

INTERVIEW WITH YVES-MARIE MAHÉ

by ANDRÉ HABIB*

Yves-Marie Mahé has been one of the most important figures of experimental French cinema since the late 90's. Born in Morlaix in Brittany (France), he founded many important film collectives, among them *La lueur déchirée* and *Collectif négatif*, and he has been an active member of the film laboratory *L'Etna*. He is also one of the most prolific voices in contemporary found footage practices, working both in film and video, repurposing trailers, porn films of the 70's and 80's, home movies, videoclips as well as blockbuster films, TV news broadcasts, etc. Pornographic material features prominently, and in various forms and modes, very early in his work, in provocative, witty, ironic and creative films like *Thème/variations* (1998), *Va te faire enculer* (*Go Fuck Yourself*, 1998), *Fuck* (1999), *Bitte* (*Cock*, 2001), *Hybride* (2001-2002), *Un air défaite* (*An Air of Defeat*, 2005), and *Eveil et initiation* (*Awakening & Initiation*, 2005). In other words, there were many reasons why we sent him a few questions in the context of this special dossier on found footage films and pornography.

André Habib: How do you explain your interest in pornographic material in the creation of your first films? Were these the types of films you first encountered as a youth (you mentioned that you have little interest in contemporary pornography)?

Yves-Marie Mahé: As a teenager, I was part of the first generation that discovered pornography on television. But if you didn't have a subscription to Canal+ (the pay channel) the image was blurred. That of course reinforced our fascination because we would be forced to imagine what we could not see. But it's really by chance that I started including pornographic material as a starting point for my films. For an evening of performances I had put together in Morlaix, Brittany, in 1996,

the artist Hervé Merer, who has since passed away, gave some Super 8 porn films he had scratched and destroyed. These strips of films later became *Va te faire enculer* (1998). I also projected during that evening some footage from experimental rock concerts I had shot at *Instants Chav* [an important venue for noise and avant-garde music in Paris] that I recently reworked for a feature length documentary.

A. H.: Was there another reason why you had an interest in pornographic material?

Y. M. M.: In many of my films, there was the idea of decomposing movement, and rather than using sports images, I preferred using images of people having sex.



Eveil et initiation
Yves-Marie Mahé (2005)

A. H.: Where did you stumble across the other footage you use, in *Fuck* for instance?

Y. M. M.: For *Fuck*, I found the Super 8 films myself, in some junk-shop. After that, many many people started giving me porn films to repurpose and I got a bit sick of it after a while. I'm not saying this to distance myself from XXX films, but for a long time it was hard for me to get rid of this label of pornographer. I now realize that it's better to have a label than not at all. The one I have at the moment (underground music specialist) is just as false or at least insufficient.

A. H.: Although certain films were finished digitally, the original material was on film. And the film was often edited and manipulated on film. Is there a reason for that?

Y. M. M.: The fact that it was film (Super 8 or 16mm) was very important in order to do a metric montage of nine frames (like in *Hybride*, which was deeply influenced by the work of Kurt Kren) with the splices that jump in the gate. It was also essential to be able to attack directly the film stock with bleach (like in *Fuck*). My work on 16mm (*Bitte*) consists of refilming some 35mm porn footage, frame by frame. I was very influenced in this by Martin Arnold's work.

A. H.: And could you explain your interest with 70's porn? Did it have something to do with a certain transgressive dimension it may have carried at a certain time? (I'm thinking of the films of Jean-Pierre Bouyxou for instance, who made underground films and then went on to do porn films in the 70's and 80's.)

Y. M. M.: I was using porn films from the 70's because they were on film and in the 90's, experimental cinema was working essentially on film, not on video.

A. H.: How would you present the music track for your Super 8 films, like *Thème/variations* or *Va te faire enculer*?

Y. M. M.: It was easy to sync the projectors simply using CD's. The music didn't need to be perfectly matched frame by frame. This being said, a number of times, for the screenings of *Va te faire enculer*, the musician Dan

Bitte
Yves-Marie Mahé (2001)





Un air défaite
Yves-Marie Mahé (2005)

Dahan played live using his sampler. Once I screened the film at 24 f/s (frames per second) rather than the usual 18 f/s, which made Dan sweat a lot! He has since then created the soundtrack for five of my films, as well as those of many of my friends.

A. H.: Within a certain tradition of the French avant-garde (from Dada to Lettrism let's say), pornography always involved a degree of provocation, an attack on moral and social norms. What was it for you?

Y. M. M.: When I used XXX images in my first films, it was to evoke sexuality in a frontal, direct way, but very quickly it became, on the contrary, to install an ironic distance (in *Hybride*, or *C'est bon pour le morale*, [2005]) with the use of the soundtrack (by using radio shows, pop songs, Christian preachers, etc.) Often, I also reworked porn films in order to transform sex scenes into rape scenes (*Bitte, Un air défaite*).

A. H.: You mentioned in an interview once, that you would project films at parties, and sometimes you would throw in some porn films to make people freak out. Could you tell me more about that?

Y. M. M.: Yes, the fact of projecting porn films at parties was clearly a form of provocation. And indeed, the mood was broken and the screening was interrupted. People often

wanted to slap me. It was really crazy fun! The reason why I stopped is that I didn't want part of the audience to be uneasy in the end. Using porn films often hides the point. The audience focuses on the nudity and the physical act and don't listen (or hear) the meaning of the film. Since then I evoke sex without showing it. Either on the soundtrack, like in *Masterchef topführer*, in 2012, where President Sarkozy is humiliated by an SM mistress. Or in a film I did in 2010, called *Relrap erdnetne suov ed edalam dner em aç, (klat uoy raeh ot kzo em sekam ti)* where I used a series of images of people coming in and of corridors or going in and out of rooms.

Recently, I thought of using an interview with Alain Soral (a fascist vermin) and the porn producer Pierre Woodman (who is maybe not a fascist, but still a major asshole). I wanted to draw a parallel between the hateful comments of Soral that have often sexual undertones (for instance his way of repeating phrases like "that whore of a journalist" [*salope de journaliste*]) and the way Woodman directs his actresses by insulting them every two seconds. But it didn't work out, since their interviews had no interest. And finally, I decided I didn't want to spend time listening to those two sad sods.

* Translated to English from French by André Habib.