of tropical trees. These figurines resemble elements of Michaux's earliest paintings, *Alphabet* and *Narration*, in their black and white composition and in the way each tree could represent a symbol, sign, or character. Michaux's visual elements begin to merge the Far East and West with his earlier works in addition to his more recent written travel adventures on paper (Fig. 7-9):

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[24] *Entre centre et absence* (1930) was Michaux's first text-and-image work. The images however were not published with the text. In the 1946 publication of *Peintures et dessins*, two images from *Entre centre et absence* were reprinted.
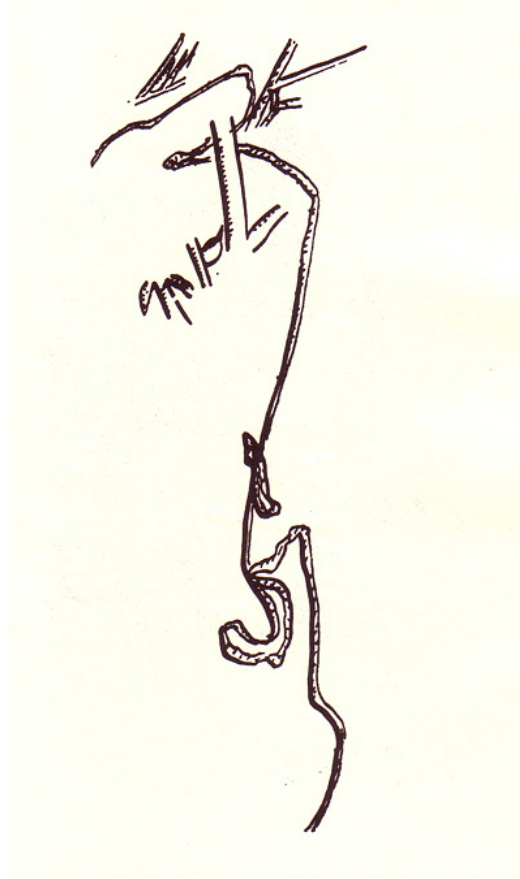
Figure 7. "Untitled" *Arbres des tropiques* **8/18 (1942)**

Figure 8. "Untitled" *Arbres des tropiques* **14/18 (1942)**
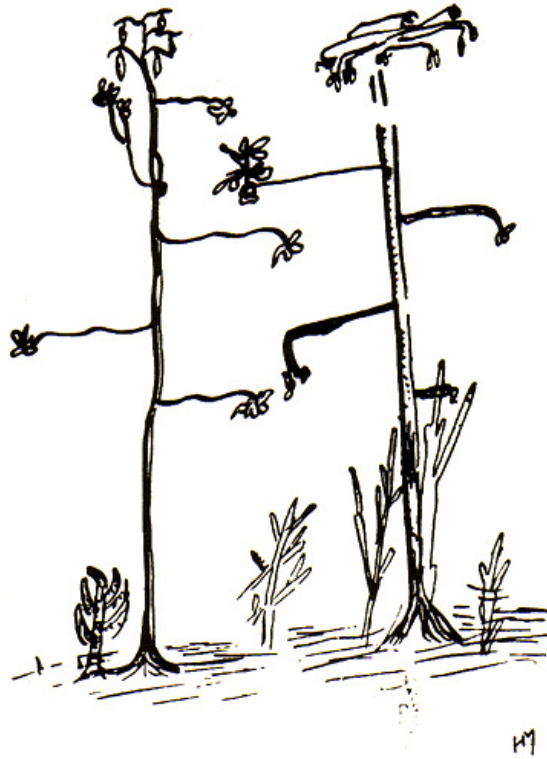
Figure 9. "Untitled" *Arbres des tropiques* **15/18 (1942)**

Many of Michaux's later painted works find their roots in Chinese characters and ideogrammatic signs. Beginning in 1951, the poet-painter created three text-and-image works, all of which incorporate visual elements reminiscent of the Orient: *Mouvements*, *Saisir*, and *Par des traits*.[25] He also published two works composed uniquely of images: *Parcours* (1967) and *Par la voix des rythmes* (1974). These post-Orient works resolutely recall the Far East while stressing the fact that the Orient entered into him "en profondeur" (*ER, OC*, III, 548). Both textually and visually, Asia maintained a presence and voice in his work. These text-and-image

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[25] *Idéogrammes en Chine* is an Asian-inspired text-and-image work; however, Michaux did not create the graphic work for this project. He created a poetic meditation that accompanied Chinese calligraphy.

projects are an example of Michaux's mixed-media works and further characterize a particular style of his poetry and painting. The effect of this Oriental style is that Michaux can be situated as a Western painter of Eastern methodology, technique, and aesthetic and as a result, Michaux's work crosses cultures as well as practices.

Imaginary travel became another means of escape for Michaux. As he looked inward, he wrote and painted to externalize his internal voyages. In his text, *Géographies imaginaries: de quelques inventeurs de mondes au XXe siècle*: *Gracq, Borges, Michaux, Tolkien,* Pierre Jourde argues that for Michaux, travel became "un paradoxe banal" and that it is "essentiellement une expérience intérieure" (1991, 275). If this is the case, then it is quite possible that Michaux's experimental or imaginary adventures led him in the opposite direction, towards the external world. In other words, whereas Michaux traveled to real places and he receded from the external world, during his imaginary voyages, he explored the exterior world. Jourde further remarks that the imaginary voyage is possibly a way to "renier absolument, sans concession, toute dépendance et toute histoire" (1991, 311). During Michaux's trips to Ecuador and Asia, he was primarily an "aventurier du dedans."[26] Conversely, in his subsequent writings and paintings, namely *Ailleurs* and his mescaline texts, Michaux travels through his creative works. The texts in *Ailleurs* demonstrate Michaux's creation of invented lands and peoples while in his mescaline works his hallucinatory experiments became part of his literary and painterly landscape.

Michaux's mescaline texts are particularly stylized in their construction and convey a highly active voice and visual flow together that communicate energy, exhilaration, and the feeling Michaux experienced while on mescline. The first of the mescaline text-and-image

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[26] *Henri Michaux: peindre, composer, écrire*. (Bibliothèque nationale de France/Gallimard, 1999) 20.

projects, *Misérable miracle*, mixes media and begins the style of text-and-image experimentation Michaux used in these works. Characteristic of Michaux's mescaline drawings and paintings are spasmodic, vertical lines that curve, twist, and appear to vibrate off the flat surfaces on which they are drawn. The graphic work focuses heavily on the use of line and Michaux tried to emulate his psychological state of mind through visual representations that he created after having taken mescaline. He erases time and space in these drawings by creating a super flat perspective. These mescaline images replicate visually Michaux's hallucinations and his attempt to transcend his world. The layout of the text-and-image works is such that a primary text is centered on the page, images appear opposite the text, and finally, remarks articulating Michaux's reaction to mescaline are in the margin (Fig. 10). The combination of the two textual elements juxtaposed with the graphic art in *Misérable miracle* record Michaux's hallucinatory travels through drugs expressed through art and writing in various constructions.

le nom, mais faisant très opérette, et qui se mettent à jouer, ou au moins à mimer un concert à une vitesse sans nom, et la moitié d'une ville comme Orléans pour les écouter, habillés eux aussi grotesquement, voyants comme des cravates, et, s'il n'y avait pas quarante rangs de balcons superposés (et pour que rien ne manque, à colonnettes et ridiculement étirées), je veux être pendu. Et le tout, cela va de soi, dans des couleurs rubans de demoiselles et confiserie pour enfants... Une parfaite nausée.

formes malingres, ajourées, évidées.

Monuments d'une autre civilisation.

* * *

Grotesque! tout ça, intolérable! Pourquoi ai-je fait cette réflexion et pensé ce mot racoleur? Hé! pouvais-je le soupçonner d'être si racoleur? En temps normal, il ne me dit rien et repart sans troubler l'onde et sans en créer.

Ici, à peine sur place, il entraîne avec lui irrésistiblement ses frères et

Le mot accrocheur rafle désordonnée dans les mots, et si rapide qu'on n'a pas le temps de les charger de sens. C'est ensuite

Pourquoi? Centre voisin inhibant l'autre? L'attention excessive d'un côté (l'optique), ne permettant plus l'attention de l'autre (l'acoustique)?

C'est une loi que j'ai cru remarquer dans la vie de l'homme, et qui dans la Mescaline est flagrante : Une fermeture, pour créer une nouvelle ouverture. Une nouvelle ouverture déclenche automatiquement une fermeture d'un autre côté... Sensibilité d'un côté, postule insensibilité d'un autre côté. Ce que les graphologues ont tant de mal à comprendre.

Quelle absurdité ce serait qu'un homme total, également présent, important, accentué en toutes ses parties!

Figure 10. Page from *Misérable miracle* (1956)

In the preface to *Ailleurs* Michaux writes about his imaginary travel journals, referencing his experience in the fictitious lands he created such as Garabagna and Poddema; he writes:

> *L'auteur a vécu très souvent ailleurs: deux ans en Garabagne, à peu près autant au pays de la Magie, un peu moins à Poddema. Ou beaucoup plus. Les dates précises manquent* (*OC*, II, 3).

As a way of continuing his imaginary travels, Michaux explains: "Ceci est une exploration. Par les mots, les signes, les dessins. La Mescaline est l'explorée" in the *Avant-Propos* to *Misérable miracle* (*OC*, II, 619). Here, mescaline was the primary means of escape (Martin 2003, 513). Michaux's imaginary exploration through the use of mescaline furthermore added another dimension to his style of art and shaped a new form of his graphic work. Through mescaline and art Michaux "invente, explore, découvre et redécouvre" (Pacquement 1993, 16). His exploratory adventures afforded him the opportunity to travel within and express himself in the exterior

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world; through mescaline; he says in *L'Infini turbulent*, "on se trouve *entre* deux mondes" (*OC*, II, 829). The possibility of existing between two worlds can be compared with Michaux's experience with Chinese ideograms, as he situated his visual language—be it invented—in an intermediary space between words and pictures.

Travel to the Orient, more than any other voyage, changed Michaux's conception of language. His exposure to the Chinese ideogrammatic language system allowed him to be liberated from Western language and all of its alphabetic and syntactic conventions and limitations (Hellerstein 1991, 329). What Michaux experienced in China, a glimpse of a possible "unity between signifier and signified reignited his dream of a universal language that would still allow him to express himself totally in signs and lines," led him to attempt creating his own language (Dickman 1999, n. pag). In *Un barbare en Asie*, he writes, "L'écriture chinoise semble une langue d'entrepreneurs, un ensemble de signes d'atelier" (*OC*, I, 356). On the one hand, Chinese writing is a language that investigates and explores ("langue d'entrepreneurs") while on the other hand it participates in a series of visual experiments ("signes d'atelier") (*OC*, I, 356). The combination of these two linguistic enterprises characterizes what Michaux hoped to merge in his own language made of "signes." Through Chinese characters, Michaux discovered an intermediary language that he could adapt, introduce, and use to shape his world. This intermediary language—a half-linguistic, half-graphic combination—defines Michaux's post-1950 works and redefines his style of text-and-image projects. These combinations underscore Michaux's integration of Chinese art, calligraphy, and language into his own work demonstrating a case where the Far East meets West on paper.

As a result of Michaux's engagement in imaginary and experimental travel, it can be argued that art replaced travel. Painting became a necessary "déplacement" as Michaux writes in

Peintures (Verger 2004, 170; *PE,OC,* I, 705). Michaux writes later in *Émergences-résurgences*, "Peinture pour l'aventure, pour que dure l'aventure de l'incertain, de l'inattendu. Après des années toujours encore l'aventure" (*OC*, III, 602). He sees the arts as a way of maintaining motion and rhythm, specifically music which "vous déplace le plus constamment, qui rend sensible aux places, aux changements de place et qui provoque le corps, les bras, les pieds" (*PAS, OC*, II, 369). Through art, Michaux continues to travel both physically and emotionally, and in *Peintures* and *Passages* he says, "Le déplacement des activités créatrices est un des plus étranges voyages en soi qu'on puisse faire" (*PE, OC*, I, 705; *PAS, OC*, II, 318). Much like Michaux's relatively nomadic lifestyle, in which he moved from place to place, painting allowed him to replicate, to a degree, the feeling of creating a new environment by moving quickly on the pages and by not turning back. In *Émergences-résurgences*, he describes how he creates a work of art:

> Dans une pièce prêtée, entourée d'arbres…je
> couvre de dessins des feuilles de papier. Puis je les
> déchire. J'en refais. À l'aventure. Je les déchire
> encore. Je les déchire. Conserver est vite agaçant.
> Mon plaisir est de faire venir, de faire apparaître,
> puis faire disparaître (*OC*, III, 551).

Like travel, art allowed Michaux to move quickly while exploring and being an adventurer. Painting afforded Michaux the opportunity to create his own environment "de faire venir, de faire apparaître, puis faire disparaître" while at the same time he was able to travel at his own pace (*ER, OC*, III, 551). When Michaux was not *en route*, he painted.

Painting stabilized Michaux. As the act of painting replaced physical travel, Michaux needed to be in one place and for the singular figure who feared the very idea of being in one place, art required stability. His transient nature—until a certain period—prevented him from maintaining a space to create art: an atelier. Even at the age of 35, Michaux remarks in

Émergences-résurgences, "[j']ai encore peur de posséder (*OC*, III, 551). Along the same lines, he writes that an "atelier ou une chambre qu'on meuble, déjà du stable, c'est changer en sédentaire le semi-nomade qu'on est resté" (*ER, OC*, III, 551). Stability frightened Michaux. He preferred the sporadic and the spontaneous; for this reason he disliked oil paint, which he refers to in *Passages* as "Cet élément pâteux, collant tout ce que je déteste dans les choses et les hommes et les femmes: la colle" (*OC*, II, 331). Words for Michaux were "collants parentaires," they grounded, stabilized, and discouraged adventure (*FV, OC*, II, 599).

Painting became a means whereby Michaux could remain in one place; in a sense he was a "peintre paralysé" (Martin 2003, 314). The garage at his friend Jacques Fourcade's house in Meudon became Michaux's atelier as he describes it, "un petit garage désaffecté, en banlieue, chez J.F.. Pas connaisseur en peinture, connaisseur en commencements, il sait reconnaître les bourgeons" (*ER, OC*, III, 551). Painting paradoxically prevented Michaux from traveling spontaneously which proved to be another "menace de fixation: la peinture elle-même créant, bien connu des peintres, un état de besoin. Voilà qui mettrait fin à mes voyages soudains, à mes departs en coup de vent" (*ER, OC*, III, 551). It was not until 1947, when Michaux was nearly 50, that he settled in a fixed location with his wife who had been ill (Bréchon 2005, 103).

The poet-painter traveled because he *needed* to, for much the same reason, he wrote and painted as another means of travel and as a way to fulfill his need to be in motion. Michaux was "un être qui se déplace pour subsister, pour comprendre, pour faire front."[27] In his visual art, "the wandering line embodies Michaux's philosophy of exploratory freedom" (Edson 1985, 93). According to Michaux, he was more an explorer than a traveler; he explains, "j'en suis à ce

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[27] *Henri Michaux: Peindre, composer, écrire.* Fiches pédagogiques. (1999) n. pag.

désespoir de n'avoir pu traduire toute la personnalité de ces peuples étranges, impression que connaissent tous ceux qui sont plutôt explorateurs qu'écrivains" (*A, OC*, II, 133).   Through travel, writing, and painting Michaux constructs his own space and his very own reality.

1.4   Michaux Poet, Michaux Painter

In his lecture on Michaux, *Découvrons Henri Michaux*, André Gide describes Michaux as "un solitaire, un retiré" (1941, 10).   Throughout his writing career, Michaux remained outside writerly circles and social groups.   Michaux comments in *Passages* on his desire to be disconnected from others; he explains, "Une de mes joies de toujours, c'est dans l'état détaché…" (*OC*, II, 289). Similarly he writes, "Ce retirement devient une habitude. Retirement de soi hors des choses. Retirement des choses hors des autres choses l'entourant" (*PAS, OC,* II, 285).   Michaux needed to be alone to write, to be completely alone (Martin 2003, 385). Although Michaux the poet chose not to socialize with contemporary writers, he needed human contact and interacted with individuals outside his literary endeavors.   It is possible that this reclusive behavior relates back to his experience in Belgium.   In the same way that he did not want to associate with fellow Belgian writers, he continued to remain detached from other poets even after moving to Paris.   Michaux did not seek the company of his fellow Belgians nor did he even want to experience feeling like a compatriot; he preferred to be in the presence of people in fields outside of his own: he enjoyed the company of psychiatrists, doctors, the ill, magicians, albino gorillas, fantastic animals, icebergs, and insects to name a few (Martin 2003, 553).

The differences between Michaux the poet and Michaux the painter are visible in *Quelques renseignements*. This autobiographical text, which Michaux wrote in the form of an

anemically annotated timeline, reveals on the one hand personal information that Michaux generally kept very private while on the other, it creates a distance between the autobiographer and the protagonist. He does this by referring to the main character, himself, exclusively in the third person as "il." This stylistic maneuver serves three purposes: first, it sets Michaux apart from his writing and perhaps even Belgian writers, second, it allows Michaux to distance himself from his painful past and third, it represents Michaux's split, divided self. Throughout the text Michaux never uses his name and he signs only his initials, "H.M.," at the conclusion of the outline. In doing so, he creates a sort of anti-autobiography in the sense that this text lacks any of the features that typically constitiute an autobiography. It is somewhat like a mosaic—in other words, constructed of a combination of diverse autobiographical elements—that brings together clips or parts of images of an object without depicting the whole. In this way, the text's fragmented composition lacks certain textual features that describe more than just brief details. In the way that *Ecuador* and *Un barbare en Asie* can be considered unconventional travel journals, *Quelques renseignements* lacks characteristics of an autobiography, most importantly, a narrative. The fact that Michaux does not create one suggests on the one hand Michaux's split self which cannot be reconciled into one complete discussion, while on the other hand, it points to Michaux's highly private self. While the text includes precise facts about Michaux's life, the organization of these fragmented details leaves little room for explanation, and so Michaux's structuring of *Quelques renseignements* at first glance does not appear to be the anti-autobiography that it really is. Michaux wrote this autobiography in 1958 and never added to it, leaving over 20 years unaccounted for between the publication of *Quelques renseignements* and his death in 1984. To continue Michaux's timeline, Robert Bréchon created his own version of Michaux's *Quelques renseignements* in *Henri Michaux: La poésie comme destin*, and

appropriately entitled his timeline *Quelques renseignements sur quatre-vingt-cinq années d'existence.*

Bréchon begins his continuation of Michaux's autobiography in much the same way as Michaux, yet Bréchon includes considerably more details in his text. Bréchon presents his facts in a format similar to that of Michaux—an unelaborated, conservative mention of names, places and events—but Michaux's autobiography seems much darker and to be clouded, appropriately, by an overwhelming sense of misfortune, struggle, and despair. Indeed, Bréchon's text conveys Michaux's lifelong struggles, but Bréchon's timeline infuses Michaux's biography with a sense of success through his numerous mentions of Michaux's literary publications and art exhibitions. Bréchon continues his text beyond 1958 and completes it in the year of Michaux's death. Bréchon's text also lends a different voice to Michaux's life as he gracefully incorporated striking fragments from Michaux's original text, sewing a visual and verbal patchwork of Michaux's existence. Bréchon concludes his biography with a quote from Laurent Fabius, the Prime Minister at the time of Michaux's death: "Avec Henri Michaux disparaît un des grands créateurs ayant participé à l'aventure littéraire et artistique de ce siècle" (2005, 327). Indeed, Michaux's career as both artist and writer was evident at the time of his death.

On several occasions, Michaux, the reclusive writer, refused literary prizes because he felt exposed to the public. In 1942 he refused the literary "prix des Ambassadeurs" and sent a draft of his rejection letter to his close friend, René Bertelé. It is clear in this letter that Michaux's identity was becoming more public and that this exposure caused a strong reaction in the form of a rejection letter in which he explains:

> Mon nom est volontiers cité dans la Presse, comme exposé à recevoir tel ou tel prix littéraire. […] …grâce à vedettemarie, de plus en plus j'y suis exposé, de moins en moins je suis disposé. Il me faut donc mon silence et mon laisser-faire : je ne veux pas de prix, et refuserais… Or, je ne le suis d'aucun, depuis longtemps,

et pour longtemps encore, si je ne me trompe pas. Entr'autres le prochain prix des
Ambassadeurs.   FIN[28]

Years later, in 1965, he refused the Grand Prix National des Lettres. Michaux the writer chose to
remain private while Michaux the painter was less reclusive.   In 1960, for instance, he was
invited to Venice and was awarded and accepted the Einaudi Prize at the Biennale in Venice.
Michaux the painter was more integrated in the painterly community and willing to be in the
public and Martin argues that painting more than literature drew Michaux towards others (2003,
389).   Even at Michaux's funeral, there was only one writer in attendance, Emile Cioran,[29]
whereas several painters were present (Martin 2003, 273). Interestingly, Michaux died on the
same day as filmmaker François Truffaut, whose death can be said to have marginalized
Michaux's but perhaps this is what Michaux would have wanted.

As a result of Michaux's reclusive nature as a poet, critics knew little about his life until
the recent publication of the Pléiade's complete works in addition to Martin's comprehensive
biography of Michaux, the first biography published on Michaux which came 19 years after his
death.   Robert Bréchon, who also wrote on Michaux's poetic works in 1959, claims to have
known nothing of his life, and in his 2005 biography on "Michaux the poet" he says:

> Quand, il y a presque un demi-siècle, H.M. m'avait lancé le défi de faire un livre
> sur son oeuvre, il m'avait interdit de parler de sa vie. Je devais tout tirer des
> textes. De toute manière, je ne savais rien de lui. D'où venait-il, qui était-il, où
> allait-il? Mystère" (Bréchon 2005, 7).

Michaux's public and private behaviors reflect a double figure: a painter who fulfilled his social
needs in the art world and a writer who maintained an extremely private literary persona.

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[28] Henri Michaux, letter to René Bertelé, 1942, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris.
[29] In her chapter on "The Assimilated," Pascale Casanova places both Michaux and Rumanian-born
E. M. Cioran in a discussion of writers who "in a sense have disappeared from their native lands"
(2004) 205.

1.5   Towards Reconciliation

In *Quelques renseignements*, Michaux said, "il voyage *contre*," referring to his travels to Turkey, Italy, and Northern Africa in 1929. Michaux traveled "contre" his Belgian nationality and his family as a means of escape and a way to liberate himself whereas he painted "pour." Painting ultimately allowed Michaux to cope with his difficulty with written language through the combination of text and image. In painting, he experienced the movement he needed and a spontaneity that allowed him to liberate himself from both words and language. Writing and painting functioned as a form of exorcism, liberation, and therapy for Michaux.

During his imaginary travels while on mescaline, he speaks of "les images 'libérées'" whose possibilities of form and composition are endless (*IT, OC*, II, 926). Initially, words and writing were Michaux's liberating tools but painting's qualities soon overshadowed that of writing.[30] Broome argues that painting "is the medium in which he becomes most easily sheer *élan*. It allows him to communicate, without artifice or impediment, with his deepest inner tempos" (1977, 130). Painting's directness best served Michaux's artistic needs (Mihailovich-Dickman 2001, 11). Painting is direct in the sense that the visual signs do not pass through a filter whereas a verbal (Western) language's meaning is reliant upon a sign in which signifier and signified generate meaning through a particular relationship. In addition to Michaux's perception of painting as direct, the act of creating became the ultimate liberating force. Gesture and speed allowed for nearly absolute freedom of expression (*Henri Michaux: peintures* 1976, 23). The fusion of travel, art, and movement gives birth to Michaux's *action painting* which is

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[30] La Charité notes that, "Every text since 1923 is in some way directed towards the liberation of the pure self and the expression of its outward projection" (1977) 76.

what ultimately allows him to escape personal trauma and moments of rupture. Michaux began his *action painting* at the time of the illness and death of his wife in 1948, and Bréchon refers to this type of painting as "la peinture gestuelle" because of Michaux's need to articulate movement and incorporate gesture in his work (2005, 123). Martin sees these works as visual creations that are impulsive and spasmodic gestures which accurately describe the visual components of these works (2003, 444). Michaux's *action painting* also constitutes works in which the paintings were completed quickly and without deliberation and where the act of creating was the most important characteristic.

As painting operated as a liberating force for Michaux, it also served as a form of exorcism (Bonnefoi 1976, 39). Both poetry and painting, but more so the latter, were for Michaux a compensation for a void and a search for an exorcism in the face of reality (*Henri Michaux: peintures* 1976, 23). In *Émergences-résurgences*, he describes the period in which his wife, Marie-Louise, suffered severe burns, eventually leading to her death as:

> Un accident. Grave. Très grave. Touchant une
> personne qui m'est proche. Tout s'arrête. Ça n'a
> plus beaucoup de sens, le réel, l'autre réel, le réel de
> distraction, qui n'a pas affaire à la Mort (*OC,* III, 562).

When Marie-Louise died, Michaux began to paint more and more "nerveusement" and "rageusement" (Bréchon 2005, 70). Michaux's exorcism through writing and painting is a recurring theme in his work; even prior to the death of his wife, Michaux relied on his creative practices as therapy throughout his life. In the preface of *Épreuves exorcismes* (1945), he seeks harmony and balance in the world, which he tries to discover through exorcism:

> *Il serait bien extraordinaire que des milliers d'événements qui sur-*
> *viennent chaque année résultât une harmonie parfaite. Il y en a tou-*
> *jours qui ne passent pas, et qu'on garde en soi, blessants.*
> *Une des choses à faire : l'exorcisme.*

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> *Toute situation est dépendance et centaines de dépendances. Il serait*
> *inouï qu'il en résultât une satisfaction sans ombre ou qu'un homme*
> *pût, si actif fût-il, les combattre toutes efficacement, dans la réalité.*
> *Une des choses à faire : l'exorcisme.*
> *L'exorcisme, réaction en force, en attaque de bélier, est le véritable*
> *poème du prisonnier* (*OC*, I, 773).

Painting proved to be the ultimate healing force for Michaux:

> …c'était elle [la peinture] qui correspondait mieux à son besoin d'exorcisme à l'égard des emprises dominatrices, c'était grâce à elle enfin qu'il avait le sentiment de se libérer du piège des mots et des phrases. Elle était le nouvel art guérisseur, une 'deuxième naissance' (Martin 2003, 301).

Michaux found the ability to heal both physically and emotionally through painting and writing. His style was influenced by Chinese art and calligraphy while his impetus for creative expression relied on a spontaneous impulse or event. As he writes in the *postface* of *La nuit remue* (1935), a collection of free verse poems, "*Par hygiène,peut-être, j'ai écrit 'Mes Propriétés', pour ma santé*" (*OC*, I, 511). Many of Michaux's texts and images can be linked directly to instances of crisis in which creative expression was the most effective form of therapy and his participation in creative expression plays a triple role. First "images comme réponse," second, "images comme énergie" and third, "images comme des piqûres," that is, Michaux used images first as a way of expressing himself, second to expel energy, and third as a therapy (*ER, OC,* III, 614). Similarly, in *Misérable miracle,* he identifies "*Les rythmes comme antidote*" (*OC*, II, 760). Movement in art serves to liberate, to exorcise, and to offer a healing therapy. Painting most appropriately suits this need as he writes, "pour m'en soulager un peu, la peinture convient mieux" (*ER, OC,* III, 569). Through Michaux's mixed-media constructions, he strives to strike a balance between the numerous opposing elements, pain, and suffering he experienced repeatedly in his life. His text-and-image work *Mouvements* offers an example of his attempt to heal through literature and art. He writes:

Signes des dix milles façons d'être en équilibre dans ce
   monde mouvant qui se rit de l'adaptation
Signes surtout pour retirer son être du piège de la langue
   des autres […]
Signes, non pour être complet, non pour conjuger
mais pour être fidèle à son 'transitoire'… (*OC,* II, 440-441).

Michaux's text encapsulates his conception of the world. He seeks balance, movement, and

equilibrium from his juxtapositions of signs that surround his poetry in *Mouvements* (Fig. 11-14).

Figure 11. "Untitled*" Mouvements* **(1951)**

Figure 12. "Untitled" *Mouvements* **(1951)**

Figure 13. "Untitled" *Mouvements* **(1951)**
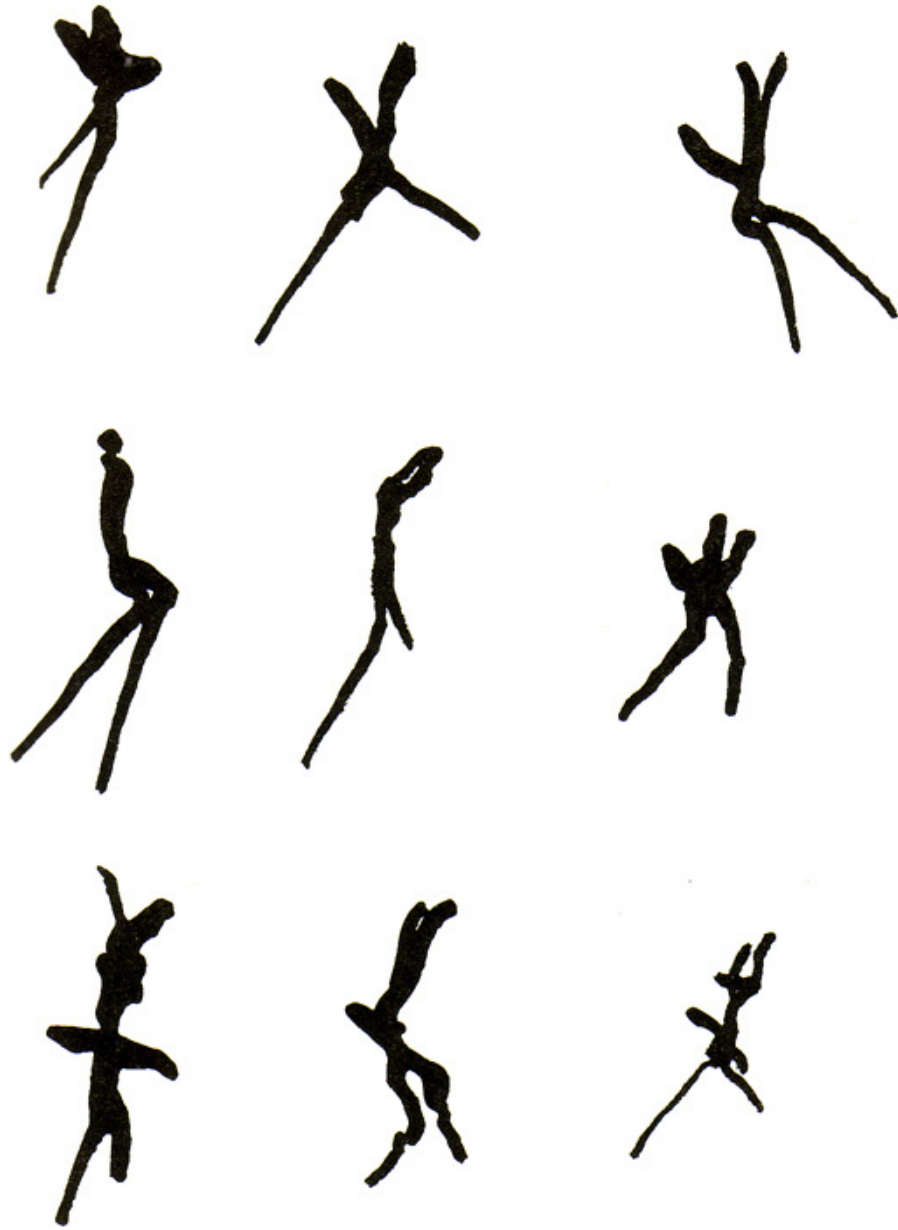
Figure 14. "Untitled" *Mouvements* **(1951)**

The pseudo characters Michaux created in this work are indeed therapeutic; they allow the poet-painter to express himself through physical gesture while at the same time support his need to to escape from Western language. By frantically painting "signe" after "signe" Michaux entered into a verbal-visual world in which the characters he painted did not signify in any language other than the one he appeared to be creating. Michaux's pseudo "signes" rely on

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anthropomorphic figures that dance, leap, and drift in all directions on his pages whereby the creator is liberated by action and faux characters. The images in *Mouvements* reflect the poet-painter's need to use language and art together, similar to how an emblem or device operates—where a title and text explain an image—so Michaux must use language to convey a particular message; without it, this work could and would be interpreted differently.

It can be said that the creation of art was more important for Michaux than the painting itself. The "acte du créateur" or "geste du créateur" itself plays an essential role in his work. Michaux associated intensely with the painterly *process*; the act of doing outweighed the finished product. It was the process of making art that was an element essential to Michaux's existence, more than painting alone and unquestionably more than words or language. In *La nuit remue*, Michaux's poem "Sportif au lit" speaks to his paradoxical nature as a writer who paints and a painter who rejects language. The lack of spontaneity Michaux complained of in language is conversely one of the aspects he finds and appreciates in painting. In "Sportif au lit" he writes, "Au fond je suis un sportif, le sportif au lit. Comprenez-moi bien, à peine ai-je les yeux fermés que me voilà en action" (*NR, OC*, I, 426). In the way that he creates this oxymoronic portrait of himself, he accurately describes his *modus operandi* in the context of his painting and writing. Although Michaux may not be moving—physically—his mind is not at rest; instead, it is engaged in action. Along the same lines, his poem "La Paresse" explains that he does not like laziness. The way in which words are not supple or changeable can be seen in Michaux's characterization of "le paresseux":

> C'est pourquoi le paresseux est indécrottable. Il ne changera jamais. C'est pourquoi aussi la paresse est la mère de tous les vices. Car qu'est-ce qui est plus égoïste que la paresse? (*NR, OC*, I, 474).

Michaux's critique in this poem affirms his need to travel and to engage in creative expression—particularly in the production of visual art—as a way to avoid being static that results in laziness. The "geste du créateur," the motion required to create art, was key to Michaux's practice; in fact, he painted hundreds, sometimes thousands of signs, one after the other as a way to be continuously in movement. Michaux's method was to paint, as opposed to an artist like Klee who wanted to demonstrate *how* to execute a painting.[31] Michaux's painterly habits speak strongly to his desire to find some way to associate with his environment as when he says, "Je ne puis m'associer vraiment au monde que par gestes" (*PAS, OC*, II, 288). The combination of movement and gesture was a way for Michaux to become a part of his environment, likely the result of his trip to China and India in which he relied on gestures—although rather unsuccessfully—to communicate with the people who spoke other languages. Moreover, in *Arbres des tropiques*, at a point when Michaux begins to focus on the "geste" in his painting, he says, "Il faut voir l'arbre à part, son geste. Il est tout geste" (*OC*, I, 725). The gesture on the one hand serves as a therapeutic act, an internal act, while on the other hand it aims to understand the external world and its natural gestures. The interplay between these two functions of the gesture operates equally to reconcile Michaux's world.

While Michaux's artistic practice can be linked to the gestures he executes in his work it can also be seen in relation to his painterly ideology which is based on gesture and movement. He articulates this idea in two key passages. In the first he writes:

> Je voudrais un *continuum*. Un *continuum* comme un murmure, qui ne finit pas, semblable à la vie, qui est ce qui nous continue, plus important que toute qualité (*ER, OC*, III, 546).

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[31] Geneviève Bonnefoi "Entretiens et témoignages sur l'oeuvre peint d'Henri Michaux" (1966) 468. For examples of his methodological and instructional tools for painting, see Paul Klee, *Théorie de l'art moderne*.

In the second he says:

> Je suis de ceux qui aiment le mouvement, le mouvement qui rompt l'inertie, qui embrouille les lignes, qui défait les alignements, me débarasse des constructions. Mouvement, comme désobéissance, comme remaniement (*ER, OC*, III, 595).

Movement and gesture are thus highly essential to Michaux's work and they play a primary role in much of his visual art. In addition, *Mouvements* focuses on the gesture such that all the "signes représentent moins les formes qu'ils font naître que les gestes qui les ont fait naître" (Bréchon 2005, 297). In this way, a text-and-image work such as *Mouvements* fills a multiplicity of voids in Michaux's world. It incorporates poetic expression conveying emotion, the visual "signes" introduce an Asian-inspired compilation of graphic designs, and the production of these anthropomorphic characters were a form of physical therapy for Michaux.

In the way that the gesture was an essential part of Michaux's process as a painter, it is an act that creates movement and the continuum of which Michaux wrote. Movement allows Michaux to experiment in multiple genres while maintaining a continuous thread in his work; it provides a form of expression *between* painting and writing and links the two creative forms. Importantly, Michaux was opposed to his work being published in a Pléaide edition because he viewed this kind of edition as one that stoped movement, in other words, it embalmed the texts within it, and in this way, it breaks momentum and the continuum that were essential to Michaux's work (Martin 2003, 646). Michaux recognizes his understanding of movement and its importance in *Passages*:

> Bien sûr, je ne voudrais pas dire que je danse, moi qui
> ne sais même pas marcher, mais j'ai fini par être intrigué
> (pas trop tôt !) par les mouvements, par l'influence que
> pourraient avoir sur moi des mouvements (*OC,* II, 344).

As early as *Arbres des tropiques,* Michaux captures the sense of action in his eighteen drawings of trees; Edson argues that, "in all of these drawings, the trees are caught in the midst of movement, although the static drawing always points us simultaneously toward that movement" (1984, 110). This simultaneous movement can be seen most notably in *Mouvements*. Leafing quickly through this text-and-image work gives a cinematic illusion reminiscent of a child's book intended to be read in the way that a film is created by flipping through the pages (Pacquement 1993, 40). Michaux's text in *Mouvements* also conveys action through language. Not only through the words he uses but also through the page layout and the repetition of the word "mouvement" together create momentum as a result of the accumulation of this word verse after verse:

> Mouvements d'écartèlement et d'exaspération intérieure
>   plus que mouvements de la marche
> mouvements d'explosion, de refus, d'étirement et tous sens…
> Mouvements des replis et des enroulements sur soi-même…
>
> mouvements à jets multiples
> mouvements à la place d'autres mouvements…
>
> mouvements
> on saute dans le 'rien' (*FV, OC*, II, 438).

In *L'Infini turbulent* Michaux focused on the effects of mescaline, and particularly on movement:

> Accélération.
> Répétition.
> Accentuation. L'impression devenue alors
> réellement conforme à son nom, *empreinte,*
> *imprimé* en nous, tenace, adhésive, indéta-
> chable, exagérément 'permanente'.
> Mescaline accélératrice, répétitrice, agita-
> trice, accentuatrice, renverseuse de toute rêve-
> rie, interruptrice.
> Démonstratrice du discontinu.
> Sentiments discontinus.
> Mouvements discontinus.

Élans discontinus.
Réflexions discontinues.
Rythme binaire. Immense scansion (*IT, OC*, II, 809).

Finally, in *Émergences-résurgences,* Michaux describes the nature of movement in relation to painting as:

Spontanée. Surspontanée. La spontanéité, qui
dans l'écriture n'est plus, s'est totalement reportée
là, où d'ailleurs elle est plus à l'aise, la réflexion plus
naturellement pouvant être tenue à l'écart (*OC,* III, 574-575).

Movement in painting and in writing possesses distinct functions and Michaux capitalized on painting's ability to convey action as he did with writing. While in painting Michaux engaged in actual physical movement to create much of his graphic work, in writing, he relied on a particular vocabulary that simulated a similar form of movement charged with energy. As a result, a text-and-image work such as *Mouvements* maintains a triple continuum: one through the poetic constructions, a second through graphic art, and a third through the combination of both kinds of constructions.

Michaux's transition to poet-painter can be associated with his first painting exhibition in 1937 entitled "Un poète qui se change en peintre" and although Michaux did not abandon writing, the impact of plastic art is manifest in his work from this point forward, particularly as a result of his experience in the Orient. Further, this exhibition arguably shaped Michaux's identity into one of a poet-painter rather than a poet or a painter. His conception of expression and communication was therefore directly related to and modeled by this exhibition. Painting assumed the role of the counter activity which called Michaux's literary practice into question and arguably devalued it (Martin 2003, 313). Several years later, long after this exhibition, as Michaux became more engaged in artistic creation and in the painterly world in Paris, he

explained to painter friend, Brassaï (Gyula Halasz) that artists who work with their hands, and thus are required to move physically to produce are, are much happier than those who do not use them (Martin 2003, 383).

The early 1950s marks a pivotal moment in Michaux's transition and career. In an interview, Michaux once said that, "je ne peux pas rester deux jours sans graphisme alors que je peux rester trois mois sans écrire" (Rey 2001, 28). Michaux's 1951 publication of *Mouvements* identifies the apogee of his transition and a moment in which his written work and plastic art definitively merged both on paper and conceptually. He gains recognition as an artist and this work in particular became Michaux's signature in a sense, much like the signature of painting or Michaux's *Plume* as a signature text. (Martin 2003, 489). Here, Michaux has two identities, the one he uses in his writing and the other he signs on his paintings. Michaux's idea of the self was thus divided between that of a poet and that of a painter. Paradoxically, as Michaux's perception of the self remains divided, his painted work and texts merge more and more on paper regardless of any deliberate awareness of his career as poet or painter, shaping him more and more into a poet-painter. In the postface of *Mouvements*, Michaux describes the differences between the text and image in this work, "R.B. [René Bertelé] me fait remarquer que dans ce livre le dessin et l'écrit ne sont pas équivalents, le premier plus libéré, le second plus chargé" (*FV, OC*, II, 599). Also with the publication of *Mouvements*, Michaux's transition becomes visibly apparent and his subsequent works will be unquestionably influenced by this key text-and-image work. In the same year as the publication of this seminal mixed-media work*,* Michaux's exhibition at the Gallerie Rive gauche in Paris, "Pour connaître mieux Henri Michaux," included a variety of his works: watercolors, lithographs, illustrated books, and his first oil paintings. Indeed, the scope of the exhibition displayed the depth and diversity of this figure's plastic art and simultaneously

communicated that "Michaux lui-même est un hybride" (Maulpoix 1999, 14). From this point

forward, Michaux defines himself not as a writer or painter but as a mixed-media artist and a

figure whose text became inextricably linked to image and image to text. In this way, Michaux

reconciles word and picture in the role of a hybrid artist.

2.0   WORDS AND IMAGES

> Né, élevé, instruit dans un milieu et
> une culture uniquement du 'verbal'
> je peins *pour me déconditionner*
> -   Michaux[32]

2.1   Word and Image Relationships

Michaux's text-and-image projects, though diverse and seemingly fragmented, raise questions

related to the way in which the word-image overlap can be explained. In an exploration of

discourses that concentrate on the overlapping relationships between literature and the arts, the

verbal and the visual elements in Michaux's work move beyond word-image tensions and

instead present combinations made of complementary components.   These combinations

transgress the limits and borders between language and image, and for this reason, Michaux's

poetic-pictorial oeuvre can be approached through the lens of iconology,[33] picture-theory, and by

comparing his work with that of other mixed-media practitioners.

G. E. Lessing's treatment of the *paragone*, a term first used by Leonardo da Vinci to

describe the tension between the poet and the painter, concentrates on the rivalry between poetry

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[32] (*ER*, *OC*, III) 54
[33] For the purposes of this study, I define iconology as the study of images or icons.

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and painting and his work highlights the debate between words and images and literature and art. Unlike Lessing's separation of poetry and painting, Michaux's numerous mixed-media projects bring these forms together. Although ways of rearticulating word-image relationships are still developing and picture-theory scholar W. J. T. Mitchell, among others, has drawn conclusions about how words and images relate, he asserts that there does not exist a "satisfactory theory" of "words about pictures" (1994, 9). In order to create a theoretical framework, the work of Lessing, Mitchell, and Linda Hutcheon provides a context for understanding Michaux's poetic-pictorial projects.

One of the first modern treatments of the relation between literature and art, Lessing's *Laocoön*, examines the relationship between poetry and painting, and in his focus on the *paragone*, he articulates characteristics present in each art. He separates neatly the two arts by placing them in mutually exclusive categories that have complementary relationships. For instance, painting relies on natural signs while poetry employs arbitrary, or man-made ones. Furthermore, while painting imitates silently, poetry expresses in spoken language.[34] One of the primary distinctions Lessing makes between poetry and painting pertains to differences in the perception of each art. He calls poetry an art of time whereas he regards painting as an art of space. That is, poetry develops as a temporal, sequential art whereas painting exists in space, in a single moment. Lessing's distinctions, particularly those related to time and space, problematize the overlapping relation between the two arts. If Lessing's work places characteristics of each art in these mutually exclusive categories, then these arts remain divided

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[34] For a further discussion of the interpretation of Lessing's separation of poetry and painting, see Jack Spector, *Surrealist Art and Writing: 1919-1939* (1997) 173-176.

in all aspects of their conception and construction but not necessarily their interpretation.[35]

Margaret Rigaud-Drayton reconsiders the relation between words and images when she discusses this concept in the context of Rousseau and authors after him who created a theory relating art and literature in which poetry appealed not only to the ear but also to the eye (2005, 5). Such a characterization of poetry and painting, suggesting that they appeal to both the ear *and* the eye, is similar to Michaux's conception of it. His view of words and images is that they are not in fact separate forms of expression; instead, he considers them to be much closer, as overlapping. Further, in "Redefining the Sister Arts: Baudelaire's Response to the Art of Delacroix," Elizabeth Abel argues that Lessing's classifications are an "intuitively obvious" claim and asserts that poetry can be perceived in both time and space[36] (1980, 38). Abel's explanation of the link between the two arts in time and space moves away from with Lessing. These views of literature and art redefine the relation between the arts in a holistic way and illustrate the characteristics shared by language and art.

In much the same way that the overlap between words and images appears to exist naturally, it can also be said that language shapes art and art shapes language. Since painting can be perceived "sequentially" it can also involve "a temporal process of perception" (Mitchell 1980, 38). On the one hand, the differences between the temporal and spatial arts are merely a "convenient relation"; there are clear boundaries between poetry and painting, and each art

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[35] Lessing explains however, that, "Thus, in the one case poetry can help to explain and illustrate painting, and in the other painting can do the same for poetry" which pertains to the way in which poetry and painting come together in certain instances. For a further discussion, see G. E. Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. Edward Allen McCormick (1962) 3.

[36] This collection of essays treats the multiple relations that emerge from images in verbal and graphic representations. For a further discussion, see Elizabeth Abel, *The Language of Images*, ed. Mitchell (1980) 38.

possesses a specific set of characteristics without any overlapping features of the two (Mitchell 1986, 101). On the other, there is a "second level of interference" between poetry and painting (Mitchell 1986, 101). In this view, the divisions between the arts of time and space fall apart because the signifieds of poetry and painting "become signifiers" in and of themselves (Mitchell 1986, 101). As a result, the verbal and visual elements of a poem or painting can convey meaning in either a temporal or spatial way, or both.

To illustrate with an example, two of Michaux's later text-and-image works *Par des traits* and *Saisir* rely on three components: a poem, a series of graphic "signes," and the combination of the two which forms a third element. The unity of the first two—the poetic and the pictorial—creates a third signifier, a verbal-visual one that transgresses the boundaries of time and space because of the interplay between the words and images. Both *Saisir* and *Par des traits*, like Michaux's other mixed-media projects, exist simultaneously in time and space, much like an emblem. Both works rely on free verse poetry juxtaposed with faux-Asian "signes" Michaux created. Like *Mouvements*, these late works maintain a rhythm full of spirit and energy that emerges from the interaction between the words and black characters—some made of thick strokes, others of more subtle, wavy lines—that resemble free-form movements of lines, quasi-insects, and spots. The words and pictures form a kind of motif that Michaux repeats not only in these two text-and-image works but also in other projects. Assembling his works in this way brings together words and images in such a way that they become inextricably linked, yielding a third element (Fig. 15).

Animaux, hommes, gestes ne sont plus le pro-
blème mais les situations le sont à présent.
    Signes significatifs d'une situation. J'aurais dû
en faire davantage. Impréparé hélas.

    Par des signes, saisir une situation, quelle mer-
veille*! Quelle transformation !
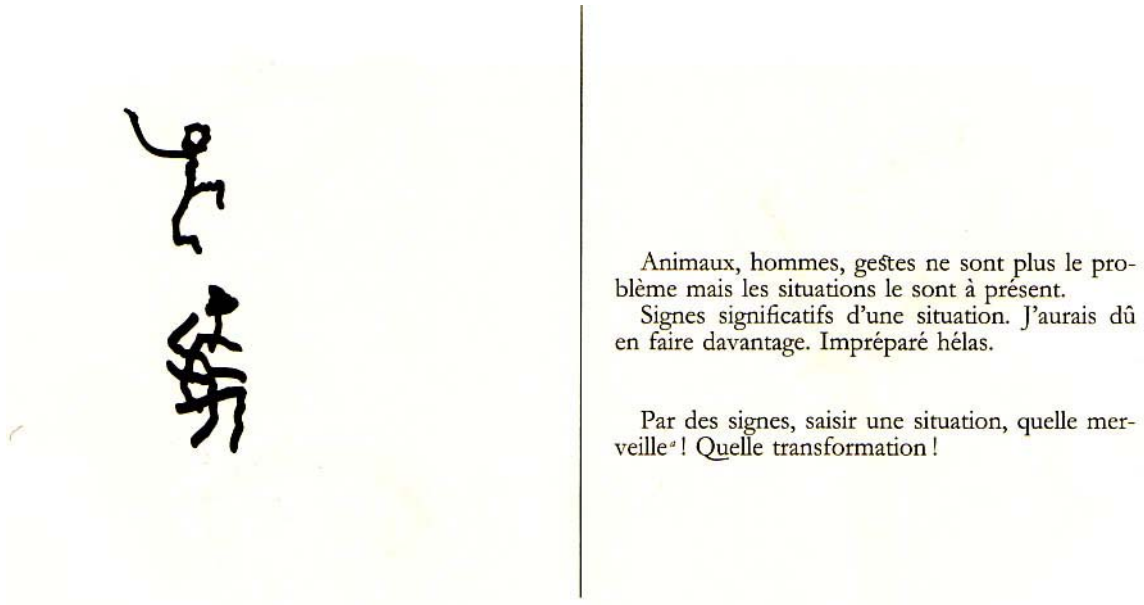
Figure 15. Page from *Saisir* (1979)

In this example, the combination of Michaux's two characters and his text creates a relation, both in time and space, between the graphics and the text. While the characters Michaux painted appear alongside his text, Michaux refers to them when he writes, "Animaux, hommes, gestes…" (*S, OC,* III, 971). By juxtaposing images and text, Michaux shows the open-ended meaning of his "signes"; they can represent nearly anything. At the same time, this juxtaposition is an example of a verbal-visual co-existence that forms a third element. In other words, the two components fuse into a third signifier that results in something capable of a "transformation!" which is the product of words plus images and it thus elicits a temporal-sequential experience (*S, OC,* III, 971).

Because Michaux fuses words and images in a number of works, the result is a natural, organic combination of the verbal and the visual. It is the very interrelationship between these words and images which creates a dialogue: this "conversation" emerges from neatly typed words in French printed on the same pages as the "signes" that recall the shape of primitive

forms of Eastern writing. These works are also examples of what Mitchell defines as an

image/text, imagetext, and image-text.[37] They require a "double literacy," contain features of

"composite" constructions, and create "relations" between words and pictures (Mitchell 1994,

89).

In addition to his text-and-image projects that illustrate a verbal-visual overlap, Michaux

articulates this mix between the arts and the blending of spatial and temporal features in his own

texts. In many instances the poet-painter uses writing to describe how visual art possesses a

textual component. The need to read art underscores once again the mixing of the verbal and the

visual as well as time and space. This is not only the case in Michaux's projects but it is also

present in the work of other artists and writers Michaux explored. For instance, Michaux writes

in *Passages* "tous peuvent lire un tableau" [38] (*OC*, II, 332). Michaux also refers to his "reading"

of Zao Wou-Ki's lithographs: "Il [Zao Wou-Ki] méritait un plus 'sérieux' lecteur" (*LHM, OC*, II,

263). Michaux sees art, notably Zao Wou-Ki's, as something to be read, and thus an art of time

and space; this awareness of reading art and that it requires a reader, together suggest a verbal

impulse in graphic work. The opposite is also true; in another text, the poet-painter writes in his

mixed-media work *Idéogrammes en Chine* that the Chinese ideographic language system

"propose à la vue" (*IC, OC*, III, 841). In this way, Michaux understands the Chinese language as

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[37] In *Picture Theory*, Mitchell defines concretely three ways to name combinations of words and images. First, he describes an "image/text" as "a problematic gap" which is to say that an image/text is neither purely visual nor verbal but is a form of representation in which there is a gap between the two. Mitchell considers the illuminated books by poet-painter William Blake as an example of an image/text, primarily because Blake's work demands a "double literacy," that is, the ability of the reader/viewer to engage in two processes in order to access one mixed-media work. Second, he uses the term "imagetext" to define a "composite" or a combination that fuses text and image. A calligram would be an example of an imagetext. Third, he describes an "image-text" as "*relations* of the visual and the verbal" (1994) 89.

[38] This text also appears in *Lecture par Henri Michaux de huit lithographies de Zao Wou-Ki* (*OC*, II) 263.

simultaneously textual and pictorial, and this written language proposes a visual component in addition to a verbal one. Appealing thus to the eye and the ear. Michaux's view of time and space resembles that of the Chinese language since this language of the Far East fits into a "pictorial and poetic matrix" (Williams 1990, 143). By focusing on this overlap, Michaux pushes the limits of "reading and seeing, and of writing and drawing" in his works; as a result, he demonstrates the narrative and spatial qualities that are juxtaposed naturally in language and art (Rigaud-Drayton 2005, 137). Indeed, there is a need to perceive doubly in the mixed media works of Michaux, the works of other practitioners of the sister arts, and the Chinese language.

The overlapping of the verbal and the visual and the need to read and view simultaneously presents itself in a postmodern context. Linda Hutcheon argues that the visual and the verbal can be seen as a way of defining "visual meaning"; this is to say that an image or a picture often provides a verbal explanation: be it with a juxtaposition of words and images or with a text that explains the meaning of an image (1989, 124). In *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon asserts that in postmodern art, text and image relationships are "never one of pure redundancy, emphasis, or repetition" and furthermore that a text "never guarantees any one single, already apparent meaning" (1989, 124). Meaning relies on the interplay *between* the verbal and the visual, the function of the text is not to explicate the image and vice versa, but to reference the "signifier" of which Mitchell speaks, as a third element carrying meaning—one that comes from the relationship between a text and an image. Michaux fits clearly into such a matrix, in which a third element signifies; Mitchell refers to these shared forms of expression as "direct and indirect expression" (1986, 101). In other words, just as a poem can both directly and indirectly express spatial elements, a painting can both directly and indirectly express temporal action. Michaux's *Peintures et dessins, Mouvements*, and *Émergences-résurgences*

include textual and graphic components that transgress temporal and spatial borders—both individually and together.

Although words and images overlap, Hutcheon asserts that words must describe images; as a result, ekphrastic poetry, or any textual or poetic treatment of a visual image, relies on the verbal to describe the visual. In the broadest sense of the term, ekphrastic poetry refers to what Adelia Williams describes as, "poems accompanied by the paintings they describe, poems about actual but unseen paintings, or poems about imaginary paintings" (1998, 123-134). More specifically, ekphrastic poetry links language and art through a linguistic process that is descriptive and poetic; it maintains a separation between words and art but it reconciles the two forms of expression in one emblem-like construction—just as the visual component is one entity, so is the verbal. In an ekphrastic poem, the text and image are hinged by an independent relationship forged by the description or explanation of an image in which each part becomes inextricably linked to the other.

Ekphrastic constructions then can also be compared to the emblem. In *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* Murray Krieger writes that an ekphrastic work "become[s] an emblem" in certain cases, namely when the "verbal object" emulates "the spatial character of the painting or sculpture by trying to force its words […] to take on a substantive configuration" (1992, 9). In the traditional sense of the word, an emblem "does contain a text" and "will normally be composed of three, or sometimes four, components" (Russell 1985, 101). The three standard parts of an emblem are "a motto, the illustration and an epigrammatic text in verse" and the emblem "will occasionally have a title" (Russell 1985, 101). The text explains the image while the image represents what is stated in the text; Krieger further notes that ekphrastic poetry "is the poet's marriage" of the verbal and the visual "within the verbal art" (1992, 22). Not only

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are these two arts imbedded in one another but an ekphrastic work is also a hybrid art in and of itself, a visual-verbal fusion. In some instances, Michaux's works appear to be ekphrastic, namely his mescaline works. These text-and-image juxtapositions rely on a construction similar to the emblem in which a text explains an image and an image illustrates a text. In these projects, Michaux wrote about his reaction to mescaline and he later created drawings that simulated his mental state under the influence of the drug after composing his writings (Fig. 16). In this way, *Misérable miracle* is a series of ekphrastic poems about "imaginary paintings" that Michaux realized after writing his text (Williams 1998, 123-134).

C'était seulement la fin de quelque chose, la fin des secousses. Le brossage cellulaire avait cessé. Allait venir le chatouillement. Et que font les cellules, qui ne savent répondre au chatouillement en chatouillant?

J'allais le savoir. Jamais je ne me serais attendu à ça.

Après une longue période de néant, et dans une sorte de repos après le combat (ou était-ce ma capitulation qui était en train de se préparer?) les mouvements rapides étaient toujours là, beaucoup moins violents, plus arrachants du tout, pourtant maîtres encore... et j'allais avoir l'occasion de m'en apercevoir.

Sans raison particulière, sauf — et ce fut suffisant — que je m'étais étonné de n'entendre aucune musique (intérieure) alors que les bruits du dehors et même une lointaine harmonie entraient en moi souverainement, je vois paraître après beaucoup de couleurs bleues une bonne cinquantaine de joueurs de trompette, la trompette levée, parfaitement ridicules, habillés de vêtements bleu et rose[1], dont je ne sais et ne veux savoir

Le cirque rétinien.

au paradis du clinquant.

1. On pense que c'est admirable de voir surgir des couleurs quand on songe à de la musique. Sans doute si on avait ça en plus. Mais la première chose qu'on remarque, et contrarié, c'est qu'on ne *peut plus* évoquer en soi des sons. Le circuit est fermé.

Figure 16. Page from *Misérable miracle* (1956)

In addition to resembling ekphrastic poetry, many of Michaux's mescaline works appear to be influenced by his experience in the Far East. Compositional elements such as the use of black ink on white backgrounds, the variety of line forms that are thin and thick, and the orientation of the drawings, which can be read and viewed horizontally and vertically, indicate clear links to Chinese writing and further, to what Michaux understood as a form of mixed-media. By

bringing together materials used to create and visual features characteristic of Chinese calligraphy, Michaux not only combines words and images but he also merges the Far East and the West in these ekphrastic works.

Another example of an ekphrastic project is Michaux's *Lecture par Henri Michaux*[39] which includes elements of both ekphrastic poetry and emblems. Michaux's eight poems describe Zao Wou-Ki's eight lithographs and Michaux's poems translate verbally Zao Wou-Ki's visual images. This results in a continuous interplay between the work's components, as in *Misérable miracle.* Here, there is a verbal-visual dialogue or what Mitchell would call an "image-text" because Michaux's poems describe and interpret Zao Wou-Ki's lithographs (1994, 89). The reader/viewer must work between the image and the text over and over again. Through this process, the reader/viewer accesses the work in stages but reads and views simultaneously. Interpreting the whole—Michaux's text and Zao Wou-Ki's image—relies on an approach that combines textual and visual analysis.

In Zao Wou-Ki's second lithograph, he depicts two lovers in the foreground of his image lying beneath a faded red moon surrounded by a white, clouded ring that hovers above tall, bare trees in pale green and red (Fig. 17). The background of the lithograph is entirely black except for the moon, the trees, the lovers, and a miniature house sketched in the bottom right-hand corner of the image. Zao Wou-Ki's lithograph resembles a negative from a photograph since the black background saturates the area around the pale-colored objects he depicts in his composition. The moon appears to be in motion, the trees stand and sway, indicating a light wind blowing during the night. Michaux's poem conveys the visual elements of this image

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[39] Although Zao Wou-Ki executed his lithographs before Michaux produced his poetic mediations, five of Michaux's poems were published later in the journal *Parler* without the images under the title "Lecture de Zao Wou-Ki" (1963): 17-23.

through a short narration that he divides into six short texts of varying length. While Michaux's poem indicates time and thus a textual narrative when he writes "la rencontre a eu lieu" "aujourd'hui," and "la lune a pris toute vie," because his poem is juxtaposed with the artist's lithograph, it appears to be ekphrastic poetry and further, that there is a close relation between the poem and the illustration. The close relation of Michaux's words and Zao Wou-Ki's images is evident in a verse such as "que de lait entoure l'astre mort" where Michaux describes figuratively the moon. Similarly, Michaux's phrases "plus de distance," "l'espace est silence," "ce silence est noir," and "il n'y a plus rien" suggest a narrative and a moment in space just as in the lithograph. In such an ekphrastic construction, readers and viewers must rely on both a textual and visual approach to the text-and-image work.

Figure 17. Page from *Lecture par Henri Michaux de huit lithographies de Zao Wou-Ki*, poem, Henri Michaux (1950), lithograph, Zao Wou-Ki (1949)

Like the ekphrastic construction in this collaborative work, Michaux and Zao Wou-Ki's friendship can be considered in a similar way. Prior to Michaux's engagement in his project with Zao Wou-Ki, he had commented on his own work in projects such as "Dessins commentés" (published in *La nuit remue*) and in *Peintures*. Only later did he collaborate with the Chinese artist Zao Wou-Ki (b.1921), and their collaboration was unique. Just as Michaux was fascinated with Chinese art, Zao Wou-Ki came to Paris to study European painting and was particularly influenced by Cézanne (*OC*, II, 1145). Michaux and Zao Wou-Ki formed a symbiotic relationship—a Westerner drawn to the Far East and an Easterner drawn to the art of Western Europe. Zao Wou-Ki called Michaux "un ami sacré […] un des seuls qui comprenne vraiment le sentiment oriental" (*OC*, II, 1145-1146). Their relationship developed from a shared interest in art to an understanding of each other's culture.

In addition to a verbal-visual relation in ekphrastic poetry, the merging of words and images relies on visual perception of the two elements together—in other words, how we see and relate cognitively the components and to what degree. In a work such as *Mouvements* or *Par des traits*, in which pages of graphic "signes" surround pages of a poetic text, first the graphic component appears, second, the text, and third, another set of visual "signes" appears. The layout of these works appeals to both the eye and the ear and as a result, these mixed-media works require multiple senses to operate simultaneously rather than sequentially, thus violating Lessing's rules of separating the poetic from the pictorial. In this way, these works call for a postmodern interpretation, particulary because in the context of postmodernism, there are clear examples of "border tensions" and also the crossing of these borders "between genres, between disciplines and discourses" (Hutcheon 1989, 18). *Mouvements* and *Par des traits* provide

concrete examples of such a border crossing. This kind of overlap between forms illustrates a concept that Hutcheon calls "fringe interference" (1989, 118).

"Fringe interference" characterizes the merging of genres or two separate forms of expression; Hutcheon describes it this way, "two stones thrown into a pond make ripples which meet and, at the point of meeting, something new happens—something that is based on individual forms that preceded it, but is nevertheless different" (1989, 118). Hutcheon asserts that the "ripples" produced from each overlap, change and "can be called postmodern" (1989, 118). Each ripple morphs into a new and different form and each new ripple maintains a relation to the previous one; as a result, all of the forms are related to one another. Michaux's text-and-image works can indeed be traced through various series of ripples, notably his text-and-image projects in which he assembled texts and images that he did not create for one project. The combination of texts and images—from different time periods and various literary or graphic works—inscribes new meaning in these juxtaposed components. This, for instance, is the case in *Peintures et dessins* and *Émergences-résurgences:* the paintings Michaux includes in *Émergences-résurgences* come from a variety of earlier mixed-media projects and together their combination with the texts forms something new and different as a result of the "fringe interference."

The postmodern phenomenon of transgressing borders "problematizes" previous relations between text and image because verbal and visual combinations "upset learned notions of relations between text/image, non-art/art, theory/practice—by installing conventions of both" arts (Hutcheon 1989, 119). These overlapping conventions, or accepted devices, contradict pure form which consequently leads to a new construction. Postmodern works operate "*between* traditional art forms" which is to say *between* words and images, *between* poetry and painting

and *between* literature and art (Hutcheon 1989, 119). These forms are thus transitional. One way to approach Michaux then is through a postmodern lens—to consider Michaux as a transitional figure whose work proliferated by "ripples," as is the case in *Peintures et dessins*, *Quelques renseignements*, and *Émergences-résurgences.*

Mitchell argues that this debate is a "struggle between body and soul, word and mind, nature and culture" (1986, 49). Michaux and his work fit conveniently into this framework of opposing yet complementary relations—most specifically because of his relationship to writing and painting. While Michaux may have been disillusioned with words and written language, there are instances in his text-and-image projects that justify to the poet-painter the use of this verbal form of communication. Language is necessary for conveying meaning, as he said in *En rêvant à partir de peintures énigmatiques,* and also to establish networks and correspondences. In this way, language is not sequential; instead, it combines time, space, language, and art since it can establish interrelationships between words and images. Michaux's mixed-media works thus appear to be something other than a combination of the purely verbal and the purely visual. If Michaux's mixed-media projects are something other than purely linguistic or purely graphic, then his use of language is justified. Mitchell, who refutes the idea of pure forms of the verbal or the visual, writes that, "there is no *essential* difference between poetry and painting, no difference, that is, that is given for all time by the inherent natures of the media, the objects they represent, or the laws of the human mind" (1986, 49). Indeed, Michaux's work is characterized by a continuous interplay between the two modes. The continuous interplay makes it difficult to divide the poet-painter's work between poetic or pictorial expression. Instead, his text-and-image works point to the concept of hybridization.

Signes revenus, pas les mêmes, plus du tout
ce que je voulais faire et pas non plus en vue
d'une langue — sortant tous du type homme, où
jambes ou bras et buste peuvent manquer, mais
homme par sa dynamique intérieure, tordu, ex-
plosé, que je soumets (ou ressens soumis) à des tor-
sions et des étirements, à des expansions en tous
sens.

En forme de racine? Homme tout de même, un
homme qui compte sur l'aveugle souterrain pour
plus tard aller au grand jour.

Dans des centaines de pages, *un à un*, comme
énuméré (quatre ou cinq par feuille, chacun à part
dans une invisible niche, sans communiquer l'un
avec l'autre), l'homme m'arrive, me revient,
l'homme inoubliable.

Sur la page blanche je le malmène, ou je le vois
malmené, flagellé, homme-flagellum.

Sans tête, tête en bas, tête massue, tête à
l'emporte-pièce, homme écartelé se ruant vers on ne
sait quoi, pour on ne sait quoi, cinglé par on ne
sait quoi.

En expansions fluidiques, érigé, devenu triple,
devenu rateau, fin, déroulé, déplié, débobiné,
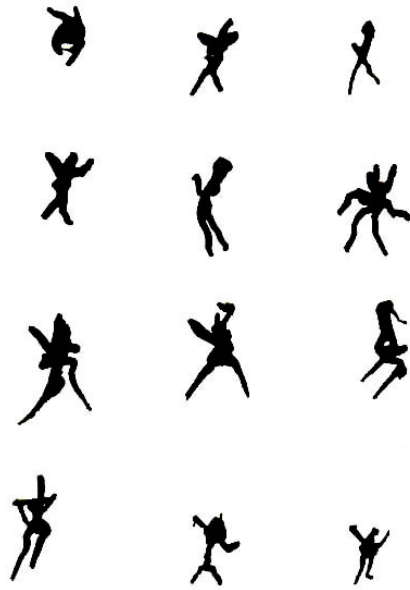
Figure 18. Pages from *Emérgences-résurgences* (1972)

The juxtaposition of text and image in *Émergences-résurgences* is particularly significant considering time and space and also the idea of a third signifier. In addition to the "signes" reproduced in *Émergences-résurgences* which convey action and rhythm, Michaux articulates this very movement in his text; he writes, "Signes revenus," "sortant du type homme," "dynamique intérieure" (Fig. 18)[40] (*ER*, *OC*, III, 580-581). As Michaux reconsiders these images in *Émergences-résurgences*, he sees them in a different way and his re-articulation of how these "signes" developed suggests a third level of interference: one beyond the image-text, text-image relation. The relation of the third signifier is the result of Michaux's new text juxtaposed with an old image and the combination of the two creates a new and different structure in the mind of the poet-painter and the reader/viewer. Because Michaux wrote the text

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[40] While Michaux wrote the text for *Émergences-résurgences* in 1972, the image in Fig. 18 comes from *Mouvements* (1951).

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for *Émergences-résurgences* in 1972 whereas the images in it come from numerous earlier works, the graphic art is—to a degree—a retrospective of Michaux's pictorial *oeuvre*. The combination of Michaux's text with his art constructs a multidimensional text-and-image work. Not only does Michaux's text exist as a self-contained narrative recounting his career as a painter, but his images also create a similar narrative because of their layout in this work. Their organization indicates more than the different kinds of art Michaux made: this layout forces a relation between one art project and the next within the bigger project of *Émergences-résurgences*. There are thus two side-by-side narrative structures woven together forming a third one: one from the text, one from the images, and a third, composite one, from the mise-en-page of words and pictures together. The third signifier in *Émergences-résurgences* consequently forges a verbal-visual relation between Michaux's words and images.

Émergences-résurgences and other text-and-image works like it can be situated between modernism and postmodernism because the numerous instances of border crossing and interference between signifiers. Indeed, the "laws of genre" Lessing defines begin to dissolve in text-and-image works, particularly in the case of postmodern and contemporary theories of the arts which provide a context for Michaux's work which mixes genres. The laws governing genre, which appeared to be a product of nature, are not natural at all but "artificial" (Mitchell 1986, 104). Further, if these laws are not natural, then "what *is* natural?" Are Michaux's fictional "signes," symbols, and ideograms natural? Are they man-made? The most important question is perhaps what is at stake by making this distinction.

Ernst Gombrich[41] argues that, "images are *more* natural than words" (Mitchell 1986, 88). In other words, images can be understood more easily because they are more widely accessible to different groups of people; they are universal in the sense that they are "objective" and because they appeal most naturally to the senses that are shared among these diverse groups (Mitchell 1986, 88). Gombrich's assertion has led Mitchell to pose two essential questions in *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*. First, "What is an image?" and second, "What is the difference between words and images?" (1986,1). Mitchell defines the term "logos" as "words, ideas, discourse," or the "science" of "icons," in other words, the science of images or pictures (1986, 1). His work is then a text about images or as he puts it, "what to say about images" and also "what images say" (1986, 1-2). As a result of the long-standing separation of the arts, there is a large division between "words and things" and more broadly "culture and nature" (Mitchell 1986, 43). Words and images are closer than in Lessing's conception and certainly in the case of Michaux as well as in other modern and postmodern text-and-image productions. Interestingly, the scope of Michaux's mixed-media works and the diversity of his projects illustrate how they transgress boundaries of time and space. His work provides examples and insights into the *way* in which words and images overlap in culture and nature and consequently begin to *close* the gap between them.

Fundamental to Michaux's Asian-inspired text-and-image works is the very question— what is an image? Are Michaux's "signes" images or text? Derrida would arguably have

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[41] Mitchell refers to Gombrich as "probably the most influential modern commentator on the relative share of nature and convention in imagery and because he has been identified at various times with both sides of the debate" (1986) 77. See also Ernst Gombrich, "Image and Code: Scope and Limits of Conventionalism in Pictorial Representation," *Image and Code*, ed. Wendy Steiner 2.2 (1981).

defined an image as "nothing but another kind of writing" which points to the close relationship between text and image; yet, Derrida's idea would situate images in relation to writing when a similar case could be made for language being a type of image (Michell 1986, 30).[42] In either case, there is an inextricable link between the two. Considered this way, Michaux's "signes" are in fact a kind of writing, particularly because each "signe" is different, it can thus be understood as a character. Since characters function to carry meaning in language, these "signes" resemble constructs of a language. This language of "signes" however, is not developed or organized enough to convey meaning through its characters: it lacks a grammar, syntax, and any elements that constitute a formal language. For this reason, Michaux's "signes" are much like hieroglyphs[43] as they were understood in the Renaissance since these image-words suggest language but they were not governed by a grammatical structure that was as developed as a formalized written language. The meaning of Michaux's language of "signes" cannot be understood by anyone other than Michaux—if, in fact, even *he* can decipher them. Michaux's symbols have not been codified so at this point, each "signe"—either by itself or in combination with others—does not have meaning in the context of a written or spoken language. Nevertheless, Michaux suggests a written language through his juxtapositions of visual "signes." By sequencing multiple symbols that appear to read and be viewed vertically and horizontally, it may be possible to discover a relation between each element. Such a sequence proposes a visual language and encourages a reader to seek meaning. Seeking meaning in Michaux's visual

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[42] Mitchell states that, "Derrida's answer to the question, 'What is an image?' would undoubtedly be 'a kind of graphic sign that dissembles itself as a direct transcript of that which it represents, or of the way things look, or of what they essentially are'" (1986) 30.
[43] In a discussion of hieroglyphs, Russell explains that in the context of Egyptian hieroglyphic signs, they are "to be presented with a visual sign and a discursive explanation." In this view, Michaux's creation of "signes" that appear to be rooted in hieroglyphs are not only visual but they also suggest the need to be placed in a linguistic context (1995) 118-119.

"signes" suggests the search for a formalized way of understanding his images, namely in the form of language.

While Michaux created thousands and thousands of "signes" and he used graphic art throughout his career, he had to rely on a real language to comment on art. Using language to articulate what we see is by default because, clearly, words do not show exactly what we see (Foucault 1970, 9). Herein lies Michaux's true difficulty with language. For him, a given set of words could not begin to be sufficient to characterize visually what the eye sees. Conversely, "it is in vain" that a visual image attempts to represent "metaphors or similes" or even "what we are saying" (Foucault 1970, 9). This explains and justifies Michaux's mixing of media. Indeed, each art's limitations are in relation to the other. Since the arts are bound by these limitations, Michel Butor claims in *Les mots dans la peinture* that we never see paintings alone, and further that our vision is never a pure vision (1969, 5). In other words, Butor argues that a text of some sort is imposed upon a visual work and results from the viewer's "reading" of the graphic representation.

Since language is capable of describing the pictorial, it can limit the way a visual image in interpreted; in this way, words and images are bound to one another. This leads to the conclusion that poetry and painting are neither separate nor distinct; the opposite is true: they rely on each other and furthermore the *interpretation* of one art is rooted in the other. Indeed, words are essential to the interpretation of both arts but the nature of visual art relies on a written or spoken vocabulary required to explain it. At the same time, it is possible to argue that visual images can limit a text while the opposite case also presents itself: an image can illuminate a text by providing a visual explanation, that is, a visual representation of a text. A visual representation can (re)create what a text articulates while a text can articulate what a graphic

image depicts. In such cases, there is a reciprocal relationship that forms between a text and a visual image. An example of such a reciprocal relationship, in which words explain a visual image and a visual image explains a text, is the case in "Duck-Rabbit" (Fig. 19).
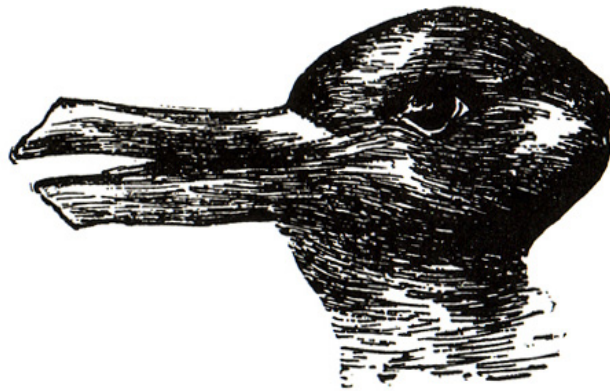
Figure 19. Joseph Jastrow, "Duck-Rabbit" (1892)

"Duck-Rabbit," a single—and at the same time double and arguably triple—image is a composite image which produces two texts and two images at once. This double structure reveals simultaneously a duck, a rabbit, and a duck-rabbit in words and pictures. Along the same lines as Michaux's text-and-image projects that have multiple signifiers, "Duck-Rabbit" also communicates numerous signifiers through words and pictures. Within the two visual images of the duck and the rabbit and the two words "duck" and "rabbit" in the title, a third element emerges: the composite image of the duck-rabbit and the compound word duck-rabbit. The combination of the two images and the two words together produces a third level of interpretation. Since it is arguable that there is no such thing in nature as a duck-rabbit, the fusion of these two animals creates a third signifer: a visual signifier made of the composite

image as well as a linguistic one made of the composite word duck-rabbit. The man-made word and image multiply the relations between each element. Further, the title explains the image while the image represents the text; this underscores the word-image relation illustrated in "Duck-Rabbit." Nevertheless, the image's title, "Duck-Rabbit" limits the possible ways this image can be interpreted yet the words are essential to the image.

This verbal-visual fusion is also the case in Guillaume Apollinaire's *Calligrammes: poèmes de la paix et de la guerre 1913-1916* (1918) which demonstrates a mixing of media in which Apollinaire used words as his medium to form visual objects. Similarly, Michaux's Belgian contemporary, René Magritte, also crafted juxtapositions, but the combinations he created in his word-object paintings subverted language; these graphic works called the relationship between words and images into question. Like Magritte, artists and writers of the Surrealist movement experimented with words and images in subversive dream-inspired combinations. Magritte attempted to show that an image does not necessarily represent a word—and vice versa—in a work such as *La Trahison des images* (Fig. 25). Michaux searched for an intermediate language; a nomenclature that could bridge the gap between French and Chinese and a form of communication that could operate between words and pictures. Through a comparative exploration of multimedia works, the development of the poet-painter's projects into organic combinations—text-and-image works that sought not to undermine language, art, or meaning but combinations that looked for a path of communication through the fusion of the visual and the verbal.

Michaux's work transgresses genre boundaries where there is a constant overlap between textual and graphic "communication" that points to postmodern "tendencies" (Williams 1990, 151). His work also provides an example of ekphrastic poetry in which the verbal and the visual

rely heavily on each other and become emblematic. Michaux's consistent merging of genres points to a position between modern and postmodern form in which words and pictures exist together in combinations that share elements of each, demonstrating that Michaux is a practitioner in transition between forms, styles, and genres. The multiple and multidimensional overlaps are what characterize and define Michaux's diverse body of text-and-image work that exists simultaneously in time and space.

2.2   Word and Image Formations

While Lessing, Mitchell, and Hutcheon help position Michaux's text-and-image work in a theoretical context, Michaux's projects can also be compared with that of other practitioners of word-image constructions. René Magritte's *Les Mots et les images* continues to investigate the debate between words and images; however, unlike Lessing, Magritte does not privilege one art over the other, instead he launches a new debate about the multiple ways in which word and images come together. Using the Belgian Surrealist's manifesto as a point of departure, the following discussion explores hybrid verbal-visual constructions such as concrete poetry, pictograms, ideograms, and calligrams. These formations illustrate not only the various ways words and images come together but they also provide examples of how these combinations are simultaneous forms of expression, needing to be read and viewed.

Primarily known for his Surrealist paintings using everyday objects, René Magritte created a text-and-image work, *Les Mots et les images* (1929), published in André Breton's *La Révolution surréaliste* (1929). It enumerates visually and textually ways words and images can combine. Magritte proposed eighteen possible ways that words and images can intersect in this

mixed-media work. In each "proposition," Magritte includes a text explaining a drawing he created in order to illustrate the different constructions words and images can form. All of the propositions include a brief textual explanation and are followed by a visual example illustrating the proposition. For instance, in one of them, Magritte writes, "un mot ne sert parfois qu'à se designer soi-même," below he wrote the term "ciel" surrounded by a line forming a cloud-like shape. In another example he explains, "une image peut prendre la place d'un mot dans une proposition," here he draws the phrase "le _____ est caché par les nuages." Where I have placed a blank line, Magritte drew an image of the sun so that the phrase is completed through the absence of a word replaced by a visual sign (Fig. 20). This proposition provides an example of a rebus, a combination of words and images in which pictures or objects represent absent words. As a result, in a rebus, the visual object replaces an absent word without compromising the meaning of a phrase or group of words. Such a mixing of words and images in a rebus demonstrates a text-and-image construction that requires a temporal and spatial reading (Fig. 21).

LES MOTS ET LES IMAGES

Un objet ne tient pas tellement à son nom qu'on ne puisse lui en trouver un autre qui lui convienne mieux

Le canon

Il y a des objets qui se passent de nom :

Un mot ne sert parfois qu'à se désigner soi-même :

ciel

Un objet rencontre son image, un objet rencontre son nom. Il arrive que l'image et le nom de cet objet se rencontrent ·

forêt

Parfois le nom d'un objet tient lieu d'une image

canon

Un mot peut prendre la place d'un objet dans la réalité :

le soleil

Une image peut prendre la place d'un mot dans une proposition ·

Le est caché par les nuages

Un objet fait supposer qu'il y en a d'autres derrière lui :

Tout tend à faire penser qu'il y a peu de relation entre un objet et ce qui le représente

l'objet réel   *l'objet représenté*

Les mots qui servent à désigner deux objets différents ne montrent pas ce qui peut séparer ces objets l'un de l'autre

personnage perdant la mémoire   *corps de femme*

Dans un tableau, les mots sont de la même substance que les images

abc   *no*

On voit autrement les images et les mots dans un tableau ·

montagne

Une forme quelconque peut remplacer l'image d'un objet

le soleil   *le soleil*

Un objet ne fait jamais le même office que son nom ou que son image

cheval

Or, les contours visibles des objets, dans la réalité, se touchent comme s'ils formaient une mosaïque :

Les figures vagues ont une signification aussi nécessaire aussi parfaite que les précises ·

Parfois, les noms écrits dans un tableau désignent des choses précises, et les images des choses vagues ·

canon

Ou bien le contraire :

brouillard

René MAGRITTE.

Figure 20. René Magritte, *Les Mots et les images* (1929)

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Rebus

The [sun] a [rose] [tree]

whilst

I [saw] 2 Lovers [handshake]

That

gazed me.

There was nor [flea]

nor loathsome [toad]

That might disturb or break delight,

Nor [snake] nor [snail]

in that same road,

And yet to me they seemed affright.

favour

Then them I told,

True Love cannot be

bold
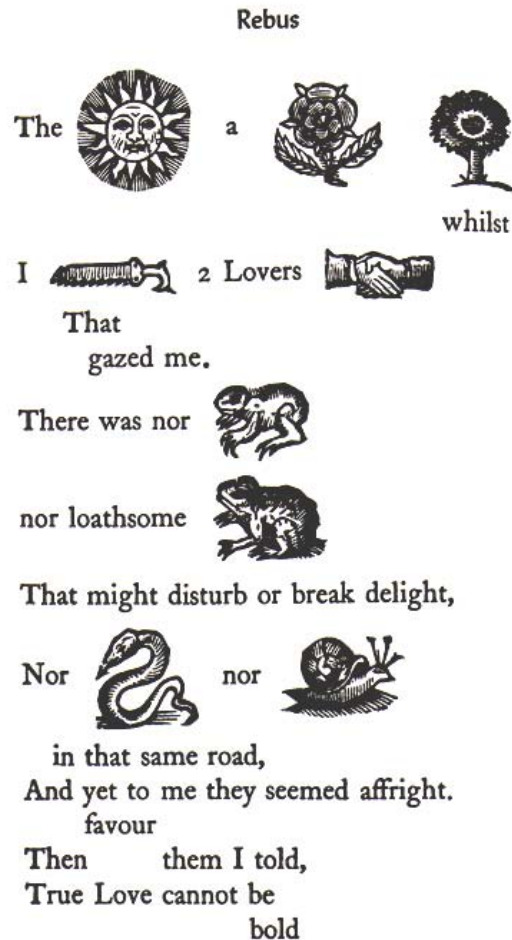
Those strange little creatures up there are, respectively, a flea and a toad.

Figure 21. Anonymous, *Rebus* (date unknown)

Magritte's *Les Mots et les images* begins a formal exploration into how the verbal and the visual can be combined in art and how they are interchangeable in certain cases. This Surrealist work is revolutionary in its construction because Magritte begins to form a theory through his series of eighteen propositions and in his exploration, Magritte calls both language and art into question. As a painter who experimented with words, Magritte redefined text-and-image relationships during the time of the Surrealist movement and further put his theory into practice

in his word-object paintings. In these works, Magritte juxtaposed two forms of expression in unlikely and provocative combinations.

There are two primary reasons why Magritte's *Les Mots et les images* is particularly subversive. First, the artist uses words and images interchangeably—words can take the place of images and images the place of words. Although this practice was not new at the time of Magritte, his manifesto simultaneously articulates and illustrates the overlapping relation between words and images, images being pictures of objects. It also shows that the relation between words and images is close and even at times, signifies the same thing. For instance, in the proposition where a drawing of "le soleil" takes the place of the word "le soleil" in a phrase, the meaning of the sentence is not compromised; instead, it remains clear—the message is not skewed by the juxtaposition of the words and image. Second, Magritte goes against this very overlapping and complementary relation he describes between the verbal and the visual by dissociating words from images. In this case, what a word and an image convey have nothing to do with one another. For example, in his very first proposition, Magritte drew an image of a leaf with the words "le canon" written below it. The image of the leaf has a short line that connects the image to the word "le canon." This proposition explains that, "Un objet ne tient pas tellement à son nom qu'on ne puisse en trouver un autre qui lui convienne mieux." As a result, the text and image draw an opposite relation between what Magritte outlined in the proposition with the sun. In the proposition that is like a rebus, Magrittte suggests that words and images can signify the same idea and that words and images can be interchangeable. Conversely, in the proposition with the picture of a leaf and the word "canon," he suggests that words and images are not in fact so linked to one another. These two examples outline the primary relations Magritte defines between the visual and the verbal that, in some instances, double each other

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whereas in other cases they have a contradictory or even arbitrary relation. The variety of relationships Magritte identifies between words and images in this work reinvestigates previous categorizations of word-image constructions by expanding how text and image can be juxtaposed and further what these juxtapositions signifiy. It is, however, Magritte's development of these relations that expanded on conceptions of word and image combinations as well as interpretations of their meaning in such formations.

In addition to *Les Mots et les images*, other text-and-image combinations such as concrete poetry, calligrams, pictograms, and ideograms demonstrate word-image fusions that do more than simply present words and images. These combinations, like Magritte's manifesto, suggest a complex relation between words and images. Further, these forms provide examples of different ways in which the verbal and the visual interact. In a concrete poem, an object formed by a text that naturally exists in time and space, the postmodern phenomenon of border-crossing between words and images in time and space is realized (Klonsky 1975, 25). Klonsky describes concrete poetry as a form that displays an "image-idea" which consequently requires a "reader-viewer" who will inevitably engage in a "double-take" upon reading or viewing a concrete poem (1975, 25). Considering the "picture-poem" and the "poem-picture," both of which emerged during the Italian Renaissance as a result of what many believe to be a "misconception of Egyptian hieroglyphs," subsequently spread through painterly and literary circles in Europe (Klonsky 1975, Introduction). Klonsky argues that "picture-poetry" declined during the Baroque and Classical periods but resurfaced in contemporary times as a "misconception of Chinese ideograms" (Fig. 22) (1975, introduction). Chinese ideograms are hieroglyphic in the way that a visual image communicates a thought or idea, just as a picture-poem fuses the two elements in a similar way.

Figure 22. Ian Hamilton Finlay, *au pair girl* **(1966)**

Ian Hamilton Finlay's *au pair girl* (1966) provides an example of concrete poetry and it is similar to a calligram. The form of a pear and the words "au pair girl" on the fruit-shaped object appear simultaneously. The triple role of seeing a pear, the words "au pair girl," and the pear-shaped object appeals to multiple senses. Until our senses are able to access individually the elements of this graphic pun, the equation's components remain unexplained. Once broken down into its parts, the connection between sound, word, object, and idea can be reconstructed and broken down again. Finlay's *au pair girl* differs from a calligram in the way Finlay uses words. Here, he uses them as objects—certain words are cut off as a result of the shape of the pair, so the form of the pear dictates the placement of the words. The words do not create the shape of the pear; instead, they fill the interior and in this way are objects. In a calligram the words are essential in the formation of an image with words—words form the shape or image but they do not function as objects since they do not get cut off. Finlay's construction appears to use

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words to create a double-take between the shape, the sound, and the objects[44] (words) inside of the pear. For these reasons, a calligram and a concrete poem are different.

Two other verbal-visual constructions, the pictogram, a pictorial symbol or sign, and the ideogram, a character or figure symbolizing the idea of an object that does not express its name, both relate to Chinese written language and Egyptian hieroglyphics. Chinese and hieroglyphics are partially visual languages and partly phonetic—this linguistic-pictorial combination not only gave birth to Michaux's "signes" but forced a rethinking of and a renewed interest in how these forms of communication operate. Michaux says that his pictograms were not "tellement signes, surtout pas signes convenus mais spontanés, inventés à mesure selon les besoins" (*ER*, [unedited version], *OC,* III, 664). That is, Michaux's pictograms operate between the conventional form of a pictogram or ideogram and a purely visual, creative one. Michaux's experimentation with the ideogram was a way to investigate language:

> …un signe qui tend à exprimer une idée, et non les sons du mot qu'il représente. Il est à la base de l'écriture des plus anciennes civilisations. A mi-chemin entre l'idée et la forme, il représente bien, pour Michaux, une première rupture avec notre écriture habituelle et son abstraction et déjà un effort pour revenir à la source la plus directe de l'expression : l'invention des SIGNES. Je veux y reconnaître aussi le souci primordial d'Henri Michaux : se servir d'un langage qui lui soit propre (Bertelé 1966, 359).

Michaux's profound frustration with the French language also led in part to his creation of his "signes." With the invention of these verbal-visual graphics, Michaux created a pseudo language that did not signify in Chinese or in French but brought Michaux a step closer to creating a nomenclature that would be unique to him.

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[44] For the purposes of this discussion, an object designates a form made up of words, images, or objects that may, however not be complete.   Conversely, an image is a representation of a thought or a collection of objects that is complete.

In addition to these word-object combinations, the calligram, a term most often associated with Guillaume Apollinaire's work, designates a stable, and conventional combination of the verbal and the visual. The calligram is not rooted in the ideogram or the pictogram; instead, it is a word-image form that can be described as a drawing of a thought (Massin 1973, 157). A calligram depicts both visually and textually the same concept—written or typed words form an image which Apollinaire's *Du coton dans les oreilles* illustrates (Fig. 23).

At first glance, the fundamental difference between a concrete poem and a calligram is that in a calligram, words dictate form. That is, words do not get cut off as they do in a concrete poem, like Finlay's *au pair girl*. In a calligram, words and language control the shape of an image that the poet draws with words.

Écoute s'il pleut écoute s'il pleut

puis	sol	des	con	la
é	dats	Flan	fon	pluie
cou	a	dres	dez-	si
tez	veu	à	vous	ten
tom	gles	l'	a	dre
ber	per	a	vec	la
la	dus	go	l'	pluie
pluie	par	nie	ho	si
si	mi	sous	ri	dou
ten	les	la	zon	ce
dre	che	pluie	beaux	
et	vaux	fi	ê	
si	de	ne	tres	
dou	fri	la	in	
ce	se	pluie	vi	
	sous	si	si	
	la	ten	bles	
	lu	dre	sous	
	ne	et	la	
	li	si	pluie	
	qui	dou	fi	
	de	ce	ne	

Les longs boyaux où tu chemines
Adieu les cagnats d'artilleurs
Tu retrouveras
La tranchée en première ligne
Les éléphants des pare-éclats
Une girouette maligne
Et les regards des guetteurs las

Figure 23. Guillaume Apollinaire, *Du coton dans les oreilles* (1925)
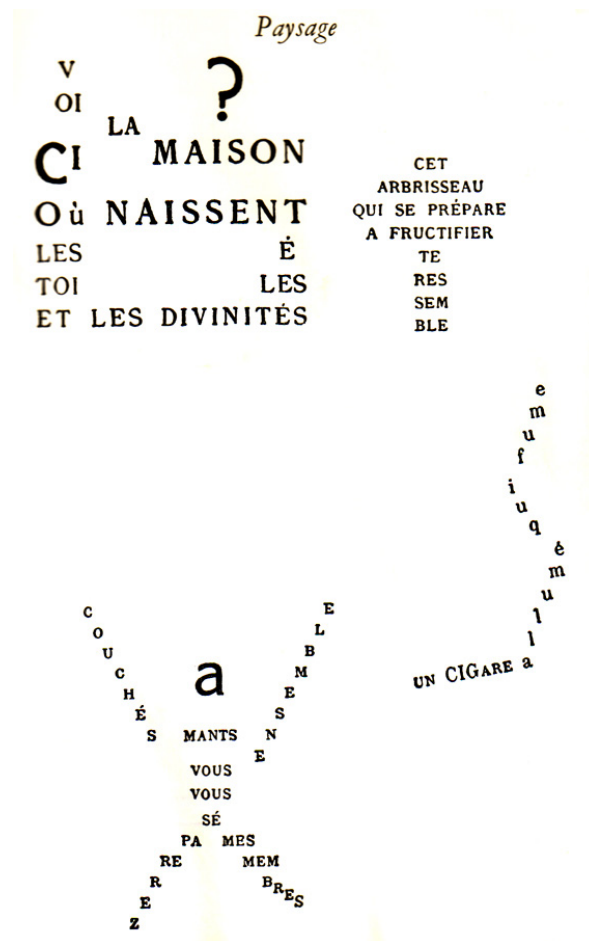
Paysage

Figure 24. Guillaume Apollinaire, *Paysage* (1925)

The same technique is repeated in *Paysage*, where words create the shape of visual images by the arrangement of words as well as the varying sizes of the letters. Along the lines of the pictograph or hieroglyph, both the words and image depict simultaneously the same word or thought.

As Foucault explains, the calligram is a "playful" form, one that "efface[s] the oldest oppositions of our alphabetical civilization: to show and name; to shape and say; to reproduce and to articulate; to imitate and to signify…" (1982, 21). Indeed, as Foucault explains, the calligram is "tautological" because it repeats what it says through what it shows and vice versa, yet it affords the possibility of reinforcing language with a visual component (1982, 21).

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Foucault considers Magritte's word-object painting, *La Trahision des images*, to be a calligram (Fig. 25). The painting's composition does not adhere to the traditional form of the calligram and in this way *La Trahision des images* is unconventional. The work in fact names and shows but claims *not* to name what it shows and vice versa. As a result, Magritte's calligram is a non-traditional one and it is subversive in its construction. The painting's legend, the very words which appear below the image of the pipe, seems to contradict what appears directly above it.
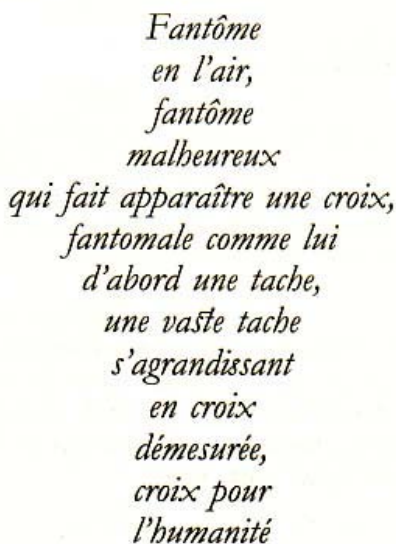
Figure 25. René Magritte, *La Trahison des images* (1929)

Much like Apollinaire's calligrams, Michaux's fragment "Fantôme," [45] published in *Quatre cents hommes en croix: Journal d'un dessinateur. Fragments* (1956), is a calligram in the more traditional sense of the term—where the words form a visual image that duplicates what the poet-painter describes in words (Fig. 26). While Michaux's "Fantôme" can be compared with Finlay's *au pair girl*, the primary difference between these two works is that Michaux's "Fantôme" is made of a complete text. Words are not cut off in order to form the image: the *fantôme*; "Fantôme" is thus a complete text even though Michaux refers to the texts and word-

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[45] For the purposes of this study, I refer to the untitled fragment as "Fantôme"; however, in Michaux's text, he does not title this poem that appears to be a calligram.

image combinations in this project as "fragments." Similarly, Michaux's quasi-calligram can also be contrasted with Magritte's *La Trahison des image* because the goal of "Fantôme" was not to create a gap between words and images; instead, it appears to suggest a close relation between them, namely their overlap. Michaux's construction is thus much like Apollinaire's *Du coton dans les oreilles* and *Paysages*. Although Michaux's fragment "Fantôme" is a complete text and object and it does not appear to subvert language in order to form a gap between words and images, it is perhaps ironic that Michaux calls this work a "fragment" since it is in fact complete. Further, Michaux does not alter the size of his font in his visual image, a technique Apollinaire used in his calligrams. Nevertheless, the words used to create "Fantôme" and Apollinaire's calligrams create an image, and the text and image complement one another, forming a complete and cohesive unit: a word-image composite.

> Fantôme
> en l'air,
> fantôme
> malheureux
> qui fait apparaître une croix,
> fantomale comme lui
> d'abord une tache,
> une vaste tache
> s'agrandissant
> en croix
> démesurée,
> croix pour
> l'humanité

Figure 26. Excerpt from a page in *Quatre cents hommes en croix: Journal d'un dessinateur. Fragments* (1956)

As Foucault notes, the calligram "never speaks and represents at the same moment"; viewing and reading happen in several steps, one forces a simultaneous apprehension of the

other, making both the text and the image an art of time and space as a result of the multimedia nature of the calligram (1982, 24-25). Foucault asserts that the calligram has a "triple role"; he explains that the calligram's role is "to augment the alphabet, to repeat something without the aid of rhetoric," and "to trap things in a double cipher" [46] (1982, 20). The calligram functions like the triple continuum in Michaux's *Mouvements*. Further, a calligram is a perfect example of what Gilbert Durand calls "[la] redondance perfectionnante" in his text on symbolism (1964, 10). The verbal-visual echo produced in a calligram can in fact demonstrate a perfect redundancy because naming with words explains an image while an image created from the very words explaining it repeats visually what appears textually. Rather than pure redundancy, the reciprocity of words and images in the calligram results in a multi-dimensional verbal-visual construction that perfects the expression.

The construction of Magritte's *Les Mots et les images* along with examples of word-image formations provide a context for many of Michaux's poetic-pictorial projects. In a number of instances, Michaux's combinations are constructed in much the same way as concrete poetry and calligrams. What appears to bring together all of these different combinations is the consistent fusion of words and images that results in a simultaneous experience of reading and viewing in time and space.

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[46] A cipher can be defined as a secret method of writing, such as a coded or cryptic message. In this way, the third role of the calligram, "to trap things" in what Foucault calls a "double cipher," can be explained by the word-image relation in the form of a calligram. Because the words and images in a calligram trap our visual perception and sense, there is thus a "double cipher." This double cipher is constituted initially of words and images. To go beyond Foucault's assertion, there may be a triple cipher that is the result of the text, the image, and the image-text: the calligram.

2.3   Michaux and Magritte: Using Language in Image

While Michaux and Magritte combined words and images in visual art, their approach to bringing together these two forms of expression was very different. Magritte's word-object paintings were a way for the Belgian Surrealist to explore, to question, and even to destroy what appeared to Magritte to be an arbitrary relation between words and images. Magritte's investigation of language is most evident in his *Les Mots et les images*, the word-object paintings he made between September 1927 and July 1930,[47] and the way he titled these and other compositions. Conversely, Michaux's use of language in visual art came out of the poet-painter's desire to use a form of expression that was free, where meaning was not limited by language. Michaux's search for such a language is clear in his post-1950 Asian-inspired text-and-image projects as well as much of the graphic art he produced throughout his career. In his visual work, Michaux avoids language rather deliberately, notably by leaving his artwork untitled or, in rare instances, titling his compositions, but in an "open-ended" way (Jones 2003, 51). Instead of attempting to undermine the principles governing language as Magritte did, Michaux subverted language by avoiding it. Although the two Belgians used language in art, notably in titles, subtitles, legends, and words, in rather opposite ways, their combinations were a way for them to explore the relation of language to image.

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[47] In "A Razor is a Razor," Frederik Leen explains that, "Words chiefly appear in Magritte's paintings during a relatively short period of no more than three years. He produced forty-two paintings with words between 1927 and 1931, six in 1927, twenty in 1928, twelve in 1929, three in 1930 and one in 1931. Text is also used in a few paintings after 1931, mostly reworkings of earlier themes" (1998) 26.

Since words must be used to explain an image, language and discourse are imbedded in graphic art and consequently emerge from the visual elements of a painting. For this reason, Michel Regis notes that, "il n'y a pas d'images sans texte" (1986, n. pag). Similarly, Butor argues in *Les mots dans la peinture* that both literary works and graphic representations are centered on two primary components: first, the literary oeuvre is formed by the relation between two associated texts: the corpus and its title; second, the pictorial oeuvre is the association of an image and of a name (1969, 11-12). This association in painting implies that there is always a presence of word and image in visual art. Further, the "name" in the pictorial oeuvre can come in the form of a title, subtitle, legend, or from the use of words within a graphic work.

Titles, of course, function as a way for an artist to communicate a thought or an idea about a visual work. Arthur Danto says that a title is not simply a name but a way to read or interpret an image; he warns however that a title "may not always be helpful" (1981, 3). In the context of Michaux and Magritte, there are a number of titling methods the two Belgians used in their art. In some works, they used highly specific titles. For instance, Magritte's *Ceci est un morceau de fromage* (1936 or 1937) depicts a slice of brie on a canvas which stands on a pedestal housed under a glass dome (Fig. 27). Titles can also be general or open-ended, as in *La fleur rouge* (1958) or *Un poulpe ou une ville* (1926) (Fig. 28-29). In many instances, Michaux titled his work by the medium he used to create it, calling a work "aquarelle" or "gouache"; Michaux also left much of his work untitled, as simply "sans titre." In addition to these kinds of titles, Magritte often wrote titles that were a form of commentary which is the case in *La Trahison des images* (Fig. 25). In this composition, Magritte sets up a debate between the legend and the object in the painting. The work's title appears to explain this battle between the object, the painted pipe, and the legend, "Ceci n'est pas une pipe," which are forced to confront one

another, primarily because of the way Magritte juxtaposed them within the confines of the painting's frame. This object-legend opposition calls language and image relations into question, evoking multiple discourses and thus a commentary from the seemingly simple words Magritte used in his title and legend. Finally, Magritte used titles that made reference to other paintings. Magritte's *La Joconde* (1962), for instance, refers to Leonardo's portrait simply through the use of words: visually, the two compositions have nothing to do with one another (Fig. 30). Another example of this titling method is Magritte's *Ceci est un morceau de fromage* which clearly refers to *La Trahison des images*. Although this work does not include text, other than its title, *Ceci est un morceau de fromage* recalls Magritte's image with the pipe and the legend "Ceci n'est pas une pipe." By using a title that resembles such a subversive legend, Magritte refers to his earlier work. Further, his image with the cheese contradicts the painting with the pipe—a painting that contradicts itself by itself. Using titles and legends in this way, Magritte complicates the relation of text to image and emphasizes the way in which language in images evokes language.

Figure 27. René Magritte, *Ceci est un morceau de fromage* **(1936 or 1937)**
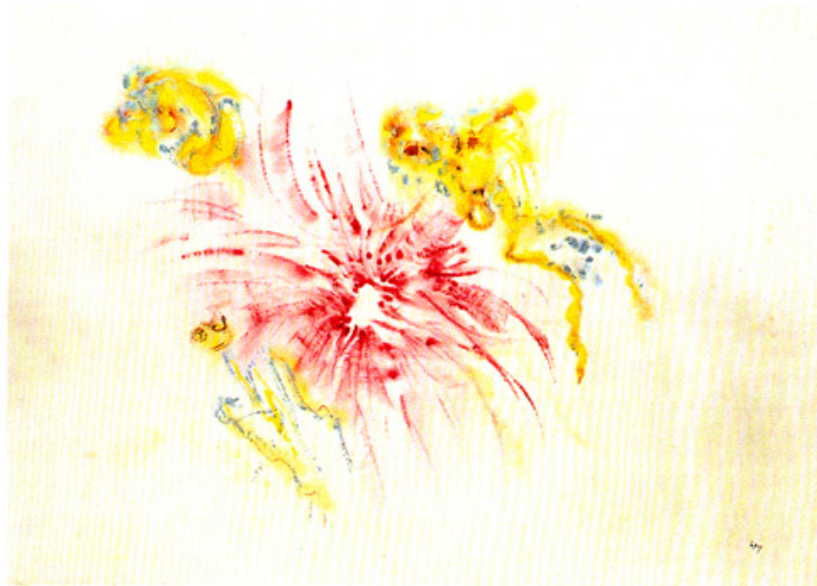
Figure 28. *La fleur rouge* **(1958)**
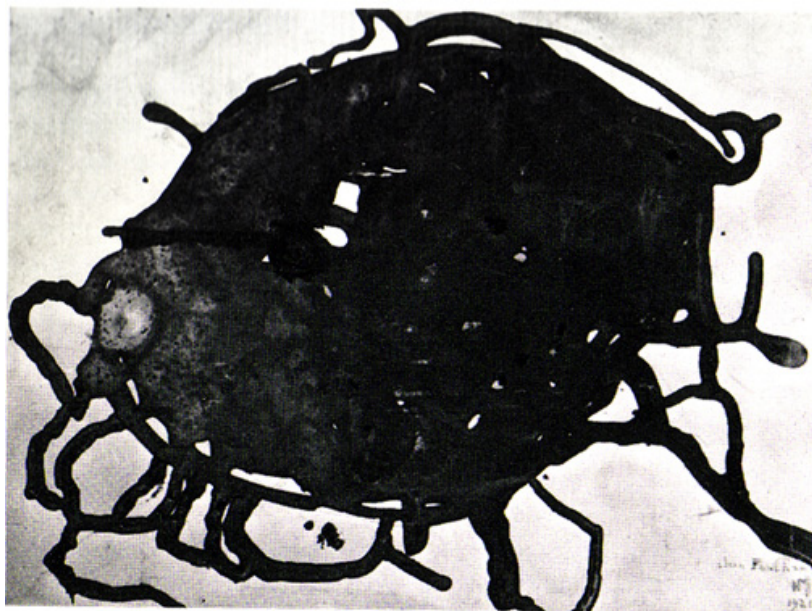
Figure 29. *Un poulpe ou une ville* **(1926)**
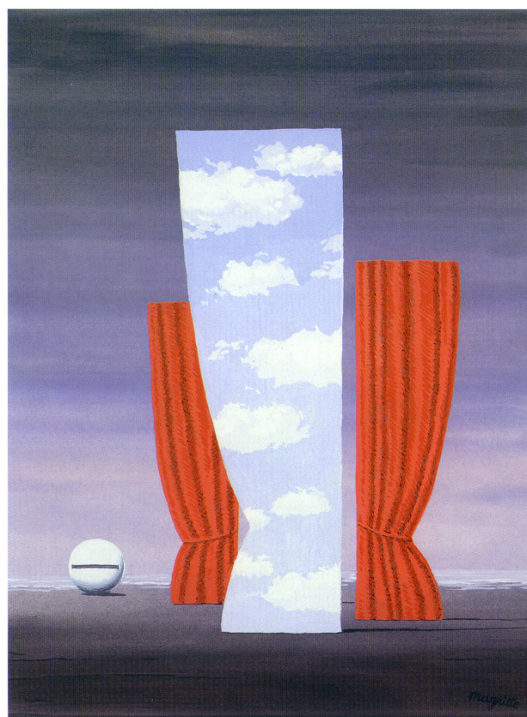
Figure 30. René Magritte, *La Joconde* **(1962)**

Like the use of a title, subtitles, a secondary title, and legends, texts housed within the painting's frame which are generally located at the bottom of an image, orient, or in some cases, disorient, the reader/viewer's understanding of a work. Subtitles or legends can often take the place of a title, form a dialogue between the title, subtitle, and legend, or further explain a title. Whereas Magritte used legends in some of his graphic work, Michaux did not; however, in some of his text-and-image works and one of his travel journals, Michaux used subtitles that explained further his title: *Ecuador. Journal de voyage*, *Misérable miracle. La mescaline*, and *Quatre cents hommes en croix. Journal d'un dessinateur. Fragments*. Like a title, these textual components can be highly specific, naming an object or subject the artist depicts, or they can be very general. In either case, they are a point of departure for interpretation which begins a pictorial narrative.

Magritte "very early grew bored with painting as an end in itself" which led him to introduce language into his graphic art (Foucault 1982, 2). Magritte's inquiry into language also caused him to explore the "arbitrary nature of language" which he viewed as a cause for "philosophical misunderstanding" (Kern 1975, 44). As a result, Magritte called language into question, repeatedly attempting to break down the semiotic link between an object and its given name which he articulates in *Les Mots et les images*. Questioning the relation of words to images, Magritte confronted language head on and put words on trial, as he does by juxtaposing an image of a pipe with the words "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" in *La Trahison des images*.

In his word-object paintings, Magritte combined ordinary, everyday objects that can be easily named in unlikely combinations with words. His compositions produce a "disorienting effect" on the reader/viewer due to the way Magritte appears to label certain objects (Foucault, 1982, 3). In *La Clef des songes* (1930), Magritte puts into practice his first proposition in *Les Mots et les images* in which he explains that, "un object ne tient pas tellement à son nom qu'on

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ne puisse lui en trouver un autre qui lui convienne mieux" (Fig. 31) (1929, 32-33). These compositions communicate the Belgian Surrealist's conception of how words and images are related and unrelated simultaneously. By calling an object by a name that differs from its given name, Magritte creates a new word-object relation while he also creates a gap between an object and its given name, forcing the reader/viewer to question the relation between a text and an image. Further, Magritte's use of language and image reveals a highly calculated, non-automatic process of bringing words and images together. In this way, Magritte's method was arguably the very opposite of surrealist automatism, in fact, it was the "reverse of automatic"[48] (Matthews 1962, 143).

In addition to using titles and legends in his paintings, another way Magritte incorporated language was by painting words on his canvases and when he did this, he generally juxtaposed them with specific images or non-specific shapes or forms. *La Clef des songes* is one example of this technique. In this composition, the concrete objects and concrete words Magritte presents together are not generally used to represent one another—there is a reciprocal relation that is a non-relation between these words and objects. For instance, below his image of a burning candle, Magritte painted the term "le plafond." This juxtaposition strategy, which appears to join two unrelated words and images, is often Magritte's technique for questioning the relation of a word to an object. At the same time, this formula raises more than a question of language-image relations, it evokes twelve words and twelve objects (and sometimes ideas). Since the six painted objects can be called by names other than the ones painted beneath them (either by the

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[48] By calling Magritte's process the "reverse of automatic" I mean to say that his creative process was not rooted in surrealist automatism; instead, it is a highly calculated, highly thought-out process of creative expression. For a further discussion, see J. H. Matthews, "The Case for Surrealist Painting," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 21:2 (1962): 139-147.

ones we know or any other name), these six objects evoke at least six words. This equation thus yields six objects and six (absent) words. The opposite is also true, the six painted words do not present the objects painted above them and consequently, the six words evoke six (absent) objects. The sum of this verbal-visual equation yields a minimum of twelve words and twelve objects.

In much the same way that Magritte used language in his painting *La Clef des songes*, he also incorporates words in *L'Apparition* (1928). In this composition, Magritte labeled forms with words thereby assigning meaning to these forms while at the same time indicating an arbitrary relation between words and objects (Fig. 32). While *La Clef des songes* relies on concrete words and images *L'Apparition* presents words in forms that look like thought-bubbles. Magritte's use of language is more open-ended because he does not force a relation between the words he painted and specific object in his composition. He merely suggests objects through words. As a result, the reader/viewer must envision the objects evoked by the words. In both of these examples, Magritte's use of language in an image creates a disorienting relation between the verbal and the visual and evokes numerous discourses on word-image relations.

Figure 31. René Magritte, *La Clef des songes* (1930)
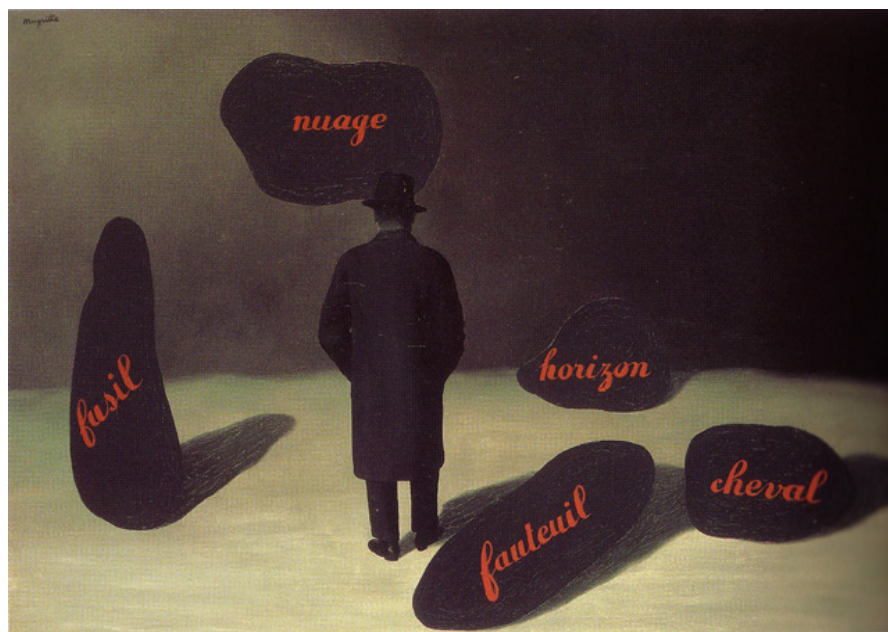
Figure 32. René Magritte, *L'Apparition* (1928)

Early in Michaux's career, he, like Magritte, struggled with using one form of expression in his work. Michaux became disillusioned with language and attempted to escape from it; however, he did not abandon language. Not only did he continue to write, but he also combined words and images. By mixing the verbal and the visual, Michaux's work demonstrates a desire to create a language of images. Forming such a language of images is particularly evident in Michaux's "signe" projects that reflect a continued search for a language between pure forms of linguistic expression and visual art. Michaux's Asian-inspired characters, of course, suggest a language of images based on Chinese calligraphy, hieroglyphs, ideographs, and pictographs but because they are not a real form of language, these characters are non-representational.

Unlike Magritte's visual art, Michaux's graphic work did not include ordinary, everyday objects; instead, his compositions employ non-representational, non-mimetic forms that are generally abstract. In addition to these kinds of language-art projects, Michaux placed a distance between his paintings and language through a variety of techniques, notably with his use of titles. Michaux's method of titling attempted to avoid language and it also tried to avoid assigning a specific meaning to an image. Although Michaux did not use words in a calculated way like Magritte, the absence of language nevertheless imposes a linguistic feature on his artwork.

Michaux's general or open-ended titles, in particular, reveal the poet-painter's desire to distance his work from language; these kinds of titles also position his visual art so that forms can be interpreted as any number of things. Indeed, as Pacquement explains, "On ne dit pas, devant un tableau de Michaux: ceci n'est pas cela, pas plus que: ceci est cela. Mais plutôt: ceci pourrait bien être ceci ou cela, et ceci et cela" (1993, 296). This is the case in Michaux's *Un poulpe ou une ville*. The title of this painting problematizes Michaux's use of language in image, notably because this open-ended title can be interpreted in any number of ways. Like Magritte's

La Clef des songes and the first proposition in *Les Mots et les images*, Michaux's *Un poulpe ou une ville* can represent an octopus, a city, or represent metaphorically a city as an octopus. Michaux's use of language in his title confirms Magritte's proposition, that "un object ne tient pas tellement à son nom qu'on ne puisse lui en trouver un autre qui lui convienne mieux" (1929, 32-33). At the same time, Michaux's title suggests that the image he painted could be any number of objects—or even ideas. Michaux's use of language in his images suggests that, unlike Magritte, his approach to combining the verbal and the visual was spontaneous and automatic, and in particular, not-calculated. In this way, Michaux appears to be more concerned with the process of creating art than with the product. In addition to these methods of titling, the paintings Michaux titles by medium, and those he calls "sans titre,"[49] are examples of his attempt to avoid any kind of "nomenclature" (Rigaud-Drayton 2005, 118).

Magritte and Michaux introduced language into their images, either with or without an agenda, and their use of language in art automatically suggests a relation between words and images. Although the variety of "pictorial strategies" used by the two Belgians differs, both cases of words in images inspire a discourse (Williams 1990, 152). Magritte's presentation of objects and unlikely names illustrates a "fissure in representation itself, the bands, layers, and fault-lines of discourse, the blank space between the text and the image" (Mitchell 1994, 69). This is also true of Michaux's compositions since his use of language in image creates layers of meaning by using general terms to name specific or shapes.

While Magritte's use of language in painting was to defy and disrupt relations between words and images, he shows the arbitrariness of language in his highly calculated juxtapositions.

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[49] Numerous examples of Michaux's untitled works can be found in *Untitled Passages by Henri Michaux*.

Magritte's close attention to naming objects in his compositions as well as the titles he wrote lead to a number of discourses between words and objects and also in the reader/viewer's interpretation. Unlike Magritte, Michaux's practice, of avoiding language in his graphic work produced a similar effect in his paintings. By avoiding language, a text emerges and it becomes clear that words are imbedded in images. These approaches to using language in art result in a language of images that conveys simultaneously a textual component and a visual one.

2.4   Michaux in Search of Language

Although Michaux used language in nearly all of his projects, his frustration with it began early and continued throughout his career. In addition to his linguistic troubles being rooted in his Belgian nationality and the language conflicts within Belgium during Michaux's childhood, he criticized the French language in a number of instances which explains why he continuously searched for one that had no limitations.

Based on Michaux's relationship with the French language, he "has never been the natural ally of words" (Broome 1977, 127). In the first part of *Quelques renseignements,* Michaux describes "writing and reading as liberating voyages of expatriation" while in the latter portion of the text he alludes to travel and graphic art as a way to escape words (Rigaud-Drayton 2005, 23). Michaux's universe, which flirted briefly with a love for writing, shifted and his "logocentric desire"[50] quickly faded (Krieger 1992, 11). The obligation to language is what forced Michaux to turn from it, a move he explains this way, "Né, élevé, instruit dans un milieu

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[50] Derrida argues in *Of Grammatology* that the "logocentric" desire is present in "all Western methods of analysis, explication, reading, or interpretation" (1974) 46.

et une culture uniquement du 'verbal' je peins *pour me déconditionner*" (*ER, OC*, III, 543). For

Michaux, language was no more than a "hand-me-down for the masses" rather than a "tool for

knowledge or self-exploration" (Dickman 1999, n. pag).

In addition to gaining a new perspective on painting, Michaux found in China and the

East the opportunity to explore the self while language, or the "immense préfabriqué qui passe de

génération en génération," did not (*ER, OC,* III, 550). Even before his trip to the Far East,

Michaux expressed his frustration with language. As early as 1927 in *Qui je fus* Michaux

criticized the French language by exclaiming his hatred for Boileau; he writes:

> Ah! que je te hais Boileau
> Boiteux, Boignetière, Boiloux, Boigermain,
> Boirops, Boitel, Boivéry,
> Boicamille, Boit de travers
> Bois ça (*OC*, I, 111).[51]

Boileau, best known for his *L'Art poétique* (1674), dedicated his life to defending the poetic

ideal that he believed to be founded in reason and truth. Boileau's doctrine of the "idéal

classique" relied on the imitation of nature in order to create truth or reality in literature or art.

Boileau's "idéal classique" condemned any form of disguise, pretension, burlesque, imagination,

or fantasy and turned to ancient writers and reason in the quest for truth and sincerity in literature

and art. Boileau's seminal text itself had to serve as a model of perfection in order to

demonstrate the truths in the arts of which he spoke. Michaux's method conflicts sharply with

the idea of producing a work with the finished product in mind; for Boileau, the act was less

important than the final work. Michaux therefore mocked Boileau because he was one of the

figures who reshaped modern French into the language that it became and is today—and it can

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[51] For a further discussion of the relation between Michaux and Boileau, see Rigaud Drayton,
(2005) 90-93.

be argued that in Michaux's mind Boileau's influence on French is one of the reasons Michaux struggled with it. In *L'Art poétique*, Boileau writes:

> Quelque sujet qu'on traite, ou plaisant, ou sublime,
> Que toujours le bon sens s'accorde avec la rime :
> L'un l'autre vainement ils semblent se haïr ;
> La rime est une esclave et ne doit qu'obéir.
> Lorsqu'à la bien chercher d'abord on s'évertue,
> L'esprit à la trouver aisément s'habitue ;
> Au joug de la raison sans peine elle fléchit
> Et loin de la gêner, la sert et l'enrichit.
> Mais lorsqu'on néglige, elle devient rebelle,
> Et pour la rattraper le sens court après elle.
> Aimez donc la raison : que toujours vos écrits
> Empruntent d'elle seule et leur lustre et leur prix.
> […]
> Surtout qu'en vos écrits la langue révérée
> Dans vos plus grands excès vous soit toujours sacrée.
> En vain vous me frappez d'un son mélodieux,
> Si le terme est impropre ou le tour vicieux :
> Mon esprit n'admet point un pompeux barbarisme,
> Ni d'un vers ampoulé l'orgueilleux solécisme.
> Sans la langue, en un mot, l'auteur le plus divin
> Est toujours, quoi qu'il fasse, un méchant écrivain.
> (Chant I, v. 27-48, 147-174)

Boileau's attention to rules and composition in his work conflicts sharply with Michaux's idea of what literary and artistic creation should be—a free form of expression. For this reason Michaux attacks Boileau's classical ideal by using made-up words—words whose bastardized forms mock the classical poet and his *alexandrins*. Boileau believed in a rigorous use of rules in language and he articulates this by writing, "Que toujours le bon sens s'accorde avec la rime" and throughout this text the words "esclave," "obéir," "sert" and "la raison" underscore a rigidity in Boileau's idea of the ideal use of language. Michaux's conception of language usage was not rigid but just the opposite. He invented words and combined French with other languages such

as English and Spanish in his texts, as he did for instance in *Ecuador*; a practice Boileau would have argued against.

In the second part of Boileau's text, he places language on a pedestal when he writes, "sans la langue, en mot, l'auteur le plus divin [e]st toujours, quoi qu'il fasse, un méchant écrivain." Boileau would have judged Michaux a "méchant écrivain" based on the poet-painter's mixing of words, languages and art and for his critique of the French language. As a result of Boileau and his contemporary "hommes de lettres" involved in codifying French grammar and vocabulary during the seventeenth century, Michaux "repeatedly described" language "as an oppressively monolithic, rigid, and permanent structure through architectural metaphors which contrast with the unstable fluidity of its speakers" (Rigaud-Drayton 2005, 61).

Michaux struggled less with speech[52] than written language because speech was more fluid. If Michaux liked any part of language it would be speech and its "unstable fluidity" (Rigaud-Drayton 2005, 61). Words, Michaux wrote, "font toujours trop dire. Ça mène loin, les mots ("Parenthèse" *OC*, I, 1027). In this way, words say too much and move away from what they intend to signify. They thus alienate ideas from meaning and signification. Further, Michaux speaks of language as a "grande machine prétentieuse, maladroite qui ne faisait que tout fausser" (*GEE*, *OC*, III, 345). Michaux does not view language as a pure form of representation of reality and truth; instead, he sees it as unwieldy and as a means of expression that distorts communication. Considering Michaux's relation to language in this way, his

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[52] In this investigation of Michaux and language, it is important to keep in mind that speech and language, according to Lacan, are not the same thing—language is a fixed structure while speech is not. Darian Leader and Judy Groves (1995) 78. This distinction, however, predates Lacan. It in fact can be attributed to Saussure and can be considered the founding gesture of structural linguistics**.**

rejection of classical rules along with his need to travel as a form of escape, he appears to be Romantic.[53]

Despite Michaux's profound admiration of the painterly process, he came to realize that painting had its own limitations just as language did; rarely, however, did Michaux speak of such limitations in painting. When he did, it was primarily in the context of a particular medium. To take one example, Michaux preferred certain media to others in painting, most notably those that reacted more spontaneously with the canvas, paper, or other surface to which it was applied. Speaking about gouache, for instance, he writes:

> La gouache *résiste* davantage à l'eau. Elle fait son petit
> mortier contre les évanescences qui la guettent. Elle tente de
> respecter les inventions de l'auteur, du respectable auteur!
> Ne me convient pas. (*PAS, OC*, II, 330).

Additionally, painting does not allow Michaux to describe in the same way as language does; he says, "Je voudrais pouvoir dessiner les effleuves qui circulent entre les personnes"; this type of description is possible with words (*PAS, OC*, II, 325). Because Michaux did not abandon language, his literary projects and art together aimed toward creating stasis, similar to the balance he described in Chinese thought and life. Despite the poet-painter's critique of language, it nevertheless fascinated him, especially languages of the Orient (Bréchon 2005, 58). Further, Michaux gauged a foreign language on two features: writing and speech; writing by the line and speech by speed (Mathieu and Collot 1987, 145). For instance, Michaux saw Arabic as a trip, whose written line was made up of a series of lines, thereby constructing a voyage (Mathieu and

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[53] Although Michaux appears to be Romantic, Bréchon argues that Michaux "ne cherche pas à rivaliser avec Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Nerval, Flaubert, les grands écrivains voyageurs du romantisme. Il cherche bien lui aussi à être étonné, mais pas par les mêmes spectacles, et pas de la même manière." For a further discussion, see Bréchon (2005) 23.

Collot 1987, 145). Michaux's interest in the line and in speed in Eastern languages recalls his

deep association with artistic practice.

Michaux's dislike of the French language led him to explore other languages such as

English. In "Observations" published in *Passages*, Michaux created a collection of maxims and

in this text he comments on spiders, cars, and sincerity in the form of fragmented bits he

assembled in this work. To take one example from "Observations," he writes about his interest

in English and his relation to French:

> Alors j'ai envie de lire l'anglais, langue fuyante. Le français m'est
> devenu à moitié étranger, culotté, outrecuidant presque. Je ne suis
> plus à sa hauteur (*PAS*, *OC*, II, 346).

Michaux's desire to read English, a language that is "fuyante," is in character with what he liked

in languages of the East—line, speed—in other words, action. French however, he describes as

half foreign, perhaps as a result of his rejection of his Belgian nationality and all that came with

it. He also writes that French became "cheeky" (culotté) and even arrogant to him; it is in fact

the complete opposite of how he speaks of his relationship to Chinese language and culture

which he esteems as modest and reserved. Moreover, Michaux says that "je ne suis plus à sa

hauteur" referring to the French language, explicitly revealing his resistance to this language

which is often too correct and focuses too heavily on good usage.

Prior to Michaux's reflections on English, his fascination with the Chinese language

developed during his 1930-1931 trip to the Far East. In *Un Barbare en Asie*, he writes:

> Mais il y a un charme, non pas plus grand [qu'une mélodie chinoise],
> mais plus constant peut-être, c'est la langue chinoise parlée.
> Comparées à cette langue, les autres sont pédantes, affli-
> gées de mille ridicules, d'une concasserie monotone à faire
> pouffer, des langues de militaires. Voilà ce qu'elles sont.
> La langue chinoise, elle, n'a pas été faite comme les
> autres, forcées par une syntaxe bousculante et ordonnatrice.

> Les mots n'en ont pas été construits durement, avec auto-
> rité, méthode, redondance, par l'agglomération de retentis-
> santes syllabes, ni par voie d'étymologie. Non, des mots
> d'une seule syllabe, et cette syllabe résonne avec incerti-
> tude. La phrase chinoise ressemble à de faibles exclama-
> tions. Un mot ne contient guère plus de trois lettres.
> […]
> Enfin, pour être encore plus près de la nature, cette
> langue est chantée. Il y a quatre tons en langue mandarine,
> huit dans les dialectes du sud de la Chine. Rien de la
> monotonie des autres langues. Avec le chinois, on monte,
> on descend, on remonte, on est à mi-chemin, on s'élance.
> Elle reste, elle joue encore en pleine nature (*OC*, I, 361).

Chinese inspires Michaux's linguistic fascination in a way that opposes his perception of French. He sees other languages as pedantic and strict, as opposed to languages of the Far East or of art that are forms of communication he associates with pleasure and, importantly, nature. Other languages are forced whereas Chinese does not dominate or dictate—it is close to nature and its tonal qualities are not monotonous, like other languages. In fact, he observes that in the Chinese language, "on monte, on descend, on remonte…" (*BA, OC*, I, 361). There is thus a diversity within the language's visual and spoken characteristics. These descriptions of Chinese recall clearly Michaux's *Aventures de lignes* and his graphic art methodology that incorporated movement and action—all of which take him away from French and the Western world. Rigaud-Drayton argues that Michaux "believed that the natural expressivity which he would find in Asian languages would be that of the Other within the self" and rightfully so; Michaux searched for an Otherness in Chinese art and language, a surrogate or alter-identity that he adopted in his creative practice (2005, 64). Michaux's interest in language of the East is in line with his

engagement with Tantric artists.[54] Michaux's interest in this type of art—in which sculpture and painting are considered languages and rely on verbal, corporeal, and pictorial languages—incorporates elements Michaux admired in Chinese. Tantric art was not a language "du monde" but instead one that "est le monde" (*Art Tantrique* 1970, n. pag).   Just as Michaux searched to achieve a balance between art and language, East and West, he sought balance between himself and the world (*Art Tantrique* 1970, n. pag). Michaux's search for a universal language is clearly inscribed in his writings, albeit in fragments, and in his graphic works. In *Épreuves, exorcismes* (1945) Michaux spoke of "un alphabet qui eût pu servir dans l'autre monde, *dans n'importe quel monde*" (*OC*, I, 785). The language Michaux sought to develop was based on the two systems of language Saussure defines in his *Cours de linguistique général*: an ideographic one and a phonetic one (1959, 25-26).   Michaux's fusion of the logocentric West with the visual, ideographic language of the East looked to merge these two linguistic systems.

Even before Michaux's interest in calligraphy and the Chinese language developed, he designed his own form of ideograms in his work, notably in his early *Alphabets* (Fig. 1-2). Further, Michaux's quest for a language other than his own is present in his poetry—as early as his first text. In *Chronique de l'aiguilleur* (1922), initially published in *Le Disque vert*, Michaux referred to the "Espéranto."[55] The poet-painter writes:

> —Mais nous, en littérature, en peinture « LA MAISON C'EST QUATRE MURS, UNE FENÊTRE, UNE PORTE, ET DU RESTE JE M'EN FOUS… »
>   Hygiène excellente !
>   Le cubisme, en peinture et sculpture, naît du même besoin

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[54] Michaux wrote texts in various exhibition catalogues, including one in *Art tantrique* (1970). The exhibition was held in Paris at the Gallery Le Point Cardinal, 17 February through March, 1970. Texts in the catalogue include those by Henri Michaux, Octavio Paz, and Souren Melikian. Michaux identified with Tantric art and artists because of their close relationship to and appreciation of nature, primitivism, and the East.
[55] Bertelé wrote about Michaux's reference to the "espéranto lyrique" (1975) 12.

actuel d'universalité et de simplicité que l'Espéranto (*OC,* I, 12).[56]

Michaux's profound frustration not only with language but also with representational art becomes his initial point of departure for his inquiry into language and also his desire to discover another form of expression. The "Hygiène excellente" of language and representational art—their need to represent reality—troubles Michaux. In the second part of his text, Michaux compares the desire of the Esperanto to the painterly style of cubism, which moved away from representational, mimetic art to a more abstract form of expression, one with which Michaux would soon identify as well as explore. Further, Michaux wrote:

> Il [l'homme] fignole, construit de multiples langues, et aux langues fait
> des centaines d'argots et de patois.
> Mais maintenant: ESPÉRANTO (*CA, OC*, I, 13).

Michaux's mention of the "Espéranto" makes it clear that the poet-painter has explored the possibility of finding another language, and certainly that he is not the first, and it is for this reason that he considers himself an "Espéranto." He will search for a language of his own. Further, Michaux's association with "Espéranto" at once identifies his desire to create a language other than his own and provides an explanation for his invented words, sounds, and linguistic creations in his text such as "Glu et Gli." At this time, Michaux has not yet begun to paint and it appears that his experimentation with language is thus a precursor to his future engagement in visual art.

Espéranto comes from the linguistic studies in the early 1900s by the Polish linguist Ludwik Zamenhof who went under the pseudonym of Doktor Espéranto (*OC*, I, 1025).

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[56] For a further discussion on Michaux's reference to Esperanto, see Rigaud-Drayton (2005) 93- 94.

Zamenhof published the first artificial language manual called *Langue internationale* in which he defined the "Fundamento esperanto,"—in it he outlined sixteen fundamental rules and nine hundred and seventeen basic root principles of the espéranto (*OC*, I, 1025). The term "espéranto," coming from the verb "espérer," relates to Michaux as the "espéranto lyrique" of which Bertelé wrote (*OC*, I, 1025). Because Michaux looked for another language, as a result of his developing difficulty with French, he did indeed hope to find another form of expression. Michaux's vision of a universal language could refer conversely to his hope of a language "d'un seul" that would have been unique to him (*OC*, I, 1158).

Michaux's dream of a universal language or even one that would be understood only by him has its roots in his childhood (*Henri Michaux*: Livorno catalogue, Mihailovich-Dickman 2001, 10). Michaux dreamed of a language that "would be at once intimate and universal" (Rigaud-Drayton 2005, 1). Early on Michaux reflected on the French language and the way it was impersonal and exclusionary. Referring to his childhood, Michaux explains:

> Un problème majeur pour moi est là-dessous.
> Enfant, je ne comprenais pas les autres. Et ils ne me comprenaient pas. Je les trouvais absurdes. On était étranger. Depuis, ça s'est amélioré. Néanmoins, l'impression qu'on ne se comprend pas réellement n'a pas disparu. Ah ! s'il y avait une langue universelle avec laquelle on se comprît vraiment tous, hommes, chiens, enfants, et non pas un peu, non pas avec réserve. Le désir, l'appel et le mirage d'une vraie langue directe subsistent en moi malgré tout (*FEFE*, *OC*, III, 459).

Michaux's experience with language throughout his childhood was fragmented; his exposure to French, Flemish and later, to Latin came at various moments early in his life. Between the ages of seven and twelve, Michaux was a student at a boarding school; he describes this experience in *Quelques renseignements* as:

Putte-Grasheide, 1906 à 1910	Hameau situé dans la Campine. Cinq ans en pension. Pensionnat pauvre, dur, froid. Étude en flamand. Ses condisciples sont fils et filles de petits paysans.
	Secret. Retranché. Honteux de ce qui l'entoure, de tout ce qui l'entoure, de tout ce qui depuis sa venue au monde l'a entouré, honteux de lui-même, de n'être que ce qu'il est, mépris aussi pour lui-même et pour tout ce qu'il connaît jusqu'à présent. Il continue à avoir le dégoût des aliments, les fourre enveloppés de papier dans ses poches et une fois dehors les enterre (*OC*, I, cxxx).

Michaux's five years at this boarding school left an indelible mark on him. Although he wrote about this period of his life more than forty years later, he recalls clearly vivid elements of the miserable surroundings and he associates this experience with language. Further, he remembers the cold, harsh conditions and his classmates, whom he depicts as "petits paysans." Full of shame—to the extent that food disgusted him and he buried it like an animal—Michaux paints a depressing image of his exposure to language that clearly contributed to his hope and search for "la langue ultime" (*OC*, I, 1159).

During the course of Michaux's literary career, he indicates, in different texts, his effort towards creating a universal language. In her introduction, Rigaud-Drayton identifies four key passages in which Michaux speaks of such a language. In *Plume*, he "suggests that he was working on 'une étude sur le langage'," in *Mouvements* he "longed for epiphanic 'signes pour retrouver le don des langues'," while in *Façons d'endormi, façons d'éveillé* he wants to find a language where "tout le monde enfin se comprît vraiment," and finally, in *Par des traits*, he

"speaks of 'rudiments d'une langue universelle idéographique contenant neuf cents idéogrammes et une grammaire' " (2005, 2).

In addition to the question of a universal language comes the question of alienation. Michaux felt alienated nearly everywhere he was, notably during his childhood so his escape into a world of literary and artistic creation at once began to fill the void in his identity that was rooted in his experience with language. By attempting to design a form of communication that would be comprehensible to the masses, Michaux imagined that there could be a way for him to bring together his world and the one he lived in. This language that Michaux hoped to create, Bréchon argues, was not to express; instead, this language was to be a "langage lettriste"—in other words, a language without concepts, expressing only "mouvements et forces" (1959, 116). A "langage lettriste" is one whose words are not really words, in the way that they do not make sense; sections of the poem "Glu et Gli" illustrate this idea. In this visceral poem, Michaux reconfigures parts of words with sounds to produce new, nonsensical terms juxtaposed with elements of the French language. Moreover, this universal language, Michaux hoped, would be "plus près de la nature" in the way that the Chinese language was (Mathieu and Collot 1987, 142). Unfortunately, Michaux's attempt to create a nomenclature accessible to all was "an endeavour which would never see the light of day [due] (in part) to the outbreak of World War II" (*Henri Michaux*: Whitechapel catalogue, Dickman 1999, n. pag).

Michaux's failed attempt to create his own language led him to use language in unconventional ways, in ways that did not fit linguistic conventions. In fact, Mathieu and Collot assert that Michaux's mescaline works create a particular "style"—one that they say is a type of non-alphabetical writing; an ensemble of characteristics that have a "global signification" (1987, 236). Interestingly, Bréchon believes that Michaux invented words that were missing—words

that he created by analogy of prefixes and suffixes, in other words, by agglutination (2005, 155-156). As a result, Michaux's invented words led him to graphic creation; he wrote about how his writing developed into lines and graphics in *Les Grandes Épreuves de l'esprit* (*OC*, III, 342) (Fig. 33).

A. — INTIMES, INCESSANTES
ALIÉNATIONS
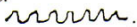
Agitation diffuse.
Difficulté de penser.
De penser suivant ma pente précédente, selon le point de vue que j'avais… que je suis amené à abandonner. Je suis violenté par un courant jusqu'à ce que mes pensées aillent avec ce «je ne sais quoi» d'hyperactif, de torrentiel, de précipité, que je sens dévaler, passages qui me forcent. Là-dessus alignées, les voilà devenues outrées. Des idées, qu'il y a seulement une heure j'eusse, à n'en pas douter, trouvées fausses et à rejeter, me conviennent à présent, mieux adaptées que les précédentes qui deviennent gênantes, vides, insipides.
Dans mon état, d'une bizarre, locale, insidieuse, cryptique surtension, ce sont les immodérées qui vont le mieux avec cet état immodéré tout au fond de moi, qui vit, qui s'est éveillé, qui est en agitation. Idées fausses, par harmonisation. Idées qui, sans que je m'en mêle, ne se retiennent plus, *aspirent à la transgression.*
De quoi ? De n'importe quoi, de toute règle qui se présentera et de la première de toutes, qui est qu'une pensée doit tenir compte des autres, sans quoi on aboutit à l'utopie, à l'erreur, à l'absurde.
Mon écriture se met à ‿‿‿‿.
Il ne s'agit pas ici d'une outrance enthousiasmante, chaleureuse ou verbale, mais d'une outrance purement, mentalement outrance.
Idées fausses. Idées froides. Idées folles.

Figure 33. Page from *Les Grandes Épreuves de l'esprit* (1966)

In this section of his text, Michaux begins to describe his handwriting. He writes, "Mon écriture se met à..." followed by a squiggly line (*GEE, OC*, III, 342). Further in this passage, Michaux describes ideas as "fausses," "froides," and "folles" which leads him to use another writing method, one that is not universal but one that recalls Bréchon's idea related to a "langage lettriste" in which movement is a fundamental component.

Lettrisme, a form of visual poetry characterized by calligraphy, emphasizes fluid movement of line, letter, and form and Rumanian-born Isodore Isou (b. 1928) began the

"lettriste" movement.   Much of Michaux's work relates to the "lettriste" style, particularly because of the poet-painter's emphasis on line, letter, and form. In *Parcours* (1965), one of Michaux's image-only works, Bertelé composed the introduction to this text and wrote about Michaux's images which were essentially a form of writing. Bertelé writes:

> Il s'agit bien ici, en effet, d'une "écriture". Écriture d'Henri
> Michaux, créée et inventée par lui, pour lui, pour dire ce qu'il a à
> dire, qui ne ressemble à rien d'autre (*OC*, III, 432).

The graphic art in *Parcours* recalls many of Michaux's earlier visual projects and in it there are clear references to Michaux's mescaline art along with "signes" he created in *Mouvements* coupled with fragments of what seems to be language in the form of pseudo characters (Fig. 34).

Figure 34. Pages from *Parcours* (1967)

At the same time, *Parcours* is a project different from his other mixed-media works, in particular because Michaux did not write any text. Aside from Bertelé's introduction to *Parcours,* there is no other text in it.

Michaux's failure to create a universal language led in varying degrees to his creation of his own visual style in graphic projects and also a verbal style, one in which he created both names and places as he did in *Voyage en Grande Garabagne*, for instance (Jourde 1991, 269). It was language—what Michaux struggled with and fought against throughout his career—that quite possibly gave "a voice to the self" (Rigaud-Drayton 2005, 63). By constructing his own "signes," Michaux created in effect a visual language that, for him fulfilled a variety of creative needs.

Resigned to the fact that his creation of a universal language would not come into being, Michaux continued his quest to find a language that was different from the ones he learned as a child. In *Par des traits*, for instance, a text-and-image meditation on language, Michaux observes the "milliers de langues sur la planète" that he finds "répertoriées, toutes contraignantes" (*OC*, III, 1284). The espéranto lyrique continues to search for a language that is "*une langue modeste, plus intime*" (*PT, OC*, III, 1284). Michaux's hope is to be able to communicate through a language of "peu de moyens" and one that is "pour peu de besoins" that has "moins à vaincre, à convaincre" but that is rather "intime" (*PA, OC*, III, 1284). Moreover, this intimate language would be "sans prétention" and for "des hommes sachant qu'ils ne savent pas" (*PA, OC*, III, 1284). Indeed, this unpretentious language recalls certain aspects of primitivism. The linguistic machine Michaux associates with language of the West brings him to the roots of primitivism. Michaux hoped to find a language where he could "commencer à zéro" just as he did in painting (*ER, OC*, III, 600). Michaux's visual "signes," he writes are, "Pas

vraiment une langue, mais toute vivante, plutôt des émotions en signes" (*PA, OC*, III, 1284).

Further, Michaux's "signes" find their way around the "laborious 'word factory'" (Broome 1977, 129). Michaux explains what he looked to find in language in *Par des traits*:

> Il s'accommoderait davantage — croit-il — d'une
> langue de peu de moyens, et sans chercher qu'elle s'am-
> plifie et s'étende, langue pour peu de besoins, entre amis
> (et qui refuserait plutôt les suiveurs), pas territoriale, ne
> visant nullement à répondre à tout, à couvrir l'ensemble
> des composants de la Terre, encore moins à vaincre, à
> convaincre, à soumettre, à couvrir un pays et qu'on s'y
> soumette toute une vie durant, mais savoureuse, intime (*OC*, III, 1284).

Michaux continues to explore his fascination with language and "signes" in *Émergences-résurgences*; he looks within as a way to understand why these characters are so important to him, he explains, "Plus tard, les signes, certains signes. Les signes me disent quelque chose" (*OC*, III, 546). Indeed, these "signes" speak to Michaux. In *Idéogrammes en Chine* (1975) he writes that their modest "syntaxe […] laisse place à la poésie. Du multiple sort l'idée" (*OC*, III, 841). In this text-and-image work, Michaux remarks that, "la langue chinoise, la plus vieille langue vivante du monde" is still legible, comprehensible, and effective (*IC, OC,* III, 816).

Although Michaux began studying Chinese in 1969,[57] it was a language he never mastered. Nonetheless it remained the basis for his philosophy of language and at the same time it served as a model of style for his graphic works. *Idéogrammes en Chine* is perhaps the mixed-media work in which the visual component brings Michaux's work closest to the Chinese

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[57] In 1969, more than forty years after his trip to China, Michaux began studying Chinese. He had a notebook in which he documented four lessons between November 27th and December 1st. Michaux copied and recopied series of ideograms with explications and commentaries using a method in English destined for the Japanese (*OC*, III, 1657).

language.[58] The ten illustrations Michaux selected for *Idéogrammes en Chine* were originally in

black on white backgrounds, but Michaux had them printed in red in his work. The illustrations

Michaux selected for this collection come from calligraphy artists such as Chiang Yee, Léon

Wieger, and Feng Hongzhang. Some of the illustrations enrich the poet-painter's text while

others are purely decorative (*OC*, III, 1666). Michaux begins *Idéogrammes en Chine* where he

writes:

> Traits dans toutes les directions. En tous sens
> des virgules, des boucles, des crochets, des accents,
> dirait-on, à toute hauteur, à tout niveau ; déconcer-
> nants buissons d'accents.
>
> Des griffures, des brisures, des débuts paraissant
> avoir été arrêtés soudain.
>
> Sans corps, sans formes, sans figures, sans
> contours, sans symétrie, sans un centre, sans rappe-
> ler aucun connu.
> Sans règle apparente de simplification, d'unifi-
> cation, de généralisation.
> Ni sobres, ni épurés, ni dépouillés.
> Chacun comme éparpillé,
> > Tel est le premier abord (*OC*, III, 817).

The repetition of "sans" in the poetic opening sequence, along with the accumulation of the

multiple forms of the ideograms Michaux includes in his work, underscores his profound

meditations on the ideogram. The possibility of "mille trajets" in these works is fundamental to

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[58] According to Léon Vandermeersch, "[c'est] l'existence d'une 'langue graphique' spécifique à la Chine, distincte d'une langue écrite ou opposée à une langue orale, qui a permis l'unité culturelle et politique du monde chinois. Seule l'écriture chinoise est restée de type idéographique et n'a pas dérivé vers l'alphabet. Cette 'langue graphique' inventée par les scribes chinois n'est pas fondée sur l'oral mais directement sur des graphies, qui n'ont pas de lien avec la langue parlée" (*OC*, III, 1662).

Michaux's attachment to Chinese because the "signe" is not bound by rules that govern language of the West, that is, French (*LHM*, *OC*, II, 263; *PAS*, *OC*, II, 332). These forms, for Michaux, are much freer and allow for creativity. Michaux's commentary on the calligraphy he selected for this work introduces another dimension of his fascination with the Far East and brings him to combine his own work with that of Chinese calligraphers. In this way, Michaux is beginning to become a poet-calligrapher (Fig. 35).

郭 灵 水 元
是 之 灾 来
後 間 害 遭
奮 興 退 白
姓 造 扵 茅

Le signe présente, sans forcer, une occasion de revenir à la chose, à l'être qui n'a plus qu'à se glisser dedans, au passage, expression réellement exprimante.

Longtemps, le Chinois avait, comme en d'autres domaines, subi le charme de la ressemblance; d'abord de la proche, puis de la lointaine ressemblance, puis de la composition aux éléments ressemblants.

Barrière aussi. Il avait fallu la sauter.

Même celle de la plus lointaine ressemblance. Course sans retour. Ressemblance définitivement en arrière.

Les Chinois étaient appelés à un autre destin.

Abstraire, c'est se libérer, se désenliser.

Figure 35. Page from *Idéogrammes en Chine* (1975)

In this example, Michaux emphasizes the natural way in which the "signe" communicates "sans forcer" and how it relates both an object and what it expresses. He also focuses on "le charme de la ressemblance" and the multiple aspects of resemblance. The "signe" represents subtly, as opposed to rigidly, in its use of rules, as Boileau imposed in the use of French. Conversely, the idea of resemblance in the "signe" reflects a principle Michaux used in his work, most certainly in his titled graphic works that could be a variety of different objects. For instance, when he

writes, "Abstraire, c'est se libérer, se désenliser," Michaux's true appreciation for a language that can communicate through abstraction or indirectly (*IC, OC*, III, 835).

Both Michaux's early and later graphic "signes" themselves did not provide an explanation of their meaning but as Bréchon notes, they introduce "un monde de signes" in which it is up to the reader/viewer to find the way (1959, 33). The poet-painter's *Par la voie des rythmes*, for instance, is made up "entirely of signs, untranslatable signs and signs that translate" and Bellour argues that these "signes" represent a "measure of being" which is to say that, "this book is practically a musical score" (*Henri Michaux* 1978, 169) (Fig. 36).

Figure 36. Pages from *Par la voie des rythmes* (1974)

Michaux speaks of his "signes" in a text entitled "Signes"[59] as "les gestes intérieurs" (*OC*, II, 431).

In much the same way that Michaux explored language of the Far East, he reflects on the linguistic nature of music in various projects. In *Par la voie des rythmes*, Michaux's interior rhythm became manifest in the form of graphics; he believes that music leads us to follow "*trajets intérieurs*" (*PAS, OC*, II, 370). It is also a tool for understanding another culture; in *Passages* he writes:

> Musique, l'art partout utilisé. À la guerre, aux champs,
> dans les temples. Art de la stimulation et de l'appel, de
> tous les appels. Art moteur et promoteur. Art pour donner
> et pour augmenter la foi. Art aux champs : employé depuis
> un temps immémorial en Afrique noire où sans lui pas de
> semailles. Devant un rang de musiciens, les travailleurs, en
> rangs aussi, rythmiquement enfoncent la semence dans la
> terre à grands gestes rapides, très rapides, précipités,
> comme entraînés dans une parade dramatique et signi-
> ficative. Art magique utilisé en Amérique centrale, aux
> Indes, en Afrique, pour faire tomber la pluie (qu'elle
> tombe ou ne tombe pas, ce qui est sûr, c'est que jamais
> sorcier ne songea à faire tomber la pluie avec un tableau,
> représentât-il le déluge) (*OC*, II, 367).

Further, he observes that music is "sans référence au monde physique extérieur," unlike a language whose references are purely exterior (*PAS, OC*, II, 369). For instance, he explains that:

> Huit minutes de musique folklorique en disent plus sur
> un peuple inconnu que cent pages de notes et de
> relevés. Document psychologique le plus révélateur
> (*PAS, OC,* II, 369).

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[59] "Signes" is published in "Textes épars 1951-1954," (*OC*, II) 417-432.

In the way that music reveals an interior state through rhythm, the materials Michaux used to paint functioned in a natural rhythm. He speaks of Chinese paper that drank the ink he used in his graphic work; he notes:

> Des feuilles de papier de Chine, buvant beaucoup, naturel-
> lement dénaturant les formes, aidaient à la décomposition de
> toute composition (Unedited version of *ER, OC*, III, 677).

For Michaux, the reaction between the paper and the ink that denatures the forms and changes the work recalls primitivism because this is the result of a natural process that is not spontaneous and does not involve artifice or manual manipulation. Like gouache, a medium that does not resist the author/artist, it is clear that a reaction between the media excites Michaux. Michaux's approach, to let the paper and ink interact and metamorphose, is an integral part of his visual art experience that creates a spontaneity in his art that cannot be controlled by its creator, in contrast with language. Despite the automatic nature of graphic art, when Michaux speaks of his mescaline art, he notes that:

> L'image: fixation de l'idée. L'abstrait —
> abstrait est une manière de rester en course.
> L'image est un procédé d'ancrage, le retour au
> solide. Sans images, l'abstrait ne ferait pas sa
> preuve (*MM, OC*, II, 675).

Indeed, Michaux's invented "signes" exemplify neologism and rhythm in the form of painting. Although each "signe" differs from any other, each of them was inspired by forms in Chinese calligraphy: as a result, the new shapes and forms Michaux painted were along the lines of creating new words in language because what Michaux appeared to be making with all of his "signes" was a verbal-visual language.

Contemporary theories of words and pictures help situate Michaux's body of work in a framework that crosses disciplines. It is in this context that Michaux's work defies clearly Lessing's boundaries dividing poetry and painting whereas Mitchell's picture-theory offers a terminology that can be applied to Michaux's work in order to demonstrate how Lessing's assertions disintegrate when applied to Michaux's mixed-media works.

The calligram, the "signe," and the ideogram define the vast majority of Michaux's later text-and-image and image-only projects. His work with these forms of visual representation pointed him in a direction that led him away from his search for his own language. Nevertheless, he continued to dream of a language in which the signifier and signified would be one (*Henri Michaux*: Whitechapel catalogue, Dickman 1999, n. pag). He continued his quest for a form of communication where the word and the image would meet (Martin 1994, 392). Michaux's intermediary language was one in which the verbal and the visual did in fact overlap in an *écriture-peinture* of sorts. And just as Michaux's double identity as a "Belge de Paris" defines the unity of the self in Michaux, his creative practice found its roots in a similar double identity—one in which the mixing of media became a necessary form of expression (Rigaud-Drayton 2002, 37). The intermediary graphic language that formed from mixing word and image defines Michaux not only as poet-painter, but it also aims toward unifying the split self in the way that a calligram sends a double message, by naming what it shows and showing what it names. Michaux's verbal-visual practice conveys a similar message and it defies the limits of time and space.

The work of Magritte also eludes Lessing's claims, and for this reason, Michaux and Magritte's work overlaps in certain ways. By use of word, object, image, and title, a comparison of the two Belgians highlights methodological differences in their work while it also points to

problems of language. Michaux's continued struggle with words led him to the Far East and Chinese. Unable to master Chinese or to create his own language, he engaged in the use of a semi-pictorial, semi-linguistic form of expression—one that freed him from the French language, limitations of time and space, and afforded him the opportunity to fuse language, art, the Far East and West into a hybrid form of expression.

3.0 TEXT AND IMAGE INQUIRIES

> Valorisé depuis les quinze, vingt ans
> que je m'étais mis à peindre il [mon
> bras droit] m'était devenu précieux,
> véritable organe de la peinture, dont
> elle ne peut se passer.
> - Michaux[60]

3.1 Bringing Words and Images Together

Michaux's entry into the art world around 1937 came at a point when he could no longer be

understood as a poet who paints or a painter who writes (Ouvry-Vial 1989, 141). The 1938

exhibition "Peintures Nouvelles de Henri Michaux. Un poète se change en peintre" indicates the

parallel development of Michaux's poetry and painting while at the same time it announces the

debut of his double career (Fig. 37) (Ouvry-Vial 1989, 141). Prior to this exhibition, Michaux

had already begun illustrating his poetry and producing artwork to accompany his writing. In

some cases, Michaux's poetry preceded his art while in others his graphic work came first

(Hubert 1984, 202). Further, "The writer may comment on the painter or vice versa" (Hubert

1984, 209). Regardless of how Michaux brought together his creative work, the observer

engages simultaneously in reading and viewing (Hubert 1984, 209). Michaux's dual career,

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[60] "Bras cassé" in *Face à ce qui dérobe* (*OC*, III, 876).

double talent, and double practice together form one corpus of text-and-image works. The way Michaux published much of his work accounts for criticism in which his art and his literature are seen as separate endeavors and further, that Michaux's career is viewed as one of a writer or a painter. As its title suggests, this chapter focuses on Michaux's research into word and image combinations: his own and that of other practitioners'. The chapter begins with a discussion how and why critics view differently Michaux's poetry and painting. It continues with case studies of Michaux's word-and-image inquiries and the goal of this approach is to illustrate the discoveries Michaux made about the work of other artists, his own practice as a poet-painter, and the poet-painter himself.

GALERIE PIERRE
2, RUE DES BEAUX-ARTS
(RUE DE SEINE)   PARIS

du 4 au 14 Novembre 1938

PEINTURES NOUVELLES
DE
Henri MICHAUX

UN POETE SE CHANGE EN
PEINTRE. -- L'on voit sa poésie
passer à la peinture, s'y faisant
une nouvelle jeunesse.

Toujours lui même, le bizarre
Michaux et sa perpétuelle in-
vention transformante. Mais
c'est à présent avec des noirs
et des rouilles sombres que "la
nuit remue", avec des rouges
éclatants qu'il fait entendre
ses "sifflets dans le Temple".

En ses tableaux de rêve d'un
métier subtil et à part comme
son style, même sourdine que
dans ses poèmes en prose
(avec quelques chose de chi-
nois), même qualité, même
vibration, et certains disent :
davantage.
                        P.V.

INVITATION   VERNISSAGE
                    LE 4 NOVEMBRE A 21 H.

Figure 37. Invitation card "Peintures Nouvelles de Henri Michaux: Un poète se change en peintre" (1938)

When Michaux speaks about writing and painting in *Peintures*, he sees that, "On change de gare de triage, quand on se met à peindre. La fabrique à mots, mots-pensées, mots-images, mots-émotions disparaît…" (*P*, *OC*, I, 705). In the context of *Peintures*, Hubert comments that Michaux describes writing and painting as "separate activities" (1984, 212). Mihailovich-Dickman remarks this same division of creative activities in this text in *Peintures*. Like Hubert, she sees that "Peinture et écriture se trouvent ici clairement distinguées: il s'agit bien de peindre *ou* d'écriture mais non pas d'un mi-chemin" (1996, 161-162). In *L'Art et l'hybride*, Claude Mouchard explains that Michaux's work is to be read or viewed: "les textes écrites (et imprimés), d'un côté," and "les réalisations d'ordre plastique, de l'autre" (2001, 83). These views of Michaux's poetry and painting place the arts in separate categories. Along the same lines, in "*Par des traits* d'Henri Michaux: La mémoire picturale du signe," Dominique Poncelet refers to Virginia La Charité, and Poncelet observes Michaux's activities as two different forms of expression; however, La Charité notes that they achieve the same objective: to "créer un ailleurs au-delà des frontières du soi" (Poncelet 2006, 206; La Charité 1977, 78).

In addition to considering Michaux's visual and verbal work as "separate activities" Michaux's artistic productions are sometimes seen as a form of writing (Hubert 1984, 212). According to Wieland Schmied, "In Michaux, painting follows writing and then precedes it again. Michaux's painting is the continuation of his writing by other means. It is the ruse of a poet who does not want to stop writing'" (1973, 7). Schmied also explains: "Michaux's painting has nothing to do with literature but much with writing. It is another way for the poet to write his 'second' writing"[61] (1973, 17). Poetry and painting thus constitute two forms of writing.

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[61] For a further discussion, see Renée Riese Hubert "Henri Michaux: Illustration and Double Talent," *World Literature Today* 58:2 (1984): 209-215.

Michaux's "signe" projects arguably suggest a language and two forms of writing—his text along with his Chinese inspired characters—whereas his other works may not however fit so clearly into such a double linguistic matrix.

Conversely, Michaux's writing and painting can be considered as one in the same. Rigaud-Drayton observes that Michaux's "attempts to hybridize French are plainest in his cross-pollination of French with other languages" (2005, 85). This is the case in *Ecuador* in which Michaux mixed French with Spanish and English. She also notes that Michaux did not "choose between the two [poetry and painting], he juxtaposed and confronted them with each other" (Rigaud-Drayton 2005. 163). In doing so, Michaux's poetry is always linked with some form of visual expression while the opposite is also true—his visual expression is always linked with some form of verbal expression. It is not by chance that Michaux relies on writing and painting in his creative expression (Edson 1985, 111). Although Michaux's poetry and painting are sometimes seen as separate, possibly as thesis and antithesis, the combination results in a creative unity. The very opposition that exists between the literary and the artistic creates a relation and synthesizes in a composite and complementary form of expression.

In cases where a verbal and a visual component come together, they form a composite work. For instance, the calligram, concrete poetry, ekphrastic poetry, emblems, word-object paintings, and illustrated novels, such as André Breton's illustrated novel *Nadja* (1928) and Ernst's graphic novel *Une semaine de bonté* (1934), provide examples of mixed-media in literature and art. These works represent what I will call word-image hybrids. Such constructions are classifiable, and they can be named more easily than many of Michaux's mixed-media works. In the case of Michaux, what differs most between word-image hybrids and poet-painter's verbal-visual juxtapositions is that Michaux's creations often break forms and

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genres. To varying degrees, his work is calligrammatic, ekphrastic, and emblematic. Michaux's word-and-image projects thus hint at these forms and suggest a relation—one that is indeed related to these other word-image hybrids. In fact, Michaux's combinations problematize the impulse to classify his work; however, his text-and-image projects share foundational elements in which these other mixed-media combinations are also rooted.

Despite the way Michaux assembled his work and the feelings he had toward language, one form of expression does not exist without the other—because Michaux constantly and consistently moved back and forth between word and image—and words and images are equally essential to Michaux's creative practice. Further, the combination of elements forms a relationship that creates balance and stasis in Michaux's word-and-image works. For instance, in *Émergences-résurgences*, Michaux said that Chinese painting "me remplissant fraternellement, naturellement comme la peinture d'aucun pays n'avait jamais fait" (*OC*, III, 667). Such a profound association with Chinese painting suggests that just as language of the Far East fascinated him so too did painting. Because Chinese writing involves a painterly, calligraphic style, writing and painting of the Far East can be considered closer—in terms of method and style—than writing and painting of the West. Michaux's earliest *Alphabets* from the 1920s (Fig. 1-2) point to the overlapping style and method of Chinese calligraphy and art—this is also present in his last text-and-image publication, *Par des traits*, which expresses a clear relation between words and images. The text and images cannot be divided and the hybridization of these elements is what defines Michaux's style from the 1920s to the 1980s.

Although Michaux's body of work spans a long period of time and reflects various literary and artistic styles, his text-and-image projects can be broken down into four groups: illustrated hybrids, visual-verbal mescaline experiments, poetic inquiry, and "signe" hybrids.

Illustrated hybrids are projects for which Michaux created the text and the images, though not always at the same time. His mescaline works mix language and image in a form of expression inspired by Chinese calligraphy but that create something beyond the verbal and the visual. In these combinations, Michaux made graphic art that attempted to capture his emotional and psychological state during his hallucinations. In his poetic inquiries, Michaux took two approaches: one involved commenting on his own art whereas the other explored the graphic art of others. In these texts, Michaux looked continuously for ways to re-explore art he had produced and also how the artwork of other practitioners affected him. In both instances, Michaux's goal was to observe and experience what he saw as newness in art. Further, these inquiries led to Michaux's articulation of how he understood visual art and further how he understood the self. Considering his own graphic work and that made by others eventually led Michaux to associate, as an artist, with practitioners working in a similar field. Michaux's "signe" hybrids emulate shapes and forms reminiscent of Asian calligraphy. Michaux's inquiry into these works and the creation of his own version of this genre synthesizes the poet-painter's creative works. By producing "signes," Michaux brought physical movement and gesture together thereby producing Asian-like characters. The creation of these forms became not only a form of physical and emotional therapy, but they also allowed the poet-painter to integrate words and images into a unified form of expression. With the production of each "signe," Michaux explored his conception of language and image and these projects are inquiries into the arts and the self. Each of these groups demonstrates a different way Michaux mixes the poetic and the painterly, and each group differs from the others in terms of style, form, and content. Nevertheless, each category is linked to the others in many ways and each relies on combining words and images.

3.2   Illustrated Hybrids

Between 1930 and 1984 Michaux created a total of thirteen illustrated hybrids[62] and after the

publication of his first one, *Entre centre et absence*, he really began to paint. Illustrated hybrids

constitute text-and-image projects for which Michaux authored both the verbal and visual

components.   Michaux created over twenty text-and-image works—including his thirteen

illustrated hybrids—yet he did not conceive of all these illustrated projects in the same way. In

some instances, Michaux brought together poems and paintings he created separately. Such is

the case, for instance, in "Dessins commentés" and *En rêvant à partir de peintures énigmatiques*.

In these two projects, Michaux comments on paintings, but the artwork is not published with the

texts.   Similarly, in many instances Michaux displayed his artwork without the accompanying

poems. Unlike an artist like Arp "who always showed concern for the interaction between text

and image" Michaux "in more than one case, assembled previously composed poems and

graphic works" (Hubert 1984, 209). Michaux's seeming lack of concern for his works to be read

and viewed together not only points to the importance of the process and not the product but also

to the way in which his poems evoke pictorial characteristics and his paintings poetic ones. That

is, they can stand alone while still suggesting elements of the other art. This approach suggests

that his initial concern was not necessarily that these particular pieces to be presented together.

In other instances, Michaux conceptualized specific poems and images to be presented together

from the start, Michaux envisioned certain texts and images to go together. In this section of

chapter three, I will focus on a number of Michaux's illustrated hybrids, notably *Peintures*,

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[62] They include: *Entre centre et absence* (1930), *Peintures* (1939), *Arbres des tropiques* (1942),
Exorcismes (1943), *Labyrinthes* (1944), *Apparitions* (1946), *Meidosems* (1948), *Mouvements*
(1951), *Quatre cents hommes en croix* (1956), *Vents et poussières* (1962), *Saisir* (1979), *Comme
un ensablement* (1981), and *Par des traits* (1984).

Arbres des tropiques, *Peintures et dessins*, and *Émergences-résurgences*, which are particularly significant to his body of work because the combination of text and image in them became a means for Michaux to investigate his method of illustration as well as the self. These works in particular were a means for Michaux's exploration of his poetic and painterly practices and in them he makes discoveries about his relation to literature and art and he articulates this in these works.

Like *Entre centre et absence,* Michaux's *Peintures* functions as a point of departure for his career as poet and painter. The year in which *Peintures* was published can in effect be called an "année composite" in particular because he named his work *Peintures* (Ouvry-Vial 1989, 130).[63] Since this project includes text and illustrations, it summarizes Michaux's work that crosses disciplines and at the same time announces his future projects. The title is thus particularly significant because it "indicates that Michaux subordinates the poetic texts to his adventure as a visual artist" (Hubert 1984, 211). This work also indicates that Michaux's interest in painting was not just a hobby.[64] By titling his project *Peintures*, he announces the seriousness of his practice as an artist.

In *Peintures* Michaux juxtaposes sixteen paintings and seven poems and he begins with a text entitled "Qui il est" which can be compared with the title of one of his earlier texts *Qui je fus* (*OC,* I, 1299). Although the images in *Peintures* are important, its introductory text is particularly relevant in the context of Michaux's double career. In *Qui je fus*, Michaux suggests who he *was* whereas his use of the present tense in "Qui il est" indicates that Michaux's

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[63] Ouvry-Vial uses the term "année composite" to describe Michaux's *Entre centre et absence* which was published in 1930 (1998) 130. This characterization can also describe 1939, the year Michaux published *Peintures*.

[64] Ouvry-Vial calls this a "violin d'Ingres" (1989) 139.

relationship with himself is now more open, and perhaps more public, and also that he is very present in this work. Further, Michaux defines himself in "Qui il est" as a "Belge de Paris," recognizing his simultaneous identity as both Belgian and French while at the same time it is equally important that Michaux observes who he is and that he acknowledges this very identity, and moreover that he *reveals* it on the first page of this project. Michaux thus introduces his inner self more freely through painting than he does in *Peintures*. Like his later text-and-image projects, *Peintures* mixes graphic work with texts and it is a meditation on art. To suggest how he reflects on the way he creates graphic art, Michaux writes, "le noir est sa boule de cristal" indicating that the black backgrounds of his canvases serve as a foregrounding mechanism for contemplating his visual creations (*OC*, I, 706). In *Peintures*, the reader/viewer witnesses the "va-et-vient" between the "visible et énonçable," and such an interplay between word and image has a presence that dominates this project even though *Peintures* is primarily made of images (*OC*, I, 1301).

Arbres des tropiques represents another example of an illustrated hybrid and this work includes an introductory text and eighteen drawings of delicate trees Michaux drew in ink, most likely inspired by his trip to Brazil in the late 1920s (*OC*, I, 1312). Here, Michaux begins to incorporate gesture in his art—line and movement take shape in this project. From this point forward, these elements become features typical of his text-and-image works. The serial nature of *Arbres des tropiques*, the sequential progression of images that read/view like moving images as a result of the eighteen trees page after page, is equally visible in his later works, especially in his mescaline drawings and in his "signe" projects. *Arbres des tropiques* is thus a precursor to Michaux's mescaline drawings that rely on action, movement, line, and verticality, that is, the vertical orientation of his artwork. In many ways, this work also appears to be a primitive form

of his Asian-inspired graphic projects. *Arbres des tropiques* in effect evokes elements of Chinese calligraphy, notably the combination of the trees in black ink, their vertical layout, and the sequence of the trees that appear to be in a progression that could suggest language and thus meaning. Michaux's use of black ink for the trees and the layout of the tall dancing figures also convey an impression of action and energy: an ever-present force in Michaux's poetry and painting.

In her article "Calligraphy, Identity: Scriptural Exploration as Cultural Adventure," Nina Hellerstein focuses on Paul Claudel's and Michaux's shared "fascination with the Chinese and Japanese writing system" (1991, 329). Hellerstein discusses the "physical and mental participation" of the calligrapher (1991, 334). The writing of Chinese calligraphers relies on what Hellerstein describes as:

> …the scriptor's manual skill, and […] the correspondence between the visual dimension of the characters and the kinetic energy of living beings. This organic, physiological view of calligraphy is rooted in the Chinese view of the body as a collection of dynamic functions rather than of organs. Thus calligraphy is essentially a transfer or circulation of energy.[…] Through the gestures of writing, the calligrapher channels the energy of his own body into the expression of the energies of the universe (1991, 334).

By transferring and circulating energy between textual and graphic production, Michaux channeled his energy within the self thereby creating "signes" from this internal energy. The goal of Michaux's creative expression was in effect to circulate energy, to go from gesture to "signe" using ink on paper.

Another illustrated hybrid, *Peintures et dessins*, is a work of double importance because it is a retrospective of Michaux's artwork and also because it includes an essay as the preface to his work which he entitles "En pensant au phénomène de la peinture." In his preface, Michaux articulates his desire to meditate on art and in doing so, he reveals the essence of his oeuvre: to

explore through verbal and visual creation. He does so, for instance, when he reflects on the art of painting portraits; he observes:

> Un portrait est un compromis entre les lignes de forces
> de la tête du dessinateur et la tête du dessiné.
> Le trajet définitif est le résultat de la lutte. Certains
> trajets renforcés, d'autres annulés, quelques-uns détournés
> (*PD, OC*, II, 863).

This passage explains the interrelationships Michaux sees between an artist, a subject, and the result of this combination in visual art. He views painting as a trip that is not always clear or direct but instead as a pathway to new experiences in which the final product is not always the intended result of the artist—this spontaneity motivated much of Michaux's practice. Michaux's reflections on art thus define *Peintures et dessins* as an important point of departure for his writing on graphic art. And since this illustrated project is more developed than *Peintures*, it brings together textual and artistic creation more explicitly (*OC*, II, 1369). In *Peintures*, the text and image are dissociated, or associated by means of the publication of the book whereas *Peintures et dessins* knits the visual and the textual work together since Michaux felt they belonged together (*OC*, II, 1369).

Michaux produced this project with René Bertelé and the Victor Michel brothers, and while Bertelé selected many of the titles and texts, he did not develop a relationship between the words and images, Michaux did (Fig. 38). The relation Michaux forged between his poems and his trees in *Peintures et dessins* is highly important considering the work's mise-en-page. In *Peintures et dessins* a transparent page covers each image and printed in red on each translucent page is a number, a title, and a text.[65] Each of the forty-three transparent pages lays on top of an illustration and as a result of this arrangement, the text and image overlap physically and

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[65] The first edition of *Peintures et dessins* appeared in 1946 and was published by Point du Jour.

consequently visually. Reading and viewing this work happens in time and space: as the reader/viewer lifts each transparent page covered with text in red ink, an individual image that lies beneath the shadow of the overlapping text reveals itself. The visual orientation of this overlaying text forces a triple encounter: reading, viewing, and reading-viewing. This temporal, sequential, and simultaneous experience is typical of Michaux's illustrated hybrids.

32. ARBRES DES TROPIQUES

... Lianes traversières, qui partent plutôt comme singes que comme végétaux et serrent, compliquent la forêt d'un immense empoitraillement...
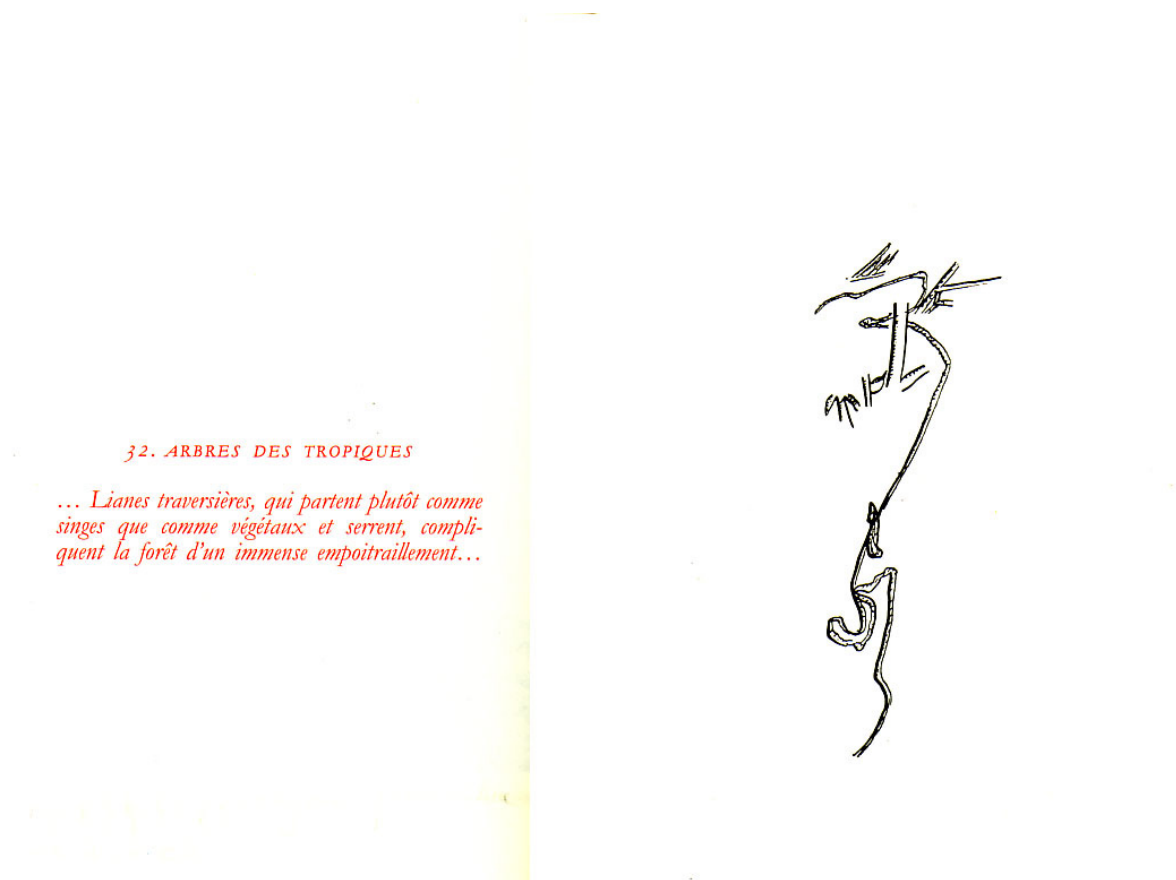
Figure 38. "32. Arbres des tropiques" (1946)[66]

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[66] The text in the *OC* is in red; however, it is printed on even-numbered pages that are opposite each illustration as opposed to beneath the illustrations. The illustrations (the trees) are reproduced in black as they were printed in the original edition.

Since *Peintures et dessins* and *Émergences-résurgences* include artwork that Michaux completed before publishing these two projects, they can be considered retrospectives of the visual artist. These two projects bring together texts and images in something of an exhibition in which Michaux assembled poetry and painting in order to display and present it. In doing so, the relation Michaux forges between his previously created art and his new texts result in a "constant mirroring of verbal and visual, and the inherent correspondence between the two media" (Williams 1990, 131). In addition to the relation between Michaux's words and images in these two works, a similar relation emerges: that of the poet-painter-autobiographer. In the projects, Michaux reveals personal information, which was rather unusual in his work. In two cases, Michaux's retrospective pieces result in autobiographical text-and-image projects. By tracing the scope of the poet-painter's illustrated hybrids, we see that the later he is in his career, the more personal information he reveals in his mixed-media works. To take an example, in his introduction to *Peintures et dessins*, "En pensant au phénomène de la peinture," and also in *Émergences-résurgences*, Michaux writes about his practice as poet and painter. "En pensant au phénomène de la peinture" is an original essay (preface) whereas the textual legends in *Peintures et dessins* come from Michaux's earlier publications such as *Mes propriétés, Voyage en Grande Garabagne, Peintures, Au pays de la magie*, and *Ecuador*. Conversely, Michaux composed an original text for *Émergences-résurgences* that he combined with over eighty graphic works he had produced earlier in his career. Because *Émergences-résurgences* was a work done on commission for Albert Skira's series "Sentiers de la creation," the text was produced rapidly, in much the same way as Michaux produced artwork.[67] In the introduction to his recent translation, Richard Sieburth characterizes *Émergences-résurgences* this way:

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[67] Other works in the Skira series "Sentiers de la création" include: Butor (*Les mots dans la*

> Like all of Michaux's texts (be they visual or verbal), *Emergences-Resurgences* is a profoundly provisional or occasional work, written on commission, tossed off (one imagines) at considerable speed—as an Action Writer (and Painter), Michaux always wanted to work fast and, ever impatient, ever nomadic, rush on to the next thing at hand (2000, 7).

Michaux's essay in *Peintures et dessins* differs from this work because it does not appear to have been written with the same speed as this commissioned piece. Michaux speaks more generally about his painterly and poetic methods in *Peintures et dessins*, whereas in *Émergences-résurgences* he addresses his practice as poet and painter more intimately. At the time Michaux wrote *Émergences-résurgences*, he was a more seasoned painter and arguably a less reclusive one than earlier in his career. Further, the rapid production of this project coupled with Michaux's meditations on his practice can account for the more autobiographical nature of his text. Reconsidering his graphic art caused him to reflect on the period when he made these works, as if he was commenting on photographs from his past.

Because Michaux only discloses fragments of autobiographical information in *Peintures et dessins* whereas in *Émergences-résurgences* he speaks more candidly, this later work can be compared with *Quelques renseignements* (Nicole 1986, 39). At the time Michaux wrote *Quelques renseignements*, he may not have conceived of himself fully as a painter while in *Émergences-résurgences*, "Michaux est plein de confidences sur l'histoire du "je peintre" (Nicole 1986, 39). This is likely the case in *Quelques renseignements* since Michaux speaks of himself using the third person—he uses only the pronoun "il" to refer to himself—which in effect distances himself from the protagonist whereas in *Émergences-résurgences*, Michaux refers to himself throughout in the first person: "je." In *Quelques renseignements*, Michaux is

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peinture), Barthes (*L'Empire des signes*), Simon (*Orion aveugle*), Ponge (*La fabrique du pré*), Bonnefoy (*L'arrière pays*), Paz (*Le singe grammarien*), and Char (*La nuit talismanique*).

highly detached from himself and this work carries a melancholy tone in contrast to *Émergences-résurgences*, where he develops reflections, meditations, and ideas relating to the "je" he calls a painter (Nicole 1986, 39). Michaux narrates in the first person and he presents a very personal glimpse into the poet-painter through a double autobiography: one through his visual work and another through his text (Nicole 1986, 39). While Michaux's text addresses his methods as a poet-painter, the layout of his artwork creates a visual timeline of his painting. Although Michaux detaches himself from the protagonist in *Quelques renseignements*, his narrative is quite the opposite in *Émergences-résurgences*: it allows the reader/viewer to enter into Michaux's interior world (Fig. 39) (*OC*, III, 1606).

les esprits abstraits, de plus en plus abstraits, de plus en plus refoulants.

Lourd, épais, embarrassant en effet est le monde.

Pour le tolérer, il faut en rejeter beaucoup d'une façon ou d'une autre. Ils le font tous.

Je le fis particulièrement tôt, trop tôt. À ma manière. Aspirant à plus de transréel, à y vivre toujours.

J'ai peint afin de rendre le monde plus « marquant », tout en refusant le « réalisme » des conduites, et des idées. J'ouvrais ainsi d'un côté, tenant fermé l'autre.

Des *signes*, ma première recherche.

C'est le monde *réduit*, au maximum.

Certains réduisent le monde à l'intelligibilité, ce qui est le rejeter en partie, comme on le voit dans

Figure 39. Images from *Émergences-résurgences* (1972)

To take an example, Michaux's use of "je" in *Émergences-résurgences* emphasizes the presence of the poet-painter, notably when he writes, "j'ai peint afin de rendre le monde…," "J'ouvrais ainsi," and "Des *signes*, ma première recherche" (*OC*, III, 644). The dominance of "je" in the text (Fig. 39) emphasizes the presence of Michaux the painter and autobiographer. In this text, Michaux also explains how art serves him; he writes, "Pour le [le monde] tolérer, il faut en rejeter beaucoup d'une façon ou d'une autre," and he similarly says, "À ma manière" (*ER, OC*, III, 644-645). Michaux was able to control graphic art and this control consequently became a way for him to integrate himself into the world. By exhibiting his artwork, for instance in a work

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like *Émergences-résurgences*, Michaux presents himself and this can be understood as an attempt to connect to others. Further, it can be seen as a way to integrate himself into a community of creative practitioners as well as to present himself to readers and viewers. Michaux's autobiographical texts are thus the result of the poet-painter revealing personal information these text-and-image works. The combination of the two forms of expression organized as retrospectives documents Michaux's observations of and insights into his work. By bringing his work together in this way, the poet-painter created a number of unconventional autobiographical works.

In addition to the intimate use of "je," Michaux focuses on the physical aspect of producing art in *Émergences-résurgences*, which he does not do in *Quelques renseignements*. In this way, the poet-painter once again reveals himself in this mixed-media project. In several instances in *Émergences-résurgences*, Michaux alludes to movement, spontaneity, adventure, logic, and balance in his painterly practice. Michaux does not explicitly reveal that these features of producing painting are what captivate him; however it is clear that they continue to engage him because they consistently appear throughout the large majority of Michaux's graphic work; he explains:

> Je suis de ceux qui aiment le mouvement, le mouvement
> qui rompt l'inertie, qui embrouille les lignes, qui
> défait les alignements, me débarrasse des construc-
> tions. Mouvement comme désobéissance, comme
> remaniement (*ER, OC*, III, 595).

Just as Michaux worked quickly as an Action-painter—and also as Sieburth suggests as an Action-writer—so Michaux seeks action and movement to break free from the stable and static. In another example, Michaux associates spontaneity with painting which leads to adventure. Michaux's focus on these features characteristic of painting—that he did not associate with

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writing—demonstrates a balance he finds by producing illustrated hybrids. The spontaneous, action-oriented nature of the graphic coupled with the poetic bond to form works that incorporate the fleeting with the grounded. He writes:

> Une fois de plus je peux être spontané, totale-
> ment, sans corrections, sans deuxième état, sans
> avoir à y revenir, à retoucher. D'emblée, là.
>   L'immédiat, les immédiats… Le nouveau venu…
> *in statu nascendi*… débloquant en moi un je ne sais
> quoi, rompant des retenus, des réserves, fêtant un
> devenir, un inattendu « devenir » : gouaches.
> […]
>
>   Peinture pour l'aventure, pour que dure l'aventure
> de l'incertain, de l'inattendu. Après des années tou-
> jours encore l'aventure (*ER, OC*, III, 601-602).

Prior to his inquiry into his writing and painting in *Quelques renseignements* and in *Émergences-résurgences*, Michaux began to develop conclusions about his fascination with painting in *Peintures et dessins*; he puts it this way:

> Je pris un autre carton et, à ma surprise, je découvris
> de grandes gouaches, éclatantes et fouillées, assurément
> de mon genre, mais que j'eusse été complètement inca-
> pable de composer. Je les regardai béant, mon ex-ami
> aussi. Beaucoup de détails et plusieurs architecturaux. De
> la construction, d'admirables couleurs. Des sujets absolu-
> ment nouveaux pour moi. Une richesse inconnue chez
> moi qui travaille plutôt en pauvre. Un épanouissement
> inattendu (*PD, OC,* I, 864).

Michaux's revelation, where he declares "à ma surprise," "je découvris," "Des sujets absolument nouveaux pour moi," and "une richesse inconnue," highlights his fascination with the newness of painting every time he produces it. However, by the time Michaux composed the text for *Émergences-résurgences*, he had already considered himself a painter whereas in *Peintures et dessins*, his *prise de conscience* was much more a recent discovery, as is clear when he remarks:

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"J'étais donc un peintre!" (*PD, OC,* I, 846). This revelation in particular solidifies Michaux's

desire to include artwork in his projects; he writes:

> Enfin je voyais, non plus l'esquisse fuyante, mais le
> monde comme je le conçois dans son étalement prolifique.
> Ils avaient enfin atterri sur ma feuille. J'étais donc un
> peintre!
> […]
> Dix ans de peinture, et décisive, étaient là, j'en suis sûr,
> j'en garde encore l'impression (*OC*, I, 864-865).

In this text, Michaux's poetic fragments accumulate into a *prise de conscience* related to his

conception of who he was as a painter. Verses in which he articulates: "non plus l'esquisse

fuyante," "le monde comme je le conçois," "enfin atteri sur ma feuille," and "j'en suis sûr"

confirm in numerous ways the certainty of Michaux's vision of the self as a painter who is sure

of himself.

In addition to moments of self-discovery, Michaux's illustrated hybrids led him to

experience a feeling of balance from his painterly endeavors which is characteristic of his

illustrated works. In *Émergences-résurgences* he puts it this way:

> En dessinant je faisais maintenant tout naturelle-
> ment de petits alignements égaux et parallèles (*OC*, III, 623).

In drawing, Michaux constructed a world in which there now were "égaux" and "parallèles"

(*OC,* III, 623). Such balance explains Michaux's psychological stasis resulting from painting,

for it was not only a form of physical therapy through movement, but it created an emotional

equilibrium for the poet-painter. In this way, Michaux found stability in his life and more

broadly in his world; he writes:

> Peinture par oubli de soi, et de ce qu'on voit ou
> qu'on pourrait voir, peinture de ce qu'on sait,
> expression de sa place dans le Monde (*ER*, *OC*, III, 633).

Towards the end of *Émergences-résurgences*, Michaux discloses the underlying reason(s) why he paints:

> J'ai peint afin de rendre le monde plus
> « marquant », tout en refusant le « réalisme » des
> conduits, et des idées. J'ouvrais ainsi d'un côté,
> tenant fermé l'autre (*OC*, III, 644).

Michaux's creation of illustrated hybrids became a means for exploring and more importantly for discovering the interior and exterior self through a form of expression freer than writing or painting alone.

3.3   Beyond Words and Images: Mescaline

In Michaux's first text-and-image work based on his experimentation with mescaline, *Miserable miracle*, he writes, "Dans les visions intérieures j'essaie d'introduire une image de l'extérieur" (*OC*, II, 643). The series of mixed-media works Michaux created during this period was an attempt to form a textual and visual context for what he experienced while on mescaline. It is clear that Michaux had several objectives with mescaline experimentation: to move beyond writing and art, to explore the self through both creative acts, to capture his psychological and physiological state through words and images, and in particular to liberate himself from the confines of his own language system—its grammar, syntax, and structure. Michaux's mescaline projects combine the methods and techniques found in Chinese calligraphy and as a result, writing and art made under the influence of mescaline allowed Michaux to escape—to a certain

degree—from language. In a way, using language while on mescaline became yet another kind of language, one that was different from French, Chinese or even art.

In contrast with the majority of Michaux's illustrated hybrids and his works centered on pseudo-Asian characters, his mescaline drawings do not look like imitations of calligraphy characters, at least not at first glance. Michaux's mescaline drawings, however, rely on methodological and stylistic components that are rooted in calligraphy. For instance, the use of black on white resembles the colors primarily used in calligraphy, his use of line that resembles pen and ink used for calligraphy, and the forms within the drawings evoke images found in calligraphy. As a result, Michaux's experience with mescaline in combination with his writing and art results in a kind of creative expression even more liberated than that of mixing words and images. Expression beyond language and image, in particular, is manifest in *Paix dans les brisements*.

Unlike Michaux's other mescaline projects, *Paix dans les brisements* mixes multiple genres: it includes prose, poetry, essay, and drawings. This text is then fragmented; the images, however, are much like those in his other works of this kind. In addition to the numerous styles of writing in this work, Michaux created fourteen mescaline drawings that begin this project. Immediately following the introductory drawings, Michaux wrote a text he calls "Signification des dessins" and in it, he creates a discourse on language, image, and mescaline; he writes:

> Fait digne d'une parenthèse, les Chinois, qui eurent
> pendant longtemps une inclination, un vrai génie de la
> modestie pour imiter la nature, suivre le sens, l'allure des
> phénomènes naturels et leur rester conjoints en sympathie
> par une sorte d'intelligence poétique, ont, à l'inverse de
> presque tous les autres peuples de cette terre, conçu uti-
> lisé une écriture qui suit la pensée de haut en bas suivant
> son débouché naturel.
>
> Fait non moins curieux, les mots y sont des caractères,

Fermes, fixes, signes qui sont avant tout à voir.

　　Et peu ou pas de syntaxe.　Rapports grammaticaux sou-
terrains, à deviner.　L'exposé, chez eux, est surtout un
tableau, tableau fait de tableaux fixes, invariants.　Proche
encore de la pensée visionnaire, de l'apparition originelle
du phénomène premier de la pensée.**　Mais abandon-
nons cela.　Langues toutes tellement fortes, tellement pos-
sédantes. […]

** Toutes différentes sont les autres langues, qui ont évolué loin du
donné primitif, maintenant caché, pour s'adonner au discours et à ce qui
lui est le plus utile, à tout ce qui, par variations des composants, par
conjugaisons et déclinaisons complexes, suffixes, etc., permet de plus pré-
cises interrelations et interdéterminations, et de façon générale répond au
besoin de faire la police d'une circulation sévèrement dirigée.　Langues de
la contrainte.　Contrainte et volonté. Chinois, moins de contrainte.　Mesca-
line, plus aucune contrainte.　Plus de rapports grammaticaux non plus (*PB, OC*, II,
997-998).

While Michaux comments on Chinese people and language in relation to the French language in

numerous other texts, he creates a three-part discussion in "Signification des dessins" that

comments on: 1) the Chinese people and the Chinese language, 2) what he calls other languages,

and 3) mescaline.　This text is particularly significant because Michaux forms a discourse on the

relation between these three groups in this section of his work.　By discussing mescaline in

relation to other languages, Michaux appears to make a case for mescaline's effect on his writing

and painting which results in a form of expression beyond that of French, Chinese, or even art.

While Michaux had already explored—quite intensely—Chinese and other languages, the

introduction of mescaline as an instrument for expression is new to his linguistic inquiry.

　　　In the first part of this text, Michaux distances the Chinese people from almost all other

peoples because of their ability to capture nature and visual images in language and poetry.

According to Michaux, Chinese people possess an extraordinary capacity to imitate nature with

modesty and to follow their senses by recreating natural phenomena, that is, images appearing in

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nature. When Michaux writes that the Chinese people have an "intelligence poétique," he suggests that their poetry is not forced; instead it is rooted in nature and it is a visual form of text. As a result of this poetic intelligence, writing follows thought. Further, because thoughts capture images, Chinese writing relates more closely to nature than to other languages: writing relies on the creation of images and pictures. Michaux points out the visual characteristics of Chinese when he writes, "les mots y sont des caractères," when he says their language is made of "signes," and because he believes this language is "avant tout à voir" (*PB, OC*, II, 998).

In the second part of this text, Michaux transitions from the Chinese people to their language. In much the same way that he conceived of nature to be the fundamental basis for the Chinese language, he posits a relation between images and thought. He says that this language is "la pensée visionnaire" and that it is a "phénomène de la pensée," indicating the explicitly visual quality of Chinese. The bond between thought and image can explain Michaux's understanding of Chinese as a language that creates paintings through writing and whose grammar is not obvious, but instead he sees it as "souterrain." Since nature does not name—it merely suggests—the Chinese language imitates it without relying on rules of grammar, syntax, and what Michaux feels are arbitrary words.

In the third part of "Significations des dessins," Michaux writes "Toutes différentes sont les autres langues, qui ont évolué loin du donné primitif…" (*PB, OC*, II, 998). These other languages are far from the natural and the primitive and thus exist at a great distance from visual languages. In addition, the function of these languages is pedantic and didactic. Moreover, they are bound by rules of conjugation, declension, and suffix. According to Michaux, these languages are policed by grammar and constricted by their grammar, which in effect implies their lack of freedom of expression. In fact, their freedom is so controlled that Michaux calls

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these languages "Langues de la contrainte," that Chinese is a language of "moins de contrainte," whereas mescaline admits "plus aucune contrainte. Plus de rapports grammaticaux non plus" (*PB, OC*, II, 998). Mescaline as a source of visual and verbal expression is perhaps chaotic and a free-for-all form of expression, but it proves to be the ultimate language of liberation.[68]

The overwhelming freedom of expression resulting from the use of mescaline explains Michaux's numerous text-and-image works involving it. While Michaux's text in *Paix dans les brisements* explores different types of language systems, and he places Chinese somewhat close to mescaline expression, they are ultimately different; however, his drawings are reminiscent of the Asian language. The vertical orientation of Michaux's graphic compositions, which can be read and viewed vertically, resemble Chinese calligraphy which can also be read and viewed in this way (Fig. 40).

The drawings in *Paix dans les brisements* contain a mix of pictograms, written language, and Chinese calligraphy. These word-image forms Michaux includes in his mescaline drawings present the fusion of different forms of expression in one work. In the top third of the illustration, there are four forms that Michaux drew outside of the main body of his image (Fig. 41). These shapes look like stars drawn using multiple lines that come together in one shape in the form of a circle. These four images suggest Chinese characters and pictograms, in particular because of their shape—which has a definite form—and also because of their arrangement. Michaux orients two of the star-like images to the left of the primary drawing, one on top of the other, whereas he positions two others to the right of the central drawing, and they have a horizontal orientation. In addition to these character-like forms, Michaux drew five sections made of thicker lines of what appears to be language. Each body of writing resembles text

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[68] Michaux wrote this before he developed chronic headaches as a side effect of using mescaline.

written in cursive. This portion of the drawing looks less like Asian calligraphy and more like Western language, notably because of its orientation, which is aligned horizontally and because of the drawings that look like cursive writing. Similarly, just below the middle of the drawing and just above the bottom of it, Michaux drew three other sets of shapes that resemble written language or blocks of text. The placement of these three short narrative-like sequences divides the whole drawing into five parts, and because of the vertical layout of the images. These divisions suggest poetry and verses within a poem. At the same time, these divisions create a symmetrical balance in the image and bring together language of the West, calligraphy, and drawing.

Figure 40. Page from *Paix dans les brisements* (1959)

Figure 41. Page from *Paix dans les brisements* (detail) (1959)

Michaux's graphic work in *Paix dans les brisements* is his most important combination of Chinese calligraphy and mescaline expression. The vertical images in black ink that are charged with movement and energy reflect both a freedom of expression and a methodology reminiscent of the language of the Far East. The vertical orientation of Michaux's mescaline drawings is

typical of th works of his mescaline period: not only does he draw images that have their roots in

Asian calligraphy but his texts also explore how mescaline affects the orientation of these

drawings. In *Connaissance par les gouffres*, a text-only mescaline work, Michaux continues to

focus on verticality in his mescaline images through writing. Michaux's text evokes a highly

vertical and visual description of his mescaline visions:

> La mescaline n'horizontalise à peu près jamais. Dans la mescaline, je voyais des formes qui s'élancent. Dans le chanvre, je voyais plutôt des formes élancées. Elles ne remuaient pas franchement. Pas fixes non plus. Je les sentais comme des "notes tenues". Elles s'affaissaient d'un coup (peut-être à un changement net du train d'ondes en peigne ?) et quelque temps après reparaissaient un peu différentes ; on aurait pu songer aux ondes dites stationnaires. Formes, fluettes, inimaginablement effilées. Une multiple verticalité grêle, à la base étriquée. Ce n'est pas l'Orient qui donnait ces formes, si exagérément minces, effilées. C'étaient ces formes amincies qu'avaient vues et tenté de copier les architectes orientaux, persans et arabes (*CG, OC,* III, 10).

Michaux emphasizes the vertical effect of mescaline on his art and how it evokes this visual

orientation. He says that mescaline almost never "horizontalise" and that its forms are not "fixes

non plus" (*CG, OC,* III, 10). Similarly, Michaux focuses on verticality in his mescaline writings

and drawings in *Paix dans les brisements*; he explains:

> Les yeux fermés, visionnairement, je regardais se précipiter tumultueusement une sorte de torrent vertical (*OC,* II, 995).

The terminology of the vertical in his description points directly to the printed layout of Chinese

or Persian calligraphy and it recalls Michaux's preference for speech over written language,

notably when he writes "fixes non plus" (*CG, OC*, III, 10).[69] Michaux sees spoken language as less stable and thus less rigid than its written counterpart and this is what he likes about it—the natural instability of spoken language.

Michaux's experimentation with mescaline functioned in several ways that differ from his illustrated hybrids. First, they introduced him to a form of language that was entirely new, one that combined features of Chinese calligraphy with art. Second, this form of communication led Michaux to investigate further his conception of the Chinese language in conjunction with French and art. Third, Michaux's mescaline drawings bring together elements of calligraphy, notably the combination of a vertical orientation with black ink. Forth and finally, Michaux's writing while under the influence of mescaline brings him down a new path that will lead to his subsequent Asian-inspired graphic works.

3.4 Poetic Inquiry I

In addition to Michaux's illustrated projects, he commented on his graphic work and that of others whereby he created something along the lines of a *poésie critique*; however, Michaux's was a form of commentary that frequently combined words and pictures, resulting in a verbal-visual inquiry into his own work and that of others. This creative activity began not long after Michaux's first art exhibition and from 1939 until 1980 Michaux wrote on artists such as Bernal, Picasso, Zao Wou-Ki, Ernst, Bettencourt, Matta, Sima, Klee, Magritte, Alechinsky, Di Chirico, and Dalí, and throughout Michaux's career just as many artists wrote about his painting

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[69] Michaux found spoken language less restricted by rules of grammar and syntax, and it is for this reason that he prefers it to written language.

(Exhibition catalogue Livorno: Michailovich-Dickman 2001, 12). Unlike *poésie critique*, Michaux's poetic inquiry is not rooted in interpretation, analysis, or criticism; instead it is based on meditation and on exploration of the self. In his poetic inquiries and in the role of poet-inquirer, Michaux is a visual anthropologist—he observes and verbalizes what emerges from his experience with art.

As a poet and a painter Michaux is in a unique position when he writes about his meditations on visual art; his poetic inquiry thus raises questions of how a writer writes about art and similarly how an artist writes about art.[70] For this reason, the poet-painter can be compared to what Adelia Williams calls Apollinaire, a "*poète critique*" (1990, 8). Williams suggests that Baudelaire and Apollinaire began the *poésie critique* genre;[71] writers who commented on art were thus not new to Michaux's era (1998, 123-134). She traces the first *poésie critique* to Charles Baudelaire's 1845 *Salon* and observes that the genre continued on "from Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* (1918) and his critical writings on modern art, through the works of the Surrealists, to the efforts of poets of the post-war generation" (1990, 2-3). This genre differs from ekphrastic poetry, art criticism, and art history because:

> The apparently impervious semiotic boundary between two different modes of artistic expression, the visual and the verbal, has long been a topic of paramount concern to 20th-century French poets, giving rise to a type of commentary called

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[70] Paul Klee's *Théorie de l'art moderne* provides an example of how an artist writes about painterly method.

[71] For a further discussion on *poésie critique*, see Adelia Williams, *The Double Cipher: Encounters Between Word and Image in Bonnefoy, Tardieu and Michaux* (1990) 3. In it Williams writes, "Although nineteenth century writers of all the genres investigated the plastic arts (including Gautier, Stendhal, Balzac, Zola, the Goncourt brothers, Huysmans, and Jarry), it was Baudelaire who enlarged the scope of the poetic medium through examination of the plastic arts. He inaugurated the modern poet's preoccupation with the arts by documenting the *Salons* (1845, 1948, 1859) and finally composed his paean to Constantin Guys, *Le peintre de la vie moderne* (1859), a celebration of the transitory heroism and eternal beauty of the modern age. In the first *Salon,* Baudelaire outlines a theory of modernity" (1990) 3.

poésie critique. First used in 1965 by Breunig and Chevalier in their edition of Apollinaire's art criticism, the term literally means "critical poetry," and generally refers to writings by poets that treat the fine arts… (Williams 1998, 123).[72]

Since the semiotic boundaries between poetry and painting are no longer "impervious," *poésie critique* exemplifies a "truly interdisciplinary genre with equally literary and art historical import" (Williams 1998, 123-134; Williams 1990, 18). Similarly, artists like Klee and Magritte produced writings on art: Klee in his *Théorie de l'art moderne* and Magritte in his *Les Mots et les images*. The writings Michaux produced, along the lines of the *poésie critique* genre, developed out of his interest in art and the need to express his ideas about it in words. Michaux's mixed-media poetic inquiry falls into two broad categories: texts he wrote about his own artwork and those he wrote on the art of artists. I will begin by considering those Michaux composed about his painting then I will continue with a discussion of Michaux's comments on the graphic work of other artists in the next section of the chapter.

The meditations Michaux discusses vary, ranging from descriptions of images to explanations of his painterly method to revealing autobiographical information. Much of Michaux's poetic commentary comes in the form of aphorisms and essays that he intersperses throughout his work. His prefaces and postfaces to works like *Peintures*, *Arbres des tropiques*, and *Peintures et dessins* also provide examples of poetic inquiry. A text-and-image work such as *Émergences-résurgences* exemplifies this genre because it can be considered an autobiography, an illustrated work, and it falls into category of poetic inquiry. It is thus a complex project and particularly relevant to a discussion of Michaux's poetry that comments on images.

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[72] For the complete discussion of the origin of *poésie critique*, see Guillaume Apollinaire, *Méditations esthétiques: les peintres cubists*, ed. L. C. Breunig and J.-Cl. Chevalier (Paris: Herman, 1965).

Although *Peintures et dessins* resembles *Émergences-résurgences*, and is an illustrated work whose preface suggests elements of a *poésie critique,* it is overall more a retrospective work than a critical one. According to Williams, the "Sentiers de la création" publications can be considered *poésie critique* because they are writings on art by literary figures; so in a way, *Émergences-résurgences* can be considered among the *poésie critique* genre (1990, 2). Poetic inquiry thus became a means by which Michaux could be introspective and communicate his observations about the self to his reader/viewer.

Prior to the seminal *Émergences-résurgences*, *Passages*, though not a text-and-image project, begins to suggest that Michaux is developing a commentary style that is along the lines of *poésie critique*. Michaux's used primarily "je" in his text-and-image works and the use of "je" as artist illustrates the way poetic inquiry led Michaux to reveal his self through meditations on his art. In *Émergences-résurgences*, Michaux's fragments on art reveal that he considers himself an artist. Importantly, Michaux began to *suggest* the presence of a "je" painter in several publications prior to *Émergences-résurgences*. In "Dessins commentés," published in *La nuit remue*, Michaux includes a series of ten poems he wrote about drawings he had made.[73] He remarks that he found these drawings months after he drew them in a drawer, and to the poet-painter's surprise; he writes, "*je fus surpris comme à un spectacle jamais vu encore, ou plutôt jamais compris*" (*LNR, OC*, I 436). Michaux's surprise at the (re)discovery of his artwork, on the one hand reveals that finding these works delights him because he had never understood them—his text suggests that *now* he does in fact understand them, "comme à un spectacle jamais vu encore" and "jamais compris" (*LNR, OC*, I, 1436). On the other hand, the pleasure he takes

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[73] The poems were first published without Michaux's artwork in *La Nouvelle revue française* 248 May (1934): 788-792.

in revisiting his art, and commenting on it, points to his roles as poet-inquirer. In another example, Michaux suggests his role as both poet and painter in "Signification des dessins" in *Paix dans les brisements*. While considering his mescaline drawings, he writes, "j'appellerais bien des 'laisses de réflexion'" (*PB, OC*, II, 999). Here, Michaux assumes the role of poet, painter, and inquirer as he reflects on his visual work. Similarly, in the sixth poem in "Dessins commentés," Michaux considers a horse he drew that he is now commenting on; he writes, "Heureusement, heureusement que je l'ai dessiné [mon cheval]" (*LNR, OC*, I, 439). Michaux finds happiness in his art and he includes himself "je" in the context of his comments on his visual work, arguably because *now* he understands the creative work he had produced. In the role of poet-painter-inquirer, he sees his work from a different perspective—one that allows him to place a distance between the artist that painted and the figure that now sees these works from a different perspective. This new view allows Michaux to understand better who he is and further, he is open about his work and he finds reason to explore and re-explore it.

In addition to characterizing himself as an artist in his writing, Michaux describes his painterly methodology which is natural, spontaneous; he is at ease with how his art develops, in *Mes propriétés* Michaux writes:

> Chacun doit avoir sa méthode. Quand je veux faire apparaître une grenouille vivante (une grenouille morte, ça c'est facile) je ne me force pas. Même, je me mets menta-lement à peindre un tableau. J'esquisse les rives d'un ruis-seau en choisissant bien mes verts, puis *j'attends* le ruisseau. Après quelque temps, je plonge une baguette au-delà de la rive ; si elle se mouille, je suis tranquille, il n'y a plus qu'à patienter un peu, bientôt apparaîtront les grenouilles sau-tant et plongeant (*OC*, I, 484).

In the painterly process, Michaux says "je ne me force pas" and that "je suis tranquille" showing the natural way art develops in his practice (*MP, OC*, I, 484). As a painter he is patient: "puis

j'attends le ruisseau" and he lets objects appear, "bientôt apparaîtront les grenouilles" (*MP,OC*, I, 484). This passage explains the development of Michaux's art through visualization, "je me mets mentalement à peindre un tableau" (*MP, OC*, I, 484).

Just as the titles of the poet-painter's artwork are open-ended, so too does his commentary on his work follow such a loose approach in their discussion—distancing once again what Michaux does in his poetic inquiry from the *poésie critique* genre. That is, Michaux does not create descriptions of his images that limit interpretation; instead, he merely presents shapes and forms to the reader/viewer. In this way, Michaux allows the reader/viewer to experience a multiplicity of interpretations of a work and this recalls what he likes so much in painting: its open-ended nature and moreover its "*rusticité*" (*ER, OC,* III, 549). By creating these kinds of titles, Michaux avoids what he calls the "Immense préfabriqué qu'on se passe de génération en génération, la langue" (*ER, OC*, III, 550). In his poetic inquiry, Michaux remains faithful to his principles of language and how he uses it to name the visual. As he writes about his mescaline drawings in "Signification des dessins," he explains that, "Ce sont—images ou mots—les dépôts instantanés…" (*PB, OC*, II, 999). What Michaux created can be understood as either words *or* images. In the sixth poem in "Dessins commentés," Michaux explains, "Ce serait bien une flamme, si ce n'était déjà un cheval, ce serait un bien bon cheval, s'il n'était en flammes" (*LNR, OC*, I, 438-439). Michaux's use of the conjunction "ou" to indicate "images" or "mots" and of the hypothetical "si" clause shows the open-ended nature of his constructions. This naming technique recalls the double title of Michaux's painting *Un poulpe ou une ville* (Fig. 29). Further, it can be compared with much of Magritte's word-object work.

Michaux's poetic exploration relies on meditation and suggestion instead of on analyzing by naming and interpreting. His poetic inquiry is a process of self-exploration and self-discovery

through this activity; Michaux uncovers the "je" he repeatedly ignored and repressed and he began to understand his world and the self that was "jamais vu" or "jamais compris" (*LNR, OC, I*, 436). His revelations come into focus as a result of the commentary on his own work.

3.5 Poetic Inquiry II

In addition to Michaux's exploration into his own work, the poet-painter considered the work of other artists—their method and practice—in a series of projects. This kind of poetic inquiry can also be divided into two categories: writings on twentieth-century artists and writings on graphic work made by those outside the art world, namely the mentally ill and children. Michaux's commentary on other artists comes in the form of poetry, essays, and fragments on artists such as Zao Wou-Ki, Matta, Klee, Picasso, and Magritte. The texts Michaux wrote on the graphic work of these artists are meditative and descriptive. "Ecriture d'épargne" (1949), for instance, is a collection of five short poems inspired by Picasso's paintings. Although Michaux referred to Picasso in several other texts as in "Chronique de l'aiguilleur" (1922) and in *Passages*, it was not until "Ecriture d'épargne" that the poet-painter dedicated a work of the poetic inquiry genre to Picasso. Similarly, Michaux's *Vigies sur cibles* (1959) is a text inspired by nine engravings by Matta. This project was Michaux's second collaborative work in which he wrote texts on art works; the first was *Lecture par Henri Michaux*. In *Vigies sur cibles*, Michaux wrote short texts and poems, some of which he wrote earlier and republished in this work: some of the fragments come from *Passages* whereas the poem "The Thin Man" comes from *Moments*. This collaborative project allowed both Michaux and Matta to "confronter leurs langages" such that "[t]antôt Matta a cherché un équivalent aux poèmes de Henri Michaux, tantôt ce dernier a décrit

les espaces et les êtres qu'il a rencontrés dans l'oeuvre de Matta" (*OC*, II, 1359).[74] This work thus illustrates a reciprocal exchange between Michaux and Matta in their creative endeavors.

In addition to commenting on the work of other artists, Michaux looked at the graphic work made by those outside of the art world. As a fragile individual himself, Michaux was drawn to the mentally ill and to their graphic art (*OC*, III, 1768). In *Les Ravagés* (1976), later published in *Chemins cherchés, chemins perdus, transgressions* (1981), Michaux wrote 40 poetic vignettes describing men and women battling the insurmountable; his exploration into the artwork of the mentally ill provided him with an opportunity to feel the suffering of others (*OC*, III, 1157, 1771). In *Essais d'enfants, dessins d'enfants*, published in *Déplacements, dégagements* (1985), Michaux comments in three essays on the artwork produced by children. What drew him to this work appears to be a child's use of line, which Michaux describes as "En tournants, tournantes lignes de larges cercles maladroits" and continues to explain that "Les cercles parfaits des dessinateurs et des géomètres n'intéressent pas l'enfant" (*OC*, III, 1327-138). What Michaux achieved in these inquiries was an association with figures outside the art world; his ability to empathize with the mentally ill and his appreciation of the painterly style—that lacked a formalized method—of children drew him closer to these two groups.

Considering the work of other artists, children, and the mentally ill brought Michaux outside of his insular world and he began to come out of his reclusive existence. In addition to his work on these figures, Michaux was consistently drawn to art and writing of the Far East. Just as *Émergences-résurgences* can be considered one of Michaux's most important works in the poetic inquiry genre—those where Michaux comments on his own work—so too can *Idéogrammes en Chine* be considered in much the same way in the context of Michaux's

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[74] Michaux and Matta's relationship is described further in the Archives Centre Pompidou.

commentary on the works of other artists. This work is particularly unique because Michaux assembled it, bringing together artwork by calligraphers and a text he wrote to go with it. Michaux selected Chinese calligraphy and he created an original text to accompany the calligraphy. *Idéogrammes en Chine* is not only an illustrated work in which Michaux provides a commentary, but it is an exploration of line, color, language, art, calligraphy, ideographs, pictographs, painterly method, and Chinese culture. In much the same way that *Émergences-résurgences* is a hybrid work *par excellence—Idéogrammes en Chine* similarly synthesizes Michaux's lifelong exploration into the poetic and the pictorial.

While Michaux combined his texts with the artwork of others, he also created a number of texts on the artist Zao Wou-Ki. For instance, Michaux's *Jeux d'encre: Trajet Zao Wou-Ki* contains four texts by the poet-painter on Zao Wou-Ki: some on his art, others on the artist.[75] Michaux's poetic inquiry into Zao Wou-Ki and his work focuses on four aspects of the Chinese artist: his method, the lightness and modesty of his work, the open-ended nature of his art, and the balance he creates through rhythm in his art and the incorporation of nature into it. Michaux explores the way in which Chinese painting resembles Zao Wou-Ki's art; he writes in *Sur Zao Wou-Ki*, "les Chinois, avec d'amples moyens, se sont satisfaits, en architecture, de construire des palais ressemblant à des tentes, préservant à l'intérieur la lumière brouillée des sous-bois, et devant durer moins qu'une futaie" (*OC*, II, 1016). In much the same way that Chinese

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[75] See Henri Michaux. *Jeux d'encre: Trajet Zao Wou-Ki*. (Paris: L'Échoppe et La Maison des Amis des Livres, 1993). Included in this work are: *Lecture par Henri Michaux de huit lithographies de Zao Wou-ki* (see also *OC*, II, 261-279), *Sans titre 1952* which was written for Zao Wou-Ki's exhibition catalogue in London at the Hanover Gallery and at the Gadby-Birch Gallery in New York in 1952, (see also "Sur Zao Wou-Ki" in *Critiques, hommages, declarations 1948-1959, OC*, II, 1016-1017), *Trajet Zao Wou-Ki* which appeared in Claude Roy's text *Zao Wou-Ki* (Le Musée de poche, 1970) and also in *XXᵉ siècle* (1971): 73-80, (see also *OC,* III, 1399-1400), and *Jeux d'encre* which appeared in *Encres de Zao Wou-Ki* (Cercle d'Art, 1980), (see also *OC,* III, 1410-1411).

architecture is modest in method, so is Chinese art. Michaux remarks that materials used in Chinese art create a "légèreté" in presentation: the canvases used by the Chinese, "des toiles de soie" and "des papiers translucides," as well as the simplicity of color as they use primarily "gris" and "noir" indicate materials that are natural and thus reflect the principles of Chinese art (*SZWK, OC*, II, 1016). In a similar example, Michaux equates the modest media used in Chinese art to the creation of balance: poetry and painting are thus approached in the same way, illustrating the overlap in the material and method. He puts it in this way:

> Le maître est-il dit quelque part 'pose l'encre légèrement
> ici, lourdement là.' C'est le sans matière qui ressuscite la
> matière, la matière en mouvement. Ainsi le pinceau évasif
> couvre une grande distance : Tao de la peinture…où simulta-
> nément aborde la poésie (*JE, OC*, III, 1410).

As a result of Zao Wou-Ki's lightness in his artistic practice, his art has a certain degree of familiarity and also charme which is not "dépaysante" (*SZWK, OC*, II, 1016; *TZWK, OC*, III, 1399). In Chinese art, Michaux observes an "absence de poids" that is "nullement transportée d'autorité"; these observations concentrate on the natural construction of this art and the way Michaux understood it (*SZWK, OC*, II, 1016).

What Michaux discovers in the art of Zao Wou-Ki is exactly what the poet-painter searches for in his own image-only work, *Par la voie des rythmes*. He hopes to discover nature, harmony, movement, rhythm, and balance through art. *Par la voie des rythmes* resembles a musical score and it undoubtedly finds its roots in what Michaux observes in the Chinese calligraphy he included in *Idéogrammes en Chine* and also what he experienced in his inquiry into the work of Zao Wou-Ki. Notably, Michaux observes the natural rhythm in Chinese art that creates balance; he explains:

> les rythmes de la nature, plus importants que la

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nature, comme ils apparurent à la pensée là-bas. Le "Yang"
l'attendit. Le "Yin" aussi, immanquablement. Le papier sans
épaisseur les avait recueillis tout naturellement (*JE, OC*, III, 1410).

In *Trajet Zao Wou-Ki*, Michaux writes, "Zao Wou-Ki, lui aussi, a quitté le concret. Mais ses tableaux ont avec la nature gardé un air de famille" (*OC*, III, 1399). In this way, Zao Wou-Ki's works are open-ended like many of Michaux's and Magritte's paintings. Moreover, Michaux illustrates this idea when he writes, "Elle est là [la nature]. Elle n'est pas là. Ce ne peut être elle, ce qu'on voit. Ce doit être elle pourtant" (*TZWK, OC*, III, 1399).

As Michaux and Zao Wou-Ki's relationship was marked by collaboration and exchange, it was also defined by balance since each artist was drawn to the culture and art of the other. In a way, Michaux's exploration of the rhythm and balance manifest in Zao Wou-Ki's art was a way for Michaux to experience the Far East through the art of another practitioner. Michaux observes that Zao Wou-Ki's art is "plus libéré du concret que ses prédécesseurs en Chine" and that this encourages freedom which consequently creates a "harmonie du Monde" which is one of the main reasons Michaux was drawn to Zao Wou-Ki (*JE, OC*, III, 1411).

Unlike Michaux's relationship with Zao Wou-Ki, Michaux's interest in Magritte had nothing to do with the Belgian Surrealist. Instead, Michaux's explored the work of Magritte because Michaux believed his paintings were enigmatic, that they evoked dreams, and were a point of departure for meditation. For this reason, Michaux explored Magritte's artwork and wrote about it. Interestingly, Michaux once said "je ne veux apprendre que de moi"; yet in the preface to his *En rêvant à partir de peintures énigmatiques* he reflects on Magritte's paintings and writes that they have an "opération instructive (*ER, OC*, III, 549; *ERA, OC*, III, 695). Similarly, Michaux says in his preface that, above all, he wants to learn from these paintings (*ERA, OC*, III, 695). By considering a selection of Magritte's paintings that Michaux found

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intriguing, the poet-painter felt he could learn more about himself by using them as a point of departure for a poetic meditation on visual art. Michaux's inquiry into a collection of Magritte's graphic works led him to participate in what he calls Magritte's "enigmatic" paintings.

Exploring two poems from Michaux's *En rêvant* about two paintings by Magritte reveals the verbal-visual overlap in this loosely organized project while at the same time it addresses broader issues in Michaux's poetic inquiry. *En rêvant* shows that Michaux's meditations on Magritte's paintings are not purely verbal. That is, *En rêvant* fuses words and images in such a way that the combination results in a mixed form of communication: one that is neither purely verbal nor purely visual. Instead, Michaux's poetic inquiry into Magritte's visual art reveals that Michaux's project is a kind of expression in which language and image intersect and interact.

Magritte's *L'Empire des lumières* (1954) (Fig. 42) depicts a light blue daytime sky filled with white clouds juxtaposed with a scene of a house on a quiet street flanked by dark trees at night. After painting *L'Empire des lumières*, Magritte wrote in a letter to Felix Fabrizio that "I got the *idea* that night and day exist together, that they are one. This is reasonable, or at the very least it's in keeping with our knowledge: in the world, night always exists at the same time as day. (Just as sadness always exists in some people at the same time as happiness in others)." Between 1949 and 1964 Magritte painted 16 oil versions and 10 in gouache of *L'Empire des lumières*—all of which were commissioned by his dealer, Alexander Iolas. The combination of night and day is particularly important in this composition notably because the impulse to juxtapose opposites is rooted in surrealism while at the same time it recalls Magritte's paradoxical combinations notably those that combine words and images. He does this most famously with his pipe and the words "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" in *La Trahison des images*.
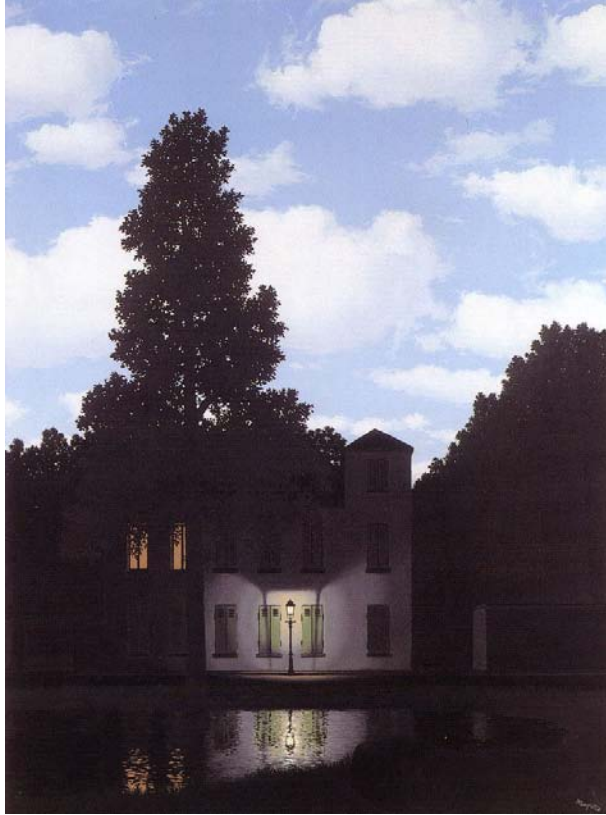
Figure 42. René Magritte *L'Empire des lumières* (1954)

In his text "à partir de" *L'Empire des lumières,* Michaux similarly juxtaposes day and night; he

writes:

> Il est rare que le jour et la nuit soient surpris ensemble.
> Cela arrive et c'est alors particulièrement exemplaire.
> Quelle bonne, souveraine harmonie ils font alors, si toute-
> fois le jour est calme, très calme, imprégné de mystère.
> Grâce au mystère, alors, la nuit sans difficulté s'unit au
> jour. Ils s'unissent et tout ensemble s'accomplissent dans
> un grand apaisement.
>   Celui qui ne s'est pas laissé lier par les attaches natu-
> relles des choses, lesquelles conduisent à l'esclavage, ne
> s'en émeut pas. À quoi tient la nature ? À si peu de chose,
> qu'une simple peinture change.
>   Un ciel bleu et blanc, un ciel de clair après-midi n'arrive
> pas à éclairer des arbres pourtant bien détachés, ni non
> plus une maison isolée, qu'un réverbère seul révèle, l'éclai-
> rant d'une lumière blafarde. L'atmosphère est quiète, trop
> quiète, d'une immobilité qui alerte. Mais rien n'arrivera.
> Tout est déjà arrivé ; arrêté depuis on ne peut savoir com-

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bien de temps (*OC*, III, 704).

Considering Michaux's text, the combination of day and night and time and space are particularly important to the verbal-visual overlap in this poetic inquiry.

Just as Magritte fuses night and day in his painting so Michaux's meditation echoes this fusion. While Magritte's image of night and day are in opposition, Michaux's results in a harmonious combination. It is not by chance that Michaux repeats the words "jour," "nuit," "s'unit," and "s'unissent" to illustrate the shared characteristics of day and night, namely that they exist simultaneously and that they are both calm and full of mystery. Along the same lines, Michaux creates a visual image of light and dark, and thus day and night, not only through the repeated use of "nuit" and "jour" but also by using words that convey light such as "ciel," "blanc," "clair," "éclairer," "réverbère," "révèle," "éclairant," and "lumière." Using terms that evoke light, Michaux presents dark and darkness through absence. In other words, he creates *contrast* between light and dark in his text just as a painter does with color.

In addition to simultaneously presenting day and night, Michaux's meditation depicts time and space together. While time relates more traditionally to writing and space to painting, Michaux mixes them, notably when he describes three periods of the day: "le jour," "l'après-midi," and "la nuit." On the one hand, Michaux creates a continuous sequence of time with these three periods of the day in his text that is linear. On the other, day, afternoon, and night are individual moments and each period represents a single visual image and thus space. Michaux creates time by linking day, afternoon, and night while at the same time he encapsulates these three moments in space in three individual snap-shots in his text. These three pictures read sequentially, as a triptych, and individually as stand-alone images.

The combination of day and night and time and space illustrates the textual and visual qualities in this meditation. Michaux's final phrase in his text: "Tout est déjà arrivé; arrêté depuis on ne peut savoir combien de temps," illustrates a technique in painting while it also alludes to a textual narrative. While a painter depicts the action leading up to the climactic moment in painting, in other words the moment leading up to the most intense action, a writer is able to communicate the before, the during, and the after without revealing the most salient moment of the work. In this example, Michaux does a little of both, he alludes to a moment after something has happened, leaving his audience to wonder what happened. In a way, what Michaux does is the opposite of the painter painting the moment leading up to the primary action. However, because Michaux does not depict the most heightened moment, he is, in a way, doing as the painter does, he is painting around the most salient image in time. Similarly, by saying that something did happen, as opposed to it will happen, Michaux suggests a narrative without having created one.

Michaux's poetic fragment about Magritte's *La Grande Famille* (1963) (Fig. 43) makes a similar case for the verbal-visual overlap in Michaux's *En rêvant*. Above a dark, vast ocean with foamy white waves crashing down in the forefront of the composition, a gigantic dove flies through a dark ocean sky. The bird's silhouette is filled with white airy clouds and blue skies—it looks like a cut out, as if it were pasted onto the canvas. The ominous sky recessed behind the dove places the bird in relief. The waves crash in the foreground and appear as though they will crash down and spill off the canvas while the dove continues its flight across the sky.

Figure 43. René Magritte *La Grande Famille* (1963)

Michaux writes:

> Un oiseau qui traversait des nuages, que des nuages
> traversaient…
>   Tandis qu'il volerait les ailes étendues largement par-
> dessus les mers, non plus criant, perpétuellement affamé,
> mais devenu contemplatif…
>   Oiseau en plein ciel, traversé des ciels (*OC,*III, 706).

Although this text is relatively short, it can be broken into three parts. Michaux begins, "Un oiseau qui traversaient des nuages, que des nuages traversaient...". This fragment mirrors exactly what Magritte's highly symmetrical painting presents. Similarly, the first part of Michaux's fragment is the exact mirror image of the second part of it. The two clauses that make up the

sentence repeat what each other describes in a chiasmus: as the bird crosses the sky the sky crosses the bird. By ending this first section with an ellipsis, Michaux avoids being redundant and he suggests the overlap between his words and the image his words describe. As a result, Michaux's depiction of a bird and clouds converging creates a snap-shot.

In the second section of the text that begins "Tandis que…," Michaux fuses the bird and sky together, no longer flying towards one another as in the first section of the text, the bird and sky overlap and are momentarily static. In other words, the bird and clouds align with each other. No longer crying out, the objects become silent and contemplative—their merging translates into harmony. Michaux ends the first part of this text with an ellipsis which he also does in the second part of his text. While Michaux's use of an ellipsis in each section suggests time and the continuation of his narration, it is also a visual play on words. The three periods in a row, "des points de suspension" in French, indicate that something is suspended. Michaux's use of an ellipsis thus refers to the large dove that Magritte suspends in air in his painting. Michaux's verbal technique results in a visual image that he repeats twice in his fragment. In other words, it's a verbal-visual double-take.

The third and final line of the text, "Oiseau en plen ciel, traversé de ciels" suggests the diverging directions of the bird and the clouds. While in the first section they are merging, in the second they overlap, in the third part of the text, they continue in opposite directions, again mirroring one another from an opposite perspective. The symmetrical balance of Michaux's words and the constant mirroring of the text create a doubling effect. In other words, the objects Michaux describes repeat themselves in words and in images, forcing the reader to read again and the viewer to see again. As a result, there are two levels of stability in this work: one resulting from the image-text relation and another resulting from the text-text relation. This

doubling structure recalls the calligram, in which words form images and the image defines the shape of what the words describe. While Magritte's painting suggests motion and movement through elements of nature: clouds, sky, sea, and the dove, Michaux's meditation creates a moving graphic through a sequence of three images that together form a narrated animation.

As its title suggests, *En rêvant* is rooted in dreams and exploration; Michaux thus travels through Magritte's enigmatic paintings—he explores the correspondences, the tensions, and the doublings of language and image in his 28 poetic fragments. *En rêvant* was first published in 1964 in *Mercure de France* and later in 1972 by Fata Morgana. While the 1964 publication has 26 textual fragments broken into two sections, the 1972 edition has 28 fragments without section breaks. The untitled postface from the earlier edition became the untitled preface to the 1972 version, and for it, Michaux composed a new, untitled postface. In both editions Michaux's texts are presented without illustrations and when the question of including small reproductions of Magritte's paintings arose, Michaux said that his project was conceived as a meditation. It is not by chance that Michaux writes in his preface that Magritte's paintings are "supports de meditation" and similarly that these meditations were "à partir des peintures." It is thus appropriate that Michaux did not want images to be included. His words alone, he felt, should be sufficient. Noting Michaux's relationship to language, his insistence on publishing his words in particular *without* any images, seems contradictory to Michaux's practice as poet-painter. *En rêvant* thus presents a rare instance in which Michaux privileges written words over images, suggesting his role as poet-inquirer and not poet-painter-inquirer. Nevertheless, the fact that Michaux's fragments are much like paintings themselves can explain Michaux's desire to keep his "artwork" separate from Magritte's.

Along the same lines, there are no titles in *En rêvant*. Michaux's preface, postface, and 28 texts are untitled. It is interesting to note that, in two of Michaux's other text-only works in which he comments on paintings, Michaux titles his work in a loose but deliberate way. For instance, in *Les Ravagés*, he numbered each of his short texts 1 through 40. In a similar text-only project, *Essais d'enfants, dessins d'enfants*, the poet-painter divided his poems into three sections which he titled "A," "B," and "C." These divisions orient the reader/viewer and provide an order for approaching each text. While Michaux generally titled his written texts, he rarely assigned titles to his paintings, and when it did, he typically named his art by the medium used to make it. The case of no titles in *En rêvant* points to his painterly practice. The absence of titles and divisions in *En rêvant* suggests that these poems, if they can indeed be called poems, are not entirely textual.

Michaux's poetic fragments in *En rêvant* demonstrate characteristics of an overlapping of language and image for a number of reasons. Each meditation appears on the page in a small, unframed block of text that is separate from the other texts (Fig. 44).

Tout seul, à part sur une table, le saxophone a pris feu*1.

☆

Occupant le tableau presque entier, une contrebasse, *la contrebasse*, au corps considérable, à l'allure pleine de suffisance, marquée de deux grandes virgules, ou clefs.
Fermé à la nature, aux voix de la forêt, aux voix de l'ardeur de la vie, aux voix de l'audace, ou aux voix de l'impossible, ce gros, ce borné, ce duc parmi les instruments repose* sur un faux col*2.

☆

Un oiseau qui traverserait des nuages, que des nuages traverseraient…
Tandis qu'il volerait les ailes étendues largement pardessus les mers, non plus criant, perpétuellement affamé, mais devenu contemplatif…
Oiseau* en plein ciel, traversé de ciels*3.

☆

Il suffit que l'on applique à une pomme, posée sur une table, un masque ou plutôt un loup, pour qu'elle regarde. Masquée, rien ne l'empêche plus d'être une personne dans cette pièce tranquille, où on ne va pas la déranger. La voilà aussitôt prête, inquiète, ou décidée.
Et si elles sont deux? Masquées toutes deux? Eh bien, ménage, c'est-à-dire précisément personnes masquées, l'air d'avoir à vivre ensemble, de feindre de s'entendre, de tenter de se défendre, l'air critique, l'air du couple, l'air du duo, l'air qu'on a lorsqu'on est pris par des sentiments familiaux, bourgeois, lesquels ne demandent décidément qu'à revenir, fût-ce dans une pomme; masque prêt à tout.
… Masque: tout ce qui reste du culte du bandit*4.

☆

Nature! nature! La nature est un tableau, que le peintre seul peut aisément mettre à l'envers, lui enlevant son règne, le règne de son perpétuel «endroit», la faisant lâcher, la renversant, la faussant* pour l'éternité (du moins celle de son tableau)1.

☆

On n'a pas vu un aigle se précipiter dans les flammes. Mais on le voit ici dans le tableau, témoin de son délire. Il y va périr à coup sûr, comme tous les proverbes du monde le savent et l'ont répété, mais sûrement un peu sans se rendre compte. Maintenant on le voit, le tableau le montre. On assiste à son plongeon dans les flammes, stupide, mais fatal. Fin prédite*2.

☆

Que soit aux défunts accordée une dernière* faveur.
Cercueils coudés pour morts préférant reposer assis*… à demi «redressés» déjà3.

☆

La lune, lassée d'être toujours derrière, cette fois se présente devant les arbres de la forêt, devant une maison isolée, toute naturelle, pas moins particulière, et faisant rêver, la même apparemment qui chaque mois refait ses éternelles figures qui se suivent sans surprise4.

Figure 44. Pages from *En rêvant* (1972)

The fragments are not connected to one another and instead they appear on the pages as independent texts. Michaux does not orient our reading of these texts. The poems lack a specific sequence for "reading" them which suggests that they can be approached in any number of ways. Similarly, there is no sequential progression. In other words, there is no narrative line from one text to the next, which reconfirms that they can be accessed in any number of ways. Magritte's paintings do not provide a linear reading structure either. Magritte's Surrealist's paintings date from the late 1920s to the 1960s and Michaux's writings on them do not follow their production dates chronologically. The language Michaux uses is highly visual and it describes tangible objects that appear regularly in Magritte's paintings. For instance, terms in the first fragment

such as "ciel bleu, blanc," "un ciel de clair après-midi," une maison isolée" and in the second fragment, Michaux's repetition of the bird, the sky, and clouds, evoke objects that are concrete and visual. Michaux's words thus become images on the page by using words that represent visual objects. Finally, in his meditations, Michaux does not mention—or even allude to—any of Magritte's titles, deliberately omitting what is often the only verbal or textual component included in most visual art.

The lack of textual features in *En rêvant* leads to a second set of arguments that demonstrates further the overlapping of language and image in this project. First, Michaux had no interest in the textual component of Magritte's paintings. He did not want his meditations to be directed in any way by language. Although Magritte's titles do not necessarily orient the viewer, mentioning them would have influenced Michaux's experience with these paintings in some way. Further, including or referring to Magritte's titles would have directed Michaux's audience (his reader/viewer) to a specific painting and title by Magritte. Second, Michaux wanted to create his own visual narrative for each individual painting, so by distancing his work from any pre-existing text, he was able to begin his narratives with a blank palette. On the one hand, Michaux's texts animate and narrate Magritte's painting, while on the other, Michaux's short texts are self-contained constructs and are textual snap-shots of his experience with these graphic works. Third and finally, in many of the texts in *En rêvant*, Michaux repeats words, names, actions, and concrete objects—exactly as Magritte did in his paintings. Just as Michaux's texts mirror in writing what Magritte's images show visually, there is another degree of mirroring: the mirroring of Michaux's text. By repeating words and images with language, Michaux's own work refers to itself through a text that creates visual objects. This is, in particular, the case in the second fragment where Michaux writes about the bird crossing the sky

that the sky crosses.   It is a visual-verbal "mise en abîme" all at once. *En rêvant* can thus be seen as pictures that speak about pictures, or what Mitchell calls "Metapictures" (1994, 36).

Since Michaux does not orient the reader/viewer with his texts or Magritte's paintings, the best way to orient our approach to these texts is by categorizing the different kinds of Magritte paintings Michaux refers to in his work. The 28 texts that compose *En rêvant* can be organized into four categories: 1) texts that refer to a specific painting by Magritte; among the 28 short texts, 23 refer to specific paintings, 2) texts that refer to two or more paintings by Magritte, 3) texts that allude to a known painting in a series by Magritte—Magritte often painted multiple versions of the same image, so it is not always certain which painting Michaux uses in his meditation, and 4) texts that suggest a painting by Magritte—in this case, Michaux mentions objects that Magritte typically used in any number of his paintings; however a specific image cannot be identified with certainty.

The two publications of *En rêvant* raise questions related to the relationship between the two Belgians. Did they know one another? Did they collaborate on this work? In the 1972 preface, Michaux reveals his experience with the paintings he comments on in *En rêvant*; Michaux admits, "je n'en avais guère vues" and that he only saw photographs of them, often in black and white, and also that the images he viewed were small reproductions. Michaux's limited exposure to Magritte's paintings kept them in the realm of the unknown, thereby allowing Michaux to escape through them. In much the same way that Michaux sought to distance his writings from the paintings that inspired them, Michaux refers to Magritte only by his initials, "R. M." in his preface, which illustrates Michaux's deep interest in distancing himself—above all—from the Surrealist painter and his paintings. It is uncertain whether

Michaux and Magritte met prior to the publication of *En rêvant*; however, in the 1972 postface, Michaux alludes to meeting his Belgian compatriot in Paris just before the 1964 publication.

In the postface to the 1972 publication of *En rêvant*, Michaux refers to the artist as "Magritte" and alludes to their meeting in Paris. Michaux writes that it was an "échange, conversation, intérêt" but does not elaborate on it. He continues and says, "j'ai appris quelques particularités de sa [Magritte's] vie." Later in his postface, he writes, "Pour moi, l'opération était terminée: celle de m'introduire dans l'inconnu: Ç'avait été comme d'entrer dans l'écriture d'une personne étrangère, là où avec peu de repères et tous du même ordre, et cessant de critiquer aussi bien que d'approuver, on s'abandonne sans résistance à une vie inattendue, dans une altérité qui fond" (*OC,* III, 713). Because Michaux's fascination with Magritte's art was rooted in the excitement of the unknown, Michaux's interest in the painter quickly faded. As Michaux puts it, "…pour continuer, j'en savais trop par d'autres voies" (*OC,* III, 713). Along the same lines, Michaux said that the "connu gênant l'inconnu" which "bientôt bloqua le champ" (*OC,* III, 713). Learning about Magritte brought Michaux out of the realm of the unknown and too far into the known.

Michaux's short texts in *En rêvant* are curious because they are not calligrams, emblems, or *poésie critique*; instead, they can be considered verbal-visual combinations that speak in pictures about Magritte's paintings. The great paradox of this work is that while Michaux distanced himself from the Surrealist movement, his mediations are automatic and thus surreal in their methodology; Michaux did not deliberate or go back and make changes to his work. Conversely, Magritte's juxtapositions are highly deliberate and calculated. His painterly method

is thus the very opposite of Surrealist automatism and the opposite of Michaux's practice.[76] Michaux's meditations, voyages, and adventures into the work of Magritte's paintings are enigmas not to be solved but explored. *En rêvant* brings together two forms of expression in which boundaries between words and images, time and space break and blur.

Michaux's fascination with Magritte's enigmatic works was inspired by the visual complexities of Magritte's surrealist paintings. Magritte's reversal of the natural order of visual objects, or at least the way in which they are understood, complicates the verbal fragments Michaux created from them. As a result, when looked at together, Michaux's poetic inquiry into Magritte's paintings brings another dimension to Magritte's unconventional compositions. While Michaux's exploration into Magritte's work is arguably more complex because it is more developed than some of his other projects on the work of artists, Michaux's close attention to distancing himself from Magritte makes this project particularly enigmatic. Nevertheless, Michaux's poetic inquiries into the work of other artists examines visual art through words and images and it is in these projects that Michaux continued his exploration of the self.

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[76] In "Henri Michaux et la fascination des images" Gennviève Bonnefoi writes, "En ce qui concerne Magritte, on peut s'interroger plus longuement sur les mobiles qui poussèrent Michaux à s'intéresser de si près à une oeuvre dont chacun pouvait constater qu'elle était l'antithèse absolue de la sienne…" *Europe* 689/699 (1987): 75. For similar discussion, see Sabine Dednam, "'En rêvant à partir de peintures énigmatiques.' Peinture, écriture, rythmes dans l'oeuvre de Henri Michaux," *French Studies in Southern Africa* 25 (1996): 55-71.

3.6   Poetic "signes"

In *Idéogrammes en Chine* Michaux describes his painterly methodology along side Chinese calligraphy he selected for this project. The organization of *Idéogrammes en Chine* illustrates a balance between the language and image, and in it Michaux writes poetry, prose, and essay to form a treatise on Chinese calligraphy (Mihailovich-Dickman 1996, 174). In doing so, Michaux assumes the role of poet-painter-producer in an attempt to synthesize language, art, calligraphy, and poetry in one text-and-image work.[77] The work reflects Michaux's search for an "utopie du signe" (*OC,* III*,* 1655).

Idéogrammes en Chine* appeared first as a preface to Tchang Long-Yen's (Léon L. Y. Chang) *La Calligraphie chinoise. Un art à quatre dimensions* and although Michaux began studying Chinese in 1969 he had abandoned it and his quest for a universal language by the time he wrote the text for *Idéogrammes en Chine*.[78] Michaux's selection of calligraphy, the illustrations, highlights the importance of bringing together his words and the images created by other poet-painters, that is, calligraphers (Fig. 45) (*OC*, III, 1658).

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[77] Mihailovich-Dickman refers to Michaux as "Michaux-calligraph" in her discussion of *Par la voie des rythmes* (1996) 172.
[78] Tchang Long-Yen, *La Calligraphie chinoise. Un art à quatre dimensions* (1971). Michaux's text is dated July 1970 (*OC,* III) 1664.

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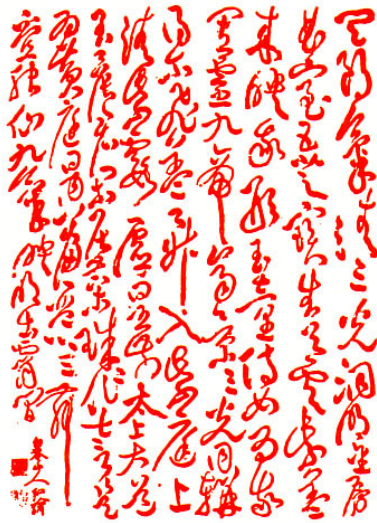
Idéogrammes[a] sans évocation.

Caractères variés à n'en pas finir.
La page[b] qui les contient : un vide lacéré.
Lacéré de multiples vies indéfinies.

Il[c] y eut pourtant une époque, où les signes étaient encore parlants, ou presque, allusifs déjà, montrant plutôt que choses, corps ou matières, montrant des groupes, des ensembles, exposant des situations[1].

Il y eut une époque. Il y en eut d'autres. Sans chercher à simplifier, ni abréger, chacune à la tâche de dérouter pour son propre compte, se mit, brouillant les pistes, à manipuler les caractères de façon à les éloigner encore d'une nouvelle manière de la lisibilité primitive[d].

Figure 45. Wang Zuolin, calligraphy (Qing Dynasty), text, *Idéogrammes en Chine* (1975)

Like *Peintures et dessins,* in which Michaux chose to print his texts in red, the calligraphy in *Idéogrammes en Chine* is also in red instead of black which was the color originally used by the calligraphers. This is not by chance since red represents an important color in Chinese culture: immortality and fortuitous events (*OC*, III, 1659-1660). The ensemble of *Idéogrammes en Chine* indicates an important event in Michaux's inquiry into Chinese language and culture which he appropriately captures in red.

Michaux's textual exploration in *Idéogrammes en Chine* centers around three aspects of calligraphy. First, its ability to create original experiences—the newness of it refreshes the mind and body; he writes:

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> ...les trouvailles
> des individualistes, les raretés et bizarreries, excentri-
> cités et originalités de toute sorte...
>   La langue chinoise en était capable. Partout elle
> donne des occasions à l'originalité. Chaque caractère
> fournit une tentation" (*IC, OC*, III, 845).

Michaux continuously looked to create what did not exist through words and images and for Michaux calligraphy functioned as a form of language and art possessing the ability to create something new.   Nearly every term in this text conveys excitement about calligraphy's originality. Michaux explains how each character is different, thus conveying an original idea: "Partout elle donne des occasions à l'originalité" (*IC, OC*, III, 845).   The text and image combinations of characters present a new visual appearance that is much like art and less like language. For this reason, calligraphy is "pleine de nouveau-nés – que de nouveau-nés!" and "pleine de terres vierges" (*IC, OC*, III, 831). Michaux's text finds its roots in what fascinated him about the art of Zao Wou-Ki and Magritte, the ability to form original images and ideas. Second, calligraphy places the reader/viewer in nature. Just as Michaux admired profoundly Zao Wou-Ki's art and Chinese painting because they were rooted in nature, so too does Michaux believe that calligraphy places the mind and body in this setting.[79]   Michaux writes, "Calligraphie auprès de laquelle, plus simplement, on se tient comme auprès d'un arbre, d'une roche, d'une source" (*IC, OC*, III, 851). Calligraphy is not an escape, but instead it is a way to co-exist in the world whereby a symbiotic relation forms between man and nature, as opposed to a dichotomous one.   Third and finally, Michaux writes that calligraphy perfects language and that it creates a balance between language, art, and writing. He puts it this way, "La calligraphie l'exalte [la langue chinoise]. Elle parfait la poésie; elle est l'expression qui rend le poème

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[79] I believe this is also true of the paintings Michaux selected for *En rêvant*.

valable, qui avalise le poète" (*IC, OC*, III, 843). Calligraphy is thus "Équilibration" (*IC, OC*, III, 843).

The combination of originality, nature, and balance exemplify Michaux's principles as a poet-painter and a poet-inquirer. In *Idéogrammes en Chine*, Michaux articulates once again his linguistic and painterly ideology in much the same way that he does in *Peintures et dessins* and *Émergences-résurgences*. Indeed, *Idéogrammes en Chine* synthesizes Michaux's practice as a poet-painter. It is a precursor to Michaux's last two text-and-image projects, which incorporate his invented calligraphic characters juxtaposed with original texts: *Saisir* and *Par des traits*. As a result, "the ostensibly impervious border between the textual and the pictorial is ultimately obscured" in Michaux's poetic "signes" (Williams 2000, 494). His inquiry into the work of Chinese calligraphers and Chinese language, was yet another way for Michaux to explore verbal-visual combinations and a way for him to draw correspondences between his own practice and that of calligraphers, who are like him poet-painters. In this way, Michaux forms a relationship between himself and a group of practitioners working in a genre similar to the one in which Michaux worked.

Starting in 1951, approximately half way through Michaux's career, he began to mix Chinese and French in a more visually obvious way. He did this in a total of five projects that included his own signature "signes."[80] The importance of *Mouvements* is that it established a form and style Michaux used in his subsequent "signe" works. It also shows the difficulty Michaux had privileging literature over art or art over literature. His career-long struggle with the poetic and the pictorial was resolved or at least addressed—to a certain degree—in these types of works (*OC*, III, 431-432). By creating a fictitious *écriture* that looked like calligraphy

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[80] They include: *Mouvements, Parcours, Par la voie des rythmes, Saisir,* and *Par des traits.*

juxtaposed with a poem, Michaux found a kind of expression that allowed him to cross borders between word and image.

After *Mouvements*, Michaux engaged in mescaline experimentation and subsequently returned to the "signe." This time, Michaux created two image-only works, exclusively of his invented characters. One of them, *Parcours*, includes Michaux's "alphabets fictifs" along with an introduction written by Bertelé (*OC*, III, 1649). The fact that Bertelé—and not Michaux—wrote this introduction emphasizes the absence of Michaux's words and thus Michaux poet (*OC*, III, 1648). The other image-only project, *Par la voie des rythmes*, detaches itself from language even more than *Parcours* because it has no text at all: there is neither a preface nor a postface.[81] The work is composed of eighty-four drawings whose shape and form vary and the "signes" in this work demonstrate a synthesis of Michaux's painted works and his literary projects (*OC*, III, 1650). Michaux achieves this through the mise-en-page which has a textual appearance: there are five chapters, each indicated by a "dessin-signe" to the right of a horizontal number indicated by: I, II, III, IIII and IIIII, rotated 90 degrees (Fig. 46) (*OC*, III, 1652).

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[81] The idea of omitting titles comes to mind, of course, in the case of *En rêvant* in which neither the preface nor the postface are titled. In this instance, the absence of a preface, postface, or titles of any kind underscores Michaux's desire to distance his graphic "signes" from any form of Western language, except for the title to the image-only work "Parcours."
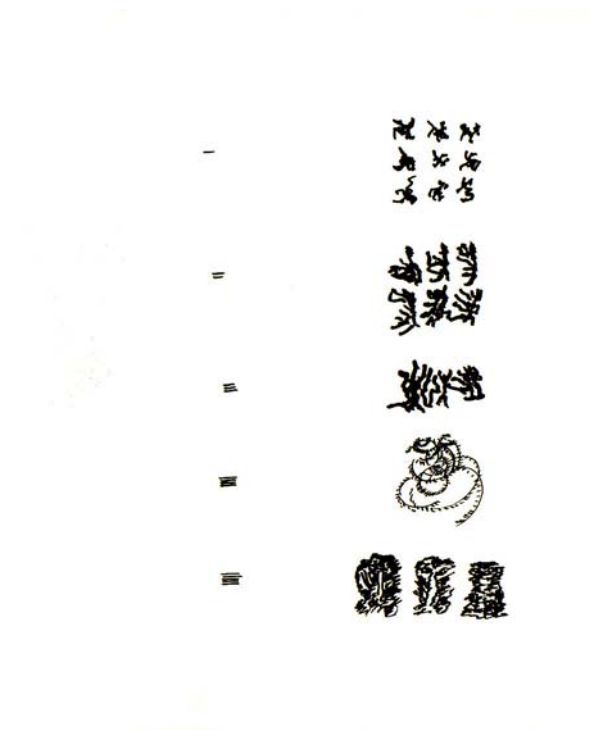
Figure 46. Table of contents, *Par la voie des rythmes* (1974)

The year following *Par la voie des rythmes*, Michaux published *Idéogrammes en Chine*; the publication sequence of *Parcours* followed by *Par la voie des rythmes* then *Idéogrammes en Chine*, underscores a synthetic moment in Michaux's career. After creating two image-only "signe" works, Michaux writes a poetic treatise on Chinese calligraphy in his *Idéogrammes en Chine*. In his last two "signe" works, *Saisir* and *Par des traits*, Michaux returned to using text and image together, combining both media in much the same way he did in *Mouvements*.

Michaux's five "signe" works raise two essential questions: first, what would have been the future of Michaux had he not gone to China in 1931? (Mihailovich-Dickman1996,162). And second, how do Michaux's "signes" relate to Chinese art, thought, and calligraphy? The first question appears to have a simple answer: if Michaux had not traveled to Asia, he would have not been inclined to create his own *écriture* resembling Chinese calligraphy. Even prior to

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Michaux's voyage to the Far East, he began experimenting with art, line, and language. It seems however that this trip influenced not only his art but quite profoundly his spirit. Because Michaux speaks of this experience years and years later, recalling the way in which this culture affected not only his artistic practice but also his spirit, it reflects a transformation that had long before entered into the poet-painter. Why Michaux executed his "signe" projects so much later in his career, as opposed to immediately or shortly after his trip, can be accounted for by a progression in his text-and-image works. Michaux's work has always been rooted in the Far East—and this is clear from his earliest visual works to his juxtapositions of his trees and texts in *Arbres des tropiques* to his mescaline projects.

Chinese art, poetry, and calligraphy help address the second question. Unlike the separation of the arts that exists in Western culture, Michael Sullivan explains in his text *The Three Perfections: Chinese Painting, Poetry and Calligraphy* that "for over a thousand years, the three arts of painting, poetry and calligraphy have been intimately connected in the minds of cultivated Chinese" (1974, 4). Although the three arts have been linked for an important period of time, Sullivan writes that painting "was often called 'silent poetry' *wu sheng shilh*, and functioned as a way to release feelings that need not, or sometimes could not, be put into words" (1974, 30). Painting as silent poetry recalls Lessing's claims about the sister arts; however, in the Chinese conception, one is not superior to the other. Sullivan also notes that calligraphers (writers) and painters were considered equals and that "calligraphy and painting are essentially the same thing" [82] (1974, 17). Further, Chinese calligraphers and painters use the same materials

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[82] Sullivan writes, "A thirteenth-century critic wrote of the great calligrapher Wang Hsien-chih (303-379) and the scholar-painter Mi Fu (1050-1107), 'being good calligraphers they were inevitably able painters, being good painters they were inevitably able calligraphers: calligraphy and painting are essentially the same thing'." (Chao His-ku, *Tung-t'ien ch'ing-lu chi* tr. Susan

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and "virtually the same technique, the same fluent rhythmic touch" (Sullivan 1974, 11).

Michaux's invented ideograms reflect a similarity in medium and style, in particular the "fluent rhythmic touch" employed in Chinese calligraphy (Sullivan 1974, 11). Indeed, the technique and juxtapositions in Michaux's five "signe" projects create rhythm. Moreover, "[t]he idea that writing and painting belong together is a very ancient one in China, and according to the ninth-century Chinese historian, Li-tai ming-hua-chi, "[w]riting and painting have different names but a common body" (Sullivan 1974, 11). This common body, one formed from images, is manifest Michaux's "signe" hybrids.

Michaux's two final text-and-image "signe" projects that combine poetry and his invented ideograms relate closely to the poet-painter's earlier Asian-inspired works. In both *Saisir* and *Par des traits*, Michaux candidly addresses his reader/viewer through meditations on language. However, unlike his earlier poetry, aphorisms, essays, and writings on language, Michaux reveals in *Saisir* that he is no longer trying to create a language; he writes, "Mon projet d'une nomenclature s'estompait, s'oubliait" (*OC*, III, 939). As a result, Michaux takes a different approach to language and "signes." In these later projects, the *espéranto* continues to seek an original form of signifying; he seeks movement, freedom, reconciliation, and closure.

Saisir is more complex both in its presentation and content than *Par des traits* which conveys a verve of free verse in two energized, visceral parts. The first part of *Par des traits* resembles *Mouvements*, where the work begins with "signes," then it transitions to a text, and it concludes with another series of "signes." In the second part of *Par des traits*, words and

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Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting* (1971) 115. See also Michael Sullivan, *The Three Perfections: Chinese Poetry, Painting and Calligraphy* (1974) 17.

"signes" merge on the pages in a final meditation on language that finishes Michaux's voyage through "signes."

Saisir appears to be Michaux's final attempt at creating a "semiotopia" (Sieburth 2006, n. pag). Michaux's quest for a graphic language develops the most in this work, primarily because of the text's content along with the Asian-inspired images. In his recent translation of *Saisir* and *Par des traits*, which he titles *Stroke by Stroke*, Sieburth argues that Michaux's title *Saisir* is not rooted in law, as its etymological definition would suggest, instead the term "saisir" is "rooted in the epistemological and aesthetic: to perceive, to discern, to apprehend" (2006, n. pag). In this way, *Saisir* is an exploration into the poet-painter. *Saisir* suggests that Michaux hopes to uncover and codify his work and further to look within and discover the self by means of the forms, shapes, and words he attempted to create in *Saisir*. According to Michaux, *Saisir* had three goals which he states at the beginning of his text, which he begins in this way:

> Qui n'a voulu saisir plus, saisir mieux, saisir au-
> trement, et les êtres et les choses, pas avec des
> mots, ni avec des phonèmes, ni des onomatopées,
> mais avec des signes graphiques ?
>
> Qui n'a voulu un jour faire un abécédaire, un
> bestiaire, et même tout un vocabulaire, d'où le
> verbal entièrement serait exclu ? (*OC*, III, 936).

Michaux's desire to create an "abécédaire," a "bestiaire," and a "vocabulaire d'où le verbal entièrement serait exclu" together suggest his desire to return to the primitive, when inventing forms, ideas, and ways to communicate was beginning to form. By means of creating an original alphabet, bestiary, or vocabulary, Michaux could have made every verbal and visual creation original. This, however, proved to be impossible:

> Mes efforts pour maintenir la saisie et l'esprit
> de saisie augmentaient bientôt mes sentiments
> d'opposition et me faisaient d'autant plus refuser

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tel animal qu'avec plus de détermination je le
dessinais. Refus de la représentation, refus de les
faire ressemblants, refus de me soumettre à la
ressemblance en général, refus de me rendre
semblable, et volonté de 'rendre' s'interrom-
paient et se succédaient. À un autre niveau se
retrouvait, d'abord inaperçu, mon refus ancien
d' 'assimiler'. Véhémence croissante, que celle
de ces prises alternant avec les rejets. Sans le
savoir et longtemps sans le remarquer, je revenais
au double acte primordial du « oui » et du « non »,
de l'acceptation et de l'horreur de l'acceptation.
Je me livrais tantôt à l'un, tantôt à l'autre, et les
animaux soumis chaotiquement à ma représenta-
tion contradictoire étaient traversés de traits
brusques comme de grandes négations. C'en était
réelement (*S, OC*, III, 938).

Michaux's vehement refusal of "la représentation" and "la ressemblance" drove him to continue

his search; however, in the second part of the passage, Michaux realizes that he was torn between

"acceptation" and "l'horreur de l'acceptation" (*S, OC*, III, 938). To take another example

Michaux explains:

Je combats le parallélisme, tout parallélisme.

Rendre les formes, les modèles, est-ce telle-
ment l'opération à faire ? (*S, OC*, III, 955).

Michaux refuses resemblance and asks not for a model but he maintains the hope for an original.

As a result, he would have to struggle with his own practice of visual representation whereby he

found an intermediary position between "oui" and "non" which would define his existence as

poet-painter. Similarly, he says:

Échapper, échapper à la similitude, échapper à
La parenté, échapper à ses « semblables » !

Désobéir à la forme.
Comme si, enfant, je me l'étais juré (*S, OC*, III, 958).

Once again, Michaux creates a way to compose the new and at the same time a means of escaping from what already exists: verbal and visual representations of reality. Just as this "double acte" defined his split self—by bringing words and images together, their combination attempts to achieve a form of reconciliation of the self—so he worked with what already existed: words, and he invented what did not: "signes." In doing so, he moves towards a utopia made of the "signes" *he* created throughout his career (*S, OC*, III, 938). The creation of his "signes" hybridizes the verbal and the visual and consequently meaning emerges as a result of these primitive, original, unencumbered forms. While Michaux says "Les menottes des mots ne se relâcheront plus," his invented "signes" do just the opposite: they can change a situation, he explains, "Par des signes, saisir une situation, quelle merveille! Quelle transformation!" (*PT, OC*, III, 1281; *S, OC*, III, 971).

Michaux's passion for "geste," "tache," and "signes" in *Saisir* and *Par des traits* is no less energized than it was in *Mouvements*. The combination of these three elements electrified *Mouvements* and is reborn in these two later projects. In *Mouvements*, Michaux wrote about "taches," "gestes," and "signes":

> Taches
> taches pour obnubilier
> pour rejeter
> pour désabriter
> pour instabiliser
> pour renaître
> pour raturer
> pour clouer le bec à la mémoire
> pour repartir
>
> […]
>
> Gestes
> gestes de la vie ignorée

gestes de la vie
gestes de la vie impulsive
et heureuse à se dilapider
de la vie saccadée, spasmodique, érectile
de la vie à la diable, de la vie n'importe comment

[…]

Signes
non de toit, de tunique ou de palais
non d'archives et de dictionnaire du savoir
mais de torsion, de violence, de bousculement
mais d'envie cinétique (*M*, *OC*, II, 439-440).

By means of "taches," "gestes," and "signes," Michaux escapes from the concrete, cerebral world into one that is rooted profoundly in a passion for energy, movement, and freedom—one that is spasmodic and erratic. Michaux's vision of such a sporadic and unpredictable world first appears in *Mouvements* and his visceral poetry delivers a verbal-visual energy that creates a cinematic experience. That is, the words and images leap off the pages and into each other, colliding and resulting in a particular style typical of Michaux's "signe" hybrids much as they do in *Arbres des tropiques*.

These same stylistic features characterize *Saisir* and *Par des traits*. In *Saisir*, Michaux emphasizes gesture and its ability to capture action and energy:

> Les gestes, les attitudes, le mouvement, les
> actions, c'est cela qui m'entraînait, et qui m'inci-
> tait présentement à les reproduire. Mais autre-
> ment que dans les langues d'avant l'écriture où,
> peut-être pour des raisons de commodité, les
> idéogrammes et pictogrammes sont généralement
> statiques, au contenu, au rendu statique, de façon
> à pouvoir être recopié couramment par n'importe
> qui, à n'importe quel moment, sans nécessiter un
> élan spécial. […]
>
> J'aurais voulu dans un homme représenter le
> geste, partant de l'intérieur, le déclenchement,
> l'arrachement ; l'*irruption* coléreuse de cette

intense, subite, ardente concentration d'où va
partir le coup, plutôt que le coup arrivé à
destination (*S, OC*, III, 962-963).

The text in *Saisir* conveys energy, particularly in the second part of the passage where he writes, "l'*irruption* coléreuse de cette intense, subite, ardente concentration," "partir le coup," and "arrive à destination" (*S, OC*, III, 963). For over sixty years gesture drove Michaux to create "signes." Gesture as energy, as movement, as escape from the static, as therapy. Michaux realizes that he cannot harness the energy in "le geste" to represent man, even though he would have wanted to, when he says "J'aurais voulu," it implies the impossibility of such a form of communication. Nevertheless, Michaux continues by means of gesture in *Par des traits*. The poetic language of the first part of the work resembles closely *Mouvements* both in form, content, and layout. His text begins:

Gestes plutôt que signes
départs

Éveil
autres éveils

PAR DES TRAITS

Approcher, explorer par des traits
Atterrir par des traits

étaler
altérer par des traits

susciter ériger
dégager par des traits

Défaire
détourner

ramener à soi
rejeter d'auprès de soi

froisser
Insignifier par des traits

Percer
pousser
cherchant
cherchant toujours LA SORTIE DU TERRIER

Pour dégager
Pour desserrer
pour assécher
pour débloquer
pour faire éclater…(*PT, OC*, III, 1249-1250).

Par des traits, in much the same way as *Mouvements*, relies on repetition of the preposition "pour" to explicate and exhaust the endless capabilities of the "geste." Unlike the "signe" which was central to the text in *Mouvements*, Michaux shifts his focus to the "geste" as a means of undermining and undoing the world. Michaux's "geste," which lives by means of "par des traits," leads him into an unstable existence, one dominated by action that moves in all directions that is spasmodic and unpredictable, one that disjoints and renders enigmatic.

Michaux concludes *Saisir* with "vers accomplissement" suggesting that his study of "signes" was nearly realized (*OC*, III, 983). Conversely, *Par des traits* ends much more resolutely, the poet-painter writes a concluding treatise on language in the form of a mediation in words:

De petits bouts de langue seulement, bien choisis, il
s'en contenterait, s'y plairait, en changerait après quelque
temps.
Une langue sans prétention, pour des hommes sachant
qu'ils ne savent pas.

Pas vraiment une langue, mais toute vivante, plutôt des
émotions en signes qui ne seraient déchiffrables que par la
détresse et l'humeur ; signes, dont le manque nous fait vivre
maintenant en état de frustration.
Après des millénaires, l'envie du signe pictographique,

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> Toujours par disparue.
>   Elle a ses moyens, son aisance, sa délivrance propre.
>   En dehors de la signalisation utilitaire, autre chaîne qui se
> prépare, elle a encore un avenir, vaste et rénovateur, mais
> comme vacances, satisfaction en soi.
>   Signe : enfin délivrant des litanies de mots, de phrases
> ne reposant que sur des phrases, se continuant en phrases il
> libérerait le cerveau de sa suroccupation locale.
>
>   Retour à une opération primitive dont la tentation encore
> sourde reçoit actuellement une nouvelle impulsion.
>   Signes qui permettraient d'être ouvert au monde autre-
> ment, créant et développant *une fonction différente* en
> l'homme, le désaliénant (*OC*, III, 1284).

Michaux leaves the reader/viewer between text and image in his final remarks on language. Because he has abandoned his quest for a one of his own, he suggests what a language should be: modest, simple, possessing only the necessary, primitive, and original. Michaux's final text-and-image project thus addresses his search for a language unique to him whereby he makes recommendations for what a language should be and how it should operate.

It is quite possible that Michaux considers Chinese calligraphy as art, rather than language, because he does not read or understand it, so calligraphy resides in the realm of the purely graphic. Michaux's pseudo "signes" are thus rooted in a system of language the poet-painter does not read, speak, or comprehend and Michaux does not associate with calligraphy on a linguistic level but instead in a visual way, and his "signes" find their roots in gesture ("geste"). Further, his "signes" reflect features of both language and art and are between the verbal and the visual: like Chinese calligraphy, Michaux created his "signes" using black ink, and similar to the mise-en-page of calligraphy, which can be read and viewed vertically and horizontally, the layout of Michaux's "signes" emulates this form.

While the Far East was Michaux's inspiration for nearly all of his text-and-image projects, his motivation for mixing media also came out of his desire to discover the self. Thus, his research into his own practice as a writer and painter as well as his inquiry into the art of other artists, writers, and calligraphers shows Michaux's desire to understand the relation between word and image and poet and painter. Further, Michaux's word-and-image inquiries appear to have been a means for him to escape from his alienated existence. By engaging in collaborative projects and exposing himself to the work of others, Michaux created common paths and established connections between his practice and that of other mixed-media practitioners.

CONCLUSION

While much of Henri Michaux's existence found its roots in opposition, the combination of language and image collapsed some of the binary divisions in his life and self, resulting in a figure and a body of work hinged on complementary components. The poet-painter's lifelong exploration into language and image found its inspiration in China, a voyage that led Michaux to explore the self, word, and image. At the same time, Michaux explored continuously his own work and that of other artists and these inquiries not only drove Michaux to reflect on different word-image combinations but most importantly, they led him to articulate his view of his practice and method as a poet-painter. Reflecting on his work, Michaux developed insights into his self through writing and painting, and by researching these forms of expression, Michaux came to a better understanding of himself, and the resulting hybridity within his corpus is the product of this highly personal self-inquiry. Michaux's transition to poet-painter, as a practitioner who operates between words and images, is thus the product of an intellectual and internal struggle he attempted to alleviate by mixing media, consequently leading to his verbal-visual body of work which he, perhaps by default, externalized in his verbal-visual corpus.

Michaux's divided self has its roots in his homeland of Belgium, a country where he felt Otherness and alienated from his family, his compatriots, and the language they spoke. These feelings of alienation created divisions within him, causing Michaux to place a great distance between himself and all that he associated with his with his native country. However, prior to

leaving Belgium definitively, Michaux discovered Lautréamont, a literary figure who inspired the young Belgian to write. For the first time in Michaux's young life, he identified with another person, albeit a fictional one, Maldoror, the protagonist in Lautréamont's *Chants de Maldoror*. Michaux's connection with this central figure was his initial impetus for exploring literary creation, which ultimately came from his desire to form relationships with others, and moreover to connect with his world through creative expression. However, Michaux saw the French language as unoriginal, as a prefabricated form of expression, since he had to use the same words as everyone else to communicate. The strict rules of French grammar and syntax and importantly, its vocabulary, troubled Michaux. Despite his initial enthusiasm for writing, his relation to language quickly transformed into a profound frustration with it.

Just as Michaux's literary career began primarily as the result of a single factor, so too did his career as a visual artist. Shortly after moving to Paris in 1924, Michaux visited a Surrealist art exhibition that electrified him and while he had despised visual art and artists, this experience encouraged his interest in this form of expression and its practitioners, motivating his earliest graphic art experiments. Unlike Michaux's disillusionment with writing, his desire to produce artwork remained stable and constant throughout his life, and creating visual art—the sheer act of creating it—was quite possibly his *raison d'être*.

Together, these factors account for the early period of Michaux's career as a poet and painter. However, more influential than these initial experiences was arguably his trip to the Far East. This voyage exposed Michaux—for the first time—to a culture in which he felt less alienated. Importantly, he came to understand China and its culture through what he saw, in part because he did not speak the Chinese language, and so his understanding of it developed from an experience not concentrated on the linguistic features of this textual and pictorial form of

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communication but instead on the visual appearance of it. Michaux's introduction to this "visual" language refocused his interest on writing and art and he now viewed French, what he viewed as a strictly verbal language in relation to Chinese, a language that was simultaneously verbal and visual. Not only did his voyage to the Far East eclipse the initial factors that motivated his mixed-media work, but it also led him to produce a hybridized form of expression—one that fused language and image in word-image juxtapositions. Much of the work Michaux created following this meaningful journey attempted to recreate what he had experienced first hand in the Far East: a visual form of language that brought together words and images. Michaux thus adopted the materials, physical gestures, and approach used to create Chinese calligraphy, ultimately transforming him into a poet-painter.

Initially, the text-and-image projects Michaux made following his trip to China did not explicitly resemble visual elements of Chinese writing. However, in *Peintures* (1939), he painted on black backgrounds, recalling the importance of black ink in Chinese writing, and in *Arbres des tropiques* (1942), he used black ink on white backgrounds, materials used by a writer, a painter, and a calligrapher. In *Peintures et dessins* (1946), Michaux brought together his own texts and images where the poems he wrote, printed on transparent pages, lay on top of his paintings, creating an experience that, like Chinese writing, was simultaneously verbal and visual. The various ways Michaux introduced features of Chinese calligraphy into his work illustrate that he did not leave behind what he observed during his travels. That, in fact, Michaux began incorporating the most primary elements used to create this language into his own work. The media and technique Michaux appropriated in these works affirm his material transformation into a poet-painter.

Beyond materials, movement and gesture were essential to the production of Chinese writing which became manifest in Michaux's poetic and pictorial practice. He converted physical gesture into visual art forms in his Asian-inspired "signes," notably in *Mouvements* (1951), and in his mescaline drawings in works such as *Misérable miracle* (1956) and *Paix dans les brisements* (1959). In order to create these forms, Michaux had to be physically active and to engage his body in this corporeal process, using gesture to produce "signe" after "signe" and movement and action to execute his spasmodic mescaline drawings. The texts and the visual art in these works also developed in similar ways: through accumulation and repetition of words and forms. In his texts, Michaux established visual patterns using language, as is clear in the poetic fragments in *Mouvements*, and in his loosely structured poem in *Paix dans les brisements*. By repeating words and aligning them vertically, Michaux presented language in a layout that emphasized the visual features of language. By positioning "signe" after "signe" and arranging multiple drawings together, Michaux suggests that his images function as language. The overlap of language and image in these mixed-media projects is the result of Michaux's highly active technique driven by gesture to produce visual forms. By communicating through gesture, Michaux reconciled tensions between the verbal and the visual in a process that was essential to his creative practice. The creation of these forms merged numerous divisions within Michaux: language and image, Far East and West, self and Other, and poet and painter. Gesture thus proved to be essential to Michaux's work and it contributed to Michaux's physical transformation into a poet-painter.

While material factors played a significant role in Michaux's poetic-pictorial practice, the Far East also inspired Michaux to move beyond objects and physical expression in his work. Importantly, it encouraged Michaux to explore the intellectual and spiritual practices in this part

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of the world, in particular meditation. This led Michaux to engage in "inquiries" into his own work and that of other visual artists and writers. Michaux's most intense meditations began in the early 1970s with his text on Magritte: *En rêvant à partir de peintures énigmatiques* (1972) and continued with *Idéogrammes en Chine* (1975), *Saisir* (1979), and *Par des traits* (1984), Michaux's final text-and-image work. Michaux's inquiries into creative expression explain the final stage of Michaux's transformation into a poet-painter which was an intellectual one. Michaux's material, physical, and intellectual transformation into a poet-painter is primarily the result of his trip to the Far East which was a point of departure for reconciling internal conflicts within the self. Whereas the material and physical aspects of creating texts and visual art are visible to the reader/viewer, and thus reflect external processes, Michaux's intellectual transformation to a poet-painter represents an internal reconciliation which is less visible in his creative work. Nevertheless, all three transformational moments reflect Michaux's experience in the Far East which eventually led to his career as a poet-painter.

Although other practitioners contemporary to Michaux used words and images together, Michaux's combinations created a methodological gap between his practice and that of his contemporaries. Unlike the Surrealist René Magritte who, for instance, set up a relation between words and images in order to show tension between them, Michaux explored language and image by bringing these two forms together to relieve tensions within him, as a form of physical and emotional therapy. In doing so, he produced a kind of expression where the boundaries between the verbal and the visual break down and disintegrate, resulting in an overlap between them. These formations highlight the shared characteristics of language and image, thus breaking rules of genre, notably those Lessing argued for in the modern period's separation of the arts. Michaux's juxtapositions are not rooted in codes of genre that dictate purely verbal or

purely visual forms or uniquely temporal or spatial formations; instead, they demonstrate tendencies of border crossing typical of the postmodern period in which words and images overlap and expression relies on a simultaneous temporality and spatiality. Michaux's mixed-media is a kind of expression between two periods while he is a transitional figure situated between the modern and postmodern movements. His juxtapositions affirm his role as a poet-painter thereby mediating the relationship between words and images, self and other. Just as Michaux said, "Je peins comme j'écris. Pour trouver, pour me retrouver, pour trouver mon propre bien que je possédais sans le savoir," (*OC*, II, 1026) he combined words and images as a way to explore the self and this inquiry consequently led to the parallel development of Michaux as a poet-painter and to the meaningful and overlapping relationship between words and images in his corpus.

ABBREVIATIONS

All references are to Henri Michaux's *Œuvres complètes*, 3 published vols., ed. Raymond Bellour and Ysé Tran (Paris: Gallimard, 1998, 2001, 2004)

Affrontements	*AF*
Ailleurs	*A*
Apparitions	*APP*
Arbres des Tropiques	*AT*
Au pays de la Magie	*PM*
Aventures de lignes	*AL*
Bras cassé	*BC*
Cas de folie circulaire	*CFC*
Chronique de l'aiguilleur	*CA*
Connaissance par les gouffres	*CG*
Déplacements, dégagements	*DD*
Ecuador	*E*
Émergences-résurgences	*ER*
En rêvant à partir de peintures énigmatiques	*ERPP*
Entre centre et absence	*ECA*
Épreuves, exorcismes	*EE*
L'Espace du dedans	*EDD*
Essais d'enfants dessins d'enfants	*EEDE*
Face à ce qui dérobe	*FCD*
Face aux verrous	*FV*
Façons d'endormi, façons d'éveillé	*FF*
Les Grandes Épreuvves de l'esprit	*GEE*
Ici, Poddema	*IP*
Idéogrammes en Chine	*IC*
L'Infini turbulent	*IT*
Jeux d'encre	*JE*

TEXT-AND-IMAGE WORKS

All references are to the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade *Œuvres complètes* edition of Henri Michaux's works.

Œuvres complètes Vol. 1
Entre centre et absence (1930)
"Dessins commentés" (1935) (published in La nuit remue)*
Peintures (1939)
Arbres des tropiques (1942)
Épreuves, exorcismes (1943)
Labyrinthes (1944)
Peintures et dessins (1946)

Œuvres complètes Vol. 2
Apparitions (1946) (published "en marge" to *La Vie dans les plis*)
Meidosems (1948) (published "en marge" to *La Vie dans les plis*)
Poésie pour pouvoir (1949)
Lecture par Henri Michaux de huit lithographies de Zao Wou-Ki (1950)
Mouvements (1951) (drawings published "en marge" to *Face aux verrous*)
*Aventures de lignes (1954) (published in *Passages*)
Misérable miracle. La mescaline (1956)
Quatre cents hommes en croix : Journal d'un dessinateur. Fragments (1956)
L'Infini turbulent (1957)
Vigies sur cibles (1959)
Paix dans les brisements (1959)

Œuvres complètes Vol. 3
Vents et poussières (1962)
**Parcours (1967)
Émergences-résurgences (1972)
*En rêvant à partir de peintures énigmatiques (1972)

**Par la voie des rythmes (1974)
Idéogrammes en Chine (1975)
*Les Ravagés (1976) (published in *Chemins cherchés, chemins perdus, transgressions*)
Saisir (1979)
Comme un ensablement (1981)
*Essais d'enfants, dessins d'enfants (1982) (published in *Déplacements, dégagements*)
Par des traits (1984)

* Indicates a text-only work in which Michaux writes about images
** Indicates an image-only work

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