

***Images  
du monde  
visionnaire  
(1963)***

**Henri  
Michaux  
& Film**

MATS ANTONISSEN & STEVEN JACOBS

MER. Books

Vandenhove Centre for Architecture and Art

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HENRI MICHAUX & ÉRIC DUVIVIER

# IMAGES DU MONDE ..... 25 VISIONNAIRE

1963

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MATS ANTONISSEN & STEVEN JACOBS

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# TEXT READ BY MICHAUX DURING THE FILM

HENRI MICHAUX

When I was asked to make a film about mescaline visions, I stated, repeated, and still repeat that it is an impossible undertaking. No matter what we do, this drug is beyond that. Even with a superior film, made with much greater resources, with everything needed for an exceptional production, I would still say in advance that these images are insufficient. They should be more dazzling, more unstable, more subtle, more labile, more elusive, more oscillating, more tremulous, more torturous, more teeming, infinitely more charged, more intensely beautiful, more horribly colorful, more aggressive, more idiotic, more strange. As for speed, it is such that all the sequences combined should fit into fifty seconds. Here, cinema becomes powerless, especially since all these characteristics would have to be increased at once.

The images in the film are therefore very subdued, slowed down, attenuated, simple indications of the visual formations through which, almost inevitably, if the dose taken is sufficient, the imagination of the person taking the drug will pass, whether he is a genius of inner life or a man without problems. We did not attempt to represent the general and profound effect on a personality, which would have been a completely different film. But the types of images commonly encountered in these states will suffice to show those interested in the important problem of visions how much they differ from those of dreams, and in a certain way from those caused by hashish, and how they resemble those reported, for better or worse, by certain mental illnesses. That is the justification for this attempt.

Before, there was nothing; after, we will be able to do better. Although mescaline visions usually pass in absolute silence, it is not without reason that music has been introduced into this part. It has a role to play.

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As the subject becomes apathetic, blissful, exhilarated, or agitated, visionary images invade their mind, animated this time not by a vibratory movement, but by a lively movement. What is disproportionately elongated, what is exaggeratedly tall, what shoots up, springs forth, rushes forward, an extreme, crazy, irresistible animation, present or always ready to be triggered, the unexpected, the comical, the immense, the marvelous, endless corridors, terraces stretching as far as the eye can see, abysses, fabulous palaces, incessant, astonishing metamorphoses, the unusual, above all the unusual, this is the realm of hashish. We hear rumors, real voices sometimes, some of the noises that relate to the visions, not constantly, not strictly, often out of sync. The same goes for the music, which starts off just right, soon becomes entangled, and ends in a dizzying, comical amalgam.

Periodically, everything stops, sound and light, or one without the other, as if someone were taking a break to regain their strength. From this fantastic parade, more fleeting than enigmatic, we have, through long trial and error, pieced together a few parts, imperfectly.

## SYNOPSIS

H.M.

This two-part film presents the visions experienced by a subject with no particular characteristics, who is subjected to two successive experiments.

In the first one, under the influence of the hallucinogen A, he sees colorful formations passing by, constantly changing for no apparent reason, trembling, like structures of some unknown being, of some unknown matter, and moreover, indefinitely in the process of becoming something else. Sometimes he thinks he sees luminous dust, sometimes tiny flickering waves, or a crystallization in progress, almost complete, but which, through an imperceptible yet rapid modification of its microstructure, crystallizes differently. Sometimes they could be something like plant cells, but just as easily the architecture of enormous distant buildings with thousands of ornaments, frames, or openings; or even the finest parts of the interior of a pink or reddish human organ that, through some miraculous autoscopy, he would have, on a microscopic scale, the privilege of seeing, as it moves and pulsates.

In the second experiment (with hallucinogen B), familiar objects and beings appear to him, but distorted, strange, in enigmatic attitudes and situations. Impetuosity, obvious or underlying abruptness.

Everything seems to be tearing itself away from the ground and its usual environment. A vertiginous bridge rises to the highest point of the sky. A head is severed with a blow from a yatagan. The body, immobilized by the open wound in its neck, releases a powerful cloud of smoke that rises, but even higher rises the head, now resting on a flying blanket, seemingly unmoved, sailing through the air above the trees and houses. On the ground, or rather in no man's land, sparks flicker.

# TEKST VOORGELEZEN DOOR MICHAUX TIJDENS DE FILM

HENRI MICHAUX

Toen mij werd voorgesteld om een film te maken over mescalinevisioenen, verklaarde ik, herhaalde ik, en ik herhaal het tot op vandaag, dat zoiets een onmogelijke opgave is. Hoe dan ook, die drug is niet te vatten. Zelfs bij een film van uitstekende kwaliteit, gemaakt met een veel groter budget, met alles wat nodig is voor een uitzonderlijke productie, zou ik nog steeds en bij voorbaat zeggen dat de beelden tekortschieten. Ze zouden verblindender moeten zijn, onstabiel, subtieler, labiel, ongrijpbaarder, wankeler, vibrerender, pijnlijker, wemelender, oneindig meer geladen, van een intensere schoonheid, afschuwelijker gekleurd, agressiever, dwazer, bevreemdender. Het moet ook sneller: alle scènes samen zouden binnen vijftig seconden moeten passen. Cinema staat hier machteloos, zeker als je weet dat eigenlijk al die elementen tegelijkertijd tot het uiterste moeten worden opgedreven. De beelden in de film zijn dus erg getemperd, vertraagd, afgezwakt. Het zijn vereenvoudigde weergaven van de visuele formaties waar de verbeelding van de gedrogeerde, als de dosis sterk genoeg is, haast onvermijdelijk doorheen glijdt, of die persoon nu een meester is van het innerlijke leven of een zorgeloze ziel. We hebben niet geprobeerd om de algemene en diepgaande werking op een specifiek persoon weer te geven; dat zou een heel andere film hebben opgeleverd. We beperkten ons tot het soort beelden dat gewoonlijk optreedt in dergelijke toestanden. Dat is voldoende om geïnteresseerden in het belangrijke vraagstuk van visioenen te tonen hoezeer deze beelden verschillen van dromen en in zekere zin ook van

hasjvisioenen, en in welke mate ze overeenkomen met de beelden die bepaalde geesteszieken met wisselend succes hebben beschreven. Daar vindt ons experiment haar bestaansrecht. Voorheen was er niets; later volgen ongetwijfeld meer geslaagde pogingen. Hoewel mescalinevisioenen zich doorgaans in volstreekte stilte voltrekken, hebben we er bewust voor gekozen om muziek toe te voegen. Die speelt een belangrijke rol.

\*\*

Terwijl de proefpersoon apathisch wordt, gelukzalig, uitgelaten of juist onrustig, dringen de visionaire beelden zich op, ditmaal niet met een vibrerende maar met een voortstuwende beweging. Alles is hier bovenmatig uitgerekt, overdreven hoog, het schiet uit, welt op, stort naar beneden, een extreme, dolle, onweerstaanbare levendigheid, aanwezig of altijd klaar om los te barsten, het is onverwacht, kolderiek, immens, wonderbaarlijk, eindeloze gangen, terrassen zover het oog reikt, afgronden, fabelachtige paleizen, onophoudelijke, verbijssterende metamorfosen, ongewoon, vooral ongewoon: dat is de visionaire wereld van hasj. Er klinkt rumoer, soms echte stemmen, geluiden die verband houden met de visioenen, niet voortdurend, niet precies, vaak asynchroon. Net als de muziek: die begint op het juiste moment, maar raakt al snel ontregeld om te eindigen in een kolderieke en oorverdovende kakofonie.

Op gezette tijden valt alles stil, geluid en licht, of een van beide, zoals wanneer iemand pauzeert om op adem te komen. Van deze fantastische, ontzettend kortstondige en raadselachtige parade hebben we met veel vallen en opstaan enkele delen gereconstrueerd, zij het op onvolmaakte wijze.

## SYNOPSIS

H.M.

Deze tweedelige film toont de visioenen van een willekeurig proefpersoon die wordt onderworpen aan twee opeenvolgende experimenten.

Tijdens het eerste experiment is de persoon onder invloed van hallucinogeen A en ziet hij kleurrijke vormen voorbijtrekken die zonder onderbreken en zonder aanwijsbare reden veranderen, vibreren; structuren van onbekende wezens en onbekende materie die eindeloos van gedaante wisselen. Soms denkt hij lichtgevende stofdeeltjes te zien, soms minuscule trillende golvingen of een kristallisatie die zich voltrekt, bijna is voltrokken, en die door een onmerkbare maar snelle verandering in de microstructuur uiteindelijk toch in een andere vorm kristalliseert. Het doet bij momenten wat denken aan plantaardige cellen, maar evengoed aan architecturale patronen van gigantische gebouwen in de verte met duizenden ornamenten, omlijstingen, of openingen, of aan de fijnmazige binnenkant van een roze of roodachtig menselijk orgaan dat de proefpersoon dankzij een miraculeuze autoscopie op microscopisch niveau kan zien bonzen en pulseren.

Tijdens het tweede experiment (met hallucinogeen B) verschijnen er vertrouwde objecten en wezens, maar dan vervormd, eigenaardig, in raadselachtige houdingen en situaties. Alles onstuimig, bruusk, opzichtig of subtiel.

Het lijkt of de dingen zich willen losrukken van de aarde en uit hun gebruikelijke leefomgeving. Een duizelingwekkende brug rijst op tot hoog aan de hemel. Een hoofd wordt afgehakt met een jatagan. Uit het lichaam, roerloos door de opengesneden hals, ontsnapt een krachtige rookpluim. Vreemd genoeg stijgt vervolgens het hoofd op en gaat schijnbaar onaangedaan door de lucht zweven op een vliegend tapijt, over bomen

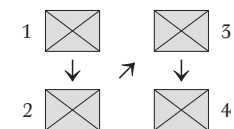
HENRI MICHAUX &  
ÉRIC DUVIVIER

**IMAGES DU  
MONDE  
VISIONNAIRE**

1963

Production: ScienceFilm & Sandoz  
34', 16mm, Color, Sound

35mm Projection Print, Université de Strasbourg, Image'Est  
4K Image Digitization by Martin Weiss under the supervision of  
Barbara Flückinger (University of Zürich)





apparaissent sous telle ou telle substance hallucinogène. C'est la grande valeur scientifique de ces expériences qui a justifié la perspective médicale initiale de cette réalisation d'Eric DUVIVIER. Le Professeur Jean DELAY en 1963, présentait ce film au corps médical en expliquant que :

“L'analogie ou l'identité de ces états expérimentaux, qui peuvent être produits et réduits en quelques heures, avec certains états d'aliénation mentale, est à l'origine des recherches actuelles sur la pathogénie biochimique des psychoses”.

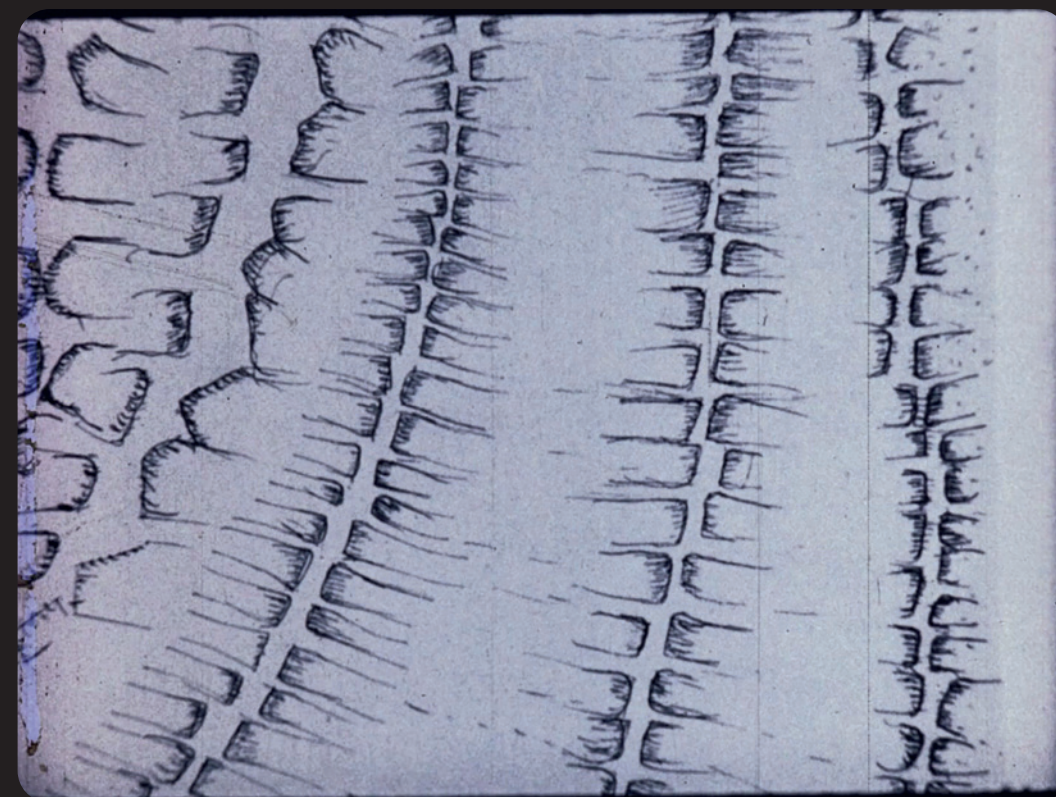
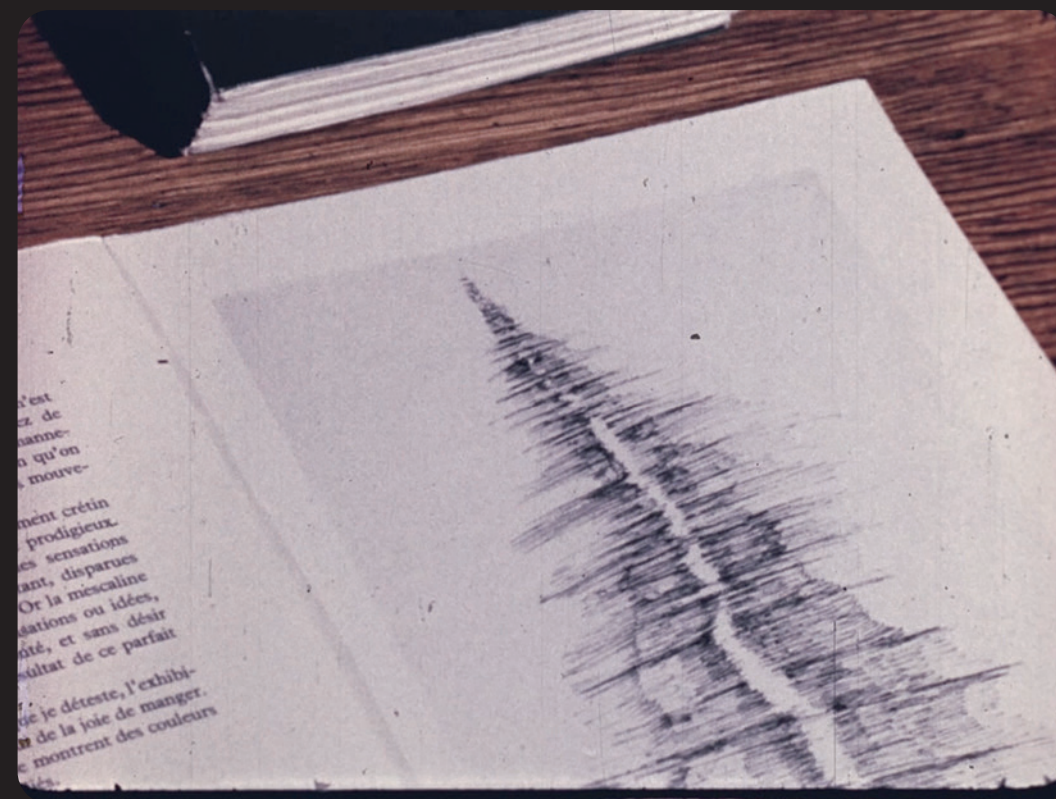
Avec une extraordinaire lucidité et une incroyable précision, Henri MICHAUX avait réussi à fixer dans sa mémoire telles ou telles images du monde visionnaire qui apparaissent sous telle ou telle substance hallucinogène. C'est la grande valeur scientifique de ces expériences qui a justifié la perspective médicale initiale de cette réalisation d'Eric DUVIVIER. Le Professeur Jean DELAY en 1963, présentait ce film au corps médical en expliquant que :  
“L'analogie ou l'identité de ces états expérimentaux, qui peuvent être produits et

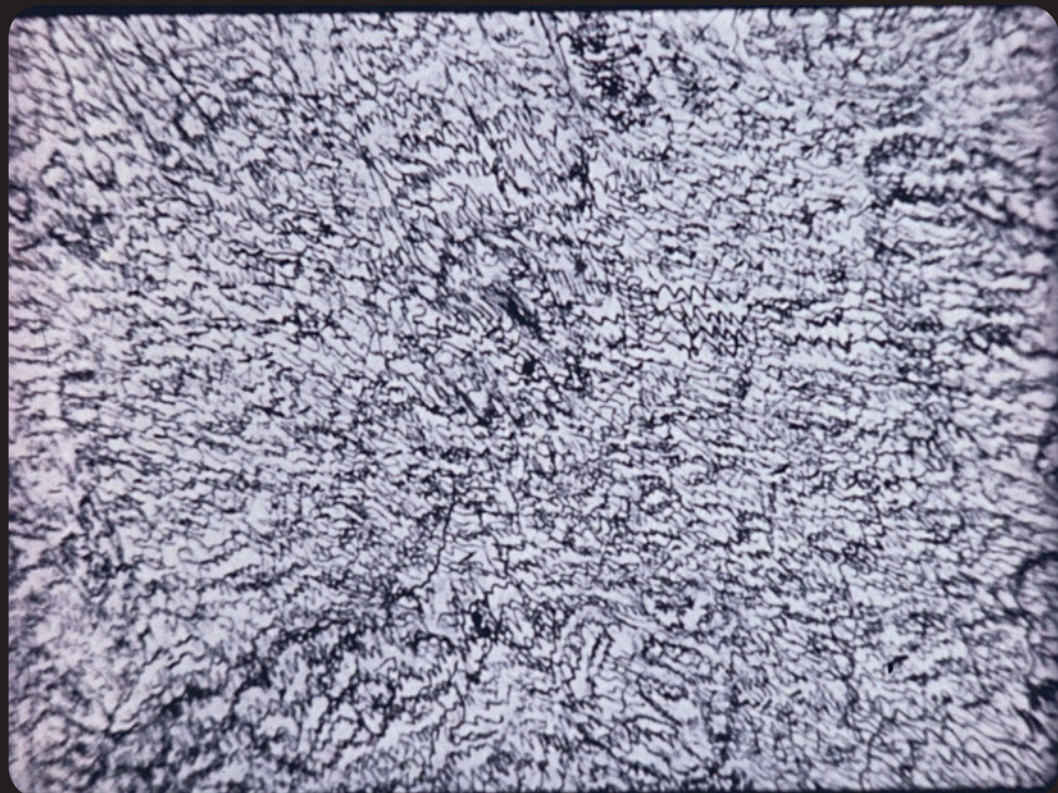
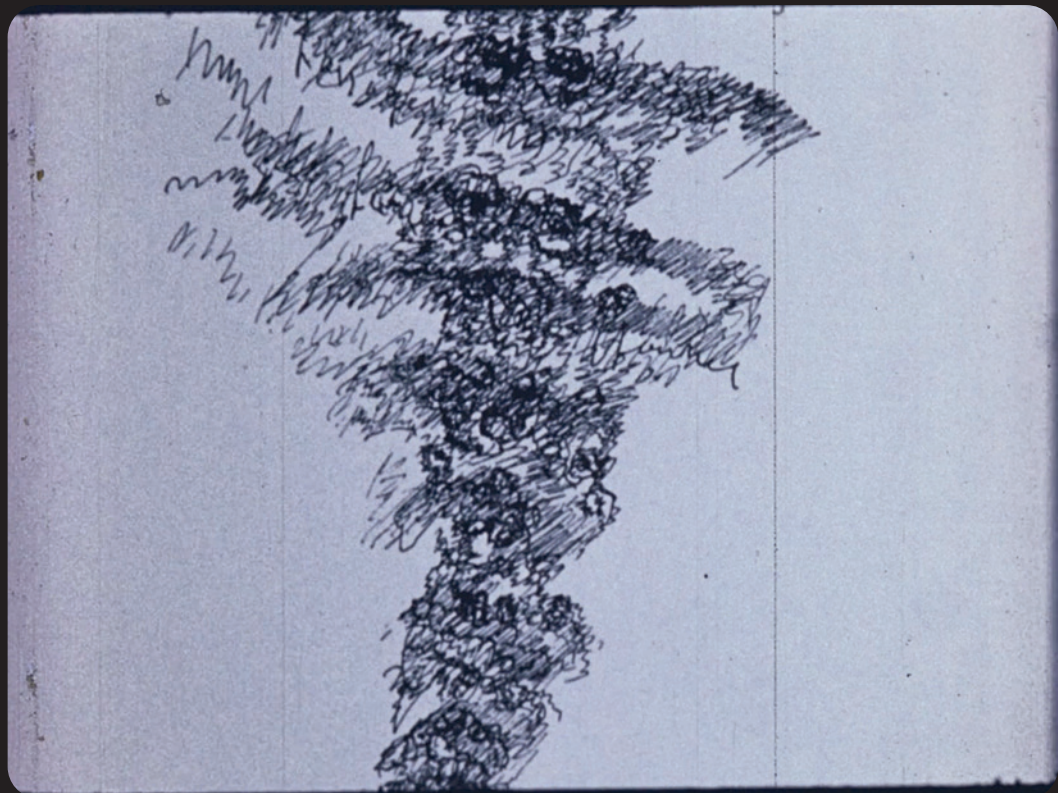
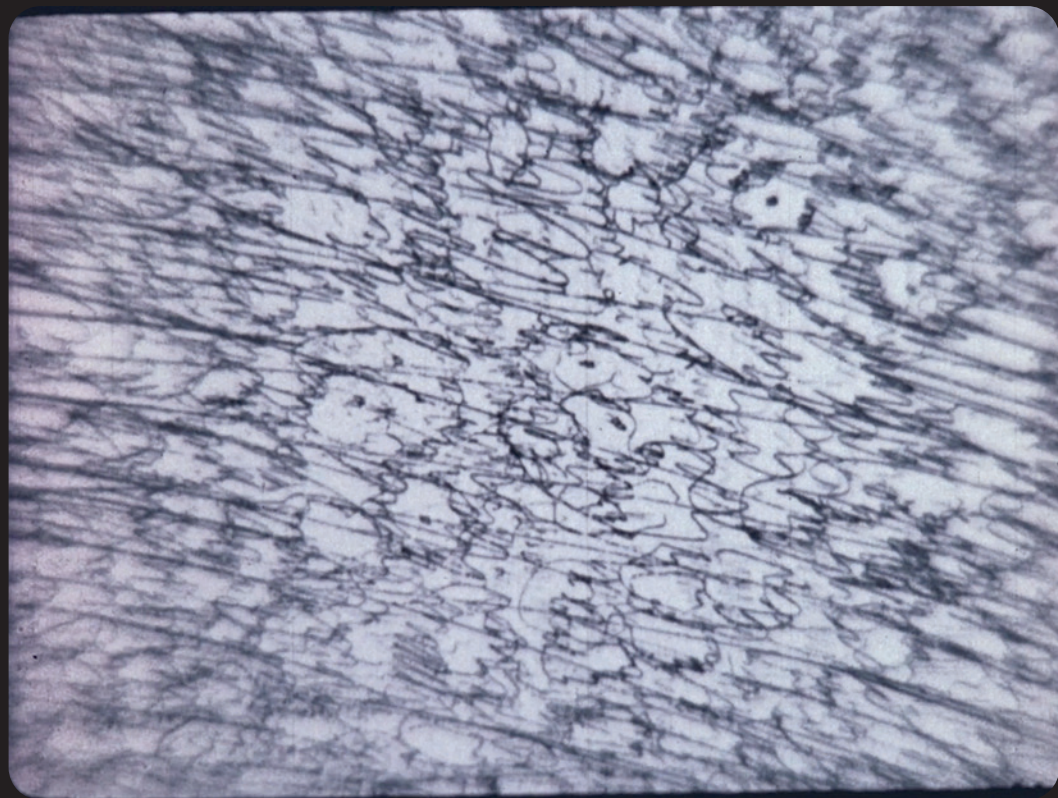
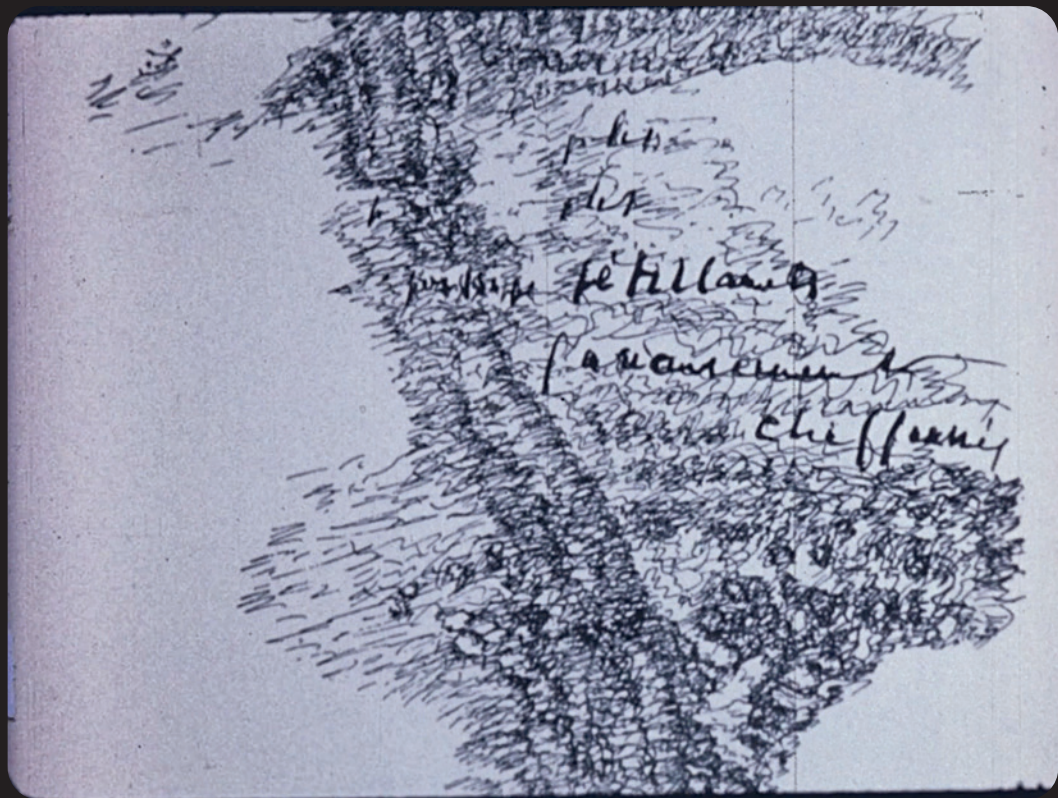
En preambule au film

## IMAGES DU MONDE VISIONNAIRE

(UN FILM DE LA CINEMATHEQUE SANDOZ)

Henri Michaux vous parle







**Un film d'Henri MICHAUX**

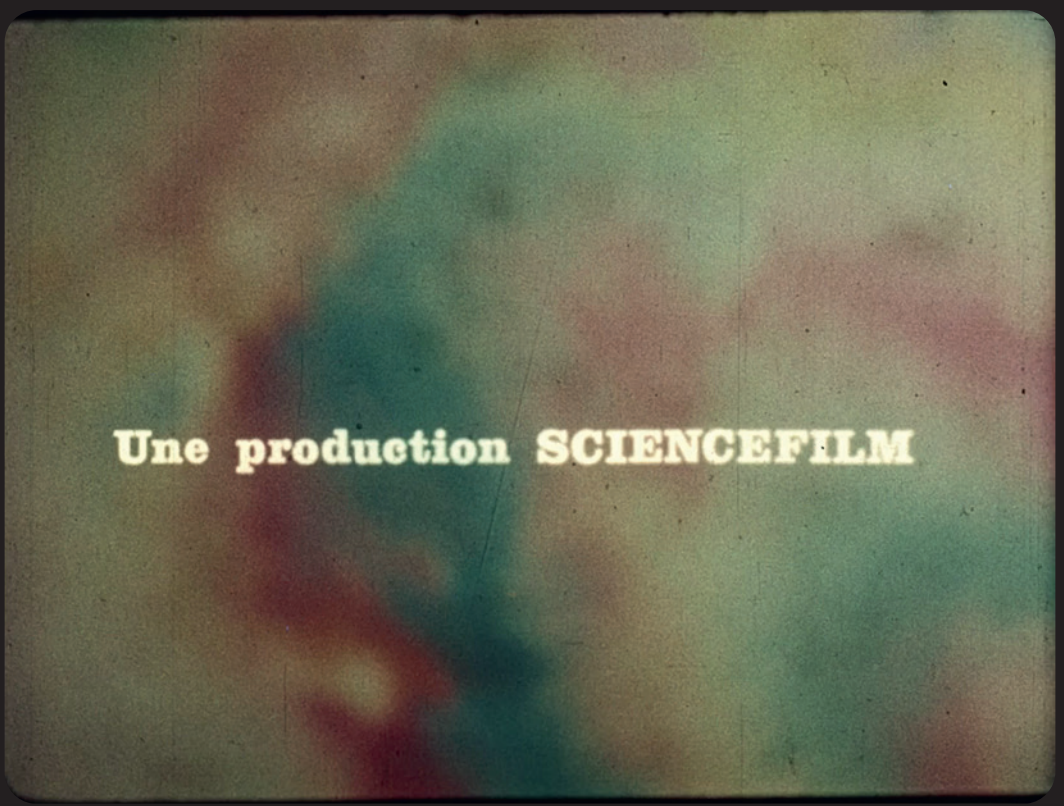
**Réalisé par Eric DUVIVIER**

**Un film d'Henri MICHAUX**

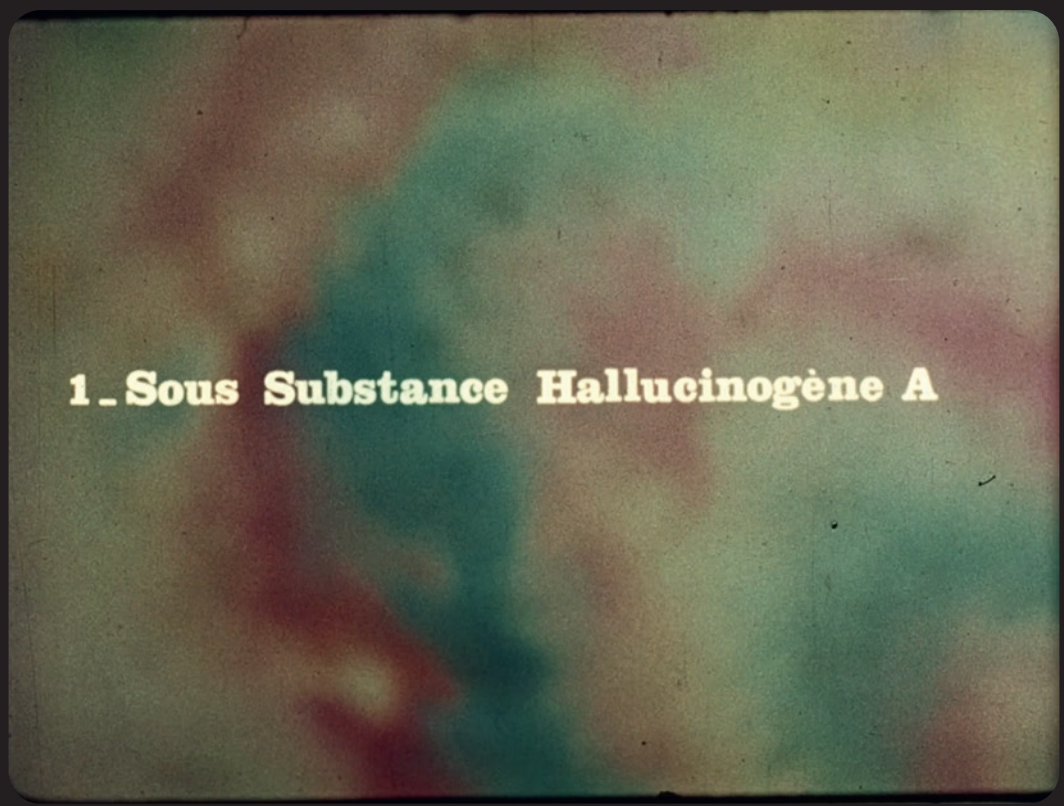
**Images: Pierre FOURNIER**

**Décors: Jean CAILLON**

**Montage sonore: Albert LUZUY**



**Une production SCIENCEFILM**



**1. Sous Substance Hallucinogène A**



**IMAGES DU MONDE VISIONNAIRE**



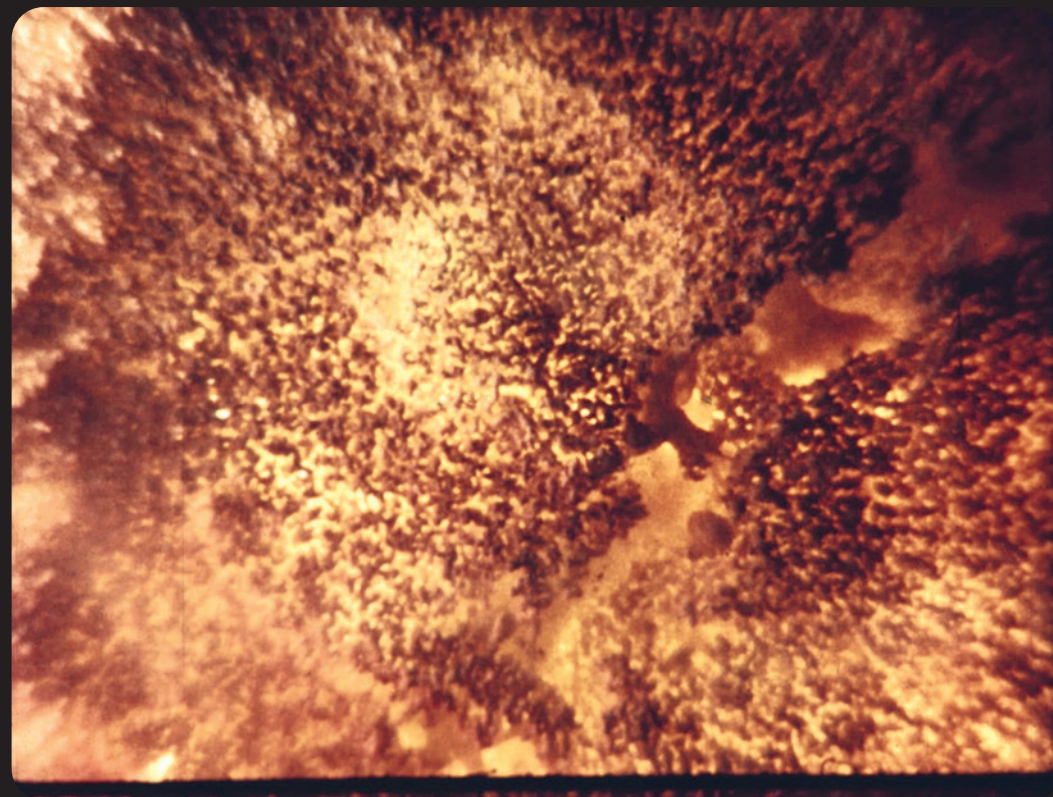
**Musique originale: Gilbert AMY**

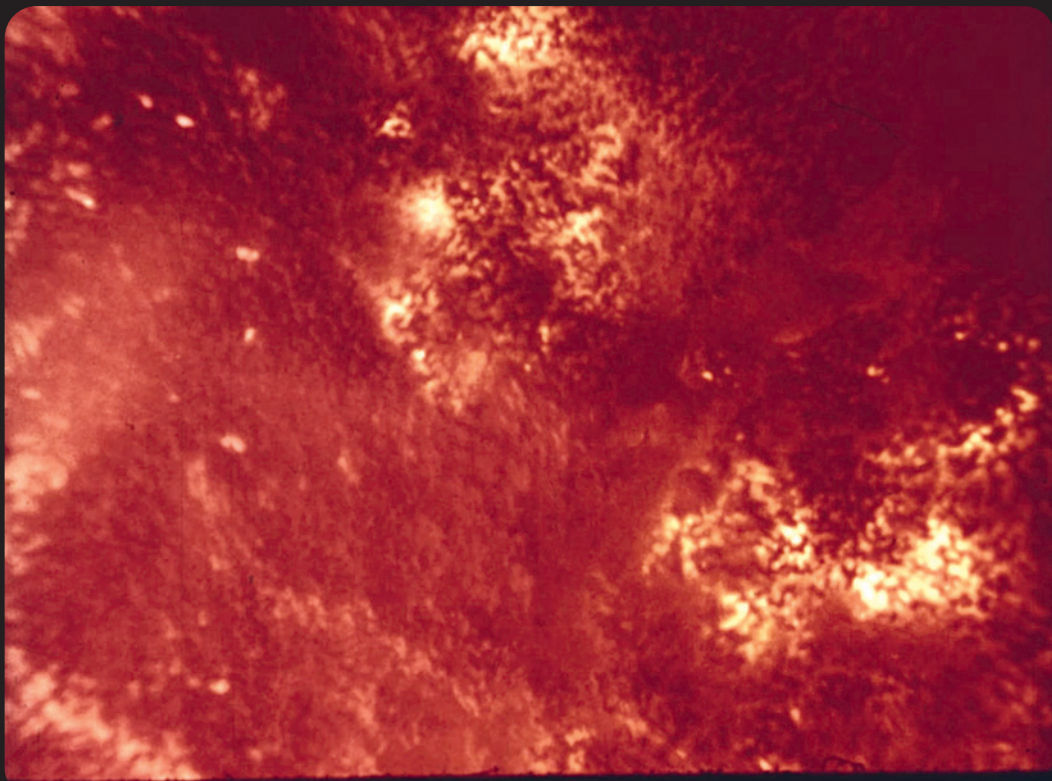
Une production SCIENCEFILM





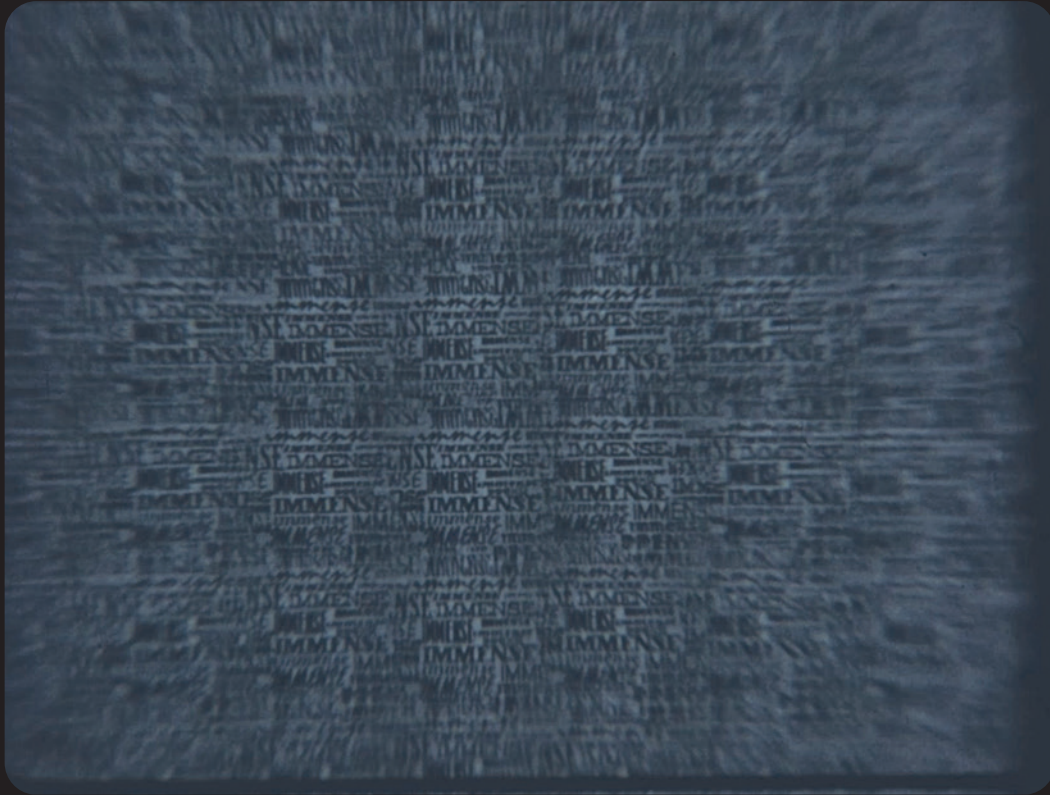






*overgrowth!*

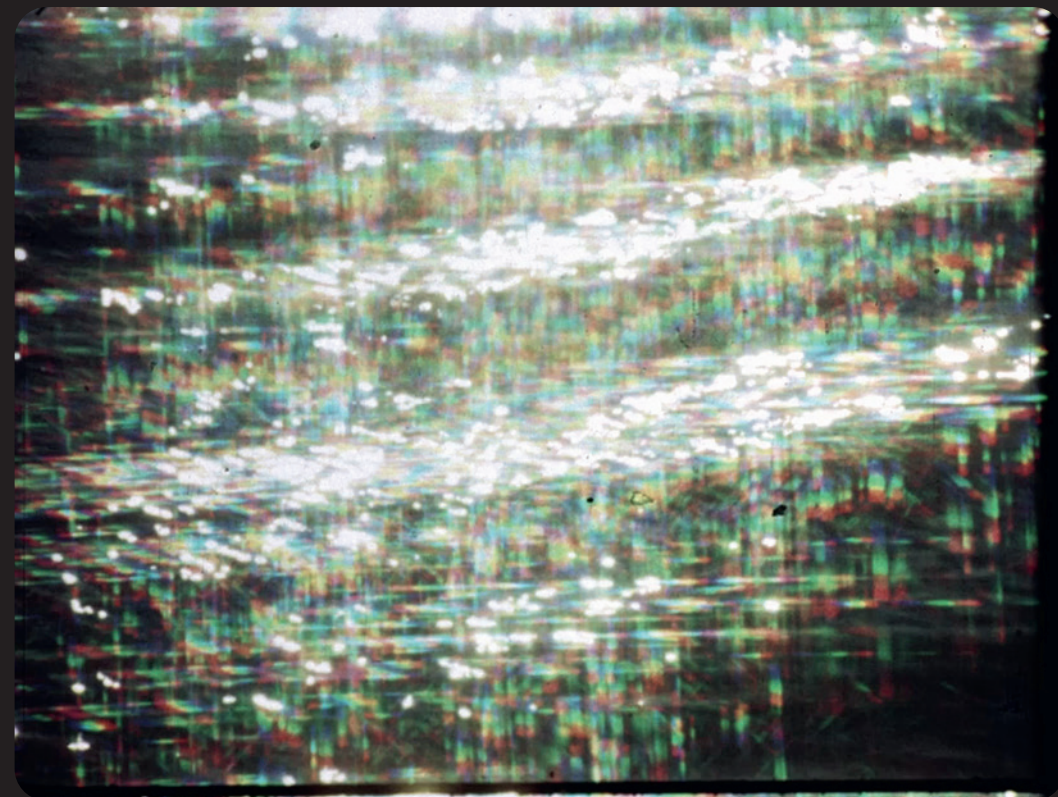
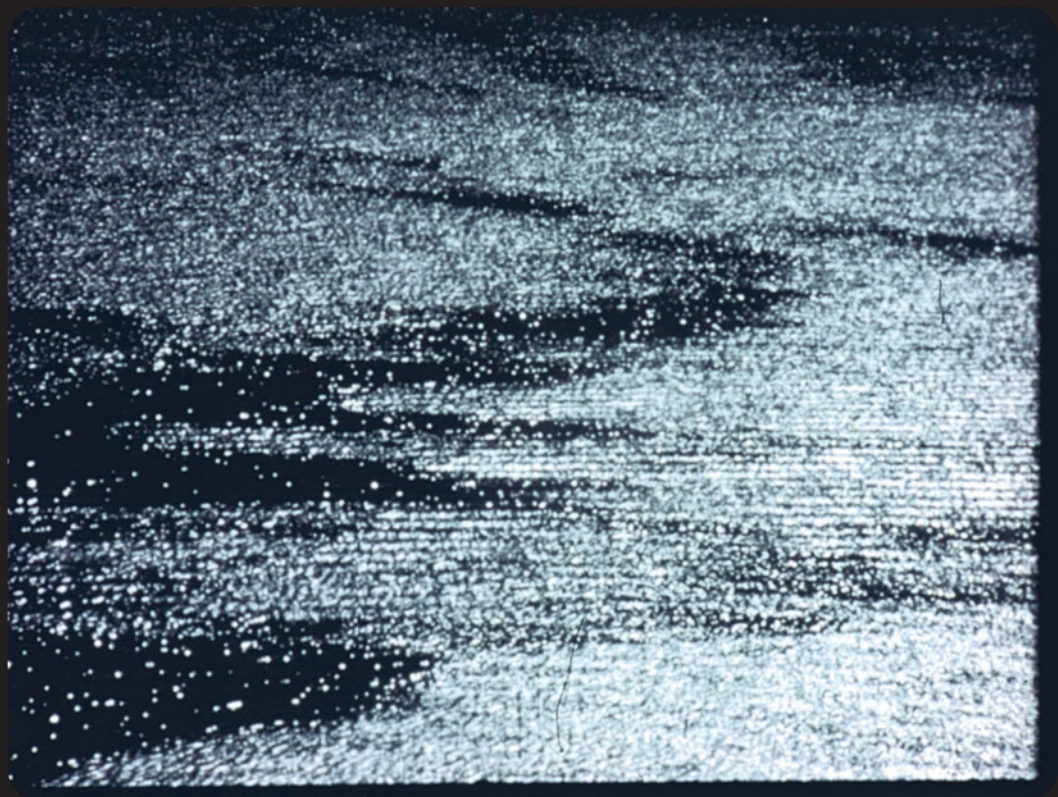
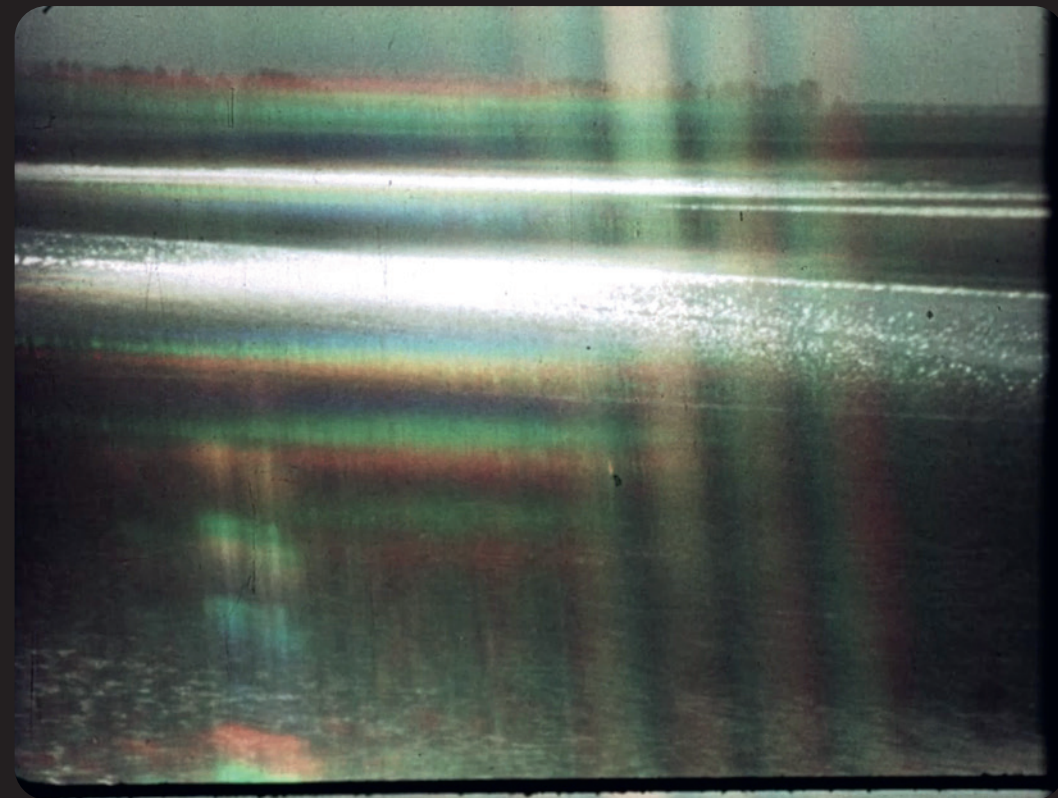
*intolérable*



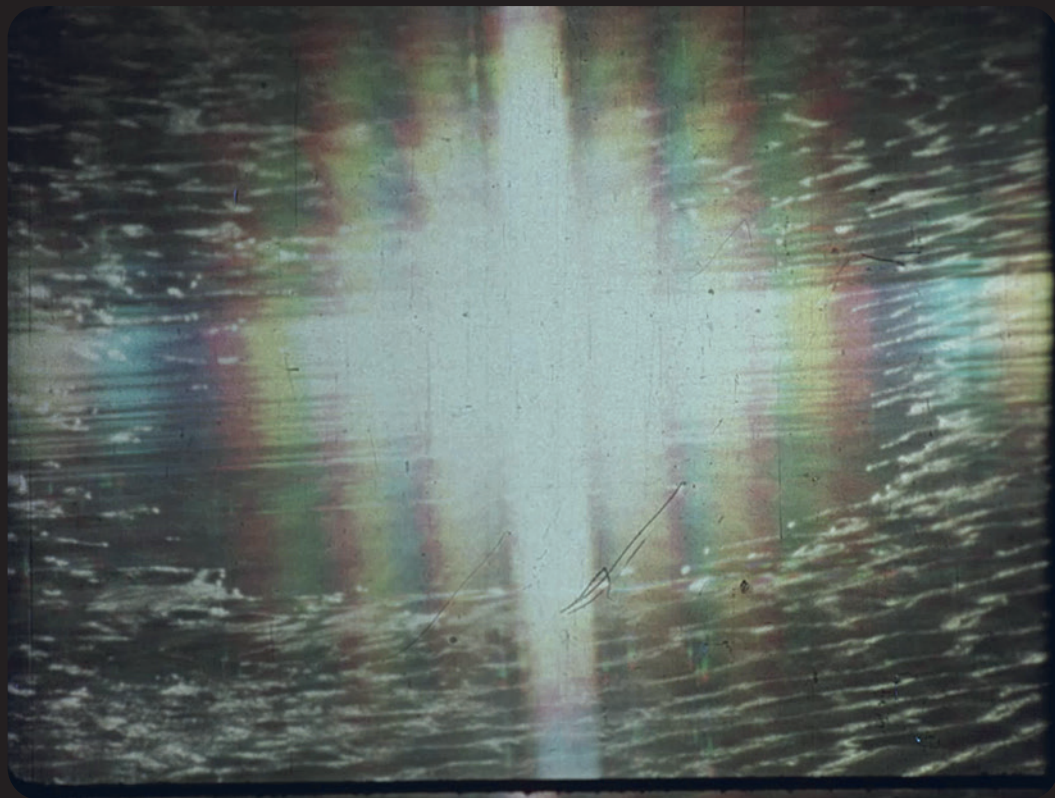
*immense*

*immense*

*immense*







# HENRI MICHAUX AND VISIONARY CINEMA

MATS ANTONISSEN AND  
STEVEN JACOBS

## Michaux Psychonaut

In 1963, Belgo-French writer and artist Henri Michaux (1899–1984) made the 34-minute film *Images du monde visionnaire* in collaboration with French filmmaker Éric Duvivier (1928–2018). The film seems to have fallen into oblivion—probably because Michaux, whose prose, poems, and paintings continue to attract interest, was to distance himself from the film later on.

*Images du monde visionnaire* is nonetheless entirely consistent with Michaux's literary, graphic, and pictorial work. He made his debut as a writer in the 1920s after failing to complete his medical studies and a brief career as a sailor. In 1924 he settled in Paris where he made a name for himself as one of the editors of the avant-garde journal *Le Disque vert*. Among other things, Michaux edited a special issue dedicated to Sigmund Freud—his interest in the unconscious permeates his entire oeuvre and links him to Surrealism, although he never officially became a member of this movement. In addition, Michaux wrote travelogues about real regions—*Ecuador: Journal de voyage* (1929); *Un Barbare en Asie* (1933)—but also about entirely fictional lands—*Voyage en Grande Garabagne* (1936); *Au pays de la magie* (1941).

Impressed by the work of Paul Klee and Max Ernst, he also devoted himself to the visual arts from the mid-1920s onwards—it is no coincidence that his earliest drawings combine image and text. Over the following decades, drawing and painting became increasingly important to Michaux. After the Second World War, his pictorial work became associated with Tachism and lyrical abstraction. Suggestive brushstrokes and dense scribbles conjure up hallucinatory faces, heads, plants, and animals. His pencil and ink drawings, engravings, and gouaches generally reveal an interest in Eastern calligraphy.<sup>1</sup>



Fig. 1  
Gisèle Freund, Portrait of Henri Michaux (1964)  
© Estate Gisèle Freund/IMEC Images

1.  
On Michaux as a visual artist, see *Henri Michaux* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1978); Alfred Pacquement and Raymond Bellour, *Henri Michaux: Peintures* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993); *Henri Michaux: Œuvres choisies, 1927–1984* (Musée de Marseille et Réunion des musées nationaux, 1993); Jean-Michel Maulpoix and Florence de Lussy (eds.), *Henri Michaux: Peindre, composer, écrire* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1999); Catherine De Zegher (ed.), *Untitled Passages by Henri Michaux* (London: Merrell, 2000); *Henri Michaux: The Mescaline Drawings* (London: The Courtauld Institute, 2025).

In 1955, the year in which he became a French citizen, Michaux experimented with hallucinogenic drugs for the first time at the age of 56. Together with poet Edith Boissonas and publisher Jean Paulhan he took mescaline under medical supervision in January of that year.<sup>2</sup> A derivative of the Mexican peyote cactus, the drug had then already inspired the art and writings of figures such as Havelock Ellis, Antonin Artaud, Salvador Dali, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Jünger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Aldous Huxley. The neuropsychiatrists of the time were actively studying the effects of mescaline. When Michaux accidentally overdosed, the Spanish-French neuropsychiatrist and psychoanalyst Julian de Ajuriaguerra helped him recover and subsequently kept him informed about scientific research on psychotropic drugs. For a scientist like Ajuriaguerra, who published a book on Michaux’s experiences with hallucinogenic drugs in 1963, the artist, with his detailed texts and drawings, was an interesting object of study.<sup>3</sup>

This was also the case for the renowned psychiatrist, neurologist, writer and academic Jean Delay, one of the pioneers of psychopharmacology.<sup>4</sup> Under Delay’s supervision, Michaux experimented with psilocybin at the Sainte-Anne Hospital in Paris in 1959. One of Delay’s students, Anne-Marie Quéting, refers to Michaux’s self-observation (as case 19) in her doctoral thesis in medicine in 1960.<sup>5</sup> In the years that followed, Michaux maintained close contact with Delay, who is explicitly mentioned at the beginning of *Images du monde visionnaire*.

Michaux’s infamous mescaline drawings did not originate during these experiments, but resulted out of them. Michaux often drew hours or sometimes days after the fact, when the strongest effects had subsided but a lingering vibration still guided his hand. For Michaux, these drawings, with their endless repetitions of small marks, represent an inner vision and a memory of the intoxicated experience. Exuberant, agitated lines and shapes appear in black and occasionally colored ink or graphite.<sup>6</sup> In *Misérable miracle* (1956), he describes his repertoire of forms as follows: “zigzag lines, points, shafts, pinnacles, peaks, microscopic columns,” brought together in “endless bands of eyes and lips” and “infinite staircases with expanding or contracting steps.”<sup>7</sup> The meticulous, trembling lines involuntarily bring to mind swarms of insects or seismographic patterns. The prologue to *Images du monde visionnaire*

shows Michaux’s gauze-like sketches and their formal influence is apparent in various subsequent shots.

According to Michaux, mescaline evokes a particular style with a corresponding color palette,<sup>8</sup> one that clearly differs from the styles that result from other mind-altering substances—a distinction that also plays a crucial role in the film’s remarkable two-part structure. In addition to mescaline, Michaux experimented with hashish, LSD, and psilocybin. Under the influence of the latter, a component of hallucinogenic mushrooms supplied by botanist Roger Heim and administered by Jean Delay, he created works that suggest vibrating forces and take on squid-like forms.<sup>9</sup> Michaux described his psychedelic experiences during this period in detail in various publications: *Misérable miracle* (1956), *Paix dans les brisements* (1959), *L’Infini turbulent* (1957), *Connaissance par les gouffres* (1961), and *Les Grandes Épreuves de l’esprit et les innombrables petites* (1966). Illustrated with drawings by the author himself, these texts oscillate between poetry and quick notations and undeniably resonate with the film *Images du monde visionnaire*.

Michaux continued to experiment with mind-altering substances for approximately thirteen years (ca. 1955–1968). For Michaux, these experiments were not the result of some kind of escapism, but rather attempts to acquire a different or deeper knowledge. He therefore approached his hallucinations much more critically than, for example, Aldous Huxley. Moreover, these experiments are rarely accompanied by an ecstatic or exalted writing style. On the contrary, Michaux describes his hallucinations almost as medical observations in a sober, documentary style. “He yields himself,” in the words of Julien Alvard, “not as a drug addict, but as an entomologist.”<sup>10</sup> Through his experiments with hallucinogens, Michaux sought to establish a connection between the irrationality of his psychedelic experiences and various new scientific concepts. After all, Michaux’s experiments coincided with a pharmacological revolution, marking the start of the large-scale, industrial production of psychotropic drugs, from neuroleptics (for schizophrenic psychosis) to antidepressants.

In 1938, Swiss chemist Albert Hofmann had synthesized LSD for the first time on behalf of pharmaceutical giant Sandoz and, five years later, experienced its powerful psychedelic effects himself.<sup>11</sup> The effects of LSD were studied extensively in the

2. Frank Leibovici, “Learning by Drawing,” in *Michaux: The Mescaline Drawings*, 9.

3. Julien de Ajuriaguerra and François Jaeggi, *Contribution à la connaissance des psychoses toxiques: expériences et découvertes du poète Henri Michaux* (Basel: Sandoz, 1964).

4. Muriel Pic, “Madman for a Day: Poetic Documents for a Scientific Revolution,” in *Michaux: The Mescaline Drawings*, 22–33. Delay and Pierre Deniker had previously discovered chlorpromazine in 1952 at the Sainte-Anne psychiatric hospital in Paris. With this first neuroleptic drug, they marked the start of psychopharmacology.

5. Anne-Marie Quéting, *La Psilocybine en psychiatrie clinique et expérimentale* (Paris: Faculté de médecine, 1960).

6. Geneviève Bonnefoi, “Experimental Revelation,” in *Henri Michaux* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1978), 103–109.

7. Henri Michaux, *Misérable miracle* (1956), *Œuvres complètes* II (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2004), 617–783.

8. Leibovici, “Learning,” *Michaux*, 11.

9. Henri Michaux, “La Psilocybine: Expériences et autocritique,” *Les Lettres nouvelles* (23 December 1959): 1–14. Michaux began corresponding with Heim in 1958, the year Heim published *Les Champignons hallucinogènes du Mexique*. In 1960, Michaux published a longer version of the text in the journal *La Revue de mycologie* XXV, 1 (June 15, 1960), edited by Heim.

10. Julien Alvard, “Un film de Henri Michaux,” *Cimaise* 11, 67 (January–March 1964): 42–51.

11. Dieter Hagenbach and Lucius Werthmüller, *Mythic Chemist: The Life of Albert Hofmann and His Discovery of LSD* (Santa Fe: Synergetic Press, 2013).



Fig. 2  
Le Disque Vert 3, 4 (1925): ‘Des rêves’

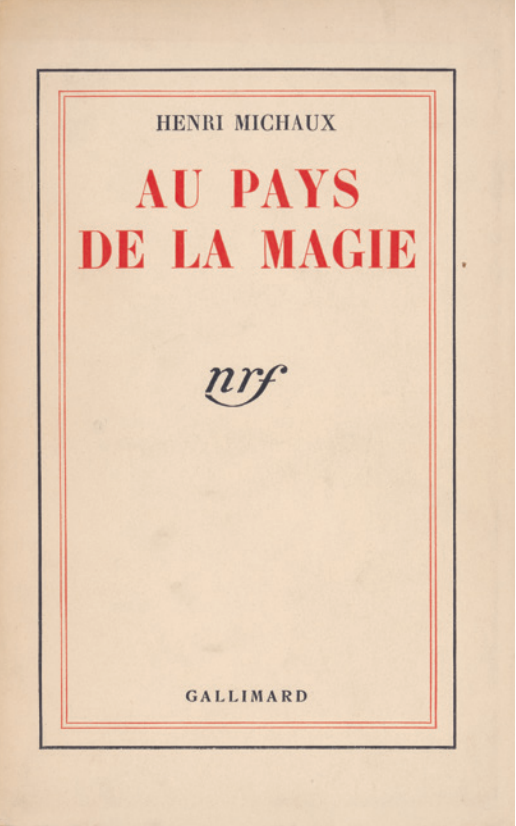


Fig. 3  
Henri Michaux, Au Pays de la magie  
(Paris: Gallimard, 1941)

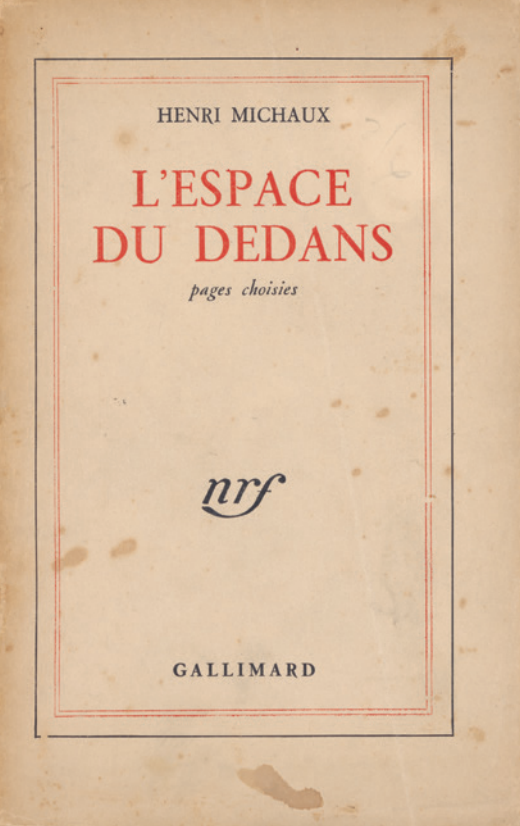


Fig. 4  
Henri Michaux, L'Espace du dedans  
(Paris: Gallimard, 1944)

following decades and the drug was used in psychiatric contexts to treat conditions such as alcoholism and schizophrenia. At the First World Congress of Psychiatry in Paris in 1950, it was decided to encourage research into the therapeutic effects of psychotropic drugs.<sup>12</sup> Sixteen years later, at the Fourth World Congress of Psychiatry in Madrid in 1966, this decision was reversed as it was determined that the drugs had negligible therapeutic value.<sup>13</sup>

Artists and poets played a prominent role in this story. As visual artist and writer Jean-Jacques Lebel notes, various artists during this period voluntarily served as “guinea pigs for writers of psychiatric dissertations on the effects of hallucinogenic substances on human behavior.”<sup>14</sup> Thanks to psychiatrist friends who supplied mescaline and psilocybin, Michaux and others were able to subject themselves to “experimental psychoses.” In any case, Michaux’s literary and visual work, as well as the film *Images du monde visionnaire*, cannot be viewed separately from his contacts with figures such as neurologist Julian de Ajuriaguerra, psychiatrist Jean Delaye, botanist Roger Heim, and many others.<sup>15</sup>

Hallucinogenic substances quickly made their way into both high and popular culture. In 1954 Aldous Huxley published *The Doors of Perception*, a book that had an undeniable influence on Michaux. Huxley describes his own experiments with mescaline under the supervision of Humphry Osmond who allegedly coined the term “psychedelic.” LSD, along with other recreational drugs, also became a crucial part of the 1960s counterculture with some users reporting out-of-body experiences. Timothy Leary, who began researching the psychedelic effects of psilocybin and LSD at Harvard in 1960, discussed hallucinogens in spiritual terms.<sup>16</sup>

In September 1966 an article on the “psychedelic art of the moment” made the front page of *Life Magazine*, which nine years earlier had published a report on “magic mushrooms” in the religious ceremonies of the Mexican Mazatecs. The magazine describes “psychedelic art” as “an amalgam of painting, sculpture, photography, electronics, and engineering.” The art movement reportedly aimed to evoke the “hallucinatory effects and heightened perceptions” caused by mind-altering substances.<sup>17</sup> The article also highlights the altered experience of time and space offered by these “psychedelic” artworks, their immersive impact in which all the viewer’s senses are engaged,

12. The First World Congress of Psychiatry took place in Paris in September 1950 with Jean Delay as president. See Benoît Maierus, “Tensions of a Discipline: The First World Congress of Psychiatry in Paris, Between Global Ambitions and Local Practices,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 98, 4 (2024): 564–586; E. Clayton-Jones and B.C.M. Otteley (eds.), *IV World Congress of Psychiatry: Reports on ‘Roche’ Psychotropic Drugs Presented at the IV World Congress on Psychiatry Madrid, 5–11 September 1966* (Amsterdam: Excerpta Medica Foundation, 1967).

13. See *IV World Congress of Psychiatry*. See also Muriel Pic, “Timeline of Henri Michaux’s Experiments and the Medical, Cultural, and Legal History of Hallucinogens in Europe,” in *Michaux: The Mescaline Drawings*, 59–63.

14. Jean-Jacques Lebel, “Tempo de l’infini turbulence,” in *Henri Michaux: Œuvres choisies, 1927–1984* (Marseille: Musée de Marseille et Réunion des musées nationaux, 1993), 30–41.

15. See Muriel Pic, “Entre le cercle expérimental et le cercle épistolaire. Henri Michaux, Roger Heim, Albert Hofmann et les expérimentations de la psilocybine (1959–1963),” in Fabien Dubosson, Lucas Marco Gisi, and Irmgard M. Wirtz. (eds.), *Lettres dans la toile: Les réseaux épistolaires dans les archives / Briefe im Netzwerk: Korresponden, Archives littéraires suisses* (Bern: Wallstein, 2022), 267–290; and Muriel Pic, “Timeline,” 59–63.

16. See publications such as *High Priest* (1968), *The Politics of Ecstasy* (1965), *Start Your Own Religion* (1967), *Psychedelic Prayers & Other Meditations* (1966), and *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1964).

17. Robert Gordon Wasson, “Seeking the Magic Mushroom,” *Life Magazine* (13 May, 1957): 100–105; “Psychedelic Art,” *Life Magazine* (9 September, 1966): 61–69.

and the role of mechanical media (slides, film, stroboscopes, oscilloscopes, stereotapes), as well as the importance of light and color effects and cinematic metaphors: “like watching a film in which every frame is a wholly different scene.” Henri Michaux’s experiments inside and outside the laboratory can be seen as a precursor to these cultural and artistic trends.

## Michaux and Film

Michaux’s decision to devote a film to his psychedelic ventures—in addition to the ink drawings, watercolors, and books—did not come as a complete surprise. As his friend, writer, film critic, and editor of his collected works Raymond Bellour has extensively demonstrated, cinema is a recurring theme in Michaux’s writings.<sup>18</sup> As early as 1922, in one of his very first publications, Michaux praises the dynamism and power of the film medium: “3,000 images for 10 lines of text and 300,000 gestures for a written page. Domination, miraculous development of the visual image and domination of the MIMETIC IMAGE, imitative intelligence.”<sup>19</sup>

Like so many other intellectuals and artists of the period, Michaux admired Charlie Chaplin. In 1924, in a special issue of *Le Disque vert* dedicated to “Charlot,” he describes him as the embodiment of “the modern soul”: Chaplin acts immediately on his impulses, which, according to the writer, are no longer governed by repressed erotic desires but are now, as a result of industrial modernity, steered by practical, utilitarian needs.<sup>20</sup> Michaux praises the energetic nature of slapstick, which defies both bourgeois morality and the laws of physics. He identifies a similar unbridled dynamism in the Indian and Chinese cinema of the 1930s, admiring above all the acting and editing styles.<sup>21</sup> Michaux repeatedly mentions visits to the cinema while traveling and expresses his fondness for of the “ethnographic” value of film: for Michaux, film can and must reveal cultural peculiarities.<sup>22</sup> That is why he preferred documentary cinema, frequenting at home in Paris the Palais de la Découverte and the Musée de l’Homme for their ethnographic, medical, and scientific programs.<sup>23</sup> Michaux also enjoyed the poetic documentaries of Jean Painlévé and Chris Marker.<sup>24</sup> Other documentaries that the artist definitely saw were *Les Champignons sacrés* (1957)

by Jean Thévenot and Roger Heim—who, in a letter after the premiere of *Images du monde visionnaire*, called the film a masterpiece—and *Calligraphie japonaise* (1957) by Pierre Alechinsky, whose subject matter perfectly matched Michaux’s own interest in (Eastern-)Asian culture in general and calligraphy in particular. Both films may have served as reference points while shooting *Images du monde visionnaire*. In addition, Michaux was also interested in horror films, which he often watched in the company of friends such as Surrealist poet Joyce Mansour.<sup>25</sup>

It is noteworthy that Michaux also recognizes “cinematic” qualities in his own visual and literary oeuvre. He speaks of a “dessin cinématique” and he states that it is “cinema” that he “appreciates most in painting.”<sup>26</sup> According to Michaux, the fluidity of the black ink contrasting with the white paper brings about a “cinematic” quality. This cinematic aspect is further enhanced by the automatism of his works, in which all kinds of faces or zoomorphic creatures seem to appear.<sup>27</sup> He characterizes his drawings and paintings as “psychic films” and reflections of “the internal trajectory of the body and of the life that animates it,” while describing his thinking as a form of “montage.”<sup>28</sup> Several years after the release of *Images du monde visionnaire*, in *Émergences-résurgences* (1972), he describes his drawings as a “screening” (*séance*) of lines that are “animated [...], zigzagging at high speed on real surfaces as if they were cinematographically projected.”<sup>29</sup>

When Michaux began his experiments with hallucinogens, the idea of film became almost obsessive. In his writings of the period, he emphasizes the undeniable analogy between alternative states of consciousness and cinema: with the consumption of mescaline, (mental) images appear, transform, and disappear at an unimaginable speed. In *L’infini turbulent*, he explores this comparison further when he describes how the hallucinations:

last more than three hours, fast-paced images, an astonishing film that sometimes slows down, becomes motionless, stops, giving me the opportunity to concentrate on an image with often beautiful colors (very rare yellows in “my” mescaline, dark lacquer or bright green, beetle green), a film that I sometimes leave to sink into depths from which I cannot immediately extricate myself.<sup>30</sup>

25. Halpern, *Michaux*, 24.

26. Henri Michaux, “Dessiner l’écoulement du temps” (1957), *Œuvres complètes* II, 371; Henri Michaux, “En pensant au phénomène de la peinture” (1946), *Œuvres complètes* II, 329.

27. Pacquement and Bellour, *Michaux: Peintures*, 21 and 98.

28. Bellour, “Images,” 1528; Henri Michaux, *Les grandes épreuves de l’esprit* (1966), *Œuvres complètes* III, 321–322.

29. Henri Michaux, *Émergences-résurgences* (1972), *Œuvres complètes* III, 629–30. Henri Michaux, *L’infini turbulent* (1957), *Œuvres complètes* II, 805–953.

18. Raymond Bellour, “*Images du monde visionnaire*: Dossier du film,” in *Henri Michaux, Œuvres complètes* III (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2004), 1526–1542.

19. Henri Michaux, “Chronique de l’aiguilleur” (1922), *Œuvres complètes* I, 11.

20. Henri Michaux, “Notre frère Charlie” (1924), *Œuvres complètes* I, 44–45. Originally published in the theme issue dedicated to “Charlot” of *Le Disque Vert* 4–5 (1924). See also René Micha, “Plume et les anges,” in Raymond Bellour (ed.), *Henri Michaux, Les Cahiers de l’Herne* (Paris: Herne, 1966), 153–55.

21. Michaux, *Un barbare en Asie* (1933/1945/1967), *Œuvres complètes* I, 325.

22. Anne-Élisabeth Halpern, *Michaux et le cinéma* (Paris: Nouvelles éditions Jean-Michel Place, 2016), 10.

23. Antoine Gaudemar, “Henri Michaux, de près et à distance” (interview with Micheline Phankim), *Libération* (30 January, 1997), [https://www.liberation.fr/livres/1997/01/30/henri-michaux-de-pres-et-a-distance-comment-vivait-il-comment-ecrivait-il-entretien-avec-micheline-p\\_192586/](https://www.liberation.fr/livres/1997/01/30/henri-michaux-de-pres-et-a-distance-comment-vivait-il-comment-ecrivait-il-entretien-avec-micheline-p_192586/) (last accessed 9 September, 2025).

24. Halpern, *Michaux*, 23–24; Anatole Dauman, *Souvenir écran*, edited by Jacques Gerber and Noëlle de Chambrun (Paris: Éditions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 1989), 149.