

The binary comics of a non-binary artist: how Vaughn Bodé's gender structures his work

Romain Becker (Lyon)

At first glance, the graphically bizarre and thematically raunchy comics of the self-proclaimed comic book messiah have no link to his transidentity – and yet, the structure of his strips and Vaughn Bodé's vision of gender and the world are actually inseparable. I want to show to what extent the deconstruction of comics in Bodé's work mirrors the construction of his complex gender, how the exposure of his genderfluid identity permeates even the graphic layout of his pages and the course of his "concerts".

Regarding the content, everything in Bodé's colorful fantasy world is contrasted in a binary way (for instance, horny women face impotent human-looking lizards), but he also splits the form in two. His characteristic "pictography"-style questions the traditional structure of comics by establishing gaps elsewhere than just between distinct panels: the latter are clearly split between speech bubbles and drawing, which leads to binary comics in which text and image work independently, yet necessarily interlock.

It is only through this means that Bodé's self-staging is possible: this dichotomy enables him to entirely remove written text from his strips and thus become an indispensable part of his art, since he becomes the only intermediary for the plot. Contrary to most of his printed comics, Bodé draws attention to his own questioning gender : he appears in leather clothes, wearing jewelry, and oftentimes tells his life story, among which finding himself through different religions and lovers.

However, contrary to his comics, Bodé's gender identity is non-binary and one can establish a link between his contrastful works and the world view he based on his spirituality : contraries are actually one, they converge, just as is the case with his identity. In spite of various psychiatrists' estimations, he is convinced of being a woman, yet interrupts his hormone therapy after a few weeks, because he did not feel like one after all. Afterwards, Bodé calls himself „omnisexual“ and eludes the typical men/women pattern, a fact around which he centers his coming-out in a comic. With Schizophrenia, he delivers his masterpiece which can be seen as the climax of his gender and comic experiences, shortly before another "sexual" experience, autoerotic asphyxiation, costed him his life..

Kurzbiographie

- 1993 Born in Vénissieux, France.
- 2011 High-school diploma at the Deutsch-Französisches Gymnasium in Saarbrücken.
- 2014 Bachelor in German studies at the Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) in Lyon.



Gesellschaft für Comicforschung

2015 „Der König ist tot, es lebe der König: Die Entwicklung Ralf Königs vom Zeichner für die Szene zum engagierten Autor für alle“, Master’s thesis, dir.: Prof. Anne Lagny of the ENS Lyon. Bachelor in English studies.

2016 Lecturing fellow at Duke University, USA. „From military to mystic: Vaughn Bodé’s travels across the underground“, Master’s thesis, dir.: Prof. Jean-Paul Gabilliet of Bordeaux 3 Montaigne.

2017 Passed the Agrégation state exam in order to teach German at secondary education level. Contributor for issue 23 of comic fanzine Gorgonzola (<http://legouttoir.free.fr/>), writer of two articles, “The contrastful gospel of Bodé’s“ und „Bodé : comic book messiah or performer?“

2018 Master’s degree in German studies at the ENS Lyon. Currently working on a doctoral thesis on the role of editors in the legitimization process of comics in Germany.