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Translation

with Commentary by Kate Sinha

Le Point

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The novelist Michel Houellebecq and his wife, Qianyum Lysis Li, travel to Amsterdam to take part in what was presented to them as a porno-artistic performance, a film under the direction of the Dutch director and member of the KIRAC collective (Keeping It Real Art Critics), Stefan Ruitenbeek. It had been agreed that the writer would wear a mask and would not be recognizable.

Kate: It was never agreed that Michel Houellebecq would not be recognisable. This is discussed in emails, which ultimately led to separating shots of genitals from shots with faces, as also stipulated in contract.

The filming takes place over several days and ends, according to the writer, with a violent argument. At the end of January, a trailer – quite trashy – appeared on social networks: it shows a pregnant woman who vomits in a car before giving birth under the watchful eye of the camera, then the Prix Goncourt appears naked, without a mask, in a hotel bed, cigarette in mouth, in a hotel bed, cigarette in mouth, next to a young woman in a nightdress. The author discovered this trailer "with dismay and disgust" and would write in a letter to the director, revealed by the Quotidien programme, "[this film] irreparably violates my privacy, my honour, but above all, what is more serious, against my wife, devastated by the lies". The Houellebecq couple subsequently promised to have the broadcast of the film banned and filed a summons in summary proceedings with the Paris court, which on 3 March declared itself "partially incompetent" and dismissed the husbands. For his part, Ruitenbeek responded to numerous interviews in the international press and did not give up broadcasting

The Houellebecq couple then promised to have the broadcast of the film banned and filed a summons in summary proceedings with the Paris court, which on 3 March declared itself 'partially incompetent' and dismissed the spouses. For his part, Ruitenbeek responded to numerous interviews in the international press and did not give up on the film. He continues to proclaim his admiration for Houellebecq whom he nevertheless framed, seemingly true to his artistic habits.

Kate: Outright lie. Stefan did not "frame" Houellebecq.

The film's release, originally scheduled for 11 March, has been postponed to an unknown date. Michel Houellebecq, in a text of his own, tells us the underside of this incredible affair

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Initially, Mr Ruitenbeek invited me to take part in an opening ceremony organised at an art school in Amsterdam, where my main task was to cut a ribbon. There were other elements, inspired by Lovecraft's universe, that interested me. In one of these e-mails, he added several films. These films seemed to have nothing to do with the project;

Kate: Why would Stefan send irrelevant films? Also the relationship between films and the project is explained in the document about the Miskatonic project that Stefan sent Houellebecq before he came to Paris with Jini.

I told myself that he only came in to show that he was a serious person, who had already achieved things. So I didn't watch all of them except one, very distraught - it seems to be the film Honeypot.

Mr Ruitenbeek came to Paris on 1 November, having suggested we meet to discuss this project. In an e-mail, he added that he would be accompanied by a friend, Jini van Rooijen, who came to Paris to participate in gangbangs, filmed by Mr Ruitenbeek, meant to feed his OnlyFans account. I was depressed when they arrived, and my wife went to this dinner alone, being filmed without her knowledge.

Kate: She knew she was being filmed She even says: "You should film this". (footage).

The idea was then floated for a sex scene with a threesome - Jini, my wife and I were also planning to feed Jini's OnlyFans account. My wife agreed, assuming it would distract me nicely. I myself accepted, subject to maintaining my anonymity,

Kate: Not true.

which seemed possible for two reasons: Films on Jini's OnlyFans account are available only to its paying subscribers; it is, from what I was told, the operating principle of OnlyFans, which is a source of income for Jini. My wife and I had to wear masks to make identification impossible.

The sexual scene took place and was filmed by Mr Ruitenbeek. After some thought, I said to myself that these masks were insufficient protection of my anonymity, and I did not provide my passport, a necessary condition imposed by OnlyFans for the film to be broadcast by them. Relations continued by e-mail in the following weeks. This exchange of e-mails included the following elements: Mr Ruitenbeek informed me that he wanted to postpone the inauguration ceremony until spring and also sent me a document containing the various documents.

Mr Ruitenbeek informed me that he wanted to postpone the inauguration ceremony until the spring and also sent me pictures of several women he said wanted to have sex with me. My wife wrote the outline of a scenario, inspired both by one of my books, *The Possibility of an Island*, and by personal memories. This screenplay seemed interesting to me, although it required a lot of work - it was too abundant, the connection between the different stories was not clear enough. But it is a criticism I could also make of my own book, the link between Daniell and Daniel25 was not easy to achieve. In any case, I was willing to discuss it with Mr Ruitenbeek, with the idea that he would be the director. Besides my participation in the script, I was ready to take on an acting role.

Kate: Inherently contradictory to the claim that his anonymity was broken by Stefan.

I was also ready to take part in pornographic scenes if the script contained them, but I did not want, for reasons of personal peace of mind, to be recognisable in these scenes. The masks seemed to me an insufficient protection of my anonymity, so I asked Mr Ruitenbeek not to film, in any sexual plan, my face and that of my wife. He accepted this condition. Gradually, the idea grew that we, my wife and I, would go to Amsterdam to meet the women who had been approached by Mr Ruitenbeek to have sexual relations with my wife or with me. These relationships, filmed by him, could have been the casting for the upcoming film, at least for the pornographic scenes - but by no means broadcast material.

Kate: Outright Lie. In the emails these scenes in Amsterdam were very clearly discussed as definitive material. For instance the emails in which Stefan discusses the kind of shots he wants to make in the hotel.

It is useful to specify that I myself directed a porn film, widely regarded as "soft porn" (La Rivière, notably broadcast on Canal+), and that the casting took place exactly in these circumstances. The one who was my wife at the time had sexual relationships with several women who were considered actresses, relationships that I filmed. I myself was not part of these relationships, because it was nothing: I was only the director of the film, which featured only actresses, filmed in lesbian love scenes. None of these casting sessions were broadcast and I destroyed them. This method seemed perfectly normal to me. I have no hostility in principle to pornography, which I consider valuable artistic material; but it is a difficult material to deal with. My own film gives me only partial satisfaction: aesthetically in my opinion very successful, it lacks dramatic tension. It might also be useful to point out that another of my books, *Staying Alive*, was filmed by Dutch director Erik Lieshout, with Iggy Pop in the cast, among others.

The result gave me complete satisfaction, especially thanks to the extraordinary work of the director of photography, Reinier van Brummelen - in his case, I would not hesitate to speak of genius. I therefore left with a very favourable a priori about Dutch cinema. We arrived in Amsterdam, my wife and I, on the afternoon of 21 December, and nothing went as planned. First, we were filmed as soon as we got off the train without ever giving our permission.

Kate: Lysis who says "I knew you would be filming so I powdered my nose". (footage).

Unfortunately, I have already been photographed or filmed in these circumstances by several low-level journalists, but this is in no way what I expected from a filmmaker. In the evening, Mr Ruitenbeek came to our hotel room, always accompanied by his cameraman. There he made us sign a contract, of which I read only one article

Kate: He read everything (footage).

because it was the only condition, meant to protect my anonymity,

Kate: Untrue: see contract

which I had asked Mr Ruitenbeek to respect, due to the likely pornographic nature of the film. Otherwise, I assumed it was a normal contract, as I have signed many in my life. The next morning, Mr Ruitenbeek returned with Isa, one of the women whose pictures he had sent me. At first things went pretty well, I exchanged kisses with Isa

Kate: It was more than just kisses, which is something he appears to want to deny.

(these are the scenes that appear in the trailer), then it went downhill. Mr Ruitenbeek came up with several staging ideas that seemed silly to me. Isa asked my wife to leave the room, which of course made any lesbian love scene impossible. In the end, I hid under a sheet to avoid being filmed. Isa, for her part, wanted to stop there. We had no other contact, either physical or verbal. After this initial failure, Mr Ruitenbeek made an attempt at reconciliation by offering me another woman whose pictures he had sent me. My wife rejected her, she did not enter our room and I did not even see her. When Mr Ruitenbeek states in his interview with Vice magazine that "a total of four women slept with Houellebecq", that is a pure lie.

The final break took place on the evening of 23 December. After a heated discussion in which my wife and I were insulted by Mr Ruitenbeek, I demanded that he and his cameraman leave my room.

Kate: Stefan left the room, it was Stefan's initiative to leave (see footage), after Houellebecq, in the middle of his scene with Isa, wanted to stop filming, contrary to the agreement.

Since then, I have not seen him again. A month after this break-up, I noticed with disgust that my wife and I were featured in a trailer

Kate: The trailer was sent to them in advance, and they responded. (see email).

directed by Mr Ruitenbeek, broadcast on several internet sites, and that this trailer was just the preamble to a longer film, which he described as "pornographic", and whose release he announced on 11 March.

I immediately took legal initiatives to try to have this broadcast banned, which I had in no way given my consent to. I later realised that this date of 11 March was not chosen by chance, but coincided with the release of my latest book, *Annihilate*, in the Netherlands, this of course to give Mr Ruitenbeek's film as much publicity as possible.

Kate: This is also not true. It is coincidence. Initially the release for the book was planned in January. Stefan was not aware of the changed release-date. It was simply a date that was available at the Betty Asfalt theatre. (Which is a very small independent film theatre, contradicting this idea of KIRAC or Stefan "exploiting" Houellebecq's fame).

But even if it was chosen to coincide: at this point in time, Houellebecq had not objected to the trailer nor the film, and so this was still a shared project. You can hardly accuse a filmmaker of trying to complete a project that all parties agreed on making.

This constant suggestion of Stefan's ill character, of him trying to piggy back on Houellebecq's fame, is a vicious attack by Houellebecq on Stefan, not the other way around.

To the latter I sent the following "open letter" to express my opinion on his methods.