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## Henri Michaux's Poetics

Brigitte Ouvry-Vial

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Brigitte Ouvry-Vial

# Henri Michaux's Poetics

Dissertation thesis submitted for the completion of the degree of Doctor in Philosophy  
(PH.D)  
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Columbia University (NYC)

Defended on January 7, 1984

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HENRI MICHAUX'S POETICS

Brigitte Ouvry-Vial

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

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1984

## ABSTRACT

### HENRI MICHAUX'S POETICS

Brigitte Ouvry-Vial

This study of Henri Michaux's poetics analyzes three of his texts on drug experimentation, namely Connaissance par les Gouffres, Misérable Miracle, Les Grandes Epreuves de L'Esprit. It examines the features characterizing texts on drug experimentation as well as their impact on the understanding of Michaux's poetry in general. It also examines the poetic analysis and elaboration which Michaux himself conducts in the three books in question.

The three books provide an extensive analysis of the experiments they narrate. They consist of a representation of the writer's strategies of representation. They take mental alienation through drugs or madness as the frame of this enterprise and they decompose the process of representation in literature. These texts play a theoretical role within Michaux's work by emphasizing and defining in terms of mental alienation a mode of expression which the other texts implicitly practice without direct reference to mental alienation.

First it seems that drugs are the means of a knowledge of the mind and that the literary work is conceived of as a space of achievement of this enterprise. Writing is the instrument of an experimental representation and control. For this reason the texts provide an

apparently objective and quasi scientific series of statements intended to rationalize the experience. Second, this apparently scientific account does not constitute the whole of the written account; it ends up as being another and quite contrary type of discourse revealing the dimension of the unexplained. This is mainly visible in the text-footnote relation which as a case of textual mania, depicts a form of madness.

In fact, the text reproduces the writer's perturbation--the physical and psychological conditions in which he is involved. It exhibits the writer's attempt to grasp phenomenon by means of words, and is conceived of as a mirror in which the writer projects his own image. A relation is thus established between the act of writing and the alleged mental experience, so that the meaning of the experience is borne by the image of the writer's vicissitudes. The texts convey a narrative and illusory experimental phenomenology: drugs that are presented as objects of the textual analysis appear to be a narrative motive and context which presents itself as a pretext. They underline the representation of the expressive experience as an experience of persecution. The texts appear to be experimental texts because they analyse the relation between thought and word, word and idea and meaning, and also because they demonstrate various possible ways of transforming mental features and figures into writing features and figures. Some models are envisaged and developed such as oral poetry, neology, and concrete poetry. Finally this is sustained by a pseudo-theoretical framework (the comparison between drug, madness, and poetry) which serves the text's formulation of its own

language and rules.

Drugs and madness constitute the code which the text holds as a model for its own idiolect. Texts on drug experimentation consist of a system of intelligibility allowing the writer an analytical dictation of his thought and a figurative transposition of mental mechanisms. Here Michaux is reflecting upon literariness. He questions and confirms the rules established for the generation of literary sentence; he supplements them with a psychic rule or frame of writing. In assuming the existence of a language of thought, Michaux introduces the dimension of the potentiality of language. Yet, whereas this language is presented as a model of reference, the only existing language is that of the text. The language of the thought is the hypostasis, in texts on drug experimentation, of poetic language. It is through such a system of indirection and reflexivity that Michaux characterizes the poetic function of language.

I shall study Michaux's justifications for experimenting with drugs and for writing about them (Part I). Then I shall verify these justifications in the economy of the text and see what kind of narrative landscape is thus established (Part II). I shall show that the texts consist of narrative adventures with words conducted in the shape and under the pretense of an experimental phenomenology (Part III). Finally, drugs which appeared to be the object of the textual analysis will be shown to be a mere pretext. They embody a writing experience and underline aspects of the signification process in general and of the textual process in particular (Part IV). For these reasons, the study of Henri Michaux's poetics after these texts

on drug experimentation may provide an answer to the question of poetic competence.

Consequently this study appears to have three main contributions. First it presents a new reading of Michaux's texts on drug experimentation. Although drugs are considered as non-creative the depiction of their effects serves a broader reflection on literary creation. Second, the insertion of non-literary objects and discourse enlarges the definition of literariness and suggests its psychological or mental substratum. Finally, this study provides a linguistic approach to a literary practice and conception of language in general and poetic language in particular.

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## INTRODUCTION

The title of this work contains an ambivalence which is important to explain. The expression "Henri Michaux's poetics" is to be understood both objectively (as a critical study and theory of Michaux's poetics after his works) and subjectively (as the poetics which Michaux himself establishes in his books). Under this heading I intend to search for the features characterizing texts on drug experimentation and to show how they are a model for Michaux's poetry. The texts, however, make this enterprise difficult. They oppose the constructivist criticism with a kaleidoscopic structure: the topics narrated are repeated and reflected throughout the three books in an apparently endless variety of patterns. Besides, texts on drug experimentation convey the puzzling impression of looking for and elaborating an "art poétique" rather than performing one. Thus the expression "Henri Michaux's Poetics" may also refer to the poetic elaboration which Michaux himself conducts in the three books in question.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, these books are entirely interpretative. They provide an extensive analysis, interpretation and extrapolation of the

---

<sup>1</sup>Les Grandes Epreuves de L'Esprit, (Paris: Ed. Gallimard, Coll. Le Point du Jour, 1966), Connaissance par les Gouffres, (Paris: Ed. Gallimard, 1967), Misérable Miracle, (Paris: Ed. Gallimard, coll. Le Point du Jour, nouvelle édition revue et augmentée, 1966 rpt. 1972). Hencefore these texts will be referred to as G.E.E.,C.L.G.,M.M.

experiments they narrate. They do so by means of a critical and almost clinical terminology often akin to that of psychiatry. This terminology disrupts the reader's expectation of a literary type of discourse. Furthermore the texts convey a reflection about literariness but when they explicitly refer to either literature or poetry, they repudiate and disavow them. Being highly interpretative however, they do not call for more interpretation; the reader and critic focus on the interpretative means and methods rather than on the information conveyed.

Instinctively, the reader perceives these three books as poetic texts. They seem to carry an indirect meaning, to signify something that is different from what they obviously say.<sup>1</sup> Meaning is even said to be secondary here: "le sens est du surajouté, du plaqué, une couleur mise sur un objet à colorier" (C.L.G. p. 228). Michaux in these texts consequently focuses on representation itself: he puts it on trial and questions it. The texts convey the writer's expressive experience under the influence of drugs. Thus they consist of a representation of the writer's strategies of representation and take mental distortion through drug and madness as the frame of this enterprise. Within their own literary practice, they decompose the process of representation in literature, and question "La représentation qu'on se faisait de la littérature."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Michael Riffaterre, Semiotics of Poetry, (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, , 1978), p. 1. "Poetry expresses concepts and things by indirection. To put it simply, a poem says one thing and means another."

<sup>2</sup>Jacques Derrida, Positions (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1972), p. 93.

In fact, the correlations which they establish between drugs, madness and poetry, and between their respective expressive aspects result in two significant contributions. First they contribute to the knowledge of mental and imaginary processes and second they provide us with a conception of language. A survey of Michaux's complete works reveals that a main enterprise is pursued from one book to another. This enterprise is a meditation upon the interior and an experimentation of the mind; a search for an appropriate medium to articulate this experience; a definition of poetic expression.<sup>1</sup> Texts on drug experimentation have a singular position with respect to this goal. They are not numerous and by their topic they constitute exceptions compared to the main narrative trend in Michaux's work. They emphasize and define in terms of mental alienation a mode of expression which the other texts implicitly practice without referring to mental alienation. They have an important theoretical role within Michaux's work. Their assertive, almost scientific, terminology seems to exclude literariness. They appear to illustrate Michaux's remark that "La vraie poésie se fait contre la poésie."<sup>2</sup>

In texts on drug experimentation Michaux also assumes the existence of an internal language or language of thought. This language would be a verbal means of expression common to dreams, mental illnesses and

---

<sup>1</sup>This wide, general statement can hardly be developed in a few words. It results from a personal reading of Michaux's works (see Bibliography in this dissertation). It also synthetically reflects the various and numerous critics on Michaux's works (see Bibliography).

<sup>2</sup>Henri Michaux, in Magazine Littéraire, (No. 74, Mars, 1973), pp. 41-42.

poetry. It would appear to be common to everyone who wants to have control over the words he uses to express inner feelings. More specifically, Michaux assumes here that there is a psychological dimension and conception of language through which another mode of expression can be reached. This hypothesis is developed in the narration of drug experiments which exemplify this alleged linguistic functioning. In fact, the writer seeks a system of exact correspondence between the mental operations experienced and discursive operations. This system is not presented as specifically poetic but as a generic mode of communicating mental contents. The definition of a new poetic language seems to be subordinated to another enterprise--an exploration of the mind ( "Poésie pour me parcourir" Passages, p. 146) and an account for the mental distortion experienced. In fact, the presentation of poetry as an instrument is an illusory device for analyzing the power of revelation of poetic language.

I shall study Michaux's justifications for experimenting with drugs and for writing about them (Part I). Then I shall verify these justifications in the economy of the text and see what kind of narrative landscape is thus established (Part II). I shall show that the texts consist of narrative adventures with words conducted in the shape and under the pretence of an experimental phenomenology (Part III). Finally, drugs which appeared to be the object of the textual analysis will be shown to be a mere pretext. They embody a writing experience and underline aspects of the signification process in general and of the textual process in particular (Part IV). For these reasons, the study of Henri Michaux's poetics as revealed by these texts on drug experimen-

mentation may provide an answer to the question of poetic competence.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>I refer here to the distinction initiated by Chomsky between linguistic "Competence (the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language) and Performance (the actual use of language in concrete situations)". See Noam Chomsky, Aspects of the Theory of Syntax, (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1965), p. 4. After the initial distinction, the notion of poetic competence has been hypothesized. For a discussion of this notion, its introduction and its implications, see Jean-Jacques Thomas, "Théorie generative et Poétique Litteraire," Langages No. 51, Sept. (1978), pp. 7-23. The question remains as to whether there is such a thing as poetic competence; that is to say, a system of specific roles and features complementing, for some individuals, the general linguistic competence and justifying the difference perceived, at the level of the performance, between poetic and ordinary language.



PART I

THE MOTIVATION FOR MICHAUX'S EXPERIMENTS  
WITH DRUGS AND FOR HIS WRITING ABOUT THEM

## CHAPTER I

### WHY EXPERIMENT WITH DRUGS?

Les drogues nous ennuient avec leur paradis.  
Qu'elles nous donnent plutôt un peu de savoir.  
Nous ne sommes pas un siècle à paradis.

C.L.G. p. 19

Our first step in this dissertation will be to understand Michaux's intention and motivation for an experimentation with drugs and a written account of this experimentation. In order for us to work out this project, we will follow Michaux's statements of purpose in forewords and postscripts.

Les Grandes Epreuves de l'Esprit, Misérable Miracle, and Connaissance par les Gouffres, indeed enclose several preliminary and concluding chapters which are intended to prepare the reader for the problematic of the books themselves: they consist of preambles or retrospective comments; they underline what the author's intentions are for the book they introduce or have been for the book they conclude. Let us see whether they allow us a clear understanding of a definite program.

The introductory sentence to Les Grandes Epreuves de L'Esprit establishes the principle aim of the drug experience for Michaux: an attempt to go beyond a trivial understanding or misunderstanding of the human mind and to reveal its very nature. "Je voudrais dévoiler le "normal," le méconnu, l'insoupçonné, l'incroyable, l'énorme normal."

(G.E.E. p. 9)

At the starting point of Michaux's enterprise there is the established fact that we do not know exactly what our usual way of being is, what our usual mental reality consists of. We do not think properly about it and what seems trivial to us is emphasized by Michaux as something bearing a specific significance: Michaux expresses the emphasis with the word "normal" in quotation marks and with the adjective "énorme", enormous, conveying the idea of a gigantic and resourceful reality.

Michaux wants to reveal a mental system, the specificity of which one is unaware of, although it is constantly active in one's most permanent and ordinary thinking process.<sup>1</sup> "Ce qui se passe, le nombre prodigieux d'opérations que dans l'heure la plus détendue, le plus ordinaire des hommes accomplit, ne s'en doutant guère, n'y prêtant attention aucune..." (G.E.E. p. 9)

Michaux therefore attempts a new perception and a new dimension of knowledge of that mysterious mental world. Michaux calls this mechanism that produces thoughts and ideas, "le Penser." He divides what we ordinarily call thought or "la pensée" into two separate levels. The first level of our mental operations ("La Pensée"), and the general level of our mental mechanisms that is the condition of the first one

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<sup>1</sup>As mentioned also by Aldous Huxley, Heaven and Hell (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), p. 93. "For most of us most of the time, the world of everyday experience seems rather dim and drab. But for a few people often, and for a fair number occasionally, some of the brightness of visionary experience spills over, as it were, into common seeing, and the everyday universe is transfigured."

("Le Penser"). This second level we are not supposed to know in ordinary life.<sup>1</sup>

In fact this conception of two (superior and inferior) levels of thoughts is not developed nor explained in the books but rather imposed. As such it appears to be a specific imagery of the books intended to suggest that there are certain kinds of circumstances in which the individual power of observation is increased ("le microscope d'une attention forcenee" G.E.E. p. 12). Those are revealing circumstances in which one watches the mechanism of one's own mind. That is to say that this textual imagery presents, as if it were mental, a general reflexive system by means of which the mind is supposed to be the spectator and the critic of its own functioning.

...c'est toujours le cerveau qui prend les coups, qui observe ses coulisses, ses ficelles, qui joue petit et grand jeu, et qui ensuite, prend du recul, un singulier recul. C.L.G. p. 10

The inward mind is viewed (although from the inside) thinking or performing mental operations. This is the goal Michaux has assigned to himself; to grasp his own active and perceptive system: "Il saisit alors son "saisir," état tout à fait hors de l'ordinaire, spectacle unique." (G.E.E. p. 12) Drug experimentation is presented as a situation in which this particular dialogue, this self experience of the mind by itself can take place, and Michaux makes it clear that drug experimentation is one example among others of such a situation, and

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. G.E.E. p. 11, "Comme l'estomac ne se digère pas lui-même, comme il importe peu qu'il ne se digère pas, l'esprit est ainsi fait qu'il ne puisse se saisir lui-même, saisir directement, constamment son mécanisme et son action, ayant autre chose à saisir."

not the only possible one.

l'esprit monstrueusement surexcité, par exemple sous  
l'effet de la mescaline à haute dose, son champ  
modifié, voit ses pensées comme des particules,...

G.E.E. p. 12

How is it that the experimentation of drugs can provide such a situation wherein an effective approach to mental phenomena can take place? The answer is complex and complies with the varied nature of drugs themselves.

First, as a chemical substance, drugs bring the subject into a state of both mental and physical alienation.

Toute drogue modifie vos appuis, l'appui que vous preniez sur vos sens, l'appui que vos sens prenaient sur le monde, l'appui que vous preniez sur votre impression générale d'être.

C.L.G. p. 9

In such a radically transforming situation, the subject is apprenticed (to drugs); he is compelled to a drastic alteration of his usual habits and behaviors, which in fact might have prevented him from seeing mental phenomena.

Second, drugs operate in this destabilization program, as a positive psychic liberation that entitles the subject to new mental capacities.

Le pouvoir séparateur et appréciateur augmente dans l'oeil. . . dans l'oreille, . . . et surtout dans l'imagination, . . . et, last but not least, dans les facultés paranormales, révélant parfois au sujet le don de voyance et de divination. C.L.G. p. 13.

In the above quotation Michaux adds to the list of the recognized sense organs (oeil, oreilles) an extra sensory mode of perception. The imagination, and parapsychological faculties such as "voyance, divination" (clairvoyance, instinctive foresight) introduce elusive and non-demonstrative capacities of apprehension within the enterprise of mental knowledge. These faculties, the latter being emphasized by the expression "last but not least" partake not so much of knowledge as of creation. They imply intuition, interpretation, comparison and are inventive acts. Furthermore they convey the notion of marvelousness. This is also suggested in the following quotation used to depict the internal reality and its organization. "L'orchestre de L'immense vie intérieure est à present un prodige." (C.L.G. p. 13) The internal reality is weighted and receives a tangible shape through the metaphor of the orchestra which however is presented in the text (cf. the indicative mode "est," and the adverb "à present") as a direct apprehension of the mental mechanism. Thus the third characteristic of drugs as the appropriate tool for mental experimentation is suggested. Drugs are a mental revelator in that they show and present the mental scene. But more than that, they are part of an enterprise affecting the experimenter and his mind. They are the instruments providing with a state of self-consciousness and allowing internal, mental manipulation.

Si la drogue est une ouverture, si elle fait  
entrevoir, elle n'est qu'une étape. Même exaltante,  
même surhumaine. ¶ Drogue est réorientation de la  
conscience. Première étape d'une manipulation.

M.M. p. 193

In this quotation, drawn from the end of Misérable Miracle the chemical named by a common noun and preceded by an article, "La drogue" is turned into a universal entity with a capital letter and no article: "Drogue." This shift suggests that the drug's influence lies not in its specific effect but rather in the general psychic action it allows upon conscious habits. The universal entity "drug" conceptualizes "drug"; from being a chemical agent it becomes an abstract step within a broader psychological and mental activity. This conceptualization illustrates a larger process within the frame of which an experimental knowledge of the mind takes place.

Drug as a mental modifier leads the experimenter to the contemplation of his mental mechanism; while doing this, it allows the experimenter not so much an unusual vision, but a new self-acquired and discrete knowledge. This belief is assumed by Michaux as expressed in the following quotation from Connaissance par Les Gouffres (Preface to Chapter V):

Celui qui par la mescaline a été agressé, qui par le dedans, à l'état naissant et presque météoriquement a connu l'alienation mentale, qui, devenu soudain en mille choses impuissant, a assisté aux coups de théâtre de l'esprit après quoi tout est changé, qui de façon privilégiée s'est trouvé à sa debandade et à ses dislocations, sait à présent.... C.L.G. p. 179

The intransitive or absolute use of the verb "savoir" with no direct object ( "Il sait..." conveys the idea not of a specific knowledge but of another kind of knowledge which we might understand as the dimension of a pure consciousness). This consciousness (as a result of drugs as a mental revelator) suggests that Michaux views drugs as the tool of an

ontological experience. "Il est comme s'il était né une seconde fois."  
(C.L.G. p. 179)

Leaving for a while the microscopic report of Michaux's statements for a macroscopic approach to his project, we find that Michaux approaches the inner reality of the mind specifically and exclusively through situations of mental alienation. In doing this, he takes sides in a scientific and methodological debate about the means of knowledge of the mental system. Michaux assumes that a new dimension of knowledge needs a new and appropriate instrument, and more than the most scientific description of normality, abnormality and permanent or temporary mental alienation are his best "enseignants," teachers. "Ce sont les perturbations intérieures de l'esprit, ses dysfonctionnements qui seront nos enseignants." (G.E.E. p. 13) He even emphasizes the superiority of these teachers to the metaphysical tradition of well-ordered speech and thought.

Plus que le trop excellent 'savoir-penser' des  
métaphysiciens, ce sont les démences, les  
arriérations, les délires, les extases et les  
agonies, le 'ne plus savoir penser' qui  
véritablement sont appelés à nous découvrir.

G.E.E. p. 14

This quotation names the various revealing circumstances experienced and referred to by Michaux. They consist of non-demonstrative, non-constructive mental activities which usually characterize madness. Each of the words quoted has in fact a precise meaning in psychiatric terminology and the accumulative series of synonymous suggests the accuracy of the experimental aspects considered by Michaux. "Démences" (insanities) means psychic impoverishments; "Arriérations"



(retardations) means deficiencies in the intellectual development; "délires," (delirium) is a confusion of ideas and often implies focusing on a theme such as persecution, magnitude or culpability. "Extases," (ecstasis) is a nervous affection provoking an absence of sensibility and mental exultation; "agonies" is used here in the classical meaning of high anxiety or moral torment. Yet it is striking to notice that each of these words besides the proper meaning mentioned above, may be used in a figurative and hyperbolic sense in ordinary language. Their accumulation in the quotation as well as their use in the plural form also comply with this hyperbolic way of speaking.

Michaux in this quotation seems to play on both uses and on two types of data. On the one hand he refers to specific aspects of mental distortion which do exhibit, although negatively, mental mechanisms. On the other hand, the whimsical and hyperbolic terminology he uses may not refer to anything specific but just constitute a way of speaking. Drugs are used as a catalyst, an increase more than a change in the rate of mental reaction. The generic expression for this mechanism ("le ne plus savoir penser") is written between quotation marks. Both facts suggest that these terms are just words within the discourse of a book as much as they are really observed states of mind. Finally, these paradoxical teachers are opposed to the "'savoir-penser' des metaphysiciens." This expression (itself in quotation marks) is presented as a fallacy. "Métaphysiciens" does not refer so much to a specific philosophical trend as it conveys the figurative meaning of persons who abusively use abstract considerations. Through this word Michaux refuses a speculative, obscure study of the a priori conditions of knowledge, which is not based on an examination of concrete reality.

It is firstly clear from this quotation that Michaux prefers the direct observation of rough spontaneous phenomena to the observation and analysis of a ready-made speech that is only an effect, an indirect exhibition of the mental mechanism. Second Michaux, as an experimental physicist insists on the fact that we happen to learn about a phenomenon through the observation of its negative aspect or disfunctioning: we know mental functioning through mental disfunctioning, and normality through abnormality. Drug experimentation therefore appears as a blue-print demonstration of the mental mechanism. This scientific choice is reinforced and justified. It is reinforced in the foreword to Les Grandes Epreuves de L'Esprit, by the comparison with medical science:

Comme le corps (ses organes et ses fonctions) a été connu principalement et dévoilé, non par les prouesses des forts, mais par les troubles des faibles, des malades, des infirmes, des blessés...

G.E.E. p. 14

It is also justified as an appropriate approach to mental reality by the intrinsic nature of mental observation itself: in mental illness the delirious output is not as much the effect of a productive strength as it is the effect of a lack in productive strength; this is expressed in the chiasmatic organization of the following sentence drawn from the concluding chapter of Connaissance par les Gouffres.<sup>1</sup> "Seule maladie

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<sup>1</sup>The chiasm here lies in the intersected disposition of the key words "pouvoirs-déficiences/déficiences-pouvoirs." It also lies in the antithesis, internal to each group, between "pouvoirs," powers and deficiencies, weaknesses. Finally the chiasm lies in the antithesis between the two groups. In the first group "pouvoirs" and "deficiences" are opposed to each other; in the second group one complements the other in a paradoxical way since weaknesses are said to allow power.

mentale qui semble avoir autant de pouvoirs que de déficiences, et dont les déficiences sont la condition des pouvoirs." (C.L.G. p. 275)

Finally, through the word "véritablement," (truly) Michaux distinguishes the revealing from the fallacious or deceptive circumstance.

In mentioning this notion of truth as opposed to an incomplete discovery of our mind, Michaux establishes the real purpose of scientific investigation: against scientific knowledge, (and its apparently well-ordered speech about the object sought after) Michaux chooses to learn and to transmit knowledge through a direct experimental speech. Michaux's conception of knowledge is thus experimental and concrete as opposed to theoretical and abstract. This implies that there must be a relation between the nature of the instrument of knowledge and the nature of the object sought after. It consists not so much of a relation between words and reality as of a relation between a textually defined instrument (mental distortion) and a textually defined object (mental mechanism). This restriction is due to the very nature of the literary text which hosts Michaux's enterprise; I mean it is due to the fact that in literary representation "les rapports entre les mots du texte l'emportent sur les rapports que ces mots entretiennent avec les choses, ou même, s'y substituent entièrement."<sup>1</sup> Yet, this restriction does not solve the ambiguity of Michaux's enterprise. His enterprise consist of transposing, adapting an instrument (discourse) to an object (mental mechanisms) which is difficult to articulate because it does initially happen outside of language.

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<sup>1</sup>Michael Riffaterre, "Système d'un genre descriptif," Poétique No. 9, (1972), p. 15.

Thus Michaux's refusal of the metaphysical abstraction and his contempt as regards metaphysics' lack of concrete basis, express a tendency but remain rhetorical. In fact it is difficult to speak of "concrete reality" about mental mechanisms; even the physical experience with drugs which Michaux narrates in the texts is for the reader a verbal reality more than a concrete one. The denial of general metaphysics and its replacement by the experimental approach may therefore be just a way for Michaux to impose his own personal metaphysics.

Meanwhile, Michaux rehabilitates the madman's wisdom. This rehabilitation which is also part of a literary tradition in the history of occidental wisdom and literature will be developed in the following paragraphs.<sup>1</sup>

Simultaneous to this contribution to a scientific debate, Michaux takes part in a long poetic tradition which, from De Quincey to Baudelaire, Nodier, Huxley and the Surrealists, has been seeking new wisdom through mental perturbation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Mikhaïl Bakhtine, L'Oeuvre de Francois Rabelais et la Culture Populaire au Moyen-Age et de la Renaissance, (Paris: Gallimard, bibli. des Idees, 1970) (english translation Rabelais and his world, MIT Press, 1968).

<sup>2</sup>Thomas De Quincey, "A Sequel to the confessions of an englis opium-eater", Suspiria De Profundis, (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1871), p. 4: "The Opium Confessions were written with some slight secondary purpose of exposing this specific power of opium upon the faculty of dreaming, but much more with the purpose of displaying the faculty itself."

Charles Baudelaire, "Du vin et du Haschich," Les Fleurs du Mal, part III, is seeking a real escape that would not be the mere reproduction and recognition of the experience to cast out.

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This new wisdom, as a new knowledge, has to be sought in a new literary perspective. Poetry, according to this view is the place of a mental investigation. The poet being the subject and the operator of this mental inquiry eliminates his conventional artistic behaviors and mechanisms and tries to "free" his own individual artistic mechanisms. Thus a speech of the subconscious occurs and is the source of a new inspiration. Through the speech of the subconscious, in fact, random chance would be reinserted into a language which, being improperly used, has lost its expressive power, as well as its relation to authentic wisdom.<sup>1</sup>

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Aldous Huxley, The Doors of Perception, and Heaven and Hell (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1954). In the Doors of Perception, Huxley attempts a description of the effects of mescaline which he refers to some scientific research going on among chemists, psychologists, neurologists and physiologists:

Neurologists and psychologists have found out something about the mechanism of its action upon the central nervous system. And at least one professional philosopher has taken mescaline for the light it may throw on such ancient, unsolved riddles as the place of mind in nature and the relationship between brain and consciousness (p. 10).

In Heaven and Hell, p. 95, Huxley confirms this tradition of both scientific and literary mental investigation, in quoting from poets who provide similar descriptions of transfiguration as provided by drug experimentation. "One thinks for example of Wordsworth's ode on the Intimations of Immortality and Childhood; of certain lyrics by George Herbert and Henry Vaughan...."

See also André Breton and Philippe Soupault, Les Champs Magnétiques (Paris: ed. Gallimard, 1967), and André Breton and Paul Eluard, L'Immaculée Conception (Paris: Seghers, 1961).

<sup>1</sup>Cf. André Breton, Manifestes du surréalisme, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, coll. Idées, 1963), pp. 179-80.

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In the history of this poetic tradition, Michaux is sometimes distinguished from, or sometimes associated with, the Surrealist movement, and more particularly with the Surrealist attempt to reach an "automatisme pur." We can in fact assume that both enterprises attempt to recover an authentic expression of the subject. They experiment with some specific circumstances (mental automatism, mental distortion) of speech productions in order to trace the origin and the nature of the enunciative process of the subject. Both enterprises attest to a spirit of research wherein poetry would reach knowledge.

Let us pursue this comparison a little further and see if a rough chart of their agreements or disagreements can enlighten our approach to Michaux's specific purpose.

In his Manifestes du surréalisme (p. 37) Breton defines Surrealism as follows:

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Il est aujourd' hui de notoriété courante que le surréalisme, en tant que mouvement organisé a pris naissance dans une opération de grande envergure portant sur le langage. De quoi s'agissait-il-donc! De rien moins que retrouver le secret d'un langage dont les éléments cessassent de se comporter en épaves à la surface d'une mer morte. Il importait pour cela de se soustraire à leur usage de plus en plus strictement utilitaire, ce qui était le seul moyen de les émanciper et de leur rendre tout leur pouvoir. . . . On en a pour preuve les tentatives, d'intérêt très inégal, qui correspondent aux 'mots en liberté' du futurisme....

Cf. Appollinaire "Et les vieilles langues sont tellement près de mourir que c'est certainement par habitude et manque d'audace qu'on les fait encore servir à la poésie."

Automatisme psychique pur par lequel on se propose d'exprimer, soit verbalement, soit par écrit, soit de toute autre manière, le fonctionnement réel de la pensée. Dictée de la pensée, en l'absence de tout contrôle exercé par la raison, en dehors de toute préoccupation esthétique et morale.

The first sentence in this definition shows that Surrealism like Michaux, is an attempt to find a true internal reality. This discovery is effected in the form of a production of thought presented as a dictation of thought by itself. It is supposed to be if not context-free, at least deprived of external influences, thus purely internal. This attempt is generally achieved, with Surrealism, through a pictorial, verbal or written experimentation of thought. Generally speaking we can say that Surrealism includes some of Michaux's assumptions about mental alienation. In fact they meet in their assumptions of what mental alienation is not.

Their first point of agreement that is of any use to our study is their consideration of mental experience as the opposite of pleasure. Speaking about those experiences which he designates as the source of his poetic imagination Breton writes in his Manifestes du surréalisme: "Il faut prendre beaucoup sur soi pour vouloir s'établir dans ces régions reculées où tout à d'abord l'air de se passer si mal, à plus forte raison pour vouloir y conduire quelqu'un." (p. 29)

In the same way, Michaux constantly describes his experience as an ordeal or as a trial to undergo.<sup>1</sup> The title of les Grandes Epreuves de

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<sup>1</sup>As confirmed by De Quincey whose work is devoted to the sufferings inflicted by opium, although it describes it as a sensual pleasure in  
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l'Esprit testifies to this ordeal, as well as the following comment in Misérable Miracle.

Faut-il parler du plaisir? c'était déplaisant. On peut se laisser aller à un certain courant qui ressemblerait à du bonheur. L'ai-je-cru? Je ne suis pas sûr du contraire. Pourtant tout au long de ces heures inouïes, je trouve, dans mon journal, ces mots, écrits plus de cinquante fois, gauchement, difficilement: Intolérable, Insupportable- Tel est le prix de ce paradis (!)

M.M. p. 16

If not a pleasure, neither can the experience devoted to mental prospection be conceived of as a creative device. By creative device I mean an artificial trick, technically controlled and aimed at the representation of unusual visions such as those produced for instance by madness. At this point, a slight difference between Michaux and Surrealism has to be introduced. Surrealism has in fact often been reproached with the fault that its revolutionary progress has remained a mere project. René Passeron assumes that Surrealist literature did not achieve its intention of tracing the madman's language and art, and

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the original preface in the year 1821. Op. cit. p. iv. "If opium-eating be a sensual pleasure, and if I am bound to confess that I have indulged it to an excess not yet recorded of any other man, it is not less true that I have struggled against this fascination with a fervent zeal."

However in the first chapter of the book itself, he confesses that his acquaintance to opium-eating might have been otherwise, p. 2: "If in early days I had fully understood the subtle powers lodged in this mighty drug (when judiciously regulated), to (1) tranquilise all irritations of the nervous system; (2) stimulate the capacities of enjoyment; and (3) under any call for extraordinary exertion..., to sustain through twenty-five consecutive hours the else dropping animal energies..., I should have inaugurated my opium career in the character of one seeking extra power and enjoyment, rather than of one shrinking from extra torment."



remained a rhetorical exercise, a mere imitation.<sup>1</sup> He accuses surrealists of making believe. In fact it seems that although it is not esthetically oriented, the result of the Surrealist experience is a mechanical picture, that is considered an achievement in itself. At least for the reader the image produced stands for a poetic image analogous (yet different) to the result of for instance the romantic inspirations, for instance, it seems that the subconscious works as the Muse of the Surrealist poet. And indeed, this achievement satisfies the pre-requisite of the enterprise: to establish poetry and poetic inspiration within an original language which, being guided by chance, would be automatic and supposedly pattern-free.

On the contrary Michaux is not satisfied with the matter-of-fact experimental production; he denies this endophasy or mental monologue any kind of interest in itself.<sup>2</sup> The image is just an epiphenomenon or a gag, that is to say a comical effect produced by a whimsical play on words or visions. It is only significant in that it designates the process of its production. "Ce spectacle complètement crétin est pourtant la traduction d'un mécanisme prodigieux... Le gag imbécile est le résultat de ce parfait fonctionnement automatique." (M.M. p. 33) Michaux refuses the notion in itself, but he takes it into

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<sup>1</sup>Rene Passeron, Encyclopédie du Surréalisme, (Paris: ed. Somogy, 1975), p. 36. "Quand on sait la fascination que 'l'art des fous' a exercé sur les poètes surréalistes, on ne peut que souligner la distance qui les sépare de ses productions, qui ne leur ont jamais renvoyé que l'image, même troublée d'ombres, de leur bonne santé et de leur mauvaise conscience. Il s'agissait pour eux de simulation."

<sup>2</sup>"Endophasie: Gr. phasis (parole) langage intérieur." Grand Larousse de la langue Française, (Paris: Larousse, 1972), p. 1610.

consideration as a symptom. In using the word "gag," he emphasizes the instantaneous and artificial character of the vision as regard to the deep level of the mechanisms that provide this vision. The vision is described as a brief laughter-provoking piece incongruent within a serious matter. Some of these visions produced in the situation of mental alienation are classified and deciphered in the opening pages of Connaissance par les Gouffres: visions of ruins, visions of mountains, of animals. In his analysis Michaux insists on presenting those visions not as the self-sufficient effect of mental creativity, but as the reflect, the echo of mental tendencies. "Les images mentales sont des tendances." (C.L.G. p. 23) Therefore neither the reader nor the critic can avoid being puzzled when faced with books that are written by a poet which (although they are not presented as poetry) are not separated by the author from the rest of his poetic production. In fact, texts on drug experimentation seem to be at the rear of poetry. They appear to be members of a poetic tradition in that they deal with introspection (as a starting point of their production). But they go beyond, and even leave this tradition in that they do not adhere to its goals. Visions are presented in his books as a representation that is close and similar to the original but they do not appear as the true reality of the mind itself.

In this enterprise of an introspective view of the mind, an epistemological inquiry seems to take place. This epistemological inquiry proceeds by inference in Michaux's forewords and postscripts. The reader is shown that there is something else beyond the pragmatic result of the experience, as if the vision was speaking for something

else. In fact the discovery proceeds step by step and the knowledge appears to be an endless task. Final knowledge is constantly postponed and the research shifts from the result acquired to the next possible and more discrete entity. Let us give a brief sketch of this system such as it appears in the books. Beyond the ideas is the mental mechanism that produces ideas; from the microscopic level of ideas we go one step further to a second level where we are allowed a panoramic vision of the mental machinery. But beyond the machinery is an autonomous phenomenon that characterizes the mechanism. Michaux calls this phenomenon "les ondes" or the phenomenon of mental waves. "Un phénomène dans l'ivresse mescalinienne paraît sous-tendre un très grand nombre de caractères, précisément les plus communs comme les plus saugrenus. Ce sont les ondes." (C.L.G. p. 15) Even beyond the waves we are urged to inquire into the general characteristics of their phenomena. "Mais ce sont les caractères des ondes en général sur quoi il convient de réfléchir." (C.L.G. p. 17)

Michaux does not justify this denomination ("Ondes") but he conversely imposes them on the reader as a basic data of the mental experience he plans to interpret. This expression seems therefore to be a metaphor designating a mental state close to the streams of consciousness. The "Ondes" are in fact presented as a phenomenon of interior monologue, as a general unbroken flow of thoughts sustaining other aspects of the mental experience (cf. quotation above C.L.G. p. 15) such as the feeling of the Infinite in the following quotation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This system leading to the feeling of Infinite is mentioned by  
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"onde qui est support pour L'Infini, sa sustentation, sa litanie."

(C.L.G. p. 27) In the case of the "Ondes" as in the case of "Démences, Délires. . ." (see G.E.E. p. 14) Michaux plays on the proper and on the figurative uses of the word. "Ondes" characterizes a mental functioning but also a narrative method and motive analogous to stream of consciousness. In fact the mode of knowledge and apprenticeship presented by the book may be related to that of the wave or waking mind. This system of encased knowledge is summarized by Michaux in Les Grandes Epreuves de l'Esprit where it is presented as the condition of an access by inference to a more accurate knowledge.<sup>1</sup> It is a necessary enterprise.

"Conscient... qu'il faut savoir dépasser, pour une conscience seconde.."

(C.L.G. p. 277) It is based on the very nature of the mental system.

"Le subconscient, le conscient second a différentes profondeurs. Plus on est loin de la conscience première, plus la conscience B ou conscience seconde a prise profonde, plus elle a accès a une connaissance étendue.

(C.L.G. p. 276) The active metaphor of the "Ondes" suggests an analogy

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De Quincey, in "A Sequel to the Confessions of an english opium-eater," Suspiria De Profundis, op. cit., p. 3. "And the dreaming organ, in connection with the heart, the eye, and the ear, compose the magnificent apparatus which forces the infinite into the chambers of a human brain." (emphasis added)

It is also the introductory theme of the Doors of Perception in which Huxley quotes from William Blake. "If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite."

<sup>1</sup>G.E.E. p. 12 "la drogue prend en traître, découvre, démasque des opérations mentales, mettant de la conscience où l'on n'en avait aucune, et parallèlement en enlevant toujours là où toujours on en avait eu, étrange jeu de tiroirs dont il faut, semble-t-il que les uns se ferment pour que d'autres s'ouvrent."

between the waking mind described and the textual system of knowledge and demonstration. This analogy is reinforced by the fact that texts on drug experimentation consist of a constantly repeated and renewed narration of the same general mental experience whose phenomena are never completely identified. There are rather narrative waves or tendencies within a broader and textual enterprise of intelligibility.

Thus we understand that Michaux's enterprise is involved in another debate outside the scientific (psychiatric) and poetic traditions. Michaux locates his books within a general philosophical perspective within which science or poetry are just epiphenomena. The vision, the image is only one step in a process towards truth which appears to be an accumulation of appearances that successively cause each other to disappear one after the other. This process points to a state of mind in which the subject guided by the desire of an Immeasurable, "Incommensurable," becomes an unbound spirit.<sup>1</sup> And this system, in which a datum given by experience is never final but constantly ascribes to its superior level of knowledge, is imposed to the reader as the epistemology of the mind. It therefore seems that the book's enterprise complies with a philosophical questioning and refers to a philosophical doctrine of Transcendence, or at least to its language conventions.

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<sup>1</sup>Henri Michaux in L'Infini turbulent, (Paris: Mercure de France, 1964), p. 212: Cette extase n'est possible qu'à la condition que l'ardeur et le sentiment d'expansion soient immenses, que l'objet, de limité devienne illimité, de personnel devienne impersonnel et qu'ils aillent dans une des directions majeures où se manifestent les grandes exaltations humaines.

We may call Transcendence a state of mind where the subjective strengths are entranced, and converge into the vision of an absolute state of realization of unity; a merging of the subject into itself at its highest degree, as in the mystical fusion.<sup>1</sup>

In the mystical tradition to which Michaux refers a mediating stage is required in order to attain this supreme feeling, and Michaux presents mental experimentation and mental alienation as an appropriate mediation. As far as the goal of this enterprise is concerned, Michaux presents it as analogous to Indian spirituality as we will see it in the following examples. Mental alienation is represented as an inner way of escape, "le chemin intérieur de la fuite et de l'évasion." (C.L.G. p. 275) Michaux shows that although the way towards truth, as in transcendental meditation, is always mediated, mental alienation is a direct and ascetic practice, as asserted in the following quotation about hysteria. "Son être exalté, renonçant aux voies de l'intelligence, de l'action, de l'art, de l'amour, trouve par d'autres voies, par des voies directes, une communication, sinon une communion impossibles autrement." (emphasis added) (C.L.G. p.275) As such, hysteria is seen not as a mode of action but as a state of mind analogous to the Samadhi in Hindu spirituality.<sup>2</sup> "Avec des

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<sup>1</sup>As mentioned by Aldous Huxley, in Heaven and Hell (op. cit.) p. 95. "Many similar descriptions are to be found in the poets and in the literature of religious mysticism... Preternal light and color are common to all visionary experiences. And along the light and color there goes, in every case, a recognition of heightened significance... Significance here is identical with being; for, at the mind's antipodes, objects do not stand for anything but themselves."

<sup>2</sup>Samadhi is a sanskrit word for meditation. The use of the sanskrit word instead of the english word "meditation" denotes, as the  
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illusions, elle a d'exceptionnelles clartés. Proche parfois de l'état de Samadhi que connaissent certains Hindous...." (C.L.G. p. 275)

More generally Michaux's attempt at transposing a mental experience into a book and at producing an understandable account makes it necessary for him to use some linguistic conventions to which the mental experience may be related. Texts on drug experimentation often refer to the language conventions of mysticism which are recognized and known and which constitute solid points of reference for the reader. Sometimes Michaux uses precise words borrowed from hindu philosophy such as "cakti, yogui, samadhi, chakras."<sup>1</sup> The necessity of using those precise words is not evident and they seem at first glance to be justified by the desire to provide with an exotic ornamentation. But these ornaments also have a function even if their philosophical implication remains vague. They function as metaphors and images. They are often printed in italics and thus indicate that the text is concerned with a certain level of spirituality which the mere reference to drug might not have conveyed.

Sometimes, Michaux does not refer to a specific tradition but expresses himself in terms that can be related to larger philosophical trends. In the first chapter of Connaissance par les Gouffres and in the last chapter of Les Grandes Epreuves de l'Esprit, Michaux develops

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coming pages will show, Michaux's desire to suggest the spiritual value of drug or madness experience.

<sup>1</sup>Cakti (C.L.G. p. 238) means power and often designates God's power. Yogui is the person who practices yoga (C.L.G. p. 276). Chakras (C.L.G. p. 171) refers to sovereignty and is identified by Michaux himself as "carrefours de conscience" (turning points of consciousness).

the idea of a pseudo mystical, partially mental, partially poetic state of mind. Here one experiences ecstasis and unity beyond the material level of the reality usually perceived. This quality or state of mind is called "amour" (love), and is presented by Michaux as the uncontrolled strengths which mental experiences such as drug, madness, or art share in common.<sup>1</sup> Although they are sometimes explicitly compared (see Part IV, Chapter 3 of this work), the three practices mentioned above are de facto related in the texts' enterprise. In fact, in being a literary and poetic assimilation of drug and madness the books work on the assumption that they offer sufficient adequacy and appropriateness to those experiences so as not to betray them. "Love" mentioned does not constitute a recurring theme in the book. Rather it seems to locally figurate the state of mind which Michaux thinks is necessary to achieve his enterprise. Yet the very fact that love is mentioned is an event per se; it contributes to convey the impression that Michaux's enterprise is that of philosophical writing. The verbal reference to love as a state of mind under whose aegis extreme mental experiences (such as drug or madness) should be looked at, constitute an allusion to Plato's philosophy; this allusion (along with other allusions) is strong enough to strike the reader. Whether these allusions to classical metaphysics are pure ornaments or not, we do not know yet. But it remains obvious that they function as an instrument of organization for the experimental report.

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<sup>1</sup>This is developed in Les Grandes Epreuves de l'Esprit's last chapter. Here a synthesis and an interpretation of the various experiences considered in the book is effected through the image of erotic and loving state.



Along with the notion of love, Michaux presents in the text his conception of three forms of self-consciousness and three forms of mania; these may almost literally be related to Plato's theory of three types of divine mania. First in an apologetic declaration from the foreword to Connaissance par les Gouffres (p. 31) Michaux presents the result of his experiences and observations which the text is intended to develop. He describes consciousness as an on-going process gradually evolving from the usual and so called normal state of mind, through the fragmented experience of mental alienation and exaltation, up to an unbound spirit and state of unity.

Si l'état normal est mélange, examen et maîtrise des pulsions et vues antagonistes, si l'état crée par la drogue ou par une maladie mentale est oscillation avec succession et séparation totale des pulsions antagonistes et points de vue opposés, il existe un troisième état, celui-ci sans alternance, comme sans mélange, où la conscience dans une totalité inouïe règne sans antagonisme aucun. C.L.G. p. 31

In this quotation above, a mystical conception is exposed. The mysticism lies in the notion of vertical, hierarchized heights of consciousness, temporary or permanent madness, and superior consciousness. Mysticism lies also in the fact that drugs are presented as a tool, which is realistically related to the world it discloses, but which is not part of it. It is finally suggested in the description of the third state seen; this state is seen as a state of unity and totality resulting from a meditative and enrapturing practice which goes beyond the influence of the artificial device used for it.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>I mean the "onde" mentioned in the rest of the quotation and which is a metonymy figuring the whole of the drug's influence. "... cela

Second, Michaux deals in his books with three major types of mental practices which almost literally correspond to Plato's three steps of divine madness as I will briefly show.<sup>1</sup> Plato's first type is that of divination and prophecy such as belongs to the priestess at Delphi. This power of divination appears in the case of drugs, as previously mentioned in this chapter with the notion of clairvoyance (that supports Michaux's attempt at mental discoveries through drug experimentation). Plato's second type of madness is that which heals the sick by means of purifications and rites revealed to a frenzied sufferer ("Thus did madness become for him that was maddened aright and possessed, deliverance for his troubles.")<sup>2</sup> The theatrics provided by the hysterics is similarly presented by Michaux as an action or rather a set of gestures through which the hysterical person exercises her mania and restores her calm. ".réaliser dans les tremblements, les convulsions, et les gestes inordonnés d'un grand accès,... un drame condensé, surtendu, drame absolu... dans quoi enfin elle se désexaspère." (C.L.G. p. 274). In the above quotation the word "drame" carries a triple meaning. First a general meaning of theater play, then a more specific meaning of tragical play. To this second meaning we can add the romanticist conception of drama seen as a mixture of comical and tragical events,

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seulement est le grand jeu, et peu importe alors qu'une onde ou non aide cet univers autonome." C.L.G. p. 31

<sup>1</sup>Plato's Phaedrus, 243 E-245C, translated with introduction and commentary by R. Hackforth, M.A., F.B.A., (Cambridge University Press, 1952), pp. 56-62.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

and this complies with the character of the hysterical manifestation: an excess of either euphoria or/and distress. Finally, the third meaning is that of psychological drama or psychodrama; this word also has both a literal and a literary meaning and conveys the idea of a difficult and painful situation. The word "désexaspère" is employed here in an absolute (i.e. with no direct object) and reflexive way (se desexaspère), and expresses the result of the hysteric theatrics. While "s'exaspère" means to become extremely irritated and impatient, the privative prefix "de" conveys the converse idea of mollification. It may seem paradoxical that a manic practice would reduce mania. Yet the paradox is, if not solved, at least justified by the fact that it complies with Plato's second type of madness, wherein mania secures through its own rituals its own alleviation. Finally this practice can even be explained if we relate it to Aristotle's catharsis.<sup>1</sup>

Finally Plato's third type of madness is poetical frenzy, which gives rise to the far truer poetry than the art of the sane composer. We have seen already how drug was for Michaux the means of restoring the individual's authentic and internal means of expression. We will also see in details how he views the mad person's expression as a type of poetry that is more deeply motivated than professional poetry (see Part IV, Chapter II). Within the context of Michaux's attempt at a knowledge of the mind, the analogy with Plato's categorization has a specific value. It does not imply an unqualified commendation of the poet's mania. Rather it suggests the value of the imaginative against the

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<sup>1</sup>See Aristotle's Poetics, Translated by Preston H. Epps (Chapel Hill:University of North Carolina Press,1970,1975 printing), p. 11, pp. 133-134.

rational and it confirms the rehabilitation of madness which I had previously mentioned. While establishing a scale of consciousness (from normality to distortion and from there to ecstasis) and relating drug experience, madness and poetry, Michaux enlarges the field of poetry. This does not imply an indiscriminate admiration of frenzied poetry. But it still suggests that Michaux primarily considers the mental level (that of the internal consciousness) as a valid poetic criterion, which reduces the difference separating the uninspired and quasi-poetic madness from inspired poetry. Thus whether the reference to mysticism or metaphysics is precise or vague, explicit or implicit it mainly has a discursive value. The language conventions referred to as that of mysticism or metaphysics are abstract ornamentations which the text uses to settle its own metaphysical frame. They also appear to be part of a philosophical argumentation which the text provides or mentions in order to overtake it.

In fact mysticism, as the belief that an ultimate reality is attainable through immediate intuition or insight, implies such an overtaking of concrete reality. The choice of mysticism as the philosophical basis of the representation justifies the text's tendency to practically go beyond this tradition or to manipulate it for its own purpose. "Transport" (transport) (C.L.G. p. 31), "Dépassement" (G.E.E. p. 200), (passing), "Dégagement" (C.L.G. p. 273), (disengagement, clearing, liberation) are words haunting the text as its obsessive motive.<sup>1</sup> All three words belong to everyday language as well as to

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<sup>1</sup>Transport applies to any violent or powerful emotion that lifts one out of one's self and usually provokes vehement expression or

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mysticist vocabulary. They convey the impression of a more or less complex reality and attitude depending on the meaning which the reader attaches to them, and on the importance which the reader gives to mysticist discourse in the text. Thus their meaning is contingent upon the reader's apprehension, and this relativity suggests that the discourse of mysticism should not be taken literally. It is mainly for Michaux the means of enlightening ordinary reality and normalcy. It is also for Michaux the means of giving keys to his texts. Michaux is indeed concerned with a transcription and an extrapolation of the experience in the texts. These words bear witnesses to this attempt in inserting the drug experience within the larger range of the mystics. Simultaneously these words do express the reality of mental activities; they approximate the states of mind of the drug user or madman. They function both figuratively and properly. On the one hand the key word of mysticism function as making believe (they pretend to convey a quasi-mystical mental experience). On the other hand they indicate the text's attempt to produce an interpretation of the original drug experience, and its tendency to renew the meaning of the mystical vocabulary used in this interpretation.

Thus the discourse on mysticism defines a textual mysticism that is a set of spiritual or philosophical beliefs according to which

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(Continued)

frenzied action. Transport may apply to erotic, drug, mental, or artistic experience. It is a rather vague and figurative word with no specific attachment to one experience in particular. "Dépassement" means passing, going beyond one's power and "dégagement" means liberation, retraction from reality by means of mental position or mania.

individual knowledge is reached through an enrapturing, contemplative and discursive experience. This textual mysticism is based on the text's intuitive practice underlined by the language conventions of mysticism. These conventions also give rigor to the text's object, that is to say the excessive, ectic mental experience under the influence of drugs.

Yet, the language conventions do not reduce the excess of the experience, but merely turn its organic and scattered features into a converse positive image. "L'absolue non-unité, le détraquage présent peut, en quelques secondes, être effacé et inversé comme un signe-se change en un signe +." (G.E.E. p. 91) The acquired unity remains excessive and controversial (as expressed in the following quotation by the oxymoric association "monstrueuse, magnifique") and the experimental phenomenon is not solved by the textual action. "Non pas en revenant au normal, absolument impossible, irréalisable, . . . mais en créant une super, monstrueuse, magnifique unité, aussi excessive que la dislocation d'il y a quelques instants était excessive." (G.E.E. p. 191) The oxymoron evokes the romanticist notion of "grotesque", its intentional aesthetics of the paradox; it suggests that the unity achieved is literary or textual. In fact the oxymoron, along with the half-comical, half-tragical hysterical drama (which we saw previously) seems to apply in the text the notion of "grotesque" introduced by Victor Hugo<sup>1</sup>

In inscribing madness and mental distortion in literature, Michaux

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<sup>1</sup>That is to say a new religion on the basis of which a new poetry will grow. See Victor Hugo, *Préface de Cromwell*, Cromwell, (Paris: J. Hetzel), 1926.

effects a "grotesque" enterprise and renews the commonly accepted idea of what artistic features and motives can be. The alliance "monstrueuse, magnifique" (monstrous, splendid) echoes to Hugo's creation of antagonist couples: "le difforme près du gracieux, le grotesque au revers du sublime, le mal avec le bien, l'ombre avec la lumière."<sup>1</sup> It also suggests that Michaux's poetry in texts on drug experimentation is based on the contrasts which was already present (in the previous quotation, G.E.E. p. 191) by the change in the nature of the experience from a negative (signe -) to a positive (signe +) sign. This contrast appears ostensibly in the basic foundations of the book; that is to say in the opposition between the aim of the book (to reveal normal and ordinary functioning of the mind) and the means of this discovery (namely extremist cases of mental distortion and abnormality).

Furthermore mental distortion as the tool, the medium, the intermediary step and the macroscopic instrument of this larger discovery of the mind, complies with Hugo's definition of the "grotesque": "Un temps d'arrêt, un terme de comparaison, un point de départ d'où on s'élève vers le beau avec une perception plus fraîche et plus excitée."<sup>2</sup> Drugs and madness are de facto imposed as new poetic objects renewing the previously conventional object or type, "l'âme", to which we can apply Hugo's word about the classical type of beauty. "Type d'abord magnifique, mais, comme il arrive toujours de ce qui est systématique, devenu dans les derniers temps faux, mesquin et

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid. p. 8.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. p. 12.

conventionnel."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the oxymoron and the relation it evokes to Hugo's "grotesque" suggests that the text's reference to well-known philosophical conventions is supplemented with a reference to literary linguistic conventions. Both philosophical and literary conventions are sufficiently well-known so as to be almost commonplaces which enlighten the intellectual frame of the project and stimulate textual innovations.

The literary convention of "grotesque (or rather the notions of oxymoron, drama, contrast which convey it) emphasizes the aspect of the text's literary enterprise. It indicates that the books aim at the representation of a mental crisis or drama, experienced by men and revealing the truth and the reality of mental mechanisms.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the importance of text and literality as regards knowledge of the mind is brought about. The text verbalizes the experimental bolts from the blue before further reflection. It is on the intended characteristics of this textual verbalization that (according to Michaux's statements of purpose) I will now concentrate.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

See also Steven Winspur, "les Ames et leurs Corps, de Descartes à Bonnefoy," paper, Colloquium Poétique du Corps, Columbia University, Oct. 18, 1982. In this paper, S. Winspur notices how a certain type of speech about body is dominated by the logic and doctrine of the soul, while conversely Bonnefoy rejects this tradition and celebrates the body. His insistence on the body results in the revelation of the mind. In Michaux's texts drugs give weight and body to the mind, but the books focus on the concrete aspects of the mind, its operations, its mechanisms.

<sup>2</sup>See Hugo's definition of the drama's character, features and object: Truth, men, reality. Preface de Cromwell, op.cit.p. 15.



## CHAPTER II

### THE GOAL OF THE WRITTEN ACCOUNT OF THE EXPERIENCE

The apprehension and organization of experience into clearly articulated belief is mainly an interpretation process and in large part a communicative process. <sup>1</sup>

If the goal of drug experimentation is for Michaux to reach something of the magnitude which belongs specifically to the human mind, the written account of this experience appears as a cognitive contribution to this general attempt. If the experimentation aspires to a presence of the object before the subject, the written account of the experience is part of this enterprise by being the correlative of the inner emotional fusion. If drugs and insanity consist of the necessary physical impulse, the written account attempts to constitute a condensed form of the experience. In fact the reader gets the impression that literariness is not the aim of Michaux's texts on drug experimentation. Rather it is their instrument, the means of achievement of an experimental representation. I take as a basic definition that literature consists of a set of works whose object goes beyond simple and ordinary communication and aims at reaching esthetical, moral or philosophical value. According to this definition the books'

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<sup>1</sup>W.G. Hardy, in Language, Thought, and Experience (Baltimore: University Park Press, 1978), p. 9.

literariness is opposed to a didactical and technicist type of documentary about the mental system--Michaux in fact uses literariness to provide a better account of extra-ordinary and complex experiences. Relying on introductory and concluding chapters I come to have the impression that the written account defined as a correlated and condensed form of the experience, operates through both a communicative and interpretative process. The books are intended to provide both a sensible reproduction of the experience's mental, physical, and verbal manifestations and an intelligible interpretation of its data of consciousness (so that they may contribute to a knowledge of the mind). These intended aspects respectively govern the communicative and the interpretative process. The sensible representation implies Michaux's creation of a reader with whom he then establishes a contract of communication. It also implies a system of demonstration based on programmatic sentences (narratively developed) and on concrete figuration (photographs, typography). The intelligible representation and interpretation implies specific textual arrangements: the author differentiates himself from both reader and experimenter (drug-user, madman) of mental distortion and presents himself as the only valid interpreter. Moreover he presents a selective description and interpretation of the experiences which the text is intended to condense in an enterprise of "recueillement."

First the book is a communicative process, since as far as the reader is concerned, writing is presented as the tracing tool and the very memory that stands for the experience itself. The written account is the only tangible evidence that the readers possess of the

experience: according to the assertive tone of the statements of purpose the books are intended to account for an investigation of mental insanity, based on a personal experience and on the observation of different cases of mental alienation. In view of this the writer establishes a contract of communication with the reader. The writer uses the first person singular "I" and directly addresses the reader represented by a second person personal pronoun "vous", you. This "vous" constitutes an address to both individual reader and a collection of readers. The written account therefore seems different from either a theoretical or an intimate narrative description of the experience; if this were the case, the reader would be invited to watch from the outside but the relation might proceed without him anyway and would only satisfy the writer's desire to articulate his experience in an organized verbalization. On the contrary, introductory and concluding chapters clearly insist on a communication contract (rather than implicitly implying it as happens in common practice). In this contract the writer is in charge of explaining and revealing his experience to a reader, transferring the knowledge discovered during the experience to him; this is the meaning of the verb "dévoiler," to reveal. Michaux says that through drug experimentation he observed the action and mechanism of thought. In concentrating on reaching a kind of solitary meditation through drugs, he unfolds the capacities of his own intellect, and unfolds them to the reader. Indeed, before he is guided, the reader's mental habits are in a state of dissipation. He will reconcentrate them through the book which is the external space open to the intelligible reconstitution of the former and internal space of the event. This

concentration is made obvious by the rhetoric of question and answer<sup>1</sup> through which Michaux gives the impression of involving the reader in his account. This is conveyed by means of a direct address and reference to the reader's feeling ("vous sentez moins ici, et davantage là"), which is simultaneously produced by Michaux. Michaux constructs his own experimental reader, that is to say a reader who reads, knows, and experiences what he is reading about. Michaux therefore adapts to the needs and answers the questions he has rhetorically provoked from the reader. While doing this Michaux inscribes the reader in the text as an effect of a strategy of dialogue. "Où 'ici'? où 'là'? Dans des dizaines d'ici,' dans des dizaines de 'là,' que vous ne connaissiez pas, que vous ne reconnaissiez pas." C.L.G. p 3

The way in which Michaux transfers his experience onto the reader, using the transference process of an intercommunicational speech, results first of all in presenting texts on drug experimentation as a place where the experimenter, having left the mental sphere for a while, would come to meet his human fellows. There he would share the result

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas de Quincey in Confessions of an English Opium-Eater simulates conversation through a narrative device:

supposing a reader to have put this question: But how came you to dream more splendidly than others?

The answer would have been:

because (praemissis praemittendis) I took excessive quantity of opium.

Secondly, suppose him to say: But how came you to take opium in this excess? The answer to that would be: Because of some early events in my life....

of his discovery which, although it has been individually experienced, is considered of public and general interest. "Je voudrais dévoiler les mécanismes complexes qui font de l'homme avant tout un opérateur." (emphasis added G.E.E. p. 9 )

The second consequence of this communication contract and creation of a reader is that of enlightening the aspect of the delivery. The written account appears to be a realistic presentation of the experience. The reader, at the very beginning of the book is put into the experimental circumstances from which both writer and reader will together proceed toward the interpretation.<sup>1</sup> In fact we feel that this "vous" includes the reader and writer as analogous of "on", we or one, through which both would simultaneously look for the meaning of the experience: the reader seeks truth by reading, the writer by writing. The question-answer system within the narration therefore questions the laws of composition of the written account. Does knowledge come first and organize the relation? Or do we start ignorant (as in the experience) and come to understand through the re-presentation of the experience?

The answer is given by way of introductory sentences or

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid. p. 9.

Ups and downs you will see, heights and depths, in our fiery course together, such as will sometimes tempt you to look shyly and suspiciously at me, your guide, and the ruler of the oscillations.

In Michaux's texts there is no avowal of such a author-reader companionship. However various textual strategies create the illusion of cooperation as we will see in this paragraph (and also in Part IV, Chapter I).

aphorisms placed as epigraphs in the texts. It seems in fact that Michaux seeks a symmetry between the experience and the written account. In the experience knowledge is final, in the book it will also come last. The book continues the experimentation, it is a second speech, it is the part of the experience that remains in memory and consciousness and that is possible to translate into language. But at the same time, at the beginning of the book, as at the beginning of the experience, there is the aspiration to another consciousness, the desire for the immeasurable, presented as the condition of the revealing experience. This aspiration is transposed in the shape of those initial sentences (the epigraphs) which the book will attempt to verify. If we look at the general pattern of forewords and postscripts in the three books we are mostly concerned with, we notice the same contrasted and quick shift from first a theoretical statement to a clinical description of the experimental happening. In Les Grandes Epreuves de l'Esprit<sup>1</sup> the introductory chapter consists of a theoretical but narrative statement of purposes printed in italics and immediately followed by the very concrete relating of a first practical experience from which Michaux will then build his interpretation. In Connaissance par les Gouffres<sup>2</sup>, the forewords consist of an aphoristic exergue in italics exhibiting the

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<sup>1</sup>G.E.E. p. 9. "Je voudrais dévoiler le 'normal'...(text in italics) Un jour, au cinéma, après avoir pris du haschich, comme je suivais dans l'obscurité un film anglo-saxon. . . ."

<sup>2</sup>C.L.G. p. 9: (General statement in italics) Les drogues nous ennuient avec leur paradis.(Clinical description) Toute drogue modifie vos appuis...la réalité, les objets même, perdant leur masse et leur raideur, cessent d'opposer une résistance sérieuse. . .

general purpose of the experimentation and followed by the clinical description of experimental facts. The passage from the one to the other is signaled by the change from "nous" (collective, universal) to "vous" (the restricted community of experimenters and readers).

The aspiration to another type of knowledge precedes the narration of the experience itself, and it is only in concluding chapters that Michaux's own individual motivation is presented, through the same system of question and answer. "Pourquoi avoir cessé de prendre de la Mescaline? ¶ Pas fiable. . . ¶ Alors, d'autres produits moins brutaux? Mais ils sont moins intéressants." (M.M. p. 195) This organization of the written account is closely akin to the aim of the experimentation<sup>1</sup> in that the personal, individual considerations are subordinate to the general attempt at a new knowledge; they come after, and must not interfere with the interpretation.

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<sup>1</sup>Michaux deliberately decides to submit himself to drug experimentation, to feel uncomfortable through drug experimentation, but for the sake of mental discoveries. "Se livrer entièrement à un monde doit répugner aussi à la plupart. . . . (G.E.E. p. 205) Therefore the order of the book complies with the history of his motivation: a theoretical goal is illustrated and verified by an experience.

An opposite position is adopted by De Quincey (op.cit., p. 4) who comes to drugs for the first purpose of relieving physical pain. He discovers the other dreaming power of opium afterwards, and this discovery leads him to theoretical comments.

The works itself opened with the narration of succession, led to opium as a resource for healing their consequences; and the opium as naturally led to the dreams. But in the synthetic order of presenting the facts, what stood last in the succession of development stood first in the order of my purposes.

One might reasonably object that I am being misled by the persuasive purpose of such introductory and concluding chapters. Not necessarily. I am in fact tempted to consider the technical and scientific tone (that is closely akin to the general attempt at new knowledge) incompatible with a mere rhetorical illusion. Although it may be an intentional fallacy, the scientific tone still expresses the narrator's aspiration at discovering the truth of the mental. The apparent invisibility of an esthetic treatment of the experience as opposed to the obvious cognitive treatment confirms this opinion. Moreover, Michaux's texts appear already highly interpretative. As critics we suppose that this interpretation is part of the literary code, is the text in itself. In other words it is not because Michaux previously asserts something about the purpose of his books that we have to take it for granted. But the only way to respect the text is to view it as self-sufficient, as asserting nothing but what it is itself, self-referential. The only way to understand the true reality of this interpretation is to follow the order of its presentation, whatever we might think about it. In other words I believe that the true reality of Michaux's communication and interpretation contract is in actual fact the only experience that is conveyed in the text. The written text is the experience itself, it is the only experience, and not a meta-linguistic approach to the presentation of the experience. The only way for me to comply with this belief is to take this communication contract as the interpretation of the experience, and this interpretation for the experience, and not to try to add my interpretation to Michaux's. We (as readers) do not reach an experience but just an interpretation of an



experience. In fact, books are the constitution of a condensed form of the experience for the experimenter turned writer himself. His own experimentation, knowledge and understanding of the experience depends on the textual achievements.

The work of the critics, consequently consists less of building an interpretation of Michaux's experimentation, since the interpretation is already done, than of ~~unbuilding~~ the itinerary of this interpretation, to follow and to examine its sinuosity and its voids. If Michaux learns through the experimentation of the abysses (as expressed by the title of Connaissance par les Gouffres), we too, as reader and critics, will learn through the voids, the failures and the difficulties of the textual experience.

The communication contract is intended to organize a proper reading of the experimental account. There is a proper reading, just as there was a proper apprehension of the experience.<sup>1</sup> In view of this the communication contract generates a reading contract through which the reader is inspired by aspirations and desires correspondent to the experience. First, if an aspiration to Infinite was required of the experimenter for the ecstatic achievement, a desire to heighten his awareness is also required of the reader.<sup>2</sup> Second, through the

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<sup>1</sup>Both are concerned with the same question as for example in this quotation from G.E.E. p. 189: "Comment se conduire, comment conduire cet afflux de forces, d'élans, d'envies, cette fureur, ce futur explosif."

<sup>2</sup>"Elle a accès à une connaissance étendue, mais toujours à la condition qu'il y ait un immense désir de l'incommensurable." C.L.G. p. 276.

introductory sentences the reader is being given notice of the knowledge he will be taught, and he is also warned that this knowledge is all he should expect from the present description. Any motivation other than purely mental and individual is irrelevant to the purpose of the books.

Que ceux qui prennent des produits pour s'adonner à des agitations et déchaînements collectifs s'arrêtent et ne se mettent pas à croire qu'il y a quelque chose ici pour eux. On ne parle pas la même langue. On ne va pas aux mêmes effets. Celui qui est incapable de retenir les actes, incapable de garder tout dans le mental est complètement à côté.

G.E.E. p. 191, footnote 1

Along with the reading contract (established by the communicative process), the interpretative process generates a writing contract which defines more clearly the nature of the written text. The written text is defined by Michaux in terms of consciousness as an intermediate consciousness within a broader process of understanding.<sup>1</sup> "Mon premier écrit sur le sujet n'est qu'une première confrontation, il faudra d'autres étapes, une autre conscience." (M.M. p. 174) Indeed, Michaux concludes Les Grandes Epreuves de l'Esprit with this non-conclusive statement: "Evolution en cours. . . ." (G.E.E. p. 207) The notion of an on-going process of knowledge within the framework of the experience is reproduced in the temporary character of the book itself. Each book is a new attempt to seize the specificity and multiplicity of the experience through a different perspective. "Les pages suivantes ne

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<sup>1</sup>"Des jours, des années passent à la détection, à la tentative de compréhension de ce que je subis, de ce qui me manipule." M.M. p. 174

constituent pas non plus le complement des mes premieres observations.

J'ai voulu le rencontrer à d'autres niveaux." (C.L.G. p. 91)

This on-going process of consciousness from one book to another in which the contribution to knowledge (by a book) is never final but always transitory, explains the second aspect of the written account as a selective consciousness of the experience. Books are not intended to be an exhaustive description of the drug considered.

Je ne donne pas ici une étude generale sur ses effets, sur les visions fantasmagoriques qu'il prodigue.

C.L.G. p. 91

On the contrary the written account is intended to observe as much of the experience as necessary for the purpose of the sought after knowledge.

...je tenais avant tout à bien suivre, à saisir dans le détail. Toute direction de recherche faisant le sacrifice des autres directions, les fameuses 'fantasias' pourtant typiques et dont il existe depuis longtemps de celebres descriptions, sont omises ici.

C.L.G. p. 91, footnote 1

The above quotation illustrates the selective aspect of the report in omitting to define the quoted "fantasias" (fanciful visions induced by Cannabis). Furthermore, the absence of definition is implicitly justified by the alleged well-known, typical commonplace character of these "fantasias." While doing this, Michaux indicates that the goal of the selection is to produce an original and innovative description. Thus the specificity of the experience described results from the specificity of the experimental goal. This written consciousness of the experience which I have defined as temporary, and as selective, now

appears to be the consciousness of a specific experimenter, the literary writer. He organizes the understanding, the investigation and examination of the experience on the basis of his sole remembrance. What we know of the experience is what he makes us know about it. Without this transmission, we have no possible access to the knowledge toward which we are guided. The writer of texts on drug experimentation does not differ from the "ordinary" writer. But Michaux insists on presenting himself as more than just a writer. Being both subject and observer of the experience he presents himself as the ideal experimenter.

Il sait maintenant, en ayant été la proie et l'observateur, qu'il existe un fonctionnement mental autre, tout différent de l'habituel, mais fonctionnement tout de même. (emphasis added)

C.L.G. p. 180

After having defined the true "instructor" (mental alienation as opposed to well formed speech) the true experience (a contemplation of mental mechanisms and not just an artificial excitement), and the true reader (mentally inspired as opposed to sensually motivated), Michaux now comes to define the true experimenter. In terms of consciousness, the author, being a former experimenter, is the only one able to deepen his experience, to transpose and extend it to someone else. The true experimenter is the person able to understand and master his experience through a system of transmission and communication. This situation is at best represented by the writer who as a mobile subject, both experimented and experimenting, can organize his books afterwards in the shape of a self-oriented and didactic analysis, as a maieutic practice: the writer indeed confronts the two aspects of his situation, moving

from abnormality to normality, from an inside introspection to an outside interpretation:

Que pouvais- je faire alors (lorsque j'étais normal) que je ne pouvais plus faire après (dans l'état anormal) et que redevenu normal à nouveau je pouvais faire, qu'ainsi alternativement des dizaines et des dizaines de fois j'ai pu faire, ai cessé de pouvoir faire ou ai eu facilité, puis extrême difficulté à faire, voilà l'examen que je me propose, imparfait certes, mais indispensable.

G.E.E. p. 13

The shifting from the space inside to the space outside from a personal inner consciousness to a transmissible external knowledge is presented as the unique privilege of the writer as opposed to both the insane and sane people. The normal person is ignorant; what he assumes as self-consciousness is just an overstatement analogous to this "Savoir d'hommes sans doute extraordinaires mais aux idées preconçues, prereçues, predirigées. (C.L.G. p. 278) Normal people are jailed in the prison of rational understanding. Mad or insane people are incarcerated in the prison of a static mind which remains unknown to others:

Une morne prison, une prison pas comme les autres, symbole d'une autre qu'ils ne connaissent pas et qu'ils ne connaîtront jamais, invisible, mais dont il est prisonnier et qui est la prison dans le Temps...

C.L.G. p.

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As the madman cannot communicate his experience, the writer speaks for him; he establishes through his books the otherwise impossible communication and link with normality. To normality he brings the knowledge that would otherwise remain ignored.

The book is the double (and interpretative) speech that substitutes form and meaning for alienation otherwise considered to be a pure waste of infertile energy.

Combien souvent n'a-t-il pas songé à ses freres, frères sans le savoir, frères de plus personne, dont le pareil désordre en plus enfoncé, plus sans espoir et tendant à l'irréversible, va durer des jours et des mois qui rejoignent des siècles, battus...des brisements d'un infini absurde dont ils ne peuvent rien tirer. (emphasis added)

C.L.G. p. 179-180

The writer appears to be the ideal and real experimenter as opposed to the profane and insane symmetrical states of incoherence and confusion.

Le profane c'est la pluralité, la variété dont à l'état de bric à brac et d'incohérence, l'excitation aliénante montre la caricature.

G.E.E. p. 198

It is interesting to notice out of the two quotations above that Michaux establishes a relation of similarity between normal and insane persons. First the writer views insane persons as his brothers, fellows, and this confirms the relationship of (frenzied) poetry with madness. Second, rather than differentiating the normal person from the madman Michaux presents madness only as the exacerbation of the normal person's confusion. (Thus Michaux innovates with regard to the commonly accepted idea that madness is the opposite of normalcy). The writer only is allowed to finish at the same time the whole project of mental experimentation in which experiencing is the first part and communicating the second. Therefore he names what the insane sees, or lives without being able to say. He makes visible what the normal

reproduites ici sur les cent cinquante écrites en pleine perturbation intérieure, ceux qui savent lire une écriture en apprendront déjà plus que par n'importe quelle description.

M.M. p. 13

But at the same time, writing is intended to be an intelligible reconstitution of the experimental lessons. It traces and settles the experience's contribution in knowledge for the sake of the person conducting the experiment.

Il me faut les retrouver...Ce m'est comme un devoir de les rejoindre G.E.E. p. 13

"Retrouver ce savoir" G.E.E. p. 56

Therefore writing implies a selection of the significant topics of the experience, a compression of experimental facts forcing out the unwanted matter from the point of view of the mental knowledge sought after. From this point of view, writing is no more a presentation but a step by step structuration of the experience. As a first step, the typographical aspect or the direct expression mixing verbal and visual language is not sufficient any more.

Le texte primordial, plus sensible que lisible, aussi dessiné qu'écrit, ne pouvait de tout façon suffire.

M.M. p.13

It is not sufficient because it is not legible, and does not provide a clear and clarifying report of the experience.

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(Continued)

of "inscription and "script." It designates the whole note and not just the simplified aspect of its typography.

...non pas deux fois, non pas trois, mais huit,  
neuf fois, j'ai dû reprendre le présent écrit...  
C.L.G. p. 53

The attempt at a synthetic image of the experience causes the written account to be not just a release but a reconstitution of the experience outside the experimental circumstances themselves, "à froid,"<sup>1</sup> afterwards. Michaux's analysis of "Canabis Indica" (C.L.G.pp. 91-175) for example is intended to reconstitute the totality of the experimental situation not only in terms of organic featuring nor only in terms of mental mechanisms, but also in terms of the cathartic self consciousness. "Trois opérations majeures: espionner le chanvre, avec le chanvre espionner l'esprit. Avec le chanvre s'espionner soi-même." (C.L.G. p. 91) This last quotation justifies the last step of the rewriting process as a transcending and cathartic text bearing witnesses to an unusual experience, after it is over.

Certains écrits transcendants, lorsqu'on se retrouvera en état de lire, pourront alors être compagnons de ces moments rares, conjonction admirable, admirablement appropriée. M.M. p. 178

Those texts are no longer subordinated to the experience, they are not secondary anymore. On the contrary they constitute a complementary and necessary conjunction, the inside-out companion of the experience, of the experimental ecstasis: its textual equivalent.

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<sup>1</sup>"Detectables alors, ces multiples foisonnements, qui dans l'état naturel se dérobent, je pars ici à leur recherche - à froid." G.E.E. p. 12-13



We have now come to understand that the written text could not possibly be the transparent and at the same time the organized presentation of the experience. However close to the reproduction of the experimental circumstances the book might be, it is always an indirect and non-objective mimesis. The written text, being charged with the double task of communication and interpretation can only be intended to oscillate between the limits of this indirection.

One side of the process shows writing as the means of an experimental reproduction and communication supported by the dialogic relation of reader and writer, and close to spoken language. The experimenter would record his impressions on a tape recorder (and transcribe them afterwards on a piece of paper).

La transcription de ces propos, leur enregistrement par un magnétophone...rendront particulièrement service, la parole restant la voie de communication la plus ouverte.

C.L.G. p. 67

Although it is already indirect, spoken language appears to be as close as possible to the easiness of spoken communication. "On va aux ponts commodes, aux réflexions les plus communicatives, à celles qui'n'arrêteront pas'." (C.L.G. p. 68) This kind of speech describes the experience, and we can define as metonymic this first cognitive accounting that uses the linearity of narrative structure to develop and impose an image of the experience in the text. The descriptive account should therefore be as matter of fact, as clinical or mechanistic as possible, as it is for example in the case of internal visions of "bouches," (mouths mentioned by Michaux), where it provides the minimum

structuration to help the readers' figuration of the phenomena.<sup>1</sup>

On the other extreme side of the writing process, writing is intended on the contrary to be the means of controlling the experimental happening.

Ecrire, qui demande force, et fait appel à de la force, devient force, devient contrôle, extension de contrôle, adversaire de l'incessante poussérisation de soi...

C.L.G. p.165

Writing then can be defined as a metaphorical transformation and control of experimental events that threaten the subject with disintegration. For example the notion of "ondes" or cerebral waves appears in the text as the translation of frightening internal feelings of movements, frenetic visions of rhythms. The word "ondes" or waves appears as a metaphor for both the feeling of mental waves and the vision of vague and waving forms although this translation is emphasized by Michaux as a verbal device for an approximate translation of those events.<sup>2</sup> It is already an interpretation that overdetermines the experience. "Ils n'ont jamais été vus, mais ont toujours été interprétés." (C.L.G. p. 17) This verbal device through which an experimental effect acquires a specific name and interpretation seems to be the experimenter's last and necessary control over an experimental violence, as expressed by

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<sup>1</sup>In C.L.G. p. 19. Here Michaux describes the relation between the drug-induced vision of mouths, the power of the drug absorbed and the personal feeling of his own mouth by the drug-experimenter.

<sup>2</sup>"..faut-il croire qu'ils ne font que traduire une impression de flottement..." C.L.G. p. 15

Claude Mouchard<sup>1</sup> and by Michaux himself.

..il existe encore une possibilité de faire avorter  
la folie, de gagner sur elle aux moments memes où  
vous en êtes travaillé et miné...

G.E.E. p. 190

This second side of the investigation allows, in an epigrammatic and sometimes metaphoric style, a significant control and repossession of the experience of mental alienation. The written account leads the experience away from madness and transforms it on the contrary into "le tremplin meme de la transcendance" (G.E.E. p. 189). This happens for example in Les Grandes Epreuves de l'Esprit where the fourth and interpretative part of the book presents a restricted (i.e. reduced to its essential characteristics) and metaphorical vision of the experience as ecstasis and love ("Amour effrene, souverain, mais surtout extase d'amour") (G.E.E. p. 198.) In this ecstatic love we look for the body that was initially the center and starting point of the experience, and whose insanity and perturbation is the basis of the further cathartic process. It seems to be rejected, forced out of the text as the final step of the experimental metamorphosis. In fact through the compound writing tool (in which all representation is transformation) the experimental body and materiality is metamorphized and metaphorically reincarnated. I hypothesize that it is reincarnated in the body of the text itself which functions as a counterweight to the experimental corporality.

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<sup>1</sup>Claude Mouchard, "La pensée expérimentale de Michaux," Critique, Octobre 1973, no. 317, pp.869-901. "Les ondes enregistrables sont la face scientifique de ce qui est vécu comme défaillance du sujet."

PART II

MICHAUX'S DEVELOPMENT OF THE PREVIOUSLY  
DEFINED MOTIVATIONS

## INTRODUCTION

The following pages are intended to demonstrate how the intentions defined in the preceding chapters occur in Michaux's texts. The task of creating the conditions which best facilitate a defensive (e.g. controlling) writing act was, as we have seen, conceived of in terms of two coexisting and concurrent phases of the textual performance. Motivated by the dynamic notion of love, the textual performance counteracts the experimental terrorism. Indeed Michaux insists that love is the converse entity that counteracts not so much hate as fear. "C'est la peur (chose curieuse) qui plus que la haine attend ceux que l'amour n'a pas satisfaits." (L'Infini Turbulent, p. 213) Through the notion of love the book presents not so much the ecstatic part of the drug experience as the converse figure or blue-print of the experience, which is basically threatening. Love is presented as a deviation, or escape that complies with a general psychological tendency. "Qui aspire à être comblé de peur? Qui ne fuit devant l'abjecte peur absolue?" (I.T. p. 213) And this tendency is all the more present in the experience with drugs. "Dans la mescaline, on la fuit tant qu'on peut et dès qu'on l'aperçoit." (I.T. p. 213)

The book therefore complies with the experimental tendency by fulfilling the general attempt to attain happiness and comfort, but also by asserting that love is the condensed and transposed form that stands for the drug experience and structures our understanding of it. "Aimer

va avec félicité (et confiance), comme peur va avec terrifiant. Dans l'ivresse mescalinienne la peur fait presque inmanquablement apparaître aux yeux de l'imagination le spectacle terrifiant." (I.T. p. 24) The link between the cause and the effect is almost reversed in this quotation. The written account should then reproduce this experimental characteristic and use it as the means to counteract an unwanted representation. It can be done by imposing love as the emblematic image of the experience that, it is hoped, might thus generate the desired felicity.<sup>1</sup> There is therefore a certain ubiquity in the way the written account uses the changeable and bi-dimensional characteristic of love. On the one hand, love appears as an experimental image. It accounts for one aspect of the experience; that is to say ecstasy that within the real experimenter lies behind the experience, almost going beyond it, as is the case for the mystic. On the other hand, and at the same time, love appears as a textual device for the necessary orientation and fixing of that violence which the subject undergoes in the experimental situation. Because of this designed ability to manipulate and to change the form of the experience, the book appears as its legible and enduring image, one that eliminates fear by orienting and thus

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<sup>1</sup>This imposition of the word and notion of "love" seems indeed to constitute a ritual, a symbolic practice intended to insinuate a positive image of the experience while the books mainly account for its "negative" aspect as a mental perturbation and distortion. "Connaissance par les Gouffres" ("Learning through Despair") scrutinizes the suffering of the subject. The possibility of another phase of felicity is only suggested, (for example in Part I, Chapter 1) through the representation of the three states where the last and third one is pure happiness. Les Grandes Epreuves de l'Esprit and Misérable Miracle refer to the notion of love more frequently. However this is an effect of the poetical function and fiction and not the trace and memory of a former experimental event.

structuring the experimental happening. "Aussi-faut il s'orienter, et extrêmement vite car le manichéisme incoercible de la drogue ne permet plus l'indifférence et la distraction, ni d'aller et venir de l'agréable au désagréable, sans se fixer." (I.T. p. 214) The written account must necessarily control the experience because of the impossibility of dealing with fear in the course of the experience itself, as well as in the memory of it, that is to say in the simultaneous as well as the posterior accounts.

Writing plays a determining part in the apprehension of the experience itself, which is one of the primary reasons why Michaux does not separate the experimental notion of fear and love from its textual, verbal representation. Moreover he insists that the strong impressions created by the drug experience remain threatening even though they are already verbalized.<sup>1</sup> In so doing, Michaux attempts to distinguish this fear from another kind of literary fear brought about by books that are specifically (but also only fictionally) devoted to fear or suspense.

On ne pourrait se laisser aller impunément à une crainte, comme il arrive dans la vie, et plus encore dans les histoires éffrayantes, récits de brigandage, de guerres, de pillages, drames et mélodrames ou romans dits policiers, où l'on joue à avoir peur un certain temps, jusqu' à un certain point en suspens.

I.T. p. 214

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<sup>1</sup>We will see later that the experimental phenomenon has an impact on the ability to write. But within the written experience which the books constitute there is no such thing as a phenomenon of fear. The suggestion of a necessary control and orientation of fear appears as a strategy of representation. It is intended to represent the fictional presence of the experience indirectly, through the presence and use of textual counterbalances which this present chapter will point out. They will create an image of the experience as a result of the tension which their defensive action implies.

Although it controls fear, Michaux's book does not solve the problem of fear mainly because it attempts to both reproduce the experience, whereby fear has to be literally represented, and to intelligibly orient the experience in terms of a quest for "sens" (direction) and meaning (and thus transcend fear).

This notion of "sens" or sense refers, not so much to the interpretative notion of "sens" as meaning, as to the experimental notion of sense as direction, and particularly to the direction that should be taken by the actor (experimenter and writer) in order to escape from horror and to get the most from his experimentation. Sense, consequently, points to the beneficent source of the infinite, as opposed to the maleficent source of terror. We therefore understand that the written account and the act of writing, defined as a double task synthesized under the generic label of "recueillement," take on all the avatars and vicissitudes of the actor's subjectivity as expressed by Claude Mouchard:<sup>1</sup> "Michaux apporte dans la drogue une inquiétude radicale du sujet sur lui-même, et la volonté contraire complémentaire de s'exposer."

Texts on drug experimentation declare themselves to be enterprises of self-observation operating through an attempt to resolve the fear that coexists with the experience. The writer-experimenter seeks his coherence through the book, but at the same time the mental dis-functioning produced by drugs and exposed in the book brings to light

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<sup>1</sup>Claude Mouchard, "La pensée expérimentale de Henri Michaux," in Critique, Oct. 1973, no. 317.



new aspects. Thus the self-observation takes place within all the fluidity and the emergencies of drug experimentation. It simultaneously sets into motion structuring agents intended to protect the experimenter's unity, and destructuring agents intended to represent the limits of the experimenter, that is to say the limits of his ability to grasp his internal space.

In our reading of texts on drug experimentation we are in fact confronted with two apparently contradictory ways of accounting for the experience.

On the one hand an apparently objective and quasi-scientific series of statements is intended to rationalize the experience and provides the reader with an apparently cognitive and structural depiction of it.

On the other hand it seems that this apparently scientific account does not constitute the whole of the written account and even falls apart (as I will show ). The scientific discourse ends in another and quite contrary speech, revealing the dimensions of the unexplained, of the unexplainable, and the struggle to grasp the experience by means of words.

I will now develop these two aspects of the written account, their respective values with regard to the experimental disclosure and the significance of their concurrent impact on Michaux's attempt to establish a literary epistemology of mental operations and representations.

## CHAPTER I

### THE NEED TO CONTROL ASPECTS OF THE EXPERIMENT WITH TEXTUAL STRUCTURING AGENTS

To begin with it, the textual program announced raises the question of the literariness. The book is the frame of a mental state representation but its literariness lies at first, on the readers assumption and belief that (like other books by Michaux) it belongs to literature. Meanwhile, Michaux's statements of purpose implicitly convey a minimalist and restricted definition of literariness: it is presented as the opposite of a cognitive, dogmatic, abstract approach of mental phenomena. Thus, at the starting point of the enterprise, the literary nature of the books consists only of their structural and linguistic imprecision (as opposed to the strict formalism which inevitably predetermines any scientific report). It also consists of their ability to provide, it is hoped, a non- prejudicial report (versus the "idees preconçues" of metaphysicians).

Michaux uses the text for the purpose of his own systematisation of the experience and punctuates it with a series of structuring agents and signifying intentions which (within the limits as will be shown in Part II, Chapter II) constitute a non literary image of the text.

In fact, the first and most obvious aspect of the experimental representation appears in the shape of an appealing quasi scientific organization and structuration. This structuration is especially striking and visible in the general (external and internal) structure of the books, in an extensive assertive tone or terminology, and also in extra-textual and non literary elements intended to sustain the text such as table of contents and footnotes.

#### A. Textual Structuration

Connaissance par les Gouffres is by far the most extensive study of toxicomania in Michaux's corpus.<sup>1</sup> But Misérable Miracle presents the signs of a search for a methodological control in the presentation of the experimental happening.

The general structure of Misérable Miracle, consists of five chapters (describing and interpreting four experiences), framed by a dated preliminary chapter (or "avant-propos") and a postscript or ("postface"). This postscript is followed by a short and final passage called "addenda," written a couple of years later; the "addenda" constitutes a symmetrical echo of the main part of the book in that it too is organized and divided into four short chapters recounting a fifth mescalinian experience.

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<sup>1</sup>Here indeed Michaux undertakes an extensive study of the effects of drugs on human sensibility, and on the ability to function mentally. This study consists in five long sections divided into separate parts. Experiments with various drugs are scrutinized in the study, and an accurate table of contents traces the itinerary of the mental fragmentation analyzed.

Besides the layout just described, each chapter is numbered and titled as if Michaux were making conclusive statements on an experimental matter that can be completely understood and mastered by the subject before the final report. The list of titles persuades us that this is a progressive argumentation, evolving from a matter-of-fact observation into a more conceptual presentation, and finally into an interpretation. Below I have listed the titles of the chapters on the left and a brief definition of their content on the right:

- I Avant-propos.....announcement of the project.
- II Avec la mescaline..field work or practical  
experimental observations.
- III Caractères de la mescaline...first synthesis and  
characterization,
- IV Le chanvre indien...parallel observations concerning  
another drug within a general  
experimentation system.
- V L'expérience de la folie...interpretations extrapolated  
from the experience.

The impression of an organized report is reinforced by the addition of subtitles and internal subdivisions within chapters. They constitute a network of justifications and reorientations, as if to insure the credibility of the report. One problem arises, however, since Chapter IV could appear as an incongruous digression on "le chanvre indien" (Canabis Indica) in a book initially announced as and supposedly dealing exclusively with Mescaline.<sup>1</sup> Yet this objection is answered by a

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<sup>1</sup>M.M. p. 13 "Ceci est une exploration. Par les mots, les signes, les dessins. La Mescaline est l'explorée."

subtitle suggesting a comparison that justifies Chapter IV, as part of a broader and more accurate process of coming to understand Mescaline:<sup>1</sup>

"Notes pour servir à un parallèle entre deux hallucinogènes." (M.M. p. 89)

#### B. Justifications for the Methods and Use of Technical Terminology

Michaux also finds it necessary to establish his scientific perspective by means of an assertive tone and terminology throughout the book. I will briefly consider this tone and terminology in one specific example: the information Michaux provides about his experimental method. The presentation of such information, almost in the form of a list, is intended to emphasize the nature of its insertion and position in the text. There, as justifications, the informative series operate as a necessary punctuation, breaking out in the experimental report in order to remind us of an alleged scientific authority and guarantee.

This information takes the form of various types, among which we have selected those that tell us about the experimental procedure. Michaux in fact points out his method, and carefully states his cautious approach to the matter:

"Ce livre suit l'ordre chronologique."  
M.M. p. 169

"Ce que j'apprends je l'apprends à mesure, comme un  
debutant."  
M.M. p. 169

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<sup>1</sup>In this very chapter Michaux states that his analysis of chanvre is restricted to the observations necessary to his understanding of Mescaline: "S'agissant d'un simple parallèle pour m'empêcher de me tromper sur l'originalité de la Mescaline." (M.M. p. 91)

Such information helps us to circumscribe Michaux's representational procedure. It is particularly significant that Michaux's concern for the reader is said and intended to command the organization of the report, along with certain aspects of its composition. The author does indeed manage to separate the general and abstract principles, which are to be given to the reader in advance, from the experimental events which will come as a discovery and a surprise to the reader, just as they were for the experimenter:

"...sans une première et partielle synthèse, il n'aurait peut-être pas su dans quoi il tombait. D'où l'avant-propos.

...la quatrième expérience de la Mescaline (qui) sera décisive. Comme elle fut pour moi une surprise, elle doit l'être pour celui qui me lit. Pour cette raison, l'avant-propos n'a pas été complété de ce que tout le monde pourra connaître dans la dernière partie."

M.M. p. 169

In this last quotation, the precision and concern assumed is intended to convey the impression of a composition in which only the strictly necessary conventions would be used. The insistence on specific arrangements induces the idea that when (conversely) there is no specific emphasis on a point of method, the book then delivers the experience "as is." Such indications of methods have therefore a double strategic value: on the one hand, when they occur, they insist on the cognitive aspect of the report intended to enlighten the reading; on the other hand, they suggest that, when they do not occur, the rhythm and chronology of the experience is "objectively" respected. Both aspects

concur to the general enterprise of justification through which the written account asserts and imposes its legitimacy, as well as its plausibility.

In addition to his methods, Michaux also specifies the protocol of his experiences through a series of short notations that support the accuracy of the report. More than in the preceding examples, these specifications occur in the form of eclectic additions to the text in which Michaux underlines the date and even the place where the experiences took place.

Mars 1955 M.M. p. 16.

1968-1971 M.M. p. 171.

Récit d'une expérience faite en 1958 à l'hôpital  
Sainte-Anne. C.L.G. p. 35

Here, the strategy does not consist of assuming false dates and circumstances because Henri Michaux, the author did in fact experience drugs. But it consists of mingling within the text temporal indications concerning the chronology of the composition (of the book), with temporal indications concerning the chronology of the experimental event narrated.<sup>1</sup> In many cases this type of notation is intended to satisfy the requirements of an exhaustive account from which nothing should be omitted. The desire to be precise, to prevent or to erase any misunderstanding with respect to the nature of his experimentation,<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Chapter II, in part II, and Chapter I, in part III of this study will analyze these aspects of the account.

<sup>2</sup>As in this quotation from M.M. page 170: "Aux amateurs de  
(Continued)

seems to predominate even at the expense of the harmonious ordering and development of the delivery: the formal coherence of the "Postface" in Miserable Miracle is balanced by two additional remarks, presented as if they had been conceived at the last minute, written "in extremis" and almost by chance.

Un mot encore... M.M. p. 170

J'oubliais. M.M. p. 170.

Then the description itself becomes a mere accumulation of names and numbers in naked style.

J'ai dû, il y a vingt-cinq ans ou plus, essayer sept à huit fois l'ether, une fois le laudanum et deux fois l'affreux alcool.

M.M. p. 170

les drogues hallucinogènes, l'acide lysergique, la psylocybine, une vingtaine de fois, la mescaline, le haschich quelques dizaines de fois, seul ou en mélange, à des doses variées...

C.L.G. p. 179

Here, the additional and accumulative techniques are intended to present the books as an exhaustive study based on an extensive experimentation with the drugs described and inscribed as the means of the attempted mental discovery.

Finally, along with the methodical desire to be exhaustive, we

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(Continued)

perspective unique, la tentation pourrait venir de juger dorénavant l'ensemble de mes écrits comme l'oeuvre d'un drogué. Je regrette. Je suis plutôt du type buveur d'eau."



should mention a non-literary (unusual in literature) system of reader orientation. The reader's approach to the representation of the experience is guided, in Connaissances par les Gouffres and Les Grandes Epreuves de l'Esprit, by impressive summaries or tables of contents. In Connaissances par les Gouffres, for example, the table of contents retraces the experimentation and establishes a chart of its development. The chart carefully separates into different groups the steps that might otherwise have been seen as a cluster, or amalgamated by the linear reading. Through the table of contents Michaux transforms the book into the appearance of a psychiatric manual or handbook in which the puzzling complexity of the experimental matter is (at least apparently) mastered by the conventional and technical idiolect of titles and headings.

Under the heading "Chapter II" in the table of contents, for example, the subcategory "6" shows a shift from a humorous and vaguely descriptive title "les ennuis qu'il a avec sa pensée" (C.L.G. p.282) to the hermetic, almost frightening terminology of an expert: "Pensées lysées. Pensées oscillatoires. Pensées xénopathiques. Pensées scotomisées."<sup>1</sup> (C.L.G. p. 282) Together with the scientific framework of the book, the table of contents acts as a conventionalized guarantee of systematic rigor complying with the general lack of lucid vigilance within the experience.<sup>2</sup> This vigilance is intended to be the means of

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<sup>1</sup>Whether those words do or do not really exist is meaningless. In point of fact they have not been invented. But their function in the text is to appear as super categorizations, unusual, hermetic, and "vraisemblables."

<sup>2</sup>See C.L.G. p. 54-55. "(Cela semble extraordinaire mais dans la drogue, on reste sans le savoir fasciné, sans songer à changer d'orientation). Je demeurais à attendre que ma vigilance revienne." (emphasis added)

deciphering the experience, orienting it towards the knowledge of the mind, and grasping (among the diversity of its aspects seen in the first draft), its efforts and its finality. "Faire de sérieux efforts pour se replacer entre et derrière ces paroles, qui n'étaient pas seulement désordres, signes de débâcle mais recherche et finalité." (C.L.G. p. 68)

In this quotation, Michaux denounces the words of the account as mere signs which allude to an experience more than they really reproduce and control it. Yet, he also mentions that whatever their value might be in terms of production of meaning, they still constitute an indication that there is an attempt at a report. The validity and representational value of the report may lie in its sole attempt

It is indeed obvious that the value of the structuration of the experience, as we have seen it up to the present, is that it cooperates along with the representational process of the experience in which the book is involved, by providing a report of the comprehensive observations.

First this part of the representational process brings the experimenter's or madman's body before the eyes of the reader as in the following quotations. Here Michaux relates a corporal or physical feeling and its consequences for the subject's mind and behavioral tendencies.

"Sous la psylocybine on perd de la force musculaire et surtout de la conscience musculaire. Or le muscle est lié à "bientôt," à conquête, à compétition, à vitalité, record, agressivité."  
C.L.G. p. 61

"Ces hypersensations concourent au sentiment illusoire du réel, d'un réel vécu auquel on prendrait part, auquel on serait présent de tous ses muscles." C.L.G. p. 126

Through these observations a link is being established between corporal and mental phenomena so that both are presented as working together in the same direction, as if in a state of harmony or reciprocal influence. In some cases the distortion of the mind influences the body and creates a new physical situation, as in the following case of hallucinations. "Le sentiment de présence subissant également une augmentation..va donner aux images mentales une présence réelle, et même une présence surréelle, va donner l'hallucination."  
(C.L.G. p. 193)

In other cases, the body influences the mind and a physical situation, such as this feeling of having lost one's body, has an effect on the ability of the mind to perceive connected but more abstract ideas: The word "demeure" here is in fact a metaphor, an attempt at suggesting one's place in the scheme of things.

"Avec son corps, il a perdu 'sa demeure' ... Il a perdu la jouissance du phénomène 'demeure,' il en a perdu le recueillement et presque l'idée."

C.L.G. p. 183

#### C. Comparisons Between Sane and Insane Researchers

The second role of the experience's structural representation consists of gradually expanding the experimental account to include the general problem of mental pathology. Indeed the main impact of the report's cognitive organization lies in the fact that it connects areas that were previously separated, such as Drugs and Insanity, and opens the text to the wide range of their connections.

Michaux's books present themselves as a significant contribution to experimental or applied psychiatry in organizing a rather rigorous chart of the symmetries and discrepancies between Drugs and Insanity. Michaux associates them through a common terminology, and the use of a common label "l'aliene a lui-meme"<sup>1</sup> supported by the uniqueness of the third person singular:

"L'aliéné à lui-même par maladie, l'aliéné à lui-même pour avoir pris une drogue hallucinogène, l'un comme l'autre a subi une perte, bizarre, abrupte, énorme."

C.L.G. p. 181

The stylistic association that makes the two situations appear interchangeable,<sup>2</sup> is also the basis for an analysis of their differences, as in the following quotation. Here Michaux shows that an apparently similar situation (for example the feeling of having lost one's body, or one's consciousness of it) in fact conceals a different reality and meaning, depending on which case of mental distortion you consider. "...l'experimentateur s'est vu partir. Il va se voir revenir. Surtout il connait, il a retenu le point de depart.¶ L'aliene lui, ne

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<sup>1</sup>Which can be translated as "the man who is insane to himself," or "the man who has alienated himself (from himself)."

<sup>2</sup>See C.L.G. p. 189. "Celui qui a pris une drogue hallucinogène, et celui qui n'est victime que de la drogue secrétée en son corps par ses organes mêmes, l'un comme l'autre il ne sait quoi de mouvant le traverse..." (emphasis added) See also G.E.E. p. 133-134 "Des dizaines et des dizaines de sujets, interrogés pendant ou aussitôt après ces états 'sans pareils' disent pareil. Certaines phrases dans le confessions des hommes les plus différents, sont en tous points interchangeables." (emphasis added)

connait et ne trouve aucune cause à tout cela et n'a pu vraisemblablement en observer clairement le début." (C.L.G. p. 181) As a consequence of this comparative system Michaux draws and establishes general rules of mental malfunctions. It is interesting to show how Michaux uses his practical observations to build a broader understanding, sometimes as cautiously and clinically as if he were dealing with the records of a laboratory:

Des troubles, on pourra, on va en inventer d'autres qui, introduisant des dégats précis, circonscrits, sans négliger des désintégrations extensives, nouvelles, permettront une observation fine. Ils feront apparaitre par comparaison que les folies naturelles examinées jusqu' à maintenant sont des ensembles frustes, gros, confus.

G.E.E. p. 178

The first sentence in this quotation indicates the manipulations to which the mental system has been submitted. The second sentence emphasizes the effects of such manipulations and observations, on the observer's apprehension of mental phenomena but also involves stylistic value judgments ("frustes").<sup>1</sup>

The result is then the transformation of the experimental aspects of mental distortion into a depassionate depiction with a formal

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<sup>1</sup>Moreover, the whole quotation seems to suggest that the written experimentation with drugs which the books constitute allow the creation of a new or artificial (as opposed to natural) type of perturbation. This suggestion seems intended to confirm (at least at this point of our study) the exhaustivity and specificity of the report's observations; it may as well be seen as an avowal the report's fallacy of which would create a literary and textual madness. We will consider this possibility later on in our analysis. (Part II, Chapter II).

categorization by types<sup>1</sup>, or models. Love or fear or any feeling has been expurgated from them, or, at any rate, has lost all of its emotional power. "Comme il existe une certaine banalité du monde visionnaire, dans lequel le génie comme le pauvre homme sont pareillement entraînés, il se rencontre dans le monde sensationnaire une certaine banalité dans l'extraordinaire." (G.E.E. p. 134)

Nonetheless behind those positive contributions to the knowledge of mental malfunctions, the textual structuration provides us with a greater understanding of the limits of the cognitive report, of its ability to represent and to explain. Conversely, the limits of cognition suggest the influence of the text's literariness. First, cognitive speech from within is limited in its apprehension of the experience by the limits of rationality itself, which cannot organize memory on the sole basis of will. "Ce serait une erreur de croire que connaissant des chemins, on va les retrouver, qu'ayant connu les mondes d'extase, on va pouvoir y rentrer à volonté! Nullement. Volonté ne compte pas, ni désirs conscients." (G.E.E. p. 207)

This apprehension of the limits of its objectivity brings the cognitive report closer to the state of insanity it has circumscribed. Paradoxically, the lucid researcher (and writer) is related to the insane in the same avid and anxious pursuit of an explanation; this relation is expressed in the following quotations wherein words and

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<sup>1</sup>See G.E.E. p. 134. "Les apparemment infinies transformations du corps, dans ces cas- la, se ramènent souvent à quelques types." (emphasis added)

expressions such as "chercher a comprendre," (to try to understand), emphasized by "toujours" (always) or "à tout prix"(at any cost) or even "et surtout"(and above all) suggest that both are moved by a strong and urgent desire to understand, and to grasp the situation within the solidity of a corresponding definition.

"Que comprendre à ça? Lui il cherche toujours à comprendre." C.L. G. p. 203

"Mon erreur était de chercher à tout prix une correspondance, et surtout une bonne correspondance." G.E.E. p. 184

Yet, in both cases, this avid attempt stresses impatience and longing and is unlikely to connote responsiveness in action. On the contrary it emphasizes a fear of frustration which is a form of lucid madness:

"Folie par la conscience de l'incapacité de donner des reponses appropriées." (C.L. G. p. 263) As a result of this comparative system, elucidating both insanity and mental sanity within the general effort to systematize mental phenomena, both the sane and the insane researcher are characterized by the same deceptive and impotent rationality.

The external or temporary observer of mental distortion emphasizes the limits of his ability to understand and to interpret: "Que sait-on des rapports? On y est bien primaire." (G.E.E. p. 184) Michaux illustrates this assertion with an example of one observation and the misinterpretation to which it leads.

"Un jour je vis...une malade soumise à un traitement de choc. Elle se débattait, hurlait... J'en étais profondément troublé.

Quelques minutes plus tard, interrogée par le psychiatre qui ne broncha pas, elle dit que ç'avait été très bien. Comment? A mon tour je l'interroge. Cette panique, cette horreur en son visage, en ses gestes, en toute son attitude...? Elle répondit toujours "non" et que ç'avait été des moments agréables..."

G.E.E. pp. 184-185 (footnote 2)

In this situation the observer has related an apparently violent reaction to its conventional signification of suffering. Yet the subject denies this interpretation, and proposes the converse image of pleasure. This does not mean that either the observer or the subject is wrong, nor does it necessarily mean that either the observer was under a mistaken impression or that the subject perversely enjoyed a painful treatment. It means only that the relation between a fact and its interpretation is different for each of them: primary and direct for the observer, it is complex and indirect for the subject who afterwards interprets through remembering. It is through remembering that he tries to reappropriate and thus erase all negative aspects.<sup>1</sup> "Certes le souvenir, plus encore que la perception immédiate, c'est davantage encore parfois une rupture d'association, une élimination des rapports, un renversement de rapports, une liquidation, déjà un renouveau." (G.E.E. p. 185) But on the other hand the insane person may also be able to grasp the complex variety of the mental performance to which he is submitted: "...devenu logique et systématique par infirmité, faute

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<sup>1</sup>When the process of observation and interpretation will be applied by the narrator to his own experiences, we will notice a similar process of counter interpretation through which the narrator will present as pleasurable ("Love") an event which elsewhere in the text might have been described as painful and unbearable.



d'aisance à saisir plusieurs plans à la fois." (C.L.G. p. 259) His ratio is then as unproductive as it was in the case of the outside observer we have just considered. "Mais son rationnel primaire et arithmétique, ennemi du complexe, de l'inattendu, de la trouvaille, de l'inspiration, des intuitions, des exceptions, des risques, des virages, des hypothèses, des aventures, est inutilisable, improductif, fermé..." (C.L.G. p. 259) We notice in the preceding quotations, and more particularly in the antiphrastic use of "arithmétique,"<sup>1</sup> an ironical attitude towards the scientific attempt at an experimental representation. This attitude complies with the statements of purpose presented in the first chapter of our study. It also introduced literariness in the textual approach of the experience. The quotation above is indeed very literary. It opposes to the notion of arithmetical rationality a series of substantives describing a variety of non-rational activities and situations. The substantives designate either steps within the literary enterprise ("inspiration") or aspects of a literary discourse seen as unexpected, original and inspired ("inattendu, ... trouvaille..."). They also refer to several non-rational facts of reality as a mixture of rules (institutions) and hazard (exceptions, risks, turns, hypotheses, adventures). Thus, this quotation enlightens Michaux's definition of irrationality wherein both "institutions" and "adventures" coexist. Furthermore, within the

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<sup>1</sup>Conventionally "arithmétique" refers to a capacity for abstract calculations that is recognized as a productive quality. Here it bears the pejorative meaning of industrious, endless and derisive mental operations.

general comparison between sane and insane researcher, this quotation erases the traditional repartition of rationality and irrationality. While it is commonly accepted that science and madness belong to one of the opposite categories, Michaux reunites them here in the same rational class. He implicitly opposes to this class a new conception of irrationality which the series of above mentioned substantives illustrate. Irrationality here appears to be non-comparison, freedom of mind, mobility, and echoes to the third style of consciousness previously quoted (in Part I, Chapter I). Irrationality here is not labeled, nor was this step of consciousness; yet let us hypothesize before further verification that what texts on drug experimentation are intended to reveal is the mental state that supports literary production. The creative and irrational literariness transforms the rational inproductivity of both sane and insane researchers, and brings their experiences to completion in the book.

#### Conclusion

The present chapter has analyzed the attempt to find a quasi-scientific structuration of the experimental account, an attempt that is linked to another aim, which is the control of the experimental happening. Both aims are in fact compatible and the suspicion of a contradiction that might arise in the reader's mind will be erased by the assimilation of the sane and the insane researcher in the same category, and in the same ironical situation of impotence. "Il y a une moquerie partout à l'égard du chercheur." (C.L.G. p. 202) (emphasis added)

This mockery to which the researcher (generally speaking, e.g. sane and insane) is submitted, is the result, however paradoxical it might seem, of the quasi-scientific structuration of the account itself. Its objective contribution to the presentation of the experience consists in defining the cognitive report of the experience as merely a relative and indirect approach to it and as one that does not eliminate the freedom and the living strength of the experience. The researcher is being laughed at in his attempt to rationalize it.

It is on the nature of this ironical mockery within the experimental apprehension and its impact on a definition of the text's literariness that I will now concentrate.

## CHAPTER II

### HOW TEXTUAL STRUCTURATION IS DIMINISHED: ANALYSIS OF TEXT-FOOTNOTE RELATIONS

The reduction of cognitive speech to a doubtful and limited apprehension of the experience is exhibited more particularly in Michaux's extensive use of footnotes and their specific relations to the text. As a referential system they are part of the quasi-scientific structuration of the experimental representation. Yet they exhibit the shift from an intended explanation to an almost impossible explanation. In appearing to convey the voice of the author as opposed to the voice of the narrator, they constitute a stabilization and a steady extension of the text. Their intended function within the above text seems not so much to clarify and confront the text with a comment brought from outside the experimental circumstances, as to support it through a echo, and a prolongation of its sayings.

Before we develop this first statement by means of practical examples, let us formulate, in a more theoretical fashion the main issues to which this analysis will lead us. Footnotes, by definition, constitute a system of reference, and are "referring expressions"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>In this study I will use the terms "referring expression" as opposed to "expression of referral"; this choice is due to the fact that "referring" conveys the idea of a conventional appearance of reference which is not necessarily achieved, while the expression of referral suggests that the reference is effective.

marked as such by the fact that they are a form of distancing the reader's attention from a typographically differentiated text. They are at the same time conventionally related to that text through a numerical sign of reference. Like all other referring expressions they "serve to pick out or to identify one "object," "entity" or "particular" apart from other objects, about which the speaker goes on to say something or ask some question."<sup>1</sup> They point to particular things and answer a various range of questions, from the basic "who? when? what? which?" to the deeper "how? why?." In other words, they satisfy an eventual "tell me more about it?" that might have arisen in the reader's mind at some point of his apprehension of the experimental representation. They may also present a question asked by the author and intended to identify and emphasize a problem caused by the main text.

But it is precisely because of this function and the completion of it that they are to be known as referring expressions, and the following analysis is intended to determine whether or not they do answer the question, and whether or not this identification function is conveyed to the reader. If they do not identify, or do not do so directly, or even not in the way we expect them to, what does that imply for Michaux's broader attempt to find an experimental representation? Does it make the footnote a literary factor? What does this malfunction bring to the

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<sup>1</sup>John R. Searle, Speech acts, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 26.

text's literariness? For the purpose of this argument I will first use John R. Searle's distinction between "a fully consummated reference" and "a successful reference."<sup>1</sup> In the definition of successful reference, I will single out the final statement, according to which the speaker cannot be accused of having failed to refer "provided only that the speaker could do so on demand."

These definitions apply to oral speech acts, while we are dealing with written statements which cannot be altered "at the reader's demand," since the book enters the communication system as it is being read, and after it has been written in full. My use of these definitions is therefore a question of method. It should not be inferred from this that I reduce the written act to an analogue of the oral act. The same "methodic" relation to the oral speech act will however appear useful later on<sup>2</sup>, in the appreciation of the textual implication and application of Michaux's intended attempt to discover an experimental representation.

I add to this theoretical approach to footnotes that they are non-literary elements or unconventional literary elements usually serving as annotations appended to a text in scholarly works.

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<sup>1</sup>John Searle, *ibid.* p. 82. "A fully consummated reference is one in which an object is identified unambiguously for the reader, that is, where the identification is communicated to the reader.

But a reference may be successful--in the sense that we could not accuse the speaker of having failed to refer--even if he does not identify the object unambiguously for the hearer provided only that the speaker could do so on demand."

<sup>2</sup>See in the same Part II, Chapter II, The value of the text-footnote relation as a "deictic reference pointing out an intermediate narrative voice between text and footnote."

Here, in the work of a poet their use is striking as "a highly unconventional use of a prescribed and specialized device."<sup>1</sup> Along with Shari Benstock, I will indeed say that referentiality and marginality are the two inherent aspects of footnotes in general, which cooperate with the text but are not intrinsic to it; this double claim and orientation of footnotes being both "inner and outer directed, frequently result in a critical appendage that bears an uneasy relation to its parent."<sup>2</sup> It is indeed on the relation between text and footnote that I will concentrate in this analysis, and specifically on the diversity of this relation and on the shift in tone that it implies. Footnotes partake of the cognitive attempt and simultaneously they confirm Michaux's refusal of dogmatism in providing ambiguous elucidations. In the text-footnote relation the quasi-scientific enterprise is balanced by the formal imprecision of the literary text. Thus the text's literariness is indirectly reintroduced through the conflict between the text's (cognitive) intention and the text's (literary) frame. Despite the initial non-literary character of footnotes, this conflict (which results in an absence of explanation) presents the text-footnote relation as a cryptogram. It shadows in the book a textual mania, which is here the hypostasis of literariness.

I will examine the various combinations of text-footnote relations exhibited in Michaux's texts, and for each of them I will try to seek

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<sup>1</sup>Shari Benstock, "At the Margin of Discourse: Footnotes in the Fictional Text," PMLA, vol. 98, No. 2, (March 1983), p. 205.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

the reason why, and the way in which, footnotes stop the story to comment on it. I will wonder what these interventions and intrusions suggest about the original authority of the text: whether they imply the presence of the author, or of a new commentator between text and footnote. I will finally see that this frequent and diverse means of stepping out of the text to corroborate, extend, or counteract it through a variety of stylistic deviations does not serve the cognitive and referential enterprise of an experimental structuration; it rather serves the experimental fiction and its indirect representation.

If one tried to set up a typology of the footnotes as they appear in the three books at hand one would distinguish two main categories, each of them exhibiting different types of statements.

Generally speaking both categories are intended to provide supplementary observations or information for the accuracy of the report, but I must make an initial broad distinction between footnotes which support the accuracy of the text through authoritative references and footnotes which rely only on Michaux's personal comments in addition to the text. The first type consists of footnotes which appear to have merely, with respect to the text, the value of elucidation. The second type consists of footnotes which appear as additional comments and narrative digressions.

#### A. From Footnotes as Annotations to Footnotes as Textual Extensions

As for the first type of footnotes defined above, which makes the most obvious contribution to the cognitive report, the reader may easily circumscribe its features in the following way: it may be a short



bibliographic reference called for by a word in the text, as in the following example:

Et le Soma<sup>1</sup>,...

1. L'Agnistoma, la description de la forme normale du sacrifice de soma dans le culte védique, par V. Henry et W. Galand, Ernest Leroux, Editeur, Paris 1906-1907, 520 pages en 2 Vol."

M.M. p. 189

Etudié pour la première fois dans la revue Triangle, novembre 1955, p. 117. Cf. aussi l'Expérience lysergique, J. Delay et Benda, l'Encéphale, nos 3 et 4, année 1958, et H. Michaux, l'Infini turbulent, page 141.

C.L.G. p. 10 footnote 1

It can also be a broader bibliographical indication which the reader might want to consult for further information, and it is not rare to find Michaux's own work among the books mentioned. Beside these bibliographical contributions, the scientific reference may also participate in the debate, by taking the form of a precise quotation from a book, or a paraphrastic reproduction of an author's observation that is then embedded in Michaux's argument.

Stephane Lupasco, dans Logique et Contradiction (Presses Universitaires, 1947) et dans plusieurs études, proclame l'importance et presque l'omniprésence des antagonismes. Cependant, il voit dans l'aliéné quelqu'un qui se trouverait privé, retiré des antagonismes. (Les Trois matières, 1960, Ed. Julliard, p. 93).

C.L.G. p. 29 Footnote 1

In this first category, footnotes consist of minor supports to the text, conveying the impression of a well-documented analysis and stamping it with the seal of guaranteed and verified truthfulness.

Yet this category is not original or unique, since we may find the same kind of references or quotations within the text itself. In Miserable Miracle, for example, we find this quotation, "'La plante Chaste<sup>1</sup>' (Rouhier)," the last word of which calls forth this footnote: "Chaste, anti-érotique, puisqu'elle laisse la virilité intacte en fait. . . ." (M.M. p. 66, footnote 1) In this case, the precise delimitation between the text and the footnote is confused (since they seem to have exchanged prerogatives), and so is the footnote's status as confirmation of the text. The suspicion of a confusion<sup>1</sup> within the cognitive report (which will be followed by more patent examples in the second type of footnote) is not, in this case, sufficiently obvious. Indeed, the referential mechanism used by Michaux in the preceding cases of footnote-text relations is still either an absolute reference, or at least a relative reference: It may be an absolute reference, as is the case when the text's general contextual argument is guaranteed by a reference to a scientific book, to one or even two scientists' names (e.g. "Professeur Delay, p. 300, dans Les Champignons hallucinogènes, R. Heim." C.L.G. p. 59, footnote 1). It may otherwise be, at least, a reference relating to the specific verbal "cotexte"<sup>2</sup> as is the case when bibliographic information sometimes expands upon a notion already

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<sup>1</sup>That is to say an exchange between the accepted characteristics of the text and that of the footnote.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Catherine Kerbrat-Orecchioni, in L'Enonciation de la Subjectivité dans le Langage, (Paris: ed. Armand Colin, 1980), p. 35: "Le contexte d'une sequence, c'est en effet son environnement verbal ou extra-verbal. Lorsqu'il s'agira du seul contexte verbal, nous parlerons régulièrement du 'cotexte.'"

present in the text, or at other times simply indicates the origin of a textual quotation.<sup>1</sup>

Even in the examples of the above case (e.g. M.M. p. 66), where both quotation and reference are in the text and the descriptive development in the footnote, there is still a stylistic difference between the information given by the text (a quotation) and the information given by the footnote (an annotation).

Nevertheless, at least in terms of the Searle theory of reference, the footnote is still "a fully consummated reference."<sup>2</sup> First it is through its function as identification (here represented by the development of an appositive explanation of the word "chaste" quoted in the text, M.M. p. 66), and not through the manner in which it performs this function, that the footnote is recognizable as a referring expression. Second, the speaker's or author's intention to refer is confirmed by the footnote's ability to provide the means of identifying the object in question (e.g. through the reading of the books indicated). The writer here adopts the appearance of critical

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<sup>1</sup>Judging by means of the criteria of referentiality allows us here to decide whether such footnotes imply a critical act or conversely a creative act of referral within a fictional account; the decision about it is that footnotes serve an hermeneutic or "cotextual" function of reference. This aspect is asserted, yet not proved by Shari Benstock (opus quoted, p. 205, p. 221, note 5): "They direct themselves toward the fiction and never toward an external construct, even when they cite 'real' works in the world outside the particular fiction." The historical or real referent "inside the novel (it) becomes part of the fiction, subject to the rules of the fiction that subsumes it."

<sup>2</sup>That is to say one in which an object is identified unambiguously for the reader, and where the identification is communicated to the reader.

objectivity to preserve his authority as well as the objectivity of his account. Such annotations in footnotes function as a suggestion that the book rests on extratextual sources, and that this intellectual background is accessible to the reader if he wishes to find it. However, as strict bibliographical documentation, they introduce a new type of information which they do not exhaust. They seem therefore to function within the text as a theoretical system of authorial confirmation and guarantee of its observations; through them, the text is differentiated from a poetical depiction of mental distortion and presented as a clinical and quasi-scientific description of it.

In the second type of footnote, Michaux supports his textual argumentation through comments of his own without specifically referring to or quoting from scientific or medical authorities. These footnotes are therefore deprived of the distinctive feature (e.g. a bibliographical, or authoritative reference) of the first type. The second type could be seen as an unmarked whole if the formulation or the system of communication between text and footnote, and finally the spatio-temporal situation of Michaux (as author and/or narrator) in both text and footnote, did not introduce significant differences among them.

In point of fact I notice that some of those footnotes comment on the initial text by means of a change in the modality of the delivery brought about mainly by a shift from "récit", narration in the text, to "discours", author's comment in the footnote. Conversely other footnotes do not show a change in the aspect of the delivery and maintain the style of the narration.

The following examples will illustrate the first category of footnotes in which there is a shift from "narrative" to discourse, although this shift does not confirm or invalidate the completion of the identifying function in the footnote. That is fortunate since, in our attempt to present a clear example of this category, we are confronted with the impossibility of finding a pure one, exhibiting a precise distinction from the enunciative marks of the text. Indeed, most of the time the footnote is called for within the text itself by a statement whose generalizing character already distinguishes it from what appears to be the subjective narration. Sometimes the generalization begins in the narration after the subject's personal experience and is pursued in the footnote (using almost the same exclamative modality) where it is then extended to the broad number of similar cases.<sup>1</sup> At other times a precise statement appears to be an intermediary between the narrator's voice and the author's voice, as in the following example:

Je les vois à nouveau se laisser aller à leur  
fausse ressemblance plus forte que tout, que ma  
volonté n'a pu que brièvement interrompre. Tout  
serait à refaire." (emphasis added)

G.E.E. p. 62

In the final sentence the absence of an introductory clause (such as "I

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<sup>1</sup>See C.L.G. p. 131: "Et pourtant déjà tant de fois le haschich m'a trompé me donnant la même impression de connaître que de subséquentes réflexions,...me démontraient fausse et illusoire. (1)

1. Visions intérieures qui font illusion. Onirisme. Combien de haschisés, dans les premières heures qui suivirent l'aventure haschichine, ont cherché de bonne foi les palais où ils s'étaient vu régner ...On avait peine, malgré l'évidence des preuves, à les convaincre."

said to myself that"... "I thought that...") indicates a kind of free indirect style still close to the spontaneity of the individual expression. But the transformation in meaning, the presence of an indefinite collective pronoun ("Tout") and of the infinitive make it akin to a more impersonal and abstract judgment that effects the link with the "on" (e.g. the indefinite collective pronoun) of the footnote:

1. Dans l'aliénation, c'est ainsi sûrement, on n'en finit pas de remettre au point ces choses...

L'aliéné acceptera de revenir sur certaines idées, mais moins d'une heure après, parfois deux minutes après, tout est à reprendre. (emphasis added)

G.E.E. p. 62

In this footnote, the tentative statement of the text ("tout serait à refaire") is verified and confirmed through an almost symmetrical expression, whose tone, however, is no longer hypothetical but assertive (tout est à reprendre). What then can be the value of the footnote? What kind of reference and solution does it provide to the problem of textual ambiguity?

The shift between first person narration (in the text) and impersonal narration (in the footnote) is relayed by the common use of a third person and generalizing locution. Through this impersonal statement in both text and footnote, the narrator does not show himself directly but rather suggests that he is hiding himself behind an implicit and impersonal authority of judgment which would be commonly in use inside the text and outside in the footnote. This common implicit authority of judgment first repeats and thus respects in the footnote

the opinion given by the narrator about his experience. Second it extends this opinion to the writer's opinion and interpretation about the general case of mental distortion. The footnote will thus pretend to be based not on intellectual speculations but on the practical experimentation with the phenomenon which the literary text provides. The footnote is not based on extra-textual conceptual certitude. Rather it contributes to the literary text's coherence. In fact, in the quotation above, the reference to mental distortion conveys a modality of doubt (c'est ainsi surement). Conversely, the footnote appears to be an intermediary statement, tangential to the narration with which it collaborates (in repeating its statements) and which it only corrects and confirms in shifting from the conditional "tout serait...", to the assertive "tout est..." Therefore the footnote here is a successful reference<sup>1</sup> because the slight change in tone prevents us from denying the writer's attempt at a precision. The mimetic reproduction of the statement however, suggests that the footnote does not overcome the limits (in understanding and identification) of narration itself.

We have found at least one example of a regular and successful reference, wherein the narrative description of an insane person refers to a clinical diagnosis of the behavioral description. Stylistically, however, there is only a shift from the textual "Il" describing the average "insane" person "l'aliéné" [man or woman] to the indefinite pronoun "quelqu'un" [man or woman] designating the average individual.

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<sup>1</sup>That is to say that the writer cannot be accused of having failed to refer, even if he does not identify the object unambiguously.

"Attention il va tout gâcher pour se soulager. Il va créer une relation personnelle avec ça... Il cherche à placer cet excès et à vivre avec.

1. De toute façon la présence d'une amplitude aussi exceptionnelle en quelqu'un le rend inapte à toute vie normale, même s'il arrivait à se retenir de délirer. Mais personne ne peut se retenir de délirer si l'intensité s'accroît. Tout, et tous, nous tenons à une certaine dose.

C.L.G. p.248- 249

The footnote in this case appears as a successful reference since it shows the author's ability and desire to identify the particularities mentioned in the text, even if this identification is not complete. Here indeed the footnote suggests what the excess ("l'excès") implies for the life of the subject, (that is to say his inaptitude for a normal life, whatever the subject's attempt might be to reduce his symptoms). But it does not explain what the excess consists of except through a vague paraphrase "amplitude aussi exceptionnelle," nor does it identify what the life presented as normal is like. It identifies it all the less that the end of the footnote includes reader, writer, and madman in the comment through the use of collective pronouns "Tous, nous..." This inclusion suggests an accepted and general idea of normalcy, and confuses our perception, as readers, of the madman's case presented. In including the reader in the critical act, Michaux exempts himself from being more explicit and invites the reader to use his own experience to elucidate the text. While doing this Michaux emphasizes one aspect of the text's literariness. The use of "nous" creates a complicity between the narrator and the narratee. It produces an effect of community of experience between reader and writer, which supplements the text's



contract of communication. Thus Michaux's personal experience is explicitly extended to the collectivity of readers, and as such it needs not to be fully developed.

For many other cases, a new reason for footnotes had to be found since the notion of successful reference is reduced to the sole fact that the existence of a footnote seems to attest to the author's intention to resolve textual ambiguities, while the footnote itself appears rather to increase the ambiguity. The reader's expectation of an unambiguous identification is in fact thwarted by fruitless statements, whose purpose seems to be that of confronting or echoing textual questions with another question.

These footnotes seem to explore and to play on stylistic modalities, from the hypothetical modality ("peut-être," "il doit...") to the doubtful or unknown (e.g. footnotes ending with a question mark and using the conditional tense). We see this in the following examples, where the link between text and footnote is not directly perceived, but requires reflection in order to be grasped and where the explanatory power of the footnote is almost non-existent.

exemple a "C'est moi, ma drogue, que celle-ci  
m'enlève.

1. Il doit y avoir des tempéraments plus mescaliniens que d'autres... Des races aussi peut-être."

M.M. p. 87

exemple b "Il y a hâte en moi. Il y a urgence.<sup>1</sup>

1. Qu'arriverait-il si on administrait cet 'accélérateur' à des animaux ralentis, au caméléon, au paresseux aï ou à une marmotte sortant d'hibernation?"

M.M. p. 31

In the first and second examples it is indeed clear that the exact link between text and footnote is not directly perceived, and conversely that there is a gap between one and the other which the reader has to jump over or to scan. Thus it is the "face to face" confrontation of text and footnote that elucidates the argumentation with a meaning arising from between those two terms.

In the first case the correlation plays on a double meaning of the word "drug". One meaning, in the text, is a subjective use of "drug" as "ma drogue" or as something that one savours or enjoys more than anything else to which one is addicted. This subjective meaning is here metaphorical since it represents the writer and more precisely the feeling, the perception and consciousness of himself, by which he is now defined under the influence of mescaline. In another way the footnote refers to the objective meaning of drug as a substance that dulls or dims the senses. It suggests that some temperaments must be better adapted and suited than others to a mescaline experience. From this game within the text and between text and footnote, playing on an individual or general acception of the notion of drug, a meaning is indirectly conveyed or barely suggested: the individual mentioned in the text is specifically influenced by mescaline. The nature of this specific relation to drugs is however subordinate to the interpretation given to the expression "plus mescaliniens" (more mescalinian). I understand it to mean individuals who respond better than others to the action of mescaline. But what does this mean? Should it be taken in an objective sense, as favoring the characteristic effects of the drug itself, to which such subjects submit better than others? Then the

text-footnote correlation would emphasize the fact that the actor is more "mescalinian" than others since he submits himself to its effects. Should it be taken in a subjective sense, as allowing the maintaining of the individual coherence despite the effects of drug? Then the text-footnote correlation would emphasize that the actor is less "mescalinian" than others since he cannot resist its effects.

The choice remains open and the limited value of the footnote consists first in suggestively underlining the situational information given by the text, that is to say, the difference between respectively individual or general prerogatives of mescaline. Secondly it is of limited value since it is a performative declaration of this gap, by means of the shift perceived between text and footnote. So whether the reader scans it, as we did in this analysis, or whether he jumps over it, as we probably did in a first reading, the informative value of the text-footnote correlation will not considerably differ. The footnote in itself appears to be an almost unsuccessful reference. It is only through a face-to-face confrontation (a moving to and fro from text to footnote) that a meaning could be outlined. Along with this fact its dubitative character, ("Il doit," "peut-être," "...") together contribute to almost deny any attempted reference on the writer's part were it not for the sole existence of a footnote. The reader is not certain of the implications of the commentary because he does not know how to interpret its information; the footnote here seems not so much to identify the who, what, and why imposed by the text, as to duplicate them by raising new how?, what?, who? questions from the reader.

In the second case quoted (M.M. p. 31) the explanation and meaning just as in the preceding case, only come from the disruption between text and footnote. Explanation and meaning come not from their obvious direct relations (for example a direct relation from a statement to its confirmation or invalidation), but conversely from their indirect relation alone which requires some interpretation from the reader. The footnote's interrogative modality in fact functions as an exclamation because the declaration it carries appears almost as a bet. It appears as a bet because the question stated is made highly whimsical by the impossibility of answering it, by the comical effect of contrast produced by two opposite notions, haste ("accélérateur") and slowness ("animaux ralentis"), and more particularly by the funny and oxymoric injection depicted, that is to say the injection of the very phenomenon of haste to the stereotypes of slow-motion and sleep. I should add that the comic is also conveyed by the shift from a human subject to animals, and by the qualifications given to the animals. They are indeed presented in an accumulative gradation of segments from short to long, starting with one single name "caméleon," increasing to a name<sup>1</sup> followed by a nominal determination, "au paresseux aï," and then a name followed

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<sup>1</sup>In fact, the name of the animal was originally "aï" and the adjective "paresseux" was attached to this animal to qualify its slowness. Now, as proved by the text, the adjective has become a substantive "Le paresseux," that replaces the zoological name, but the semantic value of the adjective remains unchanged. Conversely then "aï" appears as a secondary name and characterization of the animal, its value as a zoological denomination is optional and may be balanced in this example by its comic homophony with the interjection "aie!" that would then express the reaction of the slow animal to the application of the accelerator.

by a circumstantial determination "une marmotte sortant d'hibernation" so the meaning conveyed here is almost non-existent. The footnote intensifies the emergency situation presented in the text, emphasizes it as something which goes against nature, and indirectly depicts it through the suggestion of a comical bet.

In the two examples that we have seen, the functional aspect of the footnote insists upon being not an explanation but an illocutionary statement (see definition on p. 100). The informative referential content of the footnote is almost reduced to zero, which means that meaning here is not produced by the narrative information, but only by the enunciative system of a footnote distant from the text. By means of their specific interrogative, and exclamative modalities, the footnotes here give information that is not directly relevant at the narrative level, but they designate the activity of interlocution: they present themselves as a kind of confidential chattering between two interlocutors (text-footnote, narrator-author, "narrateur-narrataire").<sup>1</sup> They remind the reader, by their existence, of his own duplication in this duplication (the "narratee" is a screen between narrator and reader, it is the virtual aspect in the text of the real reader) while at the same time, depriving him of the expected explanation, they prevent his identification with the virtual or fictive reader created by the narration.

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Gerard Genette in Figures III, (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 265. Like the enunciator who has a double intratextual (narrator) and extra textual (author) position, the receptor, the real reader (extra textual), has a fictive homologue (implicitly or explicitly) in the text, which Genette calls the "narrataire," (narratee).

Through the word "illocutionary" I mean to indicate that the footnotes I have analyzed underline more the act of exchanging and elaborating information (between text and footnote) than the precise informational content thus provided. The various possible combinations of text-footnote relations (which I have only seen partially) outline the narrating situation itself whose functioning is tested out as mentioned by Shari Benstock "the narrator's orientation toward the narratee recalls both of Jakobson's "phatic" (verifying the contact) and his "conative" (acting on the receiver) functions."<sup>1</sup> In the last examples analyzed, footnotes do not solve the ambiguous meaning that has arisen from the text; they rather serve to distract the reader in exhibiting various modalities and shifts in tone which suggest that they may freely choose to elucidate or not to elucidate the text to which they are related. They underline that they can be as multidirectional as possible and their proliferation combined with their diversity in Michaux's books exhibits the diversity of identities that literary writing itself can assume. The ironical aspect of such questioning footnotes (seen in the examples from M.M. p. 87, p. 31) seems intended to emphasize how derisive the identification of the footnote is, as opposed to the pragmatic value of the writing act which originates them.<sup>2</sup>

Simultaneously this ironical means of distancing the act of

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<sup>1</sup>Shari Benstock, op. cit., p. 223, note 16.

<sup>2</sup>Besides footnotes thus originated reflect a necessity of controlling the experimental representation, but this necessity here seems to result only in the interruption of the text by intruding footnotes; it does not affect the form of the footnote, nor the univocity of its uses.

footnoting from the content of the footnotes seems also intended to form links between footnotes that still pretend to solve textual problems (even if we cannot confirm this intention, the perception of their pragmatic project prevents us from entirely denying it) and footnotes of the last type which I will now consider.

I have defined the last category as one continuing the act and situation of enunciation from the text to the footnote.

This continuing appears first as a reproduction of the stylistic and semantic components of the passage upon which the footnotes comment, as in examples where the footnote maintains the "je" of the narrator and the precise circumstances of the experimental moment described by the text. It reproduces the textual circumstances in time and space by means of shifters markers such as "ici" in the following quotation: "Il faudrait pour cela un sentiment des distances... dont ici je suis totalement dépourvu." (M.M. p. 41) "Ici" associates text and footnote as one single textual circumstance, since as shifter "ici" is relative to the circumstances of its utterance. It systematically refers to objects whose nature can only be determined within the particular situation of its enunciation. This "ici" indicates here that footnote and text simultaneously carry the voice of the narrator, but it does not state the time of their respective articulation, since Michaux here does not use "maintenant." "Ici" refers to the contextual representation of the mental state in which the writer is involved.<sup>1</sup> Besides the semantic

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<sup>1</sup>The speaking subject is here confused with the experiencing subject and evolves from the blind belief in the hallucinated presence, to the partial awareness of a trick created by the drug experience. As to the specific use of tenses and temporal indications such as "ce soir-la", I will analyze them as well as their impact on the understanding of text-footnote relation in the next section of this study .

circumstances, the footnote also perpetuates the syntactic modality and structure of text, as in those unexpected examples where the sentence started in the text is simply continued in the footnote, without grammatical disruption.

L'excitation optique c'est comme si elle avait disparu. 1

1. Malgré la mydriase très forte, qui, inchangée devait durer des heures.

M.M. p. 125

Nulle part cette conscience unificatrice n'est mieux,... plus hautement soutenue qu'en montagne. 1

1. Où l'amplitude des mouvements respiratoires, la stimulation cardiaque et l'effort de la montée, autant ou plus que la vue étendue, ont leur part.

M.M. p. 178

The prolongation of the syntactic structure of the sentence from the text to the footnote establishes between the two a strong grammatical link as if they formed one single sentence and makes it now necessary to consider the footnote as an additional narrative comment partaking in the narration. It appears as a textual correlative, a second track generated by the main track for the purpose of dealing with secondary but still relevant elements such as the agents or the adjacent circumstances of the main experimental phenomena.

Finally, it is not unusual to find that the proximity of text to footnote leads the main narrative track to transfer its characteristics to the second track, where a longer narration is developed not as a



correlative but as a continuity which appears to be autonomous as an effect of the typographical difference. Consider the following extract, for instance:

Serait-ce fini<sup>1</sup>?

<sup>1</sup>A peu près à ce moment, dans la pénombre j'allais me lever- "Ne sortez pas," me dit un de mes compagnons, qui m'avait paru désirer un verre d'eau - "Ne sortez pas."

Sortir d'où? fais-je, plus ou moins plaisamment et entre autres choses pour écarter l'idée que j'en fais plus qu'eux et m'expose à des malaises. Ils rient. Mais le mot me revenant, se met à fonctionner, se développant avec finir en séries qui s'enjambent. Finir et sortir devenus inépuisables.  
M.M. p. 37

Here there is no stylistic nor semantic difference at all between text and footnote and the content of the footnote could very well be a passage from the text.<sup>1</sup> The footnote does refer to the text but it does not strictly identify an element of the text. It runs parallel to it, and continues it so that in such cases it is almost possible to read the bottom of the page as a passage from the text no less and no more self-sufficient than if it were embedded in the text. The bottom of the page shares with the text the space of the page as well as the responsibility of the account.

Generally speaking, footnotes in Michaux's books do exhibit the conventional visual signs that make them recognizable as footnotes: they are separated from the text, located at the bottom of the page, typed in smaller print, and related to the text by means of a number.

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<sup>1</sup>In G.E.E. p. 174 the sentence calling for a footnote is separated from the following sentences by three dots that insert within the text the pause in space and time necessary for the reading of the footnote.

They do appear as marginal, but when it comes to their specific relation to the text, they seem to compete with it or to cooperate with it, or to extend it in a free, imprecise, and often whimsical way. Thus they induce us to question our initial assumptions and expectations as regards their intended scientific function.

Whether they appear to be evasive or accurate elucidations, parallel developments or ambiguous digressions, they are effective parts of the narration, and simultaneously innovate a new narrative line. This new narrative type is in a space outside the space of the main text, to which it is linked in a flexible manner. Footnotes may or may not occur, and they do not have to occur systematically at the bottom of each page; neither is their absence significant (as a blank space in the text would be) nor does their use specifically denote one argument that is more important than others. Footnotes are not specifically expected to be long or short; they can be used to comment upon an argument through as long a development as the writer wishes, without stating to the particular value of the argument developed. Footnotes in Michaux's books apparently contribute to the illusion of the books as quasi scientific reports in which they would be used to act objectively upon the text through restrictive or additional comments. In fact they appear to originate in an internal narrative logic or agency which is similar to that of the text, yet which is not limited to the boundaries of the text. They are directed towards the reader of a literary text for whom the authority lies in the text more than in the outside and referential support of the text; they will not be verified and the writer may take advantage of this credibility to use footnotes in as

many ways as he wishes to justify his experimental report. Being aware of the reader, the writer may use the footnote from the point of view of the narrator, or from the point of view of the author, and present the footnote as either simultaneous or posterior to the fictive time of the text's inscription.

Thus the footnote appears to be intentional fallacies, irrelevant because the elucidation resides in the actual text which is the free-standing work itself. They concur however, to the definition of the text's literariness in raising the question of the text's enclosure. The self-consistency and self-sufficiency of the literary text is now a commonly accepted idea in the theory of literature. But the ways it is made obvious vary from one text to another. In texts on drug experimentation, footnotes are the means of this disclosure. They are presented as a quasi-scientific system of information opening the text to extratextual references. In fact their derisive character conveys the converse image of the text's self-referentiality. Yet, I assume they also partake to the texts' attempt at providing a literary representation of mental states.

#### B. Footnotes as Host of the Narrative<sup>1</sup>

First of all the footnote refers to the text's verbal and grammatical environment, and it will be noticed that the similarity

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<sup>1</sup>As shifter's or deictic marker i.e.: an indexical expression interpretable only in terms of the events shown in the above narration: the footnote's referent can be identified with relation to the speaker and reader, and more particularly to the time and place identified in the discourse (text or footnote) itself.

between text and footnote may grow into an identity. There is no specific stylistic delimitation between text and footnotes: they present the same variations in tone and style (direct style when the narrator reports his own experience or indirect style when the narrator reports and describes the experience of a madman), in the markers of person (first person singular shifting to the third person singular or plural) and in the tonality (concrete illustration or abstract; quasi-scientific statement).

Second, because of the space that they occupy, and because of their typographical form on the page, footnotes almost function as a visual system of reference.

The variety of the footnote's enunciative style and its identity with the text's enunciative style is used by the writer to confer upon the footnote the quality of spatial and visual alerting to the text. This deliberate introduction is made, or presented as necessary for the interpretation of the text, in the same way that an oral declaration such as "take this chair" has to be followed, in order to be relevant, by a gesture of the hand or a movement of the eyes towards the object denoted. In his reading the reader is in fact constantly invited to leave the story and to visually cross the space of the page. He goes from the text to the footnote in question as if he were following a physical gesture. This gesture can be signaled by the three dots "... " that I mentioned previously (G.E.E. p. 147) and which allow, in the text, the pause in space and time necessary for the reading of the footnote. It can be signaled by the repetition of the same word in the text and in the footnote which creates a visual echo catching the

reader's attention. It can also be any aspect of the footnote's concrete anchorage on the page, such as the abbreviations contained in the bibliographic information, and any distinctive and visual sign analogous to the audible signs of reference in oral conversation.<sup>1</sup> The difference is that the gesture, in a book, remains visual and static; the reading of the footnote is optional and whether the reader chooses to read it at the moment of the story when it occurs, or to postpone its reading, the footnote will remain printed. Still it appears as a way of introducing the discursive dimension in the text. Usually the continuity (typographical and syntactic) of the text, and the reader's desire not to interrupt it make it possible to neglect or to cancel the reading of footnotes. Yet, in Michaux's books, it may happen that the footnote engulfs the text, or extends throughout the page in such a way that if he were to neglect it (which he still may do) the reader would impair his reading of an important part of the discussion. In this case (as illustrated by G.E.E. p. 82 where the text and footnote equally share the space of the page) the argument is divided into two parts: on the one hand the text produces a matter of fact description of an experimental situation.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand the footnote prevents a

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<sup>1</sup>We can indeed hold that the reduced typography of the footnote has its equivalent in the change in tone adopted by the speaker in oral conversation to indicate an addition of information to a statement uttered immediately before the change.

<sup>2</sup>"Voilà bien six fois que ma chambre a changé<sup>1</sup>, . . .et rien ne préparait dans l'ameublement l'arrivée d'une terrasse. . .

1. Ceux qui parlent d'hallucination ou de pseudo-hallucination visuelle, par ces seuls mots déjà sont et vont à côté....Une façon d'être, une attitude, c'est par elles plutôt que ça commence."  
G.E.E. p. 82

defective interpretation of the situation depicted (that of a visual hallucination) and explains the real origin of the phenomenon (that is to say a feeling, an internal behavior which provokes a vision). Yet the same justification and explanation is provided by the text itself after the passage calling for the footnote.<sup>1</sup> The footnote therefore appears as an annotation which is not indispensable and which is subordinate to the text: the identification it provides is not more precise than the one provided within the main narrative track. The extension of the footnote however appears as a visual reminder through which the text calls attention to itself and confirms its initial authority.

Consequently, footnotes pretend to refer to the text as deictics<sup>2</sup> while this deictic reference is merely rhetorical; footnotes refer only to the cotextual or verbal environment of the narration which they pretend to identify while in fact they are as fictional as the narration itself. I use the term "deictics" to name linguistic elements (such as personal or demonstrative pronouns) whose referential function (in their inscription by the narrator as well as in their interpretation by the reader) implies that one takes into consideration the role played by narrator and reader, as well as the circumstances that are presented as that of the act of narrating. Footnotes can be seen as deictics since interpreting them as critical acts implies taking into consideration

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<sup>1</sup>"Ce qui se passe, ce qui se montre n'utilise en rien la configuration de ma chambre, ce n'est pas une illusion visuelle."  
G.E.E. p. 82

<sup>2</sup>The definition of deictics follows in this paragraph.

the role of the narrator, of the author and of the reader related or separated by the use of footnotes. They also appear as deictics since their freedom allows the writer to adopt various attitudes towards the moment of their inscription, presented as simultaneous or posterior to the main narration. But in the particular circumstances of a written discourse, this deictic reference to the text is fictive, and cannot be taken as a simple verbal "pointing."

The book has indeed been written before being read, and the inscription of explanatory footnotes rests, like the narration, on the sole responsibility and will of the writer. Therefore footnotes are more akin to anaphorics: the writer anticipates eventual questions from the reader, and incorporates a fictive reader into his text (through the use of personal pronouns such as ("nous, vous")) as he does in other appendices such as forewords and postscripts. Footnotes function as anaphorics, as a system of insistence and repetition. They signal an attempt of the narrator which their repetition alone is sufficient to convey and to express: More specifically they indicate the narrator's desire to incorporate a scriptural authority within the experimental report, and to create an analytical support to the narration.

The following example and its analysis is intended to develop this attempt: the text-footnote relation will appear to be a mimetic articulation of the experience. The footnote in question (C.L.G. p. 202) analyzes the experimental happening from an internal point of view: that is to say that it does not explain it, but reproduce the experience indirectly and implicitly, by means of combinations between what is

presented as the narrator's position in the text, and what is presented as the narrator's position in the footnote. This reproduction is conveyed implicitly since the footnote appears to be the objective tool of a narrative verification, while in fact and conversely the footnote adapts its analysis to the text's descriptions. Thus the footnote seems to objectify a narrative description, to confirm the narrative's possibility of translating, and thus of interpreting the experience.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore the footnote creates an effect of reality.<sup>2</sup> In duplicating the text's experimental description, the footnote integrates the experience, creates it within the book. Finally the footnote constitutes the linguistic and analytical support necessary to maintain the experimental image throughout the text. The text-footnote relation produces the effect of an intermediary narrative presence, between text and footnote, and between narrator and author. This third and intermediate agent comes from the duplication of the report from the text to the footnote; through the footnote the writer apparently attempts to counteract or control the text and its representation. Yet this opposition is conversely the means of a fusion.

In the following example I will analyze how the footnote performs a fusion with the text through a succession of different types of

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<sup>1</sup>Since the footnote, supposed to be objective, does not contradict the narration but rather justifies its sayings.

<sup>2</sup>See Michel Collot, "La dimension du déictique," in Littérature, No. 38, (Mai 1980), pp. 62-76. The author of this article analyses the importance and the function of discursive units such as deictics in poems. He speaks of an "effet de présence" (p. 71): the deictic reintroduces the subject in the text, as a pseudo-reference, as if it were real.



declarative modalities and aspectual variations.<sup>1</sup>

The footnote that I shall examine takes the form of a long digression written in the first person singular and is therefore one that inserts the writer into the narrative situation of the text. The text is written in the third person singular and describes the madman's reaction to auditory hallucinations or "voices" that he encounters. The insertion and participation of the speaker in the madman's situation will be performed by means of deictics which will temporarily relate the process articulated by the footnote and the process articulated by the text, as well as the moments of their delivery.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Aspectual indications concern the relationship between the period that is the topic of the utterance and the one in which the process is situated. See Ducrot and Todorov, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Sciences of Language* (english translation), (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1979), p. 307.

<sup>2</sup>In this study I will use several descriptive terms borrowed from the French linguistic terminology and for which it is not always easy to find a precise English equivalent. I have decided to use them in a direct translation and to explain in advance in which sense I do so.

I call "enunciation" the equivalent of "énonciation," in which I distinguish three parts: the act, the situation, and the object. The act of enunciation is "la mise en fonctionnement de la langue par un acte individuel d'utilisation" (E. Benveniste, "l'appareil formel de l'énonciation," in *Langages*, 17, Mars 1970, p. 12). It designates the linguistic activity performed by the person who speaks at the moment when he or she speaks.

The situation of enunciation, which I could also call the situation of communication is, within the act of enunciation, the circumstances in time and space and the general conditions of production and reception of the message. Finally, the result of the productive enunciation is the object or message produced. Yet, it is common to reconcile the result and the act of production which often designates itself as its own object. It is indeed possible to use language without producing an articulated speech (for example in the case of onomatopoeia, that is to say, the use of sounds which suggest a meaning, or of words imitating natural sounds) but it is impossible to articulate speech without emitting. So that the act of production in itself is always mingled with its products, and can only be analyzed after it.

The intrinsic goal of Michaux's footnote here is to explain the madman's disorientation caused by auditory hallucinations heard as voices, and to do so by describing Michaux's own difficulties in identifying their origin under similar circumstances of mental distortion. Yet this assumption is not given directly, but progressively, for the footnote presents one by one, and in order, the various steps from the observation of the phenomenon to its interpretation.

The text has already stated that the voices were in fact hallucinations whose character consists in the fact that they are imitations of real voices. They belong to existing people and have been heard before, but in totally different circumstances. Now they exist within the head of the subject himself and illustrate his present feelings and thoughts. ("Ainsi il entendra une voix de gamine si la réflexion était railleuse, de clergyman si elle était vaguement admonestatrice..." C.L.G. p. 201) Their confusing character lies in their very use of a foreign element to express subjective thoughts. The footnote will then try to explain this situation by means of a parallel example drawn from the own experience of the author who dissects his reflexive itinerary while at the same time relating it to the text from which it derives. The footnote functions as a deictic reference to the text, that is to say a reference to its situation of enunciation and its experimental descriptions. In the following pages I will outline the intrinsic structure of the footnote, which reproduces the main steps of its attempted elucidation and fusion with respect to the text.

Et moi aussi je cherchais où, ces voix inventées dans l'instant, où donc j'avais pu en entendre de pareilles et comment j'avais pu bien les retenir et les imiter instantanément, moi qui n'ai ni la mémoire, ni le moindre talent pour ce genre d'évocations. C.L.G. p. 201 footnote 1.

The first step develops the observations made after the perceptible facts of the experience in the form of an indirect interrogation ("où donc", "comment"). They state the difficulty of tracing the origin of the voices.

In this first sequence we notice a shift from a concrete type of statement to an abstract one, intended to reinforce the speaker's astonishment through the generalization of his mental inaptitude: "moi qui n'ai ni la mémoire, ni..." The first type of statement is written in the imperfect and pluperfect, characteristic of the historical narration<sup>1</sup> "récit," so that the time of the process mentioned in the footnote ("je cherchais") is shown to be prior to the time of the footnote's enunciation. The activity of research is shown as concomitant to the time of the event mentioned in the text to which it refers. The link is even strengthened by the use of the initial deictics "Et/moi/aussi," that is to say two conjunctions that place the speaker of the footnote (in the form of "moi") in the textual situation. "Moi," according to Benveniste,<sup>2</sup> is "le nom propre instantané de tout locuteur," so that it does not mean here the introduction of a new

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<sup>1</sup>Emile Benveniste, in Problèmes de linguistique Générale, Tome II, (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), p. 201.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 201.

character but only the insertion of the writer into the narrative situation.

In the same initial sentence another deictic, the demonstrative "ces", points out from within the footnote, the voices seen in the text before and experienced in the circumstances to which the footnote refers. The temporal indication ("inventées dans l'instant") also refers to the experimental description, and not to an object mentioned within the time of enunciation of the footnotes. The past participle alone conveys the idea of a process which is already accomplished and not reactivated; "Dans l'instant" would be "à l'instant" if the process expressed coincided temporally with the moment of its enunciation.

The second statement with its anaphoric repetition of the personal pronoun "moi," introduces an abstract statement of "discourse"<sup>1</sup> as opposed to history. It is conveyed in the present tense which, moreover, brings with it here a value of generalization. The shift from "narrative" to "discourse" in the observation step of the inquiry then induces the speaker and inquirer to posit an hypothesis.

Ne serait-ce pas par une sorte de jeu, me disais-je encore, que je place une voix si pointue sur une réflexion?

The hypothesis as such states the unobserved and absent origin of the phenomenon from which the observed phenomenon results, but this unobservable origin is only presented as a fantasy of the imagination ("une sorte de jeu"), a game which does not help the elucidation. What is more, the speaker's hypothesis is reported in a

semi-direct or free indirect style. It is free since there is no verb introducing the hypothesis (such as "I wonder whether it would not be by a kind of play that...") It is indirect since it is presented as a mental investigation conducted within an earlier moment of enunciation; this is signified by the interpolated clause in the imperfect and emphasized by the additional "encore". Yet here the presence of the "je" in the statement mentioned and of "me-je" in the mentioning statement is confusing. In the statement mentioned the "je" of the speaker designates the subject of the enunciation as the active agent of the action mentioned, e.g. "placer une voix"... In the interpolated sentence, the connection "me-je" designates the subject of the enunciation as the reflexive subject of the action expressed that is "dire." If now one analyzed the expression "placer une voix sur une réflexion," one wonders whether there is not a periphrastic or indirect description of the mere action of "Dire," "to say," seen as an operation of voicing a reflection. Finally the phonic play on "jeu/me-je/me" seems to suggest that the hypothesis which conveys the idea of a fantasy, or game, is in itself a fantasy, a verbal effect introduced in the discourse, by a footnote, in reference to the narrative text. Such an imitative reproduction is the performative way through which the footnote "identifies" the situation described in the text.<sup>1</sup> This performative practice elucidates the problem raised in the text. It

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<sup>1</sup>The speech act theory calls performative an efficient act of language, that is to say an act of enunciation which achieves in itself the action which it articulates; for example the expression "I promise" constitutes the articulation and the completion of the process of promising.

does so in denouncing the process observed as purely reflexive, and as a voice embedded within the actor's<sup>1</sup> mind and not as a voice coming from the outside (as the madman believed). The "je découvre" of the footnote was necessarily written later in time (at least by three months) than the date of experiment, and the participation of the speaker of the footnote in the experimental circumstances described (suggested in the first sentence) is fictive. The voice is identified "c'est la voix d'une voisine" in a second use of the present tense which here supports the affirmation of a general existence even outside the circumstances related by the book. It is the voice of a woman, which the subject heard within a certain period of time specified by the imperfect ("j'entendais l'an dernier"). The reference here shifts from one temporal referent to another. It was referring (through the imperfect) to the moment of the experience narrated; it now turns to be a deictic reference to the situation of enunciation of the footnote: "L'an dernier" situates the process within the footnote's situation of communication as opposed to "L'année d'avant" which would have been a contextual reference to the circumstances related as past. Finally, in the same sentence, a second use of the imperfect introduces a fourth temporal dimension: "j'entendais" refers to the origin of the voice, prior to the phenomenon of hallucination; "je me débarrassais" refers to the speaker's<sup>2</sup> reaction, to the phenomenon described. So the two uses

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<sup>1</sup>That is to say the character represented in the narration as the center of the action and phenomenon.

<sup>2</sup>That is to say the writer of the footnote who describes himself as the actor and center of an hallucination, which he analyses while describing it.

of the imperfect tense, here refer to two different moments in time, logically incompatible yet linguistically associated. The hearing of the voice should indeed be marked as farther past than the phenomenon of its incarnation. The same sentence has therefore played on four different levels of temporality: the present of narration, the present of general existence beyond narration (although this existence also "exists" only within the narration), the imperfect of the distant past, and the imperfect of the recent past. This variety emphasizes the ability of the footnote's situation of communication, and thus the imprecision of the identification it provides.

As for the statement "ainsi je me débarrassais," its meaning is not very clear. "Ainsi" refers to the phenomenon, and "me débarrassais" suggests an action of rejection, whose cause is mentioned: the voice does not fit the nature of the reflexion; it is an imprecise "incarnation" of it:<sup>1</sup> "...elle n'était pas, en effet, parfaitement accordée à l'esprit de la réflexion, ce n'était qu'une approximation, un jeu imprécis, un choix fautive de mieux." (C.L.G. p. 202) Yet, the nature of the rejection is unclear. Obviously it does not lie in the identification of the origin of the voice since the rejection is presented as prior to the identification. Then it lies in the phenomenon itself of "incarnation," but the process of "incarnation" is

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<sup>1</sup>According to Michaux's term of "une voix incarnée", C.L.G. p. 201. I will discuss later its implication as to Michaux's analytical description but I can already define it. The word "incarnation" means the embodiment of an auditory memory in the form of a thought and voice within the actor's mind.

precisely the opposite of rejection. Such is nonetheless the case here, a fact emphasized by its repetition as a game ("un jeu imprécis") trick played by the unconscious. I interpret the "incarnation" seen as a rejection to be the manifestation of a process of repression. The process provokes the strangeness of a familiar voice<sup>1</sup>, and thus its absurdity with respect to the reflection which is supposed to have originated it. The footnote itself outlines the absurd and paradoxal character of this phenomenon, which as such cannot be elucidated.

"Autre difficulté. Autre relance dans l'absurdité."

This renewed difficulty is true for the subject of the hallucination (or actor), for the subject of its interpretation (or writer), and for the reader of the text-footnote relation. Indeed it is the identification of the voice that provokes the heightened disorientation of the actor--that is to say the madman and also in this case the writer of the footnote. At this point the writer confuses in the act of his enunciation the situation of enunciation of the footnote and the situation of enunciation of the phenomenon narrated. The elucidation of the phenomenon revives it and both subjects, the writer ("moi") and the actor (the madman), are now confronted with it (although differently).

"Autre relance dans l'absurdité et dont un psychotique en difficulté ne peut, évidemment trouver l'explication, qui a

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<sup>1</sup>See Sami Ali, Corps reel, Corps imaginaire, (Paris: Dunod, Bordas, 1977), p. 22: "Paradoxalement la source de frayeur n'est pas l'étrange dans son immédiate opposition au familier, c'est le familier de jadis que le refoulement a rendu méconnaissable et qui, derechef, fait irruption."



moi-même me demandait des heures de recherches et de retours en arrière, c'est à dire d'efforts." C.L.G. p. 202

The link between their two respective situations is established by the coordination "et" and more strongly by the relative pronoun "dont" which grammatically implicates the madman in the situation defined. The difference is then only a difference in lucidity, since the madman, given the very circumstances of the event, cannot explain what he is submitted to. Conversely the speaker of the footnote, taking advantage of his mobility, his ability to go to and fro between the experimental event's narration and its later discussion is able to identify the phenomenon. This difference is marked by the use of the present tense of generality for the madman's position (thus shown to be permanent) and of the imperfect tense for the writer's difficulties which now belong to the past. Still, the explanation per se is not totally given; we only suppose, after this footnote, that Michaux represents this vocal hallucination as the incarnation not of a voice similar to the reflection but a voice dissimilar to the reflection, which is then felt as exterior. This feeling of exteriority is therefore the sign of the inappropriateness of the voice, and the passive expression of its rejection by the actor (both writer and madman).

How is this complex situation brought before the eyes of the reader? Not directly as we saw, but through a systematic combination of references: the footnote distinguishes and confuses the extra-diegetic situation (supposed to be the level of the footnote) and the intra-

diegetic level (supposed to be the level of the textual narration). It distinguishes and confuses the situations of enunciation: on the one hand it appears as a flash-back wherein the speaker locates himself in the circumstances mentioned by the text; on the other hand, it appears as a elucidation that transforms the flash-back into an organized remembrance. It distinguishes and finally confuses the position of the speakers. The same mark of a "moi-je-me" enunciation refers to several levels of enunciation: on the one hand, it refers to a subjective narrator who is the subject of the experience, and the subject-speaker of the footnote, in a kind of joint focus where both positions would be equal. On the other hand, it refers to an objective narrator, sometimes closer to the author (with the two expressions in the present tense of generalization), in a kind of "vision par derriere," (external supervision).

The footnote plays on the various possible positions of the writer. The writer adopts various attitudes within the footnote: sometimes he presents himself as the actor of an hallucination experience which happens at the same time as the madman's experience narrated. Then he does not differentiate his experience from the experience narrated in the text, and the footnote introduces the writer as a character within the narration. At other times the writer presents himself as only a commentator, as a second narrator who establishes the link between the madman represented and the reader. In other words, the writer articulates, for the reader and through his own understanding of the phenomenon, the perturbation and perplexity experienced by the madman. Finally through a third type of statement, the writer appears

to be the author according to whose experience the origin of the phenomenon can be elucidated; he presents himself as a pseudo-real, yet autobiographical type of narrator who shares some knowledge with the author. Because of this diversity, the writer is the one who speaks and who simultaneously performs the action spoken about. Speaking in the footnote is intended to appear as acting upon the phenomenon either directly (that is to say in a moment concomitant with that of the phenomenon narrated in the text), or indirectly through both a remembrance and an incarnation of the memory within and by the footnote.

As a result the footnote elucidates the madman's situation; its distance with respect to the textual narration guarantees its value as a generalization. But at the same time, by virtue of other aspects, the footnote functions as a deictic reference to the text within a situation of communication similar to that of the main narration. In this case the text-footnote relation is a punctual localization that points out a particular object or idea belonging to the text's own discourse and expands it as a footnote, as the narrator's self-reflexive commentary on the story. Thus Michaux creates a subgenre through this extensive use of the function of referentiality (which the footnoting system constitutes). The literariness of this subgenre consists, as I will develop it in the coming paragraphs, of playing with and thus emphasizing the writing strategies of the literary text.

Firstly, the footnote's literariness lies in the illusion it creates in the reader's mind.<sup>1</sup> The footnote apparently complies with

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<sup>1</sup>See Michael Riffaterre, in Essais de Stylistique Structurale, (Paris: Flammarion, 1971), p. 69: "L'objet de l'analyse du style est l'illusion que le texte crée dans l'esprit du lecteur."

the attempt at an intelligible report of the mental states. Simultaneously, it denies this attempt in providing a mere echo of the text, rather than an elucidation of it. The footnotes constitute an illusion of science and at the same time they denounce this illusion as such. On the one hand the reader may omit the reading of footnotes, thus his apprehension relies only on the literary text. On the other hand, the reader may feel compelled to read footnotes. This is the case if he believes in the scientific value of the report which might then be mutilated by the omission of footnotes. Yet, even if he does read footnotes, he does not find them significant from a scientific point of view. Thus his reading still relies on the literary text. The footnote's literariness depends upon the reader's appreciation. Either the footnote's literariness comes from the simple fact that it is not scientific; although this is not a good enough reason, it still complies with Michaux's idea of literariness as a non-dogmatic textual frame. Or the footnote is a literary or a stylistic factor of illusion that imposes itself on the reader's sight. Thus footnotes confirm the book's literariness.

The text-footnote relation creates the illusion of a scientific and objective system of reference which in fact is the tool of a self-confirmation of its own sayings by the narration. The text duplicated by the footnote conveys the illusion of the experience while the footnote is presented as the authority that guarantees the text. This illusion is all the more deliberate as the footnote is implicitly made to be the performative illustration of the text.

First, the footnote is intended and expected (by the reader) to have a therapeutic function of verification and analysis. The footnote stops the story in order to draw its meaning and to make it explicit; and the clarification is expected to be the means of relating the example exposed in the narration to a general and broader theory of mental pathology. In the last example text and footnote suggest that the voice hallucinated results from an internal process of remembrance, and more particularly of partial remembrance. The madman forgets the origin of the meaning, and therefore does not interpret it as a remembrance but as a voice coming from the outside. Text and footnote also suggest that this partial remembrance denotes a deeper process of repression, which justifies the inappropriate articulation of the thought (by the voice). The process deprives the remembrance of its referent and thus creates its strangeness.

Second, despite its therapeutic intention, the footnote takes on the exact shape of its object. The description in the footnote takes the form of an incarnation through a play of verbal implications which relate the description of the footnote to the narration of the text. These implications insinuate the footnote and the object of its representation, into the narration. As a result, the footnote intended to stop the narration in fact guarantees its perpetuation. While doing this the footnote reveals itself to be subordinate to the narration, and to be based on formal similitude with the narrated fiction; the footnote's function would then be not to analyze but to symptomatically stand for the object which it was intended to make explicit.

How is this isomorphic (i.e. morphological similitude) depiction performed? Michaux's system of representation consists of exaggerating the referential function on which the text-footnote relation is based. Footnotes have in the past appeared as ready-made syntagms, that is to say as anaphorics anticipating eventual questions, and superimposed on the text. They function as an emphasis and overdetermination<sup>1</sup> of the narration, not as a clarification of it. The reader's expectation of an identification is thwarted by a footnote which exhibits an intermediate code between narration and description, or by a descriptive clause which develops the antecedent term expressed in the text. In the footnote it seems that Michaux does not use an arbitrary linguistic code (that of the author, such as it may appear in footnotes providing bibliographic references). He replaces this expected code, substituting his own internal and narrative code that is cognate to that of the narration. Thematically the footnote extends the controversy between the incarcerated voice and the hallucinated voice. Stylistically the footnote creates a demonstration of the incarnation system in presenting itself as a voice that both insinuates itself into, and extracts itself from, the narration. It does so in the form of an objective narration, as an inside-out face of the narration.

The third aspect that makes the footnote literary is the fact that it reactivates in the book the dimension of "discourse." Although

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<sup>1</sup>See Michael Riffaterre, "Le poème comme représentation: Une lecture de Hugo" in La Production du texte, (Paris: Seuil, 1979), pp. 175-198. The concept of "Surdétermination" is elaborated on in this book in an analysis of textual anomalies, and their mode of contributing to the efficiency of the poetic mimesis.

discourse is often viewed to be oral, it belongs also to written texts as defined by Benveniste.<sup>1</sup> The footnote reproduces oral discourse through exclamative, interrogative modalities, and through free indirect style. It also borrows its manner of expression and purpose from oral discourse in various ways: it interrupts the text to point at particular aspects of it, it directly addresses the reader ("vous") and it implies the writer into the narrative through this system of interlocution ("nous, moi, je"). Furthermore, this reactivation contributes to the footnote's literariness in that it sustains one aspect of Michaux's system of representation.

In fact, the text-footnote relation is based on an analogy between the footnote and the voice narrated. The footnote is presented as a written segment relating to a textual reflection just as the voice in the madman's head is represented as an auditory modality relating to a mental reflection ("une voix nouvelle créée en accord...avec l'humeur correspondante à cette réflexion là") (C.L.G. p. 200).

Through a series of stylistic and thematic implications, the footnote is related to the text, and made to point out an object of the text, in the same way that as a result of mental distortion a voice is superimposed on the madman's reflection. Yet the relation of the footnote to the text, just as the relation of the voice to the thought,

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<sup>1</sup>Benveniste, op. cit. p. 209. Discourse also applies to "the mass of writing that reproduces oral discourse or that borrows its manner of expression and its purposes: correspondence, memoirs, plays, didactic works, in short, all genres in which someone addresses himself to someone, proclaims himself as the speaker and organizes what he says in the category of person."

is said to be that of inadequacy. Footnotes, being extensively used and obviously referring to the text, are analogous to "une voix si pointue" (C.L.G. p. 202) a voice too shrill with respect to the the reflection or text it voices. As such it puzzles the reader, and it points out the madman's situation through the intervention of a second narrator. This narrator , whether he is concomitant with or later in time than the textual narrator appears to be the means of an analogic elucidation of the madman's situation. The second narrator retraces (that is to say creates) the origin of the voice. The voice of the narrator inserted into the text and into the narrative context<sup>1</sup>, plays the role of the voice which the madman believes to come from the outside. The footnote is both exterior to the narration but subordinate to it; as such it reproduces the contradictory (simultaneously adequate and inadequate) character of the voice with respect to the reflection in the madman's case. The enterprise of clarification in the text-footnote relation becomes an attempt to make the narration plausible and convincing. Through this system the reader's attention is captured and his decoding or interpretation of the experience is controlled. The strategy of representation consists here in creating the illusion of an experience which the footnote would guarantee, that is to say creating the experience as the effect of a representative strategy.

First, this representative strategy is based on a catachresis presenting the articulation of the internal thinking process as a

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<sup>1</sup>One will remember that the footnote occurs in a passage of the text declaring the madman's disorientation; the footnote then grafts the (second) narrator's disorientation onto the madman's disorientation.



vocalization. Michaux represents the process of thinking, of producing mental reflections, as a voicing of the thought, and through the footnote( as well as its relation to the text) he creates an analogy between writing and speaking.

The analysis provided by the narration, and its confirmation by the footnote, exhibit the myth of a voice or sign, revealing a thought and an internal world, as if by a living breath.<sup>1</sup> This myth seems simultaneously intended to govern the constitution of writing itself, as exhibited in the text-footnote relation: the myth justifies the image of an active and auditory hallucination wherein a former voice (auditory remembrance) live and impossible to disconnect from the madman's inner thought replaces his passive voice. The madman in fact does not speak; he only thinks, and the mode of his mental production (that is to say the vocal hallucination) reinforces his confusion and his inability to understand his own situation. In the same way the superimposition of the footnote on the text, and the analogic elucidation that it brings of the madman's situation, shows the footnote to be an intended active voice which reinforces the textual voice. The hesitation between the identity of the text's speaker and of the footnote's speaker (the constant shift from "je" to "Il" or from "Il" to "je"), emphasizes a general process of exchange which carries out the constitution of narrator-author's consciousness. This consciousness is both internal to

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<sup>1</sup>This myth of an internal language, of a language of the interiority is expressed also in G.E.E. "Puisse-t-il venir, le mot magique, le son, l'image qui va vous découvrir ce monde à l'intérieur duquel vous serez invulnérable!" G.E.E. pp. 194-96. (emphasis added)

the writing process and the seat of the writing process. It is an element of the account's deconstruction, since the report does not rest on the verification of the text through footnotes, which would check the statements of the text against pertinent records. Rather, it rests on a justification of the text by footnotes which maintain the narration by providing grounds that prevent the text from being looked on with disapproval. The identifying function of the footnote progressively degenerates into a mimetic function, and the text-footnote relation appears to be a narrative gesticulation which imposes and disseminates a narrative authority. The carrying over of the narrative authority from the text to the footnote, and from one text-footnote relation to another, provide the artificial guarantee that the proper and right narrator (the one who is simultaneous and posterior to the narration, and best entitled to speak) is present at each stage of the account, and able to clear up any eventual question from the reader. Conversely, footnotes appear to be not so much an aid to the reader's understanding as a barrier to his understanding. In this case however, the barrier comes not from a lack of reference, but from an excess of referential and narrative authority. The mobility allowed by the text-footnote relation conversely reveals an instability that has its root deeper in the writing enterprise.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>In Misérable Miracle, p. 167, a series of intruding footnotes exhibit the impossibility of determining the identity of the speaker. Here Michaux quotes a report made by another experimenter (presented through the abbreviations M. Be. S.). The report is quoted in the first person singular "je," and is interrupted by two footnotes: the first one uses the first person singular pronoun "je" without indicating whether "je" is the same or different from the speaker of the text; the

(Continued)

I propose that the question of the textual authority and instability raised by footnotes illustrates a difficulty inherent to the communicative process, and which Shari Benstock<sup>1</sup> formulates as follows: "Language always embodies both authority and the threat to authority... The very fact of writing both extends and undercuts the claims of language. Thus footnotes in any text... illustrate the rhetorical double-bind that keeps all language at the margin of discourse." Within Michaux's system of representation, the superimposition of footnotes on the text, the activation of a thought through a voice, and the imperfect agreement of the voice to the thought, suggest a conception of the limits of language. The process of articulation is presented not so much as a process of production as a process of translation. The thought enters the communication through writing or enters the narration through speaking (as a voice). But its sign is a mimetic, contiguous and dissimilar expression of the thought. The sign or sound is an incarnation of the thought, that is to say it shows the typical

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(Continued from preceding page.)

second footnote objectively bears Michaux's comment on the report, and also uses "je." We then have three uses of "je," two of them clearly referring to two different speakers while one remains unidentified. First, the use of the same linguistic unit for two different referents is in itself puzzling for the reader; second, depending on the person to whom the unidentified footnote is referred, the meaning of this footnote will change totally. If it refers to the speaker of the report, it will be a self reflexive confirmation; if it refers to Michaux, it will be a comment brought from the outside to verify the report. The footnote is then the means of an ambiguity with respect to the identity of the speaker and induces the reader to question the legitimacy of the report quoted. This report might very well come from Michaux under the pretence of coming from another experimenter.

<sup>1</sup>Art. cit. p. 220.

character, the trait of the thought. This mark is felt to be excessive and the distance or inappropriateness of thought and its vocal sign is felt in the disorientation<sup>1</sup> of (both the madman and) the narrator of the footnote. There is no manifestation of the thought other than the vocal figuration encountered, and yet, this figuration is felt to be arbitrary. This inappropriateness and its interpretation presuppose an internal criterion of judgment that would be the means of declaring this inadequacy. This criterion could be (although it is not clearly defined here) the illusion of an internal language of the interiority (or of the thought) which the external language of communication would voice. Therefore it would be the norm judging the legitimacy of this outside step of articulation. The footnotes in this section of the text present themselves as the agent of a dissection, as the means of understanding the association of thought and sign. The illusion of a critical exchange between text and footnote enables the supposed internal means of verifying the phenomenon to be transposed into a textual sign. The footnote appears then as the linguistic support and context that insures this internal verification and that completes the information suggested by the text. Both concur to confirm the idea that the voice is a parasite sign of thought. Both artificially impose the idea that language is not a direct system of production of an immediately written

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<sup>1</sup>C.L.G. p. 203, "Il vit la situation d'homme qu'une voix appelle ou contraire...." "Mais une voix étrangère sera toujours extrêmement dépaysante. Moi-même, ...j'avais beau, dans le propos entendu, avoir retrouvé l'origine presque indéniable de la réflexion entamée et que celle-ci achevait, je ne pouvais les sentir liées." C.L.G. p. 203, footnote 1.

thought. Rather it is a retracing system (a conscious or unconscious remembering) a mechanical yet arbitrary translation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This is confirmed by passages from the text declaring that the voicing of the thought was a kind of simultaneous translation, yet one based on a conventional code, and not on a specifically and individually motivated code: "et ainsi il entendra une voix de gamine si la réflexion était railleuse, de clergyman si elle était vaguement admonestatrice, ou de dame patronnesse, ou d'un voyou si elle était protestataire, d'un sous-officier si elle était brutale ou énergique, etc..) C.L.G. p. 201.

### CHAPTER III

#### HOW THE TEXT REPRODUCES MADNESS

In the following pages I shall examine how, as a result of the conflict between the cognitive structuration and the agents of its diminution, the text conveys the image of madness. In fact, madness does not appear as an image within a textual description. Rather it is implicitly insinuated into the argumentative practice of the book itself which thus displays a case of textual and literary mania.

First, this literary mania is portrayed as fantasy through the previously observed footnoting system. In fact the text-footnote relation appears to be an institutionalized system of irony. In the text-footnote relation a question is answered by a disorienting answer which raises new questions either similar or dissimilar depending on the amount of stylistic variations from one to the other. Text and footnote relate to each other like poetic verses, rhyming couplets (in the case of bibliographic indications), duplicated rhymes<sup>1</sup> (when the narration is pursued in the footnotes), annexed rhymes ("rimes annexées") (when the first word of the text is the first word of the footnote), related rhymes ("rimes rapportées" when the meaning is understood by referring

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<sup>1</sup>Our translation of "rimes redoublées," see M. Grammont, Petit traite de versification française, (Paris: ed. Colin, 1969), p. 38.

the elements of the first line to the qualities and modifiers attached to another noun in subsequent line) or finally apophonies (when there is a slight modulation, and divergence of tonality, of identical sounds).

Such formal relations denounce the intended invention of meaning as a purely ostensible, rhetorical and playful system of imitation.

"mots en écho, qui font songer à une espèce de farce très primaire, comme celle que pratiquent des écoliers qui répètent sans commentaires, et comme une scie, les mots ou la dernière syllabe des mots qu'un surveillant a prononcés, sorte de degré archaïque du sabotage. C.L.G. p. 204

It is through such a primitive and simultaneously extensive system of echo that an expected explanation is thwarted by an ambiguous answer, and that the reader is fooled (i.e. his expectations are deceived). Thus footnotes appear to be rhetorical figures conveying the idea of the text's obsessive attempt at an understanding of experimental phenomena.

Secondly, this literary mania, the notion of the text's instability and inaptitude to provide a steady image of the experience, is conveyed before the eyes of the reader by the use of italics and quotation marks. The general use of italics (as well as quotation marks) is to emphasize a word or a group of words toward which the writer has a particular position.<sup>1</sup> It designates the word(s) as different from its immediate "cotext"<sup>2</sup>, but does not state whether the difference signifies its

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Elizabeth Cardonne-Arlyck, "L'Italique, signe et figure", in Romanic Review, vol. LXXI, no.1, January 1980p.75-87.

<sup>2</sup>"Cotext" or verbal environment as opposed to context (verbal and extra-verbal environment).

heterogeneity or its particular adequacy. The shift from a zero degree to a marked degree of the word tells us that a previous meaning was incorrect, but does not make the new meaning explicit. Therefore in the text as well as in footnotes, the use of italics and quotation marks presents the word thus emphasized as an approximate expression of the writer's thought. It can be a substitute for a comparison in which the comparative expression would have been replaced by the typographical sign. "Avec les visages grossiers, aux 'traits tranchés à la hâche,'..." (C.L.G. p. 149) It can also appear as an approximative representation of notions for which there is no exact word in language. This is because the writer considers all existing words inadequate to the specificity of his thought, or because the notion by itself is so removed from ordinary life that the writer cannot grasp it.<sup>1</sup>

The first case can be illustrated by the following example wherein Michaux approximates the mental performance. "S'inscrire" is also identified as the best word, and its signification has to be sustained by a positive series of synonyms.

The second case can be illustrated by the following examples, wherein the text tries to account for perceptions and states of mind that are hardly understandable because they arise in a situation of mental distortion which is usually not communicated to the sane person.

Ceux qui ont "lâché" qui vivent et entendent rester  
'de l'autre côté.' C.L.G. p. 194

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<sup>1</sup>Statistically in Michaux's work the first case is represented by quotation marks, and the second by italics.



"Quoiqu'il ne voie pas clairement quels sont ses contradicteurs... il sait qu'il les mérite. Il a commis... le peché de les ignorer.\*"

C.L.G. p. 207 (\*=in italics in the original)

The italicized "Le peche de les ignorer" expresses, in the form of an objective judgment a feeling of guilt which the madman understands subjectively and only vaguely ("il sait obscurément").

In most cases the italics in Michaux's books function as an emphasis of the marked word, as an intensive reinforcement of its basic meaning. It is an insistence that seems to break into the experimental matter, to force it into the account. Emphasized in this way a presence becomes an imposition ("Il avait... une présence extraordinaire" C.L.G. p. 153) a possession becomes exclusive ("leurs bruits et leur musique"G.E.E. p. 174), a question becomes desperate ("Mais comment agit-elle?") (C.L.G. p. 58).

In other words, italics outline an attempt from the writer. The word emphasized, becomes an object of communication rather than its means. Italics only focus on the word; it makes its meaning strange, and the hyperbolized word becomes an obstacle to the free circulation of meaning from narrator to "narratee." "L'Italique se charge de beaucoup de sens mais pour en affirmer avec la contrainte la nature évasive et aléatoire."<sup>1</sup>

That is to say that through italics the text pretends to designate, but conversely signifies only the desire or the intention to designate its only significant contribution being the event constituted by its

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<sup>1</sup>E. Cardonne-Arlyck, art. cit., p. 87.

use. A double meaning is then conveyed by italics used in text or footnotes<sup>1</sup>--the meaning of the typographical sign, announcing a declaration, and the meaning of the word object of this declaration. The typographical sign declares a specific intention to explain, that a process of explanation is yet to come, while the object of this process remains metaphoric and vague. It consists only in the suggestion of an intention. It is a disappointment, but what does it mean? It says something about the experimental event and somehow reproduces it.

First, and by themselves, the italics constitute a phenomenon of a vain attempt at finding a meaning. This failed attempt is transmitted to the "narratee" as the puzzling intuition of an allusive meaning, or almost as an illusion of meaning.

Second, within their context, the italics outline a concept which they do not identify, thus invalidating both the zero degree and the marked degree of the whole sentence. The marked degree seems intended to hyperbolize one key word that would dominate the meaning of the others. But since only the hyperbole is visible, the meaning it circumscribes appears as merely virtual, and as such remains ambiguous. Furthermore, it denotes the suggestive power of the subconscious to awaken the subject's desire for an explanation and to shadow its elaboration in the text as well as its converse, unstable, approximative character.

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<sup>1</sup>According to Michael Riffaterre, in La production du texte, op.cit. p. 10 "la mimésis de l'intention peut encore suggérer qu'il faut deux lectures simultanées, l'interprétation que semble exiger l'énoncé métalinguistique d'intention et celle qu'indiquent les formes de l'énoncé objet de ce métalangage."

When italics, thus generally defined, appear in footnotes (where one expects to find an elaborated and tangible explanation, not a questioning or tentative process of elaboration), they suggest the insinuation of an uncontrolled pulsation within the report. Through italics, chronically spread throughout the account, the distortion of mental faculties experienced expands and simultaneously contracts, notifies itself by the signal, yet does so without declaring its identity. "...le résultat de cette simultanéité pouvant être une forme d'ironie." (M. Riffaterre, see footnote p. 136).

The result is indeed a syntactic figure of irony, echoing and reproducing (in the rewriting) the phenomenon encountered in the experience. In fact, Michaux describes (in C.L.G. p. 200) how the madman's expression is governed by an ironical subconscious process of "contrepoint-farce" (tricky counterpoint); it consists of the frenzied, droll association of a word to a thought. As a result, this process provokes a comical effect of quiproquo, a droll articulation which originates in a loss of self-control and in a state of confusion. Generally speaking Michaux describes madness as a mental sabotage affecting the person's aptitude to formulate thoughts. The expression of his thoughts by means of voices, words or visions is only an approximative representation, and one which increases the ambiguity as well as the difficulty of its interpretation. The two series of clues previously mentioned converge to suggest that the text as a system of explanation is inefficient. Rather the text consists of a figurative

approximation which results in an explanation "zero" or "in absentia."<sup>1</sup>  
This explanation is obsessively attempted, and as such it suggests a  
kind of textual mania.

In a third series of clues I will develop this textual mania which  
takes on the characteristics of the observed and experienced madness.  
This will be considered in two final examples of text-footnote  
relations. The first can be defined in terms of versification, as an  
example of alternate rhymes: within the same page and the same context  
two passages of the text call for two footnotes. The page in question  
concludes a section of Connaissance par les Gouffres entitled "Babel des  
sensations," wherein Michaux describes the variety and diversity of  
strange and also unknown sensations that repeatedly assail  
the subject. Such sensations defy classification in the opposite  
categories of maleficent fear and beneficent love, "pôle sinistre.. et  
pôle des béatitudes" (C.L.G. p. 215) and their continuing freedom  
triggers the subject's train of thought, induces him to decipher them.  
"Nombreux, insistants, insistants, insistants appels à compréhension,

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<sup>1</sup>I use the expression "in absentia" in reference to the general  
theory of the tropes divided into two types: "in absentia," and "in  
praesentia." "In praesentia" denotes the coexistence of a signifier  
used both figuratively and literally within the same sequence. "In  
absentia" suggests the presence of one single signifier with two  
semantic levels of interpretation: a literal meaning, that is obvious  
(as in the case of the footnote), its immediate perceptible content. A  
second desired meaning is latent, and constitutes the real meaning of  
the syntagm (here the footnote); this real meaning has to be reached in  
order for the coherence of the syntagm to be restored. In this  
expression "an obsessive explanation, in absentia" I mean to indicate  
that the footnote constitutes a figurative attempt at an explanation  
which remains absent or inefficient, and which forces the critics to  
look for a latent and derived meaning of the footnote in Michaux's  
books.

déclenchements," (catastrophic releasings) in the above quotation , accurately describes the difficulties encountered by the writer in generating an experimental verbalization. Constantly throughout Michaux's pages the act and machinery of writing are set in motion and blocked. The following series of successive statements, uttered at close intervals like the minutes of a trial, present the same "start-stop" structure, in which the writing act shortly after it is started, is blocked and started again only to be blocked again...

1. "Le papier trouve, il commence à écrire cependant..."
2. "A mesure que son écriture avance dans la page... il ne peut plus s'y reporter."
3. "Cependant il continue à écrire, mais inéluctablement..."
4. "Il ne peut plus écrire sans que..."  
(G.E.E. p. 95 emphasis added)

In this series of statements, the use of adversative expressions introduces a new clause which indicates how or in which way the attempt of the first part of the statement is limited in its expansion. The adversative expressions function as preclusive elements which introduce a new statement only to present it as the condition of the impossibility of the first denied statement.

The first and second clause in each sentence interact like the first and second elements of a negation which is, in French, composed of two parts. The first one introduces a discordance between the process

thereby outlined and its unmarked degree (without "ne"); the second part effects the exclusion of the fact from the possible reality. This process of precluding effects a gradual increase in the difficulty encountered, since as noticed in statements (3) and (4) the negative element is present in the first part and not only in the second one. It is an adversative expression in the first one, "Cependant"; it is a full negation in the second one, "...ne...plus." Yet the meaning of the last statements indicates that the writing machine gradually stops choking and despite the resistance starts, as if the interpretation of the negativity within the writing act had a reverse effect on its generation:<sup>1</sup> the negation of the speech (within the speech) constitutes its origin, and traces it in the book. What is denied (the possibility of the writing) constitutes a differentiation (writing vs not writing) and also the origin of the act of signification.

The act of writing is shown as an object that is different from the speech which denies it, and this complies with Julia Kristeva's view of negativity.<sup>2</sup> "Autre, par rapport à elle et par conséquent marqué par un indice de non existence qui serait l'indice de l'exclusion, de la fausseté de la mort, de la fiction, de la folie." The representation of negativity in the textual situation does have a double indicative value. First it reveals the persecution of the writing act within the experimental circumstances. Second, it suggests that this opposition allows and induces the representation of two distinct and equal

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. C.L.G. p. 216, "Saisir malgré les résistances."

<sup>2</sup>Julia Kristeva, "Poésie et négativité" in Sémeiotiké, (Paris: Seuil, 1969), p. 188.

entities at the origin of the text: the experience on the one hand, the writing act on the other. As mentioned by the quotation from Julia Kristeva, this indication of non-existence (of the object included in the speech) suggests various aspects which this study will encounter: "Exclusion," (the act of writing is excluded by the mental performance), "falsity" (the writing act is neither wrong nor right, but does not serve the purpose of a genuine experimental inscription) "death" (the negation of writing results in the lost of a subjective control of the experience, the death of genuine subjectivity), "fiction," (the writing act is only an illusion, a fictional phenomenology), and finally "madness", or mental distortion, which is exactly what the text wants to suggest and to represent.

Between each repetition of the duel (between the writing act and the experimental effect) in the series quoted (G.E.E. p. 95), the distance increases as a sign of the writing release. The difficulty shifts from a difficulty to start to a difficulty to continue, and from there to the necessary perseverance.

"Il continue à écrire pourtant. En présence de tant d'eau et d'ondulations, il persévère." G.E.E. P. 95

"Plutôt encore essayer d'écrire... et à nouveau il s'y met. Il a des tas de choses à 'rendre.'" G.E.E. p. 96

Each attempt is then allowed a certain expansion which introduces words. Yet words do not appear as the operators of a signifying operation, but as its objects. If we look at the expansions allowed, we notice that each of them describes one aspect of the action, conceived by the

phenomenon, and taken against the words intending to grasp it. This may be seen in the following list of statements defined respectively by a schematic characterization of the action they exhibit.

- (1) Decomposition ..ces mots-qu'est-ce qu'ils ont donc?-comme du bois qui sans intervention de feu serait devenu cendre, les mots, sans qu'il ait rien fait de spécial ont cessé d'être de l'ordre du langage. G.E.E. p. 95
- (2) Transformation ..les mots, restés en arrière, traits et jambages, tracés précédemment, se sont changés en petits tas, en petites touffes... dans le lointain. G.E.E. p. 95
- (3) Denaturalization ..à partir du haut de la page, le désert revient, envahissant, dénaturant, recouvrant la feuille où les mots en lointaines broussailles tremblantes se perdent. G.E.E. p. 95
- (4) Substitution Comment se défendre? Il ne peut écrire sans qu'un grand spectacle de la nature ne se présente à la place, ne s'impose, s'étalant, se substituant à la page. G.E.E. p. 95
- (5) Depreciation ..il persévère et les mots, quoique tremblants, sont là, écrits sur l'eau, pourtant pas mouillés, et que le fleuve n'efface pas, mais eux non plus, ils ne peuvent effacer le fleuve. (Invalidation) Et à mesure,... le sens s'éteint. G.E.E. pp. 95-96

Each statement describes a specific operation to which the word is submitted, and this operation more generally characterizes the various influences and powers of the drug exercised on the subject's mental faculties. We have identified the first case (1) as a decomposition, since words here undergo destructive dissolution and are reduced to ashes, as if by a chemical change. The solvent, the agent of the decomposition is not visible and not even perceivable except through the



change in the words. The change is not specifically stated but only suggested by a comparison with wood. The words lose their characteristic aspect of signs, and become unrecognizable because, since the agent is unidentified, and the conditions also remain unknown. The decomposition then consists in excluding the words from their initial category without endowing them with a new appearance that might be linked or connected to some kind of identifiable form. The second case (2) exhibits a transformation of the outward semblance of the words, through which however the initial components of the sign "traits et jambages" remain visible (yet not identifiable). Although far away, "dans le lointain," the strokes stay within the space of the page and may be assimilated to aggregate heaps ("tas") or tufts (touffes), that are vague but still named. In the third case (3) the transformation is identified as a denaturing power which implies an alteration of the words but no loss of their identity. Through the effect of mental distortion the subject cannot keep on writing and his vision is troubled. As a result, the page is perceived as a blurred image where words appear like bushes in the distance as if in a wide landscape. But this alteration through which the word is denatured comes from a transfer which by an extended catachresis conveys the vegetable syllepsis of the leaf of paper, "la feuille," to the words inscribed on the leaf and now seen as disheveled.

The fourth case (4) brings an initial conclusion to the first steps (Decomposition, Transformation, Denaturalization) in presenting not words but their converse realization, not as sentences but as an evocation, as a broad still-life which progressively invades the page.

A power of substitution is here described, through which writing reproduces something but more as a painting would. In other mescaline texts such as Misérable Miracle, Paix dans les brisements<sup>1</sup>, reproductions are given of the manuscripts on which the body of the words progressively ceases to exist as previously constituted, and degenerates into bushes and brush-strokes. Scattered across the page they draw the picture of a flat and often marine landscape--river, sea, beach and sky--against which they almost depict a flying crow.<sup>2</sup>

In an analogous way the first paragraph in Misérable Miracle describes the manuscript thus constituted and emphasizes the comparison of the tortured words with tumultuously flying leaves and birds.<sup>3</sup> There the chronicle of the writing releases, is synthetically presented, and tends to suggest, through an accumulation of descriptive terms, the speed of the experiment. Sentences and words are represented here as birds whose expansion is brutally interrupted.

Finally, in the fifth case (5), the experimental phenomenon appears as a power of depression, since words that had progressively made their way through the mental tempest remain powerless and empty. They do not control the phenomenon, although the phenomenon does not dismiss them.

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<sup>1</sup>Henri Michaux, Paix dans les brisements, (Paris: Ed. Flinker, 1959).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. p. 125.

<sup>3</sup>M.M. p. 14, "Les phrases interrompues, aux syllabes volantes, éfilochées, tirillées, fonçaient, tombaient, mouraient. Les suivantes discontinues pareillement, continuaient de même leur récit troublé, oiseaux en plein drame auxquels des ciseaux invisibles coupaient les ailes au vol."

Words are presented here as if they were in face to face confrontation with the phenomenon ("le fleuve"), and at the same time written on the phenomenon, ("écrits sur l'eau"). Both vertical and horizontal dimensions are here mingled in a metaphorical representation of the drug's mental distortion as waves which would wash and carry away the page and its words as they do the mind and its thoughts. Yet words remain intact, "pourtant pas mouillés," and they are typographically inscribed as words on the page. So we wonder where the "experience leaves its work". It occurs at the level of words, in a second phase of the same operation here decomposed in two steps. The devaluation expresses the reciprocity of the enemies in terms of weapons; the writing-act imposes its words, the mental-act imposes its influence but on a subsequent aspect of the word, that is to say its subsequent meaning which now is cancelled. We do notice, throughout this writing "page" or chronicle that the writing attempt is not entirely annihilated by the mental phenomenon. Its mechanistic performance is completed since, from one case to another, words are becoming more and more visible. But they are not allowed access to meaningful representations, the mental phenomenon being an operation that affects the intelligence and the lucid interpretation of the situation. Yet, with the expression "le sens s'éteint," (meaning fades away), the text seems to suggest how meaning was present before; otherwise the text would first state an absence of meaning, as opposed to its disappearance. The writing chronicles seem therefore to suggest that at the starting point of the writing experience meaning is present, which makes the accounting necessary. The inscription of meaning is

urgent, while the word, supposed to support its inscription, cannot at that time be formed. After all the attempts we have seen, the word is inscribed on the page, but simultaneously meaningless.

There is a major debate among Michaux's critics about Michaux's so-called refusal of language, a debate which Michaux himself exacerbates by constantly criticizing words throughout his experimental accounting. Yet this seems paradoxical coming from such a prolific writer, who would use words precisely for the purpose of their denial. The present chapter contributes to this debate, and takes a first stand in it by suggesting a persecution of the text. At this point of the analysis however, and following the example of writing-releases and word inscriptions, all we can say is that the repression produced by the cause of mental distortion (drug or madness) does not touch the meaning of the words; they are not presented in this text as having a previous meaning, but rather as tending toward a meaning which they do not stabilize. This repression affects the signifying function in itself. Words are invalidated in the last case (5) of the last passage not because of what they signify; it is their very possibility of signifying which is rejected. In this intermediate state of consciousness defined as the space of writing, the phenomenon remains below the words, and mainly because it is moving, changing, inconstant. Words submitted, through the intermediary of the mind, to such transformations appear as the result of a mental projection whose modality and incoherence they reproduce. In this state of the textual process, the writer uses faculties which he does not master or control and which cannot help to constitute a stable meaning. The repeated attempt to write ("lire ne

suffit pas. Il va écrire. Plus personnel." G.E.E. p. 94. " Plutôt encore essayer d'écrire...et à nouveau il s'y met. Il a des tas de choses à 'rendre.'" G.E.E. p. 96) constitutes (in the emergency situation) a therapeutic attempt to open the doors of internal perception to the function of symbolization. In reducing the aspect of the experience to an almost empty image of simple attempts with little analytical details, Michaux reproduces the original situation of the writer who is watched as he reiterates the same activity of articulation.

The various aspects of the phenomenal action defined as decomposition, transformation, denaturalization, substitution, depreciation and invalidation (the last two may be reunited under "Invalidation") are constantly repeated throughout Michaux's books on mental distortion, whether temporary or permanent. They represent the main antagonisms and obstacles encountered by the subject in the course of his experiment as well as by the text in the course of its narration. Whether it is developed, as in the last example, or shortly mentioned, as in Connaissance par Les Gouffres (pp. 225 and 227), the figuration of a precluded writing attempt and the description of its preclusion, are always related to the mental phenomenon of thought obliteration. The operations performed here on words have their correspondence in the mental sphere with operations practiced on thoughts. Keeping in mind the statements about words we can retrace a perfectly symmetrical experience in terms of thought in Connaissance par les gouffres. In this passage, the compact presentation is not a mark of greater understanding. Conversely it is the sign of the impossibility of separating the various aspects of the general mental performance.

The mechanisms of word-releases appear as the external face of the internal mechanisms of thinking, "Le penser." Symmetrically the various operations (possibility or impossibility of the word) to which the words-objects have been submitted appear as the external face of the particular internal operations to which the thoughts ("les pensees") are submitted under the influence of the general mechanism of thinking. The following quotation describes successively the particular level of thoughts as objects [1], and the general level of thinking. This second level is seen as an invisible yet effective mechanism [2] producing and manipulating thoughts for a reason which the text gives only later.

[1] A cette vitesse autrement excessive les pensées, filant à la file indienne mais oscillantes aussi, subissent un traitement, subissent des déchiquetages comme si elle étaient des objets. [2] Sur un invisible trajet destructeur, aussitôt elles deviennent inopérantes, défaites aussitôt que faites, ne pouvant 's'inscrire', ne pouvant être remémorées quelques instants plus tard, ne pouvant rester intactes. C.L.G. p. 226

The first sentence designates the thoughts as objects, while the second sentence describes the treatment to which they are submitted. We recognize in this description phenomena equivalent to those seen for words: the impossibility of self-inscription ("ne pouvant s'inscrire"), the impossibility of remaining recognizable or intact once inscribed ("ne pouvant rester intactes"), the impossibility of remaining within the mental "page" and time ("ne pouvant être remémorées quelques instants plus tard"), the instantaneous decomposition or dissolution ("Défaites aussitôt que faites") and finally the process of their invalidation ("deviennent inopérantes"). However the present

description does not classify the operations and actions as it did in the case of words. They are all listed pell-mell and concentrated in compact sentences. Thus they do not explain the phenomenon but only state it. The mediation of the narrative adventure of words appears then to be a necessary orientation and organization of the mental adventure of thoughts. Furthermore the process of writing-releases has been presented as a progression towards inscription that was either in motion or stopped, while thinking is a system of manipulation that can proceed in any direction, as progress as well as regression.

Consequently thoughts are submitted less to forces of opposition than to forces of displacement, oscillations, fluctuations within a psychic system inhabited by the unconscious. We suppose the mental space to be the place of a progressive process of association going from the initial perception to the final answer, from the intermediate step of unconsciousness, to pre-consciousness, and from there to consciousness. The thoughts mentioned by Michaux are the (input) perceptions, and words are their answer, the (output) result of the stimulation. But in a state of mental distortion such as hallucination or hysteria the right part of the system is forgotten and remains inactive so that the mental mechanisms proceed to and fro between the unconscious and the preconscious. The last one is already on the side of language but not sufficiently, not completely, and the whole system undergoes a regression.

Michaux's text accounts for this event in describing the thought's inability to take hold. "Dans aucune des cent façons dont dans la réalité elle peut se situer, elle ne s'établit, ni ne demeure." (C.L.G.

p. 226) The text manages to orient the phenomenon, since it reproduces the tortured system of thought but it also constitutes a tense attempt to go beyond it, to force articulation. As such it allows the psychic mechanisms to be watched through the possibility as well as through the preclusion of language. It reintroduces the writer as "lui, le responsable de cette pagaille" (C.L.G. p. 227), that is to say as the center of this psychic action, but not as its master. It introduces him fictively to deny his power, and thus to evict him more strongly again. "La monnaie de filou passe de main en main et se dérobe a lui. 'Comme s'il n' était pas l'intéressé, comme s'il n'était pas le maître. Et sûrement il ne l'est plus." (C.L.G. p. 227) A partial conclusion concerning the relation between word-releases and the perturbation or turbulences of thought can be drawn. The preclusion of writing and words I have just studied appears not as a strict reproduction but as a sign. It is symptomatic of the mental process ("Pensées qui reviennent en oppositions alternantes comme spasmodiques"(C.L.G. p. 226) seen as a repetitive movement going back and forth within the mind. The preclusion of word is the grammatical or linguistic mark and signal of thoughts "lysées. . .oscillatoires. . .xénopathiques. . . scotomisées. . ." (C.L.G. p. 220). These terms (which are examples of impressive quasi-scientific terminology) are indeed not specifically developed either in or by the description. Generally speaking, they authorize the various aspects of the mutilations which thoughts undergo. The description itself actually converges to document and illustrate



✗ → 1/2/72.

more particularly the notion of scotomization<sup>1</sup> which characterizes hallucination. It is mentioned in Connaissance Par Les Gouffres through the various statements that we have seen, and it is signified in the description of the preclusion of words.<sup>2</sup>

The first text (C.L.G.), however, allows the naming of the general phenomenon by relating the "minutes" of the writing act and the seconds of thinking under the same circumstances of obliteration. Here the phenomenon is observed as a trick insidiously played upon the experimenter. The insidious<sup>3</sup> process of obliteration is observed through its impact on successive aspects of the signifying process: it is considered within a writing-act, within a mental phrase, within a mere reflection, and within a memory or the attempted reconstruction of a memory. Its impact will be worse and worse from the first to the last case mentioned and will lead the subject through the various steps leading from a relative "insens" (insanity) to an absolute insanity. As for the words, the text in Connaissance par les Gouffres confirms les Grandes Epreuves de l'Esprit in emphasizing obliteration as an operation affecting the intelligibility and not the aspect of words:

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<sup>1</sup>A term of medical science, denoting an obscuring of part of the visual field due to lesion of the ophtalmic centres of the brain.

<sup>2</sup>The negation or preclusion is indeed one case among others of scotomisation, and it is at the same time a minor example of scotomisation: "La langue française, par le forclusif, exprime ce désir de scotomisation, traduisant aussi le phénomène normal dont la scotomisation décrite en pathologie mentale..., est l'exagération pathologique." Damourette et Pichon, "La négation," in Michel Arrivé et Jean Claude Chevalier, La Grammaire, (Paris: Klincksieck, 1970), p. 153.

<sup>3</sup>The phenomenon of scotomisation is said by physicians to be frequently so small as to be unnoted.

... les mots qu'il avait pourtant compris tout à l'heure sont maintenant privés, déssaisis de leur sens. Non de leur aspect de mots de connaissance, non de la conscience de la façon dont ils sont à prononcer. Seulement de leur sens. C.L.G. p. 228

First, the passage here presents thoughts as already verbalized through words, ideas as opposed to the words-objects seen in the previous textual passage. The writer's apprehension of those verbalized ideas confirms his supposition that meaning, formerly seen as "fading away", was indeed present before. Thus, in relating those two sequences belonging to two different books by Michaux, we obtain an intertext which provides a complete description and explanation of the obliteration, which each of them alone is not sufficient to provide. Second, through this precision, the vertical relation within a sign between signified (above) and signifier (below) is displaced to a deductive relation. The word here is a typographic and phonetic unit ("conscience de la façon dont ils sont à prononcer" C.L.G. p. 228), and a strict signifier separated from its signified by the thought's obliteration. This signifier still remains an idea per se. It has the appearance of an idea ("leur aspect de mot de connaissance") but the condition of realization of the idea, namely meaning, is missing.

Therefore words are presented not as a reproduction of thought, but as elements of a structure in which the system of thought is exhibited, and which consists of three successive and additional steps: thought, word, meaning. In normalcy the system of thinking consists of a progression towards a conscious articulation, so that the mechanisms function from left to right. In the regressive situation defined by

mental pathology the progression reversely turns into regression. The process of thinking consists in going from right to left so that the articulation through writing (which systematically goes forward toward the word and, if possible, reaches meaning) proceeds here in the opposite direction. The word tries to reach the meaning from which it is separated,<sup>1</sup> and meaning here is withdrawn to the prior phase of pre-consciousness (or even further unconscious). This is the reason for Michaux's terminology "insens"<sup>2</sup> which is a combination of an insane meaning (in French "insensé") and an opposite sense or direction ("sens inverse"). " ...cependant que l'aveugle obliteration continue il fait passer l'"insens" dans les étapes de plus en plus importantes de la prise de conscience de la situation jusqu' à réellement perdre la tête, perdre le fil, perdre tout fil. . . " (C.L.G. p.228-229) By means of empty signifiers, the writer-experimenter reaches a goal opposite to that of his expectations. Instead of building the image of his coherence, he makes his way toward his incoherence. Thus losing any means of control, he organizes his loss and disorientation within the erratic world of the unconscious. There words adopt a final aspect as mere signs of an attempt. Ils veulent seulement dire qu'il voulait dire quelque chose, qu'il à cherché, qu'il n'a pas su où chercher." (C.L.G. p. 229)

The three other points of observation of thought obliteration are only hastily taken up by Michaux, and we will not concentrate too much

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<sup>1</sup>In Michaux's representation.

<sup>2</sup>Which we have met already as a system of significations through which the footnotes refers backwards to the text inside as the only place for the truth of the experience. (See Part II, Chapter III)

on them largely because they only extend the concept of the "insens" that we have seen. They are distinguished from the previous example of a written sentence or writing act, by the fact that all are cases of preverbal activity, such as mental sentences, "phrases mentales" (C.L.G. p. 229), and memory. Michaux seems to consider this order of presentation the order of their appearance within a psychic regression, so that their obliteration will affect the mental state of the subject in relative proportion to their starting point. The obliteration of mental sentences will cause only a minor worsening of the "insens" provoked by the obliteration of written sentences. In the same way that the word remains, yet without meaning, the process of thinking continues but does not belong to consciousness any more.

Further down, and deeper in the unconscious, comes the case of the reflection; through the same action of wiping off, the obliteration deprives the reflection of its meaning, and the same operation is then applied to the last case. In this text, Michaux makes a progressive and metonymic decomposition from top to bottom of the psychic system. He exposes his own representation of the system before the reader's eyes. This is done by submitting the various and successive elements of this system to the same operation of subtraction, which is presented as a subtraction of meaning. Yet meaning is in itself a category relative to the signifier considered, and adopts various aspects in proportion to each signifier. Using a mathematical representation I can schematize the textual representation of the mental process (and thus the contribution of the textual phenomenology of the thought) as follows:

- (1) The meaning of  $x$  is  $y$
- (2)  $x$  minus  $y = z$
- (3)  $x$  belongs to  $X$ , which is its subcategory
- (4) So that  $x$  minus  $y = z$  means also  $X$  including  
( $x$  minus  $y = z$ ) = non  $X$

I shall apply the four steps to the four signifiers considered according to the meaning and categories defined by the text, and not by me; indeed the text uses the meaning, the "sens" as a token applicable to all four signifiers, and which therefore appears to be the condition of the signifier's realization and possibility. In so doing I obtain the following schematized representation of the process of obliteration (previously developed in the last pages of this chapter).

Case 1: The word.

- (1) The meaning of the word is the idea (signified).
- (2) The word minus the idea is a sign.
- (3) The word belongs to verbalization.
- (4) Verbalization including (a word minus its signified) that is to say verbalization including a sign means = no verbalization, since a sign conveys information without verbal communication.

Case 2: The mental sentence. (C.L.G. p. 229)

- (1) The meaning of the mental sentence is its conscious meaning.
- (2) The mental sentence minus its conscious meaning is a preconscious sentence.
- (3) The mental sentence belongs to consciousness.
- (4) Consciousness without conscious meaning or with preconscious meaning is a non-consciousness.

Case 3: The reflection.

- (1) The meaning of a reflection is its motivation.

- (2) A reflection without motivation is a reflection without origin, therefore insane
- (3) The reflection belongs to the general category of the hypothesis.
- (4) An hypothesis including a reflection without origin is not only a non-hypothesis but indeed the opposite of a hypothesis.

A hypothesis in fact implies an insufficiency of presently available evidence from observed data, and therefore a tentative formulation that forms a point of departure for further investigation. If one deprives it of this tentative formulation as represented by the reflection (which itself is only a starting thought, an unhurried consideration) one erases the hypothesis. So, the operation seen here is not only a subtraction but an active destruction of meaning, as proved by the following quotation. "...car il ne s'agit pas d'une soustraction, mais d'un dynamisme et qui a quelque chose de féroce)." (C.L.G. p. 230) The operation evolves in a more complex process with an intentional finality in nonsense, "non sens." "...d'annulation de sens à annulation de sens il en arrive en très peu de temps, et même de secondes, à une vertigineuse profondeur de non-sens, à la presque absolue situation de non-sens..." (C.L.G. p. 230) The deeper a step is within the psychic system, the closer it is to the unconscious. In its regression consciousness has passed through the various steps, of the preconscious, then unconscious, states. Below this there is only insanity. The last point observed actually consists in reinforcing this feeling of an abyss through the emptiness of language itself. This state of complete annihilation is reproduced with a very small amount of words (since neither words nor feelings are present in this phase) in

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the last case of obliteration.

Case 4: The remembrance. (C.L.G. P. 231)

- (1) The meaning of remembrance is the evocation.
- (2) A remembrance without evocation is a non remembrance.
- (3) Remembrance belongs to the general category of memory.
- (4) Memory including, proceeding through non-remembrance is a non-memory, is an absence of any mnesic trace.

At this point the subject has even gone below the level of perception. He is totally devoid of any means of capturing his situation, and he looks at the state of deprivation in which he remains immobile. "Il sait seulement qu'il est encore là. C'est tout. Le reste, tout le reste, car il sait encore qu'il y a un reste, 'connais plus.'" (C.L.G. p. 231) The absence of the subject's means consequently results in a pure and empty mental mechanism which is the minimal sign of his living brain. This mechanism is reduced to the very operations which characterize its mode of functioning, and to the doubt that such a mechanical and systematic situation provides: "Scrupuleux, souffrants, ils restent indécis, d'une indécision qui ne finit pas, qu'ils ne peuvent modifier." (C.L.G. p. 232) On the linguistic level, this state, if articulated, is represented through a total separation of signified and signifier. The word progressively loses its characteristic as a sign through an obsessive and mechanical repetition which only signals the mental drive. "Impuissance, impuissance a conduit à ce va-et-vient infernal. Impuissance conduit aussi, parfois, à la répétition d'une seule idée, d'un seul mot, un seul qui n'en finit

plus, seule vie dans la plaine ébrieuse de la folie." (C.L.G. p. 232)

The respective analysis of the two passages from les Grandes Epreuves de l'Esprit and Connaissance par les Gouffres, as well as their comparison, leads me to two clusters of conclusions which I shall now summarize.

#### Initial Conclusions

First, the various aspects taken on by the word in the textual system of experimental representation have emphasized Michaux's specific conception of the word, and more particularly his view of the (unstable) relation which exists between signifier and signified. In Michaux's experimental representation the word functions as a "letter"<sup>1</sup>, within an unconscious conceived not as a biological reservoir of drives (as by Freud) but as a "linguistic" reservoir of thoughts which the word materializes. This world of thoughts is presented as a infralanguage which borrows the word seen as "letter" in order to materially support its speech.

Second, the process of scotomization has a concrete as well as mental application. It is referred to through the visualized disappearance of words as objects on the page. The mental aspects of the phenomenon are also represented in the obliteration of thoughts and the obliteration of the words as ideas.

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<sup>1</sup>I refer to Lacan's "Letter" in "The Agency of the letter in the unconscious, or reason since Freud" (L'Instance de la lettre, Ecrits, 1966), Ecrits: A selection, trans., (Sheridon, N.Y.: Norton, 1977).



### Secondary Conclusions

The mobility of the "word" as conceived by Michaux allows the representation of the experimenter's situation. Confirming the arrangements (and tools) observed in the preceding chapter, the text appears as a narcissistic structure which constitutes an illusory parry (parade) against the experienced confusion of the words. The illusion of a parade allows an imaginary depiction of the psychic apparel and provides a reflection of it through sustaining lexical and linguistic imagery: The expressions (see C.L.G. pp. 229-231) (1) "mental phrase", (2) "reflection", and the ambivalence of (3) "souvenir" between the act and the product of remembrance, play on the realism of the text. The text is presented as (1) a phrastic articulation of a mental process, (2) as a reflection of a reflexive situation, and (3) as a memorandum written after the remembrance of a past experience. The text literally uses the process observed (i.e. the disjunction signifier-signified) to model and to represent not only the mental experience but also the writing experience. Writing can be seen as an attempt to signify, which is not satisfied here: signifier and signified remain contiguous, or separated. This can be illustrated through Lacan's diagram which also suggests the previously seen relation of subtraction between signifier and signified.<sup>1</sup>

[(S....S')  $\simeq$  S (-)S] metonymy.

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<sup>1</sup>Jacques Lacan, "L'instance de la lettre...", Ecrits, 1966, op. cit., p. 158 and comments by Julia Kristeva, "Metaphore et metonymie dans la logique de l'inconscient," Lecture, Columbia University, October 29, 1982.

This disjunction of signifier and signified almost equals subtracting the one from the other: that is to say bringing them into a relation of distance where both extreme elements of the signification line are present but can neither reach nor fuse with each other. In terms of mental processes, in Connaissance par les Gouffres this metonymic diagram appears as a mechanical movement of oscillation and indecision. "L'aliéné rencontre parfois une indécision qui est la même chose et tout autre chose. Il n'est plus entre deux solutions possibles, mais dans un mécanisme d'oscillations." (C.L.G. p. 232) The above quotation synthesizes the mental movement as an "oscillation" which stresses less the rapid alternation between two extremes than the periodic to-and-fro motion.

In Les Grandes Epreuves de l'Esprit, the analytic representation of this movement in terms of narrative adventure stresses the two poles and the increasing distance in between them.

Un écart apparaît entre ce qu'il se met à écrire et ce qu'il a dans la tête...un écart dans le temps, un écart qui laisse la place à des tas de choses.

G.E.E. p. 96

Between what the writer begins writing (or the object of his narration) and what he thinks (or the object of his thought), there is a gap which should not exist: the object of his narration was intended to be the object thought, the object of his mental activity. The gap is not so much a difference or a digression, as an expanse in space and time. The narrative adventure becomes then more complex since the reflexive structure displayed in order to grasp the phenomenon becomes a narrative

object in itself, autonomous and active. It is on the nature of this  
expanse, a new phenomenon that I shall now concentrate.

### CHAPTER III

#### CROSSING THE EXPERIMENTAL SEA: THE WRITER'S NAVIGATION BETWEEN SIGNS

Within the chronicle of writing, the illusion of an experimental phenomenology consists also of attaching an image of the writer to the various situations depicted. Generally speaking the writer's mental sphere is presented through the image of the sea, as an expanse between thinking and writing. In this cerebral ocean, thoughts, ideas, visions, feelings are convulsed as if in a paroxysm; they are separated from one another and made to constitute an ailment of isolated internal streams or waves, an autonomous and senseless circulation of pirate signs or stations whose frequencies clash, rarely meet, and thus provoke disorientation. The image of the sea, which occasionally occurs within the three books at hand, includes the writer and experimenter. He is simultaneously the victim and the instrument of victimization within the performance of the mental slide or tidal wave, as seen in the following quotation.

Dans une même inexplicable mer, une mer agitée  
omniprésente, dont il ne peut sortir, partout  
ondulante, une façon d'être mer lui-même autant que  
dans la mer ou traversé de mers, une mer des choses,  
du temps, de l'espace, monde nouveau à trop de  
variables, où l'idée est dans la houle, où  
l'observation est dans la houle, où les choses et  
les coordonnées sont dans la houle.

C.L.G. p.190

The pictorial representation of cerebral movement as a tortured liquidity, justifies specific self-denominations by the writer. He describes his own degradation and shipwreck, from the position of "remorqueur" (C.L.G. p. 54), tugboat, to the position of "nageur" (G.E.E. p. 41), swimmer, and down to the "plongeur" (C.L.G. p. 45), plunger or diver which is the last and overwhelming state of his immersion.

To begin, the first position (that of the tugboat) appears as the best possible situation since it depicts the writer's ability to locate himself on the surface level of this experimental sea, and also to position himself within the signs, as a relative instrument of their measure and transportation. Through the image of the tugboat, that is to say a strongly-built boat used for towing, the writer presents himself in the situation of writing within (and despite) resistance; he struggles in opposition and takes up the yoke again and thus retraces his labors as a result of his straining effort.

Tout un temps, une comparaison m'étant venue à l'esprit, celle d'un remorqueur quittant le port et pénétrant dans une mer tempêteuse, où il trace son chemin malaisément, tout un temps ma main, pourtant pas à plus de vingt centimètres de mes yeux, m'apparut plus comme un remorqueur, entourée d'eau agitée, que comme une main. C.L.G. p. 54

The perception of his situation by the writer, which is the object of this quotation, appears to illustrate the metonymic diagram mentioned in the previous pages. First this quotation develops the writer's attempt to trace his way across the mental journey, from the pole or port of perception which he has left to the pole or port of recording and

inscription. Yet, the second pole is not mentioned and only the tensive aspect of the situation is presented.

Second, this approach is depicted and performed as a result of a double, almost triple metonymic shift, or more precisely through a double metonymy along with a synecdoche. The first shift illustrates a metonymy of the concrete effect for the abstract cause, since the abstract difficulty of the report (of inscribing as well as of describing) is expressed through the concrete difficulty of tracing letters and words ("J'arrivai à écrire. M'y forçant. Forçant ma main." C.L.G. p. 54). A second shift illustrates a metonymy of the physical for the mental: the mental state of the writer, his inaptitude to remain concentrated, is represented by his physical feeling of distance from his hand, the instrument of his concentration. This is a synecdoche of the part for the whole since the whole subjective situation (body and mind) is expressed by the situation of a physical part of it, notably the hand. Thirdly, the difficulty in keeping up with the situation is expressed within a comparative structure, by the fact that the body, progressively absorbed by the phenomenon, becomes a part of it. The body becomes its visible and perceptible extension as a result of an active denaturalization that affects not only the writer's lucid production of thoughts and words but the lucid perception of his own body. Yet, with the balancing parallelism ("Tout un temps...tout un temps") and with the appreciation of the degree of closeness between "remorqueur" and "main" (which is marked as not absolute but relative, "plus comme...que comme"... , more as... than as), the ordered structure of the comparison reveals only a relative control over the situation by

means of a verbal vigilance. The whole of the interpretation lies in the comparison which allows a reduction of the preexisting duality between the mental situation and the writing activity. This reduction is not total, but only relative or partial; the hand remains a "hand." As such and on the one hand it eliminates the impossibility of writing and makes it possible, since the subject can write, and perform the mechanical act of writing. "Forçant ma main.. Mais enfin elle allait de l'avant, moi décidé, ne lui permettant pas le repos." (C.L.G. p. 54) On the other hand, however, this activity is shown to be purely mechanical and does not permit a significantly meaningful report. The comparison, as the expression of a difference, mutually excludes the terms it has brought to be compared, and thus appears as a signifying structure but not as the production of a signified. "Je ne pus toutefois forcer mon attention à découvrir le détail du phénomène qui me délabrait." (C.L.G. p. 54)

Depicting the writer's approach as a tugboat, the text illustrates the devalorization effected by the mental event. Here again, the inscription of words is not presented but their contribution to meaning remains invalid, since the status quo created by the textual comparison has brought the mental phenomenon and the writing phenomenon into a relatively reciprocal relation. This has been performed by means of a transferal to a third comparing token: a comparative vehicle constitutes a shuttle back and forth from the mental phenomenon to the writing phenomenon. Thus it holds them both together in the same common, but purely rhetorical figuration, which as such is equally strange to both of them. Moreover the suggestive value of this

comparison consists of the word (or motion) assuming the charge of this comparative vehicle, being precisely the word "tugboat," that is to say a word designating a particular category of vehicle. We understand that the comparison conveys the image of its own performing system, which is simultaneously the performing system of a text. It is a system of creative production as described by Virginia Woolf through metaphors close to the image of the tempestuous sea.

Always...before she exchanged the fluidity of life for the concentration of painting she had a few moments of nakedness where she seemed an unborn soul, a soul reft of body, hesitating on some windy pinnacle and exposed without protection to all the blasts of doubt." <sup>1</sup>

The state of semi-consciousness which constitutes the space of the text is presented as a state of nakedness wherein the subject puts himself in between thinking and writing. Both extremes exclude each other, leaving the subject of this oscillation in a disabling situation of doubt. This representation is the means of incarnating the experimental body in the text where it could be maintained through a transferal process. That is to say that Michaux's narrative adventure consists less of exchanging than of bringing the fluidity of the experience into the text. On the one hand, Michaux's performance is based on the same bi-polar and transforming system as defined by Virginia Woolf. On the other hand, however, it denies the goal and the result that Virginia Woolf assigns to this process. While Virginia Woolf's "concentration of painting"

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<sup>1</sup>Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse, (London: Granada Publishing, 1981), p. 148.



implies a change in the medium and the object's alteration from its fluid nature to a concentrated semblance of it, Michaux's process of textual incarnation consists of an (intended) operation of recollection: that is to say to bring back, to the text as to the mind, what has been lost. This operation is achieved and watched in this passage as uneasy. Through this very comparative system, the text avoids the concentration and condensation of the phenomenon in the word; conversely, the distance that exists between thought and word is exhibited in this passage. The shuttling comparative system is the means of visualizing this distance; that is to say of controlling and reproducing it and of turning the oscillation into a possible instrument of reconciliation. As such the comparative system tends to demonstrate a virtual congruity of what seemed thus far incompatible.

The narrative comparison and its token seen as the tugboat, reproduce the steps of a metaphorization process. The approximate analogy of the hand signified by the tugboat signifier is not a complete superimposition. The hand remains a mechanical signified which denotes a signifier (letters and words traced by the hand). The text then only suggests a process of metaphorization, through the presence of a vehicle which constitutes a figurative synthesis of the two separate spaces; that is to say thinking (or the internal movement within the cerebral ocean) and writing (or the movement of externalizing the space within). The text suggests the metaphor but does not achieve it.<sup>1</sup> At this point

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Frederic Shepler, in Creatures Within, (Bloomington, Ind.: Physsard Publisher, 1977), p. 11: "Metaphors are sparce, rare phenomena in a genre often defined by their usage."

in the adventure the writer is indeed not in a position to produce, from self-observation, a favorable image of himself. He cannot produce an image in which his conscious half (writing) would restore himself through a cathartic transposition of his alternate experiencing and unconscious half. Throughout the books, and as we will see in the writer's next self-denominations, the comparative system appears as a cautious and tiptoeing attempt by the writer to define himself, and to verbalize the mental experience. Conversely, the metaphorical system sanctions an unpurposed entry into the penetrable mental medium wherein the writer becomes completely involved, as a result of a psychological state indicated by the experimental delirium.

Because of the prevalence of the comparative system, of its close linking as well as its frequent use of lexical tenors belonging to the nautical and marine vocabulary, we can associate the character of Michaux's narrative adventure with Mallarmé's "maraudeur aquatique."<sup>1</sup> Using this denomination, Mallarmé describes self-observation through literature and poetry as a universe deprived of meaning but one that opens the space of the textual reflection, with as great a lack of protective barriers as possible, to the unsolvable navigation and oscillations of signs. The writer's situation, which is suggested by the comparison of his hand with a tugboat and results neither in fixing nor even in extracting, tugging at a meaning, is more exactly a derivation. The narration contaminated by the effects of the cerebral

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. "Le nénuphar blanc," in Oeuvres Complètes, (Paris: Ed. Gallimard, coll. Pléiade, 1945), p. 285.

(tidal) wave: through extended and simple metaphors (in praesentia as well as in absentia), it will take on the semblance of a logbook.

The two other cases of self-denomination raised in the text, the "nageur," and "plongeur," do consist of metaphors, extended and simple. I call them metaphors because the image they convey is not introduced by a comparing expression, but is either merely substituted (in absentia) for the subject they characterize, or related to him by the expression of an identity (in praesentia). The metaphor of the swimmer appears several times and is almost systematically related to the extended metaphor describing the mental sphere experienced as the liquid space of the writer's progressive drowning:

- (1) Nageur entre deux eaux, dans un courant m'éloignant de toute rive, j'essayais cependant de comprendre mieux quel coup de pied avait pu si bien m'envoyer loin du bord. C.L.G. p. 80
- (2) Je dérivais incessamment. Un nageur, déporté par un puissant courant transversal, parfois malgré sa brasse régulière se trouve pareillement entraîné loin de la rive à atteindre. Moi, non seulement je m'éloignais de la rive, mais je la perdais de vue,...et c'est quatre, cinq rives, c'est dix rives, douze rives, je ne sais combien de rives dont j'étais successivement repoussé. G.E.E. p. 41

We notice in the preceding quotations the extended metaphor of the powerful river describing the mental space and metonymically separating it into its various components, "le courant" (the stream), "la rive, les rives" (the banks), "le bord" (the water's edge), "les eaux" (the waters). More particularly we notice the specific use of "entre deux eaux," which literally refers to the different levels and heights of

water in a river (beside which various species of fish are displayed). Figuratively, "in between two waters" conveys the ideas of an unresolved, ambiguous situation, and depicts the uncertainty of the writer's level of awareness. This expression also conveys the idea of vertical heights of consciousness, while the developed description of the situation suggests a lateral movement through which the experimenter would be carried away from the bank. He finds himself adrift due to the effect of a perpendicular stream contradicting his attempt to reach the bank. Such a powerful action, inducing a lateral displacement (away from the bank of meaning toward the middle of the cerebral sea), may even result in a to and fro lateral movement: this is suggested by the end of the second quotation where the writer is described as pushed away from the various and successive banks which he was trying to reach.<sup>1</sup> Then the sociolectic element "entre deux eaux" is used as a stereotype depicting a situation of ambiguity; within the textual idiolect it serves the representation of lateral movement despite its intrinsic reference to a vertical interval.

The second quotation presents the swimmer not directly as a metaphor, but as a comparing token used as an approach to the compared subject. Grammatically the token appears as a noun preceded by an indefinite article (un nageur) which conveys the impression that the

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<sup>1</sup>This depicted movement constitutes here a fictional representation of the attempt-obstacle system observed in the case of writing and word releases. As regards the importance of vertical movement in Michaux's psychological gymnastics, see Robert Brechon, "l'espace, le corps, la conscience, in L'Herne, Henri Michaux, (1966; rpt. Paris: ed. de L'Herne, 1983), pp. 191-193.

token is at least initially one instrument of a comparison among others, and not the selected element of a comparison, as "le nageur" would be. At first sight the obvious aspect of this comparison is improved by the expression of an equivalence, "pareillement" (similarly), but there is no metaphor in this sentence. In the following sentence however, the comparison generates an extended metaphor in placing the writer compared into its own semantic landscape, "la rive." The writer's situation is progressively contaminated by this imagery almost by means of a one-way "énallage"<sup>1</sup>: The swimmer's environment is transferred to the writer through a repetitive and accumulative gradation "quatre, cinq rives, dix rives, douze rives" (G.E.E. p. 41) and through the meliorative repetition of the presentative "c'est...c'est..."that builds up the association and identification. Yet both writer and swimmer remain separate, different, and their connections so far seem only to be the result of a fortuitous predication. An analogy is drawn between the two situations, not between the subjects themselves. The subject remains "moi," but measures his situation through the terminology of a swimmer. The first quotation (C.L.G. p. 80) fuses the subject and the swimmer in a single lexical entity, "nageur," which is obviously a metaphor for the writer. It characterizes him all the better as it is not preceded by an article; thus it functions not as a separate determination but as an intrinsic qualification and attribute of the writer. Moreover the

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<sup>1</sup>The "énallage", is a rhetorical figure which consists of exchanging the respective characterizations and qualificatives of two nouns in the same sentence. The exchange and interpretation is grammatical as well as lexical, the ideas interpenetrate and add the one to the other.

metaphor occurs here within the writer's synthetically confessed attempt to trace the origin of his situation. From the comparison to the metaphor the lucidity has decreased, since the writer does not use a metaphorical terminology deliberately, to give an analogical representation of his situation. He is unable to identify its mental origin and can only approximate it through the vague and physical metaphor of "coup de pied," a kick. Such a metaphor results from an immediate, intuitive and imprecise perception of the phenomenon. It is not a dynamic metaphor which would either enrich the analysis by a specific reference, or induce a new image. In "coup de pied" the metaphor seems only to satisfy its first requirement of "Docere,"<sup>1</sup> that is to say of communicating an event which cannot be stated exactly; the metaphor then compensates for the impossibility of finding the right word, and produces only a vague meaning.<sup>2</sup>

Both cases of (extended and simple) metaphors of the swimmer bring about an analogy between the ideas and not between the objects themselves. Simultaneously they make visible a phenomenon of which the subject hardly conceives. Moreover the swimmer as well as the kick constitute references which are well known to the reader and which thus enable him to comprehend the situation, albeit vaguely.

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. The three functions of the metaphor "Docere, Placere, Movere," defined by Michel Le Guern, in Sémantique de la Metaphore et de la Métonymie, (Paris: Larousse, 1973), p.71 .

<sup>2</sup>Such a case would confirm Locke's interpretation, according to which language is secondary, but makes up and compensates for a deficiency of the human mind to understand. Locke, Essay on Human Understanding, (New York: F. and John W. Yolton, 2 vols., 1961), Chapt. 10.

à déchiffrement." (C.L.G. p. 216) As a result of this effective power of suggestion the sensations lead the subject to a state of mind characterized by a blind and increasingly eager urge to find an explanation: "En lui augmente l'échauffement vers l'explication: Danger! Nouveau danger! Danger extrême, mais il ne le verra que trop tard... et encore." (C.L.G. p. 216)

This activity is underscored as a fascination or an excessive enthusiasm and curiosity which as such constitutes a pathological symptom and denotes a change from the normal. C'est l'explication qui va le désigner, à coup sûr à l'attention apeurée des gens sains." (C.L.G. p. 216) This observation clearly states that the interpretation of the urge for an explanation is relative to normalcy, and that the criterion--normalcy consists of the reaction inspired by insane behavior. Yet in the same way that italics appeared as a sign of a living elaborative writing, the eager and repeated attempt to produce an explanation exhibits a living subconscious encroaching upon consciousness in an ostentatious manner. It is a detectable mark of mania, impressed on the explanatory attempt (by the insistence with which Michaux states it) and which is said by Michaux to be inherent to the behaviour mentioned. In the following quotation Michaux establishes the proof of disease by means of an equation which uses the speculative value of the verbal infinitive to draw a law from the facts observed.

Donner des explications, abonder en explications,  
trouver des explications à tout: marque de  
dérangement mental.

C.L.G. p. 216

Immediately after this theoretical statement Michaux adds a more spontaneous and exclusive argument emphasizing the paradoxical "and" genuine character of this law: "c'est un comble!... et c'est vrai." (C.L.G. p. 216). While a loss of sense and control is indeed conventionally attached to madness, the explanation usually implies normalcy and rationality. The desire for an explanation should accordingly speak in the madman's favor, as an indication of some remaining lucidity on his part. In fact, a first footnote relates the madman to normalcy through the mention of an equivalent thirst for understanding, as observed in the particular case of children:

Pour qui aurait oublié l'énorme faim d'explications dans l'espèce humaine (actuelle), il lui suffirait d'écouter un enfant parler. "Pourquoi?" est son maître mot, son lassant maître mot. Il semble ne penser que pour chercher des explications. L'adulte a appris à attendre.

C.L.G. p. 216 (footnote 1)

Through the last sentence in the footnote (which echoes a similar assertion in the text ("la personne normale y résiste. Elle sait se retenir (trop même)" C.L.G. p. 216) a distinction is made between insane and sane people. This difference is said to lie not in the acts performed, but in the degree of intensity with which they are performed.<sup>1</sup> The madman behaves hyperbolically in systematically

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<sup>1</sup>In the same way, footnotes have been seen as doubtful references, not because they do not refer (since they do refer) but because of the specific degree of completion of their intended function of identification. They justify more than was expected, and this excess strikes the reader.

Besides the text-footnote relation, this applies also to the method of comparison between sane and insane persons, which was initially

(Continued)



attempting to explain: with the child he shares the ostentatious aspect of his desire, although the child is merely considered tedious ("lassant") when he asks for explanations, while the madman is considered maniac when he systematically provides explanations. The difference then lies in the fact that the child asks excessively, while the madman answers excessively. Yet, the normal person is found also to behave hyperbolically, ("Elle sait se retenir, (trop même)") (emphasis added), but his excess is directly opposite to the one above; it consists of excessively moderating his attempt at and desire for an explanation. Therefore, in the comment on the law seen as a paradox, as an excessive interpretation ("c'est un comble"), Michaux underlines the fact that whereas only the madman's behavior is perceived to be maniac, both sane and insane persons are nonetheless excessive. The comment on the law or equation (C.L.G. p. 216) coordinates the assertion of a paradox ("et c'est vrai") and the assertion of reality, instead of opposing them. "Mais", would subordinate the second statement to the first ("c'est un comble!") by means of a controversion which would then convey the following meaning: although such a law and such an interpretation seems excessive and paradoxical (since explanations usually imply

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(Continued from preceding page)

elaborated by the cognitive report and seen as the sign of limited explanation of the experience. The account here takes the chance of going beyond the limits of possible explanation, by dividing itself into text and footnote. It is apparently hoped that this bi-dimensional structure of confrontation will allow the clarity which was impossible when the observer (text alone, or experimenter, or patient) faces the event directly. The indirect comparative analysis here seems expected to provide a better understanding than the direct predication.

rationality and lucidity), however hard it is to imagine, this law is true.

But the text presents the coordination "et", which only adds the second statement to the first as another and concurrent opinion about the common subject of discussion (the equation) which is represented in both statements by the same representative "c'est". With "et" the statement conveys the idea that this equation is a paradox and is true at the same time, that the reality described by the theoretical equation is at the same time unbelievable and logically possible. This deviation with respect to the commonly accepted ideas about insanity on the one hand, and normalcy<sup>1</sup> on the other, is then proved and performed at the very end of the paragraph and chapter, by the polemic relation of text with a second footnote, a relation in which the poet exposes himself, through an intermediary, to the charge of insanity.

In the second footnote Michaux mentions the Inferno by Strindberg and points out textual clues that concur to denote the author's madness.

Il faut relire Inferno de Strindberg, livre plein de relations de signes, comme aussi d'explications, dont un grand nombre dans le domaine scientifique. Significations comme explications, la plupart manifestement inconsistantes. On y trouve cet aveu (qui pourrait être mais ne paraît pas ici marque de voyance et le conduit à des rapprochements insensés): "je n'avais qu'à ouvrir un livre quelconque à n'importe quelle page, je trouvais l'explication désirée.

C.L.G. p. 216 (footnote 2)

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<sup>1</sup>Indeed both are commonly considered to be opposite, and not only as differing in the degree of performance of similar actions and behaviors.

We first notice that the description made of Strindberg's book could be applied to Michaux's books themselves. Indeed, both share an important number of relations between signs (seen for example in the text-footnote relation, in the italics, conveying information beyond the strict verbal communication), a great number of explanations mostly borrowed from the sciences (as seen in the methodic pieces of information which punctuate the text, or the references to studies in medical sciences), and even the inconsistency of such explanations (denounced by the footnote's weak identification power). Second, the link between the two authors is generally sustained by connections that can be established between their common interest (although performed differently) in the exploration of dreams.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, Strindberg is mentioned by Michaux as a case mental insanity, because the word in the text that calls for the footnote is "l'aliéné" (C.L.G. p. 216), and because his scientificity is obviously considered (in the parenthesis within the footnote) as a mark not of lucidity but of insanity. Yet the same author is elsewhere<sup>2</sup> presented as a playwright whose work certainly shows, with only little critical distance, the story and misfortunes of his life; yet he is not strictly categorized as mad. This status therefore remains ambiguous and its determination depends on the norm applied.

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Henri Michaux, Façons d'endormi, façons d'éveillé (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), and Strindberg, Le Songe, 1903. In addition Strindberg did medical studies in 1908, and characters in his work are often doctors, nurses, as well as dreamers.

<sup>2</sup>See Lionel Richard, Encyclopédie de l'Expressionisme, Paris: ed. Somogy, 1978), pp. 177-180.

It is then significant that Michaux should designate Inferno as the work of an insane person while Michaux's own books, which are not regarded as permeated by insanity, present similar characteristics. We then wonder whether the conscious or unconscious purpose of Michaux (behind the apparent reference, which remains ambiguous) is not to ponder the value of explanations brought by the written report, through a polemic relation between text and footnote. They indeed constitute a practical disputation, since while appearing to support the text by an example, the footnote in fact denounces it. The footnote would be conceived as counteracting the tendency, the danger of an explanation that might lay hold on the text as well.

Since the footnote prevents the danger by means of the ambiguous explanation that we have seen, the footnote only brings an absurd proof of the law asserted in the text. Although too late ("trop tard...et encore" C.L.G. p. 216) it does emphasize a risk and the unmistakable signs of a madness that came to be inevitable.

The text-footnote relation appears as an avowal (analogous to the one quoted from Strindberg, and through which the written account brings itself to the attention of the reader): it seems to declare itself as a case of explanation-mania, falling into the madness it was supposed to capture. The written confession of a writing mania is here indirectly performed by the exchange of meanings between text and footnote, but it is directly articulated in Les Grandes Epreuves de l'Esprit.

Ce qu'il [l'auteur de l'écrit] a laborieusement souligné le fera remarquer, non comme un homme remarquable, mais comme un homme qui ne se rend pas compte de l'ensemble, qui ne le contrôle pas, à qui il échappe incroyablement. G.E.E. p. 155

Ambiguous as well as obsessional, the confusing footnote seems in fact to comply with an expected function of reproduction rather than with its expected function of control. Being simultaneously appealing and disappointing, the footnote represents the tyrannical irony of the subconscious that manipulates the subject and organizes the instability and mobility of his signifying productions which we have entitled "explanation in absentia." It is indeed a textual irony that tyrannically maintains the "narratee" as well as the narrator in a state of interpretative uncertainty. As a result this irony conveys the dimension of the inability to explain as we will verify through the confusing character of the final text-footnote relation.

There the formal element connecting text and footnote appears to be a mere phenomenon of visual rhyme while the production of meaning in this relation joins that of the "fratras"<sup>1</sup>

Mettons que je ne sois pas très doué pour la  
dependance. 1

1. La pharmaco-dependance vis-à-vis de la  
Mescaline, du Haschich et des hallucinogènes, qui  
mérite à peine ce nom, n'est aucunement comparable à  
la vraie et très grave dépendance, celle qui existe  
vis-à-vis de l'héroïne ou d'un stupéfiant du même  
ordre, dont et pas seulement pour cette raison, je  
me suis abstenu.

M.M. p. 195

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Henri Morier, Dictionnaire de Poétique et de Rhétorique, (Paris: Puf, 1961), pp. 171-72. We can define the "possible fratras" (as opposed to the "impossible" one which only results in incoherence) as a poem with a fixed form composed of a couplet separated from a following couplet which develops or comments upon it. The comment is improvised by means of comical rhymes and by irrelevant or at least extraneous connections to the initial topic assigned as the theme of a development.

In the short last sentence of the book, the last word calls forth a footnote which starts by repeating this word but does so in order to add a characterization which suggests a reduction from the general to a particular aspect of dependance.

La dépendance vs la pharmaco-dépendance.<sup>1</sup>

The footnote, which seems intended to develop the tendency evoked in the text, in fact exemplifies it through the description of a different and progressively disconnected dependance.

The footnote develops the notion of the text but by asserting that it is different and admits of no possible comparison ("n'est aucunement comparable...") with the only real and serious dependance ("la vraie et la très grave"). Michaux locates this dependance (héroïne) but does not describe it. He has never even experienced it ("dont..je me suis abstenu"), partially because it was known to provoke real dependance (e.g. addiction) but mainly for other reasons ("et pas seulement pour cette raison"). Those he does not explain either.

What explanation does this complex series of statements give for dependance? Nothing but the performative assertion of the impossibility of a comparison, through the effective absence of a comparison; nothing but the performative verification of the subject's inexperience with the drugs mentioned ("héroïne et autres stupéfiants du même ordre"). This verification is exhibited in the inability to say more about the

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<sup>1</sup>That is to say, the addiction developed by the organism after some time of regular drug usage, and the submission of the subject's faculties to the influence of drugs.

drugs, and thus the footnote only emphasizes the textual assertion. The text asserted that the narrator was not "doue," prepared for addiction; the footnote shows that what he experienced under the heading "dépendance" could not really be considered as such, and could hardly even be called by that name ("mérite à peine ce nom'). The explanation provided seems, at best, to be an indirect supporting statement and at worst to be an addition which invalidates the text. In fact, it denies the text, by rejecting the so-called dependance as invalid and its alleged experimentation as false. It denounces the text as a hyperbole, as an overstatement: in giving the name "dépendance" to something that is other, the text belies either the alleged experience, or its ability to control this experience by means of the proper words. Given what we know of the footnote's function, we find it all the more strange that in the end the text should play an ambiguous as opposed to a conclusive game. This attitude in fact contradicts or at least alters the commonly accepted idea<sup>1</sup> that a book builds its interpretation in such a way that meaning is progressively disclosed until one reaches its final revelation. To this expectation the book opposes the final merging of the interpretation with the experimental complexity and ambiguity which the report was supposed to (and partially pretended to) overcome. The disagreement of text and footnote, the two categories at issue here, seems to suggest that the narrator goes back on his word. In fact he does so in a very concrete way by ending his argumentation on a footnote

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<sup>1</sup>It is by such ostensible change from the normal that the written account depicts the mental background of its production.

whereas a footnote implies only a temporary escape from the text to which the reader usually goes back. In this particular case, the reader goes backwards into the text since the text does not continue.<sup>1</sup> Thus the contradictory character of the footnote marks the end of the line and the starting point of an inverse reading motion. That is to say that the truth of the experience lies only in the textual elaboration of an attempt to find its explanation.

#### Conclusion

The analysis of structuring and destructuring agents set into motion by the written account ends up by stating the limits of a cognitive apprehension of the experience. On the one hand the rational cognitive report has been seen to be a merely rhetorical (yet scrupulous) naming of an experimental protocol which fails: it conveys to the reader, only the impression of an alleged experience. As such it confirms Michaux's prejudices against an objective and voluntary depiction of the experience. Conversely it suggests a subjective, allusive and rather dilettante method, whereby the experience would freely speak for and by itself.

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<sup>1</sup>This particular case, however, exhibits a situation which is true for the entire system of text-footnote relations. We recall Michael Riffaterre's words (cf. "Intertextual scrambling," in Romanic Review, vol LXVIII, number 3, May 1977, p. 206). The text-footnote relation can be seen as an extended example of "scrambling," or "scrambled text," which is presented as "an icon of intention." This "icon of intention" has been particularly defined as an obsessive attempt at an explanation which remained absent or missing. The deviation in the use of footnotes constitutes a kind of ungrammaticality whose unescapable character (all the more so in our present example of M.M. p. 195) "makes reading a restrictive process," and I should add, a regressive process.



Danger surtout de l'excès de maîtrise, de la trop grande utilisation du pouvoir directeur de la pensée qui fait la bêtise particulière des "grands cerveaux studieux," qui ne connaissent plus que le penser dirigé (volontaire, objectif, calculateur) et le savoir, négligeant de laisser de l'intelligence en liberté, et de rester en contact avec l'inconscient, l'inconnu, le mystère.

G.E.E. p. 30

The second aspect of the report has borne witness to this free process of communication and interpretation, through which the subconscious is suggested, along with its influence on the elaboration of meaning and its result in a figurative, yet missing explanation. As such this second aspect has succeeded in localizing the unknown aspects of the experience, without betraying it, and has implicitly suggested how the expressed could possibly relate to the unexpressed. In so doing, this part of the report has partially complied with the stated aim: reproducing the experience without altering it. However, and on the other hand, this system of a suggestive reproduction (as opposed to a clearly articulated analysis and argumentation) could hardly avoid falling under the influence of the mental distortion reproduced, and thus limits its own power of control. For the sake of an experimental reproduction that would not be an overstatement, the text remains within the limits given to the interpretation by the alleged experience. The text limits its critical distance and control to the parameters of the character's or actor's lucidity and vigilance, no matter how assertive the account might sound.

..il continue à marcher dans 'ses histoires' qui ne devraient pas résister à un examen critique. Mais elles résistent et parfaitement.

C.L.G. p. 217

The expression "his stories" refers to the actor's fantasies, speculations, hallucinations, explanations, governed by the subconscious, and which cognitive and referential reports fail to organize, to control, and to explain.

After these results, we are able to understand that the efforts (both cognitive and referential) that the text makes to relate an internal world to its written or verbal externalization reveal the attempt to assuage anxieties relating to the internal world. This attempt is made so obvious and ostensible that it builds, a contrario, as one effect of its signs (seen as counteracts), an image of the experience which it simultaneously controls. The coordinated action of structuring and destructuring agents tends to suggest that external relations (e.g. the relations of the text to the experience) should be the means of testing out internal relations (that is to say the relation of the writer to the experimentation). In this section, we have not approached the internal relations, but the external relations, both cognitive and referential, have provided us with certain facts.

First, what we are supposed and able to learn about the experience consists only in the knowledge disclosed by the experience itself, and the truth of this knowledge is limited to (e.g. can be verified only by) the internal conditions of the textual experimental apprehension.<sup>1</sup> The acquisition and verification of this knowledge is restricted to the

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<sup>1</sup>We will see this more thoroughly in the next part of the dissertation, but we have already been acquainted with this criterion by the last example of "Dépendance." There, experimental dependance means a textual dependance, or a dependance relative to the textual image of the experience.

capacities and faculties provided by and to the writer. It is consequently based on the agreement of the object sought after with the instrument of research; this agreement results from the textual system of representation.

Second, there is no such thing as an experiencing subject on the one hand, and a writing subject on the other hand. There is only a narrator who writes, supposedly after the drug effects wear away, in order to communicate this experience. Yet the written account, through its cognitive and referential aspects, works under the pretence of speaking for two separated subjects (for example in splitting the argumentation into text and footnotes)<sup>1</sup>; their conventionalized dissimilarity is intended to suggest the mobility of the experimenter, alternatively conscious and unconscious, and to convey the impression of a good balance between external and internal relations. Thus the text produces the system of verification of its own sayings.

Third, the account is entirely single-minded. It is the relation of one single and individual apprehension of mental distortion despite the variety of its aspects, alternately oriented subjectively (the "je" of the narrator relates his experience) or oriented objectively (the "il" conveys the experience of an alleged other experimenter). The shifting between the two complies with Michaux's intention to ascertain

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<sup>1</sup>Michaux also pretends to account for his own experience with mental distortion in the name of the permanently insane person. See G.E.E. pp. 48-49. "Je revoyais en éclair ces lettres de malades mentaux...Il faudrait, me répétais-je, qu'un jour, si je retrouve mes moyens, j'arrive à écrire en leur nom à eux."

his understanding of the internal world through a wide range of observations, and not through the sole experience of a single individual. In fact there is only one system of evaluation, no matter what the linguistic identity of the represented actor may be, and the writer takes charge of the whole interpretation, either as an objective narrator, "je,"<sup>1</sup> or through a character, "Il." The truth of the experience appears therefore to be relative to the particular condition of its articulation by a given writer within a given text, while the initial statements of purpose claimed the converse intention of discovering a general knowledge of the mental.

Finally, the cognitive and referential report, through the double action of structuring and destructuring agents, provides only an ambiguous depiction of the phenomena. For the reader, as for the subject represented, the mental phenomena remains enigmatic. "Il reste un bourdonnement énigmatique." (C.L.G. p. 244)

This enigmatic buzzing suggests the presence of a phenomenon which does not reveal its true nature. The enigma is developed in the text as the visible face of the experience which is intended to denote the "ins and outs" of its autonomy. Through the figure of enigma, the experience is given as a power, "Si impossible à contrôler, si méchante pour les démarches de l'esprit." (C.L.G. p. 237) The experimental power is impossible to control, since it can only be circumscribed and not explained. The unexplained (cf. "De l'inexpliqué passe" G.E.E. p. 184)

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<sup>1</sup>I call this situation "objective" because when he writes "je," the writer objectifies the origin of the account; he explicitly reveals it as subjective.

is the only answer resulting from the attempt at a structuration. The experimental power is cruel for mental faculties since its circumscription is performed by the cognitive and referential system at its own expense, that is to say at the expense of its own legitimacy and expectations. The cognitive and referential system finally ends in bankruptcy. What then is its validity? Is there none? No, the absence of a cognitive depiction of the experience is a sign in itself which denotes a presence, perceived although not explained, and perceived as ostensibly absent.

..de "l'inexpliqué" passe, qu'on perd aussi vite qu'on le perçoit, dont, bien loin d'en deviner le sens, on ne pourrait même pas situer son non-sens. Par des "absences" seulement, on sait qu' ils ont été. G.E.E. p. 185

The account will indeed shift from the absence of explanation to the tracing and localization of this absence. This suggests that the text does not provide the direct, pragmatic and systematic knowledge of the mental experience, but its indirect converse and illusive concretization.

Through a textual incarnation of experimental energy and dynamism which before further explanation, I will call the experimental "body", the reader will watch an experience. He will not watch a conquest of meaning, but at least the converse and progressive process of its loss, in the form of a narration of the difficulty of describing: "l'aventure de la perte de l'avoir."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>I use this title as a general heading for the narrative aspects which we will now consider. I borrow it from Misérable Miracle in which it serves as a subtitle for the second chapter in "Addenda." It can be translated as "the adventurous loss of one's possessions," or "the adventure of being dispossessed."

PART III

"L'AVENTURE DE LA PERTE DE L'AVOIR." A NARRATIVE  
ADVENTURE AND THE ILLUSION OF AN EXPERIMENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY

## INTRODUCTION

Dans certains moments de l'existence il est arrivé à des chercheurs du Spirituel, il est arrivé qu'en pleine lucidité ils rencontrent - envers de la mystique, de la purification, de l'ascèse -la Force, le monstre de Force.

C.L.G. p. 237

As a result of the capsized attempt at structuration, the text unexpectedly fades into the converse adventure of a difficult experimental verbalization. I call "textual incarnation of the experimental body" the representation, in the text, of the writer's perturbation, of the material, physical and psychological conditions which involve him. I use the title "l'aventure de la perte de l'avoir" for the specific nature and topic of this textual incarnation which exhibits the writer's attempt and struggle to grasp mental phenomena by means of words.

It is literally a textual adventure and experience concurrent to the other textual aspects we have seen in the previous chapters, and which is at the same time generated by their defective results. The experience is duplicated in the text which progressively coincides with it although the text was only intended to be the reflection of the experience. The first effect of this duplication consists of presenting

the character or hero of the adventure as the duplication of the writer, in order to assimilate the one to the other.

In this adventure the main role is actually played by the writer who expresses himself as the experimenter, who is both speaking and spoken about. The presence of this experimenter before the reader's eyes is intended to appear as it is described in the following quotation.

Le texte à quelque endroit que vous le preniez, devient une voix, la voix même qui lui convient, et l'homme parle derrière cette voix. Le responsable est là, mince comme il était, et que le caractère imprimé ne durcit plus, il est là à nouveau, occupé sur le champ à s'exprimer, cherchant ses idées. Il recommence. Fini de faire l'abstrait, le vague. L'homme de derrière son nom vient avec son poids, son manque de poids.

C.L.G. p. 173

In this quotation, Michaux represents himself as a reader. This reader, under the specific circumstances of the drug experience, watches the initial tools or implements that gave rise to the book he is reading. Such implements appear as the vocal presence of the writer behind the formal appearance of lines on the page, as the expressing process of words and ideas, and as the corporeal presence of a man behind an author's name. The specific faculties of lucidity or imagination developed under the influence of drugs actually allow the reader a phenomenological viewpoint: that is to say, a perception of the components and phenomena which constitute the text he is reading. Under those circumstances the text appears as a screen on which the writer is projected and can easily be watched working ("occupé sur le champ à



penser, à s'exprimer, cherchant ses idées"). The text is a transparent window through the lines of which the writer recuperates his human presence ("le responsable est là, mince comme il était, et que le caractère imprimé ne durcit plus").<sup>1</sup> It is a workbench on which the raw material of the vulnerable experimenter will be shaped and represented ("fini de faire l'abstrait, le vague. L'homme de derriere son nom vient avec son poids, son manque de poids"). I believe that the textual adventure announced is intended to present the eyes of the external reader (we, as readers) with a figure of the writer similar to the one mentioned in the quotation above. Here the writer would be watched while attempting to account for the mental phenomenon to which he would simultaneously be submitted.

First this enterprise appears as reflexive, the text being conceived as a mirror in which the writer would project and watch his own image.

Second, the enterprise establishes a relation and equation between the act of writing and the experience. The text in this adventure is presented as a flat space without depth. Here the perception will operate according to principles that are internal to the experience and its representation and not to the principles of communication with reality. The reflexive activity supposes a limited critical distance between the writer and the object of his perception. Therefore the development of this perception throughout the book

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<sup>1</sup>Let us notice the possible double meaning of "caractère imprimé" which designates first the typographical sign of print, but also can be understood as the character narrated, created in the printed matter and which duplicates the narrator.

constitutes the image of the experience and concretizes it. For those two reasons the narrative adventure can be defined as a (pseudo)-phenomenology which indirectly materializes the experience referred to in stating the writer's attempts to put it in words. Thus it indirectly describes, expresses, and voices its corporeality.

In this adventure the writer intends to hold the "driving gear," and to be obviously involved in the signifying process as the object and agent of the articulation. His mediation allows the representation of the phenomenon (which cannot possibly occur directly) but which is displaced in the depiction of the mental, corporal organism submitted to the phenomenon. This is why we call this phenomenology a pseudo-phenomenology or an illusion of phenomenology. The text is actually the medium which brings mental appearances to show themselves as explicitly and as systematically as possible.

As for the intended location of this textual adventure in the experimental protocol, we can situate it at the point of the experience, where the effects of drugs start to disappear, and where the experimenter regains consciousness. In such an intermediate state of mind, he feels that he is recovering and believes that he will soon make proper use of his mental faculties.

Le penser 'rentre' en lui.

G.E.E. p. 15

La conscience, c'est aussi la conscience de la baguette magique de la re-conscience, l'impression confuse et confiante de la proximité de la pensée, de l'imminence de la pensée, de la pensée bientôt à volonté.

G.E.E. pp. 15-16

The text in fact explores this stage of mental processes as the working time and space for its phenomenology. In these circumstances the subject uses writing's power of vigilance to look at the workings of his thoughts. "Lorsqu'on fait sur sa personne une expérience d'aliénation, il est capital qu'il reste en soi assez de présence vigile pour observer le mental maltraité qui, toujours en mouvement, cherche à continuer son travail, le faisant autrement, à la diable, vous menant sur des voies singulières. (G.E.E. p. 165) In evaluating the amount of lucidity or consciousness necessary to observe the phenomenon, this quotation also reveals the double position of the writer, both manipulating and manipulated.

On the one hand he is a manipulator of the experience in that he observes it. While grasping the phenomenon through the act of writing he grasps or perceives his perceptive power. He represents himself and as a result of this reflexive narrative phenomenology, he seizes the mental experience: "...elle a affaire à lui, lui, avant tout, lui, seul manipulateur." (G.E.E. p. 17) But on the other hand, under the same circumstances of an intermediate consciousness, he exposes himself to the reverse process of being manipulated and driven away. The narration implicitly concretizes the experimental strength in submitting its own practice to the effects of the phenomenon. The meaning of the experience will thus be borne by the image of the writer and the definition of the writer's vicissitudes will denote the phenomenon.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This is also suggested by F. Shepler who, however, remains ambiguous and does not choose between "personal problems" as a fully  
(Continued)

Thus, step by step, and indirectly, the text will come to constitute the intended knowledge of the mind.

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(continued)

denoted meaning in general or as a local system of depiction and disclosure (in the second sentence). "Michaux's contribution is that most of his mescaline works refer to his own personal problems. We are forced to discover the meaning of drug by hurtling through hell and heaven with him." Frederic Shepler, in Creatures Within, (Bloomington: Physsards, 1977), p. 113.

## CHAPTER I

### TOOLS FOR THE INTENDED PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE EXPERIENCE

Before I look at the minutes of the textual phenomenology I would like to outline the two main devices which support this illusory enterprise.

First, Michaux objectifies himself as a character in the narration. He presents himself before the reader's eyes as an experimenter conducting the experiment and submitted to its effects. He actualizes the impact of drugs on self-consciousness in order for him to proceed to their interpretation. While doing this he gives credibility to the report, and simultaneously he presents it as the representation of a writing experience. This representation is conducted under the pretence of a state of mental distortion influenced by drugs. Thus Michaux entitles himself to define his task as an enterprise of "Saisir malgré les résistances" (C.L.G. p. 158), to grasp within and despite the resistance of the phenomenon.

The textual praxis will develop the impossibility (which I will show) of grasping the experience by means of words and concretize its phenomenological aspects. It will also summarize the writer's perturbation in the "other" state of mind by the notion of persecution. "Dans l'état 'autre,' l'explication et le raisonnement débouchent naturellement dans la 'persécution.'" (C.L.G. p. 185) The second

tool of his illusory phenomenology consists for Michaux of actualizing the experimental report as an object of analysis whose modalities of production bear witness to the persecution mentioned. By way of metalinguistic description of its production, the text performs indirectly the investigation of phenomena which are apprehensible only through their impact on the act of writing.

In fact major parts of the books develop the difficulties of writing the experimental account. Constantly throughout the books, the image of the Infinite, and of a mystic degree of inner contemplation through drugs, is balanced by the repeated litany of suffering the impossibility of writing. I hypothesize that text and experience reciprocally include each other so as to state an impossibility of combining the true experience of the phenomenon with a simultaneously clear representation.

Sometimes the situation of the experimenter per se is exposed, and we will notice in the following quotation that the third person singular does not prevent his direct comment on the situation he encounters and fails to comprehend. "Avancant dans un monde vide de plus en plus heterogene a lui, de plus en plus epouvantablement soustrait a sa prise. C'est atroce, atroce." (C.L.G. p. 229) Sometimes the situation of the experimenter is exposed through its impact on the original draft. The narration describes the effect of the experience through the description of its inscription. "... Tout au long de ces heures inouïes, je trouve, dans mon journal, ces mots, écrits plus de cinquante fois, gauchement, difficilement: Intolérable, Insupportable." (M.M. p. 16)

I first notice that the preceding quotation conveys an iterative meaning: it is a single statement about a repetitive situation occurring from one moment to another and with only little variations as seen in the slight modulation from "Intolérable," (intolerable) to "Insupportable," (unbearable). Second, this quotation constitutes "une mise en abyme" of a text into the text, and more particularly of the initial experimental account or "journal" into the present text. This operation is emphasized by a play on signifier and signified: the proof and the quality of the situation is given not by a direct quotation but by a description of its chosen words "ces mots," as significant signifiers. "Intolérable," "Insupportable" are written in italics which means that they are approximately representative of the iterated description; they are simultaneously taken as signified within the diary (quoted in the book) and as signifiers in the new account where they denote the situation of the subject. A comment is previously made on the words of the diary, and on their particular typographical aspect defined as "gauchement", "difficilement." The adverbs here denote the aspect of writing in the diary which in itself is a sign of the difficulty of writing; but at the same time the adverbs function in the text (Misérable Miracle) which we read, as signifieds. Then an interaction between the diary and the actual text occurs, since a signifier in one of them becomes a signified in the other one, and vice versa. This inclusion and interaction already erases the distance between the first and second account, and tends to erase the second one's character as a posterior rewriting. But it bears an even greater value in terms of an experimental representation, since it is improved

by a pseudo-collusion of the various levels of narrative temporality. The sentence is in effect written in the present tense which conveys the idea of a simultaneous narration, as opposed to the rest of the passage which, being written in the imperfect, conveys the idea of a narration posterior to the action. Within this sentence a relation is established to the experience described in the passage, by means of a deictic association of both temporalities. With the statement "tout au long de ces heures inouïes," the sentence reviews the generality of the event mentioned ("here and now") in the situation of enunciation in which the passage is articulated. But in a second statement a reference immediately follows to a previous situation mentioned ("then and there") in a previous accounting ("Dans mon journal"): by "ces mots" the text refers to the journal and designates the words that he will quote shortly after the sentence. On the one hand it does seem necessary for the writer to have finished reading the diary in order for him to synthesize the iterations spotted. So that "heures," here, could mean the "minutes", the "acts" of the experimental process, as represented minute by minute in the diary in proportion to the event. But on the other hand, "ces heures inouïes" remains ambiguous since it definitely presents, within a sentence in the present tense, a general length of time which belongs to the past; that is to say the experimental past as well as the past of the enunciation (prior to that of the sentence). The text here creates by a linguistic confusion of its spatio-temporal determinations (past and present, there and here, repeated and unique) a fictive and pseudo-interaction of the narrative elements. It is intended to produce the effect of a narration which is simultaneous to



the action. In the following harmonizations and combinations this is textually realized (yet logically impossible).

First the chronology of the fact narrated<sup>1</sup> (that is to say the synthetic reading of the diary) coincides with the chronology of the textual signifiers (that is to say the statement "Tout au long de"). There is no way that we can make a distinction here between the saying and the fact. When the text states "je trouve", there is no way we can prove that the narrator does "find" at the moment he says he does. "Je trouve" means "I find" and "I say that I find"; that is to say that the narrator here enunciates a fact which is at the same time a saying. Second, the narrator presents himself as the author of the diary to which he refers, "mon journal," and which he reads and simultaneously quotes. The narrator splits himself in two: a main (present) narrator and a secondary (former) narrator whom he quotes. Through this fictive division he then assumes a new role, that of a "narratee" who is informed (and thus given form) by the utterance of the secondary narrator. Thus the sentence here produces a reflexive situation where the narrator gives himself form by means of a duplication (and "mise en abyme"). In so doing he creates a coincidence between the chronology of the narrator (that is to say the moment of the account's drafting) where the narrator "finds," invents, creates the diary through the account,

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<sup>1</sup>I will refer to the various aspects of the narrative temporality distinguished by Catherine Kerbrat Orecchioni op. cit., p. 172-174. She distinguishes four aspects defined as follows: a) chronology of encoding, b) chronology of decoding, c) chronology of textual signifiers, and d) chronology of facts narrated. For each of them, except (c), there is an opposition between a textual level and an extra-textual level. In this study, and except for (d), I have only considered the textual level of each chronology.

and the chronology of the fact narrated (that is to say the reading of the diary) where the same narrator, (now as a "narratee") "finds", learns or reads through the quotation from the diary.

Thus a relation of identity is created between the present act of narrating and the former diary. The present act of narration consists of giving an account (narration-quotation) of contemporary or very recent fact (reading). A diary is the report of contemporary or recent facts by a narrator who mixes his (fictive) writing act with the writing act of the author. The characteristic of the diary is not lost, nor is its referent, that is to say the experience: it is signified through the words quoted, and through the qualifications attached to those words. This network of narrative complexities then results in erasing the spatio-temporal distance between the former and the new account. The diary, initially contemporary to the experience, is erased as a signified prior to the present text, and is reduced to a signifier of the text. The distance between the book (as a rewriting) and the experience is also reduced and linguistically assimilated for the purpose of a (fictive) phenomenology. Finally, the minutes of the diary constitute the narrative signifier of the experimental hours which the book thus comes to signify and to sustain.

## CHAPTER II

### NARRATIVE OF A TEXT'S PSYCHOSIS: WRITING RELEASES, WORD INSCRIPTION: HOW THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF WRITING REPRESENTS THE OBLITERATION OF THOUGHTS

At the starting point of the adventure, the scene is set between the leaf of paper and the pen with which the writer will attend the mental show. "Je ne suis plus dans mon état naturel. Et saisissant crayon et bloc de papier, je me mets en devoir de noter le spectacle extraordinaire." (G.E.E. p. 37) He intends to follow and progressively describe the dislocation of his thoughts, the variation of his feelings, the transformation of his mood. Yet, as stated in the following juxtaposition of recapitulative statements, the expectations are met not with a description of the phenomena per se, but with the pell-mell narrative series of their destructive effect on subjectivity all the more oppressive as the aggressor remains unidentified ("on"). "Ce jour-là, on brassa mes cellules, on les secoua, les sabota, les mit en convulsions. On leur faisait des caresses, on se livrait dessus à des arrachements. On me voulait tout consentant." (M.M. P. 15)

The narrative program is not immediately followed by its effective achievement, but rather deviates and exhausts itself through the chronic repetition of the harshness needed to keep up with its "premiers et catastrophiques déclenchements du 'désespoir de ne pouvoir se mettre en situation.'" (C.L.G. p. 263) The expression "catastrophiques

Yet the examples observed of nominal metaphors seem to be produced less by substitution than by "cotextual" (verbal) and contextual relations between the subject characterized and the figurative and characterizing focus or vehicle. The cotextual environment here consists of the semantics and representation of the experience as a fluid space in motion: we have seen this through the initial figuration of the agitated sea, its specific lexicon, as well as its syntactic functioning, seen as oscillation, back and forth movement, obliteration, repetition, contamination. The contextual environment consists of the general narrative adventure through which the experience is incarnated and communicated. It is a process of displacement and transfer aimed at an elucidation of experimental phenomena. In this context the tools of the narrated phenomenology consist first of placing the text in an intermediary situation of a guiding but simultaneously impressionable consciousness; second, in displacing the nature of the object sought after from the initial experience to the process of its depiction; third, in constituting the text as an external procession of images that duplicates the internal procession of sensations. As such, the text complies with the nature of the internal visionary world seen as an extension of the sensation on which it depends. "Si fantastique qu'il paraisse (une fois dépassé les formes géométriques, les couleurs contraires et kaléidoscopiques), le défilé visionnaire, lui-même tributaire accompagne, double et traduit le défilé sensationnaire." (G.E.E. pp. 131-132)

In the same way that a vision within the experience simultaneously duplicates a sensation, the image within the text simultaneously

duplicates the experimental phenomenon. The indirection of the text is then minor, since it reproduces an experimental phenomenology which itself proceeds through indirect translation, and the linearity of writing as a procession of words and images, reproduces the experimental procession of phenomena. The text which cotextually and contextually integrates the space and time of the experience within its own space and time constitutes a visible image, a metaphor of the experimental process (seen as a procession of duplicates).

For this reason the cotextual and contextual environment of the metaphors observed (namely, the metaphor of the tugboat, and the metaphor of the swimmer) is literally and figuratively the environment of the sentence. Literally, since the metaphor is a verbal and phrastic figuration of an idea. Figuratively also, since the sentence appears to be a narrative object; as a linear combination of words, as well as by the aspect of its components (the words are the signs and extensions of former ideas) the sentence exemplifies, portrays and reflects the mental functioning, or mental sentence.

La longue phrase presque ininterrompue, faite de  
bric et de broc, se rapportant à des réflexions  
différentes arrêtées à mi-phrase, se chevauchant.

G.E.E. p. 40

This quotation describes the written sentence which contains the aspects of its mental analogue. The sentence is almost uninterrupted (like the continuity of the mental mechanisms, even in situations where thoughts are obliterated); it is diversified in its components; it consists of a juxtaposition of various words which tentatively follows the diversity

of mental fluctuations and relates internal reflections to the diversity and eclectism on which it depends. The reflection is so perfect that there is no way to decide whether the "mi-phrase" mentioned, refers to the mental process wherein the thoughts are obliterated, or to the written phrase which simultaneously articulates it.

The metaphors, which previously appeared as mere signs of the writer's situation, now acquire, through the specificity of their referential space, a specific value. Formerly seen as trivial and vague, they become justified within the writing-phrastic situation which they conote. The writer is a swimmer and his hand almost a tugboat within a contextual situation of derivation, which is a mental derivation seen through and as a phrastic derivation. Immediately after the metaphor of the swimmer we find in effect a figurative description of the phrastic derivation, which through a metaphor in praesentia exhibits more generally the conditions of the production of experimental meaning:

Mais ma phrase qui était ma nage à moi persistait, étant obscurément convaincu qu'en gardant le contact, fut-il défectueux, avec ce qui me passait par la tête et très peu par l'écriture, je devais tôt ou tard retrouver le souvenir dont je demeurais inexplicablement coupé. G.E.E. p. 41

In this quotation the real object "phrase" and the object-image "nage," are both present. Thus they outline the process of metaphorization which consists of relating two elements, originally distinct in purpose, to a future fusion or condensation which would then enrich the object with qualifications imported by the object-image.

Here a relation is suggested between "phrase" and "nage" and established by means of an identity the copula, "était." Yet, rather than an identity, it is really an equivalence that is expressed. The image here ("nage") appears not as imported from the outside but already integrated by the writer's situation, through the presence of a possessive pronoun "ma nage," reinforced by a supplementary appropriation, "à moi." Thus, "nage," the swimming, is less a metaphor per se than a characterization, a precise figuration of the "phrase" which has already been seen as a visual metaphor of the mental process. Through this analogy the modality of the writer's situation is depicted. The sentence is the writer's mode of action, his motivating power, in the same way that the motivating power of the swimmer is the act of swimming. The text here reinforces the sentence as the metaphor of the situation, in showing that the sentence is to the writer what swimming is to the swimmer, that is to say his way of acting as well as his way of being. Indeed it is only while swimming that one is a swimmer. Consequently, it is through sentence-writing that the writer defines himself as the actor of the experience.

The swimming metaphor therefore appears as a phenomenological approach which characterizes an entity, (the sentence) that has already been seen as a paradigm in itself (as a metaphor of the insightful phenomenon). It constitutes then not so much a metaphor as a metonymy or more specifically a synecdoche which expresses the specific quality of the sentence. It symbolizes the phrase as the fluid and waving mode through which the writer approaches reality "from the inside". First the accumulation of possessive pronouns emphasizes the subjective

motivation of the sentence. Second, the grammatical structure of the first sentence is disrupted by an anacoluthon<sup>1</sup> which reveals the presence of the writer's experimental thinking behind the production of the sentence: "Mais ma phrase...persistait, étant bien convaincu que... je devais." (emphasis added) Third, the presence of the thinking writer-experimenter is marked as prevalent. The sentence is presented as a translanguistic activity half immersed into the mental activity. Thus, it is a mode of remembrance. It is as transparent as possible, and related, as closely as possible to the source of thought:

"convaincu qu'en gardant le contact, fut-il défectueux, avec ce qui se passait par la tête et très peu par l'écriture, je devais tôt ou tard retrouver le souvenir..." Upon what is then this conviction and supposition based? What are the chances of retracing the memory? How can the phrase be the tracing tool of the remembrance? Precisely because writing here is swimming. If we consider once again the vehicle of the symbolic figuration, we see it as a word conveying the idea of a means of displacement, of transportation: Swimming, which qualifies the sentence, qualifies the means of a passage from idea to word; this qualification which we have seen to be figurative consists also of a displacement, of an operation of transference from the idea (swimming) to the thing (here seen as an ensemble of words, the phrase). Here, the textual illusion of phenomenology consists of an illustrative emphasis:

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<sup>1</sup>The anacoluthon consists of shifting, within the same sentence, from a first grammatical subject, the sentence to a second grammatical subject, "je", by means of a present participle referring to the second while syntactically it should refer to the first.



the text represents an experimental phenomenon of displacement (the sentence) by means of a figure, that is to say, by means of a semantic operation of displacement (the metaphor of writing). The whole of it constitutes a generalized metaphor which represents the writing adventure as an aquatic dancing or ballet, under water, and suggests an indefinite transporting of meaning.

The textual phenomenology here seems to recognize the value of the process of meaning (as opposed to the value of a produced meaning). It exhibits the living character of a writing activity which constitutes itself not as a strict means of production, but as an epiphora (as the extreme end of the metaphorical process) or a place where meaning can travel; thus a place where the inexpressable can inscribe itself. This discovery or recognition is immediately and favorably followed by the goal's completion. "Et voila qu'en plein travail de sisyphé, sans que rien l'ait annoncé, revient, est revenu le souvenir de l'épisode mémorable." (G.E.E. p. 41) This accomplishment is satisfying not only because the memory is traced, but also because there is an adequacy between the object sought after (here the vision of oscillating book shelves G.E.E.pp. 61-62) and the phrastic instrument of its research and tracing. The sentence translates (the visual experience) because it is a lateral oscillation, a back and forth movement from the internal event to the external word. As an epiphora, and as a "travelling," screen and window self-displaced along the mental phenomenon, the sentence is adapted to be the dynamic and cinematic motion picture of the moving phenomenon.

The second value of the sentence as an adapted tool, or as a supposedly transparent shooting-projecting compound, lies in its dynamic character: as a displacement it prevents the condensation; conversely it proceeds only by approximation, and by a moving approach and circumscription of the phenomenon. The sentence constitutes the major instrument of an "objectification of the subjective" which is the main task and method of the narrative adventure. Within the requirement and the necessity of controlling the phenomenon without altering it,<sup>1</sup> the sentence so defined appears to be the ideal (although indirect) instrument of the textual illusion of phenomenology seen more precisely now as an observation conducted through words.

The writer's third image and self denomination ("le plongeur") confirms the aspect of the writing adventure which the first two designations have conveyed. It confirms them, however in being a counter-example, one in which a metaphor, in absentia, as a proceed of substitution and condensation, figurates the writer's drowning within the experimental body.

In this passage Michaux describes his experience of psylocybine conducted in the presence of physicians and in a hospital. The reflexive situation is not direct here but indirect, since the subject's self-observation is relayed by the look of the outside observers. The writer is presented through a metaphorical figuration as "le plongeur" (C.L.G. p. 45) which we could translate as the "diver" but more

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<sup>1</sup>See G.E.E. pp. 126-127 "J'aurais voulu. . . ne pas les [the experimental phenomenon] inserer dans un système, ne pas les gauchir non plus. . . Sans rien orienter, . . . je tenais . . . a observer." (emphasis added)

precisely as the "man who plunges." He is the diver since with respect to the experimental protocol and the structure of the observation, he dives into the mental world for the purpose of gaining knowledge, to gather information about it which he will bring back to the outside: "tout ce que j'avais à faire était de renseigner tant que je pouvais les témoins." (C.L.G. pp. 44-45) Yet, he is not a professional diver; he is absorbed and immersed and overwhelmed by the influence of the drug and as such he is plunging into it: "je ne m'aperçus du danger qu'en plein dedans." (C.L.G. p. 44) The image of the "plongeur" translates the situation of the writer defined in the rest of the passage as "nauffrage" (shipwreck), "noyade" (drowning). The outside observers are the lucid observers watching the non-lucid subject. "..ils interrogeaient du regard le plongeur que j'étais dès que je faisais surface." (C.L.G. p. 45) The information brought about by this experience is restricted to the rare and short phases when the experience loosens its effect. It is also conditioned by the fact that the writer does not provide himself with an instrument of self-observation, such as simultaneous writing. The passage here is presented as a rewriting after the experience, while the writer during the experience was only speaking, which constitutes only a minor instrument of vigilance ("une vigilance d'infirme prêt à un combat d'arrière-garde." C.L.G. p. 53). Consequently the experimenter in this case assumes only one position at a time: experiencing first, relating afterwards, and since speaking is not solid enough to maintain in himself the necessary state of semi-consciousness, he is reduced to one

single position condensed in the metaphor in absentia, "le plongeur". The absence (which results in condensation) of a comparative element, reveals also the absence of the textual phenomenological tools, and provokes the collapse of the observation within the absolute "insens" previously defined. There the subject speaks and feels but both visual and mental manifestations are mere reproductions of an internal universe "en désagregation." (C.L.G. p. 45)

This passage does not describe the attempt to provide an explanation, nor the nature of its impossibility, and "words," as narrative objects, are excluded from it. It rather appears to be a repetitive text whose assigned object is not composed. The metaphor of the "plongeur" is the only identification proposed for the writer. Furthermore it is only an eclectic and weak pause within a textual spiral which seems not so much to represent an experience as to chip away at its surface in order to examine its internal condition.<sup>1</sup> Yet it does not induce a sharp perception of it, but conversely the explanation here is affected by a live presence imposed on the writer. The text here approaches directly (that is, as directly as possible) the writer's body in its raw and unshaped materiality, manipulated by the drug. "Et recommençaient, et recommençaient sans repit les irresistibles tentatives acharnées, comme bras artificiels pétrissant une pâte préparée. Moi, j'étais cette pâte." (C.L.G. p. 42) The work bench here is not the writing-activity anymore but the mental scene which indefinitely manipulates and massages the writer. The experience here

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<sup>1</sup>"Je ne faisais qu'écorner ma réflexion avec ce trop peu de mots. G.E.E. p. 40 (emphasis added)

is not an action upon the words, or upon the thoughts, but upon the brain whose perception by the writer is seen as the final phase of the regression; below meaning, below writing, below thinking, it is the sole and ultimate ground of neurons and cells that the drug now affects. Thus it reveals to the writer a sensitivity to his own micro-organisms which he might not otherwise have suspected. The operation undergone is described as "gymnastique cellulaire" (C.L.G. p. 43), "malaxage et remassage," "hammam psychique" (C.L.G. p. 43), which are respectively a descriptive periphrasis, a descriptive analogy characterizing the effects of the phenomenon on the subject, a metaphor "hammam psychique." Except for the first expression, which locates the phenomenon at the level of the cells, the other qualifications are displaced with respect to their object: they apply a terminology used for the body in general, to a single and intangible part of this body (namely, the brain). This impropriety denotes a particular aspect of the metaphor, seen as synesthesia and which appears here as the minimal form of self-approach allowed to the writer. The expression "Hammam psychique" actually expresses a shift from one level of sensation to another one. The synesthesia here consists of simultaneously perceiving the impression imposed on the brain (which is at the same time the central turning-point of all perceptions, whether they affect the brain or a part of the body), and an impression reflected by the brain onto the body's whole nervous system which is then submitted to the same experimental effect. The perception of the mental perturbation as a "massage," "brassage intérieur"<sup>1</sup> is described as a more concrete and corporeal strength: "Des serpents de force...bras sans substance, très efficaces . . . (C.L.G. pp. 42).

The synesthetic passage from a cerebral phenomenon to the physical feeling of a physical action affecting the whole body is reinforced in the passage by the repeated affirmation of another physical perception: that of having lost one's body. The psilocybin is presented here as a drug affecting the lucidity of the perceptive system, and reducing the ability to react. This reduction in the text affects three aspects of the writer's prerogatives. First, he is deprived of his faculty of observation. The writer depicts a blinking of the eyes, sometimes closed, sometimes opened by the effect of the drug. The lucidity of his observation in particular is affected since the perception is not improved whether his eyes are closed or open: when his eyes are closed, he watches the basic and elusive movement of his mental mechanisms become disrupted, "le grand monde des fluides." When his eyes are open, he is only able to watch the very matter-of-fact conditions of his outside situation "j'étais devant quatre étrangers, assis , sans rien faire." (C.L.G. p. 46) As a consequence his speech is proportionate to his lucidity, and the only mention of speech in the text states its ineffectiveness: "je me dévoyais en paroles explicatives." (C.L.G. p. 46) The verb "je me dévoyais" conveys the idea of mechanical acts of speech leading the writer astray rather than helping to restore him through the production of an interpretation. Second, without the

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<sup>1</sup>Which synthesizes the various operations of decomposition, manipulation seen previously.

possibility of observing the subject finds himself deprived of his body, or rather of the consciousness of his body: "Sans repères visuels, plus de corps." (C.L.G p. 46); Tout autre, celle-là profondément changée, la conscience de mon corps . . . ." (C.L.G. p. 49) Third the obliteration or alteration of sight alters the writer's perception of outside reality and of the individuals belonging to this reality: "j'y naufrageais aussitôt le souvenir de leur présence et de toute autre réalité." (C.L.G. p. 46)

The text describes a state of pre-narcissism wherein self-identification cannot be achieved even by the intermediary identification of others since the whole perceptive process is distorted. Michaux decomposes this scene in the passage by depicting himself as deprived of his face<sup>1</sup>, ("ne sentant pas mon visage, ne pouvant le sentir en imagination") and because of the specific situation of non reflexive observation in which he finds himself. He cannot rebuild himself in imagination through a fictional figuration on a page, nor can he possibly watch his face directly without a mirror. "Mais le mien, je ne l'ai pas en face de moi pour l'observer. Il ne m' était pas un spectacle, tandis qu'eux. . . ." (C.L.G. p. 49) He then tentatively tries to transfer and to compensate for the absence of his self-image by using the image of the others, but his apprehension is restricted to the limits imposed by the phenomenon on his system of perception: "Je les recomposais mal, proportionnellement à la façon dont mal j'occupais le mien." (C.L.G. p. 49)

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<sup>1</sup>The face is the initial step of the narrative recognition, and there the writer starts to identify himself as another.

The text here illustrates then the mingling and confusion of the perceptions, their reciprocal implications (inside/ outside, mental/ corporal, self/ other) and their resulting image of a writer who is empty, without a face, without a body, without speech. As such it represents the drowning of the writer, deprived of a constitutive reflexive dimension, and likely to "die" as a writer. The collapse is, however, not total and the very method of synesthesia illustrates the hope of a possible constitution of an image of the writer. The synesthesia allows the displacement of an effect of emptiness onto an image, manifesting this emptiness, thus somehow realizing it. The effect on the brain is displaced and depicted as an image of a manipulated body; the effect on the self-consciousness, that is to say the absence of a subject's face, is displaced and compensated for at least by an approximation of the others' face ("visiblement ils se fatiguaient de plus en plus" C.L.G.p.49); the emptiness of the speech is compensated for by impressions on the memory: "Je parlais dans l'espoir de les ranimer un peu. Leur air compassé me restera longtemps dans la mémoire." (C.L.G. p.49- 50) The memory consists of a (written) revitalization, of the writer who in this quotation, projects on the others his own internal feeling of passivity. "Mais du docteur, parti plus tôt, et que je n'ai pas revu, je garde l'impression reçue, que je ne peux redresser, d'une santé profondément atteinte." (C.L.G. p. 52) The text is obviously presented here as an after-the-fact accounting of an experience that was not previously written, but only tentatively



conveyed through acts of speech. It apparently bases its recounting on memory of the experience, but presents itself as unable to alter this memory "que je ne peux pas redresser." As such it presents itself only as an indirect reconstitution of the experience.

The immediate consequence of this system of recuperation in the passage is to limit and prevent the so-called shipwreck or drowning of the narrative hero. The writer does plunge and is effectively overwhelmed by the phenomena imposed by psylocybin. But the writer is called "plongeur" and not a shipwrecked person; he is characterized and allowed a certain mobility.<sup>1</sup> The "plongeur" indeed suggests a movement of oscillation from the deep bottom to the outside surface, an up and down vertical movement along one single line. As a "plongeur" the writer is still mobile, the permanence of a moving perturbation suggests a passive, ineffective, but saving instability: "J'étais dans le grand monde des fluides, plus forts que tout, fluide moi-même" (C.L.G. p. 46) The metaphor, in absentia does not suggest a total erasure of the compared term to the benefit of the comparing image, but a super imposition of the comparing or signifier on the signified. The space between signifier and signified is reduced; both coincide and almost add the one to the other. To illustrate this process I can borrow the

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<sup>1</sup>I disagree on this point with the interpretation of Virginia La Charite, who considers Michaux's description of experience with psylocybin as a "real," valid description; therefore Virginia La Charite takes Michaux's statement for granted and disregards the general movement of metaphorization which depicts and vitalizes the narrated character. "Psylocybin depersonalizes because it affects muscular movement; all physical strength is sapped at the same time as mobilization is suppressed. The derealization creates a passivity which is the experience of separation" in Henri Michaux ( Boston: Twayne Pub., 1977), p. 114.

Lacanian diagram of the metaphor in the same way as I used Lacan's other diagram to summarize the process of metonymy.

$$\left[ \left( \frac{S}{S} \right) \simeq S(+S) \right]^1$$

In this diagram Lacan represents metaphor as an event of signification, and condensation as a supplementary signification. The condensation is seen here as an addition of the signifier "plongeur" to the writer signified but the addition does not constitute a fixation or a stabilization. Rather the addition suggests that the writer can define himself even as simplified and unstable.<sup>2</sup> Here indeed, the metaphorization allows the writer to make statements upon himself although he is in a situation in which he does not control his thought. The metaphor of the "plongeur" reproduces the mechanisms of "non-sens," but does not stabilize it since its stabilization would be a declared meaning in itself. Here no meaning, no perception is produced, except one of an absence of perception and meaning.<sup>3</sup> The experience whose

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<sup>1</sup>Lacan, "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason since Freud, in Ecrits: A selection, trans. Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977) p. 158. "S'" stands for the signified and "S" for the signifier; "+" represents the addition.

<sup>2</sup>I prefer to call this writer "unstable" rather than "absent" in Lacan's words. Yet the instability still points at a being "which is present there, below the surface of conscious discourse, beyond the bar of resistance, in the other scene. The function of the metaphor is then to reveal the "true discourse" of the unconscious." Quotation from Maria Ruegg, "Metaphor and Metonymy" (on Lacan's theory of Metaphor and Metonymy in The Letter in the Unconscious), Glyph 6, (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1979), p. 152.

<sup>3</sup>See Lacan, op. cit., p. 158: "Metaphor occurs (se place) at the  
(Continued)

phenomenal persecution prevents the writer from grasping his situation still allows him to grasp this impossibility. The difficulty encountered by the writer has become the main narrative object and motivating power. Even in the metaphor of the "plongeur," the writer's navigation in the middle of the experimental sea (that is to say the sea of phenomena, and the sea of empty signs), and below the level of the sea (below the signs) remains ambivalent: on the one hand it constitutes the maximum of persecution and confusion where writing is shapeless and derelict;<sup>1</sup> on the other hand the metaphor is not stabilized, and the possibility remains for the writer to displace himself again onto another denomination and image of himself.<sup>2</sup> As such the metaphor appears as a space of focalization virtually open to the next possible denomination.

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(Continued)

precise point at which sense emerges from (se produit dans) nonsense." Maria Ruegg (opus quoted, p. 151) comments on this statement in the following terms which support our analysis: "The signifier provides access to the riches of this meaningful realm by showing us not only what is said (which is meaningless, the "peu de sens"), but more importantly by indicating what "it" does not say, the lack to which 'it' points."

<sup>1</sup>The metaphor appears as repressing. Retrospectively, this enlightens the metaphorical incarnation of the thought by a voice (C.L.G. p. 202) which was seen by the footnotes as a "rejection," and which I had interpreted as a movement of unconscious repression and defamiliarization.

<sup>2</sup>I shall show that the metaphor is rather a contextual network of signification within a contiguous syntactic structure.

## Conclusion

The various examples of comparison, metonymy, metaphor and synesthesia which we have encountered in our analysis have revealed the specificity of Michaux's system of figuration. The image of the disabled derelict writer is the condition of a depiction (of the experience) which mimes and indirectly reproduces persecution. In fact persecution affects more the nature of the writer's self-approach than the very possibility of his approach.

Michaux's figurative system, seen as a perpetual movement of displacement exhibits a new and extremist conception of metaphor: the metaphor appears to be the mobile space for the representation of a mobile character. Rather than operating a condensation and stabilization, metaphor mobilizes the writer. On the one hand the mobility of the writer is the negative sign of his persecution, of his submission to phenomena which drive him. On the other hand, and even in the case of the "plongeur" metaphor stresses the communication and transfer of the experimental power onto the writer.

The three denominations which I have analyzed, the "remorqueur", the "nageur," and the "plongeur," represent the writer's three possible modalities of action and motion. The tugboat describes him (through his hand) in an enterprise of externalization, trying to tug the raw material of the inside and cerebral world into the outside word of verbalization. The swimmer describes him within the inside world as an oscillating intermediary between the pole of thinking and the pole of writing. The "diver" describes him in up and down vertical movements

of alternate immersion and emergence, and a state of permanent and constantly renewed fall. As such the three denominations produce a credible image of the writer as a true experimenter.

The narcissistic structure of the text makes this observation within mobility possible. This double structure allows the writer to watch the oscillation toward meaning or toward the words. In the first two examples the production of an account is due to a contextual relation, as for example the sentence (in the episode of the swimmer), which concretizes the mobile and motivating power of subjective mobility and inscription. Conversely, the absence of a reflexive structuration of the experimentation in the last case justifies the absence of any articulation by the writer. He does not write, but speaks, and his speech is a projection and not an inscription. The text adopts a schizoid disposition in representing the manipulation to which writing is submitted. Yet, this double structure cannot exist in itself without a third element which interferes within the narcissistic and reflexive confrontation to guarantee it. The mere oscillation between thought and words cannot express itself by itself, but through an accounting which grasps it as an oscillation. An authoritative element is required to insure the functioning of the reflexivity and its productivity. In the case of the tugboat, "le remorqueur," a comparative element imported from the outside was the means of a figuration of the writer's situation. Without the image of the tugboat organizing the passage from inside to outside, the hand would have remained entirely a hand with no possible access to the interior world, and the writing-act would have appeared as a parallel external activity and not as the means of a

passage and remembrance through tracing.

In the case of the swimmer, the phrase is the instrument and space of the shuttle and passage. In the case of the "diver" the absence of a reflexive structure (wherein the writer would watch himself writing, and thus would grasp his experience through its impact on writing) is replaced by the presence of the outside observers.

But for those three cases, we have to suppose the presence of a third element which guarantees the maintaining and functioning of the dual structure of writing. The narration clearly introduces the necessary presence which originates its production. In the external structure of the text, the outside authority which governs the relation between the narrator and his narration is the author, invisible but active since the narrator is fictively included within the narrative adventure as the tangible image of the experimenter.<sup>1</sup>

In the internal structure of the narration, the authority governing the relation between the writer and his mental process takes on various aspects, all of them being authoritative and frightening. It can be the mental phenomenon which obliterates the thinking process through the dissension seen between word and thought. It can also be an auditory hallucination which by its anachronistic aspect allows to reveal a thought underneath, as well as a separatism between mental and verbal productions. Within the narrative adventure, the authoritative

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<sup>1</sup>The experimenter is not seen directly; he is only indirectly seen through its writing-speaking activity of accounting.

guarantee consists of a representation of an "author," witnessing, criticizing, intervening in the narrative production:

C'est alors que lui vient soudain, forte, indubitable, l'impression de quelqu'un de penché sur son épaule, regardant par-dessus son épaule son texte, en curieux, en amateur intéressé qui aurait son mot à dire, qui de très près s'y intéresse, le suit, le surveille, le critique, le lit avant même que l'écrit ne soit entièrement tracé!

Agaçant, fortement agaçant..."

G.E.E. p. 97

At this point of the narrative adventure, the illusion of an experimenter phenomenology has succeeded in reintroducing the presence of the "author"<sup>1</sup> within the text, and in circumscribing his presence both as an illusion ("Sans doute, tournant la tête, il lui serait facile de voir qu'il n'y a personne là en fait, en chair". G.E.E. p. 97) and as an illusion necessary to the representation and incarnation of the experience.

The "author" shares with the mental phenomenon the characteristics of being the origin of the production and prior to its achievement "avant même que l'écrit ne soit entièrement tracé." Both also appear as an oppressive control imposed upon the narrator and his narrative activity. But there is still a difference between those two authorities: the phenomenon or, thinking mechanism belongs to the narration, it is a part of it and governs the writer's (narrative)

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<sup>1</sup>I write the word "author" within quotation marks because as soon as he is not only presupposed but objectified, the author becomes a narrative representation of the authorial function.

identity as a persecuted writer. It is an authority organizing the production of the unexplained, of what remains secret and cannot be named.

Conversely the "author," fictively represented in the narration as the supervisor ("Ainsi continue l'écrit, "surveillé" par l'autre." G.E.E. p. 98) constitutes the guarantee of the articulation. The presence of the author prevents the narrator from assuming total responsibility for the account, and insinuates a critical intervention. The interaction of the "author" or rather of "the other" ("l'autre") is an extensive production of comments, approbations, disagreements, criticisms, which convey to the subject-narrator the impression of a multiple critical presence:

. . . un multiple murmure, comme d'un groupe de plusieurs qui...interrompent et interfèrent, et bougonnent et objectent et moquent et désapprouvent et raillent, . . .et reviennent sur, et ne tolèrent pas, et discutent, et se désolidarisent, et rient, et rient, et rient, et sursautent, et sabotent, et sabotent. . . . G.E.E. p. 98

This quotation exhibits, through the accumulation of verbs, the intervention and sanctions felt by the writer. In this passage the sanction and intervention exercised by the "author" modify and sabotage the narrative production but do not erase its inscription. Conversely, this latent and insistent murmur insures continuation of the productivity despite and beyond the writing act itself: "Assez! Il n'en peut plus. Il s'arrête, décidé: 'Ne plus écrire.'" D'ailleurs il ferme les yeux." (G.E.E. p. 98) The narrator here quotes from his narration since the statement "ne plus écrire!" is presented within



quotation marks; therefore, the declared cessation of writing happens to be an act of writing; as such it implies the free activation of a significant production which, if it does not constitute a real speech, at least induces the possibility of it in exhibiting a new type of productivity which we can call metamorphosis. "'Ne plus' s'est changé en grévistes!" (G.E.E. p. 99) The metamorphosis indeed consists of relating verbal elements of the narrative adventure to its visual or sensitive connotations, to its connected representatives or components within the narration. As such it constitutes the hope of a possible articulation of the subjective experience. Thanks to the fictional presence of the "author," as the alternate other of the narrator, the narrative structure created at the beginning of the adventure appears to be not the final place of arrival and destination of an experimental translation, but the starting point of its generation.

This happy ending constituted by the metamorphosis is nonetheless not representative of the narrative adventure conceived for the three books at hands. It locally indicates here the possibility offered by the triangular narcissistic structure ("author"/writer narration, or "other" observer/writer observer/writer observed) to articulate the experience which otherwise would remain "lettre morte." But it is not extensively exploited by the books at hand<sup>1</sup> which insist mainly on the writer's drowning within the signs produced by the mental experience.

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<sup>1</sup>Many other books of Michaux's, less theoretical and analytical, but more fictional, rely on the techniques of metamorphosis: See, Ailleurs, (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), or La Vie dans les plis, (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), or L'Espace du dedans, pages choisies (1927-1959), (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

The narrative performance here has shown the succession of states submitted to various powers of transformations but has limited itself to the phase of disjunctive manipulation. The narration illustrates how the writer is dispossessed of his faculties by the phenomenon, and ultimately prevented from failure and loss of control by the guarantee of a third term which duplicates and intensifies the writer's will by the "author's" will.

If then I attempt a diagnosis of this narrative adventure seen as the narrative of a writing psychosis within the general frame of an illusion of experimental phenomenology, I can state it in the following way.

The illusion of an experimental phenomenology illustrates the writer's attempt to deal with external situations and relations, and appears to have two aims.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand it is intended to improve the writer-experimenter's relation to the external world by means of written statements; this implied establishing relations to the first external objects, seen as words. On the other hand, and simultaneously, the anxieties regarding the internal world and internal objects (namely, thoughts) had to be alleviated. Throughout the adventure, thoughts and thinking processes are seen as destructive impulses against which the writer struggles by means of words intended to face, to control, and to counteract persecutory anxieties.

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<sup>1</sup>The following terminology and diagnosis is inspired by Melanie Klein's description and characterization of the psycho-analytic experience, as seen in the treatment of a ten-year old boy, in Narrative of a Child Analysis, (New York: Delta, Dell Publishings, Inc., 1976), pp. 461-466.

The phenomenal persecution is attached to the destruction of the writer's whole external and internal world, but this disaster is mitigated by the textual guarantee of a mobility. The writer has indeed become able to some extent to work through the depressive position. Metonymy and metaphor appear to be the conditions which make possible a localization of the writer in the narration although he is shown at a loss. Such figures grasp and stabilize the instability of the writer, they assuage and attenuate it temporarily, without erasing it. More than the word, which is submitted to the phenomenon, as its letter, the image is the instrument of the "author," and complies with the attempt at a writer's conservation. The image is the product of the narrative imagination which transforms the experience: it states the unstable, and names what is pure undetermined movement, or builds what is pure destruction. The tangible (although indirect) incarnation of the experimental body is made possible through the image and under the guarantee of the text, while it was impossible through the words seen as marks within the thinking-writing process. The collision seen in the narrative psychosis between the words considered as good objects (tools for communicating) and the phenomena felt to be bad objects, reflects a larger conflict within the writer: a conflict between the part of him which he feels to be good (the writing part) as well as allied with the good object, and the part of the subject which he feels to be hostile and allied with bad objects (the perturbed thinking part). The writing part is intended to counteract and to fight the destructive part, but we have seen that for this purpose the writer was not strong enough, that he could not deal with the impending disaster. The

"author" appears then as the helpful "super-ego" which restrains the effects of the experience in opposing its own authority to the phenomenal authority.

As a result the textual incarnation of the experimental body, which was the aim of the narrative adventure, appears to be a transposition of the experience by means of the image. This transposition is the condition that makes the experience possible, but also that reveals it to be not an experimentation with drugs, but an experimentation with words. It is the experience of expression in general (sustained fictionally and possibly autobiographically by drugs) that Michaux has narrated. More particularly, he describes the experience of the expression, and he feels it to be an experience with persecution: the writer is affected by the destructive impulses which he articulates and which energize his articulation. The persecution within the experience of expression rehabilitates the moment and power of writing. It illustrates the writer's alternate possession and dispossession of himself, his attempt to put an end to the oscillation between thinking and writing mechanisms.

I can then conclude the narrative adventure by a final quotation which synthetizes it in declaring an omnipresent persecution, as a narrative hypothesis and preconception<sup>1</sup> which holds the text up and shapes the experience of the expression. This quotation simultaneously

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. C.L.G. p. 186, footnote 1. "Dans l'état de fermeté diminuée où il est, il serait incapable de faire face à une hostilité déclarée. . . , à une persecution. Il la prévoit, il l'appréhende. Il la préfabrique."

introduces the idea of an imposture which designates the experience represented (that is to say the frightening experience of mental distortion under the influence of drugs or madness) as imaginary and indirect. In fact there is only a textual experience which is passed off as genuine, as an effect of the signs produced by the illusion of an experimental phenomenology.

L'hypothèse à essayer et qui s'imposait dans des circonstances aussi singulières. L'idée générale de persécution l'envahit, vient de toutes parts, véritable idée-carrefour que tout était. Une autre l'accompagne (ou la précède), qu'on pourrait appeler délire d'imposture ou idée générale d'imposture.

C.L.G. p. 186

PART IV

PRACTICAL AND THEORETICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE  
NARRATIVE ADVENTURE FOR MICHAUX'S POETICS

## INTRODUCTION

The results of the various steps of my past analysis lead me now to draw some practical and theoretical conclusions with respect to Henri Michaux's poetics. These conclusions come from the particular example of texts on drug experiences, and explain aspects of Michaux's works in general, because of the specific strategical enterprise of epistemology and phenomenology which the texts at hand constitute.

First, texts on drug experiences appear as strategic tools for the representation of the writing experience, and they are conceived of as the basis of a reflection on the operation of signification. The drug experience in itself is a narrative motive and context which presents itself as a pretext: not only is it presented as the literal pre-text, or pre-textual event, prior to the account which will relate it, but the drug experience appears also as the predominant topic in the books, offered as explanation of the book's policy. It is a pretext in that it is a fictional subterfuge offered as a motive for writing the text, and which ostensibly replaces the true reason. As such we must admit that the drug experience is a plausible pretext; it constitutes the main textual argument which centralizes and motivates narration, and which also coerces the reading although it does not entirely motivate it. The experience of drugs appears actually as the element in terms of which we understand and in terms of which the narration is conducted. It is not a purely fictive and extraneous argument in the text, since the

conclusions provided by the book about mental distortion are probably inspired by what Michaux recalls of his experiences with drugs. At many points, moreover, Michaux's descriptions on drug experimentation support those of other commentators such as Huxley, De Quincey, Ernst Junger.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the argument and specific subject matter which drug experimentation constitutes in the text does not reconstitute this recalled experience which remains exterior to the text, while the account proposes its own and specific experimental version.

The experiences with drugs which the text presents appear to be thematically specific and unique, as proven by the titles of the books which do not directly allude to drugs but more generally to a broad experience of the "interior" under headings such as "Despair," or "Ordeals of the mind." Such headings (including Misérable Miracle whose title exhibits a greater subjective and fictional transposition of the experience alluded to) indicate the general subject matter of the books within which drug appears to be a support, gigantic and omnipresent, yet subordinate to more vast and also more metaphysical a enterprise. This support via drugs may in fact be rejected but the principles it illustrates abide.

Stylistically also, the experience of drugs is connotated in the books which provide the reader not so much with a clinical description of the experience (although this partially occurs also) as with a poetical analysis and decomposition of the effects and aspects of a

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<sup>1</sup>Ernst Jünger, Approches Drogues et Ivresse, (Paris: ed. La Table Ronde, 1973). See also Part I, Chapter I of this dissertation for examples of these similarities.



system of thought.<sup>1</sup> If then the drug experience fictionally and narratively coerces the reading, it does not motivate it entirely, and the reader is fully conscious (and this is also what interests him) that he is reading Michaux's textual, individual, and poetical account of the so-called drug experiences.

The second conclusion that can be made concerning Michaux's poetics in that the experience of drug as a pretext thus justifies the text which narrates it, and sustains the problematic of the persecution which constitutes the main feature of the experience represented. That is to say that it constitutes the narrative model and shape in terms of which the experience of expression is conducted through the text. The drug experience is the narrative form of the general experience of expression which constitutes the "real" topic of the book and which is felt as an experience of persecution. It is the image or figure which gives body to the metaphysical and imaginary experience of expression.

Third, the general enterprise of the book consists of a poetics of the decomposition and recomposition of the process of signification, and also in a narrative as well as literary return to the internal sources of individual thoughts and signs. With respect to this general enterprise, the experience of drugs appears as an internal unit of signification, as a useful narrative myth. It is a myth as a narrative that presents part of the textual beliefs and explains the textual practice and phenomenon, (that is to say the textual experience of the

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<sup>1</sup>Poetic discourse is in Paul de Man's words, "the most advanced and refined mode of deconstruction." Cf. "Semiology and Rhetoric," Diacritics 3:3 (1973).

expression). It is a myth also in that it is imaginary or at least unverifiable, as a fanciful explanation textually held to be true but utterly without facts, all the more so as it turns to be absent, impossible to capture or to explain.<sup>1</sup>

Yet it is a useful myth, an internal unit of significations, which serves to hide and to replace another myth, that is to say the myth of the interior, and the myth of the expression of the interior. The inside is a myth in that it cannot be expressed, that is to say made exterior by means of words, without being utterly betrayed and destroyed as an interior. Michaux represents the interior and language or two orders as two separate elements which he would like to, but does not know how to, relate; the interior experience is seen as an immaterial "fire" and the verbal articulation as "earth": "Ce qui vaut pour le feu, comment s'y prendre pour qu'il vaille aussi pour la terre?" (G.E.E. p. 126) The internal world in Michaux's books is experienced as a region or "terrain"<sup>2</sup> which cannot be predicated as a piece of chalk, as a concrete

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<sup>1</sup>This system of an absent presence is frequent in Michaux's works. Ecuador for example (cf. Ecuador, (Paris: Gallimard, 1968)) consists of the diary of a trip along the Amazon River and states the situation of strangeness which the traveller experiences (and which is analogous to the persecution experienced in texts on drugs). This strangeness is in fact presented as the extrinsic character of the language used in the interior trip conducted through writing. The Amazon is the textual image given to the linguistic space sought after. At the end of the diary, the poet declares the failure of his attempt at reaching a new language or at internalizing language which remains extraneous. He states it through the following words which simultaneously establish the conscious presence of a phenomenon and its linguistic, verbal absence, its lack of reality: "Mais où est donc l'Amazone?...Je n'ai donc pas vu l'Amazone. Je n'en parlerai donc pas." Ecuador, *ibid*, p. 169.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Henri Michaux, Mes propriétés (1929), in L'Espace Du Dedans, (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), pp. 42-43. The individuality is portrayed as one's belongings, properties, as a land to investigate. "Mon Terrain... Il y a mon terrain et moi; puis il y a l'étranger."

object. Conversely, it is presented as a pre-predicative ground open to representative language and determined by an horizon of relational structures (mainly oscillation, and obliteration). The relational structures experienced constitute the worldliness of the internal world but they cannot be directly portrayed. Michaux suggests that this matrix of relation does not have the character of objects, but he displaces it, and portrays it as textual objects or quasi objects, (when he features them he objectifies them within the articulated structure of writing). The internal world appears as something unsayable, and which should be exhibited in a way of its own. This is attempted through the illusion of a phenomenology which constitutes a kind of meditative and tentative figuration through which Michaux still makes clear to the reader that thereby they (that is to say Michaux and the reader) have come to confront something ineffable, elusive and not entirely reducible to its sign in articulated language.

Finally the task of grasping the interior is displaced onto the task of depicting the tentative capture of the interior: this second task or topic is sustained by the narrative image of drug experiences which allow the coloration and thus the revelation of the writing act.<sup>1</sup> The specific coloration allowed by the drug experience is the mental distortion and its textual correlate in persecution which gives body to

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<sup>1</sup>I speak of coloration and revelation in the same way that a chemical colorant is used to color the water of some river in order to trace its itinerary when it becomes subterranean. The coloration enables one to distinguish within the resurgent water, the water that comes from the initial river and the waters which it has joined in the course of its evolution.

the experience of expression. First as a revealer it allows the distinction between writing as the object of the narrative analysis, and writing as the means of this analysis. Thus embellished and embodied, the experience of the expression appears as a tormented and disturbed expression in which there is a disjunction between the intentions of meaning and the linguistic form which articulates these intentions.<sup>1</sup> The experience of drugs is the motive of the saga of the writer's enterprise; it exhibits the separation between the intentions of meaning (seen as "thoughts" in Michaux's books) and their linguistic forms, and it institutionalizes this separation as a principled disagreement. The drug experience then affords the epistemology of the expression, its analysis and decomposition. To summarize the results of this narrative process, I can say that the drug experience is an ostensible yet not delusive tool used to embody the image of an internal experience. The system of indirect transmission through which the interior is shown as bound up with another situation ( that of mental distortion as figured by the drug experience) is not totally alien to the interior, to its essential nature. There is a possible, although hazardous identification between the interior and the drug experience or between the state of mind implied by writing (seen as a search for an adequation between thoughts and words) and the state of mental

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<sup>1</sup>I borrow this descriptive definition of the persecution experienced by the expression from Laurent Jenny, "Poétique et Terreur," Lecture, Columbia University, Maison Française, April 6, 1983.

distortion.<sup>1</sup> Michaux's texts on drugs therefore constitute a reevaluation of the accepted idea that poetry is a codified equivalent of the state of dreaming or of hallucination.

In a fourth cluster of comments, I will focus on the text's disposition which makes language visible. In Michaux's books, the attempt is made to bring the writer into a peculiar sort of encounter with himself through which his concern can be focused in the direction of the internal world. More particularly the program consists of bringing the interior to a proper formulation. But the interior (seen as the thinking process) is also the basis of the articulation. Hence the writer is presented as the individual who expresses the intelligibility of the inside in language. Since the means of this expression cannot be any one, but only a word motivated from the inside, the text creates a specific internal (and textual) context through which it presents itself as a kind of primitive language: half embedded in the mental processes it draws them out and is simultaneously an authentic translation of them. The internal world remains therefore

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<sup>1</sup>I call it hazardous because it is unverifiable. Normality maintains us in relation to the external world, and prevents us from reaching the purely interior. Conversely, mental distortion deprives us of relations to the outside. We are therefore never in the position to compare both stages simultaneously and the textual reconstruction of this possibility remains a metaphorical approximation. We can only work toward the remembrance of such experiences, and create analogies, or work toward the comparison between various comments made about internal experiences by sane or insane researchers. The relation between the interior in general, and the interior revealed by the drug experience, as well as the relation between poetic writing and a preconscious, pre-verbal state of nakedness, thus appears as a plausible hypothesis and simultaneously as a metaphorical effect of discourse.

contingent upon language<sup>1</sup> which clears and conceals it: it clears it as its articulation, it conceals it since the means of this articulation is an indirect mediation. However this articulation is at least an establishment of the interior which at the same time provides a reflexion about the why and how of language. The narrative phenomenology provides a kind of encyclopedia of the writing acts through which the thoughts become perceptible as gestures. Between a quasi-scientific approach and a poetical approach to the mental phenomenon, the books interrogate the esthetic aspect of the thought which underlies the book's esthetic activity. From the alleged original drug experience little remains but the diversity of its tentative apprehensions. Through such apprehensions the reader is made to perceive the texture of the sentences, the energy necessary to their elaboration; the reader is shown "l'insignifiance des constructions de l'esprit" (G.E.E. p. 204). As a result of this representation, "on sait ce que coûtent les

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<sup>1</sup>We have indeed seen that the metaphor was essentially a contextual change and production of meaning which had to be studied in relation to and as an integral part of the text in which it appeared. According to this aspect, metaphors in Michaux's books meet Paul Ricoeur's conception of "La métaphore vive" seen as a whole semantic event within a broad context including "considerations on what constitutes discourse, conditions of intelligibility and interpretation." Paul Ricoeur, La Métaphore vive, (Paris: Seuil, 1975). If the whole context is necessary to arrive at the proper meaning, does it not mean that the particular motivation of language upon which the internal meaning depends, is more generally a textual process of articulation, and the specific conditions of its production? I am referring to the system of reference from a signifier to another signifier which Michael Riffaterre defines as a relation of over determination which "donne l'illusion que l'arbitraire du signe est diminué." Michael Riffaterre, La Production du texte, op. cit., p. 46. See also comments on Paul Ricoeur's book, by Inge Crosman, The status of metaphoric Discourse: Paul Ricoeur. "La Métaphore vive," in Romanic Review, vol. XVIII no. 3, May 1977, p 207.

pensées."<sup>1</sup>

The narration in fact alternately incarnates and dissolves the "parole," that is to say the represented act and linguistic behavior of the individual narrator. More particularly the narration provides a figuration of what Saussure calls "le circuit de la parole"<sup>2</sup> (the circuit of speech), that is to say the system of relations existing from a psychic event to its physical or physiological impact, and to its execution by the individual; that is to say also, from a mental stimulation, to its articulation as a thought, and its communication through the mouth or, here, the pen of the writer-speaker. The example of writing-releases and word-releases has illustrated this textual manipulation as the means of figuring, within writing, the failure of the linguistic act and the situation that conditions its failure. Thus, the narration allows a textualization of the alleged mental experience seen as governing a writing experience, within the intimacy of inscription which then appeared as an extension of the thought. Michaux, on the basis of this double experience, elaborates a language by means of which he would recapture former experiences or grasps for the first time new experiences of fundamental significance, such as the mental experience.

Michaux's problematic in texts on drug experiences seems therefore to be a narrative analysis of the position of the writing-act. The act of writing appears as medium and as a kind of associationism

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<sup>1</sup>Claude Mouchard, "La pensée expérimentale de Henri Michaux," in Critique, Octobre 1973, no. 317.

<sup>2</sup>Ferdinand de Saussure, Cours de Linguistique Générale, (Paris: Payot), 1976, pp. 27-30.

between a corporeal space<sup>1</sup> and a semantic space, but whose relations are disturbed. Michaux's texts conduct an analysis of the resistance and tensions encountered by the act of writing in the course of its utilization, and he considers this resistance as tests and tokens indicating the structure of verbal communication. The overdetermination and narrative emphasis which the resistance constitutes make possible the depiction of what Michaux views as the structure and attributes of the act of speech in poetry and literature. In the following pages, I shall develop these views according to three main perspectives, which seem to me to define the contribution of texts on drug experiences onto Henri Michaux's general poetics.

The two aspects (body and sign, or body and code) of the act of speech, its dual articulation (which I will show) to both sides of the process of articulation and communication, is clearly stated in the narrative adventure: the narration constantly underlines and tries to solve the paradox of being the objective communication<sup>2</sup> of a subjective experience. At other times, the same narration abandons the idea of questioning this paradox, and reduces the dissociation and resistance by conversely stating the duality as a textual system, as a model which the text institutionalizes.

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<sup>1</sup>I call "corporeal space" or "body" what I have previously interpreted as "experimental body" and which I am now able to identify as the structure of the internal representations which take the body as the object and place of their anchorage.

<sup>2</sup>Objective because it uses the language and linguistic rules of collective and public communication in order to be understood by the reader.



In that case the paradoxical and transitional character of writing is recognized and accepted as is.

As a result of this recognition, a second textual perspective and practice is made possible wherein the experience functions as a verbal dynamic sustaining the textual style and productivity or rather its "poietic."

The "Drug experience" is indeed the source of verbal innovations sustaining the alleged transposition from a first sensuous notation into a legible text. In this text indeed, the mobile writer is only perceived through his relation to the account he is able to provide, through the status of his discourse. His perturbation is depicted in terms of "style" and originality, lost or recovered, depending on the various aspects attributed to the experience. The experience represented in the books is structured like a text which the account submits to various types of analysis--thematic, grammatical, stylistic or sequential. Moreover, the text builds a system of illusionism or a structuring "Trompe l'oeil," in perspective which conveys, by means of margins, paratexts, narrative objects and even some aspects of concrete poetry, the impression of a "vécu." The text then appears as a hermeneutical phenomenology which pretends to relate a thought to a word while in fact, by means of narrative semiotics, it only relates one word to another, one signifier to another signifier.

The last aspect of this poetics of experience, which is also a poetics of the expression, consists of elaborating the hypothesis of a new language at work in the text. This new language appears as a language of thought and is presented as the internal and necessary

motivation of the textual language. I shall synthesize the aspects of this language and ask whether it can really be called a language or rather a code. I shall question the independence of this language with respect to poetic language in general, and try to determine its influence. The alleged language of thought will conclusively appear as a private dimension given to the language of the text, in order for the former to be an authentic instrument accounting for the interior. The language of thought will be seen within Michaux's texts as the hypostasis of poetic language.

## CHAPTER I

### THE WORD, THE ACT OF SPEECH, AND THE TWO POLES OF EXPRESSION

The narrative play on two aspects of writing (writing as the object and writing as the instrument of the narrative discussion) provides Michaux with a frame for representing language. The theoretical value of this enterprise remains that of a metaphorical enterprise, since Michaux does not separate here the question of the origin of writing from the question of the origin of language. Michaux's analysis takes it for granted that language seen through writing is language in general. The act of writing is not seen as a specific use of language but rather as the condition that best reveals the nature of the sign and its relation to the internal signified. Thus the text's discourse is guaranteed as the means of an authentic revelation of the internal world. Indeed the text is presented in the evocational perspective of the internal world, and is seen as equally literal and representational since it is the way through which the unsayable can be at best formulated and produced. For this reason Michaux's systemization of the experience of expression takes place within a pseudo-theoretical context of destruction and reconstruction of its own linguistic motivation.

A. Establishment of a Pseudo-Theoretical Context: The essential "Unsaid"

The pseudo-theoretical context is established through a process of negation. The authentication of the poetic discourse or rather of the textual writing act is achieved by denying the linguistic conditions and modalities on which, however, it rests. That is to say that the process of reconstruction is both limited and conveyed through its converse aspect as a decomposition. The assertion of an authentic (poetic) discourse that would voice the internal world in a straight-forward manner (rather than be employed for its representation), is indirectly conveyed through the judgment of incommensurateness pronounced upon language and words in general.<sup>1</sup> Yet the fact that language in general is the means of testing itself indicates that there may be a hope and a way of reconstituting it (on the basis of the internal world evoked), of recreating an authentic link between internal thoughts or sensations and words. The decomposition is in effect the means of asking and possibly discovering how the representational word within authentic discourse differs from that of general representational language.

In a short passage of Les Grandes Epreuves de L'Esprit (pp. 47-50) Michaux presents the situation of writing as the "suspension of being

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<sup>1</sup>The doubt about language, theoretically established in texts on drugs, is practically exhibited in other of Michaux's works as the basis of their writing system and thematics. In Ecuador for example (Paris: Gallimard, 1968) Michaux refuses language as an exoticism which appears to him to be the cause of strangeness and individual relinquishment. In Emergences-Résurgences (Genève: Skira, 1972) Michaux accounts for an attempt to unlearn language through painting: "né, élevé, instruit dans un milieu et une culture uniquement du "verbal", je peins pour me déconditionner" (ibid, p. 9).

upright,"<sup>1</sup> as a defiant uprising against strict obedience to a verbal code of behavior. He actually describes himself as a feeble-minded person, whose feeble-mindedness is however limited to the category of words: "imbecile en mots" (G.E.E. p. 47).

Devenu imbécile en mots, il est vrai que je ne saisissais plus bien l'ensemble, ce particulier ensemble idées-phrase, moi je saisissais bien d'autres ensembles, des ensembles que la phrase, eût-elle été parfaite, ne pouvait pas rendre, inhabituée à ce genre d'extraordinaire et que l'esprit percevait sans pouvoir s'en emparer.

G.E.E. pp. 47-48

In this quotation writing is pointed out, as if from within. Through the expression "imbécile en mots," Michaux suggests that the mind and its apprehension is not subordinated to writing and that the link between the mind and writing can be erased. The quotation describes a displacement of the focalization from writing, (seen as the constituted association of ideas, to sentences "l'ensemble idées-phrases"), to another unit of signification, which Michaux does not define. They appear to be subdeterminations which below writing, organize the apprehension of the internal situation. Further on in the paragraph, Michaux identifies the space (where they occur) as that of the "mental." "...j'étais tout mental, ne vivant que de mental, interesse uniquement de mental et meme separe de tout ce qui n'est pas mental." (G.E.E. p. 48) The "holding at a distance" of writing ("je ne saisissais plus bien l'ensemble idées-phrases") is presented not so much

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, translation by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 332, note 31.

as the sign of a feeble-mindedness as the sign of another aptitude. The writer presents himself not as the one who writes, but as the one who subtracts his language from its extension in writing. The exteriority of writing regarding the mind is an illusory effect of the self-reflexive text, which in fact refers to an exteriority of the mind to writing. Yet whether this exteriorisation is conveyed outright or by means of a textual bias, it still implicitly conveys the notion of an instrumentality of writing. Through the expression "l'ensemble idées-phrases," and through the suggestion that the sentence is "inhabituée à ce genre d'extraordinaire" (that is to say, not accustomed to the type of representation which mental situations sometimes require), Michaux conveys the idea of a technical, prearranged or pre-determined use of writing.<sup>1</sup> Writing is presented as the means of articulating more common and more exterior situations. Moreover, writing appears as an instrument extending a subjective "language," rather than constituting it. The first quotation in fact, indicates a distinction between the sentence and "L'esprit," or the mind. It presents the mind as the space which conceives, as an unarticulated language which the sentence would (and normally does) realize and extend. Here the suspension of the "being-upright" position of the writer, disconnects the sentence from the mind, the means of an exteriorization of meaning from the means of its internal elaboration (the mind--"L'esprit percevait sans pouvoir s'en emparer"). For Michaux

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<sup>1</sup>Which refers to a pre-determined use of language in general: "Immense préfabriqué qui se passe de génération en génération, la langue." Emergences-Résurgences, p. 18.

the written signifier or sentence is a representative instrument; it takes its meaning from a former signified which itself is a kind of primary signifier in the form of a perception, or "feeling of the mind."<sup>1</sup>

The conception of writing as instrument is a way for Michaux to conceive of a language, seen not as outside language, but as an encounter of the subject with himself below the level of his articulation and exteriorization by writing.<sup>2</sup> This underlying level is presented in comparison, and in reference to writing in general. Writing is the norm with respect to which the prior level of the signifier can be defined. As such Michaux's presentation complies with a Lacanian theory of an ex-centered and displaced subject of discourse.<sup>3</sup> Michaux here presents himself as thinking ("dans le mental"). Thinking is underlined as his (true) discourse, while, the sentence appears as an independent act of discourse, as an "it" that accounts ("La phrase rend") The account which (the sentence) "it" provides is judged

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<sup>1</sup>This expression is borrowed from Jacques Derrida, op. cit. p. 11. Jacques Derrida mentions that the feeling of the mind is however not the most internal signifier, and it is not the closest to the signified. We saw previously in the narrative adventure, and even before in the writing-compound constituted by the text-footnote relation, that the "voice," as an illusion of phonocentrism, had a relation of mechanistic and immediate proximity to the mind, although it was already a translation and not a natural signification of the mind.

<sup>2</sup>For Michaux that is a betrayal since writing is presented as a static immobile process of articulation, which does not follow the displacement of the subjectivity, or rather its internalization.

<sup>3</sup>The "ça" which truly speaks is opposed to the "je" of the imaginary discourse; see Jacques Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," in Ecrits, op. cit., pp. 90-91.

inadequate: it does not grasp the internal situation and, it even conveys a false image of the writer's situation. The situation of the text, the self-reflection and illusory critical distancing which the text figures hides the conflictual situation: that of denying sentences through sentences, and of denying their meaning within the context of this articulation. Michaux indeed refers to the sentence and the words written, without quoting them. He imagines an internal reader of those sentences, and opposes two levels of understanding: the mediocre level of the average reader "n'importe quel lecteur" (G.E.E. p. 67), "...le premier venu aux idées" (G.E.E. p. 68), and the level of the writer who afterwards comments upon the sentence. The reader of the book is implicitly guided on the right track, that of the writer's understanding. In fact the qualifications attached to the imaginary reader dissuade the real reader from adhering to similar opinions, and thus they justify the writer's sayings. The imaginary reader, according to Michaux, would interpret the writer's inaptitude for formulating ideas as a sign of an absence of ideas: "N'aboutissant qu'à du galimatias, j'aurais passé pour confus, et coupé du mental.." (G.E.E. p. 48) The disturbed sentence would appear as the symptom of a deeper mental diminution. "...j'eusse paru au moins singulièrement diminué." (G.E.E. p. 49) To this superficial reading, Michaux opposes a "real" reading: "tandis que je me sentais plutôt ramené - comment dire?- au milieu même de mon être." (G.E.E. p. 49) Both quotations exhibit a system of opposition between a "being" and an "appearing to be." Writing is represented as the space of the "appearance," while the space beneath writing is presented as that of "being." This being however is grasped



only in comparison to and in opposition to its appearance; that is to say that being here is still dependent on its trace. The semi-dependence experienced is suggested by the interpolated clause, "comment dire?" which inserts, as if by a direct intervention of the writer, the doubt previously asserted about the ability of writing to grasp being. Simultaneously the "comment dire" expresses the approximate character of the statement it precedes "ramené au milieu de mon être." Being therefore appears as the textual feeling of an absent presence (absent but for its textual image). The writer in fact pretends that by withdrawing from the words he invests another space, that of the "Essence." The definition of the "Essence" follows the pattern of determination of "Being ": the decomposition of the group of words (which bear the "Essence") sustains the implicit reconstruction of the "Essence."

First, the decomposition consists of asserting that the distortion of normal faculties constitutes a reinforcement of the internal self definition, and that reciprocally normal faculties prevent the perception of the internal Essence. (See G.E.E. p. 50) Second, the essence receives a minimalist and restrictive, rather than positive definition. The essence is presented as what remains when the dimension of the other, and its norm has been removed.

L'essence: ce qui reste quand on n' a plus à se  
baisser, à s'employer, à fonctionner, à se rendre  
défini, particulier, petit. G.E.E. p. 50

The series of determinations, (whose denial allows the affirmation of the essence) designates the behavioral performance of a subject related to the other scene and thus compromising his autarchic presence to himself.<sup>1</sup> I notice in these series the pejorative connotation attached to the attitudes mentioned, and the absence of a converse and specific internal determination. This metaphysical approach is developed not so much for the sake of itself as to constitute a pseudo-philosophical frame for the text's poetic discourse. The decomposition is the frame through which the text's poetic discourse is presented as an authentic revelation of the internal world.<sup>2</sup> How is it authentic? First because it is only an evocation (as opposed to an assertion), second because it is presentational (rather than representational), and third because it is an enlightening process of revelation (as opposed to a demonstration). We have seen how it was an evocation as opposed to an assertion, in the fact that being was not asserted, but suggested in comparison and opposition to an assertion. Then it is presentational rather than representational, since the being produced receives no literal formulation, but is imposed as a presence. The saying of the

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<sup>1</sup>Language is part of this behavior: "Langage pour condamner a suivre, à être fidèle, qui pousse à montrer un important standing." Emergences Résurgences, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>2</sup>With respect to the distinction between language as an instrument related to the world, used for practical means, and the Essence seen as the cessation of the subservience, Michaux joins Mallarmé's view of two states of language in Crise de Vers. Besides, this conception of language rests for both of them on a metaphysical experience of the internal world, and they tend toward the identification of the word and the internal space seen as a nothingness or an absence, or a negation which poetry would suggest, reveal and enclose.

text is presented as a showing, in that it gives the mental situation a form before the eyes of the reader. Finally it gives form to the mental situation through a process of enlightening revelation, as seen in the last paragraph of the passage we have looked at: "Ce fut comme si en vision intérieure j'étais mis soudain en présence d'une grande, très grande sphère." (G.E.E. p. 50) The revelation in this quotation is presented as the sudden sight (within the circuit of the text) of an internal space (which Michaux then decomposes as I will show in part C of this chapter). The text here is the linear frame of apparition of a non-linear, internal structure. Michaux wants to document this structure as the space of the non-simultaneity of internal feeling and the word. He therefore insists on its pluri-dimensionality.<sup>1</sup> Yet, when it comes to analyzing the functioning of the sphere mentioned, I shall show that it reduces to a bi-dimensional, quasi-linear system of writing. The presence of the internal world before the external, remains textually an "as if," "comme si en vision intérieure." (G.E.E. p. 50) Yet this "as if" is the last touch of the authentication of the poetic discourse, which seems to limit its performance on the model of the internal writing. Thus poetic discourse presents itself as

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<sup>1</sup>The sphere of G.E.E. rejoins the rebus of Ecuador, or the ideogram "ascèse de l'immediat de l'eclair" in Idéogrammes en Chine, ed. fata Morgana, or other examples in Michaux's works (and even the poem in C.L.G.) of pictography, or ideography; those attempts to separate thought from linear writing can be gathered under the generic term of "mythogram," that is to say a writing that spells its symbol pluri-dimensionally. The word "mythogram" moreover suggests another level of experience, as well as a mythical system of representation, thus closer to that of the unconscious. See "Mythogram" in Leroi-Gourhan's terms, quoted by Derrida, Of Grammatology, op. cit., p. 85.

internally motivated and logocentric uprising. The poetic discourse functions as a kind of generative poetics aimed at the structural description of the hidden (internal) part of the signifying chain. At the same time it presents this structure as a process on which the text is based, that is to say that the poetic discourse appears as a pseudo-generative poetics which engenders and traces its structural process and the system of its realization while apparently intending to decipher it.

The pseudo-theoretical and pseudo-phenomenological contexts created in the text as its literal frame of reference constitute the textual illusion of generative poetics: the text produces its own selective features to explain its own particularities. First, the production of a selective feature, as we saw it, is based on a simple reversal: the exterior point of view, according to which the poor writing and articulating performance denotes a deeper feeble-mindedness, is reversed, and becomes an interior point of view and criterion according to which it is writing that is a limited, weak and inappropriate instrument of the subjectivity. The measure of the acceptability of a statement remains, but its norm of reference changes from exterior and general to interior and individual.

Second the text engenders its own taxonomic system and suggests a kind of intuitive competence.<sup>1</sup> This competence (such as the definition

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<sup>1</sup>The notion of an intuitive poetic competence sustaining our intuitions about poetry still implies the taking into consideration of the text, of the means through which it restitutes or shadows the elements, the specific linguistic traits which accompany this competence. This problematic balance between an intuitive, implicit, competence and its textual reflective correspondent in performance, is  
(Continued)

of the Essence) is only barely sketched and outlined so as to appear intuitive. Yet without this sketch the reader would not possess this intuitive competence and would therefore not understand the specificity of the textual performance, nor verify, through his reading, the efficacy of the poetic mimesis.<sup>1</sup> I showed how the writer's introduction of a mediocre reader in the narration (in G.E.E. p. 50) was a way of providing the real reader with the "right" competence, and of leading him towards the "right" or rather the desired interpretation.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, and with respect to its formal narrative level, the text appears to be a performance that is effected on the prior basis of a self-provided, and self-managed competence.<sup>3</sup>

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(Continued)

mentioned in the following quotation where Delas balances Levin's conception of the poetical competence (1). See Daniel Delas, in Daniel Delas et Jean Jacques Thomas, *Poétique generative, Langages*, Sept. 1978, 51, p. 94:

"Notre compétence poétique nous permet de postuler la présence d'éléments manquants, absents de la forme superficielle du texte mais implicites dans la structure sous jacente: comment ensuite comprenons-nous réellement le texte! C'est une autre affaire. Levin se contente de dire que ce constat initial fonde linguistiquement le jugement de poéticité.... Il est toutefois evident que le problème de la restitution effective (en performance) de ces éléments manquants subsiste, qu'il engage le texte (poétique) dans son entier et appelle une théorie de celui-ci."

<sup>1</sup>That is to say its aptitude for being both a structural description and a performative process of the internal reality.

<sup>2</sup>Yet, the narrative techniques are not the only way through which a intuitive and poetical competence is educed. It is only an obvious marker of the fact that the whole text is engaged in the constitution of its competence.

<sup>3</sup>This does not exclude phenomena such as intertextuality; on the contrary the phenomena of conscious or unconscious intertextuality (between various levels of language, and between the idiolect of the text and the general sociolectic competence) are part of this textual system of a linguistic manipulation.

This self managed competence and the essential "unsaid" it suggests can be observed through the system of denomination used for the mental world. Throughout texts on drug experimentation the mental phenomenon receives various denominations, either metaphorical ("le fleuve tourmenteur") or pseudo-phenomenological ("le "phénomène"). Either it is a generalization ("univers") or it is a minimalist view of the writer's state of perturbation ("enfoncé"). Those definitions are part of the general metaphorical taxonomy of the text where they appear as a series of invariants. The word "phenomenon" is constantly used in the text and being overused it acquires a validity as an objective event. The word "univers," is sufficiently vague to be an intrinsic denomination of the mental space or world. The impossibility of saying more about this internal, ungraspable universe, makes it necessary to appeal to a spatial metaphor. This use is not specific to the text, but occurs also in ordinary language, so that the sociolect generally speaking constitutes the norm and designates the signifier "univers" as an invariant, characterizing, in an abstract and vague way, the mental structure.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the word "univers" is not specific to the mental world; it denotes the entire system of created things and physical phenomena (regarded as a unit in its arrangement), or any entire system of phenomenal items as perceived by limited human vision. The signifier "fleuve tourmenteur" constitutes a third type of invariant, in referring to the general metaphorical network of the books. Constantly throughout his accounts Michaux uses the metaphor of the "fleuve" (river) of the "rue" (street) of the "defile," (seen as procession or as succession of mountains) or "sierra," of the maelstrom. This metaphorical networking

is imposed by the text as its norm: it concurs with the textual coherence, and imposes at least the image of a referential unity.

Finally, the adjective "enfonce" is one among several analogous approximations (cf. "nageur," "plongeur," "bouscule," "depasse," "bouleverse" . . . ). They constitute the writer's perception of his mental situation and are often related to the notion of aphasia or speech distortion. The extensive use of the terms previously mentioned imposes them as a definitional norm. Besides, being metaphorical these invariants present the mental phenomenon as unsayable except for its textual approximation.

#### B. Michaux's Presentation of the Internal Expression's Bi-Polarity.

Let us now, after this theoretical adjustment, come to the structural models of the signification process which the text produces.

Throughout texts on drug experimentation the signification process, as observed within the specific circumstances of mental distortion, receives various representations. Generally speaking they all depict it as a single system of two poles or two tendencies. Their agreement and

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<sup>1</sup>See Jean Francois le Ny, "Semantique et Psychologie," in Problèmes de Sémantique psychologique, Langages, Décembre 1975, 40, p. 13: "On doit certes être conscient du caractère relativement trompeur des métaphores auxquelles la description de ces réalités psychologiques entraîne plus ou moins inévitablement, telles que celles liées à l'emploi de "stock," d'"être contenues dans la mémoire," et en general de tous les termes à référence spatiale; dans l'esprit des chercheurs qui les utilisent, ces métaphores n'impliquent aucune sorte d'hypothèse neuropsychologique, c'est à dire neuro-atomique, concernant une quelconque correspondance de ces unités avec des structures nerveuses localisables. Il s'agit au contraire d'une façon de caractériser aussi abstraitement que possible la composante perceptivo- articulatoire des vocabulaires individuels."

harmonious combination constitutes the unity of the expression and signification process, while their disagreement constitutes cases of verbal pathology and confusionism. The representation of this linguistic bi-polarity varies depending on the narrative perspective adopted.

The bi-polarity is hypothesized as a succession of polarizations and depolarizations (C.L.G. p. 29) which Michaux does not define. Rather he glosses it in the books as "oscillation dans les idées, les désirs" (C.L.G. p. 27), as an internal movement of alternation between moments of focalization and moments of derealization of the perception. The expression's bi-polarity can be seen as a whole as a "Tennis des synonymes" (C.L.G. p. 95), or as a "chaîne," (chain, C.L.G. p. 126) or assembly line in which link after link ("anneau") the thought is related to language. The expression "Tennis des synonymes," depicts a bi-partite structure wherein the two parts are distinguished and yet respond to each other just as words which have very nearly the same meaning would do in the same language. The notion of a chain is mentioned by Michaux, but as a whole which, at the precise narrative point where it occurs, cannot be grasped, except for one of its links being more striking than the others.

Je ne pouvais voir la chaîne entière, . . . chaîne dont les anneaux apparaissent séparés, inattendus, de nature inégale, dissemblable, et dont on ne voit jamais qu'un à la fois (quand on le voit), un seul et frappant. C.L.G. p. 126

The line is observed in a passage where Michaux tries to systematize and reshape the experience of expression in order to integrate it within a



broader understanding of writing. The concept of line is used to model the experience of expression although the perception of the line is denied, (or at least its perception as a homogeneous concept is denied). The text insist rather on the fact that the line within the pluri-dimensionality of the internal or mental sphere appears as a long and vast scale which escapes the structuration attempt. This suggests that the poetical discourse casts aside the modalities of its own real system of articulation in order to investigate another space and state: the state of regression, and of the impossibility of communicating. The partial visualization of the line situates Michaux's views of the bipolarity of language between Jakobson's and Lacan's theory. In "Two Aspects of Language and Two types of Aphasic Disturbances" Jakobson derives his distinction between metaphor and metonymy from a differentiation of two linguistic faculties, selection and combination.<sup>1</sup> He derives this difference from the observations of speech disorders, but he declares that it is intrinsic to the symbolic order itself. I will not discuss Jakobson's assertion here but simply notice the analogy between Jakobson's and Michaux's attempt. Michaux's enterprise (and this difference is important) is made within the circumstances of literary communication, while Jakobson extends his concept of separatism (between syntax and paradigm, contiguity and similarity) to the whole

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<sup>1</sup>See Roman Jakobson, "Deux aspects du langage, Deux types d'aphasie," in Essais de Linguistique, T.I., (Paris: Minuit, 1965). We will discuss the two linguistic faculties defined by Jakobson later, in the last part of this conclusion.

symbolic order "whether it be intrasubjective or social."<sup>1</sup> We are tempted to doubt whether social communication really exhibits those two fundamental poles of language. I would rather think that ordinary language is polysemic and plays on a multiplicity of codes, but that it tries to "reduce the polysemic potential to an unambiguous single meaning."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, if ordinary language is a play on metonymical and metaphorical meaning, I think that this play is fixed mainly as a stereotype within the subject before it enters the articulation process. Yet, as far as literary language is concerned, and more particularly as far as Michaux's work is concerned (as an example of poetical discourse, similar, in that it investigates and depicts them, to cases of speech disorders), Jakobson's theory is confirmed: the oscillation seen in the narrative adventure, the metonymic and metaphorical system of the subjective definition confirms (at least through a rhetorical reconstruction of the experience of expression) the Jakobsonian theory of two poles. With this theory, moreover, Michaux concurs in presenting the internal code as evolving and deriving along a line, a single axis or scale of language.<sup>3</sup> Yet, the play and separation between the two poles in Jakobson's theory also implies an exclusion of the one to the other; they cannot coexist, and this exclusivity is probably based, in Jakobson's theory, on the observation of ordinary language, and on the

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<sup>1</sup>Jakobson, *ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup>Maria Ruegg, Metaphor and Metonymy, *op. cit.* p. 147.

<sup>3</sup>We will develop the comparison and the discrepancy of Michaux's view as regards Jakobson's theory when we present Michaux's model of the two poles.

reduction of the ambivalence it requires. Conversely (in Michaux's works), the absence of a referent exterior to the message, the role of contextual determination in the use and constitution of figures, and the fact that the text is the process of the structure which it depicts, are among the aspects which allow the co-existence and co-presentation of the two poles. In this respect Michaux's narrative presentation joins Lacan's theory wherein two superimposed axes allow the co-existence and non-exclusivity of the two forms of discourse. However there is not necessarily a good balance between them; (Lacan indeed insists that the metaphor has a paternal function which guarantees meaning and direction, although it is a meaning in absentia).

In his own narrative and poetical theory Michaux sometimes emphasizes the oscillation between two poles, which co-exist, and cannot be reduced to each other. At other times he emphasizes a monistic view of the experience of expression, where one pole or one form of language expands and covers the other. Generally speaking, in texts on drug experimentation Michaux elaborates an analysis of the system of alternate "erasing" which governs the textual (poetical) performance.<sup>1</sup> More particularly Michaux plays on a postulate which is made the

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<sup>1</sup>I refer through the word "effacement" or "erasing," to the general aspect seen in the narrative adventure of the alternate effacement of words or of thoughts and meaning. I also refer to a broader theory of "effacements" or ellipsis in (generative) poetics as illustrated in Daniel Delas et Jean Jacques Thomas, *Poétique generative*, op. cit. pp. 94-104: See "L'ellipse poétique est fondée sur des effacements linguistiques non récupérables. L'analyse de la densité en poésie" (S.R. Levin, *Foundation of language* 7, 1971, 38.55). See Also "L'effacement et son role dans l'analyse grammaticale" in Katz et Postal (1964, pp. 79-81), and Ohmann, R. 1964, "Generative Grammar and the Concept of Literary Style" *Word* 20-3, pp. 423-439).

starting point in the textual chain of reasoning and systematizing the internal grammar. He assumes that the internal grammar and the speaker fuse in the writer's aptitude for interpreting sentences. This postulate implies the necessity of taking into consideration the textual restitution of the poetic competence. The text indeed appears to be the illustrative process of the structure it depicts. The double-binding of the experience of expression between internal thought and external word is revealed in the interpretative analysis provided in the book. Conversely, the narrative passages insist on the hierarchized, monistic aspect of the system (where words are said to be erased by thoughts and internal phenomena).<sup>1</sup> Both concur in Michaux's systematization: when Michaux indicates in the analysis (such as in a passage of G.E.E. pp. 50-51 which I will discuss in more depth) the phenomena which, he says, motivate and make explicit the expressive adventure, he does not add something to the reader's understanding of it. He rather contributes to justifying his poetical discourse and the reader's impression of its density. He explains it in revealing structures that are necessary to the interpretation of the expression experience: they are specific to poetry and to the internal situations on which poetic language (or at least its specific performance in texts) is said to be based.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See C.L.G. p. 28. "Seul, Le résultat final est de l'ambivalence, mais jamais les deux impulsions ne paraissent ensemble en un tableau les contenant toutes deux, en un mélange harmonieux ou inharmonieux. Il semble que cela soit impossible, contre nature."

<sup>2</sup>"Pour qu'une analyse linguistique explique une impression poétique de densité, elle doit révéler soit des structures spécifiques à la poésie, soit des structures révélant des propriétés que les rendent insolites de par la façon dont elles correspondent aux règles de la grammaire" Daniel Delas, op. cit. p. 96.

These structures consist of the represented system of alternation which governs the relation between the thought and its verbal articulation. The difference between Michaux's formulation of this system and a theoretical analysis lies not in the clarity of the observation. It lies first in the status given to such representation. The text is not the space of a true definition but rather of a possible or imaginary illustration of the mental reality. A straight formulation would be sensed as deviant in a literary text, and contrary to its ideal of an internal self-revelation. The identification of the phenomenon remains global, despite its resemblance to other psychiatric or linguistic formulations. It also remains relative to the local circumstances of the passage, and to the metaphorical system of the books in which it occurs.

Second, the difference between Michaux's view of the expression's bi-polarity and a theoretical one, lies in the fact that Michaux uses it to criticize discourse. The metaphorical denominations given to the mental space of the thought suggest, as we saw, a profound and global structure (the sphere) which the writer contemplates. Conversely, the external aspect of the signification process is presented as a particular and social distillate of its internal character. The causal line and its movement of alternation imposed by the text emphasize the extreme aspects of the expressive situations: the internal pole of aphasia, and the external pole of speech. While the first one is seen as the pole of the writer's adhesion to his "être" and thoughts, the pole of speech is seen as an improper extension of the perception. This is conveyed through expressions such as the following: "...je me

dévoçais dans des paroles explicatives". . . "parlant trop, me vidant en paroles (banales, ressassées d'ailleurs)..". (C.L.G. p.46,p.48). Through the terms "me dévoçais" (to lead oneself astray) "me vidant" (drain oneself), the text depicts speech as a proliferation ("parlant trop" emphasis added) that does not articulate the intended internal signified. Rather it is an instrument of banalisation, one that empties and cancels the individuality and specificity of the subjective situation.

Such a conflictual relation of speech with respect to the internal phenomena, designates nonetheless the activity of signification, as an event within the general psychological activity of the writer.<sup>1</sup> Third, Michaux's view of the expression's bi-polarity is the means of an emphasis. In fact, Michaux focuses on one specific aspect of the signification line, that of the word, le "mot" or words "les mots. . . les paroles." In doing this, Michaux certainly authorizes himself, on the basis of his practical experience, to be a writer for whom the word becomes a plastic instrument after which the metaphorical process is engendered.<sup>2</sup> The book's literary perspective allows Michaux to

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Jean Francois le Ny, op. cit. pp. 4-5. "Les activités sémantiques sont, considérées en extension, une sous-classe des activités psychologiques." Cette "activité psychologique d'un type particulier, que nous appelons sémantique, . . . est par nature individuelle." It is indeed defined by the "parole" or speech, that is to say the individual act and use of language, although there are common points between the respective semantic activities of several individuals.

<sup>2</sup>Poetry questions the word; it attempts to find the "nom propre," to constitute singular and individual word-thoughts or, word-object, through a process of abstraction. Cf. Ecuador, op. cit. pp. 28-29. "Le nom - Je cherchais des noms et j'étais malheureux. Le nom: valeur d'après coup et de longue expérience. . . un nom est un objet à détacher."

approach the question of the word rather instinctively and without justifying the presuppositions on which his research is based. To speak about the "word" in fact means to isolate an element of the signification line, and give it a specific function. This takes place within a general comparison and opposition, not so much of word against thought, as of language against thought. Yet Michaux does not separate the word from language in general, and the word analyzed in his books is already a written predicate within a supposed initial draft. The notion of "word" used by Michaux therefore complies with a general theory of language only in that it is limited to a literary practice which both applies and formulates this theory. Michaux's theory appears as a psychology of language based on a literary practice. The notion of word appears as a bias, and as a median term between various aspects of the linguistic activity which usually are treated separately, either by the linguist, the psychologist, the philosopher, or even the grammarian. The notion of "word" gives rise to extended and interdisciplinary research converging from various horizons.<sup>1</sup> It preoccupies researchers as varied as grammarians or phonolinguists (A. Martinet), psychologists (J.F. le Ny, L. Vygotski, R. Gori) linguists, philosophers (Paul Ricoeur), literary theorists (M. Riffaterre).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bibliographical references for the various names which I will be mentioning are to be found in the final bibliography under the author's name.

<sup>2</sup>It seems to me that the notions of intertextuality, overdetermination, and the relations and distinctions between the textual idiolect and the general sociolect still view the word (the written word) as the focal point of various influences, and more particularly of a double influence: that of ordinary language (and its use of the word) and that of poetic semiosis (and its (other) use of the word).

The point of view of the writer on the word seems to me to be (as a praxis) as valid as that of the other researchers. It is in fact based on a reflection on language and its possibilities, on a verbal mobility and flexibility, on a communicative intention, and on norms of verification. Those implements and dispositions differ in the poet's case in their orientation and above all in their predetermined perception by the reader.<sup>1</sup> Yet the rigor and coherence of the linguistic model he provides is not inferior to that of the researcher. As far as Michaux is concerned, the "insights" of language, of the word, may be approached from the sensitive and analytical point of view of reading in general and critical reading in particular. A "world view" comes across through the poet's language just as it does in the science of language. The poet however views language as his own, as the basis of his "private" practice, (whereas within works on the science of language, language is the place and the means of a practice of ideas). Given these limits, I will approach Michaux's view of the relations which the word exhibits between thought and language.<sup>2</sup>

C. Mental Semantics

*Sp. D. Intention*

Psychological studies on semantics theoretically classify semantic activities in three types: the ones that are determined by some

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<sup>1</sup>This is why Michaux's contribution to the knowledge of mental mechanisms is still considered as poetical, whatever his proximity to scientific comments might be.

<sup>2</sup>I will use the point of view of psychology (semantic or not) on the formation of the signifier; see future footnotes for references to J.F. le Ny, and R. Gori.



signifier (corresponding to the understanding of speech), the ones that are followed by some signifier (corresponding to the production of speech), and finally the ones which neither follow nor precede any kind of speech but which can still be considered related to or exhibiting some characteristics through which they can be related to signification.) The third category is viewed as follows: "la parole intérieure et les activités verbales corrélatives de la pensée, ... ont évidemment un contenu sémantique essentiel."<sup>1</sup> Michaux's written enterprise of observation concentrates on the last two categories, although these two still presuppose a previous signifier, in that only an obvious verbal activity can suggest and shed light on this internal language. The text is presented as a semantic activity which follows another semantic activity (the experience of expression), which itself follows an internal activity (the internal side of the experience of expression, the mental mechanisms). Both the second and the third aspects then presuppose and are based on the first type of semantic activity, that is to say a semantic activity which is determined by some signifier.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 7. "De L'existence de telles activités nous avons des preuves objectives suffisantes, à partir des verbalisations qui peuvent être provoquées, ou des enregistrements psycho-physiologiques quantitatifs que l'on peut en obtenir." See also C.L.G. p. 198 "La pensée parlée, la réflexion devenue parole et son, tant elle est forte, est autrement phénoménale."

<sup>2</sup>There lies the problem of the genesis of speech which Michaux has tried to trace in the narrative adventure, and which le Ny formulates in the form of a question. Ibid., p. 7 "Qui peut dire comment germe la parole d'un conteur qui improvise au cours de cette période fluide ou le contenu sémantique ne s'est pas encore cristallisé dans le discours qui va l'exprimer?... Ou peut considérer que les trois activités sémantiques ne diffèrent pas en nature." (emphasis added)

The previous signifier does not appear as such but rather as an event which has some verbal characteristics, as we saw in the case of the "letter," the sign, the mental reflection, or the memory (C.L.G. pp. 226 to 232). It appears to be an event which can be observed either from the inside, (as within the writing act which the text presents) or from the outside, through its impact on the writer's performance and on the perception of his performance. "La parole intérieure qui semble venir de l'extérieur, les réflexions-mots qui retentissent comme de vraies paroles entendues, ce rapport entre le dedans et le dehors apparent." (C.L.G. p. 199)

<sup>REV</sup>  
The mental "parole" in the narration has appeared as a series of stimuli which are produced by the individual behavior and its attempt at communication (and interpretation). They engender a semantic activity, of understanding or of production. Such is the case of the "appels à compréhension, à déchiffrement" (C.L.G. p. 216) which provoke the explanation mania. Such is the case also of the "Babel des sensations" (C.L.G. p. 211) which appears as the space of multiple informations ("La voici, la Tour de Babel, la véritable, où sans cesse des milliers d'informations arrivent, ... intraduisibles.") and which exhibits a multiplicity of codes. More particularly Michaux evokes here the specificity and individuality of each sense in terms of "langue" (while the word "parole" would be more suitable). "Babel... qui en la langue spécifique de chacun des sens lui parle à tort et à travers, en odeurs, en sons, en frottements, en fourmillements et en lueurs qui ne sont là que pour lui." (C.L.G. p. 211)

Obviously Michaux uses "langue" here as a metaphor. Yet it denotes the sensory stimuli which constitute the writer's experience. They are the signs which the writer grasps in his attempt to grasp his situation.

("Dans son monde incertain, transparent, les signes deviennent les seuls points d'appui." C.L.G. p. 213, footnote 1.) They stimulate the writer's activity of understanding and they are viewed as signifiers:

"Et pas seulement les objets alors parlent. Les bruits aussi font signe." (C.L.G. p. 212) These stimuli are to be related to a general

notion of mental semantics which Michaux calls "la pensée néoténique" and which he describes as self engendering of the thought or as the general mental activity based on a permanent production of partial, dependent yet separate thoughts.<sup>1</sup>

In the preceding paragraph I listed examples of stimuli which were inducing an activity of understanding; Michaux also considers other parts of the causal line where signifiers are part of the writer's performance, and engender a semantic activity of production. This second type of signifying event is represented in Michaux's texts, either rhetorically, through the image of the (alleged) first draft, or by the text itself. In actual fact the text is instituted as a behavioral policy and strategy aimed at the (re)production of an expression which itself engenders and motivates the narration. This behavioral policy (whose tools have been seen in the illusion of phenomenology) is intended to generate adequate semantic

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. C.L.G. p. 92. "Avant qu'une pensée ne soit accomplie, venue à maturité, elle accouche d'une nouvelle, et celle-ci à peine née, incomplètement formée, en met au monde une autre, une nichée d'autres..."

and syntactical developments.

Michaux's representation of the first type of mental semantics can be seen as hermeneutics of aphasia. Such a title may seem paradoxical, since aphasia implies the loss of power to use language, and thus produces no sign that the analyst might grasp in order for him to interpret the internal world.

Yet I can first resolve this paradox in showing that it is based on the notion of the invariants textually created and narratively hypothetized. Michaux builds his interpretation of the signification on the assumption of an experience of the interior wherein the stimuli would constitute sort of mnesic signified. They belong to the broader category of the memories in that they constitute the origin of the cognitive memory (such as the memory of words and grammar) on which the verbal articulation is based. The passage from the text which I will be looking at makes it clear that Michaux's enterprise is to look for the origin of signification in the internal functioning of memory. Second, Michaux's hermeneutics of aphasia is based on the hypothesis that there are non-lexicalized and non-temporalized semantic representations of the intended sayings. The internal mechanisms, which sustain the articulation or the non-articulation of the word, constitute the norm ruthlessly sifting the relevant from the irrelevant words. A criterion of relevancy is at work, and the rightfulness of the word consists of its congruity with an internal unit of signification, or stimulus which however is not graspable as such but only operates after the tentative verbalization.

Michaux's intention in this aspect of the hermeneutics of aphasia consists, then, of discovering the semantic functioning at work within semantic structures previously defined (causal line, alternate consciousness, sphere). The hermeneutics or interpretation of the mental mechanisms, is an extension of the phenomenological enterprise. Through such an enterprise of understanding the book relates the technical aspects of the expression's genesis to the broader problem of signification. The signifying discourse of the text is objectively an interpretation, an enunciation that grasps the expressive reality by means of textual signifiers. It does so in displacing itself to different spots of the causal line of signification and settling within the mental space. Michaux's model of the internal structure reveals that the internal world has no meaning in itself, but rather that it is significance, (a signification process close to a computational process) combining and manipulating verbal signifiers.

Michaux bases his model on the bi-polarity and duality observed during the experience of expression and its attributes: hesitation, oscillation, and persecution. He depicts the computational process as a dialectical movement of opposition between two functions, approximately identified as "explication" and "c'est ça" (G.E.E. p. 51).<sup>1</sup> Those denominations do not directly designate the poles but indirectly reconstitute the semantic activity which they generate.

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<sup>1</sup>The quotation marks suggest the aleatory and evasive value of such denominations.

...une... tres grande sphere. Avec ses deux pôles. Chacun de ces pôles, toute tension, toute énergie, éclairait deux compréhensions. [1]  
Deux systèmes, deux modes.¶ Un pôle, son mot générateur (d'affluents)était 'explication.' L'autre pôle, son mot générateur, c'était 'C'est ça.' Explication appelait les siens.¶ C'est ça appelait les siens. Appelait, ralliait, émettait, faisait surgir, expulsait.¶ Les pôles à toute vitesse, magnétiquement, se les lançaient l'un à l'autre, paons mâles faisant la roue, s'opposant, opposant leurs avantages, leurs homologues. G.E.E. p. 50-51

The text introduces us, in the above quotation, to the internal sub-lexical, and aphasic phase of the signification process. This "aphasia" is however represented through words, and interpreted in accordance with the deviant signifieds. The aphasia is viewed as a signification process yet one which is not achieved properly: the signifieds remain in the margin, more as "aperçus", immediate impression and insights, or signals of significations, than as real significations ("Parrallèlement ou plutôt diagonalement et en marge, des aperçus sans cesse apparaissaient, des significations vivement démultipliées ..." G.E.E. p. 51). The aphasia presented in the text appears not so much as the loss of the power to use speech, as of power to control speech: this results in incommunicability of the internal impressions and feelings.<sup>2</sup> Simultaneously the text provides the necessary control in

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<sup>1</sup>I notice a slight ambiguity in this expression as if each pole had two comprehensive activities, which would make four altogether. According to the rest of the passage, which is fairly clear, I think that this is here a mistake or a slip of pen, systematically imposing the image of the duality of mental topology.

<sup>2</sup>"C'était en tout cas un de ces prodigieux "à côté" mentaux, peu utiles pour les relations avec les autres, car incommunicables, dont on peut être sûr que la tête de beaucoup d'aliénés est pleine... cette incommunicabilité est à l'origine sans doute de l'attitude de nombre d'entre eux..." G.E.E. p. 53.

presenting the situation in the form of a model (i.e. G.E.E p. 51). This model sounds rather esoteric and hermetic. It sounds esoteric in that the image and mental design it provides is not familiar to the outside reader, does not match his own experience. We indeed do not experience the mental as a closed world which we can abstract from our feeling of exterior reality. We rather experience it in relation to, and as different from the outside. Here, the mental sphere is considered in abstracto, and projected in the text as a separate entity whose functioning would be purely internal. As such the model also sounds like a textual image: hermetic, tightly sealed so that no outside element can enter, nor escape. But that is a textual fallacy. We have to keep this in mind in order to separate, within the quotation and the model it provides, the elements arising from the textual system of representation and the elements arising from the system represented. Michaux actually represents the mental as a dialectical system of semantic opposition and exchange between two separate poles which in fact are two tendencies or aspects of the same semantic process. Each pole is represented as a sign processor: both interact through their intermediate components, since to each pole corresponds a lexical family under the heading "les siens," as if specific significations were attached to each semantic functioning. The model suggest the existence, (as a permanent and coexisting duality within the mental functioning) of a movement between an internal and an external motivation. In reality, the reclusive sphere represented here denotes only the incapacity to produce an external articulation: it is this incommunicability that the model represents in the image of a bipolar

signifying process, wherein two tendencies are at issue. The textual fallacy consists in presenting the two tendencies as coexisting, while, in reality, either one or the other governs the subject's semantic activity. What does this model of opposition then represent? It represents the dialectic movement (intrinsic to any semantic activity) occurring between a semantic structure and the event which takes place in it, between a sign and its use. The two denominations, "explication" and "c'est ça", and their opposition illustrate the tension intrinsic to the act of writing, (and which we have seen as the space of the metaphorical tension in the narrative adventure). Here, an alternation occurs between a deep level and a surface level: "c'est ça" is the observation of an evidence, a mode of expression wherein signifier and signified are fused and which imposes itself without explanation. The metaphor is the space of this evidence, where the image, as an "aperçu," presents itself immediately as given by a sensitive intuition. "Explication" is the periphrastic and metonymical use of the sign which is the propriety of the text and of language influenced by an external system of communication. Both modes of expression act upon the sign in a double way, expanding or limiting it, excluding or including it, as expressed by the series of verbs quoted and which denote an activity of concentration and emission: "Appelait, ralliait, émettait, faisait surgir, expulsait." Michaux locates those two activities indifferently in the mental sphere, and does not set up each of them respectively at one and the other extreme of the causal line. Also, Michaux does not distinguish here between the activities of the one and that of the other; he rather presents them both as playful uses of signifiers and



places this playfulness under the sign of the flow and consumption of meaning within an intrasubjective space of linguistic jubilation. "Moi, le spectateur, qui certes n'en paraissait pas l'auteur, ni d'aucun des deux le 'supporter.' J'étais ébahi, émerveillé. J'assistais. J'étais dans la salle." (G.E.E. p. 52)

Both modes of expression derive meaning indifferently and indefinitely as expressed by the paragraph following the previous quotation:

significations vivement demultipliées renvoyant à des significations inattendues, lointaines, à une autre profondeur, à des profondeurs reportant à des origines, à des coulisses de la signification de plus en plus reculées, de plus en plus dérochées, folle sémantique de dérivés toujours en dérivation et en au-delà. G.E.E. p. 51

Here the process of derivation emphasizes the description of the mental semantics which the text provides. The mental poetics seem intended to constitute an insight: it is a view of and from the inside which defines a "poëin" or functioning which is a producing and a doing. Poetry here almost flirts with the absence of meaning, but simultaneously controls it. It underlines the idea that signification is in itself an accident which is locally possible, in circumstances where a meaning can form and be linked at random. As such the mental poetics figure at the margin of madness as a "folle sémantique...": they appear to be a (regressive or inductive) system which mostly underlines the polyvalence and/or the relativity of the sign with respect to the connective process which introduces it. This process is indeed shown as the addition of three clauses, bringing from language

and transposing into language a live semantic experience. The sign is first internally uttered, then visualized, then set into motion: "mot. . . (vraisemblablement prononcés dans mon inconscient), puis visualisés, mis en action." (G.E.E. p. 52) The result of this process however, is mediocre, with respect to the whole phenomenon, ("ces mots, si subalternes...était-ce important à l'intellection"? G.E. E. pp. 52-53), and the model insists rather on the "sauvage cinema minute" which manipulates words. Here, the accent is put on the exchange, on the competition between the two semantic tendencies whose dynamic dialectic constitutes the process of signification. First Michaux insists on the reciprocity and the similitude of the two forms and two uses of language mentioned. He repeats several times in the passage that they are identical:

le pôle 'c'est ça' et le pôle 'explication' aveugles à leur identité foncière, se jetaient spectaculairement l'un à l'autre leurs dissemblances qui n'étaient que des ressemblances divergentes, raison de leur tonus. G.E.E. p. 52

The distinction made between "dissemblances" and "ressemblances divergentes" suggests that metaphor and metonymy are not two different figures but rather two ways and two variants of the same generic figure. From one common point they move to extend the sign in different directions: thus they draw the word apart, create it as the space of their divergence more than as the sign of it. "N'étaient-ce pas, visualisés par surprise, ces 'champs de forces créés dans l'imaginaire par le rapprochement de deux images différentes.'" (G.E.E. p. 52) Second, however, the similitude evoked consists mainly of reducing

metaphor and metonymy to the space of the metaphor. It consists of making of the metonymy an extension and a subordinate clause of the metaphor seen as an attempt at a conclusion, as an indefinite transportation of meaning, and as the reciprocal attraction of the tenor. The notion of a dynamic relation of equals, or of outbidding, (suggested in the image "paons males faisant la roue," peacocks rivalling in the display of their brilliant colors) and finally of the magnetism which attracts the one to the other, induce us to confirm the omnipresence and domination of the metaphor: The inductive semantic process viewed in the passage does seem to be based on a magnetism or electric charge produced at the level of the signifier by the proximity of a magnetic field--that of the mental. The signified resulting from this magnetism, is as such an insightful aperçu.

Parfois un pôle était plus en action, puis s'atténuait, perdait de la force, tandis que l'autre agissant à fond dardait ses armes, ou plutôt les éléments de son système de vocables et d'explications. G.E.E. p. 51

We have perceived in the narrative adventure a phenomenon of alternate and incompatible comprehension (that is to say perception and articulation) or interpretation similar to the one synthesized in the above quotation. I will now reunite the interpretative synthesis and analysis in developing Michaux's last contribution to the field of language hermeneutics: the double allegiance of the act of speech to the body and to the code.

#### D. Body and Code in the Act of Speech<sup>1</sup>

The following pages will attempt to analyse the position and the nature of the act of speech within the imaginary psychic economy of the writer.<sup>2</sup> The hermetic presentation of the mental system, the illusion which the text creates of its hermetism insures the closing of language.

*l. (n. 29-30)*  
The text represents the writing act as a transitional <sup>one</sup> element between an imaginary (and unsayable) space and a social communication based on rules. The writing act is represented as in tension; it is drawn apart by either the mental corporeal phenomenon, "experimental body" or by a set of linguistic rules, by an informative, cognitive and utilitarian motivation: "...s'agissant de mots, s'unir, c'est toujours s'unir en vue de quelque chose . . . qui va servir à d'autres, et que d'autres vont servir." (G.E.E. p.42- 43) Besides the formation and production of an object *le* the text reveals the existence of a moderator who conducts the discourse according to the normal and common laws of representation. He associates his corporeal, internal movements with an articulatory semantics whose signs can be perceived by someone else.

Et c'est toujours quelqu'un qui les fait s'unir, les fait servir, subordonnant l'un à l'autre, les intégrant à un troisième, c'est quelqu'un à qui ça plaît, qui y trouve son compte, qui en est l'auteur,

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<sup>1</sup>This heading echoes the title of R. Gori's book: Le Corps et le Signe dans l'Acte de Parole, (Paris: ed. Dunod, 1978). I moreover place my analysis of Michaux's representation of the act of speech under Gori's enlightening suggestion--that is to say, the double articulation of the act of speech by the body and by the sign.

<sup>2</sup>That is to say the management of the act of speech by the psyche, as well as the imaginary representation which the writer has or creates for himself, of the act of speech.

ou au moins l'arrangeur. G.E.E. p. 43

In the above quotation language is seen as an instrument that can be adapted to the various situations which are to be articulated. It is seen as a code: that is to say a system of signals which is used with a pre-determined special meaning (that is, a meaning varying with the individual user "qui y trouve son compte") as in a computer ("les fait s'unir . . . subordonnant . . . intégrant"). It is a system of signs which the individual uses to communicate in accordance with the common and general laws of communication. (The use of an impersonal tone, and of verbal infinitives in the following quotation underlines the pre-determined and normative character of the communicative code: "il conviendrait d'infléchir, de conduire, d'aiguiller de préparer, de justifier, d'introduire . . . etc." (G.E.E. p.43)) The normative code is a series of verbal arrangements which are necessary to the coherence of a public performance ("expose"): ". . . tout ce qu'il n'aurait jamais cru qui entre dans le moindre "exposé", afin qu'il y ait ensemble." (G.E.E. p. 43) Yet, Michaux does not analyze the transitional reality of the act of speech after some kind of experimental case or other but by the specific observation of its dissociations and perturbations in the writing process.

More particularly, Michaux's texts present a destabilized case of the writing-act in that the moderator is not present, but missing

because he is literally "absentminded."<sup>1</sup>

The analysis of the resistance in the writing-act results in the revelation of its general structure. Michaux's hermeneutics of the writing-mental situation comply with R. Gori's hermeneutics of the psychotic's discourse in that both situations and analyses exhibit the ruptures within the writing-act:<sup>2</sup> "Les éléments restent des unités debout." (G.E.E. p. 63) The notion of "unités debout" is an imaginary hypothesis but it expresses the feeling that the usual imperceptible and instinctive intervention, which usually places thoughts and mental images within language, is here missing.

The writing-act as envisaged by Michaux is then approached from a psychological and even psychoanalytical point of view, in light of which the moments of the signification process receive a specific definition. The writing-act is seen as the very act of articulating outside of its content in meaning. Language is seen in general as a code and ensemble of linguistic signs actualized by a collectivity. In this respect Michaux does not specifically distinguish the written code from the

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<sup>1</sup>Ce "quelqu'un", ici, ne peut plus faire cela. . . . Mais quelqu'un qui présentement sache faire cela, introduire, rapprocher (car même apposer, c'est unir), éclairer les relations des idées entre elles . . . manque." (G.E.E. p. 63 - emphasis added).

<sup>2</sup>Michaux's analysis also complies with other studies on linguistic symptoms of schizophrenic language, which demonstrate the same bi-polarity. See S. Piro's Il linguaggio schizofrenico (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1972), and L. Irigaray, Le langage des déments, (The Hague: Mouton, 1973).

See also the review article and bibliography by Eugen S. Bar, "Semiotic Studies in schizophrenia and Senile psychosis", Semiotica 16:3, Mouton Publishers, (1976) pp. 269-283.

spoken code, but he only presents a collective code which corresponds to the formal structure of language: so that the value of a signifier is strictly defined either in its opposition or in its similarity to the internal units of signification.

In both cases in Michaux's analysis the signifiers are called "mots", but they are divided, under this common heading between imperfect words and positively marked words, depending on whether they are felt and shown to be influenced by the external or internal linguistic competence. The distinction between syntagmatic and associative relations can define Michaux's representation in a more theoretical way.<sup>1</sup> It is borrowed from Saussure who locates those functionings and formations of the signified in two different "spheres", and associates them with two different kinds of mental activity.<sup>2</sup> There is the sphere of the linear "Etendue" and the cerebral sphere. Within the latter the associative relations between linguistic units are specific and constitute according to Saussure the "trésor intérieur qui constitue la langue chez chaque individu"<sup>3</sup>. Michaux concentrates

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<sup>1</sup>See Ferdinand de Saussure, Cours de linguistique générale, op.cit. pp. 170-171.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, pp. 170-171, "Dans un état de langue . . . les rapports et les différences entre termes linguistiques se déroulent dans deux sphères distinctes dont chacune est génératrice d'un certain ordre de valeur . . . Ils correspondent à deux formes de notre activité mentale, toute deux indispensables à la vie de la langue".

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, p. 171. Here through the word "treasure" I notice on Saussure's part, a valorisation of internal language, similar to Michaux's one which constitutes the individual language (la langue) that is to say not his performance but his competence, thus private.

on the internal sphere, but also on the relation, within the act of speech, between the two spheres. The terminological complicity between Saussure and Michaux is striking and makes us recognize in Michaux a literary follower of Saussure's psychologicistic thesis. I call him a literary follower to the extent that he obviously uses theory for a specific purpose, that of representing "his" language, and "his" view of language.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand Michaux's model is presented within a book, within written language which constitutes the authority, the place and the criterion judging the code's authenticity. In this respect the model proposed in them is valid only as a literary model of poetic language. Yet, and on the other hand, this literary enterprise places itself in the perspective of analyzing language in general through, and by means of, literature. If therefore Michaux's model of language in general remains a literary hypothesis, it nonetheless contributes (at least as a transgression) to a general linguistic approach: the opposition between written and spoken language is replaced here by an opposition between internal and external language (between "private" language, in which we think, and public language, in which we articulate). The act of speech which Michaux takes as the object of his

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<sup>1</sup>In the same way drugs, the original of this dual representation, constitute not so much an ordeal as a proof and a revelation of Michaux's mental, spiritual, psychological and linguistic tendencies. cf. Robert Bréchon, *l'espace, le corps, la conscience*, in Cahiers de L'Herne, Henri Michaux, op. cit., p. 189: "Dans cette schizophrénie expérimentale que décrivent les traités sur la mescaline on apprend beaucoup sur la poésie et sur la drogue, mais on ne peut pas ne pas reconnaître la folie idiosyncratique de Michaux, cette manière personnelle et inimitable qu'il a . . . de penser et de vivre l'espace et surtout . . . de le créer par le langage".



analysis is either a written act of speech (that of the book he is writing) or an oral act of speech (that of the insane person he is describing. Both have in common (since both are textual representations) a double allegiance to the code (through the desire and necessity to communicate) and to the body. ✓ By "Body" I mean the structure of unconscious representations which take the writer's body and mind as its place and object. Michaux views the Body as a series of units of significance (fantasy, image, tendency, feeling . . .) and his aim in the book is to restore them and to integrate them within the external language of communication or code. ✓

the subjective investments which sustain the act of speech, and which he represents in cases wherein the dislocation is effected by the body. <sup>I understand</sup>

Then the act of speech is the space of drives and imaginary representations through which the word figures a part of the body or of the corporeal experience. <sup>space of drives</sup>

At other times Michaux insists on the objective investments which sustain the act of speech and represent situations wherein the dislocation is effected by the code. There, there is no difficulty in writing or articulating, but there is an excess of signs, of explanation and of meaning, devoid of relation to the corporeal experience. These are cases where the report becomes a dispassionate and rhetorical chronicle. <sup>1/A</sup> The aim of the narration is to reestablish a link between body and code, to embody the code so as to make it a form, a literally "metaphysical" expression of the corporeal experience and not its foil. At this stage, body and code would not be disjunctive any more, but the code would duplicate and include the body.

I will leave for the next chapter the moment and terms of this unification, and will give now some examples of each extreme situation.

As soon as I begin this undertaking, I notice the disproportionate place taken up in the book, by the code. In Michaux's books there is a small amount of examples showing the excess of subjective investment in the writing-act, compared to a great number of examples stating the excess of objective instruments. Three reasons then will bring me now to concentrate on Michaux's analysis of the code. First, I have already shown in the narrative adventure the way in which the body influences the report, organizes the navigation of signs, and imposes its characteristics onto the code (through the three metaphors of the writer) so that the narrative situation is represented as an extension, and as a part of the corporeal situation.

Second, I have shown that this subjective report of the mental situation in the code is made indirectly by means of metaphorical invariants which tend to present the words as verbal equivalents of their (absent) psychological functioning which in itself is not:<sup>1</sup> its function consists rather of transmitting and transferring information about an absent reality. The metaphor also consists of creating within the text (and within the reader's psychological activity) an event which is analogous to the event perceived within the mental activity of the writer, as well as of the insane person.

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<sup>1</sup>See R. Bréchon, op. cit., p. 181, "Chez Henri Michaux les situations psychologiques, les relations humaines, les expériences spirituelles s'expriment constamment par des métaphores spatiales" (emphasis added).

Third and consequently, the analysis of the subjective investments in the writing-act is possible following the verbal behavior of the writer. The verbal stimuli which the narration depicts are to be perceived only if they are congruent with words in the external vocabulary: it is according to words that the comparison is made and that the initial unit of signification is identified.<sup>1</sup> Therefore the extreme situation of subjective investment is impossible to watch and impossible to articulate, since the obliteration of thought is by definition unthinkable. "En fait l'oblitération de la pensée n'est pas commode du tout à observer puisque l'observation s'interrompt précisément dans ces moments." (C.L.G. p. 221) The whole responsibility then rests on the code, and the degree of subjectivity or objectivity which the writing-act exhibits. In the written act of speech the body tends to become an abstraction, or an approximation; movements of desire, drives, repressed memories are representations. Conversely, when it is not a body-metaphor, the discourse is invested by the code and its function of objectification. The code then appears to be a counter-investment of the corporeal experience, an escape from the internal reality through the manipulation of the external verbal reality.<sup>2</sup> Such cases of discursive objectification are also exhibited

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<sup>1</sup>cf. le NY, op. cit., p. 11 . . . "la fonction principale qui semble être celle de ces unités est d'être en quelque sorte un intermédiaire entre les signifiants externes et les activités sémantiques proprement dites."

<sup>2</sup>As suggested in Part III through the following quotation, "Je me devoyais en paroles explicatives", C.L.G. p. 46, I recall an expression from D. W. Winnicott (in Playing and Reality, (London: Tavistock Publications, 1971), saying that this discourse is (with respect) to the true speech what compulsion to fantasy is to dream.

in the text and reveal a metalinguistic function of discourse. This occurs when the discourse concentrates on the code, when the message concerns language itself and when the multiplication of signs insures an hermetism between body and code which neutralizes the internal experience. In such cases language is pointed out by the narration, as an exterior articulation which isolates the experience but does not symbolize it.

In fact, the metalinguistic function of the text starts with <sup>internal</sup> a more general reflection on the means and possibilities of accounting for the experience: that is to say of realizing the "vieux jumelage de la pensée et de la parole" (G.E.E. p. 27) and of giving an account of the experience. The text presents in some passages the extremes of verbalization through the image of the writer asserved by his language. "Les règles du langage, meme s'il les transgresse souvent plus souvent le tiennent encore trop asservi ." (G.E.E. p. 159) This enslavement is depicted as a subversion and consequent subservience of the internal experience with respect to verbalization. Language is shown as the agent of a loss of the internal experience due to its authoritative action and rules. "La parole oblige la pensée à suivre son bonhomme de chemin. La procession des mots, la pensée doit la suivre, le vêtements des mots, y entrer, l'inscription des mots, s'y fixer, s'y penser, s'y modérer. Chute dans la verbalisation". (G.E.E. p. 28)

The writing-act (as suggested in the former definition of the essence as an opposite of social instances, G.E.E. p. 52) is seen as an instance of socialization submitting the internal experience to its rules. In the particular case of an autarchic state of mind, it thus

appears as an instrument of profanation.<sup>1</sup> At those moments where he criticizes it, language is seen as a machine itself indifferent to its object.

le langage paraissait une grande machine  
pretentieuse, maladroite qui ne faisait que tout  
fausser, qui d'ailleurs allait s'éloignant dans une  
grandissante distanciation, dans l'indifférence.  
G.E.E. p. 28

In the above quotation, Michaux presents language as an instrument which is not cosubstantial to thought, and not intrinsic to the writer himself since it is a machine--object which may be used or not. As such it takes the form of an intermediary between the writer and his experience, which acts upon it, treats it. The linguistic machine in fact is a writing machine, which displaces the experience from thought to verbalization. The linguistic machine quoted here plays with respect to the writing experience, a role similar to that of the drug experience: it plays the role of a narrative object which nonetheless functions in parallel to the text and the narration which it symbolizes. The writing of the text, is the adventure narrated by "the text" using the expedient of the machine.<sup>2</sup> The text appears then as its own transforming power, and simultaneously presents itself as available to specific

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<sup>1</sup>"Bien connu de plusieurs de ceux qui prirent de la mescaline, et de schizophrènes qui n'eurent rien à prendre. Parler, dans cet état singulier on s'y refuse, parler est ressenti comme une profanation."  
G.E.E. p. 28

<sup>2</sup>For various types of machine, (writing, textual, reading) see Daniel Compere, "Les machines à écrire", Revue des lettres Modernes, (Jules Verne, Machines et imaginaire), no. 3, (1980), pp.62-76.

interpretations. First the "self-sufficiency"<sup>1</sup> thus defined will be used and investigated by Michaux's texts in a way to be described by the next chapter. Second, the openness thus created to specific interpretations allows Michaux's manipulations of two notions of language; an imperfect language, which we are now defining, and another, non-imperfect language, which the text otherwise uses without questioning it and which is poetic language. That is to say that the analysis of the act of speech is a means of defining the necessity and the functioning of another language, differently motivated than ordinary language, and which is poetic language. Of this language, Michaux does not speak directly but he suggests it through a negative theology.<sup>2</sup> In so doing Michaux complies with the general hope regarding language, on which 19th and 20th century poets have written, like Bonnefoy in "L'acte et le lieu de la poesie:"

le langage n'est pas le verbe. Aussi déformée,  
aussi transformée que puisse être notre syntaxe,  
elle ne sera jamais qu'une métaphore de la syntaxe  
impossible, ne signifiant que l'exil. 3

On this assumption rests also the whole endeavour of Michaux's texts on drug experimentation: language is only an approximate image of our consubstantial "verb" or word, which is the impossible language,

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<sup>1</sup>See Michael Riffaterre, The "Self-sufficient text", Diacritics, (Fall 1973) p. 39.

<sup>2</sup>On negativity, cf. Julia Kristeva, Semiotike, op. cit. p. 188. See quotations in this study, Part III, Chapter II.

<sup>3</sup>Yves Bonnefoy, "L'acte et le lieu de la Poésie," in Du mouvement et de l'immobilité de Douve, (Paris: Gallimard), pp. 188-198.

that which constitutes the individual's verbal-mental perception of himself, but which he cannot perceive outside language. However great the degree of the code's subjectivity, the code remains a figuration of the internal experience and an approximation of the writer's ideal of a private language. On the one hand then it suggests the internal syntax, on the other hand it signifies its impossibility and its distortion.

Michaux's refusal of language therefore complies with a broader poetic tendency which constitutes poetry as the place of the relative search of celebration, but also of struggle and imposture.<sup>1</sup> Because of the well-known character of the denunciation of language, and because of the impossibility encountered by the critic of making statements upon this unspeakable except by repeating the words of the poet, I will only summarize here the main arguments of Michaux's denial and move quickly towards the analysis of its poetic appropriation. (See part Part IV, Chapters II and III).

"Chute, "profanation," "indifference," "éloignement," partially constitute, in Michaux's texts, the series of pejorative modifiers which are intended to suggest language's basic imperfection. First the

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<sup>1</sup>Yves Bonnefoy (op. cit. pp. 205-206) synthesizes what Michaux's analytical narration develops: "Mais la difficulté du langage, son incapacite fameuse à exprimer l'immediat, je n'oublie certes pas qu'elle n'est pas résolue. Elle n'est au mieux qu'éclaircie, ou accusée, puisque je n'ai fait que vouloir des mots qu'ils mettent leur foi dans le silence. Que peuvent-ils retenir ou dire, quand la présence se donne dans l'univers de l'instant? La parole peut bien, comme je le fais maintenant, célébrer la présence, chanter un acte, nous préparer en esprit à sa rencontre, mais non pas nous permettre de l'accomplir. La parole est déjà l'oubli, il se peut bien qu'elle ait été notre chute, la voici en tout cas privée de la rencontre de l'être, ne faut il pas condamner une fois de plus, la prétention de la poésie?"

texts illustrate the general incompatibility between the code and the experience. Language belongs to linearity, while the mental experience is global, and its mechanisms characterized by multiplicity, speed and diversity. The following quotation illustrates those aspects of the multidimensional mental sphere which language, being linear, can but reduce.

Les difficultés insurmontables, proviennent de la vitesse inouïe d'apparition, transformation, disparition des visions; de la multiplicité, du pullulement dans chaque vision;. . . M.M. p. 15

Second, this general incompatibility which the text illustrates through the narrative adventure defines the code's inability to grasp the phenomenon, which by its very nature escapes the nature of the code. The phenomenon is presented as absent from the description. "Encore que son sujet ne soit plus en vue, ne me revienne aucunement. . . Si bizarrement il a disparu... et si simplement." (G.E.E. p. 39) Language then appears as a pure aim, as a research deprived of its object: "... apposer des mots, visant en aveugle le fait surprenant qui seul était à noter." (G.E.E. p.38- 39, emphasis added) There is then an opposition between the writing rhythm (slow, accumulative, appositive) and the rhythm of the experience (quick, global), which results in an increasing distance and disassociation: "...les tronçons de phrases qui naissent m'en éloignent, chacun à sa façon, et m'en repoussent." (G.E.E. p. 39) The disassociation felt is simultaneously the mark of a norm according to which language or the linguistic performance is judged. The internal phenomenon, constitutes the norm of linguistic irrelevance.



In the narrative description of the code, Michaux comments upon the incommensurability of the word with respect to the phenomenon, and this incommensurability is expressed as a spatial distance ("éloignement") or as a qualitative distance ("mots imparfaits" G.E.E. p. 39), but still the absent (non articulated) phenomenon is a criterion for the validity of the code. "Encore qu'il soit clair, et à chaque bout de phrase prouvé à nouveau que je passe invariablement à côté." (G.E.E. p. 39, emphasis added)

Third, the malfunction of language is due to the general orientation of the writing act. Instead of going toward the phenomenon to be described (thus following the regressive movement which the mental experience constitutes) writing goes toward the exterior in a progressive and appositive derivation, "pas dans l'ordre qui conviendrait" (G.E.E. p. 38)

je dois penser sans doute que, puisqu'en quelque façon ces vingt ou trente chaînons que sont mes bouts de phrases sont rattachables à "l'évènement", ils pourront bientôt, eux ou les suivants, m'y rattacher ouvertement, et me ramener au souvenir recherché. G.E.E. p. 39

The above quotation presents the writing process as an assembly line ("chaînons que sont mes bouts de phrases") relative to the phenomenon or event. "L'évènement" appears as the initial stimulus which triggers the articulation process ("mes bouts de phrase sont rattachables à l'évènement").

This line, in its unilateral orientation (that is to say externalization) is at the same time hoped to be the means of a return

to the initial and motivating phenomenon (here a memory). ("Ils pourront bientôt, eux ou les suivants, m'y rattacher ouvertement, et me ramener au souvenir recherché"). Here Michaux views his writing activity as intended ("je dois penser sans doute que. . .") to be a circular writing, returning back to the phenomenon which originated it, or a two-way activity, simultaneously progressive and regressive. Writing would go from front to back "d'avant en arrière" (G.E.E. p. 38): There lies the "difficulté transformatrice" (G.E.E. p. 38). The event in that case would be the starting point and the destination of realization, as if the displacement was not a transformation but a forming, or a system of transparent revelation. The adjective "ouvertement" suggests an ideal of transparency, or an open system of revelation extended in time through the accumulation of signifiers. The writing act seems considered in the texts as a kind of circular writing, or as a writing-reading system; it is a general system of comprehensive signification and of productive comprehension. Through this system, the writer would apply a comprehensive system of representation to a phenomenon. The text duplicates the mental derivation, and rebuilds its representation. With respect to this system in the text, Michaux's act of writing can be understood to be a model of comprehension as theorized by Chomsky and hypothesized by Miller. <sup>1</sup> Chomsky declares that it is

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Pierre Lecocq et Louis Maryaniak, "Opérations mentales, structure linguistique et analyse chronométrique: une approche expérimentale de la compréhension," Langage, "Problèmes de sémantique psychologique," op. cit., pp. 77-78. Chomsky, in Syntactic Structures (La Haye: Mouton, 1957), p. 107, and G.A. Miller, "Some psychological studies in grammar," American Psychologist, No. 17, (1962), pp. 748-762.

necessary (although it is not sufficient) in order to understand a sentence, to rebuild its representation at each level, and even at its transformational level--there the underlying nuclear sentence can be seen as elements of signification according to which the sentence is built. This theoretical vision of comprehension complies with Michaux's whole system of textual representation (where the mental experience is seen as a series of internal units of signification after which the textual sentence is patterned). The internal units of signification are seen as stimuli-words, or internal signifiers which constitute the basic nuclei of the written articulation. As such, Michaux views his specific act of writing as a process of comprehension (analogous to the system of derivational complexity, defined by Miller and inspired by Chomsky). For him, understanding implies a series of reverse transformational rules which are applied to the surface level of a sentence or statement and which produces the recovery of the deep level and its interpretation.

The isomorphism between the mental and textual grammar, through which the mental semantic behavior is intended to be reproduced, complies with this model of understanding. Writing and the text (seen as an open space for the development of a mental grammar or semantics), are intended to be a process of understanding or verification, more than a process of production. The text is aimed at the understanding of psychological mechanisms that underlie the verbal production. As such the isomorphism between mental and formal grammar is not the goal of the demonstration, but the basic postulate of its practice. Implicitly in the text, the semantic representation of a statement (attested to as the

hypothetical first draft, or as the cerebral performance which the writer says he watches) is defined as the starting structure in the wake of which a comparison and an elaborate formalization is possible. This is the reason why, in Michaux's texts, the whole experience is seen as a linguistic experience. This is also why the description of the writer's performance consists in discovering its specific psychological aspects (that is to say, the objective and/or subjective investments which I have mentioned). The text reveals the malfunction of the transposition from mental to verbal discourse, and bases it on their opposition in sense and in direction, although writing at the same time constitutes the comprehensive analysis of their relations: " La plus grande attention par étapes compréhensives des vagues qui ne vont pas l'une vers l'autre." (G.E.E. p. 38) Language is represented as a code whose power to reveal is possible as far as it serves first the free expression of the writer, and only secondarily the communication function. Michaux represents it either as an enterprise extrinsic to its object)"ce qui attérit sur la feville n'est pas, ne peut pas être conforme à mon dessein" G.E.E. p. 38). The verbal sentence is intrinsic to the object which it represents; it implies a transitive activity of speaking about something while the mental event seems to be an articulation of psychic elements. The relation between them makes it possible for verbal discourse to represent them in its own mode of articulation, and to impose this representation as the mental mode of articulation. Yet, we have no other proof nor representation other than through language.

First, Michaux illustrates this through a quotation from the alleged first draft (G.E.E. p. 38). Here, he refers to the mythical

intention of saying or "vouloir-dire"

'Je vais dire.J'ai voulu dire, entraînant le précédent, puis par progressive impuissance parce que frappé d'un certain angle diverté, dis-je m'arrête de mon étonnement déporté de pensée en archipel, sur les lieux je continue correctrice.'  
(G.E.E. p. 38)

The limitation of the writer's performance to a quoted intention of saying serves here to suggest the internal phase of writing and the ungrammaticality of the sentence quoted reinforces this representation. The ungrammaticality is based on a disruptive syntax or anacoluthia<sup>1</sup> on the indecision of the gender (masculine "déporté" v. feminine "correctrice") on the absence of subordination between propositions, and on the absence of temporal correspondence between verbs ("qui ne vont pas l'une vers l'autre si quelqu'un de sagace qui serait libre. . . , est-ce s'apercevait. . ." G.E.E. p. 38). Writing here only provides articulated fragments; it is an intrinsic formulation of the mental event, yet, devoid of the articulatory syntax necessary to its understanding.

The limitation of the writer's performance to quoted intention of saying ("Ne formant de la phrase recherchée qu'un bout, que des bouts, des membres. " G.E.E. p. 38) is also the means of providing a sample of the mental proposition whose "vouloir-dire" is the object of the representation.<sup>2</sup> As such it approximatively suggests the mental

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<sup>1</sup>The anacoluthia noticed in the quotation denotes a broader process of anacoluthon, seen as the psycholinguistic consequence of the cerebral phenomenon of thought obliteration.

<sup>2</sup>Michaux joins up here with Mallarmé's enterprise (in "un coup de Des") of disseminated and elliptical syntax whose structural description  
(continued)

sentence's intransitivity. It also suggests a potential (as opposed to effective) state of language which Gustave Guillaume defined as "puissanciel."<sup>1</sup> Second, the difficulty of writing due to the extrinsic character of the inscription with respect to the thought is depicted as an impossible task. The passage here (G.E.E. p. 38) depicts a disproportion between the heaviness of the object "les pavés," the task of writing seen as a reversal "retourner les pavés" and the insufficiency of the writing instrument "plume d'alouette."<sup>2</sup>

Third, the code appears as an impossible direct completion of the thought, and as the accomplishment of a displaced object. The writing act is designated in the text by means of the rhetorical figure, "dubitation."<sup>3</sup> It is presented as a doubt as about where to begin, what

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(continued)

may be produced, but not its meaning and which depicts the experience of signification as a paroxysm of random and absurd meaning.

<sup>1</sup>Roch Valin, "Perspective Psychomécaniques sur la Syntaxe," Cahiers de Psychomécanique du Langage, (Quebec: Presses de L'université Laval, 1981), pp. 13-14.

<sup>2</sup>Writing here is explicitly designated through a metonymic symbol, the "plume," writing quill, and it is connoted as feeble, weak by the mention of the "alouette," the bird from which this feather would be taken. Furthermore, the "plume" being the traditional but also old-fashioned instrument of the writer as opposed to the modern pen, its inappropriateness may be suggested as an anachronism, disproportionate in strength but also in time. Finally, we can consider the metonymy of "plume" for bird which leads to the metaphor of bird for poetic inspiration. (See Mallarmé's wing quoted by M. Riffaterre, Semiotics of Poetry, op. cit. pp. 150-51).

<sup>3</sup>"Dubitation" see Morier, op. cit., p. 167. "Figure par laquelle l'auteur ou le locuteur semble hésiter entre plusieurs mots, plusieurs partis à prendre, plusieurs sens à donner à une action. Nous hésitons pour de multiples raisons: Lenteur ou insuffisance d'esprit, défaut de mémoire; pauvreté de vocabulaire; inhibition due à un sentiment de culpabilité, c.a.d. véto de la conscience morale."

to do, or what to say. This rhetorical figuration of the writing destiny: its attempt, its endeavor, its search, its hope, more than its effectiveness. The code designates its object through the designation of its distance and inappropriateness with respect to this object. Throughout the text Michaux describes the relation of mental and verbal propositions in the form of a syncopation where one proposition would occur on the weak beat of the other. The accented note of the mental coincides with a preclusion of the code, while the accented note of the word coincides with a linguistic derealization. Through this continual movement of mutual overlapping and interpolation<sup>1</sup> the text defines not so much a mental space, as a framework of temporality, alternating with the writing temporality. Michaux assigns two optional and equally deceptive situations as a result of the incompatibility ("impossible vivre-ensemble" C.L.G. p. 166) of mental and verbal linguistic orders. Either the writer remains passive, depersonalized and tires himself out through language: "devenu chroniqueur par manque d'indépendance et de combativité" (C.L.G. p. 53). Or, opposite of chronicle, silence may be a mode of representation: "mutisme absolu" (G.E.E. p. 28). Whether it is used or not, language fools us, in providing either an empty, industrious chronicle, or a delusive silence.

Ainsi, de plusieurs façons la parole trompe. Et tout autant trompera le silence. Silence qui ne veut pas

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<sup>1</sup> Faute de la première j'ai voulu noter la seconde... mais, à vouloir la rendre clairement, j'ai pris un certain retard, et déjà se présentait une troisième réflexion... dont comme j'hésitais, je n'eus le temps d'écrire que la syllabe "dis" car sur ces entrefaites une nouvelle réflexion m'était venue. . . . ' G.E.E. p.39- 40

nécessairement dire indigence. Silence aussi par excès, par l'excès de tout ce qu'on voit et sent présentement, qu'on ne pourrait pas traduire. Autisme par honnêteté. C.L.G. p. 70

In denouncing the linguistic imposture, the text affords its implicit replacement by another imposture, which is the poetic imposture itself. The text seems to be a system of representation for Michaux's model of the psychological aspects of signification. In fact, the text does not grasp anything but its own system of representation and indirection.

N'était-ce pas, venue en surimpression, une représentation, qui doublait le phénomène réel de l'idéation, et n'était pas la saisie même de celui-ci mais seulement le renforcement, la traduction appuyée d'un de ses épiphénomènes, habituellement inaperçu et à ce moment rendu visible  
G.E.E. p. 22 (emphasis added)

At the same time, the indirection is presented as unavoidable, and as part of the process of textualization of the internal aspects of signification. The text illustrates the conditions needed to integrate mental features into language. It makes mental and individual traits become linguistic writing traits, through a process of transposition ("traduction appuyée" G.E.E. p. 22). In the coming chapter, I will analyze the aspects of this transposition of individual and internal traits. I will also show how this process results in a textual performance seen as poetic, since for Michaux, profound individuality and its traits are the basic criterion for poetic language.



## CHAPTER II

### THE TEXT'S POIETICS: HOW DOES THE TEXT EFFECT THE TRANSPPOSITION OF MENTAL FEATURES INTO WRITING FEATURES?

In the following pages, I will analyze how this transposition is brought about, that is to say how drugs as a narrative motive (for the expression experience) determine the thematic and rhythmic dynamics of literary discourse. Two main trends characterize this poietics: first the text brings about a verbal experience, which is seen as a discourse with a specific lexicon and syntax. The experience is presented in terms of rhetorical figures and the writer views his own personality in terms of style. Second, the text integrates this idiolect and as such it constitutes an enterprise of experimental poetry: it brings into play the corporeal dimension of language discovered through concrete poetry, through a operation of evocative nomination and through the insertion of narrative objects.

#### A. The Body Talk

The alleged mental experience is a purely verbal phenomenon. We saw that it exists only at the level of the textual representation and it is represented as a discourse wherein words and ideas are phenomena per se, equal to the powerful sensations mentioned. "Sans pouvoir désormais pour limiter pour réduire, il rencontre constamment des idées, des noms, des forces en expansion." (C.L.G. p. 266) This is to be

noticed first in the corporeal representation and terminology of the text. The entire body is never seen since the parts of the body and the gestures depicted are limited to the head, the face and the eyes, on the one hand, and to the upper parts, hands, arms, shoulders and chest on the other hand.<sup>1</sup> The body represented in the book is a sitting body, whose capabilities and mobility are restricted to that of articulating, seeing, thinking, hearing, and writing. The anatomic terminology in the texts (which is mainly restricted to the words "face" and "body"), designates not so much the writer's real body as the mental projection, the perception of his body.. The corporal taxonomy is always used within a negative context (where the body is said to be lost, unfelt), a displaced context (the mental sphere) or a metaphorical context. The "body" and "face" are generic words for the designation of the writer's mind also, since the logic of the mind governs the experimental representation. The corporeal experience is viewed in terms of consciousness, and the influence of drug is seen not so much through its physical concrete impacts (sufferings, feelings) as through its impact on the writer's perception of the outside world, as similar or dissimilar to his own internal world. Thought and mind as pure concepts are left aside, and replaced by an experimental thinking. Not a meditation, this thinking is more like a mental struggle: its own discursive logic tests the truth of external language. The body in

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<sup>1</sup>These terms moreover are not frequent; it is difficult to give an exact idea of their frequency but I can say that besides face, "visage" which occurs regularly, as well as body "le corps," the others may occur only once or twice per book.

Do not panic!

texts on drug experimentation belongs then to language. It is a "body talk", a discourse, wherein the writer's body (his experimental body undergoing the effects of drug) is a fictional image and a word. The body as well as the mind are words within the textual idiolect which conditions the reader's access to meaning, and his perception of a body in the text. The text effects a semiotic decomposition of the fictional body, which is thus presented as an original dictionary.<sup>1</sup>

Michaux synthesizes the experience made of words. He represents the expressive experience made under the influence of drugs by means of analogies to other known discursive situations. He describes it as a dream, as a verbal "rêverie" and in an emblematic depiction he characterizes it under the heading "casse-tete."

Rêverie en mots qui continuent, maintenant retentissante, véritable casse tête. Je suis dans les voix et les mots, comme je serais barbotant dans un torrent inégal, passant dans les uns, m'enfonçant dans d'autres, d'autres m'éclaboussant, d'autres me faisant perdre l'équilibre en paraissant m'apostropher. Mots impératifs, d'autres se perdants, comme s'ils allaient ailleurs et lâchaient mon 'appareil.' C.L.G. p. 163

The expression "casse-tête" is an analogical transcription of the mental situation and it bears a double meaning. On the one hand it is intended

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<sup>1</sup>In this way, we echo Michel Grimaud's assertion that the body comes first, and the physical activities shape intellectual activities which use a corporal lexicon as stereotypes (ex. to fall in love) cf. Michel Grimaud, "l'organe du sens, sémiotisation du corps imaginaire," lecture, Colloque Poétique du Corps, Columbia University, November 1982. Yet there is a limit to such an assertion which is that this corporeal taxonomy supposes a previous nomination; the corporal foundations of language thus come from language, and from its designation of the body.

to signify a mental pressure exerted on the head, as if to break it. On the other hand, it constitutes a stereotype referring to the situation of being puzzled, and to the difficulty of finding the right word. The quotation depicts a verbal maelstrom through the metaphor of the "torrent inégal," (analogous to the agitated sea, see, see Part III, Chapter III). The words here are explicitly seen as spaces of passage open to various investments: neutral "passant par les uns" (as only transient "mots-relais"), or embodied "m'enfonçant dans d'autres", or codified and codifying ("mots impératifs) The quotation depicts a general experience of "radicaux en liberté" (C.L.G. p. 220) that is to say a verbal fantasy wherein words or parts of words are the elements of a free and playful mental representation.

Elsewhere, the expressive experience is assimilated to an act of oral poetry wherein the voice is active and takes charge of articulating the internal impulse which originates it.

Subitement des chants sortirent, . . . je les  
sentais sortir, devant sortir, pressés de sortir,  
mouvements phonateurs incoercibles, . . .  
j'entendais . . . leur origine dans ma gorge,  
possédée d'une sorte d'envie vocale qui me rendait  
coparticipant et actif.

C.L.G. p. 84

In the above quotation the voice appears as the extension of the body (since it comes from the "gorge") where an articulatory action begins. The voice comes out of the body, of the writer's internal vision (des chants sortirent, oui sortirent) but does not exhaust it, as language would do. Based on a corporeal theater the voice appears as a

performance wherein the body still models discourse and articulation by means of the throat's articulatory dance. The body is here immobile next to this movement of the throat. But it is represented by the voice which is the operation emitting the impulse to communicate, this "envie vocale" through which the writer's experience is both preserved and articulated ("coparticipant et actif"). For this reason the voice represents the specificity of the expression experience at this precise moment of nakedness, where the unspeakable is eager to be formulated ("devant sortir, pressés de sortir").<sup>1</sup> The voice here takes up the myth of phonocentrism in mentioning those "mouvements phonateurs incoercibles" through which the voice and the phonatory act appear as the immediate, spontaneous expression of the individual experience.<sup>2</sup> The organic voice is the sign of the harmony between the internal subjective rhythm and the external, objective, musical environment.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>I recall here Paul Zumthor's expression in "Le corps et la lettre, Lecture," Colloque Poétique du Corps, Columbia University, November 1982. There he described the voice as "une indicibilité apte à se revêtir de langage."

<sup>2</sup>See the work of Jacques Derrida, and particularly "Sémiologie et grammatologie, Entretien avec Julia Kristeva," Positions, (Paris: Ed. de Minuit, 1972), pp. 27-38. "La phoné est en effect la substance signifiante qui se donne à la conscience comme le plus intimement unie à la pensée du concept signifié. La voix est, de ce point de vue, la conscience elle-même" (ibid. p. 32). See Phonocentrism, Ducrot et Todorov, op. cit. pp. 349-350 ". . . the privilège of the phonic signifier over the graphic signifier [which] can be legitimized on the basis of the distinction between an inside (where thought resides) and an outside (where writing falls). Speech is the expression close to consciousness even if the voice is not conceived as a quasi-effacement of the signifier."

<sup>3</sup>In this particular example, Michaux in fact depicts himself listening to music under the influence of mescaline.

The voice appears then as a minimal linguistic performance emphasizing not so much the nature of a message as the event and the origin of this message. It is not a speech but a pure sound. This minimalist performance complies with the initial steps of poetry (such as in orphic poetry or in the early medieval poetry of troubadours) when it tries to be only a voice, a carmen, without semantic boundaries. The voice is then the part of the body according to which discourse can be produced but which simultaneously remains close to its original source of inspiration, or rather expiration. Although meaning here remains enigmatic, the text aspires to be this voice, this pre-verbal articulation whose movements designate the internal rythm of drives. In this ideal oral spontaneity, the voice takes up the internal impulse which gives birth to its performance; it interprets and at the same time betrays the body. Michaux evokes this possible mode of articulation in the context of a kind of "transe" (C.L.G. P. 84) and an experience through which the performer's voice faithfully transmits his internal state. The oral poetry which is outlined in this quotation is a modality through which an internal feature or state could be transposed as a sign in the communication process. Written poetry, with which we are dealing here, rejects this possibility by necessarily reintroducing meaning (yet this evocation of the voice, which recalls Appollinaire's 'Phonographe' or vocal texts is pursued by Michaux's record La Ralentie in which Michaux reads a text entitled "La Ralentie" thus both the words of the text and the rhythm of the reading convey the notion of slowness.) Generally speaking, Michaux depicts the mental experience as a system of form and signification whose basic content is

revealed by the text as a lexical source or productivity. The word displayed by the text is quoted as coming from the mental sphere, as seen in thought by the writer before it is written. The text represents itself as a critical system of deciphering the internal semantics in that it quotes the word perceived. This word's basic value is that of defining the internal reality: either it synthetizes it,<sup>1</sup> or it depicts it in a more ironic way, as in the following case. Here the words appear to be mental impressions circumscribing the phenomenon more than as the proper words per se. "D'abord il se presenta a mon esprit deux synonymes, quelque chose comme "peu important" et "modeste" ou "réservé et modeste" ou "humble et effacé". . . . (C.L.G. p. 138)

Whether it summarizes or circumscribes the internal feeling, the word takes the shape of a previous paradigm from which the text will then derive. The word is an initial unit of signification which the text then expands: "Qu'est ce qui allait être branché sur 'distance'? Distance rôdait toujours, je n'en étais plus le maître et j'en étais mal et peu l'observateur." (C.L.G. p. 164) The text presents itself as only the place of the word impression, and through the use of quotation marks, it reveals the word "distance" to be a sufficient word and a tautology. In fact it seems to be a generic term which is to be found in the depiction of the signification line, and in the various metaphors and metonymies which show the relationship between the internal content and its external articulation. The word "immense" follows the same

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<sup>1</sup>See C.L.G. p. 163 "Je me trouvais ensuite observant une certaine situation dont l'élément principal était défini par le mot 'distance' que j'écrivis."

process" in Misérable Miracle (p. 22). It is mentally pronounced (que je prononçais mentalement) and it conveys throughout the book the sense of immensity, vastness, amplitude, infinity, growth.

There is a system of exchange between the text (seen as a paragrammatic development) and the given experimental vocable, more than an inductive system of derivation. Spread out into the text, these words constitute a system of justification of its descriptive system and one which is all the more genuine that it is presented as formally extrinsic to the text. At the same time, the text presents itself as congruent with this initial statement, since it allows its paraphrase and repetition under various forms.<sup>1</sup> As a critical instrument of its own productivity, the text indifferently oscillates between the representation of an implicit derivation and that of an explicit derivation.<sup>2</sup> Michaux describes as an implicit derivation a system of basic paradigms ("les mots-clés" C.L.G. p. 167) which is suggested and perceived by the writer but not actualized. Conversely in the explicit derivation the word is actualized as in the case of "distance" (C.L.G. p. 163) or "immense" (M.M. p. 22). Through this play on various levels of mental impression the text justifies the authenticity of its system of transposition of the experience seen as a pre-text. Besides the system of word-impressions, there is also a system of neology.

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<sup>1</sup>I could even speak of saturation, since the text is perceived by the reader as the constant repetition under different forms of the same expression experience, and of its difficulties.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Michael Riffaterre, La Production du texte, op. cit., p. 66.



of word-creation, and invention.<sup>1</sup> The text furnishes a kind of poetics of neologism as defined by Michael Riffaterre.<sup>2</sup> For Michaux this neology rests on a situation of mental distortion ("Que de mots semblent avoir été inventés par des nevrosés" C.L.G. p. 78) or it comes from the necessity of an appropriate and specific lexicon. Whether it is quoted by Michaux, ("Martyrissiblement ' par exemple me venait et me revenait." M.M. p. 14) or practiced by the text without further justification (as in the case of the "L'anopodokotolotopadnodrome" M.M. p. 45) the neologism allows the restitution of the specificity of the mental system and network of signification in that it "offers the solution or possibility of the non-grammaticality."<sup>3</sup> What does this non grammaticality (rather than un-grammaticality) consist of? Not so much as a breaking of the rules of grammar, but rather as the constitution of words according to another and internal grammar of which those neologisms are the only proof. In texts on drug experimentation there are three different types of neologisms.<sup>4</sup> First, "Martyrissiblement"

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Yvon Belaval, "Introduction à la poésie expérimentale", in Critique, Nov. 1962, p. 913 "La drogue, comme la poésie d'Henri Michaux invente des neologismes et des mots composites."

<sup>2</sup>Michael Riffaterre, La Production du texte, pp. 61-76.

<sup>3</sup>Our translation from Michael Riffaterre, op. cit, p. 65: "Premièrement, là où les limites du lexique rendent irréalisable la dérivation, il\* offre la solution de la non-grammaticalité." il\*=the neologism.

<sup>4</sup>In other texts from Michaux the neologism constitutes the main stylistic trend: Cf. Voyage en Grande Garabagne, Callimard, Paris, 1967 (where the neologism is used in the designation of people and tribes supposed to inhabit this country, itself designated by a neologism) cf. Le Grand Combat and Glu et gli - in Qui je fus, L'Espace du Dedans, op. cit. pp. 12-16. There the neologism meets up with onomatopoeia.

appears as a neologism constructed by hybridization. It is an adverbial offspring the noun "martyr" is extended to a superlative (through the suffixe -issi(ble) ) and transformed into an adverb through the addition of the adverbial suffix "-ment". The element "-ble" in between does not correspond to any element in language but produces an effect of likeness with other adjectival endings (such as "visible(ment)," "probable(ment)"...) Second, the "l'anopodokotolotopadnodrome" appears to be a fantastic bet carrying various connotations. It is a construction by mere accumulation of syllables which neither compose recognizable words, nor consist (as in the case of the hybridization) of original parts of words. However they do initiate a word apparently composed after the principles (prefixes and suffixes) of Greek composition.<sup>1</sup> We can isolate the particle "an" with a privative meaning, or a play on "ano-ana" close to the particle "ana" suggesting inversion or duplication. We notice the prefix or suffix "podo" - (from foot) used in zoology (cf. gasteropode); we notice the suffix "drome" as in the word "syndrome". Generally speaking this neologism is intended to designate the specific phenomenon and syndrome experienced by the experimenters and from which their visions originate. At the same time the neologism illustrates the signs and characteristics of abnormality; that is to say the impossibility to compose (manifestement, la mescaline ne savait pas composer. M.M. p. 44). Finally this neologism demonstrates a certain type of onomatopoeia which imitates by its length

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Grevisse, la composition grecque, in Le Bon Usage, (Gembloux (Belgique): ed. Duculot, 1975), pp. 108-111.

and its sounds - but in a whimsical way since the word is deprived of meaning – the scholarly learned vocabulary. It imitates a word and functions as a noun in the sentences – « l'anapodokotolopadnodrome allait fermer » : as such it emphasizes the specificity of the internal world and its mechanisms, its distance with regards to meaning and with regards to ordinary language. Being unverifiable, but apparently originated by the internal fonctionings it appears to be the right word. It evokes an unspeakable unconscious which is partially accessible to analysis. A third category of neology to be mentioned is onomatopoeia, that is to say the approximate transposition of inarticulate shouts or sounds. Onomatopoeia is common to popular language as well as to the language of children, to mental pathology and to poetry. The word "krakatoa" repeated three times (M.M. p. 14) does not appear to be a sound in mental perception, but a word, the articulation of a sound. It suggests a parrot's cry, or that of any kind of exotic bird. The exoticism is an effect of the neologism and it sustains the linguistics suggestion of another world. At the same time, it evokes a situation of internal jungle or confusion. The notion of downfall can be perceived in the onomatopoeia through its likeness to the common onomatopoeia "patatra" designating the fall of objects, and to "crac" suggesting the breaking of objects. Thus Michaux's onomatopoeic neologism is a compound of ready-made onomatopoeia. It takes place within language and reveals a mobility and an aptitude to evoke internal performance. Furthermore, the neologism's interpretation is sustained by another word produced by mental occurrence. The word "cristal" which is a common noun ("un plus commun encore comme cristal" M.M. p. 14) nevertheless is presented as

an invention. The neologism "krakatoa" seems indeed to catalyse notions latent in the word "cristal", to previously suggest its breaking as an image of internal reality and distortion. The word "cristal" is presented by Michaux as a pure interbal signifier: it is presented as total, unique, exhaustive, over-determined (by its quotation marks and alleged repetition) and as the synthesis of a whole discourse:

'Cristal revenait vingt fois de suite, me tenant à lui seul un grand discours, chargé d'un autre monde, et je ne serais pas arrivé à l'augmenter de si peu que ce soit, ou à le complimenter de quelque autre.'" M.M. p. 14

The word "cristal" felt as an invention, appears simultaneously to be the right word and symbol. The neologism previously seen were presented as mental formulations derived and expanded by the text. The word "cristal" is presented as a whole, which can neither be expanded nor decomposed. It appears rather as the product and the concretization of a derivation, of a pre-existing line which however has no other manifestation but "cristal". This word "cristal" confirms Michaux's conception of the seen seen as a space of concretisation. It complies also with a broader poetics where the word per se is intended to act as a symbol, as a body formed by solidification of a substance, but one that can adopt various configurations or faces, just as a "crystal" (a snow or salt crystal) does. The word "cristal" here recalls Vigny's Les Destinées in which the pearl, the diamond, or the crystal are seen as the symbols of a pure and total poetry that would condense and include everything. Poetry would also be ascetic and spiritually

oriented so that it would not disclose its content, but only reveal its invisible presence.

The word "cristal" is described saying a lot ("me tenant un grand discours"), and this discourse is said to come from an other world or internal scene ("chargé d'un autre monde"). However, its value is solely evocative, and not informative; we do not know exactly what it says. As such it represents a kind of poetry, devoid of semantic boundaries, but one which is still evocative, in which the word is the isolated and abstract figure of a known entity, and a point of convergence between language and the internal world. It is interesting to notice that as such the figure reunites a word and a world seen as internal chaos and as a tempestuous sea according to Michaux's idiolect. "Lui seul, comme un naufragé sur une île m'était tout et le reste et l'océan agité dont il venait de sortir, et qu'il rappelait irrésistiblement au naufragé que j'étais comme lui, seul et résistant dans la débâcle. (M.M. p. 14) Here the word is shipwrecked as much as the writer, and at the same time it is the sign of his escape and recovery. As such it is the expression of internal chaos, its product and its overcoming by means of crystallization. The word "cristal" causes the internal (chaos) to assume a crystalline structure, and a fixed shape, as does Mallarmé's word, "comme ce seul objet dont le néant s'honore."<sup>1</sup>

Thus by means of the neologism, Michaux describes the lexical creativity of the drug or mental distortion experience as a polysemantic

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<sup>1</sup>Mallarmé, "Ses purs ongles..."Oeuvres Complètes, (Paris: Ed. Gallimard, 1945) p. 68.

nonsense manifested at the level of the word which organizes the internal chaos.

Besides this neological tendency drug and mental experience are also presented, as a new mode of association. A syntactic creativity sustains the lexical creativity according to laws of communication that are different to that of conventional discourse. The two previous models suggested as ideal expressions of the mental experience (the textual poetics of the voice and the poetics of the neologism) remain literary categories . They are representations within the text which presents them as possible modes which it could adopt. Thus, the text reveals its mobility, its ability to play and to mime other modes of expression (such as orality for example). The case that we are approaching now, however, is not presented as a whole but rather as a system dispersed throughout the text, and Michaux insists on its transgressive character with respect to the rules of language. Language, under the influence of drug, and in a situation of mental liberation, is described by Michaux as a series of operations effected on words. Generally speaking this series of operations reveal a mental transformational syntax which either prevents the articulation, or affects the readability of the sentence (in distorting the typography), or may even produce meaningless sentences. Observed in words in the narrative adventure, this transformational syntax corresponds to a mental situation and functioning which Michaux describes with several approximations as "l'aventure des micro-alterations, du fourmillement des micro-variations, des micro-oppositions, des micro-rapprochements..."(C.L.G. p. 139). The mental faculties and habits of

the writer are changed: he thinks differently, his mind skips easily from one thought to another, and he allows himself all kinds of mental operations, which are then to be felt at the level of his articulation. His articulation is seen as impossible, or incoherent, as verbal delirium. The delirium is described in the text as a process of dismemberment and of metamorphosis, and is instituted as a discursive system characteristic of the mental experience of the mental expression. Michaux presents a metaphorical description of this system which he views as producing mental visions internally changing into others. He depicts the mental situation and its functioning as a sort of ever-changing mental painting "en perpétuelle métamorphose et transubstantiation (M.M. p. 41), one which is not aimed at a specific representation but rather appears to be the unrulylike and capricious exercise of an unbounded imagination.

...allant tantôt vers la forme d'une gigantesque larve, tantôt paraissant le premier projet d'un tapis immense et presque orogénique, ou le pagne encore frémissant d'un danseur noir éffondré, qui va s'endormir. Mais du sommeil et avant qu'il s'accomplisse, ressort magiquement l'édifice... M.M. p. 41

Michaux in fact depicts a kind of verbal magic which proceeds by adjunction and induction from one image to another, by metamorphic or anamorphic transformation; thus it denotes the mental sphere and its "engrenage fou" (M.M. p. 22). Moreover, the magic of the internal visions is presented as a language or as an expressive technique of the mind which reveals its workings.

je vois se prononcer, se dérober, s'affirmer,  
s'assurer, s'abandonner, se reprendre, se raffermir,  
à coups de ponctuations, de répétitions, de  
secousses hésitantes, par lents devoiements, par  
fissurations, par indiscernables glissements, je  
vois se former, se déformer, se redéformer, un  
édifice tressautant. M.M. p. 41

Michaux mainly emphasizes the indefinite, transgressive and disoriented character of this mode of composition with regard to the conventional laws of composition. One aspect of this emphasis consists (as seen in the quotation above through the series "ponctuations,... répétitions, fissurations.") of saturating the text with an extensive use of abstract words ending with the suffixe "tion"; "transformation," "différentiation", "dissociation," "oblitération,", "décomposition," "répétition,". These words illustrate the general process of dismemberment which is described as the specific mode of the mental composition and that affects the written record of the mental experience. These operations are sometimes developed and explained in the book (as we saw in Part III, chapter II), but usually they are only quoted.

For this reason they appear to be textual figures and representations of the mental functioning. They constitute a system directly opposed to that of ordinary language, yet without new structures. The act of articulation under specific mental circumstances is seen as an anti-discourse which however is perceived according to the usual system and functioning of communication. It is seen as decomposition, and not as another mode of composition, or a recomposition according to another esthetics: Michaux's presentation of



this other system of communication seems intended not to constitute a separate entity. Rather it seems to serve as a critical fiction as an instrument of ridicule, used against the usual system of communication. The critical tool emerges out of the system itself since drug experimentation is mostly seen as a moment in which the mind can grasp and watch its own mechanism while it usually unconsciously works:

opération qui semble se foutre de vos opérations mentales ¶ SYSTEME DOUÉ D'UN POUVOIR AUTONOME DE RIDICULISATION DU SYSTÈME.

C.L.G. p. 120.

The description of mental composition consists of revealing its degree of conformity and of transgression with respect to ordinary mode of composition. "Peu d'inventions somme toute dans les structures, mais pour le parodique tout est bon. Tout va au but." (C.L.G. p. 85)

The above quotation is borrowed from a passage of the book in which Michaux describes himself listening to music under the influence of mescaline. He describes his listening as an operation of decomposition through which the mental mechanisms impose their functioning upon the music. The result is a "déli de musique", and the music becomes "dévergondée, entremetteuse, libertine, folle, impie, ignoble, subversive" (C.L.G. p. 85) because the mental mechanisms absorb the music and submit it to its system of perceptive deformations and transformations. The subversion consists not so much of creating a new music, as of subjecting to parody the presupposed and hypogrammatic music. It remains within the data given by this music. The text represents the parodic perceptive-expressive experience as an operation

of exaggeration, and overdetermination. "Il y avait aussi par moments, des notes haut perchées, des jumelages ineptes, des frottements musicaux jamais entendus, des abbellimenti outranciers, un divisionisme fou, des voix couplées étrangement avec des aboiements ou des hurlements de la jungle." (C.L.G. p. 85)

The parody effected consists of extracting the main characteristics of musical composition and emphasizing them. It uses its features absurdly and improperly, it associates them abruptly in a playful satirical composition ("il y avait par moments. . . , des gamineries"). The parody affects the height of notes, the association of tones. It satyrizes the composition, in exaggerating the ornamentation, and in disrupting the meter, as well as the harmonic unity. What is the final aim of this parody (Tout va au but)? It seems that an overdetermination of the initial composition is aimed at "since the parody consists of an attempted refutation and simultaneous revelation of the initial musical text. The parody enlightens a specific decoding of the musical language and composition. The parody presents itself as another execution of the score<sup>1</sup> based not on a principle of conformity but of transgression.

Parody and metamorphosis appear to be the two related figures through which Michaux describes the textual system of communication that influences the writing of the text. Through them he represents how language acts upon language in the text. Through the parody of

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<sup>1</sup>We recall Michael Riffaterre's assertion in la Production du texte, op.cit. p. 19 "le mecanisme meme de dechiffrement de la partition qu'est le texte."

composition which the expression experience reveals, Michaux depicts an aspect of the textual argumentation. Parody, which is presented as the main expressive aspect during experimental situations, is the illustration of the textual process itself. It is a key provided for the decoding of the text.

The text presents the experience as a rhetoric of decomposition. This rhetoric appears rather as a counter-rhetoric establishing a new mode of association and composition seen as "Desassociation" (G.E.E. p. 182), and as a counter-creation. In the books, in fact, Michaux attempts a representation of the expression experience and calls the reader's attention to the discursive level and to the obstacles encountered during writing. While emphasizing the discordant and disjunctive relationship between experience and language Michaux underlines the importance of the mode of expression. He creates the illusion of a discourse which dramatizes language and the expression experience, within the text's literary discourse. Through this counter-rhetoric Michaux reveals the features of writing and rhetoric in general. He questions them, and revives them. The mental experience is an illusion which serves as a foil for the analysis of language and also for its teaching. Through the reference to another language, through the textual representation of a distance between the textual use of language and its general use Michaux forces the reader to reflect upon language.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The reference to another language, to a mental experience and expression functions as the reference to the real mentioned by Michael Riffaterre, *ibid.* p. 21: "On aura avantage à considerer les références au réel exclusivement comme une espèce de gymnastique verbale que le text fait faire au lecteur." In fact, in Part IV, Chapter III, I will show how this reference to the mental world is the means of establishing the rudiments of poetic language.

For this reason the unifying principle of the experience appears to be a discursive subject who is to be perceived through his relation to the status of the text. His personality is stylistic and his identity is seen (not in metaphysical terms) but in terms of style and originality. This is conveyed by the following expressions of Michaux's reaction to the hallucinogene experienced:

Il m'enlevait mon originalité. C.L.G. p. 47  
Dans cet éboulement j'avais perdu mon style (C.L.G.  
p. 52)  
Ce manquement psychique ne me permettant plus mon style. (C.L.G. p. 48) (emphasis added)

Moreover, style is held as the testimony of the writer's feeling, as the concrete, and not illusory proof of his state of mind.

Champignon contre l'indépendance. Contre la singularité. Je me sentais devenir quelconque. Comme je l'ai dit, ce n'était pas illusion. Je n'avais plus mon style. C.L.G. p. 66

All these definitions are negative, style is denied. The books are based on the attempt at style independent from the author's style and which they are said never to wholly grasp. The search for a style is linked in the texts to the experience and hardship of the writer. What is sought after is an attribute of the writer, one which would perform his experience and his vision.

Comme dire cela? Il aurait fallu une manière accidentée que je ne possède pas, faite de surprises, de coq-à-l'âne, d'aperçus en un instant, de rebondissements et d'incidences, un style instable, tobogganant et babouin. M.M. p. 14

The writer is said not to possess the mode through which he should

outwardly manifest and handle ("maniere" seen as handling) his visions. This mode is depicted as an esthetic of non-coherence and spontaneity (surprises, . . . coq à l'âne, aperçus. . .). The difficulty lies in the ideal of diversity and instability assigned to this mode and which makes definition impossible. The non-definable and unconventional character of this style is conveyed by the modifiers attached: the neologism "tobogganant" and the derivative "babouin." "Tobogganant" made from the word "toboggan" seems to suggest an inability to stop, once started and defines the ideal of style that would adhere to sudden declines experienced. "Babouin" (baboon) uses as an adjective the ape baboon, and conveys the notion of a whimsically gesticulating, playful and even grotesque style. Both neologisms appear to be counter-characteristics of the usual notion of style which often suggests elegance, harmony and distinction. This unstable style complies however with the necessity of reproducing the presupposed mental experience, and with the necessity for Michaux to create his own stylistic substance. When it is explicitly quoted in text as it is in the previous quotation, the "style" is presented as an ideal which cannot be grasped, as a challenge to the text, putting it into question. When conversely the notion of style is not explicit, (as it generally is not) it fuses with the mental idiosyncrasy which the text seeks after and practices. It then becomes the means of a challenge addressed to literature in general. Michaux submits the text to an operation of dissolution which reveals the textual logic and he tries to circumscribe the material and intimate aspects of the operation of writing. If he proposes several variations of the same experience it is not for the sake of recalling internal visions, but to find out and reveal through their representations what

exists behind the images; a feeling of the mind, the creative imagination, the writing conception and impulse. This impulse constitutes the only style in that it allows the poet to act upon his thought and more particularly, it allows him to experience his individual action. (IL A ACTION SUR SA PENSÉE. SON ACTION. G.E.E. p. 18, ). Generally speaking, throughout texts on drug experimentation, style is presented as an action of intervention upon language. This is developed in a passage from Connaissance par les Couffres describing the mental epic which the writer experiences. Here the imagination and creative energy is depicted as "masse d'energie pure"(C.L.G. p. 238) and as "insurrection psychique qui est au dedans de lui" (C.L.G. p. 239) notion close to the philosophical notion of Aufhebung or Erlebnis). The psychic uprising is however said to be deprived of a soul, "quoique sans âme" (C.L.G. p. 239) The question of writing is presented in terms of the mental experience of a subject, while simultaneously the notion of subject is only used for the description and argumentation (son vecteur et sujet. C.L.G. p. 260) The force which motivates textual composition, is depicted as an action happening beyond the "je," beyond the conventional sign or imprint of the writer.

...vehicule cahotant de sa pensee, qui la rend inefficace, qui la renvoie derisoire et la tripatouille et la dilacere sauvagement sans s'occuper de "je", sans le remarquer, se desentravant sauvagement en tous sens. C.L.G.p.238

The "je" of the writer, is presently seen in quotation marks as a stereotyped and conventional "je." It is overcome by an operation of mental consumption, (thought consumes thought) or of mental manipulation

by means of new words. The action mentioned here, is a new kind of acting upon the thought as expressed by the neologisms which characterize it, "tripatouille," and "dilacere." Both convey the impression of a violent manipulation through which the mind liberates itself. The operation is presented as an initiation: the writer's energy is multiplied and he is inspired by the desire to free himself from all that constitutes his social environment and its system of constraining values. Mental energy is represented as an operation of violent discharge firing off all emotional content, as seen in the series of synonyms which describe it.

...se décharger... de tout, de meubles, d'objets, de personnes, d'ordre installé, d'interdits sociaux ou familiaux ou personnels... (aussi bien d'ailleurs de matelas ou de coussins que de chiens ou de femmes),...C.L.G. p.240

In these series, a transposition is effected from the mental figures previously seen (as decomposition) into figures of elocution and style. More specifically we notice the transposition from a mental rhetoric to a physical actual style, and to concrete act of writing whose definition here rejoins and explains the style of Qui je fus (Le Grand Combat, Gli et Gli).<sup>1</sup> It joins its aspect as a concrete intervention as regards to various preys: concrete objects, dogs or women (the latter being among the favorite victims of Michaux's stylistic interventionism.<sup>2</sup>) In fact

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<sup>1</sup> in L'Espace du Dedans, op. cit., pp. 12-14.

<sup>2</sup> See "Une vie de chien, *ibid.*, p. 31: "Ce qui me fatigue ainsi ce sont mes interventions continuelles. J'ai déjà dit que dans la rue je me battais avec tout le monde; je gifle l'un, je prends le sein aux femmes, et me servant de mon pied comme d'un tentacule, je mets la panique dans les voitures du Métropolitain."

the actions listed (C.L.G. p.24 ) do belong to a rhetorical category defined by Fontanier as "Prétendues Figures de Pensée." Fontanier associates them either with the figures of thought or the figures of passion and he contests their appellation as Figures since he considers the feeling they convey as serious, sincere and not affected.<sup>1</sup> These figures are the "Imprécation" and "Déprécation," and it is essential to Michaux's envisioned style that they appear not as figures but conversely as the author's real actions, feelings with regard to the world he orders. I categorize under the heading "Imprécation," the substantives "vehemence, violence, brisements, éclats." They depict the series of maledictions of furious wishes which "éclatent sans connaître de frein ni de mesure"<sup>2</sup> because of the excessive energy which the experiences." This energy induces him to a violent liberation one which is seen here as an internal movement of deflagration or "bombe" (C.L.G. p. 241).

I categorize under the heading "Déprécation," the series of verbal derivatives through which the injuries and the evil is expressed.<sup>3</sup> Deprecation consists in wishing someone evil (or good) in expressing or demanding something in the most persuasive and insisting way. I attach to this definition the words "massacres, destructions,

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<sup>1</sup>Fontanier, op. cit. p. 435 "où trouver dans le langage ces détours, ces combinaisons ingénieuses d'un esprit qui médite une surprise ou un triomphe? N'est-il pas tout de la nature seule, s'il faut le dire et n'y voir--ou pas en quelque sorte le coeur tout entier? Enfin, ne faudrait--il pas toujours, pour produire son effet et inspirer la terreur, qu'elle parut réelle et sérieuse, et ne put pas être prise pour un vain jeu?"

<sup>2</sup>Fontanier, ibid. p. 435.

<sup>3</sup>See Fontanier, "Déprécation," ibid. p. 440.



renversements, ecrasements, broiements, dislocations, eventration." In this graduated series of nouns the suffixes "-tion" or "-ment" are attached to the radicals of verbs conveying the notion of concrete, violent, physical disruption and destruction. This corporeal terminology is used metaphorically to depict the stylistic effect expected. The above mentioned action consists of discursively displacing normal connections, of turning upside down, of continually changing to the contrary, squeezing out of shape, both the words, the images and their meaning. Both the first and the second series gathered under the heading "Imprecation" and "Déprécation" designate the mode of elocution spontaneously enacted by the mental energy. Through phonic repetitions (-tions, -ment) through consonantic friction and through an accumulation of words conveying the notion of aggressivity, they evoke a cacophony and the epic tournament of the writer's impetuosity against his personal monsters.. Both series can also be seen as figures of style. They constitute a general operation of "reversion" which Fontanier describes as a construction by revolution in which words in a proposition are converted into their contrary.<sup>1</sup> How is this figure suggested? How does the text achieve the shift from a narrative situation to a definition of style?

First this is conveyed by the conventional character of the esthetics used for the description of the writer's situation. In this passage the writer's situation is described as an epic tournament and one which adopts an animistic character. The writer's mental struggle

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<sup>1</sup>Fontanier, op. cit. p. 381.

is depicted as a "corps à corps monstrueux" (C.L.G. p. 239), with a "monstrueux compagnon au potentiel insoutenable" (C.L.G. p. 240). The animism here is emphasized by grotesque connotations. The fight is said to be a fight between monsters. It is an unconventional epic fight between ignoble opponents, and a chimeric confrontation: the writer views himself as a veal "saisi à ses naseaux douloureux par un crocodile experimente qui l'entraîne irresistiblement sous les eaux." (C.L.G. p. 279). The grotesque confrontation of "veal" and "crocodile," and the overdetermination of the mental struggle by the recurrence of the liquid metaphor (les eaux) designate the description as ostentatious, as a romanticist cliché. The cliché is an instrument of expressivity. It reveals that the object and message of the description consist of defining a style.

Second, the notion of aggressivity is conveyed by the cliché. This is the way through which the text transcribes the writer's psychological state. In fact Michaux's passage appears to be the metaphorical version (in terms of style) of the phenomena of aggressivity which Lacan examines (in terms of psychic action) (see next quotation). Michaux's passage describes an operation of discharge, conducted by means of verbal threats and images of corporeal destruction. These images stand for the writer's psychic action; they define his expressive action or the effective style of his psychic action (cf. "Il action sur sa pensée. Son action." G.E.E. p. 18 in capital letters in the text) Michaux's description joins Lacan's definition of the aggressivity seen in the following quotation as a series of images, and more particularly as specific images of corporeal destruction.

These III: :l'agressivité, dans l'expérience, nous est donnée comme intention d'agression et comme image de dislocation corporelle, et c'est sous de tels modes qu'elle se démontre efficiente. . . Les vecteurs electifs des intentions agressives sont les images de castration, d'éviscération, de mutilation, de démembrement, de dislocation, d'éventrement, de dévoration, d'éclatement du corps. . . 1

The conformity with Lacan's view is restricted to the images he observes, since we cannot prove Michaux's intention of aggressivity. Rather we can speak of an effect of aggressivity which bears a programatic value as regard to some of Michaux's other texts. Here Michaux theoretizes an expressive aggressivity which elsewhere (see L'Espace du Dedans, op. cit., pp. 12-14) he practices. Michaux's metaphors join Lacan's observation about the generic images chosen to express aggressivity and which Lacan says, are the imaginary themes most common to the human mind in general.<sup>2</sup> Michaux's description of the writer's mental situation by means of images of corporeal dislocation reveals not a particular individual stylistic tendency, but a fundamental one. Thus, the second way through which the description is made to define a stylistic figure consists in emphasizing that aggressivity as a psychic action that expresses itself by means of a convention in the expressive system in general.

In fact, Michaux insists that style cannot be only "une mince pellicule de personnalité et de réflexion propre" (C.L.G. p. 33). It must be an absolute impulse. The abstract figuration of this absolute

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<sup>1</sup>Jacques Lacan, L'Agréssivité en psychanalyse, in Ecrits, (Paris: Seuil, 1966), pp. 103-104.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 113.

in the text is the third way through which the description of the mental experience serves a definition of style.

In this passage the writer identifies himself with the gestalt of his own body ("L'homme en présence de son moteur. . . ""Son'être' était une usine contrôlée. . ." C.L.G. p. 238). He views it as an internal subversive impulse "absolument sauvage, absolument négateur" (C.L.G. p. 242) through which his mode of address appears as "crime, . . . meurtre" (C.L.G. p. 242) as murder: "Tuer était donc l'action privilégiée et secrète cachée sous ses troubles"... (C.L.G. p. 242)

The passage brings about the abstract idea of the writing act as murder without developing, nor justifying it, and the argument remains metapsychological. Here, the writing act is seen as unconscious ("Son subconscient choisit la victime. . . Lui? Il n'est pas dans le coup." C.L.G. P. 241) It is also seen as an act of "consommation, . . . dilapidation" (C.L.G. p. 240) of the writer's energy, and one which results in a cathartic "assouvissement" (C.L.G. p. 241), "calme" (C.L.G. p. 241). The passage here emphasizes the pulsional position of enunciation in which writing originates.<sup>1</sup> It presents it as subversive ("un acte subversif" C.L.G. p. 242), as deliberately deviant,<sup>2</sup> and as

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<sup>1</sup>This position is close to Freud's Death Instinct as defined by Julia Kristeva in La Révolution du Langage Poétique, (Paris: Seuil, 1974), p. 611. "En ouvrant ainsi le code de la langue vers une hétérogénéité qui le sous-tend. . . nous avons trouvé--la pulsion d'agressivité, le rejet, la négativité ou ce que Freud appelle la pulsion de mort, au fondement de l'activité signifiante."

<sup>2</sup>See M. M. p. 143 "Le contraire de l'acte normal se présentait tentateur. . . La fascination de l'idée fautive chez les fous, de l'acte à ne pas commettre, s'établirait en fonction des règles qui régissent l'expression et l'oeuvre d'art en général."

revolutionary: "Véritable pile et bombe d'indiscipline" (C.L.G. p. 239).

The writing act for Michaux originates in a crisis and is motivated by an aggressive impulse. Its validity as an individual means of expression lies in its proximity with the immediate thought. The writing act envisaged by Michaux must be "une voie directe du psychisme aux choses."<sup>1</sup> In texts on drug experimentation the mental distortion described justified a reinforcement of this proximity and this connection, "comme si du cerveau il était passé directement à dépendre d'une station électrique" (C.L.G. p. 238). Here Michaux describes a kind of automatic writing.

Finally, the experimental description induces a definition of style in naming the psychic action at work in mental distortion. The psychic impulse is figured in the text under the heading "Ça".<sup>2</sup> This "Ça" remains an abstract figure, but as a name given to the experience it overdetermines it and signals the textualization. The "Ça" is developed as "Dynamique étrangère suractualisée" (C.L.G. p. 238). It defines an ethos, or a textual function of persuasion. Thus the mental experience appears to be an expressive experience. Its style is a dynamic (aggressive and subversive) which motivates the text; being mental and

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<sup>1</sup>See Michaux Une voie pour l'Insubordination, (Paris: Fata Morgana), 1980, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>The kinship with Lacan's "Ça" is too striking not to be mentioned. It will however not be developed since the heading "Ca" seems intended mainly to systematize the idea of a linguistic impulse and to figurate it narratively. However, the "Ça" is also used as a figure in Une voie pour l'Insubordination, where the reference to Lacan seems to be more explicit.

presented as a pre-text it is exterior ("étrangère") to the text which simultaneously actualizes and overdetermines it.

It is on the aspect of this mental dynamics inspired to and actualized in the text that I will now concentrate. This chapter has presented the specific ways in which language is used under the specific mental circumstances described in the text. The text presents this mode of utilization of language as inspired by drugs or madness, and simultaneously it integrates it in its own practice. The text uses the mental linguistic features represented as its own style. The structural description of the mental experience, seen as a discursive experience with specific stylistic features, inspires a textual enterprise of experimental poetry.

#### B. Aspects of the Experimental Poetry

The main characteristics of the textual method of producing the semiotic rhythm of the experience, and of the textual enterprise of experimental poetry, consists of its theatricality. An experimental effect is created by various modes of dramatization inspired in texts on drug experimentation by the magic mode. I include under the heading "magic" the various incantatory and invocational rituals used in religious practice to address an absent person, an abstract entity and to achieve special effects. Michaux refers to such practices in texts on drug experimentation to suggest that on the basis of these formulas a special state of exaltation, meditation and transmutation is produced. As such they appear to be metaphorical models of reference establishing a link between the states of mind provoked by situations apparently as

perfume, music, and of its environment (drawings of gardens, birds...); it constitutes a caricatural representation of these features, "Barbouillages grossièrement suggestifs" (C.L.G. p. 146). It thus appears to be an artificial device to awaken the imagination. The image is presented in such an energetic way that it becomes almost a living scene.<sup>1</sup> Michaux's description plays on a double notion of (powder) haschich absorbed. It is seen as deceiving, as "poudre aux yeux"<sup>2</sup> and simultaneously as efficient, "poudre qui a pouvoir" (C.L.G. p. 147). Thus, Michaux's description of the magic practices functions also as a rhetorical artifice emblematic of the textual system of experimental representation. The image of a mental experience at work in the text or affecting it is conveyed through three main illusionist techniques: concrete poetry, the naming process, and the introduction of "objets de valeur."<sup>3</sup>

The expression "concrete poetry" designates a specific type of poetic objectification; it resorts to the visual, typographical or plastic aspect of the words and of their arrangement on the page and

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<sup>1</sup>See C.L.G. pp. 133-134. Michaux describes here an analogous phenomenon of apparition (of a garden). The tactile imagination is awakened so that the experimenter physically responds with all his senses to the spectacular image: "L'imagination tactile surexcitée, on est là comme prêt à cueillir, à marcher, à tourner, à se baisser, à glisser, à escalader un tertre, à s'approcher d'un parterre, à s'en éloigner et, quoique immobile, on est au festin de la 'participation.'"

<sup>2</sup>French expression: "Jeter de la poudre aux yeux" (to dazzle, to delude). Faire illusion par de fausses apparences, cf. Grand Larousse de la langue française, op. cit., vol. 5, p. 4514.

<sup>3</sup>Expression borrowed from Algirdas Julien Greimas, "Un problème de Sémiotique narrative: les objets de valeur," in Langages, Sémiotiques textuelle, no. 31, Sept. 1973.

figures a direct transmission of any message. It is a way to derive new meaning from words esthetically (and not only semantically) motivated. It is not reduced to a purely formal esthetics but rather it consists of a visual reiteration of the function of the word.<sup>1</sup> Concrete poetry partakes of the general evocational system of a text, as well as of the reflexive demonstration through which it makes its process of production obvious. I should like to underline a particular aspect of concrete poetry, most strikingly represented in Miserable Miracle. I mean the notes written in italics in the lateral margin of the page.<sup>2</sup> Because of their unconventional character, and because of their typography which is different from either that of the text, or that of the footnotes, they constitute a means of visual alerting. They convey the impression that the book is the direct copy of a writing-note book, printed "as is" and thus reproducing the material aspects of the writing experience. They appear as flashing ideas parallel to the text to which they relate in various ways.

First they serve to give short indications about time, :le lendemain (M.M. p. 83) 'plus de trois mois écoulés" (M.M. p. 87), or a concomittant experimental circumstance, "rire soudain, rire sans cause" (M.M. p. 92). They summarize a passage by means of brief headings, "Distanciation d'une réflexion" (M.M. p. 119), Signification

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<sup>1</sup>See Mihai Nadin, "Sur le sens de la poésie concrète," Poétique, no. 42, April 1980, pp. 250-262.

<sup>2</sup>These are akin to notes in talmudic scriptures, and in some of Derrida's books. See J. Derrida in Marges de la philosophie, (Paris: ed. Minuit, 1972), and in Glas, (Paris: ed. Galilee, 1974).



absences" (M.M. p. 138), "gravitation des idées" (M.M. p.78). They paraphrase the passage of the text to which they correspond or digress from the main subject in writing. Sometimes they repeat the text, sometimes there is no connection between text and marginal note aside from the physical contiguity.

Second, their main impact is visual, and they contribute to making a "foire optique" (M.M. p. 38) out of the text. They convey an impression of parallel and spontaneous improvisation, since they often depict in a few isolated words (instead of full sentences), "images, ... vitesse... saccades... flèches... ruines..." The appearance on the page of these isolated words figures the mode of their eclectic impression in the experimenter's mind. With respect to the particular phenomenon of colored visions, marginal notes constitute a short cut through which the appearance of colors can be figured. Two pages of Misérable Miracle (pp. 28-29) are saturated with color words, "couleur, vert. . . rose", with their derivatives--"coloré...rosé...rosissement...", and with their various syntactic combinations--"vert...du vert...de vert...plus vert...en vert." The text provides a verbal objectification and an experimental illusion since the homonymous preposition "vers" is even mingled within the depiction. The color-words are presented either as substantives with or without article ("rose, ...le rose") or as adjectives ("multiples bulbes roses"). As a result of this saturation the page produces an internal spread of colors similar to the mental visionary process: "Une superficie invraisemblablement immense de bulbes colorés me sature." Marginal notes contribute to this figuration in laterally marking, through a typographical rhythm, the spasmodic appearance of colors: "vert?/pas vert?", "j'emets/"vert"!; "Extinction

du vert." "Dans l'égout du rose."<sup>1</sup> The "pétarade des couleurs" (M.M. p. 28) is thus not only verbally referred to but also textually, almost graphically reproduced.

Third, marginal notes are the means of overtaking the conventional limits of the page and of the written text. They concretize a larger linguistic activity involving not only the meaning but also the visual and formal aspects of signs. They extend the power of the text to the usually white empty margins which border it, and thus constitute its echo. They alter the usual pace of reading by introducing a third dimension in the page. In fact, the reader is not compelled to approach the page from top to bottom, in a line to line reading and from left to right. Now he can consider marginal notes and text as columns in a newspaper; he can read back and forth between the text and notes. Depending on the page (right or left) he is reading, the meaning of notes and text may change. On the left page he goes from the notes to the text, and marginal notes thus appear to be elements of an original draft, of a previous notation. On the right page, the reader reads the text first (on the left) then the notes on the extreme right of the page. Here the notes appear to be afterthoughts, textual commentaries or rejections.

Usually, the expression of the experience's multiplicity takes place within the limits of the linear text, and is restricted to these limits. By means of marginal notes, the experimental pluri-dimensionality is conveyed and simultaneously the distance between text

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<sup>1</sup>The words are vertically superimposed the one above the other in marginal notes. The dash between them in the above quotation is only the means of figuring where the separation occurs.

and notes figures the irreducible distance experienced "du geste à la parole, de la pensée à la parole. . ." (C.L.G. p. 262) Marginal notes constitute another way of analyzing the expression experience, which neither alters nor provides a remedy for the distance, "Ecart" (M.M. P. 23) experienced. Rather they play on it ("Laissons faire puisqu'on y peut rien" M.M. P. 23). This results in the dynamic integration of the very notion of distance by means of a dialogic relation between text and margin, and by means of a color adjective, "blanc" (white). While the text announces an outbursting vision of white ("Et "Blanc" Sort.Blanc absolu. Blanc par dessus toute blancheur." M.M. p. 23) the marginal note paraphrases it ("une blancheur apparait." M.M. p. 23). The contiguity of text and marginal note also allows a white space and column in between them. Both the word "blanc" and the blank space objectify the absence of an object, the absence of intelligible sign. Furthermore, they create the illusion of this blank experienced on the page, in transforming the absence, blankness mentioned into a full presence. The initial outburst (blanc absolu...) presented as the product of inarticulateness, progressively comes to signify it, to be an expressive sign of it. This is expressed by the double meaning of "criant" in the expression "Blanc criant de blancheur"; here "criant" suggest the striking character of the white, it is an hyperbole, and simultaneously its proper meaning of "shouting" remains. It is reinforced in the passage by the description of the white as "singe hurleur" (M.M. p. 23) The white vision and the word "blanc" reproduce the space experienced, they mimic it (as a monkey mimics) and at the same time express it exageratingly (singe hurleur, howler). Through

the animistic assimilation, and through the extensive repetition of the word "blanc" in both text and marginal note echoing to one another, the blankness is visually and schematically concretized ("le blanc existe donc." M.M. p. 23). While the text initially referred to it as to an absence of reality, a void, a mental vacuum, it now realizes its intelligible feature on the page.

By means of marginal notes the writer has access to a new mode of writing, one which is more figurative and emancipated from strict semantic boundaries. In marginal notes words may be abbreviated ("Le Ha" M.M. p. 106 for Hachisch), the style may be direct, the words having neither referent nor interlocutor ("Courez tout seuls, vous" M.M. p. 139), and a word can be repeated so as to create an effect of real and of spontaneity. This is illustrated by the two following examples where marginal notes constitute pieces of free form poems.

incessants coups  
de vent mille  
à la seconde  
mille  
mille  
mille

M.M. p. 138

emboitements-  
déboitements  
emboitements-  
déboitements

M.M. p. 41

In the first example, the shape of the note narrows progressively. There is no punctuation and the note does not constitute a sentence. It is paratactic and the vertical repetition of "mille" three times, visually marks the rhythm of the seconds quoted. In the second example

the alternate addition of two series of hyphenated "emboitements, deboitements" reinforces the idea of a systematic mechanical process. In this appearance of a spontaneous articulation, the words acquire a stronger efficacy. They perform the internal happening rather than just alluding to it. This is all the more true that marginal notes as well as the main text play on the typographical aspect of words. The efficacy of some words, their specificity as key-words representative of the mental experience is often reinforced through a typographical enlargement. "Immense" for example is presented as a key-word; its inscription is described in the text while the note figures the process of exaggeration to which the word is submitted.

iMMense. . . Les doubles jambages de ces  
'm' de malheur s'etirent. . .  
M.M. p. 22

Both text and note reproduce by means of a concrete typographical device the mental process of emphasis which the word "immense" conveys and which the passage describes ("je pense à faire des déclarations immensement montantes" M. M. p. 22)

In this example the concrete poetry is associated with another aspect of Michaux's experimental poetry, which I have defined as the naming process (or process of nomination), and which carries a pedagogical value with respect to the writing process. The naming process consists in the descriptive emphasis of some aspects of the writing act, in dramatizing the experience made with words. A first aspect of this is to be seen through a method of writing exposed in Connaissance par les Gouffres. Here, Michaux suggests a new method of

notation which would allow the transcription of the internal experience without words. This system is both theoretically exposed and practiced in the book where it partakes of the qualities of concrete poetry.

J'avais convenu avec moi-meme. . . que les trous de sens je les marquerais avec des points, que l'arret de sens prolonge, je le marquerais d'un trait et la fin de l'arret d'un autre trait plus loin, que les arrêts de sens en profondeur seraient marques de deux traits, enfin que les arrêts graves, . . . j'essaierais quand meme de les marquer par trois traits. C.L.G. p. 166

This long quotation establishes a nomenclature of the various mental phases experienced. It also provides with a conventional code for transcribing them although in the absence of words. This code is made of "traits" (dashes), and "points," dots; it is a minimalist mode of transcribing only the alternate start-stop rhythm of thought and the various lengths of the blank phases. The value of this code remains ambivalent. Sometimes it is the means of an immediate communication of the very feeling experienced, which conveys the impression of overtaking the words as seen in the following example of blocked rectangles prolonging the written text.

Foncant vers plus de retentissement  
vers plus de  
plus  
Plus  
P L U S

Here, the words are first decreased and reduced to the word "plus" written in small letters. Then in the next line "plus" appears with a capital initial and inaugurates a converse movement of increase. The word is not understood as a word with meaning but as a graphic block sign which can expand on the page; the block rectangles cancel out language while expressing the idea of increase conveyed by the word "plus," more. At other times this code is viewed as the expression of the space below word, of the space where a mental phrase proceeds through non-verbal signs "muette, signalée, non-prononcée, comme sans mots les tam-tams africains transmettent des messages" (C.L.G. p. 141). In the text, this quotation is followed by the succession of long or short, single or double strokes (mentioned in quotation from C.L.G. p. 166). This notation is an attempt at a structural description of the rhythm of the sentence.<sup>1</sup> A pure rhythm is described which is presented here as the rhythm of drives, but which is also the rhythm of expression outside its concretization into words. Through this rhythmic sequel Michaux suggests that rhythm supports the signifying function, including meaning. Besides this notation interferes within written passages. In the poem "Tapis roulant en marche" (C.L.G. p.93-120) which

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<sup>1</sup>This notation is analogous to the rhythmic readings practiced by literary theoreticians such as Jacques Roubaud according to who rhythm is the constitutive element of poetic verse. See J. Roubaud, in La Vieillesse d'Alexandre, Maspero, 1978 or 'Essai de Lecture rythmique', in Langue française (Analyses linguistiques de la Poésie), Larousse, No. 49, Fev. 1981, p. 49.

depicts the progressive liberation from the notion of message and the attempt at a direct communication of feelings, blanks and series of dots remain between the written words. A relation of equality is thus established between written and non-written elements. Dots and dashes suggest the moments of latency between words which occur within the writing activity. Through dots and dashes the "non-said" is valorized and considered as much expressive as what is effectively said. This aspect of poetic comprehension enlarges the notion of expression which is no longer limited to an obvious product but also includes the hesitation and latency between moments of emission, the visual aspect of sign, and the non-verbal phases of mental derivation. Through concrete poetry and the comment upon the expression experience the text strips down language ("Transparent à moi, le monde, pur, . . . décodé. . ." C.L.G. p. 109) This stripping however proceeds by means of an encoding (such as the code of dots and dashes, the fragmented disposition of words on the page, the typographical emphasis. The purpose is thus not to create an anti-language but rather to revive the infinite rhythm and possibilities of language itself.

In fact, words in the text are presented as effective solicitations ("mot racoleur, . . . si racoleur . . . M.M. p. 35). The word "Hallucination" (M.M. p. 55) read on the cover of a book provokes the hallucination of a colored picture: "Au mot "Hallucination," j'en avais fait une . . . M.M. p. 55). The words "Immense" and "Multitude" function as symbols of one experience. They are used without article and are printed with capital initial ("Immense est autour de lui" . . . (C.L.G. p.248." Et Multitude s'étend" . . . C.L.G. p. 12). They function as derivative names of the experience created by synecdochy in



accordance to the experimental characteristics.

Finally the process of naming is exhibited within the text, not as an actual relating of a noun to a thing but as a progressive approach of the object which denies that naming is possible. A passage from Connaissance par les Gouffres illustrates this process. The first step of writing is shown as a hesitating identification and naming.

...je vis sur la table un objet que je ne  
connaissais pas. Je n'en trouvai pas le nom. Je ne  
voyais pas quel genre de nom il pouvait avoir.  
C.L.G. p. 168

The second step is an initial approximation brought about by means of a drawing described.

Puis, sur un bout de papier je formai grossièrement  
un carré. L'objet inconnu avait à peu près cette  
forme. C.L.G. p. 168

In a third step another drawing is added to the first one, and a mnemotechi word is written in reference not to the object itself but to its context.

Autour du destin je pus ajouter plus tard un plus  
grand tracé, rectangulaire, peu régulier . . . et en  
travers je griffonnai 'table,' espérant retrouver  
plus tard . . . C.L.G. p. 169.

Writing here is seen as experimental writing; it consists not of naming but in marking an object, in building a system of marks (mainly graphic) by which the object may be identified. Naming, when it is possible, is viewed as an activity referring to reality through words which do not constitute this reality.

Enfin, je vis d'immenses coulmas. J'écrivis le mot aussitôt, mais je ne sais plus ce que sont les coulmas. En notant le vocable, je me décapitai de la vision et de son sens, le mot seul resta, témoin inutilisable. C.L.G. p. 39.

The naming act is dramatized by the paradox of two successive uses of the same word "coulmas". "Coulmas" is first mentioned as a vision. Then it is used as a word to describe a vision. The validity of the word is questionable because of its absence of meaning. The text thus reveals the distance between the word or signifier "coulmas" and the object "coulmas".

The last aspect of experimental poetry on which I will concentrate consists of the integration within the narration of narrative objects or valuables<sup>1</sup> as a guarantee to its achievement. The oscillation presented in Michaux's narration, between a possible and an impossible experimental relation depends on the presence or absence of these objects. "le miroir", (C.L.G. p. 142) the mirror is one of these objects. It occurs in the passage where the writer is deprived from a reflexive instrument of analysis (writing) and depends on the outside observer's reaction to measure the effect of drugs on his physical

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<sup>1</sup>I refer under the term "valuables" to Greimas's categorization (inspired by Dumeil) of the narrative economy into two classes of objects. See Greimas, op. cit. On the one hand there are the objects which provide services to the hero and dispense him from possessing specific qualities that are necessary to the realization of the deeds. On the other hand there are the objects which are a valuable intermediary between the hero to whom goods are destined and the mythical "destinateur". They rule elementary values such as "Love, Health, Beauty, Fecondity". One value is attached to one object and the subject acquires this value in aiming at the object.

appearance.<sup>1</sup> The introduction of the mirror which fictionally allows the reflexive contemplation, provokes a shift from inarticulateness to articulation and to the possible recomposition of his face by the experimenter. "Une mouche" (G.E.E. p. 101), a fly is another of these objects and its intervention is described as follows.

Une mouche lourde, une mouche en larges orbes sous  
le plafond, entre le plafond et lui vole . . . Une  
mouche comme venue pour lui, l'avertir.  
Significative, une mouche du destin . . . G.E.E. p.  
109

The image of the fly on the ceiling and as a sign of the poet's destiny appears to be a cliché.<sup>2</sup> It is also a stereotype within Michaux's idiosyncrasy. The fly is a narrative theme in Michaux's Voyage en Grande Garabagne where the people called 'Emanglons' are obsessed with flies. The word "mouche" allows a variation on the figurative uses of 'fly' to arise in french language (faire mouche; prendre la mouche; fine mouche; quelle mouche le pique . . . ). The "mouche" is then a narrative object allowing the manipulation of linguistic expressions. In Michaux's painted work to (and particularly in his china - ink works), spots, insects or approximate human shapes figure the myriads of black spots which can be seen in the head after prolonged staring at

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<sup>1</sup>This is also the passage where he designates himself as a "plongeur", See Part III, Chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup>Hugo too has a fly as destiny and E. Dickinson also. The fly in the ceiling is also close to Baudelaire cerebral's spider (in Spleen II) and its connotation of the poet's anxiety.

strong light. In a work called "Saisir" Michaux compares the respective expressive values of a gesture, a word and a drawing. The drawing referred to consists of "mouches", analogous to the beauty mark or of precarious writing called "pattes de mouches" in french. The word "mouche" is then a valuable object for Michaux. It is a sign, it has a meaning, and it is also pure graphics, as such it includes the pluralities that Michaux expects from the word. It allows several (linguistic, thematic) manipulations, and it is an element through which the text calls attention to itself.

Among these objects, the "Livre", the book appears to be a major narrative agent of the text's theatricalization and experimental poetry. The image of the book occurs several times in texts on drug experimentation, as a book read, written, or even quoted. It constitutes a warning, and also a model with respect to which the text must conform or differentiate itself. I will analyze its value and function in a specific passage from Misérable Miracle which reveals how writing can transpose internal features into writing features as expressed by the final triumphant exclamation: "Vastitude avait trouvé Verbe" (Vastness had Found Word, M.M. p. 181).

This passage appears at the outset to differentiate itself from the rest of the bok. It belongs to the Addenda included in a reedition of the book, and it constitutes a synthesis in twenty-two pages of the experimenter's later encounters with Mescaline. Thematically it differs from the original part of the book (devoted to the difficulty, or impossibility or relating sensations to words) in that it describes a positive experience, seen as enjoyment and accomplishment.

The passage describes a progressive process of development from the first effects of the drug, to the writer's intense and ecstatic involvement. This progression is followed by the rhythmic structure of the passage which consists of one single movement of expansion. The transitions and pauses are imperceptible so as to suggest a breathing movement. The text's disposition in short parallel and successive stanzas conveys an impression of rhythmic regularity sustained by a uniform syntactic pattern, or parataxe. The experience is presented as revelation and realization. The writer shifts from being subservient to being an active participant in the experience of the Infinitive: "Un certain assujettissement . . . avait disparu". (M.M. p. 178). "J'étais... dans l'excellence . . ., l'excédence . . . le vastissime." (M.M. p. 178). This process of "Elargissement, . . . Amplification, . . . Prolifération" . . . (M.M. pp. 178-179) is activated by the introduction as a narrative object of a book displayed before the eyes of the writer and simultaneously of the reader. Through this insertion Michaux organizes a transfer of value from the quoted book to the current text.

First the book-object is noticed "un petit livre à mes pieds, . . . cessa d'être inaperçu" (M.M. p. 179). Then the description discloses its constituents "des lettres, des lignes de lettres . . ." (M.M. p. 180), and finally the writer-reader encounters a word, presented as a key-word which condenses a totality of meaning: "Soudain un mot m'arriva, me joignit. Myriades était ce mot. Myriades, Myriades. Tout s'y trouvait . . ." (M.M. p. 180). The presentation of the book here is akin to that of a contemplative practice which consists of staring

fixedly at a suggestive and valuable object upon which the mind expands in meditation. The word perceived and quoted is the starting point of a meditation; it is a verbal nucleus synthesizing the dimension of the book described, and which reveals to be the "Atharvasira Upanishad", a sacred book of the hindu religion consisting of a series of prayers and incantatory formula. The transferal from one book to the other is already visible since the text does not differentiate between the words of the book from which he quotes and the word "Myriades" which is a reaction inspired by the reading of this initial book, and which belongs to the current text.

... "Je suis L'Eternel, je suis le temporaire . . .  
... "Je suis le permanent, je suis l'impermanent  
"Je suis L'Est et L'Ouest. Je suis le Sud et le Nord  
... "Je suis le principe masculin, le neutre, le féminin  
"Je suis l'Intérieur et l'Extérieur  
"Je suis les eaux. Je suis le feu  
"Je suis Brahma et je suis le non Brahma."

M.M. p. 180

Thematically the quotation from the sacred book and the reference to oriental mysticism is the means of figuring a spiritual, transcendent state of mind, of unweighting a more general turning over and ecstasis in the mind. The above-quoted book incarnates the motive of a superior value in the passage and that of another mental sphere. Furthermore it incarnates an immemorial, almost divine knowledge that of the Eternal; it is a dialectical Eternal based on the acceptance and association of opposites and not on the reduction of duality. The quotation describes a spiritual uprising based on the bringing together of contraries, and

this knowledge is given in part to the writer. The parallel formula introduces fundamental binary couples, such as Eternal-temporary, permanent-impermanent. The parallelisms have an architectonic value with regard to the major thematic of the book, that is to say the comparison between internal and external world, and between the neutral experience and its articulation. The reference to mysticism is then the means of integrating this comparison within a specific convention of discourse. The formulas create a confusion on a stylistic level between the "je" of the formula, and the textual "je". This confusion is increased by another confusion between a "Il" in a succeeding formula ("'Il purifie les générations humaines'" . . . M.M. p. 181) and a textual "Il" which is used without quotation marks in a sentence imitating the formula: "Il aura le mérite de tous les sacrifices, Il sera plongé dans toutes les eaux purifiantes". (M.M. p. 181)

In the above formulas (one being quoted within the text, the other belonging to the text and being quoted by me) the shift from the first to the second illustrates a transfer: First the speech of the sacred book is assimilated by the book. Second while the first formula describes the purification effected by a god (Il), the second refers to the person (Il) submitted to, or receiving this purification. Moreover, Michaux interrupts at one point the formula that he is quoting. "Il (Qui "Il" Je ne tenais pas à le savoir)". He interferes within the quotation to question it, he weighs the "Il" quoted against his own "Je" as if to transfer the authority of the one onto the other. Thus the insertion of a quoted book within the book results in a stylistic assimilation of the one by the other. A thematic transfer occurs also,

in which the text assimilates the context of the sacred book quoted (Voilà à qui, à quoi j'étais uni, où je baignais, où je me répandais." M.M. p. 181). The quotation of the book within the text appears as a solemn and sacramental act because of which that which is pronounced does effectively appear. The word or formula commands the manifestations of the notions which they signify.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, as a result of this assimilation the writer is inspired a mode of articulation of the multiplicity he experiences. This mode is both corporeal and verbal, and it includes both internal and verbal objects (the internal "Vastitude" and the formation of "Verbe") without reducing their duality. It is an ideal model, close to oral speech, a pure linguistic jubilation and one with an ethos, which is not deprived of meaning. Meaning, however, remains contingent upon a pure incantatory and vocal expression, that of the hymn.

Hymne ouvert à tout  
Hymne moi-même  
Hymne. M.M. p. 181

The text does not go beyond naming the hymn which is referred to as a fixed form involving senses and mind in the beatitude of a vocal performance. In the hymn, the ideal of oral poetry is supplemented with religiosity. A hymn is an address to God whose existence justifies the hymn. The hymn seems here to be an address to the writer himself, or

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<sup>1</sup>Cf M.M. p. 69 "Ce qu'on apprend en démonologie semble à present devenir clair, à savoir que le nom est tout. Vérifié ici." This quotation fits the process which I have been describing and it also presents it in relation to magic practices.



a pleasurable (oral) act which satisfies the writer and actuates his desired communication with the space beyond.

As a result of this experimental poetry the text reveals within the text the process of its own manufacturing. This revelation is made on the basis of an invention, that of a mental style and discourse which the text assimilates.

As such the experimental poetry and the text's poietics in general partake of Michaux's positioning with regards to literary language. It questions the principles of literary conventions and situates the text in opposition to them.

In the final chapter I will show how Michaux uses the criteria of the mental use of language to describe and criticize the use of language in literature.

CHAPTER III

MENTAL POETICS: A REDEFINITION OF LITERARY LANGUAGE

Michaux's texts on drug experimentation appear to be texts of experimental poetry in which a definition of the poetic function of language and of its motivation is effected. Initially the persecution and systematization experienced by the imagination under the influence of drugs creates a non-literary environment. It seems that the attempted knowledge of mental processes uses the non-dogmatic frame and space of the book only for a literal account of the experience. Yet, the topic of the book, or rather the object of its analysis changes and literariness progressively comes to receive if not a new definition, at least an indirect redefinition.

Thematically this redefinition is conducted through the description of the effects of drugs on creativity and the ability to write. It is conveyed through the description of a spasmodic rhythm of writing, and through the progressive elimination of the image of fear (replaced by that of love, accomplishment and unity as seen in the past example of M.M. pp. 179-81). As a result of a progressive decomposition and impoverishment of his language, of the perception and consciousness of his own body, the writer depicts himself as experiencing a void; that is to say an absence of ideas as well as of expressive means which however is not considered negatively.

Conversely, the void is depicted as a "Tabula rasa," the basis of reconstruction of an authentic expression.

Vide qui est aussi bien étalement que soustraction et autant excès que perte . . . ¶ Aspiration à plus, à mieux, à au-delà, l'au-delà du connu, du dicible, du représentable, du pensable, de l'admirable, à l'au-delà de tout imaginable. M.M. pp. 185-186.

The void or emptiness is viewed as a promising absence, as the starting point and evocation of a transcending experience. The mental decomposition described in the text under the pretense of reproducing a previous experience, consists in fact of recreating the conditions of true speech and creativity. The silence evoked is not pure aphasia, rather it is the sign that another linguistic sphere or level of competence is reached whose means and rules have to be developed. This other language or mode of reacting is presented as non-verbal and non-corporeal although it is approximated in physical terms.

...un frisson, un frisson qui serait sans chair, sans peau, un frisson abstrait, un frisson en un atelier du cerveau, dans une zone où l'on ne peut frissonner en frissons. En quoi alors va-t-elle frissonner?

M.M. pp. 19-20.

This other language is presented as mental and abstract. It remains implicit in the text although it is constantly referred to. The text shadows it as an element of comparison and differentiation towards both language in general and literary language in particular.

#### A. Mental Images, Mental Figures Versus Literary Ones

The first aspect of this redefinition consists in fact in an explicit questioning and denial of the constitution of images and the

use of rhetorical figures in literature.

In a passage from Connaissance par les Gouffres, Michaux analyzes some sequences written under the influence of Cannabis. Here he differentiates between mental and literary production of images particularly in the following sentence: "Paolo! Paolo! crié d'une voix bordée de rouge." (C.L.G. p. 127). The sentence quoted is not related to any situation or memory but conversely presented as a spontaneous image. It is also presented as an image in several dimensions (color, sound) and one in which the voice is an object visualized by a red border. A visual element, the color is superimposed upon a quoted voice and the superimposition conveys the oral intonation into the written sentence. The objective "red" connotes aggressivity, violence and anger as it does in the common french expression describing anger "voir rouge." The sentence is presented as mental; it is the memory in itself and not simply its articulation. Its origin is unknown and it appears to be a phenomenon per se. Michaux then differentiates this kind of sentence from an analogous process of deviant expression in literature:

"Voix bordée de rouge." De la littérature? Non, nullement, phénomène précis, courant dans l'ivresse du chanvre, et qui,--j'y songe--justifierait bien un certain procédé littéraire, pas si procédé que cela alors. C.L.G. p. 127.

A distinction is made between a literary "procède," device, conveying the notion of falsity, artificiality, and a mental process

seen as straightforward and authentic. However, there is a link between the two: through the rhetorical clausula "j'y songe," the mental process mentioned leads to the evocation of its literary homologous.<sup>1</sup> The literary device is not described, nor is its difference with respect to the mental process explained. Yet, by mentioning it, Michaux confirms the phenomenological value of the sentence previously quoted within the text. At the same time the reference to literature serves a redefinition and a renewal of literature rather than its denial. The sentence quoted within the book appears before the reader's eyes as a printed excerpt from a poem, as a literary product. It seems to differ from the language of the book only because Michaux creates this illusion (Michaux presents it as a quotation followed by an analysis). In fact there is nothing but the text which divides itself between direct production and indirect comment upon its own production.

In fact the differentiation between literary and mental language serves to relate a verbal process of word coalescence to its mental origin. A compound word, or a compact expression has to be created to express the variety and the simultaneity of feelings experienced.

Lorsque... deux de ces hypersensations apparaissent  
. . . on est pour les énoncer conjointes ainsi  
qu'elles se présentent . . . ¶ Prêssé par le temps, .  
. . ., les mots parfois seront écourtés, par une  
fatale coalescence, deux tronçons étrangers,  
subitement soudés en un mot nouveau. C.L.G. p.127-  
128.

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<sup>1</sup>The interpretation of "alors" in the quotation remains ambiguous. It can have a temporal meaning referring to the internal experience. It can also have a logical meaning. In this second case it would mean that the relation between the phenomenon and the literary process gives value to the literary process, authenticifies it.

Ordinary language of communication forbids this coalescence; it imposes a linear and successive description which betrays the sensation experienced. Such a compact mode of expression (which is admitted in poetry as seen in the synthesis of voice, shout, and anger by "voix bordée de rouge") occurs naturally in situations of mental distortion. Michaux gives the example of "pénétro-versée" which results from the coalescence of two past-participles "pénétrée" and "traversée" (both being sensations felt by the hysterics in a crisis). The compound constitutes a new vocable appropriate to the specificity of the situation while either "pénétrée" (penetrated) or "traversee" (thwarted) would be insufficient. Furthermore it is inspired by instinctive needs and not according to etymological rules ("Elle n'a pas étudié pour le fabriquer . . . Mots pour ses besoins nouveaux," C.L.G. p. 128). Shifting to a broader criticism of language in general, Michaux signals that the deviant character of the word is only due to the singularity of the impression it conveys.<sup>1</sup> This allows him not to decipher the sequence quoted in the text, and not to justify the words it uses. Michaux leaves them unexplained or he provides only a conventional explanation relating the words to the sociolect in general.

Mais pourquoi le mot rouge, plutôt que bleu ou vert?  
Rouge est habituellement lié au sang, à la violence,  
au danger, aux avertissements de danger. Cette  
raison générale peut-être suffit aussi dans mon cas.  
C.L.G. p. 129.

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<sup>1</sup>"Si au lieu d'être seule à ressentir cette horrible impression ... il y avait des milliers de personnes qui, dans ce pays, sentissent pareillement, le terme de "pénétroversée eût été depuis longtemps français." C.L.G. p. 129.

The detour through the comparison between internal, literary and public language appears to be a trick. It is intended to intrigue (and fool) the reader in creating the illusion of a mental mode of expression different from the modes of expression already known. Furthermore this trick is the means of preserving intact and unexplained the language of the text, to present it as self-sufficient.

In Les Grandes Epreuves de l'Esprit, Michaux establishes a comparison between the mental mode of association and the literary mode of association. Through this comparison Michaux ostensibly locates his enterprise as being at distance from that of literature. He does not define this other sphere of composition; nonetheless he induces that literature is an artefact, an artificial situation compared on the instinctive, spontaneous mode of individual expression. Michaux establishes an initial distinction between the psychological substracts intrinsic respectively to the literary composition and to the hypothesized mental composition. Michaux emphasizes the voluntary character of literary composition, and implicitly recommends a converse spontaneity.

C'est seulement par volonté, par désir de continuer son plaisir grâce à un esprit de suite (qui est une volonté de suite) qu'en littérature... G.E.E. p. 182

In the above quotation the notion of pleasure "plaisir" is linked to that of willfulness, which designates the formal unity of literature as a pleasure, as a rationalized formalism, and systematized continuity. To this regularity Michaux opposes the unpredictable character of mental composition, its eclectism, and its systematic discontinuity. The

passage to which I refer consists of repeated alternation of statements describing first mental composition then literary composition. Both are presented as related, as sharing similar figures; however they use these differently. Mental composition is presented as the spontaneous practice of natural figures. Literature is presented as the rational use of the stereotyped figures used solely for the constitution of a particular meaning. The text thus establishes a system of comparison and opposition between the organization of images in literary rhetoric and a mental counter-rhetoric in which images have their own way. The analysis mainly concentrates on one trope and one figure which conventionally defines the literary or poetic genre: metaphor, and parallelism. As for the metaphor, the text distinguishes between live metaphor, and a systematic metaphor. The live metaphor characterizes mental composition in which the operation of transferring meaning, of condensing, of drawing together elements, objects or words results in a disruptive invisible meaning which can hardly be reconstituted.

"Elles [les images] passaient, non de façon à conduire, mais à détourner, par diversifications à perte de vue, chacune étant, pour le sens, une rupture et un saut à accomplir et de plus en plus malaisé."

(G.E.E. p. 182) The condensation and proximity is only temporary in the mental metaphor, which consists rather of creating a gap, or a distance between notions. "Il y avait un seul instant parallélisme, métaphore, rapprochement, puis l'écart s'agrandissait. (G.E.E. p. 182)

The notion of metaphor quoted above, appears to designate a counter-metaphor, directly opposed to the literary trope. Literature in fact is described as a process of expansion and extension after an initial metaphor. "Là, je pouvais voir clairement que ce n'est qu'en



littérature que les images se continuent et que la métaphore grandit, s'amplifie, se détaille, se poursuit." (G.E.E. p. 182)

The comparison between the two uses of the metaphor rests on an analogy implied in the word "images." This word refers to the mental phenomenon of internal vision and imagination, and to the discursive rhetorical phenomenon of "images," created by means of figures. Through the double-meaning of the word "images" the text compares two rhetorics (a literary rhetoric and a mental counter-rhetoric). In fact the distinction between mental (alias real) and literary (alias false) metaphor allows Michaux to emphasize the literary principle of the extended metaphor, on the basis of which the text however rests.<sup>1</sup>

In a similar manner Michaux approaches the notion of parallelism through a denial of its literary misuse. He presents literary parallelism as an artefact imposed by literary formalism despite the mode of spontaneous imagination experienced in thought.

La spontanéité, ce sont les rebonds, les ricochets, le retour à l'imparrallélisme et à la divergence... en littérature une image demeure parrallèle à une autre et est suivie de plusieurs qui vont dans le même sens.

G.E.E. p. 182

In the above quotation, as in this whole passage, Michaux's denegation of literature consists of displacing the text's value from the representation it provides onto the process and production of this

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<sup>1</sup>The image of the tempestuous sea is used throughout the three books to depict the mental space. It generates other images such as the self designations of the writer (tugboat, swimmer, diver) or the association of mental and phrastic derivation.

representation.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the denial of literature in general, as a system of composition distinct from that of the text, constitutes a justification of the text, and of its literary practice. Finally, this justification and overdetermination is all the more patent in that the text takes as a comparative token the notion of parallelism which is commonly held among literary theoreticians as one distinctive characteristic of poetry.<sup>2</sup> Consequently the denial should not mislead us; its purpose and effect is not to reject parallelism, but conversely to overdetermine it, to reconstruct its relevance, within an esthetic ideal of spontaneity. For this reason Michaux denounces the fixed and rationalized use of the parallelism in literature. It forces the association of images, and exaggerates their conformity or complicity. The denial of literary parallelism focuses on the use of the figure as a morpho-syntactic parallelism, as a figure which brings elements together. To this restrictive definition and practice Michaux opposes a broader use of parallelism which is not only syntactic but extended at

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. As underlined by Michael Riffaterre in La Production du texte, op.cit., p. 285: "Il ne reste du texte littéraire qu'une activité metalinguistique portant directement sur le statut de l'écriture, plutôt que sur ce que le poème semble représenter. Il ne reste du texte que la pratique même de sa production."

<sup>2</sup>See R. Jakobson, in Essais de Linguistique Générale, (Paris: Seuil, 1963), p. 235, and in "Grammatical Parallelism and its Russian facet," in Language, 42, (1966), pp. 399-429. See also N. Ruwet, "Malherbe et la théorie des parallélismes en poésie," in Culture, science et développement, Melanges ch. Mazaze, Toulouse, (1979), pp. 145-155. And Jean Molino 'sur le parallélisme morpho-syntaxique,' in Analyses linguistiques de la Poésie, Langue Française 49, Février 1981, p. 77.

the thematic level of the text;<sup>1</sup> it is a figure revealing not only the similarities but also the differences between two notions.

The mental mode of comparison reveals the innate components of real parallelism. The "imparrallelisme" to which the mental images spontaneously return after a temporary connection, is an operation a contrario; it is produced by the parallelism itself, as a figure of oscillation and of discontinuity. The denial is then the means of renewing the relevancy and increasing the range of effect of figures which being too frequently used in literature have lost their expressive power. The text considers the process of imagification at the starting point, and learns from it how to associate an abstract reflection to a discursive image.

Lorsque j'étais d'humeur à réfléchir, que des réflexions me venaient et se suivaient il arrivait qu'après un temps dans l'abstraction, l'une accrochait une image.

G.E.E p. 181

The mode of association brought about is identified in terms of classical rhetoric. "Là je voyais la relation, la première étant une sorte d'exemple, la suivante une comparaison" (G.E.E. pp. 181-182) Michaux underlines its difference with regards to the literary rhetoric of association. Mental discourse is polyvalent and its mode of associating plays on the double aspect of parallelism as a figure of proximity and distance. "toujours des images, associations sans doute

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<sup>1</sup>In the last point of this Chapter I will develop the major parrallelism, between drug, madness and poetry on which the texts are based.

mais amenant autant que des rapprochements, des éloignements successifs." (G.E.E. p. 182)

The text's denial of literary rhetoric results therefore not so much in providing a counter-rhetoric, as a super-rhetoric. The asserted imparallelism plays in relation to the parallelism a role similar to that of "disjunction" in classical rhetoric, in relation to "conjunction."<sup>1</sup> Disjunction, consists of omitting copulatives conjunctions, of juxtaposing the elements of discourse that are similar rather than subordinating or coordinating the one to the other. At first sight, it appears as a figure of separation as the opposite of the conjunction. But, "qu'on la considère quant à l'esprit, quant à l'effet, on verra qu'elle lie plus fortement peut-être que la conjonction même."<sup>2</sup> The text depicts mental rhetoric as a system of separation, dismemberment, and displacement.

The counter-rhetoric is aimed not at the exclusion of literariness but at its renewing. It raises the text's literariness in trying to supplement it with literality (rather than restricting it to this function). In fact in another explicit questioning of literary practice, Michaux discusses the literality of the expression, its adhesion to the substance of the thought. In a passage from Connaissance par les Gouffres Michaux points out that the expression problem of the madman lies in the fact that he experiences an absence of weight or body

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<sup>1</sup>See Fontanier, op. cit., p. 340

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 361.

which language can only but edify through words. The immateriality he feels is betrayed by words which can only approximate it as in the following expressions: "Il dit qu'il est à côté de son propre corps. Que son corps est ailleurs. Qu'on le lui a volé. Qu'il porte un cadavre. Que son corps est creux. Qu'on le lui a changé. . ." (C.L.G. p. 184) First, Michaux underlines that despite its bizarre aspect to the eyes of the normal person, this discourse is true<sup>1</sup>: "Il dit plus vrai à des gens qui ne savent pas reconnaître la vérité" (C.L.G. p. 184) Second, Michaux characterizes this discourse as "poetic." In the following quotation an association is brought about between style and language and also between poetic language and primitive language.

De plus il emploie un style poétique, langage de base, auquel son état désastreux l'a fait revenir, mais que les autres ne comprennent pas, ne tolèrent qu'exceptionnellement et seulement en tant que "spécialité." C.L.G. p. 185

The quotation establishes a link between the madman's language and poetry based on a consideration of style. The word "style" in the above quotation is preceded by an indefinite article "un" ("a style as opposed to" style) which presents it as a quality attached to pathological expression. The appositive clausula associates style and language, and the style discussed appears to be a series of lexical and syntactic means or features. Michaux's texts on drug experimentation

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<sup>1</sup>As for "pénétrorsée," this speech seems deviant because it expresses a feeling that is not shared by the other people. "Il n'est pires sourds, on le sait que les possédants. En tout domaine la privation est ce qu'on peut le plus difficilement rendre sensible à ceux qui sont nantis." C.L.G. p. 184-185

are an attempt to theoretize the features which singularize and constitute pathological expression. It is identified as "poetic" without further explanation, except for the equivalence stated in the opposition between "poétique," poetic and "de base," elementary, basic. First the elementary character of this poetic-like style is associated with literality and truth. This style is the literal way through which the mad person expresses her true internal feeling. Second, this style adheres to the situation experienced, it results from it. This poetic-like expressivity however is not viewed as ("spécialité") a supplementary and more sophisticated use of language. Rather this poetic style is said to be inspired by the internal situation, to be an a priori code and motivation causing a different language. Through this analogy between poetic and pathological language Michaux suggests that pathological language is a non-recognized, unaccepted form of poetry; it is the marginal aspect of poetry as opposed to its established aspect as a specific discourse producing works of art. Poetry here is felt as a personal, internal way of using language. It is the motivation and the inspiration which is here considered rather than the product of it. Poetry thus indirectly defined differs from either literature or usual language which was questioned in the previous examples considered. While literature was seen as a systematized use of language and linguistic features, poetry is presented here only as a subjective and non-specialized practice which actuates an internal state. Michaux however pursues his argumentation by differentiating pathological poetry from poetry in general and the critical element of comparison is here also metaphor.

Il réalise la métaphore, il se laisse fasciner par elle. Martyr d'une analogie trop sentie, trop subie. Il ne sait pas se retenir, ce que savent si bien les poètes de profession qui passent de l'une à l'autre. Lui, il est dans le profond caveau d'une seule. C.L.G. p. 185

The quotation designates a professional versus experimental metaphor. In professional poetry, metaphor is a figure of rhetoric and of virtuosity which the poet changes and renews at will. In mental distortion the metaphor is concretely experienced. The mental metaphor evoked in the above quotation is in fact a metaphorical representation of the mental image and fixation. It is a tangible metaphor and one which realizes what professional poetry only figurates. The difference lies then in the literality of the pathological condensation. Michaux does not develop it here but later in the book he gives an example of it. The example he chooses consists of the stereotypical identification of the madman to Napoleon. The conventional character of this example makes it appear as a stylistic cliché. As a cliché it partakes of the textual enterprise of a redefinition of poetry and poetic motivation. The detour by pathological poetic style is the means not so much of inventing an unknown form of poetry as of revealing the psychological basis of poetry in general. The cliché is the means of an emphasis and overdetermination (by contrast with its own lack of semantic substance) of the poetic metaphor. It insists on the instructive and almost arbitrary character of the madman's identification to an image. "Ne pouvant plus laisser infixée. . . cette prodigieuse grandeur. . . dont le secret l'étouffe, homme simple et qui croit simplifier, et croit avoir compris, il se déclare Napoléon ou Bismarck (ou Staline)."

(C.L.G. p. 250) Here the metaphor consists of associating a feeling of magnitude to the conventional image and figure of magnitude. Further, the reference to the object image is felt as a simplification of a broader state of mind. Implicitly then, poetic metaphor consists of a process of complications and increase by means of an original, non-conventional image. Being delirious, pathological metaphor or fixation consists of an oscillation between two equally irrelevant identities and of an imperfect approximation of the one by the other. "Sa place est entre deux absurdites: L'une d'etre Dupont (qui'la du reste oublie), alors qu'il est le plus souverain des hommes. . . Et l'autre d'etre Napoleon, mais a qui quantite d'attributs de grandeur manquent." (C.L.G. p. 250) There is no real object nor object-image anymore. Both are interchangeable and equally unsatisfying. An internal tendency is performed by means of a conventional image (as opposed to an invention). There is no metaphor but an internal tendency ("sa "Napoleonite'") which preexists ("en lui") to its verbalization rather than depending on it: "La verite c'est l'impression de souverainement etre qui l'inonde, . . . , et remplit Napoleon en lui ou plutot sa 'Napoleonite.'" (C.L.G. p. 280) Conversely, the literary metaphor (as seen in the writer's self designations) consists of a displacement from a real object to an object-image which reveals an internal dimension and allows its overtaking. The initial object remains present in the image portraying it. Conversely pathological fixation consists of an excessive displacement ("Son probleme etait un probleme de placement" C.L.G. p. 250). It resolves a tension ("Vainement etant enfants, ils ont essaye elle d'etre Jeanne d'Arc, lui



d'être Napoleon... C.L.G. p. 250) with respect to a model by means of an operation of transfer, a third condensation which resolves the tension between real-object and object-image in favor of the fantastic image.<sup>1</sup> The fixed and non-ambiguous character of the investment denotes Madness. First, the cliché provides a stylistic effect of contrast emphasizing another trait of style; namely metaphor in poetry in general and in texts of literary prose such as texts on drug experimentation. The cliché has a function of demonstration and overdetermination of both types of metaphor. It depicts mental metaphor as a blind fixation and literal alienation to a fantasy. Conversely, it suggests that a mobile choice governs a non-literal representation and metaphor in literature.

Second, the cliché is here decomposed and thus somehow renewed.<sup>2</sup> The decomposition of the process of fixing identification to a model is the means of giving meaning and semantic substance to a stereotype which seemed not to have any. The cliché therefore functions here as a realistic reference.<sup>3</sup> It functions as an instrument of differentiation with respect to Michaux's texts and it also produces an effect of reality within the literary text. It is the means of a psychological

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<sup>1</sup>C.L.G. p. 251-252 "c'est maintenant. . . que l'identification, rejetée depuis longtemps comme décidément impossible, se réalise. . . Grâce à leur alienation, ils ont réussi! L'absurdité d'un mécanisme qui ne présentait plus aucun intérêt s'accomplit complètement hors de propos et catastrophiquement."

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Michael Riffaterre, Essais de Stylistique Structurale, op.cit. p. 167.

<sup>3</sup>This cliché belongs to the second type defined by M. Riffaterre, *ibid.*, p. 171. "Le cliché comme objet de l'expression 'représente', 'rapporte,' présente comme une réalité extérieure à l'écriture de l'auteur."

characterization of the writer in texts on drug experimentation. In fact, it is a fictive means through which the text intends to give a psychological status to literary metaphor. The rareness of metaphors in texts on drug experimentation, and their explicit criticism of the formalist use of figures in literature seems to partake of this enterprise. It is mainly an attempt at renewing the motivation of figures in literary prose and more particularly their mental motivation and origin.

#### B. Poetics of mental Pathology

In fact, examples of mental distortion and pathological expression concern the notion of linguistic motivation. Generally speaking the notion of linguistic motivation opposes itself to the arbitrariness of language. It concerns the influence of internal subjectivity on the articulation, and the ability of language to really associate a proper signifier to an object or idea sought after. Michaux analyses it through the example of a table built by a schizophrenic person; that is to say through a non-verbal but objectional expression. This object offers tangible proofs to the observer and Michaux categorizes it as "Exemple typique de maniérisme objectal" (G.E.E. p. 156). The term "maniérisme" illustrates the present debate brought about in texts on drug experimentation between pathological and artistic expression. It has a psychiatric connotation (that of a deviant, inadequate and complex mode of expression); it has also an esthetic connotation (referring to the XVI Century form of art mostly italian and french, and implying excessive or sophisticated ornamentation).

Michaux underlines the obsessional aspect of this creative process. The object sought after, the table is constantly reactualized in the mind of the creator. "l'ouvrage de quelqu'un qui revient périodiquement à l'idée de 'table'" (G.E.E. p. 157). "sans jamais pouvoir s'arrêter, sans que ce fut jamais'assez', E. avait oeuvré direction 'Table.'" (G.E.E. p.157) The fabrication process functions by repetition which does not take into account the object's state of completion.<sup>1</sup> The table appears to be a leit-motiv which does not reach formalization: ". . de plus en plus entassement, de moins en moins table." (G.E.E. p. 156) "on ne songeait plus à l'ensemble comme à une table."...(G.E.E. p. 157) It does not result from an hazardous mode of composition ("...elle n'avait pas été faite non plus à l'aventure." G.E.E. p. 157), but rather from an unusual and manierist type of composition: "désimplifiée à mesure qu'elle avait été travaillée." (G.E.E. p. 156)

In normal composition a signified (the object "table") corresponds to a signifier (or a group of signifiers, feet, plateau) with a specific arrangement. Pathological composition relates a real signified in progress to a mental signified. The imaginary object governs the elaboration in a way through which the madman can transpose a psychic image directly into a real thing, without submitting to the rules of construction: "Par petits blocs, successivement mis en place, ajouts inutiles, supplément pour le supplément...." (G.E.E. p. 157) This objectual transposition (by complication, addition of elements) of the

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<sup>1</sup>"La table qu'on avait devant les yeux était le résultat de reprises incessantes..." G.E.E.p.157 "Telle qu'elle, c'était une table à rajouts, . . . , et si elle était terminée, c'est dans la mesure où il n'y avait plus moyen d'y rien ajouter..." G.E.E. p. 156

idea of a table, results in producing a hermetic, useless object. "Elle n'était appropriée à aucun usage, à rien de ce qu'on attend d'une table." (G.E.E.p.158). "...L'idée sans doute ne vint à personne de l'utiliser comme table."(G.E.E.p.158) In fact Michaux's presentation of the table suggest several possible common points between the "table" as a pathological sign and poetic sign. First this table is not so much an object as a sign whose signified sticks to the signifier. The table produced can neither be integrated within nor assimilated to general category of objects, nor does it belong to a recognized style: "...un meuble à part, un instrument inconnu. . . dont on n'aurait pas eu l'emploi. Table . . . qui n'était pas "bourgeoise," pas rustique, pas de campagne, pas de cuisine, pas de travail." (G.E.E. p. 157) It is an abstract sign rather than a concrete utilitarian object. Literally it is the sign of a table. As a sign, however, it constitutes the whole of the thing it signifies and there is no other possible realization of the table conceived of by the madman than this one. A process of distorted expression brings the object composed closer to internal experience. Second, Michaux presents the "distorted" expression at work in the composition of the table as an unconscious process of analogy.

En elle quelque chose d'atterré, de pétrifié.  
Elle eût pu faire songer à un moteur arrêté.  
¶. . . moteur qui par là n'est peut-être pas sans  
analogie avec cette table compliquée, énigmatique, à  
l'arrêt elle-aussi . . . G.E.E. p. 157-158.

Besides Michaux relates the analogy with the motor to the madman's

autobiography.<sup>1</sup> The table borrows some structural characteristics from the image of the engine. This analogy explains the devious character of the table produced compared to an ordinary table.

Third, the object produced remains ambiguous and bears the mark of the deviance in which it originates: "Elle continuait même je ne sais quoi, sa propre affaire sans doute . . ." (G.E.E. p. 156) "...un'je ne sais quoi' d'irréductible était toujours la". (G.E.E. p. 161). The expressions "je ne sais quoi" (as well as the "quelque chose" G.E.E. p. 158) refers to the vocabulary and aesthetics of classical poetry. It serves to point out, without describing it precisely, the specificity and poeticity of a formulation. It also implicitly attributes this specificity to the inherent life, and to the subjectivity in which the expression originates. The "je ne sais quoi" complies with an aesthetics of the unsayable and of the ineffable, with a mode of expression through which inner qualities are suggested but not articulated: "...avec des mots quelconques, avancés puis repris, vouloir faire passer l'indicible, et puis l'effacer." (G.E.E. p. 161).<sup>2</sup> It is through this movement of resumption and erasure that the ineffable is conveyed to the outside person and reader. A pathetic and emotional effect is produced by the specificity of the signifier and signification process. The "je ne sais quoi" generates an affect which is the

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<sup>1</sup>E... était, auparavant, chauffeur-conducteur de camions, métier où vraisemblablement plus d'une fois en panne sur la route, il avait dû lui arriver de considérer, capot ouvert, le moteur de son camion . . ." G.E.E. p. 158.

<sup>2</sup>Michaux relates here the objectal and the verbal expression of the schizophrenic person.

signified itself:<sup>1</sup> " . . . aux visiteurs occasionnels, la table d'E. faisait pitie . . . Ils se demandaient quel est l'incapable qui n'avait pu venir a bout de faire simplement une table" (G.E.E. pp. 161-162). Besides the reference to Aristotle's poetics, the expression "pitie" in the passage is explicitly presented as an element of comparison between the effect inspired respectively by the pathological creation and the work of art: "La table d'E. faisait pitie, au lieu de les scandaliser, comme eut fait l'oeuvre apparemment debraillée de tel ou tel artiste moderne mais neanmoins ayant son unite d'audace, d'insolence, et de savoir-faire." (G.E.E. p. 161- 162) The comparison and the differentiation effected in the above quotation recalls the statement previously seen about the public acceptance of poetic language. I mean the tolerance of poetic language as a "specialite" (G.E.E. p. 185) versus the rejection of its pathological version. In the first case (G.E.E. p. 162) the work of art is considered a scandal while the pathological creation is tolerated by means of pity or compassion. In the second case, the pathological creation is denied and rejected while the work of art is accepted within certain conditions. In fact these two oppositions, and the appearance of a contradiction between them, are not to be taken literally. They constitute a device by means of which Michaux reveals the poetic content of the pathological expression and the pathological content of the work of art. Both to be inspired pity or to be scandalized by an object are reactions equally inspired to the

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<sup>1</sup>I follow here Jean Cohen's argument in 'Poesie et Motivation,' Poetique, No. 11, (1972), p. 441. "Appartient au langage pathetique tout enonce dont la reponse affective est l'effet primaire du signifiant, ce qui veut dire que l'affect est le signifie et non pas son effet derive."

outside observer by the pathos in general (whether it is pathological or literary). The pathological object presents the same audacious, unusual, apparently disorganized character (see previous quotation, G.E.E. p. 162) as a certain type of work of art. The value of this comparison consists of raising pathological distortion and the abnormality of structure characteristic of the table's construction to the dimension of pathos. This is more precisely conveyed in the following quotation through a discussion on symmetry: "En effet, sans tenir compte du matériau et de son fâcheux effet sur l'ensemble, E. avait, par exemple, mis de vieux morceaux de linoleum usagés pour faire le pendant ici et là de parties en bois." (G.E.E. p. 162) The symmetry observed in the composition between plastic and wooden elements is not governed by aesthetic or decorative preoccupations. Rather, it produces a non-aesthetic effect which at the same time shows that symmetry is considered to be a requirement: ". . . revenu périodiquement à la symétrie comme à une obligation, et (que) cependant les parties ne concordait pas, le zèle n'avait pas suffi à faire concorder" (G.E.E. p. 162).

The resulting discordance, the failure in the attempted symmetry appears then to be not just a special effect produced by the audacity of the "artist," rather it is the expression of an internal, incorrigible tendency: "Plus forte que tout, sa discordance . . . (maladie de la discordance, premier nom donné à la schizophrénie) s'était exprimée" (G.E.E. p. 162). This tendency or discordance is also the symptom of his sickness; here the symptom is the pathos, that is to say the element in representation which evokes pity: "n'était-ce pas là le plus

emouvant . . ." (G.E.E. p. 162).(emphasis added ).

Finally, the difference felt in the object (with respect to an ordinary table) is identified and authenticated. In fact poetry itself is often defined by the notion of difference; yet this does not necessarily imply that any difference makes an expression poetic. The present example seems to suggest that the expressivity of an expression, its pathetic effect, comes from the irrational and unconscious character of its inspiration. The difference observed denotes an unsaid from which the reader or observer remains distant. It signals itself and stimulates compassion. Simultaneously it is an interdiction, the sign of a secrecy which cannot be disclosed: " . . . le plan d'organisation, etranger aux idees courantes, tenait a distance." (G.E.E. p. 158)(emphasis added)."..cette table portait en elle-meme son interdit, objet bizarre a la comprehension et a l'utilisation...(G.E.E. p. 158) The pathological object, alike the poetic one, differs from that of ordinary language. This difference can be located and underlined but as a secret common only to specific mental experiences which the normal person does not know. The difference and its complementary secrecy contribute to pathological and poetic sign's self-sufficiency ("objet... duquel il eut fallu etre initie, et qui, "encombree d'elle-meme," semblait rejeter tout encombrement de plus," G.E.E. p. 158). As a result, the object produced differs from an ordinary one not only for the outside observer, but for the author himself: "A E., les tables, il va sans dire, ne constituaient pas un probleme. Il se servait de celles de l'asile, qui, elles, n'avaient aucun caractere special. ¶ Mais l'etat naturel d'une table simple ne lui avait pas suffit quand il s'etait agi



d'en faire une,"(G.E.E. p. 159). Free from any utilitarian determination the object produced signifies an internal difference to which it wholly conforms as its phenomenological effect.

The example and analysis of the pathological expression and production is for Michaux the means of isolating the poetic sign. The image of a concrete object is the means of passively unweighting the poetic sign and of allowing it analysis. The table-sign is depicted as an ideal object. It denotes an abstract poetic motivation resulting in a self-sufficient and pathetic expression.

Abstraction autonome, qui ne travaille pas, ne se lie pas à d'autres, se suffisant à elle-même et qui laisse méduse. C.L.G. p. 130.

#### C. The text and the internal code

The reference to cases of pathological expression is the means of a linguistic mentalization by means of which Michaux theoretizes the poetic process. In texts on drug experimentation Michaux tries to suggest the primary processes which constitute the act of poetry, rather than the results of this process. Furthermore he tries to transform the pluralities of the alleged internal and experimental language into actual poetic and textual signs.

Generally speaking texts on drug experimentation consist of a series of narrative and descriptive manipulations effected on thoughts, words and ideas and their interactions. These are aimed at the knowledge of the computational mechanisms through which mental and verbal spheres relate to each other. These are also aimed at discovering how the internal pattern of using words is acted out in

another verbal sphere by means of a linguistic conditioning. This does not mean that the initial aim announced (that is to say the knowledge of mental mechanisms) has been forgotten. Rather it seems that this initial project presupposes a means, a system of representation whose characterization is treated by the book. The strategy of the books for researching mental processes consists then in inferring this characterization (that of the representational system) from the details of a mental or psychological theory.

For this reason Michaux introduces the hypothesis of a language of thought. He presents the thinking process as a predicative process different from and yet dependent upon written language.

First he states the belief, as in the following quotation, that there is an internal pattern of using words which is prior to certain lines of writing. "le penser qui au cours de l'écrit envisage à mesure les diverses possibilités de la phrase et choisit" (G.E.E. p. 62). Part of the writing-process consists of a mental computation and investigation in which verbalization is only a final step. Yet, writing as the output of the computational treatment imposes its rules. "Toute pensée,... doit en fonction de la phrase, constamment être re pensée, re composée" (G.E.E. p. 43) The phrastic structure is not manipulable at will and it implies altering the original thought.

Second, the text is an attempt to describe the mental processes by means of internal visions experienced; in fact, drug induced visions and thought are necessary to reveal the mental mechanisms. Yet, the images they provide are said to be non creative and non-sensuous: "Elle (La Mesc.) fait des images si exactement depouillées de la bonne fourrure de

la sensation. . . qu'elles sont le marchepied du mental pur, de l'abstrait et de la démonstration.¶ Aussi est elle l'ennemie de la poésie, de la méditation, et surtout du mystère." (M.M. p. 64). The text then is also an attempt to mend the lack of images or to vary their fixity. "Je n'arrivai pas encore à écrire. . . faute d'images dont j'aurais eu besoin comme exemple des lois qu'il me semblait avoir découvertes, ou bien je revenais aux images subies mais sans aucune liberté vis à vis d'elles, . . . en véritable paralysé de l'imagination." (M.M. p. 66) Writing under the influence of drugs suffers from a lack of imagination and flexibility. The mental happening cannot be described because the state of mind which allows its discovery simultaneously supposes the suppression of varied imagination and of descriptive faculties. The text supplements the lack of imagination experienced by providing images. The image provided is thus presented neither as merely supplementing ornamentation, nor as a purely suggestive element of depiction; rather it appears as a methodical instrument which actuates the experience and its communication: " L'image: fixation de l'idée. . .L'image est un procédé d'ancrage, le retour au solide. Sans images, l'abstrait ne ferait pas sa preuve." (M.M. p.66-67) Literariness is here positively reintroduced as the mode of completion of the initial attempt at a knowledge of the mind.

The reference to pathological language and to situations of mental distortions appears therefore intended to renew the definition of literary language, to enlighten the text's productivity, rather than to disclose another unknown language. Texts on drug experimentation constitute the field of a linguistic practice. Here language is put on

trial and its norms are figuratively exploded. This practice is said to happen outside language and outside literariness; yet it is only intelligible through the literary language of the book. Furthermore, the language of thought referred to is presented as an independent, private language. Yet its privacy is only relative to the text which presupposes its existence. This language appears as a hypothetical archetype justifying the manipulations effected upon language in general. In fact the textual apprenticeship of the alleged internal language consists not so much of learning its specific predicates as in seeking its expressiveness and its presence in the general linguistic practice. The properties of this other language which the text covers are only those which can be expressed in terms of normal literary language. Rather than language this other mode of experienced expression appears to be a code affecting the language of the text. What makes it appear to be a code rather than a language?

First the regression depicted in the text is not presented as indefinite. The text depicts a mental linguistic process which is prior to language, yet which is not evidently shown as language per se. Rather it is presented as a series of processes and operations affecting language and which are semantic activities of a psychological nature. These are assimilated to figures in ordinary literary rhetorics but their terminological distinction (or rhetorics of differentiation, obliteration. . .) suggests a difference. The degree of subjective involvement they involve is stronger and their range of action is broader. Thus they present themselves as the mental origin of verbal rhetorics, which they emphasize and justify.

Second, the mental sphere spoken about does not have a lexicon of its own. The various examples of neology have emphasized a faculty to manipulate existing elements. to rearrange ready made units and to use onomatopoeia. This neology remains within the possibilities of ordinary linguistic composition and words thus produced, even if they are deviant or hardly understandable, can still be identified according to the usual linguistic norms. The specific expressiveness which affects language in mental distortion is seen as overdetermination: "le schizophrène a introduit ses accentuations et surimpressions à lui, indépendamment les unes des autres, à chacun des différents niveaux du langage." (C.L.G. p. 156). The linguistic performance of the schizophrenic is a license applied specifically to each part of language. This presupposes a disarticulation of language (and justifies the systematic "chopping" of the signification line effected in the text). The refusal of simplicity and the expressive overdetermination is also summarized in the following quotation.

Au niveau du vocabulaire il met les néologismes, au niveau de l'orthographe la répétition, la bi répétition, la tri répétition des lettres ou des syllabes, au niveau de la scription les spirales, les boucles aux lettres, les vains soulignements, au niveau sémantique l'hermétisme, les éllipses outrées, indéchiffrables, les apparents non-sens.  
G.E.E. p. 155

The above quotation summarizes aspects of the internal code which have otherwise been separately envisaged in the text either in the description of Michaux's experiences and observations, or in the text's concrete poetry. All aspects can be gathered under the previously seen heading "Maniérisme." Pathological manierism evoked reinforces literary

manierism. It suggests that a stylistic surcharge and complication takes its roots deep in the mind. It conveys "le merveilleux singulier dont les autres n'ont aucune idée" (G.E.E p. 153) and as regards to which unmarked, simple linguistic use seems inappropriate ("indigente, artificielle, impropre G.E.E. p. 154) Third, another argument in favor of a code (rather than language) may be based on the fact that no definite meaning is attached to an expression produced under these circumstances, except for that effect of singularity, difference, and secrecy ("son air plein de sous-entendu, de mystère, ne donnent aucune clef. Il sait quelque chose que l'autre ne sait pas. Il se meut là où l'autre n'entre pas. G.E.E. p. 153) Michaux's texts rather depict a suggestive and evocative use of language, through which the inexpressible is alluded to (since it is only within language that the inexpressible can be measured).

Finally drugs which constitute the narrative code of the text, are also the means of enlightening its esthetic operations. Drug is presented as an instrument of reminiscence. It does not provide a new experience but rather constitutes a new treatment of information. Referring to the notion of living experience in general ("Tout ce à quoi nous avons affaire dans la nature, comme dans la vie..." C.L.G. p. 131) Michaux depicts "un bouquet de sensations, un panorama d'impressions..." (C.L.G. p. 131). Drug consists of a specific treatment and manipulation of this experience. It is a remembering process recalling proustian reminiscence ("le haschich ressuscite le senti et le vu d'autrefois..." C.L.G. p. 131). It is also an operation of selection and emphasis

reviving and overdetermining some aspects of the experience: "le chanvre indien exalte, détaille quelques éléments, pas tous, . . . très rarement selon leur pertinence, leur importance dans l'ensemble ou leur signification, et celles-là il les exalte aveuglément." (C.L.G. p. 132) Thus drug constitutes a pictorial device, an emblem of the textual processes.

In fact, texts on drug experimentation present themselves as a series of variations (from one chapter to another, and one book to another) on a unique topic. They repetitively narrate the same experience, yet in introducing variety in this narration.<sup>1</sup> The text is the means of recalling some aspects of the experience, of occulting others. It invents, transforms and transposes a general experience. Drugs are the textual code by means of which Michaux recomposes and figures the circulation and production of ideas in the literary text.

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<sup>1</sup>One aspect of this variety can even be contradictory statements. The point of view on drugs for examples changes. Sometimes drug is said to induce abstraction (cf. Mescaline, M.M. p. 66). At other times it is said to increase concrete perception or memory. These contradictions are almost hidden since Michaux relates a specific effect to a specific drug. Yet, there are some cases where two statements about the same drug contradict one another (for example the addenda in M.M. contradicts the descriptions made in the original part of the book) and it is also difficult to establish one single pattern for all drugs altogether. These variations and contradictions reveal, I think, that the text sometimes describes drugs literally, at other times uses them as an emblem of its own style.

## CONCLUSION

Drugs and madness constitute the code or dialect which the text holds as a model for its own idiolect and functioning. By a series of manipulations the text provides a representation of the alleged mental sequence in the textual sequence. Michaux's texts on drug experimentation are striking because of their repetitive, meditative, and non conclusive aspect. The text seems to be thought rather than written, and complies with Michaux's definition of thinking: ". . . penser. . . c'est, entre autres operations, placer les elements dans le champ pensant, . . . ¶ C'est arriver a repousser, une fois enregistres, les mots, les phrases, les paragraphes, se degager de leur attraction et de leurs attraites. . ." (G.E.E. p. 17-18) As such Michaux's texts on drug experimentation consists of an action and a representation.<sup>1</sup> They constitute a system of intelligibility allowing the writer an analytical dictation of his thought and a figurative transposition of mental mechanisms. The text seems to function as a radiosopic instrument applied to the writer's mind. The poem's sequential analysis (C.L.G. pp. 121-144) for example contributes to this enterprise by presenting a verbal experience<sup>2</sup> as an instant picture of the thought, and by seeking

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<sup>1</sup>Michael Riffaterre, La Production du texte, op. cit., p. 45

<sup>2</sup>Cf. "Paolo! Paolo! crie d'une voix bordee de rouge." C.L.G. p. 127.



after the link between this sequence and the experimental circumstances where it was produced. More specifically the textual enterprise of intelligibility is aimed at clarifying the rules which govern the engendering of such sequences; that is to say its progressive process of production "du senti vers l'évoqué, du qualificatif vers le substantif, de l'impression vers la chose, de la chose vers le panorama de choses et vers le décor." (C.L.G. p. 123)<sup>1</sup> This progression which is presented as that of the thought depicts in fact the process of the textual description itself. By ostensibly providing the reader with the reconstitution of its own process, it announces itself as a reflection upon its own literariness.

In fact the main aspects of writing which the writer experiences, discovers and underlines confirm the rules of literary sentence namely the rules of overdetermination, conversion and expansion established by Michael Riffaterre.<sup>2</sup> The rule of overdetermination ("en fonction de laquelle la phrase entraîne l'adhésion du lecteur") is largely followed in texts on drug experimentation; based upon this rule is the whole system of reference and comparison with drug and madness, as well as the analysis of pathological and distorted modes of expression. More particularly the various aspects seen of parodic, emphatic and

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<sup>1</sup>This quotation provides the reader with the reconstitution of the descriptive method. It complies with M. Riffaterre definition of the literary sentence as "action et représentation" (La Production du texte, op. cit., p. 45): "La phrase littéraire doit donc être telle que ces reconstitutions [auteur, réalité, code] soient possibles. Énonçant un message, racontant une histoire, mais en même temps montrant le décor, mettant les personnages en scène et expliquant leurs motifs. . . ."

<sup>2</sup>Michael Riffaterre, *ibid.*, Chapter 3, p. 45.

complicated mode of articulation, are elements within the rule of overdetermination. The second rule of conversion ("qui permet de traiter la phrase comme unité de style. . . qui s'applique aux cas où la phrase est engendrée par une transformation simultanée de ses composantes. . . ") is also adhered to by the various operations of decomposition, obliteration, negation, inversion or metamorphosis observed. The final rule of expansion or symptomatic transformation ("étant donné une phrase minimale-nucléaire-matricielle- chacune de ses composante engendre une forme plus complexe") is analogically referred to; it is referred to under headings as various as "épanchements" "modulations," "prolifération," "amplification" by which the text describes the mode of expression experienced in mental distortion. This is mainly illustrated through the description of visions governed in Michaux's words by an "intarissable processus d'ornementogénèse" (G.L.C. p. 18) The above theoretical definition of this rule is in fact followed almost literally (although analogically) in the description of drug-induced visions;<sup>1</sup> however it is often associated with the notion of overdetermination. Finally the three rules referred to are depicted at work in the narrative adventure that is to say in the description of words-releases, words preclusion (Part III, Chapter I) as well as of extended metaphors, synesthesia and metamorphosis (Part III, Chapter II and Conclusion). The analogical examples and images offered by the

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<sup>1</sup>For example C.L.G. p. 148-149 "La même infime variation sans fin et mystérieuse, . . . conduit ce visage mouvant à varier, indéfiniment, à se reformer autre. . . ¶ Si la femme a un visage simple et naïf, elle rayonnera de simplicité, . . si elle est pure, elle sera adorable, angélique, oui elle sera ange peut être mieux que tout car elle irradie. L'au delà, en elle radieux, transpire. . . et se renouvelle."

text: are terminological variants of these literary processes, and their mental version, since the mental code is, in texts on drug experimentation, the hypostasis of literary code.

To the three previously defined rules, texts on drug experimentation add a supplementary one. Rather, they supplement these rules with a general frame of application which is psychic. Through this addition of a psychic requirement and characteristic to the definition of the literary act of communication, the text attempts at defining the differential element of poetic language with regards to both literary and ordinary language. Michaux's research on expressivity is a metaphysical as well as a literary enterprise. Here, the meditation upon language denotes, as expressed by Jean Terrasse, "La préhistoire de l'oeuvre, époque ou la nécessité de forger l'instrument nouveau qui servira à ses explorations, oblige l'écrivain à réfléchir sur les exigences et les nécessités de son art."<sup>1</sup> The addition of a supplementary psychic frame of writing is the means of evolving from a formal definition of literariness, to the definition of poeticity; literariness would be a code of representation, while poeticity would be a code of knowledge and conquest of the ineffable.<sup>2</sup> This psychic dimension is depicted as the inactive aspect of love, as "abandon."

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<sup>1</sup>Jean Terrasse, "De L'être du langage au langage de l'être," in Synthèses, No. 275, mai 1969, pp. 70-87.

<sup>2</sup>I define as "ineffable" that which has to be expressed and is declared unsayable but which expresses itself nevertheless in situations such as poetry or madness. Y. Belaval, art. cit., defines the ineffable as "une qualité particulière de l'expression dont le principe est d'être une expression créatrice."

Throughout his books, Michaux presents the pathological and pathetic aspect of this "abandon" seen as escape and self-exclusion by delirious identification as observed in hysteria.<sup>1</sup> He also presents the mystical version of "abandon" as the means of access to an utmost state of absolute contemplation.

It is presented as "vent psychique qui defait avant qu'elles ne naissent les determinations, les categories" (G.E.E. p. 204). It appears to be the necessary requirement to liberate words from rigid and categorized meanings which tradition and daily use has imposed on them. Then one can record the psychic film without betraying it:

"Illumination: contemplation absolument non appropriative, qui seulement recoit, absolument non conquérante, absolument tranquillisante. . . une vaste inouïe clairvoyance" (G.E.E. p. 204).

This psychic dimension enlightened by drug and madness in the text refers to Rimbaud's poetics (Illuminations, clairvoyance). It implies an analogous confusion of "je" and "ca" or "cela", an analogous exploration of the unknown and an analogous experience of clairvoyance by means of controlled mental distortion: "le poete se fait voyant par un long, immense et raisonne dereglement de tous les sens" (Rimbaud)

Both are related in an analogous poetry of the event. This psychic dimension seen as "Sagesse non profane, non utilisable" (G.E.E. p. 204) is the basis of the poetic work which Mallarmé defines as follows:

"[libérer les mots] de leur fonction de numéraire facile et

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<sup>1</sup>"Elle sait se quitter. Elle aime se quitter. Elle est folle de se quitter. Elle comprend en se quittant." C.L.G. p. 271

representatif. . .pour qu'ils retrouvent leur virtualite."<sup>1</sup> The psychic dimension is the means of introducing in the text the notion of linguistic virtuality, of a "realite puissancielle du langage" (potential reality of language) as formulated by Gustave Guillaume.<sup>2</sup> It justifies the text as an enterprise of linguistic positioning and glosing about the expressive tentatives and ends of poetic discourse.

Michaux's texts on drug experimentation are based on the belief that there are higher levels of thinking dependent upon language; their deciphering involves a crisis in communication. Various dialectical representations of these levels are provided which present them as models upon which the textual practice is constructed. In fact the text, like the hysterical subject, in search of its authentic expressivity, "recherche l'empreinte" (C.L.G. p. 271) and "contracte les maladies mentales les plus diverses, . . .en prend les tics, les attitudes, les symptomes." (C.L.G. p. 271) This pragmatics presupposes a specific conception of language and its use. In ordinary language acts of speech are judged in accordance with criterium of grammaticality, with an external scale of grammaticality. In poetic language, as implied by Michaux's texts, the act of speech (whether it be that of the madman, the drug experimenter, or the poet) complies with a scale of

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<sup>1</sup>Mallarme in Divagations, (Geneve: ed. A. Skira, 1934), p. 226.

<sup>2</sup>Guillaume distinguishes between a potential and an effective linguistic state. The potential state of language consists simply of the possibility of language. For Guillaume, language is a phenomenon that is being effected. It is a passage, a transition from one state to another and which the phrastic construction realizes. See Roch Valin, Perspectives Psychomecaniques sur la Syntaxe, (Quebec: Presses de l'universite Laval, 1981).

subjectivity. The notion of degrees of internal, or subjectivity is superimposed or replaces that of degrees of grammaticality introduced by Chomsky. (It is in accordance to these degrees that a sentence is viewed as deviant or not, is understood or not). In poetic language a sentence is considered appropriate or valid when it contains a certain degree of subjectivity, enough to convey the writer's intention, and the process that governs the elaboration of the sentence.

This conception is an element of answer with regards to the debate about poetic performance and competence. For Michaux poetic language complies with the general rules of literary prose; it also implies a supplementary mental disposition. However it does not constitute a language of its own, but rather a specific code, a codified use of language whose performance is different from ordinary language.

This conception also obliterates distinctions between madness and normalcy. Madness differs from normalcy in degree but not in nature. The signification line which the text takes as its main object of analysis and along which it deambulates illustrates the mobility of the frontier.

Finally, one can summarize the main characteristics of Michaux's poetics in texts on drug experimentation as follows:

- There is an internal pattern of using words which is prior to certain lines of writing. Naming occurs in this pattern and is then acted out in another pattern through a kind of linguistic conditioning.

- This conditioning is effected by objectifying situations or causes (such as mental distortion). The text therefore is presented as the linguistically promoted objectification of that data of consciousness called "le Penser" (thought or thinking). It is amalgamated with that larger scheme of objectification of the subjective experience; it stands as a middle term between an objectified past (the mental experience, and the mental aspects of the writing experience) and an objectified future (the effect of the narration and information on the reader).
  
- The text analyzes the writing experience in terms of thoughts through a binomial presentation of a formless item (thought, tendency, movement, feeling) and a form (word, or gesture). While doing this it frames a new code through which it adjusts to a wider internal universe.
  
- The text finally uses various metaphorical and synesthetic means; it refers to non-spatial, non-verbal experiences by spatial or verbal terms. This is an inevitable effect of the text's metaphorical system; yet it provides an aesthetic representation and measure of the immediacy of relation from thought to language.

In texts on drugs experimentation Michaux organizes a reciprocal or controversial polemics between language and an exotic language, namely the language of thought. This exotic language is, in the text, the hypostasis of poetic language. In fact, since we think in our language

to examine the exotic language, exotic language appears to be a mirror held to our own.

La souricière du langage est telle que, quoi qu'on fasse, on ne prend guère que des souris qui ont déjà été prises précédemment: les mots parlent d'eux-mêmes. (Passages, p. 231) [1]

It is, however, by means of this system of indirect reflection, that Michaux defines and characterizes the language of poetry, its performance and its competence.

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<sup>1</sup>Transl: "Language is such a mouse-trap that no matter what one does, one only catches mice that have already and previously been caught. Words speak by or about themselves."



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