

EXPERIMENT FIVE

HENRI MICHAUX
Translated by Patrick Gregory

IN ORDER TO START myself off in the most exalted direction I begin by reading through several Hindu poems and then take up *The Life of Buddha*, which I had laid aside a few weeks ago having found the book a disappointment.

This time immediate enthusiasm, without any reservations, and I am carried away, transported, without being able to put my finger on the point of departure.

tendency to
personalize
mescaline

Quite mechanically I raise my fingers to my face and I am aware of the odor *sui generis* of mescaline, and I realize with emotion that the two of us are one, that we together are sharing these words, and this amazing revelation of life's magnificence.

The page fades, more urgent things seize hold of my attention, and I find myself busy forming resolutions, completely convinced that I now know what really matters in life. Away with these trifling worries about Art! I must change my ways—starting tomorrow I must set out on the path of liberation, the path of saintliness. I remain immersed in these reflections for some time and then resume my reading. At the very first lines a sudden surge of exaltation, almost physical, as if I were in an auto and someone impetuously slammed a foot down on the accelerator.

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Experiment Five

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*The deflection,
the diabolical
deflection*

And now that I am at the pinnacle of enthusiasm, at the point of highest tension . . . what then? What is happening? What is going on?

Is it because of these photos of the Hindu Pantheon that I have scattered about me in which one sees the gods with their goddesses — goddesses with voluptuous, flowing limbs, carved by knowing hands, figures conceived and destined for love?

*infernal rodeo:
I change
at top speed
from one mount
to yet another
sort but
still
at full speed*

Is it because I have recently learned from a thesis written by Dr. Wilhelm* that madmen have reacted to mescaline by an outpouring of obscenity, obscene words, obscene gestures, demonstrating that this drug, so cold and metaphysical, also knows how to exalt eroticism, and that I can expect at one time or another to see my subconscious rise to the surface?

And can it be that these two affective attitudes, the erotic and the mystic, are really so close to one another in essence?

Strasbourg, 1955.
*I see
the Unnamable*

. . . Suddenly my enthusiasm undergoes a transformation — no recession, but on the contrary, an augmentation, an intensification — and I see (in an interior vision) . . .

Everything, ah! everything that can in an instant reveal itself, hide itself, offer itself!

*Prodigious
pollution*

Prodigious pollution, undulating, unfurling, engulfing the horizon, and the horizon of my soul and my soul's desires.

I am stupefied, gasping for breath. I have not yet grasped what has happened to me and I want to convince myself that these visions, incredibly, unreasonably licentious, but of a mescalinean licentiousness — that is to say, infinite in their lewdness — will not continue.

But can I really believe that? And here I am wondering whether I am or am not going to allow myself to watch this impossible performance for a moment more.

*trance
that expands
erotic
trance*

Haven't I understood yet? Understood what? That it is not so much the vision that counts, but the trance, the trance that comes in like a thief in the night and snatches me up, and then expands,

*Dr. Wilhelm, *L'intérêt de l'épreuve mescalinique dans les maladies mentales*. Strasbourg, 1955.

*catapulted
into eroticism*

*fluids ravage
me
shaking my soul*

*metaphysical
orgasm*

*fissures
delights
precipices
avalanches*

*cataclysm
of delights*

and expands, and expands, and pushes me, precipitates me into a state of ecstasy, an ecstasy not physical, not local, but interior, essential, central to my being and that drags me down into this center and imprisons me there, and intoxicates me, bowls me over, corrupts me, dissolves me in a spasm of delight, without check, without counterweight, without restraint, without will, won't, or can't—an insatiable, symphonic concupiscence whose lewd vistas are only the corroboration and illustration of the multiple, impossible, cerebral orgasm that holds me relentlessly in its grasp.

The whole world seems to be caught up in this flood of extraordinary delight. Eyes drown, limbs drown, beings drown. A great stream of bodies flows by, one against the other, pressing, embracing, interlacing, a meander of torsos lost like me in the great divide of delight.

Amidst these gigantic embraces vines larger than life expand and intertwine—tremblings and delights metamorphosed into vines. Earth and waters, mountains and trees, all give themselves up to the debauchery with lascivious writhings. All is fashioned for delight, by delight—but a delight that transcends human dimensions, that ranges from the most impetuous thrill of exaltation to a sort of half-death where, however, an abrasive trickle of pleasure still flows. In a cataclysm of delight this mass of animal humanity is seized by convulsions, these spasms bringing it into harmony with the ecstatic disorder of my spirit.

From time to time I open my eyes (which glow, I suspect, from the illumination within me) and try to fix my gaze on the neuter objects in the room, objects that have, in the past, served as barriers against the surging dissolution, dikes to hold back the filthy flood that pours in from all directions.

But I have lost confidence in them and it now seems as though all objects have relinquished their neutrality. And this is what I come to realize and the fact is drummed home, with ever-increasing emphasis, by an illuminated vision of overwhelm-

ing eroticism: nothing is innocent, nothing neuter—no being, no thing.

This truth is continuously dinned into me and the flashing evidence, enveloped in an explosion of light, fills my consciousness and I see them (everything) for what they are: universal fornication, or preparation for fornication, or symbols of fornication.

In a sort of Luciferian demonstration the most banal forms, the most utterly insignificant forms, reveal, by a series of flash-back visions, their essential relationships to the one, only and impure reality.

It is incredibly bizarre to see objects, objects up until now completely innocent, perverted, mentally perverted, in such a manner: the stem from which droops a flower, and then the flower itself, formerly effaced, and then the fruit, currants, a cluster of currants (this red so very outspoken, these spherical forms so unequivocally expressive) and the very name, currants, that swells with sensuality like a soft sponge in a tepid bath of soapy water.

This looming mass of currants that I see, clusters and garlands, intoxicates me, degrades me, and now I know, will always know, the exact meaning of our affinity and the nature of this pleasure that is to be found in their evocation, currants, and the evocation of merely the word, pleasure that even the purest of maidens must find in them, and that opens in me an abyss; abyss, for I assess the depth of my descent into vice and degradation by the intensity of their erotic fascination, by the extent to which such objects are contaminated, becoming for me more erogenous than the most beautiful of breasts, or a secret embrace in the shadows. Far more than any erotic scene it is this violent and ever-increasing perversion of objects that fascinates me, bewilders me, a poem of swarming things, of larvae, of inundations, of tropical exuberances, vague like the sea (yet even more exalting) and like the sea again, limitless, knowing no barrier, an immense orgiastic respiration.

*the erotic
illumination*

*Demonic
ecstasy*

*corrupted
objects
bearing
messages of
corruption*

*libidinous
clusters*

All that I witnessed that afternoon would fill with delight the lifetime of any man. The devil's temptation, I know it now, and I know too that there is no swimmer strong enough to struggle against that stream.

eroticism of
dislocation
of grinding
of blasting

Its immensity, its rapidity, its maddening repetition, its secret undertows, its universal devastation, are without comparison.

unwinding
of the will

Seduced, all succumbs and sinks, dragged down into a bottomless pit of eroticism that resembles some gigantic dislocation of the Earth's surface, some earthquake. Lines, even the most emphatically linear lines, almost abstract at first and without any relation to human forms, suddenly become inebriated and indulge in disgraceful undulations. One cannot say to what, to whom, these movements correspond but they are disgraceful none the less and I cannot follow them without sensing my own depravity being multiplied to the maximum degree, for I am enmeshed in these elongations, these flabby, limpid fissures that whine like a saxophone proclaiming: promiscuity, promiscuity, universal promiscuity. And one cannot break away, disentangle one's self from the all-engulfing impurity.

impossible
to swim away

I am immersed in contemplation, total impregnation. But no sadism. In the flow of associations Sade himself comes to mind and I have to laugh — Sade, and all the trouble that he went to, so highly organized, so very methodical, so businesslike. No cruelty here. Truly not necessary. Faith in a general, in a universal impurity, *entirely sensual*, without overlord or underdog, without suffering or desire for suffering, an unalloyed sensuality overflowing everywhere!

metaphysical
shamelessness

The absolute *impurity*, or rather, the absolute *anti-purity* sinks ever deeper into the joy of shamelessness.

the plant is
debauched

This force that debauches plant, soil, Earth, everything (a turbid spectacle, but above all, excessive, excessive) has only one aim: eroticism, only one concern: eroticism, with absolutely no room for anything else, for the least distraction, for the least diversion, and would constitute (and

not only for the Christian) the 100% temptation, the temptation *par excellence*, the irresistible temptation, more disastrous to love than the most puritanical denial.

Enormous exhibition of profanity. Sprouting limbs (animal or vegetable? — who can say? what does it matter?) answer with exuberance the monstrous cry that wells up within one, and the entire world must participate, and all mental images coagulate and contribute their mass to this prodigious rhetoric of the rut.

Water-lilies, roses, antique columns, outlandishly obese morulae, Ottoman cupolas, naves, vaults, arches, minarets, basins, pillars, a multitude of forms of all kinds now speak out with resonant clarity, no longer in an undertone. And now the perversities on these monuments, these ornaments, stand out in sharp relief and one wonders how they could have been overlooked, unrecognized, so strong is the impression.

from depravity
into a yet
more
dilated
depravity

At the same time grotesque rhythms, dragging, sliding, caught up as well, yes, especially them, in this eros-orgy make mock of conventional eroticism and replace it with wild lurches, coming at irregular intervals and with irregular degrees of force, dividing and multiplying, a veritable deprivation of rhythm which could correspond (for everything is linked) to the gigantic tumults and embraces of an incestuous passion, in a roller coaster, in a bombed-out city, with insects tickling your feet; or to a choir which, while singing Messiaen's setting to the liturgies of the Divine Presence, would suddenly fall sprawling into the mud with shrieks of evil laughter.

Overflowing with delight and sensuality, the human appendage and all its specialized organs forgotten, one exists as a simple integer in a bestial Eden. A sort of return to the archaic state of being, that is what one feels, a state understood (if they are capable of understanding) by unicellular creatures, when the overfed cell, turgid and satiated with itself, splits in two — can stand it no longer — divides, disgorging an indigestible half of its insupportable bulk. And it seemed to me that I

was thus unburdening myself, ceaselessly, in this extraordinary act of deliverance.

I have lost all care, all shame. Whatever it is that is attacking me simultaneously (and I seem to be skidding, out of control) at all the centers of pleasure, has now come to its conclusion, its apogee, its demonic issue, which is the *dissolution of all countenance*, of all will power (dissolute: a word so very apt that, in a flash, I understand) in an incessant grinding action inflicted at a superhuman speed which wipes away all possibility of resistance. This rapid movement causes the interior of my being to give way and collapse into a pleasing nothingness, only to dilate itself an instant later, and fall apart again, and then swell up, and again come tumbling down, and again rise up, again, in an impure assumption. An impossible rhythm anywhere else. Dissolution! Dissolution at top speed! That is where I have gotten to in this trance with no exit, exultation in general dissolution. The temptation of Saint Anthony, I know it now: the temptation of dissolution of the will, of demeanor. Amidst this universal feminization the sinner sinks down, content. *Delight in deliquescence.*

Worn out by asceticism, he must have been visited by similar visions, rushing, swarming in upon him at this bewildering speed, this disorganizing rapidity, so unexpected, so superhuman or (infrahuman) that one does not know how to defend oneself, or even that one ought to defend oneself.

No man can stand up to this demonic operation. A great many mystics have said it: "No man can resist its power. Only the Grace of God can do that."

Temptation of the sex-brain. Exaltation, as though a secondary brain, liberated from the principal one and become all-powerful, functions alone, sliced from the other and functioning only for eroticism, concerned only with eroticism, and whose reasoning, whose logic, whose memory, whose style, are *exclusively* erotic, but which none the less manages to belong (oddly enough) to a

*Dissolution
of all will power,
of all reserve,
of all
serenity*

THE TIDAL WAVE
IN THE
NERVES

*delight
in
deliquescence*

real world, an exclusively erotic world, stuffed, saturated, composed of erotic matter, which then parades by in endless ranks under a prodigiously perverse, clairvoyant, and malevolent gaze.

Then does the devil really exist? The demonic operation exists (on a nonhuman level), which with a rapid downward plunge, accompanied by the unfurling of millions of spasms within the soul, severs in its frenzy the *virtus* from *virtuous* and brings about in man the degradation of all nobility.

It pollutes the angel in man. A state absolutely out of the ordinary that only the mystics, drugged with fasts, vigils, and prolonged orisons that leave them completely exhausted (but thereby clairvoyant), and several madmen have experienced, though neither mystics nor madmen have spoken of these experiences in a comprehensive manner, the mystics because of their discretion, their fear of attracting attention to things that should be avoided, and the madmen because of their lack of attention and verbal coherence. Among the meddlers in demonology, Stanislas De Guaïta seems to have known this state: "What is this fearsome spasm," he writes, "that grabs hold of you, that enervates you, crushes you? What psychic pollution of Nature is this that compels you to partake with delight in the degradation of all beings, all things?"

It is only reasonable that swamps, mud, flowing sewers are the images belonging to this state, where one is most certainly caught up and carried away. Sin (yes against the self, against its personality, against its nobility, against the idea of the self that one wants to hold on to . . . and (for a man who possesses religion) against God.

The demon-seducer has mounted the throne, for you have let yourself go, indefinitely, yielded to infinite abandon. The seduction of dissolution. Sin: acceptance of dissolution.

But I have not yet said enough about the importance, the omnipresent and subterranean importance of the rhythms. Above, below those already mentioned, there will always be found one particular rhythm which unrhythmically— it excels

*by the
unfurling
of millions of
spasms*

*the degradation
of man*

*psychic
pollution*

*the will
rotted*

*seduction
of
dissolution*

*unfurling
in the nerves*

the others as a corrupter, as a decayer of virtue, as a liquidator of credos — disrupts, devastates, decomposes, with a diabolical lack of restraint, with raillery and ridicule, the relative stability that one could always find in vice, in order to make you sink deeper, and yet deeper, and yet blasphemously deeper. Polyraillery. Polyrhythmic. Polydevastation: such is the mescaline style and the demonic style.

When the erotic spectacle of human bodies has withdrawn from the limelight, when in turn the spectacle of possessed animals and vegetables has faded, and finally, after the monumental and geological monstrosities have ceased their gyrations — when you no longer know what it is you are looking at amidst the utter confusion of all these various forms slapped about (and snapped up) by alternating movements, underhanded, unexpected movements similar to enormous outbursts of laughter that are suddenly cut short — then you lose all equilibrium and feel yourself flowing in zigzags toward the essential shamelessness, drawn on by an indefinite force from one audacity to another, a greater audacity, and you are mad for impurity, yearning to dissolve yourself in yet greater, yet more excessive, yet more revealing lewdness, and without end.

Even in abjection mescaline is never forgetful of infinity.

I get up. I want no more of this. I have touched bottom, and God knows in what condition I will return, if I ever do manage to return.

I don't want to see any more, know any more. I must get out of this infernal orbit.

Besides, I have learned enough. *Basta!* Even the devil, my curiosity once satisfied, could not keep me any longer.

That's it! I've caught hold of myself. Done. Success!

But look out. Something is swelling up again. Something still simmering.

*I quit
the infernal
orbit*

not yet

Just a short while ago, for the first time in my life, I was totally, frantically, diabolically, on the other side (the side of perversity). What would a second time be like?

The day of my experience with madness,* I had continual desires to kill, destroy, burn, cut, which I instantly fought off, which returned again, which I fought off, etc. Just now, in a sort of ecstasy, in erotic *transports*, I was lost in contemplation and *letting myself be carried away*, without putting up any, or almost any, resistance. There's the difference. You *don't withdraw from ecstasy*. And now, what's to be done? I feel that I will draw back from nothing. And that's all. Can't grasp any other facts. That's not a good sign, but from where will the danger come?

I try to create a vacuum, a perfect vacuum in myself, and maintain it.

I supervise my thoughts for fear that I shall introduce into them some person that I respect, and thus subject this person to the indignities that are in the process of preparation.

By way of distraction, having remembered that the sense of smell sometimes behaves strangely, that perfumes undergo abnormal transformations, I take up a vial brought back from the Orient and unfasten the cap.

Coup de théâtre!

From its prison, the ponderous Syriac perfume escapes, and enters. Blasphemous, huge, irresistible, like a fat laugh bursting forth from the sequestered nave of a gothic cathedral, it enters, sweeping aside my being (my style of being) and I let it flow into me, over me; I wrap myself in it, smear myself with it, pervert myself by it. Infamous incarnation.

As if in echo to the perfume, one of those cross-echoes so particular to the drug, a woman's voice is heard, a solemn voice, in the distance. My God, if only she will stay there in the distance, but of course, my thought anticipates the action. Immediately she moves toward me, like a black savage utterly possessed by lust, and that noise

and?

*the ponderous
Syriac perfume
enters*

*depravation
by smell*

*This experience is described in Michaux's *Miserable Miracle*, Chap. V.

that she is making with her tongue and with her whispering breath in a sleeping mouth, a familiar noise, rapidly erodes away my resistance. But I must, I must resist. There can be nothing between us. While I am pulling myself together — or trying to — she takes off, automatically, her dress, her education, her politeness, her reserve, her party manners, our distant friendship, and she has done it with a flick of the wrist, as though they were all a single chemise.

And the laugh! That laugh! Has she ever dared to laugh like that before, show off, give off such a laugh!

Profanation! I did not want that.

We are not man and woman, woman and man, but something simplified to its most elemental state, like two masses reduced to contrary charges of electricity, like two fluids that are compelled by some law of physics to mingle and blend. The demonic lewdness in her, the tempest which has in an instant swept away all that she was before, the old faith to which she clung, and everything else, is outrageously incredible, and although I have not made a move, it is certain that I am an accomplice.

The nihilism of this lewdness, the infernal contagion that she has just contracted, and which seems to have rotted her in an instant, would make her unrecognizable even to those who know her best and it appears to have spread its defilement retrospectively, back to the time of her first communion, back to that day when her life was transfigured. — Well, now she has it, that transfiguration of her life! The God-extractor has done its work. Our secret subterranean complicity was acting, and we were held like captives in a cask. It must not be allowed to continue!

You will say to me: "But all that was only in your thoughts." Yes, but when thoughts are that intense, they are a hundred times more real than reality. The essence and power of reality made forever unforgettable, "consecrated."

It must not be allowed to continue. I rush to the window and throw it wide open. Simultaneously, the bright light striking my eyes, which have

*No, no
it must not
it must not
it must not*

grown hypersensitive and unaccustomed to the sun, and the brisk, chilling air, make me ill and dissipate the vision, and almost dissipate the presence. I have succeeded.

I return to the couch and stretch myself out, exhausted. These yanks at the brake are the most exhausting of all. Something is still going on inside me, but it is vague. I am disoriented. I have managed to stop the process, and now I seem to vaguely regret my action, regret not carrying through to the end. Cowardice or not cowardice? Which way does cowardice lie — in stopping myself, or continuing on?

*I have
interrupted
the process*

*You must always
pay for that*

*I play at
throwing my
hand,
farther
and even
farther*

Far from relapsing into a calm, passive state, I find myself playing games. Well now, this is the first time this has ever happened to me. And what a silly game I have invented. A madman's game has popped into my head, I don't know how: I play at throwing (mentally, in an interior vision) my hand, as far away as possible, farther, and even farther, phenomenally far . . . so far that — there! I have gone and lost it. Idiot! Now you have got to find it again. But to find a hand lost in space! I can't see it anywhere. Will I ever see it again? I'm frightened. Since eroticism banishes fear, and since I now know the way there, I begin to wonder whether I should not return. As I hesitate, half won over, I find my hand again. Whew! Let's be more prudent. Play it safe.

No more games under the influence of mescaline. Never again. Always overdoing it, going at full speed into the beyond, farther, farther, no playmate for a man!

Let's try drawing.

Drawing with a red pencil.

The act of drawing radically increases my presence in my hand and in my face, for I habitually reflect on people's faces rather than on their bodies.

*the drawing
provokes in me
a return to
the hand
to the face*

My face, forgotten and lost for hours: it is as if I were cutting a path toward it, approaching it from behind.

A rapid turn of the wheel that — away from the universe, from adventures — leads me back to my face.

I return to the face like a swimmer, after a dive, returns to the surface. But I am ill at ease there, not at home.

Horrible drawing of a face in which I see the ravages inflicted and yet to be inflicted, and everything that is vulnerable in the face wants to express the disorder, the disarticulation, disintegration that I feel strongly outside of it.

A head that some people will look at later with extreme uneasiness. A head more undone than pathetic, an outlaw's head, the head of a broken man, at the end of his tether, that tragedy now beckons . . .

I abandon this drawing which is like a pang of bad conscience. Now no more face, no more awareness of face or of evil. I return backwards into my centers of the here-and-now, into my abodes of the here-and-now.

Don't immobilize yourself in the mescaline. Keep your freedom.

Given myself good advice today, but a bit late in giving it.

Finished once again with the adventure and with the queer satanic experiment. Will I now be able to say, like the Yogi said of his Tantric teachings?

"Inaccessible to all impregnations
delighting in every delight
touching everything like the wind
penetrating everywhere like the air
the Yogi is always pure
a bather in the stream
He delights in every delight and no evil
can soil him."*

*Kulrnavatantra, IX.

No, I could not bring myself to say that. I had to "disimpregnate" myself.†

I had been spoiled.

It was after gazing at the feeble ugliness of my mad drawings that I began seriously to disentangle myself and to detach myself, disgusted, from that afternoon which, were I to live ten lifetimes, would always remain in my memory.

First moments of decontamination.

It was more than two months later that, having gone to the seaside one brisk autumn evening, I was able to turn toward the biting wind, toward the sea, mother of energy, without sensing the presence of that turbid atmosphere that I had been dragging about within me. I turned toward the wind as I was compelled to do, as my nature demanded, and there suddenly surged up that solid side of me that had vanished eight weeks ago. Since then, since the seaside, it seems to me that it has gained ground, and that hardness, anti-deliquence have become my battlecries, my comrades, my goal. But between it and me, still falls a shadow . . . a spell, in a certain sense the continuation of myself.

†The erotic (satanic) bath being an hypnotic bath.



THE CONSCIOUSNESS-EXPANDING DRUG
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