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Between Text and Image, East and West: Henri Michaux's Signs and Christian Dotremont's «Logogrammes»¹

THERE ARE NUMEROUS PARALLELS to be drawn between Henri Michaux and Christian Dotremont both in terms of biographical detail and creative output. These two poets were born in Belgium, within twenty-five years of, and less than 60 kilometres away from, each other². Both travelled extensively, visiting places which were not generally on the tourist trail at the time. Michaux, particularly in his youth, spent protracted periods in various countries in South America and Asia, whereas Dotremont was attracted to the far North, Scandinavia, and especially the vast snow-filled spaces of Lapland. Both men were not only poets, but also visual artists, and were fascinated by the creative possibilities offered by different expressive forms. Michaux was an established author, published by Gallimard, and his works have been translated in many different languages (English, Spanish, German, Swedish, to name but a few). His international reputation as a visual artist was officially established when he won the Einaudi Prize at the 1960 Venice Biennial and his artistic works are still regularly exhibited all over the world. His visual and verbal production has been the subject of much

¹ Parts of this article include modified extracts from my book: *Henri Michaux: Experimentation with Signs*.

² Michaux was born in Namur in the Walloon region of Belgium in 1899 and died in Paris in 1984. Dotremont was born in Tervuren in the Flemish region of Belgium in 1922 and died in Buizingen in the same region in 1979.

critical interest and remains so today (Vrydaghs 2008: p.15)³. Dotremont was also a published writer and a recognised artist: he represented Belgium, alongside Pierre Alechinsky, at the 1972 Venice Biennial and his artistic works have been exhibited in places such as Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Montreal and New York. His involvement with the avant-garde group CoBrA⁴, which was concerned with the interface between different media, particularly the visual and the verbal, is well known as is his influence on the Lettrists and the Situationists. He strove for a dual (visual/verbal) creativity in his work, rejecting any classification of his experimentation in traditional generic categories. His output, particularly his theoretical reflections on the visual aspect of writing systems, remains of interest today for scholars and practitioners alike, as attest work by, for example, artists and writers interested in «asemic writing» such as Tim Gaze, based in the Adelaide Hills of South Australia⁵.

Furthermore, there are literal crossovers in their lives and works. Michaux's signs and Dotremont's «logogrammes», the focus of this article, have often been compared. Indeed, museum and gallery curators have encouraged this analogy by exhibiting their works in close proximity in order to install some sort of dialogue between them for the spectator⁶. Although there is no concrete evidence that the two men actually met, they were definitely aware of each other's work. Alechinsky, who was also part of the CoBrA group, made a film, *Calligraphie japonaise*, the title pointing clearly to the subject matter

³ David Vrydaghs asserts in his socio-analytical study of Michaux's work that he is currently the most studied poet in France.

⁴ The name CoBrA comes from the combination of the first letters of the three capital cities in which this artistic tendency was born: Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam.

⁵ See the website www.asemic.net and various issues of *Asemic* magazine published in Kent Town, Australia. Gaze is also interested in Michaux's signs. Nathalie Aubert has published widely on Dotremont (see Aubert 2006), and is currently completing a monograph on him. She has also engaged in comparative discussion of the two creators. See «L'Un écrit, l'autre pas: Christian Dotremont et Henri Michaux. Peintres écrivains», a paper delivered at the Modern French Seminar at Oxford University in 2007 and at the international conference «Écrit(ure)s de peintres belges» held in Namur, Belgium, in the same year. The proceedings of the latter are in the process of being published.

⁶ Alechinsky, who disapproves of this curatorial practice, discusses this bringing together of the two artists' works in the following terms: «À Bruxelles, les Musées royaux ont longtemps forcé la similitude en exhibant une encre de Michaux volontairement muette, donc aboutie, à côté d'un logogramme sans transcription, donc inabouti» (Alechinsky 2004: p. 113).

and for which Dotremont provided the commentary. This film contains an ink drawing from Michaux's *Mouvements* series accompanied by the following text intoned by Dotremont: «“Le Japonais est moderne depuis dix siècles”, écrivait Henri Michaux, qui voit avec autant de netteté ce qu'il regarde et ce qu'il invente. Encore lisons-nous ses peintures et ses encres comme *L'espace du dedans*» (Alechinsky 2004: p. 8)⁷. Michaux and Dotremont also participated on a book with twelve other artists, *Pour Jorn*, the profits of which were to go to Asger Jorn, the Danish visual artist who also contributed to CoBrA (Lalande 1998: p. 383). On an anecdotal level, Alechinsky describes the older creator's anxious reaction to an exhibition of Dotremont's «logogrammes» in the following terms:

En 1978, gravissant l'escalier quatre à quatre, s'ouvrant la porte, Michaux marchant à moi: «C'est un traquenard, Alechinsky, vous l'avez fait exprès, m'inviter à cette exposition. Je ne veux aucun fils». Mais il était arrivé tard, la galerie déjà fermée; dans la demi-obscurité il n'avait dû apercevoir de Dotremont que des rubans d'encre sur écrans de papier. Traits, taches et vivacités proches... «sans que vous ayez pu par la porte vitrée distinguer leurs transcriptions minuscules, d'un crayon calme, dominé, chaque image ou plutôt chaque mot d'abord illisible offrant à tous les coups du pinceau son texte réel». L'avais-je rassuré? Sourire. «Des logogrammes? Alors c'est autre chose. Il écrit, lui.» (Alechinsky 1999: p. 97)

From their material manifestation on the page or the canvas, it can be observed that Michaux's experimentation with signs and Dotremont's «logogrammes» are similar. Whether they are writing or drawing remains indeterminate; they appear to belong somewhere in-between these expressive systems⁸. They both bear witness to an influence of ideographic forms and calligraphy and this is unsurprising when the visual aspect of the ideogram is considered. In this article, the reasons behind Michaux's and Dotremont's attraction to the creative potential presented by the ideogram will be explored. Their respective appropriations of this signifying system will be discussed with regard to an interstitial and intertextual figure that allows for a

⁷ *L'Espace du dedans* is the title of one of Michaux's volumes of poetic texts (Michaux 1966).

⁸ As is shown by his account of Michaux's reaction, Alechinsky was adamant that Dotremont's «logogrammes» were writing, whereas Michaux's signs were not: «Certes des Michaux font penser à des écritures, mais ce sont des écritures qui n'ont ni mots ni lettres. Michaux peint pour fuir les mots. Dotremont peint les mots pour les approfondir» (Alechinsky 2004: p. 113).

reimagining of poetic, textual and visual space, for a new interdisciplinary real of sorts.

Throughout his life, Michaux drew and painted signs and alphabets. There are many different examples of this type of production in his œuvre, which ranges from the ink drawing, *Alphabet* (1927), to the book containing text and signs, *Par des Traits* (1984), the last publication in his lifetime. He also wrote directly about the ideographic signifying system in *Un Barbare en Asie* (1933) and *Idéogrammes en Chine* (1975), highlighting how it responded favourably to certain questions he had concerning the limitations of representation, signification and communication within Western signifying systems. Dotremont's first attempts at «logogrammes» date from 1962 in *Dessin-mots* with Mogens Balle (Dotremont 1980: p. 140), although he traces their origins back to Lapland in the mid-1950s⁹. During the 1960s and 1970s, Dotremont exhibited and published his «logogrammes» in various reviews and books, for example, in *Strates* (1964, 1965) and *Logbook* (1975). Well before this experimentation, however, Dotremont made reference to the visual aspect of the letter and the word, linking it to Chinese signifying systems in «Signification et sinification»¹⁰.

As writers, it could be argued that Michaux's and Dotremont's attraction to and reading of the «Orient» form part of and are constrained by an idealistic continuation of a long Francophone Orientalist tradition, including François-René de Chateaubriand, Alphonse de Lamartine, Gérard de Nerval, Victor Segalen and Paul Claudel, which appropriates Oriental culture to serve its own purposes in terms of signification and representation (Said 1979: p. 43; Williams 1990: p. 144-145). Indeed, the revelations produced by Michaux's eight-month journey to various countries in Asia in 1932 recounted in *Un Barbare en Asie* appear to conform to a rather Eurocentric approach, verging on the offensive for the modern-day reader. In this respect, his comments on Japan are revealing of a certain era:

Une mentalité d'insulaire, fermée et orgueilleuse.
[...]

⁹ «Alors quand j'ai cette envie d'écrire un logogramme, je vais vers une feuille de papier qui est pour moi comme la Laponie, parce qu'en 1956, lors de mon premier voyage en Laponie, c'est vraiment là que j'ai été le plus inspiré vers le logogramme [...]» (Lalande 1998: p. 258).

¹⁰ «Je m'aperçus alors que sans le savoir, puisque je l'avais tracée horizontalement, j'avais "écrit" une phrase fort mystérieuse, où dominaient les caractères chinois [...]»; «j'écrivais *toujours* chinois» (Dotremont 1950: p. 19).

Peuple prisonnier de son île, de son masque, de ses conventions, de sa police, de sa discipline, de ses paquetages et de son cordon de sécurité.

[...]

Peuple, enfin, dénué de sagesse, de simplicité et de profondeur, archisérieux, quoique aimant les jouets et les nouveautés, s'amusant difficilement, ambitieux, superficiel et visiblement destiné à notre mal et à notre civilisation (Michaux 1933: p. 389).

Michaux realised with the benefit of hindsight the error of his ways and added an apologetic, embarrassed, preface to this book, which affirms: «*Il date, ce livre. De l'époque à la fois engourdie et sous tension de ce continent; il date. De ma naïveté, de mon ignorance, de mon illusion de démystifier, il date*» (Michaux 1933: p. 279). It must be noted that Michaux was well aware of the illusory or imaginary quality of his travel writings and it could be argued that the element of Eurocentrism present in these accounts led him to think critically about his representations of otherness. Later publications and interviews indicate his continued reflection on his experiences in Asia, the time it took for him to digest this discovery fully, and an ongoing interest in the ideographic signifying system (Rey 2001: p. 24; Bellour 2000: p. 203).

Dotremont never visited China or Asia nor attempted to represent these countries in the same way as Michaux in his so-called travel narratives. His experiences on a Mongolian train, «moi j'avais été en Mongolie», are in fact imaginary: «c'est-à-dire dans le "Train mongol" (entre Paris et Bruxelles)» (Dotremont 1950: p. 19). They instead open up a textual space of possible discoveries between different cultures (East and West, France and Belgium) without any actual travelling to distant lands:

... Le train auquel nous assignons d'être mongol, qui nous assigne devant la Mongolie, qui cesse d'être moyen de locomotion pour devenir palais de la rencontre et de la découverte, curieux couloir qui donne sur lui-même, serpent (*Ibidem*).

This evocation of a self-reflexive space in the last clause underlines the experience of the textual character of reality, its mediate nature, creating a space of discovery and meeting points, and anticipating Roland Barthes's *L'Empire des signes* and its examination of a fictional, textual space named Japan. Commentators have also likened Michaux's *Un Barbare en Asie* to Barthes's text¹¹. Both works focus

¹¹ Raymond Bellour writes: «L'originalité de l'Orient de Michaux, qui préfigure par exemple, le mouvement plus ténu que tracera, quarante ans plus tard, le Japon dans la vision de Barthes, est de fournir à la pensée un ébranlement attendu, qui permet

on a desire for self-knowledge through the exploration of another culture and a fascination with the visual nature of Oriental signifying systems. Barthes, Michaux and Dotremont are all concerned here with the impossibility of direct access to the real. Their works underline an awareness of the figurative nature of any textual representation, thus highlighting how language constructs and shapes the world rather than the world determining language. It powerfully reminds us how the creative process does not depend on some pre-given reality but can transcend the empirical and point to the new. In this light, both Dotremont and Michaux appear to incorporate aspects of the ideogram in their works in an attempt to figure this idea of the new, disrupting and reimagining textual conventions within the text itself.

Many visual artists were also experimenting with the ideogram in the period following the Second World War. Indeed, a fascination with Chinese and Japanese calligraphic techniques to further the expressive possibilities of the line was relatively common amongst Western artists at the time. This tendency forms part of an artistic tradition which can be compared to literary Orientalism, starting with «Japonisme» at the end of the nineteenth century, taken up enthusiastically by Impressionist painters such as Claude Monet and Édouard Manet. Certain practitioners involved in the post-Second World War artistic scene, particularly in Paris, for example, Georges Mathieu, demonstrated an interest in Zen Buddhism and its various expressive forms, without doubt in response to the horrors of the war, but also with regard to a need for renewing artistic expression in reaction to the growing importance and influence of Abstract Expressionism, represented by artists such as Jackson Pollock¹². Members of CoBrA, including Jorn, Alechinsky and Corneille, shared these concerns and experimented with ideographic and calligraphic forms as a potential solution to representational problems regarding form, content and process. Alechinsky incorporated calligraphic forms into many of his works, often mixing them with decipherable text and images, pointing to the desire for a new interdisciplinary expressive space (Drucker and Gass 1997: p. 22). He expressed his admiration for Dotremont's «logogrammes» by comparing them – very favourably – to other artists' experimental output at the time, including Michaux:

avant tout à celui qui le vit de se décrocher de lui-même et de se retrouver ainsi, à jamais, autre» (Bellour 1998: p. 1107).

¹² For more information on this subject, see Westgeest 1996.

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Avec les logogrammes, la pratique du logogramme, tu es devenu le seul calligraphe occidental¹³ (Malraux a beau dire). Je déteste les immatures, les rébarbatives japonaiseries de Mathieu; les singeries chinoises d'André Masson aussi; les chatouilles de Tobey, idem. Même les candides laisser-aller de Tal-Coat. Ils tracent au-dessus de leur niveau intellectuel! Ils grafouillent et sont applaudis pour n'avoir rien dit. Michaux seul s'en tire et par cela qu'il figure et, parallèlement, par écrit qu'il s'explique. Ou refuse d'expliquer (Lalande 1998: p. 349).

Many of these practitioners, however, although interested in the formal aesthetic qualities of the ideogram used in Chinese calligraphy, had little or no knowledge of Mandarin or other languages used in China or how these signifying systems actually worked.

Indeed, most Western artists and writers regarded these systems as being essentially visual when, in fact, only ten per cent of these characters represent reality through a purely visual signifying process¹⁴. Many artists, writers and scholars, such as Ernest Fenollosa, whose essay, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, was very influential in certain artistic and literary circles in propagating ideas on Chinese as the perfect natural language in the first half of the twentieth century, refused to acknowledge this (Fenollosa 1920/no date: p. 53-96). The majority of Chinese characters actually consist of visual compounds made up of a root that gives the meaning and another element that alludes to the pronunciation of the word. This creative misunderstanding as to how these ideographic systems function can also be applied to a certain extent to Michaux's signs and Dotremont's «logogrammes»¹⁵. In «Signification et sinification», Dotremont demonstrates how this confusion may actually lead to a new imaginative space, by comparing Chinese writing to contemporary visual artists experimenting with the limits of figuration:

¹³ André Malraux used these terms to describe Georges Mathieu.

¹⁴ Richard Sieburth discusses this visual appropriation of the Chinese character in the works of Ezra Pound and Michaux (Sieburth 1986: p. 15-27; Sieburth 2000: p. 207-216).

¹⁵ Dong Qiang analyses Michaux's understanding of Chinese writing systems as posited in *Idéogrammes en Chine*. He affirms that *Idéogrammes en Chine* is not strictly about the evolution of Chinese characters; these characters instead provide an inspirational yet arbitrary starting point for Michaux's own reflection on this theme. He compares it to another text by Michaux entitled *En rêvant à partir de peintures énigmatiques* in which Michaux takes several paintings by René Magritte and, rather than writing about them objectively, turns them into his own fictional narratives (Qiang 1999: p. 55-69).

Mais qu'est-ce que c'est que le «compréhensible» et l'«incompréhensible»? Pourquoi mon regard parfois s'arrête-t-il à loisir sur des textes égyptiens, ou chinois justement, que je ne «comprends» pas? Je les comprends, en fait; lorsque je «lis» une page d'écriture chinoise, je suis dans les rues de Pékin; je les comprends comme je comprends une page d'écriture de Miró, un mot de Arp, une phrase de Hartung, une ardoise d'Ubac (Dotremont 1950: p. 19).

Departing from the traditional receptive processes engendered by conventional representational systems, both poet-artists (mis)understood the potential of the Chinese character, taken from a cultural tradition distant and thus «other» and exotic to their own, to render the speed, movement and spontaneity of inner and outer worlds, but also the very action that produced this representation. The fact that Michaux possessed in-depth and sophisticated knowledge about these systems actually bears little relevance, when their intended Western audience is taken into consideration. What is important here is a movement away from conventional textual representation into an imaginary Orientalised space.

Much of Michaux's visual and verbal output, including his experimentation with signs, is born out of a rejection of traditional forms of verbal expression, characterised by the grammatical and syntactical constraints of Western writing systems. He was concerned with escaping these rigid forms in an attempt to express the dynamism of the thought process and the body, which, he believed, would in turn bring direct contact with the inner self. In the Western artistic tradition, he was unable to find answers in mimetism or figuration: «Refus de la représentation, refus de les faire ressemblants, refus de me soumettre à la ressemblance en général» (Michaux 1979: p. 938). In Chinese painting and writing, however, he discovered a means of expression that aspired above all to signification, and not to imitation. As he states in *Un Barbare en Asie*:

Le Chinois possède la faculté de réduire l'être à l'être signifié (quelque chose comme la faculté mathématique ou algébrique). Si un combat doit prendre place, il ne livre pas le combat, il ne le simule même pas. Il le signifie. Cela seul l'intéresse, le combat lui-même lui paraîtrait grossier (Michaux 1933: p. 364).

For Michaux, then, the Chinese signifying system is able to reduce being to meaning, to show, rather than attempt to imitate, the mediate character of reality. He admired this system in which the gap between the signifier and the signified appears reduced by comparison with European languages. He was mostly interested in what he considered to be the direct signifying capacity of ideograms and

calligraphy, that is, their ability to signify signification, the constitutive force of language and its various processes.

The assimilation of the Chinese signifying system is clearly present in Michaux's experimentation with signs. Like the Chinese writing system, it is both writing and drawing and its interdisciplinary nature emphasises the visual dimension of the written line and the signifying, communicative capacities of the drawn line. The very layout of *Mouvements* mirrors that of the ancient Chinese text, *The Book of Changes* (Blofeld 1965; Mihailovich-Dickman 1996: p. 159-190). Furthermore, the contents page of *Par la Voie des rythmes* borrows and adapts the Chinese concept for signifying numbers (Michaux 1974: p. 813). The way in which Michaux composes his figures also shows how he borrowed from this system; for example, for *Mouvements*, he drew his signs with a brush in true calligraphic style. This interest in calligraphy was also fuelled by his study of Oriental philosophies. Calligraphers were expected to nurture and maintain a high level of concentration and detachment, close to Zen meditation techniques, whilst composing their ideographic figures (Baatsch 1993: p. 119). The very first line of *Tao-te-ching*, the principal text of Taoism by Lao-Tzu, reads «The Tao that can be spoken is not the true Tao» (Douglas 1999: unpaginated). It is instead an intangible concept that aims for a truth beyond expressive means and cannot be evoked using words. Tao is both being and becoming, the very notions that Michaux attempts to convey in his signs. Michaux would have been familiar with this ancient text. He even uses a quotation from it as an epigraph to *Un Barbare en Asie*: «Gouvernez l'empire comme vous cuirez un petit poisson», thus underlining his attention to the infinitely small detail (Michaux 1933: p. 278).

In 1975, Michaux was still expressing his admiration for Chinese calligraphy in *Idéogrammes en Chine*, which outlines his understanding of the evolution of the Chinese writing system. He traces the formation of various characters from close resemblance to their natural object to complete abstraction. As well as carrying and rendering the physical gesture of drawing, they are now able to signify nature rather than just imitate it: «Ne plus imiter la nature. La signifier. Par des traits, des élans» (Michaux 1975: p. 843). This quotation contains the title of Michaux's final book incorporating signs, *Par des Traits*, and highlights his continued preoccupation with the line as a means of direct expression. The process evoked in *Idéogrammes en Chine* does not signify a distancing from the outside world but rather another way of perceiving it, a kind of distillation of the essence, free from the conventions of figurative representation.

The physical dimension of the writing process also plays a significant role. Indeed, Michaux's appropriation of Chinese characters and his interest in primitive forms of expression take account of the body as a vehicle for the mind. As Roland Barthes declared in his essays on André Masson:

La vérité de l'écriture n'est ni dans ses messages, ni dans le système de transmission qu'elle constitue pour le sens courant [...], mais dans la main qui appuie, trace et se conduit, c'est-à-dire dans le corps qui bat (qui jouit). (Barthes 1973: p. 143)

The strong presence and influence of ideographic characters in the figures and signs of artists such as Masson, Michaux and Dotremont bear witness to the possibility of rendering the dynamics of the body, and the thought process that is embedded physiologically in this movement, in the fixed line of a page or canvas.

Like Michaux's *Mouvements* series, many of Dotremont's «logogrammes» are composed with Indian ink and a brush, alluding to an assimilation of calligraphic techniques. The «logogrammes», however, unlike Michaux's signs, always contain a rather obscure line of text at the bottom of the page or the canvas, for example, «Toute seconde est une première» or «Folie de vin foulé à la main tenant le déjà» (Dotremont 1999: p. 4, 12). These inscriptions become the titles of the work which inevitably orient the spectator's or reader's interpretation. Although Michaux's books containing signs (except for *Par la Voie des rythmes*) do contain passages of conventional text, they are not linked in the same manner. The texts rather evoke how the signs came into being and what they aim to do. They are mostly kept very separate from the signs because of the material layout of the book. In addition, Dotremont's «logogrammes» are not systematised on the page. They may in fact be closer to Michaux's larger Indian ink paintings which are clearly not as structured as *Mouvements*, for example. These paintings still, however, appear to have some horizontal organisation, and, more importantly, the physical gesture remains central to their dynamic aspect. A definite tension is created in Michaux's signs and Dotremont's «logogrammes» between the refined nature of Chinese ideograms and a search for speed, movement and spontaneity, with a nod in the direction of Surrealist automatism¹⁶.

¹⁶ Both Michaux and Dotremont were of the opinion that Surrealist automatism ignored the movement of the body (Michaux 1922/26: p. 58-61; Sicard 1986: p. 168).

And yet, although their experimentation is physically similar, Michaux and Dotremont do inhabit these spaces in different ways. Dotremont denies any calligraphic influence on his «logogrammes» as well as any claims of abstraction in the following terms:

Ne me dites pas que mes logogrammes sont abstraits. Et ne me dites pas qu'ils sont calligraphiques: Je ne cherche pas la beauté, je la trouve parfois, et alors je l'accepte, si elle n'est pas purement formaliste. Mon but n'est ni la beauté ni la laideur, mon but est l'unité d'inspiration verbale-graphique; mon but est cette source (Dotremont 1980: p. 20-21).

Dotremont's foregrounding of a unifying crossover of text and image characterises much of the output of CoBrA and his refusal of both calligraphy and abstraction only functions in theoretical terms on account of the visual aspect of this signifying system for the Western eye. He is searching for an expressive form, a new space, where there are no longer any divisions between text and image:

Il ne s'agit donc plus du tout des peintres qui peignent dans leur peinture le poème d'un poète ou d'eux-mêmes; il ne s'agit plus du tout des poètes qui, inspirés par une peinture, écrivent un poème sur le papier, hors de cette peinture; il ne s'agit plus du tout de peintres imitant plus ou moins vaguement l'écriture ou la calligraphie, ou la typographie; et il ne s'agit plus du tout de l'illustration, procédé de division (Blistène *et al.* 1993: p. 17).

If, according to Dotremont, it is no longer question of artists illustrating poetry or poets taking inspiration from the visual arts, could the «logogramme» provide the locus for this new interdisciplinary form?

Situated in the interstitial spaces between the ideogram and the alphabet, hence between Eastern and Western signifying systems, Dotremont's «logogrammes» and Michaux's signs question the interface between writing and drawing, between the page and the canvas as they were published in reviews and books as well as exhibited in galleries and museums. Barthes introduces the term «intertexte» when examining Masson's semiographic output which, like Michaux's signs and Dotremont's «logogrammes», can be situated in between different cultural practices:

Tout d'abord, Masson établit délibérément ce qu'on appelle un intertexte: le peintre circule entre deux textes (au moins): d'une part le sien (disons: celui de la peinture, de ses pratiques, de ses gestes, de ses instruments) et d'autre part celui de l'idéographie chinoise (c'est-à-dire d'une culture localisée): comme il se doit dans toute inter-textualité véritable, les signes asiatiques ne sont pas des modèles inspireurs, des «sources», mais des conducteurs d'énergie graphique, des citations

déformées, repérables selon le trait, non selon la lettre; ce qui se déplace dès lors, c'est la responsabilité de l'œuvre: elle n'est plus consacrée par une propriété étroite (celle de son créateur immédiat), elle voyage dans un espace culturel qui est ouvert, sans limites, sans cloisons, sans hiérarchies. (Barthes 1973: p. 142-143)

The unlimited nature of intertextuality opens the original text to a much wider, dynamic creative and receptive process. The signs and «logogrammes» circulate between and dialogue with existing structures and texts, both visual and verbal. The impossibility of demarcating the limits of any text, suggested by Barthes in this quotation, destroys the idea of an original or dominant text and instead affirms its endless critical potential. Indeed, it seems that this destruction allows both Michaux and Dotremont in turn to disrupt textual and artistic conventions and to introduce other expressive forms, notably, the ideogram, into these spaces. From intertext to intermedia¹⁷, Michaux's signs and Dotremont's «logogrammes» make use of the Western appropriation and ensuing misunderstanding of the ideogram to create a dazzling interfusion of text and image, in which all boundaries are blurred between writing and drawing, within the book and beyond it¹⁸.

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¹⁷ This word was borrowed from Samuel Taylor Coleridge by the Fluxus poet Dick Higgins in order to evoke a conceptual fusion of two different art forms that can no longer be described as mixed media because they are indistinguishable (Blistène *et al.* 1993: p. 428).

¹⁸ I would like to thank Kevin Inston for his insightful comments on this article.

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