

# Writing the Mists of Memory

## The Narrative Journeys of Henri Michaux and Nicolas Bouvier

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The narrative journeys of Henri Michaux and Nicolas Bouvier are the fruit of complex and dynamic processes that deal in first instance with memory. If imagination plays an important role in their writing, and mainly in Michaux's, the blanks in the memory, these holes that make episodes misty are important not only in the forgetfulness they represent, but also by the re-construction exercise they motive in a more or less inventive way. The act of writing is here understood as an act appropriation and transformation of time and of space, with resource to Deleuze and Guattari's notions such as rhizome, lines of flight, (de)/(re)territorialisation, and smooth and striated spaces.

Beyond the difficulties and often the pain inherent to the act of writing lies the significant change of the writer who experiences therefore a metamorphic process through the exercise of writing and memory.

Henri Michaux (Namur, 1899 – Paris, 1984) and Nicolas Bouvier (Geneva, 1929-1998) are two travellers who write about their experiences between the real and the imaginary.<sup>1</sup> Each journey motivates new experiences and consequently provokes significant changes at various levels. Writing is subsequent to travel and it entails, therefore, a mnemonic effort. Memory has indeed a main role in the act of

storytelling and writing becomes not only a filter of experiences, but also an exercise of re-construction that follows its own course, more or less independently of the real experience that belongs to the past.

In this paper, I propose to analyse the metamorphosis motivated by some journeys of the writers, enhancing the difficulties, often the pain, inherent to the act of writing. Firstly, we will look into the travelling and analyse how stories come to life, in which context and with which motivations, pointing out the differences between the physical and geographical journeys and those that are more mental and imaginative. Afterwards, we will look into the threads of memory and the necessary presence of forgetfulness as survival but also as a sphere for creativity in the appropriation and transformation of time and space. Finally, we will look into the challenge and resistance of both writers to the boundaries imposed by language and memory, understanding how mental geographies look for constant deterritorialisations.

## 1. Stories of travel

Travelling is an act inherent in the humanity that marks the evolution which makes our species what it is today. These journeys have always had different objectives and have therefore served distinct purposes. The primitive cave paintings portraying the adventures of hunters are the first written Western signs that bear witness to great stories of journeys. For centuries the same need for storytelling, in particular surrounding journeys, has continued: in distinct ways and through different means though the need for sharing and dissemination in space and time seems to be similar.

Henri Michaux and Nicolas Bouvier are two European Franco-phone travellers of the 20th century whose writing skills particularly emerge from the panorama of the travel literature of their time.<sup>2</sup> Their stories of travel reflect their own personal paths as travellers, artists and, of course, human beings. Their nomad spirit was attracted to the East with Michaux having a special connection to China while Bouvier to Japan.<sup>3</sup> Whilst both adventurous and contemporaries they had never met although only 30 years separated them. Michaux was a reference to Bouvier and *Ecuador* was one of the latter's most prominent bedside books. Often he recited by heart the verses written by Michaux depicting a poetical way of departing: "Emportez-moi dans une caravelle, / Dans une vieille et

douce caravelle” (Michaux, 1967a, p. 171).<sup>4</sup> In Michaux’s works, the downfall and the idea of an endless unshaped journey of defeat are recurrent images since his first travel narratives. Already in *Ecuador*, which is presented as a frustrated attempt of a travel journal, one can read the following preface: “Un homme qui ne sait ni voyager ni tenir un journal a composé ce journal de voyages. Mais, au moment de signer, tout à coup pris de peur, il se jette la première pierre. Voilà” (Michaux, 1929, Préface).<sup>5</sup> *Ecuador*, in fact based on a real physical experience of travelling, is published in 1929 which is more than twenty years apart from the journey that proved essential in Nicolas Bouvier’s life and work. In 1953, the Swiss writer decides, together with his painter friend, Thierry Vernet, to travel towards East. The decision is made and Bouvier described the point of departure as follows: “Nous avons deux ans devant nous et de l’argent pour quatre mois. Le programme était vague, mais dans de pareilles affaires, l’essentiel est de partir” (Bouvier, 2001, p. 12).<sup>6</sup>

This journey will end about four years later in Japan and it will be described in roughly three narratives with different characteristics: *L’Usage du monde* [*The Way of the World*] (1963), *Le Poisson-Scorpion* [*The Scorpion-Fish*] (1981) and *Japon* [*Japan*] (1967), which became later *Chronique japonaise* [*Japanese Chronicles*] (1975). Other journeys and narratives have been present in Bouvier’s life, however this first long journey would act as a marker until his last days.

The case for Michaux was a bit different. He also travelled a lot, but after his second work based on a physical experience of travel, which gave birth to *Un Barbare en Asie* [*A Barbarian in Asia*] [1933], he abandoned the idea of writing based on particular trips (with more or less traditional or trendy characteristics). Therefore, narrating real journeys, places and people was cast off and from that moment on he dedicated his time and writing to imaginary worlds. However, these imaginary places and people, such as the Émanglons or the Poddemaïs, are inspired and nourished by the geographical journeys actually done by Michaux. It is in this sense that Jérôme Roger points out that the narratives of imaginary places, such as *Voyage en Grande Garabagne* [*Voyage to Great Garaban*] (1936), *Au pays de la Magie* [*In the Country of Magic*] (1941) or *Ici, Poddema* [*Report from Poddema*] (1946),<sup>7</sup> can be read “à la lumière de l’époque où génocides, grandes purges et autres purifications ethniques révélèrent un système d’esclavage généralisable à l’ensemble de l’humanité” (Roger,

2000, p. 107).<sup>8</sup> The characters of these imaginary places and the anonymous narrator are essential pieces in the transference of emotions, pain and dilemmas. As Michaux states in *Passages* [*Passages*]:

Mes “Emanglons”, “Mages”, “Hivinizikis” furent tous des personnages-tampons suscités par le voyage. (Plume disparut le jour même de mon retour de Turquie où il était né.)

[...] C’est pourquoi le pays étranger était une occasion, une provocation à personnages, auxquels dès lors je remettai l’affaire, celle de jouir et de souffrir, des gens et des choses étrangères et hostiles. Eux-mêmes étaient composés pour s’en fichier un peu et remuer tout sens dessus dessous. Ainsi les mages (du *Pays de la Magie*) furent commencés le lendemain de mon arrivée à Rio-de-Janeiro [sic], me séparant si bien de ces Brésiliens, avec qui je ne trouvais pas le contact [...]. (Michaux, 1950, pp. 161-162)<sup>9</sup>

In Michaux, the imaginary comes to make the real bearable and is also a way to interpret and integrate the differences. In Bouvier, the real journeys are in fact the proper object of writing, although in *The Scorpion-Fish* magic and supernatural elements also come onto the scene making this work a narrative with glimpses of a dark novel. Regardless of whether the journeys and places were real or imaginary the writers’ imaginaries were always fed by real experiences. However, this leaves unanswered the ways in which time and space are articulated, organized and transposed through memory into the act of writing.

## 2. Time, space and memory design

The moment between the actual travelling and the act of writing is lived in a kind of limbo. It is a moment of passage which entails different emotions, attitudes and expectations although it is always different from moment to moment, trip to trip. The journey is no longer the same. It is another journey that begins with writing: “Il [the written journey] a vécu sa vie” (Michaux, 1967b, Préface).<sup>10</sup> Hence the written journey presents itself differently to the geographical journey, even though both are experienced and led by the same subject. In the same way, when the object is the written

journey, time is no longer measured in terms of the length of time of the physical act of travelling, but rather through the relationship between the subject writer and the narrative in a very particular timeframe: “Il date, ce livre” (Michaux, 1967b, p. [11]).<sup>11</sup>

The same feeling immediately comes to the surface in Bouvier’s first book. By the end, when seemingly having some problems and doubts about the timing and the manner of ending his narration, he is confronted with an ambivalent feeling and the need of telling everything or simply being silent. He faced the impossibility of telling everything and moreover the impossibility of sharing his exact emotions, dialogues and perspectives on those episodes. Once again, time is quite important since it is a part of the contextual framework of both travelling and writing: “*Et puis pourquoi s’obstiner à parler de ce voyage? quel rapport avec ma vie présente? aucun, et je n’ai plus de présent*”<sup>12</sup> (Bouvier, 2001, p. 407). The difficult dilemma between what has been lived and what is being lived of the *same* journey causes anguish and leads to an inescapable void. The narrative becomes then a “*récit fantôme*” (Bouvier, 2001, p. 407),<sup>13</sup> a place where memory seeks to rebuild the episodes in order to tell them as they were (or as they are remembered). Nevertheless, despite the numerous notebooks, memory can be a dark and terrible place that closes upon the subject, which strives harder and harder to “*revenir au Château des Paiens, à ce trou de mémoire*” (Bouvier, 2001, p. 407)<sup>14</sup> and faces only with “*ces souvenirs qui ont séché*” (Bouvier, 2001, p. 408).<sup>15</sup> Significant experiences which lose life, mobility and thereby all the meaning they seemed to have before the attempt to put them into writing.

If Michaux’s artistic attitude is positioned in an everlasting relentless countercurrent, similar memory holes seem to strike him, namely in the attempts of telling his physical travelling experiences. In what he calls a “*Préface à quelques souvenirs*”, situated near the end of *Ecuador*, he states: “*Voyant une grosse année réduite à si peu de pages, l’auteur est ému. Sûrement il s’est passé encore bien d’autres choses. / Le voilà qui cherche. Mais il ne rencontre que brouillards. / Alors pour masquer son embarras, il prend une voix de pédagogue*” (Michaux, 1929, p. 181).<sup>16</sup>

The imprints in memory are not similar for everyone nor are they the same for every person involved in the exact same experience. Memory has its own space and time, and each subject devel-

ops strategies to evoke memory. At the same time, memory holes that both writers complain about are oblivion strategies for human beings to be safe. Forgetting is an integral and internal process of safeguarding, or more accurately, as argues Nietzsche in his *The Genealogy of Morals*:

the utility [...] of the active forgetfulness [...] is a very sentinel and nurse of psychic order, repose, etiquette; and this shows at once why it is that there can exist no happiness, no gladness, no hope, no pride, no real present, without forgetfulness. [...] But this very animal who finds it necessary to be forgetful, in whom, in fact, forgetfulness represents a force and a form of robust health, has reared for himself an opposition-power, a memory, with whose help forgetfulness is, in certain instances, kept in check. (Nietzsche, 2003, pp. 34-35)

In fact, the need of the writer to remember represents an effort and is often indeed a painful act. If we continue with Nietzsche's thoughts, we can stress what he considers to be "an axiom of the oldest (unfortunately also the longest) psychology in the world" (Nietzsche, 2003, p. 37), that is that the human being has an "instinct which found in pain its most potent mnemonic" (Nietzsche, 2003, p. 37).

Often enough this pain is not only psychological, but also physical. The body participates in the travelling experience as well as in the writing experience. Michaux had health problems since before *Ecuador* and still he risked his life in the mountains and later in other places, such as the Amazonia. Bouvier had several problems on his journeys and he severely felt his long walks in his legs. In the writing process, the body is also compromised and its memory is also more or less an active part of the act of writing.

Memory is also in this sense a present evocation of the past. If, on the one hand, memory is always related to a present moment, and in discourse complies with the present of narration, on the other hand, "[t]he process of remembering integrates present, past and future in a single task" (Achugar, 2008, p. 7).

The mists are therefore part of the process and they lead to a choice entailed by the act of writing itself: either one keeps the mist,



or chooses oblivion or yet one reconstructs that particular episode. Often writing seems an impossibility; rewriting through an exercise of revisited memory far more: “Ici, barbare on fut, barbare on doit rester” (Michaux, 1967b, p. 14).<sup>17</sup> Michaux refuses then to touch his text. At the time, as he states in the preface, when travelling through India and China, he had, so he states, the impression those people “me parurent mériter d’être réels” (Michaux, 1967b, p. 13),<sup>18</sup> that is, to be depicted as accurately as possible on paper. To some extent, Bouvier’s attitude regarding his stay in Ceylon is the opposite, since the place, as are the people, do not seem to be worthy of incorporation through writing. All the atmosphere of Ceylon is like a dream; hazy and untouchable, a bit like the figure of Père Álvaro or of the great grocer-Circe in *The Scorpion-Fish*, which lead the reader right into the heart of magic. It is indeed because of this general impression of blurriness, both in the ambience and in the inner image, that Bouvier takes his time to be able to write about his stay in Ceylon. He feels he has to wait like a vase which has to be filled until he can no longer stand to keep it to himself and has to break his silence, no matter how painful that can be. For this reason, this particular act of writing becomes possible only 23 years later, with Debussy playing uninterruptedly, and with a perpetual flow of whisky, in order to recreate, as far as it would be possible, the thorny and weighty atmosphere of Ceylon.<sup>19</sup> It is in this way that Bouvier will seek to awaken the episodes in his memory in order to transpose them into words. The text was, in his own words, “overworked” and its structure was perfectly thorough in detail, from the number of chapters to the revelations in each of them. Until his last days, he was seeking the liberty regarding this part of his life. Michaux, always in the countercurrent, was also seeking new forms of getting free from his (and others’) limitations.

The relationship between real travelling and writing is a complex one (Martin, 2005; Jakubec, 2010) which are characteristic of both authors. However, as we have discussed, this complex and difficult process gives birth and originates the creative act. It is the interstices of real, imaginary and memory that creativity arises. These holes of memory and the consequent effort of re-construction are the driving force for new forms of inventiveness in writing, but also in painting (for Michaux). On the other side of the game played by memory, Bouvier uses photography beyond a mere means

to help memory in the writing act after the travelling episodes. Photography is also a panacea for all the difficulties of language (Marchetti, 1994; Guennoc, 2006; Guyon, 2008). Furthermore, painting and photography appear in the artistic development of these authors, contributing to the management of time and space in the memory mainly as potential escape routes. Pushing themselves constantly to their limits, Michaux and Bouvier juggle with the real, the imaginary, awareness and ghostly images (Dupuis, 2010) in a field of inventiveness where immediacy and memory exercises struggle to gain artistic expression.

### 3. The Metamorphosis of (de)territorialisation

The willingness – or the need? – to defy the limits, unearth emotions and build constantly renewed and enriched identities, made both writers look further down in their outer space. The exploration of new uncomfortable spaces outside the familiar corresponds to a deep state of *dépaysement*, consisting in both exterior and interior displacement. For Bouvier, writing is also a construction of identity (Laurel, 2006); a path that has to be taken, full of obstacles to be faced and fears to be confronted. This permanent departure from the familiar territory makes them outsiders, sometimes in their own spaces, like in the paper where Michaux's figures emerge. They seem to come to life, and start occupying the territory of the page they jump out of and make their creator an outsider vis-à-vis his own work (Michaux, 1985, p. 84). In this sense, there is also a metamorphosis of the author, originated by his own works. When the creative act comes to its end, the creator has to disappear, like in Barthes' death of the author (Barthes, 1984). This process described by Michaux would therefore be the performed death of the author; a death that is not an end in itself but it is a part of a more complex process of metamorphosis. The fear of disappearance is also present since *Ec-uador*: "Je compte sur toi, lecteur, sur toi qui me vas lire, quelque jour, sur toi lectrice. Ne me laisse pas seul avec les morts comme un soldat sur le front qui ne reçoit pas de lettres. Choisis moi [sic] parmi eux, pour ma grande anxiété et mon grand désir. Parle-moi alors, je t'en prie, j'y compte" (Michaux, 1929, p. 81).<sup>20</sup> The writer / artist turns up to become an outsider that has to be annihilated and, in this sense, it also represents a loss – from being a creator the writer has to grieve over his inner self prior to the creative act. It is interesting to



note, however, that in Bouvier's works the word struggles to come up and beat the imposing silence. Even when they fill in pages, often many years after the real journey that originated them, the subject seems to be hiding and disappear behind the episodes and the characters that live in them. The poetics of disappearance (Hambursin, 1997; Ridon, 2002) takes shape, bearing witness to the biggest danger of them all, the death of narrative by birth. In fact, this becomes clearer when we look at Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic model, where different types of line emerge. In fact, both the writing and the inherent identity construction processes surrounding it can be seen in the dynamic composition of the rhizome:

the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple. It is not the One that becomes Two or even directly three, four, five, etc. It is not a multiple derived from the One, or to which One is added ( $n+1$ ). It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overflows. It constitutes linear multiplicities with  $n$  dimensions having neither subject nor object, which can be laid out on a plane of consistency, and from which the One is always subtracted ( $n-1$ ). When a multiplicity of this kind changes dimension, it necessarily changes in nature as well, undergoes a metamorphosis. (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, p. 23).

This horizontal chaotic structure – the rhizome – is the nourishing battle field for different types of line: “First, a relatively supple line of interlaced codes and territorialities [...]. Second, a rigid line, which brings about a dualist organization of segments [...]. Third, one or several lines of flight, marked by quanta and defined by decoding and deterritorialization” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, pp. 244-245). One should however take into account that in their different actions they can be parallel, complement themselves or collide, therefore “[i]t would be more accurate to say that there is

a space in which the three kinds of closely intermingled lines co-exist” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, p. 245).

The lines of flight express then the gestures that seek for deterritorialisation, for penetrating unknown spaces outside the familiar zones of comfort. This however implies conflicts, confrontations, struggles, battles and defeats where the risk can be death itself. The journey described in *Le Poisson-Scorpion* is a clear witness of the strength of the urges to defy the limits and enter the zones of silence: in doing so, Bouvier had severe health problems and almost went mad. When passing it to writing, no matter how hard and painful the process was, there an exercise of internal organisation, which corresponds, at least to a certain extent, to a reterritorialisation.

The narrative becomes also multiplicity, which is “composed of heterogeneous terms in symbiosis, and [...] is continually transforming itself into a string of other multiplicities” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, p. 275).

This kind of transference between different spaces as well as the symbiosis and transformations are at the heart of the complex relationship between smooth and striated spaces, in the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari. Indeed, “sedentary space is striated, by walls, enclosures, and roads between enclosures, while nomadic space is smooth, marked only by ‘traits’ that are effaced and displaced in the trajectory” (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, p. 420). Consequently, one could not be without the other since the creation of nomadic spaces (smooth spaces) is limited and aroused, to some extent, by the borders of the sedentary spaces (striated spaces) (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, p. 524). The most important element in the functioning of the metaphorical rhizome, a lively nomadic multiplicity (which can be incarnated, for example, in the writing or in the physical journey), is the interactions, or the “passages” (a keyword in Michaux’s work):

What interests us in operations of striation and smoothing are precisely the passages or combinations: how the forces at work within space continually striate it, and how in the course of its striation it develops other forces and emits new smooth spaces. [...] Movements, speed and slowness, are sometimes enough to reconstruct a smooth space.

Of course, smooth spaces are not in themselves liberatory.  
(Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 551)

The nomadic space is a free desert zone; it is the space where the traveller goes and finds whatever he can, with all the inherent risks of that adventure. Writing however, if it can be felt as a creative act and as a space of free will, most of the times imposes its own rhythm and rules on the writer. In that sense, it constitutes a striated space in which the nomadic self has necessarily become reterritorialised. In the process, there are therefore different degrees and permanent movements in the sense that between deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, there is detachment and appropriation; input and output; familiar and unfamiliar; structure and chaos; life and death. By memory and writing, the unfamiliar becomes familiar; at the same time, the mists of memory allow new forms of deterritorialisation in what they create further unfamiliar spaces. Reterritorialisation happens afterwards, in the moment in which the familiar (and striated) space will be rearranged and adapted to the new elements gained outside its borders by the challenges represented by the lines of flight. Though, in nomadic space, the reterritorialisation never happens fully nor it replaces completely deterritorialisation because the latter is ceaseless in these smooth spaces (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, p. 420).

Hence, for Michaux, the escape gate, and his main source and expression for inner lines of flight, was drawing and painting. As he comprehensively discusses in *Émergences Résurgences* [*Emergences Resurgences*], he found in painting and drawing a freedom impossible to get from writing, with its established and rigid symbols and codes (Michaux, 1972). In the painted trace he found spontaneity, immediate action with a minimal intervention of the mind, contrarily to writing, which was formed in the mind prior to appearance on paper. The consciousness, the constant awareness and the embedded habits related to language were considered limitations in Michaux's view. That is also the reason that he invented several illegible alphabets and symbols (Parish, 2007; Aubert, 2008; Kawakami, 2011). As for Bouvier, which sees in photography a quicker possibility for apprehending the exterior world than writing, the tendency to what Charles-Albert Cingria defined as "surexactitude"<sup>21</sup> (1968, p. 216) follows him as a permanent chain

in time and space. For this reason, Bouvier felt this mandatory need for sedentariness when writing (Bouvier, 2004, pp. 1300, 1380), because, eventually, as Michaux states, the author “est revenu chez lui après chaque voyage. Il n’a pas une résistance indéfinie” (Michaux, 1967c, p. [7]).<sup>22</sup>

These adventures, misadventures, conquests and fatigues; the constant adaptations, challenges and changes, make them new beings, with renewed identities amongst the multiplicity of the self. They live in a complete schizo world, not in the mental illness sense, but as Deleuze and Guattari defend. As Brian Massumi puts it, in this context “schizophrenia as a positive process is inventive connection, expansion rather than withdrawal. Its twoness is a relay to a multiplicity. From one to another (and another...). [...] Not aimlessly. Experimentally. [...] Schizophrenia is the enlargement of life’s limits through the pragmatic proliferation of concepts” (1992, p. [1]). It corresponds then to a constant need for change and for rebuilding a disquiet self. This is the process that puts Michaux and Bouvier on the move. And whenever physical motion is an impossibility, the mind has its strategies to work on it:

Une habitude très mienne. Voici les circonstances: c’est quand je suis étendu et que néanmoins le sommeil ne vient pas. Alors je me comble. Je me donne en esprit tout ce qu’il me plaît d’obtenir. Partant de faits personnels toujours réels et d’une ligne si plausible, j’arrive doucement à me faire sacrer roi de plusieurs pays, ou quelque chose de ce genre. Cette habitude est aussi vieille que ma mémoire. (Michaux, 1929, p. 49)<sup>23</sup>

The constant need for deterritorialisation is what makes Michaux king of his own properties,<sup>24</sup> a habit that he dates back to his childhood and which keeps on existing until his last days.

The journeys can therefore be elements of change or simply play as catalysts in the inner metamorphosis of the writers. Each journey is unique, whether it is in the geographical and physical motion or whether an imaginary activity. Each step is part of the necessary dislocation: it is difficult, risky but yet the only possible way of living. Writing is just another type of journey which entails other emotions, while metamorphoses continue to occur.

## Concluding remarks

The journey is multiple, as is identity. In the process of travelling, whether by its lively experience or whether by the nourishing of writing that it represents, metamorphosis is a constant phenomenon. The articulation between the self, the exterior and the arts is composed and developed as a rhizomatic structure in which the subject switches over and over again from striated spaces to smooth ones and vice-versa. From this analysis it comes into view that the evocation of memory is often painful, even when regarding its blanks spaces and their correspondent re-construction in the actual act of writing. Dislocations, with their implied particular appropriation of time and space, are often the occasions for renewed perspectives and new discoveries; as is the difficulty of unravelling the real external world. This is what is behind the deleuze-guattarian concept of rhizome, which constitutes a fruitful model that gives account of the connections, dynamics and risks, in this case, inherent to the act of evoking memory in the act of writing. Moreover, beyond the risks and the pain, with the metamorphosis, a promise of a better – or at least different – *afterwards* surfaces.

Similarly to other places, Michaux's invented Poddema, is again a narrative journey that proposes to challenge limits, as it is indeed a cruel and figurative portrayal of a torn humankind. A grain of hope is however always present waiting to blossom, because metamorphoses are possible and, as the Phoenix, humankind represented in Poddema can be reborn from its own ashes: "Un du Conseil des pots m'a dit: 'Ne nous jugez pas: vous avez vu Poddema sous un signe. Elle a vécu sous d'autres. Elle vivra sous d'autres encore. Métamorphose! Métamorphose, qui engloutit et refait des métamorphoses. Chez nous, un moment ouvre un océan de siècles'" (Michaux, 1967c, p. 240).<sup>25</sup>

## Notes

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- 2 One should note however that, as artists, their expressions go further beyond writing: Michaux's drawings, paintings and fabulous invent-

ed signs are as important as his writing pieces; Bouvier's photographs are another means of achieving and seizing alterity and of expressing his inner-subjectivity.

- 3 Dans son étude, Charles Forsdick (2006) compare l'Asie dans l'oeuvre de Nicolas Bouvier et de Roland Barthes. Pour Michaux, il s'agit encore d'une autre perspective (André-Acquier, 1987; Kawamaki, 2000; Bawin, 2008; Laügt, 2008, 63-89).
- 4 "Carry me away into a Portuguese *boat* of once, / Into an old and gentle Portuguese *boat* of once" (Siegel, 1968, p. 66).
- 5 "A man who knows neither how to travel nor how to keep a journal has put together this travel journal. But at the moment of signing he is suddenly afraid. So he casts the first stone. Here" (Michaux, 2001, Preface).
- 6 "We had two years in front of us, and money for four months" (Bouvier, 2007, p. 12). Thierry Vernet will also register his impressions in the correspondence with family during his adventure with his friend (Vernet, 2006). See Topping (2010) for the analysis of the dialogue between the text of Bouvier and the Chinese ink drawings by Vernet in *L'Usage du monde*.
- 7 The three titles were gathered in 1948 and published under the title of *Ailleurs* [*Elsewhere*].
- 8 "in the light of a time where genocide, big purges or other ethnic purifications revealed a system of generalized slavery to all humankind." My translation. For further reflection on collective memory, history and modernity, see Huyssen (2003).
- 9 "My 'Emanglons', 'Magi', 'Hivinizikis' were all buffer-characters provoked by a trip. (Plume disappeared the very day I got back from Turkey where he had been born.)  
[...] That's why the foreign country was the occasion, the provocation for characters, to whom I gave the job from then on – both of having pleasure and of suffering from foreign, hostile, people and things. The characters themselves were composed so as not to care and turn everything topsy-turvy. Thus the Magus (from the 'Land of Magic') was begun the day after I arrived in Rio de Janeiro, successfully separating me from the Brazilians: I was having such a hard time relating to them" (Michaux, 1994, p. 331).
- 10 "It has lived its life." My translation.
- 11 "It is old, this book." My translation.



- 12 "But then why insist on talking about this journey? What bearing does it have on my life at present? None; anyway, I no longer have a present" (Bouvier, 2007, p. 307).
- 13 "ghostly narrative" (Bouvier, 2007, p. 308)
- 14 "back to the Pagans' Castle, back to that hole in my memory" (Bouvier, 2007, p. 308).
- 15 "these memories which have withered on the stalk" (Bouvier, 2007, p. 308).
- 16 "Preface to some recollections  
Seeing a huge year reduce to so few pages the author is astonished. Surely there must have been lots of other things.  
So he rummages around. Nothing. Or, if not nothing, mists.  
Finally to mask his embarrassment he assumes a professorial voice" (Michaux, 2001, p. 123).
- 17 "Here, once a barbarian, always a barbarian." My translation.
- 18 "it seemed to me they deserved to be real." My translation.
- 19 In his interviews with Irène Lichtenstein-Fall, he discusses this a bit further (Bouvier, 2004, pp. 1329-1331).
- 20 "I am counting on you, oh future reader. Do not leave me alone with the dead, like a soldier at the front who gets no mail. Choose me from among them if only for my great desire and concern. Speak to me, then please, I am counting on you" (Michaux, 2001, p. 58).
- 21 "surexactness"
- 22 "returned home after each journey. He doesn't have an indefinite resistance." My translation.
- 23 "A habit all my own. Here is how it works. It's when I'm stretched out and for some reason sleep doesn't come. So I just stuff myself. I give myself mentally whatever U would enjoy possessing. Starting from a set of personal and always real facts (which are themselves most plausibly arranged), I manage by and by to arrive at a point where I am crowned king of several countries, or something of the sort. As a habit it goes back to my earliest memories" (Michaux, 2001, p. 38).
- 24 It seems the same principle lies beneath the writing of *Mes Propriétés* [*My Properties*] (Michaux, 1967b, pp. 95-101).
- 25 "One member of the Council of old fellows told me: "Do not take judgment: you have seen Poddema under one sign. It has lived under others. It will live under still others. Metamorphosis! Metamorphosis which engulfs and creates new ones. Here one moment opens an ocean of centuries.'" My translation.

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