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# Rooms of Colossal Bones â Pedro Costaâs Trilogy

By Ana Balona de Oliveira

Pedro Costa's films belie both the cinematic exploitation of suffering and the documentary urge to record truth and fix recognition. Ana Balona de Oliveira sifts through the bones and ruins of Costa's FontaÃ-nhas trilogy, set in a disappearing Lisbon slum

Pedro Costa (born in Lisbon in 1959) recently concluded his film trilogy, begun in 1997 with *Ossos* (*Bones*) and continued in 2000 with *No Quarto da Vanda* (*In Vanda's Room*). The closing of this indelibly moving and harsh cinematic journey through Lisbon's FontaÃ-nhas slum district took place in 2004 with *Juventude em Marcha* (*Colossal Youth*), presented in the Official Competition at the Cannes Film Festival in 2006, as well as among other film festivals and several museums worldwide. It was finally released in London with screenings at the CinÃ© LumiÃ©re (April 2008) and the ICA (June 2008), while the whole of Costa's oeuvre will be presented in a retrospective at Tate Modern in 2009.

Still from Colossal Youth

Pedro Costa, still from *Colossal Youth*, 2004

Debuting as a director with *Cartas a JÃ©lia* (1987), Costa has since then directed *O Sangue* (*The Blood*) in 1990, followed by *Casa de Lava* (*Down to Earth*) in 1994. In 2001, between *In Vanda's Room* and *Colossal Youth*, Costa presented *OÃt votre sourire enfoui?/ Onde jaz o teu sorriso?* (*Where Does Your Hidden Smile Lie?*), capturing the French directors Jean-Marie Straub and DaniÃ©le Huillet in the process of editing the third version of their *Sicilia!* (1999). Straub and Huillet were not acquainted with Costa's work but decided to accept the Portuguese director's discreet entrance into their editing room after reading Emmanuel Burdeau's review of *In Vanda's Room* in *Cahiers du CinÃ©ma* and realising how much Jacques Rivette likes his films.<sup>1</sup> Although *Where Does Your Hidden Smile Lie?* undoubtedly pays homage to the French couple, Costa's own oeuvre has gained visibility very much independently of its renowned cinematic affiliations.

Despite the fact that *Where Does Your Hidden Smile Lie?* will not be the main focus of discussion here, it provides the viewer of Costa's films with invaluable insights into his own aesthetic and, through this aesthetic, his beyond-the-aesthetic concerns. For through this marvellously sombre film about Straub/Huillet's oeuvre and the making of cinema in general one glimpses Costa's approximation to some of the couple's views and practices and thus, in a humbly indirect way, his own view on filmic practice. Amazingly, some of the barely lit shots of DaniÃ©le's back and profile in the editing *camera obscura* of the Studio National des Arts Contemporains of Le Fresnoy, with her long, seemingly very dark hair and thin fragile body, recall some of the shots of Vanda in the painful yet conversational intimacy of her *camera obscura*. Yet, in the latter's case, this is her own ineluctably poor, darkened chamber, more an entrapping cell, cave or coffin than Huillet's editing room. *In Vanda's Room*, and equally *Where Does Your Hidden Smile Lie?*, present a claustrophobic space for a thin fragile body; however, contrary to Huillet, Vanda is heroin addicted, surviving in the imposed urban social margins of Lisbon's FontaÃ-nhas slum, where basic rights to housing, health, education and work fail to be implemented and a constant daily struggle for a resiliently maintained dignity takes

place.

Jacques Rancière's remarks on the similarities between *In Vanda's Room* and *Where Does Your Hidden Smile Lie?* when he writes on their shared poetics of the room:

Those who watch *Where Does Your Hidden Smile Lie?* after having watched *In Vanda's Room* evidently feel the homologies that translate Pedro Costa's style. The same closed space, the same pale green tonality, the same pervading darkness, similarly cut through by three luminous rectangles or circles: to the right, a door opening to a corridor; in the background, a TV screen a familiar appliance in the home of Vanda's mother (à); the screen of the working table in Le Fresnoy's editing room (à); finally, a halo of light: working lamp in the functional studio, vacillating candle light in the illegally occupied house. Two characters are almost always enough to occupy this limited space. And it is indeed frequent that one of them a generally, the male character a is present solely by his voice, whereas the other one a in general, female a devotes herself to a manual labour: Vanda prepares the drugs, Zita reels the wool in, whilst Nhurro or Pedro talk about their helplessness; Danièle Huillet winds the film on the reels, puts the images in motion, sticks the film back together,<sup>2</sup> while Jean-Marie Straub leaves and enters the room, blending beliefs and significant stories.

Interestingly, Rancière calls attention to Costa's filming of a gendered labour division that is also present in *Colossal Youth*. In this film Vanda spends her time in the domesticity of the new white ghetto to which Fontainhas's inhabitants are being relocated, taking care of her daughter and preparing her husband and male visitors's meals. *Colossal Youth* begins with Clotilde branding a kitchen knife in the airless darkened interior of her slum shack, in a threatening gesture that culminates with her partner, Ventura, being evicted from their shared home and the destruction of their domestic belongings. Bete, another slum dweller, lives entrapped in her lightless room, silently occupied with painstaking cleaning tasks, while Ventura, the moaning visitor, is often kept outside, waiting in a wrecked red couch for a door or window to open. Men alone seem capable of movement through the dark slum and the new housing project, even if this movement happens solely in rare outdoor shots or is not even seen, while women are more often perceived as labouring within the narrow boundaries of the room. One wonders whether or not Costa is intentionally denouncing (by presenting) this division, for, in the context of *Where Does Your Hidden Smile Lie?*, this does not seem to be the case.

In effect, Rancière establishes a connection between Costa and Straub/Huillet based on a common political awareness that entails a choice to focus on the lives of the downtrodden through the austere method of capturing time, gestures and words.<sup>3</sup> Making similar connections Thierry Lounas mentions the three directors' shared intention of making cinema without being devoted to it, of expressing through cinema that which does not pertain exclusively to it.<sup>4</sup> Even if reduced to the most densely simplified structure of fleshless bone, motionless body, inexpressive word, precise gesture, endless languor and rigorously illuminated object, Costa's work is indeed a powerful artistic immersion in the miseries of those devoted to indifference. It does not, however, endeavour to offer a sociological representation of exploitation, which could itself become exploitative of the miseries portrayed. His work, like Straub/Huillet's, is not mainly driven by sympathy, solidarity or politics. It is a form of art per se, made of matured ideas and experienced methods; yet, also made of that which can become art but is not necessarily art a disinterested interest in working with those offering their faces, bodies and voices to the camera, a genuine interest in their resistant lives. The result of this interest, contrary to the general indifference, could have become something else. Costa's interest becomes film.<sup>5</sup>

Despite their affiliations, Costa and Straub/Huillet also meet each other in the dissimilarities of their work. In this respect, Ranci re focuses on the disparate presence of words:

*In Vanda's Room*, just as in *Sicilia!* and in *Operai, Contadini*, nobody stops talking. However, those words [*In Vanda's Room*], uttered by bodies lain in beds or spread over chairs, interspersed by cough or silenced in an almost inaudible complaint, parasitically invaded by screams coming from the other side of walls always too thin, or disturbed by the bulldozers' noises, are the words of a state, the state of those who live between the incessant murmur of an anonymous life and the silence of an immutable condition. The art of the film-maker of the inactive bodies and cities in the process of being demolished consists in drawing the fragile dividing line that the film-makers of the erected bodies and proud words erase in their work.<sup>6</sup>

The way these film-makers portray the lives of the poor, even if they depart from a similar political conscience, diverges in the aesthetic outcome. Straub/Huillet capture their epic resistance by elevating them to the status of the strong stone statue, whereas Costa looks for their heroism in the resilience of the sick, aged, broken-boned body, whose fragile skeleton finds its architectural metaphor in the very smashing of the slum's feeble walls. In *Colossal Youth* the new white walls of the housing project could perhaps indicate a strengthening of the bone or rejuvenating of the body, and to a certain extent this might be the case. In this film, Vanda regains her health and raises her young daughter. However, Ventura injures his head, both physically in a working accident, and emotionally through abandonment and displacement (which amounts not only to the geographical displacement of the new ghetto, but also to the timely dislocation of the unrecognisable present). Moreover, while not roaming between dark and white walls, Ventura lays in the chairs, beds and floors of his so called children with the hopeless motionlessness of dying bones.

Colossal Youth, Pedro Costa, 2004

Pedro Costa, still from *Colossal Youth*, 2004

Costa alludes to his belief in an idea of vengeance in the beginning of cinema: "To take revenge for something that is not very well" Chaplin is someone who took revenge for many things his own end, his past, mankind, he takes revenge for massacres without killing anybody, without exerting violence, without violating.<sup>7</sup> This notion of taking revenge through film rather than violence for what is not right in the state of the world is expressed, in Costa's films, through the bodies' resistant immobility. Albeit seemingly passive and defeated, these bodies are in fact resisting the general indifference to their situation and the demolition of their neighbourhood in particular. Even if an analogy between frail bone and precarious architecture seems to be at stake as stated above, there is also an opposing resistance in the body that responds with immobility to the destroying machine at its door. While Straub/Huillet present their characters' resistance through the fight of the labourer's raised fist, Costa, "without exerting violence" or fighting, portrays the vengeance tensely contained within the inactively protesting shape of the lain body. In *Colossal Youth*, Ventura casually undermines the estate agent of the new housing project who lists the endless rules to which flat owners should abide, by ignoring him, leaving him alone speaking to the empty white walls. In a phantasmatically assertive claim for a bureaucratically inexistent large family, Ventura refuses the first tiny flat he has been given and demands one large enough for his wife and many children. Furthermore, when he visits one of his supposed sons, an invigilator at the Gulbenkian Museum, Ventura, again, sits down, but here in a chair he is not supposed to sit in and from which he is promptly evicted. In *In Vanda's Room*, Vanda could be seen to resist Fontinha's destruction in her

pursuit of a room-entrapped, heroin-addicted, motionless life. In this context, it is important to note that Costa never falls into an epic justification of Vanda's choice to resist through drug addiction, as much as he never shows any glimpse of moralistic criticism.<sup>8</sup> In *Bones*, with which Costa introduced the Fonta's-trilogy, the poor teenage couple taking the leading roles resist in the labyrinthic immobility of their whirling desperation by unsuccessfully attempting to evade parenthood – the mother, by trying to kill herself and her newborn, the father, by trying to sell his baby in the streets.

Still from *Ossos* (Bones), Pedro Costa, 1997  
Pedro Costa, still from *Ossos* (Bones), 1997

It is not surprising James Quandt titled an essay on the director's work "Still Lives: The Films of Pedro Costa."<sup>9</sup> Some of the shots of *Bones*, *In Vanda's Room* and *Colossal Youth*, most frequently those of poorly lit and impoverished interiors, resemble painterly still lives: dark shacks into which scarce rays of sunlight enter just to illuminate a half empty bottle of wine, a smashed piece of old furniture, unexpected red flowers, but also the back of a neck, an old, beaten up hand, the longing of an immigrant labourer's eye for his Cape Verdean forgotten youth and lost love. The phrase "still lives" gains here, therefore, a double meaning – not only does it refer to the painterly, shadowy objects that accompany the quietly empty despair of Fonta's-inhabitants, but also to these ghostly characters' lives themselves, filmed in the *resistant* stillness of their hopeless bodies.<sup>10</sup>

Costa's films are not documentaries, except for *Where Does Your Hidden Smile Lie?*, despite the fact that the director has increasingly chosen to work with non-professional actors, available light and an ever less intrusive occupation of the filming location by an ever more reduced crew and inconspicuous recording device. The films are long and composed of densely concentrated, non-moving shots which do not connect within a structure of linear narrative fluidity. The viewer of *Bones*, *In Vanda's Room* and *Colossal Youth* is challenged by this choice of intermingling past and present moments that are susceptible to being narratively perceived only by means of a very close attention to details, such as Ventura wearing builders' clothes and a head bandage in some of the scenes, and a retiree's black suit in others. These details might guide the viewer along a non-linear path of extremely long, steady shoots, where only the textures of an immutable present seem to matter and no obvious explanations about before and after are given. This inevitably creates the "vertical" tension inherent to the almost total absence of "horizontal" tracking shots.<sup>11</sup> Besides the paused rhythm, there is an excruciating silence, cut only by the characters' words and the apparently unpremeditated mechanical and human sounds penetrating the neighbourhoods and rooms where action slowly unfolds. No other soundtrack is heard. Furthermore, actors spend many hours rehearsing each scene and line with the director to reach an outcome of nude simplicity and precision with an almost emotionally inexpressive declamatory effect.<sup>12</sup> In *Colossal Youth*, some of this vertically mute tension is slightly released only when Ventura plays a Cape Verdean record and we listen in to its warmly melancholic musical murmur. As Straub put it, there is no "musical soup" to help sustain the lack of idea and form.<sup>13</sup>

Costa's patient labour, paradoxically suffused with a tender way of filming the violence which pervades his characters' lives, might constitute the basis of his notion of cinematic vengeance for the world's miseries. He seems to take revenge for these by giving an enormous amount of time and attention to the painfully maintained yet colossal dignity of his non-professional willing collaborators, in a process of exchange rather than arrest of their lives through their images.<sup>14</sup>

It is precisely in the interstices of Costa's mesmerisingly beautiful shots of the derelict architectures wherein the wandering bones of the downtrodden mutely speak and agonisingly move, that one of the most potentially polemical issues surrounding Costa's filming of Fonta's shanty town arises – the danger of falling into exoticism and the visual exploitation of desperate poverty.<sup>15</sup> Manohla Dargis states that Costa "flirts dangerously here with turning his characters into exotics, with making their misery seem somehow ennobling."<sup>16</sup> However, this supposed approximation to the exotic is extraneous to Costa's slum trilogy, as Dargis acknowledges by affirming that in the end "he never strays down that path, perhaps because the people in this movie [*Colossal Youth*] are as much his collaborators as his subjects."<sup>17</sup> Costa began his cinematic and personal involvement with the Cape Verdean immigrant community settled in Lisbon's Fonta's slum district when he travelled to Cape Verde to shoot *Down to Earth*, returning to Lisbon as the carrier of gifts and messages for those who had long left the Atlantic islands to start a harsh working life as builders (of buildings in which they would never be expected to enter, as with Ventura's experience at the Gulbenkian).

Costa then decided to make a film based on the lives of those he met in the slum – *Bones*, or the story of the helpless teenage mother who tries to gas herself and her newborn baby, while the young father strives to sell it and then give it away in the desolate streets of Fonta's. It is indeed a fact that, after realising how he had "invaded a residential neighbourhood with the unwieldy machinery of film production", Costa was displeased with the shooting of *Bones*, having in this context admitted that "the balance is off between those behind and in front of the camera."<sup>18</sup> At this stage one wonders whether such balance can ever be attained. It appears, however, that Costa has attempted to develop a working method in which, if not balanced, at least this relationship between the film-maker and the actor, collaborator, character has been radically challenged and transformed. For, at Vanda Duarte's prompting, he then decided to continue shooting in the slum but this time almost by himself, with nothing more than a small digital video camera, in a long two years process which culminated with *In Vanda's Room*, and during which Costa became friends with his actors. One may acknowledge, therefore, that Costa did try to reach an ever less unbalanced relationship with his co-workers, as he would surely name them.

In this film, Costa steadily portrays Vanda, her sister Zita, Nhurro and Pedro, among other characters, in the non-moralistic dark room of Vanda's heroin addiction, while the surrounding bulldozers, demolishing Fonta's, are continuously heard, even if unseen.<sup>19</sup> In the film, Vanda's world and life are collapsing in the fragile sick architecture of both her home and body. In reality, this neighbourhood, not very distant from Lisbon's centre and therefore envisaged by local authorities as nothing more than a malign tumour of poverty, drugs and prostitution, was being "eradicated".

Still from *Colossal Youth*, Pedro Costa, 2004

Pedro Costa, still from *Colossal Youth*, 2004

At the time when the actual process of demolition was very much towards its end and Fonta's dwellers were being relocated into brand new social housing ghettos, *Colossal Youth* captures, through its characters' very personal dramas, the real contradictory feelings of those once forced to live in the harsh conditions of the dark slum's narrow alleys to now being forced again – but this time, "gratefully" – to leave the only place they have grown used to, on whose walls life memories were physically inscribed as much as wounds on skin and bones. In the film, empty and unfamiliar, apparently luminous and open, but indeed again opaque and entrapping white rooms await the new inhabitants. One can never see through the white light of the new windows. They seem to procure

what Jos  Saramago called 'white blindness'.<sup>20</sup> This whiteness appears, therefore, as excluding as the slum's dark walls, or perhaps even more, for besides their opaque light confinement opposed to the slum's where scribbles and graffiti still seem to allow for some sort of feeling of belonging, the new walls do not permit inscription, appropriation, recognition. Ventura's traces on Gulbenkian's floor are cleaned after he leaves, and, more significantly, for this happens in his prospective new home, the estate agent who takes Ventura there for the first time wipes the wall against which Ventura has been leaning. In this sense, *Colossal Youth* appears to move between the dark and the white room as much as its main character, Ventura, continuously wanders between the remnants of his destroyed Fonta nhas and the new ghetto (as if the Portuguese displacement from his Cape Verdean homeland were not enough).

Vanda is still a coughing sick woman, but lives now in a white new home, endeavouring, through methadone, to survive in order to raise her daughter. Ventura, the Cape Verdean retired labourer, takes the leading role. His name seems to paradoxically embody some sort of hope in the future to come, for 'ventura' means good fortune. The film's title itself entails, perhaps, a possibility of looking forward, since, literally translated, *Juventude em Marcha* stands for 'youth on the march' (having been uttered for the first time by a Cape Verdean old woman resiliently dancing in *Down to Earth*). However, Ventura is an old man abandoned by his wife Clotilde and wounded by an extremely hard working life. Ghostly, roaming between two worlds which he does not recognise, Ventura spends his lonely time visiting several downtrodden sons and daughters who are not his own children, such as Vanda, Nhurro, Paulo, and Bete, one of Fonta nhas's last dwellers. One of the most significant scenes portrays Ventura and Bete exchanging each other's visions of the marks inscribed on the walls of Bete's sombre shack - they both see a world of which they will lose sight in the new white homes; but these ghosts seem to haunt them even where walls offer no possibility of inscription, for Vanda and her child still see them in the old couches brought from the slum. The past appears inescapable. In *Colossal Youth*, Vanda's sister, Zita, dies - not from the poison she took, someone says, but rather from all the poison taken before she was even born.

Ventura repeatedly recites a love letter (adapted from a poem by Robert Desnos, which emerges for the first time in *Down to Earth*) to his absent Clotilde, whilst fruitlessly helping his friend Lento to memorise it for his Arc ngela.<sup>21</sup> At the very end, when Ventura recites it one last time while holding Lento's hand, this letter might actually represent that glimpse of hope or, in Aur lien Gerbault's words, re-blossoming.<sup>22</sup> Lento's new white home burned - a suicide attempt, perhaps - and thus became as darkly destroyed as his no longer existent Fonta nhas shack (which he seemed to have shared with Ventura during at least a period of the latter's working life). It is precisely at this stage of Lento's extreme desperation, when dark and white rooms appear to blend, that Ventura finally admits to have no family with whom to occupy his new home, no wife and no imaginary children; yet, he is now closer to Lento than ever before (even if Lento thinks the opposite), for he now fully understands his friend's loneliness through his own. His window is right there in front of Lento's, says Ventura, while they both peer out. Although the viewers of *Colossal Youth* cannot see the object of the characters' gaze, as is usually the case in Costa's films, these windows seem to have lost their claustrophobic white blindness - or some sort of devastatingly compassionate vengeance seems to have taken place.

Ana Balona de Oliveira <anabalonaliveira AT yahoo.com> studied Philosophy and Aesthetics in Portugal and Switzerland, and Art History at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, where she

is soon starting her PhD

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## Info

*Juventude em Marcha (Colossal Youth)* is showing in the Institute of Contemporary Arts cinema, London, 7- 28 June 2008

## Footnotes

1 In this respect, see Thierry Lounas, "Notas sobre *Onde jaz o teu sorriso?*" ("Notes on *Where Does Your Hidden Smile Lie?*"), in Pedro Costa, Jean-Marie Straub, DaniÃ«le Huillet, *Onde jaz o teu sorriso?*, Lisbon: AssÃ«rio & Alvim, 2004, p.110.

2 Jacques RanciÃ«re, "Os Quartos do Cineasta" ("The Director's Rooms"), in Costa, Straub, Huillet, *Onde jaz o teu sorriso?*, pp. 131-2, translated by the author.

3 Ibid., p. 132, translated by the author.

4 Lounas, "Notas sobre *Onde jaz o teu sorriso?*", p. 115, translated by the author.

5 Pedro Costa said: "art should be more than it is and a lot less than it is" Brecht said he made jewels for the poor. He talked about the epic quality of the day-to-day life of common people. That's something I pursue. I really want them to be heroes" (Costa quoted in Dennis Lim, "Director's Quest for Truth Among the Downtrodden", in *New York Times*, July 29 2007, and [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/29/movies/29lim.html?\\_r=1&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/29/movies/29lim.html?_r=1&oref=slogin)).

6 RanciÃ«re., "Os Quartos do Cineasta", p. 133, p. 139, translated by the author, italics added.

7 Costa, in <http://archives.arte-tv.com/>, translated by the author.

8 Lim wrote that "Mr. Costa handled the copious drug use matter-of-factly. "I was never moralistic", he said. "But I was hoping to get them to see that drugs are a punishment imposed on them by external forces" (Lim, and Costa quoted by Lim, "Director's Quest for Truth Among the Downtrodden", in [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/29/movies/29lim.html?\\_r=1&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/29/movies/29lim.html?_r=1&oref=slogin)).

9 James Quandt, "Still Lives: The Films of Pedro Costa", in *Artforum* (September 2006) and <http://www.cinemathequeontario.ca/programme.aspx?programmeId=149>.

10 Showing an understanding of the Portuguese lineage of film-makers to which Costa very independently pertains (albeit limited to no more than two of its most notorious names), Quandt correctly approximates the director to Manoel de Oliveira and JoÃ«o CÃ©sar Monteiro's "propensity for the long take and tableaux structure, a fondness for haunted, life-battered faces and desolate landscapes, and a Dostoyevskian sense of life as hell" (Quandt, "Still Lives", in <http://www.cinemathequeontario.ca/programme.aspx?programmeId=149>). Here one could surely add the films of Paulo Rocha, JosÃ© Ãlvvaro Morais and Teresa Vilaverde.

11 Focussing on *Bones*, Shigehiko Hasumi discusses the notion of "a vertical power that breaks the viewer free from the story's linear cause and effect". He continues, "the present moment is made visually absolute. While not abandoning the time flow of the film, this "absolutification" of the present

moment is a bare, unadorned directorial technique that creates a raw filmic continuity for fiction, which otherwise would be subordinated to narrative flow and human psychology. Only rarely in film is the ultimate state of fiction thus so simply integrated with the ultimate state of documentaryâ, Shigehiko Hasumi, âAdventure: An Essay on Pedro Costaâ (2005), in [http://www.rouge.com.au/10/costa\\_hasumi.html](http://www.rouge.com.au/10/costa_hasumi.html)Pedro Costa, *Colossal Youth*, 2004

12 Lim wrote that â[*In Vanda's Room*] feels at times like a documentary but is actually the result of long conversations and multiple takes. Ms. Duarte [Vanda] and her friends, who sit around, talk, prepare heroin fixes, smoke and shoot up, are not documentary subjects so much as actors playing themselvesâ (Lim, âDirector's Quest for Truth Among the Downtroddenâ, in [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/29/movies/29lim.html?\\_r=1&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/29/movies/29lim.html?_r=1&oref=slogin)). In this context, Straub, who also works with non-professional actors, said what Costa could perhaps have said about his own work: âsome people have the impression â because we reject verisimilitude and TV-style cinema â! â that there is no psychology in our films. But that's not true. All this is psychology. There is no psychology in terms of the performance of the actor because there is a dramatic abstraction that goes deeper than so-called verisimilitude. But it's there, in between the shots, in the very montage and in the way the shots are linked to each other, it is extremely subtle psychologyâ (Jean-Marie Straub, in Pedro Costa, *OÃt gÃt votre sourire enfoui?/ Onde jaz o teu sorriso? (Where Does Your Hidden Smile Lie?)*, 2001).

13 Jacques Rancie`re, âOs Quartos do Cineastaâ (âThe Director's Roomsâ), in Costa, Straub, Huillet, *Onde jaz o teu sorriso?*, pp. 131-2, translated by the author.

14 Hasumi says that âwatching any of Costa's films grabs hold of our gaze and forces us to personally experience the motion of the film. At times his scenes sting our eyes with their piercing pain, and at times they wrap our eyes in ineffable tendernessâ (Hasumi, âAdventureâ, in [http://www.rouge.com.au/10/costa\\_hasumi.html](http://www.rouge.com.au/10/costa_hasumi.html)).

15 As far as lighting is concerned, few achieve what Jason Sanders calls âCosta's astonishing lighting and framing of decaying walls and rugged visages (âas if a direct invocation of Vermeerâ, noted Manohla Dargis in the *New York Times*)â (Sanders and Dargis quoted by Sanders, in <http://www.bampfa.berkeley.edu/film/FN16862>).

16 Manohla Dargis, âLife, Assembled One Room at a Timeâ, in *New York Times*, August 3 2007, and <http://movies.nytimes.com/2007/08/03/movies/03colo.html>. In this respect, see Melanie Gilligan, âSlumploitation â The Favela on Film and TVâ, in <http://www.metamute.org/en/Slumploitation-Favela-on-Film-and-TV>, where Gilligan discusses the approach of some Brazilian directors and Brazilian media corporations in general to the problematic of slum representation.

17 Dargis, âLife, Assembled One Room at a Timeâ, in <http://movies.nytimes.com/2007/08/03/movies/03colo.html>. In this context, to watch AurÃlien Gerbault's *Tout Refleurit: Pedro Costa, cinÃaste* *All Blossoms Again: Pedro Costa, Director*, 2006, â a documentary accompanying Costa's editing of *Colossal Youth*, his work with Ventura, its main character, and his going back to the now demolished FontaÃnhas, in an interesting double of Costa's filming of Straub/Huillet's editing of *Sicilia!* âp becomes mandatory.

18 Lim and Costa quoted by Lim, âDirector's Quest for Truth Among the Downtroddenâ, in [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/29/movies/29lim.html?\\_r=1&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/29/movies/29lim.html?_r=1&oref=slogin).

19 Hasumi, discussing some of *Down to Earth*'s characters, says: "It is unclear what their eyes are seeing or what their blank faces are trying to say, for Pedro Costa rarely uses shots that connect the eyes, which are the origin of sight, to the objects captured by their gaze" (Hasumi, "Adventure", in [http://www.rouge.com.au/10/costa\\_hasumi.html](http://www.rouge.com.au/10/costa_hasumi.html)).

20 Josã© Saramago, *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira (Blindness)*, Lisboa: Editorial Caminho, 1995.

21 The fullest recital of the poem in the film runs, "Nha crecheu, my love./Being together again/Will brighten our lives/For at least 30 years./I'll come back to you/Strong and loving./I wish I could offer you/100000 cigarettes./A dozen fancy dresses./A car./That little lava house/You always dreamed of./A three-penny bouquet./But most of all./Drink a bottle of good wine/And think of me./Here, it's nothing but work./There are over a hundred of us now./Did my letter arrive safely?/Still nothing from you./Some other time./Every day, every minute./I learn beautiful new words/For you and me alone/Made to fit us both./Like fine silk pajamas./Wouldn't you like that?/I can only send you/One letter a month./Still nothing from you./Some other time./I often get scared/building these walls./Me with a pick and cement./You with your silence./A pit so deep./It swallows you up./It hurts to see these horrors/That I don't want to see./Your lovely hair slips/Through/my fingers like dry grass./Often, I feel weak and think/I'm going to forget you", Pedro Costa, *Juventude em Marcha (Colossal Youth)*, 2004.

22 See footnote 17 above.