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BARNOLE

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and
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HOUSE OF TOLERANCE

L'APOLLONIDE - SOUVENIRS DE LA MAISON CLOSE

A FILM BY BERTRAND BONELLO

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HOUSE OF TOLERANCE

L'APOLLONIDE - SOUVENIRS DE LA MAISON CLOSE

A FILM BY BERTRAND BONELLO

2011 France Color 2h05 35 mm 1.85 Dolby SRD

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SYNOPSIS

The dawn of the XXth century: *L'Apollonide, a house of tolerance*, is living its last days.

In this closed world, where some men fall in love and others become viciously harmful, the girls share their secrets, their fears, their joys and their pains...





CONVERSATION BETWEEN BERTRAND BONELLO AND LAURE ADLER¹

Avril 2011

GENESIS

LAURE ADLER: How did the desire to make a movie about what was once called a house of tolerance come to you?

BERTRAND BONELLO: Ten years ago, I wanted to make a film on the reopening of brothels today. Then I gave up.

After filming *ON WAR*, my last film, I really wanted to make a film with a group of girls, the dynamics of a group. It is my partner (Josée Deshaies), who is also my director of photography, who suggested that I go back to the idea of brothels but treated from a historical standpoint. I then started researching the subject and stumbled upon your book, it was the first one I read. I'm interested in the closed world aspect. Whenever there is a closed world, it can become a fictitious world, a world for cinema. Then it was up to me to work between document and fiction, between a chronicle and a narrative.

The representation of the prostitute has always come to us through the eyes of men: most are painters or writers who went to brothels, and then came home to work on a painting or a book. The prostitute's point of view has always been extremely difficult to find.

LA: Therefore, they elude us! And it is just as well. They do also truly elude us when they are alive.

BB: There is something profoundly mysterious about them, and this is why they have been a recurring figure in fiction writing since the beginning of art history. The first film which features a prostitute was made in 1900; it just goes to show that they became a character literally as soon as cinema was invented.

THE HOUSE OF TOLERANCE

LA: You depict admirably the fact that the brothel was a place for socializing, meaning that before going up to the rooms, people waited, talked and drank.

BB: Some men didn't even go up to the bedrooms; they just came to have a drink.

LA: What is very interesting in your film is the specific role of the upstairs and the downstairs. The latter is a sumptuous space, a beautiful background to enhance the beauty of the young women who are here to quench the sexual appetites of the bourgeois. But the brothel is a prison as well. There is the upstairs, where they live a barren life, and the downstairs, where they have to play their role.

How did you manage to lead us on this journey - which is both dream-like and real - through this closed space that is the brothel?

BB: I would tell the actresses: "you are like actresses going on a theater stage." I tried to divide up the space into three parts: the salons, the bedrooms and what I call the kitchen. I wanted to keep this balance, without setting priorities. We managed to shoot in just one set. This way, in one shot, we go from the attic, where they sleep, to the much more luxurious corridor leading to the rooms where they work. I wanted to show that this coexisted, that they were only one door away from wearing either a simple night gown or a magnificent dress with dreamy costume jewelry. It is a film about contrasts.

TO SEE AND BE SEEN

LA: A rather enigmatic character, to whom something awful happens, starts and finishes the film. As is often the case in your movies, we broach the question of "seeing and being seen".

BB: It is also about the body and the mind, and the way one affects the other.

I think I was branded for life by Cronenberg's films because he only talks about this: the way the relation with the body is going to influence the mind. Sometimes leading to madness. To come back to the character you mentioned; while I was writing the screenplay, I dreamt two or three nights in a row about *THE MAN WHO LAUGHS* a 1920s adaptation of Victor Hugo's novel. Then I thought I was going to try and create the laughing woman.

1. Laure Adler is the author of *Daily Life in the Bordellos of Paris, 1830-1930*, published by Welcome Rain Publishers, 2002, USA.



LA: Your film is a story within a story for cinema.

BB: My director of photography also thinks that this is the way all my films are. In truth, one could say that the character played Noémie Lvovsky is me, the director, directing this brothel, she designs her sets, she asks the prefect for help the way I ask the CNC for money... and maybe you could consider that her client is my audience...

LA: So it's not by chance, I imagine, that the main characters like the brothel's madam and the main clients are played by moviemakers.

BB: I realized this very late into the process! It is a bit by chance. For one thing, I think these moviemakers are good actors. All at once, we were in a room and realized there were ten of us! Why so many directors? I don't know; somehow it must be my way of talking about cinema.

THE GIRLS, A COLLECTIVE BODY

LA: What is fascinating is that the girls are seen by the madam, a woman and a master, who watches her boarders. In the end, the men are somewhat like the girls' slaves; the girls win over their clients.

BB: Yes, I absolutely do believe it is so. The woman-master is a jail-keeper. The harshness comes from the house itself, the jail and the living conditions.

With my director of photography, we chose to film only the girls. Sometimes the men are seen from the back, or their head is cut off by the frame. There are, therefore, very few counter shot scenes, we stay with the girls, and if we turn around, it's the girl who is in the frame as well.

LA: And when there is a close-up of a man, it's a mask.

BB: Exactly, and it reinforces the impression that the prostitute is above the client. I told the actresses: "Be careful, I want twelve intelligent girls." It was really important for me: they're not being fooled, they are strong women.

LA: In any case, they are very dignified, very irreverent, very insolent, and very luminous; they know who they are. They are also slaves who will fight for the abolition of slavery. They know they can die from their work. One of them manages to escape, it's important that one of the girls makes it out, because being a prostitute is not one's destiny.

BB: She manages to escape because she does so early on. It is truly a matter of time. Indeed, after one year, their debts are too heavy for them to leave. It isn't a destiny but one need to be clear-sighted. Clear-sightedness, here, comes from a very young girl who arrives, quickly understands the situation and leaves before it's too late.

LA: She looks like she stepped out of a Renoir painting.

BB: Her hair, her skin, her body, yes. It's really hard to find girls who look that way, now.

LA: How did you choose the girls?

BB: It was a lengthy process. It took almost nine months. First, we had to find girls who embodied a form of modernity in order not to emphasize the reconstitution aspect, all the while being able to travel in time, back to 1900. I had my mind set on a mix, professional and non-professional actresses, as well as a mix of training and educational backgrounds. At the same time, this mix and this diversity had to lead to the consistency of the group. The girls had to work together, in a synergy. I was far more obsessed by the idea of forming a group than that of having a leading role.

Yet, above all, I think that the choice was guided by the fact that each of the actresses, as a person, is interesting to me. Sometimes, you don't even know why, but a girl enters a room and you think: that's her. Even before you shoot screen tests.

LA: It is a collective body.

BB: It was really important for me not to make a choral film, with characters and extras. I wanted to treat the six leading roles and the others in the same manner. I put the same effort into choosing them, and directing them.





LA: All the actresses in your film look like sitting models, from paintings by Manet, Monet and Courbet. Is this why you wanted them to come out of the house's space to let them breathe, in every meaning of the term?

BB: It was important to take the spectator outside in order to better feel, afterwards, the prison-like atmosphere back inside the brothel. I imagined what it would be like, for a prostitute, to go to the country with the madam once a month, or every other month.

LA: And then it shows the girls' innocence, because they are completely surrounded by this protective nature.

BB: I told them: "Forget the prostitutes, be young women." Something like joy and innocence permeated the scene.

DESIRES AND FANTASIES

LA: You may find this surprising but for me it's a film about faces. Even though the body is an important subject matter

in the film, the question of the face keeps recurring, almost hauntingly.

BB: Regarding the bodies, I thought a lot about the following: what ought to be shown in the bedroom sequences? I wanted to avoid the classic sex scenes, and also, once again, show things from their point of view. This is why, then, the faces imposed themselves, indeed...

LA: You found ways of filming the clients' desire without showing sexual intercourse. It is a very chaste film.

BB: Very modest. I aimed for bedroom sequences that are theater-like, and fetishistic. Almost Buñuel-style. There is very little nudity because it's rather close to the truth; they had widely slit undergarments. Men didn't undress much either, it took too much time. People would make love all dressed.

Therefore what we see more are the fantasies that the men want to see embodied: "I want a geisha..., I want a doll..." The fantasies reveal as much about sex as seeing bodies being thrust in a simulated act in front of the

camera. This can sometimes be conveyed by a perverted look but there are also games, like the bathtub filled with champagne, for instance...

I wanted to work on the theater-like implication of the moment when the door to the brothel is closed, and the client enters.

LA: Indeed it was a theater. But it is a painter's film too.

BB: We looked at many paintings, the framing and composition, the color balance, the poses...

LA: Manet, Monet, Renoir?

BB: Among others, and there are numerous others, not nearly as good; yet everything was interesting to me. As far as the time period is concerned, I am very attached to specific details, far more than to the wider idea of a reconstitution.

LA: It is a film about fantasy and fantasy is particularly hard to represent. A sequence recurs in an insistent

manner; it is the sequence played by Louis-Do de Lencquesaing, who keeps wanting to look – much like Courbet – inside the vagina of a woman. Your film also talks about the inseparable link between prostitution and maternity.

BB: Yes. He says: "I want to see the inside of your sex to be able to paint your face." As if this was where the soul could be seen. Were they maternal? Probably a little. I see all these men as somewhat lost. For instance, I like the moment when the character played by Louis-Do simply can no longer force himself to go home.

LA: But a brothel was not a pension, and therefore he has to leave. The house of tolerance is a place that is reassuring for men when it comes to their virility but also from a social standpoint.

BB: The English had their Men's Clubs, we had the brothels.

LA: This sociability between men mirrors the solidarity between the girls.



BB: I wanted the girls to stand together, even if there are rivalries. This is something you talk about in your book; they helped each other, there was no competition. I panicked a little the first two days of shooting but soon after, I felt that the solidarity was going to be there, between the girls, and that I was going to be able to film it.

COSTUMES AND LIGHTING

LA: The costumes are positively sublime, where did you find them?

BB: I worked with a costume designer (Anaïs Romand) who is familiar with this time period. We didn't have much money, so she advised me to concentrate on undergarment and corsets. She had every corset tailor-made. The sets, in the end, are fairly simple. As my director of photography said: "a diamond on black velvet". So we put black velvet on the walls to offset the girls and make them shine even more.

LA: The lighting of your film is that of fantasy, of desire, a neo- Buñuel light.

BB: I divided the entire film into two parts, both in terms of acting direction and light: day and night. It was really hard for the director of photography because there were no windows. She started from an idea that I like: the advent of electricity. This way, downstairs, where luxury is, there are electrical lamps while upstairs there is no electricity, so they use candles. Her real wish was more a dream than an idea; she wanted the girls to be their own light.

CREATING SPACE AND TIME

BB: In the narrative construction, the first and third part somewhat mirror one another. The middle part, on the other hand, is almost like a chronicle. Also, there was no space for the girls since we couldn't go out, so we had to create space within time. We played with time, simultaneity, flashbacks, two-way mirrors and split screens. The film unfolds a little like a round dance, with link shots and transitions; an idea at the end of a scene becomes the beginning of the next one. The girls somewhat tag-team the narrative thread, and that's how

we filmed. Sometimes, we go back to a certain point to flesh it out or give another point of view.

LA: There is a form of discontinuity in the narrative, yet just one temporality and, actually, just one tempo, like in jazz.

THE MUSIC OF THE SOULS, A PRESENT-DAY FILM

LA: You put contemporary music in the middle and at the end of the film. Is it to show the subject matter's contemporaneity? Or is it to show it isn't a period film?

BB: What I am afraid of, with period films, is reconstitution. When I was writing the film, I listened to this soul music from the 60s and the soul of the black American singers always took me back to the girls. When one of them dies, they start singing an American slave song around her.

We don't have to use a string quartet just because we are in 1900. It wasn't just to modernize the idea; it's simply that these women evoked this music for me. Maybe it's something about the connection with slavery.

LA: With the new laws and proposals about making the clients pay taxes, you end up being right in synch with today's news. The brothels are once again much talked about, and your film ends precisely with the shot of a hooker on the job on a street somewhere in some town today.

BB: Yes, *Porte de la Chapelle*. At the end, one of the girls asks another: "What are you going to do now?" and the other answers "I don't know." One hundred years later, she's still doing the same thing.

For me, it was the idea of fictional destiny, one manages to escape while the other will be a hooker her whole life. I found it interesting to talk about the destiny of a woman who will never escape even though she's long dreamt she would.





ON FLESH

LA: Then, there are also those who will end up meeting their maker; death is omnipresent.

BB: Yes, there is a danger, syphilis, in particular.

LA: There, you are also faithful to what happened then historically. The only men allowed inside the brothel, aside from the clients, were the doctors. There is a sequence in the film where the girls have to open their legs, not to make money but to be examined by the doctor. In this sequence, it is blatant that they are young bodies meant for a business aimed at the bourgeoisie and that, therefore, these young bodies have to be clean and healthy.

BB: I think this sequence is very cruel. The doctor is played by a real gynecologist; when he started speaking his lines with his medical tone, my blood froze. The girls wait their turn, terrified: are they going to find out that they are pregnant? That they are sick?

I wanted to make it a sequence about fear. We don't see the doctor much, what we see are the girls' faces as they're waiting their turn, the verdict.

If anyone finds anything political in this film, I'd like it to be through sequences like this one.

LA: It was also the vice squad that was embodied by these doctors. In addition, it was one of the leading doctors at the time, Parent Duchâtelet, who invented the legal framework for brothels making medical visits mandatory, with a report for the prefecture. And I don't believe it's only a coincidence that the same man invented the Paris sewage system.

MELANCHOLY AND DECADENCE

LA: Deep down, I can't help wondering whether this isn't a film about a lost paradise.

BB: Indeed, a king of melancholy, of decadence, in the etymological meaning of the term. There is also the darkness of Romanticism. The shot of the petal falling is an utterly romantic shot, but somewhat grotesque, because if it isn't it becomes sentimentalism.

LA: Concerning the idea of decadence that you mentioned, there is this scene where the Laughing woman is exhibited like a freak show figure. How did you conceive that scene?

BB: Like something operatic. It's a form of staging within the staging. There are only a few shots.

The energy had to be entirely different from that of the brothel; it's almost religious. I thought of paintings, pictorial representations. As for her, I thought of her as a marble statue, with her skin so white. The others are just decorum. We are inside her head. It is all staged like an aristocratic show.

LA: 1900. It was the transition from one century to another, a date when the brothels started declining because the girls started working in the streets, taking over the sidewalks.

BB: The idea was to show, without going outside, how Paris, France and the world were going to change.

We understand quickly that the brothel is going to close down. We are only witnessing the downfall of things and the way the girls are slowly deteriorating. I think there's nothing more touching than a form of beauty slowly withering, to never return... a slow fall from magnificence... a desperate party. What these women go through so they won't shatter to pieces.





BERTRAND BONELLO

Bertrand Bonello was born in 1968. Educated as a musician before becoming a filmmaker, he made his first feature film in 1998, *QUELQUE CHOSE D'ORGANIQUE* (Something Organic) for which he also wrote the screenplay and the music. The film was selected for the Berlin film festival in the "Panorama" section.

In 2001, his second film, *LE PORNOGRAPHE* (The Pornographer) the portrait of a retired porno film maker interpreted by Jean-Pierre Léaud, was presented at the International Critics' week at the Cannes Film Festival and won the International Film Critics' Fipresci Prize.

In 2003, Bertrand Bonello directed *TIRESIA*, which was in competition in the Official Selection at the Cannes Film Festival.

He returned to Cannes in 2005 with a film short in a special screening, *CINDY THE DOLL IS MINE*, with Asia Argento, a homage to the artist photographer, Cindy Sherman.

In 2007, Bonello directed and produced a new project, *MY NEW PICTURE*, presented at Locarno Film Festival.

Bertrand Bonello directed in 2008, *DE LA GUERRE* (On War), with Mathieu Amalric, selected at the Director's Fortnight. In 2010, his short *Where the boys are* is selected at Locarno Film Festival.

L'APOLLONIDE - Souvenirs de la maison close (House of tolerance) is his fifth long feature.

FILMOGRAPHY

2011 *L'APOLLONIDE - Souvenirs de la maison close* (House of tolerance)

2008 *DE LA GUERRE* (On war)

2003 *TIRESIA*

2001 *LE PORNOGRAPHE* (The pornographer)

1998 *QUELQUE CHOSE D'ORGANIQUE* (something organic)

Shorts

2010 *WHERE THE BOYS ARE*

2006 *MY NEW PICTURE*

2005 *CINDY : THE DOLL IS MINE*

1997 *THE ADVENTURES OF JAMES AND DAVID*

1996 *QUI JE SUIS*



NOÉMIE LVOVSKY

After graduating from the Fémis, Noémie Lvovsky started as screen writer, working with Arnaud Desplechin on *LA VIE DES MORTS* (1991) and *LA SENTINELLE* (*The Sentinel* - 1992). In 1994, she directed her first feature film *OUBLIE-MOI* (*Forget Me*) starring Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi, with whom she later co-wrote the screenplays for two films *IL EST PLUS FACILE POUR UN CHAMEAU* (*It's Easier for a Camel* - 2003) and *ACTRICES* (*Actresses* - 2007).

Her second feature film, *LA VIE NE ME FAIT PAS PEUR* (*Life doesn't Scare Me*), received the Jean Vigo Prize in 1999. She then went on to make *LES SENTIMENTS* (*Feelings* - Louis Deluc Prize in 2003) and *FAUT QUE ÇA DANSE* (*Let's Dance*) in 2007.

Alongside her career as a director, she started acting in 2001 in Yvan Attal's *MA FEMME EST UNE ACTRICE* (*My Wife is an Actress*). Afterwards, she was seen in several films, such as *ROIS ET REINE* (*Kings & Queen*) by Arnaud Desplechin (2004), *L'UN RESTE, L'AUTRE PART* (*One Stays, One leaves*) by Claude Berri (2005), *ACTRICES* (*Actresses*) by Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi (2007) and also *LES BEAUX GOSSÉS* (*The French Kissers*) by Riad Sattouf (2009). She is featured in Benoît Jacquot's upcoming film, *LES ADIEUX À LA REINE* (*Farewell, My Queen*), *17 FILLES* (*17 girls*) by Delphine & Muriel Coulin, *PRESUME COUPABLE* (*Guilty*) BY VINCENT GARENQ, and *LE SKYLAB* by Julie Delpy.



HAFSIA HERZI

Her first movie role at age 20 in Abdellatif Kechiche's *LA GRAINE ET LE MULET* (The Secret of the Grain - 2007) allowed Hafsia Herzi to receive honoring rewards such as the Acting Prize at the Venice Mostra as well as the Best Budding Actress Cesar.

Since, she has worked for directors such as Raja Amari or Alain Guiraudie. She will soon be back on the screen in *LE CHAT DU RABBIN* (The Rabbi's Cat) by Joan Sfar and *LA SOURCE DES FEMMES* (The Source) by Radu Mihaileanu, also competing at the Cannes Film Festival this year.

ADÈLE HAENEL

Adèle Haenel obtained her first role at age 13 in *LES DIABLES* (The Devils) by Christophe Ruggia (2002). She delivered a particularly remarkable performance in 2007 in *NAISSANCES DES PIEUVRES* (Water Lilies) by Céline Sciamma, for which she received a Cesar nomination in 2008. She will soon be seen in Valérie Mrejen and Bertrand Schefer's *EN VILLE* (Iris in Bloom), as well as in *APRÈS LE SUD* by Jean-Jacques Jauffret, both presented at the Directors' Fortnight this year.

CÉLINE SALLETTE

A graduate from the Conservatoire National Supérieur d'Art dramatique, Céline Sallette played her first part in a movie in 2004, in Philippe Garrel's *LES AMANTS RÉGULIERS* (Regular Lovers). Then she starred in Patrick Granperret's *MEURTRIÈRES* (Murderers - 2005). She was later featured in films like *LE GRAND ALIBI* (The Great Alibi) by Pascal Bonitzer or *LA GRANDE VIE* (The High Life) by Emmanuel Salinger. She is also featured in Philippe Garrel's next film, *UN ÉTÉ BRÛLANT*.

JASMINE TRINCA

Jasmine Trinca started her career in cinema in 2001 with Nanni Moretti's *LA STANZA DEL FIGLIO* (The Son's Room), and worked again with him in 2006 for *IL CAIMANO* (The Caïman). She was also seen in *LA MEGLIO GIOVENTU* (The Best of Youth) by Marco Tullio Giordana (2003) or in Michele Placido's films, *ROMANZO CRIMINALE* (Crime Novel - 2005) and *IL GRANDE SOGNO* (Le rêve italien - 2009), for which she received the Best Actress award at the Venice Film Festival.

ALICE BARNOLE and **ILIANA ZABETH** are acting for the first time in a feature film.

CAST

Hafsia Herzi	<i>Samira</i>	Xavier Beauvois
Céline Sallette	<i>Clotilde</i>	Louis-Do de Lencquesaing
Jasmine Trinca	<i>Julie</i>	Jacques Nolot
Adèle Haenel	<i>Léa</i>	Laurent Lacotte
Alice Barnole	<i>Madeleine</i>	
Iliana Zabeth	<i>Pauline</i>	
and Noémie Lvovsky	<i>Marie-France</i>	

Judith Lou Levy
Anaïs Thomas
Pauline Jacquard
Maïa Sandoz
Joanna Grudzinska
Esther Garrel

CREDITS

Screenplay	Bertrand Bonello
Stage Director	Bertrand Bonello
Assistant Stage Director	Elsa Amiel
Cinematographer	Josée Deshaies
Editor	Fabrice Rouaud
Sound	Jean-Pierre Duret, Nicolas Moreau, Jean-Pierre Laforce
Set Decorator	Alain Guffroy
Costumes	Anaïs Romand AFCCA
Make-up	Laure Talazac
Hair	Ferouz Zaafour
Music	Bertrand Bonello
Production Director	Aude Cathelin
Post-production	Christina Crassaris
Production	Kristina Larsen (Les Films du Lendemain) and Bertrand Bonello (My New Picture)

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