Forty years on:
Philippe Garrel, Counterculture and the Zanzibar Daisy Chain
by Helen Donlon

Philippe Garrel sits at a press conference in May 2008 *[see links, red panel]*, following the world premiere of his new film La Frontiere de l'Aube at the 61st Cannes Film Festival. At his side sits the star of this and his previous film (Les Amants Reguliers, 2006), his 24 year old son Louis. It is forty years since Garrel sr., then a youth of 20, was making his fourth film Le Reveleateur, one of four films that he was to make that year.

Le Reveleateur

Sylvina Boissonnas, the Schlumberger heiress who threw aside her stifling bourgeois family expectations to dedicate her time and funds to young underground filmmakers and other artists, was the producer of several of Garrel’s films, Le Reveleateur being just the first. (Frame, Le Reveleateur, 1968, below right.) For many people, and certainly outside France, the only contact they might have with this outstanding film is a now iconic black and white image of Bernadette Lafont and Stanislas Robiolles evoking both Christ and Oedipus. The same image showed up later on Barry Adamson’s groundbreaking post-Magazine album, Oedipus Schmoedipus. Often compared to David Lynch’s rarely seen early film The Grandmother, Le Reveleateur is a film about childhood and motherhood, key themes in much of Garrel’s work of the period.

But let’s stop here a moment to examine the first of several interesting cultural leylines.

As I sit here gathering notes and clips, news of this year’s Palme d’Or has just come through from Indiewire. Laurent Cantet has been awarded the prestigious prize for his new film Entre les murs (a film about adolescence and teacher-pupil relationships). It is the first French film to take the prize since 1987, but seems somehow wonderfully appropriate given the media awareness of the forty year anniversary of May ’68 that has dominated this year’s festival. Ironic but rewarding given how France’s forty year anniversary of May ’68 that has dominated this year’s festival. Ironic but rewarding given how France’s twenty year anniversary of May ’88 that has dominated this year’s festival. Ironic but rewarding given how France’s forty year anniversary of May ‘68 that has dominated this year’s festival. Ironic but rewarding given how France’s twenty year anniversary of May ‘88 that has dominated this year’s festival. Ironic but rewarding given how France’s forty year anniversary of May ‘68 that has dominated this year’s festival. Ironic but rewarding given how France’s twenty year anniversary of May ‘88 that has dominated this year’s festival.

Lynch is practically French. Canal Plus have been his major backers now for a long time; he was recently awarded a French Legion d’Honneur, and has received two Césars and a Palme d’Or back in 1990 for Sailor et Lula (Wild at Heart). My personal favourite Lynch film, Lost Highway, made some seven years later, features music by Barry Adamson, the Manchester Moss Side musical talent, who worked with Nick Cave’s Birthday Party and the band Magazine. Adamson’s breakthrough solo album, Oedipus Schmoedipus, features, as stated above, the beautiful and haunting quasi-religious image from Garrel’s Le Reveleateur. Le Reveleateur is, however, a silent.

Prodigious and talented actors Laurent Terzieff and Bernadette Lafont play the father and the mother, and apart from Robiolles, they basically comprise the entire cast in this silent epic. Le Reveleateur was a defining moment not only for the actors, and for Garrel, but also for French underground cinema. Producer Sylvia Boissonnas was to be behind many of the more fascinating adventures and projects that came out of the variously talented

http://www.londongrip.com/LondonGrip/Film%3A_Donlon_on_Garrel_.html
Parisian cinema underground, especially that part of it which crossed over with the cafe theatre spectacles of Marc’O and his troupe. Garrel also brought his experimental painter friends Daniel Pommereulle, Olivier Mosset and Frédéric Pardo to the mix and somehow the melange created a hive of activity. This hive, for the period culminating in May 1968, either launched or linked the careers of musicians Valere Lagrange, Jean Pierre Kalfon, Nico, Didier Leon, Barney Wilen and others. Then there were the actors: Pierre Clémenti, Tina Aumont, Zouzou, Haydée Politoff, Yves Beneyton; and other filmmakers, apart from Garrel, such as Serge Bard, Jackie Raynal, Patrick Deval, Michel Auder and François de Menil. Many of these characters fitted, of course, into two or more of the above categories.

**Purs et Durs**

A recent book by Sally Shafto entitled Zanzibar: The Zanzibar Films and the Dandies of May 1968 (Paris Experimental, 2007) traces the evolution and trajectories of the nucleus of this group, the so-called purs et durs underground filmmakers and artists, and their Zanzibar affiliation and activities. The centerpiece of the book features a black and white photograph of a group of key Zanzibar figures: Caroline De Bendern, Barney Wilen, Pierre Clémenti, and Sylvina Boissonnas and Affifi outside L'Hôtel Pont-Royal in Paris. Zanzibar was officially any artist or crew financed by Boissonnas, though any very closely linked artists or activities have become associated over time. A great defining image for example, while unrelated to Zanzibar financing, is that world-famous image of model and heiress Caroline de Bendern on the shoulders of Jean-Jacques Lebel during the Paris manifestations. The publication on the front of Paris Match, and subsequent syndication of this photo of De Bendern (Paris Match, 1968, right) waving a Maoist flag lost her all her future family inheritance when her relatives saw the image.

One of the active civil participants of May ’68, both in Paris and down in Cannes, was filmmaker and Cahiers du Cinéma contributor Jean-Luc Godard, whose films La Chinoise (1967) and Weekend (1968) were later perceived as something of a premonition of the French rioting of ’68. Fellow cinéaste Eric Rohmer, also a Cahiers name, had made La Collectionneuse in 1967 with Daniel Pommereulle and Haydée Politoff, and the film was edited by Jackie Raynal. It was Rohmer’s contribution to the portrayal of general social malaise and boredom amongst a group of French libertines. That malaise broke loose when André Malraux removed Henri Langlois from his position as the much-loved and lauded head of the Cinématheque Française in Paris. As Langlois had been a great supporter of the Zanzibar films, this was a dark moment for the group.

In his 2005 film Les Amants Réglieurs, Garrel recounts the sadness and disappointment that was daily life for the young protestors of 1968, and again features his son Louis as his protagonist. In Amants, as in this year’s Frontière de l’Aube, the character is a young man called François, and many elements of his life and character are identifiable based on Garrel senior. Nonetheless, when the Parisian riots really exploded and the nights were an amphetamine blast of burning upturned cars, political chanting and CRS riot police, Philippe Garrel was not one of the rioters. His revolt was more intellectual, non-violent and refusenik. He silenced his films, or laid down minimalist dialogue at best. He shot in black and white. Budget dictated aesthetics, but nonetheless it all looked right, and he set down the blueprint for future work.

Louis Garrel had also been used in Bernardo Bertolucci’s 1968-set film The Dreamers of 2003 (frame, below left) at which point he was just 20 years old, as his father had been in 1968. Here he was playing an intellectual bourgeois youth trapped happily in a kind of Les Enfants Terribles scenario with his twin sister and a young American while Paris burned outside the windows of their infinitely intriguing family apartment, where they lay around drinking and indulging their catchy obsession with cinema. The opening scene is set at the Cinématheque itself, and the three youths meet, appropriately enough, during a pro-Langlois protest outside. In fact Bertolucci and later Philippe Garrel for Les Amants Réglieurs would share many of the props, costume and other unit materials, as their productions were set in the same moment in history, albeit that Bertolucci’s was shot in luscious full production mode, and Garrel was on trademark black and white low budget terrain.

**The Garrel Circle**

In May 1968 Sylvina Boissonnas and Jackie Raynal, dressed in Red Cross uniforms, helped the wounded on the barricades. Jean-Luc Godard, Valerie Lagrange, Pierre Clémenti*, Jean-Pierre Kalfon, Jean-Jacques Schuhl and others would wind their way through mayhem to support the protestors before finally taking refuge at Schuhl’s apartment situated near Place St Michel, the centre of the disruptions. Through the night they would wash and dress various injured refugees from the streets below.

According to Valerie Lagrange in her recent autobiography, Memoir d’un temps où l’on s’aimait, it was a night that re-charted the careers of several of the group. By morning she was off to Rome to stay in Trastevere. Clémenti was already there, and had been there through the shooting of Bertolucci’s Partner (1968). One of his co-stars, Tina Aumont (in Tempo Magazine, 1968, below right) – who

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**LINKS:**

Garrel interviewed at 61st Cannes Film Festival Press Conference

Frozen Warnings

Clémenti in Bertolucci’s film, Partner, 1968
died a year ago of a pulmonary illness at her home in France - was another one of the brilliant young creatures who moved around the Latin Quarter in the sixties, and who shone both as a sixties screen beauty, and later as vamp in such movies as Salon Kitty (Tinto Brass, 1976).

In the early sixties she had married Christian Marquand, which connected her to both Marquand and Trintignant film dynasties. Christian Marquand’s sister Nadine who later became a director and author, married Jean-Louis Trintignant. Much later, Nadine and Jean-Louis’s beautiful actress daughter Marie, who bore a striking resemblance to Tina Aumont, was murdered in 2003 by her rock star husband Bertrand Cantat from rock band Noir Désir. Nadine Trintignant has written books about both brother Christian and daughter Marie.

Tina Aumont was a Hollywood baby, being the only daughter of Maria Montez and Jean-Pierre Aumont. Montez had committed suicide in the bath when Tina was only five and she had apparently found her mother’s corpse, an experience which friends say marked her for life. At the age of 16 she married Marquand in Paris. At the time Marquand was hanging out in Paris with his sister Nadine; he a young actor, she a film editor. Even during these very early days Marquand shared a house with two people who would remain closely bonded to do long time to come. One was the film director Roger Vadim, the other Marlon Brando. In fact Brando later named his son Christian after Marquand (as Anita Pallenberg and Keith Richards would name their son Marlon after Brando). In terms of creative chemistry Aumont had met her match in the older Marquand though she later moved in with the younger but equally beautiful Frédéric Pardo, thus bringing her into the Garrel circle.

Frédéric Pardo had an antiquarian grandfather and gallery owner father, and a mother who was a dear friend of Simone de Beauvoir. He was Jean-Paul Sartre’s godson. Pardo’s art characteristically features a lot of psychedelic oils and work in tempera, particularly in his early pictures and his album art for groups such as Ash Ra Tempel. He later took up painting and was commissioned to paint François Mitterrand. Back in the 1960s he lived in a psychedelic apartment filled with beautiful artifacts and much of the time, his Zanzibar friends. From very early on he and Garrel became the best of friends, kindred spirits. Garrel’s 2004 film Les Amants Reguliers is dedicated to Pardo, and Garrel’s latest, La Frontière de l’Aube, featured in this year’s Cannes Film Festival, gets its inspiration from a Théophile Gautier novel given to Garrel by Pardo.

Pardo and Aumont had by May ’68 also taken up residency in Trastevere, the old and beautiful area of Rome where Bertolucci was filming Partner. They kept in close contact with the Paris circle and when Garrel came to visit they all rented a place in Positano to be together and relax. It was here that Garrel was to meet singer Nico, who had worked with Fellini and had a son by Alain Delon. Fresh from New York and her now immortalised singing career fronting the Velvet Underground and hanging out at Andy Warhol’s Factory, Nico arrived with Viva, a “superstar” for no apparent reason (common at the Factory). On meeting Nico, Garrel’s path darkened somewhat, and he started making more aching films, entering a period of sparseness both on screen and in his home life. He and Nico lived from then and throughout the seventies in a black apartment in Paris with no electricity and no furniture, their lives defined by dependency, and co-dependency. Out of this period came some of the most stunning work either of them had produced to date.

In Positano, Nico wrote her stunning album The Marble Index (cover, left) Produced by John Cale, it was almost ignored at the time of its release, and certainly underappreciated. The haunting track Frozen Warnings*, with her icy neo-classical vocals and avant-garde harmonium arrangements is one of the best songs she ever wrote, and seems to define a kind of timelessness or ability to connect with times past and dateless that defines the mood of the late sixties. Garrel meanwhile finished Le Révélateur; and was now shooting his appreciated classic Le Lit de la Vierge.

Le Lit saw a whole crowd of these Paris underground refugees, now in the Aumont-Pardo circle in Positano, move across to Morocco for filming, once again under the purse strings and protection of Sylvina Boissonnas. Singer and hipster Zouzou audaciously played both the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdailene. Valerie Lagrange and her partner Jean-Louis Kalfon were given small parts, as was Margareth Clémenti and her husband Pierre Clémenti who played, naturally, Jesus Christ. Friends Didier Leon and Babette Lamy were also given parts.

Pardo, armed with his super-8 handheld camera recorded the behind the scenes antics of the crew, as they partied their way through Morocco on Boissonnas’s money and Garrel’s creative urges. His resulting silent b/w makes for a beautiful addition to the French boxset of Les Amants Reguliers. He immortalises Tina Aumont in particular, in a way that absolutely sums up the moment: stoned, heavenly, opulent yet ascetic, satisfied yet curious - all simultaneously present.
in her fixed, lazy stare.

It could so easily have been the Stones before the final last glories of Brian Jones, whose Icarus moment came at the same time, and in the same place. It was in Morocco that his great love Anita Pallenberg (in Performance, right) left him for his best friend and fellow Stone, Keith Richards. And on another leyline of coincidence, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards had also just been over in Positano, writing Monkey Man and Midnight Ramblcr, for their album Let It Bleed. Very soon, they would be in the middle of their own rift, back in London, filming Performance for Nicoles Roeg and Donald Cammell.

Performance is perhaps the quintessential psychedelic London film of the period, capturing the flip side of Antonioni's poptastic Blow-Up, this time representing a London set in a darkened cave of a house in Powys Square, with an edgy representation of East End gangland violence and squallor added in. The violence was informed by East End face David Litvinoff who introduced actor James Fox around the Old Kent Road. Actor Johnny Bindon, an associate of both Princess Margaret and the Krays/Richardsons, was called in to play Moody. Bindon also brought street credibility to the film, having moved in protection and gambling circles all his life. Back on the Powys Square set (furnished by 60s hip Kings Road designer Christopher Gibbs) Keith Richards was becoming increasingly paranoid seeing the fun that Pallenberg and Jagger were having on set.

Influenced by the writings of Borges, Cammell was putting together a spaced-out version of decadence in which daily delights included magic mushroom meals, oversized baths and a wardrobe crammed full of velvets, damasks, mirrors and silks. The wardrobe design was by Deborah Dixon, Cammell's wife at the time and with whom he had lived in Paris when he first crossed paths with the Zouzou/Saint Germain and Brando/Vadim/Marquand circles. In fact Cammell had originally offered the role of Turner to Brando, and it was taken by Jagger only after Brando had had to turn it down. Cammell cast another friend of his and Deborah’s from the Paris days in Performance, the young French actress Michèle Breton, who had also made an appearance as an anarchist in Godard’s aforementioned Week-End, alongside Jean-Pierre Kalfon, Valerie Lagrange and Daniel Pommereulle.

Pommereulle himself had also featured in perhaps the most seminal Zanzibar film . . . that wasn’t even a Zanzibar film. It wasn’t financed by Sylvia Boissonnas, and it wasn’t filmed Garrel or any of the other young directors under the Zanzibar wing of protection. La Collectionnuse was, as mentioned earlier, made by Eric Rohmer and starred Pommereulle (who had come into the group by virtue of his work as an avant-garde artist, and his friendship with Garrel and Pardo). It also starred Haydeé Polito whom who was known in both the Paris and Rome circles of the group and Alain Jouffroy, another central figure of May '68. According to Jackie Raynal, in an interview with Sight and Sound, “Godard had an Alfa Romeo with a 35mm camera, and he and Alain Jouffroy and Garrel went around shooting footage. Because of the Alfa Romeo, the police left them alone.” La Collectionnuse also starred Dennis Berry, the husband of Godard’s ex-muse Anna Karina, and the ex-husband of the intriguing Godard actress Jean Seberg (from A Bout de Souffle, 1959, below left) homaged in Bertolucci's The Dreamers, in one of the opening scenes.

It’s worth saying a word about Seberg here as she made an appearance in one of Garrel's most intriguing films, Le Bleu des Origines (1979). This 50 minute piece is silent, black and white and features only close-ups of the faces of the actresses Nico, Zouzou and Seberg. In the late sixties Seberg had been a public supporter of the Black Panthers. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, considering her a threat to America, ordered that her telephone be tapped, and when she became pregnant by her second husband Romain Gary, rumours were deliberately spread that she was pregnant by a Black Panther. She never recovered from the rumours, and even presented the stillborn baby's pictures at a press conference blaming the rumours on the ill-fated birth. Seberg died of an overdose in 1979 at the age of 41, after a disastrous 1970s. In 1974 Garrel had first filmed her in Les Hautes Solitudes, in which she appeared as herself alongside Tina Aumont, Laurent Terzieff and Nico.

Two more Garrel films deserve a quick mention (though there is plenty more to say) and they are Le Berceau de Cristal (1976) and La Cicatrice Intérieure (1972).

In Le Berceau Garrel cast himself and Nico, Pierre and Margareth Clémenti, Frederic Pardo and Dominique Sanda (who, like Aumont, lived with both Pardo and Marquand during the sixties) and the effervescent Anita Pallenberg. Lutz Ulbrich (Ash Ra Tempel) who became Nico's partner after she split with Garrel, did the music. It was a feast of counterculture icons: Pallenberg shoots up heroin onscreen; Nico takes a loaded gun and her character does a Borgesian shot to the head (shades of both Performance, and Cammell’s own suicide years later).

La Cicatrice Intérieure is filmed entirely on location it has no credits except a title and Garrel prohibited the use of subtitles. Again with Nico, and featuring her...
beautiful music, it also stars Kalfon, Clémenti and his son Balthazar, and Nico's son Ari.

At the time Garrel's son by his partner, actress Brigitte Sy, had not yet been born. Now Garrel has closed the circle: Louis represents him in *Les Amants Réunis* (frame, 2006, left), where for the second time in a matter of eighteen months the young actor gets to re-enact the events of May '68 for both Garrel sr. (*Les Amants*) and Bernardo Bertolucci (*The Dreamers*).

*La Cicatrice Intérieure* is probably my favourite Garrel film. Featuring a beautifully extended scene in which Garrel is seen walking through a desert landscape dressed in his trademark psychedelic Edwardian mufti, on and on in a straight and regular line until we realise he has been walking in one enormous circle, it is a shocking manifestation and one of the least predictable metaphors I have seen in any cinema. (*Garrel with Nico, La Cicatrice Intérieure, below.*) It forces the obvious question. If anything has changed and the students of May 1968 did get anywhere, it is to place films like Garrel's on the map in a way they never were in the time they were made, and he is at last being recognised as the great auteur he always was.