

## Jacques Kebadian, From One Revolution to Another

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**ABSTRACT** The career of filmmaker Jacques Kebadian (born April 20, 1940, in Paris) is striking for its loyalty to people, ideas and revolutionary ideals. In the 1960s, the author of *Trotsky* (1967) took part in several far-left groups, a filmmakers' collective (ARC, Atelier de Recherche Cinématographique/Film Research Studio), and many, often clandestine, interventions. His work then shifted to accompanying internationalist struggles, supporting undocumented migrants, commemorating the Armenian genocide, following artists he was close to, and portraying women in the Resistance whom he admired. We asked him to detail some of the stages on this unique trajectory. The interview was conducted in French, in July 2023, and then translated into English.

**KEYWORDS** May 68; Trotskyism; militant actions; collective films.

In anticipation of an in-depth study of Jacques Kebadian's work, Cyrus Boyer and Nicole Brenez decided to interview Jacques Kebadian on the theme of cinema and revolution for *Aniki*. This interview took place in Paris, near the Eglise d'Auteuil, during the summer of 2023. It was, then, transcribed by Cyrus Boyer and Nicole Brenez, proofread by Jacques Kebadian, and translated by Cyrus Boyer.



Image 1: Jacques Kébadian during the interview in Paris, July 11, 2023. | Photograph by Cyrus Boyer | © Cyrus Boyer.

**Cyrus Boyer** – You studied at the IDHEC (Institut des hautes études cinématographiques/Institute for Advanced Cinematographic Studies), then worked with Robert Bresson, while developing revolutionary ideas. At what point did these ideals appear in your life?

**Jacques Kébadian** – Before the IDHEC and Robert Bresson, I grew up in a communist environment, with my father being a communist sympathizer. I remember how deeply moved we were when Stalin died, and I think I even cried. I had the feeling that the world was going to end, that Stalin represented peace and paradise, and that we were going to live in hell. I was twelve; it was in 1953. Then, in high school (Première), I spent some time at the Jeunesses Communistes (Communist Youth). I also had a wonderful history teacher who must have been a Communist himself, and we studied the French Revolution. I didn't just study this subject at the Lycée, I also read Saint-Just and Robespierre, and was passionate about it, which is partly reflected in my film *Trotsky*.

**Nicole Brenez** – What high school did you go to?

**JK** – It was the Lycée Carnot in Paris. Actually, I went to a lot of *lycées*, because I was expelled every two years. I never stayed in the same one for more than two years. I was expelled, I guess, for indiscipline, maybe because I was talking too much, because I was too restless. But it wasn't

for revolutionary ideas. From the *seconde*,<sup>1</sup> my ideas became clearer. At that time, the crisis with the Communist Party was already there, due to the events in Hungary.<sup>2</sup> There were some debates in our communist cell; we couldn't understand how Russian tanks could have come to crush the Hungarian revolution. Party members came to explain that it was both for economic reasons and because of the fascist movements that were infiltrated, that there had been mistakes, and so on. But we had a boy in our cell who was a Tito supporter, and therefore independent of this Stalinist interpretation. So my revolutionary engagement was built up little by little. It was in particular the Algerian war that exacerbated the crisis with the Communist Party, because the PCF was calling for peace in Algeria, and we couldn't understand why they didn't support the "Algerian revolution". Perhaps many people did not realize this at the time. The Algerian war brought transition and the idea of revolution; that's when I first became interested in it. When I was in philosophy at the Lycée Condorcet, I came into contact with Hubert, Alain Krivine's twin brother, who was then a young high-school student and later became the leader of the Trotskyist Communist League. In 1958, Alain was one of the best sellers of the Jeunesses Communistes newspaper, *L'Avant-Garde*, which earned him a place at the Festival of Democratic Youth, in Moscow. He was still in line with the PCF while his brothers were already Trotskyites. That's how I got in touch with the networks supporting the FLN (Front de Libération Nationale/National Liberation Front). I didn't take part in any big interventions, but, for example, we went to railway stations, got on trains, handed out tracts to departing soldiers and wrote slogans on cars. After the Algerian War, of course, there was Vietnam. And here it was the same: the Communist Party was not very opposed to the Vietnam War. I don't know if it was due to the influence of Godard's film or not, but I used to go to Harry's Bar where there were G.I.s with their American cars, because there were still American bases in France and soldiers who used to drink there, at Harry's Bar in the Madeleine. And we were using cans of paint to write *FLN vaincra* (FLN will win), *US hors du Vietnam* (US out of Vietnam) on the beautiful American cars.

<sup>1</sup> The year before secondary school, when students are aged between 15 and 16.

<sup>2</sup> The Budapest Uprising, or 1956 Revolution, was a spontaneous popular revolt against the Hungarian communist regime and its policies imposed by the USSR. It lasted from 23 October to 10 November 1956.

**NB** – *Masculin féminin* was shot in 1966, so you must have done it before Jean-Pierre Léaud.

**JK** – To come back to Algeria, it was more serious. I might have gone to Sweden or somewhere else, but I managed to get reformed with a bit of complicity: I would not have gone there anyway. And so, during my philosophy year and my preparatory year for the IDHEC entrance exam at the Lycée Voltaire, I was a ‘suitcase carrier’ in Lyon and at the same time, we were doing firebomb and Molotov cocktail training, to attack trains leaving with military equipment.<sup>3</sup> But I was never really part of any specific actions on trains. On the other hand, one action failed, but it was a big one: we were all in two cars waiting at the Fresnes prison, where some militants were about to escape, and we had to pick them up. Unfortunately, the escape failed: we later read about it in *France-Soir*. However, the organizers had managed to transfer a machine gun into the prison, which was quite a big deal. And we were there to pick up the prisoners, to protect them just in case... Among the prisoners was Olivier Hadouchi’s father. When I told him about this attempt during a meeting with Angela Davis in Nanterre, Olivier Hadouchi told me: ‘My father was one of those who was going to escape’. So, we could say that it is not cinema, it is not revolution either; these are engagements which are, let’s say, a little risky.

**NB** – Was this part of the Jeanson network?

**JK** – No, not the Jeanson network, I was in the other one, Jeune Résistance (Young Resistance), linked to the Jeanson network’s ‘suitcase carriers.’<sup>4</sup>

**CB** – Which revolutionary thinkers inspired you?

**JK** – Let’s go back in time a little: in terms of cinema, let’s say Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov and even Vsevolod Poudovkin. Then, in literature, there is Marx. But I haven’t read the great works of Marx, I have only read the *Manifesto*, and that was enough for me to consider myself a Marxist. And then there were a few texts about the Paris Commune: one of the historical events that influenced me most, apart

<sup>3</sup> ‘Suitcase carrier’ was the nickname given to French militants transporting funds and false papers on behalf of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) during the Algerian war.

<sup>4</sup> Jeune Résistance (Young Resistance) was the movement of resistance fighters refusing to do their military service in Algeria, founded in 1958 by Henri Curiel. Its members included Alain Krivine, Jean-Louis Hurst and Robert Davezies.

from the French Revolution of course, was the Paris Commune. When I was young, among the books I loved was Jules Vallès' *L'enfant, L'adolescent*...

**CB** – In which context did you discover Eisenstein's films? In a family context?

**JK** – No, rather at the Cinémathèque Française. I used to go to the cinema in Colombes, the same town where Eddy Mitchell, born the same year as me, later conceived and created "La Dernière Séance".<sup>5</sup> Every Sunday, I went to see American films and cartoons in this little cinema in a side street near the market. But back then, it was film noir, westerns, it was mostly American. For me, back then, cinema was all about actors and westerns. I loved that. I discovered Eisenstein at the Cinémathèque when I was in *Première*. I was lucky enough to meet a French teacher in high school who was like a spiritual father to me, where there was a loving relationship on his side, for me it was a loving friendship... So you could say that, in two years, thanks to him, I discovered theater, Beckett, Ionesco, Jean Genet, Brecht, Kateb Yacine, Roland Dubillard... It was the heyday of the Théâtre de Lutèce, with theater people such as Roger Blin and Jean-Marie Serreau.<sup>6</sup> And above all, the Cinémathèque in rue d'Ulm, several evenings a week... Literature, museums, Mozart operas...

**NB** – What was this teacher's name?

**JK** – Georges Sallet, he was also a theater critic and signed his papers as Gilles Sandier.

**NB** – He was a very famous critic, then.

**JK** – Yes, he published a novel, *L'an n'aura plus d'hiver* (1960); and two books about theater: *Théâtre et combat*, in 1970, and later *Théâtre en crise* (1982).

**NB** – Where and when was that?

**JK** – It was at the Lycée Carnot. I spent two years of *première* with him.<sup>7</sup> At the beginning, I started at the bottom of the class in French, but at the end of the year, I climbed. And then we met, he gave us books to read,

<sup>5</sup> "La Dernière Séance" (1982–1998) was a monthly television program showing mainly American genre films.

<sup>6</sup> The Théâtre de Lutèce was a historic theater in Paris's Latin Quarter. It presented important plays during the 1950s and 1960s, such as Jean Genet's *Les nègres*. It closed in 1976.

<sup>7</sup> First year of high school, when students are between 16 and 17 years old.

so of course there was André Gide, Pierre Herbart, Cocteau... *Les enfants terribles*, *Les nourritures terrestres*, the approach to the family, I thought it was really great, it completely exhilarated me. Then we became great friends and did a tour of France on a Vespa. In the competition to prepare for the IDHEC, the theme was Romanesque art, and that's how I discovered the whole of Romanesque France.

**NB** – Was it thanks to him that you met Robert Bresson, or not at all?

**JK** – No, it wasn't thanks to him, but it was through him that I saw Bresson's films quite quickly. *Pickpocket* made a deep impression on me, as did Dostoyevsky's books, *The Idiot*, *Crime and Punishment*, *The Demons*... Then there was Henri Agel, the history teacher at lycée Voltaire, who introduced us to Bresson and Jean Grémillon, his favorite filmmakers. In preparation for IDHEC, there was the Alain Resnais movement, with *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959), and the Jean-Luc Godard movement with *À bout de souffle* (1960). The Marxists were for Resnais, the anarchists for JLG... I wasn't a theorist or anything, just a leftist, and I liked both. As always, I also loved Mao and Che Guevara. *The Little Red Book* and *One, Two, Three Vietnam* were the same for me. In any case, it was the same idea of making a revolution.

**CB** – For you, the revolution is for whose benefit?

**JK** – Theoretically, to fight injustice and capitalism. That's how it was; it is the old world, and you hope for something different, but it did not happen.

**NB** – But just to clarify: at that time and in France, did you believe, for example, in the revolutionary proletariat and the dictatorship of the proletariat? Was it necessary to have a revolution in the name of the workers, according to the Marxist conception of the time?

**JK** – Yes, we thought that the working class was the Workers' Councils. The Russian Revolution fascinated me because of the Workers' Councils, where the people were taught to fight. We see that in Eisenstein's films. In *Trotsky*, which I made in 1967, I tried to show the bright side of the Russian Revolution, before Stalin. At the IDHEC, apart from mobilizing against the Vietnam War, we were quite active. Some of us were in the Jeunesses Communistes, while others were libertarian, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist. But the communist students had split from the Communist Party. And without permission, we took the school's cameras and Nagras to film in the north. We were a whole group of both cinematographers and directors, even script supervisors,

because I had a great love affair [with Françoise Renberg]. And we went to film the great miners' strike in 1963. What's stupid is that we gave all our rushes to the CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail/General Confederation of Labor). We never found out what happened to our images and sounds.

**NB** – You may be able to find them by consulting the Ciné-Archives website, the Film Archive of the French Communist Party.

**JK** – Then I was free to make *Trotsky*, thanks to Pierre-André Boutang, the producer: he gave me complete freedom. I had a studio in Joinville, and I met a Russian set designer, George Wakhevitch, who had lived through the Russian Revolution as a child.<sup>8</sup> He was a great draftsman and had sketched the figures of the Bolshevik party at the age of 14 before immigrating to France in 1921. He even drew Trotsky's black leather military suit, which can be seen in the few archives that escaped Stalin's censorship. George Wakhevitch used to say, "For Trotsky, I see a great stormy sky". I had a huge studio in Joinville. So Wakhevitch had a big stormy sky painted, and I asked for a huge enlargement of a photo of Trotsky, and another of Stalin; I wanted to contrast their speeches. I also asked for a cell to be built in which militants could tell Trotsky's life. I shot the film with actors such as Patrice Chéreau and Marcel Maréchal, who were friends of mine – I knew them from the theater – and with some militants from the Jeunesses Communistes Révolutionnaires (Revolutionary Communist Youth), young Trotskyists, Guy and Joani Hocquenghem and others who became *22 Mars* militants in Nanterre.

**CB** – The film portrays *Trotsky* using archive footage as well as with different actors: was there a desire to break through the cult of personality and show that "Trotsky" is above all a speech that can circulate from mouth to mouth?

**JK** – Yes, this is why I used a leather jacket to symbolize him, and every time someone speaks, he passes it on to the next speaker. So, let's just say that it was indeed his word, like Saint-Just's, that continues to live on. Each revolutionary speech dealt with a different subject: the bureaucracy, the International, the war, Germany in 1933. Trotsky was highly critical of Stalinism, saying: "You are confusing fascists and

<sup>8</sup> George Wakhevitch (1907–1984) was born in Odessa (Ukraine) and died in Paris. He was France's most famous chief decorator. He worked with Jean Epstein, Jean Renoir, René Clair, Julien Duvivier, Jacques Feyder, Luis Buñuel, among others. His family fled the USSR in 1921.



socialists; you have the wrong enemies.” At that time, we had to form an alliance with socialism against fascism. I am saying all this because I think he had a lot of fair ideas, and often people are saying “Yes, but there was Kronstadt,” and so on, but I don’t know the background very well. Maybe he was wrong!

**NB** – Well, the first thing he did was massacre the anarchists (laughs).

**JK** – Yes, that’s what the anarchists say. I thought the idea of the Permanent Revolution was right, let’s say a revolution can only succeed if it extends to Germany, Spain... Even in Spain, he saw how the Stalinists broke the Spanish revolution by choosing to kill the anarchists and Trotskyists. It was really a betrayal of all revolutions, to keep their stronghold and have only Communist Parties that only serve to protect the USSR. For me, it is the same for the Cuban revolution, and here too, it is being swept away today with Che Guevara. And then again in ‘67, there was the Cultural Revolution: the Trotskyists were very anti-Mao, and I was still a bit of a Trotskyist sympathizer at the time. As long as we don’t have power, we are just a revolutionary movement, and a revolutionary movement doesn’t cut off heads.

**CB** – In May 68, you joined the ARC collective (Atelier de Recherche Cinématographique); what were the ideas that united its members, and how did it work?

**JK** – The collective was initially created with a core group of IDHEC students: Michel Andrieu, Renan Pollès, Patrick Meunier, Françoise Renberg, and then others who were in the La Borde psychiatric hospital. Jean-Claude Polack and Félix Guattari wanted to bring us together. First, they wanted the Atelier de Recherche Cinématographique to reflect on their work. And I said we wanted to make films because that was our job. It wasn’t a question of reflection on something we hadn’t done yet. So, we decided to do a revolutionary counter-actuality atelier. It started when we were filming in Berlin, at the great internationalist demonstration against the Vietnam War. That was in December ‘67, and the next day we met Rudi Dutschke. There were all the people from the critical university, who inspired the 22 Mars movement in Nanterre. I think it was the Germans who initiated it, by questioning what they were taught at university. So, we made this film about the international demonstration (*Berlin 68 - Rudi Dutschke*, 1968) and while we were editing it, we found out that Rudi Dutschke had been shot in the head. He was between life and death in April, and we were completely overwhelmed because we were living with his images. Back in France,



in April, everything came to a head when we went to Nanterre to show films about the Black Panthers, and that was when Nanterre was closed down. There was a chain of events, and the Nanterre members of the 22 Mars movement came to occupy the Sorbonne, and we were in, because as soon as it started, we had cameras to film.<sup>9</sup> So we filmed May 3, May 6, the night of the barricades and so on. Then we filmed the factories: we had crews and participants from the États Généraux du Cinéma (General Estates of Cinema) that came to join us and help us, especially the operators. We didn't take part in the États Généraux, we said to them: "Reform cinema if you like, but right now there is a lot going on, so give us some film, we need a lab." So, at the États Généraux, people helped us to send films to Belgium or Italy. But we have not found all the material, and sometimes we didn't know where the laboratories were or where the films had been shot. When May 68 ended during the summer, we went to Brittany and elsewhere to show the films, but we knew it was over and the prints had been confiscated, so we couldn't go very far.

**NB** – I would like to clarify a small point about Anne Wiazemsky: you had known her since *Au hasard Balthazar* (1966), you had a love affair, she also was at Nanterre as a student, where she was the link between artists and militants. In 1967, in Nanterre, she organized the meeting between Jean-Luc Godard and Daniel Cohn-Bendit, then Omar Diop.

**JK** – Yes, but we didn't see each other anymore after she married JLG.

**NB** – Yet you were in the same place at the same time, calling for the same thing.

**JK** – You would have to check the dates of the films; at one point, we were in the same place at the same time as Godard when he was doing his Ciné-tracts. I remember he even came to the University of Vincennes, where the cinema section had been created with the first quarter-inch videos, to show how it worked. Then I intervened; you can see it in one of the films. I intervened, perplexed, and said "Listen, instead of talking about cinema, there are cameras, there is equipment, there are still things going on and we have to go and film."<sup>10</sup> That was the level of urgency.

<sup>9</sup> Student movement launched at the University of Paris-Nanterre, where the university was occupied and students asked for the release of arrested activists opposed to the Vietnam War. The movement is considered one of the key moments of the beginning of May '68.

<sup>10</sup> See Claudia Von Alemann's film *Ce n'est qu'un début, continuons le combat* (1969), from minute 2.



Image 2: Jean-Luc Godard, Pierre-William Glenn and Jacques Kébadian. Photograph supplied by Jacques Kébadian, 1968. | © Jacques Kébadian.

**NB** – In fact, you were in favor of action.

**JK** – Yes, I was for the movement. This is why, when the Trotskyists said, “we are going to rebuild the party”, I turned to the Maoists, who were really carrying on. And I joined the factory.

**CB** – How did the ARC collective work?

**JK** – Let’s say that the creation and production were really made during the editing. Myself and Michel Andrieu edited *Le droit à la parole* (*The Right of Speech*, 1968) and *Ce n'est qu'un début* (*This Is Only a Beginning*, 1968), Jean-Denis Bonan and Mireille Abramovici edited *Le joli mois de Mai* (*The Beautiful Month of May*, 1968), and Renan Pollès edited *Comité d'action 13e* (*13th Comity of Action*, 1968): he considered it his film, so the editors were the directors, and the images were everyone’s responsibility. Jean-Michel Humeau was also a partner; he gave us some images and also shot films on his own.

**CB** – Can you tell us about your experience at the factory?<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> In 1969, Jacques Kébadian became a worker at the Valentine paint factory, where he led militant actions and warned about the deplorable working conditions of the workers. His actions earned him a two-year suspended prison sentence.

**JK** – At the factory? It didn't last long (laughs).

**NB** – How was it concretely possible to get in?

**JK** – Well, that was when I joined the Gauche Prolétarienne [Proletarian Left].<sup>12</sup> Before that, I was briefly in Roland Castro's movement.

**NB** – “Vive La Révolution”.

**JK** – Yes, I did interventions with them; as soon as there were interventions, I went with them. We went to Meulan to occupy the town hall, which was making false papers for migrants, but not to help them: they were selling them. They were selling very expensive stamps. So we occupied the town hall, and when we left, some of them were arrested and put in prison. There were also interventions with the Gauche Prolétarienne, for example, we made the metro free in Billancourt: we let people pass, they probably already had tickets but... (laughs). Another intervention was “Une journée à la mer” (“a day at the seaside”): we used large buses to take children from the housing estates in Gennevilliers to the sea. So, a day at the seaside for children who had never seen the sea, and another intervention was called “Pas de vacances pour les riches” (“no holidays for the rich”). We took over my parents' pavilion in Colombes during one summer when they were away, and made shit bombs with which we attacked the Plaza Athénée: we threw the shit bombs into the hall.<sup>13</sup> You had to do things like that (laughs).

**NB** – Were you part of the commando that mowed down Fauchon?<sup>14</sup>

**JK** – No, no, but it's a good deed. This is what we should be doing today, taking over department stores – now that all department stores are making a fortune – and delivering goods elsewhere... It's symbolic anyway.

**NB** – That's what the rioters just did.<sup>15</sup>

**JK** – Yes, they helped themselves – they took a lot.

**NB** – But it wasn't to start a revolution.

<sup>12</sup> French Maoist political party, with a spontaneous ideology (also called Mao-Spontex).

<sup>13</sup> Plaza Athénée is a luxury hotel near the Champs-Élysées.

<sup>14</sup> In French, *faucher Fauchon*. On 9 May 1970, shouting “Fauchon feeds the slums”, a Maoist group took over Fauchon, a luxury grocery shop on Place de la Madeleine, and requisitioned goods for distribution in the slums and hostels in Nanterre, Bagnolet and Ivry where immigrant workers and their families lived.

<sup>15</sup> From 27 June to 4 July 2023, following the murder of Nahel Merzouk, a 17-year-old young man, by a police officer, urban violence broke out across France, mainly targeting the police, public buildings and shops.

**JK** – No, but today we must be able to choose targets that make sense.

**CB** – During the *Gilets Jaunes* [Yellow Jackets], there was a bit of that.<sup>16</sup>

**JK** – Yes, of course there were the *Gilets Jaunes*. To go back to the prison and factory episode: we were in action for two months, distributing the newspaper and leaflets. Our interventions at Valentine included sticking up “Valentine Poison” labels, sabotaging the paintwork and knocking it down. But at one point, we realized there was a snitch in our group and he turned us in. I was fired, but I told myself that you cannot just leave like that, so I came back with my megaphone to speak out and tell people: “Wake up, you’re being exploited”. It took a while, but it was quite a sight (laughs): I climbed up the piles of paint cans to knock them over. And then I was arrested, taken to the police station, but they didn’t keep me; they were used to it, I think, at the Asnières police station with Valentine. I was released and we continued our activism outside the club, at Valentine’s newspaper. We also took part in a rather amusing intervention; I explain this because there was a chief we had denounced in a leaflet; chiefs were often former gendarmes or former soldiers who made up Valentine’s command. Because there were a lot of immigrant workers, they reproduced the behavior of the colonies. So, we decided to do something: cover the boss with a can of paint. But the person who was going to put the can of paint on had to be told who the boss was, so he dressed up as a girl and I had a false mustache; it was really burlesque. We stationed ourselves in the Gare du Nord annex to keep an eye out for the foreman, and we pretended to flirt: everyone looked at us because he looked like a transvestite and I looked like a pimp. But that was how I could show him who the boss was, and he could do this intervention. They were anecdotal but funny interventions.

**NB** – Not many people would do that nowadays, especially in France.

**JK** – One last intervention put me in prison. It was a quasi-military intervention: students from the Proletarian Left were in a truck with a false number plate; they had arrived with red flags on well-hidden pickaxes. Pierre Overney was driving.<sup>17</sup> Two cars were waiting to pull

<sup>16</sup> *Gilets Jaunes* is the name of a popular protest movement launched in France in October 2018, which began on the right, but over the long term saw an unprecedented spectrum of political sensibilities converge in the fight against social inequality.

<sup>17</sup> Pierre Overney (1948–1972) was a militant worker and member of the *Gauche Prolétarienne* who was killed by a Renault security guard in 1972. His death at the age of 23 left its mark on the militant world, and the G.P. leadership called for a renunciation of violence. Pierre Overney’s killer, Jean-Antoine Tramoni, was

out, with Molotov cocktails in case we were followed to prevent us from being caught. So the kids could get out, Overney opened the door, I had a megaphone to speak into and the police came out to beat us up. So the kids got out of the truck and then, bang bang bang: there was a real scuffle with the management. Then we fled, the retreat was organized: the *Gauche Prolétarienne* with the van and we managed to get out without any damage. Pierre Overney's funeral marked the end of the *Gauche Prolétarienne* and the end of violence: 200,000 people were at his funeral. Suddenly, it no longer made sense to be an avant-garde, but others continued. Then came movements like FHAR (Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire/Homosexual Front for Revolutionary Action) and MLF (Mouvement de Libération des Femmes/Women's Liberation Movement). Fortunately, something else began to exist in the 70s. But a lot of people who were activists took drugs and died of overdoses.

You asked me if I wanted to make a fiction film, because Françoise Renberg and Michel Andrieu and I wrote a script about the Fauqueux affair: it was a sordid event, the story of the kidnapping of a little girl. But we didn't insist on it because it was too subordinate to a militant discourse, it wasn't lively at all.

**NB** – The story of militants kidnapping an industrialist's daughter?

**JK** – No, they were not militants, they were people demanding things. I would have to remember that and try to find that scenario. I know I've got a copy and I would like to read it again to see. But if it was never developed, it must have been rubbish.

**CB** – What about the creation of *Albertine* (1972)?

**JK** – *Albertine* was conceived after *Coup pour coup* (1972).<sup>18</sup> We were very disappointed, so as I'd got an *avance sur recette* [advance on revenue] for a short film about a girl who had been punished by the disciplinary committee, we decided, with the core group of activists who'd taken part in the filming of *Coup pour coup*, to make a collective film. It was still in the spirit of '68: a bit rebellious, revolting, but we said to ourselves "we are going to do it differently". We invented scenes as

a "former chief warrant officer who had served in Indochina and Algeria" (Baruch 1972, 23). Tramoni was in turn assassinated in 1977 by two former militants of the *Gauche Prolétarienne*.

<sup>18</sup> Begun as a collective film, *Coup pour coup* (1972), about a strike in a textile factory, was finally appropriated and signed by Marin Karmitz.

we went along: at the time, there was a movement of young single mothers who were mothers at 14 or 15 and were locked up in re-education centers. It was also a film about the pleasures of childhood; that children can have pleasures, something we are in the process of completely denying today. That's how *Albertine* came about, with everyone's ideas. After that, it was the editing that means I consider it a bit my own, but the film is still signed "Groupe Eugène Varlin".<sup>19</sup> Franssou (Françoise Prenant) played Albertine, a 13-year-old girl who was actually 18.

**CB** – How did this collective work?

**JK** – It was made up of people who had been disappointed by *Coup pour coup* and members of the ARC: Renan Pollès did the photography, the sound engineer was Daniel Ollivier, but at that time we were no longer Maoists. Fortunately, later there was the FHAR, the MLF and the MLAC...<sup>20</sup> *Albertine* was shown as the pre-program to *Histoire d'A* (1974) by Marielle Issartel and Charles Belmont because our two films were forbidden to under-18s; but I don't know if it was shown often or not.

**CB** – I am taking a leap back in time with *La fragile armada* (2005). Did you want to show a different point of view on the revolution? Compared to what we see in France.

**JK** – We were not looking for a different point of view, we welcomed a revolutionary movement that was developing a different language from the one we knew, while questioning the same things, remaining very poetic and close to nature. Joani Hocquenghem, who went to Mexico after May '68, was a member of the JCR and plays in *Trotsky*.<sup>21</sup>

**NB** – How did the two of you meet?

**JK** – The Hocquenghem and the Kebadian, we literally had a cell all to ourselves in the JCR and we were *tendance 4*, which was kicked out because we were Mao-Spontex (laughs).<sup>22</sup> At a certain point, when the JCR started to rebuild the revolutionary party for the next revolutions,

<sup>19</sup> Eugène Varlin (1839–1871), worker, socialist activist, member of the Council of the Paris Commune, was tortured and shot by the Versailles army.

<sup>20</sup> MLAC is shorthand for Movement for the Freedom of Abortion and Contraception.

<sup>21</sup> JCR is shorthand for Jeunesse du Partii Communiste (Youth of the Communist Party).

<sup>22</sup> Mao-Spontex was a libertarian and ironic movement born in May 68. "Spontex" is shorthand for "spontaneist", but also refers to a brand of sponge that was widely advertised at the time.



we said “we are going to continue in a different way”. My sisters Ani and Aïda [Kebadian], Guy [Hocquenghem], Joani and myself too. Then I got involved again and they stayed free: they did squats, all sorts of things. Guy Hocquenghem was one of the leaders of the FHAR, and he can be seen in *Trotsky* with his brother in the scene about the biography. My sister Aïda, for example, went to the Cévennes with Joani, and then Joani went to Mexico with another VLR (Vive La Révolution) activist. He stayed there, met a Mexican woman and one day he said to me: “Why don't you make a film about Mexico?” and I replied: “I'll make a film if you explain to me why you didn't want to come back”. The result was *Calle San Luis Potosi* (1991), which I shot with my first 8 mm video camera, and it was important for me because it allowed me to become completely autonomous in the making of a film. So I went to Mexico and when I brought the footage back to Pierre-André Boutang, he helped me to achieve it: he had a collection titled “Océaniques” where he welcomed independent documentaries.<sup>23</sup> So I was able to make this first film with Joani, which is the story of his street life and his love affair with a girl in prison, whom he visited while she was sleeping there. The prison authorities agreed to let me shoot inside the prison. Then we went to the south, where the mother and father of his imprisoned girlfriend lived. I like this film because it was Joani who narrated everything in voice-over. Joani was very aware of the war in Chiapas, which existed long before the film, and one day he heard that the Zapatistas were preparing a big march on Mexico City. He asked me: “I am going with a tape recorder and a pen, but would you like to come with a camera?” He explained a few events so that I could understand what was going on and I found a producer who gave us the resources to go with my nephew, Camille Ponsin, who has since become a great documentary filmmaker.<sup>24</sup> We followed the Zapatista march without knowing how things would end: it was a big risk. When they arrived in Mexico City, there were a million of them. It is beautiful to see, it is also a revolution, peaceful but powerful.

<sup>23</sup> “Océaniques” was a Cultural program broadcast from 1987 to 1992 on the third public television channel, renowned for its quality.

<sup>24</sup> In 2014, Camille Ponsin directed *Le droit au baiser*, about the repression of sexuality in Turkey, followed in 2022 by *La combattante*, a portrait of ethnologist Marie-José Tubiana, who helps Darfur refugees confront the French administration.



**CB** – Were you aware of the role of Subcomandante Marcos?<sup>25</sup> In the film, he is often filmed in a group, and we don't just focus on him.

**JK** – Yes, he is still the one who gives the most beautiful speeches, but there are also the women who speak and others... Today, Marcos has completely faded into the background.

**NB** – You still didn't want to maintain the cult of personality.

**JK** – No, but we still see it a lot.

**CB** – Yes, but the words get around. On American television, they only showed him.

**JK** – I don't know how it was shown elsewhere, but in this film we see that it is a growing movement. On my side, I discovered while making the film that most Mexicans have Indian ancestors. I met a teacher in a school and the headmaster was quick to tell me, "My grandmother is Indian". In fact, there are 40–50 Indian ethnic groups in Mexico, all quite different, in different regions.

**NB** – Has this film also been shown on television?

**JK** – No, but it was released in theaters.

**NB** – And were you able to show it in Mexico?

**JK** – We showed it two or three years ago before COVID. Subcomandante Marcos created a film festival and wrote a long letter asking people to show their films. So, *La fragile armada* was translated and subtitled in Spanish. As this was around the time of *Les révoltés* (2019), we also sent *Les révoltés* to Chiapas. And both films were shown twenty years after the shooting of *La fragile armada*. Joani was there, and it was great because there was a whole generation of young Zapatistas who knew nothing about their elders' movement. They discovered this march, and they discovered how revolts also existed in France.

**CB** – How did you come up with the idea of making *L'île de mai* or *Les révoltés*, fifty years later, with raw footage and no commentary?

**JK** – Michel Andrieu and I said to ourselves, "After all, we are the ones who shot most of the images of May 68", not only us, of course, because

<sup>25</sup> Commandant Marcos, whose real name is Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente, was the spokesperson and military leader of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), a leftist revolutionary group in Mexico. He gained international attention for leading the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas on January 1, 1994, and became a symbolic figure for social justice movements before retiring from the public eye in 2014.

there were other films about Citroën, Jean-Pierre Thorn at Renault-Flins... And we thought it was a shame that there should be a tribute to May 68 without the images of May 68. So, we decided to make a film, using only the images of May shot by those who lived it. The directors agreed to give them to us because we didn't have the money to pay for the archives: Jean-Pierre Thorn gave us access to his footage, for Citroën we had access to Edouard Hayem's film, as did Jean-Michel Humeau. Only William Klein had to pay for his two shots; he charged for his two or three minutes of footage.

**NB** – Even though he is the only one who is rich.

**JK** – And then we managed to come to an agreement with the INA for the images we hadn't filmed, because Jean-Louis Comolli, in order to make his film produced by the INA based on the book we made together, *Les fantômes de Mai 68*, on photograms from *Le droit à la parole* (a book published by Yellow Now), had edited the images and photographs from our film *Le droit à la parole* into his own. The film has the same title as the book, *Les fantômes de Mai 68* (2018).

**CB** – Was the free circulation of these May 68 images part of your revolutionary concept?

**JK** – Yes, they circulated at the beginning, that was normal. Now people pay a little bit for the rights but if they don't have the means we give them, it depends on the type of production.

**CB** – But you still felt it was important to keep these images alive.

**JK** – Yes, I also made an installation based on still images. Using the photos from *Le Droit à la parole*, I created a large installation with 1,454 images that I had printed out. We created a wall with one minute of May 68 in photograms, making 1,454 photos, each print of which was signed and then stuck on the wall. People could choose them for €5 a picture. After May 68, the ARC group split up, and everyone went their own way. I went to work in the factory, while others made *films d'auteur*.

**CB** – Precisely, there were those who abandoned the spirit of May 68, Romain Goupil, Daniel Cohn-Bendit... and you remained a revolutionary.

**JK** – Yes, Goupil spits on me now, or rather he spits on what he used to like!

**NB** – Would you say that you've remained faithful to your original revolutionary ideals? Or have you moved politically?

**JK** – No, I remain in solidarity with everything that is going on: the Gilets Jaunes, the youth riots... all the newspapers react by talking about burnt-out cars and don't try to understand.

**NB** – I can confirm that Jacques marches in all the demonstrations in Paris.

**JK** – Yes, I did the ones for retirement, and it's my son Itvan, with his partner 'Vénéno', who makes the banners.<sup>26</sup> He has been doing graphics since he was a teenager.

**NB** – We haven't talked about it today, but Jacques has also been following all the movements of undocumented migrants' movements.

**JK** – Yes, there is an important film.<sup>27</sup>

**NB** – They are an extension of your ideas, but they are not revolutionary films.

**JK** – Yes, they are denunciatory films, although in the Saint-Bernard movement of undocumented migrants there were real militants who were revolutionaries. But what was the point of all that? In one version of my script Phèbus, my character, Lazare, talks to an old comrade as he walks along the walls of the Santé prison: "When we're twenty, we're all heroes, we do everything, we can do everything, and now when we are forty we are tired, we are no longer good for anything..." So, it's true, what are we leaving our children today? Long live socialism!

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<sup>26</sup> Itvan Kebadian, from the Black Lines collective.

<sup>27</sup> *D'une brousse à l'autre*, 1998.

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### Filmography

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*Berlin 68 - Rudi Dutschke*. Dir. Collectif ARC. France, 1968. 41 mins.

*Calle San Luis Potosi*. Dir. Jacques Kébadian and Joani Hocquenghem. Cèdre Production, France, 1991. 54 mins.

*Ce n'est qu'un début*. Dir. Collectif ARC. France, 1968. 45 mins.

*Coup pour coup*. Dir. Marin Karmitz. Cinema Services, MK2 Productions, France, 1972. 89 mins.

*Hiroshima, mon amour*. Dir. Alain Resnais. Argos Films, Como Films, Pathé Overseas Production, France, 1959. 91 mins.

*Histoire d'A*. Dir. Charles Belmont, Marielle Issartel. Riga Films, France, 1974. 90 mins.

*La fragile armada*. Dir. Jacques Kébadian and Joani Hocquenghem. Play Film, Images Plus, France, 2005. 120 mins.

*Le droit à baiser*. Dir. Camille Ponsin. Electrick Films, France, 2013. 52 mins.

*Le droit à la parole*. Dir. Collectif ARC. France, 1968. 52 mins.

*Le joli moi de mai*. Dir. Collectif ARC. France, 1968. 33 mins.

*Les révoltés (or L'île de Mai)*. Dir. Jacques Kébadian and Michel Andrieu. Iskra, France, 2018. 82 mins.

*Masculin, féminin*. Dir. Jean-Luc Godard. Argos Films, Anouchka Films, Svensk Filmindustri, France, 1966. 100 mins.

*Trotsky*. Dir. Jacques Kébadian. ORTF – Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française, France, 1967. 50 mins.

## Jacques Kebadian, De Uma Revolução a Outra

**RESUMO** A carreira do cineasta Jacques Kebadian (nascido a 20 de abril de 1940, em Paris) impressiona pela sua fidelidade às pessoas, às ideias e aos ideais revolucionários. Nos anos 60, o autor de *Trotsky* (1967) participou em vários grupos de extrema-esquerda, num coletivo de cineastas (ARC, Atelier de Recherche Cinématographique) e em numerosas ações, muitas vezes clandestinas. O seu trabalho passou, então, a acompanhar as lutas internacionalistas, a apoiar os imigrantes em situação irregular, a recordar o genocídio arménio, a seguir artistas de quem era próximo e a retratar mulheres da Resistência que admirava. Pedimos-lhe que nos descrevesse algumas das etapas desta trajetória única. A entrevista foi conduzida em francês em Abril de 2023 e depois traduzida para inglês.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE** Maio de 68; Trotskismo; ativismo; filmes coletivos.

## Jacques Kebadian, d'une révolution l'autre

**RÉSUMÉ** Le parcours du cinéaste Jacques Kebadian (né le 20 avril 1940 à Paris) frappe par sa fidélité aux êtres, aux idées, aux idéaux révolutionnaires. Dans les années 1960, l'auteur de *Trotsky* (1967) participe à plusieurs groupes d'extrême-gauche, à un collectif de cinéastes (l'ARC, Atelier de Recherche Cinématographique), à de nombreuses actions souvent clandestines. Puis son travail se tourne vers l'accompagnement de luttes internationalistes, le soutien aux sans-papiers, la remémoration du génocide arménien, le suivi d'artistes dont il est proche, le portrait de résistantes qu'il admire. Nous lui avons demandé de bien vouloir détailler quelques étapes de ce trajet hors du commun.

**MOTS-CLÉS** Mai 68; Trotskisme; actions militantes; film collectif.