Marcel Mariën's Woman Ajar. A case of minor photography?

Mariën's work, which risks slipping through art history's net.

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**Abstract** (**E**): This paper examines *Woman Ajar* (1985), a late, largely forgotten photo book by Marcel Mariën, one of the key figures of Belgian post war surrealism. Representing the female body as fragmented and alienated by small objects, Mariën's photographs balance between the private (amateurish) and the public (professional) and explores the fragile border between art and pornography. In addition, there is a sense of belatedness in them, which makes them particularly hard to label. This paper proposes the concept of minor photography, borrowed from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of a minor literature, as a valuable tool to approach Marcel

**Abstract (F):** 

Cet article examine *Woman Ajar* (1985), un livre de photographie tardif et largement oublié de Marcel Mariën, l'une des figures clés du surréalisme belge d'après-guerre. Représentant le corps féminin comme fragmenté et aliéné par de petits objets, les photographies de Mariën balancent entre les sphères privée (amateur) et publique (professionnelle) et explorent la frontière fragile entre l'art et la pornographie. En outre, il y a en elles un sens de la tardiveté, qui les rend particulièrement difficiles à étiqueter. Cet article propose le concept de photographie mineure, emprunté au concept de littérature mineure avancé par Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari, comme un outil précieux permettant d'approcher l'œuvre de Marcel Mariën, qui court le risque de glisser au travers du filet de l'histoire de l'art.

**Keywords:** Marcel Mariën, surrealism in Belgium, deskilling, anachronism, minor photography

### Article

In 1985 a peculiar photo book appeared on the market, under the revealing title Woman Ajar. The author of the 100 photographs of naked women was the socalled "last true Belgian surrealist" (Ketelbuters 1984), Marcel Mariën (1920-1993), then in his mid-sixties. The book was published by the recently formed Antwerp publishing house Loempia, which specialized in, among other things, erotic and anarchist, humorous comic-books. In the Dutch speaking part of the country *Loempia* was mostly known for publishing Urbanus-comics, which were rather naughty children's comics about the childhood of one of the most popular television comedians in Flanders and the Netherlands, Urbanus. Both in content and drawing style these comics were perceived as rather vulgar, certainly in comparison to Suske and Wiske or Tintin. The popular series had a print run of a 100,000 copies, which made more other financially risky enterprises possible. While Loempia's main activity clearly did not concentrate on art books, nor artist's books for that matter, its policy did allow for some side projects, as for instance an edition of the erotic engravings by fin de siècle artist Félicien Rops, or the book which is the topic of this paper.

Woman Ajar was published in three languages: French (La Femme entrouverte), Dutch (De Openstaande Vrouw) and English, involving a considerable risk on the part of the small publishing house. Printed on glossy art paper and sold at a rather expensive price of 1395 Belgian Franks, about 60 Euros today, it was clearly conceived as an artist's book. In addition, a deluxe edition of 50 signed and numbered copies, accompanied by an original photograph, were sold at prices of 4500 to 6500 Belgian Franks<sup>i</sup>.



Fig. 1 Marcel Mariën, "The other one" in *Woman Ajar*, Antwerpen: Loempia, 1985:10, © SABAM 2010.



Fig. 1 Marcel Mariën, "Portrait of the artist", in *Woman Ajar*, Antwerpen: Loempia, 1985: 106. "© SABAM 2010.

Taking a closer look inside the book, one recurrent element immediately stands out: the female body. Starting with an exploration of the face and ending with an Origine du monde-like celebration of the female sex as a kind of cosmic gateway, the book scrutinizes the female body without ever revealing its totality. Rather, the sequence of cropped bodies suggests a kind of bodily fragmentation in the form of one body-part after another (fig. 1). The first photographs focus on the face while simultaneously hiding it, often behind paper masksii. Later the torso receives facial qualities as well, as for instance when the nipple functions as an eye behind a cut-out paper figure. Mariën proceeds then to another part of the female body: the breasts, giving them an exhaustive treatment and finally arrives at the lower parts of the female torso, the pubic area. Here he circles around a bit but not for very long before he gives a first full frontal view, which is rapidly softened by the humorous addition of a toy horse. Having covered the most sensual parts of the body, the photographer then takes some distance and allows for more interplay between the different bodyparts. Finally, the book closes with a wink from the author: a reflection in the mirror of the vagina, revealing a self-portrait of Marcel Mariën (fig. 2).

Mariën's examination of the female body through a detailed analysis of its different body parts brings to mind some of the most typical procedures of surrealist photography. In the recent exhibition on surrealist photography and film, *La Subversion des images*, held at Centre Pompidou in Paris, a separate room was devoted to this fragmentary, detailed view on the world in general, and the female body in particular. This room full of images of isolated navels, bottoms, sexes, breasts, lips, eyes, or Boiffard's *Big toes* thematized the scopophilic pleasure in surrealist photography.

The same parade of anatomical details can be found in Mariën's collages, photographs and even in both the title and logo of his magazine *Les Lèvres Nues*. As Elza Adamowicz has suggested, this focus on anatomical detail can be related to surrealism's appropriation of sixteenth-century *blason* poetics:

"In Renaissance literature the *blason* genre was designed to celebrate – or vituperate – a woman. It is essentially descriptive, both an inventory and an invention, involving the enumeration of body parts and their metaphorization. Yet it is also narrative, using the topos of the exotic or consquistatdor's voyage of discovery or uncovering of the body. The surrealists appropriate the literary format of the blazon [...] to parodic

and poetic ends, subverting the genre by pushing its mechanics to their limits." (Adamowicz 1998: 175)

At first sight then, the cropping and fragmentation of the body in *Woman Ajar* could be labelled misogynist as this procedure of objectifying or even fetishizing the female body subjects women to the gaze of the male photographer. However, the book also invites a more careful reading, suggesting that these images are not completely disadvantageous to women. In contrast to the idealized and mediatized images of women present in the form of magazine cut-outs, Mariën's models are never idealized. They are all women he knew personally (Bussy 2007). These are not professional models but 'real' women who are clearly contrasted with the commodified women in the mass media or the idealized nudes in art history.

In his exploration of the body Mariën employs objects, most of which are very common and small in scale. Dice, toys or cards bring an element of play to the images whereas tourist miniature replicas of the Tour Eiffel or the Arc du Triomphe transform the female body into a landscape. Accordingly, Mariën inscribes himself within the tradition of the Brussels surrealist group, which considered the placing of ordinary, even banal objects in extraordinary contexts to be a very efficient method to suspend the procedures of habit. Theorized by Paul Nougé (1895-1967) in his writings on René Magritte's (1898-1967) paintings, the disturbing object became one of the trademarks of the Brussels surrealist group and could be regarded as the Brussels alternative for the automatic writing practices of the Parisian group centred around Breton (Nougé 1956: 85-89). It is this work of depaysagement of the object that is a central feature of Woman Ajar. However, in Mariën's pictures, the presence of objects is more amusing than disturbing. The light and almost pun-like character of his photographs becomes apparent when compared with the more famous and enigmatic series of surrealist photographs, La Subversion des images, taken by Paul Nougé in 1929-1930 (De Nayer 1995).

## Art in the name of Bad Taste?

The procedure of the disturbing object in *Woman Ajar* calls for some reflections on the effect these photographs have on their reader. Mariën's images may not have the strong enigmatic power of Nougé's *Subversion des images*, but they do seem to possess an affective quality of a completely different order. They are disturbing, often

provoking strong responses of rejection or disgust, not because of what they represent but because of the way in which this is represented. These images seem to have some erotic ambition, yet they are not titillating in the least. They do not look like the work of an artist at all, but instead like the work of a common or garden-variety photographer, in short, an amateur. Moreover, they seem anachronistic, as photographs that should have been made half a century earlier and seem lost in time. In short, if *Woman Ajar* is to be considered a work of art, it must surely be art in the name of bad taste.

### **Amateurism**

The first feature, the blatant amateurism of these pictures, is closely connected to the poverty of technical skill they demonstrate. Lighting, décor and composition all lack subtlety. Yet, this characteristic of *deskilling* should not necessarily present a 'problem'. John Roberts (Roberts 2007) has convincingly demonstrated that *deskilling* was one of the basic features of the historical avant-gardes, hence the Dadaist and Surrealist interest in different forms of vernacular photography. Furthermore, as Jeff Wall described in *Marks of indifference*, amateurism was one of the formal characteristics of the neo-avant-garde, which saw it as a suitable modus operandi to undo the fixed codes of high, institutionalized, subjective art and as a way of aligning art practice with general social/cultural practice (Wall 2005 [1995]).

If we accept the full scope of John Roberts' argument, however, what makes us recognize Duchamp's *Fountain* as a work of art, in spite of its deskilling, is a second movement of re-skilling, namely the immaterial labour implied in selecting, naming and re-contextualising a mass-reproduced urinal. In *Woman Ajar* this second movement, present in the humorous or poetic layer of the photographs, risks being too light to counterbalance the above described lack of artistic skill. In addition, in his overall treatment of the female body, Mariën seems to be standing on slippery ground. To use Kenneth Clark's terminology, *Woman Ajar* produces an awkward tension between 'the naked', as in the representation of a particular naked body, and 'the nude', to be understood as the idealized naked body of classical art (Clark 1985 [1972]). Mariën's images betray no effort to universalize or idealize his posing models, neither during production nor in the dark room, which makes them revert to the category of 'the naked': his photographs show bodies with undisguised flaws. As already suggested, Mariën seems to have deliberately played with both categories in

contrasting his 'naked' models with contemporary 'nudes' of the advertisement or porn industry. But whereas in Nan Goldin's *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1986), published only a year later, real or 'naked' bodies are a logical continuation of an intimate snapshot-photography, the photographs in *Woman Ajar* are artificial. They are staged, mostly taken in Mariën's attic, which was equipped as a small studio<sup>iii</sup>. As such, these photographs invite the viewer to read through the codes of the nude, while being simultaneously in discord with the represented bodies themselves, which in all their nakedness refer to a more private space into which the viewer has intruded.

Again, Mariën's staged photographs reveal a strong continuity with the photographs produced by the Brussels surrealists in the 1920s-1930s. The predominance of the Brussels group in the 'mise-en-scène' - section of the aforementioned exhibition at the Centre Pompidou is, in this regard, telling. That figures like Paul Nougé or René Magritte preferred staged pictures above spontaneous ones should not be surprising given their general mistrust of automatism<sup>iv</sup>. Suspicious of the so-called 'automatist' practices celebrated by Breton, they preferred deliberate and conscious writing and image making. As Poivert has argued, a characteristic of staged photography is that it forces the beholder to adopt the position of the outsider: excluded from the actual mise-en-scène, the only role left for him to play is that of the voyeur (Poivert 2009). Also staying offscreen is Marcel Mariën himself, the master performer, photographer and stage director whose traces are nevertheless omnipresent in the objects placed carefully on these motionless bodies.

This theatricality connects *Woman Ajar* with some of the earliest photographs made by Mariën in the mid 1940s – early 1950s. Almost the complete spectrum of Mariën's late photographs is already present in them: their amateurish appearance, the body and its relation to objects, the body as a canvas on which poems are written, the play of erotics and humour. Importantly, their very different context of display gives them a far more intimate and private character. Mariën kept most of these pictures in small albums, notebooks almost, meant for private eyes only. Most of them are conserved in the *Archives et Musée de la Littérature* and have never been published<sup>v</sup>. Leafing through these albums generates a completely different experience from browsing an official publication such as *Woman Ajar*. Not only is there the difference of scale and a haptic quality that gives them more charm, but foremost there is the experience of leafing through a forbidden (or at least hidden) family album. In many ways the images in *Woman Ajar* still carry a residue of this intimate quality, which

feels mismatched with the enterprise of publishing it as an artist's book, reflected in the glossy paper and classic lay-out. It is this tension between public ambition and private practice that makes these images often cross the line of 'good taste' and at times incline towards pornography<sup>vi</sup>.

### Anachronism

This brief historical elaboration brings more clearly into perspective the second feature of these images, their blatant anachronism. *Woman Ajar* could be regarded as a late publication by the 'late' or perhaps even 'latest' surrealist in Belgium, Marcel Mariën, the man who became at an age of 17 an accomplice of the Brussels surrealist group centred around Paul Nougé and René Magritte, both of whom were more than 20 years his senior. Mariën remained faithful to this Brussels legacy all his life and rigorously followed Nougé's strict moral guide lines until his death. As opposed to other main figures of the second generation, Mariën would not be distracted by the 'sidetracks' towards spontaneity, drawn out by Christian Dotremont (1922-1979) and Cobra, or towards conceptualism like Marcel Broodthaers (1924-1976).

At the time he published *Woman Ajar* Magritte's artistic language had been part of the national and international canon for over 20 years, Nougés *La Subversion des images* had existed for half a century, and Rosalind Krauss was rescuing surrealist photography from oblivion (Krauss 1985). In Belgium, as the current research of Liesbeth Decan demonstrates, artists such as Jacques Lizène and J.L. Nyst were continuing the legacy of Marcel Broodthaers, producing a form of conceptual art with strong surrealist undercurrents (Decan 2007).

In many ways, as an artist who falls between two generations, staying loyal to the first while already belonging to the second, this anachronism has been part of Mariën's oeuvre and strategy from the very beginning. Already in the early 1950s when Mariën started publishing the as yet unpublished writings of Nougé in his *Les Lèvres Nues*, accomplices of the first hour, Marcel Lecomte (1900-1966) and Camille Goemans (1900-1960), criticized this act precisely as "anachronistic" (Paenhuysen 2005).

All these observations lead inevitably to the question whether it is interesting or at all useful to discuss this late manifestation of surrealism in Belgium. And, if so, what would be the best way to approach it? The answer to the first question seems positive, if only because Mariën was one of the most important witnesses of this first

generation of surrealists in Belgium. It was primarily his writing of *L'activité du surréalisme en belgique* that secured him a position in the history of art. Mariën became Belgian surrealism's number one archivist, publishing unknown texts and letters by its key figures in *Les Lèvres Nues* and *Les faits accomplis*. However, besides this activity of unquestionably major importance, he was also the producer of an extremely consistent, though varied, oeuvre comprising texts, collages, assemblages, objects, photographs and even film. Already in 1972, Flemish art critic Freddy De Vree beautifully described this oeuvre as a collection of "tinkering, clumsy collages and constructions, coarse jokes and schoolboy games" (De Vree 1972)<sup>vii</sup>. Deskilling thus had been a feature of his artistic enterprise all along. Moreover, Mariën's choice of a medium was made according to its "efficiency".

This lesser known aspect of Mariën's work could help us to better understand the very specific context of Brussels surrealism that played an important role in the emergence of the postmedium condition, a term used by Rosalind Krauss to describe the oeuvre of Marcel Broodthaers (Krauss 1999). As a figure bridging two generations, Mariën's oeuvre shows how this postmedium condition is in fact strongly indebted and connected to the ways of thinking of the first generation of Brussels surrealists. Mariën, strongly believing in the relevance of his mentors' texts in postwar times, became the main publisher of their (often hidden or forgotten) texts and made them accessible for new generations to come. Hence his personal search for efficiency and pragmatic openness for new media can be easily traced back to the writings of Nougé:

"Nul moyen ne nous semblait négligeable, [...] nous nous aidions à inventer sur le réel deux ou trois idées efficaces." (Nougé 1956: 55).

"Qu'il nous soit donné de découvrir quelque instrument plus léger, plus efficace et nous abandonnerons pour jamais [...] cet outillage de peu de prix. A l'heure présente [...] les mots, couleurs etc. nous ne pouvons encore leur refuser la chance d'une mystérieuse et solennelle affection. Ainsi se justifierait la musique d'André Souris, la peinture de René Magritte, ou la poésie de Camille Goemans, aujourd'hui musicien, peintre ou poète, mais demain peut-être..." (Nougé 1956 : 56).

# Avant-/Arrière-garde?

For all these reasons, it seems interesting to see how these late photographs fit within a rich and varied oeuvre. This leaves us with the second question: How to proceed?

As the earlier description of the seeming ananchronism of *Woman Ajar* suggests, it is hard to label this work as a work of the avant-garde. If it seems out-of-time, it is certainly not for its quality of running ahead. Perhaps a term recently proposed in literary studies by William Marx, "arrière-garde" or reargarde, might prove more helpful (Marx 2004). That depends on how we interpret the concept. If we understand it as a 'coming too late', a following of the previous generation's avant-garde and hence, a working along the sideline of a new generation of avant-gardists (or even being passed by), the term arrière-garde appears to suit the practice of Mariën rather well. Especially when his late, increasingly pornographic work is taken into consideration, the stereotypical image of the aging, sexually obsessed surrealist artist seems hard to avoid. Moreover, compared to his visual and textual interventions in the first series of *Les Lèvres Nues* (1954-1958), Mariën's images at the end of his career seem to have lost their cutting edge.

If, however, we understand arrière-garde as a movement of going in the opposite direction from the avant-garde, the term becomes rather questionable in the context of Marcel Mariën. Vincent Kaufmann for instance links the concept with an a-historical/anti-intellectual/ nationalist and socially conservative attitude (Kaufmann 2004). This definition of arrière-garde then, pointing in the direction of the retrograde artist would not be at all helpful in assessing the work of Mariën.

Perhaps there is a different temporality at work in Mariën's oeuvre, and *Woman Ajar* in particular, one beyond or maybe better beside the avant- or arrièregarde. As has recently been asserted in modernism and avant-garde studies (Piotrewski 2009, Friedman 2006), the very terminology of avant-garde (or modernism) becomes rather problematic once one leaves the 'centre' and enters the 'periphery' where different temporalities are seen at work. Although situated in immediate proximity to European capitals of art such as Paris, London or Berlin, Brussels can be considered a periphery within the centre. Certainly with regard to surrealism, which in Belgium seems to have had resonances far beyond the death of the key figures of the first generation, a different temporal demarcation might be appropriate. Viii

But even then Marcel Mariën could be considered a difficult case. In his explorations of the fragile border between art and life he seems to have deliberately distanced himself from the art scene by adopting an art practice in the margin.

Art critic Freddy de Vree articulated this problem of placing Mariën within the art scene as follows:

"I have never managed to relate these works with any aesthetic enterprise, with a gallery presentation, with selling in our absurd system. I always saw them as self-evident, but at the same time, evidently marginal, not on the fringe, but in the frame itself, too bad to be art, too good on the other hand to still be dealing with art. It is not as much something against art, as something beside it, it is a kind of production which has taken on the form of certain art works, just as its hard to distinguish Marcel Mariën, both in dress and in language, from any ordinary school director." (De Vree 1972)

# Woman Ajar: A case of minor Photography?

To close this article, I would like to propose another tool to approach this kind of work, which seems to risk slipping through art history's net, namely the concept of "minor art" a term borrowed from philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Deleuze and Guattari developed this notion first in their work on Kafka, *Kafka towards a minor literature* (original French edition 1975). Before connecting their notion of the minor to Mariën's *Woman Ajar*, it is useful to briefly clarify it.

First of all, Deleuze and Guattari conceive life as 'continuous variation'. They explain this very clearly in *A Thousand Plateaus* (original French edition in 1980) in their elaboration of linguistics. For them, variation in language, as in life, always comes first. Norms and rules (for example, grammar) are just variations that are fixed at a certain moment, extracted from the 'flux of variations' and as such made the 'standard'. Hence, a constant or invariant could be understood as a variable that obtains a temporary or relatively central position and the process of obtaining this position is strongly related to power relations. Therefore, what is 'standard' or the 'norm' could be understood as that which is said to be the 'standard' by the authoritative speaker. The terms minor versus major have to do with the way in which this variation is dealt with. Either the variables are treated in such a way as to extract from them constants and constant relations, in which case we could speak of a major use. Or they can be set in oscillation, become intensified, which could be a definition of a minor use.

Translated to literature, minor literature is closely related to that which a 'minority' does with the dominant language, which can be understood as an

intensifying of the dominant language. The use of English by Afro-Americans is a good example of such a minor treatment of language. Although 'minor usages' are certainly not restricted to marginal positions, it is there that the play of variation is most alive. In this regard, it might be important to understand Marcel Mariën as a figure in the margin. Differing from his fellow surrealists; he had no bourgeois, nor an exclusively French speaking background (being the son of a Flemish father and a Walloon mother). Moreover, having dropped out of school at the age of 14, he had to earn a living with working- and middle class jobs; working one day as a dockworker, another as a typist or a sailor (Mariën 1983).

A more specific definition of minor literature can be found in the third chapter of the book on Kafka, in which Deleuze and Guattari propose three features: 1. deterritorialization, 2. politicization and 3. collectivization.

- 1. In a minor literature writers experiment with their medium and, as such, bring the dominant fixed codes into movement.
- 2. Every individual intrigue in a minor literature is immediately linked to politics. In Kafka's *Trial*, for example, "K" runs through all segments of society, continuously connecting the familial (Oedipal) triangle with other segments of society, commercial, bureaucratic, juridical etc. The political power of the minoritarian however is not to be understood in terms of overt political statements or critique, but rather fulfils a creative, affirmative function.
- 3. Finally, in a minor literature every enunciation takes on a collective value. Basically, this implies that in a minor literature writers try to efface themselves and articulate collective voices. In a major literature, on the other hand, authors seek to develop a unique voice and express themselves as individuals.

Where do these characteristics take us when we link them to *Woman Ajar?* The first feature of deterritorialization is helpful in order to better understand the general awkwardness that Mariën's photographs evoke. Playing with dominant representational schemes of women in both mass media and art history, shifting the language of art photography to pornography and vice versa and balancing between the private (amateurish/naked) and public (professional/nude), Mariën produces an inbetween photography, which seems particularly hard to label. In an interview conducted in 1994 on the occasion of his recent photographs, Mariën articulated this as follows:

"Ces œuvres - je pense- sont aussi éloignées de ce que peuvent produire des professionnels de la photo que des visées de professionnels de la pornographie. Je ne serai apprécié ni des uns ni des autres! Les premiers sont tellement obnubilés par le langage photographique qu'ils en oublient l'objet, les autres se moquent bien des idées. Or c'est l'idée, ici, qui importe. C'est elle qui empêche l'effet de monotonie qui marque la production érotique courante (revues, cinéma, etc.), elle qui relie le corps à l'esprit et le situe dans un réseau complexe de relations." (Ketelbuters 1984)

2. Politicization: As mentioned above, Mariën inscribed himself in the project of the Brussels surrealist group. Although many of its members had strong communist sympathies, they distanced themselves from the party in order to secure their artistic liberty<sup>ix</sup>. They saw art as a powerful means to fight the dangers of habit, to open the mind towards new possibilities, new experiences. An essential procedure to achieve this rupture was the *objet bouleversant*, ordinary objects placed in unfamiliar contexts, in a way so as to suspend the procedures of habit. Although this method is one of the recurrent elements of *Woman Ajar*, it had lost most of its subversive impact by the mid 1980s. What seems to be really at stake in this project is the way in which it challenges the art system by pushing its representational codes to the limits. Bad taste in this regard should then no longer be considered as a failure but rather as a powerful and poisonous tool by which to achieve this goal. Already in 1954 Mariën described the surrealist 'iconoclast' strategy, which could be considered to be his personal strategy, as follows:

"Ils inventent des objets et des images où le contrepoison est comme mêlé à leur tissue, où l'acte de sacrilège n'est plus fonction d'une intervention extérieure mais installé en permanence dans l'oeuvre même, incorporée à celle-ci. [...] Il ne s'agit pas de caricature, mais d'une entreprise où la poésie et l'humour s'allient pour dégager d'une imagerie routinière l'évidence quotidienne grossièrement maquillée. » (Mariën 1954: 21)

3. Collectivization: The Deleuzo-Guattarian notion of collective enunciation is omnipresent in Mariën's work. Given Mariën's personal loyalty to Nougé's moral principles, the influence of the latter's following line « j'aimerais assez, que ceux d'entre nous dont le nom commence à marquer un peu, l'*effacent* » (Nougé 1956: 79), cannot be underestimated. That this was more than an eloquent phrase is evident when we consider the typical strategies used by Nougé and his accomplices: quoting,

rewriting, falsification and a cult of anonymity were the main features. Notions of 'mastership' or 'authorship' were suspect and amateurish practices were embraced. Hence, they deliberately connected their work with that of others (dead or alive) and with broader social practice. Likewise in Woman Ajar, visual references going from Magritte to Courbet and a poor execution of the photographs shut the door to any personal style or touch of mastership in the book. Hence, releasing Woman Ajar via the niche publishing house Loempia makes perfect sense and could have answered Mariën's need to reach a public of 'accomplices' without having to surrender to the official art circuit. But the risk in this enterprise of turning away from art as 'autonomous form' and its dependence on the art institution is to become entirely swallowed up by the heteronomy of life (Rancière 2010). In short, as history has shown, the danger of Mariën's project was that in the end it would no longer be perceived as art at all but merely as a marginal activity, more an art of living than a new form of art speaking for a new kind of life, doomed to become invisible and thus forgotten. But that was probably the risk Mariën wanted to take and the only conceivable destination. When asked in a 1984 interview, for the meaning of surrealism, Marcel Mariën's answer was crystal-clear: «Le dédain de l'argent, des honneurs, de tout ce qui ressemble à une carrière. » (Gillemon 1986).

"How many styles or genres or literary movements, even very small ones," ask Deleuze and Guattari, "have only one single dream: to assume a major function in language [...]. Create the opposite dream: know how to create a becoming-minor." (Deleuze 2007 [1975]: 27).

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Brussels, Archives et Musée de la Littérature française, Marcel Mariën, FS47 EOO44

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>ii</sup>This hiding of the face might have had a pragmatical reason, as some of the women photographed, wanted to stay incognito. (Bussy 2007: 85).

iii Mariën did not have a dark room and did not develop his photographs personally. (Bussy 2007: 119)

iv Interestingly enough, both Nougé's and Magritte's images were not meant to be published at the moment they were taken. Like most of Nougé's texts it was Marcel Mariën who published his series of *La Suversion* in Les Lèvres NuesLes Lèvres Nues (Nougé 1968). Magritte's images were only made public posthumously. (Canonne 2007: 278-280)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>v</sup> An exception are three small images from the collection of the Charleroi Museum of Photography which have recently been published in the *La Subversion des images* catalogue, page 107.

vi That Mariën's late work inclined more and more towards the pornographic, can be demonstrated by one of his last exhibitions, held at Galerie La Marée in 1988, with the revealing title: *Pornographie pour tous*. In the accompanying little catalogue, Mariën celebrates pornography for its efficient visual language and its direct sensual impact on the beholder

vii Author's translation

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viii See in this regard the challenging temporal demarcation of Xavier Canonne's landmark work on Belgian Surrealism (Canonne 2007).

ix However, this attitude would be disputed after World War II, when a young generation, amongst whom the Belgian Christian Dotremont, would plead for a stronger "political" commitment and founded "Le Surréalisme Révolutionnaire" (Canonne 2007:52-56)

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