Amoriography

Christian Besson

Translator: Simon Pleasance

Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/17117>

DOI: 10.4000/critiquedart.17117

ISBN: 2265-9404

ISSN: 2265-9404

Publisher

Groupeement d'intérêt scientifique (GIS) Archives de la critique d'art

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 June 2015

ISBN: 1246-8258

ISSN: 1246-8258

Electronic reference

Christian Besson, « Amoriography », *Critique d'art* [Online], 44 | Printemps/Été 2015, Online since 01 June 2016, connection on 10 December 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/17117> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/critiquedart.17117>

This text was automatically generated on 10 December 2020.

Archives de la critique d'art

Amoriography

Christian Besson

Translation : Simon Pleasance

REFERENCES

Marc Décimo, *Sciences et Pataphysique : Tome 1. Savants reconnus, érudits aberrés, fous littéraires, hétéroclites et celtomanes en quête d'ancêtres hébreux, troyens, gaulois, francs, atlantes, animaux, végétaux, aryens, extraterrestres et autres ?*, Dijon : Les Presses du réel, 2014, (Les Hétéroclites)

Marc Décimo, *Sciences et Pataphysique : Tome 2. Comment la linguistique vint à Paris. De Michel Bréal à Ferdinand de Saussure*, Dijon : Les Presses du réel, 2014, (Les Hétéroclites)

Marc Décimo, *Les Jocondes à moustaches*, Dijon : Les Presses du réel, 2014, (Les Hétéroclites)

- 1 Sapeck, alias Eugène François Bonaventure Bataille, born on 7 May 1853 in Le Mans, died in the asylum at Clermont-sur-Oise on 10 June 1891, illustrious fellow hoaxer and travelling companion of Alphonse Allais and Jules Jouy, gave us a pipe-smoking Mona Lisa, among the illustrations with which he embellished Coquelin Cadet's *Le Rire* (Paris, Ollendorff, 1887). After Daniel Grojnowski, who used it for the cover of his book about the *esprit fumiste* –literally 'hoax(er) spirit'–,¹ Marc Décimo is quite right to use it to introduce his own book on *Les Jocondes à moustaches*, even if Sapeck's Mona Lisa is moustache-less.² That pipe—of 1887—is a direct introduction to the eroticism—right, Magritte?!—and the *Familienroman* of the father of L.H.O.O.Q. examined in the voluminous third part, an eroticism and a *roman* which, incidentally, already lay at the heart of his *Marcel Duchamp mis à nu*.³ Décimo earlier recalls an important contextual event for understanding how, even before the First World War, the Mona Lisa was sexually over-affected by a press and other commentators who found her decidedly “fickle”, because, having vanished for more than two years, from 21 August 1911 to 12 December 1913, when she re-appeared in Florence, it turned out she had let herself be “kidnapped” by a certain Peruggia, a house

painter. The French had indeed called that Monna (an abbreviation of Madonna)—Frédéric Dard used the word “moniche”—“Mona”—, which makes one think!

- 2 The context was already the emancipation of women from their sole birth-giving role (pending the right to vote in 1944). Does a post card from before the Great War not show the Mona Lisa in thigh boots and T-shirt on a bike? As an ambiguous flapper woman, we can tell *La Joconde*—the French title for the Mona Lisa—apart from *Le Jocond*, as has been explained to us by Doctor Cyclopède (*Minute* of 28 March 1983), “by the shape of her bike”!
- 3 The bearded woman was a celebrity in the 19th century. Joséphine Boisdechêne, born in 1831 in Versoix, was put on display in France back in 1849. Térésa hymned the bearded woman at the Alcazar, in 1865, the year when Clémentine Delait was born, another extremely hirsute woman who was famous among First World War troops (French *poilus*, which, incidentally, also means hairy) (her story has been told by François Caradec and Jean Nohain), with whom Marcel Duchamp was probably better acquainted. A hundred years later, this latter would write “*rasée*”—shaved—on the Mona Lisa adorning the back of a playing card. He had a phobia about hair and advocated total depilation. Lydie Fischer Sarazin-Levassor complied—“Why not, if it gives him pleasure?” She mentions that anecdote in *Un Echec matrimonial*,⁴ memories of her Duchamp years edited and introduced by Marc Décimo in 2007, the same year that *Les Etats généraux du poil* was held at the Palais de Tokyo, brainchild of the Collège de ‘Pataphysique, on the 8, 9 and 10 clinamen 134 (the conference ended on 1 April vulg. In it, hair was compared to scales). Commenting on the 1965 playing card, and noting, in passing, that there was a lawn mower with the brand name Joconde, Décimo enjoyed the *excursus* and provided a most hilarious extract from the *rasibus* library. The effect of the list is there, from the beginning of his book to the end, sum of precise, chronologically listed notes: with the lengthy series of post-Duchampian Mona Lisas extending from 1920, with Francis Picabia who forgot the goatee, to 2014, with a mural made in China. The iconographic collecting ended up, incidentally, giving rise to an exhibition in Japan (Maebashi, Gunma province) in 2011. The *Vertige de la liste* has been singled out by the T.S. Umberto Eco; Décimo’s contribution to this kind of effect also resides in his commented inventory of the Duchamp library,⁵ as well as in his edition of the writings of Marie Le Masson Le Golft.⁶
- 4 If Marc Décimo has focused on L.H.O.O.Q., this is also because he is attentive to language. The L (*elle*, she) forgotten by Duchamp, during a 1964 lecture, echoes the double R of Rose Séavy and that of R. Mutt (which, in reverse, gives *Mutter*, i.e. “mother” in German): the play on letters and the puzzle introducing a dash of confusion into the genre.
- 5 Pronouncing the name of a letter to solve an enigma is a trick that dates back at least to the Renaissance (Cf. Céard and Margolin’s study of puzzles), and the tradition has never died. The often fantastic names of Les Incohérents use and misuse it (N. Hair, A.G. Laflaimne, S.A.C., Loys O., Dubontabac G., B. Nart, G.O. Mètre, K. Poral, K. Rabin). In the *Journal* of 20 September 1900, Alphonse Allais proposed a reform of spelling based on procedure. He no longer wrote “Hélène a eu des bébés” [Helen had babies], but “LN A U D BB”; a résumé of his novel in progress gives: “AID KN N E O PI DIN E LIA ET LV...” [Aidé Cahen est née au pays des Hyènes et elle y a été élevée...]. In those final years of the 19th century, Les Incohérents and Allais were nevertheless considerably preceded (and surpassed) when it came to crazy linguistics by a whole cohort of amateur linguists. Marc Décimo takes a look at them in the first volume of *Sciences et Pataphysique*, all 1024 pages

of it. What is involved here, needless to add, is involuntary pataphysics, not to be confused with the (voluntary) 'Pataphysique of the members of the College of the same name.

- 6 In the latter half of the 18th century, Jacques Le Brigant constructed a wild theory of Breton as the origin of all languages. In the beginning were the vowels, already laden with symbols. It is possible to find traces of the primitive tongue, the monosyllabic Celtic language, here, there and everywhere in the world, but it is at Pontrieux, the author's birth place (the location of Paradise), that the purest form of the primitive tongue of the Brigantes has been conserved (a people from whom he is a directly descended—he is an "elect"). It is the root of Hebrew, Chaldean, Syriac, Arabic, Persian, Greek, Latin, and French... His conception of language was essentially nominal; he argued using vague approximations, paronymy, and associations of ideas. He would interest Joyce... His procedures are close to those of Jean-Pierre Brisset,⁷ a literary lunatic about whom Marc Décimo wrote his dissertation,⁸ and who reckoned that the cry of the ancestral frog discovering sexuality was the origin of language: "Ai que ? Ai que ce ? Exe, sais que ce ? ce éque-ce, ce exe, sexe...". And not forgetting someone like Paul Tisseyre asserting that the sounds of the French language come from the cry of prehistoric beasts.⁹
- 7 In the wake of Le Brigant, other Celtomaniacal harbingers would emerge, such as Malo Corret de La Tour d'Auvergne and the Councillor Charles-Joseph de Grave, who turned Homer and Hesiod into Belgian Atlases, direct ancestors of the Gauls.
- 8 The army of delirious linguistics of eclectic researchers and other exceeded scholars would find refuge in the Société de linguistique, founded in Paris in 1854, and in its organ, *La Tribune des linguistes* (1858-1860), edited by Casimir Henricy. In 1854, in *Les Révolutionnaires de l'A-B-C*, Erdan campaigned for the search for a universal language. People were looking for solutions, some of which were dismissed, like *La Notographie, ou l'Art d'écrire aussi vite que la parole dans toutes les langues*, by Etienne Vidal, who, for example, proposed replacing "Le bon roi Dagobert a mis sa culotte à l'envers" [good king Dagobert put his pants on back to front] by "La lèn xa xé fa féan xéa lan za la xa fa xa faif"—that is called progress! Each one of those linguists was entitled to a notice, and their bibliography is often edifying. When rantings of this sort are attacked, people cry conspiracy and martyrdom—"enter the inevitable tirade about Galileo, Christopher Columbus and Salomon de Causs". The ideal member believed in the spirit of independence and was keen to resist oppression. Among his post-1848 revolution values, higgledy-piggledy and paradoxically in some cases: "attachment to the primacy of the soil, Gallic mythology, the *unitéiste* quest [Fourier], spiritualism, free thought, socialism, claimed positivism, freedom of association and the possibility of printing". There is something of the artist in all these mad linguists with their unshakeably obstinate belief in their own fiction.
- 9 The other side of this history is recounted to us in volume 2 of *Sciences et Pataphysique*. From 1864 to 1906, Michel Bréal, educated in Germany in the system of seminars and Bopp's comparativism (which he would translate), would hold a chair in comparative grammar at the Collège de France. He would contribute to the invention, in 1868, of the Ecole des hautes études where he taught the same discipline until 1881, when he voluntarily made way for Ferdinand de Saussure. The Société de linguistique de Paris, created in tandem in 1864, would ban in its *Mémoires* and *Bulletins* any communication about the origin of languages and about universal languages. The *Tribune des linguistes* was thenceforth well removed, but not without the odd gasp.

- 10 Marc Décimo is a lecturer at the University of Orléans (sciences of language); to this title he readily adds his status as Regent of the Collège de 'Pataphysique (Chair of Literary, Ethnographic and Architectural Amoriography).¹⁰ He was given the title unbeknownst to him and he only discovered it in 2000,¹¹ at the time of the disoccultation of the College.¹² The said college does indeed have a soft spot for the style of neologisms; to my knowledge, this has never been commented upon: "Amoriography" is visibly a term coined from the Greek *μωρία* (madness), which would mean that Décimo studies the creation of madness, but also, by taking *μωρία* for the rhetorical figure of contradiction and the prefix *α* in the privative sense, that he focuses on the writings of those who are insensitive to contradiction! Le Brigant, put through the ordeal of interpreting, through the Breton of Pontrioux, a language that is presented to him as Huron, but which was invented to trap him, makes fun of himself then gets round it by asserting that: "It is not possible to pronounce a single word which is not Celtic". According to Karl Popper: "A system that is part of empirical science must be able to be refuted by experience". One of the characteristics of Le Brigant and his successors is, on the other hand, the impermeability of their systems with regard to any counter-proof. One sometimes feels that, as a good academic, Décimo leans towards science—towards Bréal, Havet, Gaidoz, Reinach, Möhl, Meillet, Gaston Paris, and Saussure—, that he admires the administration of Victor Duruy and even more that of Jules Ferry, that he is for the secular Republic and the Enlightenment. It is, however, important to understand why the second volume, which, unlike the first, seems to deal with positive science, is nevertheless placed under the overall title of *Sciences et Pataphysique*.
- 11 'Pataphysique is the science of epiphenomena, and studies the imaginary world which is added on to this one. Although it is said that the only science is general science, there is a science of exceptions, a science of the specific, quoth, in substance, its inventor Faustroll, alias Alfred Jarry. Otherwise put, a matter of viewpoint, science itself being a special case of 'Pataphysique. A major reversal which we owe to one of the pivotal principles of the said 'Pataphysique, the principle of equivalence. Or, as Ruy Launoir explains in some detail, "Not only does the pataphysician accept no definitive scientific explanation, but, further, he attributes no moral value to any value, be it moral, aesthetic, or other: he holds these values to be simple facts of opinion. The principle of universal equivalence and of the conversion of opposites reduces the world considered in its pataphysical dimension to exclusively specific cases." Le Brigant and Saussure, both involved in the same fight?
- 12 Marcel Duchamp was Satrap of the College which welcomed other artists practising arts both fine and ugly, such as Max Ernst, Joan Miró, Man Ray, Escher, Jean Dubuffet, Enrico Baj, Asger Jorn, Roland Topor and Barry Flanagan. All of them, endowed with an imperturbable mood, like Marc Décimo, were probably well aware of the gay science of exceptions, with its imaginary solutions and its principle of equivalence.

NOTES

1. Grojnowski, Daniel. *Au commencement du rire moderne : l'esprit fumiste*, Paris : Corti, 1997
2. Marc Décimo writes that she was "conceived for the 1883 exhibition of *Arts incoherent*", and says of Sapeck that he was "part of the group of Incohérents". Strictly speaking, there was no group formed akin to that of the Hydropathes. At the Incohérents, to my knowledge, Sapeck exhibited just two works, in 1883 as it happens: *La Lune est le lorgnon d'un dieu qui n'a qu'un œil* (shown again in May 1889, shortly before its author sank into madness) and *Luttes de poitrines*.
3. Décimo, Marc. *Marcel Duchamp mis à nu : à propos du processus créatif*, Dijon : Les Presses du réel, 2004. Not forgetting the collective compilation *Marcel Duchamp et l'érotisme* (Dijon : les Presses du réel, 2008) edited by the same author.
4. Fischer Sarazin-Levassor, Lydie. *Un Echec matrimonial : le cœur de la mariée mis à nu par son célibataire même*, Dijon : Les Presses du réel, 2007
5. Décimo, Marc. *La Bibliothèque de Marcel Duchamp, peut-être*, Dijon : Les Presses du réel, 2002
6. Le Masson Le Golft, Marie. *Balance de la nature*, preceded by Marc Décimo, *La Femme qui aimait la nature*, Dijon : Les Presses du réel, 2005
7. Brisset, Jean-Pierre. *Œuvres complètes*, prefaced and edited by Marc Décimo, Dijon : Les Presses du réel, 2001
8. Edited by Michel Arrivé, another member of the Collège de 'Pataphysique, author of studies on Alfred Jarry and editor of the first volume of the complete works (Bibliothèque de La Pléiade). As a spin-off: Décimo, Marc. *Jean-Pierre Brisset : Prince des Penseurs, inventeur, grammairien et prophète*, Dijon : Les Presses du réel, 2001.
9. Décimo, Marc. *Le Diable au désert. Ananké Hel !*, followed by Paul Tisseyre-Ananké, *Rires et Larmes dans l'armée*, Dijon : Les Presses du réel, 2005.
10. There is no room here to comment on other research. Cf. Marc Décimo, *Les Jardins de l'art brut*, Dijon : Les Presses du réel, 2007 ; *Emilie-Herminie Hanin (1862-1948) : inventeure, peintresse naïve, brute et folle littéraire*, Dijon : Les Presses du réel, 2013.
11. Marc Décimo, communication of 13 April 2015 to the author.
12. On the history of the Collège, see: Launoir, Ruy. *Clefs pour la 'Pataphysique*, Paris : Seghers, 1969 (new augmented edition, L'Hexaèdre, 2005. *Les Très riches heures du Collège de 'Pataphysique*, Paris : Fayard, 2000. Collège de 'Pataphysique, Sous-Commission du Grand Extérieur, *Le Cercle des Pataphysiciens*, Paris : Mille et une nuits, 2008 (with contributions by Décimo).