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Ask Me Anything

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Ask Me Anything

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Visual Art

by

Chelsea Rector

August 2014

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## List of Figures

Figure 1 ‘related conversation: BwO\_Fernando’  
Page 2

Figure 2 ‘related conversation: BwO\_Fernando’  
Page 3

Figure 3 ‘related conversation: BwO\_Fernando’  
Page 4

Figure 4 ‘related conversation: BwO\_Fernando’  
Page 5

Figure 5 ‘related conversation: BwO\_Fernando’  
Page 6

Figure 6 ‘related conversation: BwO\_Fernando’  
Page 7

Figure 7 ‘related conversation: BwO\_Fernando’  
Page 8

Figure 8 ‘related conversation: BwO\_Fernando’  
Page 9

Figure 9 ‘ama\_misc\_forever’  
Page 10

Figure 10 ‘ama\_michaux\_hands at Gargas’  
Page 12

Figure 11 ‘ama\_michaux\_mouvements\_iii’  
Page 13

Figure 12 ‘Lavender Mist’  
Page 14

Figure 13 ‘ama\_misc\_for example\_Kant’  
Page 15

Figure 14 ‘video\_ama\_developing shame resilience’  
Page 16

Figure 15 ‘video\_ama\_embracing shadow’  
Page 17

Figure 16 ‘video\_ama\_inhabiting the body’  
Page 18

Figure 17 ‘video\_ama\_understanding empathy’  
Page 19

Figure 18 ‘video\_ama\_waking from the trance of unworthiness’  
Page 20

Figure 19 ‘ama\_Michaux\_Bataille in a cave’  
Page 21

Figure 20 ‘ama\_misc\_gargas engraving’  
Page 22

Figure 22 ‘ama\_Michaux\_Mescaline\_i’  
Page 23

Figure 21 ‘ama\_Michaux\_Mescaline\_ii’  
Page 24

Figure 22 ‘ama\_Michaux\_Mescaline\_iii’  
Page 25

Figure 23 ‘ama\_Michaux\_Mouvements\_ii’  
Page 26

Figure 24 ‘ama\_Michaux\_Mouvements\_iii’  
Page 27

Figure 25 ‘ama\_misc\_counter technique’  
Page 28

Figure 26 ‘ama\_misc\_counter technique’  
Page 29

Figure 27 ‘ama\_misc\_counter technique’  
Page 30

Figure 28 ‘ama\_misc\_counter technique’  
Page 31

Figure 29 ‘ama\_misc\_counter technique’  
Page 32

Figure 30 ‘ama\_misc\_counter technique’  
Page 33

Figure 31 ‘ama\_misc\_counter technique’  
Page 34

I suppose I could write about why the essays in *Other than identity: The subject, politics, and art* are so useful. Then again, to write is, itself, a thing to be written about. IN MY CASE, written in light of these conjectures: it is true that writing is at first an act, and, it is true that poetry is a sign of something among people. Doing the work of description, self-reflexivity, and really anything that is as rhetorical as the discussion of “aesthetics” in art and literature, will certainly, at least, posit some fiction. Memory, consciousness-sweet dreams are made of the figurative relations, what is seen, around and composing one's sense of life.

To see in a dream is to be fascinated, and fascination arises when, far from apprehending at a distance, we are apprehended by this distance, invested by it and invested with it. In the case of sight, not only do we touch the thing, thanks to an interval that disencumbers us of it, but we touch it without being encumbered by this interval. In the case of fascination we are perhaps already outside the realm of the visible-invisible. [Blanchot, Maurice; *L'Espace Littéraire* pp.41-2/31 in Benjamin, Andrew; “Figuring Self-Identity: Blanchot’s *Bataille*” p. 26; italics, mine]

We also have a sense of death. As in, my sister gave me a lot of Adderall and then I thought I might die because everyday I take a lot of Zoloft, that is bad with alcohol, and I woke up and I was still drunk and on a lot of Adderall and on my Zoloft and then I ate scrambled eggs and I threw up all day while we were sightseeing and it was hot outside.

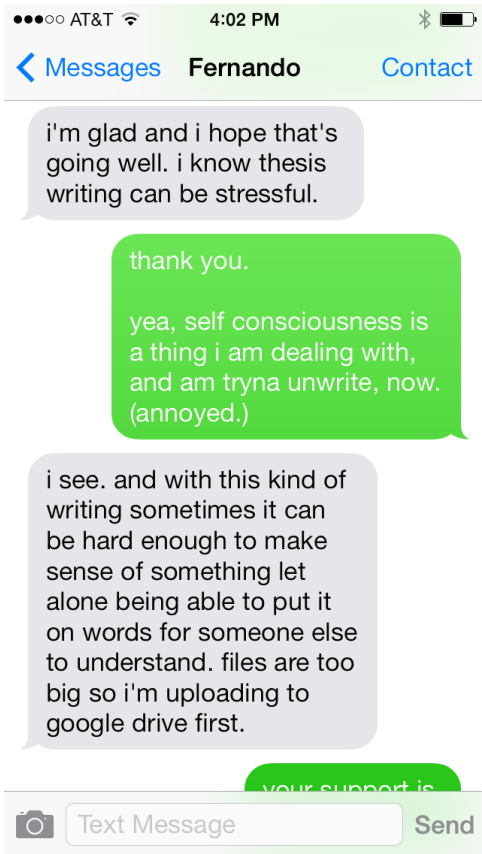


Figure 1 'related conversation: BwO\_Fernando'

Fiction and its possible forms are in my use portals to literature and poetry, literary and critical theories. Theories matter to me. I believe I use them, especially, to critically destabilize the subject and to destabilize my own subjectivity. (This probably is the manner in which theory's use is recommended.) Theory suggests possibilities and contexts for the modes, forms, and values with which I live. I maintain responsibility for the ways in which my thoughts organize themselves.

I care for language because I believe meaning is not fixed, because we contend with judgment and ideology, and it all matters. One must permit oneself to speculate about, and to talk about speculating about, how a person is or ought to be!

I often ask, *where's the body*. In response to this and as a reconciliatory gesture, Ask Me Anything is a project whose objects look different depending on where you are in relation to them. They ask to be looked at, they ask to be read, and my sense is that they construct a space where the stories you have to tell- inside your head or maybe to whoever you're visiting the museum with- are coherent with what all AMA prompts in us. This situates some kind of regard, as if, like you, the six untitled objects are noticing things.

My friend and I were driving through an intersection and it had a yellow light. She turned to me and said that getting through the yellow light means inevitably in life we'll be good at initiating sex. I didn't ever tell my friend about how a year before our yellow light revelation, when I was driving alone through an intersection- probably thinking about sex- there was a yellow light and I made it. Even then, instantly, I thought that making it seemed like having sex, except with different feelings.

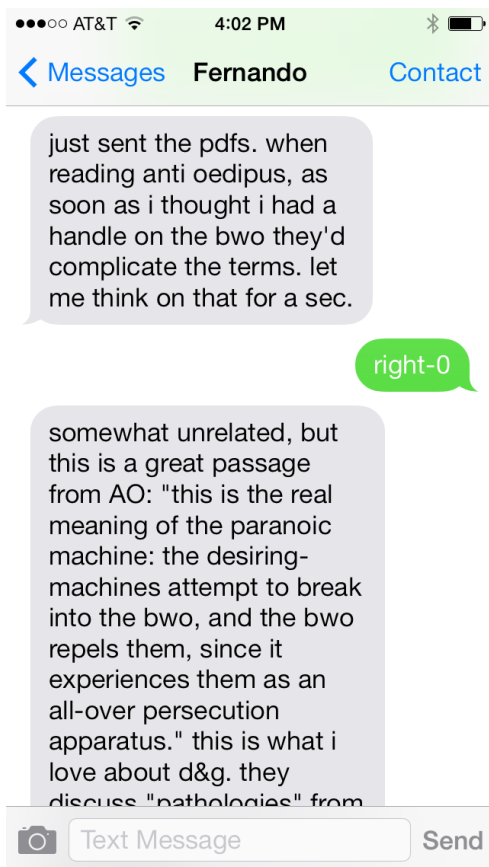


Figure 2 'related conversation: BwO\_Fernando'

In Ask Me Anything, the thing is emotional. It has thin skin, soft, like a baby or an old person; it addresses itself and its other. 'It' is a portal to my pronoun problem-slash-how I never state my subject. 'It' is also pressed onto the glass of a flatbed scanner in order to become, ultimately, a digital image. My contribution to the 2014 MFA thesis exhibition "Monster," is a suite of six scanned images. Scans of some poems whose lines are remarks, addressing interiority, more or less. I don't know if I made successful pictures of poems but I do know that I have written some specific poems.

This specificity- or non-specificity, depending on your mood- is pregnant with its Subject. As far as I can tell, the Subject is the Self who sees, who reads, who speaks, who

regards itself- consuming, supporting. Specifically, the Self stands to reckon with the signifier 'I' and the possibility of a language of thought. I have questions like; how is thought languaged/made into articulable parts (how do we have words)? What's so sticky about thought and language and our selves?

Video is the name of a notebook where the poems were written, for the photographic series Ask Me Anything. AMA is a selection of poems, transposed from

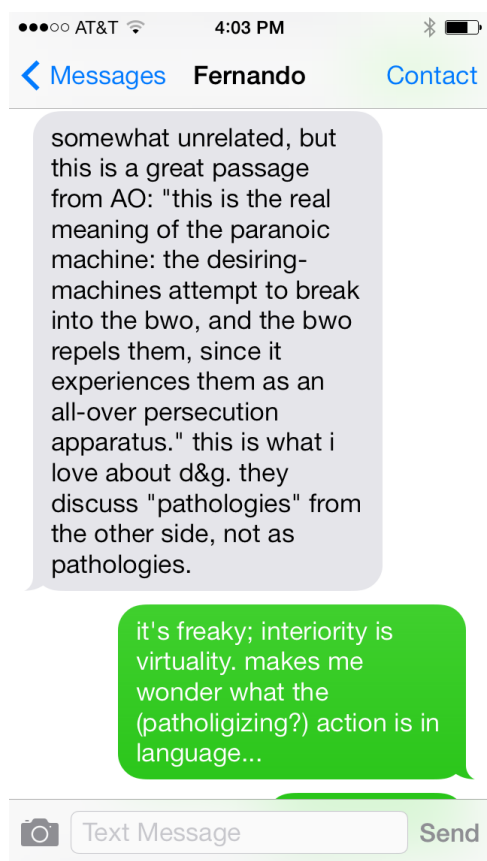


Figure 3 'related conversation: BwO\_Fernando'

Video a notebook. Ask Me Anything is the presentation of an attempt to theorize the reading

body. Ask Me Anything offers this conjecture:

The Reading Body is in motion. Theorizing this, in my case, means the subject both inscribes and describes how it is something and some thing, like someone in love- the body in reverie.

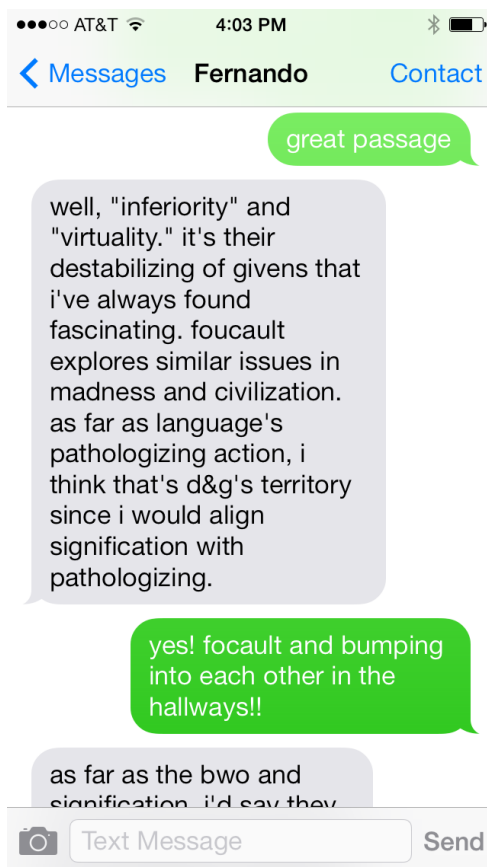
Ideally AMA actually does posit the mimesis, deconstruction/digestion, and the rehabilitation of longing's modes and æffects while they ebb and flow among remarks that address the text/subject/Self's inside/interior/cave.

Regarding the body directly, this project called Ask Me Anything intends to formulate a supportive, open, psycho-emotional space or atmosphere for the viewer/reader.



Language and meaning are full of difficulties. This statement tastes true to me because, in life, the difficulties fill the interstices made of positions like our Self in relation to our social/cultural site/cite (where the Self identifies itself). Sometimes we sense the body, we feel present. Addressing the body in language, however, is in meaningful ways difficult work.

Furthermore, a lot of the fallacies of language and meaning, composition, are standardized; standardization reifies those fallacies. The aesthetic-standardization of



pictures hinges on their chronological organization by continent or region, medium, and subject matter. Whatever can be said of this present moment, as far as I know, would sound something like Please Keep To The Footpath, or DANGER, or like playing a recording of autotuned group laughter on an infinite loop.

Some people do drugs to bond intimately with the symptom of reification's mimetic chaos, since this notion of the particularity of a singular somatic experience is both hyperbolic

Figure 4 'related conversation: BwO\_Fernando'

and completely familiar. The light of this notion seduces us, and longing creeps in like a surprise shadow representing one's own death, the point of no return.

I am very uncomfortable around comedians when they are not being funny doing their comedy on stage because I need them to make me laugh, to make me bowl over, loose my breath and cry.

Every love story is a ghost story. Immer wieder: always again. It is not death that many of us imagine and feel fear of; it is a representation of death that we worry about.

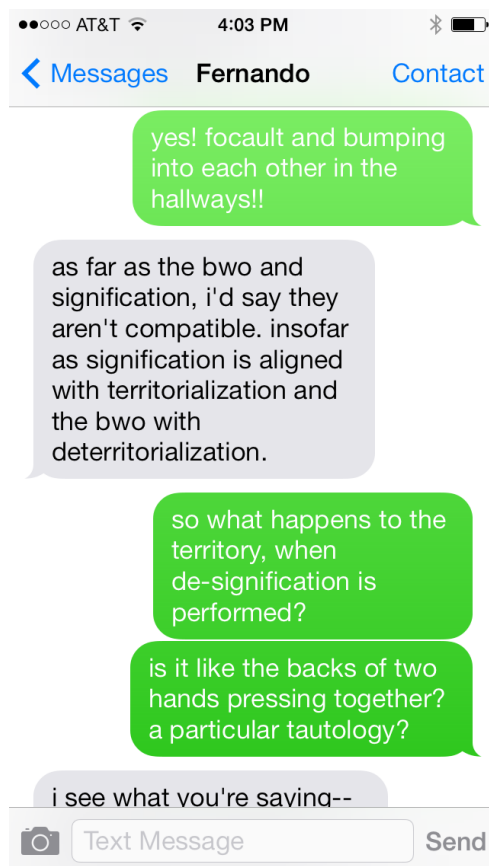


Figure 5 'related conversation: BwO\_Fernando'

Representation is the language of the living, and of Being.

Some lines in the poems seem to reach us from that distant point, from where the figure yearns at the impossible horizon, those edges of the body. "Maybe I can't help you." Ask Me Anything jettisons the figure, the point of Being, so far out and enduring laughing, crying, sneezing, and coming... Further still, the distance and the humidity, ghost-like, render the subject shadowed.

Is a writer an archaeologist? Henri

Michaux referred to archaeology in print- illustrations, tables, diagrams (actually, I am talking about classificatory grids) reproduced in scholarly archaeological journals and texts. Pages turned open and set out around his studio describes, literally, getting language to float; I am talking about words floating in the air. I am nodding toward Michaux's subjectivity. As far as my subjectivity goes, I keep cleaning the keyboard on my laptop.

Now more than ever, the Self is an object, it seems. There isn't a fitting name for what Michaux is doing. We have the books he produced, in them drawings, and in a

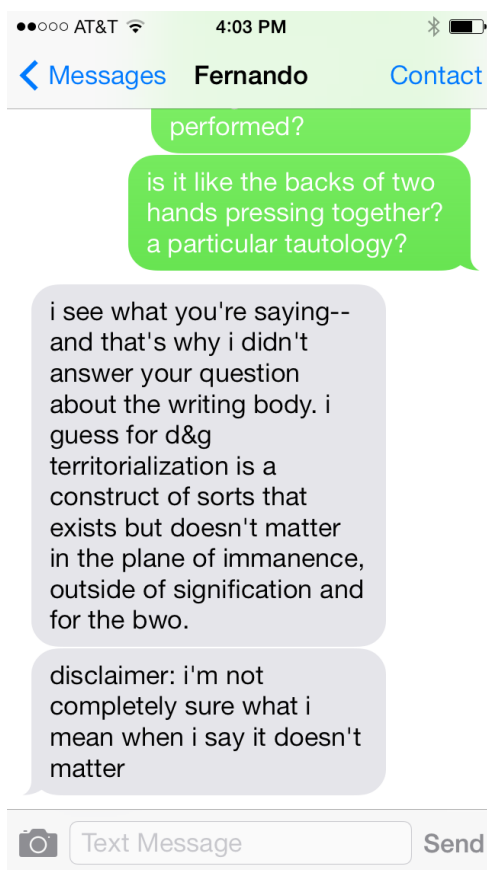


Figure 6 'related conversation: BwO\_Fernando'

manner of opening- a manner of opening matters- the drawings annotate the kinesis, in writing as an act of deconditioning signification; designifying. Poetry is an action we make with our bodies, as in prayer, writing, drawing, marking, even without a center or subject.

The visual channels of archaeology- grids and tables organizing illustrated reproductions of prehistoric painting/mark making- are for Michaux, particularly in his book, *Mouvements*, 1951, containers for a certain resistance of form. What does this resistance look like, words floating in the air?

This resistance does not aim to obliterate, obfuscate, or ameliorate the grid, format, ideogram, nor the fragment. It is clear that the page's formatting is substrate- however conceptual or intuitive as Michaux drew.

Moving the characters away from alphabets, out of signification, directly and concretely M's resistance to signify within word or pictographic alphabets indicates an arrow of

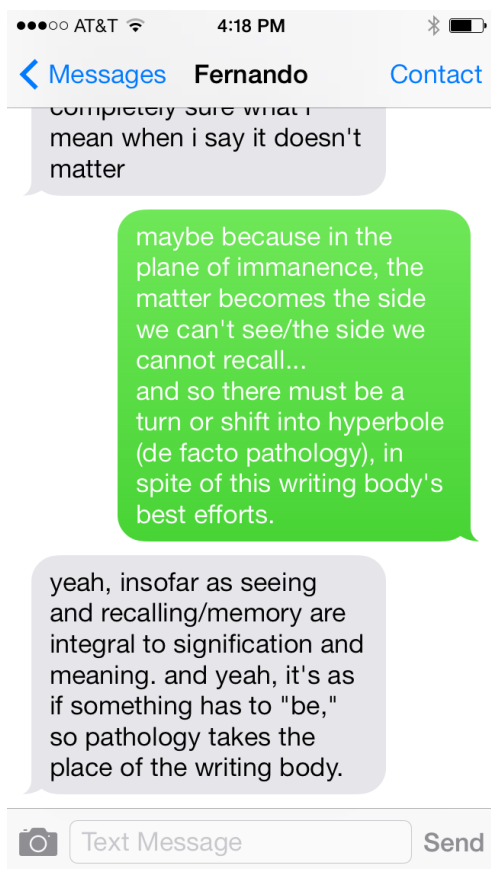


Figure 7 'related conversation: BwO\_Fernando'

time. From 1956 to 1958, this arrow of time arcs inward, as Michaux intakes mescaline- the liquid, sometimes tea, form of a plant-based hallucinogen- in order to draw out of the mescaline body, the body without organs; all body.

This mescaline body, that Michaux tracks or maps through drawing is “conscious of internal images (and of external phenomena as well), it is only with a certain limited quantity of consciousness, a certain restricted speed of consciousness succeeding each other and making ‘contact.’” [1: Michaux; Untitled

Passages by Henri Michaux; p.131] This mescaline body, so theorized, bears a latent motif, the consciousness-es of a page. What is time/duration, then on mescaline? ...on drawing? ...on poetry?

His mescaline forms and his movement ideographs testify that ‘design’ is a relation between the body and language, and this is no suggestion of a hierarchy because everything, by Michaux’s use of the book format, applies laterally. Moreover, a latent grid endures, as the page and its formatting are some kind of skeleton. Skeletons are

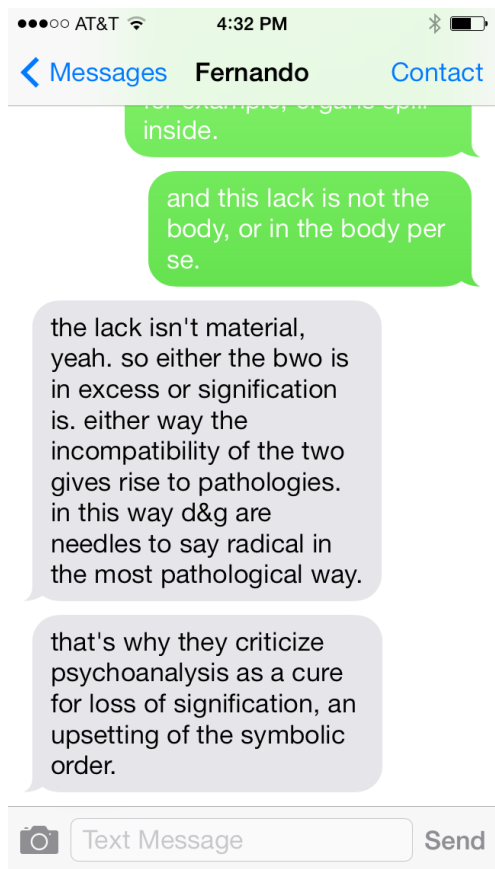


Figure 8 'related conversation: BwO\_Fernando'

things, exactly between metaphor and analogy. This page/skeleton desires, in Michaux’s case, the mescaline body without organs, between figuring and determining.

It seems Michaux made note of how prehistoric cave wall patterns formalized an animal body, figure, or mark. These figures and marks situate the cave chamber (mouth) as site for self-identification. Cave inscriptions overtly work the texture, or morph, of cave rock (MODERN BODY) often carrying the line, ‘in sync’ with the geologic surface, animating the figure or pattern in a way that

often overtly suggests the cessation or beginning of the marking. [2: Leroi-Gourhan and Michelson; “The Hands of Gargas: Toward a General Study” p. 22-24] For example identifying Hands on the walls at Gargas or a little horse at Lascaux....In this way, Michaux brings his knowledge of these prehistoric drawing techniques, to bear upon the

conventional page, as a temporal information delivery system. What does the page and grid reveal or resist, in the manner of a cave wall-drawing surface?

The grid's Platonic blankness, unlike an undulating and heterogeneous cave rock INSIDE surface, always organizes forms that are between their legibility as figures, as methods of counting/marking, as pattern, as composition, between signification(s). As though grids grow furtive from latent signification, Michaux resists any urge to subsume

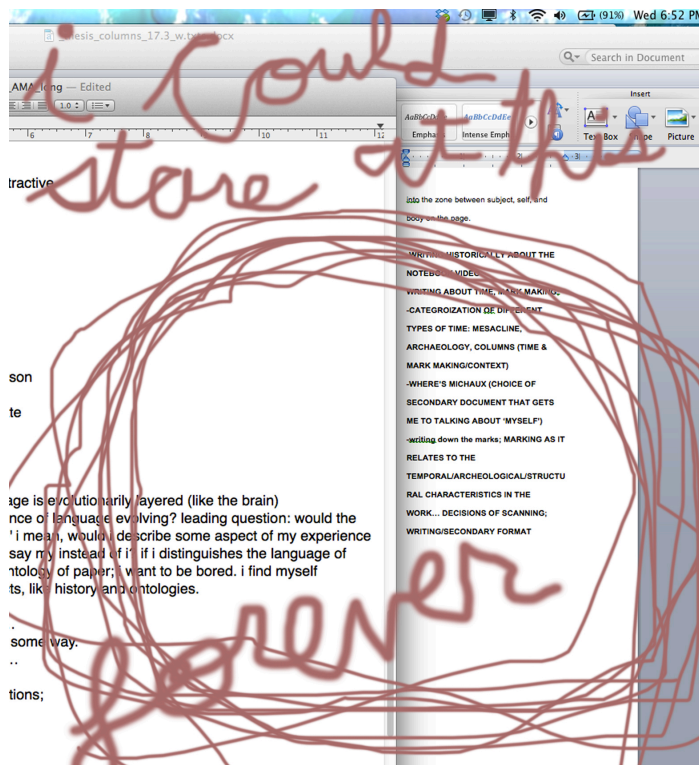


Figure 9 'ama\_misc\_forever'

the body- that frenetic and searching mescaline consciousness- as it takes primordial recourse in moving outward, if only to mark that it has done so.

Today we know this mark as it cites, bringing self-identity to bear upon what is known, construing something

singular out of the plural-empirical. The grid is a temporal disciplinary structure, to the unpredictable rhythmic patterns of the body.

WHAT DO WE CALL THIS BODY? This (mescaline body) is not a body engaging in acts of destruction or sacrifice. The mescaline body delivers us, back into time, into a body, into a cave; a body in the act of existing as the body of human; a

fingerprint, a handprint, flicking the wrist; writing. This is the human body inscribing itself as the originating technic for lines, figures, fields. The inscriptions inside the caves denote a ritualistic transgression of body boundaries, boundaries suggested, fundamentally, by flesh. With respect to animal forms depicted in caves, particularly where repeated markings envelop the form and space surrounding, and distance and proximity are physics that, like the flesh barriers of the body, become ritually transgressed, vis a vis the very markings recorded on the cave walls. [3: Leroi-Gourhan and Michelson; “The Religion of the Cave: Magic or Metaphysics?”p. 12]. Animals depicted upon cave walls were often not animals of the hunt.

Bataille is here to help me establish an ontological claim. Humans consistently make visible the body. Consistently, an urge to move the body outside of itself, AND TO IMPRINT ITSELF OUTSIDE, can be traced insofar as the record mark of the movement exists as the movement trace’s interface. It is this interfacing that creates a “sensuous reality [une réalité sensible] which modifies the world, responding to our desire for something miraculous, extra-worldly [une réponse au désir de prodige], implied in the very essence of what it is to be human’ (Bataille; Lascaux, p. 37) [4: Noland; “Bataille Looking” p. 135].”





Figure 10 'ama\_michaux\_hands at gargas'

Understanding aesthetic impulse in these terms, Michaux's output exists as a hallmark of the modern body. (M: cave rock) Training device, technique, and container, *Mouvements* and the *Mescaline Drawings* index the body as it is brought to limit by the grid format. Formatting has it that the drawings in *Mouvements* and the drawings from *Mescaline* seem to have been pressed or oozed out.

Michaux turns the body out as the hands at Gargas expose the body's volume (unseen/my own)- the hands trace what

was then, the presence of the whole body. Michaux instead writes the (then) present body, insofar as the editorial formatting of Michaux's *Mouvements* suggest, by rhythm, a body performing- whereby transgressing- the body as a transcription machine.

We are reading around the body. Light and shadow form a silhouette, Michaux, drawing body repetitions, does so improvising in the space of the formatted page. This transgression/improvisation is a dedicated collapse in which "rhythm ruled the page, sometimes several pages in succession, and the more numerous were the signs that



appeared (one day there were close on five thousand), the more alive they were.”

[5:Michaux; Untitled Passages by Henri Michaux; p.61]

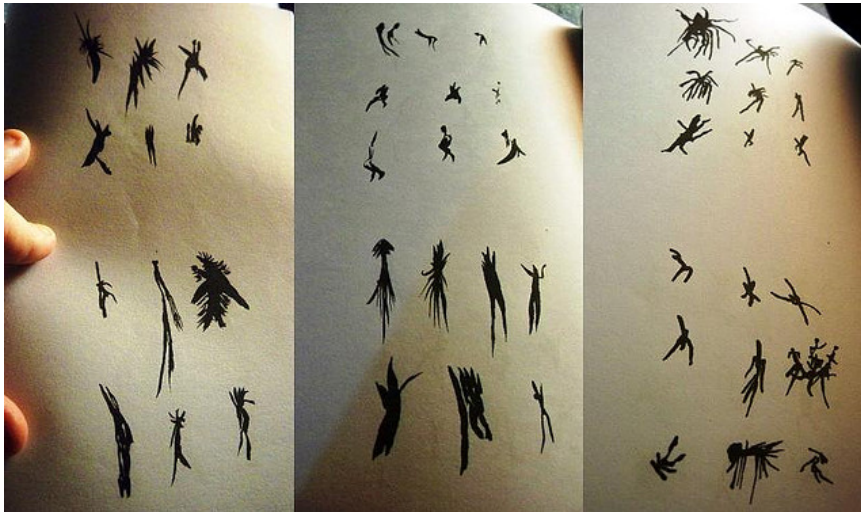


Figure 11 'ama\_michaux\_mouvements\_iii'

Why does  
movement make  
possible  
Michaux's  
proposition of a  
new body? Is this  
self-reflexivity? A  
resistance of

form? Michaux has observed that the characters, 'movement became my movement.' As the 'motor,' then, he is the form's cause; but as the double, he is the form's effect. That is, the movements required to make the forms actually produce a new moving self and, as a result, a new 'technique of the body.' [6: Noland; "Inscription as Performance: Henri Michaux and the Writing Body;" p. 169] This describes an interpretative process, whereas, Video is not an interpretive project; it is more of an experiment of translation, often dealt as a proposition.

Where the hands at Gargas sign the body as a directly and concretely unseen mass, Michaux insists upon ink (figure) on the conventional page (ground). These characters mark light's turn into the shadow of (suddenly) an unseen or vanished body. This turn is designification, the absolute possibility of signification's inverse. We see the

hand inverted in the form of the trace of itself, the-form-of-the-absence-of-the-body, and this is what is seen at Gargas. Limiting by intensity-turned-ineffable, when we feel out of body, such experiences are, like silhouettes, a limit defining the moment at which possibility and impossibility merge while holding themselves apart. [7: Benjamin; “Figuring Self-Identity: Blanchot’s Bataille”] Like drugs, self-identity can turn you inside out and easier to read than in the straight up limit-experience, that by affect does not inscribe itself and is without cite like an unseen ghost, whereas silhouettes, like signs, are light and shadow coupled into a deconditioned form of transcription.



Figure 12 'Lavender Mist'

Mouvements  
cites the body  
outside of  
itself; a  
change takes  
place. The  
nature of this  
change works  
within and as  
a result of the

process of interpretation. The exigency at play here is the text’s difficult insistence that it be experienced and thus that it be understood. [7: Benjamin, “Figuring Self-Identity: Blanchot’s Bataille” p. 28] At this stage, Video addresses it’s singularity using the first-person, I. To amalgamate this singular extension, the form of the second person, you, gets

invoked. The third person address takes the form of a proposition or a simple observation. In my case, the text intends to relate many Selves- voices- from the position of a disembodied 'I.' Michaux inscribed that as movement on the page, and thus "the self revealed is nothing but movement, or to put it differently, the self is the way the self moves. This does not mean that the self's movements are untrained by cultural inflection (or freed from anatomical determination). Michaux, in movement, has not rediscovered some originary, essential way of moving, but only a way of moving as a body that inscribes." [7: Noland; "Inscription as Performance: Henri Michaux and the Writing Body;" p. 168] In Michaux and Gargas we are looking at the body marking, not the other way around. This makes me think of ghosts and haunting. When a ghost is seen it is recognized. On the other hand the ghost is a sense, a presence, until it is seen. This formal draw- visible/invisible- is at the heart of the matter of the Reading Body.

We recognize pages formatted in books; in this case the ghost is seen. By virtue of this recognition, we are led to consider, whereby reading, the graphic symbols printed there.

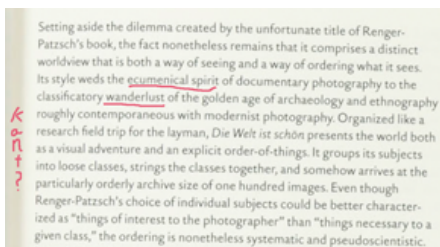


Figure 13 "ama\_for example\_Kant"

By conjecture, the notebook Video is one preoccupied by intrusions, allusions, and flurries of language in the context of... itself. Like the Michael Snow film, Wavelength, the notebook Video squints a single long shot into focus. Page formatting, as a processing device, invokes thresholds of legibility and the active, attentive, reading body. (Not necessarily an active, attentive, ghost busting body- it would be nearly impossible to ghost bust while reading poems or looking at drawings in a book.) We read off the page,

a substrate aggregating the descriptions of the language forms on it. The page formalizes language forms, and with the grid the page extends the inevitability of the language form, in all possible directions.

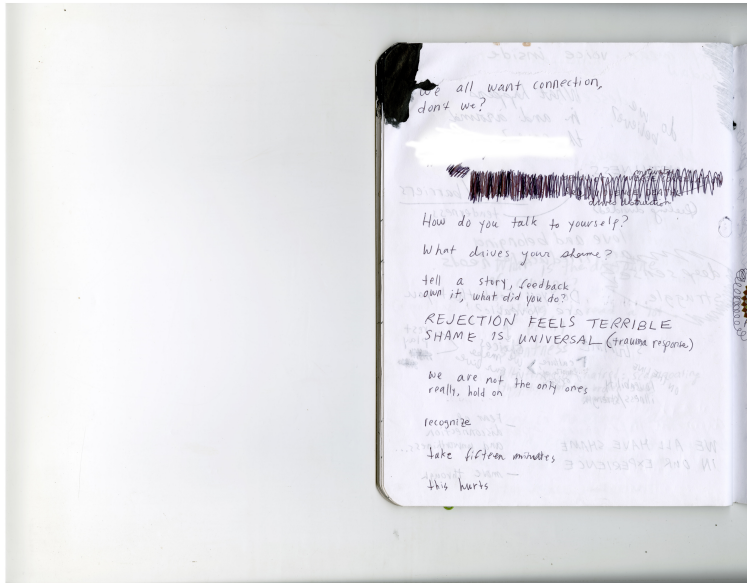


Figure 14 'video\_ama\_developing shame resilience'

Then, there is a reading body seeking to map, by way of the format, language and graphical information into 'everywhere,' insofar as everywhere is an

arrow traced out of prehistory, out of the kinesthetic marking body, through a universally languaged body that technically mimes itself, searching itself, into the zone between subject, self, and body on the page. The Reading Body is the house of self-identity.



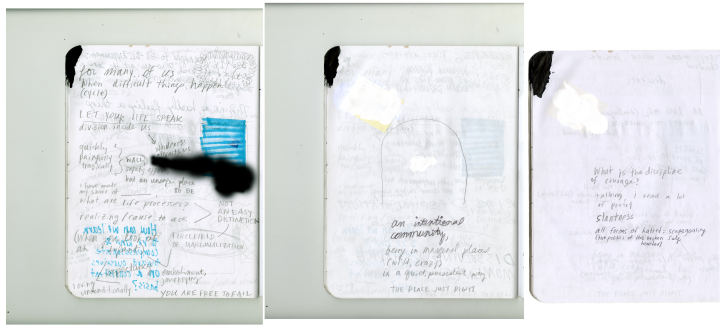


Figure 15 'video\_ama\_embracing shadow'

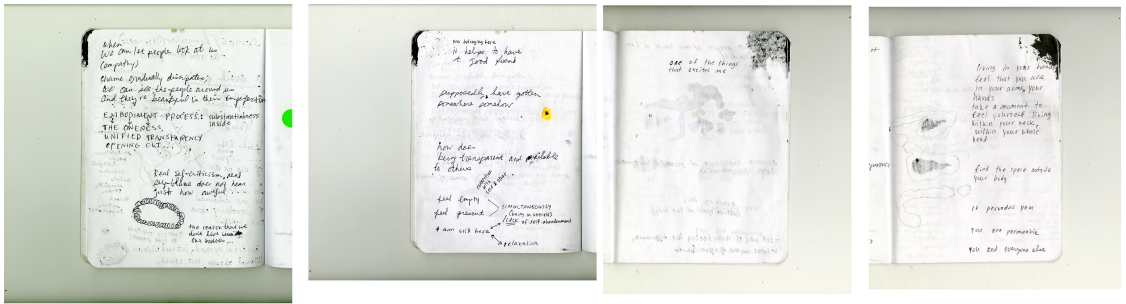


Figure 16 'video\_ama\_inhabiting the body'

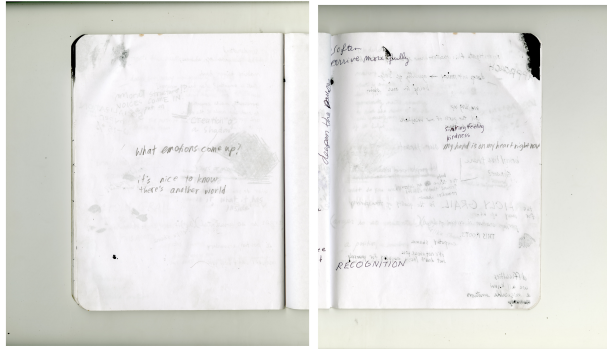


Figure 17 'video\_ama\_understanding empathy'

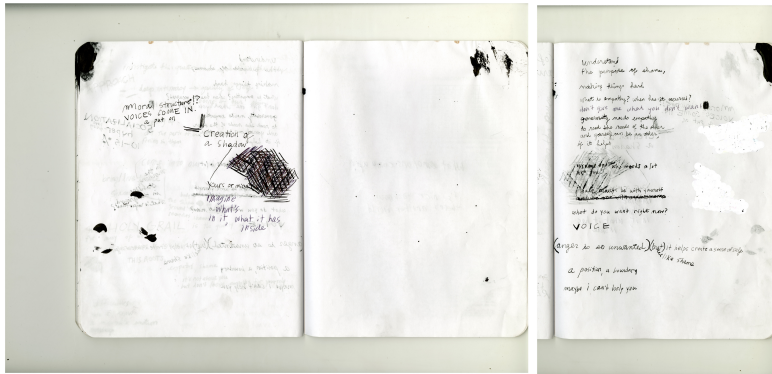


Figure 18 'video\_ama\_waking from the trance of unworthiness'



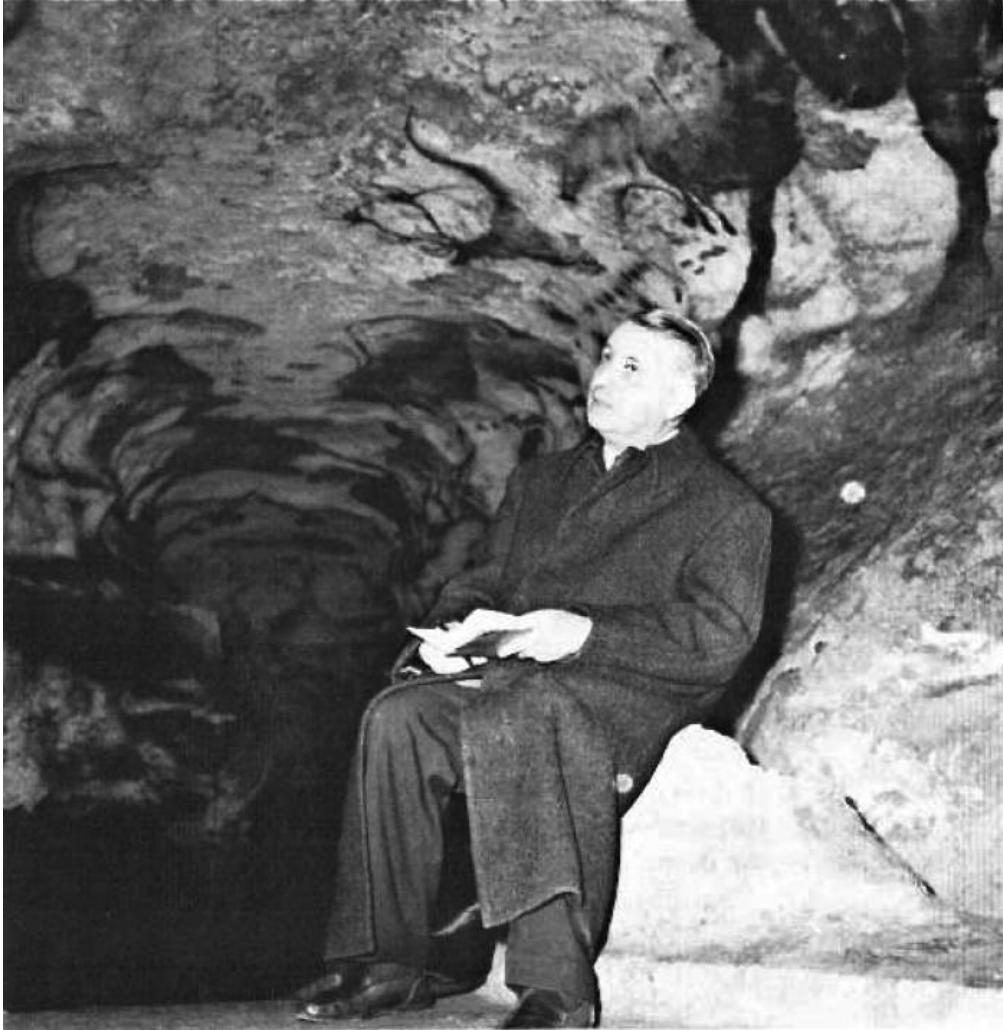


Figure 19 'ama\_Michaux\_Bataille in a cave'

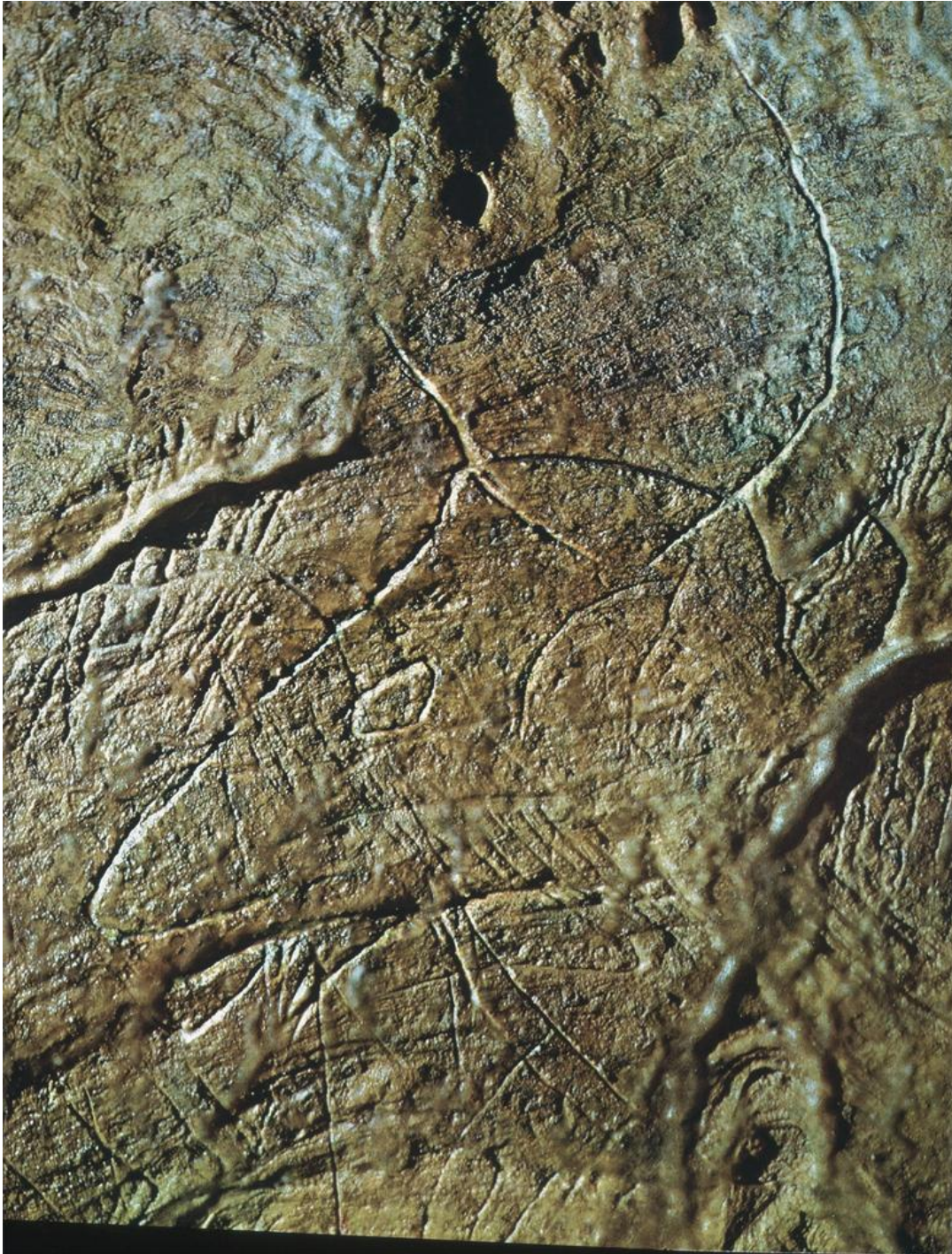


Figure 20 'ama\_Michaux\_misc\_gargas engraving'





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Figure 23 'ama\_Michaux\_Mescaline\_iii'

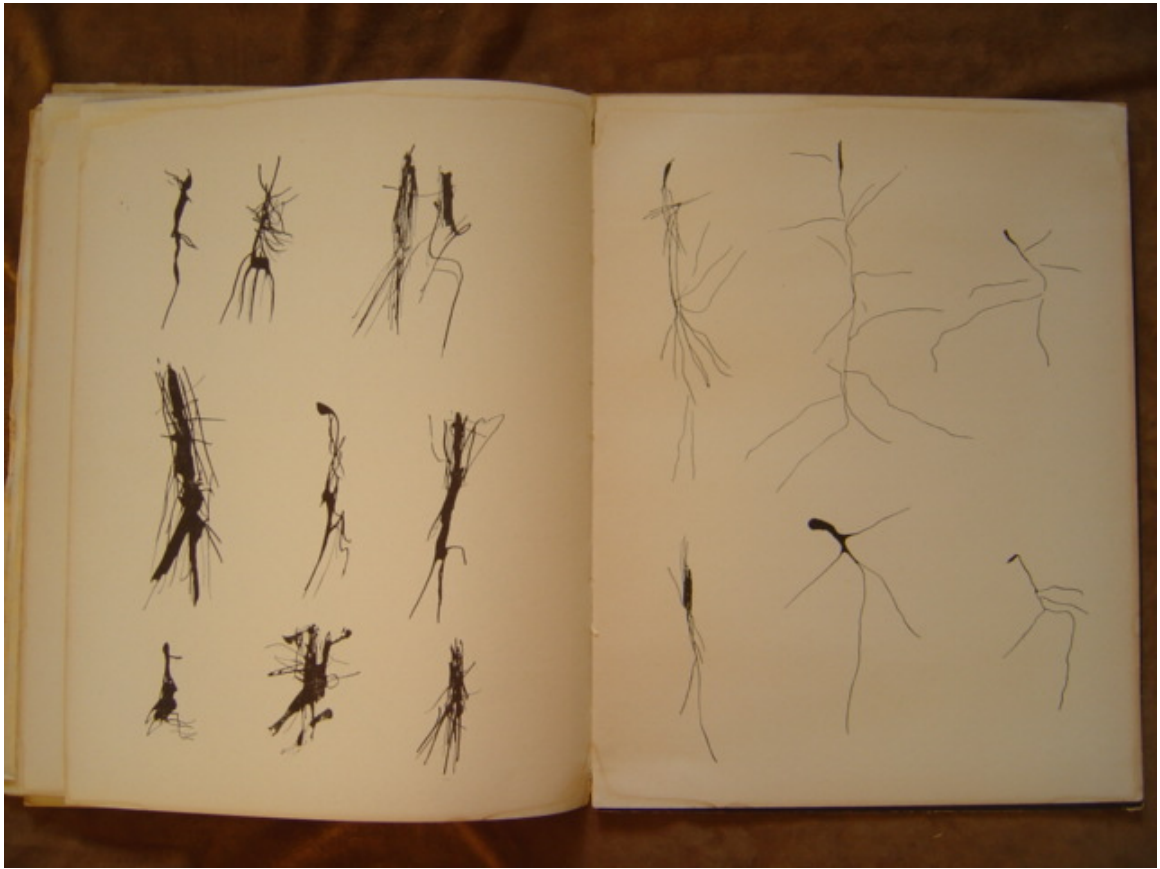


Figure 24 'ama\_Michaux\_Mouvements\_ii'





Figure 25 'ama\_Michaux\_Mouvements\_iii'



Figure 26 'ama\_misc\_counter technique movement'





Figure 27 'ama\_misc\_counter technique movement'



Figure 28 'ama\_misc\_counter technique movement'



Figure 29 'ama\_misc\_counter technique movement'



Figure 30 'ama\_misc\_counter technique movement'



Figure 31 'ama\_misc\_counter technique movement'



Figure 32 'ama\_misc\_counter technique movement'